

TOWARDS THE CERTAIN GOAL

Study 3

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Prayer: Dear Lord, in your mercy and love, pour your Spirit upon us anew, and help us to love you with all our heart, strength and soul, and particularly in this study, with our mind. Enable us to apply our minds, that we might receive your blessing with joy, and faith – that our hope may be stirred, awakened, renewed. In Jesus name – Amen!

INTRODUCTION

At the outset of this study – lest we become perturbed by the difficult words and concepts in P. T. Forsyth's, *The Justification of God* – let us consider carefully two important theological terms – **revelation** and **teleology**. Grasping them afresh should encourage us.

Revelation

Revelation: That which takes place when the hidden is unveiled, disclosed, revealed.

Jesus said, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). The hidden God has been revealed. We only know God because he willingly comes to us, to unveil himself and his plan, in the incarnation – the birth, life, deeds, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. The outpouring of the Spirit of the Father, and Son, now enables us to know:

“...what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” – *these things God has revealed to us* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God (1Corinthians 2:9-10).

When we ponder the future of creation we are pressed, (yet confined), to the knowledge and understanding, which comes from God to humanity, through revelation. Although at present *we see in a mirror, dimly* (1Corinthians 13:12), nevertheless, we do see! In Christ, God has revealed his will and plan, in sufficient detail, and the apostles have made more explicit, that which the Risen Jesus opened to them. For *these things God has revealed to us. The creation waits with eager longing* (Romans 8:21), for all that the new creation brings, namely, the *renewal of all things when the Son of man is seated on the throne of his glory* (Matthew 19:28). The regeneration! This is the **telos**.

Teleology

Teleology: The study of the telos, or goal, which God the Father, has set.

This goal is for the redemption of humanity in Christ, the glorification of all creation. This was planned in Christ from *before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:4).

THE PROBLEMS: REVELATION AND TELEOLOGY

Forsyth conceded that the matters of revelation and teleology did continue to arise for the church, and the world. In an effort to explore how difficult it can be to comprehend history, and grasp what is to be understood of the future, and the coming appearing of Christ and to then to proclaim it, Forsyth asks many difficult yet probing questions (see p. 43-47 of *The Justification of God*), after this brief introduction:

The radical questions of a belief are forced upon us anew by each crisis of the world. And the first task of the Church, before it go to work on the situation that a crisis leaves behind, is to secure the truth and certainty for its own soul of its faith in the overcoming of evil by good; an operation which may mean the recasting of much current and favourite belief.¹

Here are some of his searching questions that follow:

1. Is there a divine government of such a world, a world whose history streams with so much blood, ruin, and misery as to make civilisation seem to many doubtfully worthwhile? ²
2. That question means for its answer another, Is there a divine goal of the world?
3. Because if there is, God who secures it has the right to appoint both its times and its means; and a good government of the world is what helps best in our circumstances to bring us there. But is there such a goal, and where do we find it?
4. How shall we be sure of it?

¹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, 1988, p. 42

² The 20th Century catalogue of Genocide is a frightening matter to contemplate:

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/>

The term 'Genocide' was coined by a jurist named Raphael Lemkin in 1944 by combining the Greek word 'genos' (race) with the Latin word 'cide' (killing). Genocide as defined by the United Nations in 1948 means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, including: (a) killing members of the group (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Recent to Past Occurrences

- Bosnia-Herzegovina: 1992-1995 - 200,000 Deaths
- Rwanda: 1994 - 800,000 Deaths
- Pol Pot in Cambodia: 1975-1979 - 2,000,000 Deaths
- Nazi Holocaust: 1938-1945 - 6,000,000 Deaths
- Rape of Nanking: 1937-1938 - 300,000 Deaths
- Stalin's Forced Famine: 1932-1933 - 7,000,000 Deaths
- Armenians in Turkey: 1915-1918 - 1,500,000 Deaths

Adolf Hitler to his Army commanders, August 22, 1939:

"Thus for the time being I have sent to the East only my 'Death's Head Units' with the orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish race or language. Only in such a way will we win the vital space that we need. Who still talks nowadays about the Armenians?"

5. Are we to believe in it only if we can sketch its economy, and trace the convergence of all lines, whatever their crook or curve, to that point?
6. Do I believe that all *is* well with my soul only in so far as I see that all *goes* well?
7. Can we be sure that all is well with the world only if the stream of its history run through no dreadful caves, nor shoot wild cataracts, nor ever sink to a trickle in the sand of deserts horrible?
8. Is there, in spite of all appearance, a divine teleology for the soul and for the race?³

A revelation will be great, universal, and final just as it does answer such questions, and pacifies even the soul it does not yet satisfy.⁴

In other words, the very doctrine of the goal, and the aim, and the destiny set for the creation by God, and being worked out in history - as it is set forth by Scripture, and proclaimed by the church to the world - has an important effect, even on a world who is as yet uncertain, unbelieving or unconvinced. We need to recall, that the *blessed assurance* we know in the Lord, the certainty of faith, comes to a person by faith. A person who has through revelation, through believing the gospel, met Christ, and come to faith, can say with an indescribable joy:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1 - NIV).

Wherever our witness is humble and clear, this certainty has its beneficial effect upon the wider world. As Forsyth says, it *pacifies even the soul it does not yet satisfy*.

The searching questions continue:

1. Nature not only exists, nor only changes; it grows. It certainly grows in complexity. It grows, with all its order, more heterogeneous.⁵ It is full of new departures. It grows in quantity and variety. But does it grow in quality?
2. Is the evolution process really progress? Is the complexity more than complicated, is it sublimated⁶? Is it all but a mode of motion, or does the long series rise to action? Is it really dramatic, or only spectacular? Is it a play or a tableau?⁷ Does it work up to anything?
3. Does it work anything out?
4. Has it a denouement⁸, a reconciliation?
5. Is there a teleology of nature's living history?

³ P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, 1988, p. 42

⁴ Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, p. 43

⁵ Heterogenous means: completely different; incongruous; not homogenous

⁶ Sublimated means to make nobler, or purer

⁷ A tableau is a dramatic scene; in a play, an interlude where everyone freezes.

⁸ Denouement means: the final resolution of a complex sequence of events

6. Is there a growing organism of organisms from the mollusc to the man? And if it come to a head in man, does man come to a head in anything? He *is* an end – *has* he an end? Has he a chief end, a destiny? How do you know?
7. What is it, where, when? Does the human history in which nature issues crown the teleological side of nature or the dysteleological, the fitness of things or their 'cussedness'? Does it seal the order or the ravage of nature?
8. Does war exist for peace, or peace for war? Which element is the natural selection of history?
9. Is there a drift in all things? And is it a torrent over Niagara, or a fine vapour steaming, like praise, to the hills and the heavens?
10. Is the world a whole? And, if it is, is it a whole marmoreal⁹, statuesque, and symmetrical, or organic, vital and moving. If it move, what is its goal? Has it a perfection, and is that perfection in itself?

Such are the questions that a world calamity brings home in passionate and tragic terms. Perhaps, if we survey them in our calm, we may find an anchorage ready in our storm. Through the clearer water we may discern a bottom that will hold when our old moorings drag.¹⁰

Are you clear what the questions are?¹¹

Forsyth is probing the idea many may have in their minds in the face of a global crisis, which is so tragic, that it defies explanation: *is history therefore only dumb?*¹²

THAT POINT IS CHRIST

We must continually come anew to the purpose for which the Son of God appeared – to destroy the works of the devil (1Jon 3:8) - to deal with our guilt as a race, and to so break the leverage that the devil has in blinding us to the way God gives for a genuine future. Forsyth asks: 'Is there any divine visitation that puts us in possession, *in petto*¹³, of the goal of all surmise?¹⁴ Is there any divine gift and deed that fixes the colours seen by genius in the eternal purpose and Kingdom of God, where all earth's hues are not mere tints but jewels – not mere perpetual gleams, but enduring, precious foundation stones?'¹⁵

To all such questions Christianity answers with an everlasting yea, however Christendom may blue or belie it. The eternal finality has become an historic event. There is a point of Time at which Time is no longer, and it passes into pure but concrete Eternity. That point is Christ. In Christ there is a spot where we are known far more than we know.¹⁶

⁹ Marmoreal means: Like marble, in whiteness, hardness

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 44

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. p. 45

¹³ In Petto means: In secret, or private.

¹⁴ Surmise: An idea or opinion based on insufficiently conclusive evidence; to make a guess or conjecture.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 45

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 47