

The Princess and Curdie, MacDonald
English 10

MacDonald, I think, is showing that we do not do the will of God in SPITE of reason, but BECAUSE of it. At one point, the Grandmother commands Curdie to plunge his hands into her fire, which Curdie does at once. At first glance, it appears that this is done in spite of reason, for who finds it reasonable to burn themselves? On the second glance, perhaps, we see that it is done, not in a lapse into an irrational leap of faith, but because Curdie has good REASON to believe that the Grandmother knows what is best. In the same way, when God wants us to do something which seems ridiculous to worldly reason, it look to the world as if we have abandoned reason and take a leap of faith. Just as in Curdie's case, this is incorrect. We do the will of God, not irrationally, but because we have good reason to believe that God knows what is best, and will keep His promises. (Amazon.com review, edited.)

Particularly fascinating is the concept that all humans are either noble human beings, or else slowly turning into animals on the inside. By putting his hands into a magical fire, Curdie is given the ability to perceive the inner layer of man by means of a handshake: "you will henceforth be able to know at once the hand of a man who is growing into a beast." (p.73) One cannot help but wonder if MacDonald has too much faith in human nature, since he does not spell out that it is only the regenerating Spirit that makes a heart true and noble. But the underlying truth is valid: all men's hearts are inclined to be beastly because of sin, but by the grace of God some hearts are changed to be noble and truly human. It echoes the truth of the teaching of Jesus Christ: where your heart is, there your treasure is, and ultimately you cannot serve both God and Mammon. Those who are overwhelmed by wickedness and by love of Mammon, are eventually destroyed, whereas those with a pure heart and love of God establish the kingdom of righteousness. The pessimism of the final ending raises many questions, but perhaps can be best explained as a growing wickedness among men leading to a complete and final judgment, similar to the flood and the end of the world. MacDonald's tale is in the end very reminiscent of the Biblical pattern of the Judges and Kings: in times of wickedness, God raised up judges and kings to ensure the establishment of a kingdom where justice and righteousness reigned. (Amazon.com review)

<http://www.amazon.com/Princess-Curdie-Puffin-Classics/dp/0140367624>