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Untitled Photograph

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From the Editor:

What a glorious spring! How lucky we are to live in such delightful surroundings. The Pacific Northwest is a gardener’s delight, full of fertile soil and scenic beauty. Our own Concordia campus is a wonderful example of the exciting variety of blooms, blossoms, greenery, and landscaping that can be achieved here. It’s such a treat to walk around campus and observe the many plants, lovingly tended by our grounds crew, all wildly blooming and sweetly scented. Your eye strays from one blossom to another...to the ivy-covered brick walls...what a specific Northwest is a gardener’s delight, full of fertile soil and scenic beauty.

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A Creation Story
(for Jacqueline and Michael)
by Larry Gross

I’m not one given to explaining my art. Words don’t flow like paint, they stumble out of my mouth, a line now, a sentence after the morning coffee, and they seem to fall short of the mark most of the time. An artist of words might agree. It hardly makes sense to explain a good story. Can its beauty be relived by its mere retelling? I think there are as many ways to receive an inflexion as there are those designed—or even not designed—by the storyteller. Even the parts we haven’t planned are in the plan of the Maker. Maybe it’s like that with preaching, though I don’t have as much experience myself. Does the preacher simply read the sermon script? And how do we explain a good sermon?

The trouble is I am enticed into explaining this unexplainable mystery, that is, the immeasurable wisdom of the Creator, whose mark of creative energy is breathed into everything. It’s too amazing to explain. Indeed, it is wonderful because it is a mystery, a mystery that loses its impact, even causes me to sin against the first commandment, when I learn how to explain it. (Maybe it’s like the Hebrew nation who feared the name of God.) Instead, I yearn to experience a creation infused with what is incomprehensible, that character of God eternally implanted in all things, fixed in time, chronos and kairos, everywhere and everywhen, from the first breath of creation. This wonderful story has continued since the beginning, because God’s signature is made known to humanity through the whole of creation. God’s creative word, spoken in the blackness, continues to sound from the throat of God, filling the universe with fertility, and endowing humanity with god-like imagination. I suggest this is an artist’s first “doctrine” of the creation story. (Genesis 1 and 2, “created in the image of God,” i.e., called to be creators. You know, I think William Blake might have said “Amen” to that)

If any of what I’ve just written makes sense, you will appreciate that my explanation of the painting will be a little different from when I painted it six months ago, and even more different from when I drew it in 1995. I began with Genesis 1, and I’ve experienced a few new twists and turns. Indulge me.

In the beginning there were Celtic knots. Here a trinity of lines, interdependently woven together, like a root system, from which each day of creation sprouts. They are painted a purposeful green. The ancient Celtic tribe was around long before the birth of Jesus, a Mes stianic people who readily accepted Christ as the Messiah when St. Patrick came preaching the Gospel. The knots traditionally symbolize the eternal, and the days of creation each grow from that eternal cord, suggesting that God continues to create in us, through us, by us, and in spite of us. Yes, we are part of an eternal creation story. And it is good.

The first day sprouts like a bright yellow flower against the dark purples of the mountain. There are two parts to this flower—a joyous light appearing like thin beads of light radiating from the center, and a delicate teardrop alluding to the separation of light and dark. At the end of the first day, God said, “It is good.” I remember a feeling of surprise at the sight of this first day in my painting. But I like it and I understand it better today than the day that the image was born.

[I hope you have all enjoyed the beautiful drawing that is this issue’s cover. In this essay, Professor Gross explains some of the drawing’s symbolism—Ed.]