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THE DOCTRINE OF AUTHORITY
IN THE THEOLOGY OF
P. T. FORSYTH

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A dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of
Arts in the University of Durham by B.G. Worrall, (formerly
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BIBLIOGRAPHYAbbreviations

ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
ET	The Expository Times.
HJ	The Hibbert Journal.
LQR	The London Quarterly Review.
SJT	The Scottish Journal of Theology.

Books and Articles by Forsyth

In view of the long titles used by Forsyth, the initials shown in brackets are used for reference.

- The Church and the Sacraments 1917 (CS)
- The Church, the Gospel and Society 1962 (CGS)
 (Two addresses "The Holy Church the Moral Guide of Society" and "The Grace of the Gospel as the Moral Authority in the Church", given by Forsyth as the President of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1905)
- Christ on Parnassus 1911 (CP)
- Faith, Freedom and the Future 1912 (FFF)
- God the Holy Father 1957 (GHF)
 (Reprint of three books of sermons "The Holy Father and the Living Christ", "Christian Perfection" and "The Taste of Death and the Life of Grace")
- The Justification of God 1917 (JG)

- This Life and the Next 1918 (TLN)
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 H.R. Mackintosh Types of Modern Theology 1937
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 F.D. Maurice The Kingdom of Christ 2 Vols 1838 New
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 J.K. Mozley Some Tendencies in British Theology 1951
 J. Oman Vision and Authority 1902
 A.E.J. Rawlinson Essay in 'Foundations' (Ed Streeter) 1912
 -do- Authority and Freedom 1924
 -do- Essay in 'Essays Catholic and Critical'
 (Ed Selwyn) 1926

- J.A.T. Robinson Honest to God 1963
A. Sabatier The Religions of Authority and the Religion of
the Spirit E.T. 1910
T.B. Strong Authority in the Church 1903
C.H. Vine (Ed) The Old Faith and the New Theology 1907
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INTRODUCTION

Peter Taylor Forsyth was born at Old Machar, Aberdeen, in 1848, and after studying at Aberdeen, Gottingen and London, was called to the ministry of the Congregational Church at Shipley, Yorkshire, in 1876. There followed twenty five years of pastoral work in five churches before he was called to the Principalship of Hackney Theological College in 1901. He remained at Hackney for twenty years, during which time most of his theological work was done, until his death in 1921.

In the early days of his ministry he was unpopular among the orthodox Congregationalists of Yorkshire, and was considered a leader among " .. a school of writers and speakers which makes for itself very high claims. The rank and file assume for themselves the position of advanced thinkers; they speak of many differing from them as old-fashioned and narrow; .." (Justice and Mercy. A review of a Sermon published by Rev. P.T. Forsyth, no date. cited W.L. Bradley, P.T. Forsyth, the Man and His work, p33). Later, it is clear, he saw himself as a prophet to his own age. (PPMM pl93). Always he addressed himself to the problems of his age, frequently using the expression "the question of the hour is ..", so that any assessment of his work must take account of the theological climate in which he worked.

General Background

It is often felt that the Victorian Age was an age of settled religious faith. Certainly among the upper and middle classes attendance at church was expected, while among the lower classes outward acceptance of religion was at least as strong as it had ever been. It was an age of missionary zeal, and there was an encouraging interest in theological literature. But, in spite of all this, L.E. Elliott-Binns described it as " .. supremely an age of doubt and

conflict, and also of much inconsistency. "(L.E. Elliott-Binns, *The Development of English Theology in the Later Nineteenth Century*, 1950, p7). He goes on to point out that "The biographies of the later nineteenth century contain not a few records of prolonged, and often indecisive, conflict in the minds of those who sought to reconcile their spiritual needs with their intellectual principles." (ibid p8).

Such conflicts would have been rare at the beginning of Victoria's reign. The intellectual revolution which had taken place on the continent of Europe, associated primarily with the name of Immanuel Kant, had not, generally speaking, had much effect on English religious thought. C.C.J. Webb gives four assumptions which he considers to have been basic to English theological thinking in 1850:- (a) the transcendence of God; (b) the origin of the material world in an act of creation in time; (c) the claim of scripture to be an authoritative revelation of truth otherwise unobtainable by man; (d) the happiness and salvation of individual souls as the supreme concern of religion. (C.C.J. Webb. *Religious Thought in England from 1850*. 1932. p9). The next half century, that is the period during which Forsyth received his theological training, grew to maturity, and was involved in pastoral work, saw each of these assumptions questioned and, for a time at least, overthrown.

The first, and most sensational, challenge to the accepted scheme of the nation's religious thought came from the natural sciences. This was a period of great advance in the natural sciences, so much so that the concept of 'Science' was almost deified by the end of the period, and the pronouncements of scientists were treated with the awe and reverence which had once been the preserve of the theologians.

It was from the Science of Geology that the first attack came, undermining the Genesis stories of creation. At first the orthodox refused to take the attack seriously or defended their position by means of ingenious juggling with numbers. However it became clear that the traditional belief that God had created the universe, sun, moon and stars, very much as we know them now, in a period of six days in the year 4004, was untenable for one who took Geology seriously.

But the disturbance caused in religious circles by the findings of the Geologists was as nothing compared with that caused by the Biologists and the theory of evolution. This had first appeared before the general public in 1844 with the anonymous publication of 'The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation', which was later discovered to be the work of a Scotsman named Robert Chambers. This work was severely criticised by scientists, which gave the orthodox a false sense of security. But in 1859 came Charles Darwin's 'Origin of Species', to be followed twelve years later by 'The Descent of Man'. Darwin had amassed such a wealth of data that henceforth the theory of evolution had to be taken with real seriousness. Though it was at first criticised, even by many scientists, by the turn of the century John Oman was admitting that evolution was the dominant concept of the day (John Oman. Vision and Authority. 1902. p7).

It is difficult to exaggerate the differences which acceptance of this theory made in the thought of the time. Negatively it was a denial of the accuracy of the Genesis creation narratives and, by implication, a number of related doctrines. For instance the traditional conception of man as a being specially created by God and

specially endowed with a capacity for communion with Him, was replaced by a doctrine which traced man's origin to the operation of natural and impersonal laws. With the denial of this doctrine went the denial of the related doctrine of the Fall, which explained man's loss of communion with his Maker, hence it was a popular gibe among the anti-orthodox that when he fell man had fallen upwards. An almost equally serious result was that the apologist was robbed of one of his favourite arguments, the argument from design. Nature was depicted as a ruthless struggle for survival, rather than as the vast, complex, but exceptionally well oiled machine which Christian apologists had traditionally claimed it to be, an argument given classical expression in Paley's illustration of the watch and the watchmaker. Underlying all this of course was the realisation that if the creation narratives were false the old idea of the Bible as containing divine revelation in the form of infallible propositions must be abandoned.

However, the theory of evolution also made a constructive addition to man's thought. Beginning as a scientific hypothesis in the study of biology it was extended to cover every part of man's being and history. When, for instance, the renewed interest in the study of history, which was characteristic of the latter part of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, brought to light the vastness of man's history, an attempt was made to apply the concept of evolution to that; and when this renewed interest in history brought to light the similarity between the religion of Israel and that of neighbouring tribes, and gave impetus to the study of comparative religion, the concept of evolution was again applied. Not only had man himself developed from a primitive organism but his religion and moral customs were also in a process of development.

One result of this near deification of 'Science' and more particularly of the theory of evolution was a scientific agnosticism. The attitude which was willing to turn its back completely on any thought of revelation and accept as true only that which could be proved by scientific experiment. Such an attitude led to a concentration on the present time and its ills and opportunities, often producing valuable social teaching and work. Typical of such an attitude was Darwin's self appointed populariser Huxley, who asked, "Why trouble ourselves about matters about which, however important they may be, we know nothing and can know nothing? We live in a world which is full of misery and ignorance, and the plain duty of all of us is to make the little corner he can influence somewhat less miserable and ignorant than it was before he entered it" (quoted L.E. Elliott-Binns. op. cit. p9). In its most extreme form this led to the philosophical school of 'Positivism', whose chief exponent, Comte, attempted to find in 'humanity' the inspiration and object of reverence which had previously been found in God. This did not have a great following in England. The nearest equivalent was Utilitarianism, which was also an attempt to promote the greatest happiness and comfort of mankind as a whole, and which saw the chief means to this end as the removal of all traditional restraints, especially as these had been embodied in religion. The chief exponent of this school had been John Stuart Mill; hence the movement suffered a severe setback with the posthumous publication of Mill's essay 'Theism' (1870), in which he allowed that creation gave evidence of an intelligent mind at work.

A second result, and a more widespread one, was the growth of a sort of religion of nature. This had its roots in the Romantic movement and had been introduced into England from Germany, first

through Coleridge and Carlyle, but later finding its most influential expression in the poetry of Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning. It seems to have been a half conscious attempt to find within nature itself the inspiration and absolute values which had previously been held to come from outside it. The growth of the movement is evidence of the widespread dissatisfaction with the understanding of nature which saw it as a mere machine, and with the hegemony of the natural sciences and the idea of uniform laws. Nature was not seen as a machine, obeying some monotonous laws, it was a far deeper and more vital thing than that; it was itself a living organism.

Such a dependence on nature can easily develop into pantheism, or nature worship. Indeed there can be little doubt that Wordsworth reached this position; in his poetry if not in his specifically religious writings. But there was a more sophisticated understanding of such immanentism than mere naturalism. This was philosophical idealism, which, in varying forms, was the reigning orthodoxy in British philosophy from the eighties of the last century to the twenties of this. Like the naturalism just mentioned it kept the centrality of the idea of evolution, but it was an advance in that it claimed that ultimate reality was found not only in the sphere of the natural sciences, but also in aesthetic, moral and religious experiences. The great strength of this movement was that it was able to keep spiritual values, and recognise the spiritual element in man, while denying the traditional doctrines of Christianity. Which denial seemed necessary following the recent advances in science and historical criticism. The result was that for many it took the place of Christianity.

It was vastly helped in this by its moralism which fitted in with the nation's general religious outlook, and by its ability to fit with another contemporary movement. Matthew Arnold's description of religion as "Morality touched with emotion" has always been more true of the Englishman's religion than of most. By the end of the nineteenth century dissatisfaction with the supposed immorality of traditional orthodoxy, especially its particularism and its Hell fire, was the cause of many defections from the faith among intellectuals. The problem was further complicated by a growth of social concern to which the blatant other-worldliness of much Victorian religion seemed either indifferent or opposed. The work of the Christian Socialist movement of 1848-54 had failed, at least as far as the founding of co-operative movements was concerned. But the influence of its leaders, especially the ubiquitous F.D. Maurice, was strong throughout the whole of this period. The spirit of Democracy was in the air and growing stronger. For many Idealist philosophy provided both a spiritual basis for life and an inspiration for social reform. (T.U.C. was formed in 1868 and met annually after 1871).

Faced then with such challenges, from the natural sciences, from historical criticism, from the general philosophical approach of the age, and from the growing power of the idea of democracy, all in some measure permeated by the idea of evolution, the old orthodoxy was bound to crumble. Some fresh apologetic was necessary. The first reaction of the religious leaders to evolution was terror, followed by denial, and they received some support for this attitude from the scientific world of the day. No doubt for many humble believers Darwin and his followers, together with the Biblical critics, were veritable antichrists, and they would have been satisfied with their fathers' traditional appeal to the Bible as the 'Word of God'.

Thus when the new views were first thrust upon the attention of the English religious public by the publication of 'Essays and Reviews' (1860) followed shortly by Bishop Colenso's 'Introduction to the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua' (1862), there was widespread support, particularly among the clergy, for the indictment of two of the contributors to 'Essays and Reviews' for heresy, and for the deposing of Colenso, Bishop of Natal, from his see. Similarly, twenty five years later, Spurgeon, the extremely conservative Baptist leader, got considerable support from the rank and file of his own denomination when, in the 'Down Grade' controversy, he denounced as heretical those who accepted the new critical conclusions concerning the inspiration of scripture. (cp. J.W. Grant. Free Churchmanship in England, 1870-1940. 1955. p 93f) But clearly such an attitude could not be maintained. It was impossible for educated men to adopt one attitude for their religion while preferring another for their intellectual lives.

It appeared obvious that, if denial of the new movements was impossible, there had to be some concession or accommodation from the religious camp. Since the first attack, both of science and of historical criticism, had been on the supposed history of the Old Testament, it was in this sphere that concessions were first made. It was allowed that much of what had been taken as history was nothing but folk-lore, however it was insisted that it was folk-lore with a moral. As for creation, the theory of evolution was not only accepted, but, making a virtue out of a necessity, several argued that the wonder of God's act was enhanced if it was understood as spreading over many geological ages instead of taking place in a few days. However such concessions came too late. They were normally made in too apologetic a tone, and they did not meet the real problem of the

cleavage between traditional Christianity and the intellectual spirit of the age. A far more thorough-going theological reconstruction was called for.

The tools for such a reconstruction came, as the attack had come, from Germany. Though England had been some time behind the intellectual life of Europe, the distress through which her religious life was now passing stemmed originally from the work of Immanuel Kant, Kant's philosophy can be best understood, very generally, by means of three propositions. First, he argued that we can only have certain and definite knowledge of truth through sense impressions. Outside such sense impression our attitude must be one of agnosticism. Hence he denied all the metaphysical arguments for the existence of God as being beyond the scope of our mind, and gave impetus to the dominance of the scientific method. Secondly, he allowed that we could have touch with ultimate reality through our moral sense, that is at the level of experience of moral obligation and sense of duty. Reflection on such experience implies the existence of God, Freedom of the will, and Immortality of the soul. But these are not proved. Thirdly, he asserted, that in the act of knowing, the mind is not passive but active. It helps to shape what we know by organising it in forms of space and time. These three aspects developed independently can lead to different philosophical positions, hence much later thought can trace itself back to Kant, and often, as we shall see, contradictory theories each claimed to be true to Kant.

The most immediately popular development of Kantianism came from Hegel. Hegel took up the third of the above propositions, the regulative and active part of mind in knowledge, and stressed it.

Meanwhile he denied the first, that we can have no knowledge beyond sense impression. For Hegel everything must be knowable and everything must be reducible to mind. The ultimate reality is pure thought or spirit which manifests itself in various ways, but supremely in the human mind or spirit, so that the activities of the human mind are the best clue, and the only means, for understanding the ultimate reality or world spirit. H.R. Mackintosh says of him, "No one has ever been quite sure what Hegel believed about God, but we shall not be far out if we describe his general system as a form of pantheistic Monism or logical Evolutionism" (H.R. Mackintosh. Types of Modern Theology. 1937. p102). Being, like thought, is a dialectic process which moves forward by the reconciliation of opposites. As in thought progress is made by the reconciliation of thesis and antithesis in synthesis, both thesis and antithesis being necessary for each other and the final synthesis, so in history, claimed Hegel, we can see the same thing happening. Thus he describes history as God's realisation of Himself through or in the process of human experience.

Such a reconstruction had obvious advantages, and there is no doubt that Hegel considered himself a Christian apologist. "Nothing can be more certain than that Hegel meant to be friendly; indeed he appears to have been quite sincerely persuaded that for the first time he was giving the Christian religion an opportunity to understand itself. Reconciliation was to be the watchword of the new era. The truth formulated by speculation is actually none other than that preached by religion in more childlike tones." (ibid p106). Of course Hegel saw that the understanding of ultimate reality as pure thought was only possible for philosophers. The masses of mankind were not capable of grasping it, so for them the

truth would continue to be taught in the pictorial language of religion and grasped by the imagination, a lower faculty than reason. Nevertheless, properly understood, such religious teaching was not false, for all the principle Christian doctrines could be affirmed from Hegel's standpoint. A.R. Vidler gives the following explanation of the Trinity as typical of Hegelian theologising. "As pure abstract idea, God is Father; as going forth into finite being, the element of change and variety, God is Son; as once more subsuming or cancelling this distinction, and turning again home enriched by this outgoing in so called manifestation or incarnation, God is Holy Spirit." (A.R. Vidler. The Church in an Age of Revolution. 1961. p30).

The advantages of this system were that it gave a spiritual understanding of the world, saving man's spiritual instincts from the scientific agnosticism of the Positivists. By its emphasis on the clash of thesis and antithesis it allowed that progress would not always be a smooth forward march, while, at the same time the notion of development remained central to the system. It found room for the philosopher and for the humble believer, without completely discarding the traditional Christian language. The importance of the secular was allowed, since there was no rigid distinction between spiritual and material, and it was thus congenial to those who were enthusiastic for social improvement, and to Christian Socialism. Finally, not least attractive in this period, though never explicitly stated, was that it acknowledged the dignity and importance of man. Rarely can a theological system have been so blatantly anthropocentric.

But the system also had its disadvantages. Christian doctrine had to pay dearly for its philosophical integrity. No more could be

heard of the uniqueness of Jesus. Hegel could speak in terms of incarnation, but not in terms of a unique incarnation. This was not always clearly realised in England. For him the two natures language was merely a pictorial way of expressing the fact that there is no real distinction between God and man. Both need each other. "The idealism of Hegel being rigorously immanent, the Absolute mind is not another mind, but the essence of all finite minds, and they are constituents of it." (Mackintosh pl03). Thus the man Jesus of Nazareth was only one of the "great men" of history who had caught a glimpse of the great speculative truth which Hegel had worked out, and tried to teach it to his disciples. Such an understanding of Jesus was worked out from a Hegelian standpoint first by Strauss, and then by Baur, the latter carrying his rhythm of thesis and antithesis on in to the history of the church.

The Hegelian philosophy was introduced into England by the influential Oxford philosopher T.H. Green. Its impact on theology in this country was by no means as great as it had been in Germany, where it had enjoyed enormous prestige. It has never been customary in England for any one philosophical system to completely dominate the theological scene. As far as the question of New Testament criticism was concerned, English theology was saved from the extremes of Strauss and Baur by the work of the three Cambridge scholars, Westcott, Lightfoot and Hort. Of Lightfoot, A.R. Vidler has written, " .. his commentary on Galatians virtually demolished the theory of Baur and the Tubingen school, which had dated most of the New Testament documents in the second century. He showed that a severely critical and historical study led to conclusions quite different from those that the German critics reached because they started with a theory into which they made the facts fit" (op. cit.

pl33). Nevertheless, Hegelianism exercised a considerable influence in England. In Glasgow the two eminent teachers John and Edward Caird were both deeply influenced by it.

However its influence was most clearly seen in a product of Oxford University. The collection of Essays under the title 'Lux Mundi', appeared in 1889, the work of a group of 'High' Anglicans under the leadership of Charles Gore, at that time Principal of Pusey House. In his preface Gore said that he and his collaborators were " .. aiming only at interpreting the faith we have received ..", though he admitted that the intellectual, social and scientific changes of the age were such as to " .. necessitate some general restatement of its claim and meaning ..". For a book with such an apparently modest aim the affect of 'Lux Mundi' was phenomenal. J.K. Mozley has said of it, "Few books in modern times have so clearly marked the presence of a new era and so deeply influenced its character .." (J.K. Mozley. Some Tendencies in British Theology. 1951. pl7). The chief interest at the time was aroused by Gore's article in which he showed that he no longer held to the inerrancy of scripture and adumbrated the Kenotic Christology which he was to put forward later in his Bampton lectures. However, more important was the wholehearted acceptance of immanentism. Many of the contributors had been pupils of T.H. Green, and the sub-title of the volume "a series of studies in the religion of the Incarnation", showed a distinct movement from the Atonement as the central interest in theology. F.D. Maurice had shown that the incarnation provided a far better starting point for those who wished to minimise the distinction between God and man. Evolution is gladly accepted and Aubrey Moore rejoiced that "Evolution has restored to us the Immanence of God which Deism denied".

The Lux Mundi party dominated Anglican theology, and to a lesser extent the whole of English theology, for the next thirty years. As far as Gore was concerned, though he worked out his own Christology more fully in his Bamptom lectures of 1892, the movement had gone far enough. Gore was consistently loyal to the Catholic creeds. But the insistence on immanence, though necessary at the time, taken with other contemporary forces, was to lead in a direction in which Gore had no wish to go. It reached its nadir in the work of R.J. Campbell and the 'New Theology' controversy of 1907, to which we shall have to return.

Meanwhile we must note that Hegel's was not the only theological reconstruction to come from Germany. Against its aridity and intellectualism, Albrecht Ritschl, also appealing to Kant, protested in favour of moral and personal religion; and it is probable that Ritschl had more general effect on English theology. He set himself to establish the primacy of historic revelation, denying our ability to know God apart from His revelation of Himself to us. From this standpoint he denied a purely metaphysical theology, such as Hegel's, as a Hellenistic intrusion into the pure New Testament faith. In its place he put the person of the historic Jesus which he was sure could be adequately constructed from the Gospels. But Jesus, he said, could only be understood by His work, which was, by obedience, to win redemption and to establish the Kingdom of God as an ethical community. Thus we have the basis of his celebrated description of Christianity as "an ellipse with two foci", namely justification by faith and the Kingdom of God. H.R. Mackintosh describes it thus, "The fount of all redemption is Christ's supreme act in establishing the church on earth. In perfect fidelity He fulfilled the vocation given Him by the Father, suffering all that hatred and unbelief could

inflict and exhibiting utter patience unto death; and this great act of obedience is the ground on which His followers, as a community, are declared righteous by God and have their sins forgiven." (op. cit. pl61). However, this historic revelation, merely as a fact, is of no value to us until we assert it for ourselves by a 'value-judgment'. Thus "Jesus Christ died on Calvary" is a simple judgment of fact, which the pure historian might make; but "we have redemption through His blood" is, in Ritschlian terms, "an independent value-judgment", or, in plain English, a personal conviction." (ibid pl53). Of course, judgments of value presuppose judgments of fact. It is not Ritschl's argument that we can believe what we like as long as we believe it firmly enough.

Fuller treatment of Ritschl would need discussion of his Christology. He speaks of Jesus only as Founder of Christianity whose influence is prolonged by memory and meditation on history, and he ignores many points normally discussed in a Christology. Certainly he thought he had kept the divinity of Christ. His theology is thoroughly Christo-centric, and the honour given to Christ is tremendous. But it is far from certain that to say He has the 'worth of God for us' is what Christianity has traditionally understood by the Godhead of the Son.

More important for our present purposes is to see that Ritschl has restored emphasis to the historic Jesus, and has shown that Christian confession involves personal involvement and commitment to Christ. But, on the debit side, he has minimised dogma, overstressed the idea of the kingdom as an ethical community committed to social reform, and, however good his intentions in this respect, given impetus to subjectivism.

The result of minimising of dogma was Liberal Protestantism, which took up Ritschl's criticism of dogma as the Hellenising of the pure New Testament faith and attempted to get back behind the religion about Jesus, found in Paul and John, to the religion of Jesus, which, it was supposed, could be found by historical criticism of the synoptic gospels. Such a view had been propounded in England by Hatch as early as 1888, but its real apostle was Adolf Harnack in his 'History of Dogma' (1886-9), translated into English as 'What is Christianity?' (1901). "According to Harnack, the essence of Christianity was what he regarded as the essence of Christ's teaching: the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. ... The time had now come to reduce Christianity to its true essence, filial and individual trust in the divine fatherhood" (A.R. Vidler. op. cit. pl83). This was opposed by the French Catholic Modernist Loisy, who insisted that Jesus should be understood as an eschatological preacher. But it was not until Schweitzer's 'Quest of the historical Jesus' appeared in English in 1910 that this understanding was firmly established. Even then, outside theological circles, the simple gospel of Jesus the ethical teacher was the religion of the age, at least in England. Meanwhile the Bible was regarded as simply the expression of man's highest spiritual consciousness.

The impetus Ritschl had given to subjectivism led to an appeal to Religious Experience as an apologetic tool. This was not completely new. It had always been for many, and especially for Evangelicals, the surest proof of their faith, against which no intellectual argument, however strong, could ultimately prevail. But it had not previously been used as a major theological argument; now it was being so used. In 1890, R.W. Dale, denying that

Biblical criticism could shake the faith of Christians in Christ, had written, "Their faith in Him rests on foundations which lie far beyond the reach of scientific and historical criticism. They know for themselves that Christ is the Saviour of men; for they have received through Him the remission of their own sins; He has translated them into the Divine Kingdom; He has given them strength for righteousness and through Him they have found God" (R.W. Dale. *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*. 1890. p23). Such arguments, and Dale was not alone in using them, opened the way for an appeal to 'the inner light', and 'the divinity in every man'. Works of Inge, Underhill, and von Hugel, led in a revived interest in mysticism, not always maintaining any objective historical revelation in Christ, or distinguishing between a Christian and non Christian mysticism.

Such an apologetic was open to criticism from the growing science of psychology, and such criticism came from Starbuck and William James. The latter's Gifford Lectures on the 'Varieties of Religious Experience' (1901-2), made it easy to discount religion as merely subjective, and to see the desire for salvation as an expression of the instinct for self-preservation. James himself was a Christian, but not all of those who used his arguments shared his faith. Elliott Binns comments that such arguments " ... were often accompanied by the patronising admission that religion might be a useful thing, even if its truth was a matter of indifference". (op. cit. p117).

A more important result, however, was the obvious affinity between the concentration on inner experience and the current stress on immanence. The combination of these tendencies, together with

the widespread and long continuing neglect of theology, particularly affected non conformity. The Church of England was saved from its worst affects by the strength of the 'Church idea', stemming from the Lux Mundi group, and the personal influence of Gore, who came to be looked upon as something of a reactionary. But the doctrine of the Church was weak in non-conformity at this time, and there was no party or leader to be compared with the Lux Mundi group and Gore, at least for theological leadership. The result was the 'New Theology' of R.J. Campbell, to which brief allusion has already been made. A slightly fuller treatment is necessary, not because of the intrinsic worth of the movement, which was small, but because it was a logical development from the current trends, and because it often seems to lie behind some of Forsyth's work.

R.J. Campbell was minister of the City Temple and thus holder of the most influential pulpit in Congregationalism. In the autumn of 1906, he addressed the London Board of Congregational Ministers on 'The Changing Sanctions of Popular Theology', a paper, later published in 'The Christian World', giving an interpretation of God's dealings with man almost exclusively in terms of Divine immanence. The result was a controversy in which Campbell was accused of departing from the Evangelical faith. Shortly after its beginning Campbell outlined his position more fully in a somewhat disputatious book, 'The New Theology' (1907). Other books and pamphlets in support of his position soon followed, and he organised his followers into 'The Progressive League', which he soon reorganised, in the hope of excluding extremists, as 'The Liberal Christian League'.

Campbell defined his position as "the attitude of those who

believe that the fundamentals of the Christian faith need to be rearticulated in terms of the immanence of God". Which, apart from the explicit use of the word immanence, is not too far removed from the aim which Gore had given as the inspiration of the Lux Mundi group. Later, in an interview in the Daily Mail, Campbell described his message as "The Gospel of the Humanity of God and of the divinity of Man" (cited. J.W. Grant. op. cit. pl35). From this point of view historical revelation was set aside and doctrine after doctrine was interpreted in accordance with the laws of evolving human life. The uniqueness of Christ was a special object of attack, and the life of Jesus was held out as the normal life of all men. The Bible was replaced by appeal to inner witness, "Never mind what the Bible says about this or that, if you are in search of truth, but trust the voice of God within you" (attributed to Campbell by W.H.S. Aubrey, in *The Old Faith and the New Theology*. cited by J.W. Grant. op. cit. pl38).

Incidental to the whole movement, though less evident in Campbell than in some of his followers, was the claim to be the theological manifestation of Socialism. The church, they claimed, existed for social reform and for that alone.

This movement, as represented by Campbell and his immediate supporters, did not have wide support, even in Campbell's own denomination Congregationalism. So much can be seen by the names of those who opposed it in the volume '*The Old Faith and the New Theology*' (1907), edited by C.H. Vine. But it did bring to light the great dangers in current trends of thought. The combination of a philosophy of immanence, a concern for social righteousness and an indifference to Dogmatic Theology was common in much contemporary

theology. It had gained much from Maurice, and was particularly strong in non-conformity. As Sir J.C. Compton Rickett told the Congregational Union in 1908, "No recent utterance would have set the heather on fire if that heather had not been already dry as tinder" (cited J.W. Grant. op. cit. p144).

This then was the general background against which Forsyth worked. We must now consider how it handled the problem of Authority.

Contemporary Thought on Authority.

Every theological system has to come to terms with the problem of authority. Accepting the Pauline dictum that there is no authority but of God, the problem has always been - what is the nature of that authority, and where is it to be found. It has frequently been noted as a preliminary to this discussion (cp J. Iverarch. E.R.E. art. 1906. and T.A. Lacey. Authority in the Church. 1928. int. al.), that the English word authority has two distinct, though closely related, meanings. In the first place it can mean legal power (latin jus), the power to say the last word, as in the authority of an Act of Parliament. In this sense there is usually an underlying threat of force to compel obedience if need be. Alternatively, it can be used to refer to moral weightiness, (latin auctoritas), the right to influence opinion. It is in this sense that a counsel quotes authorities, opinions which one is under a moral obligation to consider. This distinction is useful, but must not be overpressed since the two meanings overlap. "The common element in all forms of Authority is ultimately to enforce opinion, and to constrain belief. Without this element of coerciveness, authority has no real meaning." (Iverarch. op. cit.).

As far as the question of religious authority is concerned there seems always to have been two major temptations; to confuse authority with infallibility, and to look for authority in the form of definite pronouncements on a particular subject. The two main positions are familiar; there has been the appeal to the authority of the Bible as the 'Word of God', and there has been the appeal to the Church as the divinely inspired, Spirit filled, community. For the Roman communion another factor was added in 1870 when the

Vatican Council issued a decree declaring that, in certain circumstances, the Pope also possessed infallible authority. There has also been a third position, never as strong as the other two but always having its adherents. That is the appeal to the 'inner light', the immediate witness of the Spirit in the heart of the believer. Broadly speaking it is this third stream of thought which had the pre-eminence at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

There were, of course, at this time, those who made their appeal straight to the Bible or to the Church in the traditional way. However most writers on the subject agree in denying both these alternatives, at least in their crudest forms. In fact sometimes they appear to be stated in unnecessarily crude and naive forms in order to be rejected the more easily. There is a revolt against the old idea of a final external authority, either from the Bible or the Church. The spirit of the age leads towards freedom from old restraints and dependence on the immanence of God in man, or at least in his highest moral aspirations. Often there is a crusading air about those who champion freedom against what they regard as the old obscurantism. They write with great confidence, as those sure of right and confident of victory in the near future. Many would have agreed with Sabatier's characterisation of the religious situation; "Two systems of theology still confront one another: the theology of authority and the theology of experience. They are characterised by methods radically opposed in the scientific development of religious ideas and Christian dogmas. ... At the present hour one method is dying and destined soon to disappear; the other is taking on ever more vigorous development, and is destined to triumph." (A. Sabatier. *The Religions of Authority and*

the Religion of the Spirit. English Trans. 1910. p xiii). Hence characteristic of all influential writing on the subject during this period is the demand that authority should be moral and experimental, and must commend itself to the individual conscience.

In England the most radical rejection of external authority appeared in James Martineau's "The Seat of Authority in Religion" (1890). Martineau was not an orthodox Christian but a convinced theist who had been a unitarian pastor before becoming a professional philosopher. He adopted a radically critical approach to the New Testament, seeing Jesus as merely an ethical teacher. Hence he prefers to speak of religion rather than of Christianity, and seems to feel relief at what he sees as the imminent failure of traditional Christianity and the possibility of theism without it. For Martineau the seat of authority is the moral conscience. The ideals of duty are divine. In the course of history this truth has been blended with error due to its expression in mythological terms, but when the claims of conscience are rightly interpreted man is in personal relationship with God. He seems unwilling to give historical evidence any function in religion which, for him was a purely personal and individual matter to be born anew in each mind.

Martineau's was an extreme position among English theologians who generally showed a greater desire to keep in some form the authority of the Bible and of the Church. But there was still a tremendous emphasis on freedom; evolutionary progress in man's moral and spiritual faculties; and the primacy of individual experience or intuition.

All these tendencies are found in the work of John Oman whose

'Vision and Authority' appeared in 1902. Oman accepts the immanence of God as shown in evolution, but he argues that as man has developed spiritual faculties and aspirations he must be understood in terms of them and not in terms of his past development, " .. his religion cannot be explained away by the road he has travelled, but the road he has travelled is to be explained by his religion" (op. cit. p11). Any idea of a coercive authority he denies. He sees it as God's purpose to allow man to develop as a spiritual being with complete freedom, to seek for truth, and finally to find it in a willing submission to His own will. Hence he argues "The highest fitness of man is to learn how to accept the discipline of life, and walk utterly by the guidance of duty" (ibid p77). In accordance with this purpose God has not given an authority claiming complete and unquestioning obedience but is content to wait for man's own willing submission, in accordance with his own inner consciousness and spiritual vision. "The truly marvellous thing in God's revelation of Himself is not that it subdues man to His obedience which were easy, but that it makes man free with the liberty of God's children, which is a difficulty only omniscience could overcome." (ibid p91). The possibility of God's purpose, that is the creation by discipline of free spiritual beings to enjoy communion with Himself, can be seen intellectually by considering man's aspirations, which could not have come from his past development only. But for full confidence in God's guidance the essential attitude is that childlikeness which Jesus asked of His followers. This means, not dependence on authority, but a questioning open mind" .. eager speculation on the serious matters of life, eager hospitality to thoughts too vast to be grasped and too noble to be dismissed, and a whole-hearted disregard to all that might turn one aside from the quest ... eagerness to learn, submissiveness to reality, unconsciousness of the dull

formulas which cover ignorance, and the conventions which fear investigation. it is nothing else than a demand that man shall follow utterly the leading of his own spiritual insight, and that, on the one hand, he shall not use it merely to see with the eyes of other men; and on the other, that he shall not suffer it to be misled by any hesitation or interference within his own soul. Thus it is a condition not of the subjection, but of the freedom of our spiritual nature." (ibid p39f).

Oman did not intend to discard external authority altogether. He agreed that every age had need of a prophet; and that freedom is not freedom in a void but in relation to others, and at a certain place in the historical progress of the race. The insights of previous generations were not to be ignored, "To be faithful to our own spiritual insight, it must be our constant endeavour to be faithful to our spiritual ancestry." (ibid p84). Christ Himself has a unique place among the prophets as the only one whose life was of a piece with His teaching. But even He does not claim absolute authority, seeking rather to guide men and waiting for them to see the truth for themselves. Thus, "The man who accepts Christ as teacher is not subjugated to the dominion of absolute truth not to be investigated or criticised but receives intellectual emancipation, and is convinced only by the perfection which can bear all investigation, and which he receives because he has seen, and cherishes because he loves." (ibid p107). The Church has taken Christ's place as teacher. It is the fellowship of those who have 'the spirit of Christ', and must use His method, and so " ... present Christ, not as an imperious ruler breaking what He cannot bend, but as the revelation of all truth to the minds that see Him, and of all power to the hearts that love Him." (ibid p261).

In doing this it is witnessing to the experience of the saints, and beyond this it has no authority.

The Bible is valuable as the written testimony of those nearest to Christ. As such it is not open to purely private interpretation, nor is the opinion of the majority necessarily correct, but interpretation rests on the proper approach. Those who approach it with the nearest approximation to the apostles attitude are in the best position to interpret it. So it is that, "The poet has often been nearer the source than the theologian" (ibid p206). The creeds are also valuable as expressing the experience of the saints. But these again are only testimony based on experience. He does not want to react against dogmatism so violently that no certainty is left at all. He believes that there can be certainty, the certainty of the slow unfolding of the purpose of God.

Oman is in many ways typical of those theologians who tried to use evolutionary idealism as a vehicle of Christian apologetics. This emerges most clearly in his stress on the individual with his freedom and spiritual aspirations. For Oman the supreme religious fact is the individual " .. made in his own degree in the image of God, thinking God's thought, and setting before him as a conscious resolve God's purpose, and being led onwards to his share in God's freedom." (ibid p88). It is seen also in what appears to be a rather naive expectation that, though much of the traditional religious framework has been shaken, the future holds the prospect of almost endless progress, "When all our external human authorities are disturbed, we are most driven to regard the ultimate Divine authority which speaks in our own hearts; and, though at first it

may seem that confusion has fallen upon us, we shall see in the end that we have found a surer guide to distinguish for us the fleeting from the perennial. And what other authority can stem man's passions, correct his will, teach him a higher standard than pleasure, and call him to consecrate all his powers, not to his own personal gain but to the ultimate and general good, if not that which makes him see that God's will is love, and God's goal freedom." (ibid p339).

A far more stimulating study of the problem, but one which shared a good many of Oman's viewpoints, came seven years later in J.H. Leckie's 'Authority in Religion' (1909). Leckie is as keen as Oman to keep the fact of moral freedom, and points out that in many spheres progress is usually made by the assertion of freedom by some individual who denies accepted laws. But he begins his work with an uncompromising assertion of the fact of authority, present in all branches of life but especially in religion, " .. because religion is informed by instincts and emotions that exalt the ideas of discipleship, obedience, dependence, humility." (op. cit. p9); and he seeks to maintain the element of externality. He defines it as " .. a power that constrains to belief and action, and is recognised by the individual as existing independently of his own thought or will. More shortly we may describe authority as a power, not self produced, which rules belief or conduct." (ibid p 1f). Later he gives the organ of authority as the soul in communion with God; of course the ultimate source is God Himself. Such communion can come, and hence such authority can be expressed, in a number of ways. "Perhaps the position might be tentatively put in some such way as this - Religious authority is found wherever conviction arises in the soul such as to carry with it the assurance that it is of God. This conviction may be created in three ways: (1) by direct

revelation to the individual conscience in which it is found; (2) or by a message conveyed to that conscience through a specially endowed soul, and recognised by it as true; (3) or by a deliverance of the common religious consciousness, verified in the individual experience." (ibid p98f).

This formulation of the theory makes ample allowance for the prophets. In fact Leckie emphasises the fact that God's way of revelation appears to be by selection of certain gifted souls; referred to by Leckie as the aristocrats of the spiritual life. He can also give some content to the authority of the Church, which he refers to as the Christian democracy. This authority is in the common tradition which is formed by the message of the aristocrats, is governed by it, but also interprets it. As with Oman the authority of the Church is only that of witnessing, but the Church is expected to give a rational account of its faith. "The process by which faith proceeds towards dogma is a natural and necessary one; it is the effort of religion to justify and defend its position in the reasonable order of things, and cannot be checked or forbidden." (ibid p161). Such symbols of faith as the church may formulate are to be used to guard and guide, not to limit or oppress.

The uniqueness and authority of Jesus is safeguarded by the argument, "If the revealing activity of God concentrates itself in select souls, why should there not be one in whom it dwells completely?" (ibid p97), together with the fact that Jesus claimed, and has always been recognised as having, a unique Lordship over men, and a unique relationship to God.

Leckie has definitely attempted to give far greater weight to

external authority than Oman appears to have done. Nevertheless he is equally open to the charge of subjectivism. He sees this and tries to defend against it. "It is never asserted", he writes, "that man discovers truth for himself; but, on the contrary, earnestly affirmed that God reveals Himself to the soul, and that apart from this action of God there could be no religious life or knowledge of Him at all." (ibid p89f). But, in the last resort, there is no objective standard to which reference may be made in the case of rival claims to communion with God, apart from the message of the prophets and the common Christian tradition. He admits the validity of this criticism and answers that the only test is experience. That which survives when tested by experience of life is true, and that which fails men in life is false, and always, "Whenever a higher message is given, more suited to the wants of men, the lower gospel will lose its power and pass away." (ibid p100). From this point of view there is no 'a priori' reason why an individual should not be independent of the historic revelation in Jesus Christ. So he writes, "It is always possible that the experience of an individual as to faith and prayer and the culture of the devout life may be richer and higher than that of the great common Fellowship of believers, the ancient universal Church - it may be, but who shall affirm that it is? An ordinary person may possibly be found who maintains that his relation to God is so direct as to render him independent of Jesus Christ and superior to His authority; but a claim like this can only be silently registered, and left in the hands of Time; it is beyond the region of debate, because it soars above the realms of actuality." (ibid p225f).

Both Oman and Leckie begin from a consideration of man as a

religious being and move towards their idea of authority from him. Both exalt Jesus as teacher, and accept Him as more than a teacher, and both bring in the value of the historic testimony of the Christian church. But neither are really dependent on history. In both there is an optimistic looking forward to a greater spiritual attainment by man, so neither can logically give any objective finality to the revelation in Christ.

Anglican contributions to the discussion are much more historical in approach, though in different ways. They come mainly from two writers; T.B. Strong, whose 'Authority in the Church' was published in 1903; and A.E.J. Rawlinson, who made several contributions, an essay in 'Foundations' (1912), his book 'Authority and Freedom' (1924), and a further essay in 'Essays Catholic and Critical' (1926). Both stress the Church as an historical society, both stress the need for authority in a society, and both draw attention to the complete dependence on authority which is natural at an early stage of education.

From this starting point Strong claims that in any society authority is founded on a contract between the members of the society, but that it is not merely negative, restraining wrongdoing for the general good, but also positive and thus from time to time over riding the wishes of some parties to the contract and imposing itself upon them for a moral end. Turning now to the Christian society, the church, he finds two respects in which it is different from other societies. First it is founded by the historic acts of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ, and is now ruled by God, who rules " ... not as a remote king over alien subjects, but as a Father over men who through absorption in the

Eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ have been adopted as sons" (op. cit. p46). Secondly, he claims, this rule of God is exercised through divinely appointed persons whose qualification for their office, at least in the Acts, was a divine call and the fact that they had been witnesses of the original acts. As the church grew it is clear that acceptance of these facts, and of the interpretation of them which is Christian doctrine, was expected of its members. Strong points out that historical truths are always accepted, to some extent at least, on trust, based on an assessment of the character of the witnesses. We do not expect the witnesses to lie, and base this expectation on our solidarity with them in the human race. In the case of Christians " .. the basis of intellectual adhesion is moral or social; that is, underlying it is the relation in which men stand to Jesus Christ" (ibid p77). It is this insistence on the primacy and finality of the historic acts of God, in an assessment of the doctrine of authority, which sets Strong's argument apart from that of many of his contemporaries, and which is its chief value.

Rawlinson starts from the same point, the necessary dependence on authority in education. But his chief interest, at least in 1912, was in the psychological development of the individual in his relation to authority. After the first stage of acceptance of authority comes a stage of criticism and the assertion of the individual's right to reject what had previously been accepted. This should be followed by a stage of free acceptance, voluntary assent to authority on grounds arrived at by the free use of reason. It is only this freely given submission to authority which is of any moral worth. But it is in the second stage that authority, which he defines as " .. expression of responsible and competent

opinion" (Foundations. p366), that is as in the latin 'auctoritas', should be operative. Then it is used as a guide to those asserting their freedom to criticise what had previously been accepted. Its content is " .. the witness of the saints, individually and corporately, to the validity of the spiritual experience upon which their lives are based." (ibid p378). In this witness the experience of the Apostolic age is held to be normative. This theory is more fully worked out in 1923 when a historical survey of various types of authority used in the church since the break down of the medieval synthesis is given. However in the last resort Rawlinson does not advance on his theory of authority as the witness of the saints.

From this summary of contemporary views certain points can be noted as typical of the treatment of this problem in the entire age. First, and most obvious, is the complete rejection of the old idea of an oracular authority enshrined in the Bible or the Church. It is no longer possible to look for definite pronouncements on particular situations which will be both authoritative and infallible since they come direct from God. (This of course does not apply to the Roman Church). The old trust in the Bible had gone with the scientific opposition to the Genesis creation narratives and the advent of historical criticism. Meanwhile confidence in the church had been shaken because of the obscurantist defence of literalism in some quarters, and because of the slackness of the church in supporting agitation for social reform, a slackness which sometimes passed into open opposition to the growing socialist movement.

The early stories of Genesis were explained as folk lore

expressing man's attempt to understand himself and his environment. This led to much more of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, being understood in terms of man's spiritual aspirations rather than as God's divine revelation. Thus the second characteristic element of contemporary approaches to the idea of authority, as to many other doctrines, is that they start from man, and from man as an individual. The centre of attention is the individual on his religious side. Stress is laid on his free moral will, his ability to choose, but also upon his sense of 'higher' hopes and ideals. His history is seen as a steady progress in morality and spiritual discernment until he has come to his present excellence. Proof of this excellence is seen in the growing awareness of social evils, and the growing interest in and power of democracy, with its stress on the worth of individuals and the equality of all individuals. Jesus, even when His deity was accepted in the most orthodox way, was seen as the great moral teacher who had first grasped these truths and tried to teach them to His followers. The purpose of the incarnation was to illuminate men's minds, and show them the divinity within them and shaping the natural order. But the working out of Jesus teaching by St. Paul, and the concepts of sin, judgment and redemption, were now considered to be things of the past. At best they were to be translated into more palatable modern terms, at worst they were to be discarded as Hellenistic accretions to the original simple religion of Jesus. The 'History of Religions' school had shown that this simple religion of Jesus had been overladen with mythology. When it was rediscovered and reduced to its essentials it was seen to be only a more advanced form of other religions. Hence all who shared the 'spirit of Christ' were to be welcomed into a brave new

church. This 'spirit of Christ' within a man, his spiritual sensibility and attitude to his neighbours and environment, was the real authority.

With this starting point two other things had to follow, so we see that, thirdly, there was a denial of any objective historical finality. If man's history is a continuing spiritual progress to higher things the uniqueness and finality of any past revelation is impossible. Hence, though many wanted to treat the experiences and intuitions of the saints of the past with great respect, arguing that the present age must build on what has gone before, it could not be denied that the present more advanced and enlightened age had a better grasp on spiritual truth. Fourthly, a development of the last point, we find that the age is characterised by a cheerful hopeful optimism, looking forward confidently to future spiritual progress, normally leading to a vague pantheistic idealism. A contemporary writer speaks of a movement towards " .. a conception that finds in religion the burgeoning and blossoming of all the faculties of man; the life of the imagination, the reason, the affections and the conscience at their full; taking up into itself and expressing the secrets of poetry and art and science and philosophy and sociology, as knowledge grows transfigured into reverence, as beauty exhales in worship and goodness becomes the sacrament of the indwelling Logos of the cosmos." (R. Heber Newton. The Outcome of the Theological Movement of Our Age. Hibbert Journal. Vol. IV. Oct. '05 - Jun '06. p270). Hence any finality must be at the end of the series not in the middle of it, and authority can only be that which urges submission to this on-going purpose.

The result of all this is that the concept of final authority as something to which submission must be made is only found as a stage in education, the first stage through which men are expected to pass. Beyond this stage authority can only be influence. In the last resort every man must be true to his own ideals and aspirations, and what does not come home to him as true from this source is not to be accepted as authoritative for him.

It should be noted finally that T.B. Strong stands out from this general pattern because of his insistence on the importance of historic events, on divinely inspired interpretation of them, and on the moral solidarity of the race. He seems to keep some idea of static and propositional authoritative pronouncements.

The Doctrine in P.T. Forsyth.

Though he was willing to learn from the latest insights of his contemporaries, and in one sense, his emphasis on the primacy of the moral, to go even beyond them, Forsyth is generally reckoned to have been a voice crying in the wilderness in his own generation. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in his teaching on authority. This was a subject to which he returned again and again. He repeatedly insisted that it was the basic religious question, and that for the lack of a proper answer to it the church of his time was lacking in power. As far as he was concerned the answer was, in principle, clear and he never tired of giving it.

Something of the importance which he attached to this question is seen by the fact that when he was asked to address an international conference of Congregationalists at Boston in 1899 he took as his subject "The Evangelical Principle of Authority". Six years later he returned to the subject in both of the addresses which he gave while chairman of the C.U.E.W. Meanwhile he had begun to stress its importance in a number of articles. Writing in 1904 on "The Need for a Positive Gospel" he said "There is one note indispensable to a Positive Gospel, and indeed supreme; it is the note of Authority" (L Q R Cl Jan. 1904 p81); and the following year he wrote "There is no question so deep and urgent at this moment as that regarding the seat of Authority and its nature." (H J IV. Oct. 1905 p63). From this time onward his views were settled. There was no change in this, or for that matter any other part of his theology. Whatever the subject

there would be some reference to authority, and there is no book in which he does not refer to it, while there are numerous articles devoted to explication and defence of his views, which were most uncongenial to the majority of his contemporaries. In 1913 these arguments were set out definitively in his book "The Principle of Authority", which includes the substance, and often the exact words and phrases, of many previous articles. He continued to refer to the question frequently and, in 1917, his theodicy "The Justification of God" was, in part at least, a re-affirmation of his views in the light of a world war.

In view of the importance which Forsyth attached to the subject, as well as the considerable amount of writing he did on it, it is, at first sight, a little surprising that the revival of interest in his work which has taken place during recent years has not produced a study of his doctrine of authority. Only R.M. Brown among his interpreters has considered the subject worthy of a detailed treatment, and the latest study of his theology, though describing "The Principle of Authority" as "The longest, most philosophical and most difficult of his books ..." goes on to deal with the problem of authority in little more than one page. (A.M. Hunter. "Teaching and Preaching the New Testament" Pt III The Theology of P.T. Forsyth.). However, this apparent neglect is not as serious as it seems. Forsyth's doctrine of authority comes from, in fact is part of, his Christology; and, as he often repeats 'Christology can only be understood as Soteriology'. It was his constant aim always to 'set his compass by the inexhaustible cross'. All his thinking was controlled by his view of the cross, and to understand it one

must first understand this view.

Forsyth gives us his theology of the cross when he explains that the whole purpose of the incarnation was 'to settle in a final way the issue between a holy God and the guilt of man'. In this seminal phrase, repeated several times in his writings, we have most of the dominant ideas of his thought, including his thought on authority. It will be as well, therefore, to draw out these ideas before proceeding.

First, we must notice that his thought is God centred. He himself saw the basic difference between his own theology and that of most of his contemporaries as a difference between a Theocentric and an anthropocentric theology. At a time when most religious thinkers were stressing "the divinity in every man", and calling upon their fellow to be true to their "higher aspirations", Forsyth spoke scathingly and often of all those who began their thinking from "that excellent creature man". "All the great religious teachers", he writes, "take God for granted, and go on.

All our knowledge arises upon us concretely out of certain actual relations in which reality approaches us." (P A pl09). Thus, while others spoke of the tremendous value of religion and the idea of God to humanity, he, while admitting and making use of the important place of value judgments in religious experience, saw that the need of the hour was to stress God's intrinsic worth, His value for Himself. This meant turning from the idea of God as man's friend and ally to the much greater idea of God as man's maker, redeemer and Lord.

Secondly, he sees God as active. God is not the end product of man's religious thought, not an object which is reached by intellectual speculation at the end of a series of "proofs", or posited by deduction from man's religious experience of spiritual longings. All this is far too flattering to man, and far too congenial to his pride. Instead Forsyth proclaims that God is the active subject of Christianity who is known to men only as He chooses to make Himself known by the essentially miraculous act of revelation; and this act of revelation was also the act of redemption, the cross of Christ.

However, though he stresses the priority of the act of God, both in the historic sense of the death on Calvary and also in the contemporary sense of the realisation of its application by the individual believer, he also insists on the need for man's action. Christianity, as Forsyth saw it, could not be understood by spectators but only by participants. Saving faith and personal experience of redemption were seen as basic requirements for an understanding of what he called positive theology.

But it is clear that he saw the possibility of much theology and theologising which were not positive and did not spring from and depend upon such experience. In this connection he often distinguishes between theology as an academic discipline, which may be useful or not, positive or not, and religion. Used in this sense the word "religion" has a very honourable place in Forsyth's vocabulary. Thus he can begin what many consider to be his greatest book with the sentence "The root of all theology is real religion ... saving faith in Jesus Christ" (PPJC p3). But he can also speak of "mere religion" of "natural religion of the

cheerful, sunny, young, and American type, which has never "descended into Hell" or found the absolute triumph in the absolute tragedy" (LQR Cl p65.). Similarly his appeal to religious experience is not, as we shall see, an appeal to any vague sense of numinous awe. He can speak, almost contemptuously, of the "lower end" of religion " .. the attenuated religion where all men are religious and susceptible to some form of the spiritual in proportion to its lack of moral demand" (PA pl61). The religion and religious experience to which Forsyth appealed were above all moral. He quoted frequently and with approval Butler's dictum that "morality is the nature of things", and saw the movement towards what he called the moralising of religion as the most profitable movement discernible in recent theology (LQR CXXVIII p 161-74). But this leads us to the next determinative theme in his thinking.

In no respect does Forsyth appear to be so near to his contemporaries as in his stress on the moral. Like many of them he was a Kantian and was convinced that the ethical is the real and that it is in moral experience, particularly in moral choice and obedience to the "ought" of conscience, that man is in touch with the ultimate reality of the world. Thus he is pleased to see the influence which Kantian philosophy was exerting on theological thinking, replacing intellectualism by voluntarism. "Theology, under Ritschl, has been so far Kantianised that it has become a matter of the practical reason instead of the pure. It has become experimental instead of conceptual or even idealist. It has become under Maurice (except for the idealists and the mystical intuitionists) a matter of the conscience. In so far to Kantianise is to Christianise. It is to moralise.

It is even to evangelise." (LQR CXVII p2).

In the above quotation what is denied is as important as what is affirmed. Most of Forsyth's more influential contemporaries would come under the parenthetical exception as idealists or mystical intuitionists. Morality in the hands of such people became sympathy, or a weak and sentimentalised conception of love. Forsyth was saved from this by his determination to begin his thinking with God, so that instead of beginning with man's awareness of the claims of conscience he begins with God as the absolute moral reality. This is not a denial of the love of God or an attempt to move it from the centre of the theological scene. It is rather a demand that it should be thought of 'not as love simply, but as holy love'. His insistence on the holiness of God is probably the chief characteristic of Forsyth's whole theology, and one of the most difficult to grasp.

To describe God as holy is much more than to call attention to a particular attribute, one among many. Holiness for Forsyth is never a quantitative term, it describes the whole nature of God in moral terms. It draws attention to His completeness and transcendence, the God who is "high and lifted up", who, in one sense at least, has no need of man, or of anything outside Himself. To describe God as holy is to describe Him as the ultimate moral reality. " .. our practical experience convinces us of the "ought" of the moral norm. The ideal is that that should rule. In God such an ideal is reached ... Absolute being must be identical with the Absolute moral norm ... That is the holiness of God, the identification of the moral norm and the ultimate reality of the world ... the Holy is the ideal good, fair and true, translated in

our religious consciousness to a transcendent personal reality, not proved but known, experienced immediately and honoured at sight as the one thing in the world valuable in itself and making a world" (PA p5f). This is the strain in his theology which has led many to criticise Forsyth for having an Old Testament conception of God. But those who criticise in this way often overlook the fact that in insisting on the moral nature of holiness Forsyth also insists that it is personal and active, and finds expression in grace.

Over against this holy God stands sinful man. The emphasis on sin is a direct result of the starting point. As Kant taught that morality brought a sense of "ought", so Forsyth taught that holiness brought a sense of sin, in fact in one place he takes Kant's famous apostrophe to duty and applies it to sanctity. (PA p366). Here we see that the apparent similarity between Forsyth and his contemporaries is only superficial. Where others speak of the wonder and nobility of the conscience of man, he speaks of its tragedy and sin; he presses beyond conscience to the guilty conscience; beyond man's apprehension and admiration of a moral universe, to his deeper awareness of alienation and despair before its demands. This is the basic religious problem, as it is the basic moral problem. "We are religious", he writes 'not as we ask "How am I to judge about God?", but as we ask, and are answered, "How does God judge about me?" ". (PA 165). At a time when sin was being minimised and many of his contemporaries were speaking confidently of man's inevitable progress, Forsyth was stressing not only sin but guilt, and this not only as it affected the individual but the race, "Sin is not an influence which affects but a sectional conscience, or troubles but a few members

of the race. In so far as it is real at all, it affects and vitiates the whole conscience, the whole man, that is, and the whole race in its moral aspect and reliability." (PA p404). Again and again we find him trying to recall his generation to a realisation of the seriousness of the natural man's moral position, and to cut through the sentimentalism and optimism of a liberalism which did not, indeed could not, deal with the tragic element in human life, and which had therefore no answer to ultimate moral problems. In this cause he is willing to enlist any allies, so that we find him writing on "The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy" and "Ibsen's treatment of Guilt" simply because "The whole question of the tragic is one which the present age needs some compulsion to face; yet there or nowhere lies the solution of life .." (LQR CXVIII p193).

Some of Forsyth's finest writing, from a rhetorical point of view, is on the subject of sin and guilt. Yet he never wallowed in it as some others may have done. He always treats it with awful seriousness; and he does not only describe it, he offers an explanation of it. The tragic element in life is "the issue between a holy God and the guilt of man", it is, in other words, God's judgment on sin.

One of the most important aspects of holiness is judgment. A text to which Forsyth continually returns is "The Lord hath a controversy with His people," and he tells the preachers of his day that they lack power because they have not taken the Lord's controversy with proper seriousness. By speaking of love instead of holy love, by omitting the moral note, they have minimised sin, and completely forgotten the wrath of God. Yet this wrath is active in the world, the reaction of God against the

sin of man, which expressed itself, as it always does, in pride and self-sufficiency, in the exaltation of "that excellent creature man", rather than in a humble acknowledgment of dependence on God and a confession of His holiness.

The need of the natural man, blighted by sin and facing the deserved judgment of God is redemption. It is pointless to exhort him with visions of beauty truth and goodness. For one thing he does not choose the highest when he sees it, but, more important, account must also be taken of what Forsyth refers to as the legacy or entail, of sin. Those who think of man as God's ally and regard sin as mere weakness or immaturity which can be outgrown, have not yet thought seriously either of the holiness of God or of the sinfulness of man, "The disparity of God and man is not gradual, it is not a matter of degree What ails us is not limitation but transgression, not poverty but alienation. It is the breach of communion that is the trouble We are not His counterparts but His antagonists And as a race we are not even stray sheep, or wandering prodigals merely, we are rebels taken with weapons in our hands." (PFMM p37f).

In the face of this situation, this gap between holiness and sin, this infinite qualitative difference between God and man, any reconciliation must be from God's side. But it must be such a reconciliation as will maintain His holiness. Merely to forgive, to treat man's sin, his wilful disobedience and proud self-assertion, as of no account would be immoral. It would mean that the ultimate moral reality of the world could no longer be relied upon. Hence, though it is part of holiness to desire to make that which is unholy holy also, this is not accomplished by any

"cheap" mercy. The need for judgment cannot be overlooked, and reconciliation must be based upon atonement.

This reconciliation and atonement is effected in the cross of Christ, all springing from holiness. By the act of the cross, which sums up, or "points" the whole of the incarnation, Christ did two things. He atoned for man's sin by accepting, on man's behalf, the judgment of God upon it; and He confessed, also on man's behalf, the holiness of God and the moral rightness of the judgment.

He atoned for man's sin by accepting God's judgment upon it. This is substitutionary atonement. Some who see the grandeur of Forsyth's work and welcome the recent revival of interest in it, draw back from this phrase. But it must be faced. Jesus was our representative, He did, on behalf of the whole race, make confession of the holiness of God. But in order to do that, indeed in doing it He became our substitute and was condemned in our place, thus satisfying God's holiness.

Forsyth is not speaking here of any equivalent suffering. Neither does he think in terms of cold and impersonal justice, but rather of a personal act. Nor does he think of God's anger as arbitrary or petulant, but rather as the necessary reaction of holiness to sin. Finally we are not allowed to think of a just, legalistic and rather aloof Father being placated on our behalf by the intervention of a merciful, heroic and sympathetic Son. God's grace is not procured by the act of atonement; the act of atonement is provided by God's grace. He points out that in the Old Testament the sacrificial system was not regarded as persuading God to be gracious, but rather it was accepted as the divinely

appointed means of perpetuating grace. He insists that the cross did not change God's attitude to man, but His relation to him. God's attitude was the same before and after the cross, what the cross did was make possible His expression of that attitude.

Hence we see that it was not only an act of judgment but also of reconciliation. What was impossible to the natural man, the restoration of communion between God and himself and the re-establishment of the moral order of the universe, has been effected by God's decisive act in the cross of Christ. It has been effected not only for individuals but for the world, and the first demand on any theory of the atonement is that it should do justice to the holiness of God.

However, it must also affect man. Reconciliation takes place between persons. Not only is God's holiness satisfied but man's sin is judged and forgiven, and confession is made on man's behalf of the holiness of God and the rightness of His judgment on sin. Both elements have to be kept, judgment and redemption, 'nothing damns like what saves'.

Concluding this summary of Forsyth's doctrine of the cross we must note his insistence on its completeness. The issue has been settled 'in a final way', 'it is done, it does not remain to be done'. In other words, he takes up and reiterates the Puritan emphasis on "the finished work of Christ", insisting that we live in a world which is, in principle, a redeemed world. "The certainty of revelation and faith is that in the universal Christ the world is chosen for salvation, and is saved in principle, and shall be saved in fact. The lost are lost by refusing that gospel in their

mysterious and incalculable freedom." (PA p357). Faith is the personal reception of this.

But it is important to point out that the doctrine of the cross which he presents is not meant to be presented to the intellectual criticism of the natural man, who may then take part of it and leave the rest. It is never a thing to be argued over but always to be experienced. It is not worked out step by step, but received by revelation in the act of conversion where both judgment and redemption are "effected". Conversion is a gift of God which changes man's status vis-a-vis the righteousness of God. It comes by personal experience of Christ which first judges and condemns, and then establishes the believer's footing on the ultimate moral reality of the universe. It comes to us "... by Christ as the agent of God's self-reparatory holiness ... By means best known to God, the giver, we are united to such a holy Christ and set for ever inside the Justice of God, which is no more over us, and no more confronts us, but is within us, and we within it" (P A p43).

The result of this is that we can no longer speak in terms of loyalty to Christ, but must speak in terms of being possessed, of being owned by Him who has judged and redeemed us. Here is the basis of Forsyth's doctrine of Authority. It is an authority of grace, an authority based, as all his theology is based, on the cross of Christ as the decisive moral act of God. "The grace of God in the historic cross of Christ must be the one source of morals and seal of Authority for a race that is redeemed or nothing, redeemed or lost." (PA p402).

In what follows we will attempt to discover how Forsyth works out his doctrine from this starting point. We must examine more closely what he means by 'the evangelical experience of salvation', and see how he defends his position against the obvious criticisms of subjectivism and how he traces this present experience of the believer to the work of the historic Jesus. We must consider what he has to say about the other traditional sources of authority, the Bible, the Church, reason and experience, and also what he has to say about freedom. Finally we must attempt to trace any major influences in his thought, and attempt some criticism of it.

Those who approach Forsyth's work looking for a clearly worked out and coherently stated doctrine of authority, or for that matter of anything else, are doomed to be disappointed. However, it would be a mistake to assume from this that he was not clear or dogmatic in his views, for he was both. The apparent lack of system is due to the subject matter and not to the thinker. Or rather it is due to the particular approach which this thinker believes it is right to take to the subject.

It is a firm conviction with Forsyth that any "system" of theology is the result of an imposition of previously held ideas and not an honest reading of the facts. He denies that theology can be finally systematised. Here is the difference between a philosophic approach and a religious one. Philosophy must be systematic and must eventually lead to monism, while religion cannot be systematic and monism is a denial of the basic religious fact of the divided conscience.

Nevertheless his work has an orderliness of its own. In fact "The Principle of Authority" is probably the most orderly of all his books. This orderliness comes from his determination always to "set his compass at the inexhaustible cross". The result is a considerable amount of repetition as each new question which is raised is brought to the cross and seen in the light of the great moral act which took place there.

This is the key to his epistemology. Following Kant he saw the real as the moral, and the search for reality in the moral realm took the place of the search for abstract intellectual truth. He was a voluntarist, not an intellectualist, and he had little

time or patience for metaphysical systems. Truth for him had to be vital truth, truth in action, the truth which settled the conscience and gave moral dynamic for life. And this was the truth of a personal God, expressed in a personal action, and received by a personal act of choice. Therefore, though his work was not systematic in the generally accepted sense, he certainly had a method of working. "In a Christian faith we descend on creation from redemption, we do not descend on redemption from creation, on grace from nature, on faith from science. It is in the Grace of God that all our thought begins. In thinking of religion we must begin with what makes us Christians, and not simply with what makes us religious. The method here, as often elsewhere, is more than half the battle." (PA p184).

We have seen that his concept of authority begins with the experience of conversion and regeneration. In this experience the believer knows himself to be set right with the moral universe and given a footing, a certainty, in his relation with the absolute moral reality of the world, God. At once we must face the question of the validity of such an appeal and the consequences of accepting it. This is a question to which we shall return, since it is one that Forsyth touches upon on many occasions. The preliminary point which must be dealt with now is whether or not he is right to take the whole basis of his argument out of the realm of impartial scientific investigation. Is he not guilty of a flagrant "petitio principii" in asserting, as he does assert, that the most careful sifting of the evidence and the most penetrating intellectual inquiry can prove neither the truth nor the falsity of his basic premiss? To many of his contemporaries this was just about the worst possible crime he could have committed. It

was an age when intellectual honesty seemed to be synonymous with an open-ness to scientific investigation, so that this high-handed procedure at the very beginning of the argument was in itself sufficient to discredit the whole case, and to disqualify it from serious consideration.

Forsyth was aware of this argument, but unswerving in his adhesion to his chosen starting point. His argument was that each field of human experience and study had to be investigated by methods proper to itself. This principle is allowed in other branches of study and must therefore be allowed in this one. He makes this point at some length in an article which I shall quote at length, both because the argument is put with such clarity that it merits extended quotation, and also because of its fundamental importance in Forsyth's thought, not least in his approach to authority.

"It may be found disappointing by some to be told that it is impossible to prove supernatural truth except to a supernatural and superrational experience ... How then do you propose to settle it? You tell me you proceed by the canons of reason. You will go by those methods which a long and sifted experience has shown to be fruitful in the religion of research, and especially research historical and philosophical You pursue your inquiry, then, on such positive principles. These canons are settled for you before you embark on your search. You will be told that your results will be worthless unless you start from them and follow them. Well, what objection do you have to describe these as dogmas given you in advance of your inquiry, and made obligatory in the Church of science? Who would listen to a man who

abjured the inductive methods of observation and experiment, who discarded these dogmas? You reply that these principles, these formulas, are practical, and are founded on experience long and corrected. Yes, but so are the dogmas about the supernatural with which we approach supernatural truth. It was to explain a tremendous experience that they arose

"Now if I took those supernatural principles, and compelled you to admit them before I allowed you to enter on physical research, you might well complain. You might say I was taking the principles of one kind of experience and forcing them on a quite different kind; that I was treating by the laws of one nature objects which have a very different nature - as if one should test music by mathematics, or poetry by logic, or seek life's secret with a lamp and a lancet. And you would remind me that the true fact of science is to treat each object according to its own nature, to adjust our method to the difference, say, between a mineral and an animal, a fact and a tone ...

"You will not wonder, then, if I want to apply your principle all round. The experience of nature (human or other) can never take the place of the experience of religion (or more correctly of God). You will be prepared now to hear me protest against the dogmatism with which you want to impose upon my experience of the living God doctrines which you drew from the treatment of sensible nature ... You want to subject the person of Christ entirely to methods which are very useful when you are testing natural processes, or historic documents or their normal characters. But when you propose to apply rational principles as final to the incarnation, you are begging a great question. You are taking it for granted,

without more ado, that the incarnation was above all things a rational process. Whereas it was in the nature of an act, and, an act being an exercise of will and personality, it is beyond the rationality which explains a process. It was experience of God's and therefore only to be met and owned by an experience of ours, i.e., not by a conviction or a conclusion, but by religion. The only real belief in the incarnation is not assent, but living faith. If you propose to subject it to a human test, or reduce it to a philosophic process, you are as dogmatic as any Christian. You are worse, because you want to apply to my experience of faith principles and dogmas which you gathered in a different region outside faith. You are doing to religion what you fiercely resent that religion should do to art or science. You are limiting its freedom by a foreign dogma." (The British Weekly, Feb. 17, 1910, p557. cited by R.M. Brown).

If this line of argument is accepted and we agree to begin with Forsyth from the evangelical experience of conversion and regeneration, we must go on to ask in what terms authority comes to us if not in rational or metaphysical ones. His answer is clear. We must move in the religious realm, not the scientific, and that means in the realm of the moral, or, for Forsyth, the realm of ultimate reality. For he does not see man's moral sense, or his moral life, as one faculty among others. This would be a denial of his Kantian epistemology. The moral question is the question of the whole man, and if it is to be resolved at all it must be resolved in an experience of the whole man. His whole being is here called into question.

The revelation of God's grace when it comes to a man in the

experience we are discussing first shows him the real seriousness of his situation. There is some ambiguity in Forsyth's language on this point. He writes at times as if the natural man is able to appreciate his position though not able to help himself in it, or redeem himself from it. Thus he says, "Conscience which, going some way, makes many heroes, going to the end, makes cowards of us all. It ends by accusing more than inspiring, and it cannot forgive. It repents, but the penitent conscience cannot forgive. The good man can never forgive himself. Conscience will give us sound footing up to a point, till it rouse the sense of the holy, and then it creates in us the passion for forgiveness as life's one need. But no conscience of ours can either forgive us or assure us of the forgiveness of God, the grace of the Holy." (PA p182). Elsewhere, however, he denies even this, and argues that even knowledge of sin and the possibility of repentance are the results of God's revelation. We can see, as people like Hardy have seen, the tragic and unsatisfactory nature of human life, but not until we have experienced salvation can we really know the seriousness of sin. "It is impossible that the whole dimension and heinousness of wickedness, the abysmal pention of humanity, should be grasped by any created soul No single soul of us escapes from the evil far enough to gauge it, ... " (JG p31). " ... sin is blacker than misery, and guilt is only revealed by grace. No experience of life shows a world so bad, black, perverse and hopeless as it is shown by the revelation of its holy salvation" (LQR CXVIII p210).

He is clear, however, that it is in this moral realm that the revelation comes and the authority is experienced. But, as the last quotation shows, the experience is also, and primarily, an

experience of grace through a personal encounter. The question which is forced upon us is "How do I stand before the Holy God who is my judge?". And with the question comes the answer which is both the assurance of forgiveness and a demand for personal committal and obedience, "The answer is from God; and it is the gift of Himself, engaged in the act of securing His holy sovereignty in things, making His holiness good for the world, and especially in me. And to such a personal answer our only due rejoinder is personal also. It is self-donative. Our certainty is practical. Our religion is absolute self committal ... And even that self-surrender is created by Him." (PA p42)..

Though he insists that God is active even in man's response, Forsyth keeps the duality of the encounter. He can speak both of the power of the experience humbling and overcoming the believer, and also of man's freedom to resist, and even ultimately to refuse to enter the relationship. It is in this strain of his thinking that he uses the word "transaction" to which some critics have taken exception. He was aware of the possibility of its being misunderstood, and tried to defend against this "one is carried beyond the idea even of an act to another idea which must not be rejected simply because it has become encrusted, for a business people, with commercial associations. It was a great transaction (*italics*). Or we can use the old word of a "covenant", if only we secure the idea of a reciprocity without a bargain" (PA p57).

It is probable that the biblical word "covenant" conveys his meaning more exactly, in the sense of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel made at Mount Sinai. Not an agreement between equals

with similar conditions on both sides, but rather one that has been given, almost imposed, by one party upon the other, with grace on the side of the giver and willing acceptance and obedience on the side of the recipients. Thus he speaks of faith as man's self-donation to God's self-donative act in Christ.

The result of this encounter is a sense of certainty and assurance. It is not self-certainty, or confidence of an intellectual kind, but what Forsyth refers to as soul-certainty. Its basis is not in man's knowledge of God, but in his confidence that he is known by God and has been given by God a footing in the moral world, the right to which he had forfeited by his rebellion and which he could never have obtained for himself. This is a tremendous assertion. From being at variance with the moral world, and guilty before the Holy God who is the ultimate moral reality of that world, the sinful man, by the gracious act of this same God, has been placed in a relationship of communion with the moral order and is held there by God Himself. The act which placed him there was the supreme moral act of the cross by which God secured not only the sinner's righteousness but also His own. Hence the believer's certainty is part of, and as sure as, God's self-certainty, " ... we enter communion with His advances of Holy Love. And our certainty is, by the Holy Spirit, a most incredible thing - it is a function of the certainty which God always has of Himself ... Joined to Christ by faith's committal I am loved in the love that the Father for ever spends on His eternal Holy Son. It is a tremendous certainty. It plants us in the eternal centre of the world" (PA pp 39, 42).

A necessary correlate of this certainty is the acknowledgment

of the authority of the One who has effected it, "the crown rights of the Redeemer". The authority and the experience are one. It is not that the experience corroborates the authority, or confirms the claim of an authority known in some other way. It is rather that the authority is active only in the experience. Furthermore, a moral act of such magnitude cannot be limited in its application or scope to any individual, or even any group. What has happened in the cross of Christ affected the whole world. As the guilt of sin lays upon "the great solitary human conscience", so the redemption effected has been effected for all. He never tires of saying that the whole world is in principle redeemed, whether it believes it or not, and whether it like it or not.

So much for the experience and its interpretation by the believer, but such an appeal brings its own dangers and difficulties. There is first the obvious danger of subjectivism. How can we be sure that our own personal experience has any objective reality? May we not be deluding ourselves? Or, can we be sure that the experience, which is real enough in itself, cannot be explained in some other way, by psychology for instance? Is there any objective reality corresponding to the experience? Can a theory such as this find any respectable philosophical backing, or is it liable to be criticised on philosophical and logical grounds? Finally, and in a sense most important, why is this experience related to the life, work, and particularly death, of Jesus of Nazareth, and did He give this interpretation of His own work? The last question was particularly important for Forsyth, working against the background of the liberal "Jesus of History" school, which, as we have seen, saw Jesus as a teacher of the Fatherhood of

God and the Brotherhood of man.

Forsyth saw these dangers and took account of them. The possibility of the conversion experience, indeed the whole experience of religion, being an illusion seems to have been one which was presented to him often. No doubt it was often used in argument against him, but there are passages in his writing which make it probable that he had felt the force of this particular brand of scepticism for himself. He allows that one possible way of dealing with illusionism would be to show that the appeal of revelation was answered by some spiritual "a priori" in man, some seed of divinity, light of reason or moral sense. We shall return to this point later when considering how the authority is received. For the moment it must suffice to say that he does not take this road.

His own argument is, first, to draw attention to the intensity of the experience, its strength and importance for the one who experiences it. Once it has been allowed that morality is the nature of things, then nothing can be as real as a man's personal moral experience, and an experience which can bring a radical life-change, such as the experience of conversion has been known to bring, cannot in the last resort be dismissed as an illusion. He points out, indeed he often returns to the subject and insists, that what is involved is not a sentimental or aesthetic experience which lasts for an hour or two and then disappears. Neither is it a philosophy of life accepted for a time as a working hypothesis, a beneficent illusion which we persuade ourselves to believe because of the comfort and social benefit we hope it will bring. Rather it is a pertinacious and compelling sense of restraint, not always comfortable. "It becomes masterful. It controls us in

everything that we regard as life's reality, so that if reality be anywhere it must be here. It turns to our habit and quality of moral life We experience not a novelty, but a regeneration. We do not live to ourselves and our experiences, but to Christ. We feel, moreover, not merely that we change, but that we are changed, and changed in one decisive way. We live no more to ourselves, but we are sent to a great spiritual servitude for life;"

"... if the faith that our experience is God's visitation, fill, fortify, and settle for life our whole moral personality, we have the surest escape from the idea that that objective in our experience is imaginary." (PA pp24, 28).

But that is not all. His main line of argument here is that the experience of conversion can be integrated into life in a way which is impossible with mere illusions. "How do we know when we awake," he asks, "that the visions of the night are not reality?" Not because they did not appear vivid at the time, they may often be extremely so; nor because they appeared confused and contradictory, since they are often neither; but because they cannot be worked into the whole fabric of our life. "If", he writes, "we sail through the air on a broomstick at two in the morning, or inherit a legacy of millions at five, we cannot safely work the experience into the day's outlook or the day's conduct ... The test of a dream is not to pinch one's self, to get over one vivid impression by another ... The test is practice. The dream does not work - meaning by that not that it does not succeed, but that it is not in the context of our moral life. Such is all hallucination. But reality is in organic connection with life's whole" (PA pp 186f). The experience we are here discussing is in such organic connection. It places us in communion with God and

in step with the whole moral order which had previously been against us. What we cannot do with our dreams of flying broomsticks and legacies, we can do with our experience of conversion. We can treat it as real, live our lives from it, and find that it works. " ... the thing which guarantees the reality of the content in experience is this, that in so treating it, in treating it as real, we acquire our souls for life" (PA p27). To doubt this would lead to such inner conflict and contradiction that nothing could be certain at all.

Finally he goes behind the experience of the individual to the experience of the church, not only the contemporary church but the church through the ages. This, of course, is not an argument peculiar to Forsyth, but it is one that he employs as well as it was ever employed. "No consensus of truth," he argues, "has ever been established by such an extraordinary variety of testimony from all ages, lands, and stations of men, simple and critical, men of all gifts and of none." (PA p25). At a time when democracy, individual judgment, and the rule of the majority, were popular watchwords this was a powerful argument. But we shall see later how Forsyth turned it against those who wished to settle doctrine by a majority vote.

By these arguments he defends the reality of the evangelical experience, and his method of starting from it. But, as has been said, he does not stop with the experience. There must be an objective reality corresponding to the subjective experience. It is not the experience itself which is authoritative but that which is experienced. The seat of authority is the soul. That was a commonplace among his contemporaries, the soul in communion with God. With this he agrees. Its seat is the soul, is subjective, but its

seat is not its source. He saw that the source of authority had to be outside man, something external to him which made demands upon him, and which had a recognised right to be obeyed. Only so could authority be finally saved from subjectivism and man placed on a secure moral footing in relation to the whole moral universe. In other words, it is essential that the believer should be able to say of his experience of Christ "I am certain", but it is no less essential that he should be able to pass beyond this and say "it is certain". Though Forsyth allows that he may not be able to say the second with quite the same force that he can say the first, it is the "it is certain" which is basic. "The real ground of our certitude, therefore, is the nature of the thing of which we are sure, rather than the nature of the experience in which we are sure" (PA p52). He summarises the requirements of authority as follows " ... religion to our modern soul has two features. As ethical it must be essentially an act, and not a sentiment only; and as psychological it must be an experience. And to these subjective experiences of religion must correspond its object. That must be a person putting himself into an act for an experience." (PA p63).

The object of which the believer is certain, and which provides the basis of authority is, of course, God. But, as the above quotation has shown, it is God conceived not as an object of knowledge but as a person. Furthermore He is conceived, or rather received, as a person in action. In other words, for Forsyth, God is indissolubly subject.

It is this which distinguishes religious knowledge from any other form of knowledge. Physical sciences are, basically, about things. They deal with objects which can be manipulated and observed.

The scientist takes the initiative and approaches the object of his study. He knows them, but they do not know him. The scientist is disinterested, but the religious man cannot be.

Philosophy also has a certain sphere of action in which the philosopher has the initiative. It is true that here one is dealing not so much with objects as with ideas and principles, and certainly these things do assert some influence on the philosopher. But while a principle may compel some measure of intellectual assent, it does not compel the surrender of the will, nor does it recreate the soul. It may impress and demand respect, but it does not exert a final authority for life. Such an authority must be known as a person is known.

However, even to realise that we have to consider knowledge of a person, great advance though it is, does not go far enough. Knowledge of our fellows is knowledge of persons, yet it does not provide the external objectivity necessary for authority. When knowing our neighbour and recognising him as a person we are still keeping ourselves central, beginning from our own subjective experience. This anthropocentric approach is the fundamental error of all the various false conceptions about God, and Forsyth shows how Deism, Pantheism, and Theism are all based on it. "The common vice", he writes, "of all these imperfect forms of religion is that they treat God as an object of knowledge more or less theoretic, instead of treating Him as the subject of a knowledge, which is inceptive and creative, as searching as it is infinite, and as particular as it is universal" (PA p151).

God then must be known as a Subject. He does not wait upon our

approach to Him, and the important thing about the relationship is not what we know or postulate about Him. Instead He has taken the initiative in approaching us and knowing us. "We find Him because He first finds us, ... the main thing, the unique thing, in religion is not a God whom we know but a God who knows us" (PA pl49). This approach of God to us is revelation, and it comes from outside ourselves. It is discontinuous with the rest of life, involving a confrontation or encounter with God, and in this encounter it is man who is known, and who knows himself, not as a disinterested spectator or theoriser about religion and philosophy, but as an object of God's knowledge. He is known in a special sense, says Forsyth, in the sense of being chosen for a destiny. In other words the knowledge is election and election to redemption. Once more the argument has returned to the cross, the focal point of revelation.

At this point criticism is possible from two quarters. First, it may be argued, as exponents of the new science of psychology did argue, not only that the experience in question can be explained differently, but also that the laws of thought and limits of the human mind are such as to forbid the revealing authority of a divine personality. Secondly, even if it is allowed that the experience of conversion is in fact an experience of confrontation with an external subject who may be called God, it is still not clear why this should be connected with the historical person Jesus of Nazareth, and more particularly with His death. It is certainly not clear why this connection should be made if there is no indication in Jesus' own teaching that He ever intended it to be made, as many of Forsyth's contemporaries would argue. Thus the course of the argument is confused by the fact that Forsyth is fighting on two fronts at once. As well as stating his case to critics outside the church, he is also

directing his energies to those within the church who were preaching and teaching what he held to be a defective, or at best immature, Gospel.

He saw that the danger of subjectivism in his appeal to experience led to a real danger of the psychologist becoming the final judge in matters of religion. Though this was anathema to him he would not simply ignore the challenge or deny the right of the psychologist to make the criticism. At the same time he had no patience with triflers. Thus he writes, "... the problem is not solved by the hasty heroics which warn criticism off the grounds, ... the only warning in place is one against ... those discursive minds who, without competent knowledge, demand precedence for vagrant intuitions or smatterings on matters of so much venerable delicacy and moral difficulty. The real problem is one of adjustment. It is to adjust the belief in an objective, and especially an historical, authority with the rights of sound criticism, the results of tradition, and the facts of the spiritual man." (PA p76).

What had to be held, he argued, was the centrality of the experience of the new creator in a saved and enlightened conscience as the final source of authority. If that were to be lost then Christianity would be reduced to one religion among others. But, by the nature of the case, it could not be lost. It was the basic datum around which the enquiry revolved. Any form of science could examine and even criticise it, but its existence was "given", and by no canons of scientific argument could it be denied. Criticism could only remove unessential accretions and could therefore do nothing but good.

The argument that the laws of thought and limits of the human mind are such as to forbid the revealing authority of a divine personality did not carry conviction because it did not take account of this "given-ness". The question at issue is not what we may know, but what we do know; knowledge cannot wait for a satisfactory epistemology, "No theory of knowledge can destroy the fact of knowledge, the experienced reality of revelation is the material on which a philosophy of revelation or of religion must begin to work." (PA p92). To deny the existence of the basic datum nullified the argument from the beginning.

In any case, he argued, the laws of thought have no independent hypostatic existence and power of their own, they are merely our normal way of thinking, any unity they possess belongs not to the laws themselves but to the thinker. The ground of real knowledge is experience, and it cannot be bound by a previously worked out and "closed" system of thought. Theology must take account of the "revelationary and experienced fact." We have, in fact, no forms of knowledge which are not ultimately based on experience, and there is no such thing as faith or knowledge apart from believing and knowing men.

It must be made clear at this point that Forsyth does not wish by this line of argument to deny the value and importance of mental categories, but only to argue that "Any conclusion we draw is certain only as we know that the premiss is given us in the very fact and act of concrete life" (PA p98). To ignore the experience which gives rise to the thought is to claim the thought as ours and not "given", while to ignore the mental processes of thought is merely to accumulate experience external to ourselves. The influence of Kant

is rarely more obvious than when he speaks of "... the unifying of the observations we make, by the selective and co-ordinating act of judgment, working from a tendency or an instinct which demands that truth shall reflect the unity of the moral personality" (PA pl03).

Turning to the connection between the experience of conversion, and indeed the whole of contemporary Christianity, and the historic figure of Jesus of Nazareth, he makes great play with Lessing's dictum that "The accidental truths of history can never become proof for the necessary truths of reason". He distinguishes between the facts of history and the creative historical tradition. The former, he agrees, can be viewed as if from a distance and criticised; but we are all part of the latter, involved in the tradition and unable to step back from it and view it from outside. It is clear that he had no fear of Biblical criticism of a historical nature. The detailed facts he was willing to let go and to argue that the core of the faith, redemption and recreation, was unaffected. The details had their place, they were sacramental, conveying the grace of God in redemption, but were not themselves to be identified with that grace. Hence scepticism regarding the historical accuracy of the details need not lead to ultimate doubt of the reality of salvation, "The author of our new creation cannot be dissolved by critical science, though the source of a sacramental impression may. The man who was the sacrament of our regeneration may fall into soul-collapse without entailing mind; but the Saviour who was the Creator of it cannot, without involving me in the debacle" (PA pl13). It is not clear how far Forsyth was willing to go with this historical scepticism. It appears a difficult and dangerous road to follow, and we must return to this passage when we come to make some criticisms of his whole position.

For the moment, however, it is clear that he did not consider it was necessary to go as far as he was apparently willing to go. The central historic facts of the gospel are, he believes, secure against historical criticism. From this point he proceeds by the same method of argument that he adopted with the psychologists. That is, he insists that it is necessary to take account of the fact concerned before discussing how certain events can be experienced long after they have happened and what authority such experience can have. The fact concerned here is that the historic person Jesus of Nazareth has founded an absolute faith, and that we can only speak of Him as a fact with an aura of interpretation, the interpretation of the New Testament and the Christian tradition. Christian certainty is not based simply on the historic fact of a historic person, but on the historic fact of Christ as it appears within the tradition. "The great fact is the historic phenomenon, Jesus, plus its "meta-historic" Word, the fact active only in its Word, acting therefrom always as living, life-giving Spirit." (PA p115). Light is thrown on Forsyth's understanding of this by a rare definitive footnote written the previous year, "... when I speak of the Word .. I do not identify it with the Bible, with the Canon. The Word is man's responsive and inspired act of confessing the Gospel as the new creative act of God. It took effect first in the Apostles, and then in the continuous and manifold publication of their message by the Church. And by the Spirit is meant not simply God's presence in the world He made, nor even His presence in History by the historic Son and His posthumous effect, but God's presence in the Church in an Eternal Son and a Holy Spirit Who not only fills the Word but mediates it to the soul" (FFF p 1n).

It is, of course, always open to the critics to claim that the

tradition is mistaken, that the simple Jesus of history has been lost beneath a welter of wrong interpretation, for which there is no foundation in His own teaching and understanding of Himself; and that it is necessary to choose between Jesus and Paul, the simple preacher of the synoptic tradition or the eschatological Christ of the epistles. Many of his contemporaries saw the issue in this way, but Forsyth was able to show that this view was not supported by the New Testament. Quite apart from the impossibility of getting behind the synoptic tradition to the supposedly simple religious teacher said to be hidden there, there is not really the difference between the sources that this theory suggests.

In his Christological work "The Person and Place of Jesus Christ", he answers this criticism at length by drawing out the picture of Jesus which is actually presented by the synoptic Gospels, and showing that it is not the picture of a simple moral teacher that many supposed. It is clear that Jesus thinks of Himself as being in a category distinct from other men. Where He was, there He taught, salvation was. And He asks for devotion not to His teaching, not to a set of principles, but to His person. He called men, not to martyrdom for a cause, but to service and sacrifice for His own sake and the Gospel's, and there were no limits to the devotion He claimed, all human relationships must be subordinated to the relationship to Himself. Clearly He thinks of Himself as standing between men and God, not with men before God. All this is expressed most clearly in the crowning synoptic text of Matthew 11:27 "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him." Here it is clear that Jesus identifies Himself with the Son referred to, otherwise His own relation to such a Son must have

been part of His personal piety and He confesses to no such relationship. Thus He is claiming for Himself, not only a uniqueness, but a finality, there is no thought of another coming after Him to complete His work, the Spirit applies it to individuals but the atoning redeeming work is His alone and is undertaken and finished by Him. Surely this is best explained as a claim to divinity. Though, Forsyth suggests, perhaps it was only after the great redeeming acts of death and resurrection were over that Jesus Himself was able fully to understand its meaning.

In any case if He was so quickly and so radically misunderstood by His earliest and closest followers, His teaching could hardly have had the simplicity now being claimed for it. This, claims Forsyth, should be enough to silence this particular objection, though it leaves out of account any ministry of the Holy Spirit to guide, and if necessary to correct, the Biblical writers, and the fact that the Bible has in fact produced reconciliation. We shall return to these points when considering what Forsyth has to say about the authority of Scripture.

At the moment we must pass on to another problem. If it is granted that the authority of Christianity is the authority of a redeemer and is only recognised by those who have experienced His redeeming activity, we must still go on to ask how such people recognise this authority when it comes to them. What is it that makes, or allows, men to respond to it? Does there not have to be some "a priori" in man which judges the revelation, or some point of contact to which it makes its appeal? And if there is, is not this "a priori" in men the real basis of the authority, that which gives the revelation its right to command?

Had Forsyth answered Yes to these questions he would have fallen in line with those who began their thinking with "that excellent creature man" and his "higher aspirations". Like them he could have spoken of man's need to choose the highest when he sees it. The notion of morality would have been present, and so would the Kantian insistence on the "ought" of conscience; but the centre of gravity of his position would have been changed. Religion would have become just another interest of humanity such as science art or ethics, whereas he insists that it is more a matter of choice and freedom than these, it is less aesthetic and has its own authority. Religion, he writes, "... places us, as these other interests do not, before an object where we are chiefly concerned not with knowing, but with being known, not with our certainty of God but with God's certainty of us, which to share is to own the Authority Eternal." (PA pl67).

Nevertheless he allows the justice of the demand for some form of "a priori" in the soul. But he maintains the Theocentricity of his argument by insisting that this "a priori" is found in the region of the will and not that of the intellect. This, after all, is all of a piece with his voluntarist epistemology. Yet he refuses to lapse into irrationality and to deny thought completely, 'We think of God', he writes, "we entertain the idea of God, as we think anything else that is reasonable. But what everything turns on for the truth of the notion is the discovery of a right and a claim in it Everything turns therefore on the decision with which our will owns the claim set upon us by that idea in its exigent truth and reality." (PA pl02). Hence our response is not blind or mechanical, it does involve a judgment, but "The verdict is in the response, not before it. It is the verdict of the will in faith,

not of intelligence. The verdict is faith, it is not a prior condition of faith. The judgment is latent in the act of faith, it does not precede it." (PA pl46). The "a priori" in men does not judge the revelation, but is judged by it, and recognises its judgment as just. So we do not measure it by the best in man, but recognise it as it judges and redeems his worst. Once more Forsyth is insisting on the essentially miraculous nature of revelation. It is the approach to man of the God who is the supreme moral reality of the universe, and in face of such an approach man is in no position to criticise, argue or suggest terms. "My response", says Forsyth, "is but to confess, obey, trust and worship. And it is not elicited, as if it were my native best, but it is created in me by the very power which reveals my worst. The supreme Authority of His grace creates a response of faith which His holiness alone would awe and benumb. When all is said, the reason why we believe in the miracle of Grace is a miracle. It is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." (PA pl69).

Thus the only "a priori" in men which he is willing to allow is the existence of a responsible moral will which is able to acknowledge what it ought to prefer even when it is unable actually to prefer it. The experience of conversion is the acknowledgment at once both of judgment and forgiveness. Not acknowledgment of sin from which one looks for forgiveness, nor a conception of the possibility of forgiveness which one can appraise critically with a view to accepting or rejecting it. The cross is seen as the revelation of both the majesty and the mercy of God, His goodness and severity at once. We have returned again to the inexhaustible cross.

There remains one further sphere, and that a very important one,

within which we must consider the question of authority. We have seen that Forsyth insists on the need for an objective act of authority in history; now we must consider the relation between authority and the general idea of history. This was a question which the historical events of Forsyth's own life-time forced upon his attention with peculiar force.

The question is, is there a meaning and purpose in history or is it simply a blind succession of meaningless events? If there is such a meaning and purpose, then that must be our authority and guide if we are to live happily in history. But how are we to find this meaning, and what is its relation to the Holy, the moral absolute at the heart of things? Forsyth dealt with this question on several occasions, and his writing on this subject is as relevant today as anything he ever wrote.

He distinguished two methods of approach. First there is the inductive method. Here one surveys the whole field of human history and tries to make judgments and assess values according to general drifts. Secondly there is what he refers to as "the method of valuation", here one takes a luminous point, or points, and uses it, or them, to light up the whole.

It was the first which was most popular in his day. We have seen that the theory of evolution had been taken from its original scientific context and made into a general principle of human progress. The Kingdom of God was looked upon as the goal of the ever mounting, ever advancing evolutionary trend, to the understanding of which the general spiritual consciousness supplied the key. Thus the values which emerged from man's history, and which were seen to be able to

stand the test of time, were the true ones. All that was needed was a sufficiently detailed study of the historical events to enable the beholder to see the general pattern and to extract these values. The pattern to emerge, so it was held, was one traceable to the workings of a moral providence.

Forsyth did not completely reject this approach. He described Schiller's phrase 'History is the true criticism and last judgment of the world' as " ... one of the most valuable gifts of last century to the conception of history ..." (JG p199). Such an outlook did ethicise history and introduce the element of judgment, and, in its day, it was a necessary protest in the interest of moral realism against an other-worldly view of judgment. But, by itself it was not enough. It gave the impression that mere survival or efficiency is the test of right, that what survives is good and that what fails is necessarily evil or false. It does not take account of the tragic element in history or of the genius misunderstood by his contemporaries. To these points Forsyth devotes considerable attention. For him it was the recognition of the gravity of the human situation, of the seriousness of sin, which distinguished Christianity from the general modern attitude. Account has to be taken of man's moral failures and of the apparent triumph of evil at so many points. It is of no avail to compare the amount of good and evil in the world at any time, what is needed is to know which is destined to win.

Furthermore, though it may be that in history so far there appears to be a gradual triumph of the moral, this, of itself, is no guarantee that the future will witness the same progress. If this method of empirical historical observation is to yield a true

picture of history as a whole, from which conclusions are to be drawn concerning the power controlling it, then at least it must be demanded that the whole of history should be observed. Clearly this is impossible. Man may study such history as has preceded his own life, but he has no means of knowing what proportion of the whole is there involved. Subsequent history may be much more extensive, and may show different general drifts.

It was because he had himself taken account of the element of tragedy and sin in history and in human nature, and had not followed the general line applauding man's moral evolution, that Forsyth did not have to change his theology of history when Europe was plunged into the first world war in the summer of 1914. This catastrophe which served, or should have served, to sound the death knell of much 'liberal' theology, was merely a grim and tragic vindication of his position. He did not have to revise his teaching but simply to underline parts of it. This he did in his book "The Justification of God" (1917), sub-titled "Lectures for War-time on a Christian Theodicy". Here he argues that we can not believe in God because we can trace the ways of His providence in history. It is rather that because we are made to believe in God by some other means we accept His providence as an article of faith and may see some evidence of it from time to time. Such times, he argues, are the crises of history. For the man of faith these are signs of God's judgment, they are to be expected, indeed it would be more difficult for the Christian to explain their absence if they did not occur than to account for their occurrence, but since judgment is a sign of concern they can be taken as a source of comfort. However, without prior faith they are inexplicable, and not only do they not provide grounds for faith, but must, uninterpreted, lead to despair.

"We cannot", he writes, "discover a God of holy love in the career of history so far as gone, nor in the principles of a rational idealism; ... Our belief in God, historic as it is, is a belief in spite of history. Those who draw their belief from God's treatment of them or their time must collapse in the black hour" (JG pl92). Rather than trying to sift a meaning from an analysis of empirical historical events Christian faith asserts that meaning has been imposed upon history, and that this meaning is given through the redemption effected by the cross.

We see then that of the two methods mentioned earlier Forsyth has taken the second. He has taken a luminous point in the light of which history is viewed. This he claims is necessary if there is to be any standard by which judgment of history is to be made. It is also, and this is more important, the Biblical method. The Bible sees history as a succession of saving crises or judgments (for salvation and judgment are seen as different sides of the same coin - cp. Rom 1:17f), leading to the greatest crisis of all the cross of Christ. In the cross, interpreted by the Apostles, is the Christian teleology of history. Here we see the final triumph of God and the final judgment of man's sin; for here the power of evil did its worst at the point where it found God at His weakest in Jesus the suffering servant, but it was defeated. We have then a fact, or point, which is both within history and the key to history, since it is the point where God has declared Himself and established His own reign for ever.

From this point Forsyth goes on to enjoy himself in propounding in different ways the paradoxical fact that the Last Judgment is already past. It is not waiting in some distant future too far

away to cause concern; it is past, effected at Calvary. Yet it is not past in the sense that we have no further need to worry about it. It is past in principle. The world has been judged and redeemed. But this is a fact visible only to faith. The world goes on, man's pride still rules and is still judged. Such judgment was present in the war, but this, terrible though it was, and Forsyth saw the horrific and tragic side as deeply as most, was no more than a particularly virulent manifestation of the evil that was always present in man and in the world. "After all, the present cataclysm is an acute condensation of what has been going on in nature, human and other, for milleniums." (JG pl29). The Christian seeing it all with the eye of faith, could accept it as judgment and trust God in spite of it.

R.M. Brown suggests that Forsyth's theology of history could almost be reduced to two Biblical assertions, 'We see not yet all things ... but we see Jesus' (Heb 2:8f), and the words of Jesus, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). (R.M. Brown: P.T. Forsyth: Prophet for Today, pl49). While taking full account of all that is evil and unsatisfactory in world history and in the human situation - and it should be emphasised here that Forsyth was never glib in this respect, he never suggested that war was any less evil because it could be interpreted as divine judgment - the Christian can still be of good cheer because Christ has overcome the world, and because his faith does not depend on history and cannot be shaken by it. "With this security," says Forsyth, "we can sit loosely to many anomalies which seem to rule God out of the course of things. Our faith did not arise from the order of the world; the world's convulsion, therefore, need not destroy it. Rather it rose from the sharpest crisis, the greatest war, the

deadliest death, and the deepest grave the world ever knew - in Christ's Cross ... The Church is not there to exhibit progress and its optimism, but to reveal Christ and His regenerating power." (JG p57).

Clearly this is an evangelical view of history and the cross, not a philosophical answer to the problem of evil. Yet this is what we should expect from Forsyth, it is of a piece with the rest of his theology. There are no complete and no easy answers, and Christian faith is no source of smug complacency. Such answers, or such underlying principles to answers, as there are, are revealed by God to those who are committed to Him in faith, not to intellectual spectators. The authority of grace must be known by experience in life, not critically examined in a spirit of philosophic detachment. However there are particular media by which this experience of authority comes, and certain spheres within which the experience normally takes place. We must now turn to examine these.

Forsyth deals with four organs or vehicles by means of which Christians may expect the authority of the Gospel to come to them - Church, Bible, Reason and Experience. In each case he is careful to insist that they are channels and only authoritative in so far as they make clear the Gospel of Grace. Their authority is not their own, it is not resident in them, it is rather the authority of a witness or a servant. He sees that so often in Christian history the qualified nature of this authority has not been clearly recognised, so that each one of these media has been taken as authoritative in itself to the detriment of the Gospel. Thus on its "catholic" wing the church has been tempted to exalt itself and its traditions first to a position of equality with the Gospel, and then to a superiority over it; faith in the church has replaced faith in the Gospel. Much protestantism, on the other hand, has replaced an infallible church by an infallible book, and been led into an obscurantist Biblicism. On both sides Dogmatic Theology, whether in the form of Thomist philosophy or Reformed Confessions of Faith, has given rise to a hidebound orthodoxy; and, as a protest against this Pietists and Evangelicals have over emphasised the value of the conversion experience.

In the case of each of these Forsyth believes himself to be dealing with misunderstandings of proper organs of authority. His task therefore is to show that it is the Gospel mediated through them which is the final authority, not the organs themselves. But he realises that the exponents of these views do claim, to a greater or lesser extent, that they have to deal with an external objective authority. It was not so with many others.

There were many who believed that the Reformation had released

them from any authority apart from their own private judgment and religious experience. To such people the appeal to reason was not an appeal to Christian thinking about revelation, and the appeal to experience was not to experience of Christ; they were rather appeals to the enlightened modern intellect and spiritual apprehension. Furthermore, they would claim that there was no warrant for saying that any man's opinion was of greater weight than any other man's; this would be cramping to human freedom of thought and the "right" of the individual. If a higher judgment was ever needed it could be reached by a democratic vote. Before proceeding to Forsyth's discussion of the organs of authority mentioned above, it is necessary to consider briefly his answer to this sort of argument.

First he points out that a claim to this sort of freedom can not be based on the teaching of the Reformers; it owes more to the Renaissance. The Liberty of the Christian Man is a gift of God, not a "right" of man, and it is the gift of a personal responsible freedom before God, not of unrestrained licence. It is freedom from an institution, the Roman idea of the church, but not freedom from God. "When Luther spoke of Christian freedom he had no idea of the rights of man or of classes. ... in the strict Christian sense religious liberty means freedom before God, in God, 'no condemnation', freedom of intercourse with God, unhampered by guilt and the demands of a law which God has now made His own charge and become responsible for in Christ. It is the sonship of faith, the being at home, not in society, but in the Father's house and kingdom." (FFF p200f). The Reformation was an appeal back to the Bible, and for the Bible man can never be completely free, he can only have freedom from one thing and for another, and the

Christian is free from sin and the law for the Gospel.

Neither is the Christian made free from the necessity of listening to the expert. 'The Reformation, if it destroyed the hierarchy of the Church, did not destroy the hierarchy of competency, spiritual or intellectual.' (PA p283). The most ignorant believer is free to confess his faith and experience, but he is not free, without training, to enter the region where preaching becomes teaching, and confession of faith becomes the theology of the Church. In this realm, as in others, the amateur must make way for the specialist and expert. He remains free to make himself an expert, but until he has done so he can not claim an equal weight for his own opinions as for the opinions of those who are expert. Forsyth obviously had a deep seated loathing for amateurs who dabbled in theology.

Secondly he argues (rightly or wrongly), that as a matter of historical fact democracy has flourished most under the influence of Calvin and his disciples. This is because in the Calvinistic system authority has meant responsibility and order. The strong have been restrained, and the weak supported and given a limited freedom, based on a proper regard for authority.

Thirdly, in part an extension of the last point, he points out that authority is necessary to progress, whether the progress of a child being trained for its place in adult life, or that of a nation which is to make the best use of the fruits of civilisation. At first the rightness of the authority is not seen and it has to be accepted passively, but even when it is seen submission is still required. Far from being an interference with the development of

free individual personality, as it was charged with being, authority is necessary for the development of moral personality in which freedom is only one part.

Similarly, authority was accused of hampering free thought. But Forsyth points out that thought is rarely free, and that many who assail the tradition of the past do so as representatives of the inferior tradition called fashion. In fact those who ask for freedom so vehemently have not stopped to think what they are asking. "Nothing worse could happen to man than that he should be absolute lord of himself and all beside" (PA p322). He tends to see the current claim for freedom of thought and the "rights" of the individual as mere egoism, self assertion leading to the rule of the strongest or largest number.

Thus, fourthly, he distrusts the appeal from the expert to the majority opinion in any context, and considers it completely out of place in the Church. The Church is always wrong to think in terms of publicity, vote catching and majorities. In spiritual matters there are points not open to public debate, matters to be faced which would not attract publicity or benefit by it. But these matters are matters of revelation on whose truth the church depends. "Christianity is not a religion of polity any more than a mere cult of conduct, but it is a religion of truth, and of the kind of faith that involves truth: and its Church, as it arose, so stands or falls by some theology; which, being involved in God's gift of Himself in revelation, cannot depend on any majority." (PA p233). But, he goes on to ask, even if there was to be a vote on some point of doctrine who would vote, and how would the value of the votes be assessed? Would any account be taken of the Christian dead, still

members of the Church of Christ, and what would be the voting power of Christ Himself in such a poll? Of course such questions are merely rhetorical. As far as Forsyth was concerned such questions could not arise in the Christian Church. "The Church is not a democracy. Its native spirit is not the spirit of a democracy. Its assemblies are not public meetings where each stands on his equal right. ... The Church is a Theocracy. Its gatherings are meetings of those who own a common worship and obedience. One stands in the midst, before whom our conscience has neither rights nor merits. He is an absolute King, and not an elected president." (CGS p73).

But it was the fifth point, the reference to revelation already hinted at above, which he felt must finally silence the appeal to freedom and democracy. The state may be organised as a democracy because the state is not bound by any past once-for-all event which makes it what it is; the church is so bound. In the last resort it can never be a democracy for it has an absolute King who not only claims the loyalty of his subjects, but who has re-made them for Himself as His own possession. Such was the claim of the Apostolic Christ, and the rejection of this Christ un-churched the group that made it.

In a rare personal aside Forsyth illustrates this point. "An eminent but orthodox and puzzled Congregationalist layman once said to me that if a Church became unanimous in rejecting an historic Christ, or an apostolic Gospel, in favour of "the spirit of Christ," it was difficult to see how it could be shown to have ceased to be Congregationalist. ... The answer was that it had not ceased to be Congregationalist, as the Unitarians have not; it had ceased to be a church." (PA p249). His point, the centrality of Christ the

Redeemer, is clear, though he could have allowed that the assembly in question remained a Congregationalist Church but not a Christian Church. This does not mean, as we shall see, that he allowed no variation of theological opinion on matters further from the centre, but he was clear that the act of redemption was final and constitutive for Christianity. It was thus an authority which could not finally be questioned. He described it as "... a Word that stands over the Church within it; and, so long as the Bible, with its creative record, is not wiped from the historic consciousness of the race, it stands fast if every vote in a church or council turned false." (PA p25lf). It is only as they express this Word that Church, Bible, Reason and Experience have authority, and we must now return from this digression to consider their authority.

It has become fashionable to speak of Forsyth as a High Churchman, indeed he himself wrote "Congregationalism at least is High Church or nothing" (FFF p215). But "High Church" is a vague and question-begging term, and the meaning which Forsyth would have intended, in the context of a discussion on the relations between church and state, is not always, indeed not often, intended by its general use. A good deal of exposition and qualification is necessary before it can be allowed to stand as a description of his doctrine of the Church.

Certainly he considered the Church to be very important. He saw the creation of the Christian society to be, historically, the first result of the Work of Christ, and so he had no patience with those who thought of it as a fraternity of philanthropists, or a club for the spiritually minded. "The great Church", he wrote, "is primarily the result of an act of God. It is primarily a divine

creation and not a voluntary association. It is not of man nor of the will of man. It was called and created by a divine Act of the Holy, which is continued by the Church in a mystic Gospel of moral action, and not in a sacrament." (CS p60). Since it is this same divine act of the Holy which justifies man it is not surprising to find him continuing a few pages later, "To be in Christ is in the same act to be in the Church. Anything we do in the way of joining the Church by a confession of faith is only making explicit in the statement what is already implicit in the fact." (CS p62). So no Christian can ignore the Church or sit loosely to it.

But it is also very important to see what Forsyth denies about the Church, since here he touches upon doctrines, or theories, upon which excessive claims for authority have frequently been made. He was not happy with the term "Body of Christ", though of course he acknowledged its scriptural nature, since its unqualified use by many representatives of the "catholic" wing of the Church did not do justice to the essential difference between Christ and the Church which is kept in other, equally scriptural, metaphors, such as "The Bride of Christ". Forsyth always insisted that Christ was important for those things in which He differed from us more than for those which He shared with us, and A.M. Hunter's comment "Call it the Bride of Christ or the Body of Christ, it was one as the vis-a-vis of the one Redeemer" (op. cit. pl67), glosses over an important theological point. For the same reason he will not allow the term "prolongation of the incarnation", either of the Church or of the Sacraments. It obscures ~~the~~ fact that the Church is a creature and Christ is not; more important it leaves out the reciprocity of the relation between Christ and the Church which is the result of moral regeneration, and obscures the finished nature of Christ's

work. He points out that at the incarnation Christ passed into a flesh distinct from Himself, and at the proper time He left it and it became a corpse. The Church is distinct from this flesh in that it is capable of a moral reciprocity of which the incarnation body was not. If it is argued that it is human nature in its psychological sense that is the Body of Christ this leaves out the need for a regeneration of human nature. The Christian Church consists of regenerated souls, but Christ himself needed no such regeneration. Further he will not allow that "... the crisis of His death, resurrection and life in the Spirit made no greater change in human history than is expressed in such a word as prolongation."

This is not to belittle the importance of the Church, but to attempt to do justice to its origin and to its present relation to its Lord in virtue of which it can still claim to be, in a sense, His externalisation, "To express this second form of His outward presence, the Church, we need some other word than the prolongation of the Incarnation, and one that does more justice to the cruciality of the Cross and the reality of the New Creation. ... Only by experience of Redemption has (the Church) a religious knowledge of what incarnation means. And if the meaning of Incarnation is only to be understood by the Church after passing through a moral crisis, then its intrinsic nature must be moral; i.e. it is not continued in the Church as a process, but reflected by the Church as an act. The Church is not the continuation of Christ, but His creation and His response." (CS p81-3).

If this criticism be allowed to stand, then the Church cannot claim for itself and its own words the direct Authority of Christ. But there is another way in which this claim is made, that is by

recourse to the doctrine of Apostolic Succession, understood as the tactual transmission of grace by episcopal ordination. Forsyth denies the basis of this theory. The Apostles were unique, and, in any case, they did not claim to pass on any authority, or indeed to have any, apart from the Gospel which they preached. What they did leave behind them was the New Testament as a standard by which future preachers were to be judged. Forsyth is not here criticising episcopacy as such. He sees it as a possible means of Church government, but not a necessary one and not one that can claim to be Apostolic, at least not as it is generally understood. It is the New Testament which is the real successor to the Apostolate.

The Church therefore gets its authority, not from the Apostles direct, but from the Apostolic Gospel which it holds in trust. This is not to deny the authority of the Church, but rather to magnify it by showing that it is not dependant on man but on the act of God, whose Spirit activates and honours the preaching of the Gospel. However, there is also a limiting of Church authority here, for the Spirit remains independent of the Church as Lord over it, and is free to work outside the normal sphere of Church influence. Failure to recognise this independence is the chief heresy of Roman Catholicism.

It must also be recognised that the Church itself is subject to the authority of the Gospel. No statement of the Church is final and infallible. Neither is any period of Church History, even the sixteenth century, to be made normative. The Reformation was the recovery of the Gospel as a living force, and the true heirs of the Reformation are not those who idolise Luther and Calvin and settle

down into Protestant Orthodoxy, but those in every age who submit their Church life to the criticism of the Gospel. "... the proper treatment of the Reformation is to finish it - to reform and complete it. ... to reform it by its own intrinsic principle of faith. We are but half way through the Reformation. So mighty was that conversion of Christianity, that second birth of the Gospel. Remember it was in its nature the Church's reforming of itself. So it goes on as the self-reformation of the reformed Church." (PFMM pl09). The Church could only claim to be infallible if the Gospel could be exhausted by doctrinal statements and faith reduced to intellectual assent, as Rome claims. Where this is done the personal element is omitted or obscured and the Church, as institution, has intruded between Christ and the individual soul and assumed the prerogative of Christ. The religion which results is not truly called Christianity, "For Christianity is an absolutely personal faith. That is to say, we are judged and saved eternally not by our relation to the Church but by our relation to Christ the Redeemer. In the last resort this Christ is the authority to our soul as directly as He is to the Church. ... The function of the Church is to introduce Christ and the soul, that He may do for that soul His work for every soul; it takes no responsibility for the soul, which is the prerogative of Christ alone" (PA p317).

This centrality of the Gospel limits the Church also in its relation to the state. To many in his own denomination and theological tradition Forsyth appeared to be inconsistent on this point. His insistence on Theocentricity seemed to many to point logically to a Theocratic state. We have seen that to exponents of democracy in the Church he argues strongly that the Church is Theocratic. But he does not extend this idea to cover the state.

Yet this is quite consistent. The state is certainly not beyond the control of God, and thus should not be beyond the concern of the Church. But the Church, as we have seen, consists of those who have responded in faith to the preaching of the Gospel. The ordinary citizen, qua citizen, has not, and though it is true that Christ died for him and that he too is, in principle, redeemed, he is free in his incalculable freedom to reject that redemption. In any case, he can not be made to see his redemption by despotic action of a church-state. "All talk of a theocracy which should draw the secular power under the spiritual is foreign both to the Gospel and to true Catholicism. The Church has been at its best when it did not mix with political transactions in the way of ruling prerogative or direct control. Its true influence is that of its apostolic Word and its moral character. When it sought first the righteousness of the Kingdom it had all that it needed of other things in tail" (CS p78).

But if he had a low opinion of a church-state, he appears to have had an even lower one of a state-church. Even in an attempt to maintain unity a state church appeared to him to be an anomaly. Whereas Rome was wrong to restrict the freedom of the Holy Spirit to a professional hierarchy, an established church has gone further and sacrificed its autonomy to secular authorities, not necessarily even Christian. (This is the Low-Church attitude which Forsyth criticises). Against both of these he claimed that Non-Conformity, despite its mistakes, has neither usurped the authority of Christ for its own priesthood, nor relinquished its own proper authority to the state. In this way it has at least been in a position to exercise its proper function towards the state, which is not control, service or neutrality, but guidance.

He did not claim that it had fulfilled this function.

At this point it must be noted that Forsyth always writes on this subject as if the established church is teetering towards its fall and cannot hope to survive for long, while the real hope for renewal of the Church in England lies with a federation of Free Churches. The forty years since his death which have proved him so right in so much that he said which was unpopular in his own day, have proved him no less decisively wrong in both of these prognostications.

Though he does not allow the claims for the ministry which the "Catholics" make, he was far from satisfied with the attitude to it and to its authority which he found in much popular protestantism. The minister was often reduced to a chairman, organiser, or leader in social functions. For Forsyth the true minister is a sacramental man, equipped by the Spirit and only recognised by the Church. His authority does not come from the Church but from the Gospel he preaches, the church merely provides the opportunity for this preaching. Though not of the Apostolic Succession through tactual transmission of grace, the preacher of the Gospel does stand in the true Apostolic Succession. "The Apostolic Succession is the Evangelical succession. Its continuity lies not in a due evolution but in a common inspiration, a common ministration of God's grace as mercy. It is (so to say) not a vertical continuity descending in a line, but a solidary, spreading through a mass; not a chain on which the Church is hung, but a nervous system pervading it and, by the Word, continually creating it" (CS pl39f).

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance and authority which Forsyth gave to the ministry as a preaching ministry. For him preaching is a sacramental act, indeed the sacramental act, and the whole of Christian history is seen as a struggle between pulpit and altar, preacher and priest. "The first Apostles were neither priests nor bishops. They were preachers, missionaries, heralds of the Cross, and agents of the Gospel. The Apostolic succession is the evangelical. It is with the preachers of the Word, and not with the priestly operators of the work, or with its episcopal organisers. ... The sacrament which gives value to all other sacraments is the Sacrament of the living Word." (PPMM pl4). This is not to deny the value of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, indeed Forsyth valued both highly, but they are merely tangible modes of conveying the Gospel which is audible in preaching, and just because they are tangible and material they are open to misunderstanding and abuse, either being given superstitious reverence as possessing magical powers in themselves, or being dismissed as mere symbols and ceremonies. In them the moral element can easily be obscured or lost. But the true sacrament is in holy personality.

He develops this theme in relation to two "catholic" claims for the Mass. First, while denying the transubstantiation of the elements, he speaks of the transubstantiation of the person. True of every Christian man this should be true in a special sense of the preacher. Such a claim, though emphatically not merely a play on words, has at least the appearance of a debating point - and Forsyth delighted in the unusual use of words as well as in the use of unusual words. But he goes on to claim that preaching is, what the Mass claims to be, a reproduction of Christ's work,

or a part of the action of Christ. What he denied to the Church as an institution, the continuation of the work of Christ, Forsyth asserts of the work of the preacher. "The preacher, in reproducing this Gospel word of God, prolongs Christ's sacramental work. The real presence of Christ crucified is what makes preaching. ... We do not repeat or imitate that Cross, on the one hand; and we do not merely state it, on the other. It re-enacts itself in us. God's living word reproduces itself as a living act." (PPMM p55). Thus, in this sense he would allow the same to the Church as a preacher or apostle, for he is clear that the chief work of the Church is preaching.

This then is the authority of the Church, and, for Forsyth, a very real authority. The authority of the Gospel, an authority which he feared the church of his own generation was in grave danger of losing or of allowing to go by default. It was losing it because it was looking for its authority in the wrong places and was expecting it to be effective in a wrong way. It was wrong for the Church to try to gain prestige for itself, even if it intended to use that prestige in a socially useful way. It was also wrong for the Church to try to wield an authority which would change social or political affairs. The Church was trying to be an authority for society without realising what was the authority for itself. For this reason Forsyth insists that the Preacher's primary function, and thus his first use of authority, is to preach the Gospel to the Church. He does not deny that there are other functions which a minister of the Gospel should fulfil. He lists three others, pastoral work, liturgical work and social and philanthropic work. In these respects, especially in the matter of worship, he saw that there was a secondary authority in tried

practice and custom. But he deprecated the fact that so many preachers and so many churches were getting so lost in these things that they were neglecting the first task of preaching the gospel. He saw it, therefore, as one of his own prophetic tasks to recall the Church to a proper use of its real authority, which involved recalling it to its Charter - the Bible.

To make an appeal for a return to the Bible at the time Forsyth made it called for some explanation; and especially when, as in this case, what was intended was a return to the Apostle Paul. J.K. Mozley gives as the first characteristic of the theological climate of the time its interest in Biblical analysis, especially the "higher" criticism of the New Testament. (Expositor Feb 1922 p67ff). For generations the Bible had been taken as Word of God without further qualification. The actual words of scripture, whether they were found in legal codes, the oracles of prophets, the evangelists or the letters of Apostles were taken as the actual words of God to the Christian reader. Such an approach had now been shown to be impossible and the pendulum had swung completely in the opposite direction. It was now fashionable to see the Bible, especially the Old Testament, as no more than an interesting collection of documents illustrative of man's spiritual evolution. It might be allowed that the original writer or speaker had some authority for his own age, but he had none for the present; and in any case it was difficult, if not impossible, to find out what his actual words were. The important thing was the life example and teaching of Jesus as found in the synoptic gospels unencumbered by theology. As for Paul, when he was not reviled as a charlatan his work was dismissed as a perversion of the simple gospel of Jesus, owing more to Greek mystery religions than to the teaching of the prophet of

Nazareth. We have touched briefly on Forsyth's attitude to all this before, now we must return to examine it a little more closely.

First it must be clearly stated that Forsyth did not wish to return to the pre-critical attitude to scripture. He did not believe in the verbal inerrancy of the Bible, and did not wish to "defend" it against the attacks of literary or historical criticism.

In fact he considered that the results of such criticism were beneficial and led to a better understanding of the Bible.

"Modern scholarship", he wrote, "has made of the Bible a new Book. It has in a certain sense re-discovered it. ... We have, through the labours of more than a century of the finest scholarship in all the world, come to understand the Bible, in its original sense, as it was never understood before." (WOC p33f). A.M. Hunter has shown that he was well aware of the work that was being done, particularly in the New Testament field, and that, on a number of points he had already arrived at positions which were considered "modern" some thirty years later. (op cit ppl47ff).

However, he differed from many of his contemporaries in that he did not regard the work of Biblical criticism as the main task of theology, though he hints in one place that in his earlier years he had done so. (PPMM pl92). As far as he was concerned such work was never more than a "handmaid", a clearing of the ground to make way for the work of dogmatics, and to help the preacher. The criticism of the actual text of the Bible did not, for him, affect its authority, since he had never found its authority in the text itself. He did not believe that revelation came in the form of a series of propositions, that was a Roman view. For him revelation was a personal disclosure of God in action, it was in

fact the Gospel. It was therefore beyond the scope of scientific criticism of the Bible, just as the Gospel itself was an authority beyond the Bible. So, as early as 1905, we find him writing "The Higher Criticism has been a great blessing, but it has gone too far alone, i.e., without final reference to the highest, the synthetic standard of the Bible - the Gospel of Grace. What we need, to give us the real historic contents of the Bible, is not a History of the Religion of Israel, but of Redemption - with all the light the Higher Criticism can shed on it, and much more that it cannot." (CGS p69).

From this it might appear that he regarded the Bible either as merely the record of the Word of God, or as containing, but not itself being that Word. Both of these views had their exponents, and it is not impossible to hold both together. In fact, however, he took neither. For the first he argued that the Bible was not a historical record and was not intended to be such a record. Even the Gospels, he asserts, were written "from faith to faith", and are more in the nature of sermons than historical records.

This is why a biography of Jesus in the normally accepted sense of the word is not possible. As for the idea that the Bible contained the Gospel, he argued that it would be more true to reverse it and say that the Gospel contained the Bible. The Bible was not the final and complete revelation, and thus the final authority, of God; but it is part of that revelation and an essential part, the revelation is not complete without it. He was willing to agree with those who said that the revelation was Christ Himself, but he insisted that this is only true if it refers to the whole Christ, not merely the pious teacher whom some found in the synoptics. The whole Christ included the

Apostolic interpretation, without which the historical Jesus is ineffective. Here, as elsewhere, he would follow Kant and accept the dictum that "fact, without interpretation, is blind."

The Gospel, he pointed out, was preached by the Apostles before it was written by the evangelists, and this preaching was part of the Gospel, it was the divinely inspired interpretation of the total event of Jesus. The Gospels were written later to support the preaching, not the preaching to explain the gospels. He argued that it is quite beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus promised His disciples further illumination or exposition of the facts which they had witnessed, after His own death. Nor is it open to question, to an unbiased reader of the New Testament, that the Apostles believed themselves to be possessed of a special inspiration by virtue of which they were able to interpret the events of Jesus' life and death to the church, or rather through which the risen and ascended Christ was interpreting Himself. These things being so, to deny the authority of the Apostles is equivalent to saying that Jesus failed to do what He had promised to do. It is also to deny the verdict of the New Testament Church, for there, clearly, the Apostles were accepted on their own estimate of themselves as men who stood with God facing the Church, not with men facing God.

But, it is necessary to go even further than this. Just as the authority of the Apostles cannot be denied, it cannot be avoided or superseded. They did not merely call attention to experiences which they had enjoyed or theories which had seemed good to themselves. They claimed to be prolonging and completing the Gospel act by means of an authoritative interpretation.

They can not be treated, says Forsyth, in the way the Samaritans treated the woman who had met Jesus at the well (John 4:42). Later ages can not claim that they have had the same experience as the apostles, or that they have had other experiences or revelations which go beyond those of the Apostles in such a way as to leave the Apostolic teaching behind. The Apostles allowed that the Church might grow in their teaching, but they did not allow that it might grow out of it. Their experience was not given them for their own sanctification or edification, but it was to be authoritative for the Church for all time, their teaching and experience are included in the Gospel fact as the experience and teaching of later ages is not. "This interpretation of theirs, this exposition of Christ, was a providential, integral, and, we might say, polar part of the action of the total fact itself, and not a searchlight thrown on it from without. Christ's finality functioned through the Apostles in self-description, as it did not through the Fathers. "The Lord is the Spirit" The whole revelatory act included the manifestation and its posthumous self interpretation included them in a polar unity. The fact Christ could act only by having a certain meaning, which was guaranteed as its own meaning by His own action in the Apostles." (PA p31). Elsewhere the same view of scripture is stated more succinctly, "The New Testament is not the first stage of the evolution but the last phase of the revelatory fact and deed." (PPJC p152).

This is a view of scripture which is fairly familiar today, but unusual when Forsyth stated it. He did in fact state it many times. But he had in it strange inconsistencies. He did not assert, did not need to assert, that every view of the Apostles,

every statement they made, was necessarily true. The standard by which they are to be judged is their relation to the central theme of Redemption, whatever is required by their preaching of redemption is to be accepted, but other matters, matters further from the centre, need not be accepted in the same way. Clearly this attitude is going to run in to difficulties about what is and what is not required by the Apostles doctrine of Redemption, and who is to decide?

Forsyth himself illustrates this difficulty by reference to the question of the Virgin Birth. This, he argues, is not an issue which can be settled by the historical or literary critics acting purely as critics, "The real settlement of the question lies farther within theological territory. It is really a theological question and not a critical, ... The Virgin Birth is not a necessity created by the integrity and infallibility of the Bible; it is a necessity created (if at all) by the solidarity of the Gospel, and by the requirements of grace. ... If it was essential to the perfect holiness of Christ's redeeming obedience, ... then it must stand, whatever the critics say. I am not here called on to decide that question. I only quote it as an illustration of method, to show what is meant by saying that there is a dogmatic criticism of the Bible higher than what is called the higher" (PPMM pl3f). Elsewhere however he does give decisions, deciding that Paul was mistaken on anthropology, no doubt a reference to Romans 5 (PPJC pl55), and the nearness of the Parousia (PA pl32).

It is clear that he has in mind Luther's dictum that the Bible is to be accepted as authoritative as far as it 'plies Christ', a phrase which he quotes on a number of occasions. However, he

criticises Luther for his attitude to the epistle of James, saying that Luther approached it with a pre-conceived idea of a Pauline Christ. But it could also be argued that Forsyth has come to scripture with his own view of what is important. Many would argue today that the Parousia is a more important topic than Forsyth seems to allow, and, if Paul was mistaken about it, this would be very embarrassing for Forsyth's view of the authority of scripture.

He has a considerable defence against this sort of criticism, or at least a standpoint from which to view it, in his view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the appropriation of scripture by the believer. He is aware that many exalted the ministry of the Spirit at the expense of the Word, and against such people he takes what he refers to as a Lutheran, as opposed to a Calvinist, view of the relation between the two. He is anxious to guard against the false mysticism which separates the two. This, he says, comes from Calvin. "Calvin keeps distinct, though inseparable, the effect of the inspired Word and the complementary action of the Spirit as really decisive, truly inward, and heart-opening. The latter is something added to the former rather than produced by it." (FFF p39). From this point of view it is possible to speak of a second revelation to the individual, separate from the Word. He is keen to say that Calvin himself did not fall into this error, but he did make it possible for others to do so. Luther, on the other hand, makes the internal witness of the Spirit more organic and immanent to the Word. "The action of the Spirit is immediate to the soul yet not unmediated by the Word. The Spirit when He had set the Word down in history did not abdicate for it and its rich posthumous effects. He is

always there, personally with and over it." (FFF p29f). It is as it has this present self-authenticating witness of the Spirit working within it that scripture has a present authority for us.

From this it is easier to see why he is so fond of the term sacramental in relation to scripture, and can take so apparently cavalier an attitude to the actual historical accuracy of the documents. It is undoubtedly true that in the last resort the authority of scripture cannot be proved from historical methods, it must be existentially self authenticating to the reader, and an attitude of faith is needed in approaching it. However, even when this has been allowed, Forsyth sometimes uses extreme language in speaking of his indifference to historical criticism. Ultimately Christianity must rest on facts. Forsyth, of course, saw this and believed that the historical evidence was strong, so that he did not have to go so far with his historical scepticism as he said he would be willing to go. Probably had he not been so sure of the history, he would have been less emphatic in denying its value.

This criticism notwithstanding, it is clear that Forsyth gave to the Bible, or rather saw in the Bible, a very high authority indeed. It was a part of the Gospel which was the final authority. In practice it is clear that he valued it highly. He bemoaned the decay of devotional Bible reading by the laity and urged it strongly upon the ministry. Speaking to men preparing for the ministry he said "I do not believe in verbal inspiration. I am with the critics in principle. But the true minister ought to find the words and phrases of the Bible so full of spiritual food and felicity that he has some difficulty in not

believing in verbal inspiration." (PFMM p26). Finally, his views on this subject are probably best expressed in the well known passage in which he speaks of his own experience of Bible reading, "I read the story of the Father who beseeches Christ to heal his son. I hear the answer of the Lord, "I will come down and heal him." "Him!" That means me. The words are life to my distempered soul. I care little for them (when I need them most) as a historic incident of the long past, and element in the discussion of miracles. They do not serve their divinest purpose till they come to me as they came to that father. They come with a promise here and now. ... I do not ask the critics for assurance that the incident took place exactly as recorded. I will talk of that when I am healed. It is a question for those who are trying to frame a biography of Jesus, or discussing the matter of miracles. ... I was not in the thought of Jesus when He spoke them; neither was I in His thought upon the cross. But by the witness of the Spirit to my faith they come, as if they were said to no one else. I was in His Gospel. They come to me as they are in God. And I live on them for long. And the Bible is precious for their sake. And I wait by their hope, and in the strength of their life I go many nights and days till I come to another mount of God, and the same Gospel speaks and restores me from another holy hill" (CGS pl27).

Turning now to his views on the authority of reason, or of theology, we find two superficially opposed strands in his writings. On the one hand there are passages where he appears to deprecate reason and the pursuit of Theology and insists on the primacy of the experience of redemption in a way that leaves all else out of account. But elsewhere he speaks very highly of Theology,

insisting that it is a necessity for the Church and severely criticising those who are indifferent to it, or who take an hostile attitude to it as useless word-chopping keeping the church from its proper task. In fact he is not being inconsistent in his thought, though he is in his language. It is necessary first to see that he uses the word "Theology" in two distinct senses, so that in fact he distinguishes in practice between good and bad Theology. Secondly, it is necessary to see that even good theology has no final authority of its own. Like the Church and the Bible it only has the authority of a witness to the Gospel.

The theology which he criticised was that which began from man and sought to explain everything in rational terms, ending with a perfectly consistent and coherent monistic system. Such an approach owed more to Hegel than to the Bible. It did not take account of the facts of the case, either of man's sinfulness or of the grace of God in redemption. It reduced Theology to a deductive system, the explication of an idea. The result might well be an admirable intellectual system but it would not, in Forsyth's judgment, be true Christian Theology because it was not based on real religion, saving faith, and did not set its compass by the Cross.

Here as elsewhere Forsyth begins from the experience of redemption, "Our theological capital", he writes, "is not ideas we arrive at but experience we go through ..." (PA p93). Theology was not meant to be used as a means of proof but rather as an account of faith. He defined it as "... the intelligible content, the inevitable statement (spreading out to the elaborate exposition), of the act and person given in a historic revelation"

(PA 212). It was imperative that it should not be cut away from this historic base. Understood in this way theology is a necessary function of the church, so necessary that religious certainty is not possible without it. In other words it is necessary to go beyond mere confession of personal faith in the "testimony meeting" to make some attempt at its explication. "Theology", he says, "is the expression or the exposition of the Church's fundamental consciousness of what makes the Church the Church. And the Church's certainty is certainty of its theology, and not of something else by the remote aid of its theology. It is certainty of salvation - a word which has no meaning but a theological one for the soul." (PA p345). In this expression of faith the church would naturally call upon its experience, but it would not be limited to it. Theology must go beyond subjective experience, even the experience of redemption, to the objective facts in which that experience is grounded.

It is important to notice that here Forsyth is speaking of the Church. It is the Church that must have a theology, not necessarily the individual believer. Theology belongs to the Church, it is the Church's responsibility. "With private members of a Church it does not much matter whether they have a theology or not, so long as they are respectful to those who do. It does not matter whether Messrs. X, Y or Z, have a theology or not - except in so far as they may cease to be merely Messrs. X, Y or Z, and become teachers of the Church, use its prestige, and voice its Gospel" (PA p214). This raises the question of what is meant by asking Messrs. X, Y, and Z to be respectful to the experts. It would presumably be possible to respectfully disagree with the experts, to refuse to accept their opinions.

Would this put Messrs. X, Y, and Z outside the Church?

It seems here that Forsyth is in danger of going back to the old Orthodoxy, which, as we shall see later, he greatly admired, and demanding assent to certain doctrinal propositions as a condition of Church membership. However he did not do so. He saw here the danger of giving way to the "catholic" tendency, present also in Protestantism, and obscuring the Gospel. Yet he cannot allow that Messrs. X, Y and Z, are free to concoct their own version of Christianity. What he does is to distinguish between primary and secondary levels of theology. Primary theology is the basic fundamental statement of the historic revelation, while secondary theology is the exposition of this fundamental statement in different terms according to different historical, cultural, or intellectual frameworks. (see PA p213n). Later he developed this distinction and spoke of three different levels of belief, which he referred to as Dogma, Doctrine, and Theology.

Dogma is the most basic of the three. It is the irreducible minimum of belief, the belief that in the cross of Christ God acted in such a way as to reconcile the world to Himself and that Christian belief is the reception of this by the individual. R.M. Brown has suggested that the word "Kerygma" is the nearest equivalent in modern theological language to what Forsyth has in mind by Dogma. (op cit p45). Shading off from this irreducible minimum are Doctrine, which is a more scientific elaboration of Dogma, and Theology, which is a more tentative groping towards Doctrine. Of these three he believes that adherence to the first, Dogma, should be made a condition of Church membership. Doctrine

is the corporate possession of the Church, while Theology may be practised by an individual. It is possible that in the practice of the third the individual may stray from the accepted paths of orthodoxy, but there is room in the Church "... for a heterodoxy which yet maintained the evangelical continuity, and which declared the reality of a historic and moral redemption of the race in the Cross of Christ" (PA p220).

It is clear from this that he has moved a long way from the old orthodoxy and its talk of saving truths. Indeed he goes so far as to say "There is then no authority for mere theological knowledge or statement. There are doctrines of salvation, but no saving doctrines. In a strict use of words, there is no such thing as saving truth" (^{HJ}~~see~~ IV 1905 p68). But it is also clear that he is not willing to relapse into the vague creedlessness that is the bane of his denomination. He insists that it does matter what a man believes, and that some confession of the Apostolic faith is essential for Church membership.

He certainly has no objection in principle to the idea of a creed, but he criticises the so called Catholic creeds for being unbalanced. He often speaks of the need for a creed which will be built around the act of redemption and which will make that central. It is from this position that he criticises the three traditional creeds. The Athanasian Creed does not mention redemption and forgiveness at all; the Nicene Creed mentions the remission of sins late and in a passing way, and so does the Apostles Creed. Historically considered this is quite understandable. The early creeds were drawn up more as a defence against heresy than as an attempt to proclaim the truth, and it was in respect of the

doctrines of the Trinity and the Person of Christ, rather than the Work of Christ, that such defence was needed. It could even be argued that the very paucity of reference to redemption and forgiveness is testimony to the fact that the early church was agreed on their importance. But Forsyth is concerned, not with the history of the matter, but with their present usefulness and the place which they give, or rather fail to give, to the irreducible minimum of belief which he refers to as Dogma. From this point of view he pours scorn on them, "What wonder that the moral authority of the church has proved such an unstable thing in the course of history when her ecumenical symbols not only do not start from the real source of authority in Christianity, but scarcely allude to it. I mean, of course, redeeming grace. It was inevitable, if Christianity was to survive, that these archaic symbols, with their tremendous missing of the Christian point, should be replaced by the profound and accurate Evangelical Confessions of the Reformation" (CGS pl24). It is not that he wishes to re-instate these Confessions, but he is sure that they have pierced to the heart of the matter in a way in which the creeds have not. The task of the theologian is to do for his own day what these Confessions did for theirs. And it is significant of course that they should be called Confessions. For Forsyth, as for the Reformers, the task of theology is to confess the Apostolic Christ, it is only as they do this that theological statements have any authority for the Church.

His stress on the experience of redemption might lead us to expect that he would make the fourth alternative, religious experience, the chief media of authority, and, in a sense, he does.

He welcomed the powerful movement which was current in his time to appeal to the authority of experience rather than to the more static authority of Church, Bible or Confessions. He saw it as an immense step forward and described Schleiermacher, to whom above all the movement was indebted for its origin, as 'the great regenerative genius of modern theology'. In the realm of Christian experience all are laymen, and Forsyth rejoiced in the thought that the simplest believer had an equal right to speak on the central issue of Christianity as the most able and sophisticated theologian.

Yet as early as 1906 he saw the dangers of relying on mere religious experience as a final authority. In that year he told his fellow Free Churchmen, 'There are many who feel that the Churches most dominated by the experimental method, though they have gained in force, are not gaining to the same extent in the power which sustains the force. They can carry an election with men easier than rest in an election of God ... The inner certainty is not what it was. The objective security is not what it was. The note of authority is not what it was.' (The Place of Spiritual Experience in the making of Theology; a paper read to the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches at Birmingham, as reported in "The Christian World Pulpit", 21st March 1906, published RON p68ff). Later in the same paper he speaks of the need to correct Schleiermacher by Ritschl, and, years later, we find him correcting Ritschl also. He never retracted his own stress on experience, but he did qualify it considerably.

Part of his criticism of those who asked for assent to doctrinal statements as a condition for Church membership was that

they were making Christianity both too intellectual and too easy. A man might be able to handle doctrine, even the doctrine of redemption, with great skill but never know the meaning of it for himself. Perhaps Forsyth remembered that he had been such a man in his earlier years. Actual experience of redemption involved a far more rigorous struggle, and at a far deeper level of experience, than did intellectual understanding of theories of the atonement. It was because of the emphasis which he wished to place on this element of personal conviction and inner struggle that Forsyth welcomed the increased attention being paid to experimental theology, and not because he saw the experience itself as being authoritative.

As has been explained earlier, Forsyth emphasised the content rather than the mere fact of religious experience. And it was on this point that he wanted to criticise many who appealed to the experience itself. He saw many deficiencies in this latter view. In the first place there was the danger of beginning from "that excellent creature man", and making his experience the final authority or judgment bar at which the Gospel was tried. This would be to forget that man's religious experience is subject to sin with the rest of his nature. There must be no suggestion of the experience being an arbiter over the claim of the Gospel. "Experience in this region does not mean a prior standard in us by which we accept or reject the Gospel's claims. It does not mean that the Gospel submits to be tried by the code we have put together from our previous experience of natural things, even in the religious sphere. It creates assent rather than accepts it." (PA p333).

An even worse danger is that the experience might drift away from the historic base of revelation all together. One would then find, as was current in Forsyth's day, a general appeal to all the vaguely spiritual emotions of the ages, where all talk of finality was dismissed as intolerant and outmoded dogmatism. Such an appeal might appear very urbane, sophisticated, and liberal, but it could not, as Forsyth saw and as the first world war was to prove, sustain those who held it in times of tragedy. It was an attitude which a man might hold, but it could not hold a man, much less a church. The religious experience which Forsyth advocated was distinctively Christian experience, based on revelation. Even here he had to go further and insist that the revelation meant redemption and not mere pious impression.

With these very necessary qualifications we can assert that for Forsyth authority came in experience. It was not drawn by deductive reasoning from the experience, nor did the experience coming later corroborate a claim to authority which had been recognised earlier, but the authority came in the experience. The experience in question is a moral experience of the whole man in which his whole being is called into question and he is wholly committed in a venture of faith. It is not an experience which comes to order to the dabblers in mysticism, or to the impressionable who are seeking a comfortable feeling of exaltation or inspiration from a consideration of the grandeur of the hills or the broad expanse of the ocean. It comes to those who are in earnest, and it comes as a converting overmastering consciousness of having been re-created, re-born.

He does not say that this experience must come quickly, in

a way that can be dated, in what is known as a "crisis" conversion. Indeed he sometimes appears to be doubtful about the permanence of such conversions, and criticises those who try to force "decisions" for Christ. But he clearly regards the experience itself, however it comes, as a necessity for any really deep understanding of Christianity. That there are those in the church who have never had such an experience he admits, and he does not suggest that they should be un-churched or that they are not Christians, but he insists that their grasp on the faith is less secure, and their practical usefulness to others is much less, than that of those who have reached Christian maturity by a long and deep struggle. On the difference between the two types he writes, "There are men and women whose faith from their early years is simple, ready, and sure. They are not the victims of a deadly struggle. It is not theirs to clear a path with spiritual agony from darkness into light, and rise from despair into faith and hope. But that is the heavy destiny of many another, who only comes to the simplicity of trust in his later years, and only gains the peace of confident love after he has been exercised and strengthened by the searching conflict of many a spiritual fight. Is the faith of the twice-born worth no more than that of the once-born? Surely no. He who has fought his way to light has a grasp and sinew denied to the other's gentle trust, and a power to lift others to his side. He knows the ground he has travelled with armed vigilance as the cheery traveller does not. He has a power of sympathy with other serious wayfarers which is absent in those to whom the burden was light. And to the faith of the warrior a whole world of deep significance and rich association lies open, where the more childlike mood feels but a vague spiritual presence and a dim sense of voiceless balmy

breath." (CP p83). The result, or reward, of the struggle is an experience of life-change, and to the one who has experienced it it is the truest thing he can know.

Once more, then, we are driven back to the Gospel of God's Grace as the final authority. It is mediated through the Church, the Bible, theological Confessions and Christian Experience, but it is not dependent on any of these things for its validity. Its essential nature, as Forsyth never tires of asserting, is miraculous. It comes to man by revelation, and its objective source is the inexhaustible Cross of Christ.

It is a standard criticism of a theological position which stresses grace, sin, and the sovereignty of God that it provides for personal salvation but not for any social ethic. It is apt, say its critics, to provide plenty of intellectual excitement and stimulation for those who like it, and can follow it, but it provides no guidance in the practical business of living Christianly in this present world. While it may be very well to criticise the vague idealists, social reformers and mere philanthropists for having no adequate theological basis for their position, it is also necessary for those who make this criticism to show that their own more lofty theological position gives some direction and guidance for social action. If they cannot do so, and must relapse into ethical quietism, they can hardly expect much of an audience from those who are trying to come to grips with the actual human and social problems which are the concrete evidence of that state of sin about which the neo-orthodox theologian can theorise in calm academic detachment.

Forsyth, however, was not an academic recluse. Furthermore he had personal experience of the pathetic circumstances in which many of his fellows lived. His own home background had been poor. Since then he had been pastor to five different congregations, no doubt meeting the normal social and ethical problems of the day, and when he went into academic life there is no reason to suppose that he forgot his past or lost interest in practical social and ethical problems. Speaking as chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, the highest position his denomination could offer, he was able to say, "Do not take my arm and lead me away to the dwellings of the pound-a-weeks and the nothing-a-weeks and tell me if I want realities to consider there. Long ago I

was there, and worked there, and considered there, and have been considering ever since." (CGS p96). It is necessary for us to try to find out some of the results of this considering, for ethics is, in a sense, the reverse side of authority.

Christian ethics as a distinct discipline in its own right is not dealt with in Forsyth's writing. There is a book on Marriage, another on Socialism, and a number of articles and sermons on related subjects, but there is no systematic work on Christian Ethics or attempt to give a blue-print for a Christian Society. This is partly due to the generally "ad hoc" nature of his writing. Most of his books began as series of lectures given for a special purpose. He never wrote or attempted a Church Dogmatics, though if he had done so there would doubtless have been a section on this subject. It is also due to the fact that he did not believe it was possible to speak of ethics without theology. For him ethics had to be theological or nothing. And, of course, the theology he had in mind was the theology of sin, grace, and the Cross of Christ.

This was an unusual position then, as it is now, and needs explanation if not justification. The study of ethics is normally taken to mean the formulation of a number of rules, or at least principles, by which life is to be lived. Christian ethics is popularly supposed to differ from non-Christian in that the rules are taken from the teaching of Jesus, or sometimes from the whole of the New Testament or of the Bible. In either case it is generally supposed that what is at stake is what a man does, more than what he believes, or what he is. For the Christian liberalism of Forsyth's day this meant interpreting the Kingdom of God as a

social organisation and quarrying a code of ethical behaviour and social reform from the Sermon on the Mount. Forsyth considered such an approach to be basically wrong.

In the first place it is making Christ a legislator as Moses was, and assuming that He would say now exactly what He said two thousand years ago. It is a relapse into Pharisaism. This was not the way the early apostles understood Jesus' purpose. They made little direct use of His ethical teaching, and it was not the teaching that founded the church. "The result of his life and teaching was that they all forsook him and fled; but the result of his cross, resurrection, and glory was to rally them and create the Church in which he dwells." (PP7326). Clearly it was not the high moral tone of His precepts which re-made them. More than that was needed.

This is the second error which he pointed out in the conventional understanding of ethics without theology; it assumes that men are able to change, and that they will naturally desire the highest when they see it, or have it shown to them. The fate of Jesus Himself shows that this is not so. Forsyth points out on several occasions that it was the good and religious element in Judaism that brought about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. It was always the sin of the good people that troubled Jesus most, and those who occupy themselves in framing plans for social improvement are, of course, the good people. But the trouble is they are consciously good, they are striving for perfection in their own strength, and are offering others schemes by which they can reach the same high standards.

The result of all this must be the triumph of Romanism, for this is the Roman view of Christian Perfection. In an early sermon he wrote, "As soon as you part with the idea that our perfection is in our faith and not in our conduct, you have taken the train for Rome; and I urge you to get out at the first stop and go back to another platform." Later in the same sermon he goes on, "Our chief danger today is not the ceremonial ritual, but the moral and social ritual. It is the idea that men are to be saved by well-doing, by integrity, by purity, by generosity, by philanthropy, by doing as Christ did rather than trusting what Christ did, by loving instead of trusting love." (GHF pp 121, 128). What is missing is the realisation that the reformer is under the judgment of God as well as the people and the situation that he is trying to reform.

The root trouble is a failure really to face the facts. He accuses those who speak often of the facts of poverty, slums, vice and commercial or industrial exploitation, of failing to face up to the real fact of moral sin, and he means sin which lies as a curse upon the whole race, not on part of it only. By dwelling on the obvious and surface sins they are blinding themselves to the underlying sinfulness which is their ultimate cause. "The grace of God in the historic Cross of Christ must be the one source of morals and seal of authority for a race that is redeemed or nothing, redeemed or lost. The greatest fact in social ethics is also the most formidable and intractable; it is the fact of sin and the sense of guilt. All morals are academic which fail to recognise this - the real royalty of the moral, its actual wreck, and its imperative redemption." (PA p402f). It is because by His death He has dealt in a final way with this sinfulness that

Christ is the final authority in the realm of ethics.

The truly moral man is the one who has recognised this and accepted the salvation and forgiveness wrought by Christ for himself. In other words one does not become a Christian by doing good, but having become a Christian one does good. There is not only a change in order but a change in attitude to moral living and its problems if one begins from the fact of redemption. The Christian believes he is living in a redeemed world, the issue between good and evil has been settled, and this lends a more confident note to his approach to social problems than is possible for the non-Christian social reformer. The latter is struggling against powers which must often appear insuperable to those who see the tragic note in human existence, but the former is applying a final victory already won.

Thus, for Forsyth, the Christian ethic is not the application of a set of rules, but the proclaiming of redemption and the working out of a principle. Such an attitude may still, after any amount of theological argument, appear doctrinaire and remote. He was aware of this, but was still sure that in theory the Christian can go no further. He cannot, that is, work out a Christian ethical system which is always applicable. However, in practice he can go further, and Forsyth urged his fellow Christians to do so.

It was not, in his view, the Church's task to make far-reaching pronouncements in the fields of economics or industrial organisation, but it was the Church's task to produce men who might be able to do so, or who would at least be able to act Christianly in their own

situation. While denying that the Church could be permanently associated with any particular political party or economic programme he insisted that it was a Christian duty to be concerned, informed, and active in such affairs. Behind this was the belief that Christ had redeemed all men and the whole of society.

For himself Forsyth seems to have been very active in the political and social life of his day. He was a keen critic of the Liberal party, and concerned himself with such current problems as the Education Act, the conditions of Chinese labour in the Transvaal, the growth of organised labour and its relations with capitalism, and the responsibility of the community to the individual member. The great questions which were burning issues to him, and on which he wrote and spoke with considerable vehemence, are often, in principle at least, settled today. But this is as he would have expected it to be. A Christian ethic of the conventional sort would have become outmoded, but his diagnosis of the ethical disease and his principles for ethical action have not.

Sources and Influences.

On several occasions attention has been drawn to the differences between Forsyth's thought and that of his contemporaries. It has been noted that he thought of himself as a prophet, and as a lonely prophet. This estimate was endorsed by his contemporaries and by later students of his work. Time and again he contrasts the liberal theology of his day with the more positive gospel which he seeks to proclaim. Many of his most influential contemporaries thought of him as something of an intellectual oddity, or even an obscurantist, and it must be allowed that his rather pungent style, and the sharp criticism he would turn on those with whose opinions he disagreed would not have endeared him to all. The speed with which his work was forgotten, at least generally, following his death in 1921, supports the theory that he was very much a voice in the wilderness. Nevertheless, even when allowance has been made for this loneliness or individuality, it is reasonable to suppose that there were influences on his thought, and some attempt must be made to mention at least the more important.

Two difficulties are apparent at once. The first is purely practical. Forsyth himself rarely indicates any sources, or mentions any influences on his thought; none of his books has an index, and he makes little use of footnotes. This is not because he was loath to give credit where it was due, but arises mainly from the nature of his work. Most of his books originated as lectures where frequent references to sources or quoting of authorities would have been out of place, though W.L. Bradley asserts that "... there are occasions when he paraphrases

sentences, paragraphs, or even pages of German theologians with a bare reference to the fact that he is indebted to the author for that particular theme." (W.L. Bradley: P.T. Forsyth, the Man and his Work p.90). Forsyth admits this, however, writing in one place, "In certain moods, as one traces back the origin of some lines of thought or even phrases of speech, the words come to mind, "What have I that I have not received" (PPJC Preface p viii).

The second difficulty is greater. It is rarely possible to say that any particular line of thought in Forsyth's writing came from any particular source, because by the time it appears in print he has made it his own and adapted it to his own purpose. He does not use the method, common in theological writing, of listing half a dozen theories on a particular point and then selecting what he considers to be the best parts of each to present the result as his own system. It was not his intention to write systematic theology of that sort, he preferred rather to unfold his own position, always referring back to the cross but with a minimum of quotation. It must also be remembered that he was over fifty when his most serious writing began, an age when the economic and spiritual struggles of his earlier years had perhaps engendered a certain confidenceⁱⁿ himself and in his own grasp of his subject which did not need to be buttressed by frequent reference to other divines. This is not to say that he was indifferent to other men's ideas, far from it, but rather that he was not limited by his sources. He gives his own attitude to the question in the following words 'Much of our work has been to steal. That does not matter if it is done wisely and gratefully. When a man gives out a great thought, get it, work it; it is common property. It belongs

to the whole world, to be claimed and assimilated by whoever shall find." (WOC 66). This was his own way, but before mentioning some of the men whose ideas he worked and assimilated mention must be made of his own spiritual experience. It is probable that his own experience was an influence upon his work which has ^{been} much under-valued.

It is a rather remarkable fact that the Forsyth who came to 'set his compass by the inexhaustible cross', and to contrast the positive gospel with the popular liberalism of his day, had himself once been an ardent exponent of that liberalism of which he was later so trenchant a critic. It would have been difficult for him to have avoided its influence completely, but at one time he had not only been influenced by it but had aspired to lead its crusade. W.L. Bradley gives the text of two letters which he wrote to the English Independent in 1877 while he was minister of the Congregational Church at Shipley, which contain many of the sentiments of liberalism which he later attacked. He appeals for comprehension and open communion on the basis of common "spiritual sympathy", rather than orthodox doctrine, and sees true Christian discipleship as loyalty to the character of Jesus, " ... shall we not gain vastly" he wrote then, "by letting it be openly known that our Church means all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, all who revere the character as supreme, ...". Later he writes, "We are, in the long run, ruled more by our ideals than by our defined beliefs. Christ has done more for Christianity as a moral and spiritual ideal than merely as the centre of a system of faith. ... Call all who worship the goodness of Christ members of Christ. It is only so that we shall develop those deeper foundations of Supreme goodness which make it the

revelation and very presence of God." (W.L. Bradley. op. cit. p280, 282). Such sentiments may have been in his mind over thirty years later when he wrote, "Granting that many today are moved by the figure of Christ, by the picture stepping out of its scriptural frame on them, can they stop there? Can such an impression carry the weight of life and conscience to the end" (LQR CXVI p200). His answer was that it definitely could not.

It is in the second of the quotations given above that we hear the real Forsyth, but clearly a radical transformation has taken place, the "sunny liberal" has become the theologian of the cross. This radical transformation, the evangelical experience of conversion, was basic to all that Forsyth was to write in the future, and was clearly a far more important influence on his thought than the work of any theologian whom he may have read. Commenting on Forsyth's death, Thomas Yates, President of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1922, said "It was a profound experience of grace that made Dr. Forsyth the great Doctor of the Church that he was." (cited R.M. Brown pl3).

That Forsyth had such an experience is beyond reasonable doubt, but it is difficult to give it a date, or to say any more about its nature. In the short memoir of her father which is printed as a preface to the second edition of "The Work of Christ", Forsyth's daughter suggests that it was the sermon "Holy Father", preached at the Congregational Union meetings held in Leicester in 1896 which first suggested to his contemporaries that there had been a re-orientation in his thought. But she denies that this was a sudden change.

At this period of his life Forsyth was a sick man. When, in 1894, he was called from a six year ministry at Clarendon Park, Leicester, to the pastorate of Emmanuel Church, Cambridge, he was obliged to ask for three months complete rest before taking up his new charge. The rest does not appear to have had the desired effect. He arrived at Cambridge still very ill, and a week after his arrival his first wife, upon whom he had previously depended greatly but who had recently become an almost helpless invalid, died suddenly. His first three years at Cambridge were a time of loneliness and suffering. It is interesting to speculate that it may have been during these years that Forsyth himself learned the basic importance of that tragic note in human affairs, to a consideration of which he repeatedly calls attention, and the answer to which he found in the cross. It would be fitting that the sermon "Holy Father", sounding as it does so many of his characteristic themes, should have come from such a period.

However, ten years later, Forsyth himself gave a different answer to the question of his conversion, though one which does not preclude the speculation above. He told an audience of men preparing for the ministry that it was the seriousness of the minister's work, and the need for confidence and assurance in his pastoral duties, which first shook his liberalism. This existential concern led him to the Bible and the great theologians to bring about his complete conversion. This is one of the few personal passages of any length in Forsyth's writing, and gives his own testimony to the influences to which he was indebted; it must therefore be quoted at length:-

"There was a time when I was interested in the first degree with purely scientific criticism. Bred among academic scholarship of the classics and philosophy, I carried these habits to the Bible, and I found in the subject a new fascination, in proportion as the stakes were so much higher. But, fortunately for me, I was not condemned to the mere scholar's cloistered life. I could not treat the matter as an academic quest. I was kept close to practical conditions. I was in a relation of life, duty, and responsibility for others. I could not contemplate conclusions without asking how they would affect these people, and my word to them, in doubt, death, grief or repentance. I could not call on them to accept my verdict on points that came so near their souls. That is not our conception of the ministry. And they were people in the press and care of life. They could not give their minds to such critical questions. Yet there were Christian matters which men must decide for themselves, trained or not. Therefore, these matters could not be the things which were at issue in historic criticism taken alone. It also pleased God by the revelation of His holiness and grace, which the great theologians taught me to find in the Bible, to bring home to me my sin in a way that submerged all the school questions in weight, urgency and poignancy. I was turned from a Christian to a believer, from a lover of love to an object of grace. And so, whereas I first thought that what the Churches needed was enlightened instruction and liberal theology, I came to be sure that what they needed was evangelization, in something more than the conventional sense of that word.

"I withdrew my prime attention from much of the scholar's work and gave it to those theological interests, imbibed first

from Maurice, and then more mightily through Ritschl, which come nearer to life than science, sentiment, or ethic can ever do. I immersed myself in the Logic of Hegel, and corrected it by the theology of Paul, and its continuity in the Reformation, because I was all the time being corrected and humiliated by the Holy Spirit' (PFMM p192f, 195). With the addition of Kant and the Puritans we have here the main influences on Forsyth's thought.

The impression given by such a personal testimony is of a struggle in which he felt his soul was at stake. This idea is re-inforced by his frequent use of the idea of wrestling as an analogy of the spiritual life, particularly in his smaller devotional works. (cp Escott p4). His own struggle came from a growing sense of the holiness of God, and of the sinfulness and unworthiness of man before Him. A broken relationship which, apart from the grace of God, must have meant the annihilation of man. The theologians and other thinkers who helped him were those who helped him to understand and express this situation in the great themes of holiness, sin, and active grace received in experimental religion. In other words it was not the other men's work as such, but their ideas as illuminating his own experience and understanding of the situation that helped him.

It is in this way, I think, that the influence of F.D. Maurice must be understood, at least as far as Maurice's influence was permanent and is found in the later books. At an early stage this influence appears to have been very great. It came to Forsyth not only through Maurice's books, but through the personality of one of his greatest admirers, J. Baldwin Brown, to whom Forsyth acknowledged a great debt. The greatness and importance of

Maurice was that, at a time when theology was coming to be considered an adjunct of philosophy, or of a general world view tending to social improvement, he remained a theologian and always wrote and spoke as a theologian.

Maurice stressed the moral content of Christianity, and the idea of the Holiness of God to which man should respond in moral obedience. These are strains of thought which appear also in Forsyth. But what is not so clear is that Forsyth got them from Maurice, or, if he did, that the later Forsyth remained so heavily indebted to the older man as is often supposed. Generally speaking Maurice was an eclectic thinker, gathering together the best parts of many systems. Forsyth on the other hand was, or certainly became, a man dominated by one controlling concern, to set his compass by the cross. It is not likely that Forsyth would have accepted the Maurician axiom that men are normally right in what they assert and wrong in what they deny. This is too near the genial toleration which he so much opposed. Certainly in "The Principle of Authority", it is Maurice's personal holiness and seriousness vis a vis the things of God which are commended, not his theology. It is also worth noting that Newman is commended in the same passage. (PA p306).

The theme which he is generally thought to have taken from Maurice is the conception of the solidarity of the human race. Certainly the fact that, in an age when the stress in religion was normally placed on individualism, both should have this theme makes it likely that Forsyth should have taken it from Maurice. W.L. Bradley shows that in the two letters to the 'English Independent', mentioned earlier, probably the earliest of Forsyth's

writing to be printed, a number of Maurician themes, including this one of racial solidarity, can be found. However it must be noted that Forsyth presents it in a completely different way. Maurice begins his thinking on this theme from the incarnation, Forsyth from the atonement. This can be seen in the different ways they treat the subject of baptism. For Maurice it is "... the sign of admission into a spiritual and universal kingdom, grounded upon our Lord's incarnation, and ultimately resting upon the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, ..." (The Kingdom of Christ, vol 11 pl7. cp vol 1 pp279); while for Forsyth it is the sacrament of Regeneration. There is no reason why Forsyth should not have taken the idea direct from Paul, especially from Romans 5.

On the subject of authority the two differed considerably. Maurice's thinking ran on the more institutional lines typical of a 'High Church' Anglican. It is best to see Maurice's abiding influence as inspirational rather than formative.

The influence of Ritschl however was much greater and more permanent, both for what he himself provided, and for the other influences which came to Forsyth, initially at least through him. In the Memoir previously referred to Forsyth's daughter says that her father himself described the semester spent at Gottingen as the most important intellectual factor in his experience. Not only did he learn a lot from Ritschl, but he also acquired a facility and fluency in German thought and language which he retained for the rest of his life. He was thus able to read and make use of German theology long before most of his contemporaries, and he had a great admiration for it. It was a source of some regret to him

that most of the German theological work made available to English readers was of an extreme, and often destructive nature, (PPJC viii) and when he died about one third of the books in his library were in German. Ritschl was the first, and probably the greatest, influence from this source.

Something has already been said about Ritschl's system in the introductory section. From him Forsyth took a number of points which are basic to his whole theology. When the theology of Schleiermacher had emphasised religious experience practically to the exclusion of all else, it was Ritschl who insisted that the Christian religion must have, and in fact did have, an objective historical base. This base was in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He did not deny the value and importance of religious experience, but for him theology did not rise within experience, but simply makes its appeal to, and is recognised by, experience. The Gospel would be true whether or not it was experienced. This is also Forsyth's position.

It was Ritschl also who stressed the importance of 'value-judgments'. That is, the believer must make an act of obedience and personal commitment when he asserts that Jesus work was done for him. It is not enough simply to assert, or even to believe, that it took place objectively in history, an act of involvement is necessary. Here again we have Forsyth's stress on man's "self- donation to the donative grace of God", and here we are coming to the heart of Forsyth's doctrine of authority. (cp "The Place of Spiritual Experience in the Making of Theology" RON pp 68-80).

In several respects Forsyth became critical of Ritschl. Chiefly in his Christology, his doctrine of Atonement, and his famous description of Christianity as an ellipse with two foci, the cross and the Kingdom. But of greatest importance is his complete acceptance of Ritschl's emphasis on the moral note, and his Kantianism. It may have been in Gottingen that Forsyth himself first adopted his Kantian epistemology, but certainly he later spoke of the Kantianising of Christianity as Ritschl's great work, (LQR CXVII p2).

For Kant himself, and his philosophy, Forsyth had the greatest possible respect, and this is at the very heart of his doctrine of authority, for it was from Kant that he learned, as Ritschl had learned, the primacy of the moral. He saw that it was Kant who had broken the hold of rationalism and metaphysics on theology, and he was thankful for such a service. "With Kant", he says, "came a new order of things. The ethical took the place that had been held by the intellectual. The notion of reality replaced that of truth. Religion placed us not in line with the rationality in the world but in rapport with the reality of it. And the ethical was the real. ... The Christian religion at least involves if not the solitude at least the primacy of the ethical. If reality is to reach us it must be thus. And what Christianity means by the holy is best expressed in ethical terms as the absolute moral reality." (PA p4).

Time and again he returns to Kant's axiom at the outset of his metaphysic of ethic "There is nothing conceivable in the world, or out of it, which can be called good without qualification except a good will". When using it as a standard to judge history he writes "This might equally well be called the method

of revelation as distinct from induction. It makes a clear distinction between the natural life process, however rarefied or spiritual, and the action of the moral consciousness. It presents us, in the good will, in the development thereto of the moral personality, with a standard by which to assess the value of everything, either done or proposed." (PA p201). To Kant he frequently gives the title "The Philosopher of Protestantism", and though he felt it was necessary to go beyond him to revelation, it was Kant who had made the new developments possible by which revelation and the response to it could be expressed.

Matching the positive influence of Kant is what might be called the negative influence of Hegel. Forsyth seems to see Hegel as the arch-enemy, the apostle of a speculative and rationalist philosophy. It was Hegel after all who had provided the philosophical justification for doctrines of Divine immanence and ideas of inevitable process and progress; ideas which ruled out Forsyth's belief in an objective and final authority at a set point within history. Thus he refers to Hegel's idealism as a Theosophy (PA p213), and criticises its theological exponents for preaching a gospel of man's adjustment to his fate instead of a reconciliation between persons. "The Gospel of Christ speaks otherwise. It speaks of a God to whom we are to be reconciled in a mutual act which He begins; and not of an order or process with which we are to be adjusted by our lonely act, or to which we are to be resigned." (WOC p74).

But, as he says, in his case Hegel's philosophy was corrected by the theology of St. Paul and its continuity in the Reformation. Forsyth was thoroughly Pauline in his outlook. We have seen that

in his treatment of the Bible he re-acted violently against the "Jesus of History" movement with its simple moral teacher, and which claimed to begin from the synoptic gospels. His own thinking began from the proclamation of the Gospel, the earliest preaching, and its expression in the Pauline epistles. He anticipated the results of a lot of later discussion by denying that there was any radical difference between the different New Testament writers, or that a different picture of Jesus is to be found in the synoptic gospels from that in the epistles. Nevertheless he finds the gospel in its purest form in the writings of St. Paul. It is from Paul that he takes his insistence on the conversion experience as the basis of authority.

It is natural, therefore, that he should be influenced by the Reformers and their re-discovery of St. Paul. This influence grows in his later work. No doubt he found in Luther and his intense inner struggle to reconcile his own sense of guilt with the grace of God in Christ an analogy to Paul's experience, and perhaps also to his own. Like Luther he saw that Christians are at the same time justified and sinners, and he frequently quotes Luther's saying that "Theology makes sinners". In the realm of authority he took from Luther the principle of finding authority in that which "plied Christ", and he uses that principle in his treatment of the authority of the Bible, the Church and christian experience. Similarly he follows Luther in the question of Religious liberty, claiming that it is freedom from guilt, liberty of conscience before God, not the right of unlimited individual choice.

Luther would appeal to Forsyth because of his stress on experience and probably because of a similarity in temperament.

But, as a theologian Forsyth is nearer to Calvin, particularly in his later works. W.L. Bradley considers, "There is a trend in his writings away from Luther (where he began with Ritschlianism) towards Calvin and the Puritans, so that by the time of his publication of "Faith, Freedom, and the Future, he is laying the greatest stress upon Calvinism as tempered by the British mind." (Bradley op. cit. p108). For Forsyth Calvin was the father of democracy, and he was so, paradoxically, because of his insistence on the majesty and freedom of God. It was in Calvin, chiefly, that he found the insistence on "the Crown Rights of the Redeemer", and the Theocentric as opposed to anthropocentric basis of theology. "What was it", he asked, "that made the tremendous strength of Calvinism? What makes some form of Calvinism indispensable and immortal? It was this, that it cared more to secure the freedom of God than of man. That is what it found in the Cross. ... The Calvinistic doctrine of predestination was the foundation of modern public liberty; and, deeply, because it was an awful attempt to secure God's freedom in Grace at any cost." (PA p255).

From Calvin it was natural that he should turn to the English Puritans, the founding fathers of his own denomination. He approached them critically, and was willing to find many faults in their position. Their attitude to the Bible and its authority was too static. In many of them the dynamic spirit of Calvinism had become fossilized, and in others swamped by the spiritualism of anabaptism. So there was no false hero worship in Forsyth's approach. Yet, in spite of all, it is probable that they are quoted more frequently than any other source. Forsyth's long titles; and perhaps even his difficult style, are reminiscent of

the Puritans; and Baxter, Owen, Robinson, and, above all, Goodwin, (cp FFF pp 116-9) are given the rare honour of being mentioned by name.

The reason for his high regard of the Puritans is not hard to find. Given the fact that his denominational background would lead him to them, having once arrived Forsyth would find himself on familiar ground. Their major interest, and their understanding of the human situation and its resolution by the active grace of God, was the same as his own. Whatever criticisms might be made of them, in his opinion, their basis was right. In one of his addresses as President of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, he expanded this point at length. "The old orthodoxies can never again be what they were; but one thing in them draws me and sustains me amidst much that is hopelessly out of date. And it is this, that they had a true eye for what really mattered in Christianity; and especially that they did grapple with the final facts of human nature, the abysses of moral experience, the wickedness of the human heart, and its darling self-will. They closed with ultimates. They did not heal lightly the wound of the people. They did confront the last riddle of the world, the last tragedy of the conscience, the last crisis of the soul. They did not toy with the human curse. ... with a very criticizable theology, they stood at the centre of things with their religion of the moral Atonement, of a free but most costly Gospel." (CGS pl21f).

Several students of Forsyth have drawn attention to the fact that he knew and quoted the works of Kierkegaard long before the Danish philosopher was widely known in this country. But here

again, I think, it is wiser to say that the Dane's influence was inspirational rather than that Forsyth actually took any major ideas from him. If, as has been suggested several times above, Forsyth had experienced intense spiritual struggles himself, he would have found in Kierkegaard an ally and fellow sufferer. It is in this vein, as an example of the seriousness of man's condition and his relation to God, that Forsyth quotes him, "There is no greater division within religion than that between Emerson and Kierkegaard, between a religion that but consecrates the optimism of clean youth, and that which hallows the tragic note, and deals with a world sick unto death. We choose the latter. Every form of religion is less Christian as it retires from that centre where guilt and grace meet in an eternal and regenerative world-crisis in Christ" (PA p203). Kierkegaard had grasped the fact that man must be active in the Divine human drama.

Nietsche is mentioned in the same way, "Nietsche felt as millions feel, that life culminated in its tragic experiences, and that whatever solved the tragedy of life solved all life. ... He was not a spectator but an actor in this tragedy, so much so that it unhinged his mind." (JG p210). But it is probable that Forsyth had learned his "existential" note from Paul and the Reformers. The philosophers would merely underline and support what he had already discovered, or worked out, for himself. In any case, Forsyth goes beyond "angst" to a sober confidence and joy, which Nietsche apparently did not conceive possible, and at which Kierkegaard only occasionally hinted.

These then were the main influences on Forsyth, at least as far as his thinking on authority is concerned. But there are many others

who, though perhaps less influential, nevertheless made some contribution. In his early years he was very much influenced by A.M. Fairbairn. He records his thanks to Fairbairn for helping him to understand Hegel, (PPMM p195n), and, when he had become Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, described him as "... the one powerful teacher among us whose theology had the cosmopolitan note." (FFF p178). Dale and Denney he knew personally, and it is probable that he was influenced by both. He thought that every minister should have studied McLeod Campbell on the Atonement, (WOC p149), and there are close similarities between his own work and that of McLeod Campbell, especially in the stress which they both laid upon the holiness of God.

Among non theological writers, he speaks often of those who stress the element of tragedy in human affairs. As well as Hardy, to whom we have already seen several references, he refers in this vein to, Shakespeare, (JG p213), Matthew Arnold (CGS p100), George Eliot and Tennyson (TLN p9ff), and has a lengthy article on Ibsen (HJ Vol 14 p 105-22).

But, when all these influences have been considered, it must be repeated that Forsyth was an independent thinker. He no doubt learned from the best sources available, but he also criticised those from whom he learned most, and went beyond the positions he received from his teachers to produce something distinctively his own. As W.L. Bradley remarks in concluding the relevant section of his book, it is perhaps for that reason that Forsyth is now being read again while the others have for the most part been relegated to mere historical study.

CONCLUSION

Two matters remain to be discussed. First, some attempt must be made to assess Forsyth's work, as far as it concerns the doctrine of authority, and make certain criticisms of it. Secondly we must consider what a renewed interest in his work might be able to contribute to modern theological thinking. Is he, as has been claimed, a prophet for today who is relevant to the church in the nineteen sixties; or was he merely a prophet to his own day, ahead of his own time but behind ours? Alternatively, was he really the obscurantist that some of his contemporaries thought he was, vainly trying to stem the tide of theological progress and return to a restricted and outdated orthodoxy?

The first thing to be noted is that he was willing, in spite of unpopularity, to stand out against the popular thinking of his day. Denney apart, there seems to have been no other theologian of the front rank who held the fundamentals that Forsyth held. That he should have been willing to hold them in spite of misunderstanding, and in spite of the fact that his own earlier liberalism must often have risen in his mind, demands respect. But more important is the fact that he appears to have been proved correct.

Liberal Protestantism, at least in the form that Forsyth knew it, failed, and chiefly because it lacked the note of authority, and thus of certainty. Its easy toleration of any movement of the human spirit was necessarily shallow and superficial, and necessarily opposed to finality and authority. Forsyth saw the need to pierce through this superficiality to find a firm rock on

which to take his stand. Like his Puritans he sought to deal with ultimates, with the result that his work remains, while that of most of his contemporaries is forgotten.

Secondly, and of the greatest importance, is the fact that his thinking was thoroughly Biblical. We have seen his dependence on Paul and the re-discovery of Paul in the Reformers. When James Denney asked him for a statement of the theses underlying 'Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind' he replied, "If there be anything in the book which St. Paul, as the supreme devotee, organ, and expositor of Christ, would not have passed or paralleled, that I would at once withdraw and lament, whether it were in matter or tone" (The British Weekly, Oct 31, 1907, p83. cited R.M. Brown op cit pl40), and no doubt he would have said the same for any of his books.

This appeal to St. Paul is sometimes contrasted with an appeal to the Synoptic Gospels, and this is certainly how it was seen by his contemporaries. In 1908 the Hibbert Journal produced a supplement contrasting the Jesus of the Synoptics with the Christ of Paul. At times Forsyth himself seems to accept this dichotomy, but in fact he saw that it was false, that the simple Jesus of the Gospels was not to be found there. Ahead of his time as a New Testament Scholar he insisted that the writers of the New Testament knew only the Christ of the epistles and the apostolic preaching, and that acceptance of Christ as Redeemer was a pre-requisite for the first readers of the Gospels. He had used the word 'kerygma' for the core of the early church's preaching twenty three years before Dodd's 'Apostolic Preaching and its Development' had made it common currency. (PA pl27.)¹

¹A.M. Hunter has given further evidence of his anticipating the results of later N.T. Scholarship in E.T. LXXIII pl00ff and Teaching and Preaching the New Testament ch 21).

Nevertheless, it was from St. Paul that he chiefly drew his inspiration.

From St. Paul came his doctrine of authority as an authority of experienced grace in conversion. When faced with questions demanding authoritative guidance in the church at Corinth, the apostle's first step was to direct the attention of his readers back to their experience of conversion. He reminded them of the blessings they had received by the "calling of Christ", and set the foolishness of preaching above all worldly wisdom simply because it had worked for the Corinthians. If it had not done so, that is if the Corinthian Christians could have denied his basic premiss, then Paul's whole argument would have fallen to the ground. As the epistle proceeds every question raised by the Corinthians is referred back to their experience of redemption, which is itself dependent on the historic facts of the primitive kerygma outlined in 1 Cor 15: 1-8. (cp R.R. Williams "Authority in the Apostolic Age, pp. 12-30).

This is Forsyth's method exactly. With the Apostle he insisted on the primacy of the conversion experience, the finality of the objective redemptive acts in history, and the importance of preaching without concession to the wisdom of this world. Underlying all this is the belief that redemption is an act of God; an insistence throughout on the divine initiative, or "letting God be God"; in fact the Theocentricity which distinguished his thinking from that of those who began with "that excellent creature man".

From this the third and fourth points emerge. He has a very

realistic view of the state of man. The near deification of human nature favoured by immanentism did not really do justice to the complexity of the human situation. It could not support its adherents, or at least not many of them, through the horrors of a world war. But, as we have seen, Forsyth did not have to change his theology to explain that tragedy. Not committed to the thesis that day by day in every way man was growing better and better, he was not so severely shaken when it was clearly shown to be wrong. Indeed, he could justly have argued that he had attempted on many occasions to draw attention to the tragic element in human affairs which the war exemplified.

The fourth point is his insistence on revelation and his understanding of revelation. He was ahead of his time in realising that revelation was not necessarily the revelation of truths in propositional form. He saw clearly that it was a moral and personal encounter, the revelation of a Person acting upon another person. This is the "existential" note in his thinking which is much more commonplace today than it was when he was writing. Nothing is more noteworthy in his thought than the realisation that the whole of a man's life must be effected and judged by the divinely inspired recognition and response to revelation. But he saves himself from the abstraction and unreality of some existentialist thought by his stress on the need to integrate the conversion experience with the rest of life.

Finally Forsyth is worthy of commendation for the rigour and honesty of his thinking. In his criticism of shallowness and superficiality he did not fall into the same errors himself.

He does not oppose one set of clear ideas by another. This is not to say that his own thinking is not clear, it is, however, he does not allow a thirst for clarity, or even easy intelligibility to smooth out any difficulties in his way. He sees clearly that the conversion experience and the teaching of the New Testament, from which he starts, do not lend themselves to easy explanation. Thus he is willing to assert paradoxes when the occasion demands. But, on the other hand, one is not left with the impression that this is a glib appeal to mystery. It does not even appear to be a particularly reverent drawing back from things too high or too sacred for human comprehension. He has merely pursued his attempt to understand and explain to the point where the paradox is inevitable, and having reached that point he states the paradox. But even then he does not suggest that the matter is now for ever closed, but rather that this is as far as he is able to go at present.

If these points are put down to the credit of Forsyth, as I believe they must be, it is necessary next to ask what criticisms can be made of his position. In describing him as a prophet, or as a voice in the wilderness, it is easy to assume that he must have been right and his contemporaries wrong. Such an assumption, if unexamined, would of course be too glib. Neither must it be assumed that his critics did not include serious and sincere thinkers who understood him but, having understood, preferred to differ from him. Writing of the renewed interest in his work and the re-issue of many of his books, A.J. Gossip has written of him "He did not impress everyone. For, while some hailed him as a veritable and indubitable prophet, ... others, and among them minds not to be lightly dismissed, were left little affected by

him, or even stone cold; irritated by his mannerisms, and untouched by his message, and his way of stating it."

(P.T. Forsyth E.T., March 1949, pl48).

The reference to his mannerisms and way of stating his message raises the question of his literary style, which has often been discussed. He seems to delight in odd words and unusual grammatical constructions which, added to the willingness to assert paradoxes mentioned above, can lead to difficulty in finding his meaning. Gossip, in the article mentioned, goes on to quote Sylvester Horne's description of his writing as 'Fireworks in a fog'. Forsyth himself denied that his style was unusually complicated and it is probably simplest to see it as part of the man himself, something over which he had no control, and which he could not have altered had he wished to do so. The problem is of a piece with the lack of indices and footnotes, he often appears to make allusions, or to assume a familiarity with certain lines of thought which is not always justified. The result is that often there are too many thoughts packed into each sentence for easy reading. At other times however he can give the impression of passing over a difficult point in a flow of rhetoric. His daughter suggests that the real difficulty was the idiom of his mind rather than of his pen, and points out that most of his students, and most of those who begin with a sympathy for his starting point, do not find him unbearably difficult. Criticism of his style may frequently cover a distaste for his theology.

A more difficult problem, as far as his mannerisms are concerned, is his apparently harsh attitude towards theological amateurs. The hard and dogmatic strain which gives strength and

virility to his writing, appears to reflect a hardness in his character which was manifested as an intolerant, or even contemptuous, attitude to those who differed from him, or who could not, or would not, follow his arguments. Though it is only fair to add that some of his sermons and addresses to his students have a deeply sympathetic pastoral tone. (cp Escott Pt 8, and RON passim).

More important for the present purpose are possible criticisms of his message, particularly as it effects authority. A number of these arise from the fact that he was writing for his own age. The chief complaint made about him is that he concentrates so much on the cross that he ignores the life of Jesus. I think this is a fair criticism. He was definitely correct to place the emphasis on the cross, and to claim that it was the cross and not the teaching and example of Jesus which brought man's redemption, and which had been the message with which the apostles had turned the world upside down. But so great was his emphasis that the life and ministry of Jesus are virtually overlooked. It is indicative in this respect that he seldom uses the name 'Jesus', preferring the title 'Christ'.

However, though this criticism must be allowed to stand, it cannot be counted such a damaging one when one considers the background against which he was working. He could justly have replied that most of his contemporaries were overlooking the cross, and that the sympathetic and humane side of Jesus' ministry had been stressed to the point of sentimentality. In any case he had taken account of the humanity of Jesus in his Christology, and had shewn there that He had been a much more demanding teacher than was

usually allowed by those who wished to see Him as merely a teacher. Furthermore the main point of His teaching had been Himself and the act He was about to perform. The criticism of ignoring the life and teaching then, is not so severe a criticism as some have made it out to be, but we shall have to mention it again.

A similar line of defence can be taken against those who criticise his doctrine of apostolic inspiration, though, I think, this is a more serious criticism. We have seen that he believed the apostolic witness was 'part of the revelatory fact and deed', but he is not clear how much of the apostolic writing is to be included in that witness. His intention seems to be to use Luther's maxim of accepting that which 'plies Christ'. However, for him, this seems to become 'plies the Cross'. Thus we have seen that he is rather casual about the historicity of the purpose of the virgin birth stories, and he appears to reject both the apostolic doctrine of original sin and also the expectation of the Parousia as being 'farther from the centre'. It could be argued that the Biblical language about these matters is in some sense mythological; but even mythological language expresses something, and Forsyth appears to make no attempt to find and state it.

It does not follow from this, as it may at first sight seem, that, on these principles, any other reader of the New Testament could form his own idea of what was central to the faith and then accept as much of the New Testament as fitted that theory, rejecting or ignoring the rest. Forsyth has not approached scripture with preconceived ideas. He rather uses the Gospel which has come through the scripture and brought salvation, to interpret the scripture which has borne it. Further he shows on

critical grounds that any honest reading of the New Testament must show up the centrality of the cross and the preaching of redemption.

Nevertheless, there are other points, not far removed from the centre, which are also obvious in the New Testament, and to which he does not appear to have given their proper weight. Chief of these is the expectation of the Parousia, which is, in part at least, the final assertion of the authority of God in Christ. Yet this doctrine is strangely absent from Forsyth's writing. Even in the Justification of God, where one might expect it to be introduced, he does not speak of the New Testament expectation of the personal return of Jesus Christ in Glory. Neither does he make it clear that he has demythologised this element of New Testament faith.

Rather similar is the lack of stress on the Ascension. He acknowledges the ascension and the present reign of Christ, but he does not use it as he might have done in speaking of authority. The result of this is found in the tone of his work rather than in any particular strands of teaching. He is confident, but his confidence comes from his certainty that the world was redeemed by the act of the cross. This is good, but it tends to have a certain harshness about it which it might not have had if the present reign of the ascended Jesus had been more prominent in his thinking. While it is always necessary to stress as he did the tragic element in human experience, that is, to take sin with proper seriousness, and this I will suggest is still a relevant note, it is also important to affirm that Jesus reigns in spite of that. The human situation is black enough, but perhaps not as black as it might otherwise have been. Forsyth does not

always seem to remember this.

It must be admitted, then, that Forsyth's stress on the cross, good and necessary though it was in his own day, led him to overlook or minimise, other equally Biblical points. As far as the doctrine of authority is concerned this is seen most obviously in his neglect of the ethical teaching both of Jesus and of the apostles. This point has been touched upon above. We saw then that he insisted that all ethics must be theological and must begin from the cross. For him the great point was not individual sins and the cultivation of the 'good life', but the solidary fact of sinfulness, the answer to which was in the cross. In principle this must be the complete and sufficient answer. Christians are saved, and simply have to work out their salvation by referring each moral problem, indeed each action, to the cross. This is the New Testament position, and Forsyth is on firm ground in taking it. However, help is needed in applying the cross to moral problems. Some modern theologians have distinguished between the indicative 'one is saved', which indicates the status of the Christian, and the imperative 'be ye perfect', which draws attention to his so far imperfect moral state. It is in this second part of the paradox that help is needed.

Forsyth insists that we should find our perfection in our faith, and not in our works, which presumably must remain imperfect. But, without settling all the questions, the New Testament does contain a lot of ethical material from which certain principles of moral conduct may be drawn. Forsyth does not use such material, partly, no doubt, because his chief interest was elsewhere, but also because he was afraid that all casuistry must

be Roman. Here he is definitely reacting against the popular Liberal Protestantism of his age, but appears to have gone too far. The vivid immediate awareness of redemption leading to spontaneous action in gratitude may be the best and surest spring of ethical action, but it is probably the least common. Such an awareness does not come to every Christian, and few, if any, possess it permanently. For the majority some form of casuistry is a necessity, and more treatment of it could be expected from one who laid as much stress on the importance of authority as Forsyth did.

However, even when such criticisms have been allowed their full weight, Forsyth's position remains a strong one, supported by the New Testament and by Christian experience. Such faults as there are in it are chiefly due to the nature of his writing, and to the theological atmosphere of the age which he had in mind. In fact the wonder is that his work should show such consistency over such a period and on such a diversity of subjects.

But what of its contemporary relevance? In one sense it is clearly very modern, that is in the sense that the things which Forsyth was writing fifty years ago are now much more common place than they were in his day, and many people are writing his sort of theology today. Certain points of this sort have already been mentioned several times, such points as his approach to the New Testament; the existential element; the criticism of idealism; and the stress on the primacy of grace and the miraculous nature of revelation. But the question is, has all this become so generally accepted that it is not necessary to read Forsyth to get it, and that there is nothing that the church in our own day can

learn from him?

In a review of R.M. Brown's book "P.T. Forsyth; a Prophet for Today", G.W. Bromiley appears to be making this point when he writes "... is it really the case that Forsyth is a prophet for our own time as the author supposes? ... The works of Forsyth have a far more contemporary ring than those of the majority of theologians of his day. But to say that is simply to say that he was a prophet in his own time ... That we can learn from Forsyth is obvious. Whether he has still an independently creative message is another matter" (SJT Vol 9, 1956, p447). It is not quite clear what "an independently creative message" is, and not certain that Forsyth would want to be independently creative. He would probably be sufficiently grateful if others could learn from him, and many modern theologians appear to have done that. Among leaders of his own denomination Nathaniel Micklem and Daniel Jenkins quote him frequently; rather more impressive perhaps is the number of Anglican scholars who are happy to record their indebtedness to him, including R.R. Williams, Douglas Webster, and F.W. Dillistone. Another Anglican, the Archbishop of York, wrote of "Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind", "I venture to say that if the first three pages of this book were digested, believed, worked out and acted on by the men in all our theological colleges today, there would ensue a revolution in the ministry and the pulpit work of tomorrow's clergy" (F.D. Coggan, E.T. LXXII, p324). In what ways then is his work relevant, and, in particular, what can he teach us about authority?

On the question of his general relevance two superficially

contradictory points can be made. In the first place, the theological climate of the church to-day is not so different from that of Forsyth's day as many would like to think. It is, of course, fairly easy to draw parallels between different ages by concentrating on certain points which they have in common and ignoring other, perhaps more important points in which they differ. It is a fact that in many ways the liberalism which Forsyth knew has gone, probably for ever. It is no longer necessary to defend or explain an appeal to St. Paul. But in two important respects certain movements in modern theology seem to come directly under Forsyth's criticism. The influential teaching of Paul Tillich is avowedly anthropocentric in its starting point; and with this goes a stress on the immanence of God as the "Ground of our Being".

J.A.T. Robinson has given popular expression to these views in his book "Honest to God", and it would not be difficult to find parallels between this book and the several others which have followed it and share its general view-point, and R.J. Campbell's "New Theology" and the books which followed that. Basic to this movement is an assertion of the primacy of the moral and an appeal to Kant. But frequently the desire to show the possibility of response to the universal moral demand in personal encounter and love of man, leads to the omission of the note of holiness. The sense of awe-full demand runs down to an enlightened social conscience, often accompanied by anti-nomianism.

It must be admitted that this is not the intention of the theologians concerned, but it seems to be the automatic result of their starting point. There is a continual effort to stress the seriousness of the demand. But, in spite of the use of such

existential terminology as "ultimacy", "immediacy", "encounter", and "confrontation", the effort fails. This is partly no doubt, because too much energy is dissipated in rather petulant criticism of "the traditional position", but it is also because "the Ground of our Being" does not do justice to the Biblical doctrine of God.

However, in the second place, Forsyth would not have to complain so much today about an idealised view of man. Such a view often does accompany the sort of theology just mentioned, but, equally frequent, is a greater willingness to see the element of sinfulness in man, even if it is not given that name. Meanwhile, outside the church, novelists and playwrights have competed with each other to give adequate expression to the tragic element in human affairs. Literature of the "angry young man" school, is eloquent evidence that at least some modern men are conscious of a "lostness" and "purposelessness" about the human situation; conscious too of a lack of final authority and certainty which has come from the criticism and rejection of the traditional authorities.

If, in these respects, Forsyth's thought is relevant to the present day, what can he teach us about authority? Briefly, I think, he can teach four things. First he can teach the importance of the question of authority. He was surely right to see that it was the basic religious question, and that it must be a central theme in a positive gospel. Yet there are still those who consider it to be a sign of spiritual maturity, or even of dependence on the Holy Spirit, to take a casual attitude to the whole question, asserting that the days of an authoritative religion are past. But without finality on this point, at least

in principle, there can be no certainty elsewhere in the theological system, and, what is worse, no confidence or assurance in Christian living.

Secondly, he can teach us that acceptance of a final objective authority does not involve the acceptance of authority in the form of infallible propositions. Such modern discussions of authority as there are still tend to dwell on the innerancy of Biblical propositions, or the pronouncements of popes or other ecclesiastical dignitaries on the one hand; and the claims of free thought and progress, sometimes undergirded by a questionable doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit, on the other.

The first is represented by such books as "Authority" by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, where the actual words of scripture are taken as the actual words of God, and attention is drawn to "recent discoveries" which have disproved theories which were once regarded as "the assured results of modern knowledge" (op cit p47). Dr. Lloyd-Jones is scathing in his references to those who, while admitting the excesses of "Liberalism" and agreeing that it was often hasty in its rejection of certain assertions in scripture, would now like to call a truce on the old battles and get on with the business of proclaiming the message of the Bible, speaking of its authority in a different way. But he would need a good many more discoveries to complete his picture, and leaves the impression of valuing the actual words of the text above the Gospel itself, and of wasting energy and scholarship which could be much better directed. It is a great pity that this whole school of thought, with whose preaching and moral earnestness Forsyth would have had much in common, seem to be untouched by the

renewal of interest in his work, where they would find so much which is both congenial and relevant, and prefer to go behind him to the Puritans.

A relevant example of the other approach is found in a pamphlet "The Finality of Congregationalism", by A.D. Belden, written as a criticism of the proposed draft constitution of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. Dr. Belden finds this finality in Freedom, and speaks of Freedom as final for the Gospel, for Church Unity, and for Social Order, without considering any authority apart from a legalistic one. He does not refer to Paul, or mention the doctrine of redemption, so that the possibility of a "founded freedom" such as Forsyth teaches is not raised.

Thirdly, Forsyth can teach us the importance of taking seriously the question of sin. He returned frequently to such verses as "the Lord hath a controversy with his people", and was scathingly critical of those who attempted to heal the hurt of God's people lightly, crying peace where there was no peace. This is a most relevant lesson. It is ironic that, at a time when many outside the church are probably more conscious of sin, as rebellion, as broken relationship, and as purposelessness, than they have been for many years, so many inside the church are busily explaining that things are not really so bad after all, and getting cheap laughs at the expense of fundamentalists.

Finally, and underlying it all, the modern church could learn the importance of preaching the New Testament Gospel of a decisive act of redemption as the final authority. Discussions of Church

unity seems frequently to get heated about the questions of episcopal and ministerial authority as if these were themselves final and the mere basic question of what in the last resort Christianity is seems sometimes to be squeezed out.

Further we could learn from Forsyth to know this Gospel and to preach it without concession to contemporary fashions in philosophy. This need not lead to obscurantism, but it could prevent the constant adaptation of the message to "the modern man" which is tried so often without conspicuous success. After all, to refuse to indulge in such adapting, is only an acknowledgment that the problem of communications rests at last with the Holy Spirit, and that God reveals Himself to whom He will. Far too frequently the catch-phrase "problem of communications" is used to cover the fact that the preacher is not sure what he is trying to communicate, or is afraid that the New Testament gospel could not possibly get results to-day.

Forsyth had no such qualms. His theology is a confession of faith, a testimony to experienced redemption. He was sure that he had found in the cross the true and magnetic North, and that he had been given in the Gospel a message of final authority, which, as it had saved him, would also save the world. It is fitting to close with his own words, with which he concluded his second address as Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, "I have found my rock, my reality, my eternal life in my historic Redemption. And what is moral rock, real existence, and spiritual mastery for me is also the authority and charter of the Church, the living power in all history, the moral foundation of Society, and the warrant of an infinite future for the race." (CGS pl27).