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George MacDonald and the Anthropology of Love

Robin Phillips

George MacDonald's novel *Robert Falconer* contains a scene that has haunted me ever since my father read it to me as a child. Robert lives with his grandmother, a strict Calvinist modelled after MacDonald's own grandmother. She represents in an exaggerated form the extreme sobriety of the 19th century nonconformists and serves as a foil for MacDonald to express his own frustrations with this lifeless system, particularly its dry rationalism.

In Robert's grandmother we see the complete subordination of all of life to the narrow legality of federal Calvinism. The legal categories on which such theology hinged were all important to her, while art and music were seen not simply as unnecessary distractions, but positive idolatries. Robert, on the other hand, has secretly been learning to play the violin, having discovered in music a reality deeper and more soul-satisfying than the theological dribble of his grandmother. The scene that has stayed with me all these years is when the grandmother finally discovers the existence of her grandson's violin:

Robert came home to dinner the next day a few minutes before Shagar. As he entered his grandmother's parlour, a strange odour greeted his sense. A moment more, and he stood rooted with horror, and his hair began to rise on his head. His violin lay on its back on the fire, and a yellow tongue of flame was licking the red lips of a hole in its belly. All its strings were shrivelled up save one, which burst as he gazed. And beside, stern as a Druidess, sat his grandmother in her chair, feeding her eyes with grim satisfaction on the detestable sacrifice. At length the rigidity of Robert's whole being relaxed in an involuntary howl like that of a wild beast, and he turned and rushed from the house in a helpless agony of horror. (MacDonald *Falconer*)

The characterization of this event as a providing "grim satisfaction on the detestable sacrifice" can be seen against the backdrop of the federal Calvinism that came to Scotland in the 16th and 17th centuries and which MacDonald was revolting against. Under the narrative they told, God was fundamentally a God of wrath who could only love humankind after His anger had been assuaged. This was achieved through God the Father venting His fury on God the Son when the latter suffered on the cross. But lest the Father's wrath be completely pacified and we forget how much He hates sin, Jesus only died for the elect. This arrangement allowed both sides of God's personality to be expressed: it allowed God's love to be expressed on those for whom Jesus had died; however, by electing to leave the rest of humankind

dead in their sins, it was possible for God's wrath to continue to be expressed throughout eternity.

Within Scottish Presbyterianism, this narrative found expression in the type of harsh legalism embodied by Robert's grandmother. Although salvation was technically by grace, you could only know if you were among the elect through a strenuous program of good works. To underscore this point, Scottish non-conformists engaged in what Kerry Dearborn has called "the fencing of the table" (Dearborn 13) whereby participation in Communion was dependent on lives of strict personal holiness, mediated through intense introspection and self-examination. MacDonald no doubt spoke for himself as a child when he said that Robert Falconer felt that church was "weariness to every inch of flesh upon his bone." (MacDonald *Robert Falconer*)

As a young woman MacDonald's paternal grandmother, Isobel Robertson MacDonald, had been responsible for the family joining the dissenting church against the wishes of her husband who forever remained part of the established Church of Scotland. Isobel, like her counterpart in *Robert Falconer*, represented the particularly harsh strand of Scottish Calvinism which looked upon the arts and the imagination with deep mistrust. Even the violin burning incident was based on a real event, as Isobel had allegedly burnt the violin belonging to George's uncle, thinking it was a Satanic snare. "Frivolity . . . was in her eyes a vice; loud laughter almost a crime; cards, and novelles, as she called them, were such in her estimation, as to be beyond my powers of characterization." (MacDonald, *Robert Falconer*)

Such was the approach taken by MacDonald's grandmother, with strong reinforcement at church and at school. The other key influence in MacDonald's life was his father, whom Rolland Hein describes as "an austere and spirited Calvinist of great personal strength and fortitude but the rare sort that combined piety with good humor, being wisely tolerant of human foibles" (Hein 9). A strict disciplinarian when obedience was in question, he turned a blind eye to his sons' frequent mischief and escapades. Though life on the family farm was difficult and at times stressful, the senior MacDonald was a man of exuberant joy, deep personal faith, and an abiding concern for the spiritual welfare of his nine children. George learned much about the Lord, not so much from what his father *said* (though his enthusiastic retellings of Bible stories left a lasting impact on the lad), but from the fruit of the spirit emanating from his life. C.S. Lewis was hardly exaggerating when he noted that "an almost perfect relationship with his father was the earthly root of all his wisdom. From his own father, he said, he first learned that Fatherhood must be at the core of the universe." (C.S. Lewis, Introduction, *Lilith* v)

The caring nature exhibited by the senior MacDonald seemed at

odds with what George heard at church about His heavenly Father. The good relationship he had with his father seems to have been partly responsible for the young man beginning to doubt the Calvinist portrait of God. In his novel *Weighed and Wanting* he describes his childhood struggles feeling that he did not want God to love him unless He also loved all people.

When he grew up MacDonald would use his sermons and novels to critique the theology of his upbringing, arguing that it can only work like a poison to destroy a person's soul. In Robert's violin-burning grandmother we get a glimpse of what MacDonald believed this theology could do to a person. Just as God's wrath could only be satisfied by the brutal sacrifice of His son, so grandmother Falconer's wrath could only be satisfied by making a sacrifice out of Robert's violin.

George MacDonald and the Anthropology of Rationalism

While the dialogues in MacDonald's novels do sometimes confront Calvinist dogma head-on, I would suggest that his concern was more to undermine the rationalistic anthropology behind it. Anthropology is, of course, the science of humans, and I am using the term here in the sense that James K.A. Smith did in his book *Desiring the Kingdom* to describe the different frameworks for answering questions such as, 'What is the fundamental source of our identity? What is the most central aspect of us as people?' The implicit subtext behind Scottish Calvinism was a view of man or woman as being first and foremost a thinking creature, defined, saved and sustained by his or her theological dogmas. This anthropology, which can be described as "rationalistic" or "cognitivist" formed the backdrop to much of what MacDonald reacted against in his writings.

The fixation with achieving precision in the minutia of theology (especially the legal categories surrounding reprobation and the atonement) had led to a highly intellectualized gospel that not only mitigated against a sense of mystery and wonder, but against the more tangible expressions of basic love and obedience's to Christ's commands. MacDonald's novels are full of characters who put an enormous premium on the finer points of theology while neglecting what our Lord called "the weightier matters of the law." The burning of the instrument (for good theological reasons in the grandmother's mind) is paradigmatic of this rationalistic anthropology, illustrating the subordinating of what is good, lovely, and beautiful on the altar of the theological rationalism.

By contrast, MacDonald would always be distrusting of abstract theological systems, sometimes almost to the point of becoming anti-intellectual himself. We get a glimpse of this distrust of intellectual systems

in *Malcolm* where we read:

If I knew of a theory in which was never an uncompleted arch or turret, in whose circling wall was never a ragged breach, that theory I should know but to avoid: such gaps are the eternal windows through which the dawn shall look in. A complete theory is a vault of stone around the theorist—whose very being yet depends on room to grow. (MacDonald 193)

An Anthropology of Doing

MacDonald would always remain deeply distrustful of the type of rationalistic anthropology that tended to operate as if human beings are first and foremost thinking things. While MacDonald never presented an alternative anthropology in any direct or explicit way, the thoughtful reader can discern an implicit anthropology that has strong affinities with the existentialist tradition, particularly Søren Kierkegaard. According to the more existentialist anthropology, it is what we *do*, not what we think, that defines, saves, and sustains the human person. Just as under the Calvinism of MacDonald's youth everything was subordinated to the doctrinal, thus producing an anthropology of rationalism, it is no exaggeration to say that MacDonald's alternative anthropology subordinates everything to the ethical. What we do precedes who we are. Under this existential paradigm, human identity, faith, and even salvation itself are first and foremost questions of obedience. It is here that MacDonald remained indebted to his grandmother's Calvinism perhaps more than he realized, particular its emphasis on the necessary role that works played in proving that you were among the elect.

MacDonald had greatly struggled with the role of works in the Christian life, and as a young man he wrote 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" (cited in Dearborn 13). Long after he rejected the doctrine of election, MacDonald never abandoned the idea that good works (particularly obedience to the commands of Christ) are essential to proving that one has true faith. For example, in his *Unspoken Sermons*, MacDonald suggests that for faith to be vital, true and salvific it must be obedient, saying, "But the poorest faith in the living God, the God revealed in Christ Jesus, if it be vital, true, that is obedient, is the beginning of the way to know him, and to know him is eternal life. If you mean by faith anything of a different kind, that faith will not save you" (*Unspoken Sermons—Series I, II, and III* 214).

Elsewhere he writes, "Faith is that which, knowing the Lord's will, goes and does it . . ." (cited in George MacDonald and Lewis 16). Under Calvinism, good works were the fruit of what you believed, but MacDonald has reversed this by suggesting that what we believe is determined by what

we do. A human's real belief is not what he or she thinks but what he or she does. To quote again from his *Unspoken Sermons*:

for to hold a thing with the intellect, is not to believe it. A man's real belief is that which he lives by; and that which the man I mean lives by, is the love of God, and obedience to his law, so far as he has recognized it. (209)

Do you ask, "What is faith in him?" I answer . . . doing as he tells you. I can find no words strong enough to serve for the weight of this necessity—this obedience. It is the one terrible heresy of the church, that it has always been presenting something else than obedience as faith in Christ. (210)

MacDonald further states:

We believe, therefore, that nothing will do so much for the intellect or the imagination *as being good* . . . (*A Dish of Orts, Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakspere* 36)

MacDonald's use of ethics as an organizing principle for his theology provided him with an alternative explanation of the atonement. Rejecting the substitutionary atonement theology of Scottish Presbyterianism, he developed an explanation of the cross in which man is reconciled to God more through Christ's *example* of genuine self-denial than by anything inherent in the death itself. We appropriate that self-denial through our obedience—obedience which makes possible our own regeneration by the Spirit and our subsequent knowledge of the truth:

I believe that to him who obeys, and thus opens the doors of his heart to receive the eternal gift, God gives the spirit of his son, the spirit of himself, to be in him, and lead him to the understanding of all truth . . . (*Unspoken Sermons* 281)

The Calvinism of MacDonald's upbringing taught that the Spirit is the cause of our obedience, whereas in the above quotation it is clear that MacDonald has reversed this: the Spirit is given to us as the result of obedience to God's commands, leading to understanding. Works are no longer the fruit of faith, but the means to faith.

This seems to imply a particular anthropology in which a human is first and foremost a doer. It is our *will*, not the intellect, that is the primary nexus of the human person.

This existential anthropology was not without its contradictions. While he frequently asserted that obedience precedes understanding, MacDonald sometimes also speaks of understanding as a precondition to obedience. As he wrote in the second volume of *Unspoken Sermons*:

But for him who is in earnest about the will of God, it is of endless consequence that he should think rightly of God. He

cannot come close to him, cannot truly know his will, while his notion of him is in any point that of a false god. The thing shows itself absurd. (151)

In contradistinction to some of the earlier citations we have reviewed, which suggested that the obedience is the pathway to correct knowledge of God, MacDonald is here suggesting that thinking rightly about God must be prior to action. If we put these two sets of thoughts together, we are left with a vicious cycle: we cannot know God unless we obey Him, but we cannot obey Him unless we know Him. MacDonald gives us no clue how we are to escape from this, nor is it certain that the charge of vicious circularity would have much bothered the Scotsman who spent little or no energy trying to make his ideas conform to the rigors of logic.

Another difficulty with the existential anthropology is more practical and arises from the subordination of faith to obedience. If it is only through the crucible of obedience that we forge our identity as children of God, then how can any of us ever be certain that we have enough good works to establish this identity? Apart from the problem of semi-Pelagianism that may be legitimately levelled against MacDonald's existentialist anthropology, it leaves us with a faith that can never rest confidently in our identity as children of God since such identity is always first dependent on our obedience. For those of us who are acutely conscious that our obedience is, at best, partial and imperfect, MacDonald's framework seems to offer little more comfort than the religion of his grandmother. MacDonald's God was easy to please and hard to satisfy, but we may legitimately question how such a God could *ever* be satisfied. If God can be satisfied only to the extent that we replicate the almost superhuman lives of the role models in MacDonald's novels, what hope is there for ordinary people in the real world?

While such concerns may suggest that MacDonald may have unwittingly retained more of the imprint of his harsh grandmother than he realized, there was a fundamental difference between MacDonald and his grandmother. While espousing the doctrines of grace, his grandmother's life radiated a deficit of real grace; by contract, the characters in MacDonald's novels, like MacDonald himself, live and breathe grace even though MacDonald found no place for grace within his soteriology—a soteriology rooted in his anthropology of doing.

Certainly if all we had were MacDonald's sermons and moralistic novels, we might conclude that the last word on MacDonald's anthropology is that human beings are essentially defined by what they do. While the human being is a heart, mind and body, before he or she is any of these he or she is a *will*.

An Anthropology of Love

Thankfully, MacDonald's sermons and novels are not all we have. I would like to suggest that in his fantasy and poetic works, MacDonald implicitly gives us an anthropology that tempers that of his moralistic existentialism. We in fact get the glimpse of an anthropology of love which balances the anthropology of doing and more effectively undermines the rationalism of his grandmother. This anthropology of love runs alongside MacDonald's anthropology of doing, and is ultimately what transforms the latter into something life-giving and filled with grace.

I am using the language "anthropology of love" to describe a framework hinging on the notion that human identity is not first and foremost a question of doctrines (what we think) like the rationalists would maintain, nor is it first and foremost a matter of morals (what we do); rather, the deepest seat of human identity is located first and foremost in what we love. Love precedes both doing and thinking and is the energizing principle behind both things. This recognizes that our ultimate loves are tied to a certain vision of what we think human flourishing looks like which unconsciously orients us to consider certain things worthy of our adoration. But that vision is often affective and implicit before it becomes the material of direct cognition. It is an inchoate vision that grabs our unconscious with an aesthetic pull in a way similar to how David Brooks described the formation of political preferences in his book *The Social Animal*.

Though MacDonald never articulated the anthropology of love in the formal way that I am doing here, these categories do seem to lie behind a number of his preoccupations, not least his abiding concern to show that the objects of our beliefs need to not only be true, but also lovely. Because human beings are creatures defined by their loves, we must be helped to first love that which is good, to see how the good and the true are actually worthy of our adoration. And that is precisely what MacDonald constantly strives to enable his readers to do. His imaginative works appeal to us on this deeper level, showing us a vision of the good life that seeps into our very gut, at least if we let it.

MacDonald had good personal reasons for adopting this approach. During his college days his reading of poetry and the German romances had stirred his imagination with images of loveliness, while his close affinity with the natural world constantly fed a deep attraction for things of beauty. This, however, seemed at odds with the religion of his upbringing, which he associated not with beauty but with ugliness. In his novel *David Elginbrod* he would go so far as to sarcastically suggest that the Scottish reformers had attempted to create ugly models of worship:

One grand aim of the reformers of the Scottish ecclesiastical modes appears to have been to keep the worship pure and the worshippers sincere, by embodying the whole in the ugliest forms that could be associated with the name of Christianity. (93)

This had created a dichotomy in MacDonald's mind between beauty and faith, religion and loveliness. As MacDonald continued to read the Bible, especially the gospels, he came to realize that these two sides of him were not in competition. Writing to his father in April 1847, MacDonald confessed, "One of my greatest difficulties in consenting to think of religion was that I thought I should have to give up my beautiful thoughts and love for the things God has made." (George MacDonald, cited in George MacDonald and His Wife 108) He went on to say how reading the Bible was changing his perspective:

If [the gospel of Christ] be true, everything in the universe is glorious, except sin . . . I love my Bible more—I am always finding out something new in it—I seem to have had everything to learn over again . . . 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, and Heaven the home 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—if indeed I am one. (George MacDonald, *An Expression of Character* 18)

Gradually MacDonald had come to appreciate that his imagination and love of beauty were not separate to his relationship with Christ, but integrally connected to it. Kerry Dearborn describes how "rather than viewing the imagination and the arts as satanic snares, MacDonald began to consider them as intimately connected with God's good creation . . . he not only saw the imagination's potential to harmonize with God's creative ways, but also to convey something of God's nature" (27). He would later express this understanding in his book *England's Antiphon*, in which he put forward what Dearborn has called "the basic interconnectedness of theology and poetry" (27).

It was this vision that would later be infused so skilfully into MacDonald's fantasy works. After accompanying Mr. Vane through the mysterious landscape in *Lilith* or following Diamond's travels with Lady North Wind or journeying with Curdie to Gwyntystorm, we begin to see the mystery and enchantment with which our real world has been infused. We begin to feel that the world of Faerie, as MacDonald liked to spell it, has invaded the world of men or, as Chesterton put it when writing about MacDonald, that "the fairy-tale was the inside of the ordinary story and not

the outside.”(303) This is also what C.S. Lewis discovered about MacDonald, and why it helped to nudge him away from the materialism of his atheistic worldview. “The quality which had enchanted me in his imaginative works,” Lewis wrote, “turned out to be the quality of the real universe, the divine, magical, terrifying and ecstatic reality in which we all live” (Preface xxxviii). In *A Dish of Orts*, MacDonald suggests that our world is every bit as magical, every bit as wonderful and every bit as enchanted as the world of Fairyland. He wrote movingly in *A Dish of Orts* of what happens when “the world begins to come alive around [a person]”:

He begins to feel that the stars are strange, that the moon is sad, that the sunrise is mighty. He begins to see in them all the something men call beauty. He will lie on the sunny bank and gaze into the blue heaven till his soul seems to float abroad and mingle with the infinite made visible, with the boundless condensed into colour and shape. The rush of the water through the still twilight, under the faint gleam of the exhausted west, makes in his ears a melody he is almost aware he cannot understand. (49)

Here MacDonald was on common ground with 19th century romantics like Wordsworth and Tennyson, who also saw the world pervaded with beauty and spirituality. Yet MacDonald goes one step further. He showed that it is *goodness* which infuses our world with meaning and makes it beautiful. In contrast both to the prosaic moralism of his grandmother, which sucked all beauty out of goodness, as well as the subjective sentimentalism of the romantic movement, which untethered beauty from its foundations in objective goodness, MacDonald showed that beauty and objective goodness cannot be separated. Ultimately this was because of Christ, in whose person goodness, truth, and beauty existed in perfect unity. The interconnectedness between the trinity of goodness, truth and beauty meant that to separate any of these three was to do violence to the others. As he put it in *Orts*, “beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed . . .” (315). Again, in one of his sonnets he spoke of the unfortunate disconnection between beauty and truth among those who cared little for the latter:

From the beginning good and fair are one,
But men the beauty from the truth will part,
And, though the truth is ever beauty’s heart,
After the beauty will, short-breathed, run,
And the indwelling truth deny and shun (*The Poetical Works of George MacDonald* 259)

In this MacDonald anticipated the thought of the 20th century Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who wrote,

We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a

mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance.(cited in Treier, Husbands, and Lundin 115)

Such mysterious vengeance occurred when, around the end of MacDonald's life, the Romantic movement trailed off into obscurity and perversity. With prophetic insight MacDonald had inadvertently predicted this in his essay, "A Sketch of Individual Development" when he had observed that "the soul departs from the face of beauty, when the eye begins to doubt if there be any soul behind it" (*A Dish of Orts* 60). In some of his fairy tales he shows us what happens when beauty becomes disconnected from goodness and truth. The character of the Lilith in his book *Lilith*, or the Alder tree in *Phantastes*, give a stark portrayal of beauty is disengaged from goodness and truth. This was also a theme that MacDonald explored in one of his sonnets from the collection quoted earlier:

Men may pursue the Beautiful, while they
Love not the Good, the life of all the Fair;
Keen-eyed for beauty, they will find it where
The darkness of their eyes hath power to slay
The vision of the good in beauty's ray,
Though fruits the same life-giving branches bear.

It is this sense of beauty intimately connected with both truth and goodness that raises MacDonald's novels above what would otherwise be tedious Victorian moralism. It is true that because MacDonald thought of his novels as an extension of his failed pulpit ministry that they often suffer from being heavy and didactic. However, I suggest that their chief value lies not in their literary quality but in the way that they convey to us that righteousness is attractive, that the Christian faith is not merely worthy of assent, but of *love*. In this way, the subtext to the novels constantly remains what I am calling the anthropology of love.

His novels do this in a variety of ways, not least through protagonists that show us what it means to breathe grace in the midst of conflict, to give charitably in the midst of poverty, to model Christ's love in the midst of suspicion and mistrust, to bring hope in the midst of suffering, and to live according to Christ's commands in the midst of hypocrisy, compromise, and self-centredness. While MacDonald's characters constantly remind us that nothing is as important as a person doing his or her duty (which he is always careful to define as obeying the words of the Master), his characters also

show us that nothing is as exciting, life-giving and attractive as doing my duty in the next five minutes. In this regard, MacDonald implicitly appeals to the human person as a lover, and then uses the imagination to render one's duty attractive. MacDonald's characters thus end up achieving what his theology of obedience could not, swallowing the anthropology of doing into the anthropology of loving. His characters also achieve what grandmother MacDonald could never do, modelling to us the loveable-ness of the Christian faith.

Although MacDonald uses beauty to demonstrate the loveliness of the Christian faith, he never lapses into the error of his romanticist contemporaries to make beauty an end in itself. Beauty is always something that points us beyond the universe to God's goodness. In failing to discern God's goodness behind beauty, the English Romantic poets never went far enough. John Keats' poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" was typical:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (Quiller-Couch 730)

By contrast, MacDonald taught that there was something more we needed to know, namely that there is an ultimate Source from which all beauty springs. Though he didn't conflate truth and beauty as Keats did (for MacDonald they were distinguishable but not divisible), he agreed that they were connected and spoke of hoping "for endless forms of beauty informed of truth" (*A Dish of Orts* 25). The connection between truth and beauty arose by virtue of both being derivative from God. "God's heart is the fount of beauty" he wrote in his poem "A Book of Dreams." He took up this same theme later in *A Dish of Orts*: "Let us go further and, looking at beauty, believe that God is the first of artists; that he has put beauty into nature, knowing how it will affect us, and intending that it should so affect us; that he has embodied his own grand thoughts thus that we might see them and be glad" (*A Dish of Orts* 246–247).

If the Alder tree in *Phantastes* shows us beauty detached from goodness, it was MacDonald's violin-burning grandmother who shows us goodness detached from beauty. While MacDonald sometimes seems to lapse into a competing anthropology of works, suggesting that our fundamental identity is in what we do, when we give attention to MacDonald's imaginative corpus we find a deeper picture of the human person, namely one who is first and foremost defined by his or her loves. Because of the primacy of love, both truth and goodness need to be clothed in what is beautiful before they can be embraced. Echoing Socrates who once observed that the object of education is to make us love what is beautiful, MacDonald understood that if the good and the true are not clothed in beauty, they will have no formative influence on the human person. More recently Stratford Caldecott took up the same theme in his book *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, noting that "Beauty is the radiance of the true and the good, and it is what attracts us to both" (31).

This was MacDonald's ultimate answer to the Calvinism of his upbringing. 19th century federal Calvinism was mediated through a dry rationalism that fixated on the legal categories of the atonement but had little room for beauty and imagination. As important as obedience was within MacDonald's theological schema, what was more important was that the God we worship be lovely, and therefore worthy of our obedience. That is why a case can be made for reading MacDonald's fantasy works before his novels, since it is the latter which use imaginative settings to show forth the beauty of holiness. Recall how the young Lewis felt that *Phantastes* had some enormous meaning even before his conscious mind could understand what that meaning was. Lewis did eventually come to understand that the peculiar quality he encountered in *Phantastes* was, in fact, Holiness. Reflecting on the experience Lewis said, "I did not yet know (and I was long in learning) the name of the new quality, the bright shadow, that rested on the travels of Anodos. I do now. It was Holiness (173).

When MacDonald's sermons are made to be the primary entry way into his thought, the provisional conclusion of the earlier section may stand: MacDonald approached humans with an existentialist anthropology that defines us first and foremost by what we do. However, by factoring in MacDonald's poetic and fantastic works and then interpreting the novels in their light, we see that another important theme emerges and supersedes the existential: that human beings are fundamentally people who love. Precisely because we are driven by our loves, it is important that both truth and goodness be clothed in beauty in order to become lovable. To the degree that this was his concern, MacDonald anticipates a type of aesthetic apologetic that would concern later writers like G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy Sayers and C.S. Lewis, whose aim was to rescue Christianity not so much from the charge of falsehood as from the charge of tedium, ugliness and dullness.

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