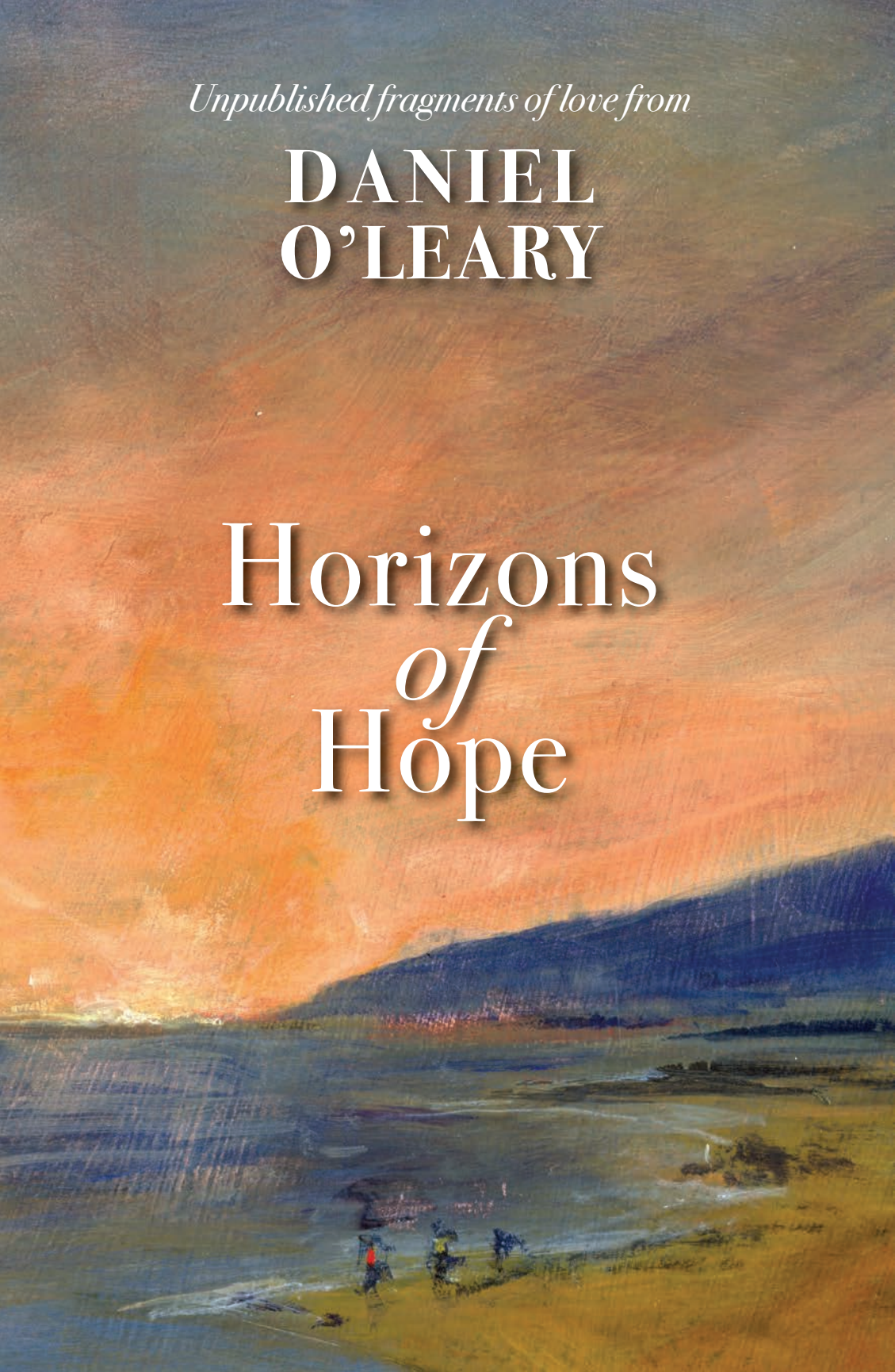


Unpublished fragments of love from

**DANIEL
O'LEARY**

Horizons
of
Hope



* * *

When Moses meets God in the burning bush, God tells him to take off his shoes because the ground he is standing on is holy. Daniel O'Leary offers us the same invitation in *Horizons of Hope*. Drawing on the deep truth that God is the author of all that is good, he challenges us to see that divine authorship everywhere, in the ordinary, in the creative, in the affective, in the aesthetic, in the moral, and in physical creation. For him, the law of gravity and the Sermon on the Mount have one and the same author – and the same purpose. This book shows us that connection. *Horizons of Hope* is a wonderfully reflective book, written in a popular style, but based on sound theology. Daniel O'Leary is a worthwhile read!

* * *

Ronald Rolheiser OMI

Author of *The Holy Longing* and *Sacred Fire*

San Antonio, Texas

* * *

Horizons of Hope is a passionate invitation from Daniel O'Leary to open our hearts and minds to experience a vulnerable, loving God, who is intimately part of all creation and is compassionately one with us.

Daniel lives on in the very heart of the mystery of the cosmic love-energy he so passionately embraced. Those of us who were privileged to know Daniel personally, and blessed to have shared in his vision and dreams, will experience in these pages, the glint in his eyes, the smile upon his face and the jigs and reels of his Celtic heart, as he explains to his readers that his excitement about all this is, "because it radically transforms the way we understand ourselves in this world, the faith we follow, the God we worship, the quality and depth of our daily-life experiences... The excitement that pervades these pages springs from the belief that a divine healing power is already moving within each of us, and within all of creation..."

Daniel's reflections are an inspirational legacy that nourish us to the core of our souls and awaken us to the realisation that, "There is another way of living our days on this troubled earth". It is an awakening that enables us to, "grow this earth into heaven".

* * *

Monica Brown

Director Emmaus Productions

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HORIZONS OF HOPE

SAMPLE

ALSO BY DANIEL O'LEARY

BOOKS:

Prism of Love (2000)

Travelling Light (2002)

Passion for the Possible (2003)

Already Within (2007)

Begin with the Heart (2008)

Unmasking God (2011)

Treasured and Transformed (2014)

The Happiness Habit (2015)

The Healing Habit (2016)

The Heavenly Habit (2017)

An Astonishing Secret (2017)

Dancing to my Death (2019)

AUDIO:

Reaching for God's Light (2012)

Horizons *of* Hope

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from

DANIEL O'LEARY



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* * *

RUAH BLESSING

*A beloved phrase of Pope Francis is having a 'big heart open to God'.
May this blessed openness set you free to surrender your future to the
powerful RUAH of the Holy Spirit.*

*May you stay strong and persevering, courageous and
whole-hearted in your commitment to this vision.*

*May your love be always stronger than your fear, your light
always stronger than the shadows that will inevitably fall across
your most precious plans for RUAH.*

*Above all, may you be given the eyes to see the face of Christ
in every face before you, friend, stranger or the one you resent the
most.*

*May you always let RUAH blow your heart wide open to endless
love.*

Daniel

* * *

SAMPLE



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SAMPLE



PROLOGUE

“The day will come when, like the rain falling on parched land, like light filtering in through utter darkness, like life slowly returning to stricken land, you will find a wonderful awareness warming your soul. It is the moment you know for sure, that the birth and death of everything, the sustaining and empowering of all that works towards good, the precious energy that creates, heals and quickens – is LOVE.”

These words, from the final pages of *Dancing to my Death* capture, for me, Daniel O’Leary’s undying conviction that life itself, in all its myriad forms, is God’s love-energy eternally unfolding. Daniel’s faith was grounded in the belief that God is pure love and that God’s love can’t help but pour out, becoming matter, as the evolving universe we encounter and, eventually, as us. His passion to communicate how we can all experience the ‘love-story of creation and the wonder of you’ filled his heart and his imagination to the very end. He encouraged us to ‘begin with the heart’, to discover ‘a new way of seeing, a new way of being’, of recognising God in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of our days and nights.

This was his ministry and he grappled with ever more imaginative and creative ways to help us experience a God who is ‘madly in love with us’, to regain a truly orthodox theology of ‘nature and grace’, but one that has often been neglected. The introduction to *Horizons of Hope* offers Daniel’s latest attempt to convey his excitement. He believed that, as twenty-first century Christians, we benefit from discoveries in cosmology and science that open our eyes as never before to a truly incarnational faith that recognises the story of the evolving universe as the love-energy of God. Daniel had been working on this theme, which was to be his next book, when he was diagnosed with cancer. That work was put on hold whilst he came to terms with and reflected on what was happening to him as the illness progressed and those reflections



were published posthumously as *Dancing to my Death*. Fortunately, although he did not have the opportunity to complete the new book, he did leave us with the introduction.

Daniel's sister Maura and brother Michael are grateful to Columba for making this unfinished work available to Daniel's many followers by publishing it now as *Horizons of Hope*. To complement the introduction, Columba have collated a collection of Daniel's articles, written over several years for *The Tablet*, articles that illustrate his unique gift for helping us to see what is already within and that 'enflesh' the theology outlined in the introduction. I hope a final, short, quote from episode seven of the *An Astonishing Secret* video course will encourage you to read with a new heart and be blessed by the gift Daniel left us.

*'At the core of a living theology is the beating, broken, beautiful heart of
God at the centre of Life.
It beats at the core of the world, in the rhythm of your own pulse.
And it is all one and the same love-energy permeating every aspect of
life. Good theology is about the love story of Creation and the
Wonder of You.'*

Margaret Siberry



FOREWORD

Four months into his seven-month journey with terminal cancer, Daniel O’Leary wrote: “Such personal reflections will contain words and phrases such as ‘the enemy gathering strength for another assault’, and ‘needing a heavy bombardment of chemo’. Also about ‘preparing for battle’ and ‘depriving the cancer of victory’. Or needing ‘a cease-fire with the nasty opponent’. I suppose there is no big deal here, but I do want to outline another way of envisioning the whole situation, especially when we bring God into the equation. A whole lot depends on whether we see God ‘out there somewhere’ or whether we understand God as the essential life, energy, and being of everything that happens in an evolving planet and humanity.” (*Dancing to my Death*, 144).

In these words we glimpse something of the depth of Daniel’s soul. Wrestling with the intense pain and anguish of his body, nonetheless his spirit rises to a transpersonal vision, empowered by the God who is never out there but always in here. That interiority, however, is not merely personal, and certainly not egotistic, but rather the life substance of all creation, the evolutionary trust of a divine life that accompanies us even in our darkest hours.

Love is the recurring theme throughout the reflections of this new book. At times it is patently human, whether reminiscing of his childhood years in Co. Kerry, his cherished connections with friends and relatives, or his unique pastoral sensitivity to the plight and questions of searching souls. And then – in almost every section of this book – we are transported into the transpersonal realm of planet earth and universal space where that creative love-energy first erupted in our world and evolved into the myriad of embodied forms that populate our world today.

Daniel O’Leary was blessed uniquely with the grace that transforms life-experiences into the integration of body-mind-spirit. This I suspect is his appeal to so many of his friends, retreatants, and readers of his work. He can hold and integrate diverse, even contrary experiences, with a remarkable



degree of wisdom and ingenuity. And what makes all that possible? The power of LOVE!

Something of this deep capacity for integration can be gleaned from these words: “We are people of the Flesh, not just people of the Book. God’s Word is translated into muscle and bone; inscribed in flesh and blood. That Word, for Christians, is now their own physical presence, the loving way they listen, look, speak, touch and create. We ourselves, in our complicated, ambiguous humanity, are the last, most complete and beautiful utterance of the Word. Most people find this too difficult to believe.”

This kind of language is often associated with contemporary humanistic psychology, or with some of the developments in modern spirituality. In Daniel’s case it comes from a deeper inner realm, which aptly can be described as a mystical horizon. For much of Christian history, mysticism was portrayed as a kind of transcendence above and beyond all earthly concern so that we become exclusively united with God - as if living outside our bodies. In fact, this is quite a false understanding of mysticism, the truer essence of which is expressed in these words from Daniel:

“Mysticism has to do with the search for the hidden love and meaning, for the experience of the abiding, absolute mystery of God, in the ordinary things that happen during our days and nights. This is particularly true of the positive and wonder-filled moments that come our way. What needs to be emphasised is that, on our part, a certain attuning and sensitising is necessary. We must work at this kind of vigilant awareness.”

Mysticism, is indeed a search, but much more important it is a discovery. And central to that discovery is the deep inner conviction of being loved unconditionally by God. More than anything else, that is the transformative empowerment at work in Daniel’s life. Even in the midst of the serrating pain of his final months on earth, he knew he was loved unconditionally! And as with many of the great mystics, that experience of unconditional love, did not come merely through people, prayer, liturgy, and priestly service, but through his growing awareness of God’s incarnational love at work in the whole of creation.

We also know that several of the great mystics had rather tumultuous lives. Even at times their faith was severely tested. And an aspect of their



life-witness, often ignored in popular literature, was their ability to hold the ordinary and extraordinary in close proximity. This is another feature of the spiritual integration alluded to above, and so frequently manifest in Daniel's life, ministry, and writing.

The human, incarnational face of that integration is nowhere more visible and poignant than in the experience of washing the feet of an outsider. Daniel recalls a Holy Thursday foot-washing ceremony at St Wilfrid's Church in Ripon, North Yorkshire where he was a pastor some years ago. At the beginning of Mass he had a difficult altercation with a marginalised person, a visitor to the church, ending up with the dismissal of the person from the church building. Later that evening, as he shared the experience with a fellow-priest, Daniel began to experience deep regret for what he had done. In his own words:

"Shocked and ashamed I searched the places he used to frequent until I found him. We walked back to the house. I asked permission to wash his feet. He agreed. The task was not easy. Little was said. It was a strange and emotional kind of reconciliation that will always stay with me. I had forgotten that Joseph [the man's name], too, was an *alter Christus*."

This is what mysticism is really about, the stuff that saints are made of. And what a challenge it poses for us all! Thanks Daniel, for your love, wisdom, and inspiration!

Fr Diarmuid O Murchu



SAMPLE



PREFACE

Golden Love

I sat in the middle of the London Olympic Stadium where the World Athletics Championships were taking place. I watched the super-human athletes break world records in all kinds of competitions before applauding crowds. Their success was achieved by relentless training. Their gold medals were wrenched from each other at a terrible price. Another time I stood in St Peter's Square and watched the pomp and ceremony, the architecture and artistry, the cheering crowds and clergy, heavy with holiness. The silver papal medals glinted in the sun.

And then, a little later again, I saw a small gathering of parents and their differently-abled children squeezed into the small living-room of an ordinary house. Two girls and three boys, each of them suffering from a whole range of severe disabilities, were playing instruments before their adoring parents. The halting notes of a tune were laboriously struck on the xylophone; verses of simple songs were picked out on the piano, or sung. Small faces shone with joy. Parents' eyes were moist with the deepest emotions. Tea and biscuits - a small mass around a family table - held it all together.

This sublime moment was achieved by patient love. Their grace-filled teacher knew each child by heart. She loved them into their confidence; she called out their shy beauty; she believed in their inner divinity. And they knew that. There were no medals. It was a competition-free, religion-free house of silver miracles, of golden love.

Daniel



* * *

*“The Lord showed me a small hazelnut
in the palm of my hand.
‘What can this be?’
‘It is all that is made – it is all of creation.’
‘But how can it all survive?’
‘It shall survive forever because I love it.’
‘And then I saw three truths –
one God made it; two God loves it;
three that love sustains and nourishes it.”*

* * *

Julian of Norwich



PRAYING OUR TROUBLED WORLD

You are away from your family. Your family is in trouble. You pray for the family. You hope the prayers will work. But you are still anxious. You decide to go back home. You arrive at home. You bring your full attention to the whole situation. You are there in person, with your total concern, your full involvement, your truest self. It is your home, where you began your life's journey. It is where you belong. From within the situation you try to bring about the change you could not achieve from the outside. Beyond all your advice from a foreign shore, all your prayers at a distant shrine, your real presence is the most powerful transforming influence of all. Because then you are inside the situation, your love is released at the heart of your family, and it does its work of healing the home.

I feel it is the same with how we pray for a deeply wounded humanity, a troubled world, a ravaged earth. We are not outsiders looking on, sending transitory good wishes towards less fortunate foreigners in a weeping world. We are not unconnected to those who perish at barricaded borders, with those who are persecuted, tortured, shot for seeking safety in our western countries. They are our family. The mutilated earth is our home, our mother. Our essence has been formed by the energies of the earth. We are, in fact, the very consciousness of the world itself, reflecting back to it its sublime wonder and its ruined beauty. Pope Francis echoes St Francis when he reminds us of these precious truths in his wonderful documents – the *Evangelii Gaudium* letter and the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

We 'pray our troubled world' when we allow our understanding of it, and our relationship with it, to be transformed; when we identify with it, consciously embracing it as the source of our being. We are now present to people's pain and their cries, to the 'groaning' of the earth itself (St Paul), in a new, deeper and more



intimate way. In some mysterious manner we are healing the world when we see it as we see ourselves and those we cherish; when we look with compassion upon it through God's eyes, recognising the divine presence already and always incarnate within it. A central dimension of 'praying our troubled world' is to get to understand more profoundly the mystery of creation and of Incarnation. What do I mean by that?

This calls for a wider world view, an expansion of the horizons of our hearts and minds, the bigger picture, a more inclusive grasp of the mystery. The Christian is becoming re-inspired by a wonderful, recently recovered theology – often referred to as a theology of creation, of 'nature and grace'. Once we acknowledge our flawed understanding of the Adam, Eve and Original Sin myth, which from the beginning radically distorts our relationship with the universe, with each other and with God, we then begin to see all creation and evolution as a divine love-story whose beauty reflects the essence of the Creator. The Incarnation most powerfully reveals this amazing, saving grace. Just as the ever-present Word redeemed the world by becoming the heart of it, so also do we when we see ourselves not just as passing travellers in exile on an alien soil, but as the beating heart of God's incarnate body, the earth itself, and all its citizens who suffer unending torments.

Too many of us say a few passing prayers for the wider, wounded world, contribute our loose change, blame someone or other for the situation, and feel smug about our efforts as dutiful citizens. Such shallow involvement may work wonders for personal ego-health; it does little for the eco-health of our natural home. We are called to be present to the troubles of the world in a real way. It is God's body; it is our mother, our sister, our brother. Its inhabitants are God's family, our family. Pope Francis writes urgently about a 'conversion' of our souls, a whole transformation of life-style, an ultimate dedication of our energies to saving planet Earth and the poor who cling to it in desperation.

The Pope believes that the call to a prayerful concern for our troubled world, to a conversion of our lives to save our Mother-Earth, is much more than an added-on obligation. It is a knowing in the heart, a recognising of our wider family of origin and destiny, an awakening of the divine imagination

already within the human psyche. Our hearts, sacred from birth and baptism, fashioned lovingly in the divine image, somehow sense this astonishing revelation of our intimacy with the earth, and our responsibility for saving her life and the lives of those whose plight is increasingly desperate.

Our prayers are powerful when they grow from the way we see and understand the mystery of creation and incarnation. The Pope is trying to help us hold the suffering poor in a ravaged world as the greatest concern of God and of us. He wants us to live and love and serve in that non-negotiable perception. Like the artist who looks at the block of marble and sees the hidden angel, like the farmer who looks at his winter fields and sees the waving harvest, like the mystic who looks at the caterpillar and sees the butterfly, like the mid-wife who looks at the pregnant woman and sees a beautiful wee baby, like Jesus who looked into the hearts of sinners and saw their grace, so too we are called to look at our beloved, broken and beautiful earth and see the weeping face of God.

Beyond a passing sympathy we now surrender to the deepest empathy, seeing our earth and its broken-hearted family from the inside, experiencing it as we experience ourselves. We are urged to get utterly involved in a full commitment and to do everything possible to transform Christian and universal consciousness before it is too late. In 'praying our troubled world' we do not stay on our knees. We need to remember in our active contemplation that Resurrection has happened. And Resurrection is about more than a miraculous moment for the crucified body of Jesus. It is the final stage of creation and Incarnation for the crucified world.

Humanity, in its evolution, is moving inexorably towards the final Omega in God. Even on this weeping, warring planet we still believe in that divine dream for it. Incarnation establishes this belonging and evolving as the very purpose of our being. Deeply, essentially we are the vital voice of the earth, calling, yearning for completion. Only when we truly realise this, and live our lives with an eternal vigilance for the well-being of our Mother-Earth, will our prayers for her be salvific and transformative. Our pleas and wishes will come from the depths of our earthy hearts and bodies. These were already, and always, the living promise in the womb of the earth. When we pray for a troubled world we are praying for our own future, for the survival of our



children, of all humanity, and of all creation – for all we call the incarnate body of God.

The troubled world we pray for is not out there, of course - anymore than God is. We, and the Holy Spirit who moves us to pray, and the world we pray for, are inextricably bound up together. All creation is moving towards fulfilment. It is a slow, vulnerable becoming, with terrible birth-pains. And the crucifixion continues. But so does Resurrection.

In his *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis sees a silent ‘eastering’ at work in the evolution of the planet – the same evolution that is transforming our own sense of participation and responsibility, in an unfolding future. ‘The kingdom of God is already present in this world,’ he writes, ‘and is growing here and there in different ways – like the small seed that grows into a great tree . . . the kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of history.’ Words such as these reveal to our hearts the depths of the mystery we are part of, and the urgency of our desires for its completion.

‘Praying our troubled world’ is now resounding from the heart of the universe. It is our own voice, no longer chanting from a disconnected, elevated and remote plateau but passionately pleading, on fire at the core of life, joining in the lamentations of the Indwelling Trinity, bereft with the sorrowful Mother of Life we call God. Pope Francis sees the emergence of a timeless, universal resurrection gestating at the core of the earth, like an eternal Spring. He believes in the Good Fridays of our existence, in the irrepressible birthing of Easter. He sees all evolution, all the slow growing of the world, in terms of incarnate redemption, in terms of the saving and blossoming of the earth. ‘Each day in our world,’ he reminds us, ‘beauty is born anew; it rises, transformed, through the storms of history . . . Where all seems to be dead, signs of resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force.’

All of this brings us to a new way of being, a new way of seeing, a new way of praying. In the Christian tradition this revelation has been called ‘the sacramental vision’, the ‘catholic imagination’. It springs from the orthodox theology of nature and grace, from the mystical spirituality of humanity, from the astonishing implications of Incarnation. It reveals to us the nature of the ultimate intimacy of God with all created beings, the

power and presence of the Holy Spirit in all that lives. In this truth and context we begin to realise, at the core of our being, the praise in bird-song, the adoration in each new dawn, the cry of the ocean, the lament of the earth. It is then that our prayer is in deep communion with the wounded earth; our anxious voices are in time and tune with the longing of life, with the desire of the Holy Spirit.

The Irish poet Joseph Mary Plunkett wrote:

*I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes;
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.*

Children, of course, unknowingly have that grace of seeing, being and belonging. They somehow sense their place in the world. And just as they heal us all, they heal the world too. Their very lives of wonder bless the earth. In ways we cannot understand, they are the fleshed prayers of Incarnation, priestesses and prophetesses of life, small sacraments of divine presence to protect their suffering sisters and brothers, and Mother-Earth herself. The land silently reverberates with the perfect passion of their innocent prayer and presence. They know that an un-prayed for world will die. Physicist Brian Swimme wrote, 'Say this to every child – you come from the energy that gave birth to the universe. Its story is your story; its beginning is your beginning.'

When we 'pray the troubled world', the troubled world is praying for itself. Why? Because we are its beating heart. We are its mind, soul and voice. And when the troubled world is praying for itself, it is God incarnate, also at the heart of her own lovely, ravaged body, that is praying and listening to its 'groaning'. Christians are challenged to hold together the mystery of creation, of evolution, of suffering, of incarnation, of Christianity, of Eucharist. This love-story captivates us with a different lilt, logic and language to the destructive, dualistic 'fall/redemption' doctrines that are still suffocating the Holy Spirit of freedom and intimacy.

At the dynamic, evolving centre of it all, is the love called God. This Love, pulsing in the dance of the Blessed Trinity, continues to beat out its pain,



prayer and praise in the heart of the cosmos and in the cosmos of the heart. It is the wild energy of the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ. It is the beginning, and the middle, and the end of God's love-affair with humanity, with every creature. It is that first sacred thrust of Being into the Alpha of space and time, finding its invincible, healing, loving way towards the Omega of God's all-embracing, all-welcoming, all-completing heart.

SAMPLE





Daniel O'Leary was originally from Rathmore in County Kerry. He worked as a priest in the Diocese of Leeds and was known across the world as a bestselling author, inspiring speaker and retreat facilitator. He worked in parishes for almost 30 years and for another 20 years he taught Theology and Religious Education at St Mary's University. Over many years his theology and spirituality were a source of inspiration and solace to countless people.

After nearly 60 years of pastoral and academic work, of studying, writing, preaching and teaching, Daniel O'Leary was writing what he described as his 'most honest, clearest and truest understanding of the meaning of Incarnation... the most exciting and beautiful treasure of an astonishing beauty', when he was sadly diagnosed with cancer.

That work was put on hold as his illness progressed and he did not have the opportunity to complete the new book before his death in 2019. Through a compilation of Daniel's working notes, along with some correspondence and a selection of his best articles, *Horizons of Hope* offers Daniel's last message on the joy of creation.

This book is filled with love, from the ordinary to the divine. It is an invitation from Daniel to open our hearts and minds to a loving God, who is very much part of us and our surroundings.

His passionate conviction that life itself is God's evolving love and his determination to communicate how we can all experience the wonder of creation, filled his heart and his imagination to the very end. This was his ministry. *Horizons of Hope* is Daniel's inspirational legacy and he lives on through the excitement captured in these pages.

'Horizons of Hope is a wonderfully reflective book, written in a popular style, but based on sound theology.
Daniel O'Leary is a worthwhile read!'

Ron Rolheiser OMI



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