The Final Sanity Is Complete Sanctity

Universal Holiness in the Soteriology of P. T. Forsyth (1848–1921)

Some Historical Mapping

Upon his return from Göttingen in September 1872, Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848–1921) enrolled himself as a theology undergraduate (on probation) at New College London. By the time the young

1. This chapter draws upon some work included in my doctoral thesis, titled Hallowed Be Thy Name: The Sanctification of All in the Soteriology of Peter Taylor Forsyth, 191–263.
Aberdonian had resigned in 1874, two meetings had occurred that were to have a lasting effect upon him. First, he met Maria Hester (Minna) Magness, whom he married in 1877. Second, he came under the influence of James Baldwin Brown (1820–1884), Congregationalism’s mediator of F. D. Maurice (1805–1872). In fact, it may have been Brown who first drew Forsyth to London, Forsyth traveling the six and a half miles out to Brixton every Sunday to hear “the greatest Independent of our times.”

It was soon after Forsyth’s leaving London in 1874 that Brown’s public lectures, published as The Doctrine of Annihilation in the Light of the Gospel of Love, were made available. Brown’s lectures attend to two of the more voluminous theological debates of the nineteenth century—the everlasting punishment of the unrepentant, and the immortality of the soul. These debates crossed cultural, denominational, and theological lines, and promoted a re-evaluation not only of eschatology, but also of theology proper; of a God whose “divine decrees of election and reprobation had an iron fixity and mechanical action of the laws of the Newtonian universe.” Such debates attended—and contributed to—an increasing agnosticism in Victorian England concerning the afterlife, and precipitated a new resolve to effect the gospel’s social implications in the present—a resolve emboldened by optimism in secularized visions of inevitable progress.

Within this climate, Forsyth, who by then had become a Congregational minister and who was on path to be Principal of Hackney College (London), carved out his own eschatological vision. While this vision betrayed some significant traces of his former pastor’s thought, it was more deeply shaped by his own extraordinary commitment to the centrality and weightiness of divine holiness given concrete shape in the sanctifying activity of One who entered “the sphere of sin’s penalty and the horror of sin’s curse, in order that, from the very midst and depth of it, His confession and praise of God’s holiness might rise like a spring of fresh water at the bottom of the bitter sea, and sweeten all.” Here we recall two inescapably related themes at the center of Forsyth’s thought; namely, the cross of Christ and the holiness of God. Any faithful

assessment of Forsyth’s soteriological universalism will be grounded on what Forsyth affirmed about the work of Christ and its relationship to divine holiness, and of holiness’ determination to find its creaturely correspondent. So Forsyth:

The purpose of a world created by a holy God must be holiness, the reflection and communion of His own holiness. Can God secure it? . . . That is the ultimate question in life . . . And to that question Christ and His cross are the answer, or they have no meaning at all. They reveal in their foregone victory the omnipotence of holiness to subdue all natural powers and forces, all natural omnipotence, to the moral sanctity of the Kingdom of God. And if they do not reveal that we are left without any ground of certainty about a holy ending for the world at all.6

Because much of the theological structure of Forsyth’s soteriological universalism mirrors that of others (for example, his rejection of the doctrines of limited atonement, double-predestination, and annihilationism, and his christological revisioning of the doctrine of election), the principal concern of this chapter will be to recall the determining foci of Forsyth’s thought; namely, its staurocentricity (cross-centeredness) and its concern with divine holiness, and to introduce what for many otherwise-sympathetic readers appears to be an anomaly in Forsyth’s soteriology, namely his pareschatology.7 We will also identify those convictions which seem to counter the direction of Forsyth’s hopeful universalism, and so make his denial of a dogmatic apokatastasis all the more perplexing.

**Crux Probat Omnia**

Forsyth neither trivialized nor minimized the gravity of sin, nor final judgment and the threat of hell. If Forsyth had a vision for universal sanctification it was because of—and not in spite of—his conviction that what God has done in Christ is a teleological fait accompli—crux probat omnia (the cross puts everything to the test). The cross is where “all things are (so to say) tied up.”8 The world is not being redeemed “as the number of

6. Forsyth, Person and Place of Jesus Christ, 228–29.
7. Pareschatology concerns the “time” between death and the end or new beginning.
“ALL SHALL BE WELL”

believers grow.” Rather, “in the universal Christ the world is chosen for salvation, and is saved in principle, and shall be saved in fact.” Whatever remains to be realized, there can be no uncertainty about whether God’s kingdom will be the achievement in which all flourish.

While Forsyth believed that Europe in 1914 witnessed “the man of sin” breaking the “restraints that kept him from being revealed till his appointed Day,” it would be a mistake at this point to accuse Forsyth of advancing a classic over-realized eschatology. Not only was he alert to the unsolved contradictions of history, but he was also aware that the eruption of the kingdom inaugurated in the incarnation finds its telos in a world “too great for earth. There is,” he insisted, “not room enough in this world for God’s eschatology.” Only in the new creation will we cease to be mere nomads of progress and instead “build the city of God on His shining tableland.”

Forsyth also insisted that creation’s future is not dependent on an arbitrary course of events but on divine election. Christ is the pledge to God that sanctification is creation’s telos, and to humanity that the doctrine of election forms the basis of the Christian proclamation of assurance. Because Christ equates to the “absolute certainty of salvation for the race,” each person may call themselves God’s elect. Forsyth categorically rejected that “overdriven individualism” which seeks soteriological assurance while being indifferent to God’s wider purposes within which alone such assurance is possible. “We do not realise that we are each one of us saved in a racial salvation.” “I am saved in a saved world.” “A soul can neither be saved nor sanctified without a world.”

For Forsyth, divine election’s value lies in the certainty of God’s holy and unwavering proclivity for universal sanctification, which can

10. Forsyth, Principle of Authority, 357.
12. Forsyth, Justification of God, 163.
13. Ibid.
14. Forsyth, Person and Place of Jesus Christ, 85.
15. Forsyth, Intercessory Services, 6.
18. Forsyth, God the Holy Father, 8.
be confounded “only if God fail.”\textsuperscript{19} His emphasis on christological and corporate election, however, is never at the expense of the person who remains the indirect object of election. The “unspeakable value” of each soul remains an indispensable part of the “religious value” of the doctrine. “What is chosen is no Church regardless of single souls, but a Church with the very hairs of its head all numbered,” apart from which the Church is an “abstraction.”\textsuperscript{20} Knowledge of election is reached religiously by “personal and evangelical faith.”\textsuperscript{21} Through this experience believers can be confident that Christ has fulfilled humanity’s responsibility, brought perdition to its terminus, and replaced “predestination of some” with “predestination of all.”\textsuperscript{22}

Pareschatology

While Forsyth had expressed concern in 1887 that Congregationalism’s home missions had increasingly relaxed views “as to the finality of death for character” and contemplated “at least the possibility of the redemptive function of hell,”\textsuperscript{23} he came by 1916 (in \textit{The Justification of God}) to reject the notion that the state of the soul is irretrievably fixed at death and to join James Baldwin Brown’s call for a “larger hope.”\textsuperscript{24} This mirrored a growing uneasiness in Edwardian England—spurred by a faith in evolutionary progress and encapsulated in John Henry Newman’s \textit{The Dream of Gerontius}, the popularity of which is evident in Edward Elgar’s oratorio composed for the Birmingham Music Festival in 1900—with the traditional doctrine of hell, and a belief that the intermediate state offers fresh soteriological opportunities for the continuation of what the Baptist theologian Samuel Cox (1826–1893) describes as “the Divine education and development of the race . . . [being] carried on toward its final issue or goal.”\textsuperscript{25} It is this whole-life-process—rather than any particular moment before or at death—which is indispensable for being’s becoming, which appeals to those for whom sanctification is a foremost

\textsuperscript{19} Forsyth, \textit{Principle of Authority}, 350.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 353–54.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 356.
\textsuperscript{22} Forsyth, \textit{Faith, Freedom and the Future}, 125.
\textsuperscript{23} Forsyth, “Sunday Schools and Modern Theology,” 126.
\textsuperscript{24} Brown, \textit{Doctrine of Annihilation}, ix, 83, 118–19.
\textsuperscript{25} Cox, \textit{Salvator Mundi}, 172–73.
concern, and which offers support for those who contend that there is no feasible way of rendering such an abrupt transition to sanctification in temporal beings. If this desired growth is unattained in this life, then purgatory (or something like it) seems requisite if God’s purpose for creation is to be accomplished with our freedom intact and our identity preserved, i.e. if God is to keep communion with who we are.

Writing in the final year of the Great War, Forsyth offered no promises that “every martyr patriot goes straight from the field of death to the side of the Saviour.” Where they do go is to Christ’s judgment seat, “where all must stand.” But while a heroic death does not in itself save, “it may be the moment of [one’s] conversion . . . the first step in a new life which advances faster there than here.”26 This post-mortem life does not provide the opportunity for sinners to atone for sin, nor is it a space of probation. Rather, Forsyth believed that “the crisis of death opens the eyes” of those previously blind, or too stubborn to see.27 Here those with “fixed faces, full not of possibilities but of impossibilities [and] . . . drowned beyond recovery in dreams”28 are granted space and time for healing, growth, repentance, rectification, new perspectives, sanctification, the unwarping of personality, the “chance of learning the meaning of life’s benediction,”29 and, for some, the completion of otherwise abruptly cut-off life. Moreover, they are confronted unambiguously with the regenerating love of God wherein the most malevolent and obstinate of creatures can undergo transformation and learn the lessons of love.

Forsyth supposed that death significantly increases sensitivity to spiritual realities: “Even if a man die indifferent in this life, he comes into circumstances where he ceases to be indifferent. If we believe about a future at all, it will be impossible for an indifferent man to remain indifferent when he has passed on there.”30 In his Stretton church burial-ground tribute to lifelong friend Charles Silvester Horne, Forsyth reminded the gathered that “death is the Great Reconciler,” and that some deaths “do not impoverish life, but enrich it.” He proceeded: “It is not well at such times to say much about heaven or about the dead. They know more than

27. Ibid., 34.
we do.”31 “Historic Christianity,” he wrote elsewhere, “is working its greatest results in the unseen world, and far more mightily, perhaps, there than here, as the spiritual climate is so much more congenial . . . [T]here is a realm far within all that goes on here where [the things of the gospel] are not neglected, but are ruling, judging, and creative powers.”32 Forsyth’s pareschatology attests to the continuity and integrity of creation—its conservatio and concursus under God. Certainly, hope in ongoing growth witnesses to God’s regard for persons not merely as they are, but as they shall be. Death, in this sense, represents a continuum, and not a terminus, of life, and an opportunity to work through the deepest issues of life. What it certainly does not represent is any fixed and irretrievable position of the human subject. This is because death only removes us from earthly conditions, not from Christ.33 Even hell is no point from which there is no return, but remains the purlieu of the possibility of saving mercy in Christ. It is precisely because hell is not the nemesis of hope that it can be part of the gospel.

This “Protestant reappraisal of purgatory”34 is among Forsyth’s most contentious notions. While he shared Protestantism’s rejection of the whole apparatus of purgatory, Forsyth insisted, “We threw away too much when we threw Purgatory clean out of doors. We threw out the baby with the dirty water of its bath. There are more conversions on the other side than on this.”35 Forsyth recognized that the doctrine itself (at least in its traditional forms) lacks biblical support, even if what it contends for does not—its basis in the Church’s practice of prayer and the communion of saints, and in holy love’s triumph through divine patience, as wood, straw, and hay are burned away and sinners are brought to realization that sin is not what we want for ourselves. “It is [God’s] powerful patience to wait till a disillusioned world come to drink of Him, despairing of every other spring.”36 “God is not in a hurry, even to save.”37 God’s patience serves the ontological structure whereby the purposes of holy love in election might reach their telos—the participation

32. Forsyth, This Life and the Next, 80.
33. Forsyth, Justification of God, 185.
35. Forsyth, This Life and the Next, 34.
in, and reciprocation of, holy love as the free decision of creation, that God may be all in all. Creation exists for this history and remains frustrated until this end is reached. To affirm the possibility of post-mortem conversion is to confess that God alone—and not death—determines the time when creation reaches its maturity, and to participate in the divine hope to that end. It is to contend that God’s satisfaction depends on bringing the new creation into being “out of the abuse and wreck” of this one. This is, Forsyth insists, God’s “grand purpose and justification” and is secured by the “hallowing of God’s name in all nature and history, and its suborning of all evil to the service, increase, and praise of eternal good,” until all is made holy at last.38 God’s patience is wise because its end is the triumph of divine holiness and justice. God’s patience is gracious because it encroaches into creaturely reality. God has all eternity “to call out living reply from the world.”39 “God gives long rests but never lets go.”40 Certainly there is, in Forsyth’s theology, no indication that the cross that “is for ever knocking solemnly at the world’s gate” will cease to knock in humanity’s grave.41 But, as we shall see, neither is there any unambiguous guarantee that such knocking will find a welcome response from all.

Holiness’ “Must”

With the turn to consider Forsyth’s understanding of divine holiness, we come to the determining locale of Forsythian soteriology and its universalistic implications, for it is precisely how Forsyth understood the nature of divine holiness that presses the question about universal resolution. Holiness is, Forsyth contended, the deepest reality there is, and the participation in and reciprocation of such is the raison d’être for all things. Creation exists to participate in and to echo God’s holy love back to its source in the triune Being who alone is self-holy. If Forsythian soteriology demands an apokatastasis panton (a restoration of all things), it is principally what Forsyth insisted about the nature and satisfaction of divine holiness—what Forsyth dogmatically referred to as holiness’ “must”—that does the work in his theology here. And what holiness

38. Forsyth, Justification of God, 155.
41. Forsyth, “Christ at the Gate,” 177.
“must” do, Forsyth insisted, is find itself echoed in all creation. Holiness cannot and will not rest until all there is is made holy. That holiness must and will find its correspondence through the transformative redemption of the disordered universe is what it means for God to love.

Forsyth contended that were God not determined to “plant” himself in command universally, God would be less than holy. There exists with holiness a necessary correspondence between ultimate veridicality and final actuality. This is holiness’ “genius and destiny,” and “there can be no uncertainty about whether it will succeed.” So Forsyth: “The supreme task for the last reality, if it be holy, is to assert and secure itself against the last challenge of it. It is to cope with moral evil, which is its absolute antithesis and mortal foe. If man can do that he is his own reality and his own God. If he cannot, his only footing is in the God who can—who indeed must, or He is not God.”

Here the nature of God’s own being and its relationship to creation invites questions of ontological and moral necessity for God who moves not from outer compulsion but freely from within his Person to establish holiness everywhere, for there is something about holiness that “must” find itself in all persons, things, and places. Forsyth wrote: “Absolute holiness must secure universal holiness; i.e. it must recover and sanctify personality everywhere. But as the underlying reality of the world, this unity cannot be merely an effort for redemption; it cannot be merely conative and tentative, with the result in more or less doubt. It must be, if it is reality, already accomplished in principle. It must be a foregone redemption, a redemption that has not now to be achieved but only actualised.”

That holiness is creation’s telos gives to Christian eschatology a theological, sociological, ethical, and aesthetic dimension, all of which were appropriately exploited by Forsyth. As the last reality, holiness is realized and satisfied in, for, and by God only as it is realized in and for all creation. Forsyth was closer to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) here than perhaps at any other point; specifically, the German philosopher’s belief that the history of the world equates to

42. Forsyth, *Preaching of Jesus*, 75.
46. Ibid., 183–84.
the self-realization of the absolute Mind/Spirit/Reason which not only provides the lens for interpreting world history as the course taken by God’s own life but also creates the demand for eschatology. However, while Hegel could speak of all “otherness” wholly vanishing in God, and therein God recognizing himself, “and in this way He maintains Himself for Himself as His own result through His own act,” Hegel’s single subject modalism leads to either dialectical pantheism, an apotheosis of the world, or creation’s end rather than to its new vivification as creatures are drawn to participate in the divine space and life. Forsyth could not follow Hegel here. Forsyth agreed that God realizes God’s own holiness in “otherness,” and even that there is a mutual circumincessio (coinherence/communion/interpenetration) at work wherein God affects and is affected by the world, but the divine achievement both affirms and assures creation’s dignity rather than swallows it up in a pantheistic beclouding.

Qualifications, Problems, Proposals

From what we have outlined thus far, it would seem that Forsyth’s soteriology presses in the direction of, and perhaps even demands, dogmatic universalism. However, in a relatively small number of passages, Forsyth placed some qualifications on the universalistic thrust of his thought; namely:

(i) the possibility of a final impenitence,
(ii) the possibility of a future judgment, and
(iii) the possibility that the salvation of the race need not include every person.

The Possibility of a Final “No”

Forsyth averred that from the vista of the Christian gospel, “eternal and destined damnation is excluded” and that “if every man did as God willed there would be no damnation . . . If man heartily believed in God’s

48. By “dogmatic” universalism I have in mind that consciously trinitarian and christologically-determined universalism which proposes that all persons will embrace God’s lordship, though remains agnostic as to any specific timetabling.
salvation there could be no perdition." Such a statement characterizes Forsyth’s twin convictions: (i) God’s desire to save, and (ii) the theoretical possibility of a final impenitence. This possibility is implicit in Forsyth’s refusal to embrace a christomonism that evacuates history and human persons and their actions of all moral meaning. Evident here is Forsyth’s aversion to pantheistic schemes such as R. J. Campbell’s—schemes “as certain as mathematics” and Forsyth’s repudiation of dogmatic universalism lest it harden into a dogma or be construed as the telos of an indifference and constriction of the automatism of Progress so deeply rooted in late nineteenth-century idealism. To proclaim an apokatastasis as a necessary or inevitable law of the universe, Forsyth averred, is merely to sponsor another form of annihilationism—that of the will.

Despite holy love’s overcoming the distance between humanity and God, Christ’s response from the side of sin and making all things fit for God’s purpose, and despite the gospel’s “objective power” and decisiveness which alter forever our relation to God, Forsyth simultaneously maintained that this gospel “may be rejected or believed.” As a pastor, Forsyth knew firsthand the fix of the “impenitent temper”; that there remains the possibility that one may become so impervious to love that one is fixed forever in a state of self-deceit; that it is “in the power of the human soul to harden itself until it become shrunk into such a tough and irreducible mass as it seems the very grace of God could do nothing with.” At the risk of obliterating the human soul, God, Forsyth insisted, respects it and works under its conditions: “The gift of the Spirit overrules natural character, but it does not obliterate it. It transfigures, but does not erase. The will God made so free that it can resist even Himself. It is free enough to resist even His gospel of more freedom and true freedom.”

Forsyth was consistently concerned to bear witness to the personal and relational character of creation, to the primacy of the will, and to a rejection of those theologies which effectively shut down creation,
reducing "living souls" to "things," and "converts" into "changelings." While Forsyth insisted, the possibility of a permanent "fixed refusal"—the sin of sins—of a saved world being "false to itself." While Forsyth avowed that the relationship between creaturely freedom and the Thou-world is bound up in the mystery of grace, and that we, consequently, ought to resist all attempts to fashion a schema of logic or of simple cause and effect, his free-will defense against soteriological universalism threatens the end that Holy Love seeks. Indeed, is it not precisely because God’s love is the kind of holy love of which Forsyth spoke that we can believe in an apokatastasis pannot—that holy love will not and can not leave unsanctified and unredeemed any part of creation, no matter how long such victory takes?

The possibility of a final “No” highlights a number of concerns. I will note two, both of which rely upon a christology that actually does some work. First, there is the concern that creation might be determined apart from the humanity of God (i.e. Jesus Christ) who creates, defines, upholds, reorders, renews, and redirects humanity to its eschatological destiny. If saving faith is “the gift of [the] God” who desires that all be saved, as Forsyth insisted, then the ongoing reality of the possibility of a final “No” can only responsibly rest with God. This is particularly so if, as Forsyth claimed, we believe because “God makes us believe—with a moral compulsion, an invasion and capture of us.” Christ creates both the response and also “the very capacity for response,” bringing to a terminus every debate between “Yes” and “No” in his resurrection “Yes.” Our faith, therefore, is part of Christ’s offering to God, part of God’s one

55. Ibid., 159.
56. Forsyth, Work of Christ, 156; Forsyth, Revelation Old and New, 36.
57. Forsyth, Cruciality of the Cross, 190.
58. The language of responsibility needs to be handled carefully lest we suggest that God is responsible for sin. A thoroughgoing determinism makes God directly responsible for sin, whereas to the extent that we take freedom seriously in a non-compatibilist sense then we have to deal with a responsibility that is more removed. Even so, God has finally brought the state of affairs into being as we have it and, if we want to maintain both God’s sovereignty and love, God knew that God was doing it and that it was worth doing and therefore God takes responsibility for all that God has made.
59. Forsyth, Justification of God, 47.
60. Forsyth, Work of Christ, 18.
pregnant deed and gift to us” in Christ’s cross. Forsyth himself leaned in this direction when he suggested that “Christ had to save us from what we were too far gone to feel. Just as the man choked with damp in a mine, or a man going to sleep in arctic cold, does not realise his danger, and the sense of danger has to be created within him, so the violent action of the Spirit takes men by force.”

Second, we ought not fashion an “idol of human agency,” for, as Karl Barth reminded us, “God did not create a neutral creature, but his creature.” We belong to God. It is God, and not God’s creature, who is the final judge and determiner of creation’s telos. We are here confronted with the question of whether one can finally damn oneself; of whether creatures have, in Joseph Ratzinger’s words, “the right to will their own damnation.” If the doors of hell cannot be unlocked from the outside, then it is creation and not God that finally determines how things will end. If sinners can determine their own destiny, then the nature of the last judgment as God’s is radically undermined, if not forfeited. God would become the auxiliary who executes the will of those who decide their fate for themselves. The notion that one can finally damn oneself can only be defended on the basis that God has not (in Donald MacKinnon’s words) “identified beyond shade of equivocation with the condemned.” But if, in Christ, humanity’s rejection of God has been overcome and rejection’s attendant isolation has been turned around—as Forsyth also suggests—then maintaining the possibility of further rejection can only, it would seem, be defended at the cost of undermining Christ’s work, the result of which would be to throw recalcitrant humanity back onto itself to, in Barth’s words, “suffer the execution” of the threat alone. But this is “the very goal which the godless cannot reach, because it has already been taken away by the eternally decreed offering of the Son of God to suffer in place of the godless.” So Paul Faber suggests: “I think when the sun

61. Forsyth, Preaching of Jesus, 80.
64. Barth, Table Talk, 37.
65. Ratzinger, Eschatology, 216.
67. Barth, Church Dogmatics II.2, 319.
rises upon them, some people will be surprised to find how far they have got in the dark."68

The Possibility of Future Final Judgment

Here we might identify four things that Forsyth affirmed about future judgment:

First, Forsyth believed that the New Testament shifts the focus from the future to the present. While he never employed the term “realized eschatology,” he did assume an “immanent teleology of history” secured in the cross which “presents us in advance with the purpose and destiny of the world.”69

Second, judgment is always a word of mercy and must not be coupled with retribution and damnation.70 By coupling judgment with mercy, Forsyth reflected Holy Scripture’s witness that God’s wrath betrays love’s unflinching commitment to creation. Thus judgment is to be both dreaded and welcomed, for through judgment lies promise that God will not let evil continue indefinitely. Negative judgment is God’s “subdominant” word and never the final solution—lest it be a word that speaks of God’s failure rather than of God’s victory, so robbing reconciliation of its moral quality.71

Third, Forsyth pleaded that the promise concerning future judgment not be evacuated from the pulpit, reminding us that the preacher “carries peril as well as grace,” and that one cannot be a “true missionary” if one has “no sense of doom and a wrath to come.”72

Fourth, Forsyth maintained that not all judgment can be shown to be corrective, educative, or saving: “There is plenty of punishment that hardens and hardens.”73 In other words, the word of grace which confronts us with the truth may produce faith but may also deepen unfaith, bringing about a hardened impenitence and a new determination to remain in the lie. “If it loose it also binds; and it can do the one only if it do the other—action and reaction being equal. If it draw some near to God,

68. Cited in Saintsbury, George MacDonald, 138.
69. Forsyth, Justification of God, 186.
70. Ibid., 172.
71. Ibid., 171.
72. Forsyth, Missions in State and Church, 228.
it repels others into distance and estrangement. There is such a thing as the repulsive power of a great affection.\textsuperscript{74} While not a foregone conclusion, here Forsyth entertained the possibility that judgment may not be salvific for the finally impenitent—that it may be “death unto death.”

Certainly Forsyth avoided the neo-Hegelian propensity to interpret judgment in terms of evolutionary process or upward progression, not least because such proposals offer no certainty of reconciliation’s final goal, and destroy any sense of decisiveness or finality in eternity, and of genuine accessibility in time. The question before us is whether future judgment might not occasion a way to universal salvation; whether negative judgment therefore constitutes God’s penultimate and not ultimate word; whether eschatological dualism will not finally be transcended in the all-embracing love of God on the way to the universal establishment of holiness.

Forsyth’s second qualification against an \textit{apokatastasis} introduces four difficulties into his soteriology. First, while Forsyth properly resisted proposals to understand coming judgment as a \textit{separate event} of God’s righteous dealings with the world apart from the cross, and rejected as fanatic those notions of impatient and reckless hope in a convulsive social \textit{parousia},\textsuperscript{75} by so concentrating the final judgment almost exclusively as the event “already by,”\textsuperscript{76} Forsyth has, as Justyn Terry observes, left Christ “little judging still to do”—the final judgment serving “largely as an appendix”—and so reversed the biblical accent on the final judgment as “the great assize.”\textsuperscript{77}

Second, such ambiguity over future judgment leaves Forsyth’s theology pregnable to the charge that in the face of ongoing injustices things may not be finally set right, leaving victims, perpetrators, and (presumably) God without the holy Sabbath for which creation was made and redeemed. Christ’s “last enemy” would remain undestroyed (1 Cor 15:26), the Son’s gift to the Father left incomplete, the universal manifestation of holiness frustrated, and God’s promise of being “all in all” left unfulfilled.

Third, when Forsyth spoke of saving judgment, he properly imagined that “salvation must be salvation not \textit{from} judgment, but \textit{by}
But he also claimed that there can be no “judgment without salvation.” These two claims become particularly obscure when Forsyth appears to present a form of judgment that is exclusively negative and bereft of soteriological significance, where the possibility that future judgment might in fact be only punitive—that which only “hardens and hardens.” Forsyth is also ambiguous about how such punitive experiences of future judgment relate to the universal and saving judgment born in Christ’s work. If the judgment at history’s end is only the corollary of judgment at history’s centre, as Forsyth claimed, then in what sense can it be merely punitive? Unfortunately, Forsyth left this question unanswered.

Finally, and most decisively, Forsyth’s speculations on future judgment foster unacceptable consequences for what he wanted to affirm about the satisfaction of holiness. “An unsatisfied God, a dissatisfied God,” he claimed, “would be no God. He would but reflect the distraction of the world, and so succumb to it.” From at least 1891 onwards, Forsyth unwaveringly averred that a holy God can be satisfied by neither pain nor death, but by holiness alone: “Justice may be satisfied with penalty: but the only satisfaction to holiness is holiness.” Punishment is an insufficient vehicle for the re-establishment of holiness. Rather, holiness’ claim can be honored only by “personality of acknowledgement.” This honoring is a christological happening which reaches to the confession of holiness through the new humanity. Although Forsyth was exiguous on the details of what future judgment will entail, he was adamant that no matter how much suffering might be an ingredient in God’s sanctifying work, no amount of penalty, remorse, verbal acknowledgement, or ritual can satisfy the claim of holy law. “Nothing but holiness, actual holiness, and holiness upon the same scale as the one holy law which was broken” can hallow God’s name and so secure creation’s ongoing life.

83. Forsyth, *Church, the Gospel and Society*, 32.
85. Ibid., 126.
The problem, as Forsyth clearly outlined, is that holiness must be satisfied, and that no creature can do it. Neither can holiness be satisfied while its antithesis remains in creation. Creation’s “resistance is not-simply to be overborne and erased; it must be converted and recovered, else the Holy is less than universal, infinite, and absolute. The unholy must be restored to holiness. It is unmade but to be remade. And there is none but the Holy creative enough to do this. And He must—by the necessity of His holiness.” Whether negative judgment is a penultimate and not the ultimate word, and whether eschatological dualism will not finally be transcended in the all-embracing holy-love of God are both questions demanded by what Forsyth himself wished to assert about the necessity of holiness’ full self-realization. That he vacillated here threatens to undermine those areas wherein he was more certain.

The Possibility of a Redeemed Race without Every Member

Forsyth navigated the notion that while Christ’s work affected the destiny of the entire human race, it remains a matter of dispute whether that must equate to all individuals. This notion betrays Forsyth’s commitment to countering the rampant individualism infecting late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Congregationalism, severely undermining congregational catholicity and its “corporate spirit.” While calling for the destruction of religious autonomy, Forsyth also pressed that “religion is nothing if not individual” and that “each soul must say ‘My God,’ and each conscience hear the words ‘Thou art the man.’” However, because individualism is terminal to faith and to any integrity that subjectivity might claim, Forsyth progressively abandoned the term “individual” for the more preferable term “personal.”

One of the deficiencies attending the autonomy of “clotted individualism” is a failure to deliver the freedom it promises, killing—rather than creating—individuality, liberty, and personality. To be cut off from the race’s history and organic life, isolated from a common authority,

86. Forsyth, Justification of God, 66–67.
87. See Forsyth, Missions in State and Church, 241.
90. Forsyth, Church and the Sacraments, 44.
and hypnotized in the pursuit of individual freedom is to become the victim of a crowd of individuals too like our vagrant selves, victims of a collective suggestion.91 True self-realization means to be realized by One who sends us to participate in society as servants of a redeemed sociality. By positing that Christ died for all but then denying any necessary connection between Christ’s death and universal salvation, Forsyth rejected scholastic Calvinism’s tendency to interpret Christ’s saving work in logico-causal terms. That Christ’s death is sufficient for all is an unequivocal truth of Scripture. That some might not believe remained, for Forsyth, a mysterious possibility though not a necessary final outcome.

Forsyth’s posing of the possibility that some might not be redeemed is puzzling, particularly given all he affirmed about holiness’ desire to find its echo in all creation, and about the indispensable value of every soul. To be sure, Forsyth nowhere denied the possibility of an apokatastasis. Though while avoiding hasty conclusions, he did insist on the curious notion that racial redemption does not equate to the salvation of every person; that every individual is not indispensable to the race’s solidarity. Not only does this move introduce the possibility that creation might reach its telos apart from all, but this notion is difficult to square with Forsyth’s repudiation of modern individualism, his recognition that we are a “moral organism, destined to a corporate personality” around Christ’s public person:92 “In the case of our neighbor we make the mistake of starting with an atomism, a discontinuity, between individuals. We ignore the fact that the other man’s existence is a factor, and not merely a feature, in our own. It is the other man that makes me possible. I discover myself, possess myself, just as I come up against my limit in him. The individual is not a spiritual reality; he finds himself only in a society of individuals . . . We each partake, for our very existence, in a corporate personality.”93 Paul Ricoeur, too, convincingly contended that “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other.”94 Only in community can one possibly exist as an individual. Who I am cannot be realized apart from the human community. It may be impossible, therefore, to separate the eternal destiny of the individual

91. Forsyth, Principle of Authority, 280.
94. Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 3.
from the destiny of the whole race and of being in all its manifestations. One's essence is inextricably knotted into the whole, and all without loss of genuine personality. It is this notion that makes vicarious fulfillment meaningful, and gives currency to the belief that the joy of the redeemed is threatened while some remain lost. So Forsyth: “We are not absolute, solitary individuals. We are in a society, an organism . . . And our selfish, godless actions and influence go out, radiate, affect the organism as they could not do were we absolute units. They spread far beyond our memory or control . . . We are members one of another both for evil and for good.”

Salvation never concerns the plucking of individuals from the web of relationships and history of existence that situates and graces meaning to every part of the whole. Because the faithful Creator values his whole work, nothing and no one can finally be lost to God's purpose lest God fail to be true to himself. New Testament faith is that “Not one . . . escapes from [God's] leash, however long it may seem.” So where modern individualism has sought to privatize death, Jesus' public resurrection announces the firstfruits of the raising of all life, the genesis of new creation. Only when all that is Christ's is made alive and subject to him will the end come for all and God be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). It is the character of Christian hope itself that is pertinent here, for there can be no particularism of hope: “Hope loses all sense and all force if it does not imply the statement of an 'all of us' or an 'all together.'”

In light of Forsyth's (i) aversion to Hegelianism's sacrificing of the individual for the sake of the mass, (ii) positive voluntarism, and (iii) valuing of the individual soul, it is difficult to see how, in his theoanthropological scheme, “every member” of the race is not required for the race's redemption. Moreover, if the identity of every person is found in a common redeemed conscience, as Forsyth claimed, and our unity is found in our corporate Head who represents “a race, and not . . . a section of it,” then it becomes difficult to appreciate how Forsyth could entertain the grammar of a redeemed race that renders any person practically dispensable. Notwithstanding his important rejection of individualism, his denial that racial redemption means the salvation of every individual

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95. Forsyth, Work of Christ, 121.
96. Forsyth, Justification of God, 182.
98. Forsyth, Principle of Authority, 354.
creates a problem not only for anthropology (that we share one humanity in moral unity) but also for christology, for in Christ God is united in covenant union with humanity. The loss of one therefore means loss to all. Ironically, Forsyth’s third qualification signals the triumph of individualism through the back door, contrary to his own assertions against individualism and for personalism within community.

The additional problem with this qualification is, yet again, pressed by Forsyth’s own insistence that holiness “must . . . establish itself in command everywhere.” If holiness’ essence is God’s perfect satisfaction and repose in eternal fullness, then one is at pains to understand how holiness might be satisfied with less than the “return to holiness” of at least every human person, if not every part of creation. Holiness’ satisfaction is not met by a pound of flesh but only by an entire absolute response in its own active kind. This is the work that Forsyth’s christology highlights so persuasively. What is at stake here, for Forsyth, is the continuing being of God himself: If divine holiness does not “go out to cover, imbue, conquer, and sanctify all things, if it [does] not give itself in love, it is the less holy. It is but partial and not absolute. As holy [God] must subdue all and bless all.”

Of Forsyth’s three qualifications, this one most lapses into incoherence and one is pained to see what value can be extracted from it. His denial of a dogmatic apokatastasis is inconsistent with his notion of retribution, with his doctrine of election, with his belief in the function and end of punishment, with his hope in post-mortem possibilities, and with his affirmation about the stauropological shape and triumph of holy love: “that no speck of His world remain which is not covered, claimed, and cured by Him; no soul which is not judged and redeemed into His fellowship.” Forsyth’s tautological qualifications remain at best confusing. At worst, they erode the “must” of holiness upon which Forsyth’s God insists.

100. Forsyth, Work of Christ, 204.
101. Ibid., 202.
102. Forsyth, Positive Preaching and Modern Mind, 240.
103. Forsyth, This Life and the Next, 29.
Forsyth’s Public Agnosticism

The universalistic tone of Forsyth’s soteriology has sponsored three basic interpretations: (i) those who conclude that Forsyth embraces soteriological universalism;105 (ii) those who deny such a conclusion;106 and (iii) those that judiciously stop short of concluding whether Forsyth does or does not embrace universalism.107 To be sure, consensus about Forsyth’s soteriological universalism is hampered by his polemics, but Forsyth certainly maintains (with the likes of Samuel Cox and Frederic William Farrar) at least what we might call a hopeful universalism,108 and that of a brand which is more consciously christological than Schleiermacher’s or Maurice’s, and better reflects Baldwin Brown’s, whose soteriology is set by his theology of divine Fatherhood, and by the conviction that, through Christ’s action, death no longer has power to determine human destiny. Forsyth’s hopeful universalism is not grounded on vague concepts of God’s benevolence, nor on naïve notions of the creature’s native goodness, but is grounded in holiness’ determination of self-realization and is secured in the kenosis and plerosis of the Son, and by the Spirit who brings to the Father all that the Son has made alive in his resurrection.

We can only speculate about why one whose theology suggests a more dogmatic universalism refused to publicly posit such a position. Four reasons may be considered:

1. Forsyth was concerned, in 1887, that “the decay or modification of old notions about the fate of the heathen and their share [in] hell has seriously affected the foreign mission field, and reduced the number of those who rushed in to pluck brands from the burning.”109 It is feasible to consider how such concern might extend to the question of universalism as both a quencher of missionary zeal and a promoter of antinomian lethargy, although it need do neither and may in fact have the opposite effect, fostering deeper joy and freedom in proclamation,

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107. Sell, Testimony and Tradition, 181; Sell, Nonconformist Theology, 152.
obedience, service, and worship. Still, Forsyth offered sufficient warnings against postponing repentance “here in the hope of doing it there” in another life,\textsuperscript{110} noting that our character here begins our destiny there. Certainly by 1909, Forsyth’s call of “must mission” upon the Church is not incompatible with his belief that “the world at last cannot refuse such a Gospel.”\textsuperscript{111}

2. While England had known such movements before, the early nineteenth century onwards witnessed a resurgence of both annihilationism and, increasingly (mostly undogmatic) universalism, chiefly among Unitarians but also among the orthodox. It is reasonable to assume that Forsyth wanted to distance himself from such movements. He would not have welcomed being responsible for sponsoring any storms of indignation or inner-denominational furor such as accompanied the publication of Edward White’s \textit{Life in Christ} (1846), or the 1853 dismissal of that “proto-martyr of the wider hope,”\textsuperscript{112} F. D. Maurice, from his professorial chair at Kings College on (unfounded) charges of universalism, and would have gladly avoided the prickly trails of controversy had he not thought compelled to tread them.

3. Forsyth carried keenly his responsibility and influence as college principal and congregational leader and consequently knew when it was prudent to opt for a measure of godly agnosticism.

4. Forsyth’s rejection of dogmatic universalism was also informed by his conviction that the materials to formulate a dogmatic belief about the last things remain beyond our reach: “we are obliged to leave such questions as universal restoration unsolved.”\textsuperscript{113}

The Self-Realization, or the Frustration, of Holiness?

Forsyth’s all-embracing staurology, his trumpeting of divine love’s omnipotence, his rejection of limited atonement, his embracing of the doctrine of purgatory (however revised), his hope in post-mortem conversion, his insistence that divine holiness requires the end to its antithesis, and his aversion to eschatological dualism all raise reasonable questions about whether his theological project demands the very

\textsuperscript{110} Forsyth, \textit{This Life and the Next}, 78.
\textsuperscript{111} Forsyth, \textit{Revelation Old and New}, 38.
\textsuperscript{112} Plumptre, \textit{The Spirits in Prison}, viii.
\textsuperscript{113} Forsyth, \textit{Work of Christ}, 161.
that he finally refused to affirm. His dismissal of both
dogmatic universalism and annihilationism therefore leaves his entire
theological vision vulnerable. Is he not guilty of stopping “half-way
across the street and run[ning] for refuge to one of those little islands in
the middle crowned by a feeble gaslamp where nobody can stay but for
a time”?114 The charge is significantly heightened when one recalls the
force with which Forsyth insisted on holiness’ “must” to find itself ev-
erywhere. It is difficult to comprehend how, in order to sustain holiness’
 incontrovertible victory—what Forsyth named “the victory of perfect
holiness for an end of universal holiness”115—any such qualifications as
Forsyth entertained can remain, lest Christian truth-claims regarding
grace’s triumph be left open to the charge of “mere illuminism,”116 and so
bereft of any finality worthy of the name “holy.”

Forsyth was confident that whatever else we might say—or not
say—about how history will end, “the end will justify the means, and the
goal glorify a Holy God.” He posited here an eschatology with inbuilt
theodicy; a consummation of all things via holiness’ triumph through
gracious moral rescue which does full justice to holiness. Redemption
is always more crucial than Meliorism.117 Whenever the finis creationis
may come, there can be no other end than that “the holy will win the
day at last.”118 To assert such is neither daring speculation nor a mere
possibility, but, in John Robinson’s words, “a reality that shall and must
be, because it already is. It already is, because it is grounded upon what
has been, one decisive act of God, once for all, embracing every creature
. . . there cannot possibly be any other outcome.”119 Here again, the rela-
tionship between time, eternity, and divine patience comes to the fore.
Forsyth pressed that the perfectly faithful God’s “Yes” is the “plan of the
universe” and that the “victory of the holy conscience on a world-scale is
sure and certain—give it time; that the triumph of the soul is in principle
won,” and only remains to be worked through. Though for now the world
lies on the wrong side of life, “God is holy, God is love, God is grace, God

115. Forsyth, Church, the Gospel and Society, 32.
117. Meliorism is the notion that the world, or society, may be improved, and suf-
fering alleviated, through rightly directed human effort.
118. Forsyth, Justification of God, 185.
119. Robinson, In the End, God, 99.
is endless power for the purposes of His grace; . . . the destiny of history is a foregone conclusion in Christ, and in the high spiritual places all is well . . . We have the faith that history in its movement is the working out of man's conquest by this God and this God's man, and God is steadily working this out by teleology—immanent and irresistible.”

The drums of the advancing future are not the throbs of human egotism swelled and inflamed but the “beating of the Eternal Heart” who is himself among us as one who turns no one away, and whose own costly death provides dogmatic certainty for holiness' final victory.

While Forsyth echoed the New Testament's tension between universal restoration and final separation, nowhere did he suggest the possibility that they are two sides of the one truth—the former as it is for God and the latter as it is for those facing the ultimate decision (as did J. A. T. Robinson, see chapter 15). Neither did he describe Christ as both the chosen and the reprobate of our election (as did Barth, see chapter 13). Instead, the tension is left unresolved in Forsyth's theology. Perhaps this is as it should be. But again such indecision undermines Forsyth's attestation regarding the necessity for holiness' final self-realization in the other because it leaves history with two possible endings. Forsyth might have rejected such a reading, recalling that God's desire for universal restoration remains, in his theology, a christologically-founded hope and so a genuine possibility. However, Forsyth's moderate- or neo-Calvinism with its emphasis on divine sovereignty and its rejection of a two-fold will makes it difficult, as his friend Alfred Ernest Garvie observes, to anticipate that any will ultimately be lost:

[Forsyth] does not expressly favour the “larger hope,” as resistance of grace may continue . . . But his theology seems to me to lend support to it. In the exercise of the sovereignty of God, in the election of individual men, not to eternal death, but life, in the finality and sufficiency and universality of the redemption of the world from sin, and reconciliation unto God in the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, there seems to be so great an assurance of God's absolute goodwill that although grace cannot coerce we may, in my judgment, believe that “love will find some way to make the pile complete.”

120. Forsyth, "Christ at the Gate," 181.
121. Ibid., 181.
But is hope enough? While God’s mercy ought not be presumed upon, and there are sufficient warnings in Scripture against postponing repentance, does not Forsyth’s theology of divine hallowing demand a more unqualified dogmatic affirmation of holiness’ complete achievement?

The End of Sin’s Hegemony

To maintain a doctrine of hell’s permanence is to confess that despite God’s best efforts to overcome sin—to sanctify creation and transform rebels into enchanted children—a black line remains across a page that God has otherwise made clean. Such vision may betray a particular commitment to a version of reality in which hell and heaven share the same ontological rights, that hell is not simply the “shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind,” as C. S. Lewis put it, but is as much reality as heaven is. If eternity is arrested with the conflict and agony of “eternally divided and warring halves, [it] would then be but the procession of an appalling tragedy.” It is difficult to imagine a more costly theological commitment. From at least 1879 until his death in 1921, Forsyth mostly avoided the implicit ongoing dualism in this account of a two-fold end for humanity. For Forsyth, sin is not God’s ontological opposite but God’s antithesis with which God can never be reconciled and which God must destroy lest eternity be marked by conflict and the hegemony of death. It is at this point that Forsyth comes closest to proffering some form of dualism, for such is the almost ontological status that he grants sin that it might threaten the very existence of God. Forsyth’s absolute rejection of any eschatological resolution that contains any features of final dualism, however, only strengthens the claim that his soteriology requires the kind of new creation that soteriological universalism imagines. It is not enough that sin be quarantined in hell. Whatever sin is—and it is a mystery—it is unjustifiable, unredeemable, and unconvertible. Strictly speaking, sin is unforgivable. Sin is what God always leaves behind on the path to the sanctification of all things.

Forsyth insisted that eternal hell can never qualify as a triumph for divine justice because an “endless Hell is not reconcilable with the

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123. Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 63.
character of God as revealed by Christ . . . If God and his Love is to be all in all, then no place is left for Hell in the end.”

Were God to allow sin to remain—whether to vindicate divine justice or for some other reason—it could only concede to evil a recognized place and function which cannot be. As Paul Fiddes insists, “there can be no theodicy without an end to evil.” Or as Forsyth famously put it, “Die sin must or God.”

“The holiness which condemns sin would be but a negative thing if it did not go on to destroy it, i.e. to destroy its power to come between God and man, and thus to thwart the universal empire of that holiness which makes the universal and infinite power to be truly God.” Forsyth contended that although sin has an inbuilt tendency to disorganize itself—to self-destruct—the only way of dealing fully with the race’s moral quagmire is if Holiness personally intervenes on sin’s stage, assumes all responsibility for sin once for all, and destroys “the vast and regnant personality of Satan.”

God has determined that evil has no future—that it can never become a sort of “naturalized or legitimated citizen of eternity” —and so its effects now, though very real, are short-lived.

If evil is to be permanent in any part of the universe, then God is there foiled and the Cross of Christ of none effect . . . So long as evil lasts there will be Hell. If evil should cease Hell would be burned out. Now if Christ’s cross means anything it means the destruction of evil everywhere and for ever. The work of the cross is not done while there is a single soul unwon to the mastery of Christ and uninfected by his spirit . . . If we believe in the cross then we believe there will come a time when evil shall everywhere cease and sin no longer be.

Echoing Hegel, Forsyth insisted that if God’s goal of self-realization is to be attained, God’s antithesis must be overcome, the negation of negation informing the essence of the divine nature (“negation itself is found in God”). Thus the necessity of God becoming fully exposed to sin’s power—of even becoming the antithesis of God’s self—in order to

126. Fiddes, Participating in God, 154.
127. Forsyth, Justification of God, 147.
129. Forsyth, Christian Ethic of War, 40.
130. Fairbairn, Place of Christ in Modern Theology, 466.
comprehensively bring God’s antithesis (in all its political, economic, and moral forms) to extinction, that God might maintain, even receive, himself in the process. Only to the extent that we can confess that nothingness has been met with, struggled with, and been vanquished in the self-nihilation of a loving God may we say that we “know” something of sin and evil’s reality, and be able to speak hopefully of its end. Only as we are submerged into Golgotha’s hellish depths do we discover the sureness of unbounded reconciliation. Hell now belongs to Christ, and so has become part of the good news. While Forsyth insisted on certain qualifications, his staurology affirms that hell cannot be the final destiny for God’s creatures. “The evil world will not win at last, because it failed to win at the only time it ever could. It is a vanquished world where men play their devilries. Christ has overcome it. It can make tribulation, but desolation it can never make.” The creation now stands in new light; its future is resurrection.

Amen—Holiness, “The Last Reality”

We have seen that Forsyth consistently averred that creation’s consummation does not bypass the annihilation of the destructive powers set against it, nor is it reached apart from the forgiveness of sins. Eschatology is therefore concerned with a positive word: the last reality of creation is when God and creation find and indwell one another in holy communion; when Holiness sees his reflection in the other, and creation joyfully and unboundedly participates in God’s space. While it would be absurd to suppose that we could give detailed shape to how such an unprecedented happening might occur, Forsyth gives us every reason to hope that nothing will be lost; that creation’s consummation will be attended by every soul forgiven, redeemed, and settled “in worship in the temple of a new heaven and earth full of holiness.”

133. Stringfellow, A Simplicity of Faith, 110: “Hell is when and where the power of death is complete, unconditional, maximum, undisguised, most awesome and awful, unbridled, most terrible, perfected. That Jesus Christ descends into Hell means that as we die (in any sense of the term die) our expectation in death is encounter with the Word of God, which is, so to speak, already there in the midst of death.”
135. Forsyth, Justification of God, 165.
and delivered from the abyss of nothingness, fragmentation, and hostility into the glory of God’s hallowed life. This final beatitude is the Son’s gift to the Father.

The last reality of the world is . . . the historic holiness of God as the power fundamental, and at last irresistible, in all cosmic things, as their last authority, therefore, and their final wealth and fullness. “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of Hosts, the fullness of the whole earth is His Glory.” That holiness is not mere purity or saintliness; it is kingship, moral kingship, the moral absolute taking slow, costly, invincible possession of its own. It carries with it the patience which is sure of its achieved reversion of the world, the portentous meekness (not without irony) which inherits the earth and has the world in fee. The Gospel is not just a message that God is love; but it is the historic act in which God’s holy love is installed as omnipotent for ever among the world’s powers and affairs. It is not the cheery word of a great good comrade (who might be as helpless as we are in the last tragic push against Fate) but the decisive power and action of the royal, omnipotent, absolute Master of every fate, the last victorious Reality of history, with Whom we have for ever to do, and to Whom for ever we belong and we turn.136

This is consistent with Forsyth’s claim that for Christian theology “everything begins and ends with the holiness of God.”137 Among Forsyth’s greatest gifts to the Church and its witness is his insistence that God’s call to creation—“You must be holy as I am holy”—must be interpreted as that word which (in H. H. Farmer’s words) both asks for “obedience at all costs” while guaranteeing “in and through such asking the soul’s ultimate succour.”138 That holiness may be all in all is the doxology that holiness demands, seeks, creates, sustains, and delights in. To promulgate holiness as the last reality therefore is to confess that holiness demands an eschatology commensurate with God’s self, that all things end where they began—in God. “The final sanity is complete sanctity. And the Holiest is the Key to the whole.”139 But the divine process which hallows all things is no mere metamorphosis of humanity via the advancement of humane civilization, philanthropy, and social reform,

137. Forsyth, Work of Christ, 78.
139. Forsyth, God the Holy Father, 115.
as important as these may be. Rather, the discriminating, consuming, selective, and reconstitutive principle which is Holy Love arrives in the triumph of God’s true cruciform humility, makes its way to all creatures, and fills the earth “as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). This, Forsyth insisted, is the last reality.

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from Origen to Moltmann

Edited by
GREGORY MACDONALD
"ALL SHALL BE WELL"
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