

IMAGE OF THE MAKER:
THE SYMBOLIC THEOLOGY OF GEORGE MACDONALD

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Abstract

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In light of the need to recapture an authentic understanding of man's *poesis* rooted in an adequate theology, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how George MacDonald's theological vision of imagination supplies us with a theory of *poesis* more comprehensive and adequate to a Catholic vision of reality. George MacDonald (1824-1905) presents a particularly relevant contribution for his unique position as both poet and theologian living on the cusp of the modern world, in a post-scientific revolution, Victorian Britain. MacDonald's thought and literary work make the claim that "story," and more precisely, the genre of "myth" or "fantasy" itself, are essential methods for communicating truth, and a privileged expression of the imagination's task of *poesis*. This thesis will therefore examine MacDonald's understanding of the imagination by identifying its foundation in two theological and philosophical principles: First, that this "veiled" or indirect mode of communication mirrors the method God Himself uses to communicate with us in creation, scripture, and supremely in Christ; and secondly, that this "mediated" or "veiled" communication is most respectful of the very structure of our human nature as embodied beings, and our process of knowing. Both of these tenets reveal the decidedly *Christocentric* and *incarnational* nature of his thought. In order to understand MacDonald's claims for the imagination, we will therefore examine the theological framework that enables him to maintain this.

Chapter One will offer an overview of MacDonald's life and the culture and theological currents that most shaped and influenced him, examining the significance of his position as both poet and theologian, and focusing particularly on his inheritance of Coleridge. Chapter Two focuses on the principle elements of his theology that shape and ground his understanding of the imagination, and thus his poetic theory. We will seek to show how MacDonald's understanding of creation, man, and the Incarnate Logos results in a particularly deep and rich account of the role of the *poetic* in man's theological vocation. Chapter Three examines MacDonald's sense of the Imagination in the context of the various approaches to imagination in the tradition, and in the romantic thinkers that preceded him. We will show the ways in which MacDonald's approach to the imagination synthesizes these various approaches, and what his particular contribution is. Chapter Four will demonstrate the ways in which MacDonald embodies in his writing the principles set forth in the previous chapters. We will identify major themes and motifs that serve to express spiritual truths in concrete forms, with particular focus on his work, *The Princess and Curdie*.