

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY IN VICTORIAN CHILDREN'S FANTASY

by

Brian Roberts, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of  
Texas State University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
with a Major in Literature  
August 2014

Committee Members:

Graeme Wend-Walker, Chair

Marilynn Olson

Teya Rosenberg

**COPYRIGHT**

by

Brian Roberts

2014

## **FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT**

### **Fair Use**

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgement. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

### **Duplication Permission**

As the copyright holder of this work, I, Brian Roberts, authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my committee members for all of their help and encouragement.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | <b>Page</b> |
|---|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....                                 | v           |
| CHAPTER   |             |
| I. THE RELIGIOUS BACKDROP.....                        | 1           |
| II. LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY AND CHILDREN'S AUTHORS ..... | 10          |
| III. CREATION AND SANCTIFICATION .....                | 19          |
| IV. THE ATONEMENT .....                               | 35          |
| V. INCLUSIVISM.....                                   | 46          |
| VI. CONCLUSION .....                                  | 59          |
| WORKS CITED.....                                      | 62          |

## CHAPTER I

### The Religious Backdrop

The nineteenth century was a time of great religious upheavals, a time in which the traditional doctrines of Christianity were subjected to a new level of scrutiny, with the result that many doctrines were changed, softened or rejected entirely. A "leading theme of the Victorian crisis of faith" was the "moral revolt against Christianity on account of its leading ideas" and "a growing sense of the immorality of such doctrines as original sin, predestination, and substitutionary atonement" (McGrath 189). There were three main responses to the nineteenth-century criticisms of Christianity: atheism, which began to flourish in the Victorian era; conservatism, the adherents of which steadfastly defended the traditional doctrines; and liberalism, an ideology held by those who believed that Christianity needed to be updated for the modern era. "Liberal Protestant thinkers," says Roger Olson, "insisted on reinterpreting all doctrines and dogmas of Christianity in ethical and moral terms, and those that could not be so reinterpreted were neglected if not discarded entirely" (*The Story of Christian Theology* 550).

Among the Victorians who embraced a more liberal form of Christianity were several authors of children's literature, including George MacDonald, Charles Kingsley, and Lewis Carroll. All three of these authors were actively engaged with the religious controversies of the time, and all three were firmly on the side of those who wished to reinterpret traditional doctrines in a more progressive and liberal way. Further, all three authors understood the subversive potential of children's literature and the power of the medium for teaching theological truths. Although not all of their children's literature can be called didactic, certainly some of it can, and the didactic purpose is often to impart a

liberal theological notion to the child reader. This didacticism is very subtle, however, as all three authors were no doubt aware of the controversy that would result from a children's work with a too overtly liberal message. It is the analysis of these works toward the end of uncovering the religious teachings embedded within them that will be the focus of the present paper, with priority given to the works of MacDonald and Kingsley.

In order to understand their theological motives, however, one has to first understand the liberal Christian movement, why it arose and for what purpose. One historical theologian has written that “the story of modern theology begins with the rise of liberal Protestant theology” (Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology* 125). But in order to understand how liberal theology arose, one has to look at what it was reacting against: the mounting criticisms of and challenges to traditional Christianity that slowly accumulated throughout the Enlightenment and reached a new level during the nineteenth century. Religion, and the supernatural answers it could supply, had already been in retreat for several centuries. As scientific advances supplied more and more answers to questions about the natural world, the need for invoking God as an explanation for natural phenomena diminished. After Galileo and Newton, God became, for many, increasingly distant and unnecessary. Locke's empiricism laid the groundwork for deism, and the importance of Christianity for many of the intelligentsia became confined to its ethical teachings and not its supernatural explanations: “Deism, natural religion, was wholly compatible with the new worldview of nature's uniformity – closed to miracles and supernatural divine interventions . . . [D]eism preserved what many considered most

important in religion and Christianity – morality” (Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology* 69).

The attitude of general indifference towards Christianity that marked much of deism turned to much sharper attacks by the end of the eighteenth century. David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* appeared to many to deliver a conclusive and final rebuttal to the traditional proofs for God’s existence. Likewise, Hume’s work on miracles “scandalized Christian opinion . . . by its insistence that the miracles of Jesus be judged precisely like other historical reports” and be “subjected to the criteria of credibility” (Wilson 23). An event so miraculous as the resurrection demanded evidence equally as miraculous if it was to be accepted by a rational person, but this evidence, Hume argued, didn’t exist, and, therefore, no one could be rationally justified in believing in the resurrection. The influence of his work on the nineteenth century can hardly be overstated: “Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* was like a bombshell falling on the search for a rational religion congenial with the spirit of the Enlightenment” (Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology* 79).

Edward Gibbon contributed, as well, to the mounting case against Christianity with *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a work that was widely read and influential throughout the nineteenth century. Gibbon argued, through his elegant and mellifluous prose, that “nearly all the early Christians, the martyrs, the doctors and the council fathers, were, when not totally contemptible, then morally absurd” (Wilson 20). His work was regarded as the greatest and most thorough study yet written on the early centuries of Christianity, and that history, laid out in his book without the glossing of piety, was an embarrassment to many Christians who read it.



Alongside these developments was the rise of higher criticism. German scholars of the Bible began to subject Scripture to hitherto unseen levels of scrutiny. These scholars “inherited the rationalistic assumption from [their] seventeenth-century intellectual ancestors that the use of human reason, free of theological limitations, is the best tool with which to study the Bible” (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 52). Under the influence of these scholars, evidence began to accumulate within the field of biblical studies against the traditional authorship of the Bible – against, for instance, the traditional belief that Moses actually wrote the Pentateuch, or St. Paul the epistles attributed to him. The Pentateuch, on this view, was “composed by different authors at different places over a period of about five centuries. The hypothesis excludes any possibility that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible” (Allison 114). Scripture began more and more to resemble a patchwork of innumerable scribes, assembled over a vast length of time, and anything but the inerrant Word of God. The findings of higher criticism were deeply disturbing to many Victorians and further undermined the intellectual credibility of traditional Christianity.

The internal textual evidence that was accumulating against the Bible’s veracity was joined by new scientific discoveries that contradicted the literal reading of Genesis. Darwin’s theory of evolution was chief among these. *The Origin of Species* “seemed to constitute a summary of a half-century’s unsettlement of traditional Christian beliefs” (Melnyk 147). And while “Darwin maintained that neither his theory nor his book was in any way an attack on religious faith, . . . [his theory] left little for God to do once the world had been created, and opened the door to the notion that God did not exist” (Steinbach 245-246). Indeed, atheist societies began to grow during this time, attracting

many members of the intelligentsia. “Victorian Britain,” says Steinbach, “had a very small but high-profile group of non-believers or atheists, those who actively rejected religion and denied the existence of God” (222).

Additionally, criticisms began to mount against not just the historicity and believability of the Christian religion, but even against the very morality of its core doctrines. Many Victorians came to “view doctrines such as substitutionary atonement and eternal torment of the damned as morally reprehensible” (Laresen 88). The rejection of the substitutionary atonement, which taught that Jesus was punished for humanity’s sins, became especially controversial as it was so universally held in Protestantism. Original sin, too, proved a controversial belief in Victorian England. It had previously been a standard and universally accepted doctrine for the majority of the church age. Nearly every major creed, Catholic or Protestant, includes the doctrine as an integral part of the theology, stretching back to Augustine. One can already see, however, by the time of Rousseau’s *Emile* that the modern world was turning away from the doctrine, and was ready for a new understanding both of children and of human nature. After the rise of the Romantic movement, in which children were idealized and their innocence celebrated by such poets as William Wordsworth, the doctrine began to seem too harsh for many, and the cultural consensus began to turn away from it. In 1838, Robert Cooper, an outspoken opponent of original sin, sold over twelve thousand copies of a lecture that criticized the doctrine. “It is man’s ignorance of the laws of his own nature,” he wrote, “of the laws of the external world in general, and the true principles upon which society ought to be based, and by which it ought to be governed, that is the cause of his depravity, and not, as assumed by the religionists, his inherent corruption or innate sinfulness” (Royle 127).

The atonement, too, was greatly criticized during the nineteenth century, especially as it was formulated and understood by Protestants. The substitutionary atonement, which had become the dominant understanding of the doctrine since Anselm, and had been taught by such theologians as John Calvin, was increasingly seen as immoral, barbaric and harsh. How could a God of love, many wondered, be appeased only by the brutal death of his son? And, further, was it even just for one man to be punished for the sins of another? “The central doctrine of Christianity,” writes Melnyk, “the death of Christ as an atonement for the sins of others, or substitutionary atonement . . . seemed to some [Victorians] both illogical and immoral” (136).

The traditional understanding of hell, which was often understood to involve literal flames and the actual physical torture of the lost for all eternity, became an embarrassing doctrine for many Victorians to hold. Coupled with the exclusivist view of salvation, the belief that only professed Christians are saved, the traditional doctrine would consign the majority of the world to eternal damnation. But the increased global and multicultural awareness amongst the Victorians made this prospect too harsh. “The knowledge of other cultures and religions,” writes Melnyk, “caused many Christians to begin to see their own beliefs in a worldwide context, leading some to question their own exclusive possession of truth,” and led many Victorians “to question the morality of central Christian doctrines, including eternal damnation” (134).

More conservative theologians and traditionalists responded to the mounting attacks on Christianity by digging in their heels, refusing to compromise, and steadfastly facing modernity with the same gospel message that had held up for nearly two thousand years. They continued to defend the traditional doctrines of original sin, hell, and the

atonement against the increasing number of detractors. Victorian conservatives were especially fervent in their defense of the substitutionary atonement, which they felt was the heart and center of the gospel, without which no one could be saved. Further, many conservatives felt emboldened by the new attacks on the faith, seeing in them a fulfillment of Paul's prophecy of the apostasy that would precede the return of Jesus: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). These conservatives "posited that the moral and spiritual state of the world would actually get worse before the cataclysmic intervention of the second coming of Christ" (Melnyk 115).

In contrast to these conservatives, other Christians moved in the opposite direction, and the nineteenth century saw the rise of the liberal Protestant movement. The very essence of liberal Christianity is the "revision and reconstruction of Christian doctrine in the light of modernity" (Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology* 126). What the liberal Christians of the nineteenth century were willing to do, what they felt they were compelled by the modern situation to do, was to reexamine the traditional doctrines of Christianity, and to reinterpret them, or, if necessary, discard them entirely. So, liberal theologians, if they believed in hell, thought its punishment merely purgatorial and finite. Universalism became the predominant view amongst liberal Christians – the belief that all, eventually, would be reconciled to God: "We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe" (1 Timothy 4:10). The atonement, the center of conservative Christianity, was moved to the periphery for liberal Christians, and they preferred "to stress the incarnation and humanity of Christ rather than his atoning death" (Wolffe 8). The doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible was rejected as

well, and the Bible came to be seen by liberal Christians as a work that contained errors and scientific inaccuracies intermingled with the divine elements. The Bible was the product of a loving God working through fallible and weak human beings. As Olson explains:

Liberal theology tends to interpret the Bible critically, meaning that the Bible is recognized as the primary Christian classic but not as supernaturally inspired or infallible. Liberal theology appeared and grew up alongside the rise of higher criticism of the Bible – the effort to interpret the Bible historically like any other ancient book or collection of books. That does not mean that all liberal theologians reject any inspiration or authority of the Bible. Usually the Bible is said to be inspired insofar as it is inspiring. (*The Journey of Modern Theology* 129)

With this view of the Bible, accommodating the new scientific evidence to the book of Genesis was a much easier task for the liberal Christians. If some new scientific finding contradicted what was in the Bible, that particular passage was understood to be an example of the human element of Scripture. Consequently, unlike their conservative counterparts, liberal theologians were quick to embrace both Darwin's evolutionary theory and the new geological evidence of an old earth.

In addition to softening and changing controversial doctrines, liberal Christians changed the emphasis of what Christianity was all about. They shifted the focus from obtaining salvation from the wrath of God, and focused instead on doing good, helping people, improving society. One example of this new emphasis can be found in the Christian Socialism movement led by F.D. Maurice, a theologian who is "credited by

many with having founded, in effect, the modern tradition of liberal Anglicanism” (Morris 3-4). Maurice was a leader in the liberal Christian movement of Victorian England, and helped, through his sermons and writings, to lead Christianity away from what he felt was the straying path of conservatism: “By its individualistic emphasis on personal salvation, with a theology of rewards and punishments, Maurice thought that the Church of England had abandoned its vocation to embrace and transform the whole nation” (Morris 15). His insistence on updating Christian doctrine for the modern world, however, was not without controversy, and Maurice, like many liberal theologians, suffered a sort of professional martyrdom as a result of his liberalism. “In 1853,” writes Morris, “[Maurice] had been forced to resign from his professorial chair at King’s College, London, for appearing to doubt the doctrine of eternal punishment” (16). Maurice’s writings were highly influential in the spiritual formation of many liberal Christians, including MacDonald, Kingsley, and Carroll, all of whom admired his work.

In summary, then, the mounting criticisms of Christianity that accumulated since the Enlightenment, and the growing cultural distaste for several key doctrines, led to a crisis of faith in Victorian England. “What the Enlightenment did, and modernity does,” says Olson, “is not destroy religion in general or Christianity in particular but force them to reconsider themselves in several ways . . . [T]he resulting reconsideration of traditional Christianity led to its reconstruction – especially reconstructions of theology and doctrine” (Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology* 27). This is the often difficult path that liberal Christianity took: the path of reinterpreting and reconsidering traditional doctrine in the light of modernity.

## CHAPTER II

### Liberal Christianity and Children's Authors

Among the Victorians who embraced liberal Christianity were several authors of children's fantasy, particularly Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald, and Lewis Carroll. Every one of these authors held, to various degrees, more liberal views of various doctrines: the atonement, original sin, creation, sanctification, and eternal punishment. Kingsley and MacDonald were outspoken in their condemnation of the traditional formulations of doctrine and in their embrace of liberalism. Carroll was less public with his faith, but one finds evidence in his personal letters of his bent toward liberal Christianity, especially in his rejection of eternal punishment.

As a young man, Charles Kingsley was very interested in science, and, like many who are scientifically literate, he "found his scientific training a stumbling block" toward embracing Christianity (Colloms 50). Leaning initially toward agnosticism, Kingsley was particularly troubled by not just the scientific inaccuracies he found in the Bible, but the harsh morality of the Old Testament, as well. How could a text that seemed, at times, so outdated and archaic be the inspired Word of God? While a student at Cambridge, Kingsley was "hard put to find one steadfast doctrine which he could wholeheartedly embrace" (Colloms 50). It was at this time that Kingsley read the work of F.D. Maurice. Maurice's liberal approach to Christianity, which taught the progressive revelation and unfolding of God throughout history, resonated strongly with Kingsley. He found in Maurice "the philosophy which solved his religious difficulties" (Colloms 60). Kingsley, convinced by the "unconventional and unexpected ideas set forth in [Maurice's] *Kingdom of Christ*," and able to now "both believe in God and accept the Church of England

intellectually and emotionally,” embraced Christianity, and even took holy orders (Colloms 52). As a young clergyman, Kingsley wrote to Maurice for advice on how to study the Bible, and the elder theologian was quick to help. The influence of F.D. Maurice on Charles Kingsley’s theology was immense.

Joining Maurice in the Christian Socialist movement, Kingsley soon became a celebrity amongst working class people. He was a sought after preacher as his “name was guaranteed to fill the church” (Colloms 136). He dedicated much of his free time and much of his writing to help alleviate harsh working and living conditions for England’s poor. Religion for the Christian Socialists was less about achieving personal salvation and more about providing fresh water for everyone and achieving fair wages. In one message to a packed audience, Kingsley preached that “all systems of society that favour the accumulation of capital in a few hands were contrary to the Kingdom of God” (Colloms 136-137).

Like many liberal Christians, Kingsley found the traditional formulation of the atonement too harsh and barbaric. The concept of a blood sacrifice to appease the wrath of God, and the concept of Christ as a propitiation for sin, was in dire need of updating. He preferred to stress, in his theological letters, the resurrection of Jesus. When St. Paul preached at Athens, Kingsley wrote, the atonement “in its sense of a death to avert God’s anger, is never mentioned. Christ’s Kingship is [Paul’s] theme; the Resurrection, not the death, the great fact” (Kingsley, *His Letters and Memories of His Life* 306). Following F.D. Maurice, Kingsley was adamant in his rejection of eternal punishment, as well, seeing it as a corruption of true Christianity, brought in from outside sources:



The doctrine [of eternal punishment] occurs nowhere in the Old Testament, or any hint of it . . . The doctrine of endless torment was, as a historical fact, brought back from Babylon by the Rabbis. It was a very ancient primary doctrine of the Magi, an appendage of their fire-kingdom of Ahriman, and may be found in the old Zends, long prior to Christianity . . . St. Paul accepts nothing of it as far as we can tell, never making the least allusion to the doctrine. (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 307)

His view was that hell's punishments were purgatorial and limited in duration. The idea of endless torment was not just too harsh and extreme, but also made God out to be unappeasable, even vindictive. Rather, hell was to be understood as the painful process whereby the obstinate sinner learns to repent and turn to God, as Kingsley explains:

You may say that Fire and Worms, whether physical or spiritual, must in all logical fairness be supposed to do what fire and worms do, viz., destroy decayed and dead matter, and set free its elements to enter into new organisms; that, as they are beneficent and purifying agents in this life, they must be supposed such in the future life, and that the conception of fire as an engine of torture, is an unnatural use of that agent, and not to be attributed to God without blasphemy, unless you suppose that the suffering (like all which He inflicts) is intended to teach man something which he cannot learn elsewhere. (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 308-309)

Kingsley was quick to point out, however, that his position on hell was perfectly allowable within the bounds of Anglican orthodoxy, lest he be brought up on heresy

charges: “The Church of England, by the deliberate expunging of the 42nd Article, which affirmed endless punishment, has declared it authoritatively to be open . . . It is so, in fact. Neither Mr. Maurice, I, or any others, who have denied it, can be dispossessed or proceeded against legally in any way whatsoever” (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 307).

It wasn't simply against traditional doctrines that Kingsley aligned himself, but against the entire theological system of Calvinism, a particularly conservative tradition within Protestantism. Victorian Calvinists, heirs of the great Puritan tradition, were vehemently opposed to any accommodation to modernity and any reinterpretations of classical Protestant orthodoxy. Their unwavering belief in the providence of God, predestination, and the unconditional election and reprobation of sinners felt increasingly out of step with the modern world, and was the embodiment of the kind of Christianity the liberals felt had to change or die. Calvinism was a sturdy tradition within conservatism, however, and showed great resiliency. Kingsley lamented this success in a letter to Maurice:

I wish I could have some talk with you; for unless I can get from you some of your moderate and charitable and two-sided notions, I shall begin to regard Calvin as a child of the Devil, and Calvinism as the upas-tree, which Satan planted in the Lord's garden at the Reformation to poison all with its shade. The influence of Calvinism abroad seems to me to have been uniformly ruinous, destructive equally of political and moral life, a blot and a scandal on the Reformation; and now that it has at last got the

upper hand in England, can we say much more for it? (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 471)

Kingsley and George MacDonald shared not only a personal friendship, but many theological similarities, as well. MacDonald greatly admired Kingsley's work in the Christian Socialist movement, and they both shared a fondness for the writings of Maurice. Like Kingsley, MacDonald turned away from Calvinism, the tradition in which he had been raised. MacDonald's "childhood experiences" with Calvinism included "many tedious encounters with the Westminster Shorter Catechism" (Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker* 12). Scottish children were expected to memorize the Shorter Catechism and be able "to give on demand any of a long series of precisely worded responses to doctrinal questions" (Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker* 12).

MacDonald would later rebel against this attempt at doctrinal conformism, and embrace a more inclusive and generous approach to theological diversity. He was suspicious of all theological systems and attempts to systematize God, and he rejected approaches to Christianity that relied too heavily on rationalism. MacDonald retained some aspects of the Calvinistic worldview, such as the providence of God – the belief that God is actively working in the world – but MacDonald always portrayed God's providential activity as something that worked for people's ultimate good, and never toward their eternal destruction, as some Calvinists believed. MacDonald also particularly abhorred the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement – the belief that Christ laid down his life *only* for the elect, absolving of sin only those chosen by God, and leaving others with the full responsibility of their sin. Like Kingsley, MacDonald felt the

traditional view of eternal punishment was too harsh and contradicted common sense notions of the goodness and fairness of God. And, like Kingsley, MacDonald embraced the purgatorial view of hell:

[MacDonald] was formulating at this time his version of universalism, which he held throughout the rest of his life . . . that is, that in eternity all people, after experiencing the consequences of those sins for which they had not found forgiveness while on earth, will be afforded a vision of God as he exists in the full beauty of his truth and will be given opportunity to decide for or against him. To decide positively is to begin to become a righteous being. The justice of God demands that each soul be given a clear-sighted choice – a privilege few on earth enjoy. Further, he affirmed that it was impossible that any purged soul could see God as he is and not desire him. (Hein, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker* 81-82)

This universalism, along with MacDonald's hope for the salvation of animals, was too much for his congregation, and he was forced to step down from the pastorate, joining the ranks of several other liberal clergyman censured for their rejection of eternal punishment. Another of MacDonald's friends also rejected the traditional view of hell, but was more circumspect in his public declarations of this: Lewis Carroll. While Carroll initially "accepted virtually all his father's teaching, he slowly veered from High Church doctrine and practice" (Cohen 343). The two great influences that led Carroll to embrace liberal Christianity were Tennyson and, as with Kingsley and MacDonald, F.D. Maurice. As Cohen explains:

Tennyson, Charles's [Carroll's] favorite living poet, surely helped him form his beliefs: Charles read him diligently, quoted him, echoed his verse, and forged an acquaintanceship with him and his family. Charles noted Tennyson's religious liberalism, and at some point he himself embraced the 'larger hope' philosophy of *In Memoriam* . . . He saw that Tennyson could question traditional dogma, turn from his father's beliefs, and yet remain an Anglican with a strong, positive Christian faith. (347-348)

In the late 1850s, Carroll sought help for his stuttering problem from a doctor named Hastings. The doctor introduced Carroll to MacDonald and the two became lifelong friends. "This closeness is understandable," writes Hein, "because the two men shared a love of children and an especial ability to recreate imaginatively a children's world" (*The Harmony Within* 17). Their fondness for children and children's literature certainly was one element of their friendship, but they were also united by their embrace of liberal Christianity: "Both were poets and novelists, both keenly interested in drama, and both struggling with a religious inheritance they could not fully accommodate" (Cohen 348). One notable similarity of their theology is their embrace of universalism, an influence, undoubtedly, of Maurice. In a personal letter that Carroll wrote on the subject, his position is plain:

God will not punish *for ever* any one who *desires* to repent, and to turn from sin. If any one says "It is certain that the Bible teaches that when once a man is in *Hell*, no matter how much he repents, there he will stay forever," I reply, "*if* I were certain the Bible taught that, I would give up

the Bible.” . . . And if any one urges “then, to be consistent, you ought to grant the *possibility* that the Devil himself might repent and be forgiven,” I reply “and I *do* grant it!” (qtd. in Cohen 362)

Carroll’s willingness to admit that even the devil might be saved from hell aligns him with Origen, a third century Church Father, and the first and greatest Christian universalist. “Origen held out hope,” writes Allison, “that God’s actions would eventually restore all fallen beings – angels, humans, perhaps even Satan and the demons – to their original state of communion with him” (705). Carroll preferred to keep his theologically liberal leanings mostly private, but one can find evidence of them on occasion in his published work, as in the case of *Sylvie and Bruno*. In the preface of that work, Carroll muses about creating a Bible for children. Most of the religious literature of the nineteenth century aimed at children was focused on sin and repentance – those were the important things for children to understand about religion. Carroll’s approach, however, is markedly different: “One principle of selection, which I would adopt [for the Children’s Bible], would be that Religion should be put before a child as a revelation of *love* – no need to pain and puzzle the young mind with the history of crime and punishment” (Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno* 241). He even says that he would omit the story of the flood from the Children’s Bible, which is a perfectly liberal approach to Scripture – simply omit the passages that offend the modern conscience. This isn’t to say Carroll had a lesser view of Scripture, though; he goes on in the same passage to call it inspired and to muse about another possible book: a collection of verses to be remembered and recited. “Such passages,” he says, “would be found useful, to repeat to one’s self and to ponder over . . . at such a time how keenly one may realize the truth of David’s rapturous

cry ‘*O how sweet are thy words unto my throat: yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth!*’” (Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno* 241-242).

Thus one finds amongst the liberal Christians of Victorian England several children’s authors who embraced the spirit of that movement. Kingsley, MacDonald, and Carroll were all keenly aware of the need to update Christian doctrine for the modern age, to reinterpret, or even to discard entirely, the traditional doctrines that were not in accord with the more tolerant and loving spirit of the age. All three used their children’s literature, to a greater or a lesser extent, to convey these beliefs.

## CHAPTER III

### Creation and Sanctification

According to the historical theologian Greg Allison, “The church has historically believed that God created the universe *ex nihilo* – out of nothing – in the relatively recent past, perhaps five or six thousand years ago” (254). This is the literal reading of Genesis and, following Bishop Ussher’s calculations, the only allowable time frame if one takes the genealogies in the Old Testament without gaps. Added to this doctrine was the understanding, as St. Paul taught, that death was not natural, but came about as a result of the Fall: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. . . . Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression” (Romans 5:12, 14). Death, even animal death, the Church taught, was never originally part of God’s good creation. This was, by and large, the standard view of creation throughout the majority of the church age. Criticisms began to emerge during the Enlightenment, however, that challenged the traditional understanding of creation. The biggest challenge to the standard view came with the rise of evolutionary theory, and “since the middle of the nineteenth century, that theory has significantly affected the church’s view of divine creation” (Allison 254). Death, the evidence was beginning to show, was not the result of a later fall, but was always present with life on Earth and, more than that, was intrinsic to that life’s very progress. Far from being the result of human sin, untold billions of deaths actually preceded the existence of the first humans.

While conservative theologians in the nineteenth century were much more reluctant to embrace evolutionary theory – and, of course, many still are – liberal



clergymen were quick to accommodate their religious beliefs to the new scientific evidence. Their accommodation went significantly further than that, however, and the new evolutionary theories affected not only their doctrine of creation, but spilled over into their doctrine of sanctification, as well. The Westminster Confession, in the thirteenth chapter, “Of Sanctification,” provides a useful summary of the historic Protestant understanding of the doctrine:

They, who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally. . . . This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part . . . yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace.

*(Westminster Confession of Faith 61-62)*

Traditionally, then, sanctification was understood as the believers’ growth in righteousness and holiness during their earthly life, and their constant, though always imperfect, progress in growing more and more like Christ. As J.C. Ryle, the nineteenth century Anglican divine put it: “In spite of all his shortcomings, the average bent and bias of [the Christian’s] way is holy, his doings holy, his tastes holy, and his habits holy. In spite of all his swerving and turning aside, like a ship beating up against a contrary wind, the general course of his life is in one direction, toward God” (Ryle 35). The Holy Spirit’s work in the believer’s heart was the chief metaphor for understanding this process of sanctification. But for more liberal theologians, such as Kingsley and

MacDonald, the advances in nineteenth century science afforded a new metaphor for one's personal, spiritual growth: evolutionary progress and evolutionary regress.

These two concepts cast a new light on one's potential, and this new understanding became a prominent theme in their children's literature, especially in Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, and in MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*. These works demonstrate within them the acceptance both of evolution and an old earth, and therefore a more liberal view of the doctrine of creation, and they convey the theme of spiritualized evolutionary progress and regress, and therefore a more liberal view of the doctrine of sanctification.

Kingsley, to begin with, was in no way ambivalent about his acceptance of evolution. "What the world calls Darwinism," Kingsley wrote, he called "fact and science" (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 249). Not only did he believe in evolution, but Kingsley was a fervent defender and apologist of the new theory, as well. Kingsley "did as much to allay the religious concerns that Darwin's work provoked amongst scientific men as he did among his fellow men of the cloth, not to mention among the broader British public" (Beatty and Hale 146). Kingsley's correspondence with Darwin himself is illuminating in this regard:

I am very anxious to obtain a copy of a pamphlet, which . . . came out shortly after your "Origin of Species," and was entitled "Reasons for believing in Mr. Darwin's Theory" – or some such words . . . If you can recollect it, and tell me where I can get a copy, I shall be very glad, as I may specially want it in your defence. (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 377)

Darwin found an ally in Kingsley and even quoted him in *Origin of Species* as a clergyman who held to evolution. So annoyed was Kingsley by the ecclesiastical opponents of Darwin's theory that he dreamed "of a day when it will be considered necessary for every candidate for ordination . . . to have passed creditably in at least one branch of physical science, if it be only to teach him the method of sound scientific thought" (Kingsley, *His Letters and Memories of His Life* 245). Kingsley was troubled not only by the opposition to evolution but, perhaps most of all, by the dichotomous view of religion and science that he saw emerging in society. It is an "old lie," Kingsley said, "that science is dangerous to orthodoxy" (*His Letters and Memories of His Life* 182). Nature should be studied, Kingsley said, must be studied, but "the study of nature can teach no moral theology" (182). Science and theology, then, were not opposed; both were needed and both could exist harmoniously side by side, supplying in their respective discipline what the other lacked.

These thoughts seem to have been the impetus for writing *The Water-Babies*, which has been called "a magical, mystical version of evolution" (Wood 233). As Uffelman writes, "In this tale of spiritual renewal, Kingsley drew on his knowledge of biology and geology, combining evolutionary theories with theology and mixing both with the revelations of the Children's Employment Commission of 1861" (26). The mixture of evolution and theology alongside a story that illustrates social inequality, especially as it existed for young chimney sweeps, makes *The Water-Babies* one of the best examples of the influence of liberal Christian theology in children's literature. That the book had a didactic purpose is plain enough in one of Kingsley's rather unflattering letters about the work:

When you read the book . . . I hope will see that I have not been idling my time away. I have tried in all sorts of queer ways, to make children and grown folks understand that there is a quite miraculous and divine element underlying all physical nature and that nobody knows anything about anything, in the sense in which they may know God in Christ, and right and wrong. And if I have wrapped up my parable in seeming Tomfooleries, it is because so only could I get the pill swallowed by a generation who are not believing, with anything like their whole heart in the Living God. (qtd in Uffelman 74)

The tomfooleries of the work center around the character of Tom, a young chimney-sweep. Summoned to clean the chimneys of an estate in the country, Tom and his master, Mr. Grimes, head out early in the morning. They are soon accompanied by a mysterious Irishwoman, who lives by the sea, has great knowledge of nature, and is perfectly happy to answer Tom's questions: "Tom asked her about the sea; and she told him how it rolled and roared over the rocks in winter nights, and lay still in the bright summer days, for the children to bathe and play in . . . Tom longed to go and see the sea, and bathe in it likewise" (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* 11). This passage foreshadows the adventure that Tom will take later in the story, but it also portrays one of Kingsley's main wishes for the work, something that he mentioned in the letter previously quoted – namely, that the story will inspire children to marvel at nature, that it will inspire wonder in them for the physical world. On this note, some critics have seen *The Water-Babies* as an early example of environmentalist literature, in that it "both educates readers to revere nature and advocates political action to protect human and natural resources" (Wood 234). Lush

descriptions of natural scenes fill the work, as do loving descriptions of all kinds of animal life. A passage particularly illustrative of this is Kingsley's celebration of the lobster:

Tom had never seen a lobster before; and he was mightily taken with this one; for he thought him the most curious, odd, ridiculous creature he had ever seen; and there he was not far wrong; for all the ingenious men, and all the scientific men, and all the fanciful men, in the world, with all the old German bogey painters into the bargain, could never invent, if all their wits were boiled into one, anything so curious, and so ridiculous, as a lobster. (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* 91)

Tom is initially portrayed as a rascal, certainly, but at least in so far as his appreciation of the natural world is concerned, he's a role model for Kingsley's child readers. Tom's wonder at the mysteries of a cave they come upon is contrasted sharply with Grimes' lack of interest: "Tom was wondering whether anything lived in that dark cave, and came out at night to fly in the meadows. But Grimes was not wondering at all" (11).

At the estate, Tom accidentally goes down the wrong chimney, and finds himself in an immaculately clean room where a little girl is asleep. As he looks at the girl, in all her angelic beauty, Tom is filled with the desire to be clean himself. A nurse catches him in the girl's room, a room he was not supposed to enter, and, suspecting that Tom is a thief, chases him from the house, into the woods. The mysterious Irishwoman, who it turns out is the queen of fairies, discreetly leads Tom to a river where he dies and is reborn as a water baby. The queen tells her fairies: "[Tom] is but a savage now, and like

the beasts which perish; and from the beasts which perish he must learn” (39). So begins Tom’s journey from immature water baby to fully grown man.

Before Tom turns into a water baby, however, and before he begins the process of evolving, Kingsley recommends that his readers adopt an open mind with regard to the natural world, and not be dogmatically opposed to something of which they’ve never heard. In the immediate context, Kingsley playfully asserts that the reader can’t disprove the existence of water babies, but in the larger context of the story in general and the purpose for which it was written, Kingsley’s admonition is clear enough – keep an open mind about evolution:

A water baby? You never heard of a water baby. Perhaps not. That is the very reason why this story was written. There are a great many things in the world which you never heard of; and a great many more which nobody ever heard of . . . And meanwhile, my dear little man, till you know a great deal more about nature than Professor Owen and Professor Huxley together, don’t tell me what cannot be, or fancy that anything is too wonderful to be true. (47, 50)

Though the recent findings of science might be frightening for the Victorian reader, and hard to accept, Kingsley assures them that they need not worry: “The great fairy Science, who is likely to be queen of all the fairies for many a year to come, can only do you good, and never do you harm” (55). The remarkable thing about referring to science as the “queen of the fairies” is how similar the phrase is to “queen of the sciences” – a title historically given to theology. Throughout most of the history of Christianity, the doctrines and teachings of the theologians were the standard to which the other sciences

had to conform their data. More liberal forms of Christianity, however, have historically been much more willing to allow science to be the standard to which theological truths must conform.

Tom's slow transformation from water baby to grown man works in two ways, and on two levels. In one sense, his evolution portrays the law of embryological recapitulation. "According to this law," explain Beatty and Hale, "a human embryo passes through a stage (characterized by the appearance of 'gill folds') corresponding to an ancestor that we have in common with fish and amphibians, later through stages corresponding to ancestors that we have in common with other four-legged animals, and so on" (142-143).

But Tom's evolution works at another level, too, beyond simply the physical process. His outward evolution mirrors his inward evolution, and, in this respect, *The Water-Babies* becomes a work about not just the doctrine of creation, but the doctrine of sanctification, as well. The two are joined in a common theme, and, in so doing, Kingsley's work shows a willingness to modify traditional doctrine, which, again, is a hallmark of liberal theology. "Through the death, moral growth, and eventual rebirth of [Tom]," says Uffelman, "Kingsley links the principles of evolution in the physical world to the growth and maturity of the spiritual being" (71). A strong piece of evidence that this is Kingsley's intention is evident from Tom's initial misconception of himself in the mirror, as he stands in the little girl's room: "And looking round, he suddenly saw, standing close to him, a little ugly, black, ragged figure . . . What did such a little black ape want in that sweet young lady's room? And, behold, it was himself" (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* 20). Tom's journey begins, then, before he ever turns into a water baby,

with the recognition that he is a “little black ape” and his journey continues until he is “quite grown up . . . into a tall man” (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* 20, 210). His realization of his sinful nature is conflated with his realization of his animal nature, and so creation and sanctification combine.

Tom’s recognition of himself as a dirty ape is similar to the Christian idea of repentance, and the episode is metaphorical of a sinner’s recognition of his fallen nature and need for a savior. This process of moral growth, then, once started, reverses the evolutionary regression Tom had been experiencing on account of his moral ignorance, since he had never been instructed in the Christian faith: “[Tom] had never been taught to say his prayers. He never had heard of God, or of Christ, except in words which you never have heard, and which it would have been well if he had never heard” (5). Tom’s progress from ape to man is contrasted, later in the story, with the devolution of the “Doasyoulikes,” a lazy group of people who don’t progress intellectually or morally and, consequently, turn into apes. A fairy reports the tragedy:

The [Doasyoulikes] are grown so stupid now, that they can hardly think: for none of them has used its wits for many hundred years . . . Besides, they are grown so fierce and suspicious and brutal that they keep out of each other’s way, and mope and sulk in the dark forests, never hearing each other’s voices, till they have forgotten almost what speech is like. I am afraid they will all be apes very soon, and all by doing only what they liked. (151)

Humankind, in Kingsley’s theology, is among the animals, and has before it two paths: the descent and evolutionary regress further into animal life or the upward progress



brought by spiritual growth. In his thought, physical nature is a symbol of sorts, an outward manifestation, of inner nature: “You will believe the one true . . . doctrine of this wonderful fairy tale, which is, that your soul makes your body, just as a snail makes his shell” (56). As Uffelmann says, “Kingsley shifted Darwin’s idea of natural selection from the physical world to the moral, showing the state of one’s physical existence to be dependent on the state of one’s soul, and endowed the evolutionary process with a redemptive end” (74). Humanity, though animal in nature, must rise above that – a lesson the narrator explains after Tom torments other water creatures:

Some people say that boys cannot help it; that it is nature, and only a proof that we are all originally descended from beasts of prey. But whether it is nature or not, little boys can help it, and must help it. For if they have naughty, low, mischievous tricks in their nature, as monkeys have, that is no reason why they should give way to those tricks like monkeys.

(Kingsley *The Water-Babies* 59)

Along his journey, Tom encounters different levels of progress amongst the animals. Some are more highly evolved than others, and Kingsley is always sure to point out that what leads to a species’ evolutionary progress or regress is its moral character. The trout, for instance, that Tom encounters are rude, cowardly, selfish creatures. When Tom first meets them, he watches from cover as they fight over bugs: “[The trout] rushed from among the stones, and began gobbling the beetles and leeches in the most greedy and quarrelsome way . . . tugging and kicking to get them away from each other” (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* 71). The salmon, by contrast, are “true gentlemen” and “well-bred,” inviting Tom into their home and showing him all manner of hospitality (78). The salmon

explain the sad story of the trout, and Tom, on hearing it, sees his possible fate laid before him if he doesn't make spiritual progress. "A great many years ago [the trout] were just like us," the salmon warns, "but they were so lazy, and cowardly, and greedy . . . and they are very properly punished for it; for they have grown ugly and brown and spotted and small" (79). Kingsley subtly makes a comparison between the regressed trout, rowdy and greedy and vulgar as they are, and some men that Tom encounters shortly after. The men are hunting salmon but, like the trout, soon start fighting amongst themselves:

They were men; and they were fighting: savage, desperate, up-and-down fighting, such as Tom had seen too many times before. And he stopped his little ears, and longed to swim away; and was very glad that he was a water baby, and had nothing to do any more with horrid dirty men, with foul clothes on their backs, and foul words on their lips. (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* 83)

One finds, then, within Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, a more liberal view both of the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of sanctification. The acceptance of evolution within the former doctrine, with all the new imagery and metaphors for understanding moral growth that evolution affords, affects the latter doctrine, as well. Similarly, MacDonald's two Princess books, *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*, are theologically and thematically very similar to Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*.

MacDonald's works show the same acceptance of evolution, and the same willingness to use evolutionary ideas to explain moral growth and regress.

Both *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie* portray a view of the earth consistent with the new geological and evolutionary findings of the time.

Indeed, MacDonald, at the beginning of *Curdie*, even gives a scientifically informed description of a mountain – one of the chief characters in the two stories’ setting. He begins by contrasting old knowledge with new knowledge: “A mountain is a strange and awful thing. In old times, without knowing so much of their strangeness and awfulness as we do, people were yet more afraid of mountains” (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* 171). Greater knowledge of the earth, which implies greater scientific knowledge, should not bring more fear, despite knowing more of the “strangeness” and “awfulness” of nature. As MacDonald explains the process of how a mountain forms, his adherence to an old age of the earth, as contrasted with a young earth age of only a few thousand years, is made plainly apparent, as is his less-than-literal understanding of Genesis:

But the inside [of the mountain], who shall tell what lies there? Caverns of awfulest solitude, their walls miles thick, sparkling with ores of gold or silver, copper or iron . . . perhaps diamonds and sapphires – who can tell? – and whoever can’t is free to think – all waiting to flash, waiting for millions of ages – ever since the earth flew off from the sun, a great blot of fire, and began to cool. (172)

MacDonald, like Kingsley, stresses the importance of admiring nature, and alongside the scientifically accurate view of creation he imparts the sentiment that nature should be cherished: “On his way to and from the mine [Curdie] took less and less notice of bees and butterflies, moths and dragonflies, the flowers and the brooks and the clouds. He was gradually changing into a commonplace man” (177). Curdie’s indifference toward nature grows so great that he soon shoots a pigeon simply for fun, an act that shows just how

little he respects animal life. For MacDonald, who held that animals actually had eternal life, this was a monstrous crime.

Like Kingsley, MacDonald allowed evolutionary theory to affect not only his doctrine of creation, but his doctrine of sanctification, too. According to Rolland Hein, MacDonald's great biographer, "the rise of evolutionary theory was something MacDonald welcomed" and he "saw it as lending strong support to his doctrine of individual spiritual development and growth, and it reinforced his optimism for the moral future of mankind" (Hein, *The Harmony Within* 27). The idea of evolutionary regression as a consequence of immoral behavior – or, to use another term, lack of progress in sanctification – shows up as a prominent theme in the two Princess books. Indeed, it is a "concept that appears in almost all of MacDonald's stories" (Hein, *The Harmony Within* 30). The similarity between the trout of Kingsley's work, regressed from their salmon origins, and the goblins in MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* is quite striking.

In the *Princess and the Goblin*, which may have actually been influenced by Kingsley's book, Princess Irene, eight years old, is sent to the country to be brought up in a castle by the side of a mountain – a mountain full of mines and passageways where goblins live. In times past, when the goblins were still men, the king had treated them harshly, and they retreated into the caves. There, deep in the earth, they changed: "They had all taken refuge in the subterranean caverns, whence they never came out but at night . . . Those who had caught sight of any of them said that they had greatly altered in the course of generations" (MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* 2). One of the more intelligent miners describes the development of the goblins in terms of evolution: "One of the miners, indeed, who had had more schooling than the rest, was wont to argue that

such must have been the primordial condition of humanity, and that education and handicraft had developed both toes and fingers – with which proposition Curdie had once heard his father sarcastically agree” (MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* 39).

The reason for their change isn't just physical, however. As in Kingsley's theology, physical nature is simply a sign, an outward symbol, of inner nature, and one's inner character can affect one's outer form. MacDonald makes it clear that the goblin's change came about from not progressing in sanctification, from refusing to forgive the king, and from letting bitterness dwell within them:

They so heartily cherished the ancestral grudge against those who occupied their former possessions, and especially against the descendants of the king who had caused their expulsion, that they sought every opportunity of tormenting them in ways that were as odd as their inventors; and although dwarfed and misshapen, they had strength equal to their cunning. (MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* 3)

The goblins are so evolutionarily regressed that they no longer even enjoy the sound of music, as when Curdie sings to them: “They can't bear singing, and they can't stand that song. They can't sing themselves . . . and they don't like other people to sing” (MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* 24). Although the goblins can still speak, the loss of music is the first sign that their regression will lead them inevitably to the loss of language, and, consequently, to a state far removed from humanity.

While MacDonald simply hinted at the theme of spiritualized evolution in *The Princess and the Goblin*, the theme is much more prominent and obvious in the follow up, *The Princess and Curdie*. In this story, Curdie is summoned by the great, wise

grandmother to go on a journey to Gwynystorm to stop a plot against the king. Before he leaves, the grandmother speaks plainly enough about the philosophy of devolution: “Have you ever heard what some philosophers say – that men were all animals once? . . . [A]ll men, if they do not take care, go down the hill to the animals’ country . . . [M]any men are actually, all their lives, going to be beasts” (217). She gives Curdie the ability to feel people’s “inside hands,” which allows him to know the sort of animal a devolving person is becoming, as in the case of Dr. Kelman who is becoming a snake. “I tell you,” says Curdie, “by the gift she gave me of testing hands, that this man is a snake. That round body he shows is but the case of a serpent” (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* 270).

This process of devolving, of traveling beastward, isn’t irreversible, however. Those who have become animals still have the ability and the goodness within them to begin the long, difficult journey back to humanity. If Dr. Kelman is an example of a human traveling beastward, Lina is an example of a beast traveling humanward. An extremely ugly, doglike creature, Lina accompanies Curdie on his journey. “I believe,” Curdie says to Princess Irene, “from what your grandmother told me, that Lina is a woman, and that she was naughty, but is now growing good” (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* 272). This path downward into animal life isn’t the result of the active work of sin, but a consequence of moral laziness, as Curdie realizes with the grandmother’s prodding. He confesses, “I was doing the wrong of never wanting or trying to be better. And now I see that I have been letting things go as they would for a long time. Whatever came into my head I did, and whatever didn’t come into my head I didn’t do” (188). In

this way, the process of evolutionary regression, of devolving, is tied to one's lack of progress in sanctification.

Both Kingsley and MacDonald held to more liberal views of the doctrine of creation, and accepted, without qualification, the new scientific theory of evolution and the new geological evidence of an old earth. Both also allowed this liberal view of the doctrine of creation to affect their doctrine of sanctification. The metaphor of evolutionary progress and regress became central to their understanding of moral and spiritual growth. As clergymen, they both saw the pastoral implications of this metaphor, and used it for a didactic purpose in their children's literature, especially in *The Water-Babies* and in the two *Princess* books by MacDonald.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Atonement

The cross of Christ has always been at the center of Christianity, but what exactly Christ did on the cross has been answered in a number of different ways. The early church had a diversity of theories as to why Christ died. The ransom theory taught that humans, after the Fall, had become the rightful property of Satan. Christ, then, to redeem humanity, became a ransom paid to the devil. The recapitulation theory taught that Christ, as the second Adam, lived a perfect life of obedience even unto a horrible death, thereby reversing what Adam had done by his disobedience. St. Anselm, writing around the first millennium, offered a new understanding called the satisfaction theory, in which Christ's sacrifice restored God's honor, which had been impugned by sinners. Later, the Reformers tweaked this view of the atonement to be more in line with the biblical evidence, and they instituted what became Protestant orthodoxy for several hundred years: the penal substitutionary view of the atonement. This view of the atonement taught that the cross satisfied both God's justice and his mercy. Allison explains:

Because he is holy, God hates sin with wrathful anger and acts against it by condemning and punishing sin. Thus, there is an eternal penalty to pay for sin. Humanity could not atone for its own sin, but Christ did: as the substitute for humanity, he dies as a sacrifice to pay the penalty, suffered the divine wrath against sin, and removed its condemnation forever. (399)

Being infinitely holy and just, God can not simply overlook sins, but each sin must be punished with eternal wrath and condemnation. But God is merciful as well as just, and desires to pardon sinners of their wrong doing. The cross is how God is able to satisfy



both requirements of his eternal nature. It allows God to be both “just and the justifier” (Romans 3:26). Christ is punished for the sins of humanity, satisfying God’s justice; and those who have faith in this sacrifice are forgiven, satisfying God’s mercy. As Calvin wrote: “Christ, in his death, was offered to the Father as a propitiatory victim; that, expiation being made by his sacrifice, we might cease to tremble at the divine wrath . . . Accordingly, faith apprehends acquittal in the condemnation of Christ, and blessing in his curse” (Calvin 329).

A later development of the penal substitutionary atonement centered around the scope, or the extent, of the sacrifice. The heirs of Calvin realized that it would be unjust for God to punish Christ for the sins of someone who is ultimately lost to hell. “The question may be put this way,” says Grudem, “when Christ died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or only for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved?” (594) If Christ was already punished for the sins of a lost person, would that person be punished for those same sins in hell? This problem of the “double payment” of sin led to the formulation of what is known as limited atonement. Christ, in this understanding, died *only* for the sins of his sheep, suffered only for the sins of the elect, and offered a sacrifice only for those who would ultimately be saved. One of the classic proof texts is John 10, in which Jesus says, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” Those who are not his sheep are left with the full responsibility of their sin.

Limited atonement is the logical outworking of the Calvinist emphasis on God’s predestination of the elect. “Calvinists,” says Olson, “deduced the doctrine of limited atonement . . . from the doctrine of God’s providence and electing decrees” (*The Story of Christian Theology* 457). In the Calvinist view of salvation, God, in his omniscience,

looked into the future and saw that his creatures would turn from him in sin, and God freely of his own sovereign grace decided that he would save for himself a people out of those sinners. He chose them for salvation before the world was even created, as St. Paul taught: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (Ephesians 1:4-5). The rest, then, were left for justice, and were never even intended to be a part of the plan of redemption, which culminated in the cross. Limited atonement quickly became established orthodoxy within the Calvinist strain of Protestantism.

This view of the atonement – the limited, penal substitutionary view – was the one in which MacDonald was raised and educated, and against which he later rebelled. As a boy, says Hein, MacDonald was “uneasy about the doctrines of limited atonement and unconditional election. With a disposition that could not long maintain a negative approach, he began to feel that God was, as Creator, everyone’s Father, and that His mercy extended impartially to all” (*The Harmony Within* 10). It wasn’t just the case, however, that MacDonald rejected the limited atonement view, but he rejected the entire penal substitutionary view of the atonement, as well – and in this he wasn’t alone. Many liberal theologians of the time, finding inspiration in the early church, were beginning to turn against the prevailing atonement theories. The idea of a man having to die to appease the wrath of God seemed barbaric and harsh. “Around 1860,” says Wolfe, “the tenor of theology changed, to stress the incarnation and humanity of Christ rather than his atoning death, and this development too was integrally related to wider intellectual and cultural trends, such as aspirations to build a more harmonious society” (8). As Cooper, a

Victorian critic of the substitutionary atonement, asked, “Why is it the pouring out of a red fluid, which has been formed by the digestion of bread and meat and vegetables, that can alone satisfy an Infinite Existence for transgression, not of the being who suffers, but of the other unnumbered millions of the world?” (qtd. in Laresen 51)

What came under attack from liberal theologians was the perceived immorality of a propitiation. Far from satisfying God’s justice, the penal substitutionary atonement was, they felt, a grand demonstration of injustice. One man cannot be punished, they argued, in the place of another. For God to punish Christ, an innocent man, for sins that he himself did not commit was logically incoherent and immoral. As MacDonald said:

Strange that in a Christian land it should need to be said, that to punish the innocent and let the guilty go free is unjust! It wrongs the innocent, the guilty and God himself. It would be the worst of all wrongs to the guilty to treat them as innocent. The whole device is a piece of spiritual charlatanry . . . If the wicked ought to be punished, it were the worst possible perversion of justice to take a righteous being however strong, and punish him instead of the sinner . . . I say justice cannot demand that which is unjust, and the whole thing is unjust. (*Unspoken Sermons* 240)

MacDonald goes on in the same sermon to say that if the penal substitutionary atonement is true, he would stop believing in God, and he makes it very plain, in an apostrophe to one who believes the prevailing theory just what he thinks of their God: “Your portrait of your God is an evil caricature of the face of Christ” (240). Elsewhere he says, of the substitutionary atonement, “This idea – this miserable fancy, rather – has terribly corrupted the preaching of the gospel” (*The Hope of the Gospel* 15).

The crucifixion, for MacDonald, was meant to inspire people to overcome their own sin, not to atone for it in their place. “MacDonald asserts,” says Miho Yamaguchi, “that the orthodox idea that Christ was punished for human sins so that Father God can forgive them is wrong. Instead of reconciling God to men, MacDonald says, Christ reconciles men to God so that they can come closer to God” (12). MacDonald placed a great emphasis on personal holiness, on the necessity of each individual growing in love of God and fellow creatures. Everyone had to overcome their own sin and weakness, and for God to do this for them, for God to overcome sin on their behalf, negated the entire process of spiritual and moral development. “Jesus did not die to save us from punishment,” MacDonald said, “He was called Jesus because he should save his people from their sins” (*Unspoken Sermons*, 236). Save them from their sins, that is, by helping them to overcome their sins *themselves*: “Jesus was born to deliver us; not, primarily, or by itself, from the punishment of any [sin] . . . He came to make us good, and therein blessed children” (*The Hope of the Gospel* 17). This emphasis on the personal overcoming of sin is why MacDonald rejected another doctrine, closely related to the substitutionary atonement: the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. The theologian Wayne Grudem summarizes the historic position:

When we say that God *imputes* Christ’s righteousness to us it means that God *thinks of* Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, or regards it *as belonging to us* . . . Christ’s righteousness became ours . . . It is essential to the heart of the gospel to insist that God declares us to be just or righteous not on the basis of our actual condition of righteousness or

holiness, but rather on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness, which he thinks of as belonging to us. (726-727)

But for MacDonald everyone had to earn their own righteousness, or "the soul thus saved would rather sink into the flames of hell than steal into heaven and skulk there under the shadow of an imputed righteousness" (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* 236). One finds in MacDonald's work, again and again, an emphasis on personal growth in holiness, to the end that one should be accepted by God, not on the basis of someone else's righteousness, but on the basis of one's own, hard earned righteousness. Everyone began as a child and had to learn, through the sometimes painful process of life, how to put others first, how to please God, and how to be a genuinely good person. God, as a loving Father, understood the stumblings and failures that his children would have along the way, and, at the end of this process of spiritual maturation, God accepted the person on the basis of their own righteousness. Yamaguchi, in her study of MacDonald's theory of the atonement, summarizes his view this way:

God and Jesus in one heart love His creatures infinitely so that they even took the suffering of the Cross to make sinful stubborn creatures see how much God loves them . . . The purpose of the Cross is, thus [for MacDonald], not to enable God to forgive us, but to enable us to know God's love, and then to love Him and love our fellow men. (30, 38).

But does one find evidence of this view of the atonement in MacDonald's children's fantasy? Although not as prominent as some other doctrines, this theme – the theme of sacrifice as a demonstration of love meant to inspire change – is present, particularly in *The Light Princess*, one of MacDonald's somewhat overlooked fairy tales. Several

articles have been published about this work, but none have connected the central sacrifice in the story to MacDonald's liberal theology of the atonement.

*The Light Princess* begins with a king and queen who desperately wish to have a child. After some time, the queen conceives a daughter and royal invitations are sent out to all the most important people, inviting them to the baby girl's christening. Unfortunately, the king forgets to send an invitation to his own sister, Princess Makemnoit, who is not only highly offended but also a witch. She attends the christening, anyway, and puts this curse on the young princess: "Light of spirit, by my charms, / Light of body, every part, / Never weary human arms – / Only crush thy parents' heart!" (3). Much of the story rests on connotations and alternate meanings of the word "light." The princess grows up into a young woman with light hair – that is, hair as "golden as the morning" (10). She is also very light hearted, laughing constantly and at everything. She is unable to take anything seriously. Worst of all, she is light bodied, and floats around weightlessly. Her evil aunt, with the curse, "deprived the child of all her gravity" (3). It is a strange sort of existence for the young princess: "If [the king] tried to catch her, she glided from him in an instant, not in the least afraid of him, but thinking it part of the game not to be caught. With one push of her foot, she would be floating in the air above his head; or would go dancing backwards and forwards and sideways, like a great butterfly" (11). The princess, having no gravity, in both senses of the word, is unable to fall in love, because her ceaselessly lighthearted temperament won't allow it.

Whenever the princess is in water, however, her gravity is restored. As she swims, her personality becomes more sedate and serious, and her body is able to stay on the ground. "The passion of her life," we're told, "was to get into the water, and she was

always the better behaved and the more beautiful the more she had of it” (MacDonald, *The Light Princess* 18). The court philosophers, who have been working on the problem of her lack of gravity, reason that if this water can temporarily restore her gravity, deeper water could restore it permanently. That is to say, if the princess could ever be made to cry, her gravity would be restored. But this proves quite difficult. The “most touching oracle of woe” is unable to move her to anything but laughter, and “an awful whipping” from her father fails to elicit tears, as well (20-21). The narrative then switches to another character, “the son of a king, who lived a thousand miles” away and who sets out to find “the daughter of a queen” to marry (21). He finds the princess swimming and soon falls in love with her. They both swim together nightly, and the princess enjoys his company, but she is still unable to love him in return:

When the prince, who had really fallen in love when he fell in the lake, began to talk to her about love, she always turned her head towards him and laughed. After a while she began to look puzzled, as if she were trying to understand what he meant, but could not – revealing a notion that he meant something. (MacDonald, *The Light Princess* 30)

Much to the dismay of the princess, the lake begins to drain, growing more shallow day by day. This is due to the evil witch Makemnoit who can’t bear to see the young princess, whom she had cursed, so happy as she plays in it. The lake eventually is drained completely, leaving behind a plate of gold with these words, foreshadowing the theme of atonement: “Death alone from death can save. / Love is death, and so is brave – / Love can fill the deepest grave. / Love loves on beneath the wave” (MacDonald, *The Light Princess* 35). The reverse side of the plate explains the necessity of a human sacrifice:

“The body of a living man could alone staunch the flow. The man must give himself of his own will; and the lake must take his life as it filled” (MacDonald 35). Someone must willingly die, then, to restore water to the lake that the princess loves. The prince decides to offer himself as the sacrifice, so that the lake will be restored and, with it, the princess’s joy.

Restraint must be shown not to read too much religious symbolism into *The Light Princess*, but certainly there is some to be found. The prince character is undoubtedly a Christ figure, come from the kingdom of his father to win the love of a princess who is unable to love him in return because of a curse. This is similar to Christ, who is often referred to in Scripture as “the bridegroom,” and the Church as the bride (Mark 2:20). Also, of course, is the similarity between Christ, who died for the church, and the prince who sacrifices himself for the princess. “Christ loved the church,” said St. Paul, “and gave himself for it,” just as the prince loves the princess and gave himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). A few lines from the song that the prince sings as the water begins to rise around him echo the traditional view of Christ’s descent into hell: “Lady, keep the world’s delight; / Keep the waters in thy sight. / Love hath made me strong to go, / For thy sake, to realms below” (MacDonald, *The Light Princess* 40). The prince’s last meal, which he asks for as the water rises around him, is reminiscent of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, as well: ““Give me a glass of wine and a biscuit . . .’ said the prince, very humbly” (MacDonald 41). Of course, the prince isn’t dying for the sins of the princess or in any sort of substitutionary way. Keeping with MacDonald’s view of the atonement, the prince’s sacrifice works chiefly as a demonstration of love, and this sacrifice is the means



by which the princess finally begins to feel something. As she watches him drown, the princess's hard heart is broken:

The water rose and rose. It touched his chin. It touched his lower lip. It touched between his lips. He shut them hard to keep it out. The princess began to feel strange. It touched his upper lip. He breathed through his nostrils. The princess looked wild. It covered his nostrils. Her eyes look scared, and shone strange in the moonlight. His head fell back; the water closed over it . . . The princess gave a shriek, and sprang into the lake.

(MacDonald, *The Light Princess* 42)

She drags him from the water, caring more for the prince than for her lake. The princess is said to love for the first time, and this, again, is very much in line with MacDonald's view of the atonement. The prince's sacrifice taught the princess how to love, which perfectly echoes the purpose of the atonement in MacDonald's theology: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). After pulling the prince from the water, the princess takes him to the castle. When the prince revives, MacDonald keeps with a common element of the story, and puns on the word "sun," subtly evoking the resurrection of the Son: "At last, when they had all but given it up, just as the sun rose, the prince opened his eyes" (MacDonald, *The Light Princess* 44). The princess cries for the first time, and it is the prince's sacrifice that helped to spur on this moment of spiritual growth.

In summary, Protestants have traditionally believed that the sacrifice of Christ was a propitiation for sin, and that Christ redeemed his followers by suffering the punishment for their sin in their place. MacDonald, following many liberal Christians of

the nineteenth century, rejected this traditional view, and preferred to think of the atonement as an act whereby God demonstrated his love, and an act which enables the sinner to love to a greater degree in return. This is shown in *The Light Princess* by the prince's sacrifice, which both shows his great love for the princess, and enables her to love for the first time.

## CHAPTER V

### Inclusivism

Broadly speaking, there are three views amongst Christians regarding the scope of salvation: inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism (Migliore 306). Exclusivism is the traditional view, and is the view that has been held by Christians for the majority of the church age. This view teaches that salvation, the attainment of eternal life, is possible only for Christians, and that a profession of faith is necessary in their earthly life. Only professed, explicit Christians receive salvation in this view. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said what has become the standard proof text for exclusivism: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” and this has traditionally been taken to mean that anyone who doesn’t approach God through Jesus – that is, through the Christian faith – fails to achieve salvation (John 14:6). Or, as the Apostle Peter said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The unpleasant aspect of this view is that it entails that the vast majority of all people from all periods of human history have not achieved salvation and are eternally lost.

Inclusivism, by contrast, “teaches that Jesus Christ is the definitive revelation of God, that the salvation accomplished in him embraces all people, and that it is somehow made available to all” (Migliore 306). It is possible, in this view, for someone to be saved, to achieve eternal life, without explicitly professing belief in Jesus during their earthly life. This is not to say, as the pluralistic approach does, that Christianity is on the same level as all other religions, or that all religions are equally true. Inclusivists believe that Christianity is the true religion, and that people achieve salvation only through Jesus,

but that it isn't necessary for people to be consciously aware of this during their life. Consequently, less emphasis is placed on the belief in particular Christian truths as necessary for salvation, such as faith in Jesus as the Son of God, or in his resurrection, but the stress, rather, is put on moral opportunities more widely available to humanity in general, such as doing good works and loving one's neighbor.

Although exclusivism has remained the dominant position for more conservative Christians, during the Victorian era inclusivism became the standard approach to salvation for liberal Christianity. One influential theologian was Maurice, "whose *Religions of the World and Their Relations to Christianity* (1846) marked the beginning of the end of the missionary 'defamation' of other religious traditions" (McGrath 263). Maurice's inclusive view of salvation was, like many of his positions and theological opinions, the subject of controversy. Conservative theologians vehemently opposed inclusivists, who they felt were undermining the pressing need for the "heathen" to hear the gospel. One critic of Maurice, writing in 1860, said:

Mr. Maurice leaves the article open to the construction that a man may be saved in any school or any sect, not indeed by virtue of his sect or school, but by an influence of which he may be utterly unconscious, or to which he may be profoundly indifferent. He may live and die in his school or sect for anything, then, that appears to the contrary, – an idolater, a scoffer, an Owenite, a spiritraper, a Mormonist, and yet be perfectly secure. He may still be saved by the unknown, unfelt agent, designated "a Redeemer of the universe." (*The Christian Observer* 790)

Maurice's writings and theology were a huge influence on Kingsley, MacDonald, and Carroll, and his inclusivist approach to salvation shows up in the children's literature of all three, in ways sometimes subtle and other times more prominent. One finds in their literature not just the possibility for non-Christian salvation, but the emphasis on salvation through following one's conscience and "doing good," which, again, is very characteristic of inclusivism.

Despite the theological themes that pervade *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley doesn't have much to say about inclusivism in that work. The absence might be due, however, to the doctrine's presence in a children's book that he published seven years earlier: *The Heroes, or Greek Fairy Tales*. This collection includes a preface in which Kingsley makes his adherence to the inclusivist understanding of salvation very apparent. The preface sets not just the tone of the ensuing stories, but actually reads as if teaching the inclusivist view of salvation to children was the primary purpose of the collection. The work served as a sort of exercise in empathy in which Kingsley's child readers were taught to respect the ancient, non-Christian Greeks, and to value their literature and stories, even if those stories were theologically incorrect at times. Also, no doubt, Kingsley wished to establish a certain way of viewing the Greeks for his young readers before another instructor taught them to view the Greeks in a more negative light. As Kingsley says in the preface:

Now, I love these old Hellens heartily; and I should be very ungrateful to them if I did not, considering all that they have taught me; and they seem to me like brothers, though they have all been dead and gone many hundred years ago. So as you must learn about them, whether you choose

or not, I wish to be the first to introduce you to them, and to say, “Come hither, children, at this blessed Christmas time, when all God’s creatures should rejoice together, and bless Him who redeemed them all. Come and see old friends of mine, whom I knew long ere you were born. They are come to visit us at Christmas, out of the world where all live to God; and to tell you some of their old fairy tales, which they loved when they were young like you.” (Kingsley, *The Heroes*)

The children, then, should view the ancient Greeks, even though they weren’t Christians, as brothers who live to the God who redeems all. Kingsley goes on in the preface to say that the Greeks were teachable and willing to learn from surrounding nations, so God rewarded them, much like he rewarded Solomon, with the gift of wisdom. “For you must not fancy, children,” says Kingsley, “that because these old Greeks were heathens, therefore God did not care for them, and taught them nothing” (*The Heroes*). On the contrary, he says, the Holy Spirit is given not just to those who are born again, as the traditional view teaches, but is actually the means by which all people, anywhere and everywhere, know the truth: “No one can think a right thought, or feel a right feeling, or understand the real truth of anything in earth and heaven, unless the good Lord Jesus teaches him by His Spirit, which gives man understanding” (*The Heroes*). This perfectly summarizes the inclusivist view of salvation. And it must be stressed that this isn’t religious pluralism. Kingsley interprets the Greek lives through a Christian worldview, and understands their contact with the divine in specifically Christian terms.

The Greeks, he said, “believed in the last six of the ten commandments and knew well what was right and what was wrong” (Kingsley, *The Heroes*). The emphasis on the

last six commandments is important, because those are the commandments having to do with loving one's neighbor, not with how to worship God properly, and it is those last six commandments that are, for the inclusivist, the most important. The first four commandments about having no other gods, not making graven images, keeping the Sabbath, and not using God's name in vain are important, but not necessary for salvation. As previously said, inclusivist views of salvation, by their very nature, have to downplay the necessity of certain specifically Christian beliefs for salvation, like belief in the divinity of Jesus or his resurrection. While acknowledging Christianity as the fullest, truest revelation of God, inclusivists have to stress common morality as the ultimate criterion for salvation. And this is precisely the note that Kingsley ends his preface for *The Heroes* on: "The stories are not all true, of course, nor half of them; you are not simple enough to fancy that; but the meaning of them is true, and true for ever, and that is—Do right, and God will help you'" (Kingsley, *The Heroes*).

Carroll insists in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* that the opinions of his characters are not necessarily his own: "I do not hold myself responsible for any of the opinions expressed by the characters in my book. They are simply opinions which, it seemed to me, might probably be held by the persons into whose mouths I put them, and which were worth consideration" (Carroll 439). Carroll's personal letters, however, have shown that some of the opinions of his characters, especially when they endorse an inclusivist view of salvation, absolutely were his own opinions too. In an especially illuminating letter written about Shakespeare, Carroll's rejection of Christian exclusivism is very clear:

In [Shakespeare's] day, when it was held to be a Christian's duty to force his belief on others by fire and sword – to burn man's body in order to save his soul – the words probably conveyed no shock. To all Christians now . . . the idea of forcing a man to abjure his religion, whatever that religion may be, is . . . simply horrible. (qtd in Cohen 363)

In *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, Lady Muriel and the narrator discuss her cousin, who is an atheist, and neither questions his salvation. The importance of good works over correct doctrinal beliefs is emphasized, or, to borrow from Kingsley, the importance of the last six commandments as opposed to the first four. "His ideas of Christianity are very shadowy," says Lady Muriel, "and even as to the existence of a God he lives in a sort of dreamland. But it has not affected his life! I feel sure, now, that the most absolute Atheist may be leading, though walking blindfold, a pure and noble life" (Carroll 462). The narrator agrees: "I entirely agree with you . . . And have we not our Saviour's own promise that such a life shall surely lead to the light?" (462) The importance of intellectual honesty and staying true to one's own conscience is illustrated in Lady Muriel's rejection of Eric "believing" in order to appease her. "He said he would believe," she says, "for my sake, if he could. And he wished, for my sake, he could see things as I did. But that is all wrong! . . . God cannot approve such low motives as that!" (Carroll 462)

Carroll even goes further than many inclusivists in a later passage where Arthur speculates that, given the role of environment in the formation of one's character, outward, visible good works might not be necessary for someone to have lived a moral life. He begins by discussing two hypothetical men. "Look back to the time," says Arthur,



“when they both began life – before they had sense enough to know Right from Wrong. Then, at any rate, they were equal in God’s sight?” (Carroll 503) Next, he says, imagine the two men in the future, one having achieved a high position of honor and success in life, the other having fallen into a life of sin and crime. If the person who achieved the high standing was tempted with “some trivial act of unfair dealing” and the thief with “some terrible crime,” it could be that the former, should he give into the temptation, would be guilty of a far greater sin, in God’s eyes, than the thief, even though, ostensibly, the thief had committed a greater crime (504). Lady Muriel is astonished by this, saying, “It upsets all one’s ideas of Right and Wrong . . . Why, in that dreadful murder-trial . . . it was possible that the least guilty man in the Court was the murderer, and that possibly the judge who tried him, by yielding to the temptation of making one unfair remark, had committed a crime outweighing the criminal’s whole career!” (Carroll 505) Arthur is much comforted by this thought, and his remarks on how it has changed his view of the entire world, and of all the people within it, sounds very much like the relief that an exclusivist must feel, once they embrace inclusivism and renounce the belief that the majority of humanity is doomed to eternal hellfire:

To me it seems to clear away much of the cloud that hangs over the world’s history . . . The thought, that perhaps the real guilt of the human race was infinitely less than I fancied it – that the millions, whom I had thought of as sunk in hopeless depths of sin, were perhaps, in God’s sight, scarcely sinning at all – was more sweet than words can tell! Life seemed more bright and beautiful, when once that thought had come! “*A livelier*

*emerald twinkles in the grass, A purer sapphire melts into the sea.”*

(Carroll 505)

The concluding lines that Arthur quotes are from Tennyson, Carroll’s “favorite living poet,” making the connection between Arthur’s belief and the author’s beliefs much stronger (Cohen 347). The gracious nature of God, who loves even those who don’t believe in his existence, is illustrated, metaphorically, through two different lockets that Sylvie is offered. One bears the inscription, “All will love Sylvie,” and another reads, “Sylvie will love all” (Carroll 282). The better choice, she realizes, is the latter: “It’s *very* nice to be loved . . . but it’s nicer to love other people!” (282) In the same way, the God of exclusivist theology, the liberal Christian would say, is the sort who wants to be loved by all, and judges people who fail to love him properly. The God of exclusivist theology demands of all that they keep the first four commandments. The God of inclusivist theology, by contrast, simply loves all.

The theme of inclusivism also shows up in MacDonald’s children’s literature. In *The Princess and Curdie*, the grandmother character is known by many different people by many different names. At first, this troubles Curdie, who asks, “Then would you mind telling me now, ma’am, for I feel very confused about it – are you the Lady of the Silver Moon? . . . And up there they call you Old Mother Wotherwop! And Princess Irene told me you were her great-great-grandmother!” (206). The grandmother replies, “I could give you twenty names more to call me, Curdie, and not one of them would be a false one. . . . Shapes are only dresses, Curdie, and dresses are only names. That which is inside is the same all the time” (206). The grandmother, who is a sort of God figure in the series, is perfectly content to let people know her in different ways and under different names. This

is similar to the concept that the same God is behind different religious traditions, and similar to the old analogy of different religions being like a sheet of stained glass, with each shining different colors, but all drawing from the same light.

Another children's book by MacDonald with inclusivism as a theme is *At the Back of the North Wind*. In this story, a young boy named Diamond meets a mysterious woman named North Wind, who seems to be the embodiment of God's providence. She takes him to the country at the back of the North Wind, a bucolic and tranquil land. The imagery that MacDonald uses for the country is similar to the imagery at the end of the Book of Revelation used to describe heaven. Both places have a clear river flowing through them, and both are full of light even without the sun or the moon. After his time in the mysterious country, Diamond is returned home, and the novel focuses on his life in the real world.

Throughout the story, the title character, North Wind, teaches a view that is certainly inclusivist. "I don't think I am just what you fancy me to be," she says to Diamond. "I have to shape myself various ways to various people. But the heart of me is true. . . . People call me by dreadful names, and think they know all about me. But they don't. Sometimes they call me Bad Fortune, sometimes Evil Chance, sometimes Ruin; and they have another name for me which I think the most dreadful of all" (MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* 333-334). Different people, then, have different names for the harsh way in which North Wind treats them, and, given the titles listed, she might even hint that the most dreadful name of all is that of the devil. In keeping with the inclusivist view of salvation, MacDonald stresses common acts of morality and "doing good" as more important than correct doctrinal belief. The old woman character in the

*Princess* books has no objection to people knowing her by different names, just so long as they're growing in wisdom and righteousness, and the same is true of the North Wind character.

Close to the doctrine of inclusivism is the doctrine of universalism, the belief that all, eventually, will find salvation. While MacDonald never explicitly taught this doctrine, it is widely considered to be the “logical conclusion of his thinking” (Dearborn 166). For many modern Christians, universalism is what MacDonald is chiefly known for, and his name frequently appears in books on the subject. In *The Evangelical Universalist*, a modern book arguing for the position, the author even adopts the pseudonym “Gregory MacDonald” as an homage.

In Romans 8, St. Paul says that all things work together for good, and universalists take this to mean that behind all the evils and sorrow of the world, God is working a plan of redemption that encompasses all people. God's judgments and wrath, and even the pain that he allows people to experience, are all, providentially, working toward the eventual revelation of goodness. North Wind frequently teaches this to Diamond. As she says at one point:

Ah, but there's another thing, Diamond: – What if I should look ugly without being bad – look ugly myself because I am making ugly things beautiful? . . . Nay, Diamond, if I change into a serpent or a tiger, you must not let go your hold of me . . . If you keep a hold, you will know who I am all the time, even when you look at me and can't see me the least like the North Wind. I may look something very awful. (*At the Back of the North Wind* 18-19)

The North Wind looks dreadful sometimes, looks ugly as she says, but this is just the means to the end of some good purpose. This concept is illustrated early in the book when the North Wind turns into a wolf and scares a woman. She explains to Diamond, “I had to make myself look like a bad thing before she could see me. If I had to put on any other shape than a wolf’s she would not have seen me” (MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* 39). Keeping with MacDonald’s view that all God’s punishments are meant to reform, and that “all punishment is kindness,” these episodes can be extrapolated out to include hell and every divine punishment (MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* 92).

At another point, North Wind informs Diamond that she has to sink a ship that night. He is shocked: “Sink a ship! What! with men in it?” (MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* 59) “It is rather dreadful,” she says, “But it is my work. I must do it” (59). He begs her not to be cruel, and she explains that while her work might look cruel, it never truly is: “I could not be cruel if I would. I can do nothing cruel, although I often do what looks like cruel to those who do not know what I really am doing. The people they say I drown, I only carry away” (60). The only way that North Wind can bear the cries of the passengers on the ship, she says, is because of a song she hears. The imagery of the song is unmistakably universalistic in its theology, and all encompassing in the salvation and joy that it promises. As she says:

I am always hearing, through every noise, through all the noise I am making myself even, the sound of a far-off song . . . [W]hat I do hear, is quite enough to make me able to bear the cry from the drowning ship . . . Somehow, I can’t say how, it tells me that all is right; that it is coming to swallow up all cries. (75-76)

The imagery of the song is undoubtedly eschatological, hinting at the final consummation and resurrection. Isaiah, in a passage about the final revelation of God, prophesied, “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces” (Isaiah 25:8). Similarly, the song that North Wind hears promises to swallow up all cries. The song’s connection to the resurrection is made even more clear in *The Princess and Curdie* when the grandmother sings a song with a similar theme: “Then the lady began to sing . . . It would make you weep if I were able to tell you what that was like, it was so beautiful and true and lovely” (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* 213). In the lyrics, she stresses the painful learning process of the present world: “The weepers are learning to smile, / And laughter to glean the sighs; / Burn and bury the care and guile, / For the day when the sleepers shall rise” (214).

The prophet Daniel spoke of the resurrection in his book, saying, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Jesus, too, taught the resurrection of the dead, and, like Daniel, he taught the dichotomous view of some rising to life and joy, and others rising from the dead to shame. “For the hour is coming,” he said, “in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). Of course, the universalist believes that this resurrection of damnation isn’t the end of the story for them, but that God is, as Peter said, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Perhaps this is the secret, the mystery, hinted at in the last stanza of the grandmother’s song. After mentioning the resurrection in the three previous stanzas, she sings: “Oh, the dews and

the moths and the daisy red, / The larks and the glimmers and flows! / The lilies and sparrows and daily bread, / And the something that nobody knows” (MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* 214). At this point, she stops spinning, overcome with joyous laughter: “The princess stopped, her wheel stopped, and she laughed. And her laugh was sweeter than song and wheel . . . for the heart of the laugh was love” (214).

The inclusivist view of salvation shows up in the work of Kingsley, Carroll, and MacDonald, and all three used their children’s literature in an almost didactic sort of way to teach this doctrine to children. Kingsley is most upfront about this, plainly telling his child readers in the preface of his collection of Greek myths that God loved the ancient Greeks and cared for them, and that all one needed to do to earn God’s favor was “do right.” Carroll, while an admitted inclusivist in his personal letters, seemed to hedge his commitment to the doctrine in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* by stating that his characters’ opinions were not necessarily his own, but he still had his characters, especially Arthur, quite plainly espouse the doctrine. MacDonald includes the doctrine in *At the Back of the North Wind* and *The Princess and Curdie* by showing the different ways in which the grandmother character and the North Wind character reveal themselves to different people. This inclusivism in MacDonald’s work subtly hints at the doctrine of universalism.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusion

Many challenges to traditional Christianity arose during the Enlightenment, including new critiques of the standard philosophical arguments for God's existence, new scientific approaches for explaining natural phenomena, and a more critical and objective approach to the study of the Bible. By the nineteenth century, many of the traditional doctrines of Christianity were under attack as well, with many Victorians feeling that the doctrines were too harsh and outdated for the modern world. The substitutionary atonement, eternal punishment, and the narrow scope of salvation, were increasingly difficult beliefs for many Victorians to hold, as was the biblical account of creation. All of these difficulties led to a crisis of faith in Victorian England.

The response from Christianity was split: conservatives held fast, and refused to compromise on the traditional doctrines. They rejected evolutionary theory, and rejected any attempts to change the standard view of the atonement, the duration of eternal punishment, or the scope of salvation. Liberal Christians, by contrast, felt the need to modernize Christianity and to reinterpret traditional dogma in the light of modern science and morality. They accepted evolutionary theory, and embraced the geological evidence of an old earth. They rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment, preferring to view hell as purgatorial. They rejected the narrow, exclusivist view of salvation, and taught that the traditional view of the atonement as a propitiation for sin was unjust and barbaric.

Several Victorian authors of children's literature embraced this liberal approach to Christianity, including Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald, and, to a lesser extent, Lewis Carroll. Their liberal view of several key doctrines can be found in their children's



literature. Both Kingsley and MacDonald allowed the theory of evolution to affect their doctrine of sanctification, and both used evolutionary progress and evolutionary regress as new metaphors for understanding one's moral and spiritual growth. MacDonald's view of the atonement as a demonstration of love as opposed to a propitiation for sin can be found in *The Light Princess*, a fairy tale in which a prince's sacrifice allows a princess to love for the first time, which is completely harmonious with MacDonald's theological writings on the atonement. Further, all three authors included the inclusivist view of salvation in their works, with MacDonald's inclusivism subtly hinting at the doctrine of universalism.

Children's literature, then, was a powerful medium for portraying the beliefs of liberal Christianity, and it was a medium that was embraced for this purpose for a very understandable reason. Although liberal Christianity began to flourish in the nineteenth century, it was still a movement very much surrounded by controversy. As previously noted, many clergymen of a liberal persuasion faced public scorn and professional censure. MacDonald lost his pastorate for his beliefs, and Kingsley feared losing his as well. Carroll made his heterodox opinions explicit only in his private letters and in his diary. Children's literature, however, because its potential for subversion was not yet widely known, gave these authors a safe medium both to express their liberal theological beliefs, and, potentially, to convince young readers to embrace those same opinions. "Inevitably the production of children's books," says Briggs, "is governed by what adults want children to be and to do, and furthermore it offers an opportunity to induce them to share those adult goals" (4-5). This is exactly what one finds in the children's literature of Kingsley, MacDonald, and Carroll when it is examined for its theological content – a

subtle, but still very apparent, didacticism, in which the child reader is taught the doctrines of liberal Christianity.

## WORKS CITED

- Allison, Gregg R. *Historical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. Print.
- Beatty, John, and Piers J. Hale. "Water Babies: An Evolutionary Parable." *Endeavour* 32.4 (2008): 141-146. *General Science Full Text (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 20 June, 2014.
- Briggs, Julia. "Reading Children's Books." *Essays in Criticism* 39:1 (1989): 1-17. *Oxford Journals Humanities Archive*. Web. 20 June, 2014.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960. Print.
- Carroll, Lewis. *The Complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*. Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions, 1996. Print.
- Cohen, Morton. *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1995. Print.
- Colloms, Brenda. *Charles Kingsley: The Lion of Eversley*. London: Constable, 1975. Print.
- Dearborn, Kerry. *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2006. Print.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1994. Print.
- Hein, Rolland. *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker*. Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1993. Print.
- . *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian UP, 1982. Print.
- Holy Bible: King James Version*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 1973. Print.

- Kingsley, Charles. *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of His Life*. London: C. Kegan Paul & Co. 1880. *Google Books*. Web. 20 June, 2014.
- . *The Heroes, or Greek Fairy Tales*. London: Macmillan. 1855. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. 20. June, 2014.
- . *The Water-Babies*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1994. Print.
- Klein, William W., Craig Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1993. Print.
- Larsen, Timothy. *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Context of Victorian Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2004. Print.
- MacDonald, Gregory. *The Evangelical Universalist*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2006. Print.
- MacDonald, George. *The Hope of the Gospel*. Ed. Rolland Hein. Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw, 1974. Print.
- . *The Light Princess and Other Fairy Tales*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006. Print.
- . *The Princess and the Goblin and The Princess and Curdie*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1995. Print.
- . *Unspoken Sermons*. San Francisco: Bottom of the Hill, 2012. Print.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. Print.
- Melnyk, Julie. *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008. Print.
- Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991. Print.

- Morris, J. N. *To Build Christ's Kingdom: F. D. Maurice and His Writings*. London: Canterbury Norwich, 2007. Print.
- Olson, Roger E. *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013. Print.
- . *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999. Print.
- Royle, Edward. *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement, 1791-1866*. Manchester: U of Manchester, 1974. Print.
- Ryle, J. C. *Regeneration*. Fearn: Christian Heritage, 2003. Print.
- Steinbach, Susie. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth Century Britain*. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.
- The Christian Observer*. Google Books. Web. 20 June, 2014.
- Uffelman, Larry K. *Charles Kingsley*. Boston: Twayne, 1979. Print.
- Wood, Naomi. "A (Sea) Green Victorian: Charles Kingsley And The Water-Babies." *The Lion And The Unicorn* 2 (1995): 233. Project MUSE. Web. 20 June, 2014.
- Wilson, A. N. *God's Funeral*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Print.
- Wolffe, John. *Religion in Victorian Britain*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997. Print.
- Yamaguchi, Miho. *George Macdonald's Challenging Theology of the Atonement, Suffering, and Death*. Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark, 2007. Print.
- Westminster Confession of Faith*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012. Print.