

Daniel's Reflection for week beginning 7th October -The Catholic-Christian Faith – told as a Love Story Expanding the Horizons of Incarnation

There is a real need for a new understanding of Incarnation in the light of the move from a closed, static and unhistorical view of Incarnation to a more dynamic, evolutionary view of reality. A huge expansion of our understanding of Incarnation now includes its universal significance, its cosmic dimension. So, a two-fold divinising – the taking up of human nature into the essence of God; the embracing of the whole of creation into that human/divine relationship between God and humanity.

A supremely important aspect of a true understanding of Incarnation is to see it as part and development of an evolving world, already pregnant with divinity, and guided from within by the Holy Spirit. It was not a sudden invasion by God into a Godless world. God was already all over our universe from the beginning. The divine/human baby 'emerging' from the womb of the world may be a better way of putting it rather than 'a coming down from heaven', 'an entering in from outside', 'a condescension' on God's part. Nothing could be further from the truth. God's heart was beating with an eternal love for us from the very first breath of Creation. There is a great need for a new perspective on Incarnation. In this bigger picture Incarnation is seen as the personification of God's overall presence in the world. Jesus is the pivotal sacrament of the inseparable unity of God's selfcommunicating divinity and humanity's longing and waiting.

We referred to a deepening cosmic dimension to Incarnation. Why is that? Over many years a dualism set in between nature and grace, between a theology of Creation and a scientific understanding of the world (even though the Christian scriptures make many significant references to a cosmic dimension of the enfleshing of God). There is a new cosmic consciousness emerging concerning the immensity and antiquity of the universe we live in. This is leading to the recovery of a creation-centered theology, the promotion of a new dialogue between science and religion, and the recognition of an ecological crisis. The Old Christian Story of creation-centered theology is meeting the New Universe Story of a living cosmology.

The same creative Word of God that was active in the beginning is now the same creative Word that was made flesh in the Incarnation. And that is made bread every Sunday morning. The transition from Creation to the historical Jesus to the final Omega is dramatic and beautiful. It is the greatest love-story ever told. Everybody that lives, every aspect of Creation that exists are expressions of divine love, full of God's essence. Future theology will have to radically include not only the significance of the Incarnation for human existence, but also for our understanding of the earth and the universe. Is it not the same divine love and light that personally became incarnate in Jesus, nurturing and healing human life on earth, that is also the same love and light that nurtured, ordered, guided and continues to hold together the cosmic evolution that began 14 billion years ago?

Theologian Dermot Lane reminds us that the Incarnation was 'first' in God's intention – but not in time. Thus it becomes possible to say that from the beginning God was present in the universe-earth-human process and that the universe-earth-human process was present in God. Physicist Brian Swimme said that 'The human face is there in the structure of the fireball' and later that 'Creation once was molten lava and now sings operas'. Vatican Councils 1 and 2 remind us that when God was shaping Adam from the mud, it was really, far down the evolutionary line, the human face of Jesus, and of all humanity that he was drafting.

In the light of Incarnation, the earth and the universe today assume special divine significance, deserving the same respect and reverence accorded to the divine dignity of the person. There is, as Pope Francis has so clearly reminded us, something sacred and sacramental about our world. Through the Incarnation God has taken all aspects of Creation and matter into God's own self, revealing their divinity from the very beginning. You could say that the very earth we walk on, the seas we sail on, and the sky that covers us is the very beautiful body of our incarnate Mother-God. Incarnation stands between the Creation and the final Omega. It was for Incarnation to happen that God made the world; and it is Incarnation that reveals the love and meaning in everything created. Lane quotes philosopher A.N. Whitehead; 'The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself'. To see the Incarnation mystery through the eyes of a poet he also quotes Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Earth's crammed with heaven,/And every common bush afire with God:/ But he who sees/takes off his shoes. Lane reserves the final word of his book* for T.S.Eliot; These are only hints and guesses./Hints followed by guesses; and the rest/Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action./The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

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