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# IN PRAISE OF MOZART

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**B**eethoven’s musical brow is always noticeably beaded with the sweat of his inventiveness, and even Bach’s is furrowed with the labour (if not the sweat) of all his vast architecture and cyclopean masonry. Mozart’s astonishing work is different: It seems to have sprung effortlessly into being, like a child born in perfection and left to mature without the slightest interference. Is this an after-dream of paradise – of the time before mankind was cursed to eat its bread in the sweat of its face, to till the thorny ground in affliction, and (for the woman) to suffer the pangs of childbirth? Even if we allow this unique exception, what could it have to do with Christianity? Isn’t the Christian solution to the curse of suffering the deeper blessing of the Cross?

Yet isn’t Christian and human life a journey from “paradise” to “heaven”? Don’t we come from God and go back to him by the water and fire of time, pain, and death? And why shouldn’t we use the “magic flute” of such dazzlingly revealed love, light, and glory to let eternal truth and harmony guide us through all the dissonances of existence? Is there any better way – indeed, is there any other way at all – to proclaim our nobility as God’s children apart from this ceaseless renewal of the presence of our origin and goal? All the great examples of humanity have made this renewal their constant exercise. Especially the One who knew he was the Son of the Father who always beheld his Father’s face and did his will. It’s both as an artist and as a man that Mozart seeks to be his disciple; the composer serves his Lord by making audible the triumphal music of unfallen and risen creation, a music that (like the Christian

heaven) doesn’t recollect suffering and guilt as a “past” memory, but contains them – overcome, forgiven, and transfigured – as a “present” reality. *Pace* Kierkegaard, then, Mozart’s work unmistakably flows with a sweet, infinitely youthful *eros* that pervades everything like a rich, intoxicating perfume: the cherubic playfulness; in a more grown-up key, the springy step of the white hero, Don Giovanni; finally, the immense weight of delight, the resonance of breaking hearts in *Così fan tutte*, and the long, cool shadows of *The Magic Flute*: Isn’t all of that just as evident in a composition like the great *Regina Caeli* (KV 267), or in the two vespers, the litanies, and the masses, where Mozart saw no need to disguise his own voice and adopt a special spiritual style and tone instead? What, after all, is supposed to be glorified if not the creation? What is supposed to be redeemed if not nature, the child of God? This isn’t “the Baroque,” but simply Christianity.

What about the confession of sins? We shall just have to accept, I think, that it is saved within the confession of grace, just as we shall have to accept that fear of judgment is saved within the confident hope of redemption. True, Mozart’s work ends with the terrors of the *Requiem* – the mysterious fragment in which the once exultant voice falls to pieces. Yet, the more time passes, the more clearly this voice rings out in the stratosphere, far above other voices that, once seemingly of equal rank, have since proved inferior, or have faded, or have gone out of date, or have even died of their own inauthenticity. On Mozart, though, not a single speck of dust has fallen... ■