CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 86: George MacDonald: Writer Who Inspired C.S. Lewis

Did You Know?

Interesting and unusual facts about George MacDonald

Kirsten Jeffrey Johnson

A Forgotten Place in History

Never one to be caught in an understatement, the journalist G. K. Chesterton wrote in 1905, "If we test the matter by strict originality of outlook, George MacDonald was one of the three or four greatest men of 19th century Britain." Whether later historians agree or disagree with Chesterton's assessment, MacDonald undeniably attracted a wide range of admirers in his own time. Queen Victoria gave MacDonald's novels to her grandchildren and granted him a Civil Pension in 1877. Archbishop Tait said that MacDonald "was the very best preacher he had ever heard."

Chesterton chaired the planning committee of the "George MacDonald Centenary Celebration," held on December 10, 1924, one hundred years after MacDonald's birth. The committee also included Sir James Barrie (author of ***Peter Pan***), the poet William Butler Yeats, Ernst Rhys (founder of ***Everyman Books***), and other well-known authors, theologians, social reformers, biblical scholars, ministers, a Member of Parliament, and leading luminaries of the day.

All the World's a Stage

George MacDonald was much sought after both to preach and to give lectures on literature. Archived letters reveal that, due to reasons of health and fatigue, he frequently had to turn down requests for both. When he did give a sermon, he refused any sort of remuneration. He was actually offered the considerable sum of $20,000 per year to pastor a Fifth Avenue church in New York but was not tempted. He lectured in England, Scotland, Ireland, America, Canada, and Italy to audiences sometimes numbering in the thousands. He often spoke on Shakespeare—upon one occasion proffering the topic choice: "'The Moral Drift of Shakespeare's Play of MacBeth'—or for MacBeth, substitute Hamlet or King Lear." Other subjects included Wordsworth, Chaucer, Shelley, Tennyson, Milton, Dante, and his own essay on the imagination. In the U. S., Robert Burns was a popular topic, with audiences delighting in MacDonald's Scottish brogue (though some upper-class English listeners labeled MacDonald's accent and manner as "poor elocution").

Grandfather of the Inklings

MacDonald had a profound influence on the circle of 20th-century British writers known as the "Inklings." J. R. R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" and C. S. Lewis's essay "On Stories" are both deeply indebted to MacDonald's writings on the relationship between faith and imagination (as is the chapter "The Ethics of Elfland" in G. K. Chesterton's ***Orthodoxy***). Charles Williams, in his book ***Victorian Narrative Verse***, included MacDonald among the 15 select poets. Tolkien and Lewis (and their student W. H. Auden) discussed MacDonald as the great "mythopoeic" writer—one who creates enduring stories greater than their medium, stories that can transform the reader. Indeed, when Lewis's character Jane (***That Hideous Strength***) needs to recover in bed, she is handed MacDonald's children's book ***The Princess and the Goblin*** to help the healing process.

Perhaps Lewis's greatest accolade to MacDonald was having him appear as his guide in ***The Great Divorce*** (like Virgil for Dante). Tolkien was more ambivalent, sometimes giving MacDonald high praise,

sometimes withdrawing it completely. But if imitation is flattery, the correlations are many and strong—even the subtitle of ***The Hobbit*** echoes one of MacDonald's titles, ***There and Back***. Lewis described Tolkien excitedly to his friend Arthur Greeves as "the one man absolutely fitted, if fate had allowed, to be a third in our friendship in the old days, for he also grew up on William Morris and George MacDonald ... "

A Connecticut Yankee in Fairyland

George MacDonald's son Greville recalled that his father and Mark Twain had an intimate friendship. Twain and his wife had read MacDonald's novel ***Robert Falconer*** while on their honeymoon, and Twain joined other literati in hosting a farewell benefit at the end of MacDonald's American lecture tour. When Twain and his wife came to England, the MacDonalds invited them to their unusual garden theater parties, including one which also hosted the African American Jubilee choir. In 1882 Twain asked MacDonald for a new edition of ***At the Back of the North Wind*** because his children had "read and re-read their own copy so many times that it looks as if it had been through the wars." Avid fans, they even made their father invent new stories about its hero.

At one point the two authors discussed the possibility of co-authoring a novel to avoid the copyright pirating that was occurring as their novels traversed the Atlantic. Although they never did so, the striking plot similarities between ***Huckleberry Finn*** and ***Sir Gibbie*** have suggested to some that this discussion was the germ for what became two very unique—and profound—novels.

Say "Cheshire Cat"

It is thanks to Lewis Carroll, the author of ***Alice in Wonderland*** and one of the earliest photography enthusiasts, that so many pictures of the MacDonald family exist today. He was repaid when, after he read them his story of Alice, the MacDonald children convinced him to publish it.

"Dinna ye ken a proverb whan ye hear 't?"

Although much has been made of the "Scots tongue" in which MacDonald writes, it is neither as formidable nor as all pervasive as many believe. Only about half of MacDonald's novels make use of this dialect (which, incidentally, is called "Doric," and is still heard in the North East of Scotland today). And even in these, it is only when certain persons speak that the dialect appears. Reading the text aloud, and paying attention to the context, is often sufficient to enable comprehension. MacDonald was actually much more frustrated by the "editing" that occurred in the multiple pirated editions appearing in America than he was by the loss of any financial compensation.

No Chauvinist

MacDonald was a social reformer in the field of education and taught in schools for working classes founded by his mentors F. D. Maurice and A. J. Scott (see Gallery). From 1859-1867 he served as head of the English Department at Bedford College, the first British institution to offer higher education to women. Through his friendship with suffragette Barbara Bodichon, he became acquainted with women's rights and social activist Josephine Butler, as well as Dr. Elizabeth Garrett, the first female doctor trained in Britain.

At Home with the MacDonalds

The MacDonald family took the commandment to "practice hospitality" quite seriously. Both in England and in Italy they became renown for opening their doors to the community around them. Letters abound which thank the MacDonalds for their listening ears or comforting words—or for simply providing a safe haven. Many claimed Louisa as a maternal figure, addressing letters to "Madre," "Motherbird," and "Mother."

While offering quiet retreat, the MacDonalds' houses were also frequently full of riotous fun. The actor Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson remembered George and the artist Arthur Hughes dressed up in bear rugs and roaring after the children "with great gusto." Octavia Hill and John Ruskin led off the folk dancing at one gathering, after a charity performance of "Beauty and the Beast."

When the MacDonalds moved to Bordighera, Italy, their house—funded by friends ranging from royalty to servants—was designed specifically to provide for large entertainment. A visitor described it as "the open house of the neighborhood, and naturally its artistic and intellectual centre." Greville MacDonald said it was "home-place or concert room, theatre or dancing-room, oratory or dining-room, the heart of every occasion being our father's and mother's." On Wednesday afternoons they held public readings from poetry and classic literature, and on Sunday evenings there were hymns, Scripture reading and exposition, and extempore prayer.

The large room downstairs could comfortably seat 200, and when the local Italian community was invited to view Christmas tableaux (evoking disapproval from exclusivists in the English population), 450 were said to have stood. One attendee commented that "in some wonderful way, all classes, nations, and creeds met willingly under that roof." The all-inclusive hospitality received notice in newspapers, inspiring others to follow suit.

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Imaginative Faith

Jennifer Trafton

Like many people, I owe my discovery of George MacDonald to C. S. Lewis. I met him first in ***Surprised by Joy*** as the author of the book that marked a crucial turning point in Lewis's pilgrimage to faith. I met him again in ***The Great Divorce*** as the narrator's gentle Scottish guide through heaven. From there I found my way to ***The Princess and the Goblin, Phantastes***, and ***Sir Gibbie***. Many books later, I realized the full truth of Lewis's statement: "I have never concealed the fact that I regarded him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him." So many of the theological ideas and emphases I associated with Lewis were there waiting for me in MacDonald the same abundant imagination, the same longing for something beyond, the same pervasive sense of joy at the center of existence.

So it is very fitting, as ***Christian History & Biography*** prepares a new C. S. Lewis issue for Fall 2005, to look first at the man whose writings shaped him more than any other's. And when we do so, what we find is not just a preface to Lewis but a fascinating story in its own right. Though 20th-century readers have focused on MacDonald as a writer of fantasies and fairy tales with unique symbolic depth, he was a man of wide interests and gifts. Poet, pastor, popular novelist, lecturer on English literature, literary critic, translator, humanitarian, actor, mystic, theorist of the imagination, friend of theologians, artists, and orphans, father of 11 children he is a window into the Victorian period in all its dizzying diversity.

MacDonald was not a systematic theologian, and it is impossible to fit him into a neatly defined box. He attracts (and sometimes offends) Protestants and Catholics, evangelicals and liberals. He combines a Calvinist's rock-solid assurance of God's sovereignty with a Romantic's love of nature and a hope for the salvation of all people that is reminiscent of the early church father Origen. He was enormously popular among the Unitarians of his era because of his sensitivity to the humanity of Christ, yet he insisted on preaching a firmly Trinitarian faith when he visited their churches. "The Divine Sonship is the key-conception which unites all the different elements of his thought," wrote Lewis of this paradoxical man. "***I dare not say that he is never in error*** [italics mine]; but to speak plainly I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continuously close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself. Hence his Christ-like union of tenderness and severity. Nowhere else outside the New Testament have I found terror and comfort so intertwined."

Another of MacDonald's early admirers, G. K. Chesterton, believed that it was precisely MacDonald's ability to bridge different traditions that made him historically significant: "And when he comes to be more carefully studied as a mystic, as I think he will be when people discover the possibility of collecting jewels scattered in a rather irregular setting, it will be found, I fancy, that he stands for a rather important turning-point in the history of Christendom, as representing the particular Christian nation of the Scots. As Protestants speak of the morning stars of the Reformation, we may be allowed to note such names here and there as morning stars of the Reunion."

There is always the danger that in studying the religious perspective of any writer or artist, we reduce his or her art to simply a roadmap of ideas. But a work of art even one made of words, like a novel or a fairy tale is more than the sum of its individual theological or moral parts. It also stands on its own. And so I encourage you to read MacDonald's works, and to read other works of fiction, through the lens he recommends: the lens of the imagination, by which we are lifted beyond merely what is to what could

be. As MacDonald himself reminds us, we live by faith and not by sight.

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Living History

First church of Norway, Da Vinci's fingerprint, and the cradle of Scottish Christianity

Compiled by Ted Olsen

First Church of Norway?

The story of the conversion of Norway's Vikings has long focused on how the country's kings converted to Christianity, then ordered their subjects to, as King Olaf Trygvesson put it in A.D. 996, "Be Christian or die." (See Issue 63: Conversion of the Vikings.)

But new radiological dating of a stave church site, first unearthed in 2001, may change that story significantly. Archaeologists say the church in Skien (the birthplace of playwright Henrik Ibsen, about 70 miles southwest of Oslo) was built between A.D. 1010 and 1040, after the deaths of Christian kings Olaf Trygvesson (d. 1000) and the canonized Olaf Haraldsson (d. 1030). But two Christian graves at the site date between 885 and 990, which (along with some other findings) University of Oslo medievalist Jon Vidar Sigurdsson says would push the date of Norway's conversion to the 800s, not the turn of the millennium. Jan Brendalsmo, archaeologist for the Foundation for Cultural Heritage Research agrees. "It is fun to see confirmation of what we have long believed, that there was a Christianization of Norway long before the two Olavs came," he told the newspaper ***Aftenposten***.

CSI: Christ Scene Investigation

At last: a Da Vinci mystery that has nothing to do with Dan Brown. Art historians agree that the Tondo (round) painting of the ***Adoration of the Christ Child***, on display at Rome's Galleria Borghese, is one of the finest Renaissance oil paintings of its kind. What they haven't agreed on is its artist. Since the 1790s, historians have attributed it to Raphael, Ghirlandaio, Lorenzo di Credi, and others. Since 1926, Fra Bartolomeo's name has been on the adjoining plaque. Others, however, have speculated that Leonardo da Vinci may have had a hand. A hand indeed: Restorers have uncovered in the painting that most archetypical of clues, a fingerprint. "I wouldn't have found it if I hadn't been using my microscope," Elizabetta Zatti told ***The Guardian***. "It's clearly a fingerprint left while the paint was still wet, but we don't really know whose finger it belongs to." But they have a good guess: Leonardo deliberately left fingerprints in some works as a signature of sorts, and some of the techniques and colors in the painting match his style. Researchers are now comparing the print with one on Leonardo's ***Lady with an Ermine***, in Krakow, Poland.

St. Peter's in Miniature

St. Peter's Basilica was no easy destination this spring, as hundreds of thousands of pilgrims traveled to Vatican City to pay their last respects to Pope John Paul II. Americans preferring to stay stateside but still see the interior of the grand church while honoring the late pope have a rare opportunity to do so: The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., happened to be exhibiting Michelangelo's original 18-foot-tall wooden model of the basilica dome as part of a large exhibit on the creation of the church. The model continues to be used when repair or restorations are needed on the actual church, and Michelangelo himself condemned builders for being less careful in their construction than he was in making the model. "The model, such as I make for everything, was exact," he scolded in a 1557 letter. The exhibit will be in Washington, D.C., through May 31, 2005, then travels to Germany.

Cradle of Scottish Christianity

Ninian may not have been the first to take the gospel to the Picts in what is now Scotland, but he's the first to get credit for it. His stone church in what is now Whithorn was named Candida Casa, the white house, because the locals had never seen such a structure before. It became a major monastic center, drawing students from Ireland and Wales, but the white walls eventually crumbled.

Today the island of Iona, founded a century after Whithorn by Columba, is the primary destination for pilgrims with Celtic Christianity on their minds. But on Good Friday, a significantly renovated Whithorn site opened, and tourists can visit the remains of the 12th-century priory built on Candida Casa's foundation. The site also has a signficant collection of 60 carved stones (including the Latinus Stone, the oldest Christian stone carving in Scotland, which dates to about 450).

Petra: Lost City of Stone

Petra, a city carved by Nabataeans out of sandstone cliffs about 48 miles south of the Dead Sea before the time of Christ, has been a popular tourist site since its rediscovery in 1812. Now the ancient city-or at least 200 important artifacts from it-are slowly touring North America. "Petra: Lost City of Stone," is presently at Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, until August 15. (From there, it's off to Calgary and Ottawa.) The Calvin display has drawn attention to Petra's Christian history-one of the most prominent artifacts is a pieced-together marble pulpit from the Byzantine-era "Blue Chapel," which demonstrates that Christians thrived at the site even after an earthquake struck it in 363. Records show bishops from Petra attending early church councils such as the Council of Sardica in 343. Athenogenes, bishop of Petra in the late 500s, is the last recorded Christian leader of the city, once home to more than 20,000.

Santa Claus Is Coming to Town

The original Saint Nicholas has been spurned by his own hometown. The city he served as bishop, Myra, in Lycia, is now the Turkish city of Demre. And on February 3, the city council voted to replace the town center's traditional bronze statue of Nicholas in a brightly colored effigy of a fat man with a red fur suit: the Nicholas imposter, Santa Claus (a perversion of the Dutch name for Nicholas, Sante Klaas). "The current statue is the best way to introduce Saint Nicholas because the whole world knows this image of him in his red clothes and hat, with his sack of presents and a bell in his hand," Mayor Suleyman Topcu told Reuters. He told the ***Chicago Tribune***, "This is the one everyone knows. We couldn't figure out what the other one is." Locals (overwhelmingly Muslim) supported the move, saying, "The other was a priest, a Christian." Tour guides, historians, and others, however, have begged the council to change its mind.

Silver Scrolls Are Older than Qumran's

In 1979, Israeli archaeologist Gabriel Barkay found two silver scrolls in a Jerusalem tomb. "May the Lord bless you and keep you," they said, quoting the Book of Numbers. "May the Lord make his face to shine upon you." Yet the inscriptions were difficult to make out. Using sophisticated computer photo imaging, Bruce Zuckerman, associate professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of Southern California, has confirmed Barkay's dating the scrolls to the 7th century B.C., or four centuries older than the Dead Sea Scrolls. "This was quite a remarkable thing, making these the oldest artifacts ever discovered that quote texts that we find in the Bible," Zuckerman told Voice of America. "This is like Godzilla meets King Kong." A previously unseen section of the scrolls, revealed only through a special photographic lighting technique, refers to God as the "rebuker of evil." Zuckerman believes the scroll was worn as a kind of amulet. High-resolution photos of the scrolls are available through ***The Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research***.

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A Pilgrim's Tale: Journey to Jerusalem

Steven Gertz

No medieval Christian in Jerusalem could remember a more brutal reign than that of Caliph al-Hakim ibn Amar Allah. Convinced that Christians were up to trickery in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (the church built over the traditional site of Jesus' death and resurrection), al-Hakim razed it in 1008. Then his men started pillaging churches and monasteries across the Holy Land, and thousands of Christians converted to Islam out of fear of the "Mad Fatimid Caliph."

So began a series of events that would eventually disrupt the pilgrimage routes of Christians to Jerusalem and provoke Urban II to call for the Crusades. In time, the purpose of the pilgrim mingled with that of the knight going to liberate and defend the Holy Land (see Issue 40: The Crusades).

Yet Christian pilgrims have traveled to the Holy Land for many reasons. In the fourth century, nobles traveled there in search of the ascetic life (thereby escaping "worldly" burdens). Others later went in expectation of the Last Judgment, prophesied to take place outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Still others went as payment for their sins (a form of indulgence condemned by Martin Luther).

But some pilgrims went simply to meditate on the sacrifice of Christ at the cross, his victory over death in the grave, and his ascension to God's right hand. Writing in 1044, Rodulf Glaber recounts the tale of one such pilgrim.

"At the same time from all over the world an innumerable crowd began to flock to the Sepulchre of the Savior in Jerusalem in greater numbers than any one had before thought possible. Not only were there some of the common people and of the middle class, but there were also several very great kings, counts, and noblemen. Finally and this had never happened before many noble ladies set out with the poor people. Many desired that they might die rather than return home.

"It so happened that a man from the territory of Autun in the Burgundy area was among those who was traveling there. His name was Lethbald. When he had looked at all these holy places he at length reached the place on the Mount of Olives from which the Lord ascended into heaven in the sight of so many reliable witnesses. This is where it is promised that he will come to judge the living and the dead.

"There he threw himself down flat on the ground, spread out like a cross, and rejoiced in the Lord with unspeakable joy. Then, standing up there he raised his hands toward heaven, strained to reach it as close as he could, and gave utterance to these words, his heart's desire. 'Lord Jesus,' he said, 'who condescended for our sake to come down from the throne of thy majesty to the earth to be the Savior of mankind; who didst also from this place which mine eyes behold, robed in flesh, return to the heaven from which thou came: I pray the supreme goodness of thine almighty power that if my soul is to depart from my body this year, I may not go away from this place, but that it may happen within sight of the place of thine Ascension. For I believe that as I have followed thee in the body in order to reach this place, so my soul, unscathed and joyful, is going to follow thee into Paradise.'"

Lethbald returned with his companions to the hospice where he was staying and, after eating, retired to sleep. When his friends heard him praising God in his sleep, they tried to get him up. But he resisted, saying he was not feeling well. Eventually he called them back to his side, took the Eucharist, bade them

farewell, and "gave up the ghost."

And how is one to evaluate the pilgrimage of Lethbald? Glaber concludes: "Many return from the Jerusalem journey simply wanting to be admired, but he was truly free from that vanity."

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Elementary School: Medieval to Modern

Chris Armstrong

In today's public-school classrooms, boys and girls learn together with others of their age and ability. They are given pictures and hands-on materials to connect abstract concepts with the observable world around them. Their teachers address them as whole people-not just brains for the memorization and regurgitation of facts.

But elementary education did not always look like this. Schoolchildren of today, though they do not know it, owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670), a Moravian bishop often called "the Father of Modern Education."

A brilliant young man whose own experience of elementary schooling was anything but happy, Comenius called the schools his age had inherited from the medieval period "slaughterhouses of the mind." He was appalled by their oppressive strictness, their stress on abstract concepts unrooted in sense or experience, and their indifference to the moral and spiritual development of their young charges. And he set out to do something about it.

Sensitive to the developmental needs of children of various ages, Comenius divided elementary schools by grades. Believing that children must be wooed rather than coerced into learning, he invented the illustrated textbook and made experience and discovery part of the classroom environment. He taught that corporal punishment, if used at all, should be connected only with moral and not intellectual faults. He insisted that girls were as fully capable of learning at the highest levels as boys. And he preached that schools should teach all realms of knowledge, including morals and piety. The Moravian's reforms were both praised and implemented all across Europe, with over half of European schools eventually using his textbooks.

But behind these reforms lay a deeper vision. Comenius belonged to the Unity of the Brethren-a group of Pietist Christians descended from followers of the proto-Reformer Jan Hus. This small group of Czech believers had been persecuted and exiled from their mother country since early in the bloody religious conflicts of the Thirty Years' War. It was this background that birthed a vision in Comenius for a Christ-centered, universal education called "Pansophism." He believed that a broad-based educational program bringing together people of diverse backgrounds in a common understanding could help avert further strife.

Comenius was no naïve visionary. He knew the foolishness and futility of the world and expressed it poignantly in his rich allegory, ***The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart***. But he believed that education, though not in itself redemptive, could complement the gospel by fostering international restoration, unity, and peace. People have long understood that one potential benefit of a liberal education is the tolerance and generosity of spirit it can instill in its students. Rising above Europe's fractiousness, Comenius taught a strongly Christ-centered version of this old ideal.

Today, focused as we are on schooling ourselves toward technical mastery and economic ends, we could stand to learn this other, deeper lesson from Comenius. In fact, today's European Union has been doing just that. "Socrates," a government-supported, Europe-wide education initiative, has named its elementary-level program "Comenius." The program promotes the same values that drove its namesake's reforms of the 1600s: pedagogical innovation, transnational cooperation, and equal

opportunity for all students (see http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/). May it recognize Comenius's Lord as well.

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The Power of Books

For the Victorians, reading could be the doorway to doubt—or to faith.

Timothy Larsen

Books contain a deadly and secret poison. Many a young man has been destroyed by reading a single volume."

Such was the solemn warning of Joel Hawes in his ***Lectures to Young Men, on the Formation of Character*** (1829). It is characteristic of 19th-century Britain that, even when someone wanted to warn against reading, he would do so by publishing a book. Reading was dangerous because it was powerful—and therefore, if the books were edifying, reading could also be a strong weapon for good.

The Victorian age was the great age of reading. In 1815, 58 percent of men and 81 percent of women were illiterate. By the end of the century, however, 95 percent of both men and women were literate. On Sundays the Victorian masses often learned to read through the free schooling provided by local churches. State education was enacted in 1870—pushing literacy rates higher.

Victorians often came to faith by reading. In the past, printed material had been too expensive for the poor. Now, the Religious Tract Society flooded the nation with cheap, edifying literature. Salvation how-to manuals were widely disseminated and highly effective. Newman Hall's ***Come to Jesus*** reached a circulation of four million copies. J. A. James, author of ***The Anxious Inquirer After Salvation Directed and Encouraged***, received a letter from one locality where 27 people had been converted through the circulation of a single copy of his book.

New doubts and new doubters

The Victorians also lost their faith through reading. "Infidel" literature was also printed in cheap editions in order to reach the working classes. New fields of learning sometimes seemed to undercut traditional religious beliefs. Charles Darwin's ***On the Origin of the Species*** (1859) sat uneasily with the Christian understanding that human beings were unique creations made in the image of God. The Darwinian scientist T. H. Huxley, invented a whole new category of doubters when he coined the word ***agnosticism*** in 1869.

A major corrosive to traditional Christian beliefs was the emerging discipline of biblical criticism. As a young girl, Mary Ann Evans was a devout evangelical Christian. Her religion was so strict that she even disapproved of Handel's ***Messiah*** as too worldly. Her faith dissolved, however, upon reading a volume that sought to expose as untenable the miraculous claims of Christianity. She then went on to translate into English the most controversial work of radical biblical criticism then emanating from Germany, D. F. Strauss's ***The Life of Jesus Critically Examined***. Being persuaded by such a book did not come without personal pain. A friend reported of Evans when she was in the midst of her translation: "She said she was Strauss-sick—it made her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion."

J. W. Colenso, missionary bishop of Natal, was overcome with doubts when his Zulu assistant asked him whether or not the story of Noah's ark was really true. Colenso went on to write ***The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined***—an attack on the historical veracity of Scripture that caused a sensation in Britain. And so it went on.

Questioning the old beliefs

Victorians also read their way toward modifications of traditional doctrines. Some Victorians began to find certain Christian dogmas deeply troubling. The humanitarian strain of Romanticism made it harder to accept innocent or extreme suffering as part of God's plan.

For some, substitutionary atonement sounded like an unpleasant, if not positively immoral, idea. Notions of the Atonement become progressively vaguer. Leading Anglicans began to speak of Christianity as "the religion of the Incarnation," and one book allowed this popular doctrine to subsume the category of atonement altogether: D. W. Simon's ***Reconciliation by Incarnation***. The Victorians made the feast of the Incarnation, Christmas, into the dominant cultural event that it has continued to be.

Even more troubling than the older doctrine of the Atonement was the traditional view of hell. Colenso refused to believe that the Zulu people had been going to hell in mass for generations. Even for those who clearly deserved to be punished, endless torment seemed excessive and therefore inhumane. Ideas of "conditional immortality" or eventual annihilation began to rival the older view.

Novel ideas

And they read novels. The Victorians made the novel into the pervasive genre of literature that it has been ever since. Moreover, in an age without electronic media, the novel had an unrivalled place as a riveting art form. For many poor people, reading was a valuable gift not taken for granted. They saved precious pennies to spend them on books. The elite, despite their wider cultural opportunities, were enthralled as well. The statesman W. E. Gladstone cancelled his plans to go to the theater because he could not put down Wilkie Collins' sensational novel, ***The Woman in White***. Some people denounced novels as capable of inducing madness, but other cherished them as highways to truth, knowledge, and the realm of the imagination.

The novel was a forum for discussing all the leading issues and concerns of a changing society and an ideal medium for those who wanted to influence people. Mary Ann Evans, after she became a skeptic, embarked on a triumphant career as a novelist under the pseudonym George Eliot. For her, the old faith was gone, but her novels could help people understand that "duty" still remained.

A whole subgenre, "Condition of England" novels, arose to aid reflection upon the plight of the working classes and the problems of industrialization. The clergyman Charles Kingsley, who was deeply concerned about social problems, took to novel writing to address these issues. Even the Conservative statesman Benjamin Disraeli wrote some "Condition of England" novels.

Another subgenre was the "loss of faith" novel. Indeed, the Victorian "crisis of faith" is more a dominant theme of Victorian fiction than the Victorian period itself. Mrs. Humphry Ward's ***Robert Elsmere*** (1888), the story of an Anglican clergyman's journey into doubt, has been called "the best-seller of the decade."

Although most of Ward's readers might have been worried about the "loss of faith," they were not actually experiencing it. Christianity was strong, vital, and pervasive throughout the Victorian era, all its many challenges notwithstanding. Church-going was high. The urban poor did not often attend on a weekly basis, but they were still apt to be believers, and to connect with the church in other ways, such as celebrating rites of passage and sending their children to Sunday school. Most people found a way to think about biblical criticism, Darwinism, and other unsettling issues without losing their religion.

Moreover, some who were temporarily thrown into doubt read their way back to faith once again, including the political reformer Thomas Cooper. Having at first lost his faith after reading Evans's translation of Strauss, he later wrote a popular refutation of Strauss, ***The Bridge of History over the***

Gulf of Time.

For the Victorians, all roads—whether to entertainment or to social action, to doubt or to faith—were paved with pages full of words.

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Life and Religion Are One

George MacDonald embraced all experiences, both joys and hardships, as vehicles of grace—and inspired others to do the same.

Rolland Hein

According to one American reader, fans raved about George MacDonald's novels as if they were "a new gospel." A huge public, she insisted, was "greedy" for more. It was not MacDonald's gospel that was new, however, but his fresh presentation of the gospel's relevance to life. MacDonald had once said, "The life, thoughts, deeds, aims, beliefs of Jesus have to be fresh expounded every age, for all the depth of eternity lies in them, and they have to be seen into more profoundly every new era of the world's spiritual history." Through his writing, he had found a way to do just that.

"Life and religion are one, or neither is anything," he insisted. Incensed by seeing professing Christians intellectually assent to Christian doctrine while still adhering to secular attitudes and patterns of life, he dedicated his ministry to demonstrating that Christian truth is at the very heart of life. Life itself is constantly trying to teach that unity. "The same God who is in us ... also is all about us—inside, the Spirit; outside, the Word," he remarked, "and the two are ever trying to meet in us." That is, every aspect of the created universe and of human experience comes from God. Rightly received, all of life is a vehicle of grace.

A storyteller for the ages

Stories, MacDonald discovered, are an ideal means for showing people the sacramental character of life. A prolific writer, he composed poetry, novels, and fairy tales for both children and adults, as well as sermons, essays, and works of literary criticism—over 50 books in all. A shrewd and discerning student of his own life's experiences, both those of joy and those of grief, he portrayed the truths he discovered in his large gallery of characters. He was careful to teach nothing that his own life did not exemplify.

MacDonald's popularity in his own century was based largely upon his novels, and such titles as ***Sir Gibbie, Robert Falconer***, and ***Thomas Wingfold, Curate*** remain highly readable today to all who are interested in the wedding of Christian truth to human experience. It is in the mythic reaches of his fairy tales, however, that his literary reputation largely endures. They stand not only in their own right but as the forerunners of many such writings by G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Madeleine L'Engle.

Chesterton and Lewis, perhaps the two most influential Christian writers of the 20th century, both hailed him as pivotal in shaping their thought. Chesterton dubbed him "St. Francis of Aberdeen" and said that MacDonald's ***The Princess and the Goblin***, which had been read to him in the nursery, was a book that "made a difference to my whole existence, which helped me to see things in a certain way from the start." Lewis saluted MacDonald as his "master," affirming that he had never written a book that did not bear the stamp of MacDonald's influence. What most affected Lewis was MacDonald's portrayal of "holiness": "The quality which had enchanted me in his imaginative works turned out to be the quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic reality in which we all live."

Earthly father and heavenly Father

George MacDonald's discernment of the "real universe" began in his childhood. He was born in 1824 in

Huntly, a town in the north of Scotland whose inhabitants held to a stern and unwavering form of Calvinism. His deep need for love was frustrated by the death of his mother from tuberculosis when he was eight. His Calvinist father, who was both a stern disciplinarian and an understanding, loving parent, undertook to be both father and mother to his family of boys.

George MacDonald Sr. was indeed a man of legendary proportions. His grandson Greville, writing the family history, tells how as a strict teetotaler he refused the recommended whiskey sedative and watched without protest while his tubercular leg was being amputated at the knee, the operation taking place on the living room table. On the other hand, he gave loving attention to his growing sons, entertaining them with many stories lifted from both the Old Testament and Gaelic mythology.

A thoughtful and sensitive child who took churchgoing very seriously, MacDonald nevertheless began to question such teachings as unconditional election and limited atonement. He wondered how the heavenly Father who created the universe and all people in it could be less loving and tender than his earthly father. Surely God was as interested in fairness as any good person was.

The God of the Beautiful

Although sorely pressed for funds, George MacDonald, Sr., recognizing in his son unusual intellectual abilities, found a way to send him to King's College, Aberdeen. A fellow student at King's described the young MacDonald as "studious, quiet, sensitive, imaginative, frank, open, speaking freely what he thought. His love of truth was intense, only equaled by his scorn of meanness, his purity and his moral courage." Love of truth and morality characterized his entire life.

At King's, MacDonald discovered in such German Romantic writers as Novalis and E. T. A. Hoffmann a form of Christianity radically different from the Calvinism of his youth. In sharp contrast to the impersonal and highly intellectualized teachings of the Shorter Catechism—from which as a youth he had been taught Christian doctrine—here was a deeply personal, mystical, and imaginative faith that resonated with MacDonald's own longings. These writings saved him from jettisoning his faith as did so many of his fellow Victorian writers.

Upon graduating, he was for two years employed as a tutor for a merchant's family in London. He saw in their lives, together with those of the Christians in the evangelical church he attended, the same discrepancies between professed belief and behavior that he had seen in Scotland. The only difference was their overriding concern with material gain. Feeling his faith severely challenged, he delved afresh into the gospel accounts of Christ's life and ministry. There he saw that the attitudes Christ confronted in his day were not unlike those he was seeing around him. Studying Christ's teachings for himself, he was deeply moved by the beauty of their moral qualities.

In the gospels he saw that fusion of life and truth for which his soul longed. "One of my greatest difficulties in considering to think of religion," he wrote to his father, "was that I thought I should have to give up my beautiful thoughts and my love for the things God had made. But I find that the happiness springing from all things not in themselves sinful is much increased by religion. God is the God of the beautiful, Religion the love of the Beautiful, & Heaven the House of the Beautiful—nature is tenfold brighter in the sun of righteousness, and my love of nature is more intense since I became a Christian."

Wisdom through suffering

After graduating from Highbury Theological Seminary, a Congregational institution, he married Louisa Powell, daughter of a London leather merchant, and together they took a church in Arundel, a town near the south coast of Sussex. Seeing in his flock the same neglect of Christian living and preoccupation with materialistic pursuits that had repulsed him in London, he began earnestly to commend to them the importance of applying the teachings of Christ to everyday life.

Displeased with such emphasis in their young pastor, the leaders in the congregation reduced his salary by two-thirds and complained that he was influenced by "German theology" and that he expressed a hope that all people will learn to be righteous, here or hereafter. The MacDonalds were not averse to living in poverty if that were necessary, but when MacDonald saw his presence was splitting the church, he left. Later, he imaginatively presented his pastoral experiences in his novel ***Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood***. Moving to Manchester, he tried to establish a church of his own and also to lecture on English literature.

Throughout this period of frustration and soul-searching he had confided his questions and frustrations with his father, who had earnestly tried to sympathize and counsel. MacDonald was deeply impressed that his own father bore, on an earthly plane, a dim resemblance to the heavenly Father in whom Christ had explicit trust. The ideal human relation of father to son became the cornerstone of his theology. "It is impossible to know God as he is and not desire him," MacDonald concluded.

As his own father's love and counsel could be counted upon to see him through hardship, so could that of God the Father. MacDonald became deeply convinced that the hardships and adversities of life are expressions of God's love necessary to strengthen and refine the soul. "So sure am I that many things which illness has led me to see are true, that I would endlessly rather never be well than lose sight of them," he later wrote in his novel ***Paul Faber, Surgeon***. His fantasy ***At the Back of the North Wind*** gives memorable imaginative expression to these convictions.

MacDonald's own hardships were manifold. When he was a young man, frequent nose-bleeds led him to suspect tuberculosis, the dread disease that beset his family and took several of his siblings. In 1855 he nearly died of an attack, saved only by the desperate measures of a homeopathic doctor from his Manchester congregation. MacDonald was utterly weakened and bedridden for many weeks.

Amidst extreme poverty and almost continuous ill health, however, the family saw their needs amazingly met, often at the last minute. Although MacDonald was always determined not to accept a dole, his friends and admirers nevertheless found ways to help. Being deeply moved by MacDonald's early dramatic poem ***Within and Without***, Lady Byron, widow of the Romantic poet Lord Byron, determined to locate the author. Finding him at Manchester in dire straits, she succeeded in convincing him she would be "the obliged person" if she were allowed to help. They accepted her offer of an expense-paid sojourn in Algiers. Their nine-month residence in the dry atmosphere and intense sunshine there was healing and restorative. It turned his health around.

Such events established MacDonald's deep sense of trust in the faithfulness of God. Life was not an affair of chance with a few divine interventions, but rather one continuous providence in which God was doing his best for every person. Wisdom came from listening carefully to what life taught.

Success and heartbreak

Returning to England from Africa, the family took residence in Hastings, a resort community on the south coast. There he published ***Phantastes***, his first attempt at Christian fantasy, in 1858. His purpose was to combine his own Christian vision with the mythic power he felt in the fantasy writing of the German Romantic authors and in such fairy tales as those of the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen.

This fantasy for adults sold poorly, however, and publishers were wary of sponsoring any more such works. Earlier, when he was a struggling young preacher and lecturer on English literature, a publisher had told him that the public cared for nothing but novels. But after attempting to write one, he discovered no publisher cared for his. Then, an inspiration struck. While attending a literary dinner, he overheard a journalist jokingly tell of a Scottish epitaph he had seen:

Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde;
Have mercy o' my soul, Lord God;
As I wad do, were I Lord God,
An' ye war Martin Elginbrodde.

The epitaph suggested to MacDonald the deep desire of the human heart for God to be as considerate in judgment as a fair-minded person would be. Fondly recalling the gentle even-handedness of his stern yet loving Scottish father—recently deceased—he undertook to memorialize him in a story set in his beloved Scotland.

The result was ***David Elginbrod***, a novel both publisher and public did care for. Sales were strong and the publisher wanted more. MacDonald had discovered his gift for capturing the nature of Scottish peasant life and accurately transcribing the quaint lilt of the Scottish dialect. More importantly to him, he now had a vehicle for giving fresh expression to Christian truth for his age, the novel being a comparatively new literary type. Writing authentic and plausible narratives acted as a discipline that kept his preaching relevant to human experience. He was soon producing novels at the rate of almost one a year. These works are remarkable for MacDonald's ability to embody true goodness in memorable characters, making godly living believable and attractive. They remain astute explorations of the practical relation of Christian conduct to life.

By 1867, he was able to purchase the Retreat, a home situated along the banks of the Thames in Hammersmith, west London. There, while MacDonald wrote and lectured, Louisa began adapting fairy tales for their family—now numbering 11 children—to act out. Acting became a family ministry. The MacDonalds were close friends of John Ruskin and Octavia Hill, pioneers in making livable housing available for the working poor. MacDonald did some preaching in their housing developments, and soon many of the inhabitants were being invited to the Retreat for Sunday afternoon entertainments.

Now in demand both as a lecturer and novelist, MacDonald together with Louisa and their oldest son Greville made a nine-month lecture tour of the United States in 1872-73. They traveled a circuit throughout New England and westward as far as St. Louis and Chicago, making a foray into Canada as well. Many of his American fans thanked him with tears of gratitude for the faith his novels had instilled in them.

His popularity in the United States was a mixed blessing, however. Unscrupulous publishers began pirating his books, paying him nothing. The lack of international copyright laws left MacDonald helpless. He also found his income at home greatly reduced, as English publishers were now forced by the competition to pay appreciably less for new manuscripts.

The family faced a yet more devastating experience when their second daughter Mary, engaged to a promising young artist, contracted tuberculosis. Desperate to defeat the disease, they set out for the Mediterranean, lacking both sufficient money and a definite destination but trusting God to provide. At Nervi near Genoa on the Italian coast they found temporary quarters in a commodious villa, but Mary died there in 1878. The family, whose emotional ties were especially strong, was crushed with grief.

The house of courage

Finding the climate a great benefit to MacDonald's precarious health, and discovering they could live more cheaply in Italy than England, they again took temporary quarters near the coastal town of Portofino. But early in 1879 their 15-year old son Maurice, stricken with severe cough and fever, died suddenly. Insult was added to grief when the local parish refused his burial in their graveyard, he not being of the Catholic faith. The family had no choice but to inter his remains on a rocky, unkempt hillside beyond the cemetery walls.

In 1880, on the strength of a generous purse taken by several friends, the MacDonalds had a very large and commodious home built in Bordighera, naming it Casa Coraggio. They used the extra room to give temporary lodging to people in dire straits who needed short-term help. So common was the family's practice of hospitality that a stranger once came to Bordighera inquiring for the location of the MacDonald "sanatorium." The ample space also allowed the daughters to receive pupils, as well as accommodating MacDonald as he preached weekly in his quiet, intimate manner to all who attended.

MacDonald was to know more deep heartaches, however. Another daughter Grace died of tuberculosis in 1884, as did their highly talented firstborn, Lilia, in 1891. Her death leant breadth and depth to his final adult fantasy, ***Lilith***, which he published in 1895. A complex and intricate myth imaginatively exploring the afterlife, it stands as both a tribute and a response to Dante's ***The Divine Comedy***. When MacDonald died in 1905, his ashes were placed in Louisa's grave in Bordighera.

Throughout his life, MacDonald maintained his conviction that each event came from the hand of his heavenly Father for his good. His quiet and persistent optimism triumphed over the many reversals of his life, not because Christian faith shielded from hardship, but because he believed that hardships and trials were the chief means by which a loving God could perfect his children. "What we call evil, is the only and best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good," he concluded in ***Phantastes***.

A Book of Strife in the form of the diary of an old soul, a long devotional poem composed after the deaths of Mary and Maurice, is a poignant testament to his sacramental faith. It suggests something of that holiness which C. S. Lewis felt in his writings:

But thou art making me, I thank thee, sire.
What thou hast done and doest thou know'st well,
And I will help thee: gently in thy fire
I will lie burning; on thy potter's wheel
I will whirl patient, though my brain should reel.
Thy grace shall be enough the grief to quell,
And growing strength perfect through weakness dire.

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The Pilgrims' Progress

For the MacDonald family, life and drama blended together.

The writer Katherine Moor has quipped that when Louisa MacDonald stopped producing babies she started producing plays. With a family of 11 children and their friends, there was no shortage of actors with sufficient artistic talent, not only to act but also to produce sets, props and music.

Louisa's ***Chamber Dramas*** was published in 1870 and included plays—such as "Cinderella," "Beauty and the Beast," and "Snowdrop"—performed by the MacDonald family for their own amusement, for friends, and for the tenants of Octavia Hill's housing schemes. So successful were these performances that both their audience and their repertoire widened. Performances of Shakespeare's ***Macbeth*** and ***Twelfth Night*** and two comedies, ***Obstinacy*** and ***Domestic Economy***, followed.

The turning point came when Louisa realized that her ailing family needed a change of air. As Louisa dramatized the second part of John Bunyan's The ***Pilgrim's Progress***, in which Christiana follows her husband Christian on the Pilgrim's journey, the MacDonald family entered a new phase. Their lives gradually blended with the drama as their seasonal migration to Italy began.

Louisa overcame obstacles of social prejudice against religious drama by the simplicity of her adaptation

of Bunyan's work and by her belief that its production was her God-given mission. Victorian Christians generally associated theater with the pursuit of pleasure and regarded it as a potentially corrupting influence. Religious drama was looked upon as irreverent. One stern Scottish character in MacDonald's novel ***Malcolm*** calls the theater "the hoose o' ineequity" (the house of iniquity). Just how innovative the MacDonalds were can be gauged from the entry for George MacDonald in the 1912 ***Dictionary of National Biography***, which comments that Louisa's adaptation of ***The Pilgrim's Progress*** "led the way for later revival of old miracle plays."

Despite such controversy, the play, performed between 1877 and 1889 in both Britain and Italy, proved to be a great success. Audiences were full and though reviews were mixed, the negative comments turned upon the uneven talents of the players rather than the content of the play.

After Lilia, the eldest daughter and most talented actor, died in 1891, the heart went out of the theatrical performances and the magnificent painted backdrops for ***Progress*** were put to other purposes. Friends continued to address family members by the names of characters they played, however ... a confirmation of the MacDonalds' sense of life as a pilgrimage.

—Rachel Johnson

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A Faith That Feels

Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth translated Romantic ideals into the language of Christian experience.

Stephen Prickett with Jennifer Trafton

For most people in Victorian Britain, Germany was a land of dark forests, romantic castles, and music boxes. The majority of the public was not yet fully aware of the controversial theories of German philosophers and biblical critics, but out of Germany had come a phenomenon that pervaded 19th-century culture: ***Romanticism***.

Romanticism began in the 1780s and 90s as a reaction against the rationalistic universe of the Enlightenment. The German Romantic poet Novalis complained that the Enlightenment thinkers "were tirelessly busy cleaning the poetry off Nature, the earth, the human soul, and the branches of learning—obliterating every trace of the holy, discrediting by sarcasm the memory of all ennobling events and persons, and stripping the world of all colorful ornament."

Rather than being a movement with a common code of beliefs, Romanticism was a mood, a way of looking at the world, a broad range of common concerns about how to understand knowledge and art. What unified all these new ideas was a fundamental shift in the climate of ***feeling*** and in attitudes toward emotion. Despite its secular manifestations, Romanticism in both Germany and England was primarily a religious phenomenon—a whole new way of understanding religious experience.

Truth tested on the pulses

The Evangelical Revival of the 18th century prepared the way for this transformation in England. (Its roots, in turn, were in German Pietism, one of several factors that set the stage for Romanticism in that country.) In reaction against the calm and pious rationality of the Church of England, John and Charles Wesley helped recover the lost emotional dimension of Christian faith. "Our souls o'erflow with pure delight," wrote Charles. It is significant that, for him, this delight in response to God took the form of hymns—poetry. The proclamation that "joy" was at the heart of creativity foreshadowed the Romantic sensibility that would soon envelop the country.

"For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," said William Wordsworth, the writer most responsible for changing the climate of feeling in the first half of the 19th century. He did not merely assert the value of feeling—he showed it as a poet. After Wordsworth's death, Matthew Arnold lamented, "But who, ah who, will make us feel?"

Known today in popular circles for such lines as "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky" and "I wandered lonely as a cloud," Wordsworth was for many Victorians preeminently a religious poet. He gave them an assurance of the overriding unity and wholeness in God's creation that was lacking in a society passing through rapid social change. His poetry showed people once again how to feel a kinship with nature. Many Victorians received from it what they most wanted: a sense of belonging that could integrate head and heart. That truth could be tested "on the pulses" (in the words of another Romantic poet, John Keats) mattered to them quite as much as that it could be intellectually demonstrated.

Though some worried that Wordsworth came dangerously close to worshiping nature, there was always a tension in his writing between a love for the natural world itself and a longing for what lay beyond

nature, a joy beyond human grasp—"something evermore about to be." George MacDonald was perhaps the first Victorian critic to point out that this tension mirrored the classic Christian paradox of God as both immanent in nature and transcendent over and beyond it. He called Wordsworth's point of view "Christian pantheism."

Poetic Christianity

Wordsworth's close friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge has earned a place among the great English poets for such classic works as "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." But in the 19th century, his reputation was based mainly on his theological writings. Coleridge articulated a Christian understanding of the imagination that influenced generations of later thinkers.

Like Wordsworth and many other Romantic thinkers, Coleridge was a Unitarian for a while—and like them, turned against that tradition. Unitarianism as a religion of Reason allowed no room for the imagination and satisfied none of the cravings of the soul. Moreover, he grew to see God not as a pantheistic presence but as a transcendent Creator, immanent in the world of nature and human psychology, but simultaneously standing over against that world in judgment.

Coleridge saw his own poetic creativeness as a divine gift, a part of the wider reality of God's creativity —"a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." The imagination is the creative faculty of the human mind, giving shape to the world and to experience through symbols and metaphors.

Coleridge believed that all religious language is ***poetic***, containing many levels of meaning. The concrete, surface meaning is true in itself, but it is at the same time a symbol of something beyond language, an earthly lens for eternal light to shine through. Even the church is poetic—it always points to a greater reality, and yet that universal truth is inseparable from the particular, historical, ever-changing, flesh-and-blood reality of the church here and now.

The language of great literature expresses more than we can know at any one time or place. Shakespeare speaks afresh to each generation with new insights; so do the creeds; so does the Bible. Coleridge traveled to Germany with Wordsworth and realized the potentially corroding effect of higher criticism on Christian belief in England. Rather than struggle with questions of biblical literalism or "proofs of God" from design, he argued that religion is essentially an existential experience. Christianity is not a proposition, but a way: "TRY IT." As a book, the Bible is open to the normal criteria of literary criticism and the historical method; but it is also for Christians the Word of God mediating the transcendent in and through the temporal—and because of this tension the Bible is not less, but more than ever a unified Work of Art.

The poet as prophet

In the Victorian period, literature and theology intertwined. It is no accident that the most prominent writers in "the tradition of Coleridge"—people like John Henry Newman, Frederick Denison Maurice, and George MacDonald—were both what we now call "creative writers" and also theologians.

In contrast to the individualistic and elitist "cult of the Artist" in many Romantic circles, for Wordsworth and Coleridge the artist is the mouthpiece of the community with a crucial moral role to play. Another English Romantic, William Blake, wrote that a poet must be a prophet to his age. The Romantics did so by attempting to restore what Novalis claimed had been wiped away by the Enlightenment: the colorful ornament of the world, the poetry in nature and human experience, the longing for the holy, the feeling in faith.

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MacDonald Society. For a fuller account see Prickett*, Romanticism and Religion *(Cambridge, 1976) and Prickett, ed.*, The Romantics: The Context of English Literature *(Holmes & Meier, 1981).

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Victorian Visionaries

George MacDonald's friends worked to reform society, challenge the church, and inspire the imagination.

Stephen Prickett, Edwin Woodruff Tait, J. Philip Newell, and Rachel Johnson

Frederick Denison Maurice

The Quest for Unity

"'I seldom go to church,' said Falconer; 'but when I do, I come here: and always feel that I am in the presence of one of the holy servants of God's great temple not made with hands. I heartily trust that man. He is what he seems to be.'" This description of the preacher in ***David Elginbrod*** is George MacDonald's tribute to his friend and mentor F. D. Maurice, arguably the most important Anglican theologian of the 19th century.

MacDonald was present at Maurice's inaugural address at the Manchester Working Men's College, and one of his first jobs after leaving Arundel was as a lecturer there. Maurice read ***Phantastes*** in manuscript and helped MacDonald to find a publisher. In 1865, after their move to London, the MacDonalds started attending St. Peter's church in Vere Street, where Maurice was the rector, and as a result of his influence eventually became members of the Church of England.

Maurice had not been brought up in the Anglican Church. In fact, he had been born and raised a Unitarian and for a time in adolescence had been strongly influenced by his mother's growing Calvinism. Perhaps partly because of the painful religious division within his own family, he longed for a truth that transcended human-made systems. He wrote later, "The desire for Unity has haunted me all my life through."

The book for which he is most remembered, The ***Kingdom of Christ*** (1838), combines an extreme theological openness with an exalted view of the church. Nearly every denomination or Christian group has some of the truth, he argued, but no one should confuse his own theological perspective with the whole truth. Christians are united in Christ, not in certain ideas ***about*** Christ.

For Maurice, the church is a "universal spiritual society." The two qualities are co-dependent. It can only be universal if it is spiritual (an inner reality as well as an outer organization). But it can only be spiritual if it is universal. Maurice believed that openness is at the heart of the New Testament. Everyone belongs to the church, without exclusion. The problem is, some people believe it and some people do not—yet. Salvation involves turning away from the sin of self-centered independence and acknowledging one's redemption in Christ, the King and Head of all humanity.

"The Church is, therefore, human society in its normal state," he wrote; "the world, that same society irregular and abnormal. The world is the Church without God: the Church is the world restored to its relation with God, taken back by Him into the state for which He created it."

Maurice did not approve of "gathered" churches—groups of people holding precisely the same beliefs. He supported the Church of England as "the Church ***in*** England"—a body of Christians of diverse beliefs bound only by the fact that they were neighbors and members of the same community.

His model for the church is not a group who agree, but a family—whose members are bound by deeper ties than verbal formulas. The Patriarchs of Genesis were first and foremost relatives. The story

of Jacob, argued Maurice, showed that God's people were founded on family relationship and not choice. The Bible, instead of being a digest of doctrine to be picked apart by theologians, is God's letter explaining to the family of Christ their own position.

Maurice was later one of the founders of the Christian Socialist Movement. This was not so much conventional socialism as it was an attempt to offer a Christian critique of social injustices. (Though its 19th-century influence was limited, Tony Blair, now Britain's longest-serving Prime Minister, has recently described himself as belonging to the "Christian Socialist tradition.") Maurice's political ideas sprang directly from his understanding of the church. His concern for poverty and its accompanying educational deprivation was not an extension of the old idea of "charity," but a principle of social theology. A universal spiritual society ultimately implied a redistribution of wealth. His work as the first principal of the London Working Men's College was fundamental to his Christian Socialism—an expression of his vision of man as a whole being. Social justice meant nothing without education.

Maurice was widely respected for his Christian character, and his charismatic personality had a gravitational pull on many writers including MacDonald, Charles Kingsley, and John Ruskin. Controversy dogged his steps, however. Before his installment at St. Peter's, he had been expelled from his teaching position at King's College, London, for publishing a series of essays that challenged the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment. Whether this persecution was a direct consequence of his unorthodoxy (the official reason) or was actually part of a political witch-hunt (for his "dangerous" social views) is still debated, but so far from being the tragedy that many contemporaries thought, it probably gave his theological views wider circulation than they would otherwise have had—and new impetus to his ministry of unity and reconciliation.

—Stephen Prickett

Lewis Carroll
Wise Nonsense

Alice in Wonderland and its sequel, ***Through the Looking Glass***, are two of the strangest and most brilliant books ever written. Although they are best known as children's books, their topsy-turvy wisdom continues to speak to readers of all ages. Their author, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, was born in 1832 to a respectable Anglican family of clergy and military officers. The third of 11 children, Dodgson was thoroughly miserable at public school and at Oxford did not study as hard as he might have done, but his obvious brilliance landed him a position as lecturer in mathematics in 1855, which he held until his death. He was ordained deacon in 1861, but did not follow his father's steps into the ministry. Rather, he spent his life as a mathematician at Oxford, and achieved modest distinction in his career. He is remembered today for his hobbies—photography and children's fantasy, which he wrote under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll.

Carroll wrote ***Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*** in 1862, when he was 30 years old. He showed the book to his friends the MacDonalds, whose enthusiastic response persuaded him to revise and publish it in 1865. Carroll went on to write a sequel, ***Through the Looking Glass***, in 1872; another great work of nonsense, the poem ***The Hunting of the Snark***, in 1876; and the wordy and little-known fantasy ***Sylvie and Bruno*** (1889; part 2, 1893).

Though a devout Christian, Carroll did not often express his religious views, and it is hard to tell the exact nature of his beliefs. The ***Alice*** books have been compared to MacDonald's works such as ***Phantastes***, in which the hero enters a strange magical realm whose laws he must learn, encounters various creatures, and ultimately emerges from the experience wiser and more mature.

In ***Sylvie and Bruno*** he attempted to express Christian ideas in a manner reminiscent of MacDonald. Carroll's most famous contributions, however, are not explicitly Christian. Rather, the ***Alice*** books turn

reality upside down and show us a mad world that appears at first glance to be totally illogical. And yet the madness has a logic of its own, and the arbitrariness of Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land turns out not to be so alien to the world we live in.

"Sentence first, verdict afterwards" › "When I use a word › it means just what I choose it to mean." Centuries of injustice and reams of postmodern theory are contained in those two famous quotations. The world of Alice has become part of our imagination, because its craziness mirrors our own.

—Edwin Woodruff Tait

Charles Kingsley
Muscular Christian

Like George MacDonald, Charles Kingsley wanted to be a poet, became known as a novelist, is best known today as a writer of fantasy, and remained a preacher through it all. Kingsley initially entered the Anglican clergy in obedience to the wishes of his future wife Fanny Grenfell, and he was determined not to become the stereotypical "man of the cloth." He pursued a life of strenuous physical activity. Early rising, "hard work and cold water," and the simple doing of your duty were the way to holiness in Kingsley's view; taking your spiritual temperature was fatal.

Kingsley's approach to faith is often called "muscular Christianity," though he hated the phrase. In his later years, Kingsley taught history at Cambridge and served as chaplain to Queen Victoria, and by the time of his death at 56 he was one of the most respected figures of his day. (Ironically, his obsession with health and manliness may have led him to shorten his life by overexertion.)

Along with his friend F. D. Maurice (whom he called "Master" after being deeply affected by ***The Kingdom of Christ***), Kingsley was concerned with the plight of the working classes in Victorian England and was one of the founders of the Christian Socialist Movement. He saw true Christianity as threatened by Roman (and Anglo-) Catholicism on the one hand, and by Transcendentalism and secular ideologies on the other. He was also deeply interested in science, earning the respect of Charles Darwin.

All of these interests found expression in Kingsley's novels, which, like MacDonald's, usually tell a story of painful spiritual growth. The young working-class poet in ***Alton Locke*** (1850), for example, learns through disappointment, imprisonment, and disease (of which he eventually dies) that political change is not enough without moral transformation.

Kingsley's most famous work is his classic children's book ***The Water-Babies*** (1862), in which the poor chimney-sweep Tom drowns in a brook in the first chapter and promptly turns into an aquatic creature, learning wisdom and compassion (even for his cruel former master) after many underwater adventures. An allegorical mixture of fantasy, science, and satire, ***The Water-Babies*** is the closest the scientific and practical Kingsley ever got to MacDonald's mysticism.

—Edwin Woodruff Tait

Alexander John Scott
Celtic Teacher

George MacDonald regarded A. J. Scott as the greatest man he had ever known. A Christian teacher in the Celtic tradition, Scott's influence on MacDonald was personal and literary and above all theological.

Scott's belief that creation is a sacred expression of the divine and his conviction that what is deepest in every human being is the image of God stood in stark contrast to the reigning Calvinism of 19th-century Scotland. "Creation," he said, "is a transparency through which the light of God can be

seen." Moreover, the deeper we move in relation to any human being, the closer we come to the mystery of God. It is these two characteristics of Scott's theology that most significantly shaped George MacDonald's vision of reality.

MacDonald met Scott in 1849 while studying at Highbury Theological College in London. By this stage, Scott was an independent teacher and preacher. In 1831 he had been deposed from the Church of Scotland for his critique of Westminster Confessionalism. For the rest of his life he lived in exile from Scotland.

In England he transposed his theological convictions into political, cultural and literary activities. In 1848, along with F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley, he became one of the founders of Christian Socialism and helped establish cooperatives and centers of education for working men and women.

Also in 1848 he was appointed professor of English literature at University College, London, where he became a close friend of John Ruskin. Then in 1851 he became the first Principal of Owens College, later Manchester University.

It was in the mid-1850s in Manchester that MacDonald joined Scott for a number of years, even seeking refuge in Scott's home during a period of serious illness."He understood me," said MacDonald, "and gave me to understand him."

—J. Phillip Newell

John Ruskin
Beauty-loving Skeptic

Of the secular "prophets" of the Victorian era, one of the most tragic and intriguing was John Ruskin. Born in 1819 to devout Evangelical Anglican parents, Ruskin launched himself precociously into fame in 1843, when he began writing a vast multivolume work of art criticism (***Modern Painters***). The final volume was published in 1860, by which time Ruskin had broadened his interests. He had come to believe that art reflected the moral condition of the people and society that produced it. Ruskin inspired a younger generation of artists and craftsmen (the Pre-Raphaelites), who combined an interest in medieval art with a commitment to social reform. He also taught art in Maurice's college for working-class men and eventually founded a utopian society called the "Guild of St. George."

Though Ruskin longed to renew society, he struggled to control his own life. Ten years after the annulment of his marriage to Euphemia Gray (for whom he had written his classic fairy tale ***The King of the Golden River***), he fell in love with a young, devout Irish evangelical named Rose La Touche. Rose's parents, however, were opposed to the relationship, both because of Ruskin's age and even more so because Ruskin had abandoned the evangelical faith of his childhood and by the 1860s was proclaiming himself a "pagan." For ten agonizing years, the MacDonalds (whom Rose's mother had introduced to Ruskin in the hope that they would bring him back to the faith) served as confidants for both parties, and at one point helped arrange a meeting.

Rose's death in 1875 sent Ruskin into a downward spiral of mental illness, but it also ironically led to his regaining some kind of faith, though the nature of that faith is hard to determine. He described the core of Christian belief accurately and sympathetically in his autobiography ***Praeterita***, and he was deeply fascinated by MacDonald's understanding of God, but he seems to have regarded Christianity as no more divine than any other religion.

In his moral earnestness and his call for a society based on beauty and creative work rather than greed and mass production, he spoke with the voice of a prophet. Yet this prophetic stance came from a tortured soul. Ruskin longed to believe, but never found a form of Christianity that he could believe in.

—Edwin Woodruff Tait

Octavia Hill
Practical Visionary

Octavia Hill was a social reformer and environmental campaigner whose legacy still touches our lives today. She was born into a family of reformers in Cambridgeshire, England. Her father's work in prison and educational reform and her grandfather's expertise on fever and sanitation influenced her interests, while her mother worked for the Ladies Guild, a cooperative association promoted by the Christian Socialist Movement. This guild worked among the London poor, and it was through her mother that the 14-year-old Octavia began her work teaching children from the Ragged Schools to make toys.

In 1853, a significant year for Octavia, she met John Ruskin while studying art and joined F. D. Maurice's congregation. It was while working as secretary to women's classes at the Working Men's College founded by Maurice that she met George MacDonald, who gave lectures on literature to the women.

Octavia soon began to direct her energies towards housing for the urban poor. Her schemes for improvement, backed by Ruskin's money, proved so successful that the work of remodeling and managing slum properties expanded from central to south London.

Her friendship with the MacDonald family developed quickly. They staged dramatic entertainments for her tenants, and she spent holidays with them. Octavia Hill was with George and Louisa MacDonald to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary and among the close friends present when George MacDonald died.

Despite the demands of work on housing projects, Octavia supported other causes, notably the Commons Preservation Society from which the National Trust was founded in 1895. This organization currently has a membership of about three million and is still actively engaged in the conservation of places of historic interest or natural beauty.

—Rachel Johnson

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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George MacDonald: Christian History Timeline

DECEMBER 10, 1824 Born in Huntly, Aberdeenshire,

1826 Family moves to the Farm, Huntly

1832 Death of MacDonald's mother, Helen MacKay MacDonald

1840 Enters King's College, Aberdeen

1848 Attends Highbury Theological College, London; proposes to Louisa Powell

1850 Accepts pastorate at Trinity Congregational Church in Arundel, Sussex

1851 Marries Louisa Powell; ordained to Congregational ministry

1852 Birth of first child, Lilia Scott; congregation reduces his salary

1853 Resigns pastorate at Arundel; the family moves to Manchester

1855 Publishes ***Within and Without: A Dramatic Poem***

1856 Lady Byron becomes MacDonald's patron; the family vacations in Algiers

1857 Moves to Huntly Cottage, Hastings

1858 Publishes ***Phantastes;*** death of father

1859 Accepts professorship of English literature at Bedford College, London

1863 Publishes ***David Elginbrod***

1865 Begins lecturing at King's College, London

1866 Becomes a member of the Church of England at the Chapel of St. Peter's, Vere Street, where F. D. Maurice is rector

1867 George MacKay, last of II children, is born; the family moves to the Retreat, Upper Mall, Hammersmith; publishes first of three volumes of ***Unspoken Sermons***

1868 Becomes involved with the housing projects sponsored by John Ruskin and Octavia Hill; publishes Robert ***Falconer***

1869 Becomes editor of ***Good Words for the Young***

1871 Publishes At ***the Back of the North Wind***

1872 George, Louisa, and their son Greville MacDonald go on a lecture tour of America; publishes ***The Princess and*** the ***Goblin***

1875 Family leaves the Retreat

1877 Louisa organizes the first family performance of ***The Pilgrim's Progress,*** with Princess Louise in attendance; Queen Victoria awards MacDonald a Civil Lists Pension

1878 Death of daughter Mary

1879 Publishes ***Sir Gibbie;*** death of son Maurice

1880 Family settles in Bordighera, Italy; publishes A ***Book of Strife in the Form of a Diary of an Old Soul***

1882 Publishes ***The Princess and Curdle*** and ***The Gifts of the Christ Child***

1884 Death of daughter Grace

1895 Publishes ***Lilith***

1891 Death of daughter Lilia

1893 Publishes ***A Dish of Orts***

1901 Louisa and George celebrate their golden wedding anniversary on June 8

1902 Death of Louisa in Bordighera

1905 Dies on September 18 at Ashtead in Surrey; his ashes are buried in Louisa's grave in Bordighera

His TIMES

1825 S. T. Coleridge, Aids to Reflection

1837 Victoria ascends the throne

1837-38 Charles Dickens, ***Oliver Twist***

1838 F. D. Maurice, ***The Kingdom of Christ***

1846 Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) publishes English translation of D. F. Strauss's ***The Life of*** Jesus ***Critically Examined***

1850s AND 60s Height of evangelical influence in England

1850 Death of William Wordsworth

1854 Inauguration of the London Working Men's College, with Maurice as first principal

1853-56 Crimean War

1859 Charles Darwin, ***On the Origin of Species***

1862 J. W. Colenso, ***The Pentoteuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined***

1865 Lewis Carroll, ***Alice's Adventures in Wonderland***

1869-70 First Vatican Council

1870 Universal elementary education introduced in England and Wales

1870s Beginning of the Keswick conferences to promote holiness

1874 G. K. Chesterton is born

1876 Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone

1878 William and Catherine Booth found the Salvation Army

1881 Cambridge University exams open to women

1884 Mark Twain, ***Huckleberry Finn***

1888 Mrs. Humphry Ward, ***Robert Elsmere***

1892 Soon after the death of Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon, the Bible League is formed

1894 Rudyard Kipling, ***The*** Jungle ***Book***

1899-1902 Boer War

1901 Death of Queen Victoria

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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A Born Preacher

George MacDonald's sermons passed the Victorian tests of earnestness and practicality with flying colors.

Robert H. Ellison

"A preacher he is to the backbone." "To talk or write is with Mr. MacDonald necessarily to preach." These statements, taken from articles published in the 1860s and '70s, are fitting descriptions of a man whose formal ministry was brief but whose interest in preaching and religious teaching continued throughout his life.

MacDonald began to sense a call to ministry in the mid-1840s, shortly after receiving his degree from King's College in Aberdeen. He became minister of Trinity Congregational Church in Arundel, Sussex, in 1850, but the universalist beliefs that had emerged during his studies at King's soon became distasteful to his congregation. Unwilling to be the cause of schism or strife, he agreed to resign after serving only three years.

He did not, however, abandon his calling. He spent some time with an informal congregation in a rented room in Manchester, and was often invited to preach in churches throughout England and Scotland.

MacDonald's doctrine and career path were a bit unconventional, but in many other respects he was very much in the mainstream of Victorian preaching. During the 19th century, there was a lively debate over whether sermons should be read from manuscript or delivered extemporaneously. Like Charles Spurgeon and a host of other preachers, MacDonald came down firmly on the "extemporaneous" side. He used only notes in the pulpit, with stenographers helping to prepare transcripts for publication in religious magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. He also followed the common practice of publishing several books of sermons, which often included works he never had the opportunity to preach.

The importance of being earnest

Both the sermons he preached and those he published met the 19th-century criteria for good preaching. First, the Victorians wanted their preachers to be "earnest," a term they used to describe sincerely Christian men who could communicate a sense of moral authority to their congregations. An article published in the ***Spectator*** in 1901 gives a good sense of MacDonald's charisma in the pulpit:

> He told his hearers of what he knew. [His sermon] was no piece of brocaded oratory, no set theological essay, it was a simple yet most profound message from a human soul to his brother souls. Here was one, you felt, who had been on the Mount of Vision and who had seen and heard things beyond mortal ken. You forgot mere logic, you were rapt into an "ampler ether, a sublimer air" than you were wont to breathe every day.

Earnestness is, of course, best expressed in person, but MacDonald apparently managed to convey it through the printed page as well. One critic praised some of his ***Unspoken Sermons*** as "arresting and illuminating," and another noted that while his books could not capture the full force of his "striking personality," those who read his sermons would get at least some sense of his "searching spiritual power."

"If we are not practical, we are nothing"

Being earnest was important, but it was not enough. Once preachers had captured their congregants' attention, they were expected to show them how to live sincere Christian lives of their own. The Victorians regarded practical application as the single most important element of preaching. A talk could be on a religious subject, and it could even be delivered from a pulpit, but if it did not offer clear and specific instructions for holy living, they judged it to be a lecture rather than a sermon.

MacDonald's emphasis upon exhortation permeates the transcripts of his spoken sermons. A typical example is this warning against schism from a sermon on Philippians 3:15-16:

> My honored friends, if we are not practical, we are nothing. Now, the one main fault in the Christian Church is separation, repulsion, recoil between the component particles of the Lord's body. ... If you delight to condemn, you are a wounder, a divider of the oneness of Christ. ... Let it humble thee to know that thy dearest opinion ... thou art doomed to change, for it cannot possibly be right, if it work in thee for death and not for life.

Practical application is not as immediately evident in his published sermons. These discourses are often technical or philosophical, reminding us less of Spurgeon's preaching than of E. B. Pusey's ***Lectures on Daniel*** or John Henry Newman's ***Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford***.

Application is not, however, entirely absent. In the three volumes of ***Unspoken Sermons***, we can find several instances of MacDonald calling his readers to be diligent in prayer, to love their enemies, to worship God rather than wealth, to grow into the likeness of Christ. John Ruskin focused on the practical impact of these books in a letter he wrote to MacDonald in 1868: "They are the best sermons I have ever read, and if ever sermons did good, these will."

MacDonald's sermons earned Ruskin's admiration and gained the attention of some critics, but his reputation during his lifetime was based largely on his novels. The case is much the same today. Aside from C. S. Lewis, whose anthology of MacDonald quotes extensively from the ***Unspoken Sermons***, few people have given much attention to his preaching. In his fiction, MacDonald speaks through other characters, but in the sermons he speaks to us himself. Experiencing MacDonald's pastoral heart firsthand can add another dimension to our understanding of his religious passions and ideas.

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Sermon Excerpt
"To the Church of the Laodiceans"

The Christian life is a constant fighting. ... You think Jesus Christ came to save you from any suffering and to do you good. He came to save you from your sins, and until you are saved from them He will step between you and no suffering. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent." [Rev. 3:19]

What does repent mean? To weep that you have done something wrong? No; that is all very well, but that is not repentance. Is repentance to be vexed with yourself that you have fallen away from your own ideal ... ? No; that is not repentance. What is repentance? Turning your back upon the evil thing; pressing on to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold upon you. To repent is to think better of it, to turn away from the evil. No man is ever condemned for the wicked things that he has done; he is condemned because he won't leave them. ...

The Son of the Father—the Eternal Son, with my heart and soul I believe, Who was ever and always with the Father; we cannot understand these things, but we get a little nearer to the profoundest truth of the Universe when we know something of the relation of the Son to the Father, for upon that the whole universe hangs—I say, the Eternal Son of the Father speaks of Himself as a suppliant at our door. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." ... Do you hear Him knocking at your hearts? He wants to get in. What do I mean by that figure? Well, I mean this, that He wants to get to your inner house, your consciousness, your life, and to clean it out for you, and to turn out that self that you are always worshipping—to turn it out, and put the Eternal Father in its place ... It is His Father that He wants to see ruling there. He is to be one with us in a way that there is no power in our hearts to understand the closeness of it, no figure in our language to say how close it is, for except you know how close the relation of Jesus Christ to the Father you cannot know how close the relation of every child of God, every creature that He has made, is to his Father, his origin. ...

When you are unhappy, restless, dissatisfied, do not know what to do with yourself, it is just because you have not Christ as your friend. To know God by knowing Christ, that is salvation, that is redemption, and nothing else is.

Excerpted from George MacDonald's sermon "To the Church of the Laodiceans," in* George MacDonald in the Pulpit*, compiled by J. Flynn and D. Edwards (Johannesen, 1999). Used with permission.

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Love at the Heart of the Universe

For George MacDonald, belief in God and obedience to God went hand in hand.

Kerry Dearborn

Christian History magazine


Love at the Heart of the Universe

"It is a law with us that no one shall sing a song who cannot be the hero of his tale, who cannot live the song he sings."

from "Within and Without"

Convinced that her son's violin is a satanic snare, a stern Scottish matron casts his beloved instrument into the fire.

Accosted by a mob about to burn him in effigy for a false accusation, a gracious Scottish man wins over his accusers with humor and humility.

The former is George MacDonald's grandmother, whom he immortalized as the violin-burning grandmother in ***Robert Falconer***. The latter is his father, with whom he had a relationship C. S. Lewis called "almost perfect." These two contrasting personalities represent the dominant forces that shaped MacDonald's theology: the Scottish Calvinism of his era and the Celtic influences of his heritage.

MacDonald wrestled deeply with their divergent perspectives of God. He came to believe that Truth is not to be found in a theological system but in a person, Jesus Christ, who calls people to follow him in all aspects of their lives. "Our business is ❩ to live truly," he wrote. Only as we live truly "will there be a possibility of our thinking correctly." Faith is a song that must be lived as well as sung.

God of wrath, God of love

Federal Calvinism provided the early scaffolding of his faith. Rather than affirming God as the Father who loves all of humanity and who freely forgives all through Jesus Christ, Federal Calvinists believed that God's love and forgiveness had to be purchased by the payment of Christ's sufferings on the cross. God was sovereign over all things and had chosen to love only the elect. This development of Calvinist belief arose in the late 16th and 17th centuries and became a dominant expression of Christianity in Scotland.

Aspects of this tradition remained vital to MacDonald, while others felt like a cage from which he yearned to escape. The imprisoning aspects involved intense legalism and the belief that God had from all eternity chosen to damn some and elect others for salvation. Though Federal Calvinists understood salvation as a gift of unmerited grace, they believed that one gained assurance of election through evidences of good works. The need for signs of salvation weighed heavily on MacDonald when joining the church. "I consented but with fear and trembling," he wrote in a letter to his father. "My greatest difficulty always is How do I know that my faith is of a lasting kind and such as will produce fruits."

Fear of God's wrath produced sobriety in religion that frowned on the arts (hence MacDonald's grandmother's distrust of the violin) and enforced strict Sabbath observances. Jesus was conveyed as the legal means by which the elect escape punishment, though not necessarily the revelation of God's

character and nature. Thus the grandmother in Robert Falconer explains, "But laddie, he cam to saitisfee God's justice by sufferin' the punishment due to oor sins; to turn aside his wrath an' curse; to reconcile him to us. Sae he cudna be a'thegither like God."

MacDonald wondered how the Creator and Redeemer could be described by his church as less loving and just than his own father. He agonized to think of God as a potentate supremely concerned about His own glory and establishing a system of limited atonement. In ***Weighed and Wanting*** he describes feeling as a child that he didn't want God to love him unless God loved all people. Thus he began to associate God more with his father's noble and caring character than with the wrathful God of his catechesis.

MacDonald's father affirmed beliefs more closely associated with Celtic Christian traditions, which derived in part from the desert tradition of the ancient Coptic church and placed central emphasis on the triune God of love. MacDonald was influenced by his father's egalitarian and generous attitude towards all people and by his desire for unity within the church. George, Sr., rejected the extreme points of both Calvinism and Arminianism and hated to see the gospel mystery torn "to pieces by those who believe there is no mystery in the Scriptures and therefore attempt to explain away what is evidently for the hour of God to conceal." MacDonald wrote later that his father bred in him the sense that fatherhood was at the world's core.

A crisis of faith

The polarities of Calvinism and Celtic Christianity in his childhood left him with many questions when he went to university. They provoked a faith crisis that led him to intense study of the Bible and ultimately to the belief that Jesus Christ is the true revelation of God's nature. Jesus did not come to purchase but to express God's love for humanity. "There is more hid in Christ than we shall ever learn ❱ The Son of God is the Teacher of men, giving them of his Spirit that Spirit which manifests the deep things of God, being to a man the mind of Christ. The great heresy of the Church of the present day is unbelief in this Spirit."

Belief in the triune God of love was like a window opening through which God's lovingkindness could breathe on MacDonald a sense of joy in his faith and delight in all of creation. He acknowledged God as the source of all truth and life and embraced what C. S. Lewis called "converted Romanticism." Human depravity was no longer the defining reality of life and faith, for he saw Christ as the Alpha and Omega who created people in grace, defeated sin and death on the cross, and is at work to bring all people into God's redeeming and transforming love. In reading his Bible, he came to see that Christ, the source of all, could use all things to draw people to himself (Col. 1:15-20). "I love my Bible more," he wrote to his father. "I am always finding out something new in it I seem to have had everything to learn over again from the beginning ❱ I must get it all from the Bible again."

God's mercy has no limits

MacDonald retained some aspects of the Calvinist teaching from his youth, including his grandmother's involvement with the poor. He held fast to the sovereignty of God, whose grace is unconditional and who alone deserves human devotion. The belief that God is sovereign gave MacDonald the freedom to challenge any theological system that claimed to be absolute.

For MacDonald, God's sovereign power is the power of love. The "love of the Son to the Father" is what "unites the universe." He therefore rejected what he perceived to be a Calvinist dichotomy between God's love and wrath. He believed that God's wrath is an expression of the consuming fire of divine love that purifies from sin, "that his life might be our life, that in us, too, might dwell that same consuming fire which is essential love." Thus, punishment has a redemptive purpose to set people on the right way and to deter them from what is wrong.

Jesus' suffering to cleanse us from sin reveals God's eternal self-giving nature, who like the father of the prodigal runs to welcome and restore prodigals to their inheritance in Christ. Christ did not die on the cross so the guilty could go free, but that they might die with Christ and so become true sons and daughters of God. Salvation is the restoration of a broken relationship: "to know God is, and alone is, eternal life, and he only knows God who knows Jesus Christ."

MacDonald trusted in God to purify and bring home all of his children. Because God will be all in all and desires all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), we are called to "hope for every man." The divine Father cannot be less merciful than the most loving human father, who would never punish forever. This is the essence of MacDonald's "universalism." However, MacDonald wasn't a universalist in the sense that there is no hell, no punishment for sin, no cost. He wrote, "If a man will not have God, he can never be rid of his weary and hateful self." Even so, as seen in C. S. Lewis' portrayal of him in ***The Great Divorce***, MacDonald left open the possibility of post-mortem conversion and believed that the terrors of hell could awaken people to their need for God: "Perhaps that will make him repent." He drew a vivid picture of this in his adult fantasy ***Lilith***. Defeated and dragged to the house of Sorrow, the wicked queen spends a terrifying night facing her own evil until she loathes herself enough to submit to being saved. MacDonald admitted the conjectural nature of his thoughts, however, and ultimately urged people to go to Jesus for understanding: "He will lead us into all truth."

The journey to holiness

Despite his emphasis on God's love and his hope that all would be saved, MacDonald left no room for cheap grace. He was fond of saying, "God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy." We are called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to become one with God, to will and love what God wills and loves. Freedom is not entitlement to choose one's own way, but the gift to walk with God in the way of self-giving love. "Obedience is the soul of knowledge," but disobedience is the way of destruction.

MacDonald believed that wisdom is gained through the willingness to relinquish possessions, security, and control and to follow Christ regardless of the cost. Central to much of his writing is the theme of pilgrimage, in which the protagonist moves from a materialistic worldview to a more sacramental embrace of life and creation. Like Celtic heroes, called ***peregrini***, the wanderers in MacDonald's Celtic-like stories grow in their love and compassion to the point of being willing to die for the sake of others. He believed that through dying to oneself, one develops the character and strength to be a true witness (***martyr***) to the nature of love that is at the heart of the universe.

Whether Irene and Curdie in the ***Princess*** books, Anodos in ***Phantastes***, Vane in ***Lilith***, or Robert Falconer, MacDonald's protagonists come to perceive meaning and music in nature, the interrelatedness of all of creation, and beauty at the heart of all things. They experience a baptism of sorts, which cleanses, heals, and engenders joy. And through the pilgrimage of relinquishment, suffering, and "death," they experience an enlivening of imagination that leads to greater empathy, creativity and courage. Celtic Christian emphases such as both feminine and masculine characteristics of God, the value of beauty and the arts, the importance of the Trinity, the dignity and worth of the stranger, the importance of community, and a love for God's creation are evident throughout MacDonald's work.

Many of MacDonald's theological conclusions were out of step with his time, but he believed them to be grounded in Scripture, ancient tradition, his own heritage, and the revelation of Jesus Christ. Rejected by many for his alternate vision, he was heralded by others as a wise prophet. Because he held fast regardless of the cost, his life and theology were forged in the fires of both suffering and faith. Thus an early biographer, Joseph Johnson, said, "MacDonald's work is the best revelation of his character. He has lived the songs he sang. He is the best he wrote."

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Sacred Story

With the pen as his pulpit, George MacDonald used fiction to show the relevance of scriptural truth to the problems of his age.

Kirsten Jeffrey Johnson

Many critics like to claim that George MacDonald was a "failed minister" who, having no other recourse, was forced to write. Yet the truth is that MacDonald continued to preach throughout his life, when his health allowed, and that he turned down some very desirable pulpit offers. He was convinced that his stories and poetry were themselves significant pastoral ministry, and he took his role as author very seriously. "The best thing you can do for your fellow," he wrote, "next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself."

MacDonald recognized the potential of being transformed by stories—that the reader or listener could learn within the framework of the story itself. He believed that readers could come to a better understanding of God if what they read was shaped by "Sacred Story"—both Scripture and the stories influenced by Scripture. He believed that an understanding of the intrinsically relational God could not be grasped outside of a relational hermeneutic; that a list of dry propositions would never be able to convey what the fullness of story—story rooted in Sacred Story—could. This is a surprisingly contemporary conviction, and yet one as old as Genesis. For MacDonald, it is also as relevant as Genesis.

What pastor does not know that if one desires to grab the attention of every tired and pre-occupied person in the pew, a story rarely fails? And that the story might be the only thing listeners remember the following week? Unfortunately, this is often seen as a failing of the people. Yet from the very beginning Scripture is filled with stories and references to them. Indeed there is more story in the Bible than any other genre.

The New Testament begins with the Crucial Story, four times over. It then continues with epistles written in the expectation that their audiences already know the New Story as well as the Old Testament stories—and thus will understand the epistles. To read those epistles without knowing the stories that inform them is akin to reading commentaries without bothering with the text commented upon. Nonetheless, many Western churches have become solely "epistle churches," and perhaps to these in particular MacDonald offers a reminder that it is the gospel that is "good news."

The lessons and limits of literature

George MacDonald grew up in a culture that placed great value upon story—and immense value upon knowing the Bible in its entirety. He was also gifted with an education that introduced him to a wealth of storied literature, not only the stories of ancient Scotland but those of ancient Greece, the Norse myths, the French ballads, and the German ***Märchen*** (fairy tales). In Mallory, Dante, Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Bunyan, he discovered profound stories that were shaped by and responded to Scripture. He found the same in such poets as Herbert, Crashaw, and Sidney, and in contemporaries such as Coleridge, Zola, and Tolstoy.

Writers like these continually showed him new perspectives on old stories and taught him how to face the challenges of human existence, how to live life more abundantly by better knowing his God

and creation. The more time he spent journeying with the characters of these texts, the more they challenged and equipped him.

But MacDonald was also very aware—as both the Bible and his favorite authors made absolutely clear—that nobility of thought is nothing without nobility of deed. Spending all of his time within these great texts would truly teach him about life, yet if he did not act upon what he was learning, the knowledge would poison him. MacDonald makes considerable effort in his novels to illustrate this. In ***Lilith*** he shows how the protagonist Vane has spent his life within the confines of mental exploration, not risking the complications or rewards of human relationship, not deigning to admit a need of others. As redemption begins to occur, Vane learns to say, "To understand is not more wonderful than to love. ... I had chosen the dead rather than the living, the thing thought rather than the thing thinking! 'Any man,' I said now, 'is more than the greatest of books!'" A significant part of Vane's journey has involved discovering that knowledge without relationship is death. This is a persistent theme for MacDonald, perhaps depicted most chillingly in the seemingly affable scholar Uncle Stoddart in ***Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood***.

Annals is a novel that even today draws readers to consider entering the ministry. Following the journey of an inexperienced minister named Walton, the reader discovers the subtle and surprising ways in which God meets him. Over time Walton learns that despite Stoddart having considerably more knowledge than anyone in the parish, he is severely lacking in wisdom. Indeed, the minister learns, the wisest parishioners are sometimes those most easily overlooked, not the best read. Walton is also surprised to find that the greatest moral support sometimes comes from the most wary agnostic, and the greatest love from those who seem least likeable. MacDonald is showing wisdom learned through his own experiences, as well as wisdom learned through his mentors—personal, literary, biblical. And in the very crafting of the story he shows how Walton learns the same.

MacDonald is not shy to point out those whose stories and poetry have shaped his writing, worldview, and God-view. In his adult novels—even the fantasies—he frequently names writers he believes worth reading. In ***David Elginbrod*** he refers to over 90 different works of literature, and this is not exceptional. MacDonald frequently has characters in his stories introducing companions to good literature, even giving tutorials meant to tempt us, as readers, with gems awaiting discovery. But his references are by no means always explicit. This is perhaps most evident in MacDonald's fantasy.

The Prophet Isaiah in fairyland

The Princess and Curdie is one of MacDonald's most popular tales. Like ***Annals***, it is about ministry—and being ministered to. For those who wish to relegate Noah, Daniel, and Jonah to the Sunday schools, perhaps it is nothing more than a tale told for children. But in imitation of his Master, MacDonald believed that good stories were for all—and poor stories for none. On the surface, this is a classic tale about journeying and serving, about faith and trust. But reading it in light of Scripture, paying close attention to particular phrases and imagery, reveals even greater richness. Each layer of meaning does not reduce the power of the story—as is proven by its "classic" standing—but imbues it with wealth. Furthermore, MacDonald follows the lead of all enduring tales, in that his novel addresses the concerns of his own era, concerns which—cloaked with historic particularity as they may be—remain perpetual.

The sacred story that provides the framework for ***Curdie*** is a text particularly renowned for its immediate and enduring pertinence: Isaiah. While many other parts of the biblical corpus (as well as many works of classic literature) color MacDonald's story, it is Isaiah that predominates. Curdie, a young miner, finds himself before a royal presence, professing his own errant ways, and thus being prepared to recognize those of his people. Like the prophet Isaiah who courageously offered, "Here I am, send me," so begins Curdie's adventure, filled with the same refrains and images: people in darkness see a great light, wine is poisoned, fires refine, animals harry courtiers, the widow and orphan are rejected, the stranger is reviled and beaten ... even obscure passages of Isaiah have

their parallel in ***Curdie***, such as a caterpillar meting out justice and a flock of doves on the defense. Literary critics have worried and puzzled over the ending of Curdie for decades (an ending that bothers few children) and yet the source and explanation lies firmly ensconced in Isaiah. But MacDonald is a pastor, not merely an exegete, and he wants his readers—whether they are aware of it or not—not only to understand Isaiah better, but to learn how relevant the text remains to the troubles of their very own age.

Both Isaiah and ***Curdie*** contain strong themes of apostasy and social injustice. Both address the interconnectedness of the people and the land, and a leadership that scoffs at the prophet's warning. MacDonald saw these themes as relevant to the culture in which he lived, a society that refused to perceive the dire need upon its doorstep. MacDonald knew streets full of crowded and disease-ridden tenements, widows and orphans without comfort, while the barons of the Industrial Revolution, blind with greed, exalted in "progress." Pollution and production raced on, side-by-side. The laissez-faire of London is the laissez-faire in ***Curdie***: "No man pretended to love his neighbour, but every one said he knew that peace and quiet behaviour was the best thing ... The city was prosperous and rich, and if everybody was not comfortable, everybody else said he ought to be ... The main proof of the verity of their religion was that things always went well with those who professed it."

An antidote to Victorian doubt

Not only did MacDonald show, through ***Curdie***, the relevance of Isaiah to the Britain of his time, but he simultaneously addressed some of the contemporary crises of faith. Debates about historical criticism were raging, and concerns over the accuracy of translation, biblical authority, evolution and the age of the earth were shaking the spiritual foundations of some ministers and laypersons. The complexities of the text of Isaiah, along with its occasional designation as "the fifth gospel," resulted in its becoming a popular test case for critical study.

MacDonald was among those Christians who did not find the discoveries of science and anthropology disturbing. Rather than seeing them as "explaining away" the supreme authority of God, he saw the questions they raised as widening and deepening the vastness of God's mysteries, showing him to be even more incredible than man had become comfortable conceiving.

And so MacDonald begins ***Curdie*** with a love song to the geological glories of the evolution of a mountain. He did not see science as antithetical to his faith in any way, but believed instead that both science and poetry were dimensions of the same truth. In an essay explaining this union, MacDonald wrote of a young poet lost in his inability to grasp that true science and true poetry cannot be at odds. This poet could well be a young Matthew Arnold, and ***Curdie*** an attempt to redress some of his angst.

Arnold, whom MacDonald called a "reverent doubter," was one of the dissenting voices of biblical criticism. Today he is best known for his poem "Dover Beach," which laments his loss of faith. This poet was in a bind, for though he loved literature, he felt that it must be subservient to the new glory of science. In multiple studies of Isaiah, including one for children, Arnold wrote of the importance of the beautiful biblical text—but also of his resigned acceptance that its value lay in its historical and moral virtues, and that "extra-belief" in Scripture was only misleading. Actually believing in the Bible, he said, was no better than believing in fairy tales.

MacDonald, who believed that fairy tales could hold truth within them—and indeed sought for his own to do so—believed that the Bible ***was*** Truth. The fact that it could not be reduced to a list of distilled morals was fundamental:

> For he has come, The Word of God, that we may know God: every word of his then, as needful

> to the knowing of himself, is needful to the knowing of God, and we must understand, as far as we may, every one of his words and every one of his actions, which, with him, were only another form of word. I believe this the immediate end of our creation.

MacDonald realized that a crucial element had been left out of the dialogue: the essential "story-ness" of the text. And so, in an attempt to explain the complicated poetic story better, as well as to counteract reductionist voices such as Arnold's, MacDonald explored Isaiah in its own storied form.

Pastoring through story

In giving ***The Princess and Curdie*** greater depth and purpose through the stories that shape it, MacDonald was following a time-honored tradition—a tradition that has produced Western literature's greatest classics and some of Christianity's most profound texts. While doing this he also responded to the quandaries of his contemporaries such as Arnold, who feared that science and Scripture must be antithetical. MacDonald was not threatened by the questions posed by his culture; he understood the need to ask them. But he sought to present a better answer—to show, through its own medium, both the enduring relevance and the enduring adequacy of the biblical text.

MacDonald uses story in the manner modeled by Scripture—"that we may know God." Knowing the vicarious educational nature of stories, he pastors his readers by "waking them up" to the incredible grace of God's love. All of his stories seek to convey this truth, as he explores death in ***At the Back of the North Wind***, obedience in ***The Wise Woman***, and the process of becoming more fully human in ***Sir Gibbie*** (the source of that marvelous phrase about learning to live "in the holy carelessness of the eternal now"). The testimony to God's love is there in ***Paul Faber*** as a man struggles powerfully with forgiveness and pride, and in ***Heather and Snow*** as grace and divine teaching are granted by a youth with mental disabilities, who also continues to grow in his own understanding of the "Father of Lights." ***Robert Falconer*** allows the reader to ask uncomfortable questions and to observe a soul wrestling with grace, while ***Salted with Fire*** condemns the refusal to offer grace and shows how desperately everyone needs it. "The Golden Key" reminds the reader that people may have different experiences of faith, yet no journey can be independent of others. It also shows how God's creation and the "faith of our fathers" can be gifts in the journey.

With each of these stories, highly varied in style and content, MacDonald wants his readers to experience transformation in order that they "might have life, and have it more abundantly." As in ***Lilith***, in ***Annals***, and in ***Curdie***, he follows the divine model, seeking to nurture a love of good stories within his readers so that they might better come to know the gospel. Easy retention of stories was not, in his pastoral understanding, a failing of the people. Rather, it was something divinely ordained.

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Unraveling Phantastes

The truth of a tale is often found not in the reading but in the rereading.

Ever since C. S. Lewis penned his autobiography, there have been readers—even Lewis scholars—mystified by ***Phantastes***. Compelled to read the book that Lewis said "most shaped my philosophy of life," and "baptized my imagination," they pick it up, get bogged down within pages, and put it down. Permanently.

Some find that if they begin with MacDonald's children's books, read a few fairy tales, then try a novel along the lines of ***Sir Gibbie*** or ***Alec Forbes***, by the time they return to ***Phantastes*** they are much better equipped. But perhaps the best key is understanding the historical context: the relationship between a reader and a text has changed considerably since the early Victorian period.

Few early Victorians were privileged enough to own many books, and a book was not simply read once and set aside. It was read and reread, the reader engaging with the text ever more deeply, each reading revealing new connections and presenting yet another journey. It was only during the lifetime of MacDonald, with the advent of penny novels and lending libraries and the popularity of magazines and serializations, that this approach to reading significantly changed. ***Phantastes***, like all books before it, expects a long-term relationship with the reader.

It is helpful when reading ***Phantastes*** to follow one theme that is noticeable early on in the tale ... what it means to "die to oneself," for instance. As this unfolds, other interwoven themes become evident, providing the next thread for the next read. The more one reads MacDonald, the more familiar one becomes with his primary themes, and the easier it is to follow their relations to each other, as well as to the books alluded to in the tale.

MacDonald points to these books not only to introduce them—he is also inviting the reader into a deeper conversation. As one reads the other books mentioned and then returns to MacDonald, suddenly one is part of a conversation that has been going on since God's first story. MacDonald is responding to Tennyson responding to Blake responding to Dante, who in turn is responding to John responding to Christ, who is reminding us of the words of Isaiah, or the Psalms, or Moses. This conversation between texts is part of the Christian heritage, part of understanding who we are and who God is.

The episodic nature of ***Phantastes*** is sometimes off-putting to contemporary readers, and yet this structure is part of MacDonald's effort to help the reader understand just how important that tradition of literary conversation can be. The 21-year-old protagonist Anodos is drawn into the realm of stories, Fairy Land, so that he may discover his own true identity. His education thus far has inspired "nobleness of thought, [but] not of deed," and his understanding of love is selfishly immature. Each separate episode he enters is a story that slowly shapes and changes him.

Anodos learns not only from acting in these stories but also from reading them—his new education begins with books of "Fairy Land, and olden times, and the knights of King Arthur's table." As his journey continues he is drawn into drama, poetry, songs, dreams, dance, pictures, memories. And in these, he realizes, he is "the chief actor therein ... for I took the place of the character who was most like myself, and his story was mine." As the stories conclude and he awakes "to the consciousness" of his present life, he realizes that he has changed as a result—that he was, in fact, vicariously "buried and risen again in these old books."

When ***Phantastes*** ends, a matured Anodos returns to his family and home "somewhat instructed, I hoped, by the adventures that had befallen me in Fairy Land. Could I translate the experience of my travels there, into common life? This was the question." Not only the question for Anodos, but the one MacDonald places firmly before his readers.

C. S. Lewis wrote that a first read reveals the plot and characters; it is in the experience of rereading that we find wisdom and strength. But be forewarned; rereading ***Phantastes*** did change his life.

—Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson

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The Wise Imagination

George MacDonald's legacy is his reminder that we are creative beings because we are made in the image of a Creator.

Trevor Hart

As a novelist and a poet George MacDonald was certainly blessed with a fertile imagination. But he was also a critic who thought long and hard about the nature of human imagination and its uses. And, as a Christian, he wanted to be able to give some account of just why it was that God made us imaginative as well as intelligent and moral beings.

MacDonald's distinctive ideas about these things are certainly woven into the fabric of his novels and poems. But they are expressed most succinctly and carefully in two essays, "The Imagination: its functions and its culture" (1867) and "The Fantastic Imagination" (1893), both published in a collection called ***A Dish of Orts***.

Created in God's likeness

The first and most important thing MacDonald tells us is that imagination is something we have in common with God. Imagination is that in man, he writes, "which is likest to the prime operation of God." As human beings, therefore, we may say that we are "made in the image of the imagination of God."

This is striking in what it tells us both about ourselves and about God. Biblical talk of human creation "in the image and likeness of God" has generally been linked to our ability to think intelligently and to discern right from wrong. But here MacDonald links it unashamedly to that part of us which writes poetry and tells stories, sees patterns in the clouds and hears the music produced by a bubbling brook, and which is too busy wondering what ***might be*** the case to be constrained by whatever ***appears to be***. Significantly, he reminds us that imagination does not have to do with such playful, creative and artistic impulses alone—but these are central to it. And God, he suggests, is like this. Our yearning for the poetic, therefore, is nothing other than a direct reflection of God's own creativity.

The God who created us made us poets and artists, and in doing so granted us a unique likeness to himself. This idea has some ancient roots, though it is one that theologians have often shied away from. But MacDonald grasps the nettle and insists that it must be so. And he sees poetry as essential to a truly human existence in God's world.

Finding God's poetry

As a Christian, MacDonald obviously believes that there is much more to the world than meets the eye. One of the key tasks of the imagination, he tells us, is to clothe invisible spiritual realities with material forms, enabling us to grasp them more securely. This is what the poet does, for instance, when he refers to love as "quick-e'yd," (George Herbert), to resentment "keeping its wrath warm" (Robert Burns), or to the Spirit of God brooding over the world with "warm breast and ... bright wings" (Gerard ManleyHopkins). When ideas take flesh in this way, MacDonald suggests, words are duly born anew of the spirit.

Such poetic links themselves are not born of human invention, however. "Everything of man," he insists, "must have been of God first." So what the poet "creates" he really only "finds." The patterns are already

present in the mind of God, awaiting our discovery. Indeed, we, too, are the products of God's own imagination, and whenever we have a genuinely "creative" insight, there is an important sense in which we are "rather ***being thought*** than ***thinking***." The ideas are God's first, and ours only by grace. It's as though God has hidden a rich store of secrets in the world he has made, and leaves us to find them out. "The man, then, who, in harmony with nature, attempts the discovery of more of her meanings, is just searching out the things of God." And it is our imaginative capacity that enables us to do this.

Spiritual nourishment through the arts

Of course, not every product of the human imagination is "of God" in this direct way. Like all of our created capacities, imagination is fallen, and MacDonald knows that it can be the source of great evil. But imagination is not just a tool whereby we enter more fully into the meaning of God's world. It is also that bit of us which God lays hold of, so to speak, in drawing us ever more fully and closely to himself. Therefore, MacDonald concludes, "infinitely worse evils would be the result of its absence."

The response to base imagining should not be to suppress it (as Christians have sometimes sought to do), but precisely to cultivate and develop it, to make it "wise." For a wise or "right" imagination is equivalent to the presence of God in us, and it is the secret of a harmonious and joyous existence in God's world. If we try to crush it, imagination will find an outlet just the same, almost certainly for evil rather than for good. So we shouldn't seek to avoid dreaming dreams but pray that those we dream may be born of God's Spirit rather than some other.

MacDonald suggests that, as well as praying, there are other things we can do to encourage this. Like the body, the imagination needs food and regular exercise in order to develop in a healthy way. Far from avoiding the arts, Christians should put themselves regularly in the way of "the finest products of the imagination." For here is not just "entertainment" (let alone the "wiles of Satan") but spiritual food and drink.

Of course we must be discerning (there is much dross, and some positively unhealthy material which we should avoid). But how shall we ever learn to discern, MacDonald asks, unless we become familiar with what is best? Literature, music, painting, drama—these have a vital part to play in the shaping of our souls. As Christians in particular, therefore, we have a mandate to engage with them responsibly.

No higher calling

MacDonald is best known among Christian readers, of course, for his own fiction and especially his fantasy. In such work, he muses, it may be that the artist comes closest to God's own mode of creativity as he too makes a world and then works and struggles and suffers with it. It is here that MacDonald's influence on later writers (Chesterton, Lewis, Sayers, Tolkien) is most explicitly apparent. Those who know Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories" will find much that is familiar, not least MacDonald's indignant insistence that "for my part, I do not write for children, but for the childlike, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five." Devotees of Dorothy Sayers, meanwhile, will readily trace links between MacDonald's argument concerning artistic creation and "law" and that developed in Sayers' ***The Mind of the Maker***.

It is not in specifics, however, that MacDonald's contribution as the "baptizer" of more than one great literary imagination should be traced, but in his wider recognition and rehabilitation of imagination itself as that God-given place in our humanity where depths are plumbed and lives shaped and reshaped. There can be no higher calling, he believed, than to be an instrument of God's continual redemptive engagements with the imagination, and through it the world.

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George MacDonald and Victorian Christianity

Jennifer Trafton

The best resource for understanding any writer is his own works, and with a writer as prolific as MacDonald you will not be lacking in reading material for a very long time. For an initial taste of his diverse output, start with Rolland Hein's anthology, ***The Heart of George MacDonald*** (1994; Regent, 2004), which includes sermons, poems, fiction, letters, and MacDonald's two essays on imagination. C. S. Lewis's ***George MacDonald: An Anthology*** offers an array of excerpts from MacDonald's ***Unspoken Sermons***, and Glenn Sadler has edited a collection of his letters, ***An Expression of Character*** (Eerdmans, 1994).

MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tales are readily available in several modern editions. For the most historically accurate picture of MacDonald, I recommend reading his novels, sermons, and other writings in their original, unabridged form.The complete set of MacDonald's works is published by Johannesen Printing & Publishing (www.johannesen.com). Don't overlook the collection of spoken sermons, ***George MacDonald in the Pulpit***, edited by J. Flynn and D. Edwards (the source of the excerpt on p. 31). There is also a centenary edition of MacDonald's novels published by Sunrise Books.

Wingfold, a quarterly magazine edited by Barbara Amell, reprints rare material by and about George MacDonald (http://pages.prodigy.net/b_amell/wingfold1.html).

The voluminous archives of the Marion E. Wade Center in Wheaton, IL (http://www.wheaton.edu/ learnres/wade/) include books and papers relating to George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, J. R. R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams. The center also publish***esSEVEN: An Anglo-American Literary Review***.

Robert Trexler has produced a wonderful resource by putting the original texts of 47 of MacDonald's books onto a single CD-Rom. Called "Ever Yours, George MacDonald," it is available for sale at the Wade Center and on the George MacDonald website (http://www.george-macdonald.com/ever_ yours. htm). Also on this website is Trexler's helpful overview of MacDonald scholarship to date, "George MacDonald: Merging Myth and Method," as well as a host of other articles by various scholars, images, news, and links to resources.

The standard biography is Greville MacDonald's portrait of his father, ***George MacDonald and His Wife*** (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), with an introduction by G. K. Chesterton. More recent biographies include ***George MacDonald*** by William Raeper (Lion, 1987) and ***George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker*** by Rolland Hein (1993; Johannesen, 1999). Hein also teamed up with photographer Larry Fink to produce ***George MacDonald: Images of His World*** (Pasture Spring Press, 2004). See www.hsutx.edu/ academics/litlang/macdonald.html to order.

For more in-depth discussion of MacDonald's works themselves, Hein's ***The Harmony Within*** (Sunrise Books, 1982; rev. ed. Cornerstone, 1999) and David S. Robb's ***God's Fiction*** (Sunrise Books, 1987) are good places to start. Those with a taste for Lewis Carroll will find much to chew on in John Docherty's study ***The Literary Products of the Lewis Carroll George MacDonald Friendship*** (Edwin Mellen, 1995).

Though MacDonald's fiction (especially his fantasy) has received a lot of attention from literary critics, there are few books that succesfully place him in his historical context. Notable exceptions include Stephen Prickett, who discusses MacDonald's relation to the Romantic tradition in ***Romanticism and Religion*** (Cambridge, 1976) and ***Victorian Fantasy*** (1979; rev. ed. Baylor, 2005), and Robert Ellison, who compares MacDonald to other Victorian preachers such as Spurgeon and Newman in ***The Victorian Pulpit*** (Associated University Presses, 1998).

A great way to meet other MacDonald enthusiasts is to join the George MacDonald Society (http://www.macdonaldsociety.org/) Members receive an annual journal, ***North Wind***, which includes articles related to MacDonald's life and work, and a quarterly newsletter, ***Orts***. The society is holding a special conference on September 16-19, 2005, to commemorate the centenary of MacDonald's death. Taking place at Baylor University in Waco, TX, the conference will feature papers by Stephen Prickett, Rolland Hein, David Robb, and other experts on George MacDonald's works.

Finally, to learn more about the Victorian period in general, check out Timothy Larsen's ***Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology*** (Baylor University Press, 2004). Larsen also recommends ***The Victorian World Pictur***e by David Newsome (Fontana Press, 1998), ***Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*** by D. W. Bebbington (Routledge, 1989), and ***The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes by Jonathan Rose*** (Yale, 2002).

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Unchained Faith

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and John Bunyan.

Collin Hansen

Left alone momentarily to work in the warden's office, prisoner Andy Dufresne (played by Tim Robbins in the 1994 film ***The Shawshank Redemption***), plots a surprise treat for his fellow inmates. He activates the warden's PA system, flips on a record player, and spreads the sweet sound of opera music throughout the jail. Initially frozen with shock, the prison guards rush toward the office to silence Dufresne's act of defiance. After they finally break through the locked door, the infuriated warden sentences Dufresne to two weeks of solitary confinement. Dufresne later boasts to his inmate friends that the time alone wasn't too hard: He listened to Mozart in his head. "That's the beauty of music," he explains. "They can't get that from you."

The Shawshank Redemption, based on a short story by Stephen King, expresses the spiritual longing for freedom. In this instance, music represents Dufresne's struggle to retain hope amid a corrupt prison culture. The movie borrows freely from a rich genre of prison narratives, which Christian writers have pioneered and bolstered for centuries. For some of Christianity's most powerful teachers, including Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and John Bunyan, internment has been God's agent for redemption and a stirring source of literary inspiration.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881)

The Russian czar's guards dispatched Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Siberia-bound sled on Christmas Eve, 1849. Earlier that year, he had been arrested for participating in a socialist discussion group, whose members desired to end serfdom in Russia. After awaiting their fate for more than eight months in a Saint Petersburg jail, they learned the bad news: They had been sentenced to death.

But on December 22, at the last possible moment, a guard rode in with the urgent news of their reprieve. The execution had been staged-one last measure of psychological torture before the czar doomed them to years of hard labor in Siberia.

As the sled made its way toward Siberia, Dostoyevsky was moved by the compassion of peasant women who trailed behind the prisoners. One of the women offered him a copy of the New Testament—the only book he was allowed to read in the labor camp. Thus far in his adult life, he hadn't had much use for Christian faith. His first novel, ***Poor Folk***, had earned him high praise as Russia's next great author, but his growing love for humanity suffered from the socialist shortcoming he would later critique in ***The Brothers Karamazov***: "The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular."

This paradox crippled most political prisoners in the labor camps. Thrown together with petty thieves and hardened killers, intellectual dissidents often struggled to adapt to the merciless system imposed by their captors and aggravated by their fellow captives. Not long after he finally returned home in 1859, Dostoyevsky published a fictionalized account of his time in Siberia. But ***Memoirs from the House of the Dead*** briefly got him in trouble once more with the government. The czar's censors deemed his novel's depiction of Russian prisons to be too favorable. Given the novel's content, it's hard to imagine what would have appeased the government. ***House of the Dead*** ponders the prisoners' pathetic attempts to exercise freedom despite restraints and repercussions. Even normal convicts who toiled in obscurity sometimes exploded in drunken, murderous frenzies.

To avoid succumbing to this destructive jail culture, Dostoyevsky drew strength from two unlikely sources. First, despite never spending a moment alone during his four years of incarceration, he grew to love and sympathize with his fellow inmates. In his youth, Dostoyevsky had been a champion of moral causes and had trusted in the human capacity to overcome problems like serfdom. But in prison he encountered men far removed from any pretense of moral capability, and he observed how the cruel prison system only trampled them further. He wrote of his surprising compassion for these rough characters, "It thrills the heart to realize that the most downtrodden man, the lowest of the low, is also a human being and is called your brother."

But mere empathy would not enable the prisoners to overcome their condition. He also embraced the New Testament's powerful redemptive possibility. In ***Crime and Punishment***, Dostoyevsky reveals something of his own conversion from morality to redemption. The murderer, Raskolnikov, nearly grieves himself to death trying to rationalize and justify his crime. So he seeks comfort from Sonia, a faithful woman driven to prostitution in order to support her family. As she reads him the story of Lazarus's resurrection, "Raskolnikov turned and looked at her with emotion. Yes, he had known it! She was trembling in a real physical fever. ... She was getting near the story of the greatest miracle, and a feeling of immense triumph came over her. Her voice rang out like a bell; triumph and joy gave it power. ... 'And he, he too, who is blinded and unbelieving, he too will hear, he too will believe.'"

The Russian government robbed Dostoyevsky of political freedom for nearly a decade. But they couldn't touch what he later called the "regeneration of my convictions."

Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-)

The story was all too common for Stalin's Soviet Union. A devoted communist, decorated for his service in defense of Mother Russia, dares to question the paranoid despot and thereby becomes an enemy of the state he so loves. Alexander Solzhenitsyn suffered for eight years in the Russian gulags, whose conditions had improved only slightly in the century since Dostoyevsky languished there. As with Dostoyevsky, however, that which did not kill Solzhenitsyn made him immeasurably stronger.

The trouble began while Solzhenitsyn was fighting on the front against Germany in the summer of 1943. Camped and awaiting battle, he met up with an old friend who shared his passion for communism's utopian possibilities. Yet they also shared a Leninist critique of Stalin's draconian style. Together they secretly composed "Resolution No. 1," which compared Stalin's communism to feudalism.

In early 1945, Captain Solzhenitsyn was preparing his soldiers for their final assault on Berlin. But on February 9, he received an unexpected summons to brigade headquarters. With one telling question from the commanding officer—"Have you a friend on the first Ukrainian Front?"—Solzhenitsyn learned his fate. Soviet political operatives had seized "Resolution No. 1" from his friend and now charged him with conspiring to overthrow Stalin's government.

Three months later, while Muscovites danced in Red Square to celebrate the war's end, Solzhenitsyn watched the fireworks from prison. The fall from Red Army officer to political captive had been crushing. Even life's most basic pleasures—sleep, human contact—had been denied him. When he was transferred from solitary confinement to a cell with three other prisoners, his spirits soared.

This simple companionship became a tremendous source of strength as he learned to cope with prison. From those who became dead to the world in order to endure, he learned that we must never surrender our humanity. "If in order to live it is necessary not to live," he wrote in ***The Gulag Archipelago Volume One***, "then what's it all for?" This realization, in turn, led him to believe that his imprisonment might have purpose. He wrote to his first wife, "Years go by, yes, but if the heart grows warmer from the misfortunes suffered, if it is cleansed therein—the years are not going by in vain."

Solzhenitsyn was still far from being a Christian. Imprisonment had greatly tarnished his reverence for the Soviet Union he had once dreamed of commemorating in literature, but there remained serious anti-Christian dogmas to hurdle. He was a true child of the 1917 Revolution, torn from his family's Orthodox faith and indoctrinated in dialectical materialism.

Solzhenitsyn was surprised, therefore, to meet Russians who still believed in God. After undergoing urgent surgery for cancer in February 1952, he was comforted one evening by a doctor who related his conversion from Judaism to Christianity. The next morning Solzhenitsyn awoke to commotion: the doctor had suffered eight blows to the head. He soon died on the operating table. No one knows why the doctor was brutally murdered, but his open Christian faith did not help his cause in the atheistic Soviet Union. In any event, the incident was no coincidence to Solzhenitsyn. He wrote in ***The Gulag Archipelago***, "And so it happened that [the doctor's] prophetic words were his last words on earth. And, directed to me, they lay upon me as an inheritance. You cannot brush off that kind of inheritance by shrugging your shoulders."

By this time, Solzhenitsyn felt hunted by the Almighty. He recovered from cancer and embraced Christ. "When at the end of jail, on top of everything else, I was placed with cancer," he recounted for biographer Joseph Pearce, "then I was fully cleansed and came back to deep awareness of God and a deep understanding of life." Neither Solzhenitsyn nor the world would ever be the same. He was released from prison in 1953, the same year Stalin died. Nine years later, he published ***One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich***, which miraculously cleared Soviet censors due to Nikita Khrushchev's efforts to de-Stalinize Russia. This chilling novel, based on his gulag experience, exposed Russians and the world to everyday life as an enemy of Stalin's communism.

Along with ***The Gulag Archipelago***, which incited the Soviet government to send him into exile, ***One Day*** dealt a crippling blow to communism's credibility. And it wouldn't have been possible without a resolute faith nourished inside the walls of Stalin's prisons.

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

Unlike Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn, John Bunyan was thrown into prison precisely because of his Christian faith. Twenty-one years old when forces loyal to the Puritans beheaded the deposed King Charles I in 1649, Bunyan suffered the sting of Anglican retribution in 1660. The mere act of meeting together became unlawful for "Nonconformists" like Bunyan under the restored King Charles II. And Bunyan was a prime target. Despite his humble "tinker" background and unordained leadership, Bunyan's sermons attracted tremendous crowds. The government jailed him in 1660 when he refused to quit preaching in exchange for freedom.

The separation from his family proved nearly unbearable. "The parting with my wife and poor children hath oft been to me in this place as the pulling the flesh from my bones," Bunyan wrote in his autobiography, ***Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners***.

With fresh understanding of the apostle Paul's experiences, Bunyan ministered to his family and church from jail through letters. Suffering gave his teaching new strength. "I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as [in prison]," he later recalled. "Those scriptures that I saw nothing in before were made in this place and state to shine upon me. ... I never knew what it was for God to stand by me at all times and at every offer of Satan to afflict me, as I have found him since I came in hither."

In 1672, after 12 long but beneficial years in prison, Bunyan was released thanks to the "Declaration of Religious Indulgence." The declaration also enabled him to become the official pastor of his church. Tensions remained high, however, and he was again jailed, this time for six months, in 1677. Once again, what the authorities intended for evil, God used for good. During this prison stint, Bunyan authored ***The Pilgrim's Progress***. Born amid strife and sacrifice, ***The Pilgrim's Progress*** gives a remarkably honest

and rich allegorical account of the Christian life.

In one memorable scene, Christian and Hopeful have been captured by Giant and are being held in his Doubting-Castle dungeon. "Now, a little before it was Day, good Christian, as one half amazed, brake out in this passionate speech: What a Fool, quoth he, am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty? I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will I am persuaded open any lock in Doubting-Castle. ... Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the dungeon door, whose bolt (as he turned the Key) gave back, and the door flew open with ease." It is the same key to heavenly escape treasured for so many years by Bunyan himself, along with Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
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The Humiliation Of King Henry

Elesha Coffman

All of the major Protestant reformers agreed that the Catholic Church had taken a wrong turn somewhere, but they disagreed about where the misstep occurred. Constantine's conversion, the codification of canon law, and the rise of scholastic theology received nominations, but as far as many Anglicans were concerned, the real trouble began in January 1077 at Canossa, a castle in Tuscany. —

Inside the castle, as freezing winds blew, Pope Gregory VII took refuge. Gregory never wanted to be pope, and he certainly never wanted to spend his waning years running around Europe, attempting to stay ahead of hostile princes. Unfortunately, his commitment to reform put him on a collision course with the secular powers of the day.

Outside the castle, Gregory's bitterest opponent, Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, knelt in the snow. On this occasion Henry did not want Gregory's head, but his blessing. Dressed as a penitent, weeping, for three cold days, Henry got what he was after—but the peace between the two men could not last. The stakes of their epic battle, known as the Investiture Controversy, were simply too high.

In theory, the church has always held the power to appoint its own leaders. In medieval practice, however, secular authorities handed out clerical offices as patronage. Following the pattern known as investiture, abbots and bishops received their positions, and the properties that went with them, from local princes. The emperor picked the pope.

Gregory believed that the corruption and immorality of the 11th-century church stemmed from this practice. Before he could fight it at lower ecclesial levels, though, he had to free the papacy from imperial control. In 1059, when Gregory was still cardinal-subdeacon Hildebrand, he engineered the creation of the College of Cardinals as the body solely responsible for electing the pope. The new system did not take hold right away, but by 1073, when it was time to choose a successor for the deceased Alexander II, the cardinals spoke with one loud voice: "Let Hildebrand be pope!" The man who had put the cardinals in charge reluctantly accepted their mandate.

The empowerment of the College of Cardinals happened early in Henry's reign, when, as a 9-year-old boy, he occupied the throne recently vacated by his powerful and pious father. Hildebrand took advantage of Henry's minority, and the young German king resented him for it. Not long after Henry took charge of his own affairs, in 1070, he found an opportunity to strike back.

Royal rudeness

Soon after his election as pope, Gregory pressed his program of reform by forbidding investiture and threatening to excommunicate any layperson who dared to appoint clergy. Henry responded in 1076 by calling for Gregory's removal from office in a letter that ended, "I, Henry, king by the grace of God, with all of my Bishops, say to you, come down, come down, and be damned throughout the ages." Gregory, naturally, deposed and excommunicated Henry.

Neither combatant could enforce his order alone, and it turned out that Henry had considerably less support than he expected. His father, Henry III, had waged a largely successful campaign to consolidate

imperial power for himself—at the expense of other German nobles, who were only too happy to see young Henry IV cut down. Faced with the prospect of aristocratic rebellion, Henry had no choice but to humble himself before the pope.

Gregory described the scene at Canossa in a letter to the German princes: "[W]e learned for certain that the king was approaching. He also, before entering Italy, sent on to us suppliant legates, offering in all things to render satisfaction to God, to St. Peter and to us. And he renewed his promise that, besides amending his life, he would observe all obedience if only he might merit to obtain from us the favor of absolution and the apostolic benediction.

"When, after long deferring this and holding frequent consultations, we had, through all the envoys who passed, severely taken him to task for his excesses, he came at length of his own accord, with a few followers, showing nothing of hostility or boldness, to the town of Canossa where we were tarrying. And there, having laid aside all the belongings of royalty, wretchedly, with bare feet and clad in wool, he continued for three days to stand before the gate of the castle. Nor did he desist from imploring with many tears the aid and consolation of the apostolic mercy until he had moved all of those who were present there."

The battle continues

Out of pastoral concern, Gregory lifted his excommunication of Henry, but he withheld his pledge of political fealty until Henry might prove himself worthy. Henry never passed that test. After Canossa, Henry continued to support clerics and nobles who opposed Gregory's reforms. Meanwhile, Henry's political enemies sought to press their apparent advantage.

Soon the empire descended into civil war. Pro-reform leaders in Germany elected their own king, Rudolf. Henry defeated Rudolf, stormed Rome, and elected his own pope, Clement III. Gregory excommunicated Henry a second time in 1080, imploring God to "exercise such swift judgment that all may know him to fall not by chance but by your power." Hedging his bets, Gregory also called upon his Norman allies in southern Italy. The Normans rescued Gregory, but they also sacked Rome, which did not please the locals. The Romans chased Gregory out of town, and he died in exile.

The Investiture Controversy continued for decades, and even after the 1122 Concordat of Worms formally ended investiture, popes and emperors crossed swords constantly. Recent events in England show that the debate continues in altered forms even today. The English monarch serves as supreme governor of the English church, in part to assure that the spectacle of Canossa is never repeated. With the divorced and remarried Prince Charles poised to wear the crown, though, some Anglican leaders believe the monarch's rule over the church should end. Surely Charles would never kneel in the snow outside Archbishop Rowan Williams's window ... but the prince's confession at the blessing of his marriage came close.

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Luther: The Daily Gift of New Life

Martin E. Marty

"Are you born again?" Bill Moyers asked me in 1976 for a television program on a term that most Americans were first learning. My answer: "Yes." When? February 26, 1928. Moyers, "You don't look old enough for that early date?" He was thinking Baptistically; I was talking about my baptism at three weeks of age. "And that does it for life?" he asked. I answered, "'Yes' and 'no.' I was also 'born again' this morning."

This plunge to the heart of Luther's theology summarizes my changed life. These lines in his ***Small Catechism*** hit me forcefully when I was in my twenties: "In the morning, as soon as you get out of bed, you are to make the sign of the holy cross and say: 'God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit watch over me. Amen." Further directions follow: say the Apostles Creed, pray the Lord's Prayer. ... Then "you are to go to your work joyfully."

Those who come to baptism at the age of personal accountability will have other ways to greet each day, and can have analogous experiences as children of God. For Luther, baptism "signifies that the old creature in us ... is to be drowned and die through ***daily*** ... repentance, and ... that ***daily*** a new person is to come forth and arise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Luther cited Romans 6:4, and added his own accent on ***daily***, as I have done with italics here.

Early on, the brunt of this call by Luther to be born again daily and his citation of Romans 6 did not shake or shape me. Nurtured in a home where this way of life was taken for granted; daydreaming through an overly scholastic Lutheran pre-theological school, I later understood Luther's "tower experience" of grace from reading Paul's epistles. This came suddenly in 1947 in seminary studies under passionate "neo-Lutheran" scholars, and gradually (after summer 1952) when as a pastor I related this teaching to the lives of others.

This signing of the cross "signifies;" it involves no hint of superstition or magic. What follows it is a demand for the gift of repentance. I did not and do not seek a Luther-like emotional trauma and a shattering onrush of new experience. Still, I learned from Luther to put to work this understanding of dailiness. When he was tempted, in doubt, depression, or near-despair, he would remind himself: ***baptizatus sum***, "I am baptized," and recognize a change.

The urgent call to baptismal repentance means a drastic turn from the old ways of yesterday and to new ways for tomorrow, with the gift of strength for today. The public image of Lutherans, as fostered by radio's Garrison Keillor types, finds a timid, do-I-dare-thinking people. It frustrates me to observe fellow Lutherans unnecessarily carrying the weight of yesterday's wrongs and burdening themselves with worries over tomorrow. Jesus would have none of either, nor would Luther, nor should I.

In pastoral theology and care I would turn this discipline into a virtual therapy. I would tell stories about Luther, who asked "Is God ***gracious***?" while theologians today say people ask "***Is*** God ... ?" Most contemporaries cannot identify with the pious monk and virtuoso repenter who bored his superior with six-hour monologues about his sin. Fortunately this confessor, John Staupitz, would not let him wallow in his petty follies. He was to realize that he was free to be an "alter Christus," an "other" Christ to his neighbor, making faith active in love. Luther's discovery and teaching move me still. ***Daily***.

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