

Adolphe Monod

The voice of the Awakening

Constance K. Walker



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Monod genealogy

Jean Monod (1765–1836) = Louise de Coninck (1775–1851)

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Frédéric Monod (1794–1863) = Constance de Coninck
= Suzanne Smedley
Henri Monod (1795–1869) = Camille Gros
Adèle Monod (1796–1876) = Édouard Babut (1787–1848)
Édouard Monod (1798–1887) = Elisa Gros
Guillaume (Billy) Monod = Sophie Peschier-Vieusseux
(1800–1896) = Nina Lauront
Adolphe Monod = Hannah Honyman (1799–1868)
(Jan 21, 1802–Apr 6, 1856)

|
Mary Monod (May 29, 1831–1890) = Henri Morin
Louise Marguerite Monod = Auguste Bouvier
(Nov 8, 1832–1887)
André John William Monod = Marie Vallette
(Aug 29, 1834–1916)
Sarah Monod (Jun 24, 1836–1912)
Emilie Monod (Apr 24, 1838–1920) = Théodore Audeoud
Constance Monod (Aug 22, 1840–Sep 26, 1841)
Camille Monod (Oct 20, 1843–1910) = Charles Félix Vernes

Gustave Monod (1803–1890) = Jane Good
Valdemar Monod (1807–1870) = Adèle le Cavalier
Marie Suzanne Monod (1809–1886) = Charles-Louis Stapfer
Edmond Monod (1813–1813)
Horace Monod (1814–1881) = Suzanne Gardes
Elisa Monod (1815–1867)
Marie Cécile Elizabeth (Betsy) Monod (1818–?)

Preface

Adolphe Monod (1802–1856) was a beloved and courageous French pastor, a major figure in the nineteenth-century Awakening. While he is still well-known among our French-speaking brothers, most English-speaking evangelicals have scarcely heard of him. My prayer is that this short biography will help make this humble and passionate servant of Christ better known.

Since my conversion in 1975, many Christians from our own and earlier eras have contributed to the growth and orientation of my faith, yet none has done so more broadly or consistently than Adolphe Monod. I first made his acquaintance in the stacks of Duke University's Perkins Library. I was searching for Christian books in French as a way of building up my faith while maintaining the linguistic skills I had gained while working at a research laboratory outside Paris. (Yes, I'm a scientist.) In God's providence and through an odd set of circumstances, I 'stumbled' upon a dusty, seemingly obscure volume from 1856 containing

Monod's death-bed meditations. Some of the chapter titles looked somber and depressing, but I was desperate and checked the book out.

Once I began to read *Les Adieux* (or *Farewells*), I realized that the titles given to the meditations were often misleading, having been chosen by Monod's children as they watched his health ebbing away. The meditations themselves were filled with life and peace and often joy, even as the speaker was suffering from intense, unremitting pain. Beyond that, the messages displayed a beautiful balance between logic and feeling, between appeals to the head and to the heart. Monod set out a lofty standard for the Christian life, while managing to make that standard winsomely appealing. His wisdom was profound. I was captivated. Only much later did I discover that Adolphe Monod was actually the most famous and beloved French-speaking evangelical pastor of his day and that *Les Adieux* is a classic work in francophone countries.

Les Adieux was thus the beginning of my decades-long 'friendship' with Adolphe Monod. I have now read and pondered many of his published works. I have also translated and edited *Les Adieux* and four books of his sermons (see Further Reading). Each volume has its own special character, and each is a challenging, thought-provoking delight. Monod's sermons display the same wonderful qualities I found in his *Farewells*, but with a more thorough and extended exposition of the author's thoughts.

I can see why Monod was called 'the voice of the Awakening.' His impact was enormous, as he labored to awaken the

nominal Christians of his era to a living, vibrant, personal faith in Jesus Christ and as he challenged those who had such faith to live more wholeheartedly for their Savior. The richness of his classic, romantic prose is only matched by the richness of his thought and the depth of his love for his Savior.

But how did God prepare Adolphe Monod for his work, and how did he fashion his faith? What natural gifts did he put into him, and what natural weaknesses did he permit in order to force his servant to lean more fully on him? And how did he lead Monod into his appointed ministry? That, of course, is the subject of this book. As believers in Christ, the work assigned to each of us is different, but the qualities of faith and character the Lord seeks to form in us and the ways he guides us are similar. And so, in researching and crafting this biography, I have found the story of Adolphe Monod's life to be almost as powerful and touching as his writings.

As the book nears completion, I am grateful for the many people who commented on the essay from which it evolved. Special thanks go to William Edgar for his linguistic and cultural insights and to Michael Haykin, who was courageous enough to entrust this biography to a scientist. Finally, Graham Hind and the staff at EP have been a blessing and an encouragement to me through the enthusiasm, sensitivity, and care with which they have embraced this project. My efforts have been bathed in much prayer, and I have often sensed a divine enabling that has left me humble and grateful. Even though imperfections undoubtedly remain in the final product, this has been a joyful work of love. May it profit many in the family of God.

1

Fear and trembling

(1855)

Pentecost was approaching, and the minister in Paris prayed fervently as he prepared his sermon.

Oh, who will grant me understanding of what I should explain to your people? My soul sighs after you, oh my God, and my spirit prays within me with inarticulate sighs. ... Do I dare say that the gift of the Holy Spirit surpasses even that of the Son, not in love but in breadth? This is the goal toward which the cross itself is only the pathway. ... If the veil is torn, it is in order to open the Holy of Holies. If Jesus' flesh has been bruised, it is in order to open heaven for us and cause it to come down into our hearts. Oh, cloudless certainty! Oh, boundless rejoicing! Oh, perfect conformity to Christ! Oh, unshadowed light! Oh, Satan crushed beneath our feet! Oh, Christ with us and in us! Oh, all the fullness of the Godhead poured out on humanity! My God, open my eyes, my heart, and my lips!

Do you hear his heart cry? Do you sense the depth of his love for his Savior? Do you see his humility and his utter dependence on God?

This prayer of humble dependence did not come from a novice minister, a recent seminary graduate full of fresh love for God yet anxiously preparing one of his first sermons. This was Adolphe Monod (pronounced *Ah-Dolf Moh-Noh*), the most famous and beloved French-speaking Protestant preacher of his day, at the very height of his preaching ability. No, the dependence and humility we hear in this prayer reveal not Monod's inexperience but the very strength of his ministry. He knew his source of supply, and he knew that it did not lie within himself. It lay within the riches of the God whom he served so faithfully. He was totally dependent on the Holy Spirit who came down at Pentecost.



Monod's preaching pulpit in Paris

Though he didn't know it, this was to be the last time Adolphe Monod would climb the steps to the preaching pulpit in Paris. At age fifty-three, his health was deteriorating rapidly, and he was preparing to take an extended leave of absence.

During those months, his health continued to decline, and his suffering increased. On Pentecost he had acknowledged that God might not heal him; now that seemed more and more likely.

My God, you want to test what is in my heart. You want to see if this old servant, who has preached with great power and conviction that there is nothing over which faith cannot triumph, is prepared to prove it himself. You want to see if he accepts the burden that he has placed on the shoulders of others. I accept this burden. I know that it is you who sends me this awful suffering, who sustains it, who prolongs it. I know that you are my Father, that you are goodness itself, and that you will send me deliverance, whether by healing me or by withdrawing me to your bosom. ...

Hurry! Distance me from all anxiety for the future. I am sometimes frightened by the slowness of this disease. I am frightened by the prospect of what lies ahead of me. But no, you are love. You are faithful. You have now given me the crucified life I so often desired in my times of health, and I accept it so as to demonstrate that the Christian can, indeed, find peace in this crucified life.

Though faith battles fear in these words, ultimately he found deep peace. It was in September that the family finally learned that Adolphe Monod's illness was terminal liver

cancer. Six long months of suffering lay ahead. Deprived of his public ministry, he was soon giving a series of short weekly meditations to friends and family. These 'farewells' were written down by his children and published just after his death. Filled with life and peace and even joy, they have become a classic in French Evangelical literature. Listen to part of the last meditation, given just one week before his death. His title was 'God is Love'; his text was Psalm 100, a joyful song of praise. The meditation moved rapidly to prayer.

Your goodness, your goodness! My God, I give you thanks for how gratuitously that goodness is demonstrated in freely pardoning me for all of my faults; me, the chief among sinners, the least of your children, the poorest of your servants; but also me whom you have filled with blessings and used for the advancement of your reign even in the excess of weakness and pain in which I am plunged today! ...

I want it to be known that there is nothing in me capable of surviving for one moment before the brightness of your face and before the light of your holiness. But now it is not I who will be judged, it is Christ in me; and I know, I know that he will enter, and I with him, and that he and I are so fully united that he would never enter and leave me outside. ...

It is true, Lord, for I desire to be sincere before you, that I suffer much, and that my joy and my thanksgiving are made somber by these continual sufferings and exhaustion. But you have sustained me up to this point, and I am confident that my prayers and those of my family and friends will win for me perfect patience. ...

Oh, my God, sanctify us perfectly, and may all that remains to us of life be employed totally in your service. May your Spirit dwell in us and be the soul, the life, and the joy of us all.

His faith prevailed, but forging the steel of that faith from an inherited religion was a painful process. During more than six years of confusion and then crisis, as God was weaning Adolphe Monod from trust in his own intellect and hard work, he used many human agents. Some were family members, especially Adolphe's eldest brother and eldest sister. Yet on his death-bed, there were three men he especially wanted to thank for their role in his conversion. Their contributions were different and complementary, each adding to the full-orbed, balanced Christian faith that characterized Adolphe Monod's ministry. Louis Gausson, a Genevan cousin and evangelical pastor, contributed to the *precision* of Monod's doctrine; Charles Scholl, the pastor of the French Protestant Church in London, contributed *practicality* to his ministry; and Thomas Erskine, a Scottish lay evangelist, imparted a *passion* to his love for the Savior. The story of Adolphe Monod's life is the story of how God used these men and others to help fashion a vibrant evangelical faith, how God tested and refined that faith through trial, and then how he used it to sustain a broad and powerful ministry within the renewal movement stirring nineteenth-century French-speaking Protestantism. It is the story of how his humble servant became 'the voice of the Awakening'.