

Living in the Hope of Glory A Conversation with Connie Walker

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Tuesdays with Morrie entered bookstores in 1997 with a modest first run of 25,000 copies. Since then, its time on bestseller lists can be measured in years, rather than weeks. The book, by Mitch Albom, chronicles the sportswriter's weekly visits with his former sociology professor, Morrie Schwartz, who was in the final stages of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). The fourteen visits occurred on Tuesday mornings; only this time, the curriculum was the meaning of life. The book's continuing appeal reflects a growing interest in lessons to be learned from the dying.

Change the year to 1856 and the dying man to a renowned French Reformed minister. He offers a brief meditation to an intimate group of friends gathered around his bedside each Sunday afternoon to celebrate the Lord's Supper. No longer able to study or prepare a sermon, the minister speaks extemporaneously from his heart and his years of walking with God. This is the setting of *Living in the Hope of Glory* written by Adolphe Monod and translated from French to English by Constance Walker, longtime CGS member and research scientist at Duke University. The *Cross and Staff* recently sat down with Connie and asked her what it was like to translate and edit this spiritual classic.

***Cross & Staff (C&S):* How did you become interested in Adolphe Monod?**

Connie: If you ever doubted that God could use human mistakes, doubt no longer. Twenty-five years ago, Bill and I were given a booklet entitled *Looking Unto Jesus* supposedly written by Adolphe Monod. I've since found out Théodore Monod was the correct author. But in the process I stumbled on the 1856 edition of Adolphe Monod's *Les Adieux* (trans. *Farewells*) buried in the stacks of Duke's library. I read it and loved it. Since the last English translation, published in 1962, was out of print, I started translating it myself. Last year P&R Publishing brought it out under the title *Living in the Hope of Glory*.

***C &S:* We've seen the setting of these meditations, but what are they like?**

Connie: Adolphe Monod (1802-1856) was the most celebrated French-speaking protestant preacher of his day, and *Living in the Hope of Glory* represents his spiritual legacy—the aspects of his faith that he wanted to impress on those who were dearest to him. Although he was terminally ill, only a few of the talks deal directly with suffering. Monod's focus was on his Lord and his flock. He found peace and joy in his relationship with God, even in the midst of intense physical suffering. There is a quality to his faith that we could all use and that comes across in the book as he pours out his love for God and for his fellow believers in these personal meditations. Originally, he had no thought that his remarks would be published, but his children took sufficient notes to be able to reconstruct the talks, and the book appeared a month after his death. It has been a French devotional classic ever since.

***C&S:* Describe the translation/editing process. How did you become so fluent in French?**

Connie: When I started this project I had no experience or training for it. I had studied French in high school, but my only other knowledge of French comes from 17 months working in a research lab outside Paris in the early 1970s.

From start to finish, the translation process has taken 20 years, but during much of that time the project languished in a filing cabinet. Finally in September 1998, I felt the Lord nudging me to get back to Monod's book and finish it. So I did.

In the beginning I struggled to figure out how literal a good translation should be. Eventually, it was through reading the Bible with my husband, Bill, that I developed a feel for this. From the earliest days of our relationship Bill insisted that we read the Word together. Typically, he will read aloud from one version, and I will follow along in the King James. Over the years, this parallel reading gave me a sense of the latitude I could take in translating a classic work.

C&S: How has the project impacted you?

Connie: There is no question that reading Monod off and on for a quarter of a century has deepened my relationship with God. One of the qualities I love about Monod is that he speaks to both heart and mind. But it isn't just the book itself that has impacted me. I learned about trusting God as he guided me in the translation, the editing, and finding a publisher. He was so faithful to lead me step by step in paths totally unfamiliar to me, but totally clear to him.

C&S: Which meditation is your favorite?

Connie: That's like the question, "What's your favorite hymn?" It depends on when you ask me! Because I often struggle with feeling rushed, his chapters on "A Holy, Active, Peaceful Life" and "The Use of Time" have helped me enormously. When I had chronic fatigue syndrome for ten years, his teachings on understanding hard times were helpful. But maybe the ones I love best are the ones that point to the closeness God desires to have with each of us.

C&S: How has the book been received?

Connie: The reward for a project like this is definitely in the comments from readers. I'm amazed at the range of folks who have been blessed by it. My 91-year old father, who was a respectful skeptic, had his heart softened by it over the last months of his life. Some friends in Minnesota have used it in their small group because they felt it was a book that all the members could relate to, despite varying levels of education and spiritual maturity. I received a letter from a woman in Georgia, who describes the book as a "treasure," particularly as she just got a diagnosis of stage four cancer. I have been praying regularly for her.

C&S: Who would benefit from reading this book?

Connie: The whole time I was working on the translation of *Living in the Hope of Glory*, I thought of it primarily as a book for Christians who want to grow in their faith and let God make changes in their lives. Beyond that, however, David Bowen, pastor of The Church of the Good Shepherd was the first to recognize the book's potential to minister to those who are going through hard times, particularly something like cancer. A few of the meditations deal directly with suffering, but more important is the witness of Monod's peaceful, joyful spirit in the midst of difficult circumstances.

C&S: Where can one find a copy?

Connie: The usual places—Amazon.com; CBD (Christianbooks.com); Barnes and Noble on the web or the local branch can order it for you. In fact, any bookstore should be able to order it.

C&S: What is your next project?

Connie: Many of Adolphe Monod's sermons have been published, but none recently in English. I've gathered seven of them into a thematic volume, "Give Me Your Heart," on relating to God and understanding the Christian life. The translation and editing are almost finished. In addition, I've been asked by Bill Edgar at Westminster Seminary to translate some of the articles in a recent French handbook on missiology for a possible American edition.

C&S: Thank you for your time, Connie. We, at CGS, are excited to see how God has opened up an additional career for you in translating the works of this 19th century minister and how Monod's message can reach another generation through your efforts.