

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 9th September -The Catholic-Christian Faith – told as a Love Story Embracing Evolution: Embracing Incarnation

Theologian Donal Harrington suggests that it is more accurate to think of God as the Creator of Evolution. The emergence of humanity is the emergence of consciousness. This is the greatest single event since the Big Bang, the cosmic acorn, the first Flaring Forth. Evolution is now a self-conscious process. With this awareness, humankind is an active agent in the evolutionary process. The creature is also a co-creator. Now the Word can participate consciously in its own unfolding. The future opens up the possibility of the creation of a Community of Love (rather than the world of wars which it has become). There is now the possibility that, in faith, divine love-energy may permeate all the relationships and interactions within our severely wounded world. The Christian, and all people of good-will, have no option but to keep believing unshakably in this Hope.

As Christianity sees it, human beings realise this possibility, by themselves taking on board the logic of evolution. The logic is that of resurrection, of breakthrough, from death to new life, from chaos to continual new creation. This pattern of transformation brings evolutionary process to its highest moment yet. And a new sense of responsibility, as Pope Francis hopes for in his first encyclical, is emerging in the human race. Human beings are evolution-become-conscious co-creators, God's partners in the unfolding New Story of the Universe. We are all collaborators in transformation now, blessed with a share of divine creativity – to make this world more like the place God imagines, and leads it to be. Creation, the evolving universe, is God's baby as it were. And the inner identity and essence of this world, and of each one of us, is what God dreams about. This essence, this soul, is its potential 'to become fully itself', true to its divine design. God mourns when God's dream for the world and for each person in it, is frustrated, when God's 'work-in-progress' is needlessly disrupted and destroyed. To keep this graced evolutionary journey true to its Creator's purpose should be the work of the Church. It has, in fact, mostly forgotten that divine imperative, and has drifted too far from its biblical moorings to be at the service of the world, its peoples, and all its creatures, by enabling them to become truly themselves made as they are, in the divine image.

The best religions each manifest a particular expression of that revelation, one that is dictated by the context of time and culture. The soil, the sun, the clouds, the air and water do the same, each in their own way. In his book*, O'Murchu opens a whole panorama of possibilities regarding the love, meaning, depth and reach of the Incarnation. He brings together the wisdom of the social sciences with more recent theological insight, to re-examine the notion of Incarnation. 'The God who befriends us in our human embodiment has been journeying with us for a long time . . .', he writes; '(God) however did not first appear in the historical Jesus of two thousand years ago. That loving, energising incarnational presence has been around for billions of years previously'. St Pope John Paul II said that 'the Spirit's presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time'. And in his *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis reminds us that we are into a radical new appraisal of faith where the earth itself and its independent life-forms require us to embrace afresh, not angelic-type dreams for utopia in another world, but a profound rediscovery of our vocation as sacred earthlings to save and complete this very earth we inhabit.

By way of a most inadequate summary I offer this long sentence: The love and light in the first Flaring Forth, the first fireball, the Big Bang is the same light and love that guides every subsequent evolutionary breakthrough for the past 14 billion years, and many more billions to come; the same light that saw the emergence of life and human self-consciousness and soul; the same love that gave birth to Incarnation under the light of a star; the same love-energy that in a piece of bread and wine, forever celebrates that personal and cosmic divinity begun in creation and confirmed in incarnation; the same dawning light every single morning that ushers in another day; the same welcoming light that shines in every window of every home of love – those everyday homes we call heaven. So, nothing went calamitously wrong at the beginning. The misunderstood myth of 'our first parents' in their garden of delights and of an original sin never actually existed. Nor was God ever angry with us – only always utterly delighted with our beauty. Paradise was not lost; we are busy building it with God.

(From one of Fr. Daniel's unpublished papers 2018)