

REVIEWS

THE PERSON AND PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST.

DR FORSYTH'S lectures on *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Congregational Union and Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1909) recall two books to my mind; first, Dr Dale's *Atonement*, originally given in the form of lectures on the same foundation, and secondly, Dr Moberly's *Atonement and Personality*. Dr Forsyth's work seems to stand as the rightful successor to both those great works. His whole heart is in Christianity as above all the religion of final atonement, and his presentation of that fact unites him more closely (though not without important differences, or rather developments) with Dr Dale than with Dr Moberly. On the other hand, he is much nearer to the Oxford thinker in the way in which he unites Soteriology with Christology and ethical with dogmatic interests. And on these lines I do not feel that it is at all excessive to say that Dr Forsyth's book is much the most important English contribution to the fundamental problems of theology since Dr Moberly's.

Dr Forsyth begins with three chapters which state with great insistence and wealth of phrasing the real problem confronting the Church to-day. And the problem is this: Are we to regard Christianity as *a* revelation or *the* revelation? Shall we speak mainly of its place in an evolutionary process which includes religion as it includes all else, or of its finality as the act of God in Christ? Are we to believe in Christ or to believe with Him and like Him? Naturally much is said of the new religious-historical school with its 'religion of Jesus'. But Dr Forsyth, using the testimony of the leaders of that school, points out that this modern interpretation of Christianity cannot possibly be derived from the New Testament, where Christ is never the first Christian, the supreme example of faith, but the object of the Church's faith equally with the Father. 'As far back as we can go we find only the belief and worship of a risen, redeeming, and glorified Christ, whom they could wholly trust but only very poorly imitate; and in His relation to God could not imitate at all.' It is to the deepest consideration of all that this primitive faith must have meant, to an understanding of what it was in the Person of Jesus which rendered this faith inevitable, that Dr Forsyth calls us.

The centre of the book is occupied with what is ever near to the author's thought, the testimony of experience. Christ's own self-consciousness, the meaning and value of the Apostles' thought about

Him, and the continual stream of experience in the soul and in the Church are passed in review. It is an argument which needs careful handling. 'Experience' may be and often is with popular apologists a much-abused word. An adequate historical, and still more an adequate ethical, culture is necessary, if it is not to degenerate into a superficial emotionalism or a pragmatism without foundations. As to Christ's self-consciousness, Dr Forsyth follows on lines already well developed. He takes note of Harnack's famous statement that 'what belongs to the Gospel as Jesus preached it is not the Son, but the Father alone', and points out that even this proposition as it stands does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Jesus is not central to the Gospel, since it is a crucial question whether the Gospel can be limited to the teaching of Jesus during the Galilean ministry, with His death and all that followed it omitted. The chapters on apostolic inspiration are more original and of great value. In brief, the view put forward is that the Apostles were the organs of Christ, necessary to Him for His final expression. Their inspiration was their sense of the meaning of Christ in the light of His finished work. And if it be argued that they put Him into a place which He would have repudiated, then we are shut up to the belief that those to whose training He devoted more and more of His time as the ministry drew to a close, understood Him less and valued Him far more untruly than Caiaphas and His bitterest enemies. And the experience which the Apostles had of Him, and the redemption they found in Him, has been continued in the individual soul and in the Church as an experience proper to the conscience, the moral and deepest part of man. The action of Christ is creative in the moral sphere, and not merely for the individual, but on the scale of history.

The last five lectures deal with the dogmatic expression of this original, and final, Christian Gospel, and are an attempt to make the Incarnation more intelligible for our age by the use of a metaphysic of ethic rather than a metaphysic of substance. An undogmatic Christianity Dr Forsyth repudiates with all his force, but there may be more than one category fit to serve the need of the theologian. Dr Forsyth looks to Kant for his philosophical calculus, and sees in the doctrine of the Incarnation, when duly ethicized, a fuller and deeper meaning than was possible for the theology which expressed itself in the two-natures formula, and made the work of Christ depend for its value on the possession by Christ of a divine nature—a theory much too mechanical and not ethical enough for our age. Dr Forsyth's statement of the union in Christ of the human and the divine combines a doctrine of real *kenosis*, which to him is as much a moral as a theological necessity, with all that was true in the old adoptianism. He sees in Christ a mutual involution of the human and the divine. The Incarnation is the result of the Son's pre-temporal moral action.

The Cross was at once 'the nadir of that self-limitation which flowed from the supramundane self-emptying of the Son, and the zenith of that moral exaltation which had been mounting throughout the long sacrifice of His earthly life'. Over against the *kenosis* stands the *plerosis* as its necessary moral correlate. The whole personality of Christ is not something given at the start by the existence side by side of the divine and the human natures, but something achieved by His life's action.

How thoroughly Dr Forsyth works out this principle can only be learned by a study of the book itself. For him the doctrine of *kenosis* is no mere way out from an otherwise impossible position, but an absolute necessity if the life of Christ is to have full moral value. Christ was not only without full knowledge of science and history, of the form of the future as well as of the past: it is also impossible to think of Him as always conscious of all He was, and of the fact that He could not sin. We cannot think of Christ as able to sin, even if Dr Forsyth's arresting idea that 'potentiality is only actuality powerfully condensed' fails to satisfy; but it is hard to see how we can look on His temptation as real if He knew that this was so. But the difficulties of so thoroughgoing a view pass away when once it is realized that the conditions under which He lived were the moral result of a moral pre-mundane act, an act in virtue of which, and of its moral quality continued throughout His life and culminating in His death, Christ redeems and saves.

Dr Forsyth has given us something much more, and something, I think, much more valuable, than a psychological theory as to the relations of the human and the divine in Christ. He makes us see the Incarnation, as he and others have made us see the Atonement, in a more moral and less formal light, as above all things a moral act in the heavenly sphere. The redemption and the re-creation Christ brings is beyond the power of any save God, so that in Christ we have to do, not with God's prophet or plenipotentiary, but with God's real presence.

On the title-page of his book Dr Forsyth has placed Butler's great words, 'Morality is the nature of things'. It is the combination of the argument from experience, stated in its widest and deepest form, with the Christology I have outlined, and the fusion of the two into a moral unity, which arouses the conviction that we are not shut up to a decision between ancient, if not antiquated, metaphysic and modern triviality, but that we can find a point where the newest philosophy and the oldest Christianity meet, and a moral Gospel satisfies the needs of the actual world.

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