Robert R. Marsh, S.J.

Between Creation and Redemption

"The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world"[1]

"God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1)

Preliminary Puzzles

Each day at mass, all through the Easter season, Roman Catholics hear, in a slowly varying context, the stirring phrase; "the joy of the Resurrection renews the whole world." This phrase, familiar by repetition, is really a puzzle, a puzzle that puzzles more the longer we stay with it. The hook is this: why does the renewal of the whole world come about through the *joy* of the Resurrection? If instead we heard simply that the Resurrection renews the whole world we might be content, imagining some cosmic transformation beyond our ken worked, as it were, behind the scenes. We are told, however, that it is not so much the Resurrection itself that brings about this renewal of creation but the joy that is its companion.

Now, were the renewal that is announced purely human—"the joy of the Resurrection renews the whole of humanity"—we could perhaps grasp the concept. We each know that joy is renewing and we know it is infectious: we can imagine it renewing the whole race. The promised renewal,

[1] Easter Preface II. Sacramentary. This phrase occurs in all the prefaces of Eastertide from preface II through to Pentecost.

however, seems to extend beyond humanity into the wider world. The *whole* world is renewed by the joy of the Resurrection. Either we are being bemused by a purely lyrical device that means less than it implies or something profound is being suggested about human being, about creation, and about God. About human being, since there is an anthropology implicit in the idea that a human characteristic—joy—should be so deeply efficacious in the "natural world"; about creation, since the flip-side of a theological anthropology is a cosmology; and about God too, since Resurrection joy is, before it is human, or "natural," Divine. This latter reflection poses further puzzles. According to St. Ignatius Loyola, whose theological aesthetics has influenced this paper, the source of Resurrection joy is not so much the Resurrection itself but the joyful Risen Christ who appears to his friends to share with them his own joy (Loyola, 1991, [221]). What is the joy of the Risen Christ? Why is he joyful?

If this discussion of the renewing and creative joy of the Resurrection poses puzzles for us so too does consideration of Creation itself. In fact, the puzzles have a lot in common and can be employed to provide a little mutual illumination. The work of Redemption issues in Joy. The work of Creation is punctuated by a repeated refrain: "and God saw it was good." What is the "good" that God sees in the work of Creation? Clearly it is appraisal. Clearly it concerns value. But what sort of value does God see in what God has made? Is it technically good—made according to blueprint and properly functioning? Or does God perhaps see a "moral" value in Creation, the value of a right action done well? Maybe both are included in the echoed "God saw it was good." A third sense of value, however, seems most appropriate at this archetypal event of Creation and that is aesthetic value. When God sees the work of God's hands and declares it

good we surely hear an expression of aesthetic delight—the fashioning of Creation is accompanied by repeated cries of divine delight!

We have, then, the Creator's delight and the Christ's joy. Both are creative of the world. Both are infectious human qualities. Both, I suggest, are aesthetic responses. Here we are at the heart of the puzzle: the nature of God's aesthetics.

Twin Aesthetics

If Creation and Redemption reveal twin aesthetics we have to ask how they are related. On the face of it they would seem to be very different. Indeed, it is a common criticism that Christianity has been obsessed with Redemption and dismissed the Creation—substituted Original Sin for Original Blessing (*e.g.*, Fox, 1983). But it would be profoundly disturbing if God were to have two unrelated aesthetics! Perhaps the relation between the delight of the Creation and the joy of the Resurrection is simply temporal: one following the other or one the consequence of the other. I believe, however, that the link will turn out to be deeper than we can yet imagine. To get anywhere we need to explore a little the nature of any aesthetic.

What makes a work of art beautiful? The traditional answers to this question are riddled with dichotomies. Is Beauty in Form or Color, proportion or light (Eco, 1988, 108)? Is it in the object or in the viewer? Indeed, two distinct traditions have been influential, the Hebraic and the Hellenistic.[2] The Hellenistic tradition concentrates on the model of vision: what is involved in aesthetic perception? Such a focus tend to raise issues that are metaphysical or epistemological

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[2] These are Richard Kearney's terms for differing understandings of *imagination*—a theological aesthetics is a theology of imagination (Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 1988).

and treats the artistic imagination as if it were a relatively passive instrument for the *beholding* of beauty?

The Hebraic tradition has been primarily concerned with *making* rather than viewing, with *art* rather than *aesthetics*. What is the import of the creating of something beautiful? Kearney tracks Biblical creation stories and Rabbinic tales to bring out the *ethical* focus of this approach to beauty and its model of the imagination as active. Now Christianity, heir to both traditions, has had to grapple from its inception with both elements, trying to understand human creative activity in the world as both fashioning *and* beholding, both dangerously powerful *and* intrinsically limited (Marsh, 1995). The chief instrument of the attempted reconciliation of viewpoints has always been the *imago dei*, that very image of God within human being which initiates us into a creativity that is both sublime and flawed. For these two aspects to be able to come together, however, something extraordinary has to be true of the human imagination: it must be capable of transcending the opposition between perception and invention. The objects of imagination have qualities of both being beheld (as objective) and invented (as subjective): they combine the possibilities of error *and* novelty. That is imagination involves genuine discovery and discovery implies contingency: a world of realities capable willy-nilly of intruding upon human concerns, yet a world it takes creative genius to explore. What was invisible is made visible in imagination. And, too, contingency implies freedom: the place of freedom is the *imago dei*.

This is a startling intuition: the capacity we have to relate to God, the *imago dei*, is rooted in something deeply aesthetic. Indeed, it is in aesthetics that the glory of the Lord shines in this

world. Art, broadly understood, is the place where the invisible becomes visible. It is where we see the unseen.

Two Dimensions of a Biblical Aesthetic

Aesthetics is, however, a notoriously *relative* affair. One person's beauty is another's ugliness. If what we have in common with our Creator, the *imago dei*, is a matter of aesthetics we had better be able to articulate something of God's own standard of aesthetic value. Does God value proportion or light? Does God prefer *e pluribus unum* or *the more the merrier*? Even expressed so flippantly we can grasp what is at stake: the meaning of being human.

I believe there are two linked aspects of a theological aesthetics that sit comfortably with both the philosophical and the Biblical witness—which cast light on God's delight and, we shall see, illuminate the puzzles with which we opened. These aspects are *foregrounding* and *risk*.

Foregrounding & Risk

"Foregrounding" may well be the elementary act of the artist. Out of a field of awareness—a background—certain qualities or elements are lifted up and brought into the focus, are foregrounded. This act is prior to any discussion of what intrinsic qualities in the finished product might make the work beautiful or aesthetically pleasing. Indeed foregrounding is, in one sense, prior to value since it creates value: in lifting up some undistinguished part of the background that element is given value (García-Rivera, forthcoming). Yet it is important to retain the "other" sense: value may not be given freely wherever the artist chooses. Not every element lifted up into prominence would contribute to the beauty of a work of art. Foregrounding captures the hybrid

nature of the imagination as, in the act, value is *discovered* that was before unknown. Foregrounding is therefore inescapably contingent. There is always a risk that the artist will not be able to discover *any* element that can be lifted up into value. All creation faces failure. All creation courts risk.

Kendall Walton bases a theory of aesthetic value on this risk.

> … aesthetic pleasure consists in pleasure taken not just in an object or person itself, but in attitude one has toward an object or person, the attitude being either admiration or something else (Walton, 1993, 508).

The enjoyment of art, Walton maintains, depends on two things: the discovery of value (which we have discussed as foregrounding) and on "being moved to declare, 'How Marvelous!'" (Walton, 1993, 509). This exclamation, at its most paradigmatic, is a delight in skill, but skill almost insufficient, an amazement that the artist has "pulled it off," has succeeded where she might have failed. He compares it to winning or losing in sport.

> The sixth game of the 1975 World series has been called the greatest baseball game ever played—not because there was more winning in it than other games. Like (virtually) all baseball games, it had just one winner and one loser. And the winner won just barely—that is part of what made it such a good game (Walton, 1993, 502).

If Walton is right our cry "How Marvelous!" recognizes value discovered—lifted up—with a skill that we appreciate "just barely" achieves its purpose. Risk is unavoidable in the creation of

art and its recognition is unavoidable in the appreciation of art. Essential to both is the awareness that things could have gone otherwise.

The Aesthetics of God

A standard problem in philosophical aesthetics is the differentiation between "artistic" beauty and "natural" beauty. Walton, for example, acknowledges the issue thus:

> The difference lies in the fact that pleasure is taken, in one case, in admiration for a person's accomplishment and, in the other, in the rather different experience of awe or wonder (Walton, 1993, 508).

Walton, believing that in natural beauty there is no accomplishment to applaud, is forced to provide a different aesthetic pleasure—awe. Here we move a step closer to the heart of the issue. If what we call natural beauty *is* authored, created, by someone, our pleasure at that beauty is almost the same as the pleasure we take in human art.[3] Creative activity, human and divine, have so much in common. With Gerard Manley Hopkins we can say "I admire thee, master of the tides, / Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall" (Hopkins, 1979, 60) *and* also realize that our cry of delight at human creativity voices an awe and wonder that is truly spiritual.

But we get ahead of ourselves. We have, on philosophical grounds, raised two fundamental aspects of any aesthetic but do we have Biblical warrant for predicating these of God's own

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[3] The similarities are substantial but, as we shall see, the difference, which concerns the *medium*, is critical.

aesthetic? García-Rivera has proposed as a basis for a theological aesthetics "the lifting up of the lowly" expressed in the Magnificat, a clear expression of foregrounding.

> God scatters the proud in their evil imagination, the *diànoia* of their hearts, in order to "lift up (*hypsoo*) the lowly," a creative act of the good imagination (García-Rivera, forthcoming).

God's justice is here revealed as aesthetic: God does not free God's people from bondage just for some instrumental purpose but because the act of liberation is intrinsically valuable. Liberation—Redemption— is not to be divorced from Creation (García-Rivera, 1996).

There is, however, more to foregrounding than the lifting up of what is valueless into value. The artist must first stoop down and encounter the background, that place of no-value where value may (or may not) be discovered. Every movement of lifting up the lowly is prepared for by a self-emptying openness to non-value. The human creative process is marked by its encounter with non-value—the real possibility that, here and now, there is no work of art to be made. And it is a commonplace that such periods of "dryness" or "creative block" in some sense come with the territory of creativity and are not associated with poor practitioners. The Incarnation would seem to suggest that stooping down to lift up is God's way of working also. The great hymn of Philippians 2: 6-11 bears witness to this double-movement:

> Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but *emptied himself*, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

> Therefore God also *highly exalted him* and gave him the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Kenosis (self-emptying) preceding *hyperhypsosis* (lifting up above) is described as an essentially aesthetic process: it leads to a human vision of the glory of God.

Paul's hymn brings us back to our starting place: the aesthetics discernible in Creation and Redemption; the delight of Creation and the joy of the Resurrection.

Creation and Redemption

If we are right in our suggestion that the "joy of the Resurrection" and the Creator's delight at creation are both aesthetic in character there are some profound implications which we must gradually expose.

Creation *ex nihilo* is foregrounding at its utmost. If God's creative act is the lifting up of no-thing to create a universe that is a fine work of art it is the ultimate expression of bringing value out of non-value. A human artist always works with a medium, with *something*, shaping that more or less humdrum substance to discover the beauty of which it is capable. The assertion that God creates *ex nihilo* amounts to the paradoxical yet revealing suggestion that God's medium is *nihil*, nothing. It is an extraordinary act of divine imagination to stoop down into the very abyss to discover and lift up there a thing of beauty, a thing of such beauty that God, as it were, exclaims "How marvelous!"—"It is good!" But what can we mean by saying that God stoops down into

nihil? What can we mean by suggesting that the fruits of God's imagination hold surprises for God? Perhaps we can come closer to clarity by exploring the nature of the creative risk involved. What does God risk in creating? William Vanstone speaks of the risk as "love's endeavor, love's expense," that any creative act worthy of the name invests the creator's self in the work, at least metaphorically (Vanstone, 1978). It is the nature of the metaphor that interests us. How does God invest Godself in the universe? If what is made has life and freedom —carries the *imago dei*— the investment deepens because the work of art can reject the artist. This is "love's expense" and Vanstone sees this price paid on the cross. I believe his insight is powerful yet it still does not quite capture the depth of the puzzle we are pursuing since it focuses *prematurely* upon humanity. What are the endeavor and expense in the very act of *creatio ex nihilo*?

Moltmann has come close to this issue by appropriating the Kabbalist Isaac Luria's notion of *tsimtsum* or withdrawal (Moltmann, 1993). Lurianic kabbalah envisions a "prelude" to creation in which the Infinite "draws back" within itself to make a "space" (the scare quotes must abound) that is not-God, a space in which something else is possible (Scholem, 1946). The idea fascinates because it captures a *kenosis* in the very process of creation that precedes the *hyperhypsosis*, the lifting-up of non-being into being. But still the *risk* in creation is not quite pinpointed.

Perhaps, by way of detour, the risk involved in the act of redemption is easier to see. The cry from the cross, "My God! Why have you abandoned me?" will not let the question of failure be swept under the carpet—that Jesus is in a deep sense God-forsaken cannot be ignored. Like Creation, Resurrection explores the utter reaches of foregrounding. Resurrection is not

resuscitation, not “a conjuring trick with bones”[4] in which life is brought back to a dead corpse. The Resurrection is not a sequel: both the death it undoes and the life it renews are utterly original. Tradition has grasped the astonishing implications of Jesus’ death in the hiatus of Holy Saturday and the image of the harrowing of hell. Jesus dies. Jesus descends among the dead. Jesus is dead with the dead. Utter annihilation has not only been risked but has been incurred. Through an*nihil*ation Jesus has become *nihil*. There is no natural process that leads away from this point of utter emptiness: the annihilation ought, naturally, to be permanent. Thus Resurrection parallels *creatio ex nihilo*—a new value, a new joy, is discovered in the free, contingent, and creative lifting up of the lowly. Von Balthasar warns of any “naturalization” of the Paschal mystery, any attempt to see the Resurrection as the culmination or chief exemplification of processes familiar from created things. Such analogies undermine the utter surprise of the “new thing” which God has done in raising Jesus—“Philosophy, he says, “knows either too much or too little:”

> Too much: because it makes bold with words and concepts at a point where the Word of God is silent, suffers and dies, in order to reveal what no philosophy can know, except through faith, namely, God’s ever greater Trinitarian love; … Too little, because philosophy does not measure that abyss into which the Word sinks down, and, having no inkling of it, closes the hiatus, or deliberately festoons the appalling thing with garlands (Balthasar, 1993, 65).

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[4] In the words of the controversial headlines incited by David Jenkins the then Anglican Bishop of Durham, England.

Rather, von Balthasar sees that the *Mysterium Paschale* is only "natural" because what transpires within the economy of salvation mirrors an "eternal dynamic," so to speak, within the Trinity.

> God, then, has no need to 'change' when he makes a reality of the wonders of his charity, wonders which include the Incarnation and, more particularly, the Passion of Christ, and, before him, the dramatic history of God with Israel and, no doubt, with humanity as a whole. All the contingent 'abasements' of God in the economy of salvation are forever included and outstripped in the eternal event of Love (Balthasar, 1993, ix).

> We shall never know how to express the abyss-like depths of the Father's self-giving, that Father who, in an eternal 'super-Kenosis', makes himself 'destitute' of all that he is and can be so as to bring forth a consubstantial divinity, the Son. Everything that can be thought and imagined where God is concerned is, in advance, included and transcended in this self-destitution which constitutes the person of the Father, and, at the same time, those of the Son and the Spirit (Balthasar, 1993, viii).

Von Balthasar thus increases the stakes: if the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery and the Creation too are aesthetic events characterized by foregrounding, then so must be the eternal inner life of the Trinity.

That the stakes are indeed high is clear when we consider the element of risk that also characterizes the aesthetic. If both creation and redemption are aesthetic acts, works of art, what

is the risk involved? Human, artistic creation is not mere copying or instantiation of pre-existing ideas in the mind of the artist—the work is, instead, a revelation. The element of discovery, the risk that the encounter with the background will not lift up a work of value, seems to be essential to art, if anything, being incomparably greater in a work of "genius" and not less. The risk of failure in aesthetic creation seems irreducible and, we have suggested, constitutive of the wonder we have at aesthetic achievement, of the glory we find there. Surely it cannot be any less so for God? But how can we speak of failure where God is concerned? Is God not free to create, to raise Jesus from the dead, indeed, as von Balthasar suggests, to enter into the "self-destitution which constitutes" the Trinity as Trinity? The paradoxical nature of freedom is here revealed as somehow the human aesthetic act is *both* the locus of the utmost freedom a human being can attain *and* of the deepest risk of failure.

Perhaps the way to explore the freedom and the risk inherent in both creation and redemption is through the hard question of what might have been. What might have been the case in creation? What might have been the case in redemption?

Consider, first, the Resurrection—what might have been the case? If the Risen Christ is filled with joy and if that joy is something aesthetic—a cry of 'how marvelous!'—what is the surprise of the Risen Christ? What might have been? What risk was taken and what has been the beautiful outcome? Is it the simple surprise of existence: joy that death and annihilation have not had the last word; that pain has ceased; that trust in the Father has been vindicated? Is this the risk: that the Resurrection might not have been? Whatever part these elements might play in the joy of the Risen *Jesus* they can hardly capture the Resurrection-joy of the Trinity. The risk that the *nihil* of Holy Saturday might be definitive remains in the domain of production rather than art, of

technology rather than aesthetics, of power rather than beauty. It is the difference between an empty canvas and one merely filled. To get at a joy that is creative, one that might renew the whole world, we need to explore the difference between *this* filled canvas and any other; between the Risen Christ of reality and the Risen Christs who 'might have been.'

I want to pursue just one such 'might-have-been.' Could the Risen Christ have discovered himself as Christus Victor—as the conqueror over death who returns to definitively confront and defeat evil? This is a *possible* aesthetic—one even celebrated, for example, in the apocalyptic writings—but its dark joy is narratively excluded by every Resurrection story. We have not a single story of Jesus meeting his murderers or delivering holy judgment or even—with the possible exception of Paul's road to Damascus—calling enemies to conversion. The Risen Jesus of revelation comes only to his friends and followers and carries not the sword of his might but bears still the wounds of his death. He comes to them individually and collectively with a message of peace and consolation. Each person is met in their own state of grief and pain—their own annihilation—and each is lifted up to a new life and a new joy: as St. Ignatius has it, the Risen Christ comes always "in the office of consoler" (Loyola, 1991, [224]). May it not be that, just as the artist discovers herself in her work, the Risen Christ discovers himself in his Resurrection to be greater—more beautiful—than he might have been and, moreover, communicates the joy of that beauty to those also lost in the *nihil* of their grief.

If the joy of the Resurrection is hard enough to fathom how much more so is God's delight in creation? What could the alternative be that the Creator risked in creating the universe? Is the risk that *nihil* will remain *nihil*: that in stooping down to nothingness nothing might come; that in this greatest risk *all* might be lost? This has been the traditional question of Creation: why being

rather than non-being; why anything rather than nothing? The answer which develops in the tradition is that creation is truly contingent—dependent purely on God's freedom (Funkenstein, 1986). The parallel we are drawing with Resurrection suggests that a thoroughly aesthetic notion of contingency would provide a way to discuss instead the question: why *this* rather than some other? Within the ambit of such an inquiry we may wonder if the risk in creation is that the result might in some way be flawed—incoherent, random, lawless. The "anthropic principle" of modern scientific cosmology speculates that the vast proportion of "possible universes," many differing from our own only by "fine-tuning," would be decidedly less rich and less hospitable to life. We might also indulge the question of evil: is this the "best of all possible worlds" in a moral sense? Are these the risks that God the Artisan and Artist takes in creating the universe? Maybe, but they still seem, however, to fall short of genuine aesthetic risk. As we have seen above, another avenue to explore is that of personal response. If the creation is an act of love and if creatures with freedom (like our own) are able to accept or reject that love, God's risk is clear. Vanstone, we have seen, follows this line of inquiry and meditates on God's daring in allowing human freedom. But even so great a risk does not capture the aesthetic wonder in the Genesis refrain—"God saw that it was good"—if for no other reason than that the delight seems to pre-date humanity. Even in Genesis creation is declared to be good from its first dawning in pure light. In our own cosmology we recognize the long, quiet ages of the universe before any life appeared on our humble planet and the vast history of life that precedes our own. In any such time-frame humanity is an extreme latecomer only blooming to existence in this last tick of the universal clock (*e.g.*, Ferris, 1988). Is God's joy at creation subdued for all those eons? Though humanity's place in creation and in God's heart is not to be ignored it alone cannot be the source of the delight of creation.

Surely the risk, which taken and transcended, elicits God's delight is the thoroughly aesthetic risk that the work, the creation, might not *live*, might simply be pedestrian. This is, I think, the risk that has to be courted in creation: that God might create and, "standing back," not be delighted, amazed, and astonished at what had been achieved, at the value and beauty lifted up *ex nihilo*. That God *does* say "How wonderful!" of what God has fashioned speaks too of Godself. In a work of art the artist, if unspeakably lucky, discovers a mirror in which to see herself. And not just to see the reflection of what she already knew, but to stand back in wonder at who she has become in the dance of creation. Does God in making the world stand back in awe at its glory and at God's own glory both reflected and discovered there? Here the analogy of art must be nuanced carefully. How does a human artist "get into" the work they create? It is the medium—the clay, the paint, the sound, the gesture—which provides (and demands) that entrance in senses both trivial and profound. It is, by definition, the medium with which the artist works to create the masterpiece: the medium is the point of contact between artist and art work, and the only bridge between the two. The medium stands between artist and art. Yet deeper is the insight that it is by fully engaging the medium that the artist creates. The medium supplies the partially recalcitrant, partially amenable background within which the artist seeks to discover value. As we have emphasized creation is not the realization of a clear and distinct idea in a neutral medium. Rather, it is an interaction with a medium in which a startling beauty might be lifted up but only at the risk of the artist's prior self-emptying. What differs in God's Creation of the world is the medium: God creates *ex nihilo*. Thus, continuing our metaphor, *nihil* is how God "gets into" the world. Between God and the World there is *Nihil*.

It is this *nihil* which makes it possible to speak of God's self-discovery in creation. The world is not a copy of God or the contents of God's mind, rather, the world is a sign of God, a sacramental sign which mediates presence. The creation of the world is not mimesis but revelation and we can speak of God's revelation to God in creation, not in terms of knowledge, but in terms of joy and exultation. God discovers the joy and delight of God's glory.

If we wish to risk this suggestion, we need also follow it to the conclusion von Balthasar demands and also ask: is this the same joy "discovered" within Godhead as the Father risks all in the eternal self-destitution which constitutes the Son and Spirit (Balthasar, 1993, viii)?

It is in this context that all the other "risks" of creation find their own place of value and, in particular, that humanity's peculiar eminence becomes clearer. If it is so that human being constitutes the first of terrestrial creation[5] to bear the weight of that glory which is freedom, then human being is also first to experience the possibility of sharing the joy of creation understood in its full aesthetic sense. None other than ourselves can freely experience that kenosis and hyperhypsosis, that of stooping down into the an-aesthetic background to lift up the lowly into value, into beauty. This is the *imago dei*, our share in divinity: that we are unfinished creatures both in the sense of being made for relationship with God and in the, I believe, deeper sense of being made to make ourselves and, making ourselves, make the world (Hart, 1985; Hefner, 1993). We alone have, in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the call to *instress* and the risk of *dis*tress. In human beings the imagination becomes aesthetic—capable of creation and

[5] The implications for theology of extra-terrestrial life-forms are endlessly fascinating but cannot be explored here.

destruction—becomes *yetser hatov* and *yetser hara,* the good and evil imaginations of Rabbinic tradition (Kearney, 1988, 37-78).

Furthermore, it is the *nihil* of divine creation which underlies and supports all creativity. Lawrence Sullivan has discussed, in the context of a morphology of South American religious life, the notion of the Sacred Origin, that primordial time/place of cultural memory in which the absolute reality of religious existence is fully present (Sullivan, 1988). In his understanding, human culture bears an ambiguous relationship with this Sacred Origin since the origin itself is beyond all culture, all difference, all stability, and being *im*mediate is, literally, insignificant. Yet all culture is born from the demise of the Primordium in some great catastrophe. In this view, culture—creation—serves to simultaneously make present the Sacred Origins and keep it at bay. The Origin is the *nihil* which would obliterate all significance and yet is the source of all significance. It is the place of death and the place of life, of stability and of significant change. All that we have rests on this *nihil* in the at once apophatic and kataphatic dynamic of creation.

Between Two Joys

Human being therefore stands between two worlds, the visible and the invisible, and indeed is defined by that frontier. We stand at the border between two joys, two delights: the joy of creation by which we become sharers in the risky, creative, self-destitution of God, and—amazing to say by our "happy fault" the occasion of an even greater re-creation, the joy of the resurrection. Human being is the link between the "twin aesthetics" of creation and redemption. Only through a human being, Jesus the Nazarean, is the work of art daringly brought back to an unforeseen beauty. Again von Balthasar's caveat must be remembered lest the foul mystery of

evil be naturalized. Creation, Fall, and Redemption may be three acts in a drama but their unfolding must not be made a natural process. We may never say that from evil a good may emerge which can annul the *nihil* that evil is. The mystery is aesthetic rather than Hegelian. Nor is the canvas whitewashed for reuse. The evil remains evil no matter the joy that issues from its defeat. For anyone to speak for another and say that her pain is worthwhile is an obscenity too often practiced. Nor may we speak for God. If God's delight in creation, re-echoing in Genesis, meets its rejection in humanity no human can speak for God and say that God's grief is worthwhile because it is assuaged in the joy of the Resurrection. Only God can speak for Godself. And God does speak by entering fully the *nihil* of death and wrong and sin and finding there, precisely *there*, a risky, surprising life and a joy that declares its verdict on evil. But declares it, as it were, privately. The Risen Jesus, still wounded, cannot impose the joy of the Resurrection, cannot be Christus Victor, but can only console those who also know *nihil*. The joy of the Resurrection cannot be imposed—it can only be caught, be shared, and so experienced in its authenticity. Thus the joy of the Resurrection *does* renew the whole world, but slowly. The whole creation still groans as it "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Romans 8:19). In this sense the human vocation is to be both created co-creator (Hefner, 1993) and redeemed co-redeemer. Indeed the two vocations are one and redemption finds its cosmic meaning at the frontier of human creativity where, in the *imago dei*, God's *creatio ex nihilo* becomes the place of freedom for human hope.

The joy of the resurrection is then the mirror—no the transposition to a higher key—of the joy of creation. What human being had rejected at Eden is accepted at Golgotha and becomes pigment in the self-portrait of God which is our world, the whole world, the world being made whole.

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