



I am delighted that this book is back in print. In the 1950s Professor Finlayson was a beloved figure in Wales. He would give Bible readings at the various 'Keswick Conventions' held in Barry and in Llandrindod Wells. His gaunt skeletal-like features and the Scottish prose gave him an other-worldly holiness. What he said seemed to me as a student profound and Christ-centred. It was what I came to think of and love as Highland piety, the product of Covenanter sacrifice, the Disruption, the Dundee awakening under McCheyne, communion seasons, the metrical psalms and the Westminster Standards. This had produced Professor Finlayson. We ministers hung around him and he would sit in the congregations of the Barry Conventions in the evenings and listen appreciatively to Omri Jenkins and Paul Tucker whose preaching was different but just as beautiful. They were golden days. It was Omri Jenkins who first spoke to me about this book, *The Cross in the Experience of our Lord*, to ensure that I read it. He had loaned his copy to someone and it had disappeared and then it was out of print. He missed it; preaching at Easter he would consult it each year. He was searching for a copy. I have had my own copy for years and love its fragrance of a Saviour's dying love for sinners.

*Geoff Thomas,*

*Minister at Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth*

There are some books so illuminating and helpful that they ought never to be out of print, and this is one. R. A. Finlayson's penetrating insights into Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus and the Last Supper lead naturally to a moving exposition both of Gethsemane as the foretaste of Calvary and Calvary as the arena of atonement. This is a book short in length, but heavy in theological weight, deep in biblical analysis, measured in doctrinal expression and rich in devotional value. I cannot commend it highly enough.

*Iain D. Campbell,*

*Minister, Free Church of Scotland, Point, Isle of Lewis*

With what winsomeness could Professor Finlayson deal with our Lord's suffering and death! Here are the talks he gave at a Welsh convention in 1954, in which he led his listeners into the heart of Christian teaching on the one who bore our sins in his own





body on the cross. This is profound theology, expressed in beautiful and gripping words that touch both our minds and hearts. As we read, we can sit at the feet of a wonderful preacher who took delight in leading his hearers to see the glory of Christ crucified.

*Allan Harman,  
Research Professor of Old Testament,  
Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne, Australia*

No subject is more important than the cross. This invaluable book cannot fail to enrich our understanding and deepen our devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Derek Prime,  
Author and former pastor of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh*





# THE CROSS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR LORD

R. A. FINLAYSON

CHRISTIAN  
**HERITAGE**





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## FOREWORD

The Incarnation is the central action of God in history and preaching is the primary means by which God now makes himself present in this world, as blessing to his people and as warning and curse to those who reject him. It therefore surely stands to reason that the proclamation of the reality and significance of the Incarnation is surely the most important thing which any Christian preacher can ever do. And yet it is a strange fact that church history has perhaps produced more great preachers of Christian truth in general than it has of the Incarnation in particular.

Such a claim perhaps needs a little elaboration. Many are the men who have been able to articulate the doctrines of divine sovereignty, of sin, of redemption and reconciliation. Many are the men who have been able to





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expound the person and the work of Jesus Christ with power and eloquence. Yet it seems that those who are able to articulate the depths of the Incarnation beyond, for example, the mere didactic ('this is what Christ taught') or active ('this is what Christ did and does') are few and far between. There is surely a profundity in the gospel narratives and the New Testament witness which goes beyond the functional. Of this too many of us preachers seem to have little grasp. What of the humiliation of the Logos in the very act of incarnation? The amazing references in the gospels to Jesus' growth in stature? The tears shed at the tomb of Lazarus? The heartache and longing expressed over Jerusalem's treatment of the Lord's prophets? The agony in the garden when the weight of the impending betrayal and suffering seemed almost to overwhelm him? The cry of dereliction on the cross? The continuing relevance of his humanity as he sits now at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for his people?

In each of these elements of Christology, there is something more profound than can be expressed in mere concepts or formulas. There are elements of personal activity, of passions, of emotions and of movements of the soul which push our puny human minds to their limits and which point to realities in the Incarnation which are hard to grasp. That is one reason why we have the gospels: sometimes narrative, like poetry, can provide a richness of dramatic texture and point to realities which are not easily expressed in isolated conceptual statements. I suspect it is also why good preaching on the Incarnation is hard to come by: preachers rightly fear overstepping the mark and trampling on sacred ground by misrepresenting this most



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holy of places. We rightly wish to avoid making God too small, too human, too much like us by imputing to him elements of fallen human mediocrity or creatureliness. Yet such caution, while commendable, is problematic if it fails to do justice to the central fact of the Incarnation, that which the church sought so strenuously to safeguard in the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Formula: Christ is God, true God, manifest in the flesh; and thus he is a revelation of who God is and how he is disposed towards us.

Great preachers of the Incarnation may be a rare commodity but they have existed. Martin Luther is perhaps the most famous of all. His Postil Sermons for Advent are miniature masterpieces of the genre. John Henry Newman may have been defective on a whole host of points but some of his Anglican sermons on the Incarnation are simply superb. Then, Scottish Presbyterianism has produced a number of great Incarnational preachers. Hugh Martin, the nineteenth century Free Church of Scotland minister had a peculiar sensitivity to Christ's reality as a human being and his sermons on Gethsemane and Calvary repay careful study. Further, the Free Church has in our own day given us Donald MacLeod: any who have had the privilege of hearing 'the Foot' preach on Christ will no doubt have vivid memories of it. Indeed, some years ago he gave a lecture at Westminster Theological Seminary on Christology: that lecture was among the most moving Christological sermons I have ever heard.

Less well-known, though undeservedly so, is the preacher whose book lies before you now: R. A. Finlayson. Finlayson happens to have been one of Donald Macleod's



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predecessors in the Chair of Systematic Theology at Free Church College, Edinburgh. It would be fascinating to know what influence he might had had on the younger man; what is certain, however, is that he too is a representative of that stream of Christian preaching which wrestled not only with the Incarnation as a doctrinal concept but also a reality in the history of salvation and the revelation and actions of God.

Sadly, Finlayson never wrote a major Christological tome but the book you hold in your hands is full of both Christological wisdom and models of what Incarnational preaching should be. I leave it to my friend and former colleague on session at Bon Accord Free Church, Dr Ian MacDonald in the following piece to introduce Finlayson as a man; suffice it here to say that you are in for a treat. Here is faithful preaching which seeks to go beyond the normal parameters of preaching on Christ and yet to remain faithful – indeed, more faithful by virtue of that fact – to the Christ not only of Paul but of the gospel narratives too.

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November 2012.





## INTRODUCTION

Tradition has it that one celebrated divine when responding to a publisher's request for sermon material, counselled his literary patron, 'Mr Printer, do your work quickly, for preachers are soon forgotten!' Sadly, experience confirms the accuracy of this pessimistic generalisation. For author and for publisher alike, the rewards from printed sermons rank far down the scale of literary remuneration. Yet, preachers ought not to be so readily consigned to oblivion for the Epistle to the Hebrews urges its readers to keep in mind the memory of their departed guides, those who had spoken to them the Word of God and who had made known to them the way of life from the Word of Life (Heb. 3:7). That exhortation is itself sufficient justification for reprinting this choice specimen of the preaching gifts of one who, in his day, was a source of blessing to many.





## THE CROSS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR LORD

Roderick Alick Finlayson was born on 18 November 1895 to Roderick Finlayson, merchant at Lochcarron, and his wife Chirsty MacLennan, the family home being situated at Hazelbrae on the western extremity of the picturesque village of Lochcarron which straddles the northern shore of the sea loch in Wester Ross from which the village is named. When the mother gave birth, the father was ill with pneumonia and it is said that Roderick, his only son, was baptised over his father's coffin.

Down the years Lochcarron has been the scene of many notable ministries, among them that of Aeneas Sage (1694-1774) whose physical prowess no less than his spiritual vigour was deployed to subdue the passions of his unruly parishioners. Another spiritual genius, whose exploits on behalf of the Kingdom of God are still spoken of in the locality, was Lachlan Mackenzie (1754-1819) or 'Mister Lachlan' as he was invariably called. Neither of these men was a native of Lochcarron but the community itself gave rise to several notable churchmen such as Donald Kennedy of Kishorn, an elder and close associate of Mister Lachlan, and the progenitor of an eminent line of Highland ministers which included Dr John Kennedy of Dingwall (1819-1884). Kishorn was also the birthplace of the Rev Murdo Mackenzie (1835-1912), minister of the Free North Church, Inverness, who, more than any other churchman, influenced the Free Church in the Highlands to remain loyal to her Disruption testimony during the church union crisis in 1900. Professor Donald Maclean DD (1869-1943), another eminent Free Churchman, was also a native of Lochcarron and so with such a cluster of Free Church luminaries emanat-



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ing from that small Highland community we can be sure that from an early age R. A. Finlayson followed the ebb and flow of the church's fortunes with an eager interest.

Like others of his generation Roderick, when he had reached his teens, had to go to Dingwall on the eastern seaboard of Ross to complete his secondary education. There he lived in lodgings on Mill Street and on Sundays he worshipped in the church made famous by Dr John Kennedy. Under the pastoral care of the warmly evangelical Rev Norman Campbell – one of the small band of ministers who remained loyal to the Free Church following the union of 1900\* – Roderick's awareness of the spiritual dimension to life was deepened and intensified.

In October 1912 he matriculated at the University of Aberdeen but with what intention as regards a vocation in life it is not possible to say. Undoubtedly he had developed spiritually under Norman Campbell in Dingwall but it was not until 1915 that he made public profession of his faith by seeking admission to the communicant membership of the Free Church. In later years he himself was given to say to others on the threshold of manhood that he had found it to be a stabilising experience to have made profession of his faith at the Lord's Table. No doubt the timing of his decision was significant for it followed on to the outbreak of the First World War. To a world already adrift on a sea of change there had now been added the perils of war which

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\* In 1900, the majority of Free Church ministers, along with their congregations, united with the United Presbyterian Church to form the United Free Church. Those Free Church ministers and congregations who declined to go in with the majority did so for doctrinal and ecclesiastical reasons.



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Roddy and so many of his contemporaries were to face in Flanders fields. It is not surprising then that he felt the urge to identify himself with the people of God as one having laid hold on a 'refuge most secure'. And so in February 1915 he returned from Aberdeen to Dingwall for the communion season and was there received into the membership of the congregation that had known him as a youth and that had watched over, with prayerful interest, his spiritual and intellectual development. He returned to Aberdeen, but by the end of the year he had enlisted with his County Regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders, and some months later he found himself in France with the British Expeditionary Force. After being in action for many months he, unlike many of his companions, was spared to return to Aberdeen, although not without the scars of battle, and, resuming his studies, he graduated MA in 1919.

When R. A. Finlayson first matriculated at Aberdeen, the Professor of English Language and Literature was H. J. C. Grierson, later Sir Herbert Grierson. Teacher and student alike revelled in the beauty of the English language and even at that early stage, Finlayson's giftedness as a literary critic was such that he was urged on completion of his Arts degree to do post-graduate work at Cambridge University. No doubt had he chosen to do so he could have followed a path to honour and greatness of a different kind, but by then he had pledged his allegiance to another teacher and to a higher cause. His delight in literature was now subordinated to serve the interests of the Book of Books, and in October 1919 he enrolled as a student of divinity at the Free Church



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College, Edinburgh. By 1922 he had completed his training, and as a probationer of the church was eligible to receive a call. Interestingly the first approach that came to him was from his native parish of Lochcarron which, as it happened, became vacant at that time. However, Finlayson, according to the Presbytery's minute, 'though he highly appreciated the people's confidence in him, did not regard it as his duty to be settled in his native parish'. There the matter ended and shortly afterwards he accepted a call to Urray (Muir-of-Ord) in Ross-shire.

In Urray he pursued his ministry in every way possible. With his domestic necessities being attended to by an older sister to whom he was deeply attached, he devoted himself to pastoring his people and to perfecting his preaching ministry. In one important respect he was less than well-equipped for pulpit ministry. In a day prior to the introduction of electronic sound amplification, he had to cope with the handicap of a voice which, although pleasant and distinctive in its West Highland cadence, was lacking in richness and resonance. Even so, the clarity of his enunciation ensured that the listener could follow him without strain.

Out of the pulpit his gift for story-telling made him a most entertaining companion. Although devoid of any capacity for mimicry, his gift for seizing on some individual idiosyncrasy or mannerism enabled him to portray another's character with remarkable and amusing vividness; and that, together with his scintillating wit and his genius for saying a thing well, ensured that company gravitated towards him. He had the ability, had he used it, to have written a series of character sketches of ministers



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and men of the Highlands that, for impish and incisive description, would have out-rivalled the considerable achievements in that direction of Norman C Macfarlane in his *Apostles of the North* and even challenged for first place the work of the acknowledged genius in the field, Donald Sage in his *Memorabilia Domestica*. Finlayson often contemplated doing such a thing but discretion appears to have prevailed in this instance.

It was of course as a preacher and not as a story-teller that R. A. Finlayson was revered. He was a powerful preacher, not in terms of voice production, but on account of his ability to make the Scriptures speak powerfully to his hearers. The power which characterised his preaching may be attributed to his personal knowledge of God, his intimate knowledge of Scripture, his intuitive understanding of people and his consummate skill with words. A devout man, ever conscious of his own need of a Saviour and of the power of Christ to save and to satisfy, he was also an exceptionally shrewd judge of character, one who knew instinctively how to get his message home to other minds. Thus equipped he brought out of the treasury of God things new and old in such a way as to captivate any who had the slightest sympathy with his mission and his message. Truths that were old and commonplace he re-stated in such thrilling and felicitous diction as made them take on new lustre, and at the same time, his incisive mind wrested from familiar passages new insights that gave added sparkle to the truth. Yet for all his adroitness of analysis and expression, his appeal was ultimately to the heart rather than to the mind of his hearers. He understood people and their problems, and



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he brought the healing power of the gospel to bear upon them in a most winsome and affecting way. Favoured indeed was the community of Urray to have enjoyed such a ministry for eighteen years.

For many, the year 1939 saw the passing of the old order and Finlayson, like many others, was called to new spheres of service. The tenor of his way was no longer to be cast in the sequestered vale of rural life. He accepted a call to Hope Street Gaelic Church (now St Vincent Street) in Glasgow. The death of his sister shortly before he left Urray had been a source of great sorrow to him, but in October 1940 his marriage to Miss Rachel Mackay, who came from a Tain family of which several members were already rendering sterling service on behalf of the Free Church both at home and abroad, brought a new and welcome companionship to his life and, in due time, a son in whom he took great delight. His tenure in Hope Street was relatively short and fragmented by secondment from 1941-1944 to the Army Chaplaincy Service in which he rose to be Deputy-Assistant Chaplain-General at Scottish Command.

The welfare of the British soldiery was always at the heart of his affections and his anxious concern for them featured prominently in his public intercession. I recall him at the Assembly of 1971 remarking with great feeling on the fact that at the Wednesday morning hour given to public prayer for the church and nation, not one of those called on to pray had had any thought for the servicemen then under terrorist attack in Ulster. To his mind this was a grave dereliction of duty on the part of the church. He himself was attracted to the comradeship of Army life.



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The picture of a disciplined body of men enlisting in the service of the King of Kings to endure whatever hardships that service demanded, had great appeal for him. On one occasion during the war he was invited in his capacity as DACG to preach in King's College Chapel, Aberdeen to the Officers Training Corps. Taking as his theme the commitment of those who served the first king of Israel and as his text, 'There went with him a band of men whose hearts God had touched' (1 Sam. 10:26), he set himself to conscript the souls of these young men to the allegiance of the Saviour. Finlayson had a fine sense of occasion and could always find a text and a mood to suit the need of the hour.

Returning to Hope Street Church in late 1944 his ministry there was further interrupted by duties devolving on him as Moderator of the 1945 Free Church General Assembly. Then in 1946 he demitted his charge when he was appointed to the Chair of Systematic Theology in the Free Church College, Edinburgh where he trained a whole generation of ministers before retiring in 1966 on attaining his seventieth year. In the classroom, students listened with rapt attention to his lucid and soul-warming delineation of the glorious doctrines of redeeming grace, and his services as a lecturer were constantly in demand in student circles of every kind. In such meetings he revelled in the cut and thrust of debate. Similarly on the floor of the Assembly he was a very effective debater. When his indignation was aroused he could be very crushing, on occasion excessively so, both in print and in public debate; but his ire was always given vent to in the interests of a cause and never in defence of himself personally.



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To those who knew him only from his reputation as a controversialist, it always came as a surprise to discover on meeting him face to face, how kind and courteous he was, a modest and a charming man, open-hearted and open-handed. He was a truly humble man who could never be persuaded to talk about himself, far less write about himself. He left no memoirs.

Undoubtedly to the general public he was first and foremost a controversialist, best known for his fiercely outspoken views ventilated in the pages of the *Monthly Record* which he edited from 1937-1958. There he did not hesitate to bring under review and evaluate against Biblical standards, the decadence which he saw emerging in all sections of society. In a day when it was not the done thing to criticise the Royals, he did not shrink from condemning members of the Royal Family for their disregard for the sanctity of the Lord's Day, warning them of the nemesis that awaited those who scorned the law of God.

He was quick to realise the all-pervasive effect which television would have on society in general and on family life in particular, and he deplored the then incipient tendency, now alas a Gaderene rush, of the BBC controllers in their programme selection to pander to the lowest common denominator in society. It was, in his view, the duty of the monopolistic BBC to maintain the Reithian maxim of giving to the general public something better, more wholesome and more uplifting than the public wanted. The spinelessness of the BBC's religious advisors was something that particularly incensed him and he was fearless in his denunciation both of the permissive



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opinions that were increasingly coming to the fore-front, and of the failure of church leaders to condemn what was so obviously subversive of national righteousness. For him as for the apostle Paul, there was a spirit of truth and a spirit of error; right and wrong were not meaningless abstractions and morality was not to be viewed as situation-dependent. Such outspokenness, although it captured the headlines, did nothing to endear him to the leaders of contemporary thought, or the framers of opinion either in the body of the church, or in the world of learning or at the seat of government. All too often his was a lone voice of protest for it was an age not just of unbelief in the world but of unbelief in the church. Like Milton's Abdiel, Finlayson held unswervingly to his convictions.

*' . . . faithful found  
Among the faithless, faithful only he;  
Among innumerable false, unmoved,  
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;  
Nor number, nor example with him wrought  
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind  
Though single.'*

Despite his isolation from the church in the world and from its corridors of power, Finlayson was far from being a separatist. He had a catholicity of outlook that allowed him to share in fellowship with members of other Christian churches to an extent unequalled by any of his contemporaries in the Free Church of Scotland. Neither



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diversities of church orders nor of forms of worship inhibited him from associating with other Christians where there was a unity in the Spirit. He was prepared to make common cause with all who shared a like precious faith in the truth revealed in Scripture and who enjoyed a common experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. His was that true ecumenicity which belongs to the domain of faith and doctrine. Consequently he always counted it a privilege to be invited to minister the Word to Christian believers who gathered together, as at the Llandrindod Wells Convention in 1954, for the purpose of being built up in their faith.

The addresses which formed the morning Bible readings at the Convention are here reprinted in the colloquial style in which they were delivered. It is not of course in the style to which he himself, purist that he was, would have consented for a published version. The original publication was put through the press without consultation with the preacher, but we are all indebted to the vision which inspired the Convention officials at the time to make these addresses available to a wider public. The content is truly the finest of the wheat, given in good measure, heaped up, pressed down and running over. And for those of us who can cast our minds back to life's glorious morning when first we heard his preaching, what blessed memories are here evoked! What rich recollections are here called forth! We hear again the messenger of grace, and sense anew the tenderness, the earnestness, the unction with which he proclaimed the consolations of the gospel to eager hearts. The person and work of the Saviour was always to be found in the



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forefront of Finlayson's preaching. In the pages that follow, that mighty and mysterious work accomplished on Calvary's cross by the God, who was both creator and redeemer, is brought before us in all its greatness, with clarity, reverence and spiritual insight. In the suffering Saviour we see the holiness, the glory and the grace of the God with whom we have to do.

R. A. Finlayson died in Edinburgh on 19 February 1989, and his mortal remains were laid to rest in the burying ground of Lochcarron, there to await the resurrection of the just.

*I. R. MacDonald*





PART ONE

THE CREATOR AS REDEEMER







## CHAPTER 1

### THE CREATOR AS REDEEMER

*'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*

*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. 4:3-6).*

It is this passage on which I would like to dwell, hoping to gather in your thoughts around this great thing that had happened when the Holy Spirit shone into our hearts with the light of the knowledge of God's glory, radiant from the face of Jesus Christ.





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The situation that Paul and his fellow-workers met with at Corinth was sad and discouraging in the extreme. But it is a situation that has been all too familiar to the gospel preacher since that day. The gospel was 'hid' to many in Corinth, a closed book, a mystery impenetrable. And it was a hid gospel for the saddest of all reasons, 'The god of this world blinded the eyes of them that believed not'.

Here were two processes going on. They believed not, they closed their eyes to the light they had, and then the god of this world removed their sight, and now they cannot see, for the god of this world took away their vision. They refused to believe, and now they cannot believe. What use is it then, to preach to such people the gospel of Jesus Christ? What use is it to uplift Christ before the eyes of men and women who are sightless? This is a dilemma that the gospel preacher still finds himself in. He is commanded to uplift Christ in the gospel to men who have no eyes to see him, to men who cannot receive him!

Paul faced that problem in all its implications, and he fell back on God, on the God who saved him, and the God who did such great things in his own experience. That was indeed the Creator-God, the God who made the worlds, the God who brought light out of primeval darkness. He was the God who shone in their hearts and gave a new light, 'The light of the knowledge of the glory of God', and that light reached him and his fellow believers 'in the face of Jesus Christ'.

Now that is where you and I stand today. We are dealing with a Creator-God, and his creative work has

been manifested in us, and we are assuredly witnesses to the fact that nothing is too hard for the Lord. We are miracles of creative and redemptive grace. Let us think together of the wondrous work of divine illumination, when God shone in our hearts with the light of the knowledge of his glory when first we met Jesus. And we are to ponder the great and glorious fact that, while once we were darkness, now we are light in the Lord, so that we may walk as children of light.

Let us consider the three great facts that we have in this passage. First of all, how did God do this great work of illumination in our hearts? Then, what kind of light did he bring to our hearts? And then, through what medium did that light reach us? What is the firmament from which the light of divine illumination has shone upon our darkened hearts to give us new perception, new understanding, new light in the Lord?

*THE WAY OF ILLUMINATION*

First of all then, how has God done this great work of illumination in our hearts? It is the God who caused the light to shine out of the darkness who has shone in our hearts. Here Paul brings us back to the God of Creation, and lets us see him at work once again on a new creation, and he seems to find in the old creation an emblem and a token of the new. It may indeed be true that that is why God has given us such a clear and full account of his first creation, that we might follow his footprints, and see the Creator-God becoming the Redeeming-God in Jesus Christ. For we do believe that the first creation contains, to the spiritual eye, a blueprint of the second creation,

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and that if we follow the footprints of the creating God we shall see there tokens of the Saviour we have met in Jesus Christ. For we believe that the work that God has done in our hearts none but the Creator could do. We believe that it was the God of Genesis who came to work out a new creation by his own almighty power.

For here again God is at work as of old with a creative word. You remember that when the world of old was shrouded in the darkness of night, God came forth with majesty and uttered the great *fiat*, 'Let there be light!' That word was a putting forth of creative power, and it cleft, like a beam of light, its way through the night; it scattered the darkness, and light dawned upon a dead and deserted world. We believe that that is precisely what God, in Jesus Christ, has done in our hearts where the darkness and deadness and desolation of death had reigned. When friends spoke to us of Jesus and asked us to look upon his pierced hands and side, we could not see, we could not understand, we were like Robert Murray McCheyne, who testified in his own experience:

*I oft read with pleasure, to soothe or engage,  
Isaiah's wild measure, and John's simple page,  
But e'en when they pictured the blood-sprinkled Tree,  
Jehovah Tsidkenu seem'd nothing to me.*

That was the testimony of many souls. But in a day of grace, a word of authority came from God; it was truly a creative word, it cleft a way for itself into the night that covered our nature, and what was impossible for human power and human skill to do, God, by a word



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of authority, did himself. He broke our darkness, he scattered the clouds that enveloped us, and lo! the day dawned, we saw light, spiritual light, God had spoken a creative word.

And God is at work as of old in a progressive development of light. We remember that, in the first creation, light came progressively. It was not the sun in its meridian splendour that shone; indeed there is evidence that the sun had come at a much later period than the light. But the light did come, it came to wax and grow. And it is significant that at every period in God's creative work, we read, 'And the evening and the morning were the first day, the evening and the morning were the second day', and so on. Why should it be evening and morning? This is not after the manner of man's toil; he works from morning to evening. It is not enough to say that this is a Jewish division of time. We have to get behind that Jewish division of time, and ask how it came about that the Jew was taught to regard time as moving from evening to morning. It was God's pattern of workmanship. He is always facing the light, his back is on the evening, his face is towards the waxing light, and the rising sun. And if that was true in the natural creation, it is blessedly true in the spiritual creation. When God shines in our hearts with spiritual illumination, it is twilight with our souls; we see, though we see but dimly.

Yet God comes with waxing light, and as God's work develops, the light progresses until, eventually, it reaches noonday splendour. Our face is towards the sun-rising, and our souls are looking towards the meridian splendour of God's fully developed work, and of God's



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self-revelation to our souls. We are always going from the evening to the morning as the work of grace progresses in our souls.

We know that God is at work once again, in an ordered sequence of events, as he was in the first creation, for we know that there was a sequence in the divine operation. But the light was a harbinger of all life upon earth. As long as night had shrouded the world there was nothing on earth but desolation and death; nothing could live where the earth was enveloped in darkness; in the outer cold of space there was nothing but death. But when light came, things began to happen on earth. Not only did the clouds lift and the darkness break, and the day dawn, and the mountains of snow and ice melt, but life came with the light. The grass began to grow in the field, the trees in the forest, fish were placed in the ocean, birds in the air, beasts in the field, and eventually man came. But the light was the prerequisite of life, and the harbinger of every blessing that God was to give to the world.

In like manner, is it not true that while the darkness of nature shrouded our hearts, there was nothing there but desolation and death? As long as we are ignorant of God in Jesus Christ we are spiritually dead; there can be no life at all as long as we are estranged from God, and aliens to his life and love. But when that light shone into our hearts, then life came. It was a harbinger of every blessing; every growth and every development in our being came because the light of the knowledge of Jesus shone into our hearts.

Is it not true then, that we, who have been saved by grace, have felt the creative power of God? Is it not true

that the God who laid the foundations of that first creation, and brought light out of primeval darkness, is the God who has shone into our hearts, and laid the foundations of a new creation which sin will not mar, and the flesh and the Devil cannot destroy? Yes, our dealings have been with the Creator-God who made himself known savingly and redeemingly to us in Jesus Christ his Son.

*THE NATURE OF THE ILLUMINATION*

And what light did God bring to our darkened hearts? It is called here, 'The light of the knowledge of the glory of God'. Let us try to examine the nature of that light. It is always difficult to examine the light. Even natural light evades investigation to a large extent. Yet we know there are several kinds of rays that blend together to make what we ordinarily call white light. Light can be broken up into its component rays, so we think God has broken up here spiritual light into three component rays.

First of all, the quality, the very nature of the divine illumination. It is God's own glory that came back to our desolate hearts. You see, that was the dignity and the honour of man in his first creation, that he was the depository of God's glory. God gave to the man he made in his image his own fellowship and his own glory. Sin came and desecrated the temple of man's nature, and God departed and took his glory away. And the fires on the altar of man's heart went out, and the temple of the human soul was left desolate, desecrated, and unclean. And that was the state of man by nature.

But when God came back in redemption, it was the divine glory that returned to the temple that had been



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cleansed, and to an altar on which the blood of Calvary had been sprinkled. And God returned in his glory to the desolate and darkened heart of man, for it was the life of God in the quickening of the Holy Spirit that came to us in the day of our redemption. We became partakers of the divine nature, and the uncreated glory of God returned to the temple of the human soul. That is really the nature of the light, it is the glory of God's life and God's presence and God's fellowship, that has come to us.

But here it is called the *knowledge* of the glory of God. Well, you know how little knowledge we have of natural light, how little knowledge we have of the sun in the heavens. Sometimes by means of the spectroscope, or by means of the natural spectrum we call the rainbow, we do get a glimpse of the multi-splendour and glory of the light of Nature. Yet, to a large extent, the glory of the sun is hid from us. In its blazing light it is beyond our perception and our understanding. Yet an amazing thing has happened when God shone into our hearts: he gave us the knowledge of his own divine glory. He came nigh to our understanding, to our apprehensions, and our final faculties were brought into close, intimate touch with the glory of the invisible God. God in Jesus Christ came within reach of finite man. And now our whole manhood can embrace the knowledge that he has given us. Our minds can see, our consciences can interpret, our hearts can feel, our wills can respond, and our whole being can go out in loving perception and in willing apprehension of the knowledge of God's glory that he has given us. 'And this is the life eternal, that

they may know thee, the only true God'. That is the wonderful thing that has happened in our redemption, that God in Christ has drawn so near that we, who are finite creatures, can behold God in Christ and say, 'We see God, we know God'. And in that knowledge of God there is life eternal.

But it is called here, '*the light* of the knowledge of the glory of God'. When knowledge becomes light, it is transmuted into a living force and a living reality. Knowledge is not always light. There is such a thing as natural knowledge, natural understanding, natural perception of the deep mysteries of nature. But that knowledge produces not one spark of light. But when we get a knowledge of the glory of God, it is knowledge that is transfused into light, knowledge that takes hold of all our faculties, and knowledge that makes use of all that God has given us, till we become 'light in the Lord'.

You remember, that is what happened in connection with the two travelling to Emmaus. Three wonderful things happened when the Stranger talked with them in the way. First, they had a *heart-emptying* experience. As they poured out their disappointment, their disillusionment, and their well-nigh despair, before the Stranger in the way, their hearts were emptied of false knowledge, of prejudice, of darkness, of misunderstanding. And then a second thing happened. There was a *heart-filling* experience, when the Lord took out of the Scriptures the things concerning himself, and made these things known to them; and enabled their understanding, with renewed vigour, to grasp the meaning of the things they heard but did not understand before, a heart-filling experience. But



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before he left them he did something more, he kindled that knowledge into a fire till their hearts *burned* within them. And it was the fire that brought light and energy and power and purity into their experience.

And that is what the Spirit of the living God does when he enters the darkened natures of men. He brings the glory of God nigh to us, and he empowers and re-invigorates our faculties to perceive and apprehend the glory of God who has come nigh to us, and there he makes that knowledge, not a dead perception, but a living flame. He baptises us with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and it is when that knowledge of God becomes a burning fire within us that we feel its drive and its power, its cleansing and consuming influence. Then we know the meaning of 'The light of the knowledge of the glory of God'. That is what happened when our hearts were illumined.

*THE MEDIUM OF ILLUMINATION*

From where did that light come to us? What was the medium through which it reached us? What was the firmament from which this sun shone? 'In the face of Jesus Christ.' What is meant by the 'face' of Jesus Christ? It is the visible appearance of Christ, the Person of Christ. Just as you say to a friend, 'I was glad to see your face', meaning, yourself, in intimate acquaintance. So the 'face' of Jesus Christ means the incarnate God, God manifested in the flesh. That is how the glory of God could become a matter of knowledge and light to us. God veiled his own glory in the manhood of Jesus Christ, and he veiled that glory not to conceal, but to reveal! And he