

Unspoken Sermons Third Series
By George MacDonald.

TO MY WIFE

Sun and wind and rain, the Lord
Is to seed his Father buried
For he is the living Word,
And the quickening Spirit.

Bordighera:
May 3, 1889

THE CREATION IN CHRIST

'All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.'
- John i. 3, 4

A Textual Challenge

It seems to me that any lover of the gospel given to thinking, and especially one accustomed to the effort of uttering thought, can hardly have failed to feel dissatisfaction, more or less definite, with the close of the third verse, as here presented to English readers. It seems to me in its feebleness, unlike, and rhetorically unworthy of the rest. That it is no worse than pleonastic, that is, redundant, therefore only unnecessary, can be no satisfaction to the man who would find perfection, if he may, in the words of him who was nearer the Lord than any other. The phrase 'that was made' seems, from its uselessness, weak even to foolishness after what precedes: 'All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.'

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My hope was therefore great when I saw, in reading the Greek, that the shifting of a period would rid me of the pleonasm. If thereupon any precious result of meaning should follow, the change would not merely be justifiable-seeing that points are of no authority with anyone accustomed to the vagaries of scribes, editors, and printers-but one for which to give thanks to God. And I found the change did unfold such a truth as showed the rhetoric itself in accordance with the highest thought of the apostle. So glad was I, that it added little to my

satisfaction to find the change supported by the best manuscripts and versions. It could add none to learn that the passage had been, in respect of the two readings, a cause of much disputation: the ground of argument on the side of the common reading, seemed to me worse than worthless.

MacDonald's Reading of John 1:3,4

Let us then look at the passage as I think it ought to be translated, and after that, seek the meaning for the sake of which it was written. It is a meaning indeed by no means dependent for its revelation on this passage, belonging as it does to the very truth as it is in Jesus; but it is therein magnificently expressed by the apostle, and differently from anywhere else-that is, if I am right in the interpretation which suggested itself the moment I saw the probable rhetorical relation of the words.

'All things were made through him, and without him was made not one thing. That which was made in him was life, and the life was the light of men.'

Note the antithesis of the through and the in.

In this grand assertion seems to me to lie, more than shadowed, the germ of creation and redemption-of all the divine in its relation to all the human.

Jesus – the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father

In attempting to set forth what I find in it, I write with no desire to provoke controversy, which I loathe, but with some hope of presenting to the minds of such as have become capable of seeing it, the glory of the truth of the Father and the Son, as uttered by this first of seers, after the grandest fashion of his insight. I am as indifferent to a reputation for orthodoxy as I despise the championship of novelty. To the untrue, the truth itself must seem unsound, for the light that is in them is darkness.

I believe, then, that Jesus Christ is the eternal son of the eternal father; that from the first of firstness Jesus is the son, because God is the father-a statement imperfect and unfit because an attempt of human thought to represent that which it cannot grasp, yet which it so believes that it must try to utter it even in speech that cannot be right. I believe therefore that the Father is the greater, that if the Father had not been, the Son could not have been. I will not apply logic to

the thesis, nor would I state it now but for the sake of what is to follow. The true heart will remember the inadequacy of our speech, and our thought also, to the things that lie near the unknown roots of our existence. In saying what I do, I only say what Paul implies when he speaks of the Lord giving up the kingdom to his father, that God may be all in all. I worship the Son as the human God, the divine, the only Man, deriving his being and power from the Father, equal with him as a son is the equal at once and the subject of his father-but making himself the equal of his father in what is most precious in Godhead, namely, Love-which is, indeed, the essence of that statement of the evangelist with which I have now to do-a higher thing than the making of the worlds and the things in them, which he did by the power of the Father, not by a self-existent power in himself, whence the apostle, to whom the Lord must have said things he did not say to the rest, or who was better able to receive what he said to all, says, 'All things were made' not by, but 'through him.'

We must not wonder things away into nonentity, but try to present them to ourselves after what fashion we are able-our shadows of the heavenly. For our very beings and understandings and consciousnesses, though but shadows in regard to any perfection either of outline or operation, are yet shadows of his being, his understanding, his consciousness, and he has cast those shadows; they are no more causally our own than his power of creation is ours.

Two Creations in Christ

In our shadow-speech then, and following with my shadow-understanding as best I can the words of the evangelist, I say, The Father, in bringing out of the unseen the things that are seen, made essential use of the Son, so that all that exists was created through him. What the difference between the part in creation of the Father and the part of the Son may be, who can understand?-but perhaps we may one day come to see into it a little; for I dare hope that, through our willed sonship, we shall come far nearer ourselves to creating. The word creation applied to the loftiest success of human genius, seems to me a mockery of humanity, itself in process of creation.

Let us read the text again: 'All things were made through him, and without him was made not one thing. That which was made in him was life.' You begin to see it? The power by which he created the worlds was given him by his father; he had in himself a greater power than that by which he made the worlds. There was

something made, not through but in him; something brought into being by himself. Here he creates in his grand way, in himself, as did the Father. 'That which was made in him was life.'

What does this mean? What is the life the apostle intends? Many forms of life have come to being through the Son, but those were results, not forms of the life that was brought to existence in him. He could not have been employed by the Father in creating, save in virtue of the life that was in him.

As to what the life of God is to himself, we can only know that we cannot know it-even that not being absolute ignorance, for no one can see that, from its very nature, he cannot understand a thing without therein approaching that thing in a most genuine manner. As to what the life of God is in relation to us, we know that it is the causing life of everything that we call life-of everything that is; and in knowing this, we know something of that life, by the very forms of its force. But the one interminable mystery, for I presume the two make but one mystery-a mystery that must be a mystery to us for ever, not because God will not explain it, but because God himself could not make us understand it-is first, how he can be self-existent, and next, how he can make other beings exist: self-existence and creation no man will ever understand. Again, regarding the matter from the side of the creature-the cause of his being is antecedent to that being; he can therefore have no knowledge of his own creation; neither could he understand that which he can do nothing like. If we could make ourselves, we should understand our creation, but to do that we must be God. And of all ideas this-that, with the self-dissatisfied, painfully circumscribed consciousness I possess, I could in any way have caused myself, is the most dismal and hopeless. Nevertheless, if I be a child of God, I must be like him, like him even in the matter of this creative energy. There must be something in me that corresponds in its childish way to the eternal might in him. But I am forestalling.

What is the Life made in Christ?

The question now is: What was that life, the thing made in the Son-made by him inside himself, not outside him-made not through but in him-the life that was his own, as God's is his own?

It was, I answer, that act in him that corresponded in him, as the son, to the self-existence of his father. Now what is the deepest in God? His power? No, for power could not make him what we mean when we say God. Evil could, of course,

never create one atom; but let us understand very plainly, that a being whose essence was only power would be such a negation of the divine that no righteous worship could be offered him: his service must be fear, and fear only. Such a being, even were he righteous in judgment, yet could not be God. The God himself whom we love could not be righteous were he not something deeper and better still than we generally mean by the word-but, alas, how little can language say without seeming to say something wrong! In one word, God is Love. Love is the deepest depth, the essence of his nature, at the root of all his being. It is not merely that he could not be God, if he had made no creatures to whom to be God; but love is the heart and hand of his creation; it is his right to create, and his power to create as well. The love that foresees creation is itself the power to create. Neither could he be righteous-that is, fair to his creatures-but that his love created them. His perfection is his love. All his divine rights rest upon his love. Ah, he is not the great monarch! The simplest peasant loving his cow, is more divine than any monarch whose monarchy is his glory. If God would not punish sin, or if he did it for anything but love, he would not be the father of Jesus Christ, the God who works as Jesus wrought.

What then, I say once more, is in Christ correspondent to the creative power of God? It must be something that comes also of love; and in the Son the love must be to the already existent. Because of that eternal love which has no beginning, the Father must have the Son. God could not love, could not be love, without making things to love: Jesus has God to love; the love of the Son is responsive to the love of the Father. The response to self-existent love is self-abnegating love. The refusal of himself is that in Jesus which corresponds to the creation of God. His love takes action, creates, in self-abjuration, in the death of self as motive; in the drowning of self in the life of God, where it lives only as love. What is life in a child? Is it not perfect response to his parents? thorough oneness with them? A child at strife with his parents, one in whom their will is not his, is no child; as a child he is dead, and his death is manifest in rigidity and contortion. His spiritual order is on the way to chaos. Disintegration has begun. Death is at work in him. See the same child yielding to the will that is righteously above his own; see the life begin to flow from the heart through the members; see the relaxing limbs; see the light rise like a fountain in his eyes, and flash from his face! Life has again its lordship!

The life of Christ is this-negatively, that he does nothing, cares for nothing for his own sake; positively, that he cares with his whole soul for the will, the pleasure of

his father. Because his father is his father, therefore he will be his child. The truth in Jesus is his relation to his father; the righteousness of Jesus is his fulfilment of that relation. Meeting this relation, loving his father with his whole being, he is not merely alive as born of God; but, giving himself with perfect will to God, choosing to die to himself and live to God, he therein creates in himself a new and higher life; and, standing upon himself, has gained the power to awake life, the divine shadow of his own, in the hearts of us his brothers and sisters, who have come from the same birth-home as himself, namely, the heart of his God and our God, his father and our father, but who, without our elder brother to do it first, would never have chosen that self-abjuration which is life, never have become alive like him. To will, not from self, but with the Eternal, is to live.

This choice of his own being, in the full knowledge of what he did; this active willing to be the Son of the Father, perfect in obedience-is that in Jesus which responds and corresponds to the self-existence of God. Jesus rose at once to the height of his being, set himself down on the throne of his nature, in the act of subjecting himself to the will of the Father as his only good, the only reason of his existence. When he died on the cross, he did that, in the wild weather of his outlying provinces in the torture of the body of his revelation, which he had done at home in glory and gladness. From the infinite beginning-for here I can speak only by contradictions-he completed and held fast the eternal circle of his existence in saying, 'Thy will, not mine, be done!' He made himself what he is by deathing himself into the will of the eternal Father, through which will he was the eternal Son-thus plunging into the fountain of his own life, the everlasting Fatherhood, and taking the Godhead of the Son. This is the life that was made in Jesus: 'That which was made in him was life.' This life, self-willed in Jesus, is the one thing that makes such life-the eternal life, the true life, possible-nay, imperative, essential, to every man, woman, and child, whom the Father has sent into the outer, that he may go back into the inner world, his heart. As the self-existent life of the Father has given us being, so the willed devotion of Jesus is his power to give us eternal life like his own-to enable us to do the same. There is no life for any man, other than the same kind that Jesus has; his disciple must live by the same absolute devotion of his will to the Father's; then is his life one with the life of the Father.

We must choose the Life that was made in Christ: Part I

Because we are come out of the divine nature, which chooses to be divine, we must choose to be divine, to be of God, to be one with God, loving and living as he loves and lives, and so be partakers of the divine nature, or we perish. Man cannot originate this life; it must be shown him, and he must choose it. God is the father of Jesus and of us-of every possibility of our being; but while God is the father of his children, Jesus is the father of their sonship; for in him is made the life which is sonship to the Father-the recognition, namely, in fact and life, that the Father has his claim upon his sons and daughters. We are not and cannot become true sons without our will willing his will, our doing following his making. It was the will of Jesus to be the thing God willed and meant him, that made him the true son of God. He was not the son of God because he could not help it, but because he willed to be in himself the son that he was in the divine idea. So with us: we must be the sons we are. We are not made to be what we cannot help being; sons and daughters are not after such fashion! We are sons and daughters in God's claim; we must be sons and daughters in our will. And we can be sons and daughters, saved into the original necessity and bliss of our being, only by choosing God for the father he is, and doing his will-yielding ourselves true sons to the absolute Father. Therein lies human bliss-only and essential. The working out of this our salvation must be pain, and the handing of it down to them that are below must ever be in pain; but the eternal form of the will of God in and for us, is intensity of bliss.

Light is an Unveiling of Life

'And the life was the light of men.'

The life of which I have now spoken became light to men in the appearing of him in whom it came into being. The life became light that men might see it, and themselves live by choosing that life also, by choosing so to live, such to be.

There is always something deeper than anything said—a something of which all human, all divine words, figures, pictures, motion-forms, are but the outer laminar spheres through which the central reality shines more or less plainly. Light itself is but the poor outside form of a deeper, better thing, namely, life. The life is Christ. The light too is Christ, but only the body of Christ. The life is Christ himself. The light is what we see and shall see in him; the life is what we may be in him. **The life 'is a light by abundant clarity invisible;'** it is the unspeakable unknown; it must become light such as men can see before men can know it. Therefore the obedient human God appeared as the obedient divine man, doing the works of his father—the things, that is, which his father did—doing them humbly before unfriendly brethren. The Son of the Father must take his own form in the substance of flesh, that he may be seen of men, and so become the light of men—not that men may have light, but that men may have life;—that, seeing what they could not originate, they may, through the life that is in them, begin to hunger after the life of which they are capable, and which is essential to their being;—that the life in them may long for him who is their life, and thirst for its own perfection, even as root and stem may thirst for the flower for whose sake, and through whose presence in them, they exist. That the child of God may become the son of God by beholding the Son, the life revealed in light; that the radiant heart of the Son of God may be the sunlight to his fellows; that the idea may be drawn out by the presence and drawing of the Ideal—that Ideal, the perfect Son of the Father, was sent to his brethren.

The Prayer of the Son

Let us not forget that the devotion of the Son could never have been but for the devotion of the Father, who never seeks his own glory one atom more than does the Son; who is devoted to the Son, and to all his sons and daughters, with a devotion perfect and eternal, with fathomless unselfishness. The whole being and doing of Jesus on earth is the same as his being and doing from all eternity, that whereby he is the blessed son—God of the father—God; it is the shining out of that life that men might see it. It is a being like God, a doing of the will of God, a working of the works of God, therefore an unveiling of the Father in the Son, that men may know him. It is the prayer of the Son to the rest of the sons to come back to the Father, to be reconciled to the Father, to behave to the Father as he does. He seems to me to say:

'I know your father, for he is my father; I know him because I have been with him from eternity. You do not know him; I have come to you to tell you that as I am, such is he; that he is just like me, only greater and better. He only is the true, original good; I am true because I seek nothing but his will. He only is all in all; I am not all in all, but he is my father, and I am the son in whom his heart of love is satisfied. Come home with me, and sit with me on the throne of my obedience. Together we will do his will, and be glad with him, for his will is the only good. You may do with me as you please; I will not defend myself. Because I speak true, my witness is unswerving; I stand to it, come what may. If I held my face to my testimony only till danger came close, and then prayed the Father for twelve legions of angels to deliver me, that would be to say the Father would do anything for his children until it began to hurt him. I bear witness that my father is such as I. In the face of death I assert it, and dare death to disprove it. Kill me; do what you will and can against me; my father is true, and I am true in saying that he is true. Danger or hurt cannot turn me aside from this my witness. Death can only kill my body; he cannot make me his captive. Father, thy will be done! The pain will pass; it will be but for a time! Gladly will I suffer that men may know that I live, and that thou art my life. Be with me, father, that it may not be more than I can bear.'

Friends, if you think anything less than this could redeem the world, or make blessed any child that God has created, you know neither the Son nor the Father.

The Bond of the Universe: Love

The bond of the universe, the chain that holds it together, the one active unity, the harmony of things, the negation of difference, the reconciliation of all forms, all shows, all wandering desires, all returning loves; the fact at the root of every vision, revealing that 'love is the only good in the world,' and selfishness the one thing hateful, in the city of the living God unutterable, is the devotion of the Son to the Father. It is the life of the universe. It is not the fact that God created all things, that makes the universe a whole; but that he through whom he created them loves him perfectly, is eternally content in his father, is satisfied to be because his father is with him. It is not the fact that God is all in all, that unites the universe; it is the love of the Son to the Father. For **of no oneness comes unity; there can be no oneness where there is only one.** For the very beginnings of unity there must be two. Without Christ, therefore, there could be no universe. **The reconciliation wrought by Jesus is not the primary source of unity, of safety to the world; that reconciliation was the necessary working out of the eternal**

antecedent fact, the fact making itself potent upon the rest of the family-that God and Christ are one, are father and son, the Father loving the Son as only the Father can love, the Son loving the Father as only the Son can love. The prayer of the Lord for unity between men and the Father and himself, springs from the eternal need of love. The more I regard it, the more I am lost in the wonder and glory of the thing. But for the Father and the Son, no two would care a jot the one for the other. It might be the right way for creatures to love because of mere existence, but what two creatures would ever have originated the loving? I cannot for a moment believe it would have been I. Even had I come into being as now with an inclination to love, selfishness would soon have overborne it. But if the Father loves the Son, if the very music that makes the harmony of life lies, not in the theory of love in the heart of the Father, but in the fact of it, in the burning love in the hearts of Father and Son, then glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the spirit of both, the fatherhood of the Father meeting and blending with the sonhood of the Son, and drawing us up into the glory of their joy, to share in the thoughts of love that pass between them, in their thoughts of delight and rest in each other, in their thoughts of joy in all the little ones. The life of Jesus is the light of men, revealing to them the Father.

We must choose the Life that was made in Christ: Part II

But light is not enough; light is for the sake of life. We too must have life in ourselves. We too must, like the Life himself, live. We can live in no way but that in which Jesus lived, in which life was made in him. That way is, to give up our life. This is the one supreme action of life possible to us for the making of life in ourselves. Christ did it of himself, and so became light to us, that we might be able to do it in ourselves, after him, and through his originating act. We must do it ourselves, I say. The help that he has given and gives, the light and the spirit-working of the Lord, the spirit, in our hearts, is all in order that we may, as we must, do it ourselves. Till then we are not alive; life is not made in us. The whole strife and labour and agony of the Son with every man, is to get him to die as he died. All preaching that aims not at this, is a building with wood and hay and stubble. If I say not with whole heart, 'My father, do with me as thou wilt, only help me against myself and for thee;' if I cannot say, 'I am thy child, the inheritor of thy spirit, thy being, a part of thyself, glorious in thee, but grown poor in me: let me be thy dog, thy horse, thy anything thou willest; let me be thine in any shape the love that is my Father may please to have me; let me be thine in any way, and my own or another's in no way but thine;'-if we cannot, fully as this, give ourselves to the Father, then we have not yet laid hold upon that for which Christ has laid hold upon us. The faith that a man may, nay, must put in God, reaches above earth and sky, stretches beyond the farthest outlying star of the creatable universe. The question is not at present, however, of removing mountains, a thing that will one day be simple to us, but of waking and rising from the dead now.

When a man truly and perfectly says with Jesus, and as Jesus said it, 'Thy will be done,' he closes the everlasting life-circle; the life of the Father and the Son flows through him; he is a part of the divine organism. Then is the prayer of the Lord in him fulfilled: 'I in them and thou in me, that they made be made perfect in one.' The Christ in us, is the spirit of the perfect child toward the perfect father. The Christ in us is our own true nature made blossom in us by the Lord, whose life is the light of men that it may become the life of men; for our true nature is childhood to the Father.

Friends, those of you who know, or suspect, that these things are true, let us arise and live-arise even in the darkest moments of spiritual stupidity, when hope itself sees nothing to hope for. Let us not trouble ourselves about the cause of our earthliness, except we know it to be some unrighteousness in us, but go at once

to the Life. Never, never let us accept as consolation the poor suggestion, that the cause of our deadness is physical. Can it be comfort to know that this body of ours, because of the death in it, is too much for the spirit-which ought not merely to triumph over it, but to inspire it with subjection and obedience? Let us comfort ourselves in the thought of the Father and the Son. So long as there dwells harmony, so long as the Son loves the Father with all the love the Father can welcome, all is well with the little ones. God is all right-why should we mind standing in the dark for a minute outside his window? Of course we miss the inness, but there is a bliss of its own in waiting. What if the rain be falling, and the wind blowing; what if we stand alone, or, more painful still, have some dear one beside us, sharing our outness; what even if the window be not shining, because of the curtains of good inscrutable drawn across it; let us think to ourselves, or say to our friend, 'God is; Jesus is not dead; nothing can be going wrong, however it may look so to hearts unfinished in childness.' Let us say to the Lord, 'Jesus, art thou loving the Father in there? Then we out here will do his will, patiently waiting till he open the door. We shall not mind the wind or the rain much. Perhaps thou art saying to the Father, *"Thy little ones need some wind and rain: their buds are hard; the flowers do not come out. I cannot get them made blessed without a little more winter-weather."* Then perhaps the Father will say, *"Comfort them, my son Jesus, with the memory of thy patience when thou wast missing me. Comfort them that thou wast sure of me when everything about thee seemed so unlike me, so unlike the place thou hadst left."* ' In a word, let us be at peace, because peace is at the heart of things-peace and utter satisfaction between the Father and the Son-in which peace they call us to share; in which peace they promise that at length, when they have their good way with us, we shall share.

Before us, then, lies a bliss unspeakable, a bliss beyond the thought or invention of man, to every child who will fall in with the perfect imagination of the Father. His imagination is one with his creative will. **The thing that God imagines, that thing exists.** When the created falls in with the will of him who 'loved him into being,' then all is well; thenceforward the mighty creation goes on in him upon higher and yet higher levels, in more and yet more divine airs. Thy will, O God, be done! Nought else is other than loss, than decay, than corruption. There is no life but that born of the life that the Word made in himself by doing thy will, which life is the light of men. Through that light is born the life of men-the same life in them that came first into being in Jesus. As he laid down his life, so must men lay down their lives, that as he liveth they may live also. That which was made in him

was life, and the life is the light of men; and yet his own, to whom he was sent, did not believe him.