1-1-2015

The Religious and Philosophical Foundations and Apologetic Implications of George MacDonald's Mysticism

Dean Hardy

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind

Dissertation in Progress

In this section of *North Wind* the editor highlights new scholars who are working on MacDonald at the Masters and Doctoral levels.

"The Religious and Philosophical Foundation and Apologetic Implications of George MacDonald's Mysticism" is a doctoral dissertation in the subject of Christian Spirituality at the University of South Africa.

The Religious and Philosophical Foundations and Apologetic Implications of George MacDonald's Mysticism

Dean Hardy

Table of Contents
Introduction

PART ONE:
An Examination of George MacDonald's Humble Beginnings and External Influences

Nineteenth-century author George MacDonald has influenced some of the greatest writers of the past century. G.K. Chesterton (1905) stated, "George Macdonald was one of the three or four great men of 19th century Britain." He even went so far to explain, "I for one can really testify to a book that has made a difference to my whole existence, which helped me to see things in a certain way from the start; a vision of things which even so real a revolution as a change of religious allegiance has substantially only crowned and confirmed. Of all the stories I ever read . . . it remains the most real, the most realistic, in the exact sense of the phrase the most like life. It is called *The Princess and the Goblin*, and is by George MacDonald." *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* mentions that MacDonald's *Princess and Goblin* books were some of J.R.R. Tolkien's childhood favorites, and even suggests, "The goblin mines beneath the Misty Mountains in *The Hobbit* owe much to it" (Carpenter and Prichard 1999:427). C.S. Lewis, on many occasions, identified MacDonald as his literary master and admitted, "I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him" (Lewis 1947:xxxvii). Oswald Chambers went so far as to write "it is a striking indication of the trend and shallowness of the modern reading public that George MacDonald's books have been so neglected" (Chambers 1995:35).

While George MacDonald maintained some national and even international success during the later parts of his career, this changed after his death in 1905. Likely due to the peculiarity and complexities of his work, his notoriety wandered off of the edge of the literary map. Chesterton predicted, "Dr. George MacDonald will be discovered some day . . . until then he will . . . be neglected, contemned, and quarried industriously by people who wish to borrow his ideas" (Chesterton 1905).

G.K. Chesterton was a prophet. In the last thirty years there has been resurgence in the reading and subsequent scholarly research in the work of George MacDonald. While there seems to be an overwhelming amount of research from critics of the literary as well as the theological persuasion, there is a striking lack of exploration from the mystical, philosophical, and apologetic angle. These aspects of George MacDonald's interior life are usually disregarded.

While many scholars examine MacDonald through the lens of literature or theology, it has yet to be found where a scholar has researched his mysticism in any overt detail. G.K. Chesterton wrote of MacDonald,

"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" (2005:13). It is my contention that Chesterton's suggestion has yet to be fully realized. Whether due to the anti-intellectualism that sometimes is associated with the study of "spirituality," or due to the complex nature of MacDonald's views, the well of his spiritual walk has been seldom tapped.

Even more interestingly, the lack of scholarship on MacDonald's mysticism can only be outdone by the absence of research on his underlying philosophical ideas. This lack of scholarship caused researcher and biographer Robert Trexler to write: "Not enough has been written of the theological and political debates of the nineteenth century, especially an exploration of the influence of MacDonald's good friend and mentor, F.D. Maurice, who, after John Henry Newman is probably the most influential and prophetic theologian of the nineteenth century. However, the theological issues of the nineteenth century, as important and under-studied as they have been, *still receive more attention than the philosophical debates upon which they rest*" (Trexler 2003, italics mine). It is this missing scholarship from the philosophical, apologetic, and mystical angle that this study seeks to fulfill.

PART II
George MacDonald's Philosophy and its Affect on his Mysticism

"Novalis has said: 'Philosophy is really homesickness, an impulse to be at home everywhere.' The life of a man here, if life it be, and not the vain image of what might be a life, is a continual attempt to find his place, his center of recipiency, and active agency . . . [But] he is not at home; his soul is astray amid people of a strange speech and a stammering tongue. But the faithful man is led onward; in the stillness that his confidence produces arise the bright images of truth; and visions of God, which are only beheld in solitary places, and granted to his soul."

—George MacDonald (1895:211-12)

Chapter Two
MacDonald's Metaphysical Foundations
Section I: Living in a Shadow World: examining MacDonald's
"Temperamental Platonism"

Section II: *Ex Deo***: Origen, Plotinus and MacDonald's view of Creation.**

Section III: **"Participation" in the Divine Nature**

Introduction

  The fact that the philosophy of MacDonald has rarely been researched is not due to a lack of willing hearts or uneducated researchers. It is likely due to the fact that even a tertiary student of MacDonald recognizes that he had a negative attitude toward the discipline. Bruce Hindmarsh stated that the "One thing he [MacDonald] never claimed to be . . . was a theologian" (Hindmarsh 1991:55). Hindmarsh is correct, but in addition, MacDonald also ignored the title of "philosopher" for the same reasons. This researcher contends that the motives for which MacDonald disliked both labels was not due to the disciplines in-and-of themselves, but rather the outworking of these fields of study on the religious culture and the personal spiritual lives of those who lived in the Victorian era. Thus, MacDonald's reasons for dismissing these disciplines will be elucidated, as well as his belief that there is, in fact, a correct theology and philosophy.

  MacDonald never publically placed himself into any theological or philosophical system, and his reasons were primarily preventative and reactionary. MacDonald himself said in a letter to his father, "I am neither Arminian or Calvinist. To no system could I subscribe" (Beinecke: April 15, 1851) as well as saying "Jesus Christ is my theology, and nothing else" (Anonymous 2012:31). One of the reasons why he never sought to proclaim his systematized theology was that he was worried about being pigeonholed into one system of belief. He writes in his sermon entitled "Light," "But if one happens to utter some individual truth which another man has made into one of the cogs of his system, he is in danger of being supposed to accept all the toothed wheels and their relations in that system" (MacDonald 2012a:250). MacDonald was concerned about being misconstrued and misinterpreted, and encouraged others to also eschew choosing a system of belief, "Therefore, if only to avoid his worst foes, his admirers, a man should avoid system. The more correct a system the worse will it be misunderstood; its professed admirers will take both its errors and their misconceptions of its truths, and hold them forth as its essence" (MacDonald 1882:332).

  Philosophy and theology did much during the Victorian period to divide and dis-unify the church until the body of Christ was barely recognizable. MacDonald (2012b:69) contends:

> All those evil doctrines about God that work misery and madness, have their origin in the brains of the wise and prudent, not in the hearts of the children. These wise and prudent, careful to make the words of his messengers rime with their conclusions, interpret the great heart of God, not by their own hearts, but by their miserable intellects; and, postponing the obedience which alone can give power to the understanding, press upon men's minds their wretched interpretations of the will of the Father, instead of the doing of that will upon their hearts. They call their *philosophy* the truth of God, and say men must hold it, or stand outside. They are the slaves of the letter in all its weakness and imperfection,—and will be until the spirit of the Word, the spirit of obedience shall set them free (italics mine).

MacDonald concluded that to choose and broadcast a specific system or denomination would simply cause more division and detract from the gospel and the mere Christianity in which he advocated. MacDonald argued that, "Division has done more to hide Christ from the view of men, than all the infidelity that has ever been spoken" (MacDonald 2009d:192). He specifically pointed out the issue of divisiveness within the church: "The real schismatic is the man who turns away love and justice from the neighbour who holds theories in religious philosophy, or as to church-constitution, different from his own; who denies or avoids his brother because he follows not with him; who calls him a schismatic because he prefers this or that mode of public worship not his" (MacDonald 2012b:80). This concept struck close to MacDonald's heart, for in the middle of the 19th century a small schism in his church in Arundel had charged him with heresy that eventually caused him to resign (Raeper 1987:90). Rolland Hein summarizes succinctly, "MacDonald, who would ally himself with no system, scorns the sectarian mentality that so vehemently expends its energies in futile clashes with those of opposing opinions" (Hein 1989:98). MacDonald was simply concerned that by proclaiming a philosophical or theological system, he'd be throwing fuel on a fire that he longed to extinguish.

　　　Thirdly, MacDonald truly believed that certain theologies, as well as an obsession for theological deliberation, could actually detract from one's relationship with the Father and one's duty to serve him. He argued that men have a habit of spending too much time focusing on their theology, and not enough on loving God and their fellow men, "Zeal for God will never eat them up; why should it? He is not interesting to them: theology may be; to

such men religion means theology" (MacDonald 2012b:68). MacDonald goes so far as to specifically state, "I firmly believe that people have hitherto been a great deal too much taken up about doctrine and far too little about practice . . ." (Greville MacDonald 2005: 155).

Not only was MacDonald worried that an infatuation with theology could poorly affect our praxis, but the theology itself could be faulty, and thus one's view of God could poorly influence our relationship with him. Rolland Hein explains, "In many novels the chief deterrent to a successful journey toward a spiritual maturity is contact with false ideas about God's character and manner of working in the world, particularly those fostered by mean and popular versions of Calvinist doctrines" (Hein 1989:120). George MacDonald did not pull punches when it came to certain theological beliefs; for instance, he goes so far as calling the doctrines of atonement and eternal torment, "doctrines of devils" (MacDonald 2012a,179). In *Robert Falconer*, MacDonald took aim at Calvinism, the creed of his youth: "For now arose within him, not without ultimate good, the evil phantasms of a theology which would explain all God's doings by low conceptions, low I mean for humanity even, of right, and law, and justice, then only taking refuge in the fact of the incapacity of the human understanding when its own inventions are impugned as undivine. In such a system, hell is invariably the deepest truth, and the love of God is not so deep as hell. Hence, as foundations must be laid in the deepest, the system is founded in hell, and the first article in the creed that Robert Falconer learned was, "I believe in hell" (MacDonald 2005:98).

There is also no doubt that MacDonald felt a calling to do damage to the prevailing systems of his day. One of his purposes was to "deliver the race from the horrors of such falsehoods, which by no means operate only on the vulgar and brutal, for to how many of the most refined and delicate of human beings are not their lives rendered bitter by the evil suggestions of lying systems--I care not what they are called--philosophy, religion, society, I care not?--to deliver men, I say, from such ghouls of the human brain, were indeed to have lived!" (MacDonald 2002:38). He believed, categorically, that Calvinism was a barricade to one's relationship with God. The following assessment will be helpful in understanding the spirit of MacDonald's stance. This review of one of MacDonald's lectures in London from a direct, albeit anonymous observer (Anonymous 2012:30-1), was originally published in *Christian World* in 1882:

It is the breaking up of old habits of theological thought, or the

> exercise of a happy liberty in regard to it, that has prepared the way
> for a preacher who avows himself, as Dr. MacDonald did on Sunday,
> to be no theologian, but who feels that the truth of God is to be
> reached in other ways than by a theological key. There ought, indeed,
> to be nothing startling in this, for it is evident that souls did somehow
> find the truth of God before Christianity knew anything of scientific
> theology. That the formulating of the truth of the New Testament
> into a system has been helpful to some minds, there can be no doubt.
> But the transposing of "truth as it is in Jesus" into a system has also
> hindered some minds from getting at Christ Himself, they having
> rested in the system, and only comprehend as much of Christ as they
> could see through the system.

Thus, theological systems could cloud the lenses of one's faith in Christ and
MacDonald felt that it was his job to clean the lens.

While it is obvious that he spoke negatively about these disciplines,
and even claimed not to espouse a particular belief system, to argue that he
did not have a philosophy or theology is simply nonsensical. Just because
MacDonald did not like the title of "philosopher" or "theologian" does not
mean that he was not one. If we are to take the words of Francis Schaeffer
seriously, we should argue that all rational beings are philosophers, "No
man can live without a worldview; therefore there is no man who is not
a philosopher" (Schaeffer 2001:4). The central difficulty with arguing
that MacDonald was not a theologian resides in the fact that in order for
MacDonald to be able to point out the falsity of any system, which he did on
many occasions, he must purport to know the truth. MacDonald argued this
point himself in his sermon 'The Last Farthing,' ". . . any system which tends
to persuade men that there is any salvation but that of becoming righteous
even as Jesus is righteous; that a man can be made good, as a good dog is
good, without his own willed share in the making; that a man is saved by
having his sins hidden under a robe of imputed righteousness—*that system,
so far as this tendency, is of the devil and not of God*. Thank God, not even
error shall injure the true of heart; it is not wickedness. They grow in the
truth, and as love casts out fear, so *truth casts out falsehood*" (MacDonald
2012a:125, italics mine).

This casting out of falsehood was the first step to replacing the
erroneous view of God with the truth. The difference between MacDonald
and his counterparts is that he would rather the reader seek the truth on
his own, rather than have MacDonald force-feed them his own personal

views. So, it is no surprise when he writes, "I know, however, that there were words in it which found their way to my conscience; and, let men of science or philosophy say what they will, the rousing of a man's conscience is the greatest event in his existence" (MacDonald 2009e:173). But for MacDonald himself, his conscience had been raised, and he did, in fact, purport to have a proper philosophical and theological underpinnings. The simplest way of reporting this fact is to recognize when he, in fact, agreed with certain scholars' points of view. He states succinctly in the *Tragedie of Hamlet*, "Note the unity of religion and philosophy in Hamlet: he takes the one true position" (MacDonald 1885:265). Now he does not argue this fact because he merely believes that Shakespeare's Hamlet is correct because he aligns with MacDonald, but even more importantly, he believes that Hamlet aligns with God's own philosophy. MacDonald stated, "Matter, time, space, are all God's, and whatever may become of our philosophies, whatever he does with or in respect of time, place, and what we call matter, his doing must be true in philosophy as well as fact" (MacDonald 2002:424). Therefore, God has a philosophy, Hamlet aligned with this philosophy, and MacDonald understands and agrees with this alignment. But in order to make this assessment he must have concluded that he had the correct philosophical and religious position in the first place. To give another example of MacDonald's affirmation of a philosophical position, take this passage in *England's Antiphon*, "Dr. Henry More was . . . chiefly known for his mystical philosophy, which he cultivated in retirement at Cambridge, and taught not only in prose, but in an elaborate, occasionally poetic poem . . . Whatever may be thought of his theories, they belong at least to the highest order of philosophy; and it will be seen from the poems I give that they must have borne their part in lifting the soul of the man towards a lofty spiritual condition of faith and fearlessness. The mystical philosophy seems to me safe enough in the hands of a poet: with others it may degenerate into dank and dusty materialism" (MacDonald 1996:223).

In the following pages, this researcher will proceed with the same spirit as MacDonald in his elevation of Dr. More's mystical philosophy. Even while MacDonald occasionally downplayed the role of philosophy, he absolutely asked and discussed questions of a metaphysical nature. Adelheid Kegler goes so far to say that "MacDonald's oeuvre is conceived in a dynamic and dialectic analysis of the central problems of modern philosophy" (Kegler 2003:19). MacDonald elucidated his philosophical positions on reality, truth, and knowledge; specifically discussed in his *Dish*

of Orts, as well as interweaving these ideals in his fantasy works and novels. Richard Reis summarizes, "MacDonald's philosophy is, for one thing, the very foundation upon which his works of fiction are laid. Most writers of fiction, perhaps, are chiefly interested in telling a good story with skill, discipline and art . . . but there have been plenty of great writers . . . to whom their private vision of truth is primary, and who use their art as a means to expression of that end; and MacDonald belongs clearly with this group. Although MacDonald himself never really put forward his ideas as a coherent system, a close examination of his scattered philosophical remarks has convinced me that they all arise from a systematic, consistent set of beliefs" (Reis 1989:31).

Section I: Living in a Shadow World: examining MacDonald's 'Temperamental Platonism' — Under the Shadow of Platonism

It is a habit of many scholars, no matter the field, to take the individual which they are researching and categorize his or her thought under the auspices of one of the great thinkers of history. This tendency is no different with those who study George MacDonald. Most MacDonald scholars place him under the umbrella of the teachings of Plato. This comes as no surprise, since this is one of the few philosophers that MacDonald ever mentioned in his novels. It is no shock for a reader of MacDonald's to stumble on a passage in which one of the main characters picked up a copy of Plato and read as a source of truth. For instance, in *Wilfred Cumbermede* the narrator states that the main character sat "down to my books, and read with tolerable attention my morning portion of Plato" (MacDonald 2009e:232). Yet, in the body of his fictional works you will never find mention of Aristotle or Augustine, Plotinus or Schleiermacher, each of which MacDonald had similarity and in whom he had much regard. Most scholars conclude that MacDonald, while he never agreed with Plato's philosophy as a whole, had placed Plato on another plane of authority. Most notably, Stephen Prickett states directly, "MacDonald is a temperamental Platonist" (Prickett 2005:170). Colin Manlove wrote, "MacDonald was a Platonist in his thinking . . ." (Manlove 2007:18). Frank Riga also contends that "MacDonald's Christianity is also heavily marked by Platonic and neoplatonic elements" (Riga 1992:112). MacDonald himself writes, in a footnote in reference to one of John Fletcher's poems, that therein lays "a glimmer of that Platonism of which, happily, we have so much more in the seventeenth century" (MacDonald 1996:140). But is there enough evidence

and conformity in the work of MacDonald to argue that he was a true
Platonist or even a Neo-Platonist?

      To begin our discussion, and to understand MacDonald's frame of
reference, it would do the reader well to reconsider Plato's famous cave
analogy:

> Plato asks us to imagine an underground cave which has an opening
> towards the light. In this cave are living human beings, with their
> legs and necks chained from childhood in such a way that they face
> the inside wall of the cave and have never seen the light of the sun.
> Above and behind them, i.e. between the prisoners and the mouth
> of the cave, is a fire, and between them and the fire is a raised way
> and a low wall, like a screen. Along this raised way there pass men
> carrying statues and figures of animals and other objects, in such
> a manner that the objects they carry appear over the top of the low
> wall or screen. They see only shadows. These prisoners represent the
> majority of man, the multitude of people who remain all their lives
> in a state of ignorance beholding only shadows of reality and hearing
> only echoes of the truth (Copleston 1993:161).

Even the casual reader of MacDonald will see some correspondence
between Plato's Cave analogy and many of the themes and symbols found
in MacDonald's work. Most prominently is MacDonald's unceasing
juxtaposition of two realities: eternal and temporal. Simply stated, Kerry
Dearborn writes, "MacDonald's belief that the world is the antechamber of
the greater reality of the Kingdom of God was redolent of Plato" (Dearborn
2006:25). Stephen Prickett argues that "this world, for him, is not a
consistent place, but is the meeting place of two very different kinds of
reality" (Prickett 2005:167); he continues by stating that MacDonald was
"only interested in the surface of this world for the news it gives him of
another, hidden reality, perceived, as it were, through a glass darkly" (Prickett
2005:170). MacDonald agreed with Plato that this world was a conduit to a
world of a concealed, deeper reality.

      MacDonald explains his own position further, "The heavens and
the earth are around us that it may be possible for us to speak of the unseen
by the seen; for the outermost husk of creation has correspondence with
the deepest things of the Creator" (MacDonald 2012a:201). Thus this
world is part of the intimate revelation of the Father. As will be discussed
in the subsequent section, this world is not merely a created entity, but is a
revelation of the heart of God. This paragraph from MacDonald's *Unspoken*

Sermons (2012a:96) will elucidate his metaphysical position:

> Things are given us, this body first of things, that through them we
> may be trained both to independence and true possession of them.
> We must possess them; they must not possess us. Their use is to
> mediate—as shapes and manifestations in lower kind of the things
> that are unseen, that is, in themselves unseeable, the things that
> belong, not to the world of speech, but the world of silence, not to the
> world of showing, *but the world of being*, the world that *cannot be
> shaken*, and must remain. These things unseen take form in the things
> of time and space—not that they may exist, for *they exist in and
> from eternal Godhead*, but that their being may be known to those in
> training for the eternal; these things unseen the sons and daughters of
> God must possess. But instead of reaching out after them, they grasp
> at their forms, reward the things seen as the things to be possessed,
> *fall in love with the bodies instead of the souls of them*. (italics mine)

Here he delineates between a world of "showing" and a world of "being,"
one of which is capable of alteration and change, the other "must remain"
and is eternal. MacDonald also makes it clear that things do not come into
existence once they are placed in our dimension of time and space, but are
already in existence in the eternal mind of God. In another place MacDonald
writes, "God began to talk to us ages before we were born: I will not say
before we began to be, for, in a sense, that very moment God thought of us
we began to exist, for what God thinks of *is*" (MacDonald 1878:202). While
it extends beyond appropriate measure to insinuate that scholars agree that
Plato held this concept, none would disagree that Neo-Platonists such as
Augustine unequivocally held this view (Williams 2003). Nevertheless, the
parallel can be drawn most distinctly in the last line of the excerpt. While the
inhabitants of Plato's cave are continuously enamored by the shadows on the
wall of the cave, MacDonald implores his readers not to "fall in love" with
the earthly world, but to reach for the unseen as part of the preparation for
our eternal destiny.

The fact that MacDonald held to the hypothesis that there is an
actual, unseen ideal world is undoubtedly clear as Narve Kragset Nystoyl
claims, "One will recognize the Platonic concept of the 'ideas', or more
precisely the division or contrast between our present physical world of
senses, and a higher, more real world of ideas, of which our world is merely
a shadow" (Nystoyl 2013:13). Manlove also concedes that MacDonald
believed that "beyond the shifting forms of this world are certain unchanging

realities, which no image of them can contain" (Manlove 2007:18).

MacDonald's metaphysical foundations, and the relationship between the realms of the seen and unseen, are also made clear in his fiction. It is no secret that George MacDonald often cited Novalis, most famously in the conclusion of Lilith where he quoted: "Our life is no dream; but it ought to become one, and perhaps will" (MacDonald 2009c:359). Stephen Prickett notes that upon reading the quote, as well as the book as a whole, "we are suddenly confronted with a new existential gloss on the traditional Platonic belief that human life is but a dream of a greater reality" (Prickett 2005:199). MacDonald believed that this world, was in fact, real, but once we reach the world of the unseen our current world will become as a dream from which we have just awoken. Our cognitive reflection of this world will be reinterpreted by the new world, but this does not devalue our current existence.

David Manley argues: "The clearest image in George MacDonald's fiction of how earth whispers of heaven, however, is . . . *The Golden Key*" (Manley 1998:45). While some scholars may disagree with Manley, this passage from MacDonald's tale (MacDonald 2009b:193) shows a clear distinction between the world of the seen and the world of the unseen, while also using imagery redolent of Plato's cave:

> It was a sea of shadows. The mass was chiefly made up of the shadows of leaves innumerable, of all lovely and imaginative forms, waving to and fro, floating and quivering in the breath of a breeze whose motion was unfelt, whose sound was unheard . . . They soon spied the shadows of flowers mingled with those of the leaves, and now and then the shadow of a bird with open beak, and throat distended with song . . . For the shadows were not merely lying on the surface of the ground, but heaped up above it like substantial forms of darkness, as if they had been cast upon a thousand different planes of the air. Tangle and Mossy often lifted their heads and gazed upwards to descry whence the shadows came; but they could see nothing more than a bright mist spread above them, higher than the tops of the mountains, which stood clear against it . . . After a while, they reached more open spaces, where the shadows were thinner; and came even to portions over which shadows only flitted, leaving them clear for such as might follow. Now a wonderful form, half bird-like half human, would float across on the country whence the shadows fell. "We MUST find the country from which the shadows come," said Mossy. "We must, dear Mossy," responded Tangle. "What if

      your golden key should be the key to it?"
Thus, in Tangle and Mossy's travels, as if executing a slow escape from
Plato's cave, they begin to transcend the world of shadows and approach the
world from which the shadows come. As they travel, the shadows become
thinner, and their hope for reaching the unseen world wells up in their hearts,
and the prediction that the golden key is, in fact, the key to the door of this
other world comes to fruition. Manley concedes that when "they finally
come to the threshold of their destination, they know they are approaching
the source of those shadows of beauty; they know they will soon 'see face to
face'" (Manley 1998:45).

      This theme of "two juxtaposed worlds" (Prickett 2005:15) runs
through many of MacDonald's works, including *Lilith*. Mr. Vane, most
strikingly, in one of his internal debates after returning from "the other
world" (MacDonald 2009c:131) questioned, "Had I come to myself out
of a vision?—or lost myself by going back to one? Which was the real—
what I now saw, or what I had just ceased to see? Could both be real,
interpenetrating yet unmingling?" (MacDonald 2009c:52). While Vane does
not follow this with a direct answer to his own question, it can be assumed
from the end of the story, that Vane, and thus MacDonald himself, would
answer with a resounding "Yes":

> "Strange dim memories, which will not abide identification, often,
> through misty windows of the past, look out upon me in the broad
> daylight, but I never dream now. It may be, notwithstanding, that,
> when most awake, I am only dreaming the more! But when I wake
> at last into that life which, as a mother her child, carries this life in
> its bosom, I shall know that I wake, and shall doubt no more. I wait;
> asleep or awake, I wait" (2009c:359).

Both of the realities mentioned above, whether "asleep or awake," do not
diminish the actuality of either frame of reference. Salvey agrees with this
assessment of MacDonald's metaphysic in *Lilith*, "Both worlds are real,
although, possibly not equally real, and both worlds are good, although
perhaps not equally good" (Salvey 2008:25). As Salvey suggests, MacDonald
holds that the unseen world may have heightened reality, a heightened
goodness that's clearly evident in this passage from *Lilith*, "We stood
for a moment at the gate whence issued roaring the radiant river. I know
not whence came the stones that fashioned it, but among them I saw the
prototypes of all the gems I had loved on earth—far more beautiful than they,
for these were living stones—such in which I saw, not the intent alone, but

the intender too; not the idea alone, but the embodier present, the operant outsender: nothing in this kingdom was dead; nothing was mere; nothing only a thing" (MacDonald 2009c:355-6). The unseen world is not a mere reflection of the divine creator, but, in some sense, exudes an existential presence of the creator that, in some way, transcends what we experience in this physical world. To conclude this argument, this passage from *Unspoken Sermons* demonstrates both MacDonald's concept that the heavens are higher than this world, while goodness still remains in this world, "The true soul sees, or will come to see, that his words, his figures always represent more than they are able to present; for, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the heavenly things higher than the earthly signs of them, let the signs be good as ever sign may be" (MacDonald 2012a:174).

A current appraisal of the research above places MacDonald firmly in the "metaphysical realist" camp, since these realities, whether seen or unseen, do not depend on the mind or the observation of man. Yet the investigation should not stop there. The next inquiry along the metaphysical vein is obvious, "What about the physical world, the world of shadows. In what way is it real?"

Once we question the metaphysical nature of these "shadows," the differences between MacDonald's view and Plato's metaphysics becomes unmistakably clear. To the prisoners in Plato's cave, elucidated in his *Republic*, "the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images" (Plato 515). Plato argued that this world was merely a shadow of the real, eternal world of ideals, and the only goodness to be found in these shadows are their usage as epistemic conduits through which we can possibly gain knowledge of the unseen, real world. They are tools by which we find reality, but their metaphysical goodness beyond this function is questionable. The shadows are not good in and of themselves; their only good is in the fact that some shadows, or the "shadows of true existence" (Plato 532) are useful to gain true knowledge. Our observations in the physical world are only reflections, or "images in the water" (Plato 532), of true reality. Even the cave itself, an analogy of our physical world, is not natural, but is to be broken free from to gain knowledge of the real world.

In contrast, MacDonald's view of the physical world has intrinsic value, apart from its epistemic usefulness. MacDonald "does not reject and devalue the physical, particular embodiment of the ideal after it has been used as a tool for contemplating that ideal" (Salvey 2008:20). Frank Riga states "MacDonald's Platonism is impure, not because he misunderstands it or

distorts it, but because of his vision of life embraces the flesh and the material world in a way that a pure Platonism would not allow" (Riga 1992:126). Simply put, MacDonald's Christian worldview could not accommodate a pure Platonism, instead his "Platonism had to be impure in order to accommodate the essential goodness of the flesh and its ultimate purification and resurrection" (Riga 1992:112). Thus, to MacDonald, even the darkness of Plato's cave is not an inherent evil, but instead is "one of the constituent elements of reality" (Riga 1992:127). As will be discussed in the next section, God is the creator of this world, and his creation was, and is, inherently good.

The goodness of this world can be most clearly observed in the narrative of Tangle and Mossy in *The Golden Key*. Frank Riga contends: "The quest parallels the journey of Plato's unchained prisoner who seeks the reality beyond the shadows and images of the cave. Unlike the freed prisoner, however, Mossy and Tangle do not discover the intelligible world of perfect form through philosophic meditation; instead they live an ordinary human life, loving the things of the world and yet dimly knowing these prefigure something more pleasing than either can describe." (Riga 1992:115). Thus this world is "not an accident of spiritual geography or a psychological quirk, but a part of man's normal condition of existence" (Prickett 2005:15).

In summary, Narve Kragset Nystoyl contends, "Although MacDonald is frequently deemed a Platonist . . . others argue that this is a difficult claim to make. At least, calling MacDonald a Platonist definitely stretches the term somewhat, as MacDonald, ever unorthodox, hardly fits the bill in all aspects" (Nystoyl 2013:34). In an even more specific condemnation of this labeling of MacDonald's philosophy as Platonic, Robert Trexler argues, "As to MacDonald (or Lewis for that matter) who is sometimes called a neo-Platonist, I do not see it fitting the truth of the matter. They both use Platonist imagery, shadows/caves, etc. But I think that's just a symbolist use of those images . . . they are sacramentalist writers, who see nature as reflecting God's truth" (Trexler 2014). While none of the scholars mentioned in this research would put MacDonald's philosophy directly in line with Plato, some, like Robert Trexler, find far more aversion to this labeling than others. But most, like Roderick McGillis, admit, "Plato is never too far from MacDonald's thinking" (McGillis 2008:203).

In *England's Antiphon's* MacDonald spoke of the work of Thomas Heywood thusly: "He had strong Platonic tendencies, interesting himself chiefly however in those questions afterwards pursued by Dr. Henry More . . . which may be called the shadow of Platonism" (MacDonald 1996:135). As

MacDonald spoke of Heywood, I firmly content that we should also apply this to the work of MacDonald himself. While no MacDonald scholar would argue that he was a thorough Platonist, it has been demonstrated that he lived and operated under "the shadow of Platonism," and that this terminology is an accurate description of MacDonald's metaphysic. Thus, in conclusion, MacDonald was a metaphysical realist who openly acknowledged that he operated under the shadow of Platonism.

Section II: Ex Deo: Plotinus, Origen, and MacDonald's doctrine of Creation

      A discussion of MacDonald's doctrine of creation may seem out of place immediately following a study of MacDonald's metaphysic, yet, at the end of this section, it will become obvious that an understanding of this doctrine is essential to appreciating the connection between MacDonald's metaphysic and his theology. According to William Raeper, MacDonald believed that "men and women were born out of the heart of God, not *Ex Nihilo* as traditionally held by the church, and thus MacDonald aligned himself with the Neo-Platonic theories of Plotinus and Origen" (Raeper 1987:243). Here again, MacDonald operated under the shadow of Plato; thus not only will MacDonald's view be explored, but also be compared and contrasted with the neo-platonic doctrines of Plotinus and Origen.

      It is believed by most scholars that in the second and third century A.D Ammonius Saccas of Alexandria taught his students the rudimentary knowledge of what will later be dubbed Neo-Platonism. While not much is known of Ammonius since he has no extant writings, there is no doubt, simply by an understanding of his students' teachings, that he subscribed to the teachings of Plato, or at least a personal interpretation thereof (Riddle 2008:46). This Platonic influence manifested itself into two of his most influential students: Origen and Plotinus.

      While Origen did hold to a creation of matter *Ex Nihilo* (De Principiis II.1.5), one can quickly see the Platonic influence on his view of creation in his Commentary on John, "We must ask about this; whether, when the saints were living a blessed life apart from matter and from any body, the dragon, falling from the pure life, became fit to be bound in matter and in a body, so that the Lord could say, speaking through storm and clouds, This is the beginning of the creation of God, made for His angels to mock at" (I.17). Similarly to Plato, Origen held to a pre-existence of the soul before the placement of that soul into matter. Before this physical world began, we

lived in a spiritual realm with God, and originally "He created all whom He made equal and alike" (De Principiis II.9.6). It was only through the free will of these rational creatures that diversity had been caused. (De Principiis II.9.6). It's also likely that Origen believed in an infinite regress of ever-recurring existences, which falls in-line with Plato's contention that the world is coeternal with the *Demiurgos*. Origen writes: "We say that not then for the first time did God begin to work when He made this visible world; but as, after its destruction, there will be another world, so also we believe that others existed before the present came into being" (De Principiis III.5.3).

Where Origen's doctrine of creation intrigues the devotees of MacDonald is where he dips his toes into the pool of emanationism. But, unlike Plotinus and MacDonald who chronologically followed him, Origen only suggests creation *Ex Deo* for God alone. John Riddle explains, "Origen's theory of emanation, derived from Plato, provided imagery that could help explain how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could be one God in three persons" (Riddle 2008: 46). Origen explains in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, "One might assert, and with reason, that God Himself is the beginning of all things, and might go on to say, as is plain, that the Father is the beginning of the Son; and the demiurge the beginning of the works of the demiurge, and that God in a word is the beginning of all that exists . . . In the Word one may see the Son, and because He is in the Father He may be said to be in the beginning" (I.17). Thus, in his view, Jesus emanated from the Father, and the Holy Spirit originated in Christ. Origen explains, "But we for our part are convinced that there are three distinct existents-Father, Son and Holy Spirit- and we do not believe any of these is unbegotten except the Father" (Wiles 2001:78). Of course, this would more than ruffle a few feathers of third century theologians, especially when Origen argued that the "Holy Spirit was brought into being through the Word [Christ], and the Word is senior to him" (Wiles 2001:78). Thus implying that there was a true ontological subordination in the Trinity. While Origen's ideas lead to heresy in the early church, there is the grounding of emanationism, which leads us to another one of Ammonius' students: Plotinus.

Plotinus' concept of emanationism was not limited to the divine, but branched out into all creation. Norman Geisler states categorically "Plotinus' God created the world *Ex Deo* (out of himself) out of a necessary and emanational unfolding and not *Ex Nihilo* (out of nothing)" (Geisler 2003:153). In Plotinus' own words: "the One is perfect and . . . has overflowed, and its exuberance has produced the new" (Enneads V.2.1).

For the uninitiated, many would take Plotinus' ideas to directly lead to pantheism, but this is not the case, especially in the strict sense of the word. He elucidates his position, "The One is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things; all things are its possession—running back, so to speak, to it—or, more correctly, not yet so, they will be" (V.2.1). The fact of the matter is that Plotinus' "One," while a complex idea, is an ontologically simple and an utterly inexplicable source. The One produces its effect, but the effect is different from its begetter due to the complexity of the creation, "For the Universe is not a Principle and Source: it springs from a source, and that source cannot be the All or anything belonging to the All, since it is to generate the All, and must be not a plurality but the Source of plurality, since universally a begetting power is less complex than the begotten" (III.8.9). Plotinus also states more simply: "the produced thing is deficient by the very addition, by being less simplex, by standing one step away from the Authentic" (II.6.1). Brandon Zimmerman explains, "There is an ontological gulf between the One and all modes of being that are derived from him, a gulf which words and concepts cannot bridge. Plotinus often expresses this paradoxically by saying that the One is all things in that they come from him, and is nothing in that he is none of the beings that come from him and has none of the limiting characteristics of a being or a substance" (Zimmerman 2009:15-6).

Plotinus did ask himself, "From such a unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence, any multiplicity, dyad, or number?" (V.1.6). In laymen terms, 'How did the One create?" It becomes clear in his fifth Ennead that the One produces the Divine Mind, or the Intellectual-Principle or Nous, which he stated, "stands as the image of The One" (V.1.7). Then this mind, since it is not devoid of creativity like the One, produces the soul. Plotinus explains, "What is left is the phase of the soul which we have declared to be an image of the Divine Intellect, retaining some light from that sun, while it pours downward upon the sphere of magnitudes (that is, of Matter) the light playing about itself which is generated from its own nature" (V.3.9). So, to use the two analogies that Plotinus oft utilized, the *Nous* is the image of the One, and the soul the image of the *Nous*; or the *Nous* is like a ray of sun from the One, and the soul is sunlight of the *Nous*.

In Origen, the substance by which God creates, in relation to the two other persons of the Trinity, is *Ex Deo*. The Father begets Jesus, and then the Holy Spirit is thus created, all out of his own eternal substance. In Plotinus,

the One emanates the *Nous*, then the *Nous* creates the soul, and the lesser realm of matter, in its own image or reflection. Yet how does MacDonald compare?

Dale Nelson states categorically, "MacDonald and Boehme believe God dwells in nature, and that nature proceeds from God, rather than being created out of nothing" (Nelson 1989:28). Rolland Hein explains how MacDonald rejects the traditional view of creation, "Man in his subconscious being, therefore, does not exist independently from God. God made man out of himself . . . and man lives and moves and has his being in God . . . Thus MacDonald repudiates the doctrine of creation *Ex Nihilo* which Augustine taught, and which many orthodox theologians have believed" (Hein 1989:47).

In MacDonald's *Castle Parable*, one of his characters prays, "We thank thee that we have a father, and not a maker; that thou hast begotten us, and not moulded us as images of clay; that we have come forth of thy heart, and have not been fashioned by thy hands. It must be so. Only the heart of a father is able to create. We rejoice in it, and bless thee that we know it. We thank thee for thyself. Be what thou art—our root and life, our beginning and end, our all in all" (MacDonald 1999:233). While it seems like MacDonald's doctrine of creation stands in stark contrast to the Biblical account of Gen 2:7 and 3:19, he argues that his view of creation *Ex Deo* is Biblically based. We find an explication of MacDonald's theory of creation in his commentary of Romans 8:19 where the scripture reads "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." MacDonald comments on the Biblical passage, "I am inclined to believe the apostle regarded the whole visible creation as, in far differing degrees of consciousness, a live outcome from the heart of the living one, who is all in all" (MacDonald 2012b:90). In *A Dish of Orts* MacDonald explains, "In the New Testament there is a higher form used to express the relation in which we stand to him- 'we are his offspring;' not the work of his hand, but the children that came forth from his heart" (MacDonald 1895:246).

In survey of MacDonald's doctrine of creation, it would appear as though he believed that the entire physical world was *Ex Deo*, "Our own poet Goldsmith, with the high instinct of genius, speaks of God having 'loved us into being.' Now I think this is not only true with regard to man, but true likewise with regard to the world in which we live. [It's] not merely a thing which God hath made . . . but is an expression of the thought, the feeling, the heart of God himself" (MacDonald 1895:246). But in other areas, he suggests that his doctrine may be more limited: "Perhaps the precious things of the

earth, the coal and the diamonds, the iron and clay and gold, may be said to have come from his hands; but the live things come from his heart- from near the same region whence ourselves we came" (MacDonald 2012a:278). It's possible that he still continued to hold the entire world as a creation out of the heart of God, but simply would not argue the point. Yet the concept that living beings were *Ex Deo* was worthy of dispute. So again, in his commentary on Romans 8:19: "Such view, at the same time, I do not care to insist upon; I only care to argue that the word *creature* or *creation* must include everything in creation that has sentient life" (MacDonald 2012b:90).

In further research, it appears as if, for MacDonald, there is no third option: either God created out of himself or there is no God. For God must either exist, and we are created out of Him, or he does not exist at all, and we have spontaneously come into existence out of nothingness. "If we came out of nothing, we could not invent the idea of a God—could we, Robert? Nothing would be our God. If we come from God, nothing is more natural, nothing so natural, as to want him, and when we have not got him, to try to find him.—What if he should be in us after all, and working in us this way? just this very way of crying out after him?" (MacDonald 2005:277). And again he explains, "Only, if man and Nature came both out of nothing, why should they not be nothing to each other? Why should not man be nothing to himself?" (MacDonald 1991:260). MacDonald saw creation out of nothing as an illogical phrase, "There is a false phrase used, that we were made out of nothing. It is a mere logical contradiction" (MacDonald 2009a:121). If there was truly "nothing," God would not exist, thus God would not be there to create. To consider these ideas more deeply, consider this extended passage from *The Dish of Orts* (MacDonald 1895:3) in an entry entitled "The Imagination":

> Poet means maker. We must not forget, however, that between creator and poet lies the one unpassable gulf which distinguishes—far be it from us to say *divides*—all that is God's from all that is man's; a gulf teeming with infinite revelations, but a gulf over which no man can pass to find out God, although God needs not to pass over it to find man; the gulf between that which calls, and that which is thus called into being; between that which makes in its own image and that which is made in that image. It is better to keep the word *creation* for that calling out of nothing which is the imagination of God; except it be as an occasional symbolic expression, whose daring is fully recognized, of the likeness of man's work to the work of his

maker. The necessary unlikeness between the creator and the created holds within it the equally necessary likeness of the thing made to him who makes it, and so of the work of the made to the work of the maker. When therefore, refusing to employ the word *creation* of the work of man, we yet use the word *imagination* of the work of God, we cannot be said to dare at all. It is only to give the name of man's faculty to that power after which and by which it was fashioned. The imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God. Everything of man must have been of God first; and it will help much towards our understanding of the imagination and its functions in man if we first succeed in regarding aright the imagination of God, in which the imagination of man lives and moves and has its being.

In the passage above, MacDonald has no qualms stating that when God created, he called us out of nothing. At first understanding, one may find it contentious that here he makes no qualms in using *Ex Nihilo* style language, yet, it must be firmly denoted that MacDonald qualifies the word "nothing" as the "imagination of God." In MacDonald's view, God created from his imagination. God called his creatures, which did not pre-exist, nor are made of God's own essence, into existence.

One must wonder why MacDonald used the verbiage "He makes them, not out of nothing, but out of Himself" in most of his passages on creation. This idea was not a fleeting concept that arose once in MacDonald's mind, then passed on. MacDonald specifically, and I would argue intentionally, used this wording in many of his books. I contend that this diction was used for two specific reasons: First, MacDonald wanted to demonstrate and remind us that God's creative process is quite different and much more glorious then when man, figuratively, "brings things into existence." As MacDonald explained, "Better to keep the word *creation* for that calling out of nothing which is the imagination of God; except it be as an occasional symbolic expression" (MacDonald 1895:3). No man creates something out of his heart in the same way that God does. When the poet uses the term "create," it can only be used analogically. As Gisela Kreglinger writes, "He goes out of his way to differentiate clearly between the creative activity of God and human creativity. MacDonald establishes God as the one who created the world out of nothing and mankind as part of God's creation" (Kreglinger 2014:84) and ask MacDonald continuously implores, "God thinks you out of himself" (MacDonald 2009a:106).

Secondly, MacDonald often wanted to remind the reader of the

direct and intimate relational ties between God and his creation. As will be researched later, MacDonald was a Christian mystic who accentuated God's immanence and fatherhood. Man is no mere accident of nature, but is the offspring of God. In MacDonald's own words, "For God is the heritage of the soul in the ownness of origin; man is the offspring of his making will, of his life; God himself is his birth-place; God is the self that makes the soul able to say *I too, I myself*. This absolute unspeakable bliss of the creature is that for which the Son died, for which the Father suffered with him. Then only is life itself; then only is it right, is it one; then only is it as designed and necessitated by the eternal life-outgiving Life" (MacDonald 2012a:189). David Robb illustrates this intimacy, "His belief that the world is a book, given pattern and significance by a writer-god . . . [suggests] the nearness and intimacy which MacDonald sought for in his understanding of God" (Robb 1987:53).

Lastly, it must be noted that some casual readers of MacDonald falsely conclude that being created "out of God's own heart" indicates that he was a pantheist. While the following section will focus on that specific research, it can be stated here that MacDonald categorically did not indicate in any of his works that creation *Ex Deo* was a dissemination, or an emanation, of God's essence into his creation. Not even Origen or Plotinus suggests such a strong emanationism, yet MacDonald is sometimes credited with this position, albeit without merit. While it is still legitimate to claim that MacDonald held to creation *Ex Deo*, but not in the traditional sense of the term. Like many of his other assessments, his view of creation was not ontological in nature, but rather, MacDonald's *Ex Deo* was focused on the primacy and the complexity of God's creative, imaginative process, as well as the relational implications of creator and his new creation.

Section III: "Participation" in the Divine Nature

Any attempt to formally categorize George MacDonald's theological perspective generally results in consternation and even robust dialogue amongst MacDonald scholars. But an attempt should be made here, not to explicate his entire theological system, but merely to set forth his view of humanity's relation to the divine. Even then, with the focus narrowed to this specific topic, there are reasons for confusion in his reader's opinions. One of the main causes of misunderstanding is an equivocation of terminology, and the confusing explanations of these terms in MacDonald's work as well as the work of modern MacDonald scholarship.

First, and most importantly, while George MacDonald knew that the term "pantheism" had heretical implications, he had no problems with categorizing his protagonists as pantheistic. For instance, in MacDonald's *What's Mine's Mine* (2000:211), one of the characters considers the idea that quite possibly, the protagonist is a pantheist:

> "The thought, IS HE A PANTHEIST? took its place. Had she not surprised him in an act of worship? In that wide outspreading of the lifted arms, was he not worshipping the whole, the Pan? Sky and stars and mountains and sea were his God! She walked aghast, forgetful of a hundred things she had heard him say that might have settled the point. She had, during the last day or two, been reading an article in which pantheism was once and again referred to with more horror than definiteness. Recovering herself a little, she ventured approach to the subject. 'There! that is what I was afraid of!' cried Mercy: 'you are pantheists!'"

The disdain for pantheism rings true in the passage, but the protagonist does something unexpected; he agrees that he is, in fact, a pantheist. But he does so on his own terms, and by his own definition, "'Yes,' answered Ian. 'If to believe that not a lily can grow, not a sparrow fall to the ground without our Father, be pantheism, Alister and I are pantheists. If by pantheism you mean anything that would not fit with that, we are not pantheists.' (MacDonald 2000:215).

What was the point of this maneuver? Why use a word that would spark such talk of heresy? It would seem that MacDonald merely wanted to champion the love of nature, and to lessen the disdain for those secularists who emulated that love. MacDonald lectured at one point, "The feeling used to be so strong in these northern parts, that if you talked about nature with anything like enthusiasm, you were worshipping a heathen goddess. Friends, it is rank paganism--worse than paganism. The devil did not make the moonlight, nor did God place us here to strive against the lovely influences of sea and land and sky amid which He has set us. The man who *loves nature aright is a good man*—a man of tender heart" (Gregs 2013:290-1, italics mine).

Another complication of the issue is that George MacDonald often used pantheistic language, and was a lover of nature himself. Greville MacDonald records one of George's letters where he contends, "The beautiful things round about you are the expression of God's face, or, as in Faust, the garment whereby we see the deity. Is God's sun more beautiful

than God himself? Has he not left it to us as a symbol of his own life-giving light?" (Greville MacDonald 2005:122). In one instance, MacDonald even goes so far as calling nature "she," "we talk even of the world which is but [God's] living garment, as if that were a person; and we call it "she" as if it were a woman, because so many of God's loveliest influences come to us through her. She always seems to me a beautiful old grandmother" (MacDonald 2000:212). But due to these personifications of nature and use of poetic, pantheistic terminology, MacDonald's words could be easily taken out of context and twisted into something that the author did not mean. For instance, in an *Unspoken Sermon*, MacDonald wrote that for the Christian, "the life of the Father and the Son flows through him; he is a part of the divine organism" (MacDonald 2012a:197). In his "A Sketch of Individual Development" MacDonald contends that "oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity" (MacDonald 1895:74). In a letter he plainly writes, "We know in ourselves that we are one with God" (Greville MacDonald 2005:432). But if the reader does not read the context, or attempt to understand what MacDonald meant by being a part of the "divine organism" or in what sense can we attain "oneness" with God, then the reader could falsely conclude that MacDonald was a thoroughgoing pantheist.

This pantheistic vocabulary and decontextualization does not affect just MacDonald, but his scholars as well. Rolland Hein writes in his *The Harmony Within*, "Humanity, when it realizes its highest spiritual potential, will differ in nowise from divinity" (Hein 1989:71). If the reader had not read previous pages which included Hein's discussion on human individuality and uniqueness, and had read this passage as a mere sound-bite, pantheism could have been concluded. William Raeper says that MacDonald's religion "involves the soul seeking a union with God—a union of substances in fact . . . a union in which the individuality is retained" (Raeper 1987:257). Raeper's commentary is unique, especially since he explains that this union between God and man to be substantial. It would seem that he is unquestionably suggesting that MacDonald was a pantheist, but in the next paragraph he writes that "MacDonald believed in a union in which the individuality was retained" (Raeper 1987:257). While Raeper's explanation of the unifying principle is nonexistent in this text, for it was not the overall point Raeper was making, our point is clear: due to MacDonald's own use of pantheistic language, as well as his scholarship, some have falsely attributed pantheism to our subject.

Lastly, and likely most importantly, MacDonald championed, on

numerous occasions, the title "Christian pantheist." It should be noted that this designation should not be unique merely because of the baggage that comes with this terminology, but simply due to the fact that it was rare to have MacDonald advocate any title at all. He was infamous for intentionally avoiding labeling his theological and doctrinal perspective, as he is oft quoted, "Jesus Christ is my theology, and nothing else" (Anonymous 2012:31).

Most of MacDonald's significant explanations on Christian Pantheism are contained within his discussions on Wordsworth. Note the positive light in which MacDonald casts this idea, "This Christian pantheism, this belief that God is in everything, and showing himself in everything, has been much brought to the light by the poets of the past generation, and has its influence still, I hope, upon the poets of the present" (MacDonald 1895:246). As was defined in *What's Mine's Mine* (MacDonald 2000:211), MacDonald defined his Christian pantheism as a theology where God is overwhelmingly immanent. Greville reiterates this concept, "Take *Lessons for a Child* as expression of his *pantheism*: a word I use in Wordsworthian sense, and antithetic to any crude theory that, admitting God's manifestation in natural phenomena, denies His personality and transcendent, creating presence—and there an end of it. George MacDonald's pantheism was faith in the Father of all life, whose living word perpetually creates, inspires and redeems the whole world" (Greville MacDonald 2005:278-9). While Greville uses the term pantheism, he strictly points out that this is no "crude theory" which "denies his personality," so how was this term to be interpreted?

While the term "pantheist" brings its own import into the minds of the reader, there is no doubt that MacDonald did not mean to use the term in the normative sense, indicating this alteration with the prefix "Christian." Kerry Dearborn explains, "MacDonald identified Wordsworth's orientation as 'Christian Pantheism,' but cautions that it does not follow that he was an apostle of nature who identified nature with God. Rather, nature was seen as 'the word of God in his own handwriting' or 'the expression of the face of God' which has a 'moulding' and formative effect. Because nature was considered part of the overflow of God's love, it could draw one back to a more vibrant perspective on all of life and offer a corrective to mechanistic ways of approaching relationships, theology, and life" (Dearborn 2006:36-37). In his own words MacDonald explains why the love of nature should be applauded, "When we understand the Word of God, then we understand the works of God; when we know the nature of an artist, we know his pictures;

when we have known and talked with the poet, we understand his poetry far better. To the man of God, all nature will be but changeful reflections of the face of God" (MacDonald 1895:256). MacDonald did argue, as stated by Paul in Ephesians 2:23 and 4:10, that "If there be a God, he is all in all, and filleth all things, and all is well" (MacDonald 1881:310). But MacDonald did not equate God and the world. For instance, in a letter to Lady Byron on the topic of Arthurian legend, "But finding God in Christ, he found God in all things-as certainly, though not so fully manifest" (Greville MacDonald 2005:311). He made the distinction between the God-man, and nature itself, showing that MacDonald must exert some distinction between nature and God.

In addition to a separation between God and nature, MacDonald was clear that God and man were quite distinct. Kerry Dearborn explains, "MacDonald was careful to acknowledge a radical difference between God and humanity. He held firmly to belief in God's sovereignty and freedom. In this way he averted the Romantic inclination toward pantheism" (Dearborn 2006:79). In his own words, he explains without equivocation, "He only is the true, original good; I am true because I seek nothing but his will. He only is all in all; I am not all in all, but he is my father, and I am the son in whom his heart of love is satisfied" (MacDonald 2012a:195). For clarity and emphasis, MacDonald specifically stated above "I am not all in all." He realizes that he cannot be God, he is not all-in-all, but there still can be oneness, in a sense.

While MacDonald obviously was not a pantheist in the normative sense, it's obvious that he argued that there was a deep connection between God and his creation. Kerry Dearborn concedes, "MacDonald also affirmed an innate connection between God the Creator and human creatures, for humans are created in God's image" (Dearborn 2006:79). This depth of connection was often, in MacDonald's writings, called "oneness," which may cause some to assume pantheism. Yet the following will make clear that while there can be "oneness," this concept of oneness cannot happen without multiplicity. In an *Unspoken Sermon*, MacDonald contends that "the final end of the separation is not individuality; that is but a means to it; the final end is oneness—an impossibility without it. For there can be no unity, no delight of love, no harmony, no good in being, where there is but one. Two at least are needed for oneness; and the greater the number of individuals, the greater, the lovelier, the richer, the diviner is the possible unity" (2012a:140). The next pertinent question revolves around MacDonald's concept of "oneness" and

how one can be, as Peter put it in 2 Peter 2:4, a partaker of the divine nature.

MacDonald writes, "We must choose to be divine, to be of God, to be one with God, loving and living as he loves and lives, and so be partakers of the divine nature, or we perish" (MacDonald 2012a:194). Thus, MacDonald does not argue that to be of the divine nature is, in fact, a part of our nature. In other words, it is not a metaphysical unity; it is a volitional one. Humanity can only choose to be unified with God. This concept in MacDonald's work recurs so consistently it may not be an exaggeration to state that he thought it one of his most important ideas to disclose to his readers. Firstly, in contrast to the strong Calvinistic determinism during MacDonald's time, he regarded the will of man to be the pinnacle of his personhood, "For the highest creation of God in man is his will, and until the highest in man meets the highest in God, their true relation is not a spiritual fact" (MacDonald 2012b:9-10). Thus, when this will is unified with God's will, the man becomes a partaker of the divine:

> The highest in man is neither his intellect nor his imagination nor his reason; all are inferior to his will, and indeed, in a grand way, dependent upon it, his will must meet God's-a will distinct from God's, else were no harmony possible between them. Not the less, therefore, but the more, is all God's. For God creates in the man the power to will His will. It may cost God a suffering man can never know, to bring the man to the point at which he will will His will, but when he is brought to that point, and declares for the truth, that is, for the will of God, he becomes one with God, and the end of God in the man's creation, the end for which Jesus was born and died, is gained. (MacDonald 2012b:10)

This concept is echoed in his *Unspoken Sermons* where he explains how man can have a "willed harmony of dual oneness—with the All-in-all. When a man can and does entirely say, 'Not my will, but thine be done'—when he so wills the will of God as to do it, then is he one with God—one, as a true son with a true father" (MacDonald 2012a:145). As well where he writes, "We are not and cannot become true sons without our will willing his will, our doing-following his making" (MacDonald 2012a:194). There are multiple repetitions of this idea in MacDonald's works, some of which are more controversial, for instance where he suggests that by willing God's will that we can be "part of the divine organism" (MacDonald 2012a:197). The wording "divine organism" may cause one to stumble, but there is no doubt, after reading the foregoing passages, that MacDonald only mean this in an

analogical, and not in a metaphysical fashion.

In a different twist, and to be complete in our understanding of contemporary modern scholarship, one MacDonald expert has a unique perspective. Bonnie Gaarden, in her *The Christian Goddess* places MacDonald under the category of "panentheism." She defines this term as "the notion that God is expressed but not contained in nature, is immanent as well as transcendent, is more familiar to modern theologians under the term 'panentheism.' [It is] spread through the theology of Thomas Aquinas, that the regularities we call the 'laws of nature' are not imposed by God from outside, but are an external manifestation of the divine reason that animates nature" (Gaarden 2011:7). This terminology, similarly to pantheism, carries with it some historical baggage. The panentheism of Alfred Whitehead, for instance, is defined as one where "the universe as we know it requires a basic reality, God, that both grounds and participates in its development" (Cooper 2006:165). Thus in classical panentheism, God exists, but is in the process of becoming, and thus, changing along with the natural world. But this does not seem to be the modern panentheism mentioned by Gaarden, especially since she mentioned Thomas Aquinas as a panentheist, a denotation that is not uttered among Thomistic or Panentheistic scholars (Cooper 2006:327). This is likely due to the possibility that Gaarden was not speaking of classical panentheism, but modern panentheism. Yet this modern panentheism sounds quite similar to what MacDonald entitled "Christian Pantheism." Thus Gaarden is merely exchanging one term with historical baggage with another term with it's own set of subconscious import.

Instead of using a word charged with hints of heresy, this researcher recommends a term which upholds MacDonald's theological orthodoxy, but would highlight the uniqueness of the MacDonald's vision. Thus we will adopt the term "sacramentalism" which has been used by such scholars as Robert Trexler, Kirsten Jeffrey Johnson, Rolland Hein, as well as alluded to by MacDonald himself. As already quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Trexler lists MacDonald along with other "sacramentalist writers, who see nature as reflecting God's truth" (Trexler 2014). Kirsten Jeffrey Johnson gives some explanation of how his Scottish upbringing likely had a strong influence on his sacramentalism, "Recorded Highland prayers reveal a people who saw a relational Triune God involved in everything from the weather to their laundry to their husbandry. This conviction of an all-encompassing, all-relating God who loves bodies and souls, the world and humanity's positive interaction within it, is woven throughout

MacDonald's work" (Johnson 2011:33). Thus, MacDonald's view holds that "the sacramental does not recognize a division between earthly and holy: earthiness is holiness, by definition of the Creator's own act" (Johnson 2011:239). So, it would be proper "use the term 'sacramental,' in a very broad sense, to describe MacDonald's view of God's relation to both the world of nature and the world of event and circumstance" (Hein 1989:44).

In MacDonald's own words he offered an analogy to help us understand the relationship of God to his creation in *The Portent*, "The very outside of a book had a charm to me. It was a kind of sacrament-an outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace; as, indeed, what on God's earth is not?" (MacDonald 1999:45). Thus, all of the earth is a sacrament, and is a symbol of God and his characteristics. Again, this terminology removes the possible heretical import, and focuses on the Biblical concept of God's immanence and revelatory creation (Romans 1:20). In even more detail, MacDonald explains "all about us, in earth and air, wherever eye or ear can reach, there is a power ever breathing itself forth in signs, now in a daisy, now in a windwaft, a cloud, a sunset; a power that holds constant and sweetest relation with the dark and silent world within us; that the same God who is in us, and upon whose tree we are the buds, if not yet the flowers, also is all about us—inside, the Spirit; outside, the Word. And the two are ever trying to meet in us; and when they meet, then the sign without, and the longing within, become one in light, and the man no more walketh in darkness, but knoweth whither he goeth" (MacDonald 2002:415). Thus God is utterly immanent, within us and out, and his Holy Spirit and his Word symbolically connect within us to produce and emanate forth his light.

In conclusion, while MacDonald usually carried an attitude of disdain for philosophy and theology, there is no doubt that the research above reveals that he did, in fact, hold to a specific philosophy and doctrine, and was concerned with the public holding beliefs that were contrary to his own, not due to intellectual arrogance, but because he believed these beliefs would negatively affect their relationship with God. This train of thought will be more thoroughly elucidated in part three. At this point it can be stated unequivocally that MacDonald was a true metaphysical realist who operated under the shadow of Platonism, who held to his own interpretation of creation *Ex Deo* in regards to God's relational character and imagination and not emanationism, and who believed in a purely theistic God under the tradition of "sacramentalism."

Works Cited

North Wind is following the format for references as dictated by the University of South Africa

Anonymous.
    2012   "Dr. MacDonald's Testimony" *Wingfold* 87:30-33. (Originally published in *Christian World*, July 20, 1882).

Beinecke Collection
    2013   The George MacDonald Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. (1830-1890).

Carpenter, Humphrey and Mari Prichard.
    1999   *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chambers, Oswald.
    1995   *Christian Disciplines: Building Strong Christian Character* Grand Rapids: Discovery House.

Chesterton, G.K.
    1905   "George MacDonald." *The Daily News*, 23 September.
    2005   Introduction to *George MacDonald and His Wife* by Greville MacDonald, 9-15. Whitehorn: Johannesen.

Cooper, John W.
    2006   *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Copleston, Frederick
    1993   *A History of Philosophy Vol. I: Greece and Rome*. New York:Image Books.

Dearborn, Kerry.
    2006   *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

Gaarden, Bonnie.
    2011   *The Christian Goddess*. Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

Geisler, Norman and Winfried Corduan
    2003   *Philosophy of Religion* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.

Gregs, Favour James.
    2013   *William Wordsworth*. London: Forgotten Books. (Original work published 1869)
    290-1.

Hein, Rolland.
    1989   *The Harmony Within: the Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald*. Eureka: Sunrise Books.

Hindmarsh, Douglas Bruce
    1991   "George MacDonald and the Forgotten Father." *North Wind* 9: 55-79.

Johnson, Kirsten Jeffrey.
    2011   "Rooted in All its story, More is Meant than Meets the Ear." Ph.D. diss., University of Saint Andrews.

Kegler, Adelheid
    2003   "Some Aspects of the Oeuvre of George MacDonald in a Curriculum of Philosophy Courses and in the Production of a Play at a German Gymnasium." *North Wind* no 22: 14-20.

Kreglinger, Gisela H.
    2014   Storied Revelations: Parables, Imagination and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction. Cambridge: Lutterworth.

Lewis, C.S.
    1947   Introduction to *George MacDonald: An Anthology*. New York: Macmillan.

MacDonald, George.
    1878   "A Letter to American Boys" *St. Nicholas Magazine for Boys and Girls*, vol. 5, No. 3: 202-205.
    1881   *Warlock o' Glenwarlock: A homely romance*. Boston, Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co.
    1882   *Weighed and Wanting*. Boston, D. Lothrop and Company.
    1885   *The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke; a study with the text of the folio of 1623*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.
    1895   *A Dish of Orts, Chiefly papers on the Imagination, and on Shakespeare*. London: Sampson Low Marston & Co.
    1991   *There and Back* Whitehorn: Johannesen. 1st Printing.
    1996   *England's Antiphon*. Whitehorn: Johannesen. 1st Printing.
    1999   *The Portent and Other Stories*. 2nd Printing.
    2000   *What's Mine's Mine*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 3rd Printing.
    2002   *Thomas Wingfold Curate*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 2nd Printing.
    2005   *Robert Falconer*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 2nd Printing.
    2009a   *George MacDonald in the Pulpit*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 3rd Printing.
    2009b   *The Light Princess and Other Fairy Tales*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 4th Printing.
    2009c   *Lilith*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 3rd Printing.
    2009d   *Paul Faber-Surgeon*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 3rd Printing.
    2009e   *Wilfrid Cumbermede*. Whitehorn:Johannesen, 2nd Printing.
    2012a   *Unspoken Sermons*. Memphis: Bottom of the Hill Publishing.
    2012b   *The Hope of the Gospel*. Las Vegas: International Alliance, 2012.

MacDonald, Greville.
>   2005   *George MacDonald and His Wife*. Whitehorn: Johannesen.
>   (Reprint of original work published 1924.)

Manley, David
>   1998   "Shadows that Fall: The Immanence of Heaven in the Fiction of
>   C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald" Northwind 17:43-49.

Manlove, Colin N.
>   2007   "The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie"
>   Northwind 27:1-36.

McGillis, Roderick.
>   2008   "Fantasy as Miracle" in *George MacDonald: Literary Heritage
>   and Heirs* Zossima Press: 201-215.

Nelson, Dale J.
>   1989   "MacDonald and Jacob Boehme." *North Wind* no 8: 24-36.

Nystoyl, Narve Kragset
>   2013   *Worldviews in George MacDonald's Phantastes and C.S. Lewis'
>   The Chronicles of Narnia*. Masters Thesis. The University of Oslo.

Origen
>   1885   *De Principiis*. From Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4. Ed. by Alexander
>   Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo, NY:
>   Christian Literature Publishing Co.
>   1896   *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. From Ante-Nicene Fathers,
>   Vol. 9. Ed. by Allan Menzies. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature
>   Publishing Co.

Plato
>   1952   *The Dialogues of Plato*. Chicago: William Benton.

Plotinus
>   1952   *Enneads*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.

Prickett, Stephen.
>   2005   *Victorian Fantasy*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

Raeper, William.
>   1987   *George MacDonald*. Batavia: Lion Publishing.

Reis, Richard H.
>   1989   *George MacDonald's Fiction: A Twentieth Century View*. Eureka:
>   Sunrise Books.

Riddle, John M.
>   2008   *A History of the Middle Ages, 300-1500*. Plymouth: Rowman &
>   Littlefield.

Riga, Frank
>   1992   "The Platonic Imagery of George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis"
>   in *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*.

    Ed. Roderick McGillis. Metuschen, NJ: Children's Literature
    Association, 111-132.

Robb, David S.
  1987 *George MacDonald*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

Salvey, Courtney
  2008 "Riddled with Evil: Fantasy as Theodicy in George MacDonald's
    Phantastes and *Lilith*." *North Wind* no 27: 16-24.

Schaeffer, Francis A.
  2001 *He is There and He is not Silent*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale.
    (Originally published in 1972).

Trexler, Robert.
  2003 "George MacDonald: Merging Myth and Method." CSL: *The
    Bulletin of the New York C.S. Lewis Society* Vol. 34, No. 4 (July/
    August).

  2014 George MacDonald Society. [Facebook] 22nd October. Available
    from: www.facebook.com [Accessed 10/25/14].

Wiles, Maurice
  2001 *Documents in Early Christian Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge
    University Press.

Williams, Thomas
  2003 "Augustine and the Platonists." A Lecture given to the Freshman
    Program of Christ College, the Honors College of Valparaiso
    University. Accessed November 11, 2014. http://shell.cas.usf.
    edu/~thomasw/aug&plat.pdf

Zimmerman, Brandon
  2009 "Sight Becomes Seeing: Plotinian Emanation as a Dynamic of
    Procession and Return" Master's Thesis. Catholic University of
    America.