

Unmasking God

SAMPLE

'To me, Daniel O'Leary is with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in that he is fearless, always exploring, always confronting pain and hurt and trouble, and always finding and revealing those seeds of love and hope that shine like stars in our souls' darkness ... Daniel is a poet of God.'

— Brendan Kennelly

**DANIEL
O'LEARY**

Unmasking God

**REVEALING THE DIVINE
IN THE ORDINARY**





Published in Australia by Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, VIC 3170
www.garrattpublishing.com.au

Copyright in this work remains the property of the contributing authors.

This edition © 2018 Garratt Publishing published by arrangement with Columba Press.

Copyright © 2011 Daniel O'Leary

First published in 2011 by Columba Press.

All rights reserved. Except as provided by the Australian copyright law, no part of this book may be reproduced in any way without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover design by Lynne Muir

Cover painting by Leigh Fraser.

Leigh is a Victorian artist who resides in South Gippsland. His landscapes are painted in the 'Tonal Impressionist' style.

All rights reserved.

ISBN 9781925073720



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

The authors and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this book. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material.

The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

Table of Contents

Introduction: <i>Dear Reader</i>	1
 <i>SPRING: THE GRACE OF EMERGING</i>	
Waiting for the ambush <i>Lent is often characterised as a time of self-denial for Christians, but this is not the whole story. It can be a time of extraordinary richness in which we are able to discover the limitless power of God's love.</i>	4
What's it to be? <i>Magnanimous or pusillanimous, the right option seems self-evident. But in life's moments of great decision the way of choice is rarely so easy or obvious.</i>	8
Gold in the dust <i>It's hard to be good, and human beings are repeat offenders. Yet the ashes that mark foreheads on Ash Wednesday are a reminder not only of sin, and of the state to which we will return, but of the extraordinary paradoxes at the heart of the Christian faith.</i>	12
Human touch of Easter <i>With Holy Week ahead of us, we should reflect on the full humanity of God, whose power, presence and promise can now and for all time come to us in a form and expression we can understand, and with whom we can be one.</i>	16
Open your eyes <i>When we love someone, we draw out the beauty that is within them, our tenderness persuading their true loveliness to emerge. Similarly at Easter, falsehood melts away and things appear as they really are.</i>	20

From man's man to free man 24

A visit to a male prison revealed the damage that has been done to so many young men, some serving jail sentences, but most imprisoned in other ways. Yet the painful path to true liberation, through death to life, was also pointed out.

Divinely human 28

The explosive power of God lies in the radical nature of Jesus and his taking on of the three great sufferings of physical pain, the loss of his good name and a sense of ultimate abandonment. To deny his humanity is to deny salvation.

Find your own Calcutta 32

In preparing to commemorate the Resurrection, we should, rather than pursue a private line to God, be asking some very public questions about our personal life choices, such as what we buy, how we vote, how simply we live, our sense of solidarity with others.

A delight in company 36

For many parishioners, God remains a punitive figure, chalking up sins to be punished. Here, a parish priest describes how his rediscovery of a simpler theology of nature and grace, with God grounded in the ordinariness of people's lives, transformed his mission.

SUMMER: THE GRACE OF BLOSSOMING

Born to be wild 42

The impulse to 'launch out into the deep' is universal and insistent. But so is the fear and hesitation that so often prevents us from responding to the call in the way Christ intended.

Windows of wonder 46

Contemplation is not a technique to be mastered but a journey inside ourselves to become one with what already is. When we do this and glimpse what is there, it takes our breath away.

Power of the real presence 50

It happened to the apostles at Pentecost. It can also happen to each and every one of us, but not through church mandate or spiritual exegesis. It is the inner authority we gain when through daily often painful honesty we recognise our own true soul and our own essence.

Mystery in a drop of wine 54

A moment at Charing Cross Tube station brings a brief revelation that, unlike between the train and the platform, there is no gap between the innate God of our hearts and the God of Jesus.

Home before dark 58

Advancing age is a time of looking back over the way people have come, and sorting the essence of a lifetime on earth. But it is also a period of looking forward – to the homeland to which God calls the faithful to return.

Painful, slow redemption 62

Irish churchmen and women – and politicians too – should resist attempts at quick closure to the shocking revelations of criminal mental, physical and sexual abuse perpetrated on the country's most vulnerable children. Rather, they should spend a lot of time of their knees.

Lost but for words 66

Jesus was not only the Son of God, he was the Word of God made flesh. And in using words to express our love for others, we reflect his love for us.

Summer is the season of dreams 70

Many of us have felt the pull of something deep down inside ourselves, and also outside of us, that we long for almost without knowing it, and that the world only lets us glimpse before it vanishes below the horizon.

AUTUMN: THE GRACE OF FADING

The most difficult leap 76

It is said that only by completely trusting at least one person can you be deemed psychologically healthy. Similarly it is only through having complete faith in Christ, complete trust, rather than slavishly following the rules, that we will be saved.

Now and for ever more 80

The special graces that permeate childhood may appear lost to adults, but it is possible to believe that children glimpse a foretaste of the joys of heaven.

Miracles of hope 84

A trip to Knock is a reminder that some unlikely places act as repositories of memories or associations. In them, it seems possible to transcend even the darkest hours of life and catch a glimpse of the ultimate destiny for which we were all created.

On not being good enough 88

It is our fear-driven ego that makes us try too hard to give the impossible 110 per cent. How much better it is sometimes just to be grounded in God.

Alternative healing 92

New Age spirituality has been condemned by a variety of voices in the church, but it would be wrong to reject its enthusiasts out of hand. Their spiritual longing, like that of many Christians, is to try their best to find the still centre at the universal heart of love.

Don't forget to wake early 96

If we are in a state of depression, or prone to such states, it is at least partly our habits of thought that bring us there or keep us there. But, even on the dark winter mornings, it is possible to allow ourselves to emerge from the gloom.

Autumn song 100

It is the mellow season, a time to reflect on those things that have grown, flourished and faded during the year, and, more importantly, those that remain with us – the fixed melodies of our life – to carry us through the cold of winter to the promise of spring.

Naturally blessed 104

Every blessing is a reminder of the original blessing – that of life itself. To administer one is to divine a wellspring of sacred presence, already secure below the surface of everything – and in that lies the true meaning of Incarnation.

After many a summer 108

For us, as we now are, everything passes. In particular, we have to say goodbye at some point to those people we love most and those places to which we are most deeply attached. The emotions associated with this essential aspect of our humanity are deep and complex.

WINTER: THE GRACE OF BELIEVING

When the soul dances 114

Instead of being drugged and drained by relentless routine, we should sway to the present music of each new day and reconnect with the essence that we all share together.

Jump, son! Jump! 118

The month of November lends itself to moods of apprehension, self-doubt and possibly despair. But there is a way through our fears – even the fear of death.

Everywhere and nowhere 122

It is communication that absorbs so much time in modern life. Periods of stillness are considered a luxury, yet those times of silent contemplation connect us with the earth and with God.

Paradox in a manger 126

It is all too easy to be seduced by the season. But Christmas is not about passive peace. It causes a restlessness, a disturbance to our complacency.

Shock waves of Bethlehem 130

It takes some doing to get our heads round the astonishing fact that God stole into our world in the same shape – that of a baby – in which we all started out. The simplicity of it all is almost too much for us. But then, extraordinary things happen in the most ordinary moments.

Light incarnate

134

A baby contains the mystery of the universe, consecrating all the day-to-day things that sustain us, while every Mass holds and celebrates the divinity of a million galaxies.

Safe haven for the lost

138

We are all wounded human beings, and the church is there to tell us that it is possible to start over again. But its message of the Saviour is not the preserve of the privileged, it is a beacon of love for all those struggling in the obscurity of sin.

Leap in the dark

142

Many of us shy away from the challenge of opening our minds and our hearts to God but unless we can surrender to him fully, we will never complete our final journey.

Painful but cleansing

146

The moral authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland has been severely compromised by the disclosure of the cover-ups of the widespread abuse of children by clergy. The revelations indicate a much wider problem which Catholics must confront head-on if the church is to survive and grow.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up this book. May it change your life. It will if you really want it to. All God needs is your 'yes'. There is an ache in everyone to be happy. But people are unaware of the great secret – that the promise and presence of joy and peace of mind is already safely within the human heart – impatiently waiting to be discovered there. That's what we mean by 'unmasking God'.

'Most people live lives of quiet desperation' wrote Thoreau. There are endless reasons for this sorry truth. In a world that suffers much disillusionment – at the failings of our religious leaders, our financial advisors, our politicians – too many have lost their joy.

There is a recurring 'absence', a sense of something missing. How do we regain the lost light, the divine nerve to welcome each new day, come what may? How do we discover a new way of being, a new way of seeing?

The excitement that pervades these pages springs from the belief that a divine power and healing is already lying within each one of us, and within all of creation. Once this revelation is taken seriously by our churches, and by ourselves, then our efforts for peace and equality, for justice and joy, will spread like wildfire.

There is another way of living our days on this troubled earth. We almost always forget (or maybe were never told) that already within us we carry the fresh wells we thirst for, the beckoning horizons for which we long, the gold hidden in the rubble of even our most dark and difficult days.

This is the core of the gospel and is at the heart of our best theology and spirituality. It is also spread over the pages of this book. It sets out to reveal 'the dearest freshness deep down things' as the poet put it. In that 'dearest' place there is no room for anxiety, guilt, shame, worry or fear anymore.

UNMASKING GOD

Too often religion masks God. The emphasis in these pages is about unmasking the distant God we were often told about, and restoring to our deepest centre, a warm, human, ever-forgiving Father/Mother who is helplessly in love with us. Today we need to feel the comforting presence of God in the ordinary moments of our lives.

The unmasked God is revealed, once and for all and forever, as the innermost intimacy at the heart of our daily being. God comes to us disguised as our very lives – their pain and their joy. We are called to penetrate this disguise – and to recognise God in our blossoming.

Once we try to believe in all this astonishing good news we are left with another vital question. It was asked by the poet Mary Oliver; ‘What are you now planning to do with your one wild and precious life?’

God bless and lots of love,

Daniel J. O’Leary
010111

PS An earlier book *Already Within* was also a collection of my *Tablet* articles. Thank you for naming it as your favourite religious book in 2007. I dedicate this new one to you. It gives me great joy and courage when you send in your stories about discovering the new growing, healing and personal freedom that is always transforming your life (www.djoleary.com).

Spring:
The Grace of Emerging

SAMPLE

Waiting for the ambush

Lent is often characterised as a time of self-denial for Christians, but this is not the whole story. It can be a time of extraordinary richness in which we are able to discover the limitless power of God's love.



Everything about us reaches out to be loved and to love, to become the other. We long for intimacy. We are born for it. We are drawn and driven by this original and persistent desire of our being.

Astonishingly, we are already encompassed by this ultimate and unique embrace – but we will not, dare not or cannot believe it. We risk staying stuck too long in the trappings of routine religion. Beyond our familiar ‘to do’ lists for Lent – the things to give up, the tasks to take on, the prayers to squeeze in, the sins to cut out – there is a deeper horizon drawing us closer into a beautiful mystery.

The pursuit of this union with God is not hampered by our imperfections and peccadilloes. The surrender to divine love is only blocked by our own futile efforts to improve, to get better, to save our souls. Beyond such mortal strivings there is a matchless immensity around the way God lures and allures our hearts with a divine determination.

When this holy ambush happens, even partially, no one is measuring merit, progress or failure any more. It is ‘grace upon grace’. Astonished, we find ourselves sinking into the love that is now becoming the power and the presence, the very breath of our lives.

‘Hidden with Christ in God’, we care little about our standing in the hierarchies of things; we waste no sleep about what others may think of us; we are experiencing, even if only in glimpses, that unutterably sublime freedom of the children of God. Beyond creeds, formulas and rites, this deeply felt fusion with incarnate

Presence reveals to us something of what falling in love with God means. In a sense, no effort is required – only the effort to let go into the pure joy of the lover's desire, to allow the love for which we were created in the first place to happen to us. We wait for our own estranged faces to find their true beauty in the radiance of God's features.

As the drop of rain assumes its full identity when surrendering to the sea, so with us. Kathleen Raine in her poem 'Message' writes:

Look, beloved child, into my eyes, see there
Your self, mirrored in that living water
From whose deep pools all images of earth are born.
See, in the gaze that holds you dear
All that you were, are and shall be for ever.

We wait for that blessed season in our lives when we empty ourselves of all that distorts the whisper of divine longing within us. All we are asked to do is to stay ready and obedient to God's fingers and lips, making new music on the silent reeds of our hearts. This astounds us. We had been told differently. The emptier we become, the more space for God to fill. The more hollow we are, the truer the music from the lips of the Flautist. In 'May I Have this Dance?' Joyce Rupp has caught the meaning:

The small wooden flute and I,
We need the one who breathes ...
So that the song-starved world
May be fed with golden melodies.

At some point during one special Lent, the veils will part just enough to transfix our hearts and transform our lives. That intimate moment will happen when the divine breath blows beauty into our shape, into our face and form. Everything is affected because everything is connected. The song of Creation itself is muted when the reeds of our lives are no longer receptive to the breath of God.

'Lord only let me make my life simple and straight,' wrote Rabindranath Tagore, 'like a flute of reeds for Thee to fill with

UNMASKING GOD

music.' The melody is pure and beautiful, new yet familiar, and it calls to us like a far wave. Our stalled heart remembers, surrenders and recognises again the melody of the Maestro. It is the music from which we come; it is the music towards which we go. We need daily silence to catch those grace notes in the cacophony of our distractedness.

Falling in love with God like this is for everyone. Human hearts are fashioned for this to happen. Nor does it mean loving the world less, and the people in it. It means we love them more. Wherever we love sensitively, passionately and faithfully, we are already in love with God. Entwined with the heart of God, our love now has no fear to it. Utterly safe, we begin to play, to thank, to bless, to live, to adore as never before.

This realisation is a daily and deeply felt transformation of our way of being and our way of seeing. We do not need to be successful, liked, praised any more; these needs are transcended. We find we can forgive almost anyone for anything; it is easier than we thought. We no longer compare, compete, complain; we do not need to. We stop judging, blaming and resenting; there is no satisfaction in doing so now. Our vision of love is deeper. 'Out beyond ideas of right and wrong there's a field,' wrote Rumi. 'I'll meet you there.'

In the still point of this bright field we come up against the edge of our darkness, the wilder frontiers of our possibilities, our passionate desire for life itself. Here in the heart of God, beyond the tyranny of a suffocating conformity, we sense the horizons for which we were created. In this silent embrace within our soul, we get younger as we grow older, we start to divine our divinity with a fiercer intent.

When we receive Holy Communion at our Lenten Mass, a transfiguration happens within us as the bread and wine die into us. Our naked souls are ravished in utter wonder. God's desire for intimacy is becoming flesh in us. Beyond words, as John Paul II once reflected, this is embodied experience. It is the ultimate lovemaking. For one shining moment of mystery

WAITING FOR THE AMBUSH

we know we are 'of one being with the Father'. Delightedly it dawns on us that every moment can be like this moment. In 'All Desires Known', Janet Morley describes her experience of it:

... and I was nothing but letting go and being held
and there were no words and there
needed to be no words and we flowed ...
and I was given up to the dark and
in the darkness I was not lost
and the wanting was like fullness and I could
hardly hold it and I was held and
you were dark and warm and without time and
without words and you held me.