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THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE  
WRITINGS OF P. T. FORSYTH

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INTRODUCTION



THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE  
WRITINGS OF P. T. FORSYTH

INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem Stated And The  
Present Study Justified

Contemporary theology has felt the impact of the crisis or Barthian theology. And in the theology of Barth, Wilhelm Pauch suggests that the most significant contribution is his recall to the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> But before Barth, Principal P. T. Forsyth interpreted aright the Protestant Reformation. J. S. Whale of England has said that Forsyth's position "...anticipates by nearly a quarter of a century the "realism" of our modern theology...."<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that Forsyth has been called a "Barthian before Barth."<sup>3</sup>

Forsyth was a copious writer and it is a tribute to the value of his theological thought that of late the demand for his books has been growing, and re-issues are appearing, both in England and America.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Stated by John A. Mackay in *Theology Today*, editorial, Vol. III, No. 3., p. 297.
2. P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, Preface by John S. Whale, p. iv.
3. Mackay, loc. cit.
4. Independent Press, London, has already re-issued three volumes in England, and Pilgrim Press, Boston, announced a re-issue of one volume schedule for May 18, 1948.

The fact that Forsyth was the anticipator of modern theological thought, plus the fact that his books are in present high demand, is a justifiable basis for a study of his writings.

④ The problem of the atonement is vital for all real religion. For Christianity, it is not merely vital, but central. Christian theology was characterized by Luther as "theologia crucis."<sup>1</sup> Clow has said "By the primacy of the Atonement I mean that it is the distinctive and the determining doctrine of the Christian religion."<sup>2</sup>

Together these facts of Forsyth's importance for present day theology and the centrality of the atonement for all theology constitute a basis and a justification for the study of the atonement in the writings of Forsyth.

#### B. Subject Delimited

It does not lie within the scope of this thesis to give a complete biography of Forsyth. Nor is it the purpose of the author to enter upon a discussion of other phases of Forsyth's theological or ecclesiastical thought than the subject of the atonement. It is not considered essential to discuss the theological thinking of the time in which Forsyth lived, although this might well be very illuminating.

This thesis will be a first hand study of Forsyth's

. . . . .

1. Forsyth, op. cit., Preface, p. iii.
2. W. M. Clow, The Cross in Christian Experience, p. 308.

writings, and primarily those that are concerned with some phase of the work of Christ, for the purpose of finding in Forsyth's works a doctrine or theory of the atonement.

### C. Procedure And Sources

The main sources which will be used as the basis for this thesis are:

1. The writings of Forsyth
2. James Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation
3. Emil Brunner, The Mediator

After a systematic outline of Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement, a study will be made of the history of atonement doctrines to find where Forsyth's theory fits into such a development. Then attention will be given to the remainder of Forsyth's writings to see if therein he is consistent with his views as set forth in his main books on the atonement. The last chapter will be devoted to a critique of Forsyth's doctrine, based on St. Paul, James Denney and Emil Brunner; then finally, a personal critique will be given. A conclusion will draw together the findings of this study.

CHAPTER I

THE VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT OF P. T. FORSYTH

## CHAPTER I

### THE VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT OF P. T. FORSYTH

#### A. Introduction

It is to be regretted that Principal Forsyth never left a systematic treatment of the subject of the atonement. However, there are two works of his in which he deals most definitely with this aspect of the Christian religion, namely, The Work of Christ and The Cruciality of the Cross. These two books form the basis for a consideration of Forsyth's view of the atonement with which this chapter is concerned.

#### B. The Need For An Atonement

##### 1. Limitations in this Approach.

As has been stated above, Forsyth has not given an orderly theological treatment of this subject. Hence it is not possible to turn to any of his works and find in them the doctrine of sin stated in a cold, logical order, commencing with the original state of man, and proceeding on to his fall, his subsequent sinful state, the nature of his sin and thence to his need of redemption. Rather Forsyth seems to by-pass all of this by way of taking it for granted, because he says "...human nature is not

. . . . .

capable, by all the finest sacrifices it might develop, of saving, of ensuring itself, and setting up the Kingdom of God." <sup>1</sup>

Forsyth proceeds instead to approach man's need of redemption from this angle, that even if one takes all of the very best of man's heroic deeds and unselfish acts of sacrifice, yea, the very best of human nature and makes the most he can of it, there is still a vast difference between man's best work and Christ's great work. The procedure will now be to see the way which Forsyth points out this difference.

## 2. Forsyth's Illustration.

The story of a great heroic act done by a railroad employee was in the Belgian papers. Two passenger trains were coming towards each other at full speed. As they neared the point where they were to be cleared by means of a switch, it was found that the switch would not work due to the frost, and catastrophe seemed inevitable. A nearby signalman suddenly threw himself between the rails and held the switch to its proper position while the train thundered over him, thus avoiding certain doom for the passengers. When the train had passed, he quietly arose and returned to his work. <sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

1. P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 10.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.



### 3. The Difference Between Man's Heroism and the Work of Christ.

This story is an illustration of one of the finest things in human nature, and yet if one would multiply such a deed indefinitely, would he have the same results as he has produced by the death of Christ? Forsyth's answer to this question is a flat "No" and the differences that supply the reason for the negative answer will now be considered.

a. The Belgian trainman acted not so much from love as he did from duty.

b. The human hero died only once, in the one act, while Christ's whole life was gathered into the one great consummate sacrifice, which has its tremendous value because of the whole personality behind it.

c. The hero in the story had nothing to do with the condition of the people whom he had saved. The sinner and the saint in the train above him were all alike to him, and he had no quarrel with any of them. But when one turns to the sacrifice of Christ, he is on different ground. Here the people not only did not know Christ, they actually hated and despised Him. He died an infinite death, for the whole world, not for a mere trainful of people. The people on the train responded favorably to the tale of their hero, but Christ had to create the power of response in the hearts

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of those for whom he died. Man resents the favor Christ did for him, unless he receives it in the Holy Spirit and takes it then in love and gratitude.

Coming then in conclusion to the essential difference between the Church and Christ and civilization and man, Forsyth says this:

"Civilization at its best represents the most man can do with the world and with human nature; but the Church, centered upon Christ, His Cross and His work, represents the best that God can do upon them. The sacrifice of the Cross was not man in Christ pleasing God; it was God in Christ reconciling man....It was not heroic man dying for a beloved and honored God; it was God in some form dying for man."<sup>1</sup>

It is this work of Christ and His Cross that is the basis for the remainder of this chapter.

### C. The Work Of Christ In Relation To God

#### 1. The Great Work of Christ was to Reconcile.

##### a. The Meaning of the Term Reconciliation.

Forsyth finds the meaning of the word reconciliation in Paul's use of the term. Paul meant it to be "the total result of Christ's life work in the fundamental, permanent, final changing of the relation between man and God, altering it from a relation of hostility to one of confidence and peace."<sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 25.

2. Ibid., p. 54.



b. The Relation of Reconciliation and Atonement.

Atonement is an Old Testament phrase which meant the covering of sin from the sight of God, and so great an act as this could be done by something provided only by God Himself. Atonement, then, according to Forsyth, is "the covering of sin by something which makes it lose the power of deranging the covenant relation between God and man and founds the new humanity."<sup>1</sup> Thus the reconciling work of Christ, or the changing of the relation between God and man, rests upon atonement as its ground.<sup>2</sup>

c. The Goal of Reconciliation.

The other thing that remains to be said about reconciliation is its goal. The great and grand end of the reconciling work of Christ was to change the relation between God and man from alienation to communion, a reciprocal communion. Thus Forsyth says, "the grand end of reconciliation is communion,"<sup>3</sup> a living, loving, holy reciprocal and habitual communion between God's soul and man's.

This last mentioned point of the goal of reconciliation as the communion between God and the Christian is one which Forsyth stresses very heavily. Reconciliation is brought about between two persons, and thus it means that there is a vital change on both sides in order to be real

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 55.
2. Ibid., p. 56 .
3. Ibid., p. 57.

at all.

Thus in summary on the word reconciliation, one is entitled to say the following with P. T. Forsyth:

1) It is between two persons who have fallen out, and not between a mere process on the one hand and a person on the other.

2) It follows then that it alters and affects both parties.

3) It rests on atonement.

Then Forsyth also adds:

4) It is a reconciliation of the world as a cosmic whole.

5) It is a reconciliation final in Jesus Christ and His Cross.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The Holiness of God.

This discussion of Forsyth's view of the atonement now comes to the very heart and core of it. Indeed, Forsyth says that "Everything begins and ends in our Christian theology with the holiness of God."<sup>2</sup> So now it is to be seen what Forsyth means by God's holiness.

### a. The Ground for the Necessity of the Atonement.

First of all, it is the holiness of God that makes sin to be guilt. Sin then becomes not merely a transgression

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 76.

2. Ibid., p. 78.

against God, but against a holy God. And if it is a transgression against a holy God, it means then that something must be done about it, namely, an atonement. And the problem in a study of the atonement is how that it is necessary to the holy love of God and how this love must make the atonement. Without a holy God, this problem would not exist. "It is the holiness of God's love that necessitates the atoning Cross."<sup>1</sup>

#### b. How God's Holiness is Satisfied.

"There is only one thing that can satisfy the holiness of God and that is holiness--adequate holiness."<sup>2</sup> The holiness of God can never be satisfied by mere suffering, or words, but by "holiness, actual holiness, and holiness upon the same scale as the one holy law which was broken."<sup>3</sup>

But this holiness that is adequate to satisfy the holiness of God must therefore be the gift of holiness atoned. "For if holiness could be satisfied by anything outside itself it would not be absolutely holy."<sup>4</sup> The holiness of God and its satisfaction will be treated later, but first, the judgment of God will be considered.

### 3. The Judgment of God.

It has been said that the holiness of God is the very

. . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 79-80.
2. Ibid., p. 126.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 208.

heart of Forsyth's system of thought. All of his views of the atonement stem from this belief and the ramifications of it will now be traced into the realm of judgment. If one starts with the premise that God is holy, it is essential that God should judge, says Forsyth.<sup>1</sup> God cannot maintain His holiness without adjusting all else to it through the process of judgment. One of Forsyth's great statements is this:

"The dignity of man is better assured if he were broken upon the maintenance of that holiness of God than if it were put aside arbitrarily, just to let him off with his life."<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of this holiness comes about through judgment, and it is the entire basis of the reconciliation of the sinner to God. This whole idea of judgment is not complete without the idea of a crisis day of judgment, which is found in the cross, and when sin has done its full work, and has been met and conquered by the cross, then there is a reconciliation. This idea of judgment and how it was met by Christ, as well as the other aspects of Christ's satisfying work, will now be discussed.

#### 4. The Satisfying Work of Christ.

##### a. The Underlying Principle in Christ's Work.

Forsyth holds to what is called an objective atonement.

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 128.  
2. Ibid.

By this is meant simply that in all of the work of Christ, God Himself made the complete sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> "The real objectivity of the atonement is not that it was made to God but by God."<sup>2</sup> God made the atonement and handed it over to man as a finished work. Any atonement that man made to God would be subjective, which though Forsyth dismisses immediately. He also dismisses the thought that Christ was a third party intervening on man's behalf. That would make grace a procured thing, which is a contradiction in terms.

Rather, Forsyth takes his text from II Corinthians 5:19, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," and saying with great emphasis that the "atonement is not that something was offered to God, but that God made the offering."<sup>3</sup>

The greatest difficulty in holding that God reconciled Himself is that one is then pressed to say that God was compelled to change His feeling about man. This needs an explanation to be sure. God's heart towards man from all eternity was gracious and grace is unchangeable. If so, was God changed at all? Here one comes to one of the little but powerful distinctions in Forsyth. God, he says, never changed His feeling towards man, but He did alter His treatment of man. God's love is eternal and unchanging, even

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 92.

2. Ibid.

3. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Forsyth, The Work of Christ, pp. 103-137.

when man is most displeasing to Him; but when one says that God changed His attitude towards man, he means that His treatment of man changed, and not His feeling.

b. Christ's Satisfactory Confession of God's Holiness and Judgment.

Forsyth describes God's holiness as the "sum of all His action and relation to the world; and the acknowledgment of it must be made in like action."<sup>1</sup> Thus the acknowledgment of God's holy laws must be actively done by man by his whole heart. And no amount of suffering is an adequate confession of holiness. The efficacious element in Christ's work is "not His suffering and death but His holy obedience to both that is the satisfying thing to God; the holiness of God the Son."<sup>2</sup> The whole atoning feature of Christ's death was His sacrifice unto holy and radical judgment. Christ's death of obedience was more than just death; it was obedient death unto judgment and that unto the final judgment of holiness.

Coming then from the prime value in Christ's work as that of obedience, what did His actual act of obedience accomplish? Mainly this, that Christ justified God in His self-justifying holiness which means His holiness as worked out in judgment.

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 125.

2. Ibid., p. 134.

While admitting that certainly it is true that Christ confessed human sin, His confession was something greater, namely, the confession of God's holiness in His judgment upon sin. And this confession of Christ was in deed of life and death, not in mere words. Christ stood in the midst of human sin, full of love for man, and fuller still of love of God and said:

"Thou art holy in all thy judgments, even in this judgment which turns not aside from Me, but strikes the sinful spot if even I stand on it."<sup>1</sup>

Thus this acceptance by Christ of God's judgment is the means for effecting human reconciliation. The way that sin could be taken away was for judgment upon sin to be acknowledged as holy, wise and good, and for judgment to be converted into confession and praise. This alone could remove guilt which stood between man and God.

And one of the great eternal benefits of this judgment sacrifice of Christ in connection with its actual reconciling work is that it assures man of the deep changelessness of grace. Man is thus assured that he may take the grace of God seriously because God is the Reconciler and He reconciles in the cross of Christ that the judgment of sin was there for good and all.<sup>2</sup>

In conclusion then, let it be said "...the whole of

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 150.
2. Ibid., p. 168.



Christ's work...was the...recognition and justification of God's judgment and holiness in it."<sup>1</sup>

As to the nature of the sacrifice of Christ, viz., whether substitutionary or no, it will be taken up in the following section.

#### D. The Work Of Christ In Relation To Man

##### 1. Christ Confessed God's Holiness in Man.

Having already understood that the main part of Christ's work was the confession of God's holiness and this holiness as worked out in judgment, one well has the right to ask, what relation does Christ's work sustain to man? It has been said before that holiness can be confessed only by adequate holiness.<sup>2</sup> Thus man's confession, which can only say "I did so and so against a holy God" is not adequate. Indeed, Forsyth says, "The more sinful man is, the less can he thus confess either his own sin or God's holiness."<sup>3</sup> Man could not possibly repent and offer his repentance to God. Even if repentance "sui generis" were possible, it would only be an offering to God's holiness and not by it, as it was insisted it must be in an objective view of the atonement. The sinful race could not offer from its damaged

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1. Ibid., p. 157.
2. This thesis, p. 7.
3. Forsyth, op. cit., p. 153.



resources anything that could satisfy God's holiness. And even if one says repentance could, how can one be sure when he has enough repentance?

But God, in realizing man's inadequacy, confessed His holiness in man by a holy infinite love. Thus Forsyth says, "The holiness of God was confessed in man by Christ, and this holy confession of Christ is the source of the truest confession of our sin that we can make."<sup>1</sup> When man was thus enabled to confess not only his own sin but also God's holiness in the judgment of sin, God could forgive him.

Now, how does the holiness of Christ operate on man so that man's confession of God's holiness is adequate? God has created in Jesus Christ the holiness of man and Christ is man's Redeemer because on the Cross He redeemed man not into any mere courage, but into real holiness. The redeeming Cross produces holiness and presents man in this holiness to God. The reason that "Christ's holiness is satisfying to God is because it is not only the means but also the anticipation of our holiness....," and "because in His saving act He is the creative power of which our new life is the product."<sup>2</sup> Christ made atonement to God then, in an act which created a new holiness in man. And it is this holiness created in man by Christ that gives value to man's repentance. In giving a statement on the work of Christ,

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 152.  
2. Ibid., p. 208.

Forsyth says:

"And the race could duly confess its sin and repent only if there arose in it One who by a perfect and impenitent holiness in Himself, and by His organic unity with us, could create such holiness in the sinful as should make the new life one long repentance, transcended by faith and thankful joy."<sup>1</sup>

The phrase "organic unity" leads directly into a discussion of the relationship Christ sustained to man.

## 2. Christ is Man's Representative, not Substitute.

It was said before that Christ could not be a mere arbitrator, bringing together two former enemies. No, rather, Christ sustains such a relation to man that in His work on the cross He was able to offer to God the effect of judging, melting and changing man, calling the things that were not yet as though they were.<sup>2</sup>

Christ's identity with man was not a natural or created identity, but the self-identification of the Creator. He is the Head of the human race by His voluntary self-identifying act, and as such He took the curse and judgment which did not belong to Himself as sinless.<sup>3</sup> In accepting the judgment due man, Christ made a sacrifice, and necessarily a penal sacrifice. Here a controversial region is entered that must be dealt with for the sake of clarity.

By penal sacrifice Forsyth does not mean that in any

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1. Ibid., p. 213.
2. Ibid., p. 192.
3. Ibid., p. 159.

sense that God punished Christ. That is just not so, for how could God punish One with Whom He was always well pleased? However, Forsyth does mean by this phrase that there is a curse and penalty for sin, and Christ voluntarily entered that region. He says:

"Christ, by the deep intimacy of His sympathy with man, entered deeply into the blight and judgment which was entailed by man's sin, and which must be entailed by man's sin if God is a holy and therefore a judging God." <sup>1</sup>

Christ then entered God's wrath, wrath here being used in the sense Forsyth uses it.<sup>2</sup> Thus it can be said that "although Christ was not punished by God, He bore God's penalty upon sin," <sup>3</sup> and it may also be concluded with Forsyth that "Christ did, at the depth of that great act of self-identification with us, when He became man,...did enter the sphere of sin's penalty, and the horror of sin's curse...He did justify God in His judgment and wrath." <sup>4</sup>

God made Christ sin, treated Him as sin, but never for a moment as sinful. Christ was identified with man, but not in the sense that He was sinful and guilty like as man. He could never say "I did it." In that respect, He could not confess personal guilt.

In conclusion then, Forsyth regards Christ as man's representative, not as his substitute. And even in the use of

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1. Ibid., p. 147.

2. By Wrath, Forsyth means the "exalted, inflexible judgment of God." Cf. The Work of Christ, p. 119.

3. Ibid., pp. 147-8.

4. Ibid.

the word representative, it must be remembered that He was self-elected and appointed, the Creator of penitent faith in man. So it can be said with Forsyth:

"Our representative, our surety He was--. What was presented to God was not only Christ's perfection, nor was it His confidence in us, but also His antedated action on us, His confidence in Himself for us. That was what stood to our good. There was offered to God a racial obedience which was implicit in the creative power of His, and not merely parallel with His, as if He were our firstfruits instead of our Sun." <sup>1</sup>

And it is as man is in Christ that he is saved. In Him as the man holy with all the holiness of God does man have the living power of release from guilt, escape from sin, repentance, faith and newness of life. <sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Solidarity of the Race.

One should not pass from a consideration of Forsyth's view of the atonement until he has included in it a glance at his belief in what he calls "the solidarity of the race." He says "...this atonement means a change of relation between God and man...the human race as one whole." <sup>3</sup> Christ's work was done then in relation to the race in its totality, and after this is accomplished, it is taken home individually. The first charge upon Christ was the reconciliation of the race and secondly its individuals by implication. And Forsyth adds that the New Testament view of reconciliation is

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1. Ibid., p. 215.
2. Ibid., p. 228.
3. Ibid., p. 57.

racial, and not the aggregate of individual conversions. What Christ saved then, was in the New Testament sense, the whole human race, and man is saved as an individual by the act which at the same time saves the whole world.<sup>1</sup> "If Christ could not save the world He could make no eternal salvation of any individual."<sup>2</sup>

#### E. Summary

In a consideration of the theory of the atonement held by P. T. Forsyth, it was seen that he took for granted that an atonement was needed. He did not linger long at this point; he simply said that man, by all of his most heroic deeds, was unable to save himself.

The work of Christ as it was conceived in relation to God by Forsyth, was to reconcile God, reconcile here being used in the Pauline sense, and also resting on the atonement as its ground. The goal of such reconciliation, it was seen, was the communion of man and God.

The character of God was discussed next, and God was seen to be a God of holiness. This holiness was the ground for the necessity of the atonement, and could be satisfied only by adequate holiness. It also worked itself out in judgment. The work of Christ was viewed in relation to God, and to His holiness, and this work was seen to be an objective

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1. Ibid., p. 114.
2. Ibid., p. 116.

atonement, that is, God reconciling the world unto Himself. The work of Christ then, was to make a satisfactory confession of God's holiness and this was accomplished not through His sufferings, but by His obedience.

The work of Christ was then seen in relation to man. First of all, Christ was the Confessor in man of God's holiness, because man, due to his sin, was unable to do it. Then Christ was seen to be the Representative of the race and not its substitute. Here a discussion was given of penal sacrifice and in what sense Christ entered God's wrath and bore a penalty for sin.

Finally there was a brief word given about racial solidarity and world salvation.

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF FORSYTH'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE  
HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE ATONEMENT

## CHAPTER II

### THE PLACE OF FORSYTH'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE ATONEMENT

#### A. Introduction

After having considered the view which P. T. Forsyth holds of the atoning work of Christ, it is the purpose of this chapter to discover where this view fits into the history of atonement doctrines. In order to do this, a brief discussion of the atonement doctrines, their history and primary emphases, will be given, followed by a consideration of where Forsyth's views belong in this development. Inasmuch as the history of atonement doctrines is not the primary purpose of this thesis, the following discussion will necessarily be brief. By and large it will be limited to a study of the three main theories of the atonement, and will not touch upon the other types of interpretations of the work of Christ.

#### B. The Three Chief Atonement Doctrines

##### 1. The Classic Idea of the Atonement.

###### a. The History of the Classic Idea.

It has usually been considered that the period of church history prior to the time of Anselm of Canterbury produced no

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definite doctrine of the atonement, but rather that this patristic period was concerned chiefly with Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus Ritschl in his great work Justification and Reconciliation refers to the view of the atonement as conceived of in the patristic period only in a few paragraphs and goes on to the real beginnings of an atonement doctrine as described by Anselm. Recently, however, theologians have been asked to review this traditional stand of beginning the doctrine of the atonement with Anselm. This has been due largely to the work of Gustaf Aulén who in Christus Victor makes an historical presentation and re-evaluation of the first millenium of church history, and continues the re-thinking with a new analysis of Luther's atonement idea. It is largely the view of Aulén that is followed in this chapter.

The patristic period had as its central idea of the atonement that of a Divine conflict and victory; it thought of Christ as fighting against and triumphing over the forces of evil in the world. This idea is a doctrine of the atonement and as such it is sharply different from the other two types.

Of the Fathers, Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200 A.D.)<sup>1</sup> might well be considered the most thoroughly representative and typical. He perhaps did more than anyone else to determine

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1. Unless otherwise stated, the dates of the men mentioned in this chapter will be taken from Sydney Cave, The Doctrine of the Work of Christ.

the form of theological thought for centuries to come. Indeed he has been called "the Schleiermacher of the second century."<sup>1</sup> In him we find the idea of the atonement recurring continually, and his basic idea is clear.

Irenaeus' teaching is a consistent example of the classic idea of the atonement. In brief he says that the work of the atonement is from the beginning to the end a work of God Himself, a work which He not only authorizes and plans, but also a work of which He is the effective agent. "God Himself enters into the world of sin and death, that He may reconcile the world to Himself."<sup>2</sup> This places the incarnation and the atonement inseparably together. Then Irenaeus also says that the background of the atonement is dualistic, meaning a conflict between the forces of good and evil, enmity between God and the world. Thus the work of the atonement is sometimes described as dramatic, meaning it is a drama depicting the battle between good and evil. This involves what is called a "doublesidedness in that God is at once the Reconciler and the Reconciled."<sup>3</sup>

This view of the atonement set forth by Irenaeus is the dominating viewpoint of the early church down to the time of John of Damascus, who is commonly regarded as marking the close of the patristic period. There may be differences among the Fathers, but certainly they are at one in agreeing

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1. Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*, p. 33.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

on their interpretation of Christ's work. However, let it be said that even here in the patristic period there are traces of the second type, the Latin theory of the atonement. Tertullian (c. 150-c. 225 A.D.) taught the idea of penance and satisfaction made by man for sin, resulting in some idea of merit. Cyprian (c. 200-258 A.D.) is the one who took these merits and transferred them to others, using Tertullian's ideas of the atonement.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless the Latin doctrine was not fully worked out during the patristic period and the prevailing view of Christ's work held by the Fathers was the classic idea.<sup>2</sup>

b. The Cardinal Teachings of the Classic Idea.

The classic type or idea of the atonement shows consistently an unbroken line of Divine operation, and a broken line in respect to merit and justice. The atoning work is done by God Himself, God being both the Reconciled and the Reconciler. There is no satisfaction of God's justice in this theory, because God's relation to man is viewed as being that of grace.

Sin is an objective power standing behind men, and the atonement is a triumph of God over sin, the devil and death.

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1. Sydney Cave, *The Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, pp. 133-35 and pp. 106-110.
2. Aulen, with Cave in nearly full agreement, says that the classic idea now largely disappears, only to reappear again in Luther. Orthodox Lutherans however, were unable to grasp their leader's view, and they return in the post-Reformation period to a semi-Latin idea. Cf. Aulen, *Christus Victor*, pp. 115-38. Today the classic idea is being revived, largely through the influence of Aulen.

Salvation is a positive thing, describing man's new relation to God, gained by Christ in His victory over the powers of evil. This victory is eternal, and therefore both present and past. Here justification and atonement are really one and the same thing, justification being the atonement brought into the present.

In the classic view, the incarnation and atonement are inseparable. The victory Christ won in His conflict with evil is the victory of God Himself, and it is God who in Christ reconciles the world to Himself. The concept of God is two-fold; first that He is manifested in conflict with evil and He is the Sovereign Ruler, showing that the above dualism is not ultimate; second, the atonement is seen as God's victory over the powers that bind men. The solution of this dualism does not lie in a rational settlement, but in the prevailing of love over wrath, by the way of Divine sacrifice.

In conclusion Aulen says: "The classic type showed us the Atonement as a movement of God to man, and God as closely and personally engaged in the work of man's deliverance."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The Latin Theory of the Atonement.

### a. The History of the Latin Theory.

The Latin theory of the atonement first appears in a fully developed form in Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), although the foundation stones were laid by Tertullian and Cyprian. Anselm's work, Cur Deus Homo? has come to be

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1. Aulen, op. cit., p. 171.

regarded as the typical expression of the Latin theory.<sup>1</sup>

The reasoning of Anselm in his work is so well known that it is not necessary to enter into it fully here. Briefly it is that man is a sinner and unable to pay the satisfaction which God requires. Man owes this satisfaction to God's honor and hence it must be man that pays the debt. But because man is unable to pay due to his sin, God alone is able. And since man must do it, and cannot, and God is able to do it, the answer is the God-man.

Following Anselm comes the period of the scholastic theologians. Here the dominant view of the atonement is certainly the Latin type of doctrine, even if it is not Anselmic in all of its ramifications. The prevailing ideas were still the payment of satisfaction as done through the human nature of Christ in His dying act. His death gains merit because He was God, even though it was His human nature which made the sacrifice. This was explicitly the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. Throughout the medieval period, the general outline of the Latin theory may be said to have prevailed, although there may have been shades of differences among the various theologians. This dominance of the Latin type may well be explained in the words of Aulen:

"The Latin doctrine of the Atonement was completely in accord with the general nature of medieval theology, with its typical emphasis on penance and

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1. The work of Tertullian and Cyprian forms the essence of the Latin doctrine, namely, the legal relation between two parties whereby merit can be transferred from one to the other. The Latin theory grew up on the penitential system.

on the Sacrifice of the Mass. The doctrine of penance emphasized the necessity of satisfaction, and the Mass was interpreted primarily as a sacrifice for sins."<sup>1</sup>

It has already been said that Luther held to the classic theory of the atonement. After Luther, however, the post-Reformation theologians reverted to the Latin type, beginning with Melancthon as early as 1542. It cannot be said that the period of Protestant Orthodoxy following the Reformation completely conforms to the Latin theory, but it is "far more uniform than the medieval doctrine in the period subsequent to Anselm."<sup>2</sup> The broad basis of the idea of satisfaction remains, just as it was in Anselm. Aulen concludes by saying: "Thus the doctrine of the Atonement in Protestant Orthodoxy belongs indisputably to the Latin type, and it forms the clearest and most logical of all the expressions of that type."<sup>3</sup>

With the coming of the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, the crucial fortress of the doctrine of the atonement was the point of assault, and it was conducted for the most part from the grounds of Abelard's theology, which is to be treated shortly. Then the nineteenth century may well be characterized by a conflict between the Latin theory of Anselm and the subjective theory of Abelard.

b. The Cardinal Teachings of the Latin Theory.

In the Latin theory, the discontinuity of the legal

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1. Ibid., p. 111.

2. Ibid., p. 144.

3. Ibid., p. 148.

order set up in the classic idea is unchanged, and the work of the atonement is no longer considered to be on Divine act from beginning to end. The payment of the required satisfaction breaks the continuity of Divine operation because the satisfaction offered is by Christ as Man. However, the atonement is still the work of God, since He planned it.

As to the doctrine of sin, it may well be questioned whether the Latin theory succeeds in realizing sin as the objective power which it purports to do. At any rate, sin is materialized by the fact that the merits of Christ can be transferred or imputed to men. As long as sin can be dealt with on this basis, it is to be doubted whether it is allowed its full, personal meaning.

It has been said that in the classic theory, atonement and justification are inseparable. Here now it is a different situation, for actual atonement is the offering of satisfaction by Christ to God, and justification is a second act whereby God transfers the merits of Christ to man. The Latin theory also misses the inseparable connection between the incarnation and the atonement because God is no longer the direct agent in the atoning work.

In conclusion, the words of Aulen are appropriate in speaking of the Latin theory: "Its root idea is that man must make an offering or payment to satisfy God's justice; this is the idea that is used to explain the work of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 98.

### 3. The Subjective Doctrine of the Atonement.

#### a. The History of the Subjective Doctrine.

It was Abelard (1079-1142), the younger contemporary of Anselm that laid the foundation upon which the theologians of the Enlightenment were to attack the Latin theory. The theory of Anselm had no sooner received its complete theological formulation than Abelard attacked it. He refused to see how any satisfaction could be made for sins against Christ. His emphasis lies on Christ as the Great Teacher and Example who arouses responsive love in man. And on the basis of this love thus aroused, God forgives and reconciles man.

Although begun at the time of the Middle Ages, Abelard's thought had almost no bearing on his day, largely because it was too radically opposed to the commonly accepted views of the age.

After the Reformation, the Pietists were the first to show any signs of a movement in the direction of the subjective doctrine. Their watchword was the "new birth," which is significant in itself in that it denotes a subjective process. The criticism of the Latin theory, begun with Abelard, now resumed with great fury in the theological discussions of the Enlightenment. A more human idea of the atonement was propounded with sin, as a state of imperfection, merely relative. The aim was to get to the

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simple love of God as revealed in Jesus' teachings, and stay away from any idea of propitiation or reconciliation. God's attitude was seen to be one of good will and benevolence, and hence there was no need for an atonement. This doctrine is entirely anthropocentric.

These ideas found great champions in Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Rashdall. These men were followed by those who tried to compromise the Latin and subjective views, by merely adding to the Latin view that it was God Himself who reconciled Himself to mankind.<sup>1</sup>

b. The Cardinal Teachings of the Subjective Theory.

In this, the third theory that has been considered, the atonement is no longer regarded as the work of God. Instead it is the result of some process that has taken place in man. Christ thus becomes the perfect Example, the Ideal Man, the Head of the race. It becomes an approach of man to God. In any such view as this, sin becomes greatly weakened and is considered to be little more than an infirmity. Aulen says: "The humanistic interpretation of the process of atonement has its ground in the failure of this theology to maintain the radical hostility of God to evil, and His judgment on sin."<sup>2</sup>

The primary element in this theory is that the change that takes place in men is more or less through the influence

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1. Ibid., p. 157.

2. Ibid., p. 165.

of Christ. Hence atonement is a word used to signify a new attitude to the world, characterized by harmony, peace of mind, and self-realization.<sup>1</sup>

All of this tends to make Christ peculiarly abstract and unreal, and it puts the incarnation into a secondary place. Instead of an incarnation, "...it is, rather, that the highest human is the revelation of the Divine," and atonement is not in any true sense the work of God.<sup>2</sup>

God is unchanging Love in this theory, with no opposition to evil, and He stands a distance from man, with the whole movement coming from man to Himself.

In conclusion, let it be said of this third or subjective theory:

"...the emphasis is shifted from that which may be held to be done for men by God...to that which is done in men and by men....God's attitude to men is really made to depend on men's attitude to God. ...The effect of Christ's work is that God, seeing the character of Christ, and His place as the Representative Man, gains a new and more hopeful view of humanity."<sup>3</sup>

### C. A Comparison Of Forsyth's Views With The Three Main Atonement Doctrines

#### 1. Forsyth and the Classic Theory.

##### a. Points of Agreement.

It has been said that the fundamental motif or idea of

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 168.
2. Ibid., p. 170.
3. Ibid., pp. 158-9.

the classic theory of the atonement is that it is fundamentally a movement from God to man. "God is at once the author and the object of reconciliation, He is reconciled in the act of reconciling the world to Himself."<sup>1</sup> It need hardly be said that Forsyth is in utter agreement with this belief. Indeed he holds to an objective atonement for he says, "The real objective element in the atonement, therefore, is that God made it and gave it finished to man, not that it was made to God by man."<sup>2</sup> Here it is evident that Forsyth is at one with the basic idea of the classic theory, that the reconciliation of the world is a movement from God to man.

Another point found in the classic theory is also approved and expanded by Forsyth, namely, the idea of a world (not universal) salvation. In connection with the objectivity of the atonement, Aulen says: "its objectivity is further emphasized by the fact that the Atonement is not regarded as affecting men primarily as individuals, but is set forth as a drama of a world's salvation."<sup>3</sup> Forsyth says:

"...God's atonement initially was made on behalf of the race, and on behalf of individuals in so far as they were members of the race. The first charge upon Christ and His Cross was the reconciliation of the race, and of its individuals by implication."<sup>4</sup>

Here again it is found that Forsyth agrees with the classic idea of the atonement.

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1. Ibid., p. 72.
2. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 93.
3. Aulen, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
4. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

It has been said that Forsyth's system of the atoning work of Christ is built around the holiness of God. By this is meant the holy love of God, which, because it is love, sent Christ into the world, and because it is holy, demanded an adequate confession of the holiness of God. Forsyth and the classic idea are again in agreement for he says: "It is this primacy of the Divine Love which is the basis of the classic idea of the Atonement as God's own work."<sup>1</sup>

There is yet another place of agreement by Forsyth with the classic idea of the atonement. It is found emphasized in Irenaeus, and the threads are picked up by Forsyth. Irenaeus does not stress the death of Christ in such a manner as to leave out the rest of His earthly life. His whole life on this earth is seen to be a continuous process of victorious conflict, culminating in the final and decisive battle on the cross.<sup>2</sup> This same emphasis on the whole life of our Lord is found in the following words of P. T. Forsyth:

"The great confession was made not alone in the precise hour of Christ's death, although it was consummated there. It had to be made in life and act, and not in a mere feeling or statement, and for this purpose death must be organically one with the whole life. You cannot sever the death of Christ from the life of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

b. Points of Different Emphasis.

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1. Aulen, op. cit., p. 156.
2. Ibid., p. 46.
3. Forsyth, op. cit., p. 153.

Aulen has also called the classic theory the dramatic one because "Its central theme is the idea of the Atonement as a Divine conflict and victory; Christ--Christus Victor-- fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world...."<sup>1</sup> God is depicted as carrying through in Christ a victorious conflict against the evil powers hostile to His will.

Now Forsyth would not deny this conflict, because he too mentions it, and both the classic view and Forsyth are agreed in saying that it is through this victory over evil that reconciliation is accomplished. "Seen from this side, the triumph over the opposing powers is regarded as a reconciling of God Himself; He is reconciled by the very act in which He reconciles the world to Himself."<sup>2</sup> But there is very little said of this conflict by Forsyth. Indeed it is not mentioned at all in his chief work on the atonement, The Work of Christ, until the very last chapter when he speaks of the three aspects of Christ's work as being Deliverance, Atonement, and Regeneration.<sup>3</sup> The first of these phases is the one emphasized by the Fathers, and Forsyth recognizes it as being part of the same act by which Christ satisfied the heart of God. But nevertheless he does not stay to discuss it at all. He merely says of Christ, "He subdued Satan, rejoiced the Father, and set up in Humanity

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1. Aulen, op. cit., p. 20.
2. Ibid., p. 21.
3. Forsyth, op. cit., p. 233.

the kingdom--all in one supreme and consummate act of His one person."<sup>1</sup>

This point of variant emphasis between Forsyth and the classic idea may well be explained by the fact that he desires to stay clear of anything that approaches the so-called "ransom-theory" whereby Christ dealt with the Devil and paid for the release of man from Satan's grasp. This transaction has been clothed in powerful images by the Fathers and when this imagery is intended to be an explanation of the atonement doctrine, it is no wonder that Forsyth remains away from it.<sup>2</sup> But this is to miss the point of the classic theory, for its idea is that the atoning work is from God and accomplished by Him, a continuous divine act. And it has been seen that Forsyth is in full agreement with this primary premise of an objective atonement.

## 2. Forsyth and the Latin Theory.

Forsyth stands in utter disagreement with the motif of the Latin theory that "The satisfaction must be made by man; and this is precisely what is done in Christ's atoning work."<sup>3</sup> Forsyth always says that the satisfaction offered to God is offered by God Himself and not by man.

This belief that God Himself is the Reconciler and the Reconciled is a continuity of Divine Action, and the Latin

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1. Ibid., p. 224.

2. For a fuller discussion of Christ's dealings with Satan as described by the Fathers, see Aulen, *Christus Victor*, pp. 63-71.

3. Aulen, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

theory breaks this continuity of Divine Action by making man reach upward to make satisfaction for his own sins. This too is at variance with the doctrine of Forsyth.

Basically it can be said that Forsyth is not in agreement with the underlying principles of the Latin theory.

### 3. Forsyth and the Subjective Theory.

It hardly needs to be said here that Forsyth is not in sympathy with a doctrine which teaches a God of love (not holy love), a subjective process, sin as imperfection, and no need for an atonement. The basic concept that what is done is for men and by men, rather than for men by God is pure folly with Forsyth. Indeed all of his ideas of the atonement are built around the work of Christ as necessitated by the holy love of God, and as satisfying the holiness of God through His Son Jesus Christ.

#### D. Summary

It has been the purpose of this chapter to discover where Forsyth's view of the atonement fits into the history of atonement doctrines. For this reason, the three chief atonement doctrines were set forth as being the classic theory, the Latin theory, and the subjective theory.

Briefly, a history of the classic idea was given, particularly as it was found in the Church Fathers. Then a brief exposition of the cardinal teachings of the classic theory

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was given.

The same procedure was followed with the Latin theory; first, a sketch of the history of the doctrine beginning with Anselm and followed by the scholastic theologians was given, and second, the chief points of the Latin theory were discussed.

The third theory, namely, the subjective view, was given attention, also under the outline of its history, beginning with Abelard, and its teachings.

In a comparison of Forsyth's views with the three theories of the atonement discussed in this chapter, it was seen that Forsyth came into closest harmony with the classic idea. The fundamental position in this theory that God was reconciling the world to Himself was seen to be the view of Forsyth as well. The idea of a world salvation, the holiness of God and the whole life and work of Christ were found to be in both the classic view and the theory of Forsyth. There was discovered a point of different emphasis between Forsyth and the classic idea, that of the conflict or battle between our Lord and Satan.

In conclusion, it was seen very clearly that Forsyth held nothing in common with either the Latin or the subjective theories of the atonement.

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CHAPTER III

THE OUTREACH OF FORSYTH'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT  
INTO HIS WRITINGS

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THE OUTREACH OF FORSYTH'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT  
INTO HIS WRITINGS

A. Introduction

The view which Forsyth holds of the atonement has already been discussed, together with a consideration of the place where his view belongs in a history of atonement doctrines. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the chief works of Forsyth and find in them, if possible, any remarks about the atonement. After having found any such statements, it will then be the procedure to see if these views are consistent with what has already been said of Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement. In order to do this, it will perhaps be best to formulate some basic principles in his doctrine, and then seek to discover these principles as they are carried out in his writings.

B. The Principle Of God's Holiness

1. God's Holiness and Resultant Judgment.

It has already been said that the central element in Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement is the holiness of God. This is reiterated by Forsyth when he says, "It is in this holiness of God that all our faith and all our theology

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begin."<sup>1</sup> This assertion of Forsyth's is carried out as his writings are studied.

In speaking of the supreme place that the will holds in our modern psychology, Forsyth says that no less is true in our religion, and that our greatest interest in the Christian revelation starts ethically with the holiness of God.<sup>2</sup> He utters a very characteristic statement when he says, "Christianity is concerned with God's holiness before all else;...."<sup>3</sup> He continues: "The revelation in Christianity is not love, but holy love."<sup>4</sup>

This holy love of God is important to Forsyth, for he finds therein an objective and final footing for a progressive age. Because God's love is a holy love, it meets the tests of life and provides surety for the Christian. This holy love of God proves that He is God after all, and His glory is proved by His calling back the world to a new creation in grace.<sup>5</sup> In speaking of the surety of the Christian, Forsyth says, "Herein is our salvation as sure and perennial as the holiness for which we are saved. And love is thus sure, because it is the holy foundation of the real, moral world."<sup>6</sup>

Forsyth makes the holiness of God's forgiving love the

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1. P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 254.
2. P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 4.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
4. P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, p. 143.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
6. P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 255.

watershed that divides his theology from that of the theological liberal.

Thus far it is evident that Forsyth holds the holiness of God in the same high regard as always.

And he continues to be consistent in speaking of God's holiness when he links it definitely with judgment. He says, "The idea of holiness is inseparable from the idea of judgment as the mode by which grace goes into action."<sup>1</sup> God is holy, and by this is meant that He is holy in His very essence and nature. Therefore, "God must either punish sin or expiate it for the sake of His infrangibly holy nature."<sup>2</sup> Thus the cross comes as a revelation of God's holy love, and it is meaningful as the place where God judges. It is the work of Christ on the cross that satisfied the holy judgment of God.

Thus seen it is evident that Forsyth is consistent in his views of God's holiness and the judgment which stems from such holiness.

## 2. God's Holiness and the Work of Christ.

The holiness of God is the immutable thing in the universe and the ruling principle of all religion. As such it has a holy claim on the guilty race. This claim must be met. But,

"None but Himself can do justice to Himself. None but the Holy can satisfy the holy and its eternal,

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1. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 5.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

unquenchable demand. It is only God as the Holy Atoning Son that can do justice to the Holy Father, or satisfy the changeless conditions of a perfectly Holy God in a guilty world."<sup>1</sup>

Thus it is seen that it is only God Himself who could answer and meet the demand of His own holiness. This He has done in Christ and His cross. Forsyth says:

"In His Cross He confessed and satisfied the holiness of God in a way so intimate, so absolute, that it was also the radical exposure of sin in all its sinfulness, and thus it became its destruction."<sup>2</sup>

Thus Christ made a holy recognition of God's wounded holiness and provided its holy satisfaction through His holy obedience. "The only satisfaction to a holy God is the absolute establishment of holiness, as Christ did it in all but the empirical way."<sup>3</sup> And this satisfaction made to God's holiness, amidst the conditions of sin and judgment, was made through the holy confession by Christ of God's holiness. And let it be emphasized that this confession of God's holiness was the primary concern of Christ's work, for Forsyth says, "What a holy God requires is the due confession of His holiness before even the confession of sin."<sup>4</sup> Christ satisfied God's holiness and judgment by saying, "Thou art holy as Thou judgest."<sup>5</sup> And because Christ met a God of holy love with a love equally holy, God could say of Christ,

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1. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, p. 214.
2. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 253.
3. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 347.
4. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, pp. 206-7.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."<sup>1</sup>

Thus it can readily be seen that Forsyth, in expressing his views of God's holiness and its satisfaction, is compatible with his doctrine as set forth in the first chapter of this thesis.

### C. The Principle That The Atonement Is Primarily An Act Of God

If it is true that God's holiness can be satisfied only by adequate holiness, then it follows, as has been said, that He must provide such holiness. This He has done in Christ. Therefore the great work of Christ was done by God in Him, and not by man. Man did not merely rise to his highest, though fallen, stature and offer his best to God. The Gospel does not rise from man. Christ is not a developed Christ that is produced from man's strength. All of this would be contained in the familiar phrase, "man trying to lift himself by his own bootstraps." Rather, God is in Christ, loving to the uttermost there, and not merely saying or showing by an agent that He loved. Appropriately Forsyth says:

"If we take in their full earnest the words that God was in Christ reconciling we have in this Christ the real presence and action of a forgiving God. The act of Christ was still more God's act, and not a mere reflection of it. His love was God's love, and not a mere response to it. We have Christ doing what God alone could do--

. . . . .

1. Matthew 3:17b.

forgiving sin committed against God alone."<sup>1</sup>

This is one of the distinguishing marks of Christianity, that in it God seeks man. In all other religions, man reaches outward and upward to find God, but in the Christian religion, God is seeking man and finding him for good and all. Christianity says that God was doing the best for man, while paganism and humanistic Christianity say that man was doing his best for God. Forsyth sums up his position admirably when he says:

"Christ is God forgiving. He does not help us to God, He brings God. In Him, God comes. He is not the agent of God but the Son of God; He is God the Son. As we must preach Christ and not merely about Christ, so Christ does not merely bring access to God, He brings God. God is love only if Jesus is God."<sup>2</sup>

Thus it is seen that in Forsyth's view it is Almighty and Holy God who gives Himself up in Christ and submits Himself to His own holy judgment. Hence Forsyth says, "The Cross does not in the New Testament exhibit God as accepting sacrifice so much as making it."<sup>3</sup> And with this statement, Forsyth has returned to his great Biblical text, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."<sup>4</sup> He remains true to his objective doctrine of the atonement. All that has just been said is in line with Forsyth's view of the atonement.

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1. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind, p. 252.
2. Forsyth, The Principle of Authority, p. 353.
3. Forsyth, The Cruciality of the Cross, p. 193.
4. II Corinthians 5:19a.

## D. Other Principles In Forsyth's View Of The Atonement.

### 1. The Goal of Reconciliation.

Forsyth declares that the object of all God's dealings with men is communion.<sup>1</sup> God has sent His Son as the surety of man's holiness in order that He Himself might have fellowship with man. He Himself is the end, and with Him man communes. Forsyth concludes, "He does not offer us communion to make us holy; He makes us holy for the sake of communion."<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of the salvation of men, Forsyth says again ". . .and our salvation can therefore only be by communion with the absolutely holy, by the self-recuperation of that universe's moral soul for our holy goal."<sup>3</sup>

Here again, in describing the goal of the atonement, Forsyth speaks of the communion with God, a position entirely in accord with that set forth in chapter one of this thesis.

### 2. A Racial or World Salvation.

Forsyth did not limit the work of Christ to the salvation of any one individual, but said rather that Christ died to save the race, and then its individuals by virtue of their membership in the human race.

This is a position that Forsyth takes in his other writings as well. He says, "It is also the Redemption not of a soul alone, but of a race, and a world that is involved."<sup>4</sup>

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1. P. T. Forsyth, Christian Perfection, p. 13.
2. Ibid., p. 13.
3. Forsyth, The Principle of Authority, p. 206.
4. Ibid.



This universality of the work of Christ is again illustrated by the term "racial soul" which Forsyth uses in speaking of the Cross of Christ as the center of all history and of the moral universe.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Unity of the Life of Christ.

The life of our Lord is viewed as one complete and organic unity by Forsyth. His death on the cross is not an isolated act, done apart from the life He lived. Indeed the cross was latent in the very nature of Christ, not as His fate, but as His consummation.<sup>2</sup> Forsyth warns against preaching about the death of Christ apart from His life, or His teachings apart from His life, for it may all well lead to falsity.<sup>3</sup>

### 4. The Obedience of Christ.

It has already been said that in Forsyth's view of the atonement, Christ's work is considered valuable from the standpoint of His holy obedience, rather than from His sufferings, which are so often emphasized. Forsyth is consistent in this regard too, for he says in another place, "It is not the death that atones, but that supreme act and expression of holy, obedient life which does justice to God's holiness as the Son alone could do;...."<sup>4</sup>

Forsyth warns against certain fallible ideas of the

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1. Ibid., p. 412.

2. P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p. 108.

3. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*, p. 82.

4. Ibid., p. 210.

atonement, and in so doing, he speaks out against imagining that any value of the atonement can be found in equivalent on the part of Christ. "Indeed", he says, "it does not lie in the suffering at all, but in the obedience, the holiness."<sup>1</sup> Any account of the atonement which views it as suffering by Christ equivalent to what man deserved, is very definitely and positively both a moral and psychological impossibility.

#### 5. Christ Not Punished by God.

Here in this area Forsyth is again found to be consistent with his view of the atonement. It has already been said that God could in no way punish Christ, and Forsyth only reiterates this view when he states, "We must renounce the idea that He was punished by the God who was ever well pleased with His beloved Son."<sup>2</sup>

#### 6. The Victory of the Cross over the Evil One.

There remains perhaps just one other place where Forsyth's writings may be examined and be found to be in line with his teaching on the atonement. This area lies in the idea of a conflict and victory of the Righteous One over Satan. This view is not prominent in Forsyth, probably because he wished to stay clear of the stigma of the ransom theory, but it is mentioned nevertheless. But when he does

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1. Ibid., p. 79.  
2. Ibid.

stay to discuss it, it is only in the following words:

"The solution of the world, therefore, is what destroys its guilt. And nothing can destroy guilt but the very holiness that makes guilt guilt. And that destruction is the work of Christ upon His Cross, the Word of Life Eternal in your hands and in your souls."<sup>1</sup>

#### E. Summary

This chapter has viewed some selected principles of the atonement as found in Forsyth's writings to discover whether or not they are consistent with his doctrine of the atonement.

First of all, the holiness of God as resulting in judgment was considered. Then this holiness was related to the work of Christ, and both of these relationships of God's holiness were found to be in full accord with Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement.

Then the basic principle of the atonement as primarily effected by God in Christ was discussed, and this too, was discovered to be in agreement with the view set forth in chapter one. Finally other principles of the atonement doctrine were considered, namely, the goal of the atonement, the salvation of the race, the unity and obedience of the life of Christ and the punishment and victory of Christ. All of these were seen to be compatible with Forsyth's view of the atonement as originally discussed.

In conclusion, let it be said that Forsyth is fully

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1. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind, p. 333.

consistent with his doctrine of the atonement in all of his writings. The basic concepts or principles are followed through faithfully and are definitely expounded as being in hearty agreement with this theory of the atonement as viewed in the first chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

A CRITIQUE OF FORSYTH'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT

## CHAPTER IV

### A CRITIQUE OF FORSYTH'S VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT

#### A. Introduction

The view which Forsyth holds of the atonement has already been discussed, together with its position in a history of that doctrine, and its outreach into Forsyth's system of thought. It is the purpose of this chapter to give a critique of his doctrine, based first on the apostle Paul, second, on a contemporary of Forsyth, James Denney, and third, on a modern theologian, Emil Brunner. From these comparisons material will be gathered for a personal critique of Forsyth's theory of the atonement, which will conclude the chapter.

#### B. A Critique Of Forsyth Based On St. Paul

##### 1. St. Paul's View of the Atonement.

###### a. Preliminary Considerations.

Perhaps no other of the early apostles did more to interpret the life and work of Christ than did St. Paul. It is because of his epistles and their importance in the early church that he is selected as the Biblical basis on which to criticize and evaluate Forsyth's view of the atonement.

During most of the eighteenth century, Paul and his letters were under great scrutiny by the scholars. Paul's

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religion was distinguished from his theology, with the emphasis being laid on the former. It has even been said that Paul was "the second founder of Christianity," and that he changed its primitive simplicity. But in recent years there has been somewhat of a revolution in the thinking of scholars about Paul, and his epistles have been interpreted in the light of his missionary work and experiences. Wrede, in his little book, Paulus, did much to advance this new interpretation of Paul, first, by pointing out the necessary opposition between Paul's religion and his theology, and second, by attempting to envisage Paul's teaching as a whole, centering it around redemption.<sup>1</sup>

b. The Idea of Triumph in St. Paul.

Paul regarded man as being in bondage to objective powers of evil, namely, sin, flesh, law and death. These forces were not abstract metaphysical entities to Paul, but real and active forces in the world. Sin was the prime enemy of man, dwelling in man and compelling him to do the evil deeds that he would gladly shun. Sin was a dreadful reality to Paul in his own experience. It found a willing instrument in the flesh of man, and it was also the instrument of death. Death was the last enemy to be destroyed. Then there was the law, namely, the Jewish law, under which Paul had chafed. The more he tried to obey it, the less he succeeded, and he learned that under the law no righteousness

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1. Cf. Aulen, *Christus Victor*, p. 80.

could be had.

Paul had a concept of the enemies of man that ruled over his age and dominated it. What matters, however, is the way Paul conceived of the victory Christ had wrought and the deliverance He had brought. Christ came and delivered Christians from sin and the flesh, "...God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, had condemned sin in the flesh:...."<sup>1</sup> God placed His Son into the sinful life of men, and there He conquered sin. And with this conquering of sin, there was a victory over death. Its sting was gone, and it no longer held power over man. Not even death was now able to separate man from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

But there is also the victory Christ gained over that enemy of man, the law. Paul learned he had to control his feelings as well as his actions. This he could not do, and so failed until in Christ it was made possible to live in the spirit, which was the fulfillment of the school master: "...that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."<sup>3</sup> Thus there is very definitely in Paul's letters a conception of the work of Christ as being a victorious battle over the enemies of man, not so much embodied in the Devil personally, but more as a complexion of demonic forces.

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1. Romans 8:3.
2. I Corinthians 15:56.
3. Romans 8:4.



c. The Gospel Defined by Paul in Romans 3:21-31.

Paul here in Romans 3:21-31 is giving a definition of the gospel, a system of righteousness by faith. Here for the first time God's attitude towards sin is revealed as being in times past that of forbearance, and now as being dealt with by Christ who is at once the Just and the Justifier. Christ is the propitiation or a propitiatory for man's sins, and thus He is the means whereby man may approach God. What is new here in Paul's statement is the fact that God Himself has taken the initiative and Himself provides the means whereby man may draw near to Him.

In speaking of Paul's view of the atonement, it might well be stated as Aulen quotes Wrede as saying:

"Christ the Son of God relinquishes His Sonship and becomes a poor man, like unto us, that we men might become God's sons; Christ descends into the sphere of sin, and overcomes it by His death, that thereby we, who were languishing in bondage to sin, might be set free---such phrases express the pith of his meaning."<sup>1</sup>

d. The Idea of God Performing the Reconciliation.

Paul, as has been said, speaks of Christ as triumphing over the hostile powers. The victory has been won and it is only a matter of time before He assumes His role of Victor over all mankind. This work of triumph is for man's sake, for man's salvation.

It is important, however, that it be noted here that this salvation is also that of atonement, for it is precisely

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1. Aulen, Christus Victor, p. 82.

the work of salvation wherein Christ triumphs over evil that constitutes the atonement between God and the world. For it is by this act that God takes away the enmity of the world and reconciles it unto Himself. This thought is central to Paul, namely, that God has effected salvation in Christ and thereby atonement: "God through Christ saves mankind from His own judgment and His own Law, establishing a new relation which transcends the order of merit and of justice."<sup>1</sup> This thought that God Himself in Christ has effected both salvation and atonement is the key to all of Paul's Christology.

## 2. St. Paul and Forsyth Compared.

### a. The Idea of Triumph.

It has been well noted and rightly so, that Paul makes great use of the triumph of Christ over evil and demonic powers. This idea of conflict and subsequent victory of Christ is not prominent in Forsyth, although it should be said in his behalf that he nowhere denies any such a battle. It is rather the lack of emphasis more than a denial, and this fact may well be explained, as said before, by Forsyth's desire to keep away from the stigma of the ransom theory. This view of Forsyth's stand may well be upheld by these words of his:

"Sin could not be conquered till it was expressed. And that was what Christ did in God and God in Christ. He brought evil to a moral head and dealt with it as a unity. He forced a final crisis of the

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1. Ibid., p. 88.

universal conscience to decide it for good. He forced battle unto victory once for all, for the race and for eternity."<sup>1</sup>

b. The Idea of God as the Reconciler.

As to the other point of Paul's view of redemption, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, Forsyth is in expressed agreement. Indeed it is one of the cornerstones of his entire theory of the atonement. His own words are apt here:

"This power and certainty of the race's salvation we can only have from God Himself as Savior. God could not depute redemption. We could not take eternal pardon from a demigod, or commit the soul to him for ever as we do to Christ. No half-God could redeem the soul which it took the whole God to create. God Himself must be the immediate doer in what Christ did to save."<sup>2</sup>

And Forsyth goes on to say that the effect Christ has had in history can only be explained by an eternal act in the Godhead which was the ground of all on the earth: only by God acting in him.<sup>3</sup>

Thus it can be said that Forsyth and Paul are in fundamental agreement in their basic view of the work of Christ, although with Forsyth one aspect of it is not expressly stated for the reason given above.

C. A Critique Of Forsyth Based On James Denney

1. Points of Agreement.

a. The Obedience of Christ.

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1. Forsyth, The Cruciality of the Cross, p. 117.
2. Forsyth, The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, p. 86.
3. Ibid.

A large portion of Forsyth's view of the atonement is built on the idea of the obedience of Christ to His Father. It is a typical statement when he says, "...the core of Christianity is Christ's being obedient unto judgment and unto the final judgment of holiness."<sup>1</sup> This too, is the view of Denney when he says, "The one term by which His word can always be described in relation to God is obedience."<sup>2</sup> There is then, agreement between Forsyth and Denney on this particular point.

b. The Sufferings of Christ.

Forsyth does not deny that Christ suffered, but what he does make a plea for is that these sufferings were in no way efficacious as a part of the atoning and reconciling work of Christ. He scoffs at the idea set forth by some that in the hour of Christ's death, He suffered all the pains of hell which the human race deserved, compressed into one brief moment.<sup>3</sup> Any such idea of equivalents is too materialistic and is not what is required, says Forsyth.<sup>4</sup> What Christ offered to God was not an equivalent penalty, but an adequate confession of God's holiness.

This same idea of the sufferings of Christ is also found in Denney. In reviewing "With pleasure" the doctrine of the atonement which he has propounded, he says, "It excludes all those ideas of equivalence between what Christ suffered

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1. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 135.
2. James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p. 233.
3. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
4. *Ibid.*

and what men as sinners were under an obligation to suffer...."<sup>1</sup> And not willing to drop the matter, Denney goes on to quote some of the classic passages which give such an interpretation to the sufferings of Christ, among them one passage from Luther.<sup>2</sup> Hence it is evident that both Forsyth and Denney are agreed that the sufferings of Christ were not an equivalent to the sufferings the human race deserved. The idea is revolting to both of them alike.

c. Penalty and Punishment.

Forsyth speaks of the sacrifice of Christ as being a penal sacrifice, while being conscious that the term is a controversial one. He attempts to overcome the stigma of the phrase by saying that in no sense did God punish Christ, because Christ was God's own beloved Son, in Whom He was always well pleased. Forsyth goes on to explain that Christ's sacrifice was penal in the sense that there is a penalty and a curse for sin, and Christ voluntarily entered the arena where sin was experiencing its penalty from God. Thus, even though as a sinless Man, He was good enough to escape sin's curse, He entered the penumbra of judgment, and therein confessed God's holiness. Therefore Forsyth says, "You can say that although Christ was not punished by God, He bore God's penalty upon sin."<sup>3</sup>

Now at first sight, it might seem that Denney would

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1. Denney, op. cit., pp. 262, 3.

2. Ibid., p. 263.

3. Forsyth, The Work of Christ, p. 147.

disagree with this view of Forsyth's, because he says, "...the burden Christ bore under the inspiration of His love cannot be described as penal."<sup>1</sup> But Denney objects to the word penal because with him it means punishment which exists in and for a bad conscience. Christ, he says, did not have a bad conscience, therefore His sufferings are by no means to be counted as penal.<sup>2</sup> It is proper, according to Denney, to let the Innocent suffer with the guilty and for them, but it is entirely immoral for Him to be punished for the guilty.

But Denney goes on to explain the sufferings of Christ in a way satisfactory to himself. He says:

"That while the agony and the Passion were not penal in the sense of coming upon Jesus through a bad conscience, or making Him the personal object of divine wrath, they were penal in the sense that in that dark hour He had to realize to the full the divine reaction against sin in the race in which He was incorporated...."<sup>3</sup>

Thus it is apparent that both Denney and Forsyth are at one in denying the penal sufferings of Christ as being due to a sense of His own sin and God's wrath and judgment upon the Sinless One. And they are also agreed that these sufferings of Christ were a result of His entering upon and receiving the divine reaction against sin. Here then is a point of agreement of great importance in understanding the doctrines of the atonement that these two theologians held.

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1. Denney, The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p. 262.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 273.

## d. Attributes of God.

Forsyth holds to the position that the work of Christ was between person and person and therefore it affects both sides. It meant an action on God as well as on man. And he also conceives of the work of Christ as God reconciling Himself through Christ. But the problem then arises, did God compel Himself to change His feeling towards man? Did He have to force Himself to be gracious?

Forsyth relieves this difficulty by saying that the heart of God, His gracious disposition towards man is always the same; His grace is unchangeable. In this respect there is no change on God's part brought about by the reconciling work of Christ. However, though God's feeling towards man did not change, His treatment of man did. The pivotal point in this statement is, of course, the distinction between a change of feeling and a change of treatment. God never ceased to love man; His love and feeling is constant: but He did change in His practical relation from anger to a friendly treatment of man. This view preserves Forsyth's position that true love can be angry towards sin and yet still be love.<sup>1</sup>

Denney also recognizes this same basic principle that reconciliation is a two-way affair, between two persons. He wrestles with the problem from the standpoint of the immutable love, of the changeless grace of God. If sin makes a difference, then is love immutable? Is God

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1. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 105.

immutable? Does forgiveness change God? Denney solves the problem by a parallel with the human father and his child, declaring that when the father does actually forgive his erring child, he still loves him as he always did, but his attitude towards him is different. This is not inconsistent with his always loving his child, says Denney. And if all this is true of an earthly father, there is no reason why it cannot be accepted as applicable to the Heavenly Father. Unchanging love is present in both cases. In the experience of forgiveness, God is reconciled to man and man is reconciled to God. God is reconciled, not in the sense that He was compelled to change His feeling towards man, but only in the sense that His will to bless man has been realized.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident without further clarification that Forsyth and Denney are at this point struggling with the same problem and have arrived at a solution which is common to both of them.

## 2. Points of Variat Meanings and Terminology.

### a. An Objective Atonement.

According to Forsyth an objective view of the atonement consists primarily in the fact that God Himself made the offering, rather than that something was offered to God by man. "The real objectivity of the atonement is not that it was made to God, but by God."<sup>2</sup> It may be fairly said

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1. Denney, *op. cit.*, pp. 237, 8.  
2. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 92.



that this was the full and entire meaning of an objective atonement according to P. T. Forsyth. Anything else to him, namely, an offering by man to God, would place the atonement in the subjective realm.

According to Denney, this may also be considered basic. In speaking of the New Testament reconciliation, he says that the underlying principle of it all is "...the sense that God takes the initiative in the work of reconciliation, that Christ is the gift of God, and the gift of His love."<sup>1</sup> And with this statement Forsyth has no quarrel. But as Denney proceeds to elucidate what he means by an objective atonement, there emerges a difference in emphasis between his view and that of Forsyth.

Denney says in one place that an objective atonement is the homage paid by Christ in recognition of the moral order established and upheld by God. This homage is recognized by God as valuable, regardless whether or not man is impressed by it.<sup>2</sup> It would seem from such a statement that Denney regards the term objective atonement as meaning that man does not have a part in saying how efficacious the work of Christ may be. In other words, the reconciliation of man to God is based on the objective and absolute work of Christ which has an independent objective value to God, and this work is not stated to be the work of God in Christ, as Forsyth insists. This interpretation of an objective

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1. Denney, op. cit., p. 237.
2. Ibid., p. 235.

atonement is not present in Forsyth, but it is not necessarily inconsistent with his view that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."

b. The Holy Love of God.

The holy love of God stands at the core of Forsyth's system of theological and Christological thought. A very typical statement of his is this: "Our Gospel is not simply God is love, but God's love is holy, for the Holy One is Love."<sup>1</sup> And when Forsyth speaks of the holy love of God he means that holiness is the law of God's nature, and even He could not trifle with His own Holiness. And it is something that man cannot easily ignore. His holiness makes it absurd to say that God will forgive, save as there is a basis for forgiveness. This holiness of God must be maintained and everything else be adjusted to it.

Denney very infrequently has any direct statement concerning the holiness of God's love or any similar phrase. After such prominence of the words in Forsyth, they are conspicuously absent in Denney. But this does not mean that a similar idea is not present. On the contrary, there are several places where it would seem that Denney is trying to put across the idea of an immutable attribute of God which must be reckoned with in any consideration of the world, man, sin or Christ. For example, in speaking of the design of the work of Christ, Denney says:

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1. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind, p. 321.

"It cannot do this simply as an exhibition of unconditional love. It can only do it as the exhibition or demonstration of a love which is itself ethical in character and looks to ethical issues. But the only love of this description is love which owns the reality of sin by submitting humbly and without rebellion to the divine action against it; it is love doing homage to the divine ethical necessities which pervade the nature of things and the whole order in which men live."<sup>1</sup>

This statement of Denney's shows that while he may not be using the same terminology of Forsyth, yet he is striving for the same goal, namely, that there is a moral order in the universe, and it must be reckoned with, whether it is called the holiness of God or not. Again he says:

"...it is not by unconditional love...but by a love the very nature of which is that it does absolute homage to the whole being and self-revelation of God, and especially to the inexorable reactions of the divine nature against sin."<sup>2</sup>

Denney also goes on to speak once of the judgment of God as reacting against sin.<sup>3</sup> This is a familiar refrain of Forsyth, who speaks much of the holiness of God necessitating judgment. Here then Denney would seem to be in agreement in idea, though not in exact words.

All of this leads to the justifiable conclusion that Forsyth and Denney are perhaps of the same mind on these points, and are aiming at the same end, only with perhaps a different terminology.

### 3. Points of Disagreement.

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1. Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, pp. 234, 5.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

a. Christ Bore the Sins of Man.

Denney says, "He bore our sins. In every sense and to every extent to which love could do so, He made them His own."<sup>1</sup> This is a point very strongly emphasized in Denney, and to show that this view is Scriptural, he turns to several Biblical instances. The first of these is the baptism of Jesus, which, he says, may have a number of aspects which may rightly be emphasized, but the basic one he finds to be thus: "Jesus, at the very outset of His career, identifying Himself, as far as love enabled Him to do so, with sinful men."<sup>2</sup> Denney goes on to say:

"...His entrance on His work, like the whole work from beginning to end, was an act of loving communion with us in our misery. He numbered Himself with the transgressors and made the burden of our sins His own."<sup>3</sup>

The act of baptism then, stands at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, signifying the identity of Jesus with His people.

There are other Scriptural allusions made by Denney to fortify this premise. He quotes Jesus' own words "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners,"<sup>4</sup> and also "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost."<sup>5</sup> These words the lost, are a pathetic expression of Christ's sense of the situation of the sinful. And then in conclusion Denney also quotes that great utterance of

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1. Ibid., p. 251.
2. Ibid., p. 252.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 253.
5. Ibid., p. 254.

Jesus, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."<sup>1</sup>

Now this whole emphasis by Denney on Jesus as the burden bearer of man's sin is an alien and even repugnant idea to Forsyth. This view of Denney, in connection with his twofold definition of Christ's work, would make Christ primarily the confessor of man's sin. Forsyth would disagree with this on the grounds that Christ could not in any real sense confess a sin with whose guilt he had nothing in common.<sup>2</sup> Here it may be seen that Forsyth and Denney are not in agreement.

b. Christ Confessed God's Holiness.

Forsyth relieves the difficulty presented in saying Christ bore and confessed man's sin by saying that the first charge upon Christ was not to confess human sin, "but to confess something greater, namely, God's holiness in His judgment upon sin."<sup>3</sup> Forsyth admits readily that Christ did confess human sin, but that was not His primary duty: first and foremost He confessed God's holiness:

"...He confessed God's holiness in reacting mortally against human sin, in cursing human sin, in judging it to its very death. He stood in the midst of human sin full of love to man, such love as enabled Him to identify Himself in the most profound, sympathetic way with the evil race; fuller still of love to the God whose name He was hallowing; and, as with one mouth, as if the

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1. Ibid.
2. Forsyth, The Work of Christ, p. 148.
3. Ibid., p. 149.

whole race confessed through Him, as with one soul, as though the whole race at last did justice to God through His soul, He lifted up His face unto God and said, 'Thou art holy in all Thy judgments, even in this judgment which turns not aside even from Me, but strikes the sinful spot if even I stand on it'.<sup>1</sup>

This element of Christ's work is not present in Denney. In fact it is entirely foreign to his doctrine of the atonement, while it plays a vital part in Forsyth's thinking.

It is evident from what has been said that Forsyth and Denney are at one on some points, are in basic agreement on others, and then disagree on still others.

#### D. Critique Of Forsyth On The Basis Of Brunner

##### 1. Points of Agreement.

###### a. The Character of God.

Both Forsyth and Brunner have reacted against the silly notion that sin is merely in the natural order of the world and has merely to be forgotten. And they are equally against the idea that because good people forgive one another, so God will be ready to forgive men for their errors.<sup>2</sup> Brunner says, "There are no human conditions in which we have the right to expect that God will forgive us as a matter of course."<sup>3</sup>

Forsyth and Brunner find the basis for the seriousness of sin to be in the character of God. This has already been pointed out sharply in Forsyth. It is equally clear in Emil

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1. Ibid., p. 150

2. Emil Brunner, The Mediator, p. 447.

3. Ibid.

Brunner. In speaking of man's sense of guilt and the fact that man's nature is perverted and spoiled and lost, Brunner says, "It is God's holiness and righteousness which makes us aware of this subjective fact as an objective fact; ...thus even our sense of guilt is due to the presence of the Divine Holiness."<sup>1</sup>

The similarity of the views of Forsyth and Brunner is seen again in the character of God as worked out in His wrath. Brunner conceives of God's holiness as requiring the annihilation of the will that resists Him.<sup>2</sup> This reaction of God's holiness against sin is the negative aspect of Divine holiness or Divine wrath. Man has rebelled against God; he has made an attack on God's honor, and God cannot permit this, for if He did, He would no longer be God. The law of His Divine Being demands a divine reaction, which is God taking a personal share in it. This inviolability of God's character is what Forsyth expressed as God's holiness working itself out in judgment. And judgment, according to Forsyth, was the anger of God.<sup>3</sup>

The dialectic element is probably the characteristic mark of Brunner's theology. In speaking of God, this is evident in the idea of love and wrath. Brunner sums it up when he proclaims, "The God who is really angry, really loves."<sup>4</sup> He makes no attempt to explain this paradox, but

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1. Ibid., pp. 443-4.

2. Ibid., p. 444.

3. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 146.

4. Brunner, *op. cit.*, p. 478.

carries it through as the cornerstone of his doctrine of the atonement. Now Forsyth is of much the same opinion when he says, "The judgment of God is perfectly compatible with His continued love, just as a father's punishment is perfectly compatible with his love for his children."<sup>1</sup>

On the idea of both love and anger in God's character, then, Brunner and Forsyth are agreed.

b. An Objective Atonement.

Forsyth has described the atonement as a work of God Himself. With this definition, Brunner would agree, for he criticizes the subjective view of the atonement by saying, "But thinkers of this type have no idea that this fact represents an actual objective transaction, in which God actually does something, and something which is absolutely necessary."<sup>2</sup> And he continues in another place, to summarize what he means by an objective atonement when he says:

"Likewise it is the only ground of knowledge of the unconditional forgiveness of God. For unconditional forgiveness means that God takes the initiative, that He does not wait till we have fulfilled the conditions, till we 'come.' He Himself 'comes.' The Cross means that He, as the Forgiving One, really comes to us sinful men. Further, it means that He comes to all."<sup>3</sup>

c. The Personal Element in the Atonement.

With both Forsyth and Brunner the atonement is a personal operation, affecting the person of God on one side, and the person of man on the other. Brunner says, "There

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1. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
2. Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 439.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 506.



is nothing particularly remarkable about the fact that a personality stands at the heart of the message of the Bible;...."<sup>1</sup>

On these three points then, Brunner and Forsyth are seen to be in accord.

## 2. Points of Disagreement.

### a. Emphasis on Sin.

It was seen that because Forsyth left no systematic treatment on the atonement such as Brunner has, there was no organized doctrine of sin to be found in his writings. Rather it was said that an atonement was considered necessary, and then a discussion of the atonement was given.<sup>2</sup> This, however, is not the case with Brunner. In reaction against liberal Protestantism, which makes sin to be at most an error and at best an illusion, Brunner sets forth sin as a real and horrible force in the world, an obstacle which creates a chasm, a deep gulf between God and man. One example of this is the following:

"The truth is rather that between us and God there is an actual obstacle, which blocks the way like a great boulder, an obstacle so great that we cannot push it out of the way by our own efforts. This obstacle is sin, or, rather, guilt. For guilt is that element in sin by which it belongs unalterably to the past, and as this unalterable element, determines the present destiny of each soul."<sup>3</sup>

And then Brunner speaks of man's inability to save

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1. Ibid., p. 490.

2. Ante, pp. 1, 2.

3. Brunner, op. cit., p. 443.

himself when he says:

"Once we have recognized this, once we have seen this gulf in its whole breadth and depth, we know that from the side of man there is no bridge, no possibility of crossing over to the other side. We cannot construct the bridge, for in this unfathomable abyss it would be impossible to find any solid ground on which to build. We can neither get rid of nor stride through the wall of fire which lies between us and God."<sup>1</sup>

A discussion of sin and its reality, and then the gulf that it has made between God and man is an element that is not to be found in Forsyth's writings.

b. The Sufferings of Christ.

Forsyth minimizes the sufferings of Christ and places the virtue of His atoning work on His obedience unto the judgment of holiness.<sup>2</sup> This view held by Forsyth is not held by Brunner.

c. The Forensic Theory of the Atonement.

Forsyth, it has been said, holds a position close to the classic view of the atonement. Brunner, on the other hand, makes a plea for the forensic theory. They both have as a common starting point the holiness of God, and both follow His holiness as it works itself out in judgment. Brunner defends the terms used by the forensic theory on the basis that they are Biblical and because they are representative of the law, both in the Old and New Testaments, especially in the parables in the latter.<sup>3</sup> It is important

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1. Ibid., p. 446.

2. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, pp. 135, 157.

3. Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 464.

to note, however, that Brunner does not use the word satisfaction, the one word to which Forsyth objects in Anselm's theory of the atonement.

Brunner also defends the forensic theory on the basis that it is not objectionable because of the terms used, but because it is opposed by those who reject the idea of Divine holiness which issues in punishment and judgment. And with this idea of the holiness of God, Forsyth would agree. Thus though Forsyth and Brunner disagree perhaps, on the use of legal terms, their fundamental position is the same, namely, the sovereignty of God's holiness.

d. The Work of Christ.

Brunner lays stress on the cost of the atonement to God, and the fact that the Son suffered and bore man's sins.<sup>1</sup> This is quite incompatible to Forsyth who says that Christ's work was not primarily to suffer for man, but to adequately confess the holiness of God.

e. The Subjective Element in the Atonement.

Forsyth's main concern was with the objective element in the atonement, that God Himself was doing the reconciling. Now with this part of the work of Christ Brunner agrees. But Brunner does not stop at this juncture, as does Forsyth, but he goes on to state the other part of the picture. He says, "But this emphasis on the objective character of the Atonement does not rule out the necessity for a subjective

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1. Ibid., p. 522.

process;...."<sup>1</sup> And he also claims that

"The first element, therefore, in the act of reconciliation is not the removal of this subjective sense of guilt, but the knowledge that our guilt has been purged, or, in the characteristic language of the Old Testament, that our 'sin is covered'."<sup>2</sup>

This knowledge, however, is made possible through the objective accomplishment of an act of God. It is this act which gives character to a subjective experience. The subjective and objective aspects of the atonement meet at the Word of divine justification. And a word is nothing unless it is heard and heard in such a way that it is believed, says Brunner.<sup>3</sup>

In summarizing the objective and subjective aspects of Christ's work, Brunner says:

"That God speaks through Christ to me, and that He thus speaks in me, is an absolutely present, and thus an absolutely subjective experience. It is the speech of the Holy Spirit. But the fact that it is in Christ, in whom and through whom God thus speaks to me, is the most objective fact possible."<sup>4</sup>

Brunner, then, definitely leaves room for the Christian experience in the heart of the believer; indeed he says the Word must be believed or it is not real. With this last statement Forsyth would not agree.

f. Eschatology.

There is another note in Brunner not found in Forsyth

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 524.
4. Ibid., pp. 527, 8.

and that is the world to come. Brunner is consistent here with the rest of his theology, because he asserts that the dialectic and contradictory nature of the world and God's revelation is also the token of the eschatological element.<sup>1</sup> Hence he says:

"The Christian faith points beyond itself to the end, to the resurrection of the body, because in itself it is inconsistent. Christ the crucified cannot be the end of the way of God; faith as seeing "through a glass darkly" cannot be the end of the revelation of truth. The dialectical and contradictory element requires a solution, but it demands a solution such as no one could master even in thought."<sup>2</sup>

#### E. Personal Critique

##### 1. Christ's Identity with Man.

On the basis of James Denney's statement of Christ's identity with man, the writer believes there is a criticism to be leveled at P. T. Forsyth. It would seem that Christ, in Forsyth's system of thought, is not closely enough identified with man, and as such there is a gulf between the Savior and those whom He came to save. The evidence of this gap is found in Forsyth's words, "God did not judge Him, but judged sin upon His Head."<sup>3</sup> Again, he says, "...and God made Christ sin in this sense, that God as it were took Him in the place of sin, rather than of the sinner, and judged the sin upon Him;...."<sup>4</sup> This leaves the

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1. Ibid., p. 532.

2. Ibid., pp. 532, 3.

3. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 83.

4. Ibid.

the writer with the feeling that Christ came almost as a third party Reconciler, who, though He came from Heaven, yet failed to taste of sin and death for every man.

This conviction on the part of the writer that in Forsyth's thought Christ is not completely identified with man, is borne out by the fact that Christ's sufferings do not find a place in Forsyth's thinking. Certainly if our Lord were identified with man completely, His sufferings would receive a place of prominence, if not of importance.

## 2. Christian Experience.

Brunner, it was said, left room in an objective atonement, for the subjective experience. While the writer would not go so far as to say that there could be no real Word of justification until it was heard and believed, he would say with Brunner that the objective act of atonement made by God still must be appropriated personally before it becomes effective in man's heart. The writer feels that this subjective experience of an objective fact is not made prominent enough in Forsyth.

## 3. Man's Responsibility.

The previously mentioned point is intimately bound up with the lack in Forsyth's view of the responsibility man has in what Christ has done. It is almost as if the work of the atonement would be effective without man's acceptance of it. Christ has satisfied God by making an adequate

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confession of God's holiness and then there remains no responsibility upon man for a similar confession of God's holiness through repentance. Forsyth partly meets this objection by saying that even the repentance in man is produced by Christ's holiness. But this statement, too is open to the former criticism, that man has little or no part to play in his repentance or acceptance of the justification God has provided. God has turned over the finished work of Christ to man; He has even created, by Christ's holiness, a latent repentance in man. It is all done. The author's criticism then, is that man can say it is all done for me, therefore I now have nothing to do about it. Rather, the writer would feel that the Holy Scriptures teach that man does have to turn from his wicked way and accept the objective atonement provided for him and as a result of this acceptance, stand justified before God.

#### F. Summary

This chapter has given a critique of Forsyth's theory of the atonement, first, based on St. Paul. Paul's views of triumph over the enemies of man, his definition of the gospel, and his belief in an objective atonement were all considered. Then these doctrines in Paul were compared with similar views in Forsyth and a fundamental agreement between Paul and Forsyth was discovered.

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Then another critique was made, this time based on a contemporary of Forsyth, James Denney. There were found numerous points of agreement between these two men, such as the obedience and sufferings of Christ, the distinction between penalty and punishment, and the attributes of God. There were also discovered places where Forsyth and Denney would agree in meaning, but not in exact definition or exact terminology. The definition of an objective atonement and the holy love of God were cited as instances of such places. In concluding the section on Denney, the points of his disagreement with Forsyth were found to be the view that Christ bore man's sins and that He confessed God's holiness.

Forsyth was also criticized on the basis of a modern theologian, Emil Brunner. The character of God, an objective atonement and the personal element in the atonement formed the basis on which Brunner and Forsyth were in agreement. But there were discovered many places of disagreement between these two men, among them being an emphasis on sin, the sufferings of Christ, the forensic theory of the atonement, and finally, eschatology.

In conclusion, a personal critique of Forsyth was given, based on Christ's identity with man, Christian experience, and finally, man's responsibility.



CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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#### A. Summary

The purpose of this thesis, as stated in the introduction, was to study the writings of P. T. Forsyth to discover in them his doctrine of the atoning work of Christ. In order to best do this, it was decided to devote the first chapter to Forsyth's view of the atonement. Then the second chapter was to be given over to a study of the history of atonement doctrines to find where in this history Forsyth's doctrine might properly be placed.

The third chapter, as stated in the introduction, was to be devoted to a study of the outreach of Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement into his writings to see if he was consistent in his view of the atonement in all of his works. Finally the fourth chapter was to be a critique of Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement, based on a Biblical writer, as well as on two others, James Denney and Emil Brunner. A conclusion was to be given which would draw together the findings of this study.

In the first chapter, the need for an atonement was given as found in Forsyth's story of a Belgian train hero. Then the work of Christ was considered in relation to God

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as being a work of reconciliation and satisfaction to the holiness and judgment of God. The atoning work of Christ was also considered from the relation it sustained to man, namely, as it confessed God's holiness in man and as He acted as man's Representative and not his Substitute. Finally a word was said about the solidarity of the race.

Chapter two was an historical study of atonement doctrines. First the classic idea of the atonement was discussed. Its history was considered as beginning with the Church Fathers, particularly with Irenaeus. The cardinal teachings of the classic idea were seen to be a movement from God to man and sin as an objective power.

The Latin theory was also reviewed as beginning with Anselm of Canterbury and as teaching the atonement as primarily a work of man as making an offering to God's justice. The subjective doctrine of the atonement was given next consideration, its history as beginning with Abelard, and its teaching as being largely anthropocentric. The last part of chapter two was a comparison of Forsyth's views with the three doctrines of the atonement as set forth in the chapter. It was evident, it was pointed out, that Forsyth was in basic agreement with the classic theory, while holding nothing in common with the other two views.

The third chapter was to be an investigation of the writings of Forsyth to see if in them he was consistent with his doctrine of the atonement. To do this, two main

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principles were arbitrarily decided upon to be traced through, namely, the principle of God's holiness as resulting in judgment and as satisfied by Christ, and the principle that the atonement was primarily an act of God. Then other minor motifs were also considered, such as the goal of reconciliation, a racial or world salvation, the unity of the life of Christ and His obedience, and the idea of punishment and of victory. In all of these areas it was readily apparent that Forsyth was entirely consistent with his doctrine of the atonement as set forth in the first chapter of this thesis.

The fourth chapter was a critique of Forsyth's view of the atonement, beginning on a Biblical basis. St. Paul was selected from among the Biblical writers and his views of the atoning work of Christ were seen to be largely two, that of the triumph of Christ and that of God performing the reconciliation. With this latter view Forsyth was in stated agreement, while he did not express very fully his agreement with the former, and at the same time he did not voice dissension.

The next part of the fourth chapter was a critique based on James Denney. Forsyth and Denney agreed on the obedience and sufferings of Christ, on the punishment of Christ and on the immutable attributes of God. It was next seen that Forsyth and Denney agreed basically on an objective atonement and the holy love of God. The points of their

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disagreement included Christ's bearing the sins of man and His confession of the holiness of God.

The comparison of Brunner and Forsyth revealed that the two men agreed on the character of God and on an objective, personal atonement, while disagreeing on the emphasis on sin, the sufferings of Christ, the forensic theory of the atonement, the subjective element in the atonement and eschatology. A personal critique closed chapter four, based largely on Christ's identity with man, Christian experience and man's responsibility.

#### B. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said without doubt that Forsyth's doctrine of the atonement as seen in this thesis has a place in the historical development of atonement doctrines and also that Forsyth is consistent with it in all of his works.

Forsyth may well be criticized for some aspects of his doctrine, as indeed he has been in this thesis, but his contribution to modern theology is none the less very great. He contributed heavily to the recent change in Protestant theology from the liberalism of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This school of theology tended towards a subjective and relativistic humanism and was controlled by a human self-deification. To this emphasis Forsyth reacted, as has

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been seen, by expounding a realistic and objective evangelicalism, based on an objective atonement as God's revelation. Indeed, Forsyth not only contributed to this change described above, he anticipated it.

This has probably been Forsyth's greatest contribution to modern theology. It has been due to his deep thinking on the atoning work of Christ, and a moralizing or ethicizing of it to save it from a dogmatic fundamentalism which emphasized Christ's sufferings on the one hand, and to keep it from merely being the offering by man of his best to God on the other hand. It is in the realm of the saving work of Jesus Christ that Forsyth has been the great able defender of evangelical truth.

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