

**Reconciliation and Renewal in Roger T. Forster:**

**The Doctrine of Atonement**

**In the Teaching and Practice of a Restoration Theology**

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*The Candidate affirms that the work submitted is his own, and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.*

*Abstract*

Over the past fifty years, Charismatic Renewal has represented a significant development in English Christianity. While this has prompted a number of investigations, few have touched on the traditional Evangelical distinctives of the new birth and crucicentrism. By way of making a contribution in this area, this thesis undertook an explication and critique of the doctrine of Atonement in Roger Thomas Forster, an indisputably significant figure within the movement. The work identified Forster's theological framework, his understanding of the circumstances that called for Christ's work, his critique of the three main historic *motifs*, and the key elements in his own theory. Examination was also made of the relationship in which the Atonement stands to reconciliation, and the relationship of the Church to the Atonement. Finally, Forster was 'located' historically by identifying his sources and influences, and 'defined' theologically by comparing and contrasting his teachings with those of conservative Evangelicalism. The thesis concluded with an overview of what had been undertaken, and its significance.

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## *Reconciliation and Renewal in Roger T. Forster:*

### The Doctrine of Atonement

#### In the Teaching and Practice of a Restoration Theology

#### The Relevance of the Research

Among the most significant developments in English Christianity in the second half of the twentieth century, have been those arising from a distinct movement outside Pentecostalism<sup>1</sup> whose chief characteristic has been an intense interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, more especially:

- (1) A belief in a post conversion crisis experience known as the 'baptism in the Spirit', something considered both normative to, and the *bene esse* of, Christian living.
- (2) A belief in the continuation of the spiritual gifts or Charismata concomitant in nature and recurrence to the New Testament narrative.
- (3) Practical distinctives in individual and corporate Christian behaviour concurrent with the above.

Most of the scholarly examinations into these developments have focused on pneumatological considerations<sup>2</sup> contextualised within a framework of Pentecostal

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<sup>1</sup> Pentecostalism has been described as 'a number of fundamentalist Protestant sects that emphasise Spirit baptism as an experience different from conversion and evidenced by speaking in tongues'. Robert G. Clouse in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 763. Hollenweger is typical of Church historians in tracing the origin of Pentecostalism in Great Britain to the Welsh Revival of 1904. Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Peabury, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1972), p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the person, but particularly the work of, the Holy Spirit. Recent works include, Herbert Carson, *Spiritual Gifts for Today? Evangelical and Charismatic Together* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1987). Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament Today* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1988). The Church of England Doctrine Commission, *We Believe in the Holy Spirit* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1991).

history, as well as practical manifestations such as miracles,<sup>3</sup> signs and wonders,<sup>4</sup> and spiritual gifts.<sup>5</sup> Given that these represent the most distinctive, and indeed most controversial elements, such an emphasis is readily anticipated. Since the mid-1980s, however, there has been an increasing tendency to explore other themes such as historical contextualisation,<sup>6</sup> theology,<sup>7</sup> pastoral theology,<sup>8</sup> eschatology,<sup>9</sup> church growth,<sup>10</sup> ecumenism,<sup>11</sup> demonology,<sup>12</sup> social ethics,<sup>13</sup> preaching,<sup>14</sup> hermeneutics,<sup>15</sup> the Reformed tradition,<sup>16</sup> and missionary activity.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Grant Wacker, 'Wimber and Wonders - what about miracles today?' *The Reformed Journal* 37 (1987), pp. 16-19.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Sarles, 'An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988), pp. 57-82.

<sup>5</sup> William Joseph Sneek, *Charismatic Spiritual Gifts: a Phenomenological Analysis* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981). David Martin and Peter Mullen, (eds.), *Strange Gifts: A Guide to the Charismatic Movement* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God: A Biblical and Historical Perspective on the Charismatic Movement* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1985). Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: the Origin and Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986). Vinson Synan (ed.), *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Tom Smail, (ed.), *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Wallace and Burkill, 'A theological and pastoral critique of the teachings of John Wimber', *Churchman: Journal of Anglican Theology* 101 (1987), p. 101-113.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Revised edition, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: a biblical mandate* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds.), *Pentecostal Movements As An Ecumenical Challenge* (London: SCM Press; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Léon-Joseph, Cardinal Suenens, *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Donald Dayton, 'Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal and Evangelical Social Action', *Transformation: An International Dialogue on Evangelical Social Ethics* 5 (1988), pp. 1-31. Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works : A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> James Forbes, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, c.1989).

<sup>15</sup> G. Martin, (ed.), *Scripture and the Charismatic Renewal* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, c.1979).

<sup>16</sup> John. I. Hesselink, 'The Charismatic Movement and the Reformed Tradition', *Reformed Review* 28 (1975), pp. 147-156.

<sup>17</sup> C. Peter Wagner, 'Supernatural Power in World Missions', *Evangelical Quarterly* 20 (1984), p. 398-400. David Barrett, 'The Twentieth Century Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal in the Holy Spirit, with its goal of world evangelisation', *International Bulletin of*

What is almost immediately evident from such a list as this is the fact that few, if any of these studies, have embraced a soteriological focus, that is 'God's saving solution to the whole problem of sin'.<sup>18</sup> Such an absence is lamentable for two reasons:

(1) Historically, soteriology has held an especially important place within Christian thought over the past half millennia. Certainly it was a significant issue for the English Reformers,<sup>19</sup> to an extent the Lollards<sup>20</sup> before them, certainly the Puritans<sup>21</sup> after, as well as the Evangelical movement that followed, commonly known as the Methodist<sup>22</sup> Revival.

(2) Theologically, 'salvation' is said to lie at the heart of Christian belief: 'it is the heart of Christianity as a system; it is the distinguishing mark of the Christian religion. For Christianity is more than a revelation; it is more than an ethic. Christianity is uniquely a religion of redemption'.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, this subject holds vital importance in any attempt to critique Charismatic Renewal as it stands

*Missionary Research* 12 (1988), pp. 119-129.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Barabas, 'Salvation', in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 874. Added emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> In English thought the importance and centrality of justification is witnessed in the Articles and Homilies of the Church of England. The latter, attributed to Thomas Cranmer, and obligated to be read in the pulpits by way of obviating the errors of 'heretical' (Roman Catholic) or ignorant clergy, consist of three series. The first 'Of Faith', focused on the issue of justification by faith alone, the second 'On Justification', on the nature of justification, and the third, 'Of Good Works' on the nature of good works and their relationship to justification by faith alone.

<sup>20</sup> While lacking the focus on 'justification by grace, through faith' of the Lutheran Reformation, the Lollards nonetheless displayed implicit conviction as to its importance through the abuses of the Church of Rome that John Wycliffe (1324-84) and his followers sought to remedy. They made known their message both by argument in academic circles (Wycliffe was 'the leading scholar of the University of Oxford'), and in widespread itinerant preaching to the people. See Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press, 1944), pp. 242f.

<sup>21</sup> Puritanism is generally regarded as having begun soon after the accession of Elizabeth I (1558) and as having lasted until the late 1600s. As to the emphases of Puritanism, Peter Toon cites these as 'personal regeneration and sanctification, household prayers, and strict morality'. J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 815.

<sup>22</sup> Initially so called on account of the methodical approach to the Christian life of its first leaders. See Sylvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London: James Clark and Co. 1903), p. 262f.

<sup>23</sup> Dyson Hague, *The Fundamentals* (Chicago, IL: n.d.), p. 23. Quoted in Leon Morris, *The*



historically and theologically to English Christian development.

Any serious examination of Charismatic Renewal from a soteriological perspective faces numerous difficulties, however. Not least this is because the quality and quantity of material available varies so widely. A truly comprehensive study would, therefore, be exceedingly difficult. With this in mind, the examination of an individual commends itself, especially if one could be found whose relationship to the movement is undoubted, and whose work is suited to scholarly investigation.

### The Field of Enquiry

Roger Thomas Forster of the Ichthus Fellowship, London, provides us with such an individual. His history is thoroughly intertwined with Charismatic development. His association with the pioneers of the movement not only reads like a 'Who's Who?' of Charismatic Renewal,<sup>24</sup> but also more importantly, reflects a theoretical and practical knowledge from its beginnings to the present time.

Though primarily a preacher and teacher, Forster's limited published works have indicated a high degree of theological erudition, earning commendation if not agreement from such eminent academics as the late Dr. F. F. Bruce.<sup>25</sup> In his overview of Charismatic Renewal, Dr. Andrew Walker considers Forster, a Cambridge graduate, to have 'one of the finest minds in the Evangelical constituency today'.<sup>26</sup>

There are a number of other dimensions to Forster's life and ministry that commend him as an ideal subject:

(1) Forster is an experienced Evangelist. His ministry began with university evangelism in the late 1950s, developed into a more general urban evangelism in the

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*Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Forster's contemporaries at University included David MacInnes, David Watson, Michael Harper, Michael Green, Michael Griffiths and David Sheppherd. Forster, interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, December 1991, transcript, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> See respectively his Forewords to R. T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy* (Send the Light Trust, 1973), and *Reason and Faith: Do modern science and Christian faith really conflict?* (Monarch Publications, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, p. 37.

1960s, and culminated in foundation of Ichthus Church in 1974,<sup>27</sup> and its many satellite churches since. An evangelistically oriented ministry is likely to be cognisant of soteriological issues, theoretical and practical.

(2) Forster has caught the interest of wider Christian and secular communities. In a 1990 article on developments in English Evangelicalism, *Christianity Today* highlighted his achievement of spearheading 'tremendous church growth in territory that had ... remained obdurate to the witness of historic churches', further commenting that while others in Charismatic Renewal had been 'building the church' Forster had held firmly to an evangelistic priority.<sup>28</sup> In its 1991 survey of church trends in England, MARC Europe presented Forster's church - the Ichthus Fellowship - as a model for church growth principles.<sup>29</sup> A year later the London *Evening Standard* cited Ichthus as the 'fastest growing church in Britain'.<sup>30</sup> The Ichthus Fellowship itself began in the Forster's front room with 16 people. In about fifteen years it came to number in excess of 2,000, a significant number by British standards.<sup>31</sup>

(3) Ichthus itself has yielded some influence. There can be very few Christians associated with the Charismatic Renewal worldwide who have not sung one of the many modern hymns written by Graham Kendrick, Ichthus' own worship leader. These lyrics, perhaps not surprisingly, strongly represent Ichthus' theology. Further, there are literally millions of Christians,<sup>32</sup> many otherwise 'traditional', who either participate in the 'March For Jesus' or who have been inspired to be involved in some

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<sup>27</sup> Forster's former Assistant, Alan Spicer, believes 'Roger has done more University Missions than anyone else alive'. Allan Spicer, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, 27 September 1990.

<sup>28</sup> *Christianity Today*, 5 February 1990, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Brierley, *Christian England: What the English Church Census Reveals* (London: MARC Europe, 1991), pp. 145-150.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Martin, 'Feel me. Touch me. Heal me', *ES Magazine*, March 1992, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> The fellowship has, however, noticeably failed to enjoy any significant growth since this date.

<sup>32</sup> In 1994 *Christianity Today* estimated over 10 million people world wide took part in that year's Praise March, a figure that was exceeded by another two million in 1996, and frequently bettered since. The March for Jesus, June 10, 2000, called 'Jesus Day', was expected to witness 20 million marching in 150 countries.

<<http://www.gmfj.org/founders.html>>

way with the 'Praise March' idea.<sup>33</sup>

## Refining the Research Field

An examination that focused on the doctrine of the Atonement commended itself on a number of grounds, not least of which was Forster's claim that the subject is central to his entire theology:

I rarely think that I have ever preached - and that is twice a day for 30 years - without preaching somewhere on the Cross, because it is the heart of everything, it is where everything comes together.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly his teaching has given much attention to issues related to Atonement. Thus over the years he has examined: sacrifice and priesthood in Genesis and Leviticus, conflict and warfare in Joshua and Job, redemption and jubilee in Ruth and Leviticus, suffering and service in Isaiah, the kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels, and identification and sacrifice in John's Gospel. Beyond this are explicit considerations of the Cross: conversion, faith, healing and Atonement, sonship, and so on. The number of papers Forster has written on these subjects runs into several hundred.

The decision to focus on Atonement was also supported by a number of wider considerations. Firstly, it is a subject that has inspired much thought and investigation within Western Christendom as a whole. Following Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* (c. 1100) many critical developments and contributions have been made. Quite relevant to this study is the fact that some of the most important of these contributions have been made by British theologians in the century following 1850,<sup>35</sup> an era which has

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<sup>33</sup> The marches began in England in the early 1980s when some local churches decided to take the 'move of the Spirit' from the churches out into the streets. Graham Kendrick participated in some of these and wrote a series of songs that was appropriate for the event. In May of 1987, Ichthus Fellowship in London joined with Youth With A Mission and Pioneer Team to organise a prayer and praise march through the streets of London. To their surprise, more than 15,000 people turned out, in spite of pouring rain. 'Awed by God's blessing', they planned another march for May of 1988. This march drew a crowd of 55,000 participants. <[http://www.mfj.org/History\\_of\\_Marching.htm](http://www.mfj.org/History_of_Marching.htm)>

<sup>34</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', lecture, transcript, c.1988, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Among the most important nineteenth century works are: J. McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856); G. Smeaton, *Atonement as Taught by Christ and His Apostles* (1871); R. W. Dale, *The Atonement* (1876); J. Scott Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* (1898); R. C. Moberly, *The Atonement and Personality* (1901). For twentieth century contributions See footnote (42) n.2 below.

exercised important influence on Forster.

Secondly - and again quite relevant for the purpose of this study - the nature of any single concept of Atonement, assuming it is intelligently and consistently held, contains many theological assumptions of a fundamental nature, 'throwing light upon the character of God, upon the nature and condition of mankind, and of the purpose of God towards men'.<sup>36</sup> In this respect a study of Atonement almost becomes a study of the foundations of the particular interpretation of Christianity to which it is attached. Commensurate to this, there exists an important link between one's understanding of the Atonement and one's doctrine of salvation. John McIntyre argues, 'variations in soteriology ... may be traced in large part to the different ways in which theologians have described the relationship between Christ's death, as a very particular event which happened, and our salvation. Without agreement on the fact of that relationship, on the precise nature of which they differ, there could be no soteriology as we know it in the Christian faith'.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Atonement is a subject which is still receiving important attention,<sup>38</sup> not least from those involved in Charismatic Renewal whose Protestant identity is consciously more aligned to the teachings of the Radical rather than Magisterial Reformation.<sup>39</sup> Among such thinkers the received 'orthodox' theories of Atonement are being challenged for unquestioned acceptance of Western Christian presuppositions<sup>40</sup> as well as failures in adequately dealing with such issues as

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<sup>36</sup> J. Scott Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Graham, 1897. Fourth edition), p. 122.

<sup>37</sup> John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> In the present decade there have been a number of significant new contributions, as well as reprints of older important works. See: footnote (43) below.

<sup>39</sup> 'Radical Reformation': 'The term covers congeries of movements flourishing from the 1520s which were often initially indebted to the "magisterial reformation" of, e.g., Zwingli and Luther but wished to push changes farther and on different bases. Especially in its earliest stages, the radical reformation was a continuation of medieval movements of lay piety, heresy and social protest'. Haddon Willmer, in J. D. Douglas (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 822.

<sup>40</sup> Presuppositions of the Constantinian Church-State settlement and the influences of Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thought on a Christian world-view. This is the opening thesis, for example, in John Driver's *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 'Author's Preface', pp. 11f.

community, the full implications of the Cross for gender distinctives, and most recently, spiritual warfare.

## Research Goal

Fundamentally, then, the goal of the research becomes a critique of Roger Forster's understanding of the Christian doctrine of Atonement. That it is Forster's view means that it is an example of theological development within Charismatic Renewal, and more particularly, an example that is reflective of his own unique adaptation of Restorationism.<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding, the thesis is not attempting an appraisal of Renewal *per se*. Rather, our chief concern is to elaborate, then make some sort of critical judgement of Forster's interpretation of Christ's death; the doctrines which underlie it; and the implications of the two. To achieve this a 'benchmark' needs to be established for comparison: for an idea only develops its own distinctive character as it is thrown into relief against another idea. In other words, in order to raise a series of critical questions our need is to pinpoint a viable and defensible belief system against which Forster's view can be compared.

A number of contexts commend themselves,<sup>42</sup> but the most viable is classic<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that the term as used in connection with Forster takes on a quite distinct meaning from its popular usage, to wit: 'Evangelical and Pentecostal, but in radical new mould ... (in which the church is governed) by divinely appointed apostles, prophets and elders'. Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, p. 31. In this sense Forster makes no claim to be a Restorationist. Notwithstanding, as he understands the term his is definitively a Restoration theology, that is, an interpretation constructed in the context of two distinct convictions: firstly, the notion that God is at work in the Church restoring the doctrines and practice of the Apostolic era, and secondly, a world-view dominated by a 'prophetic anticipation' of the return of Christ - when God will restore all things. The former recognises a distinct order and pattern as regards Church history, the latter, a clear set of characteristics that defines all history. Each represents a fundamental influence on Forster's Christian belief and practice, not least as regards principles in biblical hermeneutics; the construction of Christian doctrine; and critical appreciation in understanding Church history. Forster, interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> 1. Forster could be compared against the rise and influence of the Charismatic movement on local congregations within Roman Catholicism, or the Church of England.  
2. Forster could be examined as a straightforward comparison to current theological trends, especially (if not entirely linked to) the doctrine of Atonement. The past decade has witnessed continued contributions of thought on the Atonement including: Paul S Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: Christian idea of the Atonement* (1989); Richard

or conservative<sup>44</sup> Evangelical theology, the theology of Forster's declared constituency<sup>45</sup> and upbringing.<sup>46</sup> This allows for the broad identification of discontinuities or innovations of thought against a defined and limited backdrop,<sup>47</sup> and one that is generally recognised. Our task then becomes the straightforward comparison between Forster's teaching and contemporary Evangelicalism. More particularly it allows us to identify ways in which Forster marks a (i) confirmation, (ii) an evolution, (iii) a challenge, or (iv) an outright departure from those ideas.

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Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (1989); Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation: an essay in universalism and particularity* (1991); John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology: studies in the doctrine of the death of Christ* (1992); Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (1993); Bruce McCormack, *For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed tradition* (1993); Michael M Winter, *The Atonement* (1995); John Goldingay (ed.), *Atonement Today: a symposium at St John's College, Nottingham* (1995); Ronald Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ* (1997); Stephen Sykes, *The Story of Atonement* (1997); Darby Kathleen Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: atonement, abuse, and ransom* (1998).

3. A more distinctly historical analysis is also possible. Here, examination of Forster's teachings and practice compared to the churches of the first three centuries, especially the immediately post-apostolic era, finds strong appeal. It must be remembered that Forster explicitly claims his ministry marks a restoration of the Christianity (belief and practice) of the New Testament era. See footnote (41) above.

<sup>43</sup> 'Classic' has reference here, as *per* Forster himself, to certain Augustinian and Reformed distinctives held in common by Wesley and Whitefield, and Evangelicalism in general in the eighteenth century. Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus House, March 1997, transcript, pp. 8-12.

<sup>44</sup> This differentiation from 'liberal Evangelical' is an attempt to recognise the division between 'Fundamentalists' and 'Modernists' which took place in the opening decades of the twentieth century. See 'Walking Apart: Conservative and Liberal Evangelicals in the Early Twentieth Century', David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to 1980s* (Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1989), pp. 180-227.

<sup>45</sup> Both Forster and the Ichthus Fellowship are members of the Evangelical Alliance. Founded in 1846 to defend and propagate the historic Evangelical faith, these goals remain its purpose.

<sup>46</sup> 'I was reared in conservative Evangelicalism'. Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 28.

<sup>47</sup> The meaning of 'Evangelical' will be subject to considerable investigation later in this work, but we note here the definition of Carl F. H. Henry (for many years the editor of Christianity Today): 'Evangelical Christians are .. marked by their devotion to the sure Word of the Bible; they are committed to the inspired Scriptures as the divine rule of faith and practice. They affirm the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, including the Incarnation and virgin birth of Christ, His sinless life, substitutionary Atonement, and bodily resurrection as the ground of God's forgiveness of sinners, justification by faith alone, and the spiritual regeneration of all who trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ'. Carl Henry in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 358-359.

In conclusion then, the thesis will explicate Forster's doctrine of the Atonement *via* an appreciation of its broader theological context according to the following chapter outline: [1] first principles, [2] fundamentals in soteriology, [3] the doctrine of the Atonement, [4] its application in reconciliation, [5] its relationship to the Church, and [6] Forster's historical sources and influences, all the while identifying charismatic distinctives where they arise. The penultimate chapter [7] will then expound these same elements, but this time from a conservative Evangelical perspective, the second half of the chapter comparing them on a point by point basis, before concluding [8] with a critical reflection on what has been undertaken.

It needs to be noted that such a comparison is not part of a broader attempt to vindicate a particular viewpoint, nor conversely to argue that Forster is in error where he differs. It does, however, precisely identify the main focus of the thesis, which is to explicate and critique Forster's doctrine of the Atonement by comparing it to conservative Evangelical belief.

## **Research Method**

Forster's biographical development as a 'Charismatic' Christian provided the backdrop to the study, and has been alluded to wherever pertinent to creating a framework for an interpretative analysis. There was a broad and thorough examination of Forster's presuppositions, undertaken by way of constructing a comprehensive backdrop to his view of Atonement, which in turn helped identify underlying themes and key assumptions. The latter - especially his religious epistemology - was important in creating a structure against which to initially understand and latterly critique his doctrine of Atonement.

Subsequently, more specific examination was made of Forster's understanding by way of pursuing certain key objectives: noting and defining his preferred vocabulary; elaborating on themes and emphases; determining the relationship between redemption and Charismatic Renewal as he understands them; and identifying practical distinctives in the life of Ichthus which owe their relevance to this Atonement-Redemption-Charismatic-Renewal nexus.

The thesis continuously sought to identify Forster's major influences, literary

and personal, especially noting the acknowledged sources for his doctrine of Atonement. Some allusion has been made to contemporary scholarly debate, especially as regards its standing to Evangelical theology.

Pursuing this method has necessitated an exhaustive study of primary sources. Forster has written over a dozen books, made contributions to several others, and published a number of articles. Unpublished papers and notes - which number several hundred items - were kindly made available to the author by the Ichthus Office. Most of the latter were notes used for lectures and sermons. Proving helpful, they did, however, suffer the great disadvantage of being mostly unedited and undated. Three extensive interviews with Forster, and a number of others with members of his staff, provided important details relating to historical and biographical development, as well as theological clarification. Of equal importance was Forster's willingness to read through a majority of the draft chapters of this work, which allowed for both an increased level of certainty (that our representation of his ideas is correct) and clarity (ambiguities in his teaching have been directly tackled).

Cassette tapes provided another source of research material. Numbering literally thousands of items, and covering nearly forty years in Forster's ministry, these were a vital resource for the investigation. The sheer volume of material, and time required to sift through the subject matter, however, raised potential difficulties in methodology, necessitating careful decisions concerning selectivity. This was not so much as regards thematic messages, where choices were fairly straightforward according to issues of soteriology, but was a decided difficulty concerning biblical expositions, which easily numbered the majority. It was not always possible to decide beforehand whether an exposition of one book over and against another was more important, or one part of a book against another part. Forster's fairly strict hermeneutic, however, allowed us a degree of confidence that our examination of various sermons chosen *a priori* - from such texts as Genesis 3, Leviticus 16, and Isaiah 52-53 - yielded not only representative, but highly important insights into his theology.

Apart from issues relating to subject importance, there were issues of hermeneutics and teaching style. Forster could not always be taken strictly verbatim. More intimate situations often allow for experimentation in thought, certainly less



stress on terminological precision. Lectures aimed at university students differed from those given at various 'Bible Weeks', which in turn differed from those given to students on Ichthus' own Network Program.<sup>48</sup> Each had different strengths and weaknesses relating to analysis. Similar tensions related to sermons. Phonetic intonations permitted differences of emphasis outside an explicit vocabulary to be noted. All these factors as well as negative aspects related to audio materials such as inconsistency, contradiction, digression, polemic and so forth, were taken into account as these materials were used in examining Forster's teaching.

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<sup>48</sup> Begun in the early 1980s, the Network Programme draws students from around the world to embark upon a 'hands on' training course, which combines theological teaching with practical ministry in the areas of evangelism and pastoral care.

## Chapter One: Forster's Theological Framework

The construction of Forster's entire Christian belief system begins and ends with, 'Is this proposition, this idea or conclusion, biblical?' 'Is it according to what Christ, the apostles, and prophets taught?' In this manner Forster has consciously tested Christian doctrines and propositions, orthodoxies, 'shibboleths' indeed, before believing or teaching them.

A second major context against which Forster's thinking has developed is Christian history. Most of what has influenced him here is found in the early Church Fathers (ante-Nicene) and various 'radical' 'fringe' and 'heretical' groups<sup>1</sup> (his own terms) significantly including the Anabaptists. Relatively little appears to be taken directly from Roman Catholicism or classic Protestantism.<sup>2</sup>

A third determinative that has profoundly affected Forster's theological development is his theory of knowledge. Born out of his quest for personal certainty, 'How do I know that God is real, and that the Bible is indeed His revelation to me?' answers to these questions provided clear principles and parameters against which Forster's doctrine and practice have been drawn from the Scriptures.

### The Bible

The veracity of the Bible is fundamental to all that Roger Forster believes and practices. As a member of the Evangelical Alliance<sup>3</sup> he affirms, 'the revelation of the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Those in every century who seek to put the Bible first, and by the power of the Spirit experience a living Christ'. Forster, 'Radical Church History: The Anabaptists', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Arguably, the defining elements of 'classic Protestantism', may be stated as:

1. The Augustinian doctrine of original sin.
2. The Augustinian doctrine of predestination.
3. The Anselmic doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ.
4. The Lutheran doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

See: Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) v.2, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> An umbrella organisation representing over one million Christians in 20 denominations throughout the UK. 'Established in 1846, the Evangelical Alliance brings together Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Church of

trium God given in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments'.<sup>4</sup> As to the mode of their interpretation he places himself in the tradition of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Isaac Newton (1642-1717).<sup>5</sup> Forster understands their hermeneutic, firstly, as containing an underlying agreement that the 'mental approach and frame of mind in faith and science are similar';<sup>6</sup> and, secondly, as respecting the nature of scientific and religious (Christian) knowledge, that 'both the "book of God's word" and the "book of God's works" are true and infallible'.<sup>7</sup> Finally, that there exists a complementarity of relationship between the interpretation of the Bible (theology), and the interpretation of nature (science), with human apprehension of both being subject to distortion and limitation.<sup>8</sup>

The most concentrated examination concerning the nature of God's revelation in Scripture, is found in Forster's exhaustive treatment, undertaken with Paul Marston, on the relationship between faith and science, aptly entitled *Reason and Faith: Do Modern Science and Faith Really Conflict?* (1989). The work examines textual reliability; the canonisation of the Scriptures; the intention of the Genesis accounts of the creation and flood; and an overview of the relationship between 'faith' and 'science' in history. Particular detail is given to Genesis' creation and cosmology, and its interpretation by theologians since the apostolic age. The scholarly nature of the study is underpinned by the contributions of Dr. Paul Marston<sup>9</sup> whose own Ph.D. thesis examined certain interactions between science and the Christian faith.<sup>10</sup>

The consideration given is chiefly apologetic in nature. Forster and Marston's goal is not so much to explain why they believe the Bible, nor even re-affirm the faith

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Scotland and many others to co-operate in prayer, evangelism and social action - to work as one body, whether locally in our neighbourhoods or nationally through Parliament and the media on the pressing issues of our day'. <<http://www.eauk.org>>

<sup>4</sup> 'Basis of Faith' <<http://www.eauk.org/beliefs/basisoff.htm>>

<sup>5</sup> Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, pp. 17, 247f.

<sup>6</sup> Faith and science as knowledge share the same 'interpretative schema', 'consistency, coherence, comprehensiveness and congruity'. Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 257. Further exploration of this theme provides the subject matter this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 266.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>9</sup> Presently Senior Lecturer, Science Faculty, Lancashire University.

<sup>10</sup> Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 248. Also, biographical information on

of others through empirical evidence and reasoned defence (though that is included), but to remove a possible obstacle to those who might believe the Christian message if that message is separated from a modern literalism of the kind that insists on a six twenty-hour day creation, and literal world-wide flood.<sup>11</sup>

Concerning six-day creationism, the authors note the recent and therefore suspect nature of that view. Emphatically, they claim, it was not the understanding of early Christian writers. Barnabas, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Methodius, Lactantius, Theophilus and John of Damascus, among others, interpreted 'the "days" of Genesis 1 to mean millennia'.<sup>12</sup> 'Naïve literalism was never Christian orthodoxy'.<sup>13</sup> Particular attention is paid to Origen, who asks (c. 231),

What man of intelligence ... will consider a reasonable statement that the first and the second and the third day, in which there are said to be both morning and evening, existed without sun and moon and stars, while the first day was even without a heaven? And who could be found so silly as to believe that God, after the manner of a farmer, 'planted trees in paradise eastward in Eden', ... And ... when God is said to 'walk in paradise in the evening' ... I do not think that anyone will doubt that these are figurative expressions which indicate certain mysteries through a semblance of history.<sup>14</sup>

'Modern literalists' are not only criticised for historical reasons (the very modernity of their view) but for serious hermeneutical inconsistencies ('no intelligent Christian can possibly take it [Genesis] literally in all respects'.)<sup>15</sup> In particular, Forster and Marston note the improbability of a literal snake that was doomed to eat dust, not to mention its literal seed, nor that God literally breathed and spoke. Further criticism

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Marston, back cover.

<sup>11</sup> As F. F. Bruce says in his Foreword, 'The trouble very often is that young people have received their faith as part of a package deal, in which the truth of the gospel is wrapped up in a good deal of expendable material. It is sometimes difficult for them to distinguish what is expendable from what is essential - or to use the old metaphor, to distinguish the baby from the bath water. If a Bible class leader assures boys and girls that a consistent Christian faith requires them to believe that the world was made in 144 hours between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago, they will find it difficult to square with what they are taught in school, and may conclude that Christian faith has been undermined by scientific knowledge. What Christian faith actually teaches is quite different'. Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

is reserved for the view held by Morris and others of the Institute for Creation Research *genre*, that the second law of thermodynamics did not exist in an un-fallen world:

Let us be clear how novel is this suggestion. [It] is saying that as originally created, all animals were vegetarian, and there was no animal death. Then at the moment of that Fall of Adam, God 'withdrew' his power in some way, leaving the physical world to a new system of physics ...<sup>16</sup>

Where these and other interpretations of Genesis err, is in their failure to understand the *purpose* of its early chapters. They were not to explain the mechanics of creation, but the fact of creation. To the ancient world they were an announcement that the universe is not eternal, that the heavenly bodies are not deities, but were created by God. This would have been very significant to the first hearers of Genesis, many of whom worshipped sun, moon and stars, but now are challenged by the idea that these are but created things.<sup>17</sup>

A similar critique is made of Noah's flood. While refusing to rule out a global catastrophe, Forster and Marston see it as unlikely, and interpret the intended focus as lying on the symbolic import of the events not on the specific details.

The point at issue was not whether the flood was global, but whether or not God is active in his own world. Our God is a God of morality and judgement who acts in history - this is central to Christianity ... whether the judgement was applied to the 'land' meaning a limited area or literally across the planet is [not] relevant ... to the Christian faith.<sup>18</sup>

There are two further elements in Forster's approach to the Bible which merit consideration. First is the distinction 'between the written Scriptures and the Word of God'. Secondly, there is the distinction held by many Charismatic Christians between the Scriptures as revelation of God's will, and various experiences of the Holy Spirit as a continued revelation of His will. Concerning the first, Forster explains his position using a photographic analogy. In a portrait of his wife, he notes, the picture includes his wife, has his wife as its focus, but embraces a number of other things in the background that complete the photograph, yet are not his wife:

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 345-346.

<sup>17</sup> If, as Evangelicals claim, Genesis was written by Moses, a significant context would have been the deities of Egypt such as the solar cult of the god Ra.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Similarly, there is material in the Scripture, which is essential to grasp if I am going to understand the Word of God, but there are other things that are not specifically in themselves essential ... since something else may have done instead for us to grasp the vision of the God who actually is.<sup>19</sup>

With this in mind, says Forster, the distinctions of 'inerrancy' and 'infallibility' becomes meaningless. 'The Bible is infallible in the truth that it asserts, rather than the Bible is infallible because of its individual words'.<sup>20</sup> The actual words and the actual word series employed by the writer are not the point. Neither is the issue of whether every word is in the right place, rather it is the actual truth that is there which is the substantive issue. Forster explains,

For Eskimos, 'The Lord is my seal keeper', rather than a shepherd [would be the correct translation], because they wouldn't know what a shepherd is. [If this is true] then it must be that the actual ... words written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - could have been other words - as long as the truth that those words enshrine is still there.<sup>21</sup>

This is not to say that the words are unimportant, 'If I want the truth without the words I lose the truth.'<sup>22</sup> On the other hand,

If I want the words, and say that the words are the most important thing, I am not actually saying a true thing. The words are not important, it is the truth that is important - but I can't have one without the other.<sup>23</sup>

The 'truth' itself though, is God and the person of God. It is not the photograph that we are seeking to know, nor its literal depiction, but 'livingly' know the God behind the photograph. This is not contrary to 'a high view of the Scriptures'<sup>24</sup> but does affirm that God can only be known in the Scriptures through the Person of the Holy Spirit, not least because,

I don't know the tones in which He spoke certain things. It can make all the difference whether He said passionately 'God is love', or indifferently 'God is love', or harshly 'you shall not', or pleads 'you shall not'. Again it makes all the difference in the world whether He said 'woe to you Pharisees' with sorrow or

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<sup>19</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus House, London, March 11, 1997, transcript, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. Added emphasis.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

whether He said it viciously. Thus, discerning the attitude in which the words were spoken or written is *necessary* to get a *living* picture of the Word.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning the relationship between the Bible as the enScripturated revelation of God, and the ongoing intervention and leading of God, Forster uses the idea that Bible is like a drama of five parts. Acts one to three are the historical events of redemption past, the fifth speaks of eternity to come, both are present in the Bible, but the fourth act is missing from the text because it is being played out in the present Church age. Though the future has been established, God is speaking in this present age, coherently and consistently of course with what He says has been, and will be. This is important, not only in reference to defining the nature of the Christians and the Christian Church, their current relationship to God, and His to them, but also from the view of the eschaton. For by carefully and correctly 'hearing', thence doing, God's present Word to us, the Church hastens the day of Christ's return.<sup>26</sup>

Forster is keen to stress that such 'hearing', while subjective, chiefly comes through the Spirit 'speaking' in our meditation of the objective enScripturated Word. To know God's present leading, to know the reality of continued revelation, and thus to know God Himself, it is not just a question of being attentive to the Bible as propositional truth, but as it were 'living' and 'breathing in' the dynamic reality that is the Word. Though not complete in the sense of including present revelation, the Scriptures, and the Spirit working through them, nonetheless remain central in the mediation of God's present Word to us.

## The Early Church

Concerning the relationship between historical theology and Forster's spiritual development, profoundly determinative is his conclusion that Western Christianity (his term) has largely evolved within the biblically alien parameters of neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Among its theologians and teachers, the first three centuries of the Christian Church witnessed the intellectual abandonment of the original apostolic paradigm, giving way to 'the new theology',<sup>27</sup> the 'appalling

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. Added emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), p. 205.

apostasy of Constantinianism'.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere he comments on the 'disaster that Constantinianism brought to the Church in its early centuries, changing the very character of our faith in less than decades'.<sup>29</sup>

This deviation, largely unperceived at the time, began with the Greek Fathers, continued under their Latin successors, and reached a point of 'no return' with the Roman Imperial Church-State settlement, 'the massive intellect and influence of Augustine of Hippo sealing the whole process'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, by the early fifth century what was spoken of as 'orthodoxy' in fact represented a change or qualification to 'almost every [original] Christian doctrine'.<sup>31</sup> The focus of the change was the doctrine of grace, or the relationship between God's offer of salvation and the nature of man's ability to respond to that offer. Forster cites Calvin to make his point.

Ambrose, Origen and Jerome were of the opinion that God dispenses his grace among men according to the use of which He foresees that each will make of it. It may be added that Augustine was for some time also of this opinion; but after he had made some progress in knowledge of Scripture he not only retracted it as evidently false, but also powerfully confuted it.<sup>32</sup>

More particularly Forster cites the influence of Greek monism and believes this aspect of Hellenic philosophy was the most significant in corrupting the early post-apostolic Church. It produced a mode of thinking which he calls 'theistic monism' which, in turn had a negative influence upon the development of theology proper, cosmology and anthropology.

Theologically, 'theistic monism' gave rise to a perspective on God's character and nature, which is heavily at odds with the biblical portrait. This will be dealt with in further detail below,<sup>33</sup> but one change that is seen as 'key' in reshaping Western thought, and its view of grace, pertains to the Church's perception of divine

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<sup>28</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: The Reformation', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Forster, *A Purpose and a Destiny for every Nation?* (Ichthus Media Services, c.1995), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus House, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Forster, *Celebration* (Ichthus Media Services), June 1991, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3, 22, 8. Cited in Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy*, (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), p. 205.

<sup>33</sup> See, next chapter, 'Foundations for a theology of Atonement', and particularly, 'Forster's Doctrine of God', p. 35f.



sovereignty, which became essentially fatalistic, 'everything which happens is God's direct will'.<sup>34</sup> This includes the sins of the wicked, and indeed the works of Satan, all of which are subsumed as direct expressions of the omnipotence of God.

In cosmic terms, the relationship of the physical world to the spiritual also became conceptually distorted. Western thought came to unduly emphasise the transcendence of the heavenly realms, the immediacy and dominance of the world, thereby discounting their immense significance each to the other. Early Church awareness of the power and influence of the spiritual realm upon human kind was lost, and thus, a later world-view failed to recognise the spiritual structures of the universe through which humanity is affected by the realm of Satan and the demonic.<sup>35</sup>

Anthropologically, the biblical interpretation in which man was perceived as a tripartite composition of body, soul and spirit was replaced by a duality that defined man as soul and a body.<sup>36</sup> Forster, noting Kant's terms 'noumena' and 'phenomena', argues that even this distinction failed to hold, as the body came to be understood as but an expression of the 'real' substance. According to Forster the melding of 'soul' and 'spirit' explains much of Western Christianity's failure to make provision for man's spiritual needs outside those immediate to personal justification, and thus diminishing our perception (and benefit) of the full nature and scope of Christ's work for us in Atonement.<sup>37</sup> Quoting a missionary friend, he elaborates,

We have ministered to people's minds (souls) and also to their bodies, but we have neglected their spirits because we confuse them with their souls. We have converted their minds by explaining and teaching the gospel. We have helped their bodies with loving care, food, clothes, medicine, and alleviated their social conditions. If however, their spirits are bruised, broken or even in bondage, we find they still resort to witch doctors, gurus or mystics to gain 'spirit relief' and

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<sup>34</sup>Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), p. 21. Original emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* John Wimber and others in the Church Growth Movement call this 'the excluded middle'. See: *Power Evangelism - Signs and Wonders Today* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p. 82. Forster makes clear reference to this in a sermon entitled, 'Reality and the supernatural', preached fifteen years before the publication of Wimber's book.

<sup>36</sup> Forster, 'Reality and the Supernatural', sermon, transcript, c.1970, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 27, 1992, transcript, p. 17.

'inner freedom'.<sup>38</sup>

Claiming the early Church for inspiration, Forster presents his world-view: 'theistic dualism'. This 'biblical' world-view posits divine omnipotence against the backdrop of 'a strong, very powerful, evil entity called Satan',<sup>39</sup> who stands in actual defiance to God. It is in this that ultimately explains the negative circumstances of life, not God's decrees, providence, or secret counsels. Satan, though unequal to God, is nevertheless understood to oppose God in ways that more 'traditional' Evangelical definitions of omnipotence would not allow. The latter qualify Satan's rebellion to the point of effectively denying its authentic nature: 'Some would go so far as to state specifically that there is no real conflict between God and Satan'.<sup>40</sup> In much Christian thought then the 'fight' is really a 'fake'.<sup>41</sup>

Forster agrees that 'traditional' theologies don't sound like monism, but nonetheless insists that the their teaching is essentially 'a monistic approach ... using theistic terms'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly he is aware that in speaking of theistic dualism he will encounter opposition from many conservative Evangelicals. Anticipating this criticism, Forster is keen to show that 'dualism' as it is generally understood, that is, in Zoroastrian and Manichaeic definitions of evil as an eternal principle opposed to good 'is really monism'. As he comments, if you have equal, infinite, powerful forces, 'it is just semantics that has made them into two'.<sup>43</sup>

If good and evil are co-eternal, neither has priority over the other, one cannot defeat the other, therefore, they are one. The same is true in a polytheistic religion such as Hinduism. Everything is god, and therefore god is everything, both good and evil.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Forster, 'Reality and the Supernatural', sermon, transcript, c.1970, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 27, 1992, transcript, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Forster and Marston cites Calvin, 'Satan also, ... himself is so completely the servant of the Most High as to act only by His command'. Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), p. 31, n.1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 27.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

'Monism' imposed upon biblical cosmology has served to stress the reality of the physical world at the expense of the spiritual 'middle'. Consequently Western theology has reinforced its neglect of man's spirit by neglecting the spiritual realm which affects humanity, and by which many aspects of the affairs of the world have been influenced and governed.

### Christian Epistemology

The final and certainly determinative *a priori* in shaping Forster's view of Atonement, is his epistemology. As a theory of knowledge it embraces two presuppositions: first, that mankind's *essential* nature is the rational faculty that allows him to apprehend truth; secondly, that God is Truth and, therefore, the source of all truth, and that *ipso facto* He is known, in some measure, by humankind universally.<sup>45</sup> Concerning the mechanics of the former, Forster says that human noetic capability is rooted in 'intuition', the faculty by which empirical data is processed into conclusions. Further, these derivations are said to take place according to the principles of 'logic' - a series of thoughts joined together by 'jumps' which link one thought to another, and itself assumes that such jumps can be taken, and are 'reasonable'. The process of data collection - *via* the five senses - is similarly assumed accurate enough for 'objective' conclusions to be reached.<sup>46</sup>

'Intuition' though a 'natural' faculty must be understood as nevertheless maintained by divine fiat. Forster interprets the words 'He upholds all things by the word of his power',<sup>47</sup> as including humanity's capacity to know. Similarly, cognition is held to be integral to God's maintenance of our existence: 'God is helping all men to think, all the time, everywhere'.<sup>48</sup>

Because I am a total creature it is of necessity that I am referring to my Creator for understanding, as with everything else. As I depend upon Him for my breath, so I

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<sup>45</sup> That is, 'known in the strict and proper sense'. This is *contra* to Calvin and others who argue that man by nature only possesses a 'bare knowledge' of God which is not knowledge in this sense. See: Calvin *Institutes*, 1.3.1, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 1:3. NASB.

<sup>48</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 12.

depend on Him for the illumination of the heart and mind.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, 'even an atheist is using God when he is working out arguments to prove that God doesn't exist.'<sup>50</sup>

While following the tradition of 'classic Evangelicalism'<sup>51</sup> in acknowledging man's dependence upon God for knowledge, Forster differs from these men in his refusal to allow for a compartmentalisation between 'natural' and 'spiritual' truth, and knowledge of God from knowledge of the world in general.<sup>52</sup> There can be no legitimate distinction in the way man apprehends 'spiritual truth' from other 'truth' since 'truth' to have definition must be referenced to an absolute, that is, God Himself. Spiritual incapacity to know truth cannot be divorced from a natural incapacity to know truth. 'If my spirit is "totally depraved" [then] my intellect is "totally depraved" ... and there is no way that I can receive *anything*, therefore, in my understanding'.<sup>53</sup>

Forster also disagrees with that interpretation of 'total depravity' that posits that man is able to know the truth, but because of a 'sin nature' is unwilling to receive it.<sup>54</sup> A constitutional disposition, which differentiates between cognition and the

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Forster acknowledges here his debt to C. S. Lewis' observation, 'When you argue against God you are arguing against the very power that makes you able to argue at all'. Quoted by Clyde Kilby, in Carolyn Keefe, *C. S. Lewis: Speaker and Teacher* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> 'Classic Evangelicalism' is used through out this thesis to describe the body of belief as it was generally held by the first generation of 'Methodists', both Arminian and Calvinist (c. 1738-1770). Contextualised against a robust doctrine of Original Sin, these Evangelicals preached justification by faith alone, an experience of the new birth, and holiness in Christian living. See: Timothy L. Smith, *Whitefield and Wesley on the New Birth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), p. 11f.

<sup>52</sup> Thus Francis Turretin, the renowned Scholastic Protestant, argues the spiritual truth of 'the Scriptures are only clear to those who have its pages illuminated by the Holy Spirit', which ultimately are the elect alone. See: Douglas Jacobsen, 'Purity or Tolerance: The Social Dimension of Hermeneutics in the Calvinist, Arminian and American Evangelical Traditions', *Evangelical Journal* 11 (1993) pp 5-15 at pp. 5f.

<sup>53</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17. There are clear echoes of C. S. Lewis here, 'I disbelieve that doctrine (total depravity), partly on the logical ground that if our depravity were total we should not know ourselves to be depraved, and partly because experience shows us much goodness in human nature'. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 54-55.

<sup>54</sup> This is the view propounded by Jonathan Edwards in his *Freedom of the Will* (1754).

faculty of the will, must be understood as representing a complete contradiction.<sup>55</sup> Thus to Forster 'free will' (that is, both the ability both to understand, and to make positive moral choices, especially in things spiritual) is a necessary element to the cognitive process lying at the very heart of what it means to be human. By insisting on the equal necessity of divine aid or dependence upon God for the will's 'free' operation Forster avoids the charge of 'Pelagianism'.<sup>56</sup> At the same time he has an answer to those we may term as 'material determinists', that is, those thinkers who perceive human life as essentially programmed by factors of biological inheritance and social influence.

It is in the rôle of 'reason' that we find the heart of Forster's epistemic framework. Though subject to distortion and weakness, and variance within humanity as a whole, reason is *the* foundation of cognition. 'If we cannot rely on ... [reason] to bring us to conclusions then we have no hope at all in thinking'.<sup>57</sup> Reason is essential for the recognition of spiritual, as all truth. The Reformed idea that 'faith' apprehends spiritual knowledge by a direct, immediate and supra-rational cognition, through what Calvin calls the *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti*,<sup>58</sup> is also deemed impossible. All truth by definition must be rational and, *ipso facto*, held in the framework of reason. Therefore, the Christian knowledge is also according to reason and is 'reasonable': it does not depend upon Calvin's kind of revelation. 'You could anticipate that somewhere in the world - without opening a Bible - there would be something like the

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The Edwards scholar, Perry Miller sums up the former's theological position thus: 'You are free to do what you can do, but you are not free to do what you won't do. You are prevented by walls or by congenital idiocy, but you are free to be righteous: "There are faculties of mind, and capacity of nature, and everything else sufficient but a disposition: nothing is wanting but a will"'. Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 258, cited in James L. Prest, *The Theology of Original Sin according to Horace Bushnell* (Rome: Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae de Urbe, 1976), p. 76.

<sup>55</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus House, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> 'Pelagianism', that is, 'after Pelagius': A fifth century British monk who on witnessing the moral laxity of his generation, not least in Rome herself, preached a robust doctrine of human moral ability. Not least through the influence of Augustine, his views were declared heretical.

<sup>57</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4; 1.7.5; 1.7.13.

story of Jesus, if you just sit down and do a lot of hard thinking'.<sup>59</sup>

Forster elaborates his presuppositions by reference to historical theology and philosophical argument. Both the more scholarly<sup>60</sup> apologetic, *Reason and Faith* (1989) and its populist successor, *Christianity, Evidence and Truth*<sup>61</sup> (1995) seek to demonstrate the essential harmony between what is rational (scientific) and what is of faith,<sup>62</sup> in particular that both share an interpretative schema which meets the four-fold criteria of consistency, coherence, comprehensiveness, and congruity.<sup>63</sup> In terms of historical precedence, Forster and Marston's appeal is explicitly to Bacon and Descartes (1596-1650), and implicitly to the system of thought called the Scottish School of Realism or 'Common Sense Philosophy'.

Common Sense Philosophy proposes the following. Firstly, that human perception is a dynamic activity in which the mind establishes contact with the 'real empirical lineaments of the thing itself'.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, such perception is both possible and trustworthy because man possess within themselves an innate series of reference points - certain self evident truths - called 'common sense'. Thirdly, 'through the inductive analysis of objective data, errors of sense and reason are avoided, knowledge of truth is attained, and certainty realised'.<sup>65</sup>

In pressing for a 'reasonable' Christianity, Forster and Marston deliberately challenge the contrary intellectual ethos of contemporary British Evangelicalism. To

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<sup>59</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> 'As it happens, the philosophy of science is one of Paul Marston's specialist interests, and he began his study of it under the teaching of Popper, Lakatos and Feyerabend in the LSE in the late 1960s'. Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 248.

<sup>61</sup> Forster and Marston, *Christianity, Evidence and Truth* (Crowborough: Monarch Publications, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> See: *Christianity, Evidence and Truth*, Chapters 12 and 13, 'Relationship between biblical faith and scientific knowledge', and 'Conflict throughout history between Christianity and science?' Also, Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, pp. 247-342.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>64</sup> Theodore Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Paul K. Helseth, 'Right Reason and the Princeton Mind: The Moral Context', *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 77 p. 16.

the latter, science has little to say to the interpretation of faith, yet in adopting such an approach these men and women - so Forster asserts - are seriously departing from *their* Evangelical heritage. From the latter half of the sixteenth century Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and, subsequently, Isaac Newton (1642-1717) argued for the harmony of science with theology, and in so doing laid the foundation for an intellectual renaissance in the Universities of Scotland and England,<sup>66</sup> and North America.<sup>67</sup> This Enlightenment had its spiritual complement in the revival of classic Protestant Christianity known in Great Britain as the Methodist Revival<sup>68</sup> and in North America as the 'Great Awakening'<sup>69</sup> (c. 1735-1770). Locke provided a philosophy that thoroughly refuted the Scepticism, Deism and Unitarianism of the era, and pro-actively provided a new apologetic for the gospel. Bacon's idea of a 'two book' revelation of the Christian Faith - nature and Scripture - was utilised to provide an effective apologetic for the Christian faith that it was quickly and widely embraced among Christian thinkers. Forster and Marston also seek to show that such an approach did not represent a fundamental change from earlier Christian epistemology: the essence of Bacon's ideas was in complete harmony with what went before.<sup>70</sup> This continuity was realised at the time, and in part explains the speed with which the ideas were embraced.<sup>71</sup>

The 'fundamentalist' dichotomy separating faith from science is not only unevangelical, say Forster and Marston, but is 'aberrant' and 'should be resisted'.<sup>72</sup> Not

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<sup>66</sup> Alister McGrath comments 'the period 1690 to 1750 may be characterised as the period in which rationalism dominated English theology', with negative consequences, he notes, for the orthodox doctrine of justification. *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification From 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge University Press, 1986). p. 142.

<sup>67</sup> See: Sydney E. Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy in American Theology', *Church History* 24 (1955) p. 257f. William McLoughlin, (ed.), *The American Evangelicals 1800-1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). George M. Marsdon, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). David F. Wells, (ed.), *Reformed Theology in America: A History of its Modern Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985).

<sup>68</sup> A. Skevington Wood in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 652-653.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce Shelly in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 428-429.

<sup>70</sup> Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 268.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

least this because this artificial separation has promoted an erroneous theology *via* a flawed hermeneutic,<sup>73</sup> to wit, by agreeing to a distinction between knowledge as faith, and knowledge as reason, an intellectual device was introduced which allows theologians to posit propositions which within a rational framework would be inadmissible. Two or more contradictory statements are held as truth, the inconsistency or illogic is bridged through 'faith'. This is the route to intellectual suicide:

Once the Christian admits that there is a real and complete contradiction in his thinking he can give up his claim to talk sense and may logically make any statement he chooses, however outrageous.<sup>74</sup>

This is quite unacceptable. Any conclusion that contradicts reason must be invalid. No revelation has been given to humanity that will violate the reasoning process. This is how Forster interprets Moses' words in Leviticus, 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our sons'.<sup>75</sup> While the extent of what may be known is limited by human infirmities and weakness, faith will never require an existential, logical or any other kind of 'leap' to bridge the gap between what is reasonable to what is not. On this count Forster flatly rejects the idea of antinomy.<sup>76</sup>

Forster is mindful to show that even the most sublime doctrines of the Christian faith may be embraced and expressed by reason:

As a Unitarian theologian you might say that the Trinity is 'unreasonable', but if as mathematician I ask you, 'What is wrong with the concept of  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ ?' you surely have to admit, 'There is nothing wrong'. Logically then you can actually conceive of three integers in a relationship of a unity mathematically, even if in a spatial model three heads and six arms is rather grotesque. So the Trinity is not unreasonable. It may be a difficult concept, but it is not unreasonable because you

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Hugh Silvester, *Arguing With God*, quoted in Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), p. 32 n.14.

<sup>75</sup> Deuteronomy 29:29. NASB. Quoted in 'Original Sin', transcript, 1985, of a lecture given to the Network Training Program. Also, Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, pp. 19-20.

<sup>76</sup> 'Antinomy: A contradiction between two laws', or 'paradox'. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Forster would cite the Reformed distinction between God's revealed will and His secret will as an example of an antinomy. Indeed he critiques at length Augustine's support for this idea in his *Enchiridion*, 24 & 27. *God's Strategy* (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), pp. 217-218.



can mathematically draw up a finite statement of it.<sup>77</sup>

This is not to say Forster glibly believes that the Bible is capable of easy apprehension, nor that there are many aspects to the Christian faith that for a period time may escape our (individual and collective) rational apprehension. Nor is it to say all Christian truth can be neatly reduced to a series of formulae. Yet it is to affirm that for Bible to be believed it must be understood in logical terms, that is, rationally apprehended. It is not legitimate to appeal in a simplistic manner; 'if the Bible says it, I believe it - even if it doesn't make sense!'<sup>78</sup>

This notwithstanding, rational apprehension *requires* the aid of God. There are two operations of the Holy Spirit through which men come to attain spiritual truth. Common to all is 'inspired knowledge', or what could be termed a 'natural' or 'innate' knowledge of God.<sup>79</sup> Forster prefers the term 'inspiration', possibly because it more acutely reflects the necessary activity and rôle of the Spirit: 'The true light that enlightens every man .. coming into the world.'<sup>80</sup> Inspired knowledge is what defines man as the 'image of God'. It is this which constitutes him as a thinking and, therefore, moral being. Destitute of this ability, true cognisance would be impossible since meaning has no form unless it is (at least implicitly) referenced to God Himself. In this way Forster further refutes any 'gap' between the basis of natural and spiritual knowledge.

Separate to common 'inspiration', there is the 'revealed knowledge' given to some. 'Revelation' is a 'more direct work' of the Holy Spirit by which God communicates to humanity in a 'specific way' that is 'over and above' His work in inspiration.<sup>81</sup> This definition could be taken to mean far more than Forster actually intends. The reader may assume not only an experiential difference between

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<sup>77</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> This seems to correspond with Locke's 'self evident truths'. Forster presents three such truths in a sermon on Psalm 8. The reality and existence of God; that man is made in the image of God; that man is a reasonable being. Forster, 'What is Man?' unpublished paper, c.1970, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> John 1:9. RSV.

<sup>81</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p.

revelation and inspiration, but also one that is very marked. It is often supposed that 'revelation' represents an interruption in the cognitive process creating a dissonance that would peculiarly identify and thus self-authenticate God's special revelatory word. This supernatural authenticating element, however, Forster explicitly denies. To the recipient of revelation there is necessarily neither an unusual sentient nor noetic distinction. This is because both in His intuitive and revelatory work the Spirit communicates truth in the same mediated way, that is, *via* the rational and deductive process. Revelation is superior to inspiration only in terms of the degree of knowledge given, and even that is not clear to the one who is subject to the revelation. There will be a sense, perhaps normative, that one is hearing from God, but no more so than the serendipitous conception of some valid abstraction or theory brings the thought 'this is true'. Forster admits that many will find this difficult to accept, and that he is aware of this. Nevertheless, 'I would still maintain that there is no absolute difference ... between inspiration and revelation.'<sup>82</sup>

Forster admits that in this view revelation loses the 'special' status given it in other Christian traditions, both in the sense of the nature of that revelation, and in its being reserved for a spiritual 'elite'. This makes for a number of significant implications. No longer can we think of a group of men (prophets and apostles) who were consciously aware of an unusual work, but men and women who just like Christians today, heard from God, only perhaps more often (since they didn't have the Bible). The major difference with contemporary believers is that some of what they heard was recorded through divine intervention, and recognised as the Word of God - the Scriptures. Subjectively, however, there was no difference between their experience of revelation and that of contemporary believers. Equally there is no authoritative difference between the revelation they received and that which is received now. This provides for a chronological uniformity in the way that God speaks to men and 'demythologises' the revelation given to the prophets and apostles of old, as that which was unusual and unique. Apologetically this provides Forster with an important rationale in arguing for the continuance of revelation into present day Christian experience, that is, his stance as a 'Charismatic' Christian.

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<sup>82</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.

Forster's view has the strength of providing a clear explanation for the validity and normative status of contemporary revelation. At the same time he recognises that it raises a significant theological question: Since revelation is not 'immediate' (that is, it does not contain an infallible self authentication) it begs the question, 'How can a man know that God has spoken?'<sup>83</sup> The Old Testament prophets, he says, faced the same problem. How did any of them know that they heard from God?

Firstly, says Forster, there was an internal correspondence. That is, a positive correlation between the Spirit's inspiration *in* them and the Spirit's revelation that came *to* them.<sup>84</sup> Secondly, the revelation they received was consistent with previous revelation: there was no element of contradiction. Thirdly the revelation they 'heard' was internally coherent. Finally, it corresponded with other things that they knew empirically to be true (rational) and good (moral). Essentially, therefore, revelation was recognised by its alignment of *reason, morality, coherence* and intuitive or *self-evident truth*.

Within the process of verification Forster presents intuitive awareness ('does this feel right?') as having chronological priority, and deduction ('does this add up?') as having qualitative primacy. Revelation, however strongly felt, is subject to the test: 'does this make sense?' Without correspondence to logic, revelation can neither be received nor be established as true. It is important to note that Forster derived these principles from his own early quest to settle the veracity of the Scriptures: "If the Bible had said that the moon was made of cream cheese and empirical evidence demonstrated otherwise, the Bible could not be the Word of God".<sup>85</sup> In the final analysis, therefore, it is God given reason that allows man to establish God's Word.

Forster argues these epistemic principles are found in the Church Fathers'

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<sup>83</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Given the assertion that there is no absolute difference between inspiration and revelation it is difficult to know what Forster means by this. If we take 'inspiration' to mean 'self evident truth' and revelation to mean 'truth beyond the self evident' then he is speaking of a consistency between what one knows to be true, with the sense of what the Spirit is saying now.

<sup>85</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 13.

formulation of the canon. Their decisions as to which writings to include in the canon came *via* a process of intuition interacting with reasoned deduction. They sought for a correspondence between what they felt to be true in their hearts with what their minds deducted was true:

They also had this action from outside to inside. They were being presented with documents that were claiming to be revelation. They weren't producing those documents themselves, so first they were presented with the outward revelation and then they had to make their decisions based on their own, and the Church's intuitive processes.<sup>86</sup>

Forster is also aware that these principles have important practical implications for the Christian, especially relates to rôle of the Scriptures in day-to-day living. Firstly, if the prophets had to establish the fact that they were hearing from God, and if the Church had to establish that the Bible was indeed the Word of God, then it is incumbent upon individual believers to establish the fact that God has spoken to them through what they become persuaded is His Word. The Bible cannot be believed because the Church says it is to be trusted. Every Christian must have his own experience through which he affirms that 'the Lord has said'.<sup>87</sup>

Secondly, this epistemology of spiritual knowledge bears intimate relationship to one's approach to hermeneutics. If an interpretation of a text gives birth to an 'illogical' theology then there must be a misunderstanding of the Scriptures. *A priori* there is no possibility that the Holy Spirit could inspire confidence in something that contradicts reason. Thus,

It is ... nonsense to say that God could create men who were free, but force them to do His will. It is no use having recourse to Jesus' saying, 'All things are possible to God', for He said this in context of rich men entering the kingdom of Heaven. God can perform miracles and do what is impossible for man; but the words 'force a man to freely do God's will' do not state impossibility. They do not in fact state anything at all, for they are a meaningless word series, and the addition of 'God can' in front of them does not remove their meaninglessness.<sup>88</sup>

More profoundly, the continuity of spiritual revelation highlights the error in imputing to the Bible an innate objectivity that stands in contradistinction to the

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<sup>86</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.

<sup>87</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 16.

<sup>88</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley: Send the Light Trust, 1973), p. 33. n.16.

believer's personal experience of the Spirit. If the veracity of the Scriptures is established *via* what we may call a process of inspired deduction, it follows, arguing from the greater to the lesser, that this same process lies at the heart of the interpretative process and beyond. In other words, if the Holy Spirit must bring each individual to affirm that the Scriptures *are* the Word of God, why thereafter make His work of interpretation and personal leading inferior to, or altogether neglected in favour of the written word?

In this Forster seeks not to deprecate the Bible, but confront the tendency of some to 'bibliolatry', the 'nineteenth century concept that the Bible is objective and the Holy Spirit is subjective'.<sup>89</sup> This reflects two concerns. Initially with those Evangelicals who emphasise an 'intellectual' approach to hermeneutics at the expense or total denial of an experiential element. Secondly, with non-Charismatics whose theology causes them to sideline the rôle of experience in the Christian life. Yet Forster goes far beyond this in asserting that the Spirit is no less active today than He was before the completion of the canon.

We not only believe that God has come to us in the bread which came down in the aorist tense, 'I am the bread that was given', but also the bread that has come down in the perfect tense - that has been given and remains.<sup>90</sup>

This has implications not only concerning the work of the Holy Spirit but equally the work of Christ.

Isn't the point that it's not only the bread that came down or the bread that hasn't come down and stays down, but that it goes on to say 'I am the bread that comes down'? The bread is still coming day by day to us. All three things are said in John 6.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, by asserting that 'the Bible was not given to replace the Spirit, but rather to help us verify our experience of revelation', Forster argues that there is an implicit priority of the Spirit over the word. In this respect the Bible is a safeguard to see 'whether it is the same God who is communicating with me next week, and the week after ... not because the revelation won't grow and change [develop] but

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<sup>89</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, pp. 9-10.

<sup>90</sup> He goes on to conclude, 'There must be a growing body of revelation that God is giving the world'. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[because] it won't contradict'.<sup>92</sup> Notwithstanding, Forster qualifies what he means by 'growing revelation'.

It's true that every communication that God gives adds to that body, *but it is defined within the term that all that needs to be said has already been said in Jesus*. This is only a growing body, in the sense of how many different ways it's being said, how much is being revealed from what has already been said, and the variations of whether there is going to be a famine in Jerusalem, or is there going to be a famine in Sao Paulo. It doesn't mean to say that there is added understanding to our grasp of who God is and what he intends for us to do in a moral and worshipful sense.<sup>93</sup>

## Summary

The chapter has been important, not only for noting Forster's indebtedness to and dependence upon Scripture for the development of his Christian thought, but more significantly, for being able to pinpoint the particular method of biblical interpretation to which it is conjoined. Forster helpfully describes this both in positive and negative terms. He affirms those principles underlying what we may term a 'Baconian' hermeneutic, and rejects those behind a 'fundamentalist' approach. Inextricable to the latter is his rejection of seven-day creationism, and a literal worldwide Noahic flood. Fundamentalism not only represents an inadequate grasp of how the Bible is to be interpreted, but a poor understanding as to why the Bible has been given in the first place. Forster's reference to the views of Origen *et al.* at this juncture anticipates the second of three pivotal elements in his theological superstructure: what he terms 'the early Church'.

Forster believes that the Church before Augustine, and especially before the Constantinian 'settlement', represented something of a 'golden age', and certainly an extension of the apostolic Christianity of the New Testament era. The implications of this belief is only fully realised against the backdrop of Forster's argument that from the third century onwards Christianity underwent an extraordinary metamorphosis. Scriptural Christianity gave way to a highly corrupted and Hellenised version; there was a concomitant decline in personal piety; the supernatural manifestations of the

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<sup>91</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.

<sup>92</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author. Added emphasis.

Holy Spirit virtually disappeared; there was a profound corruption in Christian doctrine, theology proper in particular.

The final pivot in Forster's structure, epistemology, proves to be indistinguishable from a number of early spiritual questions. In other words, what have been identified as fundamental issues of faith, which Forster experienced as a very young Christian, are bound up with a number of other questions and their influence in creating a certain kind of epistemological understanding. It is very unlikely that Forster thought in these terms at the time, but eventually, experiences and the ideas to which they gave birth coalesced into a system of thought: one that gave certain place to the interaction of intuition, reason and revelation. This in turn gave rise to a highly defined and well thought-out anthropology, not least in the areas human freedom, the will, and the *imago Dei*. In other words, Forster's philosophy of 'how we know' developed in a manner that was intimately related to his understanding of 'total depravity' and 'original sin'.

## Chapter Two: Fundamentals in Soteriology

We have previously examined a number of contexts against which Forster's Christian theory has evolved, particularly his view of the Bible as the Word of God, his understanding of Christian epistemology, and his interpretation of Christian history to wit, the impact of Hellenic thought, the Constantinian Church-State Settlement, and the 'new theology' of Augustine of Hippo. In what follows, attention turns to those doctrines which provide the immediate backdrop to Forster's view of Atonement and redemption, namely: the nature of the God who redeems; the condition of man in need of redemption; the consequences of the Fall; God's provision of redemption; and the person of Jesus Christ.

### Theology Proper: The God of Atonement

Forster claims to follow Eastern Orthodoxy in attributing ontological priority to Person over Nature, that is, defining the 'reality' of the Godhead in their Persons, not the raw attributes deity (omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, *etc.*).<sup>1</sup> Forster further defines the Person or Life (ζωή) of God in terms of relationship,<sup>2</sup> righteousness,<sup>3</sup> or what some theologians have called the 'social Trinity'. The latter then is taken to *define* God. Forster clarifies as follows. Firstly, the Logos is the everlasting Son. Christ has always stood in a filial relationship to the First Person of the Trinity, Who, therefore, has always been the Father. Secondly, the essence of that Paternal-Filial relationship is love, that is, an 'eternal and mutual affirmation of total self-giving'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A view that is actually associated with the Cappadocian Fathers of the fourth century, and particularly adopted by Anglican theologians in the twentieth. See: Donald Baillie, *God Was In Christ* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), pp. 134, 137, 140f. David L. Edwards, *Tradition and Truth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> This 'is life. The Father knowing the Son, the Son knowing the Father, the Holy Spirit knowing the Son, *etc.*'. Forster, 'Born Again', sermon transcript, n.d., p. 5. Original emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> Forster draws on the relational aspect he sees as central to the Hebrew concept of righteousness. Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1973), pp. 151f.

<sup>4</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working in Us', *Daily Bread*, July-September 1985 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 64.



In this manner Forster concludes that Fatherly love is *the* attribute of deity. In it all other expressions of the divine character and divine acts find their motivation or governing principle,<sup>5</sup> especially those that, like wrath and judgement, are often understood as antithetical to love. The relational correspondence of the Persons of the Trinity also reveals the standing of God to the creation. Thereby the principle relationship by which God stands to His created order is Fatherhood. It is no less Fatherhood than that known by the Son. God can be nothing less and nothing other towards His universe.<sup>6</sup> Fatherhood is 'indiscriminate', 'unconditional' and 'total'.<sup>7</sup> While Forster constantly gives precedence to the Person of the Father,<sup>8</sup> he denies that this is subordinationism.<sup>9</sup>

Though employing traditional vocabulary to describe the attributes of deity, Forster believes that many historical definitions are serious departures from apostolic thought. A redefining of God, this corruption marked the worst of the theological distortions introduced through Greek philosophy into the early Church. The idea that deity experiences all points in time in a single moment - the 'Eternal Now' - was the first such distortion that Forster publicly identified. In a paper entitled 'Absolute Divine Foreknowledge' (n.d.) Augustine's understanding of God's eternity is challenged as both anti-Scriptural and philosophically incoherent. Concerning the former:

There is abundant biblical evidence that refutes the common notion that God is an 'eternal now' - living in the past, present and future all at once and having no succession of thoughts, experiences or volition in His existence. On the contrary God is presented in the Bible as a living Being who walks and dwells with men, performs definite acts at definite times, rests, observes, thinks and is

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> James Torrance expresses the same thought succinctly in saying that 'God can be no other than he is to himself'. Introduction to McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1996). p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Forster, 'The Light Shines in the Darkness', *Daily Bread*, July-September 1984 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> Giving precedence to one Person of the Trinity is said to be impossible with an Augustinian or Greek essentialist ontology, since this attributes priority to one essence over the three Persons.

<sup>9</sup> 'Subordinationism: an early, anti-Trinitarian, widely diffused sub-Christian Christology ... (which holds that) Christ is a divine being somewhat below the highest divine principle and that He derives His existence from it'. Samuel J. Mikolaski, in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 938.

reasoned with, remembers, is grieved, is jealous, is provoked to anger and then causes His wrath to rest, is moved with compassion, forgives and comforts, delights and rejoices, hearkens unto men, repents, changes His purposes, makes new decisions, *etc.* These various acts, states of mind, or experiences obviously conflict and can not co-exist in the same instant, and thus require the chronology of time for their occurrence.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, omniscience cannot (with any logical consistency) be interpreted as a complete knowledge of future events, unless God has foreordained those events. Human responsibility, however, makes such foreordination impossible. Thus, the future choices of moral beings, being contingent on decisions yet to be made, have not been brought into existence, and, therefore, are not possible objects of God's knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Does this then altogether deny the idea of omniscience? No, rather it defines it. God is 'all knowing', meaning He possesses perfect knowledge of all that is taking place at any given moment of time in the universe, but it does not mean every future event.<sup>12</sup> That the Bible reveals a number of future events as certain is because God has determined to bring those events to pass by direct causation.

Similarly, the nature of the divine omnipotence has been subject to widespread misunderstanding. Since Augustine, many theologians have defined this attribute largely in terms of an 'absolute divine sovereignty' by which 'God's will is accomplished in all things',<sup>13</sup> even in the activity of the devil, and the loss of the unsaved.<sup>14</sup> This is contradicted by the Bible, which describes humankind both as resisting and successfully confounding God's will. Forster cites Jesus' words to Jerusalem, 'How I would have gathered you as a hen her chick, *but you would not*', and Luke's explanation of the Jews reprobation, 'the Pharisees and the lawyers *resisted for themselves the will of God*'. (Luke 7:30).<sup>15</sup> Attempts to reconcile such passages with the

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<sup>10</sup> Forster, 'Absolute Divine Foreknowledge', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Forster, 'The Marks of God's Man', *Daily Bread*, April-June 1983 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Forster, 'How Necessary is the Kingdom Concept for Today's Church?' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Forster cites Calvin: '... doubtless we can not deny, but God would have men to perish'. John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, quoted in Forster and Marston *God's Strategy* (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), p. 31, n. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21f. Original emphasis.

Reformed-Evangelical<sup>16</sup> explanation that it is God's 'revealed will' to save all men, but his 'secret will' to irrevocably damn others, only makes things worse.

We are presented with a supposed 'signified will' that is the complete opposite of His supposed 'effectual will'! His 'signified will' is that he 'would not have men to perish'; His 'effectual will' is that He 'would have men to perish'.<sup>17</sup>

Forster allows only two possibilities if this view is correct. One would be that God is lying; openly signifying that He wants to save everyone, but in fact has no such wish. The other, that God is a contradiction; really wanting to save and wanting to damn at the same time. A more contemporary and popular view juxtaposes this absolute power of inscrutable sovereign choice with the truth of God's universal love without seeking reconciliation. Forster is equally appalled at this, not least because of the impression it gives to non-Christians. 'Agnostics thinking about the Christian faith pick up on this kind of theology, suggesting that if "God is Love", and "God is Almighty" then Christianity has a problem since there is an evident contradiction in the state of the world and God's design for it. Either He does not care, or He is not able'.<sup>18</sup>

The nature of divine omnipotence must, therefore, be contextualised - as indeed the Bible contextualises it - against the backdrop of inviolable moral freedom, man's rebellion and the active opposition of Satan.<sup>19</sup> The very nature of moral responsibility requires that man's will cannot be subject to divine control, 'God could not create free men without at the same time creating men who were able to rebel'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 'Reformed' here refers to the theological tradition which follows the Magisterial Reformation most influenced by the teachings of John Calvin, and his successor, Theodore Beza. Most, though not all its contemporary *Evangelical* adherents subscribe to the so called 'five points' of Calvinism, to wit, the doctrines of: 1. Total depravity. 2. Unconditional election. 3. Limited Atonement. 4. Irresistible grace. 5. Perseverance of the saints.

<sup>17</sup> Forster and Marston again citing Calvin. Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1973), p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note Martin Luther at this juncture. 'God governs the external affairs of the world in such a way that, if you regard and follow the judgement of human reason, you are forced to say, either that there is no God, or that God is unjust'. Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), p. 315.

<sup>19</sup> This thesis is the subject of Forster's first major published work: Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1973), pp. 3, 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

In addition to seriously re-examining our inherited definitions of the incommunicable attributes of God, Forster believes many Christians must go further to challenge, and where necessary, 'demythologise' 'orthodox' views of the divine character. He has two particularities in mind. Firstly the perception that there is an aloofness to God's experience which separates Him from the affairs of men. Secondly that this 'other-ness' or 'impassibility' extends to the point that God in His Personhood is incapable of, for example, suffering. Again, these ideas are argued to have more in common with Greek perceptions of deity, which tended to impose themselves *a priori* upon Western theological development, than the Bible. This accounts for why so many theologians wrongly dismiss as 'anthropomorphic' Scriptures that state that God changes His mind,<sup>21</sup> or suffers from the wrong choices of His creation.<sup>22</sup>

### The Need for an Atonement: Original Sin

The Augustinian doctrine of original sin (hereafter, Original Sin) teaches that all men are born in a state of constitutional moral depravity owing directly to Adam's first transgression. By the nineteenth century one Evangelical re-interpreted it (typically) in the following manner:

Original Sin is that whereby our whole nature is corrupted, and rendered contrary to the law of God; or according to the 9<sup>th</sup> article of the Church of England, 'It is that whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is, of his own nature inclined to evil'. This is sometimes called indwelling sin, Rom. vii. The imputation of the sin of Adam to his posterity is also what the divines call, with some latitude of expression, Original Sin.<sup>23</sup>

This 'indwelling sin' includes some measure personal culpability and guilt. A minority in the Christian tradition, however, have altogether denied this interpretation of inherited guilt and constitutional depravity, and it is to this denial that Forster carefully aligns himself. Sensitive to the charge of heterodoxy,<sup>24</sup> his public

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<sup>21</sup> 'And it *repented* the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart'. Genesis 6:6.

<sup>22</sup> Forster, 'Apology for Apologetics', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia, PA: Woodward, 1821, from the London edition of 1820), p. 563.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine's greatest opponent was a British monk named Pelagius. His teachings *against* Original Sin were condemned along with Nestorianism at the (local) Council of

stance on this issue has been slow in coming forth, and discreet when it has. Such timidity, however, must not be mistaken for lack of conviction. His consideration and rejection of the Augustinian concept of Original Sin draws from three disciplines: history, theology and philosophy.

(1) Historically, Original Sin was not a doctrine of the early Church, but rather part of the innovative theology of Augustine of Hippo. Prior to this, the doctrine of 'free will' seems to have been universally taught. *God's Strategy* contains a thirty-page *apologia*, arguing this point, citing among others, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, Origen, Jerome and Chrysostom.<sup>25</sup>

(2) Theologically, Forster presents two arguments. Firstly, Original Sin assumes an erroneous harmatology. Rather than sin being a transgression rooted in a deliberate volitional choice, Augustine and those who follow him, make it a metaphysical reality. Sin becomes a thing transmitted. Secondly, Original Sin requires a concept of inherited guilt, which not only raises questions concerning the true humanity of Christ (did he share in this guilt?) but also impugns the justice of God (surely God is unrighteous to punish one man for the sin of another?). In addition to these philosophical objections, there are broader exegetical difficulties, not least those found in Romans 5:17-19:

If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. (RSV)

A consistent Augustinian interpretation would require a literal and consistent use of the word 'all' in Romans 5:18, which would lead unacceptably, for most Augustinians and for Forster, to universalism.<sup>26</sup>

Decisive, however, in Forster's rejection, is Augustine's dependence on the

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Ephesus, 431.

<sup>25</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1973), p. 243-269.

<sup>26</sup> Universalism represents the idea that all men will ultimately be saved.

Latin translation of Romans 5:12:

Propterea sicut per unum hominem in hunc mundum peccatum intravit et per peccatum mors et ita in omnes homines mors pertransit *in quo* omnes peccaverunt. (Vulgate)

Δια τουτο ωσπερ δι' ενός ανθρωπου η αμαρτια εις τον κοσμον εισηλθεν και δια της αμαρτιας ο θανατος και ουτως εις παντας ανθρωπους ο θανατος διηλθεν εφ' ω παντες αμαρτον. (Nestle 21<sup>st</sup> edition)

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, *for* that all have sinned. (AV)

Says Forster, the Bishop from Hippo

... repeatedly referred to this verse and thought it unambiguous. The problem with it is that the Latin translation [*in quo*] renders the Greek phrase *εφ' ω* as 'in him', which is an impossible rendering. Sanday and Headlam, one of the great modern textual authorities on Romans, wrote, 'Though this expression (*εφ' ω*) has been much fought over, there can be little doubt that the true rendering is "because".' They will allow no other reading and note that in classical writers the phrase means 'on condition that'. They also consider the suggestion that the apostle meant to imply 'because all sinned in Adam'. But they rightly object to this; 'the objection is that the words supplied are far too important to be left to be understood. If St. Paul had meant this, why didn't he say so? The insertion of *εν Αδαμ* would have removed all ambiguity'.<sup>27</sup>

3. Forster's final objection is empirical. Original Sin and its concomitant 'total depravity' are contradicted by three observable phenomena: the absence of uniformity in wickedness; the presence of positive goodness within the human race; and a universal consciousness of 'natural justice'.<sup>28</sup> The conclusion? Common sense rejects the doctrine as 'unreasonable'.<sup>29</sup>

## The First Sin

Unlike many who reject the Augustinian view of Original Sin, Forster does not substitute in its place an 'optimistic' view of human nature, nor anything that diminishes man's *need* of redemption. Indeed, as shall be seen below, the scenario which replaces it is, in many respects, as 'bleak' as any presented within the

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>28</sup> 'On what basis can God judge the world if people have no choice but to sin?' Forster, 'Original Sin', lecture, transcript, 1985, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Forster, 'Apology for Apologetics', unpublished paper, n.d., pp. 1-3.

Augustinian tradition. Forster replaces Original Sin with a concept of *the* original or *first* sin. 'That there was an original sin, and that it has made some difference to the constitution of the world, and in the relationships amongst human beings, is certain'.<sup>30</sup>

The repercussions of that sin are to be understood primarily as 'disharmony', that is a dissonance in the three relational spheres in which human existence is lived out: spiritual, societal, and cosmic.<sup>31</sup> Forster characterises this 'disharmony' in forceful terms. In the present world there exists (respectively) enmity between humanity and God, strife between the members of the human race (especially between male and female), and conflict between humanity and the principalities and powers.<sup>32</sup>

' "Wherefore as by one man Sin [sic] entered into the world." Adam's<sup>33</sup> transgression let 'Sin' "into" - εις ελθη - "the world" - χοσμος'.<sup>34</sup> Adam opened the doorway for 'Sin' to infect the Cosmos. To Forster, this constitutes the most important aspect of the Fall. 'Sin' intruded itself into an area called the Cosmos.<sup>35</sup> These words of Paul are illustrated with the picture of a conduit entering a room from the outside, through which foul air enters. Adam's transgression is the 'pipe' through which 'Sin and death' entered.

## Cosmic Catastrophe

What is this 'Sin and death'? Forster understands the writer's personification of sin in Romans 5 as deliberate (hence his capitalisation). In the same manner that Christ reigns through grace, so there is one who reigns through sin, Satan and his hosts. Thus

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<sup>30</sup> Forster, London, letter, August 1999, to the author.

<sup>31</sup> Forster, 'Original Sin', lecture, transcript, 1985, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Forster, 'Genesis 3', sermon transcript, n.d., pp. 1-4.

<sup>33</sup> In *Reason and Faith* Forster and Marston certainly question whether Adam was 'literally' the progenitor of the entire human race, finding more sympathy with the idea that Adam and Eve were selected by God from the hominid race to experience Himself. 'Adam was selected by God, instructed in agriculture and in the knowledge of right and wrong, and intended to return in due course as a kind of missionary to the species. After his moral failure, the culture he brought them was actually inclusive of the guilt of sin and their experience became that of Paul in Romans 7:9-10'. Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, pp. 389-390.

<sup>34</sup> Forster, 'Original Sin', lecture, transcript, 1985, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> We note that Forster consistently prefers 'cosmos' to 'world'.

the 'Sin and death', which came into the Cosmos through Adam, was neither the moral corruption of the human constitution and its impact on the world, nor the entry of physical death and its bondage of nature, but the entry of demonic powers into the realm of human existence. It was not the physical world which was invaded - Satan was already present as the serpent - but, 'the supernatural, spiritual, authority structures of this universe'.<sup>36</sup>

These structures, these 'elements - στοιχεία - of the earth', which in themselves are essentially neutral, 'hold together the very material of the universe', and *ipso facto* dominate - rule over - the material realm. Satan's 'entry' into these spiritual structures was, therefore, to have an absolutely devastating effect upon man's spiritual, psychological, societal and physical environment.<sup>37</sup> The devil and his fallen angels gained 'access' to humanity previously denied them. Before the Fall, Satan could only 'speak' to man through his physical/material senses (thus he had to be embodied as a snake). Now the demonic forces have a 'direct channel' by which to exert 'influence' on the human spirit. Subsequently, those structures that were meant to facilitate social fellowship and reflect the 'graces of God's character'<sup>38</sup> are now perverted with 'the drab-ness of materialism and occult oppression'.<sup>39</sup> These distortions 'bind, bruise and make vulnerable' the individual,<sup>40</sup> and dominate 'cities, nations, and the institutions of men'.<sup>41</sup> Forster speaks of this invasion using such synonyms as 'permeation', 'infiltration' and 'energising'.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, the human race is subject to the 'easy control'<sup>43</sup> of supernatural evil forces bringing physical disease, emotional damage, and intellectual blindness to

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<sup>36</sup> Forster, 'Original Sin', lecture, transcript, 1985, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Forster, 'Renewal in Existing churches', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working Within Us', *Daily Bread*, April-June 1985 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> Forster, 'Supernatural Forces', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working Within Us', *Daily Bread*, April-June 1985 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 38.



the truth.<sup>44</sup> Each of these manifestations is the work of a specific spirit or demon such as a 'deaf and dumb spirit' (Mark 9:25), or a 'spirit of infirmity' (Luke 13:11). Similarly at a communal level there are 'particular powers' which govern the common life.<sup>45</sup> Forster's teaching on spiritual warfare emphasises the extensive and powerful nature of the demonic influence over society. In an unpublished paper, 'Theology of Praise Marches', (c.1990) Forster attributes many social evils, past and present, to the work of demonic powers. Allusions range from Hitler and the rise of fascism in 1930s Germany, to the widespread industrial disputes of 1970s Britain.

As the example of Hitler implies, Forster believes there have been moments when human society has been more subject to demonic infiltration than others, 'points in the history of the human race when the rebellion of the heavens has got involved with the rebellion of the earth, adding both to its confusion and its supernatural power'.<sup>46</sup> The 'Nephilim' mentioned in Genesis 6, literally, 'fallen ones', are the first biblical example. These were the offspring conceived through illicit sexual liaison<sup>47</sup> between spiritual forces - 'sons of God',<sup>48</sup> 'angels which kept not their first arden',<sup>49</sup> 'angels that sinned',<sup>50</sup> - and 'the daughters of men', and were especially powerful and depraved. The influence of these Nephilim was to lead to the moral collapse in human society that directly provoked the deluvian judgement. These peculiar 'invasions' were not confined to the pre-deluvian era, but have continued into the present day: 'The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward'.<sup>51</sup>

To Forster, the most important locus of such infiltration by these (and other demonic powers) has been and remains, the city-state. Scripture consistently uses

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<sup>44</sup> Forster, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Forster, 'Supernatural Powers', lecture two, transcript, n.d., p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Forster, 'Supernatural Forces', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> That is, 'through the sex drive evil spirits get involved with the human race, through the bodies of man they go to the daughters of men'. Forster, 'Supernatural Forces', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Genesis 6:2. AV.

<sup>49</sup> Ἀρχεν, 'Estate', or 'Principality' (Jude 6). This word and its interpretation is important in Forster's consideration of the New Testament understanding of 'principalities and powers'.

<sup>50</sup> 2 Peter 2:4. AV.

<sup>51</sup> Genesis 6:4. RSV. Added emphasis. See: also Numbers 13:33 and Joshua 11:22.

Babel as an archetype of rebellion and sin. Though the divine concept of city is good (Abraham looked for 'the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God', Hebrews 11:10), Babel represents a three-fold perversion. Firstly, the city's architect was demonically inspired and strengthened: Nimrod, 'was *gibbor* - "a mighty hunter" - before the Lord'.<sup>52</sup>

I think that it is right to assume that just as the 'Mighty men' who made a name before the flood were the result of Satanic involvement with the human race in sex and aggression, so too this 'Mighty hunter' - *gibbor*.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly the purpose of this city was the glorification of man: 'Let us make us a name'.<sup>54</sup> Finally, it represented a contradiction of God's intention for humanity. The desire for inordinate consolidation - 'lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth'<sup>55</sup> - is in direct opposition to the divine ordinance, 'fill the earth and subdue it'.<sup>56</sup>

If the construction of Babel marks the illicit invasion of the demonic realm into human activity, its destruction represents a significant step in the reversal of that process. The dispersion of mankind that followed the collapse of the tower was significant because it but reflected the prior interposition by God of 'confusion' into the spiritual realm of supernatural structures. Genesis 10 and 11 implicitly describe the forced separation among the principalities and powers that are responsible for rulers and authorities on earth.<sup>57</sup> This division is subsequently manifested in the ethnic division of humanity. In Daniel there are 'princes' for Persia, Greece and Rome, as well as Israel. Isaiah speaks of the 'king of Babylon', and Ezekiel alludes to the 'prince' of Egypt. It is these spiritual rulers who then - as now - account for differences in language, culture, practice government, *etc.*, among the nations.

That doesn't mean to say that every earthly prince and king, throne and authority, understands that he is being motivated by supernatural forces, or that he understands that the influence he yields, the magnetism by which he holds office, or the culture whereby he controls, or the economic structures whereby he is able to cohere society are not just simply things, but are spiritual powers and personal entities. Nonetheless he is a vehicle, and at the very heart

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<sup>52</sup> Genesis 10:9. AV.

<sup>53</sup> Forster, 'Supernatural Forces', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Genesis 11:4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>57</sup> Forster, 'Supernatural Forces', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 11.

of his being - through the drives of sex and aggression - he is a vehicle through which the enemy controls and manipulates those areas of life.<sup>58</sup>

This world-view, says Forster, is evident in the Epistles, and in particular (though not exclusively) lies behind the Pauline use of the terms 'principalities', 'powers', 'thrones', and 'dominions'. While not every mention has as its reference these supernatural forces, the most significant do, including Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 15: 24, Ephesians 1:20, 2:2, 3:10, 6:11, Colossians 1:13, 16, 2:10, 14, 15.<sup>59</sup>

First and foremost though, it is the world-view of the Gospels. Christ's promise to 'confess' the righteous before God (Luke 12:8), 'assumes' that there is a 'correspondence in the heavens for what is going on in the earth'.<sup>60</sup> Similarly Christ's assurance that when Christians are confronted in the synagogues by the civil authorities the Holy Spirit will 'teach you in the same hour what you should say', (Luke 12:12) 'assumes' that there are 'forces that lie behind those magistrates, those rulers'.<sup>61</sup> Again, Forster interprets the 'adversary' who brings the confrontation as Satan himself. All these and many other scenarios demonstrate that demonic powers are constantly working in this world against the believer.

The forty days of prayer and fasting that marked the beginning of Christ's ministry marked the commencement of His spiritual warfare against evil powers in the heavenlies. Through prayer and direct confrontation with Satan, Jesus 'cleared the deck' in the heavenlies, *before* He began to preach, heal the sick, cleanse the demonised, and work miracles.<sup>62</sup> In the same way, in time of conflict or need, it is these 'powers' that contemporary Christians must first address and 'bind', before engaging in the activities of the kingdom.

In noting the extensive degree of demonic infiltration in Forster's world-view, it is important to recognise that Satan's authority is not arbitrary, but depends upon the implicit invitation that acts of sin represent. This is where Forster differs from Augustine. It requires 'consent' for the powers to infiltrate man's realm. Further, an

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

important distinction must be made between the demonic influence that follows the individual sin act, and the invasion of evil into the corporate structures that follows when many sin. The former brings spiritual death and is highly discriminate affecting only the one who sins. The latter brings physical, psychological and spiritual distress on an indiscriminate basis both to all who live under the common 'structure' or 'element' (the same city, home, business, community, *etc.*). Thus, sickness and physical death are universal experiences largely irrespective of individual moral behaviour. At this juncture the difference between Forster and Augustine considerably closes.

The act of sin brought death into Adam's experience, but it was a 'natural' consequence, not a judgement from God in the retributive sense. Furthermore, the essence of that death was spiritual. Sin, as a choice to distance oneself from God, is but a step in a process of self-destruction culminating in the total annihilation of consciousness in Hades.<sup>63</sup> In other words, sin as the movement from radiant substantiveness<sup>64</sup> can fall only and continually into the nothingness it has chosen, the nihilism of complete separation from God.

The immediate spiritual death that Adam experienced was a divorce or sudden break in his relationship with God. Adam became subjectively alienated from the divine Fatherhood, as his perception of deity became distorted producing enmity and fear. Adam became ignorant of the divine reality as accurate perceptions of the divine love, mercy and goodness, were lost.<sup>65</sup> This in turn produced a variety of problems, all associated with the dissolution of absolutes. Consequently, Adam became self centred,<sup>66</sup> a slave of his own pride, subject to sinful habits which in turn produced more ignorance, bringing more judgement, condemnation, a sense of ugliness, and subjective repulse and estrangement from others, including Eve.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>63</sup> Forster, 'Does Hell Last Forever?' *Celebration*, June 1990, pp. 18-21.

<sup>64</sup> To borrow C. S. Lewis' concept in *The Great Divorce* (Geoffrey Bles, 1946).

<sup>65</sup> Forster, 'The Servant of God and His Enemies', *Daily Bread*, July-September 1984 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 44.

<sup>66</sup> Forster, 'Motivating the Messenger', *Daily Bread*, April-June 1983 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working Within Us', *Daily Bread*, April-June 1985 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 65.

On account of transgression, Eve herself became subject to the same 'penalties' of sin. God's word to her in Genesis 3:16 is often misunderstood as a divine action in judgement, but it narrates - rather than pronounces - the realities of self-centredness. 'Your *desire* shall be towards your husband, and he shall rule over you'. This 'desire' for Adam though, was not one of affection, but a desire to exercise domination through cunning manipulation.<sup>68</sup> The statement that Adam would 'rule' over Eve is the masculine counterpoint, Man would seek to control through superior strength. The original harmony within marriage - as all other relationships - was destroyed as each partner seeks to conquer and govern the other.<sup>69</sup>

The difference between the consequence of sin - spiritual death - from physical death must be delineated in three ways if we are to be clear about Forster's understanding of the original sin. Firstly, mortality was already present in the universe - though not in the human race. Forster argues that God's warning to Adam only had meaning through analogy, that is, it was only through the pre-existing presence of death in animals and plants that the threat of 'in dying you shall die' could be understood. Secondly, whereas spiritual death followed inevitably from sin, physical death was introduced by Divine intervention as an act of mercy. If Adam were to have eaten from the Tree of Life his physical body would have taken on immortality, and, in Forster's mind, by that fact have been placed beyond personal redemption. Thirdly, whereas spiritual death passed to Adam alone as the transgressor, physical death became the lot of all mankind, 'since by man came death'.<sup>70</sup> In this restricted sense, Adam's sin affected the entire human race. 'We all physically pass away, even babies in the womb die, though they have not sinned'.<sup>71</sup> In this manner Forster replies to those who argue using Romans 6:23 - 'the wages of sin is death' - that the universal presence of physical death, especially among the young, is the proof of inherited sin and guilt.

Does all this mean that man is born in the same state as Adam before the Fall? Not at all; we have seen that the moral world into which some men were (presumably)

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<sup>68</sup> This is Forster's interpretation of *tushûwqâh* both here and in Genesis 4:7.

<sup>69</sup> Forster, 'Genesis 3', sermon transcript, n.d., pp. 4, 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:21.

<sup>71</sup> Forster, 'Original Sin', lecture, transcript, 1985, p. 6.

living and others were afterwards born was drastically changed because of that first sin. Forster's type for post-lapsarian humanity is Cain (Genesis 4:1-8).<sup>72</sup> Adam was created into a paradise, but Cain was born into a 'disadvantaged' situation in which the cosmos, or 'spiritual environment' has been invaded by Satan. Since the sin of Adam, demonic powers have been present and active in the same sphere as God. Each side is constantly exerting an 'energising' moral influence,<sup>73</sup> but it is man himself who chooses which 'pull' takes effect. All men like Cain face a sin crisis.

Cain realised that he is not getting through to God ... and he starts to be angry, but he hasn't sinned yet. You can be angry and sin not. He is starting to be angry about his brother, and God is right close at his elbow, just as God is right close at our elbow, and close at Paul's elbow, and God says, 'Come on, be careful! If you do well, you will be accepted, there is no need to be like that about your brother'. God is warning him, and then says, 'Sin lies at the door' - not 'sin offering' as some people have gratuitously translated it, because sin offerings don't come in until Exodus. All the way through Genesis they don't exist, they come in later - 'Sin lies at the door, and you must rule over him, you must master him. His desire is towards you'.<sup>74</sup>

Sin is manoeuvring and manipulating at that moment, Sin is aware that Cain has the advantage. God has said to him, 'You must master it!' If God has said, 'You must master', it must have been a possibility. Cain didn't have to go under, he knew there was a possibility of mastering sin and he didn't have to give into it.<sup>75</sup>

Forster further illustrates the cognitive and voluntaristic nature of sin by quoting the autobiographical testimony of Paul in Romans 7:7-13. There was a point in time when the apostle experienced his own crisis with sin.

Before then he was alive. Then there was a moment when he chose - when he didn't have to, when he was responsible - to let death into his experience. Not physical death, already he is disadvantaged and will have to die physically because of Adam's fall, but now spiritual death comes upon him.<sup>76</sup>

Forster then appeals to his own, thence his reader's experience to reinforce the argument that sin is a deliberate choice: 'We all know when we sin - I can remember

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<sup>72</sup> Forster, 'Genesis 3', sermon, transcript, n.d., pp. 9-11.

<sup>73</sup> This is primarily how Forster understands Ephesians 1:11. When Paul speaks of God 'working all things according to the counsel of his will', that 'working' is not an absolute governance, but God is 'constantly seeking to move things in the direction of His will'. Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> Forster, 'Original Sin', lecture, transcript, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

one of my first sins as clear as a bell - and we know that we don't have to give into it'.<sup>77</sup> This 'energising power' of sin is Forster's approximation to the doctrine of 'total depravity'. Evil brings a gradual domination that increases with each deliberate choice to sin. Eventually (inevitably) each man gets to the point where he is in 'bondage' to Satan's grip where many kinds of sin become involuntary and need 'deliverance' to be released from its power. 'Bondage is a gradual build up of giving way, and then the enemy invades us, and he brings his death with him'.<sup>78</sup>

The forces that come to govern man from within, Forster (acknowledging Freud) are sex and aggression, 'pleasure and power'. As the substantive elements within the human libido, they are identified through the first two commands God set before humanity: 'Be fruitful and multiply', and 'have dominion over the earth and subdue it' (Genesis 1:22, 28). Since the fall of Adam, Satan seeks to pervert and twist these imperatives. As individuals consent to their function outside the intended boundaries,<sup>79</sup> they become the master of men rather than their servant.

Another word Forster uses to describe post-Fall humanity is, 'frail',<sup>80</sup> which it needs be noted, is not the inability to will the good, but the inability to do the good. In *What is Man?* he again quotes Paul. 'The good that I want to do, I don't do it, the evil which I don't want to do, I find my self doing it. The will is present with me, but how to perform I don't know'.<sup>81</sup>

Even in this condition of 'bondage', however, mankind has not ceased to be 'responsible'. Somewhere there was a free antecedent choice that gave rise to one's current condition. A man may commit a terrible crime, and in a sense have done it involuntarily, but five or ten years earlier had he handled a different situation rightly, Sin would not have taken such a stronghold in his life.

The effects of Adam's sin and the resulting corruption of my spiritual environment (when the power of sin becomes involuntary) occurs only when I

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> Forster, 'Dealing With Supernatural Forces in the City', lecture one, unpublished notes, n.d., pp. 3-4.

<sup>80</sup> Forster, 'What is Man?' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. Romans 7:18. AV.

chose my own acts of sin. I could be brought up in terribly disadvantaged home where I have been beaten, knocked around, and abused in all sorts of different ways, but if I react positively to those disadvantages I can become a man of great character. Conversely I could imbibe the darkness that all this sin represents and become resentful and bitter. The difference represented by these two reactions is not, therefore, part of the constitution that I am born with. It may be part of the constitution of the universe I am born into, notwithstanding, I let it get into my being by an act.<sup>82</sup>

The reality of moral freedom thus accounts for the forceful nature of guilt in human experience. Each guilty individual knows that he could have done otherwise than he did, which is why even atheists experience guilt.

### How did the Fall affect God?

Anthropologically, the act of transgression made continued filial intimacy between deity and humanity impossible. Separated from the divine reality, Adam became subjectively alienated: his knowledge of the Father's character of love was displaced by ignorance and fear. Theologically - even assuming no change in the Godhead - the breach of relationship was equally real: 'How can two walk together unless they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3). God's fellowship with Adam, therefore, certainly ceased, but this notwithstanding, what about God's attitude towards the race? Does His relationship towards mankind remain (objectively) exactly as it was prior to the advent of sin? Historic Evangelicalism teaches a dramatic change as all men (in Adam) were dispossessed from the privilege of being God's children, and became instead children of the devil and vessels fit for divine wrath.<sup>83</sup> However, this and associated views are not shared by Forster. Since humanity bears no formal relationship to the guilt and sin of Adam, man is accountable only for his own sin. The first transgression of Adam, therefore, brings no change in God's attitude towards others since they are morally unaffected by that sin. God considers humanity on an individual, not unitary basis. Further more, Forster steadfastly believes that God, even in the presence of individual

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. Added emphasis.

<sup>83</sup> In this respect Jonathan Edwards is typical of others of his generation such as George Whitefield and John Wesley. Sinners, he preaches, 'are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God that is expressed in the torments of hell. And the reason why they don't go down to hell at each moment is not because God, in whose power they are, is not angry with them'. From 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God'. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections* (New York. Hill and Wang, 1969), p. 157.



sin, remains Father to each human being and to the race as a whole. That relationship cannot be destroyed except by annihilation. God is Father. Thus, God's attitude to man does not change even in the presence of sin, though there is a paternal response to that sin.

In *God's Strategy in Human History* Forster moves the reader away from the historic Evangelical paradigm which centres on the offended holiness of God towards the rebellion of man, and seeks to replace it with, respectively, the indiscriminate lovingkindness and Fatherhood of God towards men on the one hand, and the unremitting divine hostility and opposition towards evil principalities and powers on the other. This is the context of 'kingdom theology', to wit, the kingdom of God is locked in warfare against the kingdom of darkness. This kingdom dimension in many ways speaks to Forster's own *cur Deus homo?* In *God's Strategy* the two kingdoms are represented respectively by Job in his suffering, and the three comforters in their accusations. The soul of Job - as Everyman - is the 'battleground' between the forces of good and evil.

While preserving the idea of subjective alienation in man towards God, Forster shifts the focus of divine alienation away from humankind - who are portrayed as victims - and places it upon the demonic. It is the devil and his hoards that cannot be saved, and the devil and his kingdom that are the implacable adversaries of all that is right and good. This 'kingdom warfare' paradigm is reinforced theologically in three ways. Firstly, by an anthropology that rejects Augustinian depravity and replaces it with moral impairment - it is not what we are that defies God, but what we foolishly choose.<sup>84</sup> Secondly, our attention is drawn to the intense enmity of the devil towards humanity. He and his fallen angels are the constant source of human woe.<sup>85</sup> Thirdly,

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<sup>84</sup> Forster comments, 'sin is not part of the constitution that I am born with, it is part of the constitution of the universe that I am born into, but I let it get into my being by an act'. Forster, 'Original Sin', sermon, transcript, 1985, p. 20.

<sup>85</sup> This raises a number of questions concerning consistency. In issues of anthropology Forster has used to his advantage the idea that God stands as Father to His creation. Its emphasis has been used to colour pretty much every facet of salvation, not least dignifying man's humanity; his value in the image of God; and making him a worthy object of the redemptive schema. What weakens this teaching is Forster's failure to apply this dignity to *all sentient moral beings*. Are they not too made in the image of God? What separates man in his rebellion from the devil in his? Forster replies (in part) to this criticism:

sin in man ceases to be attempted Theocide (invoking the appropriate response in God towards the human race) and becomes a self-inflicted wound which the kingdom of darkness uses to its advantage. Thus, the eschatological focus moves from God opposing sinful humanity and preparing all for the day of His great judgement, to God saving humanity and preparing all things for the final defeat of the demonic realm, the moment when the kingdom of God arrives in all its fullness. Even human unbelief becomes a power rooted in 'the enemy camp', something to be 'challenged', 'defied' and 'defeated' in Jesus' Name.<sup>86</sup> God not does oppose sinners and constantly hold over them the thought of fearful judgement, as those in the historic Evangelical tradition suggest,<sup>87</sup> the real object of God's opposition and wrath is the devil. Forster complements this with a perspective on salvation which declares not that men shall be saved from the wrath of God, but from 'the presence of Satan and sin'.<sup>88</sup>

This cosmic drama *motif* fortifies the idea that the sin of man has left both unchanged and undiluted the Father's love for these His children, and underscores the absolute earnestness with which God desires that *all* men be saved. On this fact hinges the 'good news' of the gospel, a gospel that (as we shall see) receives its most perfect expression in the life and death of Christ. When Paul said, 'God demonstrates His love towards us in this; that while we were yet sinners Christ died', (Romans 5:8) that 'us'

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'I would say that God's Fatherly attitude includes angels, who are called sons of God, but that this is different from being made in the image of God. Humankind as the image of God has the potential for becoming like the Son of God in character and administration, whereas it is never said that an angel has this potential.' Forster, London, letter, to the author, June 10, 1997.

<sup>86</sup> Forster, 'Saving Faith', sermon, transcript, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> In one highly typical sermon, 'the Great Assize', John Wesley reminds his hearers that all things are moving to that day when 'we are to give an account of all works, from the cradle to the grave; of all our words; of all our desires and tempers, all the thoughts and intents of the heart; of all the use we have made of our various talents, whether of body, mind or fortune ... See! See! He cometh! He maketh the clouds His chariots! He rideth upon the wings of the wind! A devouring fire goeth before Him, and after Him a flame burneth! See! He sitteth upon His throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold His eyes are as a flame of fire, His voice as many waters! How will ye escape? Will ye call to the mountains to fall on you, the rocks to cover you? Alas, the mountains themselves, the rocks the earth, the heavens, are just as ready to flee away! Can ye prevent the sentence? Wherewith? With all the substance of thine house, with thousands of gold and silver? Blind wretch! Thou camest naked from thy mothers womb, and more naked into eternity. Hear the Lord, the Judge!' Wesley, *Sermons*, v.2. (Grand rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1955), pp. 417-418.

<sup>88</sup> Forster, *Saving Faith* (Scripture Union, 1984), p. 7.

is the whole world, literally every man in it. God loves all men as much as He loves the Eternal Son. The presence of sin and rebellion has certainly introduced the woe of a Father's grief into this love, but the love itself remains according to its original nature. Such teaching is not, however, Forster's prelude to an argument for universalism. While it is true that the divine love is eternal and constant towards humanity, God's seeking reconciliation with that humanity ultimately comes to an end, even as the physical life of a man has an end.<sup>89</sup> Forster quotes C. S. Lewis, 'There are only two kinds of people ... those who say to God, "Thy will be done", and those to whom God says in the end, "Thy will be done".'<sup>90</sup> While 'God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked' (Ezekiel 33:11), 'the soul that sins will die' (Ezekiel 18:20). God's love cannot follow men into the self-induced nothingness of annihilation.

### Summary

We previously noted John Scott Lidgett's comment that an intelligible view of the Atonement will throw light upon the particular understanding of God that precedes it.<sup>91</sup> This chapter has sought to turn this idea on its head: to anticipate Forster's understanding of the Atonement by describing his view of God, and other key theological contexts (his view of man and sin). It is helpful that in each of these categories (theology, anthropology, hamartiology) Forster chooses to identify and then align himself with or against certain historical views. Concerning theology proper, God is defined as a loving society of Persons who relates primarily as 'Father' to the creation. This view said to derive from Eastern Orthodoxy and is juxtaposed against the 'traditional', or Western view that defines God largely in terms of omnipotence, omniscience and eternity. As it turns out, it is not just that the 'traditional' view wrongly understands God by defining Him in terms what He knows and what He can do (rather than who He is), but doubly compounds the error by misunderstanding even these qualities. Omnipotence 'never' meant that God can do anything: if by that we mean Augustine's view that divine will is accomplished in all things, even the loss of the un-saved. Similarly, the idea that God lives outside time and space and,

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<sup>89</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* See: C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Geoffrey Bles, 1946), pp. 66-67.

<sup>91</sup> J. Scott Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Graham, 1897. Fourth edition), p. 122.

therefore, knows all events as in a single moment, is more Augustine's invention than Scripture. The Bible teaches that God, like His creation, experiences time as a succession of moments, fails to know of all future events as certain - because they are not - is surprised, disappointed, sorrowful, changes His mind, and is constrained by, human history. Ideas that God stands emotionally above His universe - is impassable - belong more to the pagan ideas of the Hellenic philosophers than the Old and New Testaments

If Augustine's views of God and divine predestination fall foul of Forster, equally the bishop's understanding of man and sin. This is especially true of Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin. Forster's rejects the doctrine on account of its historical novelty; Augustine's poor exegesis; and the fact that it is an offence to common sense and natural justice. Though Augustine's view is rejected - as indeed are all 'traditional' doctrines of Original Sin - it is not replaced by an optimistic view of the human condition, far from it. As a consequence of Adam's first sin, Forster presents us with an elaborate understanding of human depravity in the context of corrupt principalities and powers. Humanity is in bondage to the devil and his demons. Indeed, the whole world 'lies in the hands of the evil one'. The 'cosmos' itself is a complex reality of structures - forms of human society - that are governed by the spiritual realities behind them, realities which have become dominated by Satan. These structures are present behind every form of human society, from the marriage bond to the nation state. Forster argues that the Bible - Old Testament, Gospels and New Testament Epistles - is replete with this kind of imagery and from various gives frequent exegesis to the dualistic nature of the world, and the workings of God's salvation in it.

Though Adam's sin has such a drastic effect upon the cosmos, individually the moral consequences of sin (spiritual death and judgement) fall *only* on those who follow Adam's example by themselves deliberately rebelling against God. The story of Cain prefigures every human experience. All of us face a crisis with sin, which marks the point of our own sin - 'we all know when we sin'. As to the nature of sin's consequences, these are defined principally in ontological terms: the increasing loss of life. 'Life', importantly, is defined in terms of a relationship - fellowship - with the Father. Subjectively, God increasingly becomes ugly to men and an object of fear as sin corrupts our perceptions of His reality, and false gods take His place.

The final part of the chapter dealt with the God-ward aspects of the Fall. The absolute primacy given to the Fatherhood of God in defining His nature and relationship to the creation is clearly manifest at this point. More 'traditional' perceptions of wrath, divine judgement and indeed hell, give way to paternal expressions. Humanity - all of us sons of God - have become erring children after whom the Father sends the Son as a shepherd to seek and to restore. God's distress at sin is not for His own justice (in the sense of abstract law) but his sense of justice as a Father, 'Why did you do it son? It is so bad for you'. None of this is to say that Forster's perceptions are wholly void of traditional perceptions of wrath, judgement, but these are now directed towards the evil principalities and powers. *It is they who are the objects of God's displeasure and, indeed, warfare.*

## Chapter Three: The Work of the Cross

I rarely think that I have ever preached - and that is twice a day for 30 years - without preaching somewhere on the Cross.<sup>1</sup>

Forster's consideration of this great theme - in common with other subjects - has been largely according to the disciplines of biblical exposition. This has immediate implications for our understanding of it. The presentation of ideas brought forth by this method of teaching tends to be less clear than takes place in lectures or even other kinds of preaching. As a consequence an attempt to summarise Forster's view of Atonement is made more difficult. At one juncture the work of Christ is presented in the history of Noah in Genesis, Israel in Exodus, or the priestly imagery of Leviticus, John, or Hebrews, furthermore it is often wedded to other themes such as evangelism, healing, or spiritual warfare.

In 1988, however, Forster presented a series of lectures entitled 'The Atonement'. This greatly helps us methodologically by providing an ideal focus for examination. In addition, this juncture in Forster's life marks over thirty years in the ministry, and over forty-five years as a Christian. These lectures thus represent Forster's considered and matured explanation of Christ's work. Notwithstanding, as sources they are not without problems of their own. First, there is the consideration of audience. The lectures were given to a group of 'Networkers' or student evangelist.<sup>2</sup> This made for rather less attention to theological detail, and rather more to motivation and themes directly related to soul winning. Secondly, the systematic consideration of the theme of Atonement is mostly limited to a consideration of historical theories. Forster's own view is presented in a verse-by-verse examination of the Synoptic Gospels and John. This makes for a great deal of repetition (which is exacerbated by Forster's own style) and leaves the audience the task of fitting all the pieces together to attain an overall picture.

The first lecture makes explicit certain assumptions adopted by Forster that have shaped his understanding of the Atonement. These start with the limitations

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<sup>1</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 'Network' is a one year study and hands-on evangelism programme that Ichthus has hosted since the late 1970s. It has consistently attracted students from all over the world.

inherent to a Bible-based theology. Next the value of Christian history and its earlier insights is affirmed. Finally, there is the claim that historical opinions have only been criticised as a response to new insights into Scripture, not as a reflex to what is in vogue in secular philosophy.

### The Lectures

It is a *fact*, that the truth of God ... cannot be completely analysed into propositions because there is that within it which is always elusive, that which moves away from us. So, as we dig deeper, there remains a mystery. This is particularly so with the doctrine of the Atonement.<sup>3</sup>

This proposition seems to be confirmed in that the New Testament writings make no attempt to synthesise the multiplicity of redemptive images recorded in the Old Testament into a neat uniformity, but rather allows each to stand in tension with the others. Indeed that the 'New Testament writers struggled with the Old Testament pictures',<sup>4</sup> means that our hermeneutic should be subject to the same constraint. Biblical metaphors relating to Atonement are not to be interpreted with precision against a universal whole, but are to be embraced loosely. The various symbols employed in Scripture are meant to be apprehended in such a way that they form a tension. Having said this, Forster is not arguing that the language of Scripture is so vague that it lies beyond the possibility of being understood. Rather, whatever theory of the Cross is contemplated, it should be anticipated that there will remain a certain degree of 'mystery'.

Beyond this, intellectual apprehension of truth must, in part, be separated from its spiritual value. Borrowing C. S. Lewis' analogy, Forster asserts that humankind can benefit from the Cross without exhaustively understanding it: 'the nourishment of a good meal can be experienced and profited from without a total grasp of the nutritional in terms of calories, carbohydrates, proteins and vitamins'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 1. Added emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> Forster, *Saturday Night ... Monday Morning* (Bromely, Kent: InterVarsity Press, 1980) p. 49. Added emphasis.

<sup>5</sup> Forster, *Saturday Night* p. 49. See also Lewis: 'A man can eat his dinner without understanding exactly how food nourishes him. A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works'. 'All sensible people know that if you are tired and hungry a meal will do you good. But the modern theory of nourishment - all about

Concerning the various historical theories, Forster is quite clear that older interpretations are important in our re-evaluation of biblical teaching.

- (1) Arguably, three views have dominated Western Christendom,<sup>6</sup> those taught by Irenaeus (fl. c.175-c.195), Anselm (1033-1109), and Abelard (1079-1142). While there have been a number of others 'the most important developments have remained within these'.<sup>7</sup>
- (2) 'Contrary to much past discussion' these views may be appreciated in such a fashion that their teachings are taken to be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Indeed, not only do 'the three represent far more of a coherent whole than has been historically allowed',<sup>8</sup> but much 'advance in understanding could be achieved by placing the three theories [sympathetically] beside each other'.<sup>9</sup>
- (3) None of these historical interpretations - even when considered synthetically - is exhaustive of a biblical view of Atonement. Though a number of contemporary attempts were made to update the theory in the light of nineteenth century insights, twentieth century theological developments, especially those marked by Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement, have yet to be adequately applied to earlier interpretations of Atonement. This is especially true as regards insights into the work the Holy Spirit, or an

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vitamins and proteins - is a different thing'. *Mere Christianity* (Fontana Books, 1952. Fifth impression, 1958), pp. 55, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Among the 'others' Forster could have mentioned is Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and the moral government theory, especially since it bears some significant relation to his own view. John Scott Lidgett summarises the 'principle features' of this account in the following manner:

In explaining the Atonement we must seek the key, not by regarding God as a judge administering justice, but as a ruler concerned for the highest ends of His government. The whole method of forgiving sinners is on account of the death of Christ as a 'relaxation' of the law. And this relaxation God as ruler is competent to make. But while the forgiveness of sins is entirely within the divine prerogative, it is expedient, for the maintenance of His government, that a satisfaction should be demanded. This satisfaction (*satisfactio*) must be distinguished from the exact payment of debt (*solutio*). The death of Christ is exacted, therefore, not as the equivalent of the punishment of sinners, but as the most striking means of placing in clear light the character of God, the heinousness of sin, and the authority of the law'. Scott-Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>8</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



understanding of the church as a pneumatically inspired community. Equally there has been little attempt to relate the Atonement to the 'third wave' holistic gospel, and its recovery of the 'excluded middle'.<sup>10</sup> Mainstream Evangelicalism's neglect of each of these, is, says Forster a 'serious failure to respond to the Holy Spirit'. It is a deficiency that must be answered. Indeed, 'the need [is] for a *radical* re-appraisal of what has been previously taught if we are to go forward in our understanding'.<sup>11</sup>

### The Satisfaction Theory

Forster examines each view beginning with 'the Satisfaction Theory' set forth in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?*<sup>12</sup> This theory is understood, in part, as reflecting the feudalistic and militaristic ethos of the day,<sup>13</sup> and, in part, as marking a reaction against corruptions in the 'Ransom' view, the 'somewhat distorted Atonement theology that had come to the fore in the preceding centuries'.<sup>14</sup> To the basic inquiry, '*Cur Deus homo?*' ('Why did God become man?') Anselm answers, 'To satisfy a requirement in God Himself'. More fully, that requirement is something from the human race that is needed before God can extend forgiveness to the human race. This, Forster rather conventionally notes,<sup>15</sup> reveals Anselm's underlying culturally conditioned assumption concerning the relationship between God and His universe, that God is 'a dread Sovereign' whose great majesty stands affronted by the sin and

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<sup>10</sup> A term popularised by Dr. Paul Hiebert of the Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Missions. It defines a Western Christian world-view that *a priori* excludes the 'Holy Spirit, angels, demons, signs and wonders, gifts of the Spirit' as significant and determinant forces in our natural world. Thus, for example, sickness is rarely understood as demonic in origin and needing spiritual remedy. See: John Wimber, *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), pp. 82-88.

<sup>11</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 6. Added Emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> Though chronologically not the first general theory of Atonement, the Satisfaction view is the best known, which presumably is why Forster begins with it.

<sup>13</sup> Forster is implying that Anselm has not only drawn from the cultural milieu of the day, but that his understanding was substantively determined by it.

<sup>14</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> 'Anselm is generally caricatured as a legalist emphasising justice over love'. Burnell Eckardt, Jr. *Anselm and Luther on 'The Atonement': Was it 'Necessary'?* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. 2. Eckardt cites among others of this opinion: Aulén, Ritschl, F. W. Dillistone, and Gerhard Forde.

rebellion of His subjects.<sup>16</sup> God out of right demands satisfaction to avenge the insult. The Lord Jesus Christ made this satisfaction. More specifically there was a 'pact' between the Father and the Son, in which it was agreed that the Son would become a man and fully repay man's debt.

Other than the suggestion of cultural, as opposed to what we may assume to be 'biblical influences', Forster cites another questionable aspect of Anselm's theory. That is, its failure to 'adequately' explain the connection between Jesus' obedience unto death, and the dishonour brought to God by man's sin. This must have been apparent to Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, Forster says,<sup>17</sup> since they felt it necessary to refine Anselm's teaching and more adequately identify the nature of that relationship: the dishonour done to God was the transgression of His Law, and the 'satisfaction' owed was the penalty prescribed by the perfection and justice of the law. It was this penalty that fell on Christ as He received the punishment due humanity's transgressions. Since God's wrath had been expended, the divine attitude towards sinners could be changed, and forgiveness now granted. What had to be offered to God was a literal and exact equivalent to the wrong that was done. Only in this way could the divine righteousness and justice be honoured. Christ having 'satisfied' the law, the penalties of justice need no longer be executed against sinners. In this manner, the Reformers are said to have provided a much more logical connection between the need for the Supreme Judge to fulfil His justice on the one hand, and the offering of Christ on the other.

Though acknowledging its widespread acceptance, Forster nonetheless criticises the forensic view for lacking the coherence of the Old Testament 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' logic. The satisfaction seems purely arbitrary, since there is no explanation as to *why* or on *what grounds* the Cross provides the basis for such a transaction. The following illustration is given by way of indicating the exact nature of the problem.

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<sup>16</sup> While Forster may well have read *Cur Deus Homo?* there are questions as to the degree that his appreciation of the theory, and objections to it, have been shaped by those nineteenth century theologians whose views have so influenced his own.

<sup>17</sup> Since Forster has read little Luther (by his own admission) and probably no more Calvin or Zwingli, his observations as regard their need to 'refine Anselm' must derive from secondary sources.

A man is found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. As the verdict is announced a friend of the condemned interrupts, 'Oh, please don't send him to the gallows, I'll go instead!' The judge replies, 'OK, as long as I get my pound of flesh'. The condemned man can go free and live however he likes. The innocent is hanged in his place. These are the difficulties: The forensic view does not represent true justice; and it does nothing to stop the released man 'crime-ing' it for the rest of his life.<sup>18</sup>

It was this failure, Forster argues, that the sixteenth century Anabaptists rightly criticised, leading them and others to suggest changes to the theory.<sup>19</sup>

There are, however, other aspects to this view that find Forster's appreciation. Though God is not to be seen coldly as a Judge bound by His own law and constrained to carry out its every precept, the Reformers (who it is assumed did see God in this manner)<sup>20</sup> rightly observe that the law is not some arbitrary *fiat*, but an

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<sup>18</sup>Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 11. Unless exaggerated to make a point, this criticism of Anselm (and indeed Luther and Calvin) is quite unfounded. *Cur Deus Homo?* makes it quite clear that the Atonement is *not* a matter of a mere 'pound of flesh'. Man himself needs to be changed by what Christ did, not just receive forgiveness for sin. Anselm replies that though theoretically a man may be legally forgiven and not undergo a change of heart and still go to heaven, 'what use is this,' he asks, 'such a man would never be happy'. In his second book Anselm shows that the Atonement not only includes the provision of forgiveness, but actual holiness. *Cur Deus Homo?* 2:24 This ontological change is as much included in the satisfaction of God as the execution of justice on actual transgressions. The 'expiation' of Christ for sin includes the complete eradication of sin in the elect. *Ibid.* 2:4f

<sup>19</sup> The most notable being those of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and Faustus Socinius (d.1604). Grotius posited a 'moral government' theory of Atonement, which was later embraced by Charles Finney. The sufferings of Christ are interpreted in a penal manner in the sense that they demonstrate God's moral and gubernatorial objection to sin, what John Stott calls 'a jurist's concern for public morality'. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1986), p. 121. As for Socinius' view, Bengt Häggglund comments, he and his followers 'attacked the orthodox idea of satisfaction from the ground up. They maintained that the righteousness of God does not demand Atonement for sin. Righteousness is only something that characterises God's outward acts; it is not an "essential" quality, or one that is a part of His nature. God of his free will, and "absolute goodness", can forgive and bestow eternal life on upon all who believe and strive to live in innocence. As a logical consequence the Socinians denied that Christ's obedience has any substitutionary value and that his death provided satisfaction for man's guilt. The death of Christ on the Cross merely proved that Jesus was obedient, the resurrection confirmed his divine mission'. Häggglund, *History of Theology* (St. Louis, MS: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 323.

<sup>20</sup> This sounds more like the God that Luther struggled *against* before his discovery of justification by faith alone, than the God he actually found to be and served thereafter. Timothy George notes 'how as a monk the phrase "the justice of God" in Romans 1:17 had struck terror in (Luther's), soul. All of his attempts to satisfy God - his prayers,

expression of God Himself. On this account Forster is adamant that God must uphold His Law. The same Scripture that affirms that 'God is Love', equally affirms that this love is holy. Furthermore, by nature God condemns anything that is other than He is. When God sees hatred there is a divine imperative that says, 'I am Love', and must destroy that hatred. Where He sees falsehood God has to say, 'I am Truth' and in such a way that obliterates untruth.

In this manner the Cross reveals something about God's character. It is not that the law is being satisfied in some arbitrary fashion, or that a Shylock is getting his 'pound of flesh',<sup>21</sup> (which again it is implied, is the Satisfaction view) but that through the Cross God's own holiness is being upheld. God's hatred of sin is manifest. Forster acknowledges that this aspect of the divine nature has to be expressed for God to forgive men and women.

He cannot, as some modern theologians argue, say, 'O well, to err is human, to forgive divine. Come into My heaven'. This cannot be, there is that within God that will destroy the sin that man clings to. Something has to be done if God's presence is not to be destructive to humanity. It is along this very defined line that the Cross effects a change in man and God.<sup>22</sup>

Another element in the Satisfaction theory that Forster affirms is its demonstration of God's justice. This is important, he comments, because there is 'a necessity within God' that mercy cannot be exercised *to* the world until the concept of justice has been clearly established before the world.<sup>23</sup> This he says 'modern society' tends to ignore. 'They forget "an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth,"<sup>24</sup> and they certainly miss "life for a life".'<sup>25</sup> The world has a 'made up justice' that replaces true righteousness with two merely ethical alternatives: deterrence and rehabilitation. If

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fastings, vigil's, good works - left him with a wholly disquieted conscience. His mood swung from despair over his own failures to a simmering rage at God: "I did not love, indeed I hated that God who punished sinners; and with a monstrous, silent if not blasphemous murmuring, I fumed against God.".' Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1989), p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>Forster here is alluding to the Jewish moneylender in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, who mercilessly seeks to extract every penny he is owed by the merchant Antonio.

<sup>22</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 21:24. AV.

<sup>25</sup> Exodus 21:23. AV.

criminals are treated harshly it will warn others and make them behave decently. Under the second alternative, criminals are considered misfits to be cured through psychiatry or psychology, and then returned to play their full part in the community. Neither of these approaches represents the biblical justice that requires an exact punishment deed for deed. Those who murder are to forfeit their own lives,<sup>26</sup> those who steal are to pay recompense with interest,<sup>27</sup> those who cause another to lose their sight, are themselves to be blinded, and so on.<sup>28</sup>

Forster concludes his critique by summarising that the Satisfaction theory is generally right in observing that God needs to demonstrate justice before He can give mercy, but generally wrong in understanding of the mechanics involved. Rather than exacting retribution God's need is to bring the universe to *understand* what is right from what is wrong so that in receiving forgiveness, men know they have obtained mercy and not something else.

### The Moral Theory

The 'Moral Theory' proposed by Peter Abelard in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century evolved out of dissatisfaction with both the early Church view and Anselm's alternative.<sup>29</sup> With qualified approval, Forster observes that Abelard - like many twentieth century views - rejects the idea that God required something of Christ as a condition necessary to forgiveness. Free forgiveness, however, is not the same as forgiveness without cost.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image'. Genesis 9:6. (RSV)

<sup>27</sup> 'If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. He shall make restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft'. Exodus 22:1. (RSV).

<sup>28</sup> 'When men strive together, and ... if any harm follows, then you shall give ... eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. Exodus 21:22-25. (RSV).

<sup>29</sup> Again, it is to be questioned to what extent has Forster apprehended Abelard's teaching. The latter holds to a number of doctrinal distinctives which would appeal deeply to Forster, yet which find no explicit mention. Not least among these: Abelard's denial of guilt as part of original sin; his view that sin begins with a conscious consent to do evil; that imitation not procreation leads to sin; and that sin interrupts the harmonious relationship between man and God. See: Paul C. Kemeny, 'Peter Abelard: An Examination of his Doctrine of Original Sin', *The Journal of Religious History* 16 (1991), pp. 374-386.

This is a vital proviso. Even in human society, if a man can forgive another in a blasé fashion, the reality of the forgiveness is questionable. On the other hand, if pardon involves deep 'emotional conflict',<sup>30</sup> this is indicative of true forgiveness. It is this dimension that Abelard expressed well; it cost God emotionally to forgive.

Approval is also given to the criticism that Anselm failed to adequately prioritise the rôle of God's *love* in the Cross.<sup>31</sup> As Saint John says, 'God so loved the world',<sup>32</sup> and 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins'.<sup>33</sup> Yet it is not only that love has a rôle, says Forster, but that 'love is *the* great motivation' behind the Cross,<sup>34</sup> indeed the very *essence* of the Cross. It was *love* that caused the Father to give His Son for the life of the world. 'Scripture makes it clear that the love of God is that which caused Jesus to come. It was love that *drove* Him to the Cross, and *drove* God to forgive'.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, when consideration of these issues is given to the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, Forster strongly questions whether love is appreciated as having moved God '*at all*'.<sup>36</sup>

Abelard taught that the Cross was not necessary for God to forgive, but it *was* necessary for man to receive forgiveness. The rationale is this. Humanity needs a revelation of God's love for the world, a revelation so powerful that when a person truly perceives the extent of the divine love, such a one will be driven to surrender to God in repentance. Historically this has been called the 'Moral Influence Theory' because it puts pressure on man's moral sensibilities, providing the drawing power that turns men back to God. As we shall see later, this voluntaristic element is central to Forster's own theory. That the Cross is not the cause of God's love for man, but a

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<sup>30</sup> Forster is very emphatic concerning this 'emotional' dimension, as his intonation strongly indicates. Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to know what precise weakness is being alluded to. As reported however, it seems questionable. The love of God for men is pervasive in Anselm, and is equally evident as the motivation and source of the Atonement. *Cur Deus Homo?* 1:4.

<sup>32</sup> John 3:16. AV.

<sup>33</sup> 1 John 4:10. AV.

<sup>34</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 16. Original emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Forster probably has in mind some of the Reformers' (more extreme) views that even in the damnation of the lost (who have been predestined to perdition) God is

demonstration of it, underlines the depth and unconditional nature of that love, which itself is key in bringing men to change. It is the love of God revealed by the Cross - not the threat of hell and fiery judgement - that provides the force of moral persuasion in reconciling humanity to God.

While biblically accurate in so many aspects, the Moral Theory fails, however, to sufficiently represent the offence that sin is before God. Equally its failure to acknowledge that God does have something against humankind must be dealt with. These deficiencies leave Abelard's theory 'a little bit empty, vacuous'.<sup>37</sup>

Here you are walking by a swollen mountain stream with your girlfriend, and as you go along you turn to her and say, 'I love you so much', then dive into the foaming waters, and drown because you can't swim. It might be a somewhat heroic demonstration of your love, but as the last bubbles of your breath are seen half a mile downstream your girl friend says, 'Thank the Lord I have got rid of that creature. He would have made a pretty neurotic husband!' Is God really like that? Did He jump into the stream of human experience and go down river into death in order to show how much He wants to be with us. Is that all?<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, '... if you fell into the water, and someone jumped in to save you, pushing you to the shore, but being no expert swimmer gets wafted away ... you would say for the rest of your life, "That person loved me!"'.<sup>39</sup> This is the necessity that Forster identifies as having sent Christ to the Cross. There is a divine imperative, an intense necessity revealed in such statements as, 'I *must* go to Jerusalem',<sup>40</sup> and, 'I *must* suffer these things at the hands of the Scribes and the Pharisees'.<sup>41</sup> Quite simply, there is a need in humankind upon which the Godhead *must* act so that men may be offered forgiveness.

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glorified.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. This is actually a criticism made by Anselm himself. In the dialogue with Bozo the comment is made that if God could have saved man in another way other than through the death of Christ, but that this death was undertaken not of necessity but *only* to show the extent of God's love to man, then God lacks wisdom; 'for, if a man should do by severe toil a thing which he could have done in some easy way, no one would consider him a wise man'. *Cur Deus Homo?* 1:6

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* See also, Forster, *Saturday Night*, p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 16:21.

<sup>41</sup> Mark 8:31, 9:12.

## The Conflict Theory

Finally, Forster examines the 'Classic' or 'Conflict Theory'. Early in the twentieth Century Swedish Lutheran theologian Gustaf Aulén revived this understanding. Aulén's book, *Christus Victor* (1931), argues that the emphases of Anselm and Abelard were unknown to the early Church who spoke largely in terms of 'redemption', the price paid to buy back one from captivity.<sup>42</sup> As an interpretation this view dominated the Church's understanding in the first millennium, but came into disrepute on account of 'crass speculation'<sup>43</sup> concerning the nature of the ransom, and questions as to whom the ransom was paid. As a consequence, by the time of Anselm it was a largely discredited interpretation.

Notwithstanding, Forster notes that redemption is, in fact, a very strong biblical theme. The 'unsophisticated'<sup>44</sup> speculations concerning the Ransom theory can be surmounted if the Bible's narrative - 'God redeemed Israel with an outstretched arm'<sup>45</sup> - is interpreted not in the sense that God paid a price to someone, but that 'God exerted Himself', for example, against Pharaoh and Rahab (types representing the forces of chaos). God 'paid a price' in terms of the exertion of His moral energy and activity to attain victory over the forces of evil. On the Cross Jesus *morally* exerts Himself against Sin, that is, the hosts of spiritual wickedness and demonic forces. The early Church was fond of this aspect of the Cross because through experience they perceived the relationship between demonic deliverance and physical healing. Due to a shift in world-view, a decline in the manifestation of spiritual gifts, and a greater emphasis on cerebral speculation, both this concept of victory-redemption and various experiences of healing were largely lost to the Mediaeval Church, and even more so to the Reformers.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> Deuteronomy 26:8. *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Most likely Forster is referring to the Reformers' perceived failure to carry on Rome's tradition of exorcism and healing through the sacraments, relics, pilgrimages, *etc.* Not that Forster accepts that the means were correct, but at least Rome both believed in the demonic and anticipated miracles from God as part of the redemptive provision.



In contrast, Forster observes that Genesis to Revelation is 'replete' with this *Christus victor* imagery.<sup>47</sup> God's words to Adam and Eve after the Fall, the 'first prophecy', speaks of the Messiah's mission, 'the seed of the woman will crush the Serpent's head',<sup>48</sup> as does one of the last prophecies, 'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony'.<sup>49</sup> Both portray the Atonement in relationship to Satan and his dominion, his destruction and defeat.

### The Foundation: Sonship

Christ's knowledge of His person and ministry began at an early stage in life,<sup>50</sup> and increased over His lifetime,<sup>51</sup> largely through meditating over the Scriptures.<sup>52</sup> At the age of twelve Jesus had come to the place where he was able to say, 'I must be about my Father's business'.<sup>53</sup> The grammatical construction, we are told, emphasises Christ's awareness of His unique relationship to God, 'the Father of Me' as well as speaking of His ministry: He was doing the Father's business.<sup>54</sup> This was later reiterated at Jesus' baptism, which point marked the beginning of His public ministry. Coming up out of the waters,

the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son;

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<sup>47</sup> By the time these lectures were delivered, Forster has already undertaken an in-depth exposition of the Pentateuch, as well as a number of the books of the Prophets. In the former particularly, he found these *motifs* writ large. Thus, *sacrifice and priesthood* in Genesis and Leviticus, *conflict and warfare* in Joshua and Job, *redemption and jubilee* in Ruth and Leviticus, *suffering and service* in Isaiah.

<sup>48</sup> Genesis 3:15, quoted *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Revelation 12:20, quoted *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Christ's knowledge of His person and ministry began at birth. See: Hebrews 1:5, 'For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, *this day have I begotten thee?* And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?' and Hebrews 5:5, 'So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, *today have I begotten thee*'. (Added emphasis).

<sup>51</sup> Luke records, 'He grew in wisdom and stature, in favour with God and man'. (Luke 2:52).

<sup>52</sup> 'Now that is not speculation, it is one hundred percent certain. It would have happened to every Jewish boy brought up in the Synagogue'. Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Luke 2:49. AV.

<sup>54</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 29.

with thee I am well pleased'. (Luke 3:21-22).<sup>55</sup>

These words have reference to four Old Testament texts<sup>56</sup> that Forster implies would have been immediately understood by Christ as linking Him as the unique and beloved Son of God, to the 'suffering servant' and to 'sacrifice'.<sup>57</sup> Further associations would have been consciously drawn from Isaiah:

'He was as a Lamb ... before His shearers';<sup>58</sup>

'He poured out His soul unto death';<sup>59</sup>

'He makes His soul an offering for sin'.<sup>60</sup>

Forster notes that many who approach the Atonement rightly start with Sonship, but fail to maintain it as a *defining* feature, consequently failing to see the *Father* at the heart of it all. Thus, in most theories, the God of Atonement is definitely a Judge, definitely a Lord, definitely a King but not a Father.<sup>61</sup> Forster does not argue this in the strictest semantic sense, but as a practical reality the Fatherhood of God is significantly eclipsed with the result that as a defining aspect of the Atonement, it is missed altogether. It is forgotten that the Cross was endured by the *Son* of God to reconcile us to a Father, and to a Father's heart. Yet this is absolutely vital for a correct understanding of Christ's work. 'You can not understand Atonement *in any other terms but Sonship*'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed the whole New Testament 'hangs' not 'on ideas of judgement and being declared right in a law court, and propitiation and ideas of redemption which belong to the slave market',<sup>63</sup> but rather on how men might be restored to a

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<sup>55</sup> See: Luke 3:22, 'You are My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'. Added emphasis.

<sup>56</sup> Genesis 22:2, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, and offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will show you of'. Exodus 4:22, 'Israel is my son, my first born, out of Egypt I have called my son, Israel is my son, my first born'. Psalm 2:6, 12, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you ... I have set my king upon the holy hill of Zion ... kiss the Son', and Isaiah 42:1, 'You are my servant, my chosen in whom is all my delight, in whom I am well pleased'.

<sup>57</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Isaiah 53:7, quoted *Ibid.*, p. 36..

<sup>59</sup> Isaiah 53:12, quoted *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Isaiah 53:10, quoted *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', pp. 36-37.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

relationship with God, 'which is the relationship of a Father and a son'.<sup>64</sup>

### **Atonement Proper: Identification**

Forster's concept of identification explains the mechanics or the 'how?' of Christ's work, and God's through Him, particularly in regards to the actualising of Atonement between God and man. There are three distinct and clear elements within the one concept: Christ's identification with man; God's identification with Christ; Man's identification with Christ and God in Him.

Christ's baptism reveals the first element, to wit, there exists a relationship in which the Son of God stands to the human race.<sup>65</sup> This relationship moves beyond the Incarnation itself if that be understood as Christ becoming human. Forster says there is a fundamental 'unity' or 'identification' (Forster's preferred phrase) between Christ and the entire human race, which transcends His being just a man, and corresponds to the position in which Adam stands to humanity. Without this '... there is going to be no Atonement'.<sup>66</sup>

This identification is explicitly revealed at many points in Christ's ministry, not just the moment of His baptism. As to the nature of this identification, Forster draws from Jesus' words prior to His baptism, 'it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness'. In effect, 'I am standing with every man, woman and child because they have failed to fulfil all righteousness, and need to, and in me will'.<sup>67</sup> Forster insists that this identification must not be misunderstood in some 'abstract' sense, since it is 'real'. 'It was a total saturation'.<sup>68</sup> In this he appears to anticipate the criticism that having rejected the Evangelical doctrine of constitutional union, and its clear legal connection between Christ and the human race, any other kind of union must be less substantive. This is not the case. Christ's union with the human race *is* real, so much so that He 'is actually *feeling* .. the consequences of our sin, *tasting* the results of our sin, *knowing* the

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> This will only be dealt with briefly here as this question was more comprehensively examined in the previous chapter.

<sup>66</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 31. Original emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

judgement of God upon our sin'.<sup>69</sup> To talk about Christ enduring the penalty of sin against this context would 'be a nice escape'.<sup>70</sup>

Though the Cross represents the climax of Christ's identification with the sinful race, that identification did not begin on the Cross. This explains why Jesus suffered through out His life, and not just at the end. Again there is a parallel with Adam. Forbidden to partake of the tree of knowledge, Adam was warned of God 'in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die',<sup>71</sup> but he 'lived' for another 960 years. In reality though, it was a millennium when death worked in him. In the same way death was at work in Christ not only on the Cross, not only from the beginning of His ministry, but from the earliest moments of His life 'He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows'.<sup>72</sup> It is this life long humiliation, which is so explicitly revealed in Isaiah 52 and Isaiah 53.

This truth notwithstanding, it was only on the Cross that identification reached its fullness, and it was only on the Cross that death was experienced as a judgement from God.<sup>73</sup> This is how Forster interprets the trepidation, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass'.<sup>74</sup> The crucifixion marked the supreme moment in which the sin of the whole world was allowed its complete outworking, producing fear, a sense of shame, guilt, the erosion of energy, instability, trembling for the future, and uncertainty. The

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32. Original emphasis.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>71</sup> Genesis 2:17. AV.

<sup>72</sup> Isaiah 53:4. RSV.

<sup>73</sup> 'Death as an experience of the human condition began to affect him from his earliest days, but death as a judgement of God on sin - I don't think we would say that that was at work in Christ until he reaches the Cross. However, I wouldn't like to be definitive. This was an issue that came up in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with three different views seen in three well-known preachers of the time, Benjamin Wills Newton, Edward Irving, the leader of the Catholic Apostolic Church, and Darby, the leader of the Brethren, who had different views about when the wrath of God began to work on Christ. I think it would be true to say though, that Jesus born into the human race would have experienced the outworking of man's condition of death through his lifetime, but not as necessarily a judgement upon his sin. That he doesn't have until he makes our sins his own on the Cross'. Forster, London, letter, to the author, June 10, 1997.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew 26:39. AV.

same idea is found in Jesus' claim to be the true High Priest of God.<sup>75</sup> The High Priest himself is inextricably linked with the events of *Yom Kippur*, the day when the sins of the people were laid upon the scapegoat, and the blood of the second goat was sprinkled upon the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the nation. Christ fulfils the rôle of both animals. As the scapegoat,

Every single possible thing that has ever passed through this universe, and the consequences of death that have been brought upon it, Jesus experienced. The terrible torment He must have experienced. If you say for some of us it goes on 70 years, you cannot measure pain in terms of years. As Jesus hung on the Cross the immensity of all those years of sinning in thousands of millions of people all ate into His Being.<sup>76</sup>

Another analogy that Forster uses both to explain the nature of sin's impact and the work of Christ is of a force hitting a railway train.

Think of a line of trucks on a railway track receiving an impact. One hits the first, and that one the next, and so on, till the impact bounces all the way down the line. So, in the closed circuit of this universe, sin with its repercussions bangs down from time forward and time backward to the very Cross where God has come into time and space. Christ stands as a truck with the brake on, or as the buffers, to take the impact and to exhaust the effects of our sin.<sup>77</sup>

Through this 'closed circuit' analogy Forster provides important insight as to the meaning behind his teaching that Christ 'bore' or 'took away' the sin of the world. The Satisfaction theory focuses on the legal consequences of sin: Sin was imputed to Christ who then bore the wrath of God. In Forster these ideas are absent. Sin is understood to be a 'force' that infects the universe, like sickness in a body, or to use Forster's analogy from physics, like energy in a closed system. Christ became the focal point, or point of attraction for that evil energy, receiving it all into himself until he 'exhausts' its consequences.

Being 'made sin', Christ experienced the 'fires' of God's holiness, which, says

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<sup>75</sup> "To Caiaphas' inquiry, "I adjure thee by the Living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God?" the response is given, "You will See: the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power, and coming on the clouds of heaven". Interpreted against the backdrop of Levitical worship, this speaks of the High Priest's entry once a year, through a cloud of incense, into the holiest place, to sprinkle the mercy seat with blood. For the High Priest to *sit* on the mercy seat was certain death, yet Jesus solemnly declares "You will see the Son of Man sitting down". The claim was not only to be a High Priest, but *the* High Priest'. Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 48. Original emphasis.

<sup>76</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', pp. 42-43.

Forster, are the fires of hell, 'the burning of the lake of fire'.<sup>78</sup> In the book of Revelation the enemies of God are tormented, not thousands of miles away from God, but 'in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb'.<sup>79</sup> This is the torment that Christ experienced on the Cross.

As an offering for sin (the rôle of the second goat), Jesus freely offers His life up for the world. 'I lay my life down freely' (John 10:15). 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit'. (Luke 23:46). Christ's identification with the human race, and subsequent offering of Himself was entered into wholly without external constraint. 'It was out of utter, complete free will that Jesus chose to lay down His life and take it up again'.<sup>80</sup> This is 'very important', for it is the complete autonomy of Christ's death which 'gives it its value, so it has efficacious power in our lives'.<sup>81</sup> This reveals the extent of Christ's love for the Father, as well as the depths of God's love for the world.

Jesus' cry, ' "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ' (Matthew 27:46)<sup>82</sup> points to the second part of Forster's theory of identification. This is the only time that Christ addressed His Father as 'God'. It has to be asked, 'why?' Forster notes that in John 16:32 Christ says 'I'll be alone', but then suddenly qualifies this, 'but I'll not be alone, the Father is with Me'. How is this to be understood against Matthew 27:46? The tension is resolved if the expressions of abandonment and fellowship are interpreted as the context intends, that is, historically. 'God means us to understand the Cross through Isaac and Abraham [just as] He means us to understand the Cross through what was said a couple of hours before'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Forster, *Saturday Night*, p. 57.

<sup>78</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 74. See: Forster, *Saturday Night*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>79</sup> Revelation 14:10. RSV.

<sup>80</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 57.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* By this Forster does not intend 'God means us to *exclusively* understand the Cross through Isaac and Abraham' but that the story of Abraham and Isaac, like so many in the Old Testament, is allegorical or prophetically anticipating the work of Christ in Atonement. Concerning a similar view of this particular historical instance and its relationship to Christ see Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: New and Old Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, reprint 1996), pp. 91f.

If we went to the preview 2,000 years before, where in that very place Jesus was going to be crucified on Mount Moriah, and we had gone up the mountain side with Abraham and Isaac, we would have heard Abraham say, 'We go to worship and we will come back again', and they went up the mountain together. The father and the son went up the mountain together and they came down together, and whatever happened at the top when the knife was about to go into Isaac, it could not have been too far removed from, 'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?' They must have previewed it in some way.<sup>84</sup>

Forster asks, 'How often have you heard it said that the Father abandoned the Son? That the Father turned His face away? That the Father could have nothing to do with Jesus on the Cross?'<sup>85</sup> The truth is, such an idea is 'impossible'. The Father and the Son could never be separated in the true sense because the life of the Father is in the Son, and the life of the Son is in the Father (1 John 1:2-3). Whatever the cry of dereliction means, it is not that the Father and the Son were being separated. Paul's teaching, 'God was *in* Christ reconciling the world to himself', affirms the underlying unity in the Godhead in this climactic moment. God was very definitely *with* Christ throughout the whole event:

Whatever was happening on the Cross was not the Father and the Son being pulled apart, because 'God was *in* Christ reconciling the world to Himself'. It was the action of the total Godhead.<sup>86</sup> The moment of 'forsaken-ness' was not a personal desertion, but marked the divine rejection of sin. Emphatically, there was no abandonment, but God continued in fellowship with the Son.<sup>87</sup> What Christ did experience was the God 'forsaken-ness' of the sinner, but He experienced it in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity experienced 'utter-man-lost-ness', from all the perspectives possible through the Incarnation.

It ... [was not only] the Son of God who experienced God-forsaken-ness on the Cross, but it was God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It was the totality of one triune God, the one God.<sup>88</sup>

This understanding is 'radical' because, I know that we don't like speaking of

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<sup>84</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 63.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Speaking of even the possibility of broken fellowship Forster says, 'God cannot be divided like that'. Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.

<sup>88</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 65.

the Father's experience of emotion, pain or suffering.<sup>89</sup>

As for the place of suffering in the divine purpose:

I believe that this is necessary for God to experience that if he is ever going to establish relationship with sinful man. Think about it. It was necessary for God to experience what it means to be utterly repudiated, rejected and lost. He had to experience God-forsaken-ness, He had to experience what condition man was in before He could actually get through that barrier, get across that barrier, into the heart of mankind, and He did it though His Son.<sup>90</sup>

Forster gives three reasons for this necessity. God would be able to forgive sins; He would know what He is forgiving in doing so; He would be able to effectually reach through sin into the heart of mankind. Forster illustrates the idea in *Saturday Night, Monday Morning*. An adulterous but repentant husband

stands on one foot and then the other, not looking at her in the eyes, more a mouse than a man. He says, 'I'm sorry, will you have me back?' Suddenly it snaps. Metaphorically she steps forward and stands in his shoes. She feels his condemnation, his self-judgement and fear - 'will she have me back?' She feels the consequences of his actions on herself. She puts out her arms - 'Of course I will' - there is a reconciling kiss; a new relationship has been formed. He need never have to fear now that she might reject him once she has discovered everything he has done and been, because she herself has experienced it all in it's consequences, and knows what she has forgiven.<sup>91</sup>

In the same way then, God through Christ's death on the Cross entered into a 'perfect identification' with sinful man. The Father experiences the full reality of man's sin so that He might know the totality of what He is forgiving, 'that He might say, "Of course I forgive you, come home"'.<sup>92</sup> The Godhead experienced this not only so that humanity might be forgiven, but also equally that humanity might have unquestionable confidence in that forgiveness. God will never annul or rescind that mercy since God has shown Himself to know fully what He has forgiven.

The third element in Forster's concept insists, that for identification to be actually redemptive, it could neither be undertaken away from the gaze of humanity,

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* Forster is alluding to the ancient Christian doctrine of the divine impassibility, the idea that God 'dwells in perfect bliss outside the sphere of time and space ... essentially unaffected by creatively events and experiences'. Clark Pinnock, *et al.* *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Forster, *Saturday Night*, p. 58.



nor isolated from man's experience. All that Christ did, and God in Him, didn't happen 'merely' to gain human assent, an, 'I believe',<sup>93</sup> but happened that mankind may be joined to Christ and experience for himself the redemptive work of the Cross. Jesus identified with humanity, that humanity may in turn be brought to identify with Him.

The identification of Atonement is thus a triple identification: Christ 'felt' the full corruption of sin; God 'felt' it with Him; all with the purpose that man should be brought to 'feel' it too. When Christ saw God's reaction against sin, and God saw what sin does to a man, it was with the intent that man should 'see' these things also. When Jesus wept for sin, and grieved for sin, and was broken on account of sin, and God was broken with Him, it was with the purpose that man should be brought to weep, grieve and be broken in Christ, with God. Christ's death to sin, and God's participation in it, declares the possibility of the death of all mankind to the power of sin.

Christ's discourse with the sons of Zebedee (among others) confirms the necessity of man's participation in Atonement event. Jesus asks James and John, 'Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of? And are you able to be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?' (Matthew 10:22). 'Drinking the cup' is a metaphor for identifying with human sinfulness in the presence of God. 'Baptism' speaks of an experiential saturation, the overflowing nature of the experience. That James and John are later to drink of the *same* cup corresponds the reciprocity that is intended in Christ's identification with sinners, and God in Him.

John 12:24<sup>94</sup> gives expression to the need of man's personal participation in the

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<sup>92</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> Forster is criticising the idea that Christ redeemed mankind without man partaking in that redemption, that is, by becoming actually righteous. In other words, Christ could have done something wholly objective to man's experience, yet was truly redemptive, the 'debt is paid, you can go free' kind of idea. However, as we have seen previously, Anselm never envisaged such a 'redemption'. He, as much as Forster, embraces as necessary, a subjective side to the Atonement. The difference concerns the nature of the subjective aspect and its place in the *ordo salutis*. Anselm prioritises a constitutional and legal union over a subjective one. Forster inverts the order.

<sup>94</sup> 'Truly, truly, I say unto you unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit'. AV.

Atonement. The death of one seed leading to the birth of many seeds declares Christ's substitution *for me* necessarily includes His reproduction *in me*. Through this concept of reciprocity, Forster divorces himself from the Anselmic notion that Jesus died for mankind in some 'objective vacuum'. 'Jesus is not dying for mankind over there, while we all sit over here'.<sup>95</sup> Failure to understand this is where so many interpretations of Atonement have erred. Christ 'certainly' died as a representative and substitute, but only if these words are understood as a subjective experience.<sup>96</sup>

For this reason the Cross had to be in full view of the whole world (a public demonstration), and could not have been undertaken in some corner of the universe out of sight. Christ had to die publicly so that man can 'see' and in 'seeing' be brought to die in and with Him.<sup>97</sup> It is by revelation, therefore, that men are brought to benefit from the Cross and receive personal Atonement with God.

At the heart of this triple identification is the experience of repentance. Christ repented for sin in the presence of God, so that we can repent with Him.<sup>98</sup> This is because mankind is unable to repent himself on account of a hardened and corrupted heart: 'We don't feel as bad as we ought to feel, nor ashamed as we ought to be'.<sup>99</sup> We don't truly 'see' what sin is to God. It is only a perfect and righteous man who can truly repent, but such has no need of repentance. Jesus solved the dilemma: 'C. S. Lewis gives the lovely picture of a father putting his hand over a child's hand ... so that the letters are written perfectly'.<sup>100</sup> This expresses well something that Christ has done for mankind, but it is not merely objective, it is something more: 'I have repented

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<sup>95</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 31.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> In one sense this criticism of the Satisfaction view is appreciated, especially against those Calvinistic interpretations which interpret Christ's work as wholly efficacious, that is, in itself *the sole ground of justification*. A man does not need to 'see' the Cross, and thus have his own faith in order to be justified. At another level this criticism is wrong. Even the hyper-Calvinist would insist that a revelation of the work of Christ, and thus *faith*, are necessary for salvation: 'We are justified by faith'.

<sup>98</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 33.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Fontana Books, 1952. Fifth impression), p. 57. Christian Kettler argues that Lewis used R. C. Moberly's nomenclature, which in turn was derived from McLeod Campbell's concept of vicarious repentance. See: Christian D. Kettler, 'The Vicarious Repentance of Christ in the Theology of John McLeod Campbell

for you, *so that you can repent with me*'. This concept of repentance in many ways defines Forster's view of Atonement. In order to be reconciled to God man needs to repent of his sin, that is, be brought to understand sin's nature, and having understood then to renounce sin, and then live accordingly. Sin itself has made man unable to do any of this, but what the Satisfaction view understands as primarily a legal and constitutional (that is, as pertaining to human nature) impairment, needing a legal and constitutional solution, Forster sees as moral and voluntaristic problem that needs a moral and voluntaristic solution. Eradicate mankind's spiritual blindness and, if he is willing, a sinner can, by grace, through Christ, change and enter into a relationship with the Father.

There is absolutely no question of human merit in any of this. Neither is it a question of Christ providing satisfaction to God to 'pay' for our sin, nor doing something to earn God's favour on our behalf. The issue is that humankind is *unwilling* to have fellowship with God, and consequently God *cannot* have fellowship with humanity. End man's rebellion and, *ipso facto*, fellowship can be restored. Jesus came create the opportunity, for that change of mind. This not only lies at the heart of Atonement, but also once actualised, in the fullest sense constitutes Atonement:

If a boy kicks a football through a window and his father has to pay for its replacement, there is a payment involved, but this is secondary to their relationship being brought back into harmony. There is no point in an Atonement which allows the child to keep on breaking the window knowing that the father will always pay the bill. Yet that is how the Cross of Christ is sometimes understood, what it is reduced to. The Bible doesn't convey such an understanding. The Cross is to re-establish filial relationship; that men and women come to the place of *feeling the Father's heart*, 'Why do you do it son?' and 'Father, why is it so bad for you?'<sup>101</sup>

## Redemption: Revelation

We have noted in a previous chapter that the first consequence of sin is the distortion it creates in humankind's perception of God. Sin subjectively obscures God's true nature. As nails are driven through Christ's hands, the intercession is made, 'Father, forgive them *for they don't know what they are doing*'. (Luke 23:34). Three hours later at

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and R. C. Moberly', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985), pp. 529-543 at pp. 529, 538.

<sup>101</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 27.

mid-day, physical darkness falls on the land (Luke 23:44). Taken together, says Forster, Jesus' words and the darkened sun are acts of 'prophetic revelation' that declare to us that sin brings spiritual blindness. Paul affirms this is also, '*none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*'.<sup>102</sup>

By making known the true God, and that so forcefully, the Cross sets the stage for undoing this ignorance.

In dying Jesus opened up God's heart so that the whole of mankind might see the depths of the divine love ... It provided the deepest revelation of God as Father - deeper than in anything He taught, said, or demonstrated in any other aspect of the Incarnation. The Cross declared, 'God is like this!'<sup>103</sup>

At times Forster sees this element as paramount: 'Whatever else is happening on the Cross, it reveals the very depths of who God is'.<sup>104</sup>

John 12:23 explicitly links the Cross with the revelation of God's Person. 'The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified'. To 'glorify' is 'to see the greatness of'.<sup>105</sup> The greatness of Christ and the greatness of God, by which Forster means God's character and nature, are seen in Calvary. This is especially true concerning God's love for the world. Christ's analogy of a man lying down his life for his friends, (John 15:13), receives emphasis from the fact that God is laying down His life for His enemies. Thus, 'whatever else the Cross is, it is a great act of love'.<sup>106</sup> Yet it also the moment in which God's justice is made known. The hideous nature and depravity of sin is manifest in the ugliness of Christ's death. In effect God says through it, 'That's what I think of the world, of mankind in his sin'.<sup>107</sup>

This revelation of God's character and nature was not limited to one moment on Calvary. God was made known through Jesus' good works (healing, exorcism, *etc.*), His symbolic acts (His baptism, turning water into wine, washing His disciples feet, *etc.*), and His teachings. In John 3:14 Jesus deliberately identifies Himself with

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<sup>102</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:8. AV. Added Emphasis.

<sup>103</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Moses' serpent of brass, an act of 'prophetic symbolism' which reveals Himself to be the one who is bringing life in the midst of our death.<sup>108</sup> John 6:48 presents Christ as the true Manna, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven',<sup>109</sup> in other words He is *life* itself. John 12:31-33<sup>110</sup> makes known that the world is judged, in the sense of 'finished', 'useless', 'written off', and 'no hope'.<sup>111</sup> 'We have been written off so that we know what to think of ourselves' and so 'abandon ourselves to the Cross'.<sup>112</sup> This having been said, Forster's concept of 'revelation' is far more than simply God making Himself known in a purely cognitive manner. It is a revelation of God, which through the Cross, precipitates an actual realisation of Atonement as sinners are brought to identify with Christ, and God in Him.

In saying 'if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me',<sup>113</sup> Christ confirms 'that Atonement includes a compulsive moral force', a force 'that flows from knowing that the right is the good'.<sup>114</sup> This 'draws' men to Christ to become one with Him. The same truth is found in Jesus' warning, 'Truly, truly, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you'. (John 6:53). It is not enough that the truth is known in some objective fashion, it must be entered into, partaken, 'eaten'. Revelation not only allows this partaking to happen but also brings its own substantive reality. It is through knowledge we come to feel the Father's heart, and to feel why sin is bad.<sup>115</sup> It thence gives us the power to die to sin and to live unto God.<sup>116</sup>

We often limit the meaning of the word 'substitution' to mean 'he did it for me', but it means more. He also did it *with* me, I was with Him there. I died with Him there and I rose with Him there. So what was done on the Cross was done *in* me, it was not just done for me. It was done objectively 2,000 years ago,

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>109</sup> John 6:48. AV.

<sup>110</sup> 'Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die'. RSV.

<sup>111</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 59.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>113</sup> John 12:32.

<sup>114</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 60.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

*but when I come and participate, it is in me.*<sup>117</sup>

## The Incarnation and the Human Race

The final aspect of Forster's understanding of Atonement concerns the relationship that exists between Christ and the human race. Again an attempted synthesis is sought between existing theories. Notwithstanding, Forster begins by distancing himself from 'subjective' view, which sees no legal or 'objective' bond between Christ and the human race, because it offers 'no real ground' upon which to connect the act of Atonement with those for whom it was done; and also from the 'objective' view, because it embraces a legal fiction requiring an 'artificial' exchange of man's sin for Christ's righteousness.

In his positive statement of belief, Forster highlights two passages of Scripture that are said to be fundamental in giving insight into the nature of the union that exists between Christ and the human race, Romans 5:12,18-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-49:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. Romans 5:12. (AV.)

Therefore as by the offence of one judgement came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Romans 5:18-19. (AV.)

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. 1 Corinthians 15:45-49. (AV.)

From these passages Forster draws out a number of vital concepts. The first concerns the racial unity that exists between Adam and Christ. Paul, Forster argues, 'obviously' conceives of Christ to be as much a man as Adam. The second concerns equality of 'headship' between Adam - the first man - and Christ - the second man.

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59. Added emphasis.

Another concept follows from this: whatever connection the race and the cosmos have with sin, as set forth in Adam, the same association exists between all people, the cosmos, and righteousness, as set forth in Christ. But what is the exact nature of this 'headship' relationship? Minimally there is a unity in the sense that both share a common humanity. Yet Forster goes beyond this. That Christ shares in the tragedy of physical depravity, that He came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh', (Romans 8:3) points to something beyond a solely racial integrity. Some how, in some way, Christ shares in the lot of sinful man, though without actual sin.<sup>118</sup>

Having ruled out the Augustinian/Federal interpretation of Adam's headship, Forster substitutes for it the concept of example. Thus, in the same sense that Adam's transgression may be said to have provided the occasion for sin, so Christ's righteousness has provided the occasion for righteousness. As the sinner has affirmed Adam's transgression by walking in the same path, so the justified affirms Christ's righteousness by walking in the same path. In moral terms, the sinner inherits Adam's sin only by following in the same direction. The Christian inherits Christ's life similarly, only in the sense that he follows His pattern. In this way of correspondence those who sin are said to be 'in Adam', as those who choose righteousness and are said to be 'in Christ'.

Notwithstanding, elsewhere Forster finds the concept of example somewhat inadequate. As we have noted previously, humanity is not born into a 'neutral' prelapsarian world.<sup>119</sup> Adam's sin does have involuntary implications for his posterity. At the very least, physical depravity presents an occasion to sin that otherwise would not exist. Thus, Christ Himself may be said to be more than an occasion for righteousness. While Forster's denial of inherited depravity means that he rejects the idea of inevitability, he avoids the vacuity that exists in a theory of example by arguing that just as the first transgression opened the door for the 'power' or 'energising influence' of sin to enter the world, so Christ has brought in the 'power' of righteousness. In *Saving Faith*, Forster uses the illustration of iron filings - man - caught between two magnets exerting contrary attractions.<sup>120</sup> This is exactly

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118 *Contra* Edward Irving.

119 'Cosmos', or 'universe'.

120 Forster, *Saving Faith*, p. 17f.

analogous to the conflicting powers of good and evil.

This concept has its reciprocity in Forster's theory of identification. Christ identified Himself with mankind in such a manner that is as though their sin<sup>121</sup> and sins,<sup>122</sup> and death were His own. It is in this sense that Forster interprets Hebrews 2:9: 'He tasted death for every man'. At the same time, by the Incarnation and through Christ's sympathy with the human predicament, humanity may be 'united' in the offering of Himself. On Christ's part this identification was objective in the sense that it is true of man as an organic entity, not the sum of men as specific individuals. His death was, therefore, in the former sense, the death of all men. He shares in the one death that belongs to all.

This 'objective' aspect to Atonement from humanity to the Cross carries over in the same sense in Christ's resurrection and life to humanity. Resurrection and life are potentially the lot of all men - they only have to believe, that is, consciously yield to the 'attraction' the Cross represents, and by this enter into its reality. As Christ acted to identify Himself with all men, all men must come (in the same sense) to identify themselves with Him. He tasted our death, with the purpose that we might taste His. His rising then becomes our resurrection, His life our life through the faith activity. His righteousness counts in the sight of God as the potential righteousness of us all (because it can be transmitted to, or reproduced in, all)..

Finally, it is this potentiality that makes the Cross universal. Every person has what may be called 'an interest in Christ' or a 'standing in Christ'. Through it we are all drawn to share in the fellowship of Christ who is our true life, to participate in the remission of sins and eternal life that Christ has for us.

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<sup>121</sup> The difference being that 'sin' speaks of the essential substance of transgression, whereas 'sins' speak of the very acts performed by men. The latter lends itself to a theory of imputation since Christ is generally viewed as taking the punishment due to specific sins committed by specific men. The former posits the principle of sin itself, and avoids the idea of imputation.

<sup>122</sup> 'Christ was made sin for us but He also bore our sins. He calls our sins His sins in Psalm 69'. Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.



## Summary

Forster's critical examination of the three historic theories of the Atonement, is especially helpful in furthering our appreciation of his teaching, because it reveals a vital assumption in his thinking, namely, that there exists an essential complementarity between the three views. Understanding this becomes even more important when it is realised that the same thesis underlies the construction of his own theory. Furthermore, having assumed - or reasoned - that the objective and subjective theories of Christ's work can be successfully synthesised into a more 'biblical' understanding, the same methodology is applied in terms of Forster's inclusion of more recent theological insights in constructing his own doctrine of Atonement. Forster not only believes that there exists an essential complementarity between the teachings of Anselm, Abelard, *etc.*, which allows for their synthesis into one grand theory, but on account of his doctrine of revelation in the Church, finds that this synthesis must be an ongoing undertaking, since God is constantly granting new insights into His truth.

In respect to the former, Forster's argument is not a new one. Colin Grant notes that there are number of theologians, who, with 'the advantage of hindsight' have argued that any adequate understanding of the Atonement 'must' allow for the full variety of expressions to which history has given rise. In other words, 'the various theories *all* have their contribution to make in a comprehensive appreciation of the Atonement',<sup>123</sup> notwithstanding, Grant does not believe this himself. Far from it:

The obviousness of this conclusion, and the ease with which it is reached, is exceeded only by its uselessness ... The theoretical advocacy of a sophisticated openness which is appreciative of various approaches translates into the concrete practice of the total avoidance of the whole issue ... The shallowness and absurdity of this solution is particularly glaring at that point where it derives its initial credibility, in its proposal for combining objective and subjective approaches to Atonement. The superficial plausibility of this proposal is dissipated as soon as it is recognised that far from representing different emphases on a continuum, the objective and subjective approaches reflect the diverse world-views of different historic epochs.<sup>124</sup>

In the light of such criticism what are we to make of Forster's chosen path of

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<sup>123</sup> Colin Grant, 'The Abandonment of Atonement', *Kings Theological Journal* 9 (1986), pp. 1-8 at p. 1. Added emphasis.

interpretation? More particularly, does Forster anticipate the fundamental objection to his argument, namely 'that from the point of view of the objective approach, subjective views are not views of the Atonement at all'.<sup>125</sup> Given the demonstrable failures surrounding Forster's appreciation of Anselm, equally his misinterpretation of subsequent Satisfaction theories, and most of all his failure to grasp the defining qualities of an objective Atonement, there is a great deal to suggest that Forster's thesis is indeed founded on 'shallow' and 'superficial' thinking.

Beyond this we are faced with Forster's tacit admission that the overwhelming majority of Christian thinkers are ranged against him, thus he himself asks, 'Why has the Church failed to hold the three views together?'<sup>126</sup> More important than this question is the answer that Forster gives to it. For at this juncture Forster makes another bold and unsubstantiated assertion, but one which gives significant insight into his understanding: the Church failed to hold the three theories together because it became distracted, finding focus in one significant aspect of Christ's achievement, but only one. Thus, he argues, while each theory has had a valid contribution to make, the weakness common to all, is that each has failed to maintain Christ at the centre, instead becoming theocentric, anthropocentric or diabolocentric.

Forster's answer to this error is to reformulate each theory to focus on Christ. This allows us to see that Forster has not, after all, synthesised the *motifs* into a unitary theory, but brought each into a new context and thus changed the original meaning of one, if not all three views. But it allows us to see something else, that the underlying arguments of Forster are very bold in what they affirm, and even more bold in what they deny: that a true theory of the Atonement is derived by melding together the historical insights of the Church; that the Church has previously proved itself incapable of doing this successfully.

Examining Forster's own theory allows us to determine the nature of his synthesis; whether as an attempt to meld all three theories, it is merely illusory; and whether the task is doomed from the beginning to completely reject the Atonement as an objective act in the sense defined by Anselm and his successors on account of

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

earlier presuppositions held by Forster.

We have seen that Forster's theory is defined by three distinct concepts or *motifs*: 'Sonship', 'Revelation' and 'Identification'. Every other idea stands referenced against these. Concerning definition: (1) sonship speaks most distinctively of the *context* of Atonement (what we could call the foundation of Atonement), that which gives it ultimate meaning; (2) identification addresses the fundamental nature of Atonement (what we could call Atonement Proper), what actually occurred; (3) revelation is the vehicle of its application, the means by which sinners are made beneficiaries of Christ's work (what we could call the application of redemption).

Forster's view of Atonement places great importance upon the willingness of the Father to send His Son for the salvation of the whole world. Christ didn't come to make an unwilling God propitious, but came to demonstrate that He is already favourably disposed towards us. Forster finds it necessary to emphasise this point since the 'generally held theory' implies a dichotomy in the Godhead: an angry Father who, were it not for the interposition of the Son, would readily (and even happily) obliterate a sinful humanity. It is significant to note, however, that Forster's complaint at those who fail to start with God's love in their theology is not limited to proponents of the Satisfaction theory: 'I've often stated, not only the Reformers and the Confessions but the early Church Fathers and the Creeds, fail to make the theological statement that 'God is love', and 'so loves the world'.<sup>127</sup> Forster's claim, therefore, is that most Christian theology has failed to adequately appreciate the love of God in its understanding, and thence, in its proclamation to the world. This criticism allows us not only to appreciate the emphasis that Forster places on the doctrine of God's love, but further recognise the degree of separation Forster sets between himself and historical Christian thought.

In the light of its centrality in Forster's understanding of the Atonement it is important that this love is clearly defined. What is this, the love of God? First and foremost it is a present love: wherever and in whatever condition a man may be found, God loves him. It is a persevering love: it is a love that steadfastly continues in

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<sup>126</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 23.

<sup>127</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 10, 1997, to the author.

the face of persistent alienation and enmity. It is a paramount love: God's love stands at the centre of time and eternity continuously reaching across the gulf that separates the human race from its intended inheritance. It is a universal love: 'God so loved the world', meaning all, not a limited 'elect'.<sup>128</sup> The Atonement cannot be adequately understood, says Forster, unless this love is understood as central to all that God has to say to the world.

Forster shows himself aware, however, that without appropriate qualification there is the danger of turning this love into mere sentiment:

A man is walking with his girlfriend alongside a mountain stream that has been swollen by the melting snow. Suddenly he throws himself into the dangerous torrent and shouts to her as he sinks beneath the water, 'I love you so much!' This is not so much a demonstration of love as the act of a neurotic!<sup>129</sup>

Thus, in interpreting God's essential parental relationship towards us, Forster equally insists that true love requires justice, yet avoids the 'horrible' representations commonly found among proponents of the Satisfaction theory, typified perhaps by Edwards' 'sword of divine justice' 'branded' over 'sinners' heads every moment'.<sup>130</sup> Rather, Forster defines the essentially compassionate and gracious nature of the divine justice and its requirements, as an expression of love. It is because God loves us that His justice stands in the way of heaven, as well as answering the 'why?' of reconciliation's necessity. Love, therefore, preserves the integrity of God's relationship to mankind. God can hardly be thought to act towards the world in love without coveting what is ultimately true to Himself, that is, actual righteousness. The justice of God therefore demands the reality of righteousness in human affairs, not the punishment sin to satisfy the demands of 'law'. Thus, it is the love of God - not the divine justice - that forbids salvation apart from righteousness.

The Christ of Atonement, therefore, came of necessity to establish this

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<sup>128</sup> 'That eternal, sovereign, unconditional, particular, and immutable act of God, whereby he selected some from among all mankind, and from every nation under heaven, to be redeemed and everlastingly saved by Christ'. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary Containing Definitions of all Religious Terms* (Philadelphia, PA: Woodward, 1821, from the London edition of 1820), p. 162.

<sup>129</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God'. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson,

righteousness. But how did He do it? Forster rejects the Satisfaction view that argues that Christ, as the legal representative of the elect, fulfilled the requirements of the law (by living a perfect life), then satisfied the penalty of the law (by His death), that on account of the latter, sinners may be forgiven, and by the former, declared righteous. Contrary claims notwithstanding, Forster's understanding at this crucial juncture wholly embraces the principles of the Moral theory: that Christ (by revealing the divine love) came to woo sinners into believing in God, and into yielding to Him in life-long obedience. The 'divine justice which forbids salvation apart from righteousness', is thus a justice which related to each sinner's personal and ethical disposition. The righteousness that Christ came to establish, and the Atonement undertaken to provide, therefore, is also personal and ethical.

Though abandoning the Satisfaction view, Forster's theory does retain a number of elements from the Conflict theory. Through His life, Christ manifested God's goodness to the powers of darkness, thereby 'forcing' them to relinquish their dominion over the world. Similarly in His death, Christ manifested to the unseen worlds the hideousness that is evil, causing the devil and his hordes to recognise their defeat. Though it is the essential nature of evil to shrivel up into its own insubstantiveness, Christ expedited this inevitability, and made it redemptive for humankind: for as a man sees his own evil, he can either withdraw further from the light, or move into it, joining himself to Christ's perfect 'Amen' and then re-enter the relationship with God that is life-eternal. These elements from the Conflict theory provide the 'flip-side' to the revelation that brings justification.

Having over-viewed the key elements in Forster's theory - sonship, identification and revelation - and having defined what they mean, and narrated how each relates to the other, we are in a position to answer the question 'does Forster's synthesis and development of the three historic theories actually mark the abandonment of Atonement in the objective sense of Anselm in favour of the subjective sense of Abelard?' The answer must surely be strongly affirmative. Both the definitions associated with the key elements in Forster's theory, and the nature of their mutual relationship, is subjective. The sonship which contextualises the Atonement is ours, not Christ's, though He defines it. The principle of identification is wholly

subjective, whether in regard to Christ's identification with the human race, or the identification of the human race with Him. The objective and legal dimension is completely absent. Finally, the basis on which the Atonement is actualised - revelation - is also wholly subjective. Forster deliberately removes the forensic principles of substitution, satisfaction and imputation, and replaces them with moral and ethical considerations of a wholly personal nature. Forster's claim to Christocentrism, therefore, must be heavily qualified by the consideration that the 'Christ' who is central to this theory of Atonement - and His work - is denied the objective qualities recognised by Anselm. Forster's argument then, that his view is Christocentric while others are not, becomes more a question of polemic than substance.

## Chapter Four: The Reconciliation of the World

As long as there is separation between Christ and us, all that he has suffered for the salvation of mankind is useless and unavailing to us.

John Calvin.<sup>1</sup>

Excepting Universalists, Christians of every tradition have taught that the work of God in Christ for the redemption of the world, does not justify the individual until it is met with personal appropriation. Even the briefest overview of Forster's teaching confirms that his theology lies within this framework. Of the cause, nature and sustainability of that appropriation, there has been a great deal of debate within Christendom, its Western branch particularly. Indeed the biggest theological division within the Western World - the Protestant Reformation - had this at its centre this question, 'How is the sinner justified before God?'

In his first major work, *God's Strategy in Human History*, Forster demonstrates not only a cognisance of this particular historical dialogue, but reveals his own view has developed with special reference to it, and by extension: the teachings of the pre-Augustinian Church; the event of the Constantinian state-Church settlement; and the issues surrounding the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy.

The issues relating to justification, when considered in an historical context, are complex, even more so when attempt is made to accommodate the various fine nuances involved. Martin Luther provides a case in point. From the perspective of a modern day Baptist, there appears little difference between his view of baptismal regeneration and that of the Roman Church, yet to Luther the differences were vast!<sup>2</sup> Fortunately such considerations prove to be well outside the scope of this thesis, which must restrict its focus to the issues as Forster perceives them.

Before any more can be said about 'redemption applied' it is important to point out that Forster rarely, if ever, addresses the subject in purely theoretical terms. Rather, most occurrences are found in the context of his seeking to apply the work of God to his audience. To the unconverted this is undertaken in such a way as

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:1:1.

<sup>2</sup> See: Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand

challenges their understanding of the meaning of life. To Christians Forster speaks in such a way as reminds his audience that an abundant and powerful salvation from God has been given them in Christ. Forster's preferred vocabulary for redemption is indeed 'salvation'. Men and women, the whole world is 'saved' through Christ: "Salvation" is the only word big enough, strong enough, radical enough to challenge the current world situation, and to be a message of any use to the human race today'.<sup>3</sup>

In personal terms, Forster defines salvation according to three distinct phases of experience. Firstly, that aspect of salvation which addresses a person's past, our 'having been saved ... from the penalty or consequences of sin', to wit, 'the disintegrating and deadening effects on our spirits making us unresponsive to God and His love'.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, present salvation, of our now 'being saved from the power of sin in our souls as the character of Jesus is reproduced in our personalities'.<sup>5</sup> Finally, salvation for the future, when we shall be saved 'from the presence of Satan and sin and the temptations to which our body's presence on earth exposes us'.<sup>6</sup>

Each stage of salvation not only has direct reference to the person concerned, but also affects others through transformed relationships, and through them the wider world. Thus salvation is not only individual, but also corporate and societal. All three dimensions are subject to the plan of being 'rescued' and 'transformed'. In *Saving Faith* this concept is presented diagrammatically:

Salvation ⇒ Spirit ⇒ Soul ⇒ Body ⇒ Church ⇒ World.<sup>7</sup>

But how does this salvation come to the human individual in the first place? God gives it. It is nothing less than a gift. But, 'If the gift of salvation is for the whole world, why are some saved and some not? If it is a gift, what makes the difference between the "haves and the have nots"?'<sup>8</sup> Forster answers that some men choose to

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Rapids, MI: Baker book House. 1986), pp. 108-117.

<sup>3</sup> Forster, *Saving Faith*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.



accept the gift through the exercise faith in Christ, others choose not to. 'Faith or trust in Christ, makes the distinction. It is faith which receives the gift of God'.<sup>9</sup> But what is this faith, and how does it come to a man?

In his more theological examinations of the subject (which are usually undertaken with his own constituency in view) Forster rejects historic Protestant notions concerning the nature of saving faith, together with their earlier Augustinian presuppositions: grace as an irresistible work; regeneration as a metaphysical act; and guaranteed perseverance for the elect. One thing Forster does accept as heartily as Augustine, however, is the idea that faith flows from grace, which itself is emphatically defined as unmerited favour.

### **Reconciliation and the Moral Integrity of the Universe**

Almost every aspect of Forster's teaching on the application of Christ's work into the realm individual experience affirms its voluntaristic nature. We are constantly reminded that sin and all its cognates - personal and corporate - were or are consequential to choice, or a series of choices. Humanity - despite the bondage of sin - retains the powers of rational and deductive reasoning; awareness of and receptivity to, spiritual truth; and moral responsibility and ability to choose between good and evil. Sin was not just a choice in the garden of Eden, but remains a choice.

Salvation from sin then, is also - ultimately - a choice. If a man is to be saved he must be brought to that place where he can not only make the right choice, but the right series of choices. As it were, humankind must retrace each step of sin and undo each embrace of falsehood. Voluntarism therefore defines Forster's view of redemptive appropriation. More broadly, as we shall see, it is in the defeat of Satan, and a 'right series of choices' through Christ, that the power of sin is uprooted and replaced by reconciliation, and thence fellowship with God. Forster's teaching thus substantially embraces the Conflict and Moral theories of Atonement, as well as (what he perceives to be) many practices of the early Church.

If classic Augustinian soteriology emphasises God's power to save, and semi-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Pelagianism man's need to respond, Forster recovers a third and fourth dimension: the Church's obedience to manifest the gospel to the sinner; and Satan's defeat at the hands of Christ.

There is the enemy, the god of this age - the devil - who blinds men's eyes, he must be dealt with, he must be accounted for if there is going to be progress with the gospel. So, there is the [Christian] worker's will, and there is the god of this age, his will. Thirdly there is the will of the captive who needs to be released into the area where the Spirit of the Lord becomes his liberty. Fourthly and lastly there is God Himself. For all the servant might do, and all the devil might be forced to acknowledge, and for all that the individual prisoner wants to be released, unless God puts His hand into the scene and shines light into darkness, there will be no new creation, there will be no supernatural, spiritual rebirth. So there are four wills involved and two kingdoms.<sup>10</sup>

The disharmony that is sin not only possesses and controls human personality from within (through the alienation of the mind from God) but is reinforced from without (through direct demonic influences). The latter is especially manifest in magnifying the cognitive distortion already present in humankind reinforcing his denial of the divine benevolence as well as the transgression that is sin. The truth of what Christ did on the Cross provides the ground for this multi-faceted bondage to be broken. As divine revelation brings inward freedom, a decision must be made to embrace or reject what has been made known. The realisation that God *is* merciful does not necessitate that this mercy is appropriately responded to in repentance,<sup>11</sup> only that more truth be granted. As the sinner continues to agree with what he 'sees' in the Cross he experiences repentance. As that repentance climaxes he surrenders and trusts and thus enters into faith, justification and salvation.

Subjectively the journey of the individual's salvation begins with a knowledge of the truth. 'The truth shall set you free'.<sup>12</sup> That having been said, humankind's trichotomic composition requires that 'truth' be proclaimed to all three constituents of his being. Firstly, to the physical senses. Secondly, to those pertaining to the realm of the soul. Finally, to the spiritual senses. It is this understanding that explains Forster's

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<sup>10</sup> Forster, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>As Forster says, 'There are many who do not want God to be a personal Father, which the resurrection declares; they do not like to feel they are meant to be his sons, which is what the resurrection declares; and they do not like the claims of Christ, and the way He lived, which are authenticated by the resurrection of the dead. 'Sonship', *A Witness and a Testimony*, September/October 1971, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> John 8:32.

concept of holistic evangelism. Because man is body, soul and spirit, the gospel relates to all three. This method of preaching was embodied in the Lord Jesus Himself, and *ipso facto* provides a pattern for those who would follow Him:

The whole of [Christ's] activity was in *works* and *wonders* as well as the *words* He proclaimed. It is a recovery of this totality of preaching that is necessary if we are to have a Church that is adequately going to be involved in the front line of world mission and continue to grow.<sup>13</sup>

For the Church then (as it repeatedly has) to concentrate on the verbal message of redemption constricts the gospel to the realm of the mind, and therefore greatly limits its effectiveness. Men must be challenged not only by what they hear, but by what they *see* in Christian love and what they *feel* as they witness the power of the kingdom of God advancing in 'signs and wonders'.

The moral autonomy of man in controlling his own eternal destiny is perhaps never more underlined than at this point. Ultimately, God has only one path to follow to bring humanity into the benefit of what Christ has done: humankind must be persuaded (through what each hears, sees and feels) to embrace the gospel. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the Christian community to address the sinner in this entirety (through words, works and wonders) that the full measure of persuasion may be brought to bear. The Church thus has a very significant place in the redemptive process and must be both obedient to the call to 'preach to all the nations' and spiritually attuned that it uses all means at its disposal - especially spiritual warfare.

This spiritual world-view brings to our awareness the contingent nature of the Cross, and while clearly affirming the reality human freedom, it also raises questions concerning the tenuous nature of each man's eternal salvation in Forster's theology. For, unless every one is 'playing their part' and utilising *words*, *works* and *wonders*, the fact is that there are going to be men and women in 'hell' who would not otherwise be there.<sup>14</sup> In the light of eternity this may seem rather far fetched, yet Forster is unambiguous:

In a country where the word of God is constantly proclaimed in the streets the

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<sup>13</sup> Forster, 'Church Growth', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 5. Added emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Such is the strength of emphasis on human freedom that salvation becomes contingent not only on the will or choice of the individual, but also on the will and obedience of *others*.

spiritual atmosphere fosters an effectiveness for the gospel. Where occultism pervades, where the word of God is seldom heard in the streets, a man can preach and preach, but to little avail.<sup>15</sup>

That the eternal fate of some men may in such a 'real' manner be so strongly influenced by the obedience of Christians, may lead to the question as to whether the gospel offer is truly limited to this life only. After all, if Forster is right, there will be some in hell because the Church failed in its obedience. Forster has no doubt, however.<sup>16</sup> This contingency therefore emphasises the seriousness with which the Church, and individual Christians, are to heed Christ's imperative to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel'. (Matthew 28:20). The reverse side of this contingency is the reality of man's moral choices, and their eternal significance.

### **Reconciliation in the World: Warfare, Works, Words and Wonders**

To Forster, it is a first principle that as the Church engages in spiritual warfare, men and women who otherwise would 'die in their sins', will have their eternal destinies changed:

When the spiritual forces of a city, area or nation are controlled and brought to heel - as Adam was told to have dominion over animals, including therefore the serpent - *the evangelistic results are extensive*. Peter's 'power encounter' in Acts 9 led to a peoples' movement, 'all Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord'.<sup>17</sup>

Why does spiritual warfare make such a difference? As we have seen previously, the answer lies in Forster's understanding of the first or original sin and its consequences for the world of humankind. Through that first transgression of Adam the structures of the universe were not only opened to infiltration by rebellious demonic forces, but in a substantive sense, control was also yielded to them. Forster uses the analogy of a colonial government in insurrection against imperial authority.<sup>18</sup> Many of the structures used by the rebel government in its defiance of legitimate authority are the gift and brainchild of the central government. The army, civil service, police, revenue agents, *etc.*, were all 'good things' but are now usurped and turned

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<sup>15</sup> Forster, 'Spiritual Warfare', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> See: Forster, 'Does Hell Last Forever?' *Celebration*, June 1990, p. 18f. Also, 'Judgement', sermon, transcript, n.d., p. 25f.

<sup>17</sup> Forster, 'Urban Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 38. Added emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

against their lawful rulers. In the like manner the demonic powers now use these structures to defy God, and oppress humanity.

In the days of Jesus the political oppression in Roman occupied Decapolis might be seen to be manifest personally in the man tortured by a legion of demons whom Jesus met coming from the tombs. The man begged Jesus not to send the demoniac legion - about 6,000 in number - out of the area (Mark 5:10).<sup>19</sup>

The military structures in Decapolis society had their root in, and were an extension of, these and similar demonic forces. The political problem is to be seen as a spiritual one. Reconciliation in Christ means that the Church has been called to rescue the world through spiritual warfare from subjection to Satan's dominion: social oppression, corruption and manipulation.

As previously noted, *Saving Faith* utilises the metaphor of sin as 'metal' and the devil as a 'magnet' to express the nature of Satan's dominion over man. The presence of sin brings us into evil's 'magnetic field', the more we sin the more we are pulled in its direction.<sup>20</sup> The exact nature of this has also been previously discussed as part of our understanding of the first or the original sin, but by way of reminder Satan's influence is essentially expressed through the dominion of lusts and passions and the presence of mental anguish, guilt and fear.<sup>21</sup> Through Christ the Church has been called to rescue humanity from these spiritual manifestations so that they may be saved.

The Church has been given three fundamental tools by which to 'battle' these forces and to create the atmosphere through which the gospel can prosper; prayer, proclamation, and resistance. Through prayer the Church enters the 'heavenly realms' where God grants insight into the spiritual realities lying beyond a 'flesh and blood' situation on earth. Having thus discerned the particular 'principality' involved, the Holy Spirit then instructs the Church by what particular prophetic word or command the evil structure can be brought into submission.<sup>22</sup> Once this word is 'spoken' demonic powers are bound and the gospel is enabled go out with power.<sup>23</sup> Men and

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Forster, *Saving Faith*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-27.

<sup>22</sup> Forster, 'Leadership Conference: Session Two', June 10, 1983, transcript, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Forster, 'Spiritual Warfare', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 4.

women thus freed from spiritual blindness are enabled to 'feel and interpret aright' spiritual truth, which is the character and nature of God, His love towards humanity, and His 'wrath' towards sin.

The Church's spiritual armoury includes the 'word of testimony', that is the name (authority) of Jesus, as well as the words and promises of Scripture. Through utilising these in prayer the Church can 'clear away demonic authorities that hinder access to God's throne',<sup>24</sup> and inhibit the effectiveness of the gospel:

When we take the name of Jesus and His executive arm, the Holy Spirit, into these areas we pressurise [spiritual forces] until they turn around and begin to serve God's purposes again. When the structures or spirit powers of a society are turned around, whole cities can turn to the Lord.<sup>25</sup>

As the gospel of Christ is proclaimed the 'whole underworld of spiritual forces is being disturbed'.<sup>26</sup> The very announcement of gospel effectually excites the antipathy that exists between the 'old creation and the new, the power of God and the power of the devil, light and darkness'<sup>27</sup> and the servants of God enter into the midst of that tension 'with one hand on God and one hand striking into the enemy's kingdom'.<sup>28</sup>

In this manner Forster understands Christian suffering and martyrdom as being integral to spiritual warfare, and more. It proves to be an actual extension of the cosmic struggle that was part of Christ's earthly ministry and work of Atonement. Such is based upon the common nature that ties the suffering and sacrifice of Christ with suffering and death in His body, the Church. Concerning the latter:

Revelation 14:19-20 speaks of the '... great wine press of the wrath of God, [which] was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles for a distance of two hundred miles'. The blood that is coming out is not - as some suppose - the blood of God's enemies, but the blood of the martyrs, of the saints. The harlot, the antichrist, and the forces of darkness are made to drink it, leading to intoxication and final destruction ... God takes up the blood of the Martyrs, and it destroys the powers of evil.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Forster, 'Urban Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Forster, 'An Early Missionary at Work', *Daily Bread* (Scripture Union Press, September 1985), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Forster, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Forster, 'Spiritual Warfare', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 6.

This may be compared with the work of Christ Himself. Forster commenting on Revelation 1:16, 2:12 and 19:15-21, observes,

The sword coming from Christ's mouth represents His word of truth that reveals evil in all its horror. The light and the brightness of His presence illuminate it, and His own blood witnesses to the depths of its ugliness.

As a consequence,

In the face of such revelation evil can only shrivel into itself and die ... it is as though God finally allowed the tremendous beauty and love of the Lamb of God to stand forth in all its glory. It is as though this light spread through the entire universe and the evil simply shrivelled and died.<sup>30</sup>

### *Wonders: Signs and Miracles*

Well-attested miracles give us grounds for assenting to the proposition to which they putatively bear witness. God may use the very unusual nature of these events to testify to a proposition that he would have us receive as true.

John Locke<sup>31</sup>

Concomitant to the invisible need for spiritual warfare to 'clear' the heavenlies (invisible in the sense of unseen by the sinner) is the need for visible demonstrations of the power of God to the sceptical, sin hardened spirit in humankind. A gospel message that is 'only' a propositional argument is not the gospel of the kingdom preached in the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost Peter's appeal was, 'this is that', clearly calling his hearers attention to what they could see. 'It was the experience rather than the theology which brought conviction'.<sup>32</sup>

Signs and wonders must be seen as bearing a positive correspondence to binding principalities and powers. The latter deals directly with the spiritual opposition that is aimed against humankind, which hinders their apprehension of the truth. It is removing a negative factor from the 'equation' of persuasion. The demonstration of the miraculous represents a more conscious, positive factor, causing the hearer to begin to reckon with the truth of the gospel from what he sees.<sup>33</sup> An encounter with the supernatural represents an empirical challenge to the sinner's pre-

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<sup>30</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), p. 86f.

<sup>31</sup> Paraphrased and cited by S. N. Williams, 'John Locke on the Status of Faith', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40, pp. 591-606.

<sup>32</sup> Forster, 'Interplay Between Power Evangelism and Kingdom Living', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 1.

existing world-view.<sup>34</sup> As with spiritual warfare, there are going to be occasions in which the presence of signs and wonders will be essential if men and women are to be saved. 'There can be no way in which a city as entrenched in evil as Sodom was can possibly be salvaged unless we have signs and wonders'.<sup>35</sup> Forster cites Matthew 11:21, 'if mighty works had been done in Sodom such as had been done in Chorazim and Bethsaida then Sodom would have remained until this day'.<sup>36</sup>

*Works: Social Action*

The purpose of the Church's social ministry to the world has as its goal the realisation of eternal salvation. The temporal alleviation such service brings to human suffering, therefore, is never intended to be an end in itself. In fact, all improvements without an eternal dimension are but 'empty humanism':<sup>37</sup>

The only valid good works ... are those which ... open eyes to see it is the Father at work.<sup>38</sup>

In the same way that 'signs and wonders' provide a medium for challenging men's spirits through miraculous means, so good works serve to 'speak' to people's souls in physical terms. Through the Holy Spirit's presence and illumination, social action, or what Forster calls 'works of faith', the sinner is brought to a positive sense of the true character and nature of God. 'The love and justice and forgiveness of God, seen in the society of his people, reveal the heart and character of the Father to a broken down world'.<sup>39</sup> Christian mercy and compassion point to God's greater mercy and compassion. As men receive this testimony in themselves they are prepared to hear and believe the gospel message. Let it again be noted that the presence of a supernatural element within these works - in feeding the poor and helping the elderly,

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<sup>33</sup> Forster, 'Words, Works, and Wonders', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Given the direction of a number of Renewal churches, it is important to note that Forster's desire for the miraculous is as an instrument in promoting faith, that is rational trust and confidence in God - and not as a vehicle for 'enthusiasm'. See S. N. Williams, 'John Locke on the Status of Faith', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987), p. 601.

<sup>35</sup> Forster, 'Strategy for Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Forster, 'Works, Words, and Wonders', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Forster, 'Social Action - Jesus Action', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Forster, 'Theology of Evangelism and the Gospel of the Kingdom', unpublished



caring for orphans - is no less necessary than in any demonstration of the miraculous or engaging in spiritual warfare. Only by the Spirit will men perceive that what is being demonstrated is *God's* compassion, and thus be brought to a place where they can receive 'life, sight and healing'<sup>40</sup> in their souls. Again, as with spiritual warfare and 'signs and wonders', the choice by churches and by individual Christians to be obedient to God's call to do good works creates an occasion for men to be redeemed that otherwise would not exist: 'for it is faith which gives room for God's activity by His Spirit', it is faith which gives God 'the opportunity to reveal His love supernaturally'. In this way it can be said 'practical loving turns people to Jesus'.<sup>41</sup>

*Words: Proclaiming the Gospel*

Forster understands the gospel proclamation as an intended corollary to a previous demonstration of spiritual realities, 'this is that'.<sup>42</sup> *Healing, demonic deliverance, a word of knowledge, acts of servant-hood*<sup>43</sup> all provide the platform from which to proclaim the goodnews. But this is not to say that the message itself is secondary, far from it. Man cannot be saved unless he hears God's word. An 'experience of the Spirit is not in itself adequate for conversion, it must be explained. A good life, for example, without proclamation will not lead to salvation, only the conclusion: "He is a good man"'.<sup>44</sup>

As with social activism, Forster insists that gospel preaching is no mere cognitive proposal: not simply a presentation of propositions to which the hearer is urged to give assent. Certainly it includes propositional truth, and seeks to bring knowledge, but the salvific element lies not in any wisdom or cleverness on the part of

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paper, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Forster, 'Words, Works, and Wonders', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Forster, 'The Whole Gospel', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Forster believes that twentieth century evangelism in particular tended 'to witness to its theology rather than to its experience of the living Christ'. Forster, 'Interplay Between Power Evangelism and Kingdom Living', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Forster cites the incident of a woman who came up to him and asked, 'Are you the people that dried out Grandma? (Her home had been flooded). If God is like that, I want to know Him'. *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

the preacher, but only takes on the 'power of God to save'<sup>45</sup> when the words are authenticated by the presence and witness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> 'The Spirit comes like the breath of a man's lips with the words that come through it'.<sup>47</sup>

In all this the preacher is seeking to precipitate repentance and faith towards Christ, through affirming such knowledge of God as humankind possesses by nature, 'His invisible attributes, His eternal power',<sup>48</sup> and by declaring particularities concerning God's character and nature, to wit, He loves sinners and desires their salvation.

The power of sin over man is such that he needs to be thoroughly reassured of God's goodness, and equally assured as to the grace, mercy and love of God displayed in Christ Jesus for the whole world. Sin and Satan between them have wreaked such subjective havoc in the hearts of humanity, that it takes a great work for the fear and distrust of God obscuring the reality of His Fatherhood and paternal disposition to be overcome. The gospel declaration invades such dark perceptions of deity 'wrong ideas about God'<sup>49</sup> with the alleviating light of truth. Christ on the Cross reveals the God of the Bible to be One who 'feels with the disadvantaged victim and is moved with sympathy'.<sup>50</sup> This is one reason why it is called the 'good news'. It is making manifest the hitherto obscured reality of God's Father love towards the race. The Great Commission thus 'proclaims God's goodness towards men, and His good intent', and 'tells them that they can have direct access into the heart of God'.<sup>51</sup>

That the gospel is 'good news' does not mean that it is all 'nice news', far from it. The gospel forcefully proclaims the unpleasant reality of the world in which man lives, and the reality of that condition under the dictatorship of sin. The gospel speaks

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<sup>45</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>46</sup> Forster, 'The Power of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Forster, 'Church Growth Principles', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Romans 1:20. RSV.

<sup>49</sup> Forster, 'The Servant of God and his Enemies', *Daily Bread* (Scripture Union Press, August 1985), p. 46

<sup>50</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working Within Us', *Daily Bread* (Scripture Union Press, May 1985), p. 64

<sup>51</sup> Forster, 'Church Growth Principles', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 7.

of sin's nature: that it is primarily 'a breaking of a relationship' - and not, as so often portrayed among conservative Evangelicals, a contravention of an abstract code of ethics. The gospel affirms God's law: that His character demands that sin be judged. The gospel also highlights that law has its origin in God's heart, it is an extension of His person and speaks of the awfulness of sin not by graphic descriptions of the fires of hell and the eternal torment of sinners, but by the intense suffering it has brought to the heart of the Triune God. The gospel announces that the consequences of this broken relationship - man-ward and God-ward - is 'the judgement upon sin, that has been endured for men, by Christ'.<sup>52</sup>

The gospel proclaims the dignity of man: that he was made in the image of God. Yet the gospel not only affirms that humanity was made in the likeness of his Creator, but that all men were 'predestined', 'destined beforehand', to be conformed to the image of God's Son,<sup>53</sup> that is, to ultimately bear God's own character. 'The highest end any creature could have, the highest satisfaction any living being could know is to give God pleasure as does a son to a father just by being his son'.<sup>54</sup> The gospel meets that dignity - in part - by being relevant to a world in which there is a 'great longing in man to find meaning; for love, for beauty, for truth, for spiritual things ... to find God'.<sup>55</sup> This speaks of teleology, the end or destiny to which man was created.

The hope that comes from this promise, however, also speaks of sober obligation. 'I did not choose to come into the world', reminds Forster for us all, 'but, having been born I do have my own human dignity, made in the image of God, to make my response to truth and untruth, good and evil. That is what makes me *God like*'.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the gospel presents man with a stark choice. *Despite the power of sin, despite the oppression of Satan, man must respond to the gospel, he must 'turn to the*

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Forster believes that God has destined all men to be conformed to the image of His Son, that is, to become children of God, but that our faith and repentance seals or voids this destiny. 'We were made to be sons of God, but we can choose to become sons of the devil'. 'What is Man?' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Forster, 'The Eternal Purpose of God', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Forster, 'What Is Man?' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Forster, 'Born Again', sermon transcript, n.d., p. 7. Original emphasis.

Lord'.<sup>57</sup> There are moments in every life when God speaks, moments of 'visitation when God is coming to us by His Spirit, strengthening us in our mind and in our heart and in our will that we might become sons of God'.<sup>58</sup> This ability speaks of an awful accountability. 'We were made to be sons of God, but we can choose to become sons of the devil. That is the terrible responsibility of being a human being. We can choose to become evil like the devil, by refusing God [sic] to come into our life'.<sup>59</sup> This accountability not only speaks of future choices but past decisions. The gospel requires that men acknowledge that they are sinners ultimately by choice, the sins they have committed are *their* sins. 'My wife and I have had many people in our home over the years, and I would like to make an observation, a conclusion that we came to. We never saw anybody really revolutionised or remade until they admitted that they are responsible'.<sup>60</sup>

That man is the *imago Dei* is a truth to be directed to the moral seat of that image, the conscience. 'We of course have to direct it to their minds, for their understanding; we have also to direct it to their wills, to exhort them to obedience, to response, to repentance. But largely the message ... is directed to the conscience, it is a conscience matter'.<sup>61</sup> Having declared what God has done, and what man is, the gospel calls for a response - repentance and faith. In the light of what God has done man is commanded to do something for himself.

The nature of repentance centres upon a challenge to volitionally redirect the way that we think and, subsequently live, it is a call to deal 'with our own pride and [come] to a position of humility before God'.<sup>62</sup> The urgency of repentance is focused in the mind of the hearer in two ways. Firstly, since sin flows from man's deliberate choice, he is clearly responsible for it. Secondly, since it is ultimately a choice, he can do something about it. A man may be oppressed by sin, Satan may sorely oppress

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<sup>57</sup> Forster, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 15. Original emphasis. Forster nowhere questions the necessity of the power of God if men are to be born again. In his paper 'Conversion - What Is It?', he states plainly that 'the new birth is God's work', though adds (significantly) that faith is ours.

<sup>58</sup> Forster, 'What Is Man?' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Forster, 'Born Again', sermon transcript, n.d., p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Forster, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 12.

him, yet nonetheless, 'he can turn to the Lord'.<sup>63</sup> 'The choice is between finding the freedom to become the person that God wants us to be, or enslaving ourselves to selfishness and sin'.<sup>64</sup> The choice is not of the kind that the world assumes it to be. It is not between independence from God or serving Him, it is between slavery to this world or serving the world to come. It is a choice between serving God or being in bondage to the devil.

Non-Christians laugh at this. They are offended as the Jews were by the idea that they are not free agents, but Jesus follows up the point ruthlessly. Actions speak louder than words. The Jews who claimed to be God's free children were actually in the grip of murderous hatred. People who today claim to be free of God so often seem dominated by selfish habits that they cannot break.<sup>65</sup>

'Free will' does not side step the fact that each member of the human race must owe allegiance to someone.<sup>66</sup> Yet ultimately it is the individual who has the choice of masters. If one doesn't believe in Christ for salvation it is because wills not to believe.<sup>67</sup> Again, to refuse the call of the gospel is to deliberately choose evil, the way of the devil, and bring judgement upon self - the destruction that is sin. This is the wrath of God. Finally that means to be cut off forever from His presence and love.

The promise of the gospel is the offer of forgiveness and life. The gospel not only grants freedom from the guilt of sin, but also from its power. Furthermore, it is the power of corporate or community salvation as well as that of the individual believer.<sup>68</sup> Conversion brings 'a new understanding and ability to act as one family, and loose our alienation and strangeness to each other as we see ourselves as fellow citizens in God's new society'.<sup>69</sup> The peace of God is the power to have peace with all

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>67</sup> Forster, 'Good Shepherd in Deed and Word', *Daily Bread* (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), August 1985, p. 61.

<sup>68</sup> Forster, 'Interplay Between Power Evangelism and Kingdom Living', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working Within Us', *Daily Bread* (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), May 1985, p. 65.

men, and the foundation upon which to build relationships with all.<sup>70</sup>

### Reconciliation in Man: Repentance, Justification and Righteousness

A frequent analogy Forster presents to us of man's condition is of a child alienated from its parent by disobedience, but subsequently restored to a harmonious relationship.<sup>71</sup> For this reconciliation to take place is essentially a matter of 'repentance'. The child must first recognise that his actions and, more fundamentally the disposition of the heart that underlies those actions, are out of harmony with that of the parent. Having realised this, the child must desire that he is brought back into harmony with his parent, and then he must act upon this desire. When this occurs reconciliation is effected. The two parties are again 'at one'. To interpret this repentance as merely a volitional response, however, would be erroneous. What is involved is *far more* than an act of the will. It is 'reorientation of .. being',<sup>72</sup> a realignment of the child's character with the parents. So with sinners: it was not the particular act of sin *per se* which constitute humanity's rebellion, but the reign of self and desire to be 'independent' of God that lies behind the act. Humanity must be brought to a consciousness of this, and then with divine help - as Forster would insist - 'fully repent', that is, bring his will to line up again with God's will.<sup>73</sup>

Repentance constitutes not only the commencement, but also the core of one's saving experience of Christ's atoning work. Forster's borrowed imagery from C. S. Lewis, of a father holding the hands of his child and writing the letters of the alphabet, confirms the idea that repentance is not only inspired but energised by the grace of God. As to the nature of repentance, it is nothing less than the Cross reproduced in us. Christ 'identified' with humanity that he might offer perfect repentance on our behalf, ultimately meaning *in us*. Thus, it wasn't only 'on our behalf', it was an act of God which, all along, was intended to be *infused* in those who move to appropriate redemption. If God in our stead had accepted Christ's own repentance, *per se*, then we

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Another frequently used analogy of the divine-human relationship is that of the husband to a wife.

<sup>72</sup> Forster, 'Born Again', sermon, transcript, n.d., p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> 'The crux of it all', says Forster is the sinner's 'willingness to do the Lord's will'. 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Evangelism', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 15.

would have to do nothing. The latter is related to Luther's 'passive righteousness',<sup>74</sup> but to Forster, as far as saving efficacy is concerned, such a 'passive righteousness' cannot constitute justifying righteousness. On this he is clear. What Christ did was done that we might be conformed to His image, not that we might be 'merely' justified by abstract imputation. Christ died to win over the hearts and minds of sinners. That 'identification' by which Christ came to empathise and experience the lot of sinful mankind was not only so deep that it was as though our sins were His, but so real that as a man is brought near the Cross he experiences the depth of its reality. Atonement, therefore, can not take place outside a man, but only in the context of what God has done in Christ on the Cross being subjectively recreated in the sinner's heart.

None of this is to completely deny that there is an objective element: there was - in the sense that the Cross was an historical reality. Furthermore, before it becomes a subjective experience of the nature and character of God (who He is, and what He has done about the predicament of our sin) there must be a cognitive apprehension of the objective facts. This aspect is important, for while salvation does not consist of assent to propositions about God, salvation cannot take place without propositional knowledge. The sinner's move to salvation must begin with knowledge about God, that He is our Father; about His attitude towards sin, His intolerance of it; about the end results of sin; of Christ's work on our behalf; about the promise of restoration in the Promise; about the kind of life that God has made available to those who will to have 'the faith of Christ'.<sup>75</sup> Like all knowledge, these truths are not completely and suddenly introduced to the human consciousness, but are part of a process of learning.

Forster's understanding of repentance, though embracing a formal distinction between propositional and experiential knowledge, in practice, recognises no separation between the two. Thus, the kind of knowledge predicated to repentance, is actually of a synergistic nature. As men positively respond to their innate awareness<sup>76</sup> of the difference between right and wrong, the Holy Spirit continues to draw men into, and applies this truth into their lives.

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<sup>74</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1979), p. xiif.

<sup>75</sup> Forster, 'James 2', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Which in terms of Forster's epistemology, it will be remembered, is a divinely inspired dynamic called 'intuition'. See: this thesis, chapter one, p. 22f.

This awareness of sin, which may begin as a slight prick of conscience, becomes an acute concern as the sinner is ultimately led into the reality of all that Christ became on the Cross. This includes experiencing the reaction of God to sin; realising the nature of sin itself; sin's effects on the world (the human race in particular); Christ's own response and suffering, His repentance and repudiation of sin. Out of this, and *only* out of this, may a man exercise saving faith.<sup>77</sup> Repentance then leads to faith, but what is faith?

### *Faith, Justification and Righteousness*

The New Testament word for faith - πιστις [pistis] - is based on an Old Testament Hebrew word that 'embraced the comprehensive, exclusive and personal relationship between God and man'. [Kittel] It very quickly came to express the specifically Old Testament divine relationship embodied in the Covenant tradition. The Hebrew word אָמַן [ʾêmuwn] from which πιστις was derived meant to *trust*, to *believe* and to *obey*. The latter is very strongly included in the Old Testament usage.<sup>78</sup>

The three components that Forster presents here, 'trust'<sup>79</sup>, 'believe' and 'obey', are often used in his writings as straightforward synonyms for faith. Like a number of others,<sup>80</sup> Forster finds within or around biblical faith a number of distinct elements. Faith as an act of obedience must be preceded by faith as trust or commitment, and that this act of believing or trusting must itself be preceded by apprehending a specific object for our confidence. In the most part the latter is subsumed in repentance. As we have seen, Forster essentially defines repentance as that experimental knowledge of God's Fatherhood and unconditional love that precipitates a change of mind concerning the previous choice to sin. Repentance is thus understood as a change of mind leading to a change of action.

Faith, like repentance, is connected with experimental knowledge. More

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<sup>77</sup> Forster, 'The Great Judgement Begins', *Daily Bread* (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), July-September 1985, p. 97.

<sup>78</sup> Forster, 'Faith: A Word Study', unpublished notes, n.d., p. 1. Original emphasis.

<sup>79</sup> 'Trust' Forster defines elsewhere as 'putting ourselves totally under His authority and teaching'. *Daily Bread* (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), July-September, 1985, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> Arminius, for example, defines faith in the following manner: Knowledge - *Notitia* - is antecedent to faith; for the Son of God is beheld before a sinner believes on him. But *fiducia* is consequent to it; for through faith, confidence is placed in Christ, and through Him in God. Arminius, *Disputations*, 44:5.



particularly, it is a moment of crisis when the sinner is confronted by 'the faithfulness of Christ' to save them *now* if they respond with their own act of faith.<sup>81</sup> In making the 'faithfulness of God' so explicitly the foundation of faith,<sup>82</sup> Forster is following a particular interpretation of the Greek text, whereby the subjective genitive is arguably present in certain Pauline phrases. This was a view popularised in an article by Gabriel Hebert.<sup>83</sup>

From Forster's definition of faith a number of important questions arise. First given the rôle of knowledge in the activity of faith, and given that the act of trust and obedience is responsive to it, what degree of certainty is attached to that knowledge? Secondly, faith includes a responsive act following the *interaction between the Spirit* of God and the human will. Sinners are invited to put their trust in God. But what level of commitment is required? Finally, since Forster includes obedience within faith's definition - 'works of love and mercy'<sup>84</sup> - faith is not just the knowledge of God's gracious faithfulness, not just a conscious trusting of oneself to that faithfulness, but a trusting whose veracity is manifested in obedience. But does this not make justification consequent to works? At least subjectively? To this last series of questions Forster answers,

I think I would prefer to say that it is not so much the presence of righteousness at the initial response of faith to God, it is the desire in repentance itself to do the will of God, even though we have never done it and maybe at that point are unable to do it until faith lays hold of the grace that is in Christ. I think that would be a simpler and better way of understanding the element of obedience necessary. It is a desire and an intent to be obedient, otherwise there would be no point in laying hold of God and by faith seeking his grace to do what He says.<sup>85</sup>

Returning to the first question, the level of certainty required for the act of faith. This is a particularly important issue for an evangelist such as Forster, who

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<sup>81</sup>We have previously noted Forster's preference to translate πιστεως ιησου χριστου (Galatians 2:16 *etc.*) as 'the faithfulness of Christ' over and against 'faith in Christ'. Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), p. 185f. n 28.

<sup>82</sup>'Faith in God's faithfulness'. Forster, *Daily Bread* (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), January-March 1985, p. 70.

<sup>83</sup>Gabriel Hebert, "'Faithfulness" and "Faith"', *Theology* 58 (1955), pp. 373-379. For a critique of this and similar views see, F. F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament - Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), Appendix B, pp. 363-374.

<sup>84</sup>Forster, 'James 2', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>85</sup>Forster, London, letter, August, 1999, to the author.

constantly seeks to bring his hearers to 'decide for Christ'. In dealing with the question, it must be remembered that Forster's anthropological paradigm holds that *all* men possess some knowledge of God, and that no one holds this knowledge dispassionately. It is the presence of this passion - present in the merest mention of spiritual truth - that reveals that men know more about God, and that at a far higher level of certainty than will be readily admitted. In other words, what might be lacking in explicit knowledge is powerfully present at a subconscious level. Men deep down *know* that God is real, and what He is like, and have his law written in their hearts. On this count faith is essentially a moral issue, rather than an intellectual one.

As to the actual level of explicit knowledge and thus certitude for the act of saving faith to be exercised, it is quite minimal: 'You can choose to trust somebody when [there is a great deal] you don't know. In fact you do that when you get married. There are unknowns'.<sup>86</sup>

I would interpret [it] like this: you have a subjective moment when you choose to trust God, but the justification as to why you did it grows as the years go on. This is paralleled in human relationships. Most people when they get married are making a commitment to someone who they don't really know. It is not until many years have passed that they discover just how trustworthy that person is. Now, I would like to think that I was clever enough to have worked out that God is trustworthy from the beginning. Possibly there are some people - not a lot - who do get converted that way. Their reasoning is quite simple. 'If there is a God worthy of the name God He has got to be trustworthy, and so I am going to trust Him'. That is cool, cold calm logic. However, I think most people begin with quite a big dose of 'Well, there is nobody else to trust, therefore I am going to throw myself on God and see what happens'. From that moment on they discover that God is faithful, and grow in confidence towards Him as the years pass'.<sup>87</sup>

### *Justification and Righteousness*

Intimately connected both to defining faith, and his approach to Christian salvation, is Forster's explicit and emphatic denial of the historic Protestant notion of *justification by faith alone*. Commenting on the Epistle of James he argues,

We need to assess what 'Justification by faith' really means. Certainly it can't mean by faith alone, for James 2:14 says not. That sort of faith very clearly is a dead faith:

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<sup>86</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus House, London, March 11, 1997, transcript, p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

it does not serve and love its neighbour and will express itself in partiality. The kinds of works which are in view of James are not the works of the law. Certainly it is not by the works of the law that a man is justified by God, but by the works of faith. Faith that is not working is not faith at all ... Whether a man is a Patriarch (v. 21) or a Prostitute (v. 25) *it is faith that does something* which counts before God.<sup>88</sup>

In the Protestant Reformation man was perceived to be justified *sola fide* not only without reference to his works, but without reference to anything in that man, even his faith.<sup>89</sup> Luther says, 'If faith is not without all, even the smallest works, it does not justify; indeed it is not even faith'.<sup>90</sup> Forster explicitly rejects the concepts behind such an interpretation, and (to make his position quite clear) disputes with those who argue that the emphasis on faith plus works in the early Church was a departure from apostolic teaching.

The spell of this idea is so strong that it produces statements like the following comment in a recent (and generally good book) on Church history. It refers to the letter from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth, written about 96 AD and generally ascribed to Clement. The comment is: 'Salvation is seen to be based on faith and works; for example Rahab is said to have been saved by "faith and hospitality". Perhaps the particular situation called for emphasis on faith being accompanied by suitable actions, but it does seem that Paul's doctrine of salvation through the grace of God alone was not well understood'. Now Paul wrote to the Roman church in about the year 58 AD, and Clement's epistle was sent from Rome in about 96 AD. It would seem almost certain that some of the original recipients of the Epistle to the Romans would still have been in that church. Are we seriously to believe that they failed to understand the central teaching of the epistle that Paul wrote them?<sup>91</sup>

This question concerning the relationship between faith and works could be just a problem of semantics. Initially it may seem that Forster's insistence on 'faith and works' is little different from the view, to follow Luther's dictum, that while we are saved by faith alone, the faith alone that saves is never alone. Is Forster's understanding of 'faith and works' just his way of saying that justification is inevitably followed by sanctification?

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<sup>88</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy* (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), p. 206. Added emphasis.

<sup>89</sup> Commenting on Luther's understanding of faith, for example, Timothy George observes, 'Properly speaking, faith itself does not justify; it is, so to speak, the receptive organ of justification. It does not cause grace to be, but merely becomes conscious of something already in existence. To have faith is to accept the acceptance which is ours in Jesus Christ. But this is not a self generated human activity, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit'. Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1989), p. 71.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

The answer to this supposition must be an emphatic 'no' for the very important reason that, as it turns out, Forster admits to no absolute and therefore, conceptual difference between saving faith and sanctification. While, at times, he seems to agree that justification is essentially forensic - he even quotes approvingly from Leon Morris<sup>92</sup> - closer examination shows that 'forensic' as Forster understands it takes on a wholly different meaning from Morris' interpretation not least because it holds a different place in the latter's *ordo salutis*:

In historic Protestantism justification has absolutely no formal relationship to sanctification, but precedes it, and is wholly external to it. This marked Luther's great spiritual breakthrough.

At last by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed', as it is written, 'He through faith is righteous shall live'. There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that which by the righteousness lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'.<sup>93</sup>

But in Forster righteousness is not passive, and justification is impossible unless sanctification is in essence already present. For the Protestant Reformers works of faith were evidences that one had been justified. To Forster works, in as much as they represent a disposition of the heart, are required for justification (if the term be understood as a declaration that one is right with God). In the former faith brings the external reckoning, by God, of Christ's righteousness to the sinner's account, what is traditionally termed 'imputation'. In the latter faith is inseparable from a participation in Christ's righteousness, what is traditionally called 'impartation'. The first is purely external or forensic and without reference to actual holiness, since it finds its ground in Christ *extra nos*. The second is relational and sanctifying since it finds its ground in Christ *in nobis*. To Forster, faith joins us to Christ's righteousness in a manner that reproduces that righteousness in us. This causes us to meet the conditions for God to justify us, that is, 'pronounce us right with Him'. Repentance renounces all those things which God hates, faith embraces all those things that God delights. In the

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<sup>91</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy*, (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), p. 206.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>93</sup> Luther, quoted in McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academy Books,

Reformers, Christ *extra nos* meets these conditions. Forster's relational paradigm - which is at the heart of his soteriology - makes it nonsensical to conceive that God could 'declare' righteous anyone whose heart has not *actually* been brought into line with His own. To admit this would be to deny the true meaning of redemption, reconciliation. It would be analogous to declaring peace with a man who was still very much at war with you. Whatever exists in such a situation, there is no reconciliation. Though Forster would never call this actual righteousness the *meritorious* cause of justification - 'none of this is to deny that salvation is "not of works lest any man should boast", but it is to affirm that ... [Christian] righteousness is different from that often supposed'.<sup>94</sup> Those who through Christ identify with Christ and His Atonement (through repentance and faith) are *ipso facto* reconciled to the Father, and subsequently justified.

### *Sanctification and Perseverance*

As we have just observed, Forster's soteriology represents the possession of an actual righteousness through faith as necessary to, indeed definitive of, justification in the sight of God. Repentance and faith (which includes obedience) are the two components of an ontological dynamic called 'conversion'. While God's grace is prevenient in every aspect of this dynamic, the fact remains that man's choice is the determinant upon which the whole hinges.

This principle of choice is also important in understanding Forster's view of sanctification and perseverance. This voluntaristic, though graciously enabled moral correspondence between the saint and God, must be maintained if there is to be a present justification, and must be persevered in if this justification - reconciled relationship - is to continue.<sup>95</sup> Justification has no meaning outside actual reconciliation. Consciously this represents another antithesis to the Reformers. To Luther and Calvin faith justified only in the standing it brought to Christ's righteousness. Subjective changes in the life of the believer were, at all costs, to be

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1988), p. 51.

<sup>94</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy*, (Bromley, Send the Light Trust: 1973), pp. 10-11. n. 17.

<sup>95</sup> There is nothing *per se* un-Evangelical in this view. It was held by John Wesley, and probably James Arminius.

conceptually isolated in such a context. Sanctification was never to be confused with justification. That was the error of Rome. Forster, however, finds it impossible to meaningfully separate the two. Job was righteous by faith, and his works were part of the fact.<sup>96</sup> Conversely, to the Reformers the witness of faith serves to continuously condemn the Christian's own righteousness, as Luther says, to remind him 'that all his life and works are nothing but damnable sins in the judgement of God'.<sup>97</sup> Faith makes the Christian ignorant of the law, of works, of conscience before God. Faith justified the sinner's conscience by finding its hope in Christ alone, but a sinner he remained. This is the essence of Luther's famous formula, *simul iustus et peccator*.

Furthermore, Christ is said to be the cause, ground and, therefore, final assurance of one's salvation. In Forster this finds little correspondence. Faith is not an objective union but rather, is the means of the change (repentance), which produces actual righteousness (sanctification). While such is not said to be the meritorious cause of acceptance with God, it is the essence of reconciliation, and as such *must be entered into* for justification, and *persevered in* for entry into heaven. An individual who is walking in repentance now, may change his mind later. In so doing he will revert to his earlier heart and disposition towards God, and thus return to that earlier alienation. This doctrine of 'un-conversion' is to Forster an integral necessity within an anthropology defined by moral freedom. 'If you haven't got the ability not to love, you haven't got the ability not to sin, and if you haven't got the ability to sin, you haven't got the ability to love. The two things go hand in hand'.<sup>98</sup> Fundamentally, 'this is the point of the human being'.<sup>99</sup> Freedom to love Christ must include, forever, a freedom to reject Him. Forster goes so far as to suggest,

I think that theoretically it would be possible [to sin in heaven], but it is, as I have already described, unlikely. After forty years of happy marriage who would ever want to be unfaithful? I know that I am talking boldly and I have said it before, and I have known cases where terrible things have happened which I know are demonic in people's lives, but I would say quite confidently that the idea of being unfaithful to my wife - I would never say that it never crosses my mind because once you think of being faithful you can think of being unfaithful - is ridiculous,

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<sup>96</sup> Elsewhere Forster cites Abraham and Rahab. Forster, *Saving Faith*, p. 61.

<sup>97</sup> Luther's *Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), v.44, p. 37.

<sup>98</sup> Forster, interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, p. 42.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

but it is as far removed from being a possibility as to be absolutely impossible.<sup>100</sup>

Yet one third of the angelic host, the devil, himself, fell from a far more blessed state than Adam was created in. How can humanity have hope for better things?

That is the point of the human being isn't it? That the human being is learning and growing in this situation, whereas Satan was deposited into a situation where it was all made for him and rejected it. After a lifetime of inter-working and making mistakes and coming back to the Lord, and that kind of thing, this is where I think we have got our security. So okay, I don't know, I might be wrong, I wouldn't mind if I were wrong. It seems to me it is like my confidence in the fact that I am not going to jump out of the hands of Christ, the same sort of truth now that I wouldn't want to because of the relationship there. You see, it is a relationship that is being worked out; it is not something being dropped on us.<sup>101</sup>

## Summary

Concerning the reconciliation of the sinner, Forster unambiguously rejects the idea that works save.<sup>102</sup> Yet he equally rejects the idea that faith alone saves and that justification is by faith, even in the modified Wesleyan sense of these terms.<sup>103</sup> Not least, this is because Wesley significantly embraces the Augustinian concept of Original Sin and its concomitant, metaphysical depravity, which then requires that God both initiates the call to faith, and gives faith. Prevenient grace alone accounts for 'free will' in Wesley's *schema*. Forster rejects as 'philosophically contrived' such a concept of volition. The idea that the will can be 'elevated' 'raised' or 'quickened' to a place where each man can choose acceptance of God's gracious gift, 'just does not make any sense'.<sup>104</sup> While Forster agrees with the underlying concept of voluntarism (and passionately so) it is based upon a theological schema which differs significantly from the classic alternatives to developed Augustinianism (Semi-Augustinianism, Semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism *etc.*), and (claims) to draw its views from the teaching of the Church in its first three centuries, in particular the teaching that salvation is by

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>102</sup> 'We are not saved ... by baptism ... Neither are we saved by our works'. Forster, *Saving Faith*, p. 60. By 'works', Forster means 'works of the law'. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>103</sup> Wesley held to a form of free will, rejecting the interpretation of total depravity held by Evangelical contemporaries such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

<sup>104</sup> Forster, interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, p. 44.

the works of faith.<sup>105</sup> Forster's understanding here needs to be contextualised against his own insistence that such works are distinguished from the 'works of the law', which are of a wholly different order, and very definitely were they to justify, would represent salvation by merit. 'Works of faith' mean to Forster those activities that flow out of a relationship with God, and thus are well described as 'works of love'. Further clarity is brought to the expression as we realise that 'salvation' or indeed 'justification' to Forster does not mean an essentially legal declaration based on supererogation, but recognition that one is *actually* rightly related to God.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Forster comments, 'Some people are confused at this, for they think that faith means doing nothing because Paul says we are saved by faith, not works. The simple distinction to notice is this: Paul means the works *of the law*. He says we are saved by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28). The works of the law are not the same as the works of faith ... James gives two examples of persons who had works of faith - Abraham who offered up Isaac, and Rahab the harlot. Neither case seems much of a candidate for keeping the law (James 2:21-25) since one would have committed murder and the other was a liar. But both had works of faith. Abraham obeyed, trusting that God would raise Isaac up from the dead, and Rahab lied and hid the spies ... ' Forster, *Saving Faith*, p. 61.

<sup>106</sup> By understanding righteousness in these terms (as opposed to those of *lex*) Forster avoids the need to then *quantify* such righteousness.



## Chapter Five: Reconciliation and the Church

Even the briefest overview of Church history reveals there has always existed a close relationship between the personal appropriation of redemption and the Christian Church. Christ Himself taught that the Church holds the 'keys to the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 16:19), and it was to the Church that those first three thousand converts 'were added' on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:41). The subtleties involved in critically describing the *nature* of this relationship, however, are an exhaustive and difficult undertaking. Notwithstanding, it is almost universally agreed that a vital correspondence exists between the Church and initiation into the Christian life, the Church and the process of being a Christian. *Equally, there is widespread consensus that this relationship finds its beginning in baptism,<sup>1</sup> and its continuation (at least in part) in Holy Communion.<sup>2</sup>*

Forster himself has given a great deal of thought as to the nature of the Church in its local expression,<sup>3</sup> (that is, 'church') and not least as regards the relationship of

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<sup>1</sup> 'From earliest times Baptism was seen as the entry way into the Christian faith'. F. D. Maurice, *Theological Essays* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1871), p. 192. Defining personal salvation largely in terms of 'inward regeneration', Peter Toon comments, 'In examining how ... (the new birth), was interpreted from the second to the fifteenth centuries, we must be mentally prepared to encounter an approach and context that is very different from contemporary Western Protestantism. In particular, we have to be prepared for the fact that virtually all discussion of the new birth is in the context of the rite of baptism. It was taken for granted through out these centuries that being "born of water and the Spirit" refers to the outward act of baptism (whether adults or infants) and the inward act of regeneration'. Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 71-72. Called 'baptismal regeneration' this view was substantially modified at the time of the Reformation by the Reformed churches in particular, and was modified again with the rise of both Baptist thought and the doctrines of the Evangelical Awakening. This having been said water baptism was both still practised, and held to express great importance in terms of personal redemption and the Church.

<sup>2</sup> After Pentecost the disciples 'devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and to prayer', (Acts 2:42). The 'breaking of bread' has since been called the 'Eucharist', 'Lord's Supper', or 'Holy Communion', and has been celebrated in a wide variety of ways and with widely differing interpretations, but has never been neglected. Ronald S. Wallace in J. D. Douglas (ed), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 244.

<sup>3</sup>The large number of books, papers, sermons, articles, *etc.*, explicitly with the word 'church' in, evidences just how much time Forster has devoted to the subject. This

ecclesiology to personal justification: 'How does a person become a Christian?' and, 'How does a Christian live?'

### Forster's Ecclesiology

Forster defines church firstly by its *organic* nature, and secondly, by its *character*, by which he means that it is: apostolic, pious, charismatic<sup>4</sup> and prophetic.

In the Old Testament, God's Covenant was made with a gathering of people out of the world. This prepares us, says Forster, for the idea that a called out community is central to the biblical concept of 'Church'. Indeed, the New Testament word used to describe the people of God, *ἐκκλησία*, means 'gathered assembly'.<sup>5</sup> Within these two contexts God added certain rites of worship, or 'sacraments'. Whether circumcision or the various aspects of Levitical worship in the Old Testament, or baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New, both emphasised the communal and unitary nature of the body. Thus of baptism, 'we are baptised by one Spirit into one *body*', (1 Corinthians 12:13), and the Lord's Supper, 'This is My *body*', (Matthew 26:26). Profound confirmations of this are found in the prayers of Christ, from 'Our Father' (Matthew 6:9) to the more explicit, 'I pray that they all may be *one*, even as Thou, Father art in Me, and I in Thee' (John 17:21).

The nature of church as a gathered community is further revealed in the New Testament Epistles. The most frequently used adjective to describe the church-in-assembly is *κοινωνία*, 'communion' or 'fellowship'. Too often this has been misunderstood, says Forster, as theoretically a common consent to creeds, confessions or some other explicit doctrinal statement, and practically as comprising 'little more

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chapter alone quotes from *Ten New Churches, Churches that Obey*, 'A Church for Tomorrow', 'Renewal in Existing Churches', 'Church Planting and Growth', 'House Churches, Will they survive?', 'Apostolic Churches', 'Church Growth Principles', 'The Kingdom - Mission of the Church', 'Growing Churches', 'The Local Church and its Community', 'The Alternative Church and the Alternative Society', and the eleven part lecture series, 'Radical Church History'.

<sup>4</sup> 'Charismatic' must here be defined in the fullest sense of the term to include, not only supernatural manifestations, but gifts to the body, of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and gifts in the body of 'giving', 'mercy', 'helps', 'administrations', etc.

<sup>5</sup> Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980), pp. 68-69.

than tea and biscuits after the service'. In contrast the biblical definition emphasises 'a common experience of Christ'.<sup>6</sup> It is this which lies at the heart of *ἐκκλησία* and is 'absolutely definitive' to all that the Scriptures mean by 'church'. That having been said, none of this is based on an individual or corporate once for all experience (presumably Evangelical conversion). A true church may have existed yesterday, but cannot be a true church today unless it is *being* a church today, which means 'fresh [communal] experiences of the vitalising wind of God',<sup>7</sup> that is, 'enjoying His love ... contemplating the beatific vision of Christ in His glory, and being lost in the Atonement'.<sup>8</sup>

Such is the tendency, even in Charismatic churches, to think of these experiences as individualistic, that it needs to be firmly emphasised that being a church means living with a sense of relationship with one another - 'body-ness'. Indeed, it is this element of the corporately experiential, which marks a true church, and makes it a gathering where we 'share in each other, exchange with each other, soak in each other',<sup>9</sup> 'enrich each others lives according to the measure of the grace of the Holy Spirit that has been meted out to us'. Church is where 'growth in personal relationships'<sup>10</sup> and 'practical, costly and caring involvement' in others' occurs.<sup>11</sup> It is this that lies at the centre of Paul's words, 'We all are being transformed into the same image, from glory into glory' (2 Corinthians, 4:18).

This understanding appears marginalized or wholly absent among the Magisterial Reformers. They restored the idea of the universal priesthood of believers certainly, but didn't practically apply it, laying the foundation rather for 'one man band ministries'.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, a truly organic church incorporates the plurality in

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<sup>6</sup> Forster, 'A Church for Tomorrow', unpublished paper, .n.d., p. 1. Added emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Forster, 'Sound of Joy', *A Witness and a Testimony*, September-October, 1971. p. 11. Added emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> Forster, 'The Eternal Purpose of God', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Forster, 'Church Planting and Growth', unpublished paper, 1977, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Forster, 'A Church for Tomorrow', unpublished paper, .n.d., p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Forster, 'Church Planting and Growth', 1977, p. 1. A phrase popular amongst Evangelical Charismatics in the 1980s and early 1990s. It was used to distinguish traditional one Pastor churches from those led by a plurality of Pastors (usually called 'Elders').

leadership evident in the New Testament pattern, to wit, 'elders' in each church. The leaders themselves comprised 'pastors *and* teachers, *and* apostles *and* prophets *and* evangelists' (Ephesians 4:12, see also Acts 13:1). Though the New Testament in this sense preserves a clergy-laity distinction (not all Christians are elders), it is one that is according to function, and bears no analogy to the priestly division of the Old Testament rather, all saints are now king-priests.

### The Church is Apostolic

To Christians in a wide range of traditions 'apostolic' is understood as primarily descriptive of church government: whether an ordered and 'legitimate' line of bishops going back to Peter, as in Roman Catholicism; Episcopal rule, as in Anglican, Lutheran and some Methodist traditions; or as an ancient office, which together with prophets and evangelists has re-emerged among certain Christian groups in the late twentieth century. While Forster declares some sympathy for the latter, he decidedly interprets 'apostolic' not as an office at all, but as a function. In this manner Forster clearly distances himself from those in Walker's 'Restoration' branch of Renewal.<sup>13</sup> Thus, an 'apostolic church' is neither one that has Bishops nor 'Super-Elders', but one that 'constantly prepares men and women to be "sent forth" by the commission of God'.<sup>14</sup>

Apostolic churches are .. *evangelising* the world; churches based upon apostles are those based upon *being sent*. Not holy huddles that are worshipping God, or so they think, but never see anybody go out from them to preach the gospel. Not little elect societies doing so many good works. But churches that ... are just pumping men and women into the world.<sup>15</sup>

Apostolic Christianity by nature is 'virile and powerful', but this dynamic has a clear task, a divine intention and goal: gospel proclamation.<sup>16</sup> 'Mission at home and abroad is central to the whole nature of the church'.<sup>17</sup> 'Wherever the church is, it exists

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<sup>13</sup> 'Restorationists' are in part defined by their belief that God is restoring the Church to its New Testament pattern, including the re-establishment, in governmental terms, of apostles and prophets. Andrew Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> Forster, 'Apostolic Churches', *A Voice of Faith*, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Forster, 'Church Growth Principles', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Forster, 'A Church For Tomorrow?', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 2. Added emphasis.

for the purpose of mission'.<sup>18</sup>

More significant still to our understanding of Forster is his belief that apostolic evangelism is inevitably prospered by God. If a church is truly 'organic' and 'apostolic' then it is growing. A 'true church' and conversion success are indivisible phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> A living body is, by definition, a growing body.<sup>20</sup> Church growth in Acts, as well as post-apostolic Christian demography, is cited in support of this interpretation. The church in Jerusalem probably grew to 30,000 or 40,000<sup>21</sup> before the persecution described in Acts 8:1, and within the first four centuries as much as one third of the world's population were Christian.<sup>22</sup> The connection between spirituality and success is something that Forster highlights again and again - not least in his study of Church history. '*The Quakers nearly covered the world in forty years ... It was a terrific explosion, the rapidity with which it spread through out the earth*'.<sup>23</sup> '*The Anabaptist movement spread like wildfire*',<sup>24</sup> while the earlier Waldenses had, at the peak of their influence, reached 'one in three Europeans'. Similarly, Francis Xavier, a convert of Ignatius Loyola, 'in a mere ten years ... burnt out for Christ, preaching in 52 countries, dying at the Great Wall of China, preaching that God would open up China to the Gospel'.<sup>25</sup>

'Apostolic' also has reference to the Church's relationship to Christ and sharing in His calling. As God once sent His Son into the world (Luke 4:18), so now He sends us: 'Go ye therefore into the whole world'. (Mark 16:15). That the Church is one with Christ in this calling means more than following Christ's example, and more

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<sup>18</sup> Forster, 'The Kingdom - Mission of the Church', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Forster, 'Growing Churches', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* In a study on the Acts of the Apostles Forster suggests that God expects the church to grow; that edification and numerical growth hand in hand, (Acts 9:31); that the word of God gives inevitable increase (Acts 12:24, 19:24); and, that churches reproduce churches (Acts 16:5). Forster, 'Home Missions', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Forster, 'The Local Church and its Community', unpublished paper, May 1982, p. 11. Where Forster get this figure from, or on what it is based the reader is not informed.

<sup>22</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: Introduction', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 10. Again, where Forster gets this figure is not clear.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. Original emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: The Anabaptists', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Forster contrasts this record with the Magisterial Reformers in particular, and

than being a vehicle for God's message, it is to be part of the redemptive work itself: 'The nature of Christ's body [the Church] is the Incarnation. Christ is living in His body; and being involved in humanity, He can, through His body, do things with and for man'.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Church is not only 'Christ's body for the extension of His mission and activity in the world',<sup>27</sup> but as Christ Himself was, so the Church is 'the sending forth of God'.<sup>28</sup>

The goal of apostolic evangelism is not growth for its own sake, however, but for the glory of God - assuming that 'glory' be taken as 'God being made known'. 'Being sent' begins by discovering the heart of God: that His passion is to redeem the world, and all men in it. That is why He sent His Son. The Church then proclaims this God, and through the whole adventure discovers an even deeper knowledge of God, and His redemptive purpose. 'We discover God in a way that we would never discover Him otherwise. We learn the fellowship of His sufferings. We discover that God is intimately involved with the sufferings of this world and that He is deeply compassionate to those who are as sheep without a shepherd. His heart is being bled'.<sup>29</sup>

The parallel between Forster's understanding of an apostolic/missionary oriented Church, and the apostolic ministry of Christ, is more than just striking, it proves to be definitive of the relationship that exists between the call of the Church and the work of Christ. As Christ in His ministry learned of God, and grew in 'wisdom and knowledge', so the Church learns and grows in like manner, and through the same media - words, works and wonders in the world - defeats evil and brings redemption. The significance of this element within Forster's theology of Incarnation must not be overlooked.

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Protestants in general, which failed to produce 'that sort of missionary zeal'. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Forster, 'Apostolic Churches', *A Voice of Faith*, Summer 1966, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Forster, 'Eternal Purpose', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> It is in this manner that Forster understands Christ's words, 'As the Father sent me so I send you'. Forster, 'Apostolic Churches', *A Voice of Faith*, Summer 1966, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Church is Pious

Church piety refers to the ethical manifestation of Christ in a corporate setting: 'Each church fellowship should not only theoretically be a community of God's people, but should seem to be in practice also. The purpose of the community is *to show the world the wholeness of redemption*'.<sup>30</sup> For a church to be 'charismatic', 'gifted' or 'equipped', therefore, is not an end in itself, rather the means to make God known with redemptive effect. Even piety, then is apostolic in nature.

God's declared means of promoting this piety are, on the one hand, the 'tools' of faith, and on the other, gifts of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:16). Both are to be used to 'minister - or serve - one another'.<sup>31</sup> True piety includes practical support in physical necessities, as well spiritual needs, prayer, counselling, *etc.* This is verified not only in the life of Christ who 'went around doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil' (Acts 10:48), but in the designation of Christians as 'priests' (1 Peter 2:5, 9). More pointedly James asks 'if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of food, can one say, "Depart in peace; be warmed and filled" in a disposition of faith and not give the things that are needed?'<sup>32</sup> The universal presence of needs, as well as the call to meet them, is found in the Old Testament practice of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) and again in its Messianic fulfilment:<sup>33</sup> 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord'. (Luke 4:18-20, Isaiah 61:1-3).

As part of His redemptive mission, Jesus ministered to the welfare of His people, and brought healing and deliverance from demonic oppression. The Church is to follow His example in physical and spiritual ministry.<sup>34</sup> This is not, as is so often assumed in Evangelical and Charismatic churches, a secondary or subsidiary calling. Bluntly, 'to *do* what Jesus said, is far more important than all our spiritual experiences

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<sup>30</sup> Forster, 'A Church for Tomorrow', p. 1. Added emphasis.

<sup>31</sup> Forster, 'Apostolic Churches', *A Voice of Faith*, Summer 1966, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Forster, 'James 2', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Forster, 'The Local Church and its Community', p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Forster, 'How To Practice Healing and Deliverance', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

and all our outward conformity to biblical truth'.<sup>35</sup> Yet this does not make doctrine unimportant. Since true doctrine encapsulates a genuine encounter with God, it marks that which the Christian can and must pass on in faith to others. This creates opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work in and through our words. Good works function according to the same principle, only employing the medium of actions rather than language. That our words and works issue out of fellowship with God (faith) is vital, for it is this that makes them true piety, which in turn marks them as anointed and thus effectual.

The world and the Church often coincide with their good works, yet the former, from the Christian perspective, represent nothing more than anthropocentric 'do-good-ism', or ethical improvement. In contrast to men 'cleaning up' their own world, the Christian Church presents a channel for that which is outside the world to enter into the world, and, as Forster says, 'really clean it up'.<sup>36</sup> That good works emanate from true piety means they possess a spiritual dimension that accounts not only for their motivation, source and power, but gives them an eternal quality that marks their real good. Forster takes care to show that this 'quality' is not a 'thing' but the living Christ incarnate in His body, the Church. Works done and lives lived by the Spirit of God provide a channel for the world to meet God, the God Who is meaning, life, purpose.<sup>37</sup> In comparison to knowing God, all the good works in the world are futile, since they can never meet mankind's need to know the 'why?' of his existence, nor make known the relationship of created-Creator, nor bring mankind into the child-Father filiality that Christ has re-enabled through His work.

In an unpublished paper, 'The Alternative Church and the Alternative Society', Forster expresses the ideas that good works are an expression of deepening relationships. The Atonement brings people into a fellowship with God; each other; and the world around. The former is characterised by a threefold sense of forgiveness, rightness, and filial life. This allows the Church to worship God freely, and do the works that bring the Father pleasure. The second brings a sense of family. This allows the Church to be free of those distinctions and prejudices represented in the world by

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<sup>35</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: The Anabaptists', p. 3. Added emphasis.

<sup>36</sup> Forster, 'The Local Church and its Community', p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Forster, 'Is it Reasonable to Believe?', unpublished paper, n.d., pp. 1-2.



nationality, culture, colour, gender<sup>38</sup> and class.<sup>39</sup> Finally the Church's relationship to the world is freed from materialism. That is, on the one hand, freedom from possessiveness towards the material things of this world, and, on the other, willingness to sacrifice, as Jesus challenged in Mark 10:29, 'for My sake and for the gospel'.<sup>40</sup>

Practical piety is, of course, communally expressed both within and without the Church. The reality of Christ is found where people are loving one another,<sup>41</sup> and getting involved with the conditions of human need.<sup>42</sup> This is not limited to social concern, and sooner or later must touch the realm of politics: 'it would be hard to eliminate justice and economic reform from Hosea and Amos, and international comment from Jonah, Obadiah and Ezekiel'.<sup>43</sup> This is the Old Testament pattern and the New. An 'aggressive' challenge to the presence of unrighteousness in the authorities of this world is part of the Church's calling to be king-priests. Christ taught that the Church is 'a *kingdom* people who are to seek, receive and minister, God's reign, namely His "will done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, 33. Luke 12:31, 32.) Not only is the Church to be prophetic, but also majestic, and exert God's reign, thereby getting His will done on earth'.<sup>44</sup> This calling, however, must not be misunderstood. Political activism does not mean that churches ought to create some 'bureaucratic system which is able to pressurise and lobby governments ... or writes

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<sup>38</sup> The abolition of gender distinctions is important to his argument in favour of women in spiritual leadership, especially as regard those areas of ministry traditionally reserved for men. See: Forster, *Is Leadership Male?* (Ichthus Media Services, 1994). In this respect Forster has been *avant garde*, and a clear leader among Evangelicals in pressing for the ordination of women. Significantly, however, Forster's social consciousness *excludes* sexual orientation. He not only classes homosexuality as sin, but accounts it demonic in origin, and certainly capable of 'healing' through demonic exorcism. At least this is the claim. After 'deliverance', we are told, Jack was 'never' 'afflicted by homosexual temptation again'. See the story of Jack in Forster's *Saving Faith*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>39</sup> Forster, 'The Alternative Church and the Alternative Society' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Forster, 'Notes on Radical Church History', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Forster, 'Apostolic Churches', *A Voice of Faith*, Summer 1966, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Forster, 'The Local Church and its Community', p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3. Original emphasis.

cerebral papers on the sociological condition of the community'.<sup>45</sup> Rather it is supernatural, it is to 'pray and assert that God's will, which is now theirs, should be done on earth as it is in heaven'.<sup>46</sup> This piety is not to be cloistered and private, it is to be aggressive, it is 'not going to sit down and let life roll all over it saying, "Your will be done," when it is not God's will, but stands up against all the expressions of Satan, and demands and challenges them to be shifted'.<sup>47</sup> Thus,

It is a *fundamental* part of Christian living [that] ... the Church is seen to be a people redistributing wealth, voluntarily releasing resources for the hungry, the poor, the orphaned, the widowed, the stranger; and among the deprived and starving and disadvantaged populations is pouring out its wealth to feed them with literal bread as well as to give to them the bread of the Good News to the poor, namely the Word of God.<sup>48</sup>

God is 'utterly opposed' to all kinds of exploitation and suffering by man of his fellow man, and He expects His Church to be also.<sup>49</sup> Historically, Forster notes the central rôle of Christians in many aspects of social concern and improvement in nineteenth century Britain. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) is noted for his campaign which led to the abolition of slavery, George Müller (1805-1898) for his care of orphaned children, and Lord Shaftsbury (1801-1885) for his promotion of political, social and factory reforms.<sup>50</sup>

Martyrdom and suffering are often consequential to this kind of prophetic obedience. Forster appeals to Jesus' words in Matthew 5:11-12, 'Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you ... *for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*'. Paul similarly taught, 'Those who live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution'.<sup>51</sup> As we shall see in examining Forster's critique of Church history, the presence of persecution is significant 'because if we look ... and see who is being persecuted we shall have a rough idea of where the truth is found'.<sup>52</sup> This was Christ's

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Forster, 'Renewal in Existing Churches', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Forster, 'Words, Works or Wonders?' p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Forster, 'The Salt of the Earth', *A Witness and a Testimony*, May-June 1970, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12. Quoted in 'Radical Church History: Introduction', p. 9. Original emphasis.

<sup>52</sup> Forster, 'The Local Church and its Community', p. 4.

own experience: 'He was despised and rejected of men'.<sup>53</sup>

### The Church is Charismatic

The Church by definition is a *spiritual* body. As the natural body without a spirit is dead, so too the Church without the Spirit. In this respect the importance of spiritual gifts and miraculous healings has been understood in Forster's theology from earliest days. Concomitantly he has interpreted the disappearance of the extraordinary gifts from common Christian experience as indicative of a profound decline in spirituality following the apostolic era - something which he has more recently been able to articulate as the responsibility of the Constantinian settlement of the fourth century.<sup>54</sup> The reoccurrence of the 'charismata' or supernatural spiritual gifts, in groups ranging from the second century Montanists to the nineteenth century Irvingites to contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic movements, is thus noted as the reappearance of a fuller, more biblical Christianity. Jesus promised his followers that they would do the works that He did, and greater besides, (John 14:12-14).

As to what it means to be 'charismatic', Forster's definition is broader than just the exercise of extraordinary gifts, and indeed may be said to be far more 'spiritual' than this. To be truly charismatic is to be first and foremost *visionary*. It was in these terms that the Church of Pentecost was defined: Acts 2:17, 'Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams'. 'That God's communication to a people is in these terms is clear from the onset of the Christian era, and, that it will continue to do so and be so in the last days is equally clear'.<sup>55</sup> It is a 'vision for the whole community, the whole city, the whole state, nation and world for Christ'.<sup>56</sup> Not least in this respect 'visionary' is to strongly anticipate the Second Coming, in terms of both (1) eschatological anticipation and (2) the fullness of its realisation. In other words, the immanence of the Spirit in the Church intensifies both the first fruits of redemption

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<sup>53</sup> Isaiah 53:3.

<sup>54</sup> An alternative interpretation popular among Evangelicals, is that the gifts were meant to attest the gospel and apostolic ministry *before* the completion of the Canon. After the New Testament was complete, however, such authentication became redundant. Typical of this school is Victor Budgen. Budgen *The Charismatics and the Word of God*, especially, 'When do the gifts cease?' *Ibid.*, pp. 73-89.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

(healing and wholeness), and the hope of the coming kingdom brings to the Church (that is, faith). 'You can't have a revival without that sort of Second Coming experience'.<sup>57</sup>

### The Church is Prophetic

Forster's definition of Church embraces the idea that the relationship of the Church to the individual believer is essentially 'prophetic'. The Church is a living community that shares a common experience, is equipped with spiritual gifts, and through words, works and wonders *incarnate* God. The Church becomes *part* of what it is preaching.<sup>58</sup> It is the latter which makes the Church into a vehicle of revelation, and a vehicle of outreach, through which redemption or 'what God is feeling'<sup>59</sup> and wants to do, is *actualised* in and around the Church. Minimally this happens physically, through feeding the poor, educating the untaught, helping the oppressed, but more importantly spiritually: through revealing the character and nature of God, those outside the Church are brought to repentance and faith, and thus *added* to the Church.

If the two traditionally Protestant sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper receive little attention in Forster's writing and practice, attention *is* given to other acts, such as anointing with oil, laying hands on the sick, fasting,<sup>60</sup> and prayer. All these are 'sacramental' in the sense that each is anticipated as means of grace: seeking God to heal, exorcise a demon, or speak in some specific and revelatory form such as a 'prophecy' or 'word of knowledge'. These are all facets of redemption applied, all anticipating the future eschaton, all mediated through or within the Church.

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<sup>56</sup> Forster, 'Home Missions', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Forster, *Prophetic Prayer* (Ichthus Media Service, 1997), pp. 11f. 'The price for the Church of God to be the instrument (of God), ... is that we become a people whose lives are wrapped up with God is saying to the world and what God is wanting us to talk to him about. Inevitably, the end product of this, as we get more involved, is the incarnation'. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Fasting, says Forster, will lead among other things to 'victory in areas of our life where we are weak', 'to spiritual expansion and an effective prayer life', and to bodily and spiritual healing. Forster, *Fasting* (Sovereign World, 1994), pp. 30, 23, 31.

Chief among these 'means of grace' is prayer. In *Why Must We Pray?* Forster notes 'there is nothing more important in the Christian life than prayer'.<sup>61</sup> Drawing on his ontology of God, we are reminded that since 'God is a God who talks, reflects and shares within the Trinity',<sup>62</sup> in essence 'prayer starts in the Trinity'.<sup>63</sup> As men thus communicate with God they are brought more deeply into the essence of their humanity, or as Forster puts it, more deeply into being human.<sup>64</sup> This is a dynamic on-going reality. It is eschatologically attuned, an anticipation of that moment in which all believers are 'presented before His throne, "Blameless, with great joy"'.<sup>65</sup> Prayer is thus also the means to personal holiness, itself prophetic, that is, redemptive. In *The Lord's Prayer* this theology is made more explicit. It is by prayer that Christians are enabled to 'live the Sermon on the Mount'.<sup>66</sup> Prayer then brings us the power of God to obey as we ought,<sup>67</sup> and more. Prayer allows us to be experientially united to God. 'Once we are identified with God's heart and mind we are going to notice that, within the counsels of God, God takes up his prophets and he takes up his prophetic Church and uses them to talk things through with himself, with us! He is actually discussing things, in himself, with us! We are brought into the very counsels of God!'<sup>68</sup>

Now, this 'sharing in the counsel of God' is necessary to God's redeeming activity in and among the human race. Using the examples from the lives of Jeremiah, Abraham and Moses, Forster illustrates this concept in action. In each case it was the prophet's willingness to be drawn into the thoughts and discussion of the Godhead that allowed God to work: 'it seems that if He can't get someone else to share His heart then He cannot do ultimately what He wants, that which is for the benefit and final destiny of the human race. For it is not a do-it-yourself business, it is God in

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<sup>61</sup> Forster, *Why Must We Pray?* (Ichthus Media Services, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. 'Communion with God is one reason why we must pray, and also, because we are less than human if we do not'. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15. Later Forster phrases the idea in this manner, that as we pray, 'glory gets inside us', and as glory gets inside us, 'it changes into love'. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Forster, *The Lord's Prayer* (Ichthus Media Services, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Forster, *Prophetic Prayer* (Ichthus Media Service, 1997), p. 13.

relationship with people whereby His word is done'.<sup>69</sup>

The future and destiny of the human race - of our own little part of it, or what God has given us to do here, depends upon this kind of praying that can actually - not change God's mind in the sense that he never wanted to do it in the first place - but put Him in a place where, because of His co-operation with us, He can *do* something different.<sup>70</sup>

From an Evangelical perspective all this represents something of a departure from the way prayer has been traditionally understood. That having been said, the emphasis upon the importance of prayer, and its relationship to God's redemption being applied to the world, and more perfectly manifest in the Church, is thoroughly Evangelical, especially when connected to historic revivals.<sup>71</sup>

Outside the issue of prayer and the Church, where Evangelicalism has tended to stress the rôle of the Church in fostering 'how the individual Christian overcomes temptation and progresses in holiness',<sup>72</sup> and Roman Catholicism the rôle of the Church in how the individual Christian (whether living or departed) continues to receive grace for the cleansing and forgiveness of sin, Forster has moved beyond both in teaching that the Church has a wider rôle in spiritual warfare of the territorial kind.

Generally speaking, Forster's Church exists within quite a different paradigm to his Evangelical counterpart. Instead of being a spiritual dimension in what is

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> In his opening chapter to *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1969), Eifion Evans notes the intimate connection between prayer and revival. Fervent prayer produced churches that 'became more militant in their witness, the preaching more powerful, and the whole community more conscious of the divine presence and activities ... converts were counted in hundreds'. p. 11. '... a prayer meeting was commenced .... shortly afterwards the minister's preaching seemed to become more powerful .... six hundred made a profession of faith'. p. 11. '... prayer meetings were eventually continued for nine weeks ... from that date there was a steady stream of conversions'. p. 12. 'The minister and congregation in the latter half of 1890 covenanted together to pray each noon for the unconverted, with startling effects: there were clear evidences of the Holy Spirit's working in their midst, with unmistakable signs that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation ...'. p. 13. 'Prayer also brought blessing to the Baptist church at Pontnewydd in Monmouthshire in the late summer of 1892'. p. 12. Similar instances are described in Evan's earlier work, *Revival Comes to Wales: The Story of the 1859 revival in Wales* (Welwyn, England: Evangelical Press, 1959). See especially: 'The Land of Revivals', and 'The Time of Preparation', pp. 9-21, 22-41.

<sup>72</sup> Forster, *Deliver Us from the Evil One* (Ichthus Media Services, 1996), p. 10.

otherwise a materialistic, rationalistic, and naturalistic world, Forster understands the Church against the backdrop of 'the biblical universe of a unified heavens and earth'.<sup>73</sup> It is this that takes the Church beyond not only personal holiness, or even personal healing, but into the realm of heavenly realities, to deliver from demonisation, destroy the occult and 'deflate principalities and powers'.<sup>74</sup> In other words, where more socially minded Evangelicals seek political remedy to various ills, to this Forster adds the Church's rôle in dealing directly with the supernatural forces that are the ultimate authors of such social evils as corruption, injustice and corporate greed.

### Redemption and Church History

Church history is an exciting subject, because it is the history of the movement of God in time and space. It is what God is doing through the history of mankind, and that is something itself we should be very concerned about. God is a God who speaks to us through revelation, and that revelation is given to us within history. It is what God does with history that reveals who He is. He has not just given us visions of great symbols regarding eternal truth; He has actually done something in time and space, which is the uniqueness of Christianity. Other world religions, world-views and world philosophies, don't have to have anything to do with time and space, they are just concepts, concepts and ideas that you can just abstractly reach after God, but Christianity is that Jesus Christ was born in the Middle East, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, He died and rose again. Those are historical facts. There is an historical base to Christianity. Equally there is the continuing history of Christianity in what goes on in the Church following on from the roots that are found in Israel. So the Church is the continuing revelation of God through His people into this earth.<sup>75</sup>

In this introduction to some twenty hours of lectures on 'Radical Church History', Forster expresses a number of ideas important to his understanding and approach to the subject. The first is that the Church provides the *locus* of God's expression in time and space. It is the place where God not only acts, but also makes His character and nature known. Furthermore this happens in a way that is only second to the revelation that has come in Jesus Christ. This leaves us in no doubt as to the supremely important rôle Forster ascribes to the Church and its part in bringing God's redemption into the world. More particularly, the history of the Church provides an important and living apologetic for the gospel. It must never be forgotten that the Christian Church is based on the factual existence of Jesus of Nazareth: that He was born in a real place; lived in

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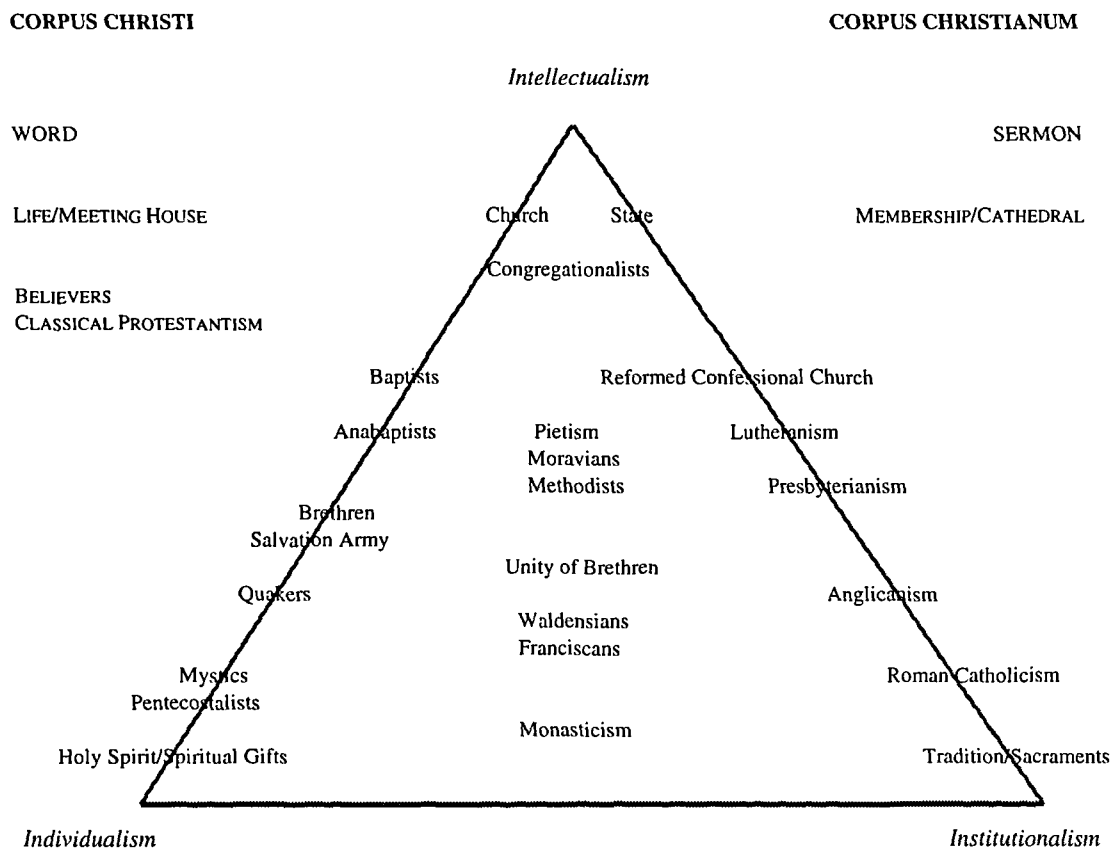
<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>75</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: Introduction', p. 1.

a real time; died under the sentencing of a real Roman Governor; and, according to the testimony of many, rose again bodily from the dead. But these are not just historical facts. They were and are 'revelation'. They represent a series of events through which God has both intervened redemptively, and spoken redemption to, humanity. They are historical facts through which God has redeemed and brings redemption. This means that the Church to the degree it incarnates Christ, brings God's redeeming Word to the world. As in Christ Himself, God reveals Himself in the lives of those who believe on Jesus Christ. Church history is not, therefore, just a series of events, but a dynamic through which God has both spoken, and still speaks. So for the Christian, and indeed the world as a whole, 'Church history is very, very important'.<sup>76</sup>

As the lectures continue, it becomes increasingly evident - not least through the diagram that accompanied the series - that the history of the 'Radical Church' is largely synonymous with a history of *the* Church:



<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*



Looking at history, Forster searches Christendom for those groups of believers who evidence the 'radical, apostolic and charismatic Christianity' of 'actual *spiritual* experience'.<sup>77</sup> This is what Forster calls 'life', and it is that which identifies the *Corpus Christi*.<sup>78</sup> The 'body of Christ' itself is set in evident (and revealing) contrast to 'institutionalism'. In an unpublished paper entitled, 'How churches Grow', spirituality is identified in terms of certain activities (those mentioned in Acts 2:42 - 47) rather than in cognitive or even an experiential sense of being reconciled to God. On account of this, Forster largely excludes the churches established by the Magisterial Reformers from his study. Priority is given to the Christianity of Thomas á Kempis (c.1380-1471), Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), Paracelsus (1493-1541) and even Michael Servetus (1511-1553) over Martin Luther (1483-1546), Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), and John Calvin (1509-1564). With this in mind, Forster seeks to demonstrate that his mould of Christianity can be traced from the earliest moments of the New Testament narrative through to the present day. 'Those points in time when the 'Spirit of God has broken out and produced a new thing'.<sup>79</sup>

What of the 'Institutional Church', the 'Corpus Christianum',<sup>80</sup> is it totally irrelevant?

The conclusion that I have come to is something like the parallel between Israel and the sect of Christianity that was produced from it. A rose bush is pretty dead, but the new shoots produce the flowers. *Past life has provided, if you like, the dry old stick out of which there comes life and a rose ... the institution of the Church of England, or the Catholic scene at the Reformation,*<sup>81</sup> the Orthodox scene out of which the Bogomils were persecuted ... these past conglomerations of life which has died - layer after layer - is now the base or ground out of which new shoots keep coming. This is how Church history seems to have gone.

Forster's stated goal then is to 'trace the history of *life* and not the history of

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. Original emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> Both these terms are Forster's. He uses them to distinguish respectively the 'institutional' from the 'true' Church. Forster, 'Notes on Radical Church History', p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* The reference to 'the Catholic scene at the time of the Reformation' seems somewhat disingenuous, unless perhaps emphasis is given to the radical Reformers, *i.e.*, the Anabaptists.

tradition'.<sup>82</sup> He admits that this approach makes for an interesting focus, one that in the view of some represents a biased concentration on 'sects' and minority groups. Yet, he insists, these are often the ones in whom a far more biblical Christianity was practised, and the fact that they were so often persecuted and labelled 'heretics' serves rather for their authentication than grounds for exclusion. A man's enemies are rarely the best representatives of his beliefs. When Forster quips, 'With one or two exceptions, you will realise that every heretic is now going to be exalted into a saint!',<sup>83</sup> he is exaggerating. Forster applies his principle in a reasonably careful manner, and his survey of history reveals that every heretic is not a saint. Notwithstanding, such care is sometimes lacking, and badly.

### **Redemption and the Protestant Reformation**

Why look at Forster's view of the Reformation era, and not a complete overview of his lecture series? The answer has to be that Forster's study of the Magisterial Reformation is important for raising serious questions as to Forster's tendency to use history to provide support for an extant theological position, rather than thoroughly investigating a matter. That this happens at all is worrying, that it happens at this particular juncture in Church history is profoundly significant in terms of our understanding of Forster himself.

The Reformation is largely regarded as the spiritual home of Evangelicals,<sup>84</sup> who from their first generation have insistently claimed to be the spiritual heirs of Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, *etc.* This is distinctly true of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and John Wesley, but no less so of contemporary Evangelicals such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Stott and J. I. Packer.

As one would expect with Forster, Scriptural criteria are claimed as paramount in his examination of this era. More particularly the test of biblical ethics, and the test of biblical beliefs. It soon becomes clear, however, that Forster's emphasis is both chronologically and qualitatively on empirical evidences of spirituality, especially

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> The importance of the Reformation to Evangelical theology will be examined in

'successful' evangelism. If they figure at all, theological distinctions are decidedly secondary.<sup>85</sup> This is in line with the methodology he stated at the beginning of his lectures:

*Whenever life appears, that alone is the Church of Christ. Now that is why we are going to look for little green shoots and flowers in every century, and as we do so we are going to be able to trace the history of life and not the history of tradition. We are going to trace the history of inspiration and not an institution. We are going to trace where God is doing something in a given generation.*<sup>86</sup>

With this in mind, Forster's views on the Reformation are almost instantly discernible, as his examination is almost wholly confined to what has generally been called the 'Radical Reformation'. The English and Scottish Reformers and the Puritans receive little consideration and Luther and Calvin only some - and that nearly all negative. While Forster's view of Luther carries glimpses of charitable ambivalence, his view of Calvin presents outright hostility. This is emphasised by contrasting admiration for the Anabaptists; strong sympathy for the leaders of the Counter Reformation; and warm appreciation of ardent Catholics such as Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier.<sup>87</sup> Similarly Erasmus is introduced as one who 'above anyone else must be called the father of the Reformation'.<sup>88</sup> The latter's debate with Luther, and Luther's *Bondage of the Will* are referenced, but it is differences in piety, not theology, which are noted, and it is Erasmus not Luther who receives commendation.

When Luther - for instance - wrote that the Pope was the Antichrist, Erasmus gently wrote to him and said, 'My dear Luther, you may be right, you may not be right. If he is the Antichrist, then telling him won't make any difference, and if he isn't, then it is a very ungentlemanly thing to do'. Such was the spirit that was in Erasmus, and the kind of irenic approach he had to the various groups involved

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Chapter Seven of this thesis.

<sup>85</sup> As to what Forster *means* by 'devotional', most likely is the sum of 'apostolic', 'pietistic', and 'charismatic'.

<sup>86</sup> Forster, 'Notes on Radical Church History', pp. 4-5. Added emphasis.

<sup>87</sup> Forster is not completely silent concerning the flaws of the great Roman Catholic evangelists. He gently chides, for example, Loyola's zealous commitment to the Papacy. 'Radical Church History: The Anabaptists', p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: Francis of Assisi, Luther and Calvin', lecture, transcript, n.d., p. 2. Again we note Forster's approach to the Reformation is subject to a number of tensions. The Reformation, even as Luther spearheaded it, is spoken of as good and necessary, so much so that Forster here gives credit for it to Erasmus! That having been said, the positive contributions of the Reformation (in terms of doctrine and practice) seem to be completely ignored.

(in the Reformation).<sup>89</sup>

Again, while Luther's rôle as a spiritual liberator is noted, the emphasis falls on his failings: His inordinate friendship with the German princes; political pandering; and a series of theological and moral compromises. More particularly Forster notes that while Luther's early sympathies lay with the principle of ecclesiastical voluntarism, he later adopted a modified concept of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a confessional church within an institutional or territorial church. A similar change is noted in Luther's attitude towards baptism. His early writings contain a sympathy for believers' baptism, but Luther later condemned those who practice it as 'only fit for master Hans', a euphemism for the hangman. Thirdly, there is Luther's change of attitude towards the Jews: his earlier regrets at their sufferings gave way to a passionate advocacy for their continued persecution. Fourthly, Luther's justification for the use of force to put down the Peasants revolt is said to be abhorrent. Finally, Forster condemns Luther's 'sadly questionable view of Scripture', referring primarily to the latter's view of James and its perceived antithesis to the teaching of Paul in Romans.<sup>90</sup>

Turning now to the Reformed wing of the Reformation, and Forster's view of John Calvin:

I wish I could find a lot of nice things to say about Calvin, I find him an extremely difficult character to cope with. There is nothing about his spirit that I can respond to at all. I remember my utter disgust when I began to read what some people call 'monumental and magnificent', 'writings of such theological profundity', Calvin's *Institutes*. My utter revulsion of the spirit that came through, which is sometimes whitewashed by saying that it is the 'spirit of the age'. I want to assure you that it is not. I haven't brought along my books to quote you this morning, but I will try to do some from memory. How do you cope with this? This is Christian literature! 'These blaspheming dogs who belch out their infirmities against the Mighty and the Most High, created *only* to be tortured in eternal darkness and damnation for ever, to bring glory to the Almighty'. How can you put up with this? What has this to do with Jesus? That's Calvin's *Institutes*! I get serious, scholarly people - who presumably never feel anything; perhaps they have no spirit? - who think that this

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* Such a serene approach is said to be characteristic of the Roman Catholic humanists in general, together with 'an emphasis on the unity and peace of the Church'. See John Olin's Introduction in *A Reformation Debate: John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: Francis of Assisi, Luther and Calvin', pp. 3-9. This seems to be an amazing accusation. Surely in this respect Luther's radical critique of the biblical canon no more than anticipated Forster's own struggles with it?

is a valid mental exercise to argue on this basis with other people.<sup>91</sup>

Forster's critique here not only reflects his general judgement of the Magisterial Reformation, but, more importantly reveals something of the *subjective* and *emotional* method of both his study and presentation. This bears some relationship to his 'experiential' approach to biblical hermeneutics: 'it is the Spirit who leads one into truth, and leads you into a hermeneutic to understand ... what the Scripture is saying'.<sup>92</sup>

This method carries over into Forster's interpretation of Christian history, where it is reinforced by a 'dynamic' or 'pneumatic ecclesiology', which builds on an understanding of the Church as the gathering of the saints characterised by a sense of unity, loving service and compassion for the lost. Forster constantly makes these characteristics the litmus test of true spirituality. We have already seen how this has manifest itself as a grounds of appreciation for the great Roman Catholic Evangelists, and here in context of the leaders of the Magisterial Reformation, it becomes the basis of negative criticism and condemnation. 'There is nothing about his [Calvin's] spirit that I can respond to'. Certainly this is understandable if Calvin's attitude towards those in theological error is accurately reported by Forster: 'these blaspheming dogs who belch out their infirmities against the Mighty and the Most High, created *only* to be tortured in eternal darkness and damnation for ever, to bring glory to the Almighty'.<sup>93</sup>

Though often emotionally utilised by Forster, in his defence it may be said that this basis of critique - at least as a methodology - is far from thoughtless, and in part represents the use of a prior and well determined series of critical tools for analysis. As

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Original emphasis.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. Added emphasis.

<sup>93</sup> While different elements in this sentence are identifiable as Calvin, the construct as a whole seems unrecognisable. Calvin does indeed refer a number of times (perhaps six) to his opponents as 'dogs', but he does so as they are understood to be enemies of the gospel, and in this respect is only using the term as the Bible itself uses it (for example, Isaiah 56:10, 11). The following polemic written against those who deny the doctrine of double predestination maybe what Forster has in mind here, if so, he is guilty of seriously distorting Calvin's words. 'Many are the species of blasphemy which these virulent dogs utter against God, we shall, as far as the case admits, give an answer to each'. *Institutes*, 3:1:2.

Forster reminds us, Jesus taught 'by their fruit ye shall know them'.<sup>94</sup> Thus Forster's examination of the Reformation centres on issues of practical piety against which it only appears theological issues are simply eclipsed. Forster's failure to explicitly examine the theological polarisation into which Europe was plunged concerning whether a man is 'justified by grace alone, through faith alone' or, as Rome was to insist, through 'faith that works by love',<sup>95</sup> has a simple explanation. Firstly Luther, Calvin, *et al.*, wrongly understood faith as mere assent,<sup>96</sup> secondly, justification *sola fide* is biblically contradicted by the Epistle of James (Christians live 'by faith but not faith alone').<sup>97</sup>

Thus Forster's reason for largely ignoring the theological debate between Luther *et al.*, and the Church of Rome, is that the discussion did not, as he insists, relate to the 'glorious rediscovery of truth and the gospel',<sup>98</sup> but rather served merely to mark a high point or 'culmination of a Millennia of European brainwashing'<sup>99</sup> sealing the 'appalling apostasy'<sup>100</sup> that was the legacy of Imperial Augustinianism. There is no surprise, then, in Forster's explication of the moral failings of the Reformers, for if Luther, Calvin, Zwingli *etc.*, are denied their 'monumental theological significance', their behaviour can often appear both demagogic and un-Christian. Their 'good work', their fight for 'the doctrines of grace', Luther's willingness 'to let

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<sup>94</sup> Matthew 7:16, 20.

<sup>95</sup>Rome's position was clearly set forth in the documents of the Counter Reformation at Trent: 'For faith, unless hope and charity be added thereto, neither unites man perfectly with Christ, nor makes him a living member of his body. For which reason it is truly said, that, *Faith without works is dead*, and pointless, and, *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which works by charity*'. 'The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent', quoted in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 2:96. Original emphasis.

<sup>96</sup> Forster understands the Reformers tendency to define faith in 'cerebral terms', as 'mental assent', or 'assent to credal forms'. 'Radical Church History: Augustine and State Religion', transcript, p. 5. In contrast Forster states, on the same page, his own understanding: 'Now ninety per cent of faith is action, putting yourself on the line, *doing something*'. (Original emphasis). We also note the observation that the Anabaptists 'found it hard to accept the Reformers' view of faith without works, a faith apparently irrespective of a changed life'. 'James 2', unpublished paper, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Forster, London, letter, February 26, 1998, to the author.

<sup>98</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: Introduction', p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

goods and kindred go, this mortal life also'<sup>101</sup> subsequently finds little sympathy.

This conclusion is poignantly demonstrated by the fact that fully one third of the lecture devoted to the Magisterial Reformation dwells on the events surrounding the execution of Michael Servetus. The inhumane conditions of his imprisonment, and the manner of his death, represent in themselves a condemnation of a gospel that claims to save without reference to works. Forster highlights Calvin's insistence on the use of green wood to make death slow and unpleasant. In contrast it is said that Servetus' 'only crimes' were to question certain theological formulations of the Ecumenical Councils concerning the trinity, and to argue that the baptism of children was contrary to Scripture.<sup>102</sup> Following George Williams' three-fold division of the 'Radical Reformation', Forster categorises Servetus (along with Paracelsus) as an 'Evangelical Rationalist'.<sup>103</sup>

Forster's concept of 'practical piety' is thus deeply theological, claiming to be based on a thorough examination of the Bible and the teaching of the early Church. As it turns out, the Reformers view of justification - that is wholly separate from sanctification - is a denial of *Christian redemption; it is not Christian justification at all*. Unashamedly he sides with the Roman Catholic view of imparted righteousness over and against the Protestant notion of imputed righteousness.<sup>104</sup> The low profile given to the theological issues of the Magisterial Reformers in their dispute with Rome is making a point. By saying that it is a *wrong* gospel, and in detailing the sins of those who taught it, there is little more to be said.

Forster's conclusion could, of course, be right. The Reformers may indeed have been doing little except perpetuate and develop the errors of Augustinianism, and that in a very uncharitable spirit. However, Forster could equally be wrong. Either way, at this juncture he is both a bad historian and a poor teacher. Though passionately taught, Forster's presentation frequently represents unsupported dogma. Certainly he

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<sup>101</sup> Luther's hymn, 'A Mighty Fortress'.

<sup>102</sup> Forster, London, letter, February 26, 1998, to the author.

<sup>103</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: The Anabaptists', p. 3. The two other streams were the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists. Forster derives this classification from Williams' *The Radical Reformation*.

<sup>104</sup> Though Forster never states it in these, somewhat charged, historical terms.

provides no evidence for a number of his most significant conclusions. The logic that the Reformer's view of the justification was wrong because they persecuted their opponents possesses the irony that Augustine - who held an opposing view of justification - also persecuted his. Does this then negate the latter view? What then of the English Reformers who also held Luther's view of justification yet were martyred for it? Surely, Cranmer, Ridley, *etc.*, perfectly meet Forster demands for 'devotional spirituality'? Similarly, what about the more Reformed Anabaptist groups? Or the Waldensians who in many ways substantially anticipated classical Protestantism? Or the French Huguenots who were explicitly Calvinist and died for their faith - many of them horribly martyred? The inconsistencies in Forster's methodology are compounded by two further concerns. The first pertains to the very definition of 'righteousness' upon which his yardstick of piety is dependent. Forster has a developed view of Christian justification, but on what grounds does *it* rest? Furthermore, Luther, though at times guilty of parody, does at least display a firm understanding of the Roman Catholic view in defence of Protestant piety. The same cannot be said for Forster. There is no substantive evidence to suggest that Foster has a clear understanding of the critical soteriological issues over which the Reformation fought.

Against this backdrop Forster's bold thesis on the correlation between doctrine and life, Calvinism and Arminianism, must be critically examined.

When you get the wave of the Spirit and masses of people are affected or converted ... it is nearly always does so against the backdrop of Arminian theology - man's responsibility, the conviction of sin that comes with that, and the whole ethos of social action and serving our fellow men and so on. ... However when that revival begins to wane what usually happens is that a strong theological emphasis comes in to take it over, and to kill it. The strong theological emphasis usually comes from people who, instead of being out on the front line getting on with the business that God has given us to do, have been sitting in their cloistered mahogany cells writing erudite Calvinist commentaries so that they can come and suppress this great wave and wind of the Spirit of God that has brought so many people into the Church. And at the bottom of the trough you get strong theology - everybody is into theology - the breakout of revival means that you get masses of converts which you haven't had time to teach yet, and then comes the teaching process and it kills them again and pulls them down. There is something wrong with the teaching that does it. You will find that it almost goes in waves of Arminianism and Calvinism, it goes like that.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Forster, 'Radical Church History: Zwingli and the Sixteenth Century', lecture, transcript, n.d., pp. 18-19.



Other than the simplistic nature of the argument, the immediate flaw in the thesis is that even a brief overview of modern Christian history, not least the Methodist Awakening, shows that the facts do not bear it out. In eighteenth century New England, for example, revival indeed provoked divisions that were theological, but not along the lines of Reformed soteriology.<sup>106</sup> Rather the divisions were according to those who were in favour of revival, and those who were against it. Subsequently, Presbyterianism came to be divided into the 'New Lights' who were in support of the movement, and the 'Old Lights' who were against it,<sup>107</sup> both groups remained Reformed. Certainly there were divisions over Calvinism in England, but the hostility and rancour were hardly one sided. Finally, Forster gives the distinct impression that revival is a peculiarly Arminian phenomenon, yet this is contradicted not only by the experience of England and New England in the 1700s, but also by the widespread experience of revival in the Calvinistic churches of Wales and Northern Ireland in 1859,<sup>108</sup> in Wales in 1904,<sup>109</sup> and in the Hebrides in 1949.<sup>110</sup>

Had Forster's thesis been that Revival has been quenched by *intellectualism*, had he argued in the traditional Evangelical manner that there is such a thing as 'dead orthodoxy', and had he highlighted the vital rôle of Christian experience to a biblical Christianity, his whole argument would be on far firmer ground. As it is, he seems to be guilty of unfounded bias and polemic. Perhaps worst of all, by *a priori* rejecting the Calvinism of Edwards, Whitefield, *etc.*, without seemingly studying their doctrine, he has missed being challenged by the spiritual dynamic these men found in their faith, and learned some of the weaknesses in his own.

## Summary

Forster defines the Church in two ways. Firstly he describes the fundamental nature of

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<sup>106</sup> 'The American revivals were carried on with out division over these issues'. Timothy L. Smith, *Whitefield and Wesley on the New Birth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), p. 20.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>108</sup> References are found throughout Brian Edwards' *Revival: A People Saturated with God* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1990).

<sup>109</sup> Eifion Evans, *The Welsh Revival of 1904* (The Evangelical Press of Wales: 1969).

<sup>110</sup> See: Andrew Woolsey, *Duncan Campbell - A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), pp. 112-130.

the Church: 'an organic community'. Like the human body the church is comprised of differing constituent elements, all of which have a different role and function, yet work together to serve a common purpose. Forster notes that the Christian body is comprised of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Notwithstanding, his teaching here is not to reinforce the position of those in Christian Restoration who lay emphasis on the offices of apostle and prophet, and thus a hierarchical form of Church government, but to emphasise that these gifts have been restored to equip the whole Church for the work of preaching the gospel, and bringing in the kingdom of God.

Secondly, Forster describes the character of this body, namely that it is apostolic, pious, charismatic and prophetic. Apostolicity alludes not only to the purpose of the Church, but also to its unity with Christ: it is Jesus' office as *the* Apostle that ordains the Church to share in the same calling - to reach out and save the lost. As it turns out, piety and the charismata are facilitative elements to this purpose, and 'prophetic' a defining element of 'apostolic'. Piety, or the lifestyle lived by the Christian community, is meant to incarnate or give visible expression to God, through good works. These activities allow those outside the Church to see deity clearly manifest, and so hopefully begin to understand the character of God, and so move toward personal reconciliation with Him. The gifts of the Spirit correspond to this, but differ in that as supernatural acts they draw attention to, and affirm, the power of God. The non-Christian thereby learning that what God desires He is able to accomplish for those that trust Him.

Key in Forster's understanding of the spiritual gifts and their function in the Church is the concept of the 'prophetic'. Supernatural manifestations - as with all other visible expressions of Church life - ought to be 'prophetic', that is, vehicles for effectually communicating the gospel message. This not only speaks to the purpose of the Church, but, provides an acid test to whether the Church is being the Church. Forster insists that neither tongues, prophecies, healings, lively worship, or the presence of apostles and prophets in the governing hierarchy are *essentially* indicative of true spirituality. Rather, only as these different elements are wedded to a prophetic spirit do they attain their true purpose: to secure the widespread conversion of sinners.

Forster's teaching on Christian revelation prepared us for the great importance he ascribes to the history of the Church. Since God has spoken to the community of believers through the ages, it is vital to be able to discern where that community - and therefore, God's voice in history - is to be found. Most controversial at this juncture was not so much Forster's desire to learn from the history of the Church, but the authority he imputes to it. Beyond this are issues of methodology. Perhaps best summed up as 'orthopraxis is the first manifestation of orthodoxy', Forster's application of his own theory not only raised questions concerning consistency, but also further doubts as to his commitment to *sola Scriptura*.

Concerning consistency, the impression was given that *a priori* considerations were often more important in judging who was spiritual, and therefore 'sound', than a rigorous application of the test of piety. Especially notable in this respect was Forster's treatment of Loyola and Xavier over and against Luther and Calvin. Luther's later rantings against the Jews and representations of polemic from Calvin's *Institutes* are juxtaposed against the achievements of the great Roman Catholic evangelists. No attempt is made to consider the achievement of the Reformation over and against the corrupt and abusive regimes of the Borgia papacy and its successors, neither is any consideration given to the evangelistic techniques employed by Loyola *et al.*, nor indeed the Christian gospel to which many of the 'heathen' were being converted. It is odd that Forster, who remonstrates against nominal Christianity and the idea of baptismal regeneration not only completely ignores it here, but highly commends the success of those who preached it.

Leaving aside considerations that similar flaws are found in Forster's critique of Reformed Protestantism in general, and the Great Awakening in particular, the significance of his stance in both these respects reveals the depth of his antagonism towards these schools of biblical interpretation. More importantly, it emphasises that at a critical and academic level, Forster essentially aligns himself with those outside the lineage of classical Evangelical belief. His dislike of Augustine and affirmation of Loyola, Xavier and even defence of Servetus must be seen as indicative in this respect.

Concerns over polemic aside, a number of Forster's arguments build on insights that warrant serious consideration. Calvin's association with the execution of Servetus, for example, raises important moral questions, and Forster is right to show

irritation with those who would defend the act as 'the spirit of the age'. More fundamental is Forster's unhappiness with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Though he doesn't admit it, Forster aligns himself with a number of Catholic theologians, not least (ironically) Augustine, as well as a number of more recent Protestant thinkers. It is shame that Forster does not deal in depth with the issues involved, notwithstanding, there is weight to his arguments concerning the invariable relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Equally, recognition ought to be given to Forster's definition of Christian piety. In recognising that holiness goes beyond personal morality to encompass a wider social obligation to justice and service, he has surely recognised one of the great weaknesses in twentieth century Evangelical belief, one which conservative Evangelicals are themselves increasingly aware.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> This is a problem recognised by a number of Evangelicals from the 1970s on: Ronald Sider (*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, InterVarsity Press, 1975), Timothy Chester (*Awakening to a world of Need*, InterVarsity Press, 1993), Dewi Hughes (*God of the Poor*, OM publishing, 1999), and Gary Haughen (*Good News about Injustice*, InterVarsity Press, 1999).

## Chapter Six: Theological Sources and Influences

An overview of the subjects and emphases present in nearly half a century of teaching reveals that compared to other areas of doctrine, Forster's understanding of Atonement has evolved relatively late. Indeed, it was not until 1988 that he gave a thorough presentation of his views. His earlier teachings on the subject are largely indirect, and in contrast to what was to follow, imply a broadly Anselmic interpretation. Not only his vocabulary, but also his definitions fall well within these parameters. His 1959 exposition of Ruth bears witness to this,<sup>1</sup> and as late as 1973, 'justification' was used in a clearly forensic<sup>2</sup> sense.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding, Forster's teaching on Atonement has always existed within a series of tensions. From his conversion onwards, there were other substantive areas of theology that militated against Anselm,<sup>4</sup> and if consistently maintained would lead to a complete break with the Satisfaction view, especially its interpretation of faith and justification.

By way of furthering the goals of the research, this chapter will seek in the first part to identify and explicate the major influences which lie behind those 'substantive areas of theology', and in the second part, identify and give examples from those written works which have more immediately affected his understanding of the Atonement. In both cases part of our purpose will be three fold: to further expand our understanding of what Forster believes; to 'locate' Forster historically and theologically; and to show that what ever criticism may be made of him, his views have been shaped by individuals who many Evangelicals are happy to regard as their

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<sup>1</sup> In both language and theology highly reminiscent of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Forster exhorts his congregation (Totterdown Brethren Assembly, Bristol) to 'reckon' that at Calvary their 'flesh was crucified' and replaced with a 'new humanity'. Forster, 'Notes on addresses from the Book of Ruth', unpublished, 1959. p. 5. See: Lloyd-Jones exposition on Romans 6:11f. in *The New Man* (Carlisle, Banner of Truth, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter the term 'forensic' is used in the classic Evangelical sense as it relates to justification, that is as a *legal* term, to wit, 'declaring or pronouncing a person righteous according to the law'. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary*, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup> Asked in an interview whether justification is once and for all, Forster replied, 'Yes. I find it quite difficult theologically to understand how you could be de-justified, once you have been acquitted in court'. Forster, Interview with unknown author, unpublished, c. 1973, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Those examined in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, but principally epistemology,

own, e.g., C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald and Leon Morris.<sup>5</sup>

In evaluating direct sources for his doctrine of Atonement, Forster's explicit claim<sup>6</sup> of overall indebtedness to John Scott-Lidgett, James Denney, D. M. Baillie, and Leon Morris<sup>7</sup> has to be taken at face value. This is because in his teaching Forster rarely makes a direct reference to, or gives a quotation from, any author.<sup>8</sup> The correlations which in their several case appear as similarities must be broadly assumed as evidences of Forster's dependence on the stated works, even though without point by point clarification it is difficult to demonstrate that these are anything more than indicative of an overall pattern of influence. Nevertheless, the underlying premise is given considerable support by the fact that Forster reviewed the greater part of this chapter, and responded both in note form and by letter.

## Part One: General Theology

### G. H. Lang

Quite early in his Christian life (1957) Forster was introduced to an elderly

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beliefs concerning hermeneutics, and the Fatherhood of God.

<sup>5</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones admits that Lewis has 'almost become the patron saint of evangelicals' (Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1992] p. 25). MacDonald's books are promoted by one of the largest Evangelical publishers in the United States (Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN), and Leon Morris' many works on the Atonement have earned high acclaim from Evangelical reviewers, and is frequently appealed to as an authority in such conservative publications as the *Evangelical Times* (August 1998, June 1999, April 2000, July 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Forster, London, letter, December 1989, to the author.

<sup>7</sup> Forster also expresses indebtedness to John Driver (*Understanding the Atonement*) and Gustav Aulén (*Christus Victor*). These two works were left out of the final draft of this chapter on account that their influence, though important, was more confined to refining Forster's understanding than in fundamentally developing it. Forster, London, letter, December 1989, to the author.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to the academic integrity of this thesis that these provisos are noted. The claims of influence are Forster's own. Since his teaching and preaching (which comprise the overwhelming part of our source materials) rarely cite sources or acknowledge direct influences, these claims are difficult to establish. His written works are rather different in this respect, but provide such a limited view into Forster, that their value is somewhat diminished, especially as they do not cover the first twenty years of Forster's theological pilgrimage. *God's Strategy* did not appear until 1973, and even it suffers from the weakness of being co-authored with another writer.

Minister who in a short space of time was to have a profound influence on his theological development. A somewhat 'controversial figure'<sup>9</sup> with a reputation for 'independent thinking'<sup>10</sup> G. H. Lang (1874-1958) influenced Forster's understanding in five distinct areas: pneumatology; revelation; sanctification; the rôle of women in the Church; and the doctrine of hell.<sup>11</sup>

Lang wasn't the first to offer Forster a theology for the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit',<sup>12</sup> but he was the first to offer it outside a traditional Evangelical framework. Where Lloyd-Jones and others defined the baptism in terms of an extraordinary assurance of salvation, Lang presented it as a whole new level relationship with God. Not least in this respect was Lang's understanding that the Spirit became the believer's personal guide in interpreting the Scriptures.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, the adoption of this idea produced a 'fundamental' shift in Forster's thinking: 'I came to realise', he says, 'that it is not my intellect that leads me into truth, but the Holy Spirit'.<sup>14</sup> From this juncture Forster's theological exploration consciously gave primacy to an 'inspirational' or 'intuitive' leading of the Spirit. In 1991 he elaborated, 'My whole approach to theology .. [became] this, it is the Spirit who leads one into truth, and leads you into a hermeneutic to understand ... what the Scripture is saying'.<sup>15</sup>

Another area where Lang was to influence Forster was in regard to the rôle that historical Christian orthodoxy ought to play in the development of contemporary theology. Lang's experience of intolerance suggested to him that many Christians had

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Brealey calls him 'the most controversial figure in Brethren circles since J. N. Darby'. D. Brealey in *G. H. Lang, An Ordered Life: the autobiography of G. H. Lang* (Paternoster Press, 1959), Foreword, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Brealey notes Lang's 'resistance to traditional orthodox teachings ... unless he were personally convinced that they were right'. Brealey, *An Ordered Life*, p. 10. Lang's independence - and indeed, isolation - is also noted by Peter Hocken. See: Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1986), p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, December 1991, transcript, pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> The first was D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the widely acclaimed Minister of Westminster Chapel, London (1943-1968).

<sup>13</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, December 1991, transcript, *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

allowed various historical ideas to cloud their interpretation of Scripture. Lang, therefore, urged Forster to abandon this presuppositional stance, and as much as possible work outside the framework of an *a priori* theology. If this method affirmed orthodoxy well enough, but if it didn't, hold on to your new understanding, 'even if it doesn't fit in with established theology'.<sup>16</sup>

Among the tenets of 'established theology' that Forster was to challenge in this manner was the doctrine of eternal punishment. The 'traditional' idea of hell had bothered Forster from his earliest days as a Christian, seeming at variance with God's compassion manifest in Christ.<sup>17</sup> At Cambridge Forster had become convinced of the soul's conditional immortality, so leading him to conclude that the fate of the lost was annihilation, a point which he subsequently discussed with Lang. Ironically Lang believed the traditional view and sought to convince Forster in that direction, but failed. Nonetheless the whole exercise provided opportunity to gain further appreciation of the linguistic, philosophical and theological issues involved.

Another strain of Lang's influence relates to his belief that there are two classes of Christian: the 'carnal' and the 'overcomer'. The latter qualify for the 'prize of the high calling' on account of their obedience and continued 'abiding' in Christ. The former, though saved from the Lake of Fire, fail to gain those heavenly privileges that are intended to *accompany* salvation. This theology of rewards provoked another 'fundamental' change in Forster's thinking, and proved a 'great motive and inspiration' for his pressing on in the Christian life.<sup>18</sup> It was in this context that Lang introduced Forster to the 'perfectionist' and 'higher life' theology of John Wesley (1703-1791) and Charles G. Finney (1792-1875),<sup>19</sup> together with their 'holiness'<sup>20</sup> successors, Paget Wilkes (1871-1934), Oswald Chambers (1874-1917), and Samuel Logan Brengle (1860-1936).

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. Added emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Forster, 'Judgement', sermon, transcript, n.d., p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, December, 1991, pp. 7-8.

<sup>20</sup> The Holiness movement in Great Britain is intimately connected with the Keswick convention which began in the 1870s and brought 'a new style of devotion' laying stress on 'the rest of faith'. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 151. He further



The final aspect of Lang's influence pertains to issues of gender. Forster says, 'I began to consider the rôle of women in the Church as far back as when I began to get exercised about biblical Church life'.<sup>21</sup> So when Lang, through his knowledge of Brethren history, argued that women ought to pray and prophesy in meetings, Forster felt confirmed in his beliefs.

In addition to these areas of influence, there were other qualities in Lang to which Forster would have been drawn, and which would either have reinforced previous convictions or stimulated new ideas. Lang's autobiography reveals that he was a man who 'lived by faith', that is looked to God to provide the means of his subsistence.<sup>22</sup> He had a passion for expository preaching born out of the early development of a highly methodical and systematic approach to biblical exposition,<sup>23</sup> and he was a man of intense personal discipline.<sup>24</sup> Each of these qualities came to be reflected in Forster himself.

### George MacDonald

George MacDonald, Forster notes, was ordained to the Congregational ministry in Arundel, England, but was soon accused of heterodoxy on account that his views on the Fatherhood of God left some hope for the heathen at the judgement.<sup>25</sup> This 'hope' developed into a reassessment of a number of other doctrines, particularly those that limited the love of God to the elect. MacDonald's fictional character, Robert Falconer, clearly came to represent his own mind, 'I dinna care for Him to love me, if He doesna love ilka (every) body'.<sup>26</sup>

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notes that a significant inspiration behind the movement was Wesleyan perfectionism.

<sup>21</sup> Forster, London, letter, June 1992, to the author.

<sup>22</sup> G. H. Lang, *An Ordered Life*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43. Lang presents a four-fold principle that came out of secular employment in the insurance business, to wit, being careful, accurate, and factual in presentation, objective and attentive in reading.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1. Lang cites four principles in the life of Saint Paul. 1. Paul had a mind of his own. 2. Paul was always on the go. 3. Paul believed in bodily exercises. 4. Paul believed in solitude.

<sup>25</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, December, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> George MacDonald, *Robert Falconer* (London: Hurst and Blackett, c.1850), p. 196.

While in retrospect we find a number of distinctives in MacDonald's theology reflected both in the spirit and the substance of Roger Forster, the one that Forster acknowledges above all is the universal Fatherhood of God. To MacDonald this relationship provided the foundation for all other attributes of divinity, not least those of sovereignty and justice. God *is* Father, He is functionally judge.<sup>27</sup> In Forster's own words this distinction became 'absolutely crucial'<sup>28</sup> in the development of his Christian thinking.

Two other teachings in MacDonald may be noted as finding parallel in Forster. First is the relationship by which MacDonald understands Christ to stand in regards the human race; that it is creational in nature, not federal.<sup>29</sup> This provides the backdrop by which the Atonement is understood to have as its goal the spiritual renovation of man through moral influence, not a legal and forensic exchange. Thus, says MacDonald, Paul's words in Romans 3:25 - 26, cannot be interpreted as they are according to earlier Evangelicals.

They say first, God must punish the sinner, for justice requires it; then they say that He does not punish the sinner, but punishes a perfectly righteous man instead, attributes His righteousness to the sinner, and so continues just. Was there ever such a confusion, such an inversion of right and wrong? Justice could not treat a righteous man as unjust; neither if justice required the punishment of sin, could justice let the sinner go unpunished.<sup>30</sup>

The second teaching relates to the nature of the 'faith' whereby we are joined to Christ. MacDonald interprets this as a graciously enabled yet voluntaristic moral realignment: the sinner assents to the reality of all that God is and has done through Christ, this is joined with love,<sup>31</sup> the two representing the regeneration of the heart.

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<sup>27</sup>The divine mercy is no longer defined as antithetical to divine justice, or vice versa, but the two are reflective of one attribute, love. 'There is no opposition, no strife whatever, between mercy and justice'. MacDonald, *Creation in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publ. 1976), p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, December, 1991, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>MacDonald's Christology is highly interesting at this point, 'Our Lord became flesh, but did not become man. He took on the form of man: He was man already'. MacDonald, *Creation in Christ*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> The sinner aligns himself with 'selflessness' or the moral disposition which gives rise to obedience. We note the similarity here with the Council of Trent's insistent joining of faith with actual righteousness or 'love'. See 'On Justification', Chapter VII.

Thus justification consists in *making* the sinner righteous: 'the perfect righteousness of the Son of God in humanity is itself the gift of God to us in Christ - to be ours as Christ is ours ... instead of its being ... ours by imputation'.<sup>32</sup> It is a justification which follows the actualisation of that principle - inherent in Christ and His Atonement - by which the sinner transforms his nature by the power of God and the assent of the will.

### C. S. Lewis

I get most of my theology from C. S. Lewis' children's books.

Roger Forster.<sup>33</sup>

One of the first things to be noted about Lewis is his indebtedness to George MacDonald. In *The Great Divorce* Lewis acknowledges, 'I have never concealed the fact that I regard him as my master: indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him'.<sup>34</sup> Thereafter we must note that the parallels between Lewis and MacDonald, Forster and Lewis are not only broad but substantive, especially as regards; epistemology; theology proper; anthropology; Original Sin and total depravity; the Atonement; heaven, hell, and the judgement. Though establishing the exact relationship between Lewis and MacDonald lies outside the scope of this thesis, Lewis' own acknowledgement evidences that a significant and direct influence does exist. The same may be said for Forster of Lewis. Not only are there a number of occasions where Forster explicitly quotes or alludes to Lewis, but also there is the explicit acknowledgement that Lewis is a thinker with whom Forster closely identifies. There are a number of striking similarities. The first pertains to Forster's predilection to logical consistency.

In reading Lewis, Forster would have witnessed a mind that affirmed the importance of logic in theological development. Says one commentator,

The emphasis on reason is everywhere apparent in Lewis' works, fictional as well as expository. In *The Pilgrims Regress* it is Reason who rescues John from the psychoanalytical prison, slays the Spirit of the Age, offers prisoners freedom and

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<sup>32</sup> MacDonald, *Creation in Christ*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>33</sup> Forster, 'Lousane Two', sermon, 1989, transcript, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 59-60. Further and equal debts of acknowledgement are made in Lewis' *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1946), pp. 20-22, and Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1955), pp. 168-171.

leads John back toward the main highway and directs him to Mother Kirk and salvation. Later in the story Reason appears as John's enemy, as he supposes, and forces him with a brandished sword into the right path, the very event that had transpired in Lewis' own experience. In *Screwtape* one of the devil's purposes was to keep the Christian out of arguments about religion. From the hellish point of view what was wanted was a quiet drift into worldly-wise common sense. Argument would inevitably lead from personal to universal issues, and universals tended to circumvent the insidious schemes of hell.<sup>35</sup>

Though reason is paramount in Lewis, it is not an *independent* reason, as Corbin Carnell observes, 'Lewis does not believe that reason unaided by God's grace, can lead man automatically to the truth ... though Lewis insists that truth as it is given in God cannot be understood apart from reason'.<sup>36</sup> Lewis' view of the rational then is fundamentally theistic. All reason, if it is reason at all, has its reference in God. Forster himself quotes Lewis in this respect: 'When you are arguing against God you are arguing against the power that makes you able to argue at all'.<sup>37</sup> While most theists would admit that God is perfect Reason, Lewis makes some bold steps in the definitions he seeks to associate with Reason, the most important of which is love, and definitive to love is freedom:

A world of automata - of creatures that worked like machines - would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared to which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free.<sup>38</sup>

It is this logical, though balanced concept of moral freedom, which gives Lewis' soteriology certain definitive qualities. Though man's voice has no final say over the destiny of the universe, or as Lewis profoundly puts it, 'hell cannot veto heaven',<sup>39</sup> each human being has the last word concerning his own destiny, 'those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done"'.<sup>40</sup> God can do no more than woo sinners back to Himself, though it is a strong wooing. At the same time Lewis seeks to carefully reflect

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<sup>35</sup> Clyde S. Gilby, 'The Creative Logician Speaking', in Carolyn Keefe (ed.), *C. S. Lewis: Speaker and Teacher* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: C. S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 69. Added emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> Clyde Gilby, *C. S. Lewis: Speaker and Teacher*, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Fontana Books, 1952. Fifth impression, 1958), p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 111.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

the grace-free-will tension he sees in Scripture. Lewis happily allows for Infinite Wisdom to be wrestle against the almost infinitely enigmatic conundrum that comprises human choice. Sin is so illogical it is impossible to account for why one chooses God and another rejects Him. Certainly Lewis disallows the idea that the right choice is reflective of some inherent moral goodness. Some of those one thinks nearest the kingdom, end up furthest away, and *vice versa*.<sup>41</sup>

Lewis' view of sin, like Forster's, finds its focus in ontology. Similarly while both men plainly acknowledge the personally angered Majesty of God in man's transgression, they equally affirm that it is Fatherly in essence. Lewis further contextualises this by emphasising the natural and dysteleological<sup>42</sup> fallout that flows from sin, or rather, that *is* sin. When moral creatures act independently of God they enter into non-life, or 'death', '... we move away, into what He regards as nonentity, where He never follows'.<sup>43</sup> Death is not to be confused as physical cessation but that which represents the inverse of life's qualities. Fullness, joy, satisfaction and above all substance are replaced by emptiness, misery, dissatisfaction and insubstantiveness. Lewis says, 'The whole difficulty of understanding Hell is that the thing to be understood is so nearly Nothing'.<sup>44</sup>

Again emphasising the ontological necessity of human freedom (and anticipating Forster), Lewis declares the sinner's perdition is not a sentence imposed upon him, but the mere fact of being what he is. 'It is not a question of God "sending" us to hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself be hell unless it is nipped in the bud'.<sup>45</sup> Salvation or redemption is, therefore, ultimately to be saved from oneself, it is the interruption of independence' downward decent into 'nothingness'. Such intervention begins as truth makes contact with the 'real' humanity lies inside all men.<sup>46</sup> The process culminates as each man and women make

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72

<sup>42</sup> 'Dysteleological' speaks of the interruption that sin introduces to the purpose for which humanity was created. Keefe, *C. S. Lewis*, p. 66.

<sup>43</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage to Venus* (London: Pan Books, 1943. Reprinted 1955), p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 68.

<sup>45</sup> C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: essays on theology and ethics*, Edited by Walter Hooper, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 155.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

their wills again 'wholly God's': 'such an act undoes with "backward mutters of dissevering power" the uncreative spell which Adam laid upon his species'.<sup>47</sup> Choice, therefore, lies at the heart of humankind's appropriation of redemption: 'it his by his will alone that man is either good or bad'.<sup>48</sup>

As to whether a man chooses to be respond or not, Lewis gives the analogy of a trembling compass needle: God waits to see if it will swing round and settle on Him.<sup>49</sup> No wonder then that Lewis considers man's 'highest activity' his positive response to God.<sup>50</sup> Not that this represents human merit, for as we have noted above, Lewis' believes this response can only be defined in enigmatic terms. It is a view of 'decision' that bares strong resemblance to the catastrophe theory: a small inexplicable change making for an enormous consequence.<sup>51</sup> It is this aspect that allows Lewis to deny that salvation is based upon good works, while at the same time emphasising the freedom of man's will.

Lewis embraces something called 'original sin', yet rejects the classic doctrine as interpreted by Augustine, the Reformers and modern Evangelicals. Lewis understands the terms as speaking of 'selfishness' rather than the curse of guilt and constitutional inability. 'Total depravity' is similarly redefined: it is not what a person is, but what they are in danger of slowly becoming as they refuse to be converted.<sup>52</sup> Man is not, therefore, born totally depraved. Indeed, *The Great Divorce* describes those

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<sup>47</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Centenary Press, 1940), p. 90.

<sup>48</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters of Lewis* (London: Collins, 1988), p. 210. Original emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis' picture of a sensitive compass is a far more delicate picture than anything we find in Forster, whose own paradigm is much more focused on warfare, battle and capitulation.

<sup>50</sup> Douglas Gilbert, *C. S. Lewis: Images of his world* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 66.

<sup>51</sup> The formal development of catastrophe theory is credited chiefly to the French topologist René Thom. It seeks to classify the ways in which a system can undergo sudden large changes in behaviour as one or more of the variables that control it are changed. A simple example is the change in shape of an arched bridge as the load on it is gradually increased. The bridge deforms in a relatively uniform manner until the load reaches a critical value, at which point the shape of the bridge changes suddenly—it collapses. More speculatively, the ideas of catastrophe theory have been applied by social scientists to a variety of situations, such as the sudden eruption of mob violence. See: 'Catastrophe Theory', <<http://www.britannica.com>>

<sup>52</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 86.

in 'hell' who are not yet 'totally' depraved, and who may yet enter heaven.<sup>53</sup>

Concerning Adam, Lewis anticipates Forster in saying that he was the offspring of an anthropoid in whom God created a living soul in the divine image, thus making him the first true man.<sup>54</sup> As to the Fall, Lewis believes that as progenitor of the human race Adam infected his descendants through the one act of disobedience, but anticipates Forster in defining this infection in moral government terms,<sup>55</sup> not as a forensic or constitutional act. Lewis also anticipates Forster's cosmic world of 'principalities and powers', though in rather less dramatic terms, particularly *vis-à-vis* practical Christian involvement in spiritual warfare. Lewis' works contain quite a developed view of spiritual conflict within man (*The Screwtape Letters*) and around man (*The Perelandra Chronicles*) but avoids the explicit kind of warfare present in Forster (which, it has to be said, often approximates a militant kind of exorcism).

Turning our attention to the Atonement, although 'Lewis begs us not to argue with others about how Christ's death saves us',<sup>56</sup> like Forster, it is a request made in the context of a theological framework that has already precluded Anselm.<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, while Lewis' cosmology allows for elements of the Conflict theory,<sup>58</sup> his view of the Atonement is essentially 'ethical' and 'subjective' in focus. Lewis stresses the power of the Cross to bring 'humiliation' and 'surrender' to the heart of man, so that he becomes truly, that is, morally, one with the Father,<sup>59</sup> and *ipso facto* a partaker

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<sup>53</sup> A second opportunity for salvation is a view that, as we have noted previously, Forster surprisingly does not share.

<sup>54</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (London: Collins, 1988), p. 237.

<sup>55</sup> J. H. Fairchild describes Moral Government as 'an arrangement to regulate the conduct of moral beings by enlightening their minds as to what actions are right and proper, and by solemn pronouncement that certain consequences will follow right action and opposite consequences wrong action so that man will fulfil his planned relationships'. Fairchild, (ed.), *Finney's Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1976)

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Gilbert, *C. S. Lewis: Images of his world* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 48-53.

<sup>58</sup> At least one author has used Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as an interpretation of the Conflict theory of the Atonement. See: Taliaferro, Charles. 'A Narnian Theory of the Atonement', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988), pp. 75-92.

<sup>59</sup> See: C. S. Lewis, 'The Perfect Penitent', and 'The Practical Conclusion', in *Mere Christianity* (Fontana Books, 1952. Fifth impression, 1958), pp. 53-58.

of the divine life.

*Mere Christianity* contains two chapters that explicitly deal with faith and Christian conversion. Most notably absent are the passive and assuring qualities of faith associated with classic Evangelicalism. In further contradistinction, Lewis only deals with faith as part of a general consideration of Christian behaviour, he doesn't emphasise it as the most important element in conversion. Not that Lewis is denigrating faith, but he does make it secondary to the sinner's voluntary (though graciously enabled) moral decision to live a new kind of life.

As to the relationship between faith and Christ, Lewis understanding bares many similarities to McLeod Campbell's theory, though Lewis uses the term 'copy'<sup>60</sup> rather than 'identification' regarding Christ's faith being reproduced in the believer. At this point Lewis (like Forster at the same juncture) reminds his readers of the priority of grace, lest faith be understood as a work of merit. By stating that free will reaches its choice by some quite mysterious route, Lewis anticipates those who might accuse him of justification by works since the reason one chooses and another does not, is a conundrum of literally infinite proportions. In other words, Lewis rejects the idea that one who chooses for God has undertaken an act of moral virtue.

While Lewis' embrace of the conflict *motif* is not as full as Forster's, it marks some considerable anticipation of him, certainly as regards a universe where priority is given to spiritual warfare and considerations of ontology and moral freedom. It has been said that Lewis considered dualism 'the most sensible and manly creed after Christianity'.<sup>61</sup> His Narnia Chronicles (written for Children) have as their central theme the warfare between good and evil. Christ is represented in the Lion Aslan, and God the Father as the Emperor beyond the Seas. Satan finds no such parallel, though evil itself finds personification in various 'anti-Christ's' such as the White Queen in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Green Lady in *The Silver Chair*, and the Ape in *The Last Battle*. Aslan's personal appearance and direct intervention in the world of Narnia is limited to its creation, his sacrifice at the hands of the Witch, and the judgement at the end of time. In times of danger his chosen instruments to help the battle for good

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<sup>60</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 61.

<sup>61</sup> Douglas Gilbert, *C. S. Lewis: Images of his world* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), p.



are children sent from our own world.

It is, however, Lewis' science fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Voyage to Venus*, and *That Hideous Strength* that give clearest expression to dualism of the kind we see later expressed in Forster. These books present a world-view in which the universe is dwelt not only by physical sentient moral beings but also by non-physical beings, *eldila*, allotted to each planet, servants of *Maledil*. Each planet has a paramount *eldil*, or *archon*, an immensely powerful being who possessing authority over many aspects of planetary life, not least control of physical laws.<sup>62</sup> In the case of earth that prince is a fallen *archon* - the *Bent Will* - served by fallen *eldila*. While that prince has been imprisoned - if he seeks to move outside the moon's orbit he will be driven back by the 'main force' - he remains hideously powerful on earth. Man is both subject and agent in this war among 'powers and principalities'.<sup>63</sup> This world-view is further explained in a fictional conversation between Lewis and one of his characters, *Ransom* in the *Voyage to Venus* (1943):

'When the Bible used that very expression about fighting principalities and powers and depraved hypersomatic beings at great heights (our translation is very misleading at that point, by the way) it meant that quite ordinary people were to do the fighting'.

'Oh I dare say', said I. 'But that's rather different. That refers to a moral conflict'.

*Ransom* threw back his head and laughed. 'Oh, Lewis, Lewis', he said, 'you are inimitable, simply inimitable!'

'Say what you like, *Ransom*, there is a difference'.

'Yes. There is. But not a difference that makes it megalomania to think that any of us might have to fight either way. I'll tell you how I look at it. Haven't you noticed in our own little war here on earth, there are different phases, and while any one phase is going on people get into the habit of thinking and behaving as if it were going to be permanent. But really the thing is changing under your hands all the time, and neither your assets nor your dangers this year are the same as the year before. Now your idea that ordinary people will never have to meet the *Dark Elida* in any form except a psychological or moral form - as temptations or the like - is simply an idea that held good for a certain phase of the cosmic war: the phase of the great siege, the phase which gave to our planet its name of *Thulcandra*, the silent planet. But suppose that phase is passing? In the next phase it may be anyone's job to meet them ... well, in some quite different mode'.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Voyage to Venus*, p. 165.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Forster would say that the 'next phase' is already with us, and has been with us some time: it came with the kingdom of God in the person of His Son.

## Part Two: Theology of Atonement

### John Scott Lidgett

Even a cursory examination shows that Lidgett's understanding of the Atonement considerably anticipates Forster. Lidgett's first major work on the subject *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* (c. 1898) includes a systematic examination of the New Testament teaching (pp. 34-120) with specific emphasis on the Gospels and the words of Christ (pp. 77-120). Of this, well over half is focused on two themes; the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (pp. 89-106); and the imagery of Sacrifice (pp. 106-120). The middle portion of the book undertakes a select overview of the doctrine in Church history, beginning with Anselm (pp. 132-139) thus missing out the early Church as well as Abelard.<sup>65</sup> Treatment is given to the Lutheran and Reformed views (pp. 139-150) as well as the Reformed 'rejoinder' to Socinius and Grotius (pp. 150-155). The historical analysis then jumps to consider a series of nineteenth century teachers, Dr. Dale (pp. 155-170), McLeod Campbell (pp. 171-179), F. D. Maurice (pp. 180-184), Dr. Westcott (186-188), Dr. Bushnell (pp. 189-201), and Albrecht Ritschl (pp. 202-217).

The second part of the book (pp. 219-416) presents Lidgett's own views rendered under the headings of 'The Satisfaction of God' (pp. 219-307), 'The Ethical

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<sup>65</sup> It has, however, to be noted that Lidgett adds an eighty page Appendix to the work examining the doctrine in Church History. This is divided into two parts:

Part One:

- I. The Early Fathers (pp. 420-428).
- II. The Doctrine of Redemption from the Devil (pp. 428-448).
- III. The Doctrine of Satisfaction (pp. 448-459).
- IV. Moral Theories (pp. 459-461).

Part Two:

- I. The Roman Doctrine (pp. 462-463).
- II. The Reformers (pp. 463-469).
- III. The Reformed Doctrine (pp. 470-474).
- IV. Socinius (pp. 474-479).
- V. The Reformers' Rejoinder to Socinius (pp. 479-481).
- VI. English Theology (pp. 481-486).
- VII. Jonathan Edwards (pp. 496-487).

Attributes of our Lord' (pp. 308-350), 'The Relationship of our Lord to the Human Race' (pp. 351-379), 'The Relationship of our Lord's divinity to the Efficacy of the Atonement' (pp. 380-397), 'The Principle of the Atonement in relation to the Spiritual Life of Individuals' (pp. 398-408), and briefly, 'The Principle of the Atonement and Social Progress' (pp. 410-416).

From this outline the similarities with the structure of Forster's lecture are obvious: both represent an historical overview followed by an examination of the Gospels. Concerning the latter, there is also considerable correspondence in emphasis as regards the themes of Suffering Servant and Sacrifice. In terms of Lidgett's systematic presentation, two themes find particularly close parallel in Forster ('The Relationship of our Lord to the Human Race' and 'The Principle of the Atonement in relation to the Spiritual Life of Individuals'), while only two are completely excluded ('The Relationship of our Lord's divinity to the Efficacy of the Atonement' and, 'The Principle of the Atonement and Social Progress').

#### *Lidgett's 'Spiritual Principle of the Atonement'*

If Lidgett terms some interpretations of the Cross as 'federal' and 'theocentric', and others 'moral' and 'anthropocentric', his own is 'spiritual' and centred on the Fatherhood of God as it is revealed in the Son:

While our Lord always distinguishes between His own Sonship and that of others, yet the Fatherhood of God and His own Sonship *is the norm after which the relation of God to men is patterned.*<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, creation itself, 'rests upon an eternal relationship of the *Son* to the world, which is manifested in His being the Creator, the constitutive life, and the ideal end of

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#### VIII. Schleiermacher (pp. 487-488).

<sup>66</sup> John Scott Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement* (London: G. H. Kelly. Second Edition, 1898), p. 21. Added emphasis. 'It is in and through the Son that creation has been brought into being, is constituted, and has vital union with God. Thus the world stands in its closest connection with the immanent life of the Godhead. The creative process has its source in the Father, its mediator in the Son. The creative product is conditioned by the Son, and has the Son as its head, through whom it has access to God. The external acts of God in creation and redemption, have their ground in, correspond to, and reflect the immanent relations of the Godhead'. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

the whole'.<sup>67</sup> In this respect Lidgett not only exemplifies nineteenth century thought,<sup>68</sup> but undoubtedly helped fashion it. It is this underlying paradigm that accounted for the book's attraction to Forster, and subsequently the theme that proved to be of defining influence.<sup>69</sup> In Lidgett the Fatherhood of God provides the precursor to two related doctrines: unlimited Atonement, and the unconditional love of God to all men.<sup>70</sup> Forster follows this exactly.

Concerning the relationship underlying Atonement between Christ and humanity and *vice versa*, Lidgett finds its locus in 'identification',<sup>71</sup> another concept fully adopted by Forster. Commenting on the text 'God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf', Lidgett remarks,

The apostle is declaring, as else where, a double identification ... there is a double exchange of status: from that of sinlessness to that of sin, in the case of Christ; from that of guilt to that of righteousness, in the case of sinners. [Yet] The expression is too strong to be interpreted as merely an exchange of status. It speaks of something He became in order that He might die for us ... a mysterious oneness ... Our faith takes upon us His righteousness and makes it our own ... on the other hand, Christ enters into our sin, takes it upon Himself, is wrapped in it.<sup>72</sup>

Lidgett develops this idea as he exegetes Paul's phrase, 'He became a curse for us'. That is, Christ 'stood' with the

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58. Added emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> In regard to nineteenth century thought, F. W. Dilliston makes the following observation: 'The significance of the nineteenth century in the history of Atonement doctrine is the new prominence given to such relations as that between father and son or between mother and child, to such concepts as personal sympathy and personal identification with others'. F. W. Dilliston, *The Christian Understanding of Atonement* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 242.

<sup>69</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus Office, London, December 1991, transcript, pp. 5-6.

<sup>70</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Lidgett acknowledges indebtedness for his use of the term 'identification' to James Denney's *Studies in Theology* and Jonathan Edwards' *Concerning the Necessity and Reasonableness of the Christian Doctrine of Satisfaction for Sin*. Denney expounds a similar understanding but expresses his debt to John McLeod Campbell: 'Christ enters sympathetically, as His relations to man required Him to do, into the whole state and responsibilities of His sinful brethren, making their burden His own, as far as it was possible for love to do so', then adds, 'something akin to it had been expressed long before by Jonathan Edwards .. a writer to whom McLeod Campbell owes much, indeed we often owe much to those to whom we are most opposed'. James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Atonement* (New York: George H. Duran Co. 1918), p. 118.

... accursed violators of the law under those conditions of its displeasure to which they were exposed. He made Himself absolutely one with them and their outcast position, and, [absorbed] into Himself all its meaning ... His being made a curse is His entering into the whole of those evil consequences that are the mark of the displeasure of the law.<sup>73</sup>

Further, 'There was the anguish which came to the All Holy from contact with sin, from the apprehension of it in all its horror, from exposure to its temptations'.<sup>74</sup> We have seen previously, that Forster also embraces this idea.

Connected with this is Lidgett's defining of the nature of God's wrath which makes it, as indeed all other divine attributes, subordinate to Fatherhood and the Father's love. As we shall see, Forster's exposition of Romans 1:18 bears close comparison to Lidgett's comments on Romans 3:23. To Lidgett, God's wrath is an expression and a minister of His love, a truth evidenced in the very existence of an atoning event:

The fact that the atoning sacrifice is provided by God, not only prevents us from conceiving of His wrath as a selfish emotion, but also shows that love works in the wrath as well as in the provision that turns it away.<sup>75</sup>

Our author is emphatic. The divine wrath is not a cold detached judgement, but an expression of God's love.

Forster, though less erudite, is equally emphatic.

I used to think that some of the passages where God seemed real up-tight about sin were taking things a bit too far. Why should God be so? Until I had my own children and they started to do things wrong. Sometimes the things that they did wrong threatened their very lives, like running out into the middle of the road, picking up bottles of medicine or poison, sticking their fingers down the electric plugs. I would get ever so up-tight, 'Why do you think that you are doing that!!' It was because I loved them that I was so up-tight about the situation, and it is because God loves us so much that He knows that if He said 'O forget it', it would be very destructive. It would destroy us.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, p. 41 - 42.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47. Added emphasis. 'Complete identification of our Lord with our nature ails of our condition'. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> Forster, 'Genesis 3', second of two sermons, transcript, p. 13.

*Scott Lidgett's View of Justification*

Representative of Lidgett's understanding of 'justification' are his comments on 1 John 2:28: ' "abiding in Christ" is the condition of the Christian life, not only as the source of holiness, but as the ground of acceptance'.<sup>77</sup> 'Abiding' is later defined as 'having fellowship with', 'habitual insight', 'union', or 'closest intimacy' with Christ.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Lidgett means that our acceptance with God flows from *our* becoming Christlike. Not in the sense that we must do works of righteousness to earn acceptance with God, but that we come to that place where we are righteous, and where we possess a disposition (or commitment of the whole man) to Christ that is evidenced by works. This is to share Christ Himself: for 'the temper of spirit produced by faith' cannot be separated 'from the object of faith'.<sup>79</sup> We must, therefore, enter into Christ's work and share it with Him if it is to avail an effectual redemption. Both these elements are found in Forster. Furthermore, as with Forster, there is no room for anything remotely approximating Luther's 'forensic' or 'objective righteousness',<sup>80</sup> only one that is 'actual'<sup>81</sup> or 'ontological'. When Lidgett asks 'On what ground could sinful men enter into the enjoyment of a relationship that seemed rightfully to belong solely to the

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<sup>77</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, pp. 63-64. Added emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

<sup>80</sup> As with 'forensic', the term 'objective righteousness' is used according to its classic Evangelical sense of having reference to the 'righteousness of faith', that is, Christ's merit imputed to the believer, on account of which they are 'accepted' or declared righteous before God. See: 'Righteousness' in Buck, *A Theological Dictionary*.

<sup>81</sup> The juxtaposing of 'objective righteousness' with 'ontological righteousness' is used to identify the nature of the difference embodied by Forster, Lidgett, *et al.*, and especially the latter's denial that Christian's justification rests *exclusively* on the external and legally imputed merits of Christ. 'Ontological' speaks of the fact that the believer through the act of faith is made *actually* righteousness, not in the sense of perfection, but in the sense that a fundamental change of being (an ontic change) has occurred. This allows God to declare the subject 'justified' that is, 'truly' and 'actually' righteous, not 'just' legally so. At one level the difference between Forster and the classic Evangelical views of justification and righteousness are clear to delineate (as we are intending to show in this chapter) but at an analytical level, the issues become extremely difficult, and the differences which have appeared so 'black and white' become grey once effort is made to undertake careful definition of the terms used. The recent debates between the Church of England and the Church of Rome over these very issues have illustrated these points, as have recent historical overviews of these issues. See: Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* volume 2 (Cambridge, 1986). For the various historical debates on justification See especially chapters 4-8, 20-29.

sinless Christ?'<sup>82</sup> His answer is clear, 'Only on the twofold ground, first, on their incorporation in Christ; and secondly, of an adequate satisfaction made by Christ, and in a sense *by them* in Christ, to God for sin'.<sup>83</sup> The definitive words are these: 'an adequate satisfaction made ... by them in Christ, to God for sin'. This personal participation in the act of redemption he a little later calls, 'faith in Atonement'.<sup>84</sup>

The same ontological dimension to Atonement is said to be evident in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, where 'we are taught, first, that our Lord's death is the cause of forgiveness of sins; second, that salvation is received *by inward impartation* of the body and blood of Christ'.<sup>85</sup> Christ's bearing of sin, therefore, was not merely the passive submission to the penal consequences of sin: it was the assumption by the Sufferer Himself of their sin with all its consequences *that we may participate in the event ourselves*. But how do we participate, and what is the nature of that participation? At this juncture Lidgett cites Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise Concerning the Necessity and Reasonableness of the Christian Doctrine of Satisfaction for Sin* (Sec. 32):

Christ's great love and pity to the elect was one source of His suffering. A strong exercise of love excites a lively idea of the object loved. A strong exercise of pity excites a lively idea of the misery under which he pities them. Christ's love then brought His elect infinitely near to Him in that grand act of suffering wherein He especially stood for them, and was substituted in their stead; and His love and pity fixed the idea of them in His mind as if He had been really they, and fixed their calamity in His mind as though it was really His. A very strong and lively love and pity towards the miserable tends to make their case ours; as in other respects so in this in particular, as it doth in our idea place us in their stead, under their misery, as it were feeling it for them actually suffering it in their stead by strong sympathy.

Concerning the sinner's relationship to this act, Lidgett points out that,

Suffering unconnected with conduct, even though the sufferer be divine ... if unrelated to the spiritual life of those for whom it is offered, would be out of harmony with all [biblical] principle. But it is not so.

The consensus of both Testaments is that the satisfying principle in our Lord's death was none other than His complete surrender and obedience to His Father in manifesting His own life as the Son throughout His earthly life - but especially in death - under the penal conditions prescribed for Him by His Incarnation and consequent union with the race of sinful men. And further, this Atonement

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<sup>82</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, p. 74.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>84</sup> Lidgett's understanding of faith is discussed below.

<sup>85</sup> Added emphasis.

complete in itself and vicarious though it is, stands in such a mystical relation to the experience of believers *as makes it to promote, and not to supersede, all those ethical interests which prophets and psalmists stood forward to assert and to protect.*<sup>86</sup>

In contrast, Anselm's forensic interpretation is said to be 'mechanical' because it fails to recognise 'the spiritual influence of the death of Christ' upon mankind, and 'entirely neglects any sense of solidarity between Him and those whom He represents'. Thus it is altogether impossible 'to realise through the form Anselm represents it, that Christ's death is in such wise ours that we can enter into it'.<sup>87</sup> The constant argument made by Lidgett (and followed by Forster) is that Christ's work in Atonement marks an ethical dynamic, a timeless event whose goal is to draw men and women into its own reality and make them righteous. Theologically the 'demand' is not for satisfaction to be rendered to the divine law, but for the actualisation of righteousness in those who are believing. It is only this that may truly be called redemption: 'Atonement to Fatherhood lies in restored, realised and manifested sonship'.<sup>88</sup>

Given the major harmatological presupposition, that sin lies in voluntary moral action, not a constitutional condition,<sup>89</sup> the Atonement event must be said to capture in a moment all righteousness, that is the 'substance'<sup>90</sup> of all that lies in the character of the Father, and unfold it as a perfect and continuous revelation. As this revelation is 'received' by members of the human race through faith, it is reproduced in them thus effecting an actual reconciliation. Lidgett's earlier supposition, 'The discipline of one man affects others either by the spiritual truths and forces which it reveals, or by the example which, since men are of a kindred nature, inspires them and attracts their sympathy', is subsequently applied to the Cross. 'It is through our spiritual nature that our Lord's sufferings influence us, and only by revelation and by

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<sup>86</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, pp. 119-120. Added emphasis.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. He then quotes approvingly from Bushnell, 'They weaken the force of divine mercy, and, in consequence, the response of grateful and penitential trust'. Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice*, Preface.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>89</sup> 'Sin ... is voluntary, is an abuse of that freedom without which men could not be moral agents. Therefore the consequence of sin is guilt'. Lidgett, *Idem.* p. 248.

<sup>90</sup> The term 'substance' is used by the writer in Hebrews 1:3. AV.



sympathy can our spiritual nature be affected'.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the Atonement must be

an influential act, so performed for the race by Him who is both its consummation and its living and eternal spirit, that what he does once for all on behalf of the race may be extended to and repeated (so far as this is intrinsically possible) in the experience of each penitent who comes to God.<sup>92</sup>

This then is the nature of God's work for the human race. 'Sympathy is best shown by the self sacrificing service which ministers to objective needs, not by conduct which has no object save to proclaim the existence of the sympathy'. This is Lidgett's anticipation of Forster's 'drowning lover' analogy.<sup>93</sup> Jesus died to save us from drowning in a sea of sin, and to make us righteous. This is justification.

### *Scott Lidgett's View of Faith*

By 'believing' the Christian is said to undertake an activity in faith 'in the same sense that walking is an act of faith'. Walking marks 'a dependence upon the substantial reality of the external world, upon the veracity of the reports as brought to the senses, and upon the power of the will to move the feet'.<sup>94</sup> These three components also comprise the substantive elements in faith. This indicates that Lidgett's epistemology accepts no distinction between natural and spiritual knowledge, suggesting, therefore that faith is not something peculiar to the spiritual realm.

When a man moves along the path of saving faith he begins by making two 'affirmations':

The first affirmation is that spiritual life is the one object of supreme worth in the universe, and that all else can but rank as means to this end. The second affirmation is that the human faculties are veracious, are given to us for the apprehension of truth, and not as will-o'-the-wisps, carrying us farther from the reality the more that we heed them. Neither of these affirmations can be demonstrated in the ordinary sense of the word. They represent an initial act of faith, like the confidence that we give to any other human faculty, more difficult because the consequences are more momentous, and because ordinary life can be carried out without such faith, which is not the case where there is practical

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<sup>91</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, p. 187.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

scepticism as to the testimony of perception.<sup>95</sup>

We particularly note Lidgett's second affirmation, 'that the human faculties are veracious'. If there is some suspicion that this - as well as other of his arguments - bears strong reference to the epistemology of Common Sense Realism, Lidgett affirms, 'On this whole subject Professor Seth's *Lectures on Scottish Philosophy* may usefully be consulted'.<sup>96</sup> This faith is a voluntaristic act, a whole-hearted affirmation of God, provoked by empirical observation and subjective experience, followed by what perhaps can best be described as a commitment to live in full harmony with the truth believed. By definition, says Lidgett, it is *not* an act founded on absolute certitude, nor even anticipated by that level of evidence present through the natural senses, hence it is 'more difficult' but for that, more virtuous.

When Lidgett observes that 'the relation in which Christians stand to our Lord is [one of] faith', he notes the following synonyms: 'becoming disciples', 'following' Christ, to 'take His yoke', 'knowing' Christ, 'abiding in Christ', 'having fellowship with Christ'. 'Taken together these phrases help us to see what faith is':<sup>97</sup>

'Faith in Christ means *spiritual adhesion*, a *cleaving to Him*, which is an *entire self committal* to Him in *trust and surrender*. It is the movement of the whole being to rest in Him, and is a complex act, which involves, through the spirit, at once the intellect, the heart, and the will.<sup>98</sup>

Hence salvation may be described ... [as] coming to the Father, by the acceptance of His forgiveness and surrender to Him. As concerns its intrinsic nature, it consists in the likeness to Christ that is caused by union with Him. But the two are inseparable, and are brought about by the same act and attitude of faith in Christ. To believe in Him is to be brought to the Father, and therefore to be assimilated<sup>99</sup> by the Son.<sup>100</sup>

All this further clarifies that Lidgett's understanding that faith can not be divorced

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375. n.1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>99</sup> Lidgett defines 'assimilation' as, 'Entrance into the fullness of the filial spirit towards God'. This is a spirit of 'joyful confidence', 'humble submission', 'absolute joyful surrender'.

<sup>100</sup> Lidgett, *The Spiritual Principle of Atonement*, p. 404. The definition of faith as 'likeness to Christ' 'caused by union with him', bears close approximation to Forster's understanding of the 'faith of Christ'.

from ontology. Faith is the means by which the unrighteous becomes righteous, a change on the basis of which God's judgement - His declaration what is - moves from 'not just' to 'justified'.

### James Denney

Not only acknowledged, but also particularly highlighted by Forster as a source of understanding the work of Christ,<sup>101</sup> is James Denney's *The Christian Doctrine of the Atonement*. As comparison is made, it is a work to which Forster's own theory bears close approximation at important junctures,<sup>102</sup> even in terms of the language used.

If the theme of God's Fatherhood does not find the same prominence in Denney as in Lidgett, he does share the same emphasis on the love of God. 'The goodness of Jesus has redeeming virtue ... because love is the soul of it, love which in its very nature makes the burdens of others its own, whatever these burdens be. ... When Jesus received sinners in the gospel they were conscious of this. ... They saw it in His face and heard it in His voice'.<sup>103</sup> The apostles Paul and John 'see in Christ the proposition - as nowhere else - the truth, that God is love'.<sup>104</sup> The Cross reflects the truth that '... the last reality in the universe is ... love'.<sup>105</sup>

Denney's explanation of the principle behind Atonement finds its locus in the same ethical identification we have noted in Lidgett, with its common acknowledged reliance on the theology of McLeod Campbell.<sup>106</sup> There is no questioning the

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<sup>101</sup> Forster, London, letter, September 1993, to the author.

<sup>102</sup> Some of the similarities between Denney and Forster may be usefully mentioned now: the love of God being the backdrop to Atonement; redemption through a multi-faceted identification - Christ with sinners, Christ with sin, sinners with Christ; Christ's repentance, its vicarious and redeeming nature; reconciliation through the sinners union with that repentance; revelation as the *prompting* and *means* of this union; sin's two-fold consequence, ontological self-destruction, and alienation from God; faith as embracing actual righteousness; actual righteousness providing the foundation of God's justification.

<sup>103</sup> James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Atonement* (New York: George H. Duran Co. 1918), p. 253.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>106</sup> 'Of all the books written on Atonement as God's way of reconciling man to Himself,

importance of it: anything 'short of this, [and] we do not really get to the Biblical conception of Atonement'.<sup>107</sup> In terms of the mechanics involved, there are three constituent elements: Christ has identified with what sin means to man; what it means to God; and has perfectly expressed what ought to be man's response.

Employing imagery which clearly anticipates Forster, Denney graphically describes the nature of Christ's identification with the sinful race: 'Christ felt all the waves and billows break over Him in which God's reaction against sin comes home';<sup>108</sup> 'No element of the tremendous reality of sin, as that reality is determined in the divine order, is ignored or evaded by Him ... sin is exhausted in His experience on the Cross; the cup is not tasted but drained';<sup>109</sup> 'He enters into our experience, He has suffers everything we suffer';<sup>110</sup> 'The Jesus who was born into our race and our lot made Himself one with us in love to the uttermost ... He took all the burdens of the race upon Himself in passionate sympathy. Above all He took that heaviest burden under which the race was sinking with despair and death, He bore our sins. In every sense and to every extent to which love could do so, He made [our sins] His own'.<sup>111</sup>

Having experienced the full reality of sin, Christ witnesses or 'sees' sin as something that God righteously condemns, and cannot but condemn, and He acknowledges in His human nature the justice of that condemnation. But beyond this,

He sees it as something from which ... there is one way of escape, that of an adequate repentance; and seeing, further, that for man left to himself there is no hope, because every sin which calls for repentance has disabled him spiritually and made him incapable of repentance really answering to his guilt, in a very agony of love He takes this responsibility of man to God upon Himself, and makes in the place of sinful men that deeply felt acknowledgement of human sin which is the repentance due from the race but beyond its power to render.<sup>112</sup>

Christ's vicarious repentance for the race, is not, however, to be understood in

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McLeod Campbell's is probably the most inspired by the Spirit of truth with which it deals'. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258. (See, McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of Atonement*, pp. 117-119).

the often received sense of 'for us, so that we don't have to', but rather, meaning 'for us, so that we may also'. It is to be understood as part of a whole called 'reconciliation', a 'reconciliation' that - as in Forster - cannot be said to have occurred except where it actually exists:

The power which Christ exercises in reconciling us to God is a moral power, not a physical or magical one, and in its operation it is subject to the laws of moral order ... Nowhere in the moral universe ... is there room for the idea of supererogation.<sup>113</sup>

Christ's vicarious repentance is the first part of a double identification, 'He not only unites Himself to us, but unites us to Himself'.<sup>114</sup> Plainly then, true Atonement is only found in its subjective reproduction in the lives of sinners:

If He is not really changing us into His own likeness, and enabling us to enter the experiences in which sin involved Him, He is not reconciling us to God, and our sins are not forgiven.<sup>115</sup>

What prompts this reproduction? Revelation. Jesus 'came to reveal the Father',<sup>116</sup> Christ came to 'manifest ... the character of a sin-forgiving God'.<sup>117</sup> He came to give perfect expression to the 'awful degradation' that is man in sin, as well as the wrath this evokes in God<sup>118</sup> which inexorably repels and condemns it.<sup>119</sup> The horror of the Cross reveals 'the solemn reaction of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men'.<sup>120</sup> At the same time the Cross provides a 'propitiation' for sin which itself gives supreme proof of God's love.<sup>121</sup> As it turns out, it is this love that 'the alienated soul' needs to know above all else: Man needs a 'manifestation of love which can assure it that neither .. sin itself nor the soul's condemnation of it .. the divine reaction .. death',<sup>122</sup> are the final reality, but that God is love.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Christ's experience of sin transcended the individual level<sup>123</sup> for sin affects not only the transgressor, 'but the society of which he is a member. It sets in motion a force which is beyond control, and which acts according to its own laws .. in ever widening circles,<sup>124</sup> producing 'unmeasured evils'. As a corollary, the Cross addresses more than the problems of the individual sinner, therefore, but presents a wider redemption, offering Atonement for the whole community of human relationships.<sup>125</sup>

### *Faith in James Denney*

The concept of faith as a moral-ontological realignment present in Lidgett, and anticipated by Forster, is substantially repeated in Denney. Faith as a saving event centres on the identification - 'an ethical experience'<sup>126</sup> - of the soul with Christ, such that the mind of Christ in relation to sin is spontaneously reproduced in the sinner.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, the sinner 'abandons' himself 'to the sin-bearing love which appeals to Him in Christ ... unreservedly, unconditionally, and forever'.<sup>128</sup> In response to this faith,

God accepts him as righteous, and he is righteous; he has received the reconciliation (Romans 5:11), and he is reconciled. It is quite needless to complicate this simple situation by discussing such questions as whether justification is 'forensic'.<sup>129</sup>

In Denney's faith is no 'legal fiction',<sup>130</sup> no transaction on which salvation is, by the will of God, made to depend, rather it is an actual reconciliation: faith and propitiation are correlative. Faith 'is that which Christ in His character of propitiation

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291. Conversely, a theology which can insist on a justification which is separate from sanctification is 'radically unsound. The only justification of which the New Testament speaks is justification of *life* (Romans 5:18); what Paul does by his faith is *live* by it (Galatians 2:20). There is no religious power which is not *ipso facto* a new moral power'. *Ibid.*, p. 296. Original emphasis.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

appeals for and is designed to evoke in the hearts of sinful men'.<sup>131</sup> But how is a man to exercise such faith?

'The sinner must *trust himself ... instantly, unreservedly, forever ... to sin bearing love* on one side and the *unconditional acceptance of it and surrender to it* on the other'.<sup>132</sup> Faith may be understood, therefore, as an 'unreserved trust', 'penitence', 'unconditional acceptance', 'surrender', and 'abandonment'<sup>133</sup> to God as revealed in the Atonement. However, such 'surrender' is not just a decision, not just an act of the will, but an experience involving the whole man. Faith unites the believer to the attitude of Christ, 'faith exhausts in itself the being of man in this direction; it is his absolute committal of himself forever to the sin bearing love of God for salvation'.<sup>134</sup>

Unaided, however, humanity could never arrive at this point. There must be a prior wooing by God Himself. To this end the Holy Spirit reveals or 'mediates' the character and mission of Christ. If a man is to identify with Christ's passion he must first 'see' that passion. This comes about primarily through proclaiming the fact of the Cross event, 'because from every word or incident of His life there breathes forth on us the Spirit in which he died'.<sup>135</sup>

Having been united with Christ the justification that results is neither external nor imputed, nor 'once and for all', but, dependent on the presence of righteousness. A man is justified because he is righteous. As a result, a man continues to be justified only as he continues to be righteous. Righteous not in the sense of, works of the law, but as reflecting the continued presence of faith, and, therefore, a right disposition towards God. Thus '... when we think of the future, the justification which we have already received through faith comes again into a sort of suspense ... the final sentence of *dikaioi* has not yet been pronounced'.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287f.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

## D. M. Baillie

In terms of fundamental principles, Donald Baillie's *God Was In Christ* represents an approach to Atonement that takes its stance from the perspective of Incarnation and paradox.<sup>137</sup> For Baillie, Atonement cannot be understood outside the Incarnation, and the Incarnation can not be comprehended outside the framework of paradox. To illustrate his wider thesis Baillie draws from the analogous tensions present in a series of doctrines: of creation *ex nihilo*; divine providence; grace and free will.<sup>138</sup>

Creation is a paradox because of the question, that if God created all out of nothing, where did the 'nothing' come from, if not out from Himself? To admit the latter, Baillie suggests, would be pantheism. The paradox of providence refers to the fact that 'the Christian believes that in some sense everything comes directly to him from God, whose working is always individual. And this becomes highly paradoxical when we reflect that in the historical network of determinants there are many which are directly contrary to the will of God'.<sup>139</sup> The supreme paradox, the doctrine of grace, refers to the tension revealed in a doctrine of moral freedom contextualized against a backdrop of sinful depravity (or *vice versa*).<sup>140</sup>

Thus far there is little to suggest widespread assimilation by, or influence upon Forster. The centrality of 'paradox' as a definitive tool in understanding Atonement not only fails to find repetition, but may also be contrary to Forster's epistemology. It is to be wondered how much Baillie's paradoxes would, in another context, be dismissed by Forster. This is especially true of the former's anthropology. In contrast to Baillie, Forster presents a clear and logical delineation between divine government and human ability, there is no paradox that needs to be held in tension. While Forster

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<sup>137</sup> Baillie himself defines 'paradox' as 'a self-contradictory statement'. Donald M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd. Second Edition, 1961), p. 110.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* See: respectively pp. 110, 111, 114f.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>140</sup> Donald Baillie's view of the human condition borders on the Augustinian, as does his doctrine of election. Replying to the criticisms of his brother by John Hick in this very context, John Baillie says, Donald 'would wished to have subscribed to such a predestinarian view as Professor Hick would apparently abhor'. J. Baillie, 'Some Comments on Professor Hick's Article on "The Christology of D. M. Baillie."' *Scottish*



agrees there is a great mystery in Atonement, such concerns the profound depths of Christ's work, not some logical tension between justice and love, law and grace.

Neither does Forster follow Baillie's extensive consideration of Trinitarian and Christological issues. Conversely, the idea of Fatherhood so dominant in Lidgett *et al.*, is, by comparison, unimportant to Baillie. Concomitantly considerably less is said concerning sonship. All these differences represent an important distinction between Baillie and Forster suggesting that Baillie's influence is of a different order than Lidgett or Denney.<sup>141</sup>

Notwithstanding, there are a number of important parallels. Firstly, the importance of the Incarnation as a reference in understanding Atonement. Secondly the moral-ontological construction given to the appropriation of redemption. Since there is far less to be said on the subject, we will begin with the latter.

Though no explicit mention is made of Edward's identification theory, the idea is present in the language Baillie uses to describe the Incarnation. God was 'in' Christ that He might be 'in' all men: Christ as humanity lived in perfect moral conformity to deity, and now man in Christ can be enabled to do this also. Through the Incarnation and Atonement Christ did something which enables men to be remade in the likeness of the same 'God filled' humanity, 'raising them above "mere morality" into a new kind of goodness which they confess is not their own but God's'.<sup>142</sup>

Concerning the Incarnation, Baillie gives emphasis to three points. The first is that the Incarnation gives perfect expression to the nature of God. The Incarnation is

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*Journal of Theology* 11 (1958), pp 265-270 at p. 269. Added emphasis.

<sup>141</sup> It might be argued that the differences between Baillie and Forster allow us to see something of Forster's methodology, especially in reference to the analysis and synthesis of his sources. Thus far, the similarities with Forster and Lidgett, *etc.*, may tempt the conclusion that his theology has been distinctly shaped by these men. While there may be some element of truth in this, it is more probable that these men - and now Baillie - reveal that Forster's approach is rather more idiosyncratic: Forster is most alert to ideas that confirm, shape or embellish his existing theological preferences.

<sup>142</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ*, p. 154. This very closely approximates the distinction Forster draws between the 'good works' of the 'world' and the 'incarnational' works of the obedient Christian.

an act of revelation, indeed, it is '*only* in Christ is God made plain to us'.<sup>143</sup> But what does He reveal? Jesus 'shows us that God is universal, unconditional love, a deity whose nature is to seek and save the lost'.<sup>144</sup> Yet, as in Forster, it is also a love that affirms the horrendous reality of the sin from which man needs to be redeemed, as well as God's eternal and settled opposition to all unrighteousness. It is a holy, and in this sense, strong love, not a mere and weak sentiment.<sup>145</sup>

Secondly, the Incarnation is an act of redemption:

It is not merely revelation of the character of God, if by revelation we mean 'A telling B something about C'; it is God himself uttering his word, which will not return to him void, but will accomplish the thing whereunto he has sent it.<sup>146</sup>

Thirdly, the Incarnation is a vicarious act. Jesus did what man cannot, that is, carry the full weight of transgression, 'physical suffering, social persecution and obloquy ... a shameful death',<sup>147</sup> above all 'that immense moral and spiritual tragedy'<sup>148</sup> which is the knowledge and experience of sin.

Fourthly, the Incarnation involved the experience of the entire Godhead. It is a vital part of Baillie's thesis that it was not just the Second Person of the Trinity who experienced the Incarnation. This is especially true at the supreme moment of the Atonement: God as Trinity was '... uniquely present in the passion and death of Jesus'.<sup>149</sup> The Cross was not a detached event for the Father and the Holy Spirit, but one in which They suffered with the victim of sin.

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63-64. Baillie later asks, 'Is the redeeming purpose which we find in Jesus part of the very being and essence of God? Is that what God is? Is it His very nature to create, and to reveal Himself, and to redeem His creature?' p. 70.

<sup>145</sup> 'He cannot take our sins lightly or treat them with indulgence. "The love that draws us nearer to Thee is hot with wrath to them." God must be inexorable towards our sins; not because He is just, but because He is loving; not in spite of His love, but because of His love; not because His love is limited, but because it is unlimited, and because as George MacDonald said, "nothing is inexorable but love." ' *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>146</sup> Sherman Johnson, 'God Was In Christ', *Anglican Theological Review* 33 (1951), pp.96-101 at p. 101.

<sup>147</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ*, p. 198.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191. Indeed, 'empathetically' doesn't do justice to Baillie's concept here. 'God was incarnate in Jesus': the Father and the Holy Spirit were incarnate in Christ.

Yet it is more than suffering *with* the victim of sin. God bears the brunt of this suffering:

He suffers more than I. Not because he is the person that has been wronged: nay it is the shame of what I have done that weighs most on him. He bears my shame as if it were his own, because of his great love for me. He bears more of the agony than I, because he ... loves more deeply.<sup>150</sup>

Baillie admits that his interpretation 'conflicts with the traditional doctrine of the divine impassibility', but without apology defends his view. 'It is hard to see how a rigid acceptance [of impassibility] can leave room for any belief in costly divine sin-bearing at all'.<sup>151</sup>

In terms of personal redemption, Baillie teaches that each member of the human race needs to be brought into an awareness that the Trinity suffered in this kind of way, and on account of the divine love for sinners. However, such knowledge initially

makes the situation worse than ever. But also better than ever, with quite a new possibility, because of the divine forgiveness. A moral law cannot forgive, and the moral consciousness cannot forgive itself. But these are abstractions, and the concrete reality is God, whose love continually reclaiming us, is what we so inadequately call the moral law. This love does not give us up even when we betray it, but keeps pressing upon us with the offer of forgiveness. And if we come to be so oriented towards God that we are more concerned about Him than our own characters, then we can accept His forgiveness and find release in a new beginning.<sup>152</sup>

This new 'orientation' is the ontological dynamic consequent to a full surrender to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ as it is proclaimed by the Church and affirmed by the Holy Spirit. This too is Forster's Atonement, an actual reconciliation. The only distinction is that where Baillie gives emphasis to a changed moral dynamic, Forster would give expression to the experience of sonship.

### Leon Morris

By his own admission, this work together with those by Scott Lidgett and James

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<sup>150</sup> D. M. Baillie, *God Was In Christ*, p. 174.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Denney, has been 'particularly influential'<sup>153</sup> on Forster's understanding of the Atonement. In reading *The Cross in the New Testament* a number of things immediately strike those readers familiar with Forster's teaching. Firstly there are clear parallels in approach, not least the systematic treatment of the Cross through the Gospels *motif* by *motif*.<sup>154</sup> Secondly, there is an important critique of the three dominant models of Atonement found in Christian history.<sup>155</sup>

That having been said, similar parallels exist with Lidgett, and may, therefore, only be indicative of the common approach taken by all three writers. More meaningful are the number of distinctly theological similarities: clearly dominant themes in defining the work of Christ in terms of sacrifice,<sup>156</sup> suffering and the suffering servant,<sup>157</sup> of substitution and identification;<sup>158</sup> repentance and faith as a moral transformation preceding justification;<sup>159</sup> the reproduction of the Cross in the lives and experiences of believers;<sup>160</sup> suffering as the pathway to good;<sup>161</sup> and other themes such as the kingdom of God,<sup>162</sup> spiritual conflict and victory;<sup>163</sup> the unity and community of believers in Christ;<sup>164</sup> the unity and presence of the Father and the Son in the work of Atonement.<sup>165</sup> Beyond this there are great similarities in the overall

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<sup>153</sup> Forster, London, letter, September 1993, to the author.

<sup>154</sup> Thus, 'Ransom', 'Victory', 'Faith', 'Judgement', etc. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 52, 55, 59, 70.

<sup>155</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*. See especially, pp. 397-404.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 174f. 257, 279f. 284. 289f. 301, 321f. 355, 370, 392, 399f. 406.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25f. 31f. 40, 49f. 55, 85, 90, 97, 111, 124, 127f. 136, 141f. 268f. 281, 317, 321, 326, 330, 359f. 392f.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 24, 31f. 42, 48, 54f. 93, 121, 166, 173f. 220f. 231, 243, 245, 249, 269, 280f. 289, 298 338, 377, 379f. 387, 404f.

<sup>159</sup> See this thesis, 'Faith in Leon Morris', below.

<sup>160</sup> 'There is a cross for the Christian as well as for Christ'. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 392.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 29, 31, 36f. 47, 66f. 82f. 92, 95f. 99f. 112, 125, 163, 276.

<sup>163</sup> '... Jesus "judged" Satan on Calvary. He completely defeated him and overthrew his purposes. That action which to the outward eye seemed Satan's complete victory, in reality represented his complete overthrow. Whatever else Calvary may mean, in one respect it is the defeat of all the forces of evil'. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 170. See: especially pp. 55-59, 168-171.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

paradigm of Atonement. Rooted in the love of God;<sup>166</sup> undertaken for all and revealing the love of God for the world;<sup>167</sup> the deliberate use of a multiplicity of motifs by the New Testament writers; the centrality of the Atonement in the Gospels;<sup>168</sup> the self-destructiveness and thence 'serious matter of sin' and the inherent nature of judgement.<sup>169</sup>

That all having been said, if the theology of these two men be likened unto a map, all these similarities but represent certain common islands, fundamentally their worlds remain distinct. There is in Morris' tackling of the Atonement nothing approximate to Forster's fundamental, 'What did the Cross mean to Christ?'<sup>170</sup> Further, though sacrifice is an important *motif* in Morris it does not anticipate Forster's emphatic, 'the Cross of Christ to Jesus and the rest of the New Testament writers was *primarily* presented in terms to do with sacrifice'.<sup>171</sup> Finally, while Morris agrees that the Cross reveals the character and nature of God, it does not approach Forster's absolute, 'the greatest act of revelation concerning the God that we worship'.<sup>172</sup>

Yet there are those 'common islands', those undoubted parallels of thought between Morris and Forster. As to the task of distinguishing which of those ideas and general principles that have been taken from Morris, there is a difficulty. Morris himself has embraced a number of earlier writers by whom Forster himself has been directly or indirectly influenced: Gustaf Aulén,<sup>173</sup> James Denney,<sup>174</sup> P. T. Forsyth<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> '... the salvation that was wrought in Christ is something that proceeds from the loving heart of God'. *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>167</sup> 'In His death Christ revealed the nature of God as love'. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>168</sup> 'It is not too much to say that the Gospels are books about the Atonement'. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-149.

<sup>170</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 14.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>173</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 185, 198, 241f. 248, 288, 373f. 381f. 388, 398, 400f. 408.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 53, 121, 125, 136, 189, 193, 218, 223, 228, 231, 243, 245, 295, 298, 340, 349f. 376, 384, 409, 414.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112, 154, 173, 192, 224, 230, 249f. 289, 295, 323, 340, 384, 391.

and Vincent Taylor.<sup>176</sup> Notwithstanding, there are numerous instances where the themes, concepts and principles, and also the phraseology used is so close to Morris as to suggest him as an important source.

Morris, as Forster, begins his examination of Christ's work with Jesus' baptism. Immediately noticeable is the commonality of verbs and ideas employed to describe the event, starting with the announcement 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. Morris says this 'brings before the mind the sacrificial system as a whole',<sup>177</sup> Forster, 'a whole plethora of ideas'.<sup>178</sup> Both apprehend the depiction of Jesus' absolute moral purity: Morris' 'Christ is depicted as personally innocent',<sup>179</sup> becomes Forster's 'the Son of God, who was perfect'.<sup>180</sup> Further parallel is seen in the following two quotes:

They [the gospel writers] picture Him as innocent of any crime or sin, as the spotless one. This point is important, for unless He was without sin Jesus could not have been the Saviour of sinful man (Morris).<sup>181</sup>

Christ was perfect. As we are later to hear men say: 'We find no sin in Him'; 'Neither do I find any wrong in Him'; 'Which of you convinces me of Sin?' (Forster).<sup>182</sup>

Beyond this both men interpret the act of baptism as Christ's 'identification' with the human race'. 'Indeed', Forster writes emphatically, 'there is going to be no Atonement unless Jesus could identify with sinners that their sin could become *really* His ... unless He was so identified as the head of the race ... unless he can bear their sins in His body by identification.<sup>183</sup> Though Morris does not use 'identification' here, he does use a number of distinct synonyms: 'linked', 'allied', 'numbered among' and 'stand'.<sup>184</sup> A

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 32, 34, 43, 47, 51, 53, 84, 92, 100, 111, 141, 176, 219, 221f. 242, 253, 272, 276f. 295, 301, 305, 308f. 329, 331, 333, 337, 350.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175. 'By His life, death, resurrection and ascension Christ triumphed over Satan and sin and every conceivable force of evil'. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>178</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 53.

<sup>179</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>180</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 31.

<sup>181</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 37.

<sup>182</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 31.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

<sup>184</sup> Christ 'is also shown to us as the one who was closely linked with sinful men ... It is impossible to understand this baptism other than along the lines that thereby Jesus took

little latter Morris does use the term in regards to Jesus' 'suffering' or 'agony', which is meaningful only on the understanding that in the death that He died Jesus would be *identified* with sinners.<sup>185</sup>

[Luke] sees Jesus' method as one in which He makes Himself one with sinners, *identifying* Himself with them.<sup>186</sup>

Morris' use of the Suffering Servant *motif* at Christ's baptism is also paralleled in Forster for whom it is a vitally important element, being found firstly in John's announcement, 'The Lamb of God', and secondly, in the circumstances surrounding the baptism act, namely Jesus receiving the Spirit without measure. Forster integrates both aspects in Isaiah's Suffering Servant.<sup>187</sup>

Another striking parallel exists in their respective treatment of Matthew 16:21 and Mark 8:31. Morris comments that the texts speak of a 'divine necessity' which underscores Jesus' act in saving sinners. This

implication must be drawn from [those] passages that say that the Son of Man must suffer (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31). There is a divine necessity about this 'must'. It is not simply advisable. It is not merely expedient. It is not the best way under the circumstances. The expression shows that there is no other possibility ... the Cross can scarcely be understood otherwise (see Matthew 17:22, 20:18f, Mark 9:31, 10:33f).<sup>188</sup>

Forster similarly comments,

There was a divine necessity, He *must*. He knew from the beginning that He had come to die. He tells His disciples that He is going to be violently taken away, He must go to Jerusalem to die. So there is a necessity in His dying, which is divine ... It is God's invention and He must do it.<sup>189</sup>

Morris continues,

"But the days will come, when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and they will fast in that day." (Matthew 9:15, Luke 5:35). There can not be the slightest

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up a position among sinners. His baptism allied Him firmly with sinners. It put Him where sinners stand. It numbered Him among sinful men'. Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106.

<sup>187</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', pp. 34f, 52f.

<sup>188</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 27.

<sup>189</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 40. Original emphasis.

doubt that "taken away" refers to Jesus death by violence',<sup>190</sup>

which becomes in Forster:

The word "to take away" largely comes from the idea of rough or sudden removal. He was aware that whatever death He was going to ... it was a Martyrs death, a sacrificial death.<sup>191</sup>

In addition to these parallels, are a large number of others which may be cited, almost on a sentence by sentence basis: Morris' 'mercy and the like are intelligible only against a background of judgement',<sup>192</sup> becomes in Forster, 'there is no such thing as mercy until justice has been established'.<sup>193</sup> Again, 'Sometimes in the history of theology the Atonement has been described in such a way as almost to imply that Jesus was saving men from the Father' (Morris),<sup>194</sup> becomes, 'One of the characteristics of the Protestant forensic view, the satisfaction theory, is the concept of an angry Father and a loving Son appeasing that anger, and almost against the Father's will persuading Him to forgive sinners' (Forster).<sup>195</sup> The following may also be noted from Morris as containing a familiar ring:

Jesus ... knew that the path to glory for the Son of man was by way of the cross.<sup>196</sup>

The cross means suffering.<sup>197</sup>

The coming of the kingdom has precipitated a struggle. Satan and all his cohorts are ranged in opposition to Christ. They are locked in mortal combat, but it is a combat in which Christ is triumphant. The disciples are called into this struggle.<sup>198</sup>

Salvation is not something wrung from an unwilling God by the desperate intervention of a compassionate Sin who took pity on those subject to the Father's destroying wrath. Salvation proceeds rather from the loving heart of the Father Himself.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 33.

<sup>191</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 39.

<sup>192</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pp. 22-22.

<sup>193</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 14.

<sup>194</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 27.

<sup>195</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 24.

<sup>196</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, p. 31.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



*Faith in Leon Morris*

Morris is clear concerning both (1) the necessity and (2) the means by which Christ's work becomes personally efficacious. Concerning the necessity, 'the divine action of God in Christ [lies] at the root of salvation', but this does not mean that all men are saved. It opens the door, 'but if men are to enter it is *necessary* that they should receive this salvation'.<sup>200</sup> Again '*unless* we make our response we do not receive His good gift'.<sup>201</sup> As to the 'how?' of this 'response', 'The New Testament gives but one answer to this question. They are to believe'.<sup>202</sup> Yet before there can be belief 'there must be repentance':

There is a negative aspect to Christianity, and this consists in a thorough going renunciation of the self seeking life ... a decisive break with all past evil ... is required of all.<sup>203</sup>

A whole hearted repentance .. means a complete break with sin.<sup>204</sup>

Men must make a complete break with every evil thing.<sup>205</sup>

Like the other Synoptists Luke dwells on the *necessity* for repentance. He records the Baptists' clarion call (Luke 3:3f). He tells us that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). He says that men are evil (Luke 11:13). At best they are no more than 'unprofitable servants' (Luke 17:10). No man at all is good (Luke 18:19). Thus men *must* repent (Luke 13:3, 5). There is no other way. The universality of sin and the harmfulness of sin taken together mean that repentance is not to be escaped. Again we have a reversal of the situation that men have created from themselves. And this reversal must be thoroughgoing, for true repentance is more than merely a form of words. If it is genuine, repentance is an attitude of the whole man. It reaches out into all of life.<sup>206</sup>

The reader cannot but be struck by Morris' understanding of repentance as an ontological dynamic: the 'reversal of the situation that men have created for themselves'. Though very similar to Forster's view, Morris' explanation is actually less forceful, for though repentance is unquestionably a moral change, 'a renunciation of

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102. Added emphasis.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390. Added emphasis.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. Added emphasis.

sin',<sup>207</sup> it is at best a 'fitful and half hearted' one.<sup>208</sup> This is meagre compared to Forster, for whom repentance is essentially a sharing in, being united to, Christ's own repentance - which is anything but 'fitful and half hearted'.

Morris and Forster better converge in their understanding of faith. Both insist that faith begins with a divinely wrought, noetic element:

Left to themselves, men do not want to be saved ... Men do not think of themselves as sinners and therefore they see no need of a Saviour. *It requires a divine work within them before they can see themselves as they really are before God.*<sup>209</sup>

If this may be termed the 'negative' said of faith's understanding, there is also the 'positive' side. This is 'faith as connected with the person of Christ and His relationship to the Father'.<sup>210</sup> This is important, for, it is not only God's Fatherly nature, but the greatness of this truth as an object of knowledge, that causes a man to 'really believe' once it is perceived.<sup>211</sup> In mechanical terms this accounts for faith's persuasive nature, and ensures that believing itself 'is not a purely human activity'.<sup>212</sup>

'Believing' means more than affirming those things of which a soul has been convinced. In this sense faith is more than 'mere credence', more than a series of truths or propositions to which the believer gives assent - even if these truths do concern Christ and the love of God set forth in Him. To the agreement in regards the object of faith there must be conjoined a 'response', a response appropriate to 'a vital and living Saviour',<sup>213</sup> a response that is a deliberate 'choice', a 'choice for God'<sup>214</sup> that is concomitantly a renunciation of Satan: 'Men must be on the side of God or that of Satan'.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p.150. Added emphasis.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>212</sup> 'Faith is not an activity generated by some human will to believe. It comes about because God first works in a man'. *Ibid.*, p. 178. It is not however this acknowledgement which interests us here, as understanding what Morris perceives by this 'work' of God.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95. Added emphasis.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

As to the nature of this response, it is the 'answering to the negative of repentance',<sup>216</sup> 'Men must decide for Christ .. [they] must take Him as their Leader',<sup>217</sup> Elsewhere Morris defines this decision as an 'attitude' towards Christ, an attitude of 'trust', 'genuine trust', a trust that 'leaves everything', a trust which 'has no reservations',<sup>218</sup> a trust which is 'a whole hearted submission to God'.<sup>219</sup>

This having been said, this trust is more than the taking of sides, more than a response to Christ, more than a moral submission, as though Christ is out there somewhere, and I am here and separated from that world. Rather, it is an act which nothing less than 'appropriates' Christ's death, and makes it the sinner's own.<sup>220</sup> Trust involves the death of self as one is joined to Christ's death. Faith is not just believing in Christ, it is not just responding to Christ in trust, but a *union* with Him:

When Jesus invited his followers to share the bread, saying to them 'This is my body', and to partake of the wine with the words, 'This is my blood', He was referring to His death for them, but He was doing more. He was inviting them to appropriate His death, to take it so to speak into their very being, to make it their own. His sacrifice is not to be viewed from afar. It is something that His children are to make their very own. And they do so by faith.<sup>221</sup>

This finds some parallel in Forster,

... often the Cross is put forward as though something is done over there for us, apart from us, and it is done over here from God, apart from God, but that is not the way ... deity effects Atonement between God and man ... The work of the Cross is not being done in a vacuum, isolated from God and man. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself'. When Jesus died, I died with Him ... the old humanity was crucified with Him, and it wasn't a second step of the Cross, it was all one eternal event.<sup>222</sup>

## Summary

Over the years Forster has rejected many of the substantive doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, and subsequently many of the tenets central to later Evangelical thought,

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

whether typified historically in such individuals as Jonathan Edwards and even John Wesley, or more recently by John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. More fundamentally, a number of these doctrines are inherent in what we may term, 'Western Orthodoxy', including Original Sin, constitutional depravity, the impassibility of God, absolute divine foreknowledge, and divine omnipotence. In their place Forster has constructed an alternative series of beliefs. As we have seen, it was mostly against this backdrop that his thoughts concerning the Atonement have evolved.

This chapter has sought to identify those individuals who have influenced Forster both in the development of these alternatives to 'orthodoxy' and subsequently in formulating an understanding of Christ's work. These have included C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald and G. H. Lang in the first category, and Scott Lidgett, James Denney, Leon Morris and D. M. Baillie in the second. Concerning the former, we may note their influence as follows:

(1) Lewis in respect to Forster's theistic dualism and world-view. All reality exists within a cosmic dualism: on the one side is God in all goodness, on the other, Satan who is all evil. Good and evil contain within themselves certain inherent properties. Good is 'reality' and 'substantiveness' which moves ever 'upward and forward' into the reality which is God. Evil is unreality and insubstantiveness which moves increasingly into nothingness. In the middle is the human race, who together with indefinable classes principalities and powers, and on account of a deliberate and volitional choice to sin, are already on that journey into annihilation. These, however, may through series of moral choices, turn away from evil, embrace the good, and thus realise for themselves God's intended creatoral ontological and teleological purpose.

(2) MacDonald in respect to the centrality of Fatherhood in Christian doctrine. This teaching led Forster into a radical reassessment of theology proper, a reassessment which Forster says proved 'absolutely crucial' to his thinking. While such critical appraisal continued throughout Forster's ministry, it was this particular breakthrough that under-girded all that was to follow. Fatherhood not only became the basis upon which the person and qualities of the Godhead were understood, but the became a critical influence on the entirety of Forster's soteriological development.

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<sup>222</sup> Forster, 'The Atonement', p. 33.

(3) G. H. Lang in terms of theological method. Lang, a man Forster calls his 'mentor'<sup>223</sup> reinforced insights from Lewis and MacDonald by adding five other distinctives, one of which especially took on determinative importance in Forster's evolution. This was the idea that the true theologian begins with a kind of *tabula rasa*: no doctrine should be presumed true, especially established orthodoxies; every historical proposition and construction should be subject to the test of Scripture. If this method affirms earlier interpretations, well enough, but if it doesn't 'hold on to your new understanding', even if it doesn't fit in with established teaching.<sup>224</sup> Forster was to follow through on this premise with great assiduity, not least as regards challenging a number of fundamental Evangelical distinctives.

Each of these influences coalesced to form an established series of presuppositions or spiritual world-view by the early 1960s, one that had become 'set in stone' by the time of the publication of *God's Strategy* in 1973. That Forster's view of the Atonement still essentially draws from the Satisfaction theory at this time, demonstrates that this area of Christian doctrine had not yet been substantially thought through. It was subsequent to 1973 and sometime before 1988 that Forster formulated his understanding of the nature of Christ's work.

That the majority of his acknowledged sources on the work of Christ reject classic Protestant soteriology, and a make various claims against Augustine, probably influenced his understanding of Atonement in the direction of the respective authors. More significant, however, is that most share in the essential features of the nineteenth century Moderatism of which MacDonald is so indicative. Forster's broader theology was already of this ilk, it is not surprising he found their interpretations of the Atonement so appealing. Notwithstanding, it is quite probable that had Forster not read any of these works, his doctrine of Christ's work would have evolved in the same direction, though more slowly.

On the basis of previously noted assumptions, the influence of Scott Lidgett, James Denney, Leon Morris and D. M. Baillie upon Forster's view of the Atonement

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<sup>223</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus House, London, March 11, 1997, transcript, p. 10.

<sup>224</sup> Forster, Interview with author, Ichthus House, London, December 1991, transcript, p. 4.

may be delineated as follows: Lidgett for a view which defines the doctrine in terms of God's Fatherhood, Denney for the moral influence of love, and Baillie for the involvement of the Trinity. Morris' influence is harder to gauge but contains a large number of similarities, even to phrases and vocabulary. Interestingly the author quoted most in his lecture series on the Atonement is C. S. Lewis, especially as regards the idea of vicarious repentance, and the theological corollaries concomitant to it.

## Chapter Seven: An Evangelical Comparison

### What is an Evangelical?

While focusing on Forster's understanding of Atonement, the previous chapters have carefully explicated the doctrine as regards the sources, influences, and historical progression of ideas within Forster himself, and as logically placed within his system of thought: beginning with the theological 'foundations' which underlie his position (the Bible and epistemology), progressing to consider the immediate backdrop to the doctrine (theology proper and original sin), then considering the Atonement itself (the work of Christ), followed by an examination of what has traditionally been called 'the application of redemption' (repentance, faith and justification) together with practical considerations (the rôle of the Church and the Christian in evangelism) and finally, exploring Forster's historical and literary sources.

With this in mind the current chapter will comprise two broad sections. The first will present a summary of contemporary<sup>1</sup> Evangelical belief utilising a parallel method of presentation. In other words, attention will be paid to identifying: Evangelical fundamentals; the doctrines that bear most immediately upon the Atonement; the doctrine itself; and its application. This will allow a straight-forward comparison of the two perspectives, the subject of the second section.

Addressing important issues of coherence and authority, our understanding of 'Evangelical', in this chapter proposes to arrive at a series of theological distinctives which themselves originate in reference to various representatives whose views have good claims to delineate Evangelical belief, and who have contributed to the overall debate on the Atonement.

### *Sources of Definition*

In his *Five Evangelical Leaders* (1994),<sup>2</sup> Christopher Catherwood - who is well placed to

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<sup>1</sup> That is, contemporary to Forster himself.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Catherwood, *Five Evangelical Leaders* (Christian Focus Publications, 1994)

make such an assessment<sup>3</sup> - presents three Britons (and two Americans) whom he considers representative of 20th century conservative<sup>4</sup> Evangelicalism, the three are: John Stott, J. I. Packer, and Catherwood's maternal grandfather, Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Catherwood's opinion receives substantial support. Timothy Dudley-Smith calls Stott, 'the most respected evangelical clergyman in the world today',<sup>5</sup> while Graham Harrison declares Lloyd-Jones 'the greatest preacher of the 20th century'.<sup>6</sup> Finally, *Christianity Today* cites James Packer as 'of one of the pre-eminent figures in the post-war evangelical resurgence'.<sup>7</sup>

As it turns out, each of these figures has, on various occasions, presented important studies on the Atonement. Stott's *The Cross of Christ* (1986) was said to be 'his most significant work to date, representing a lifetime of research, mediation and proclamation',<sup>8</sup> and itself cites the importance of the doctrine to Packer,<sup>9</sup> who describes it as 'the very heart of the Christian gospel'.<sup>10</sup> Packer deals with the subject in some depth in his *Knowing God* (1973), as well as the broader issues of faith and justification in his *A Quest for Godliness* (1990). Lloyd-Jones calls the Atonement 'the

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<sup>3</sup> His grandfather, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was perhaps one of the most important Evangelical preachers of the twentieth century. His father, Sir Frederick Catherwood is also a significant champion of the evangelical cause, especially in the political and business world. His mother, Lady Elizabeth Catherwood, is a teacher and author in her own right. After many years at Westminster Chapel, Christopher became a member of Eden Chapel, Cambridge, a conservative Evangelical Church under the pastorate of Roy Clements, himself 'a leading Evangelical preacher'. (*Daily Telegraph* 30 September, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Until the turn of the twentieth century the diversity of opinion that had arisen among Victorian Evangelicals was somewhat tolerated by both sides, but by the 1920s the tension broke and gave way to the polarisation of the two camps, conservatives or 'fundamentalists' and liberals or 'modernists'. The issues that divided the two included the nature of biblical inerrancy and inspiration, and the creation-evolution debate. The divisions became so sharp 'that some members of one party did not recognise the others as evangelicals - or even, sometimes as Christian'. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 181f.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (InterVarsity Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Graham Harrison, *Evangelical Times*, April 1981.

<sup>7</sup> *Christianity Today*, November-December, 1997, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Dust cover, Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Stott also notes the doctrine's importance to Martyn Lloyd-Jones. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, pp. 7, 9.

<sup>10</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 170.



very foundation of the Christian faith,<sup>11</sup> the 'crucial,' 'key' and 'central doctrine'<sup>12</sup> of Christianity, and deals with the subject in depth in a number of his expository works.<sup>13</sup> In addition to these three leaders, reference will occasionally be made to a number of other authors, as well as to a recent statement of faith entitled, 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration'. Drawn up in 1999 and published in *Christianity Today*,<sup>14</sup> among the 125 mostly American Evangelical leaders to subscribe to it were Britons, James Packer, who helped draft the document,<sup>15</sup> John Scott and Sinclair Ferguson.

### *Evangelical Doctrine*

Concerning the origin of Evangelicalism, the historian David Bebbington places it as lying with the Great Awakening in New England and the Methodist Revival in the British Isles in the 1730s.<sup>16</sup> The most important leaders were Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and John Wesley.<sup>17</sup> As to the influences behind it, there is general

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<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: Studies in Ephesians 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Atonement and Justification: Studies in Romans 3:20-4:25* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd-Jones' two most noted series were taken from the Epistle of Paul to the Romans (which he preached from 1955-1968) and the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (1954-1968). Both were subsequently published in book form. Michael Eaton, *Baptism with the Spirit: the teaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 132f.

<sup>14</sup> *Christianity Today*, June 14, 1999 v.43, No. 7, Page 49.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to Packer, the following individuals were responsible for drafting the document: John N. Akers, John Ankerberg, John Armstrong, D. A. Carson, Keith Davy, Maxie Dunnam, Timothy George, Scott Hafemann, Erwin Lutzer, Harold Myra, David Neff, Thomas Oden, R. C. Sproul, and John Woodbridge.

<sup>16</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 1. We also note John Hunt's comment, 'Historically "Evangelical" has its reference to type of Protestantism associated with the teachings of those associated with the Great Awakening. It has no association with the German Protestantism called "Evangelisch" of the Reformation era, nor was the term in use with respect to English Protestantism of an earlier period, Puritanism especially, though there is a direct theological relationship'. John Hunt, *Religious Thought in the England in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Gibbings and Co., Limited, 1896), p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Brian Edwards, *Revival: A people saturated with God* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1990), p. 47. He also cites Howel Harris, Daniel Rowlands in Britain, and Count Zinzendorf, the Moravian leader.

agreement that 'there was much continuity with earlier Protestant traditions'<sup>18</sup> most especially Puritanism<sup>19</sup> and the English Reformation, and the Continental Reformers, Luther and Calvin.<sup>20</sup> Packer himself often quotes from the Puritans and Continental Reformers; Stott also, though more so from the English Reformers. Lloyd-Jones quotes from the Puritans, Luther and Calvin, although his preferences clearly lie with the eighteenth century leaders, Edwards (especially),<sup>21</sup> Whitefield and Wesley, and lesser known figures such as Howell Harris and Daniel Rowlands. These affinities are important for what they reveal concerning the relationship between contemporary Evangelicalism, the Methodist Revival, Puritanism and the Protestant Reformation. This cannot be emphasised too much for its importance in identifying Evangelicalism's lineage within Christian history.

With this in mind, Evangelical belief may be said to represent a distinct variant of that kind of Protestant Christianity that is often styled 'orthodox', 'traditional' and even 'Reformed'.<sup>22</sup> As to what constitutes such 'orthodoxy', one

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<sup>18</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Packer himself cites studies by Robert C. Monk and John Walsh. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: A Puritan vision of the Christian life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 46. In addition to Hunt (above) we may also cite, Bebbington, 'Methodism ... had roots in the Puritan tradition.' *Idem.* p. 35., and the American historian Sydney Ahlstrom, 'it rested firmly on the Puritan emphasis on an inward experience of regeneration.' Ahlstrom, 'From Puritanism to Evangelicalism: A Critical Perspective,' in David Wells (ed.), *The Evangelicals: What they believe, Who they are, Where they are Changing* (1977), p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Speaking of the two volumes of Edwards' *Works* (1835 edition) that he discovered early in his ministry (1929), Lloyd-Jones says 'Their influence upon me I can not put into words'. Cited in Michael Eaton in *Baptism with the Spirit: the teaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, p. 108. See: Ian Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The first forty years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 234.

<sup>22</sup> By 'Reformed' is meant certain key theological parameters that define early Protestantism, *not* certain peculiarities concerning divine predestination. Thus Packer argues that Wesley's was an 'inconsistent Calvinism', and Carl Bangs, an American scholar of Arminius, argues that the latter was a 'Reformed theologian', a line of thought another Arminius scholar finds 'quite convincing'. See: Richard Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the thought of Jacobus Arminius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), p. 10; Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A study in the Dutch Reformation* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 15. Both arguments receive substantial support from another American scholar, John Mark Hicks. He writes, 'Arminianism, as represented by Arminius and Wesley, does not contain a substantial departure from the theology of grace in the Reformers. *In particular, the theology of Arminius is fundamentally Reformed in character.* Arminianism

detractor provides a turgid yet nonetheless helpful summary:

Traditional Christianity had what was known as the scheme of salvation. It was based on Scripture regarded as the verbally inspired record of Divine revelation; and the scheme as a whole, but by no means all included in it, stands or falls with that view of the Bible. The Pauline teaching on sin and salvation was elaborated into a scheme containing elements of Aristotelian science and the theology of St Augustine. It began with an alleged rebellion of Satan against God in which angels fell. By direct acts of God, Adam and Eve were created, apparently as adults, not only innocent but also fully righteous. Their descendants were intended to restore the number of the angels depleted by the heavenly revolt. Moved by envy, Satan persuaded our first parents to disobey one absolute command of God, that they were not to obtain knowledge, and so brought about their fall from original righteousness, in consequence of which they transmitted to all their offspring, by natural generation, a corrupted nature wholly inclined to evil, an enfeebled will, and also the guilt of their sin. Thus all mankind lay under the curse of sin both original and actual, justly the object of Divine wrath and destined to damnation.

In order to restore his thwarted purpose God sent his Son who, assuming human nature, was born on earth, whereon was wrought the drama of his death and resurrection. Jesus, pure from all defect of original and actual sin, alone fulfilled the conditions of a perfect sacrifice for human sin. By this God's legitimate anger with guilty mankind was appeased and his honour satisfied; he was graciously pleased to accept his Son's sacrifice, enabled to forgive sin, and man was potentially redeemed. The Christian Church, a Divine corporation, came into being; those baptised into it who by grace persevered in the fulfilment of its commands would be secure in the life to come. From the supernatural life of the Church, the world and history derived their meaning and without it would at a last day perish by fire. This would happen when the unknown number of souls required to replace the fallen angels was complete. The Anglican Prayer-book office for the burial of the dead still prays that God may be pleased shortly to accomplish the number of the elect and to hasten his kingdom. The dead would be raised from their graves in their bodies, despite St Paul's clear assertion that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor corruption incorruption. The saved were predestined to their salvation by an inscrutable decree of God, not for any merits of their own, but solely for those of Christ. As to the fate of the rest, there were differences of opinion, but it was generally held that they would suffer endless torment in the flames of a hell, by which climax not only would God's power and justice be finally vindicated but heaven's bliss intensified.<sup>23</sup>

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holds to the Reformation doctrines of penal substitution and *extra nos* righteousness.' J. M. Hicks, 'The Righteousness of Saving Faith: Arminian versus Remonstrant grace', *Evangelical Journal*, (1991) pp 27-39 at p. 35. Added emphasis. Lloyd-Jones while not taking this specific stance frequently quotes both Wesley brothers, and explicitly argues that the essentials of Evangelical thought lie outside the distinctions concerning election and predestination that separate Calvinist from Arminian. *What is an Evangelical?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth), p. 87. Lloyd-Jones does, however, specifically highlight and exclude 'Pelagianism' on the grounds that 'it is a denial of the truth of Scripture with regard to salvation'. *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> J. S. Bezzant, sometime Dean of St. John's College. Quoted in David Edwards,

Despite the writer's hostile stance, there are at least nine points here that may be recognised as definitive of Protestant 'orthodoxy' in general:

- (1) A distinct view of Scripture, that it is 'the verbally inspired record of Divine revelation'.
- (2) An interpretation of sin that is Pauline, Aristotelian [sic] and Augustinian.
- (3) A particular view of the Fall, to wit, as a consequence of Adam's sin all humankind are born with 'a corrupted nature wholly inclined to evil, an enfeebled will, and .. the guilt of .. sin'.
- (4) A divine backdrop against which the human race as a class are 'the object of Divine wrath and destined to damnation'.
- (5) A plan of redemption which is accomplished by the Son of God, who takes on the form of sinless, guiltless, human nature.
- (6) A conviction that Christ's obedience satisfies the 'conditions' necessary for salvation.
- (7) A particular emphasis on His perfect sacrifice through life and death, one that 'appeases' the 'legitimate anger of God,' satisfies the divine 'honour' and 'enables' forgiveness.
- (8) A view of individual salvation contextualised in terms of the Church, baptism, grace, the merits of Christ alone, perseverance and predestination.
- (9) An eschatology whose focal point is a 'last day' in which the 'saved' will be ushered into eternal bliss and the lost will 'suffer endless torment in the flames of a hell'.

### *Sola Scriptura*

The first of these (1) is what Bebbington calls 'biblicism'.<sup>24</sup> A theologically minded Evangelical examining Bezzant's summary would not only agree that the Bible is a 'verbally inspired record of Divine revelation,' but insist that it is uniquely so. Emphatically, there is no other revelation. As a consequence Scripture is not just the supreme authority but also the 'only'<sup>25</sup> or 'sole'<sup>26</sup> authority in all matters of faith and

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*Tradition and Truth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), pp. 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> 'The word of God (is), our alone guide and rule.' Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God* (Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1985), p. 243. Original emphasis.

practice. While Christians can learn from the Church and Church history, as sources they are 'not authoritative in any sense whatsoever'.<sup>27</sup>

### *Original Sin*

While some Evangelical academics might applaud the genius that was Aristotle (2), many would not.<sup>28</sup> Still, all would be happy to identify with Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin, and would argue it to be Pauline.

Integral to this doctrine is the twofold issue of the inherent guilt and depravity in man's nature<sup>29</sup> (3): the belief that on account of Adam's sin, each person born into the human race since, has been born into this world with culpability for that sin on the one hand, and with a nature that is constitutionally disposed - if not altogether 'enslaved' - 'to sin', 'the world, the flesh and the devil'<sup>30</sup> on the other. In other words, humankind on account of a 'disobedient nature ... *cannot* obey God ... he is incapable of it'.<sup>31</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls this idea of Original Sin, an 'essential' doctrine. The Evangelical, he says,

must ... assert that man is spiritually dead, and that he is totally incapable of any spiritual good, 'dead in trespasses and sins' - not merely slightly defective - and that it is not true to say that he has it in him, if only he applies himself, to believe in God and to arrive at God. We must assert as the Scriptures do, that man is totally dead.<sup>32</sup>

### The place and importance of this doctrine within the whole Evangelical

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<sup>26</sup> '... the Scripture is our *sole* authority, not only the supreme authority, but the sole authority, our only authority. I say this to say that we do not accept tradition in any sense of that term'. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 70. Original emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones for one was suspicious enough of Puritan Scholasticism, let alone Aristotle, whose philosophy, he complains, has by some 'been added to their belief in the Bible'. Lloyd-Jones *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> This is an important word in the Evangelical's vocabulary of sin. Sin is not a choice to do wrong, but antecedently is a characteristic of a person's 'very nature', which is 'evil', 'inwardly corrupt', and 'infected', 'controlling' our lives. John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (InterVarsity Press, 1958), pp. 75, 76, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 29. Original emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, pp. 81-82.

schema, therefore, can not be emphasised too strongly. Referring again to Lloyd-Jones, he not only calls it 'vital',<sup>33</sup> but flatly asserts, 'You can not have a true doctrine of salvation apart from this'.<sup>34</sup> Bebbington, appealing to history, argues that the doctrine of Original Sin was one of 'the three capital and distinguishing doctrines' of the first generation of Evangelical leaders.<sup>35</sup> Certainly Wesley and Whitefield defended it as such. Confronted with those who denied the doctrine Wesley asks,

Is it Christianity or Heathenism? For take away the Scriptural doctrine of ... Original Sin; and what is Christianity better than Heathenism? Wherein has the religion of St. Paul any pre-eminence over that of Socrates or Epictetus?<sup>36</sup>

### *Theology Proper*

Bezzant's fourth point (4) relates to the attitude of God towards humanity in sin and their final destiny. Concerning the first of these, it is nothing less than terrible wrath. Contemporary Evangelicals often lament the watering down of this doctrine. Thus Packer,

The modern habit throughout the Christian Church is to play this subject down. Those who still believe in the wrath of God say little about it. ... The fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society ... yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly. One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigour which both Testaments emphasise the reality and terror of God's wrath. ... The Bible labours the point that just as God is good to those who trust Him, so He is terrible to those who do not.<sup>37</sup>

Lloyd-Jones similarly acknowledges that the doctrine,

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<sup>33</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>35</sup> The other two distinguishing doctrines were, 'justification by faith', and 'the new birth'. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Hyman Press, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> John Wesley, *Journals*, 3 July, 1759. In a similar fashion George Whitefield argues, 'It is incumbent on those who deny it (Original Sin), to disprove the authority of the Holy Scriptures. If you can prove, you unbeliever, that the book which we call the Bible does not contain the lively oracles of God; if you can show holy men of old did not write this book, as they were inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost; then we will give up the doctrine of original sin. But unless you can do this, we must insist upon it that we are all conceived in sin, if for no other, yet for this one reason, because God who cannot lie, has told us'. 'The indwelling of the Spirit, the common privilege of all believers', sermon, quoted in Timothy L. Smith, *Whitefield and Wesley on the New Birth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 135-135.

is not only unpopular at the present time, but is even hated and detested. People can scarcely control themselves as they speak about it. The whole modern idea has been for a number of years, that God is a God of love and that we must think of God only in terms of love. To talk about the wrath of God, we are told, is utterly incompatible with any idea of God as a God of love.<sup>38</sup>

Both Lloyd-Jones and Packer are typical in appealing to the clarity and forcefulness of eighteenth century preachers on the subject. Jonathan Edwards, we are told, 'used some of the most vivid furnace imagery to make his congregation feel the horror of their position'.<sup>39</sup> Representative in this fashion is his 'The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable'. Elaborating his central thesis that the punishment of hell can not be shunned by those who are sent there, Edwards comments

They will never find any resting place there; any place of respite; any secret corner, which will be cooler than the rest, where they may have a little respite, a small abatement of the extremity of their torment. They never will be able to find any cooling stream or fountain, in any part of that world of torment; no, nor so much as a drop of water to cool their tongues. They will find no company to give them any comfort, or to do them the least good. They will find no place, where they can remain, and rest, and take breath for one minute: For they will be tormented with fire and brimstone; and will have no rest day nor night for ever and ever.<sup>40</sup>

As to the question whether sin can 'really deserve such great and grievous punishment?', Packer replies that 'beyond any shadow of a doubt the answer is yes'.<sup>41</sup>

Concerning the attitude of God towards sinners, Evangelicals find it important to affirm not only the idea that human kind have a 'sense of alienation from God because of their sin and guilt',<sup>42</sup> but that sin itself 'arouses'<sup>43</sup> a 'divine reaction'<sup>44</sup> - even 'hatred'<sup>45</sup> - in God against sinners. This is emphasised in the doctrine's elaboration that sin draws forth God's personal wrath, that is 'his personal hostility to

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<sup>38</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 50.

<sup>39</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 137.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'The Future Punishment Of The Wicked Unavoidable And Intolerable'. CD ROM (Albany, OR: Sage Digital Library, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 138.

<sup>42</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 135.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

evil,<sup>46</sup> not least because sin itself is 'rebellion ... defiance',<sup>47</sup> indeed 'hostility to God'.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, as Packer notes,

it is inadequate to regard this term (wrath) as merely descriptive of 'the inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe' or another way of speaking of the results of sin. It is rather a personal quality, without which God would cease to be fully righteous and his love would degenerate into sentimentality.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, it is the personal nature of wrath which determines the need for a propitiatory Atonement. As to the nature of propitiation Lloyd-Jones (citing the Puritan John Owen) cites four 'essential elements':

1. An offence to be taken away.
2. A person offended who needs to be pacified.
3. An offending person; a person guilty of the offence.
4. A sacrifice or some other means of making Atonement for the offence.<sup>50</sup>

James Packer clearly believes that these principles are faithful to Scripture,

The idea of propitiation - that is, of averting God's anger by an offering - runs right through the Bible ... In the Old Testament it underlies the prescribed rituals of the sin offering, the guilt offering and the Day of Atonement .... In the faith of the New Testament it is central. The love of God, the taking of manhood by the Son, the meaning of the cross, Christ's heavenly intercession, and the way of salvation, are all to be explained in terms of it ... and any explanation from which the thought of propitiation is missing will be incomplete, and indeed actually misleading, by New Testament standards.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105. Added emphasis.

<sup>47</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 90. Added emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 165.

<sup>50</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Atonement and Justification: Studies in Romans 3:20-4:25*, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 162-163. He adds, 'In saying this, we swim against the stream of much modern teaching and condemn at a stroke the views of a great number of distinguished Church leaders today, but we cannot help that. Paul wrote, 'though we, or an angel from heaven'—let alone a minister, bishop, college lecturer, university professor, or noted author—'should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema' (accursed, AV.; outcast, NEB.; damned, Phillips) (Galatians 1:8). And a gospel without propitiation at its heart is another gospel than that which Paul preached. The implications of this must not be evaded'. *Ibid.* It would be difficult to exaggerate Packer's commitment to the doctrine. Elsewhere he says, '... sin, propitiation and pardon are the basic structural features of the New Testament gospel' (171); '... when you are on top of the truth of propitiation you can see the entire Bible in perspective' (172). The meaning of God's glory ... can only be



This rendition of ἵλασκεσθαι in Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, and 1 John 4:10 therefore, is to be preferred over expiation on precisely this ground; that only the former confirms the truth of God's personal wrath.<sup>52</sup> It is not just a question that 'expiation only means half of what propitiation means,'<sup>53</sup> but as Lloyd-Jones insists, 'if you take out of the Bible this understanding of the wrath of God against sin there is little of the Bible left',<sup>54</sup> most especially, 'we can never understand the love of God until we understand this doctrine'.<sup>55</sup>

An examination of Jonathan Edward's sermon, 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God,' is helpful in understanding Evangelical teaching on this subject, and particularly their view as to the need of its emphasis.<sup>56</sup> The sermon's language used is profound for its graphic representation of the character of God and the divine attitude towards sinners.

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.<sup>57</sup>

This all having been said, John Stott finds it important to point out that, 'God's anger is poles apart from ours. What provokes our anger (injured vanity) never provokes

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understood in the light of the truth of propitiation' (172).

<sup>52</sup> Leon Morris, 'The Use of ἵλασκεσθαι etc., in Biblical Greek,' *Expository Times* 62 (1951) pp. 227-283 at p. 233. See: Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 125-185.

<sup>53</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 163. 'Expiation is an action that *has sin as its object*; it denotes the covering, putting away, or rubbing out of sin so that it no longer constitutes a barrier to friendly fellowship between man and God. Propitiation ... denotes all (this) *and the pacifying of the wrath of God*'. *Ibid.*, p. 164. Added emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Atonement and Justification: Romans 3:20-4:25* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), p. 79. Added emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 49. Original emphasis. This is a particularly interesting comment that brings out attention to the underlying dialecticism present in this view of God. It gives expression to the Evangelical dualism and its refusal to synthesise mercy and wrath into one conception (Forster's view). See: Stott's comment below, footnote 62.

<sup>56</sup> Packer uses it in this manner in the section 'The Wrath of God', *Knowing God*. Cf. pp. 137f.

<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God'.

His; and what provokes His anger (evil) seldom provokes ours'.<sup>58</sup>

Further to this subject two other works of Jonathan Edwards need to be noted. 'The Justice Of God In The Damnation Of Sinners', and 'Wicked Men Useful In Their Destruction Only'. In 'The Justice of God', Edwards sets forth the syllogism underlying the title of the work. The major premise:

Our obligation to love, honour, and obey any being, is in proportion to his loveliness, honourableness, and authority.<sup>59</sup>

The minor premise:

God is a being infinitely lovely, because he hath infinite excellency and beauty. To have infinite excellency and beauty, is the same thing as to have infinite loveliness. He is a being of infinite greatness, majesty, and glory; and therefore he is infinitely honourable. He is infinitely exalted above the greatest potentates of the earth, and highest angels in heaven; and therefore he is infinitely more honourable than they. His authority over us is infinite; and the ground of his right to our obedience is infinitely strong; for he is infinitely worthy to be obeyed himself, and we have an absolute, universal, and infinite dependence upon him.<sup>60</sup>

The conclusion:

Sin against God, being a violation of infinite obligations, must be a crime infinitely heinous, and so deserving of infinite punishment.<sup>61</sup>

The significance of this extract is that it presents to us the Evangelical understanding that God's hatred of sin and indeed the sinner is on account, not of some deficiency in the love of God, or of some vindictiveness in His Person, but of the heinous nature of sin and the evil heart of the one sinning. It is the fundamental issue of the perfection of God on one side (His 'holiness') and human depravity, to wit, his wicked nature on the other - or as Stott presents it, 'the collision between divine perfection and human rebellion, between God as He is and us as we are',<sup>62</sup> the 'seriousness of sin' and 'the majesty of God'.<sup>63</sup> The objective observer must, therefore,

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<sup>58</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 173.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'The Justice Of God In The Damnation Of Sinners', CD ROM (Albany, OR: Sage Digital Library, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 88.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

note the clear nature and interaction of anthropology and theology proper that underlies Evangelical teaching. More particularly that the first (the depravity of man in sin) is as dismal as the second (the excellence of God's glory) is exalted. The contemporary Evangelical firmly and specifically rejects 'nineteenth century liberal optimism'<sup>64</sup> concerning human nature, and equally nineteenth and twentieth century attempts to 'reconstruct God's wrath as an impersonal process',<sup>65</sup> even though in so doing he will be accused of making God 'into some sort of monster or ogre'.<sup>66</sup>

Thus it becomes a question of how God Himself is to be understood. Stott, quoting Emil Brunner's *The Mediator* (1927), complains that the 'biblical idea of God' which rests on the 'two-fold nature of holiness and love'<sup>67</sup> - or to put it another way, 'that God's resolute wrath towards sinners is as much an expression of His person as is His love'<sup>68</sup> - 'is being replaced by the modern, unilateral, monistic idea of God'.<sup>69</sup>

Yet 'the dualism of holiness and love ... or mercy and wrath can not be dissolved, changed in one synthetic conception, without at the same time destroying the seriousness of the biblical knowledge of God, the reality and the mystery of revelation and Atonement ... Here arises the "dialectic" of all genuine Christian theology, which simply aims at expressing in terms of thought the indissoluble nature of this dualism' (p. 519). So then, the Cross of Christ 'is the event in which God makes known his holiness and love simultaneously, in one event, in an absolute manner'. 'The Cross is the only place where the loving, forgiving merciful God is revealed in such a way that we perceive that His holiness and His love are equally infinite' (p. 470).<sup>70</sup>

Connected with this is the rejection of another nineteenth century idea, the universal Fatherhood of God. In asking 'What is a Christian?' Packer suggests that the 'richest answer' is, 'one who has God for his Father'.<sup>71</sup>

But cannot this be said of every man, Christian or not? Emphatically no! The idea that all men are children of God is not found in the Bible anywhere. The Old Testament shows God as the Father, not of all men, but of His own people, the seed of Abraham. 'Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my

<sup>64</sup> Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 62.

<sup>65</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>67</sup> Brunner quoted in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 130. Added emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> Brunner quoted in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 130.

<sup>70</sup> Brunner quoted in Stott, *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>71</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 181.

son go . . .' (Exodus 4:22 f.). The New Testament has a world vision, but it too shows God as the Father, not of all men, but of those who, knowing themselves to be sinners, put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their divine sin-bearer and master, and so become Abraham's spiritual seed. ... Sonship to God is not, therefore, a universal status upon which everyone enters by natural birth, but a supernatural gift that one receives through receiving Jesus.<sup>72</sup>

The corollary to this is the Evangelical attachment to the doctrine of adoption,<sup>73</sup> the teaching that after the sinner has been justified he is distinctly adopted as a child of God. While the teaching of Lloyd-Jones especially gave preference to the experiential dimension of this idea,<sup>74</sup> the fundamental point remains that objectively the sinner prior to his justification and adoption is not a child of God, but is a 'child of wrath,' a 'child of disobedience' indeed a child of the devil. 'All who are born into the world,' Lloyd-Jones emphasises, 'are under the wrath of God as Saint Paul says, we "were all Children of wrath".'<sup>75</sup>

Edwards' 'Wicked Men Useful In Their Destruction Only', gives expression to Bezzant's final point (9), that in the damnation of the 'rest' (Evangelicals would say

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>73</sup> Packer makes the interesting observation that this emphasis is new to Evangelicals. 'It is a strange fact that the truth of adoption has been little regarded in Christian history. Apart from two last century books now scarcely known (R. S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, R. A. Web, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*) there is no evangelical writing on it, nor has there been at any time since the Reformation, any more than there was before'. *Knowing God*, p. 207.

<sup>74</sup> An emphasis on adoption as a subjective experience is found throughout Lloyd-Jones's works. Two lengthy examples are found in his exposition of Ephesians 1:13, (from *God's Ultimate Purpose*) and Romans 8:14-16 (from *The Sons of God*). Another good example is his exposition of the text, "ye have received the Spirit of adoption", (Romans 5:12). He says, "This is something subjective, something which essentially belongs to the realm of feeling and subjectivity, and the emotions. It is something within us at a deeper level than the level of the intellect. That seems to me to be the vital point in this statement. In other words this does not arise from certain actions on our part; it is the Spirit that produces it in us. It is not something of which you persuade yourself. As we have seen, by applying various tests you can persuade yourself whether you are, or are not, being led by the Spirit, but that is not the position here. This is not in the realm of intellectual argumentation or demonstration; it is something of which one becomes conscious. This is - to use the obvious and the simple analogy - comparable to what we know in human love. You do not persuade yourself that you are in love; at least, if you do, or have to do, you are not in love. This is not a matter of persuasion; it is something you know; you become conscious of it'. Lloyd-Jones, *The Sons of God: Romans 8:5-17* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 235.

<sup>75</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 50.

'the wicked') 'God's power and justice be finally vindicated' and 'heaven's bliss intensified'. (Evangelicals would agree with the former, but not the latter). The doctrine presented is three fold:

1. Unfruitful persons are of use in their destruction for the glory of God's justice.<sup>76</sup>
2. Unfruitful persons in their destruction are of use for God to glorify his majesty upon them.<sup>77</sup>
3. The destruction of the unfruitful is of use, to give the saints a greater sense of their happiness, and of God's grace to them.<sup>78</sup>

Apprehending the original context in which these statements were made, makes all the difference as to how they are understood. To Evangelicals they are an explanation as to how such wickedness which is the heart of the sinner, and such dread and awful punishment as is eternal damnation, may not only be clearly justified to the believer's mind, but yet take on a redemptive quality. The thesis stands on the principle that man is either useful or useless to God his creator. God would that all men would serve Him, and so fulfil the purpose for which they were made, but if they will not to serve, and thence nothing can be done for their salvation, they will nevertheless honour God through their judgement and due punishment. But, says the Evangelical, that is not God's will for the sinner, since He has instituted a plan of redemption (5); thus God's desire rather is that such would turn away from his sins.

How great a thing hath God done for you, to give you opportunity and advantage to be useful, in that he hath sent his own Son into the world! He who is really and truly God, united himself to the human nature, and became a man, to be a prophet and teacher to you and other sinners. Yea, he laid down his life to make Atonement for sin, that you might have encouragement to serve God with hopes of acceptance.<sup>79</sup>

The Evangelical therefore uses the doctrine of wrath and judgement with a particular and distinct purpose in mind, to 'give force to the conclusion: "Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come"'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'Wicked Men Useful In Their Destruction Only', CD ROM (Albany, OR: Sage Digital Library, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19. Added emphasis.

<sup>80</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 137.

## The Evangelical Doctrine of the Atonement

The basic description of the saving death of Christ in the Bible is as propitiation, that is, as that which quenched God's wrath against us by obliterating our sins from His sight. God's wrath is His righteousness reacting against unrighteousness; it shows itself in retributive justice. But Jesus Christ has shielded us from the nightmare prospect of retributive justice by becoming our representative substitute, in obedience to His Father's will, and receiving the wages of our sin in our place. By this means justice has been done, for the sins of all that will ever be pardoned were judged and punished in the person of God the Son, and it is on this basis that pardon is now offered to us offenders. Redeeming love and retributive justice joined hands, so to speak, at Calvary, for there God showed Himself to be 'just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus'.<sup>81</sup>

If Christ's suffering and death for the salvation of the world (6) is a defining feature of 'orthodox' Christianity, the centrality of that suffering and death marks its place at the heart of the Evangelical schema.<sup>82</sup> Bebbington calls this aspect, crucicentrism.<sup>83</sup> More particularly it is a suffering and death that must be (a) defined as substitutionary, (b) defended as a satisfaction, and, (c) insisted upon as sufficient for the sinners' justification (7). In one word the whole must be summed up as 'objective'. In other words, the effectual salvific change comes wholly as Christ offers a 'vicarious penalty'.<sup>84</sup> It is this that justifies, and this alone. Only subsequently are sinners subjectively regenerated and adopted, *i.e.*, changed and brought into a relationship with God the Father.

'Substitution' or 'one person taking the place of another',<sup>85</sup> means that Christ stood for the race in exactly the same manner as Adam; in other words, according to the same manner of mystical and representative union.

'Satisfaction' pertains to the legal demands of the law regarding both the retrospective demand for sin's punishment, 'sin bearing',<sup>86</sup> and the prospective

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170. Added emphasis.

<sup>82</sup> Mather notes this 'as the keystone of Evangelical doctrine, the *sine qua non* of authentic Christian faith and life.' G. B. Mather, 'The Atonement: Representative or Substitutionary?' *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4 (1958), pp 226-272 at p. 266.

<sup>83</sup> David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 142. 'Propitiation inevitably comes first because until the wrath of God is appeased there can be no salvation for human beings at all'. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

requirements for perfect righteousness. More particularly its reference is to the 'transfer' to Christ of the 'legal consequences' of 'our sins',<sup>87</sup> - 'He endured judgement in our place'<sup>88</sup> - and the transfer to us of Christ's righteousness which thus becomes the sole basis of our 'legal justification'.<sup>89</sup>

The third claim, sufficiency, refers to the fact that Christ *extra nos* is actual salvation for the elect (as respecting those who become the children of God, not as a necessary view of predestination).

Though subject to a variety of emphases and variances in the interpretation of particularities, these three principles are universally held among conservative Evangelicals as representing the *sine qua non* not only of the Atonement, but also of the gospel itself:

We deny that any view of the Atonement that rejects the substitutionary satisfaction of divine justice, accomplished vicariously for believers, is compatible with the teaching of the Gospel.<sup>90</sup>

#### *Faith, Justification and Righteousness*

It is not until we get to Bezzant's eighth point (8) that Evangelicalism's most obvious and universally recognised distinctive is identified, 'conversionism'. The distinctiveness of this element is further realised when it is understood that conversion replaces what in many branches of Christendom is usually reserved as the function of the Church and its use of the sacraments, that is, baptism and the Eucharist. In this respect, conversionism accounts for two other particularities of Evangelical ecclesiology, a low view of the Church, and a low view of the sacraments.<sup>91</sup> That is, the understanding that whatever the relationship is that exists between the sinner and the Church and its sacraments, it is not in any sense necessary for salvation (justification), nor continuance therein, although they are considered a

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>90</sup> 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration', *Christianity Today*, November-December, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>91</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 51f.

means to spiritual well-being in sanctification when joined to faith.

In asking 'What is conversionism?' we first need to be clear as to what is 'conversion?' Conversion 'is a gracious sovereign work of divine power':<sup>92</sup>

There is not only a moral, but a physical immediate operation of the Spirit ... upon the minds or souls of men. ... The work of grace in conversion is constantly expressed by words denoting a real internal efficacy; such as creating, quickening, forming, giving a new heart. ... Wherever the work is spoken of with respect unto an active efficacy, it is ascribed unto God. He creates us anew, he quickens us, he begets us of his own will; but when it is spoken of with respect to us, there it is passively expressed; we are created in Christ Jesus, we are new creatures, we are born again, and the like.<sup>93</sup>

Conversionism is the emphasis that this doctrine is given by Evangelicals, and more particularly, their insistence that a Christian is one who has had *this* subjective experience of conversion; one who possess an experiential and cognitively Christ-centred salvation, and can give an account of it. This emphasis on the 'new birth' and its absolute necessity is a cornerstone of Evangelical belief, not least because it provides the corollary to the 'serious' biblical conviction that 'man is dead in sin, spiritually impotent, radically depraved, sin's helpless slave'.<sup>94</sup> In respect to this particularity, Edwards sets the pattern for those who were to follow. Particular note may be paid to a series of sermons on the theme preached in 1734. Concerning these Alister McGrath observes 'the intense emphasis placed by Edwards ... upon the need for spiritual rebirth.'<sup>95</sup> George Whitefield confides in his journal (1740) that he expects opposition in preaching this doctrine of 'new birth' among the 'orthodox',

I have not yet met with much opposition from the dissenters; but when I come to tell many of them, ministers as well as people, that they hold the truth in unrighteousness, that they talk and preach of justifying faith, but never felt it in their hearts, as I am persuaded that a number of them have not, then they no doubt will shoot their arrows, even bitter words.<sup>96</sup>

John Wesley bluntly warns members of the Established Church of England that they as well as the heathen will perish unless each

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<sup>92</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, p. 294.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>95</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, v.2, p. 119. Added emphasis.

<sup>96</sup> Whitefield, *Journal*, May 20, 1740. Added emphasis.



experiences something within himself, which he has not yet experienced, but which he may be beforehand assured that he shall, if the promises of God are true. That something is a living faith; 'a sure trust and confidence in God, that by the merits of Jesus Christ his sins are forgiven, and he is reconciled to the favour of God.'<sup>97</sup>

In insisting upon the absolute necessity of conversion Evangelicals thereby find it necessary to clearly delineate the peculiarities and distinctiveness involved. Thus, within Evangelicalism the new birth or conversion is the subject of considerable theological attention. In this manner we understand why it is particularly important to the Evangelical that the constituent components of conversion are correctly defined and their place in the *ordo salutis* properly identified.

At a subjective level the conversion process is usually accepted as proceeding according to the following pattern:<sup>98</sup> the awakening of the sinner to his spiritual condition, sometimes called the conviction of sin; faith, if it be understood in this subjective sense, that is, a persuasion of the veracity of the gospel promise *pro me*, and a resting in the same; justification, if this be understood as an assured sense of being in God's favour on account of Christ; repentance, if this be understood as a change of mind, namely, a sorrow for sin and a love for the right; and good works, if these be understood as the change of lifestyle necessarily commensurate to repentance and faith.

Concerning faith, particular emphasis is laid upon the fact that regeneration precedes faith,<sup>99</sup> which as an act is but the instrumental cause of justification, not its meritorious cause, the latter being (emphatically) Christ alone.

As we think of faith we must be careful, therefore, to view it in this light. Faith is not the cause of salvation. *Christ* is the cause of salvation. The grace of God in the

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<sup>97</sup> Wesley, *Journal*, July 12, 1739. Original emphasis.

<sup>98</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, pp. 298, 152.

<sup>99</sup> In respect to regeneration preceding faith, it is interesting to note that the British publication, *The Evangelical Times*, criticises 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical *Celebration*', for its failure to make this absolutely clear. On this - as on a number of other points - it says, 'too much is left open to interpretation ... an example is the following statement. "The gospel assures us that all who have entrusted their lives to Jesus Christ are born-again children of God (John 1:12)". True, if properly understood. But we could read this as meaning that trust precedes (and is the cause of) the new birth. No doubt some will feel free to take it that way, in spite of clear biblical teaching to the contrary'. Edgar Andrews, *The Evangelical Times*, December 1999, p. 11.

Lord Jesus Christ is the cause of salvation, and I must never speak in such a way as to represent faith as the cause of my salvation. What is faith then? Faith is but the instrument through which it comes to me. 'By grace are ye saved, through faith'. Faith is the channel, it is the instrument through which this salvation which is by the grace of God comes to me. I am saved by grace, 'through faith'. It is just the medium through which the grace of God bringing salvation enters into my life. We must always be extremely careful, therefore, never to say that it is our believing that saves us. Belief does not save. Faith does not save. Christ saves - Christ and His finished work.<sup>100</sup>

Related to this is the teaching that sanctification is not only wholly separate to justification, but comes after the fact. Equally, that both have their root in an antecedent union with Christ which marks regeneration; the creative act of God that inevitably produces faith.

As to the definition of faith, Packer calls it 'self abandoning trust in the person and work of Christ';<sup>101</sup> Lloyd-Jones calls it, 'Believing God'.<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Edwards in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* notes severally that faith is a 'conviction ... of the veracity of God, and that the Scriptures are his word,'<sup>103</sup> 'a persuasion of the truth of the things of the gospel',<sup>104</sup> and more particularly a 'spiritual sense,'<sup>105</sup> of these things wedded to a 'sight' of God's 'holy excellency.' Such sight can not be divorced from an appreciation of His 'faithfulness to fulfil what he offers' and of His 'glorious sufficiency' to undertake what He has promised. All in all this leads the heart of the regenerate man 'to embrace the offer' and receive within himself the 'evidence of his title to the thing offered'.<sup>106</sup> Elsewhere in the same work Edwards notes that faith is nothing less than a sight of the divine glory.<sup>107</sup> Realising the extravagant nature of the claim, he admits that 'there is a vast variety of the degrees of clearness of views of this glory', but nonetheless insists, 'there is no true and saving faith, or spiritual conviction

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<sup>100</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation*, p. 136. Original emphasis.

<sup>101</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 141.

<sup>102</sup> R. T. Kendall, *Who by Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), Preface, p. v.

<sup>103</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1898), pp. 131f.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> 'Nothing can be more evident, than that a saving belief of the gospel is here spoken of, by the apostle, as arising from the mind's being enlightened to behold the divine glory.' *Ibid.*, p. 200.

of the judgement, of the truth of the gospel, that has nothing in it of this manifestation'.<sup>108</sup>

This is important for our understanding of the most important qualities of faith, for it is the sight of the divine that provides faith with its inherently assuring quality. Faith does not rest on empirical evidences. 'The gospel of the blessed God does not go abroad a begging for its evidence, so much as some think; it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself'.<sup>109</sup> This is because a direct corollary exists between the qualities of faith, and faith's object.

Conservative Evangelicals clearly reflect these emphases in their gospel preaching. As Packer demonstrates, the truly Evangelical preacher never asks his congregation to 'decide for Christ', but inquires *via* personal experience whether each has received the gift of faith. The will is involved, but not as a choice for Christ; rather it is to be exercised in seeking the life promised in the gospel if it should be found lacking:

Look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on his mercy; ask him to give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith; ask him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write his law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from him. Turn to him and trust him as best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to him; watch, pray, and read and hear God's word, worship and commune with God's people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being, a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired has been put within you.<sup>110</sup>

Lloyd-Jones similarly enquires of his congregation if each has been converted to Christ, born anew,

The vital question we must ask ourselves, therefore, is: Am I aware of something entirely new within me? Am I aware of being controlled and mastered by something, or rather by Someone, not myself? Can I say in any degree, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'? Am I aware of the divine Person that is in me? Can I

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* Or as he says earlier, 'A view of this divine glory directly convinces the mind of the divinity of these things, as this glory is in itself a direct, clear, and all-conquering evidence of it.' *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>110</sup> Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, p. 144.

say, 'And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'? Are you aware of the fact that something has been done to you? Not that you have done something, not that you have been modifying what you were, or what you had, or what you have. Are you aware that, down in the depth of your being, God has done something, and has put something into you? Can you say, 'We are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus'? Can you say, I am an 'epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart'?<sup>111</sup>

The other term to which an Evangelical would give attention as a capital article of religion, is justification. Stott quotes J. I. Packer and others:

Justification by Faith appears to us, as it does to all Evangelicals, to be the heart and hub, the paradigm and essence, of the whole economy of God's saving grace. Like Atlas, it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of God's love in Christ towards sinners.<sup>112</sup>

In an objective sense it is understood as a wholly forensic term which pronounces a person righteous according to the law. The objects of justification are sinners, 'God justifies the wicked.' (Romans 4:5).<sup>113</sup> It is this element of ungodliness - the fact that the sinner has not changed morally - which affirms that salvation 'is by grace alone, through faith alone',<sup>114</sup> since there are no causes or grounds for justification in the sinner himself, nor could there ever be since humankind is incapable of producing the perfect righteousness the law demands. The legal grounds for the sinner's justification must, therefore, be found wholly outside himself, yet equally must be according to the perfection demanded by the law. Such righteousness can only be found in one place, Christ.

In every sense then, justification is separate from sanctification and, more so, must be maintained as such. Any watering down of this doctrine, indeed any 'ambiguity'<sup>115</sup> on this count must be reckoned 'dangerous'.<sup>116</sup> Emphatically the declaration of 'justified' is made over the sinner on account of Christ alone, and is a

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<sup>111</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare: Studies in Ephesians 6:10-13* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 227.

<sup>112</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 183. Added emphasis.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

declaration external to the individual that is purely legal and not creative. The sinner is declared just, but he is not thereby made just: this is a separate work of salvation, it is subsequent to justification and is called 'regeneration' from which sanctification flows.<sup>117</sup> In this respect modern Evangelicals are keen to emphasise that they are one with the teaching of Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards, the Puritans, and most especially Luther and Calvin.

Whatever variances were to follow, Wesley records in his Journal (1739) that on this matter he differed not so much as a 'hair's breadth' from John Calvin, and asked whether any spoke more ably on the subject than Martin Luther.<sup>118</sup> He claimed his teaching as that of 'our Church' [of England], and that universally held by 'all Reformed churches'<sup>119</sup> to wit,

I believe justification to be wholly distinct from sanctification, and necessarily antecedent to it.

I believe that neither our own holiness, nor good works, are any part of the cause of our justification; but that the death and righteousness of Christ are the whole and sole cause of it; nor, that for the sake of which, we are justified before God.

I believe no good work can be previous to justification, nor, consequently, a condition of it; but that we are justified (being till that hour ungodly, and therefore, incapable of doing any good work) by faith alone, faith without works, faith (though producing all, yet) including no good work.<sup>120</sup>

Precisely two hundred and sixty years later, the same sentiments were as clearly and passionately set forth in the 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration'. In articles twelve and thirteen the statement declares:

XII. We affirm that the doctrine of the imputation (reckoning or counting) both of our sins to Christ and of his righteousness to us, whereby our sins are fully forgiven and we are fully accepted, is essential to the biblical Gospel.

We deny that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ infused into us or by

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 'Regeneration is *not* an aspect of justification'. *Ibid.*, p. 188. Added emphasis. 'When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; he is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because He Himself in His Son has borne the penalty of their law-breaking'. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>118</sup> See: respectively, *Journal*, May 14, 1765, and his sermon, 'On God's Vineyard,' *Works* 8.

<sup>119</sup> *Sermons*, 4, n. 150. Quoted in W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of Love Divine* (Nashville, TN: Kregel Books, 1989), p. 76.

<sup>120</sup> John Wesley, *Journals*, September 13, 1739.

any righteousness that is thought to inhere within us.

XIII. We affirm that the righteousness of Christ by which we are justified is properly his own, which he achieved apart from us, in and by his perfect obedience. This righteousness is counted, reckoned, or imputed to us by the forensic (that is, legal) declaration of God, as the sole ground of our justification.

We deny that any works we perform at any stage of our existence add to the merit of Christ or earn for us any merit that contributes in any way to the ground of our justification.<sup>121</sup>

### *A Summary*

In summary then, extensive quotations from Edwards, Packer, Stott, Lloyd-Jones, *etc.*, wedded to Bezzant's nine features of orthodoxy, helped us to identify: the essential foundations of Evangelical belief; its doctrinal peculiarities; and its understanding of the Atonement. Further to this, we may note the following more particularly. Firstly, there is an underlying *ethos* which characterises its approach to the Christian religion, namely: biblicism, crucicentrism, and conversionism. Secondly, there are four specific doctrines whose emphasis marks out its theological distinctives: (1) *Sola Scriptura*; (2) Original Sin; (3) justification by faith alone; and (4) constitutional regeneration or the 'new birth'. Finally, there are the particularities which mark out an Evangelical view of the Atonement: substitution; satisfaction; sufficiency.

## **The Evangelical and Forster: Theological Contexts Compared<sup>122</sup>**

### *The Bible, Epistemology and Church History*

In comparing the Evangelical doctrine of *sola Scriptura* to Forster's teaching, it immediately becomes apparent that the reader is faced with two very distinct opinions. More particularly, that where the Evangelical finds the locus of revelation in the Bible alone, Forster finds it also in nature and in the spiritual encounters of believers - both historical and contemporary. Subsequently where the Evangelical 'contends for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints',<sup>123</sup> which, he believes, is sealed in the completed canon, Forster believes in a 'growing body of

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<sup>121</sup> *Christianity Today*, June 14, 1999, p. 55.

<sup>122</sup> For a summary, please see Table 1 below.

<sup>123</sup> Jude 3. RSV.

revelation',<sup>124</sup>

Table 1: A Comparison of Fundamental Doctrines.			
Conservative Evangelical		Roger Forster	
<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	Sole authority Infallible authority Sufficient authority	<i>Revelation</i>	Spirit, Scripture, Nature all contain the Word of God Necessity of the Holy Spirit
<i>Christian Epistemology</i>	Spirit Regeneration Faith	<i>Universal Epistemology</i>	Nature Revelation Reason
<i>Church History</i>	Helpful/Non-authoritative	<i>Christian History</i>	Revelatory/Authoritative
<i>Original Sin</i>	All sinned in Adam Legal - separation from God Sin - constitutional/involuntary Spiritual death	<i>The first sin</i>	Adam sinned first Cosmological invasion Sin - exemplary/voluntary Spiritual sickness

These differing interpretations have implications for their respective understanding of hermeneutics, that is the 'rules' governing the interpretation of God's Word. Where the Evangelical looks to the Bible as a closed system that contains within itself the principles of its own interpretation, Forster finds the Scriptures as part of a body of revelation whose meaning can only be fully grasped as the whole is brought to bear. Thus, the individual believer is to understand the Scriptures in the light of nature, Christian history, his own and others' personal encounters with the Holy Spirit.

Another important difference concerns contrary opinions in understanding the nature of revelation itself. The Evangelical believes in a peculiar work of the Spirit

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<sup>124</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 14. Thus - for example - Forster argues that it took the church 1700 years to discern from Scripture that the very principle of slavery was immoral. Lloyd-Jones specifically rejects this idea of growing revelation; to wit, 'the church through her experiences and understanding as the centuries passed, has been able to discover what was before only implicit in the Scriptures and has been able to draw it out'. He describes it as a 'subtle' and 'dangerous' compromise of the 'sole authority' of Scripture to which we can not give 'any place ... in any shape or form'. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 70.

whereby the Scriptures are uniquely 'God breathed': its authors were 'actually controlled by the Spirit'<sup>125</sup> and as a consequence wrote a complete series of infallible propositional truths. Forster, however, understands that revelation is a dynamic: partly written; partly found in believers' experiences of God; partly an on going work of the Holy Spirit that will not be complete till Christ's return. Revelation, therefore, by its very nature cannot be distilled into propositions.

In exploring these issue further, we become aware that these differences extend to the Bible itself. For example, concerning the question, 'how do I know that the Scripture is the Word of God?' The Evangelical would reply, 'through the testimony of the Holy Spirit affirming its propositions', adding that such testimony can only be received by the regenerate mind. In other words, God's supernatural act in regenerating the soul brings an awareness and confidence in spiritual truth that is supra-rational. This testimony is available to the non-Christian, but on account of natural depravity, he is unable to receive it. To the same question Forster's short reply would be 'through testing the reasonableness of its claims'. The difference with the Evangelical position is profound. Forster would even refuse to accept the Evangelical interpretation as a legitimate alternative to his own, not least because he finds the idea of constitutional depravity impossible, but also because he finds any distinction between reason and faith unacceptable.

It is apparent at this juncture that the Evangelical's concern is to affirm the objectivity of revelation in Scripture, at the same time making the believer's confidence in its authenticity rest wholly on the internal testimony of the Word itself. Forster, on the other hand, wishes to affirm that the revelation of God is both reasonable and affirmed by reason, yet at the same time impossible to reduce to propositions. Forster's priority is to avoid a cerebral understanding of truth in favour of a personal encounter, the Evangelical's priority is to avoid reason replacing faith.

Forster readily admits that in making reason the grounds upon which the Scriptures are to be believed, reason thus becomes the chief agent of their interpretation. In contrast the Evangelical is not only suspicious of reason, but completely rejects it is the means of establishing or interpreting spiritual truth. The

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<sup>125</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 72.



issue at stake is not only the threat reason represents to the formulation of sound theology, but the more insidious threat it represents to the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. These differences are represented in the following example. Where Forster boldly asserts 'you could anticipate that somewhere in the world - *without opening a Bible* - there would be something like the story of Jesus, if you just sit down and do a lot of hard thinking'.<sup>126</sup> The Evangelical profoundly disagrees.

What can we know about God *except* what we are told in this Book? You can reason, if you like, through nature and you will arrive at a creator. You will never arrive at a Father and loving God; you will never know God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>127</sup>

Another issue concerns the very nature of the Word itself: to the Evangelical the Bible contains a series of propositional truths,<sup>128</sup> but to Forster, the Word is a dynamic reality in the Person of God Himself. In Forster's perception the Evangelical view substitutes a book for God. Indeed, he specifically complains of 'Calvinists' who argue 'that the encounter with the text ... brings an immediacy of God's revelation which brings an immediacy of God Himself'.<sup>129</sup> Emphatically this is not 'the high view of Scripture' it claims but 'bibliolatry' because 'because the encounter with the text of Scripture is equated to an encounter with God Himself'.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, in limiting revelation to the Bible, the conservative Evangelical isolates himself from vast tracts of God's activity in time and space, and discards the Spirit's present dealings with the believer to spiritual irrelevancy. On exactly the same grounds this whole perception falls foul of Forster's Christology. Christ is not the only the bread which came down from heaven, *but continues to come down and be given for the life of the*

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<sup>126</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17. Added emphasis.

<sup>127</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1983), pp. 99-100. Added emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> 'We have got to assert ... that we believe the Scripture contains propositional truth. This has often been the dividing line between evangelicals and pseudo-evangelicals'. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 72. He continues, 'I have noticed over the years that is one of the first points that indicates a departure from an evangelical position when men begin to object to, and to reject, propositional truth, as Karl Barth did and most of his followers still do. But we claim that in the Bible there are propositions, truths stated in propositional form ... We have got to assert this element of propositional truth'.

<sup>129</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

world.<sup>131</sup> Jesus Christ Himself is the life of the Word, not the text of the Bible.

While not denying the reality of God's dealings with His people through history, or the truth that each believer has his own personal relationship with God, the Evangelical would deny, and strenuously, that such experiences are in any sense authoritative. Thus the focus of contention does not concern the issue of Christian experience, but the authority these experiences represent. Where Lloyd-Jones - whose teaching is if anything more experiential than Forster's - derives his understanding of experience in the light of the Scriptures, Forster, it seems brings experience as a light to the Scriptures. If it can not be said with certainty that Forster gives priority to the Word over experience, it is none the less clear that he does not follow the Evangelical construct of giving absolute precedence to the Word over experience.

Continuing with this issue of authority, Forster shows himself to be both aware of the contention, and willing to argue plainly that the Holy Spirit in the believer is authoritative. His rationale? That since the believer must draw on the Spirit to be persuaded of the veracity of Scripture in the first place, it is thereby conceded that the Spirit is paramount over the written word.

Nevertheless, we have also seen that Forster understands that the Spirit works in a manner that is thoroughly consistent with the principles of reason. Indeed, the believer can only be sure that he has encountered God if the experience can be verified by the four fold criteria of: consistency; coherence; comprehensiveness; and congruity.<sup>132</sup> In other words, the believer's latest experience of God must be consistent, coherent, comprehensive and congruous to previous such experiences if it is to be accepted as genuine. This whole process, however, is itself predicated on certain assumptions, namely, those pertaining to: (1) the veracity of the human mind; (2) its ability to rightly apprehend ideas; and (3) its competence to synthesise true conclusions from external data. Both as epistemic and anthropological principles they differ from the Evangelical distinction between spiritual and natural knowledge on the one hand,<sup>133</sup> and the inviolable separation of the regenerate from the unregenerate

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<sup>131</sup> As we have seen, this is how Forster interprets the Greek text of John 6:51.

<sup>132</sup> Forster and Marston, *Reason and Faith*, p. 257.

<sup>133</sup> The Evangelical distinction between spiritual and natural knowledge is predicated in

mind on the other. Forster's view of the paramount position of the Spirit *vis-à-vis* the Bible thereby becomes indivisible from the paramount position of reason *vis-à-vis* the Bible. Put bluntly, 'If we can not rely on ... [reason] to bring us to conclusions then we have no hope at all in thinking.'<sup>134</sup>

A particularly significant comment in this respect is Forster's admission that reason itself finally rests on analogy.<sup>135</sup> To the conservative Evangelical this not only yields too much to natural theology, but becomes the back door to denying the supreme authority of Scripture, making it secondary to human philosophy.

A good practical expression of these differences is found in their respective understanding of Scripture and the nature of God's wrath against sin. We have already seen that Forster rejects the Evangelical idea that this wrath is of a personal or retributive nature, largely on account of his understanding of the Fatherhood of God. Lloyd-Jones' analysis of the logic behind such an interpretation is revealing on account of its accusation that it is not an issue of biblical interpretation, but of bringing what he calls 'philosophy' to bear in the exegesis of Scripture. Referring to Ephesians 2:3, 'we were, by nature, children of wrath even as others,' he comments:

Well, here it is for us—and, as I have said, there is no clearer statement of it [God's wrath] anywhere in the Scripture. Why then the confusion? The confusion often arises because people turn these great statements of the apostle into matters of controversy. And they do that because they will insist on bringing in their philosophy, by which I mean their own ideas. Instead of taking the plain statements of the apostle they say: But I cannot see this. If that is so, then I do not understand how God can be a God of love. In other words, they begin philosophising, and, of course, the moment you do that you are bound to be in trouble. We either accept the Scriptures as our only foundation, or else we do not. Many say that they do accept them but then they bring in their inability to understand. Now the moment you do that you have left the Scriptures and you are introducing your own ability, your own understanding, and your own theories

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the distinction between the unregenerate and regenerate humanity, itself dependent on the doctrines of original sin and constitutional depravity.

<sup>134</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17. Added emphasis. The following point by Charles Finney is under-girded by the same logic: 'If reason ... cannot be safely appealed to, how are we to know what the Bible means? For, it is the only faculty by which we get at the truth of the oracles of God'. Finney, *Systematic Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), p. 171.

<sup>135</sup> 'All argument in the end is by analogy'. Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 14.

and ideas.<sup>136</sup>

It is relevant to note that Forster's use of reason as an instrument of Christian hermeneutics is acknowledged in *Reason and Faith* as being indebted to Bacon, Descartes, and by implication Scottish Realism or 'Common Sense Philosophy'. Given Forster's criticisms of Hellenic philosophy, it is ironic to note that Scottish Realism itself is argued by conservative Evangelicals to derive from 'that father of all common sense philosophies, Aristotle, and his mediaeval champion, St. Thomas'.<sup>137</sup> Without question - as Forster observes - Scottish Realism successfully faced down the scepticism and deism of its generation. Its assertions concerning the reliability of the senses, the rationality of man, and the presence in the world of certain self-evident truths<sup>138</sup> provided the platform for a gospel apologetic, and 'theologians quickly and widely perceived'<sup>139</sup> it as an 'answer to a prayer', 'a winning combination'<sup>140</sup> of theology and philosophy, religion and science. However, in the view Evangelical scholars, its enthusiastic adoption was to the eventual detriment of the very orthodoxy it was seeking to defend, and indeed resulted in an 'Augustan Age' for Unitarianism.<sup>141</sup> As Mark Noll points out, such was the rush to embrace Bacon 'that

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<sup>136</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God's way of Reconciliation*, p. 129.

<sup>137</sup> Thus, the renowned American scholar, Sydney Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology', *Church History* 24 (1955), pp 257-272 at p. 259.

<sup>138</sup> More particularly Thomas Reid proposes the following:

1. Philosophy depends on scientific observation, with the primary object of such observation being self-consciousness and not the external behaviour of other men.
2. The observation of consciousness establishes principles which are anterior to and independent of exercise.
3. Nothing can be the efficient cause in the proper sense but an intelligent being.
4. The first principles of morals are self-evident intuitions.

Reid, *Active Powers*, Essay 5:7.

<sup>139</sup> C. Leonard Allen, 'Baconianism and the Bible', *Church History* 55 (1986), pp.65-80 at p. 66.

<sup>140</sup> Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology', *Church History* 24 (1955), p. 268.

<sup>141</sup> H. E. Runner calls it 'a fatal synthesis'. Cited in Sydney Rooy *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 302. Samuel Baird argues that this synthesis of Enlightenment thought and Evangelical orthodoxy was to the latter's undoing. Samuel Baird, *A History of the New School and Questions Involved in the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church in 1833* (New York: 1868), p. 167f. William McLoughlin insists that it produced a theology so unorthodox that could hardly be recognised by its predecessors. William McLoughlin, (ed.), *The American Evangelicals 1800-1900: An Anthology* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1968), pp. 6f.

little serious consideration was given to whether the Baconian idea of truth was the Christian idea of truth'.<sup>142</sup> Thus while Evangelicals may have rapidly embraced Baconianism in the eighteenth century (and it has to be remembered it was mostly American Evangelicals that were doing the embracing),<sup>143</sup> they were abandoning it as rapidly in the nineteenth:

After 1860 the Protestant gospel based on the harmonious interrelationship of the Bible, natural science, and morality began to weaken and crack under the impact of Darwinianism and a changing cultural climate.<sup>144</sup>

As a consequence, there was 'a down grading of natural theology' by those very same Evangelicals who 'had previously delighted in the scientific arguments that defended

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'By the middle of the nineteenth century', says Ahlstrom, 'orthodox theology lost its Reformation bearings; 'the Augustinian strain of piety' suffered. The belief that Christianity had a proclamation to declare lost its vitality. Park hemmed-in the Scriptures with so many criteria of interpretation that they came to be only an external support to his theological system. And for Hodge doctrine became less a living language of piety than a complex burden to be borne'.

'The forces leading to this result were manifold—many of them not philosophical at all - but three contributions of the Scottish Philosophy are salient. The first is attributable to the humanistic orientation of the Hutchinson Reid tradition. As this philosophy was adopted the orthodoxy which it was intended to reinstate, was sacrificed and a new principle of doctrinal interpretation was increasingly emphasised. Self-consciousness became the oracle of religious truth. Man's need rather than God's Word became the guide in doctrinal formulation. Flowing from this first reorientation was a second. The adoption of the benign and optimistic anthropology of the Scottish Moderates by American Calvinists veiled the very insights into human nature which were a chief strength of Calvin's theology. This revision, in turn, fused the totality with a new spirit. In a third and more general way, Scottish Realism accelerated the long trend toward rational theology; which had developed, especially in England, during and after the long Deistic controversy. Combined as it was with an all too facile dismissal of Hume's critique, Reid's influence on subsequent thinkers in the Scottish tradition served to reinforce the prestige of thinkers like Locke, Butler, and Paley, who were reinterpreted in accordance with the typical Scottish emphasis. There resulted a neo-rationalism which rendered the central Christian paradoxes into stark, logical contradictions that had either to be disguised or explained away. Reformed theology was thus emptied of its most dynamic element. A kind of rationalistic rigor mortis set in'. Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology', *Church History* 24, (1955), pp. 268-269.

<sup>142</sup> Mark Noll, 'Who sets the stage for understanding Scripture?', *Christianity Today*, v.24, May 23, 1980, p. 17.

<sup>143</sup> A of point which Forster seems either unaware, or just fails to acknowledge.

<sup>144</sup> C. Leonard Allen, 'Baconianism and the Bible', *Church History* 55 (1986), p. 77.

the faith on the basis of Newtonian cosmology'.<sup>145</sup>

### *Original Sin*

Both the Evangelical and Forster are agreed that the immediate necessity of salvation by God in Christ lies in the Fall of man. In explaining the nature of that Fall, however, the differences could hardly be greater. Forster deliberately and forcefully rejects the very thing that Evangelicals are most keen to affirm, the Augustinian notion of Original Sin - the understanding that on account of Adam's sin his posterity 'have no choice but to sin. We are made that way',<sup>146</sup> or as Lloyd-Jones phrases it, 'we all inherit a sinful, depraved and polluted nature from Adam'.<sup>147</sup> In contradistinction Forster believes that when Adam committed the first sin in human consciousness, he opened the 'door' of this world to ruthless occupation by demonic anti-God, anti-human forces. Adam is still the key in understanding the human predicament, but while one believes that 'in him we are all ruined', the other understands that 'because of him the cosmos around us is ruined'. The first defines the Fall in terms of the inward corruption of the human race (man's heart), the second, in terms of the world in which humans live (man's home).

The Evangelical and Forster agree that sin universally effects the destruction of true humanity, but whereas the former interprets this as an hereditary part of our nature akin to the colour of our eyes, Forster argues that it is a reality which only exists on a voluntary, and thereby, individual basis. Each person by deliberate choice succumbs to the power and destruction of sin, and consequently moves away from the sonship for which he was created.

Despite this high view of human ability, it is quite apparent that within Forster's schema the explanation for the cosmic consequences of sin lies with the activities of the demonic realm rather than man himself. Thus, where the Evangelical - though acknowledging sin to be an involuntary part of the human condition - emphasises human responsibility, Forster - who finds sin to be voluntary - emphasises

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<sup>145</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Hyman Press, 1989), p. 91.

<sup>146</sup> Forster, 'Roots and Shoots: the influence of Augustine', *Celebration*, June 1991, p. 9.

<sup>147</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance: Studies in Romans 5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), pp.

human captivity to the kingdom of darkness. The 'supernatural, spiritual, authority structures of this universe', he says, have been occupied by Sin (*sic*). Man is now under 'easy control'.<sup>148</sup> Many social evils, as well as personal ones, have their most significant explanation in this infiltration. Where, therefore, the Evangelical accounts for the misery and sad state of the world in man's universal sinfulness and the depths of inherent human corruption - which itself is accounted for in the fall of one man, Adam<sup>149</sup> - Forster accounts for it in terms of demonic terrorism, to wit, there is an immediate and direct corollary between this world and the chaotic spiritual forces behind it.

As a direct concomitant, salvation begins not in directly tackling man's choice to sin, but in dealing with the spiritual forces which blind and binds each member of the human race. The first work of the Cross was to disarm these powers and to make a show of them. That having been done, it is the task of those set free from the power and authority of these forces to bring this liberty to others. In this context two other differences to the Evangelical position are observed. Firstly, where the latter emphasises Christ's victory over Satan, Forster emphasises the victory yet to come. Secondly, where the Evangelical believer interprets spiritual warfare as to preach the gospel and live a holy life, Forster's engages in direct warfare against the principalities and powers.

Further to Forster's doctrine of the Fall, he not only rejects the Evangelical notion that sin in man is a foregone conclusion owing to his constitutional nature - we sin because we are born sinners - but strongly asserts that *each human being reaches a* decided point in their lives where they make a clear and intentional choice to rebel against God. It is at this point that Forster's teaching on hamartiology, human responsibility and the innate clarity of human cognisance are most keenly observed. It seems that every human being has his own moment of temptation with the 'forbidden

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205, 207, 209.

<sup>148</sup> Forster, 'The Power Working Within Us', *Daily Bread* April-June 1985 (Bromley: Scripture Union Press), p. 38.

<sup>149</sup> Lloyd-Jones asks, 'Think of all the misery and unhappiness, the moral breakdown, thieving, robbery, murders, divorce, separation, all these things. Why is it like that? And why has it always been like that? ... The apostle Paul answer the question here (Romans 5:12f). He says it all results from Adam, that it is all tied up with what Adam did, and our relationship with him'. Lloyd-Jones, *Assurance: Studies in Romans 5*, p. 178.

fruit'. 'Sin ... is part of the constitution of the universe that I am born into, but I let it get into my being by an act.'<sup>150</sup> In other words, where the Evangelical accounts for human misery and sin in the terms of a universal principle - Original Sin - Forster accounts for it in terms of personal decision - specifically our choice to rebel. At this point we realise that an underlying philosophy in Forster's understanding of sin is that ability becomes the absolute measure of obligation. In other words, a just God will not hold sinners under obligation unless they have a corresponding ability. It is this view that significantly accounts for Forster's rejection of the radical and inveterate nature of sin as it is understood among Evangelicals.

Forster's biblical defence of this idea centres on Romans 7. In what is generally accepted as Paul's autobiographical experience with sin, what Evangelicals generally interpret as the apostle's existential realisation of his own depravity in the light of God's law,<sup>151</sup> is understood by Forster as the recollection of a deliberate choice to

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<sup>150</sup> Forster, 'What is Man?' unpublished paper, n.d., p. 10.

<sup>151</sup> Thus Lloyd-Jones commenting on Paul's words 'I died' makes the following observation:

'This man who was so much alive now dies. It is, as I have said, the same sort of relative terminology; but it is important that we should be clear as to what exactly he means when he says that he 'died'. It is the result of the coming of the law. He does not mean here, primarily, that he was aware of his condemnation. That is true, of course; he died in the sense that he saw that the law condemned him before God; but that is not what he is emphasising here. Here he is dealing with his case in a much more experimental and practical way. What he means is, that he was now the opposite of what he was when he was "alive". Clearly the parallelism demands that. So we interpret "I died" by "I was alive" and it means that he died in the sense in which we read of certain characters in the Bible that when they heard certain things it had a terrifying effect upon them. Of Nabal, for example, we read that when he heard certain statement he "became as one dead", even though he remained alive physically. We say "I was petrified", or "It almost killed me". That is what Paul means - "I became as a dead man".' Lloyd-Jones, *The Law: Studies in Romans 7:1-8:4* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth: 1973). p. 140.

Leon Morris expounds the passage in a very similar manner:

'Then, Paul says, *sin sprang to life and I died*. Sin was there but dormant. When the commandment came home to him, it was no longer possible to overlook its existence. Paul puts this vividly "sin sprang to life". Now he could not but see himself as a sinner, condemned before God. The result was death. L.B. translates "... a sinner, doomed to die". But Paul does not say "was doomed to die", but "I died" (cf. v.24). When the commandment 'came' it killed forever the proud Pharisee thanking God that he was not like other men and sure of his merits before God. It killed off the happy sinner, for it showed him the seriousness, not so much of sin in general as of his own sin. The "coming" of the law in that sense always kills off our cheerful assumption of innocence. We see ourselves for what we really are, sinners,



violate God's command. The difference between the two interpretations could not be more different. Where the Evangelical portrays the human condition as the reality that the sinner comes to realise, Forster presents it as a responsibility he comes to own. 'I am sin', is replaced by 'I chose to sin'.

Forster interprets Genesis 4:8 in a manner which complements and thus supports this understanding. Cain's moment of crisis with sin anticipates everyone else's, including Paul's. As God says to Cain, 'sin is ~~couching~~<sup>crouching</sup> at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it',<sup>152</sup> (RSV), so He says to us all. Forster concludes his argument by appealing to his hearers' experience, clearly expecting that it will be exactly the same as his own: 'We know when we sin - I can remember one of my first sins as clear as a bell - we know that we don't have to give into it.'<sup>153</sup>

Having expressed so intensely the voluntaristic nature of sin, how does Forster in this context understand God's relationship to the sinner? In Evangelicalism, both God's wrath and judgement against him are highlighted - despite the fact that most of these same Evangelicals understand sin as an involuntary part of the human constitution with which we are born. We would expect, perhaps, Forster with his profound emphasis on free will to 'stoke up the fires of hell', rather like Charles G. Finney, who predates Forster's voluntary and non-constitutional view of sin, and powerfully used it to underscore the deserved retribution of God upon his creatures who so wilfully and intentionally defy His authority.<sup>154</sup> Yet Forster does not follow this path. It is not just that Forster consistently maintains the priority of his Fatherhood paradigm, but more. To it he has wedded a certain anthropology that highlights man's place as a victim in the grand scheme of things. Humanity is as a

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and we die. This is not the death 'to sin' of which Paul wrote earlier (6:2, *etc.*). That is saving death, a death we die in our union with Christ, a death that frees from our bondage to sin. Here the thought is rather that to realise that we are not good and decent people in God's sight is a death. It marks the end of self confidence, self satisfaction, self reliance. It is death.' Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 282.

<sup>152</sup> Forster, 'Original Sin,' sermon transcript, p. 9.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* Added emphasis.

<sup>154</sup> On this count, Finney has, in fact, been criticised for being 'too powerful' in his preaching. In his unpublished MA thesis, 'Supportive and Coercive Influence in the Revivalism of Charles G. Finney', Gary M. Scharff concludes that Finney's revivalism clearly contains many elements of the 'coercive' and 'totalitarian'. (GTU, Berkeley, California, 1986) p. 146.

child that has erred, and consequently does not evoke justice and judgement (in the sense these terms are used by Evangelicals) but rather yearning sympathy from the Father. Quite simply the consequences of disobedience are eclipsed by God's desire for restored relationship and renewed filial intercourse on the one hand, and His understanding of the human tragedy on the other.

### The Evangelical and Forster: Doctrines of the Atonement Compared

<i>School of Thought:</i>	<b>The Evangelical</b>	<b>Roger Forster</b>
<i>Paradigm:</i>	Divine Sovereignty	Theistic Dualism
<i>Theological Foundation:</i>	Legal	Ethical
<i>Context of Atonement:</i>	The Righteousness of God The Transgression of Humanity The Judgement of God	The Fatherhood of God The Fall of the Cosmos The Judgement of Sin
<i>Elements in Atonement:</i>	Objective, to wit, Substitution Satisfaction Sufficiency	Subjective, to wit, Incarnation Identification Revelation
<i>Application of Atonement:</i>	Justification by Faith Alone	Justification by Works
<i>The New Birth:</i>	Regeneration	Ontic Realignment

Turning our attention to the respective doctrines of Atonement held by the conservative Evangelical on the one hand, and Forster on the other, it has to be said that neither in context, nor in substantive construct, nor in application, do the two interpretations of the Atonement bear much resemblance to one another.

We begin by comparing the theological contexts or world-views against which the respective views are developed. Forster's backdrop is first and foremost moral and ontological: that it is inherent to the nature of things (and not God's special action in

Christ) that good eventually triumphs over evil; that those beings who are good become more alive; that those who are evil slip away into non-existence. In Evangelicalism the underlying theological context is the doctrine of *fi* God: God's sovereign rule and reign over creation.

These interpretations are inseparable from differing understandings of God's Person, and from His standing or relationship to the creation. Does God stand as Father of all, who organises His family after the principle of consent, or as the Sovereign deity who rules the universe by divine fiat? Is God's governance contingent or absolute? The emphasis given to the first tends to be ethical, to the second, legal. These fundamental issues obviously have a great impact on what follows. To Forster, *God is Father*; His relationship to the creature is passible<sup>155</sup> and paternal; His activity is defined by seeking to reconcile the children of God with Himself. To the Evangelical *God is God*: impassible, inscrutable and transcendent; omniscient and omnipotent; merciful and just; and whose activities are determined by the manifestation of His glory.

These differences touch on the heart of the Christian message. The Evangelical would argue that to proclaim to the sinner that God is his Father - let alone emphasise the fact - is not only inappropriate, but also untrue. It is inappropriate because the thought of the divine Fatherhood will only reinforce in the sinner his spiritual complacency; rather, he needs to be woken up to the fact that God is not his Father, and urgently needs to 'flee from the wrath to come.' (Matthew 3:7). It is untrue, because by nature man is the child of wrath, not of God. Conversely, Forster would argue, to emphasise the majesty and justice of God is inadequate and in failing to represent the gospel message, hides the truth, and thus does not meet man in his need. The sinner is already aware of the transcendence of God; what he needs to understand is the paternal spirit of God towards men since it is 'the kindness of God that leads us to repentance' (Romans 2:4).

Concerning what has been identified as 'the context of Atonement' Forster's priorities are clear: the Fatherhood of God; the fall of the cosmos; and the inevitable self destruction of sin. The first speaks of sons who need to be reconciled to their

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<sup>155</sup> In the sense of: 'Susceptible of feeling or suffering, or of impressions from external

heavenly Father; the second of worlds to be recovered (the heavenly realms); the third of an ontological disaster that needs to be averted (annihilation).

The comparable three emphases of the Evangelical are decidedly forensic: the righteousness of God; the transgression of man; the judgement of God. The first points to an honour - or inherent moral integrity - that has been impugned (God's Person); the second to a law that has been violated (God's law); the third of a justice that needs to be exercised (God's judgement).

Connected with this are considerable differences in understanding the Fall, and in turn, the nature of sin. Where Forster focuses upon sin's effect on the moral fabric of the universe - the opposition of principalities and powers to man's salvation - the Evangelical's chief concern is its effect upon the human heart - the resistance of man to his own salvation. Evangelicals are agreed that where Christianity is at a low ebb, it is on account of man's unwillingness to believe, not a failure to 'bind' principalities and powers. It is not a question that the Evangelical denies the schemes of the devil, nor indeed avoids confronting them (quite the reverse), but the emphasis placed on this aspect of Christian living is profoundly less decided than in Forster, and it's understanding wholly different.

Furthermore, the Evangelical disagrees with Forster in accounting for the general effect of sin on the world, disease, poverty, disasters, and so on. Where the latter insists that these are the result of some innate quality (sin brings its own consequences, which are amplified and manipulated by principalities and powers), the Evangelical often finds the direct judgement and active intervention of God.

More importantly the judgement of the creation is in itself an anticipation of the judgement of the creature. As we have seen, it is difficult to exaggerate either the importance or the prominence given by Evangelicals to the doctrine of God's wrath and judgement. Thus Forster's idea that sin's own inherent consequences marks the sinner's judgement, is found to contrast with the Evangelical view that sin directly invokes the retributive justice of God. The first sees God as a passive observer, grieving over the sinner who reaps the consequences of 'playing with fire', the second, God as the fount of all justice who must punish those who break the divine

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agents'. *Webster's Dictionary*.

law.

Connected with this are important differences in anthropology. In Forster, mankind's culpability for sin is directly related to his ability not to sin. This *a priori* excludes the concepts of original guilt and constitutional depravity. For the Evangelical inability rather than becoming the basis for denying human responsibility and guilt is used both to amplify them, and draws attention to the full horror of sin and God's judgement of it. Finally, where in Forster sin is understood to have forfeited man of his fellowship with God but not affected his status as a child of God, the Evangelical insists that sin has cost man his status as well as his fellowship. Again this is intended to amplify the seriousness of sin.

Concerning the understanding of the substantive elements of the Atonement in Christ Forster sees them as subjective - identification and revelation. This in contrast to the Evangelical, for whom the greatness of the act is objective: a substitution and satisfaction for sin. If to Forster, Fatherhood is the context of the Atonement, to the Evangelical it is the goal. To Lloyd-Jones, Packer, Stott, *et al.*, Christ died that 'children of wrath' may become children of God. Redemption was not undertaken that sinners may realise they are already sons, but that they might be made sons, through faith. Says Stott, the 'judge has become our Father', decidedly a 'unique privilege of the person who has been born anew'.<sup>156</sup>

More fundamentally the Evangelical rejects Forster's underlying theological premise - that the Christian's understanding of 'God' should be predicated upon one person of the Trinity, the Father. Rather, the term 'God' should be allowed to stand as an all-inclusive term, thereby allowing the essential unity or oneness of God to stand alone, and outside the three persons. In this manner Fatherhood is recognised as one person of the Godhead, part of the Trinity, not the definition by which all the attributes of deity are understood.

Forster's excision of the Evangelical concepts of substitution and satisfaction and their replacement by 'identification' represents not only the most obvious difference with the Evangelical doctrine of Atonement, but as far as the particularities

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<sup>156</sup> Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p. 131. Added emphasis.

of Christ's work are concerned, the most substantive. Supreme empathy between God and man, and man and God, as experienced in Christ replaces the teaching that Christ stood as head of the race, bearing the punishment due to sin and so satisfying the wrath of God. Again, whereas in the latter, the paradigm is legal and forensic, and speaks of Christ paying the penalty of sin, *vis-à-vis* the Divine law, the former is ethical - part of an ontological-teleological continuum - and addresses itself to changing the heart of the creature. Thus the subjective rather than the objective becomes the focus for the effectual element in Christ's work.

This touches on the very power of God in redemption. Within the Evangelical framework that power is distinctly and indeed solely found in God. As to its nature, in part it is legal (God as judge declares us not guilty), and in part divine omnipotence (God as creator makes us new). None of this is based merely on the divine fiat, but follows from the work of Christ, and God in Him. Since Christ has retrospectively satisfied the demands of justice towards sinners, and has kept the law as pertaining to positive righteousness, the law of God now effectually demands their justification. Since Christ is also the head of the race, those who are now found in Him, derive a nature through regeneration as true and as righteous as Christ Himself is true and righteous, and that more inevitable and effectual than the old man derived a sinful and corrupt nature from Adam.

This whole paradigm is completely replaced in Forster with the imperatives of moral agency. The meaning of this term is perhaps best attained as we compare what might be called the 'heavenward' application of Christ's Atonement. Within the Evangelical framework 'heavenward' is distinctly God-ward: the Cross first and foremost satisfies the wrath of God. The divine justice having now been met, God is free to forgive sinners. In Forster, the 'heavenward' is the heavenly realms, that is the principalities and powers that reside there: these are now bound that man might be free to accept God's forgiveness.

Revelation, the final element and the vehicle of application in Forster's schema, must be understood to replace the New Birth of the Evangelical. The instantaneous and creative act of God (rooted in an objective Atonement) which inevitably creates repentance and faith gives way to the divinely orchestrated discovery (rooted in a subjective experience of the Atonement) that 'God loves me', raising the question,

'Will I respond appropriately and love Him, and thus be saved?' Forster still believes in a new birth, but it is redefined into a natural ontological process, analogous, if not altogether synonymous with, moral renovation that itself subsumes the principles of faith and repentance. The latter are interpreted as vehicles of the actual righteousness necessary for justification

The Evangelical understanding of the definition, relationship and distinction between justification and sanctification is thus profoundly changed. Justification is still there, it is still by grace, and it still means to 'declare just,' but now in such a way that is practicably indistinguishable from 'making just' since it is based on the presence of an actual righteousness, Christ *in nobis*, and therefore *de facto* follows on from sanctification. In effect then, 'God justifies the godly'. This is not to question Forster's belief in Romans 4:5, that 'God justifies the ungodly,' but clearly shows that his interpretation of it, and most especially his understanding of 'to justify' is decidedly removed from the Evangelical view.

Revelation in turn, as the application of the Atonement in the Forsterian *schema*, first of all continues this redefinition of 'repentance and faith', which themselves prove finally inseparable from 'sanctification' and thence 'justification'; and secondly denies the sufficiency of the Atonement in its objective dimension as it is understood by Evangelicals. Most decidedly, therefore, the believer is not justified by Christ, or by His blood. Forster would be happy to use the terms, however. It is just that by them he means that a man is made righteous and from thence acknowledged righteous ('justified') on account of the fact that Christ has, through powerful moral persuasion mediated by the Holy Spirit in the Church through wonders, works and words, inspired him to change.

It is this redefinition that reveals Forster's understanding that justification is by the works of faith, and not faith alone. The latter, he points out, is flatly contradicted, and his own interpretation is clearly affirmed, by Scripture. 'You see', says James drawing from the lives of Abraham and Rahab, 'that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone'. James 2:24 (RSV). Forster also quotes from the writers of the early Church, including one<sup>of</sup> the earliest, Clement, who with James affirms somewhere

about AD 98 that Rahab was saved by 'faith and hospitality'.<sup>157</sup> Now where Forster quotes Clement, Evangelicals quote Luther;<sup>158</sup> and where the former looks to James, the latter look to Paul, whose 'favourite expression', Stott tells us, is 'justified by faith'.<sup>159</sup> It is not the task of this chapter to adjudicate such differences; rather, to show that beyond doubt Forster's understanding of the Atonement, as well as its context and application, is decidedly different from the conservative Evangelical view.

### The Evangelical and Forster: Church History

Respecting their relationship to Church history, one of the most confident, and indeed now obvious conclusions that can be made concerning Forster and the conservative Evangelical, is the contrary nature of their respective historical allegiances; a difference which has Augustine of Hippo as its focus. Where Evangelicals find appreciation for Augustine's insights into grace, the nature of sin and the fallenness of the human will, Forster discerns the sinister and apostatising influences of Hellenic culture, resulting in the corruption not only of the biblical view of man, but more profoundly of theology proper. The Roman concept of *lex* with its dark and slavish notions of God is said to replace the biblical paradigm. Conversely, Forster looks to Pelagius and the pre-Augustinian era not only for the true understanding that sin is a voluntary act made by beings capable of behaving in a contrary manner, but for a rediscovery of the true nature and character of deity as Father. From this juncture Forster and the Evangelical generally follow two separate and often opposing streams within Western Christendom.

Our examination has shown that this dichotomy appears to be evident at every level of theological consideration: from foundations in Christian thought,<sup>160</sup> to

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<sup>157</sup> Clement's first epistle to the Corinthians, quoted in Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy*, p. 207.

<sup>158</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 185.

<sup>159</sup> Romans 3:28; 5:1. Galatians 2:16 and Philipians 3:9. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 190.

<sup>160</sup> By 'foundations in Christian thought' our allusion most importantly is to considerations of epistemology. Forster's appreciation of Baconian philosophy and its evolution through Scottish Realism cannot be divorced from an implicit appreciation of Aquinas, Natural Theology and reason. The conservative Evangelical is mostly hostile to these, preferring instead the general school of thought associated with, the Magisterial Reformers, Anselm and Augustine, for whom 'understanding is the reward of faith':



principles in soteriology, to specific doctrines of the Atonement. Concerning the latter, where the Evangelical looks to Anselm to provide an understanding of Christ's atoning work as a substitution and satisfaction for sin made to the justice of God, Forster synthesises Abelard with Aulén to define the work of Christ in terms of a moral force that defeats principalities and powers, and provides the opportunity for man to be forgiven and reconciled to a Father's heart. Where the Evangelical finds in the Reformation - the teachings of Luther and Calvin in particular - a great rediscovery of the principle of grace, and more specifically the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Forster finds a further obfuscation of Christian truth that awaits the arrival of the nineteenth century to bring a restoration of the early Church teaching that salvation is by the works of faith.

This divergence becomes all the more apparent in examining Forster's substantive sources - especially those for his doctrine of the Atonement. Few if any of these belong to the conservative Evangelical tradition, and perhaps more pertinently, few would consider such association a compliment. George MacDonald found himself unable to accept the orthodoxy of the day, namely the Calvinism of his native Scotland, and eventually was ejected by his own congregation on this account.<sup>161</sup> C. S. Lewis, as Lloyd-Jones points out, 'though almost a patron saint of Evangelicals ... was never an Evangelical and said so quite plainly himself'.<sup>162</sup> Illustrative here is Lewis' refusal to accept the fundamental Evangelical distinction between 'saved' and lost', arguing rather that the world at any one moment in time is composed of those who are becoming Christians, and those Christians who are gradually ceasing to be so.<sup>163</sup>

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'Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand' (Augustine). George Mnedelking, 'The Problem of Knowledge and Christian Faith' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, GTU, Berkeley, April, 1941).

<sup>161</sup> Jeffrey Strobel devotes a section of his thesis illustrating MacDonald's attitude towards the Calvinistic orthodoxy of his native Scotland. Indicative in this respect is Robert Falconer who duly murmurs over a volume of Thomas Boston, 'it is good for nothing but to ... furnish fuel'. Strobel, 'Easy to Please, Hard to Satisfy: The Historical Context of the Literature of George MacDonald' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California. January 1987), pp. 20f.

<sup>162</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?*, p. 25. Added emphasis.

<sup>163</sup> 'The world does not consist of 100 per cent Christians and 100 per cent non-Christians. There are people (a great many of them) who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name: some of them are clergymen. There are other people who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so. There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about

In turn, a number of Lewis' views are indebted to Scottish Moderatism; not least in this respect his understanding of vicarious repentance, which owes much to McLeod Campbell *via* the influences of R. C. Moberly.<sup>164</sup> To the conservative Evangelical Scotsman, few names are likely to evoke a more hostile reaction than that of Campbell, who as one critic points out, not only 'broke away from the mysteries of the Evangelical Faith', but consumed himself with 'fervid hyper-evangelism' that left not 'even the ashes of the Evangelical faith behind'.<sup>165</sup> Methodist John Scott Lidgett, whose teaching especially as set forth in his *Spiritual Principle of the Atonement* provoked strong opposition, stirred a similar spirit in England. 'I was threatened', says Lidgett, 'by what is commonly called a "heresy hunt" ',<sup>166</sup> - a charge subsequently upheld by the President of the Methodist Conference, Dr. Marshall Randles.<sup>167</sup> F. D. Maurice, one of Lidgett's mentors,<sup>168</sup> was decidedly in the schools of the English Romanticism (Coleridge) and Scottish Moderatism (Erskine),<sup>169</sup> and was accused of 'corrupting Evangelical truth with the infiltration of a cloudy neo-Platonic mixture of rationalism and mysticism',<sup>170</sup> one critic going as far as to stigmatise him as 'Platonism in gown and cassock'.<sup>171</sup> Another nineteenth century figure, James Denney, is accused by Lloyd-Jones of a 'deficient view of Scripture',<sup>172</sup> which one

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Christ but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand'. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 176.

<sup>164</sup> Lewis, 'The Perfect Penitent', in *Mere Christianity*, pp. 56-61. 'Lewis .. used Moberly's nomenclature ... The echo of Moberly in Lewis is obvious'. Christian D. Kettler, 'The Vicarious Repentance of Christ in the Theology of John McLeod Campbell and R. C. Moberly', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985), pp. 529-543 at p. 529.

<sup>165</sup> John MacLeod former Principal of Free Church College, Edinburgh. John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1943), p. 258.

<sup>166</sup> Lidgett quoted in, R. E. Davis (ed.), *John Scott Lidgett - A Symposium*, p. 81.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Thus Gardener, 'Lidgett's theology of the "Fatherhood of God" is almost entirely derived from Maurice'. E. Clinton Gardener, 'Horace Bushnell's Doctrine of Depravity', *Theology Today* 12 (1955). pp. 10-26 at p. 10.

<sup>169</sup> This is the argument of a number of academics including the Dutch theologian, Hendrikus Berkhof in his *Two Hundred Years of Theology: report of a personal journey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 87f., and John Hunt, *Religious Thought in England: in the nineteenth century* (London: Gibbings, 1996), pp. 190f.

<sup>170</sup> R. E. Davis, (ed.), *John Scott Lidgett - A Symposium*, p. 85.

<sup>171</sup> J. H. Rigg, cited in Bernard Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore: a century of religious thought in Britain* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 168.

<sup>172</sup> Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: the first forty years* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 286.

Evangelical explains meant 'placing Scripture and experience alongside each other as the source of doctrine',<sup>173</sup>

In the twentieth century there are Evangelical suspicions concerning the Christology of D. M. Baillie and Gutaf Aulén, the former accused of adoptionism,<sup>174</sup> the latter of docetism,<sup>175</sup> as well as 'widespread criticism' of Aulén's 'oversimplification of the Western tradition',<sup>176</sup> his 'remarkable failure' to examine justification by faith,<sup>177</sup> the 'inaccuracy' 'of some of his central statements',<sup>178</sup> and other 'evident' 'serious flaws'.<sup>179</sup> Complaints have been made against Baillie's view that he denies the *finished* work of Christ.<sup>180</sup> Moving into the twenty-first century are the controversies surrounding Clark Pinnock *et al.*, and their teaching on the 'openness of God'.<sup>181</sup> This is an interpretation that Forster anticipated, and which is notable for its distinctly non-Evangelical opinion that the traditional doctrine of God needs 'de-Hellenising'.

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<sup>173</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), p. 207.

<sup>174</sup> Thus John H. Hick, 'D. M. Baillie's theory does not perform the central Christological task of giving meaning to the dogma of the deity of Christ'. 'The Christology of D. M. Baillie', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4, (1950), pp. 1-12 at p. 11.

<sup>175</sup> George Evenson, 'A Critique of Aulén's *Christus Victor*', *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (1957), p. 741.

<sup>176</sup> Colin Gunton notes these in his '*Christus Victor* Revisited. A study in metaphor and the transformation of meaning', *Journal of Theological Studies* 38 (1985), p. 130.

<sup>177</sup> A failure noted in the light of Aulén's claim to be following Luther. George Evenson, 'A Critique of Aulén's *Christus Victor*', *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (1957), p. 743.

<sup>178</sup> Ronald Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), p. 119.

<sup>179</sup> Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 162.

<sup>180</sup> Wallace therefore criticises Baillie's view that Christ's propitiation and intercession are identical, saying that it is 'contradictory' 'to the form of the Cross itself'. Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ*, p. 111. A similar point is made by Stott, who cites Alan Stibb's monograph 'The Finished Work of Christ' (1954) to confute Baillie's position. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 268.

<sup>181</sup> A view which the American Evangelical scholar, Timothy George, acerbically calls a theory for a 'sorry ... attenuated, transcendent starved deity'. *Christianity Today*, January 9, 1995, p. 34.

## Chapter Eight: An Overview and Critical Appreciation

### Overview

In recognising the important development that Charismatic Renewal represents to the evolution of Christian thought in the past 50 years, this dissertation follows a fair number of scholars. In choosing to approach the subject in a somewhat oblique manner, that is, by examining the doctrine of the Atonement as taught by a figure representative of the movement, it follows an unusual method and examines a largely neglected subject. As a critical analysis of the Atonement in the teachings of Roger Foster, the dissertation proves unique.

In terms of what has been undertaken, the work has: reconstructed Forster's doctrine of the Atonement within the framework of its own evolution and context; constructed a contemporary conservative Evangelical view within its context; and, drawn certain deductions from comparing the two. This final chapter seeks to complete the study by outlining what has been accomplished and its significance.

The first two chapters identified the theological context within which Forster's doctrine of the Atonement developed. This examination proved fruitful, revealing the presence of a coherent series of principles relating to: epistemology; biblical hermeneutics; theology proper; anthropology; and, methodology of Christian history. The nature of these specifics suggests that Forster's formulation of doctrine eveloped in a highly structured manner, anticipating a view of the Atonement which is thoroughly 'logical'.

A second element contained within these chapters was an appreciation of Forster's understanding of the Bible, a task itself dictated by the claim that the Scriptures are central to his beliefs. The latter is evidenced by Forster's life long determination to ensure that his convictions are thoroughly rooted in the biblical texts, a determination complemented by a fearless critique of received doctrines - however long-standing or 'orthodox'. With further examination, however, the claim becomes subject to a significant number of qualifications. The first was the priority given to reason and logic as the grounds upon which the Word of God is both recognised and

interpreted. This implicit prioritisation of reason over faith was exacerbated by Forster's contention that reason not only affirms the Scriptures, but also anticipates them.<sup>1</sup> Second, was the teaching that the Bible and Word of God are separate entities: the Bible becomes the Word as it finds correspondence in the believer's experience of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that experience - not the Scripture - is the final rule of Christian faith and practice. A third qualification comes to the fore in Forster's belief in a 'growing body of revelation'.<sup>3</sup> God is constantly revealing Himself, and indeed, reveals Himself as much today as ever. All that Forster disallows is the possibility that new revelation contradicts Scripture. Finally, there is the spiritual importance that is ascribed to Christian history. It must be reckoned that the spiritual insights of believers over the millennia contain many revelations from God from which contemporary generations must learn. This seems to represent a Charismatic approximation to the Roman Catholic concept of Tradition.

Forster's teaching on the Bible faces a number of (Evangelical) objections, not least in denying that the Scriptures represent the believer's supreme rule of faith, his sole rule of faith, and by inference, that they stand complete. Inextricable from any of these are significant deviations from other Evangelical doctrines closely associated with *sola Scriptura*: not least as regards separation of reason from faith; the natural inability of man to understand spiritual truth; the bondage of the will, and, therefore the inability of man to believe spiritual truth even if he could understand it. Forster anticipates these and similar objections by making a very bold assertion: that the Evangelical position in all these respects - not his teaching - is the one guilty of heterodoxy.

More particular to the root cause of this heterodoxy was the early (c.200-300)

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<sup>1</sup> As Forster says, 'you could anticipate that somewhere in the world - without opening a Bible - there would be something like the story of Jesus, if you just sit down and do a lot of hard thinking'. Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> It is this element of 'becoming the word' that separates Forster from conservative Evangelicalism, and defines his understanding of the Spirit's testimony as quite different from the Evangelical concept of 'the *testimonium Spiritus internum*, the internal testimony of the Spirit in us, giving us assurance that this is the Word of God'. Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* pp. 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> Forster, Interview, with author, Ichthus Office, London, February 1992, transcript, p. 14.

invasion of Hellenistic philosophy into Christian thinking, and the reinterpretation of theology proper to which it gave rise. As a consequence absolute omnipotence became the concept by which other doctrines were defined. Subsequently, the Christian world-view increasingly failed to appreciate the 'real' nature of Satan's opposition to God, and demons control the world in which men live. In contrast, Forster's 'theistic dualism' maintains the 'real' nature of the battle between good and evil; denies the absolute ability of God to control events; and affirms the dominion of demonic forces over humanity.

Chapter two identified the immediate theological backdrop to Forster's doctrine of the Atonement. This began with theology proper. Forster criticises the 'traditional' understanding of God for confusing nature for character; practically abandoning God's relationship to the world for abstract concepts of transcendence; and wrongly understanding impassibility, timelessness and omnipotence. Conversely, a correct understanding of the God begins with the apprehension that all attributes of deity are defined by Fatherhood, and that man, therefore, is inviolably related to God in filial relationship. This relationship is characterised by *mutual self giving love*, but is open to the danger that freedom - the quality essential to the expression of love - will allow some men to remain separated from God, and thus frustrate His purpose for their lives.

Next, consideration was given to the Fall of man and its implications for God, for man himself, and for the principalities and powers. Most notable was Forster's construct of the latter. The sin of Adam while not carrying any legal or constitutional effects for humanity as a whole, did occasion a satanic *coup d'état* of the structures which govern man's world. From whole nations to individual cities, to the smallest social structure, all came under the control of evil forces. Thus, it becomes clear why Forster constantly represents human history from the standpoint of this greater reality. Industrial disputes to soccer hooliganism, all mark the ascendancy of evil among the correspondent principalities and powers.

While the effects of sin upon the human race are strongly affirmed, Forster's doctrine of the Fall distils into a tension between two opposing emphases. On the one hand there is the physical and spiritual subjugation of man by the fallen powers: humanity is 'bound' and 'blinded' by evil forces. On the other hand, so much

insistence is placed upon the voluntary nature of sin, that the distinct impression is given that man is only a sinner by deliberate choice. Especially to be noted is Forster's recollection of his own first sin, 'We all know when we sin - I can remember one of my first sins as clear as a bell - and we know that we don't have to give into it'.<sup>4</sup>

The third aspect of the Fall concerns the effects of man's rebellion on God. Conceptualised against the doctrine of Fatherhood and divine passibility, Forster represents sin's consequences as chiefly creating an on-going anxiety in the divine heart, as humanity - one by one - chooses the way of sin, frustrating the divine plan. Despite rejection, God remains steadfast in fulfilling His filial intent for the human race, the latter being regarded as the formal cause of God's redemptive intervention in human history.

Our explication of Forster's Atonement began in chapter three with his analysis of the three major historical views, and his arguments in favour of synthesising the significant elements of each to form one grand theory. Such an undertaking was argued necessary on account of fundamental flaws in the Satisfaction theory; the inadequacy of the two remaining views; and the need to embrace the insights achieved by various schools of theology since the Reformation, especially in Pentecostalism and Charismatic Renewal.

Incorporating biblical exegesis, Forster's own theory was identified by three principles:

- (1) Sonship - as pertaining to the foundation of the Atonement.
- (2) Identification - as regarding its substance.
- (3) Revelation - as regarding its application.

Each of these finds clear relationship to:

- (1) Theistic dualism - which contextualises Atonement against the backdrop of cosmic warfare.
- (2) Divine Fatherhood - which provides Atonement's first cause and final purpose.
- (3) 'Free will' - which points to the nature and necessity of revelation as the power by which Atonement is individually realised.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Instigated by Forster's theory of 'identification', the chapter concluded with an examination of the nature of the relationship that is said to exist between Christ and the human race. This study focused on Romans 5:18<sup>5</sup> and the parallel that exists between Adam and humanity, Christ and humanity: both being understood as essentially exemplary nature.

Chapters four and five amplified Forster's understanding of Atonement by examining his teaching on the 'application of redemption',<sup>6</sup> firstly from an anthropological perspective, and secondly from an ecclesiological one. The decision to include the latter was because of Forster's interpretation that the Church marks an extension of Christ's atoning work. Opportunity was also taken to study Forster's critique of the Reformation. The latter proved highly significant both in further defining Forster's understanding of the elements that constitute true spirituality (thus the true Church and Tradition) as well as his theological appreciation of repentance, faith and justification. His conclusion? 'Whatever be historical Christianity, it is not Protestantism'.<sup>7</sup>

The distinct *loci* of chapter four were the rôles ascribed to spiritual warfare and the sovereignty of the human will. Conceptual distinctiveness notwithstanding, both are inextricably linked to Forster's theistic dualism. Moral beings having chosen to rebel against God must now be persuaded to irrevocably resubmit themselves to that will.

Further to the application of redemption, Forster presents a clear correspondence between the Fall of man and his recovery. Firstly, the involuntary implications of sin at a cosmic level are negated through the binding of principalities and powers. Secondly, the voluntary consequences of sin are negated through the revelation of God in works, words and wonders. Through one, or a number of these agencies, man is brought to a place of crisis where - through Christ - he can renounce

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<sup>5</sup> 'Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all'. NRSV.

<sup>6</sup> Not least by John Murray. See: *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977)

<sup>7</sup> Words not actually used by Forster, but clearly appropriate to him. Cardinal Newman, cited in P. D. L. Avis, 'The Shaking of Seven Hills', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32 (1977),



the principle of transgression; return to God; receive forgiveness; and enter reconciliation.

Traditional Evangelical terms like 'repentance', 'faith' and 'justification' find considerable reference at this juncture, though the meaning Forster ascribes to each is distinctly non-evangelical. Especially to be noted is his reinterpretation of 'justification' to mean 'God's recognition of an actual righteousness in the one believing'. The vital importance ascribed to Christ in creating this moral change, is meant to answer the charge that works now replace the grace of God, and that salvation becomes a matter of merit. Notwithstanding, the concept is antithetical to the historic Protestant understanding that justification is a legal declaration consequent to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner.

The *charismata* figured significantly in Forster's teaching on the Atonement. The gifts of the Spirit - whether expressed in Christ or the Church - are manifestations of God, setting forth in the realm of men the truth of His Person and nature. The manifest suspension of natural laws in miraculous acts, for example, sets forth the power of God; and the end to which such suspension is directed, the healing of the sick, *etc.*, sets forth the goodness and kindness of God. Critical to our appreciation of Forster, however, is his understanding that the *charismata* serve to apply the Atonement, by:

- (1) Binding evil principalities and powers.
- (2) Evoking faith and repentance in man.
- (3) Hastening the full realisation of the eschaton.

On account of its importance to his doctrine of Atonement, chapter five undertook an examination of Forster's ecclesiology. In apprehending that both the individual Christian and the Christian-in-community continue Christ's atoning work, it became apparent that the efficacy of the Atonement lies in certain consequences inherent to acts of good and evil. More particularly, the power of God to make Atonement rests on the fact that every good act brings 'life' to the cosmos, and every act/evil brings 'death'. One of Forster's analogies speaks of the universe as a series of railway trucks. When the first in a line is hit, the force is sent down the line till all are

affected.<sup>8</sup> So good and evil reverberate throughout creation with an ontological impact. Good brings life in the sense of enhanced Being, and sin brings death in the sense of a movement away from Being (a movement which culminates in non-existence).

The Cross, therefore, as the supreme act of good, 'exhausts the effects of sin',<sup>9</sup> and brings life into the cosmos. But how? Christ's crucifixion gives perfect expression to the true nature of evil, witnessing this causes principalities and powers to retreat into insubstantiveness, and release their human captives. Human sinners so released are set free to 'see' the truth of their condition; discover the truth that 'God is love'; repent of their chosen estrangement from the Father; and live a life of holiness.

This whole Atonement process is repeated in the Church. When the Christian 'takes up his cross' and follows Christ, he is persecuted and suffers. As principalities and powers witness this, they retreat still further into insubstantiveness, and so are forced to release more of their human captives. So released, new human communities are set free to 'see' the truth of the gospel, exercise faith, repent, and be reconciled to God. And so the process continues until all who will be reconciled are, and all who refuse God, suffer the ontological inevitability of their choice, non-existence.

This explains the emphasis that Forster gives to obedience from within the Christian community. The achievement of redemption rests not only on the willingness of the sinner to be saved, but on the willingness of Christian community to play its full part. This teaching found particularly acute expression in Forster's concept of 'Apostolicity': the understanding that Christ and the Church share not only a common calling, a common 'sending forth' or commission from God to go into the world, but a common empowering to save the lost.

Chapter six sought to identify the most important influences behind Forster's doctrine of the Atonement, most particularly the *key* individuals and *key* ideas that influenced him, and the nature of their effect. In this respect the Fatherhood of God in George MacDonald, the radical theological method in G. H. Lang, and the interaction

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<sup>8</sup> Forster, *Saturday Night...*, p. 57. See also, Forster, *Finding the Path*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>9</sup> Forster, *Finding the Path*, p. 39.

of forces of the heavenly realms with mankind as portrayed in C. S. Lewis, were substantive examples. Concerning more explicit treatments of the Atonement to which Forster was to turn, most were in the mold of nineteenth century 'Moderate' theology. The latter not only complemented MacDonald and Lewis, but also Forster in a number of other doctrines, most especially as regards Fatherhood of God as the chief element of theology proper; a critical if not hostile attitude towards Evangelical orthodoxy; a rejection of Augustinian Original Sin; a dislike of the Magisterial Reformers; an antipathy towards the Anselmic view of the Atonement; and, not least, the adoption of ethical (as opposed to legal) interpretations of justification and righteousness.

In terms of specific works cited by Forster, the most influential was John Scott Lidgett's *Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*. Most explicit in this respect was the latter's argument that the Fatherhood of God is key to correctly understanding the Atonement, whether as pertaining to its cause (the Father's desire for His children to be reconciled), or its application (an ethical dynamic which recreates in believers the character and nature of sons). James Denney seems to have impressed Forster with three principles: Christ's identification with the race; the concept of vicarious repentance; and the view that faith is an ethical experience that recreates Christ's character in the one believing. Donald Baillie must be credited with developing in Forster the idea that the entire Trinity was involved in the Atonement, *not just in its planning, nor in various aspects of its application, but in the very act itself*. Paul's phrase 'God was in Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:19) is utilised to this end by both authors. The final, and perhaps most disparate influence cited, was Leon Morris. Though Forster originally embraced Morris' forensic understanding of 'justification', he later abandoned it, but seems to have retained the emphasis on Christ's suffering and sacrifice.

What had been burgeoning to come to the surface, finally did so in the seventh chapter, namely a straight forward doctrine by doctrine comparison between Forster and 'the conservative Evangelical'. The points of comparison paralleled the overall progress of the study, and similarly found its focus in the doctrine of the Atonement. Although the chapter perhaps gives more attention to Evangelical views - and indeed criticisms - over and against those of Forster, this but offsets the emphasis of the preceding chapters.

While previous examination revealed that Forster has rejected many substantive elements in conservative Evangelical theology, this chapter brought out the intensity of resulting antitheses. Several defining principles were found to be mutually exclusive, not least as regards the nature of biblical revelation and principles of biblical hermeneutics. These in turn proved inextricable from contracting opinions over epistemology and anthropology; natural theology and reason; Original Sin and constitutional depravity. Finally, a profound divergence arose regarding their approach to Christian history, not only as regards the value and authority of its tradition, but diametrically differing conclusions emerged concerning Augustine, the Magisterial Reformers, the Puritans, and the great Methodist revival.

It is not surprising that by the time consideration turned to comparing the two views of the Atonement, these also proved to be at considerable variance. ~~The~~ For the Evangelical the focus is Christ *extra nos* - Christ's work as an objective two-fold substitution for the race: passive as pertaining to His satisfying the wrath and justice of God, and, active as pertaining to fulfilling of the requirement of God's law. Thence, on the grounds that substitution means imputation, it becomes possible for God to forgive sinners, justify and legally adopt them. Subsequent and wholly separate to this, is sanctification: the process by which the forgiven become actually holy. To Forster the focus is Christ *in nobis*. Christ absorbs into Himself the universal consequences of sin in such a manner that humanity may, through faith be brought to know the full horror of that sin; appreciate the Father's grief; offer to God full and irrevocable repentance for sin; realign his moral disposition to righteousness; re-enter into the actuality of his filial relationship with the Father; and thence *be pronounced* justified. Wholly absent in Forster's schema is the principle of *solus Christus*, the essence not only of the Evangelical doctrine of the Atonement, but its corollary in justification.

Another profound distinction is that where the Evangelical finds a finished work in the Atonement, Forster finds a beginning. This is rooted in the fact that the former sees the work of redemption rooted in the justice of God, the latter sees it rooted in the human will. The former seeks a remedy to the violation that sin represents to the law, answered once for all by Christ's perfect fulfilment of its demands. Forster, on the other hand, says that humanity having abandoned God, must now be persuaded to return. In this context, Christ's work is understood as

wholly negative: a removal of every hindrance that sin has brought, firstly to right cognition, and, secondly a life lived in an ongoing obedience to God.

In conclusion, having not only explicated the doctrine of the Atonement in Forster, but traced the logic of its soteriological development, it becomes evident that compared to conservative Evangelicalism the distinctions between the two represent far more than a discordant emphases, or indeed spirited arguments over the nature of predestination and divine election. What has been discerned are differing<sup>10</sup> schemes of salvation which profoundly vary in their interpretation of Christ's life, suffering, death and resurrection.

### Critical Appreciation

While Forster's teaching is often repetitious and given to digression, its underlying theology is both systematic and coherent. Not least this is given expression in Forster's methodology: he studies Christian truths by breaking ideas down into their constituent elements, and then identifies *a priori* assumptions before critiquing the whole against Scripture. This approach is evidenced from the beginning of his ministry, and seems to be reflective of a mind that is not only ordered, but works within very defined perimeters according to equally defined principles. This theological *modus operandi* is manifest in a number of other ways.

The first relates to Forster's use of apologetics. There is not only Forster's love of the subject (which would be expected of an Evangelist) but the fact that for over a decade his life was spent in focused outreach to the intellectual cream of British youth - its university students. During this period, and subsequently, Forster believes that he has developed an innovative and challenging approach to presenting the Christian message, one which is stripped of unnecessary intellectual hindrances, yet remained

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<sup>10</sup> In distinction to 'opposing schemes of salvation.' Forster - though questioning of orthodoxy - yet in a number of important respects remains within classic Christian tradition, to wit: affirming man's need of salvation; the necessity of the Incarnation to achieve it; and perhaps most definitively of all, the dire and eternal consequences of sin against which God needed to interpose Himself. All this contrasts with such 'extreme radicals' (David Edwards, *Tradition and Truth*, p. 68) as Don Cupitt, whose own questioning caused him to completely 'abandon the God of traditional theism' (p. 90) dismissing the God of Christianity as a 'cosmic Father Christmas' (Cupitt, *Sea of Faith*,

keenly reasonable. This love of the cerebral has been reinforced by the kind of apologetics that Forster has embraced - 'evidentialist'.<sup>11</sup> Evidentialism draws on scientific method and empirical observation by way of presenting arguments for the gospel.

The second manifestation relates to Forster's response to questioning and criticism. The substantial interviews undertaken in pursuit of the dissertation revealed that when faced with new issues Forster's first response is to draw on certain defined principles by which the whole has been developed. For example, having explained that free will - that is, the freedom to love and not love God - forms the *sine qua non* of Being (ontology), Forster concedes that salvation cannot, therefore, possess an absolute and final certainty.

The significance of identifying Forster in this way is the ironic realisation that we have identified exactly the kind of theologian - and indeed theology - of which Forster is most suspicious. From the earliest moments of his Christian dawning, Forster was deeply critical of classic Evangelicalism for systematising doctrine, building on untested presuppositions, and frequently allowing 'human philosophy' to dominate its construction. Yet, as we have seen, Forster's views are not only combined into a clearly structured theological system, but are themselves clearly indebted to particular schools of philosophy and untested assumptions: not least the Enlightenment - in terms of apologetics and Christian epistemology - and Victorian Moderatism - for its appreciation of the Fatherhood of God and interpretation of the

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p. 271, cited in Edwards, *Ibid.*, p. 97).

<sup>11</sup> There are broadly two current schools of thought in conservative Evangelical apologetics. The first is 'evidentialism', which is rooted in philosophy of the English and Scottish Enlightenment, and the second is 'presuppositionalism', which is rooted more in the Reformers. The former seeks to persuade the non-believer of the veracity of the Christian gospel through the presentation of certain evidences and argument based on these. The latter seeks to show the non-believer that his world-view is based on certain unprovable assumptions against which Christian assumptions are simply contrasted. The first sees the Christian and non-Christian sharing a common logic and reason which provide the tools for the veracity of the gospel to be demonstrated, the second sees each as holding mutually exclusive presuppositions against which the gospel must simply be proclaimed. Examples of these two perspectives may be found respectively in: R. C. Sproul *Reason to Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), and. Cornelius Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, c1955). For discussion of the issues involved in the two approaches, see: Bernard Ramm *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1961)

Atonement.

There is also strong indication that Forster's embrace of the Enlightenment and Victorian Christianity has been undertaken in a manner which has abandoned the highly critical, empirical approach he adopted when considering classic orthodoxy. Thus, though Forster appeals to the success that marked the 'two book' approach to Christian apologetics, he seems oblivious to the strong body of evidence that suggests the whole scheme not only failed in the long run, but provided the very assumptions which undermined Trinitarian belief in favour of Deism and Unitarianism. Again, although he has gone to some length (and commendably so) to examine Augustine's relationship to the early Church, and has clearly read works *on Luther and Calvin* to identify critical weaknesses and errors, he has not extended himself to the same discipline as regards those whose views he favours. Had he done so, Forster's theology might have evolved rather differently. Without question his assertions would be more moderate, his criticisms less severe, and his overall arguments more sustainable.

There is also another irony. Among those branches of American Fundamentalism where the 'two books' apologetic remains strong, a number of contemporary scientific theories are being used to justify the very concepts of absolute divine foreknowledge and predestination that Forster dismisses as so utterly irrational. Having accepted certain laws of physics (and indeed, logic), Forster subsequently defined God's attributes by these laws. More particularly a universe of only four dimensions disallowed the idea that time could be condensed into an all encompassing moment, and so, Forster said, God must share the constraints of time with the creation. However, current developments in theoretical physics now suggest a universe with a large number of dimensions. Subsequently the idea that God lives outside time and indeed knows the end from the beginning is not only possible but 'reasonable'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Hugh Ross, whose Ph.D. is in astronomy, argues like Forster, for an 'old earth', and like him, has criticised certain branches of Fundamentalism for hindering belief in the gospel by insisting on a separation of faith from science. Indeed, the arguments in Ross' *The Creator and the Cosmos: how the greatest scientific discoveries of the century reveal God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995) bear many similarities with Forster and Marston's *Reason and Faith: Do modern science and Christian faith really conflict? What*

On a more positive note it must be said that Forster's highly critical approach has yielded significant challenges for the conservative Evangelical. Forster not only raises some important questions that have yet to be answered, but demonstrates a spirit of ruthless questioning that ought to be emulated by Evangelical pastors and their congregants. Forster is surely right in suggesting that all too many 'truths' are passed down from one generation to the next without the depth of biblical critique concomitant to a belief in *sola Scriptura*. Forster's arguments concerning the corruption of Christian thought in the third and fourth centuries, not least as regards distortions to theology proper, and perhaps most especially Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin, have weight to them.<sup>13</sup> Despite being so important to classic Evangelical thought (as indeed to historic Protestantism) Original Sin is almost certainly Augustine's invention. Furthermore the doctrine was not believed by the early Church, it was not adopted by any of the Ecumenical Councils, and though partly adopted by the Roman Catholic Church has never been part of that other great Christian tradition, Eastern Orthodoxy.

In considering the Bible, Forster rightly questions, 'On what grounds is the canon to be accepted?' If it is said that the Fathers established the same at certain Ecumenical Councils, then the Scriptures become subject to the authority of the Councils, and faith itself is placed in the body ecclesiastical and not the Word. For the same reason the Bible - and the specific books said to comprise it over and against the Roman Catholic view<sup>14</sup> - cannot be accepted because certain Protestant Confessions affirm them. Intimately connected with this are issues pertaining to what has been

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proves of interest, however, is that Ross draws on the 'revelation of nature' not only as an *apologia* for the Christian message, but *via* certain principles of quantum physics, defends the following doctrines: that God lives outside time; possesses a complete knowledge of all future events; and governs the universe in such a manner that allows for divine predestination and human free will to co-exist.

<sup>13</sup> McGrath, for example, notes the negative influence of the 'Hellenistic milieu' on the doctrine of the *απαθεια* of God, 'which', he says, 'clearly demonstrates the subordination of a biblical to a philosophical view of God'. *Iustitia Dei*, v.1, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> The Reformers rejected the Apocryphal writings: 1 and 2 Esdras; Tobit; Judith; additions to Esther; The Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus; Baruch; the Letter of Jeremiah; the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men; Susanna, Bel and the Dragon; the Prayer of Manasseh; and the books of the Maccabees. Not until after the Reformation, however, did the Apocryphal books receive full canonical status by the Roman Catholic Church



called 'the Protestant hermeneutical problem *par excellence*':<sup>15</sup> having abandoned the authority of the Church to define the meaning of Scripture, who or what is *practically* to take its place? All too often Protestantism has replaced the Pope and Vatican Councils with Confessions and Protestant Councils. As to the relationship of the Spirit to the Word, Forster's criticisms that twentieth century Evangelicalism has given birth to 'a dull, theoretical orthodoxy which is of no value', is a criticism made by many Evangelicals themselves - indeed, the quote just given belongs to Martyn Lloyd-Jones.<sup>16</sup>

This all having been said, it (again) has to be suggested that many of Forster's ideas - as well as those he admires in others - are rarely subjected to the same rigorous tests of historicity he applies against conservative Evangelicalism. If the 'early Church' didn't hold to the Augustinian doctrine of Original Sin, it certainly did not hold to Forster's radical and robust doctrine of free will.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, though the early Church spoke of 'free will' it is difficult to think of what other term they could have used fighting against Gnostic fatalism. It is one thing to argue the early Church denied

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Jacobsen, 'Purity or Tolerance: The Social Dimension of Hermeneutics in the Calvinist, Arminian and American Evangelical Traditions', *Evangelical Journal* 11 (1993), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> We have previously noted Lloyd-Jones' highly experiential view of Christian living, as well as his uncompromising dismissal of Confessional ecclesiology, the so-called 'paper church'. That having been said, it is significant to note that those contemporary Evangelicals who are most inclined to Lloyd-Jones' view, are often the most incredulous of Charismatic Renewal. The following is taken from Brian Edwards' work *Revival!* 'A few decades ago prayer and talk amongst Evangelicals on the subject of revival were both commonplace. In more recent years the word 'revival' has been moved down as a poor relation to the vogue words, 'restoration' and 'renewal'. That is simply a matter of fact, however you wish to interpret it. What is perhaps most worrying is that many today confuse revival with "a touch from the Spirit" (which we must never despise), and with Christian enthusiasm or extravagance. There are even those who believe they have something better than revival; but this betrays a poor knowledge of the history of God at work in his church. There can be nothing better on earth than a true Holy Spirit revival and, sadly, it is doubtful whether in the United Kingdom today anyone is experiencing such a thing'. Brian Edwards, *Revival! A people saturated with God*, pp. 14-15. Lloyd-Jones comments on David Du Plessis anticipate this spirit. See 'The Holy Spirit, not doctrine' in Lloyd-Jones, *What is an Evangelical?* pp. 26-29.

<sup>17</sup> The difficulty Forster faces in attempting to attain a Scriptural doctrine of human freedom is most fundamentally expressed in the fact that the term 'free will' is absent from the vocabulary of Paul, and indeed, the entire Bible. This is something which Forster completely fails to consider. While it has to be admitted that the Greek Fathers did hold to such a doctrine, this was not until the fourth century, and then is arguably the result of the very Hellenisation of which Forster complains.

fatalism by speaking of 'free will', but another to say they deliberately propounded human freedom as Forster understands it. What the Church is *against* does not necessarily indicate what it is *for*. A final problem concerns early Church terminology. The word 'saved' has been understood in radically different ways over the centuries, why not 'free will'? Just because the Fathers spoke of 'free will' doesn't at all imply that the word had the same meaning for them as it does for Forster.

Concerning the veracity of Scriptures, one wonders why Forster never encourages Christians along the same path of establishing for themselves the truth of God's word (and indeed its composition) as he himself journeyed? Furthermore, we are left wondering precisely why he is so critical of Luther for questioning the veracity of James and other books? Surely Luther's example is one he has boldly emulated? Concerning Forster's Christian apologetic (and its implicit view of revelation) he provides no evidence that the Christian Enlightenment either approximated the early Church in its approach to Christian apologetics, or in its understanding of Christian epistemology.

More significant than any of this, however, is Forster's underlying assumption concerning the theological purity of the early Church. It seems to be part of human nature to assume the existence of a 'golden age'. The Luddites found one before the Industrial Revolution in a world where everyone had four acres and a cow. Forster finds his in the Church before Constantine.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps indicative in this respect is Forster's constant assumption that this era was marked by a unitary and pervasive set of beliefs, yet as one professor of theology replied when asked what the early Church believed, 'Which part of the early Church?' Not only were there local differences, but important divergencies even in the New Testament era.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond this there is the whole issue of 'Hellenisation'. R. A. Norris points out that 'the use of Greek ideas for the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures had began

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<sup>18</sup> However, even here we are left wondering how far before Constantine? Forster admits that the 'Hellenisation' of the church began quite *early*.

<sup>19</sup> The Epistle to the Galatians not only acquaints us with the Paul's disagreement with Peter, but of a faction of Judiasers led by a certain James from Jerusalem. This also throws doubt on Forster's argument that Clement's belief in salvation by faith and works 'must' be valid merely on account of his (chronological and geographic) proximity to apostolic teaching.

before the appearance of Christianity'.<sup>20</sup> Christ Himself was born into a world dominated by Hellenic thought, yet Scripture declares this era to be 'the fullness of time'.<sup>21</sup> This more than suggests it was part of the divine plan that Christianity utilise Greek philosophy and ethical conceptions to proclaim the gospel. What does Forster make of the fact that the Scriptures themselves unambiguously utilise Greek thought in setting forth Christ as the Logos?<sup>22</sup> Or that the Bible most of the apostles read, or at least quote was the Greek Septuagint? That the Scriptures they were writing were in the Greek language, and therefore, frequently employed Greek idiom?

Finally there is Forster's idea that Hellenic thought represents an understanding that is inherently and essentially anti-Christian. For a man who believes that you could anticipate the gospel 'if you just sit down and do an awful of thinking' this is a strange assumption, most especially given that Socrates, Aristotle and Plato did precisely that: sat down and did an awful lot of thinking. Surely, Forster should be among the first to affirm the idea that the early Church rather than finding Greek philosophy antithetical to the Scriptures, found that the Scripture proved the appropriate answers to the basic problems raised by Greek philosophical speculation?

On a quite different level, concern must also be noted as regards Forster's experiences of direct revelation and their part in his theological development. Vast tracts of understanding seem dependent upon *his* encounters with the Holy Spirit. While most Evangelicals would happily allow that the Spirit leads them into truth, this is a 'leading' of the Spirit which is largely divorced from the experiential, and focused upon cognitive deductions being made from the text of Scripture. Further more, even where extraordinary cases of 'leading' are admitted, an absolute distinction is drawn between the value of such experiences over and against the authority of the written Word. Differences in opinion come down to differences in exposition. Forster, however, finds no absolute distinction between the Word in print and the Word in his experience - both are forms of God's revelation, and share a common authority. In this paradigm differences in opinion are in danger of being represented as differences in spirituality.

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<sup>20</sup> R. A. Norris, *God and the World in Early Christian Theology* (London: A & C Black, 1966) pp. 33f.

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 4:4. RSV.

None of this can be divorced from Forster's understanding of revelation. He not only resurrects within Protestantism the Roman Catholic concept of Tradition, but himself raises questions as to the criteria by which it is to be identified and interpreted. Forster not only answers these questions clearly but with passion, some of it persuasive: 'The truth *may* be found in the persecuted but *never* in the persecutors'.<sup>23</sup> It has to be admitted that it is difficult to read the Gospels and avoid the conclusion that Christ not only emphasised that true faith is inseparable from orthopraxis,<sup>24</sup> but is definitive both in identifying true spirituality now,<sup>25</sup> and the elect on the Day of Judgement.<sup>26</sup> Notwithstanding, our observations of Forster himself suggest substantial inconsistencies in applying this test of orthopraxis. Forster's bold identification of a 'spiritual' Church running from the early post-apostolic era to the Charismatic movement, includes such as Francis Xavier who utilised the Inquisition in his evangelism, and Loyola who founded the Jesuits, but excludes Wycliffe and Luther, the founders of the Reformation. Forster does the very thing he complains of others: he all too readily divides and polarises the visible Church between those who are really saints, and those who are at best poor Christians, without substantive and exhaustive examination as to what the latter actually believe and practice.

Assessing Forster's teaching on the character and nature of God represents the crossing of another Rubicon in our understanding of him. It is difficult to exaggerate the challenge that Forster brings to the 'classic' view of God, not least on account of the fact that Forster's disagreement is with the entire Western Church, not just against a certain kind of Evangelical Calvinism. Of course there is nothing new or novel in such objections. McGrath points out that historically this kind of disputation lay at the heart of the German Enlightenment, the *Aufklärung*,<sup>27</sup> and certainly arose at the time of

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<sup>22</sup> This is the language of the prologue to John's Gospel.

<sup>23</sup> Forster, London, letter, September 1993, to the author. Original emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> 'Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father'. Matthew 7:7. RSV.

<sup>25</sup> 'You will know them by their fruits'. Matthew 7:20. RSV.

<sup>26</sup> 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food'. Matthew 25:34. RSV.

<sup>27</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, v.2., p. 135f. It is interesting to note McGrath's observation (p. 142) that 'many of the *Aufklärer* were of Pietist origins', piety being such a strong element in Forster's spiritual ethos.

the Reformation,<sup>28</sup> as indeed before and since.<sup>29</sup> The point is, however, that Forster is not only seeking to argue these issues from within Evangelicalism, but implies that it is legitimate so to do. Once that is conceded, however, a fundamental shift in the meaning of 'Evangelical' occurs.

Concerning Forster's view of the Atonement, given what had been previously determined on the character and nature of God, man, sin, and principalities and powers, it was evident that whatever doctrine was to be set forth, it was to be far from the 'traditional' conservative view: that Christ died as a substitution and satisfaction for sin, thus justifying the elect.<sup>30</sup> In this context Forster's arguments are coherent and sometimes convincing. Nevertheless, his chief criticisms against the Satisfaction theory are seriously flawed. Major elements in Forster's critique are undertaken without demonstrating anything like a thorough understanding of that theory. Often his arguments are parodies: the Satisfaction theory thinks of the Atonement being achieved through Christ's death but without our holiness; the Reformers and many other proponents of the Satisfaction view fail to appreciate the love of God as *the* great motivation behind the Atonement; justification by faith meant to Luther, Calvin and their successors, justification irrespective of works, and irrespective of a changed life.

A more convincing argument put forward by Forster is the suggestion that the Satisfaction theory rests on an inadequate world-view: one which fails take into account the spiritual realities of demons and heavenly powers evident - indeed often central - in the New Testament. Forster presents his evidence clearly: confrontation with spiritual powers was an undoubted reality in Jesus' ministry and those who followed Him. It was certainly in this manner that the apostolic Church is described in Acts. It is a world-view present in the Epistles, not least in Paul's many references to 'principalities and powers'. Equally this paradigm is seen in the post-apostolic Church

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<sup>28</sup> Especially that branch of Anabaptism George Williams calls 'Evangelical rationalist'.

<sup>29</sup> We have noted this among a number of early and mid-Victorian 'Moderates'. James Torrance cites 'Barth, Rahner, T. F. Torrance, Moltmann, Jüngel, Zizioulas ... among more and more theologians' who are persuaded that 'our Western concepts of God in Roman Catholic and Protestant thought own more to Aristotle, Stoic concepts of natural law, Western jurisprudence, post-enlightenment thought, than to the God of the New Testament'. Cited in, McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (1996) Introduction, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> 'Elect' here is used in the sense of 'all who exercise saving faith', not in the

and the way it approached the world. Medieval and later Roman Catholic practices (exorcisms *etc.*) became the 'remains' of this perspective. Today, a number of human cultures still have this world-view, and not infrequently, missionary situations have caused (often reluctant) conservative Christians to re-adopt it.

Forster's positive construct of Atonement centres on the exposition of certain biblical texts: mostly those found in the gospels. In a commendable manner Forster seeks to define the Atonement through the teachings of Christ. Again, in a thoroughly Evangelical spirit, Forster interprets a number of Old Testament allusions to the Atonement Christologically. All this having been said, Forster conspicuously avoids dealing with the legal imagery present anywhere in Scripture, Christologically or otherwise. Just saying that judicial elements 'come in, but are not central,' contains more than the suggestion that he is simply ignoring the facts. Surely forensic language occupies a demonstrably central place in the New Testament, if not the Old also?<sup>31</sup> As such, it not only requires serious explanation, but appropriate integration into the whole if the theory is to be truly biblical. If the Satisfaction theory fails to adequately embrace the biblical ideas of *Christus Victor*, Forster fails all together to embrace Judge (*sic*) and judgement.

More fundamentally, however, even in his biblical exposition of the Atonement there is not only the sense that Forster has failed to take seriously the Satisfaction view, but in rejecting it on account of his *a priori* theological understanding, those same assumptions have dominated his own construct - especially in the three principles: sonship, identification, revelation - all at the expense of the language, and thus doctrine, of the Scriptures. If Forster criticises the three historic theories of Atonement for constraining the Bible into a system, and thus missing large elements of the truth, it is criticism which highlights that his failure is equal to, or even greater than any of these. There is much evidence to suggest that Forster's view of Christ's work forces the whole into a pre-defined system as much as any of the Protestant Scholastics sought to conform theirs to, say, to the doctrine of

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Augustinian sense of 'those predestined to salvation'.

<sup>31</sup> In *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* Leon Morris spends two chapters considering the legal imagery of both Testaments, especially as it stands as in defining relationship to the concept of 'justification.' Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 253-298.

absolute predestination.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most defining elements in Forster's doctrine of the Atonement is the place it gives to the charismata: becoming no less than the *sine qua non* its application. The world - on account of Adam's sin - is under the repressive authority of various demonic 'strongholds' and 'powers'. The Atonement then utilises 'signs and wonders' to defeat these powers that salvation might follow. More particularly these 'signs and wonders' consist of words, works and miracles. Initially part of Christ's ministry, they become the ministry of all who are joined to Him by faith. Otherwise termed by Forster as 'kingdom theology,' the whole represents the application of the work of Christ through words (which includes words of knowledge, prophecy, speaking in tongues) works (which are made effectual by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) and wonders (healing and other miracles). These collectively serve to bind the various principalities, and subsequently challenge sinners to repentance and faith.

It is these miraculous elements, matched by the conversion of sinners that evidences the fact that the kingdom has come, and is coming. This seeming 'now, not now' paradox - or to use G. E. Ladd's term, 'eschatological tension' - is not only a perception that is significant for its implications regarding the continued invasion of this supernatural kingdom, but equally important, it is an explanation as to why God does not always act: in other words, why only some people get healed, delivered, *etc.*, and not all.

Nonetheless Forster's Atonement anticipates a significant manifestation of signs and wonders that are accompanied by conversions. This realisation reveals one of the greatest weaknesses in Forster's whole theology. Quite simply, the *salvific impact* anticipated by this view of the Atonement is far greater than actually occurs. Indeed, the fruits ('success') of this 'kingdom theology' is meagre. Christ's triumph over Sin (*sic*) is meant to unleash a torrent of spiritual power that sets 'free' streets and cities, that is, *vast* numbers of individuals, to the place where 'apostolic' Christianity can

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<sup>32</sup> Tony Lane is typical in noting that some of Calvin's disciples 'upset the balance of his (Calvin's) theology by making the doctrine of predestination central and foundational'. Lane, *Christian Thought* (Herts., England: Lion Publishing, 1984) p. 131. One of the consequences of this shift was an elaboration of a doctrine of 'limited atonement', a view that finds no explicit reference in Calvin himself.

convert them. The figures show nothing of the sort has taken place. Ichthus and similar minded churches, despite twenty years of spiritual warfare on the streets of Forest Hill - and many other parts of the United Kingdom - have not enjoyed significant continued growth. This is not to deny that new insights may have been gathered into the nature of Christ's death, or that a Christian influence has been exerted, but it does deny the much heralded theological and spiritual *superiority* of this 'kingdom' theology over other views, other forms of evangelism, and other Christian traditions, conservative Evangelicalism in particular.

Standing back to consider the broad principles underlying Forster's theory of the Atonement, our study has identified an understanding that has been significantly shaped by biblical exposition, yet in the last analysis has to admit that the greater influence has been Forster's existential encounters with God: chiefly his experience of divine society based on Fatherhood. Appreciating this seems not only to explain Forster's particular explication of the work of Christ, but accounts for his entire world-view.

Forster's biographical history shows that experience was decidedly central in his conversion to a particular kind of spirituality, and in defining the theological determinants that were subsequently to take root in his mind. It was a powerful sense of God's *love for him* and for *all* men that provided the basis of Forster's initial act of faith. Inextricable to this was the cognitive development of a theology proper which focused on explaining - and indeed, expounding - this and subsequent encounters with the divine, in terms of unconditional love and Fatherhood. This path was in measure reinforced through the doctrinal explanation that Martyn Lloyd-Jones (and others) gave to his 'baptism of the Spirit' as a 'seal' of the Father's love, as well as the discovery of the Fatherhood theology of George MacDonald. Having found the concept so central to his early Christian development, subsequent ideas seemed to require a coherence to Fatherhood as a fundamental principle, including, most especially his anthropology, and from here concepts critical to man-in-sin, and his relationship to God: justice, judgement and hell, and, thence the Atonement. As attributes and attitudes of the Father each of these - as indeed all other seemingly antithetical-to-love concepts - becomes wholly predicated to love. Critically, the Evangelical 'dualism of holiness and love' and the dialectic underlying it (both so central to its theology proper) *are dissolved into one synthetic conception*. Understanding



this is key to rightly apprehending many aspects of Forster's theology.

We have previously noted J. I. Packer's remark, 'One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigour which both Testaments emphasise the reality and terror of God's wrath ... The Bible labours the point that just as God is good to those who trust Him, so He is terrible to those who do not'.<sup>33</sup> It must be said that Forster seeks to redefine such passages wherever possible (as in Revelation 14 where the blood of God's enemies becomes the blood of the martyrs), but avoids altogether those that stubbornly resist such redefinition. Thus, passages which patently contradict the idea that God is universally the Father of all, are studiously avoided, and Old Testament narratives which speak of the terrible destruction of Israel's enemies - traditionally interpreted as types of the Day of Judgement - become models for modern day spiritual warfare.

This difference of opinion is endemic to all that can be said of our critique of Forster's view of the Atonement. As we have previously noted, the priority accorded God's universal Fatherhood became definitive early on in his thinking. Wedded with a fundamental suspicion of conservative Evangelicalism, this produced a theological infrastructure that *a priori* precluded the Satisfaction theory and its most important cognates: imputation and substitution. It must be noted that this occurred before Forster gave serious consideration to the three historic theories. His mature understanding of the Atonement, therefore, seems somewhat disingenuous when it claims to embrace the Satisfaction *motif*. Certainly the vocabulary was borrowed, but little else. Forster did, however, take elements of *Christus Victor* appropriate to his theology of spiritual warfare, but most importantly it is the Moral Influence theory that has defined his view of the Atonement. As to Forster's sources and influences, these share a common deduction in rejecting the 'Greek', 'Constantinian' and 'Augustinian' presuppositions that underlie Western Christianity. It is this characteristic that most fundamentally describes Forster's own theology in general, and his doctrine of Atonement in particular.

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<sup>33</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 135-135.

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