

## EPILOGUE:

### The “Mmmmmm!” Factor

Now, at the very end, we can go back to the beginning. Except that, as we have seen, in the Christian understanding, the beginning is not at some chronologically remote place in the distant past. The beginning has irrupted into what looks, for us, like the middle. It summons us into becoming insiders in what the beginning’s really about: dwellers whose being is given to us from a future opening itself into our midst, making us alive to it as it does so.

So let’s go back to Genesis, which, as you remember from Chapter 11, was brought to fruition in the Garden in John’s Gospel. At the beginning of Genesis, God starts to make things, on different days. And after each day’s work, God sees that it is good. On the sixth day, God makes all the earth-bound living creatures (the aquatic and the winged variety had been made the day before). Again, in God’s regard, it is good. But then, before the sixth day fades, God seems to have a sudden seizure. Not content with the good things created that day, God decides to double down on the earth-bound creatures and creates humanity in God’s image and likeness. Having pulled off this feat, and just before resting, God looks at everything. This time, God does not merely notice that it is good. Now it looks to God to be *very* good.

Of course, those words have been read countless times over the last two and a half millennia. Each generation reads them according to its preconceptions. One reading sees this passage as a narrative way by which God declared creation intrinsically, objectively good, a kind of philosophical remark to ensure proper morals flowing from the order of creation. I wonder whether it wouldn’t be closer to the much more personal, relational way in which the Hebrew texts tell us of such things if we look at the passage slightly differently. It seems to me that what

we have in verbal form is God purring with contentment and delight at what God sees coming into being: “Mmmmm, I like it”. It is the apple of God’s eye. Then, on the sixth day, having indulged his adventurous eccentricity by bringing humans into being: “Mmmmmm, I *really* like it”.

I use the word “like” deliberately, since we usually use the word “love” when talking about how God imagines the world. But the word “love” often enough has control-freak associations, such that people can tell us they love us, and that is why we must become something else. In other words, their “love” serves as an excuse for not actually *liking* the person in front of them. One of the reasons I prefer the word “like” is that it is much more difficult to lie about. We can tell whether someone likes us or not. Their body language and way of being present to us speak more loudly than their words. Someone who likes you enjoys being with you, alongside you, wants to share your time and your company, doesn’t control you but is curious to see where you’re going to take things. They will delight with you wherever it goes.

So, with that “Mmmmmm” of God, the goodness of everything that is... is not a decree, nor a definition. It is a relationship of *really being liked* by the one who is bringing it into being, whose regard is out-of-himself delight in what we are and may become. What we’ve been looking at in this book is how that regard, that liking-us, came alive for us in our midst, occupying the space in our world—the victim space—whose existence is our sad tribute to our inability to believe that we are liked. This coming into our midst was to try to prove to us that most difficult of truths: in the midst of all the mess, the fear, the violence and the hatred which abound in our world, we are liked—irrepressibly, lyrically, chucklingly, light-heartedly, wastefully, as we are. A word of morality flowing from a heart that does not “like” is indeed part of vanity, because creating and liking are the same thing. And those liking eyes, made even more alive for us by having shared our story from within, look at us and say (as in John 16:33):

Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.