

Daniel's reflection for week beginning 1st August

Do 'Life' and 'God' mean exactly the same?

The mystery of life is one thing; the mystery of God another. But to what extent are they different? To what extent are they the same? Life and God. The One Being. Has this sense of oneness, this intimation of unity, not become more evident since the moment of Incarnation? There is an amazing transformation of 'faith' in our understanding and imaging of God when these two realities are identified as One; the Being of Life, the Being of God. 'O God,' wrote Teilhard de Chardin, 'you are as intimate as life itself.' Pope Francis equated God with Being – and the Church offers many other 'magnanimous' (a word loved by the Pope) terms for this Mystery of Love. Even the old catechisms that greeted our birth contained the question 'Where is God?' And the answer 'God is *everywhere*'.

So, do we place too great a divide between our concept of God and our concept of life itself, both referred to, we have seen, as pure Being? After all 'Being' is an orthodox Christian term for God. Is it true, then, that there is nothing we can say of life's source and essence that cannot be said equally accurately of the God of Christians? And vice versa. We call God our mother, our life, our essential being. In these reflections I meditate on the distance we often place between what we call the 'merely' natural or material of our world, and the 'super' natural nature of God. In this respect we seem to remain unaware of what 'deep' Incarnation reveals about the true incarnate presence of the Mother of all creation in the unfolding of life itself.

Can 'life itself' be addressed as God? What is lost to our accustomed way of understanding the mystery of God when we place all the qualities that we traditionally hold of God in the heart of evolving life itself? Is there not a sublime tenderness and intimacy, for instance, about the essence of a baby, a new morning, a blade of grass? Does not what we call 'life' get into the smallest places, healing the tiniest wound? And the cosmic spaces too, guiding their perfect expansion? Is 'life itself' not absolutely everywhere, and without it nothing would exist? Is it not forever intent on non-judgemental healing and wholeness? Is it not indiscriminate in its largesse, as the sun shines on good and bad alike, as the tree gives shelter to the small frightened animal as well as to the king? If ever the words 'extravagance' and 'compassion' can be applied anywhere then surely the phenomenon of the goodness of life itself can claim those qualities?

We look at the blue sea and sky, the stars, the purple mountains and we feel an affinity with them. We have come from them. We are all an essential part of each other. Their attractiveness is our attractiveness. We call nature 'our mother' as we call God by the same title. The first Creation is the first Incarnation. When faced with the utter joy and infectious beauty and stunning generosity of Being itself in all its forms, what is the difference between these two faces of mystery – the face of the mystery of the life that holds and enfolds us, and the life of the God without whom we would also cease to exist?

Why am I so excited about all of this? 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. Given the Christian teaching about Creation and Incarnation, is it not true to hold that whatever we mean by the mystery of God is now available to us only through created being, through all that we mean by life as we know and live it? The notion and nature of an incarnate God is now infused into the nature of matter – and vice versa. The supernatural has become the natural, and grace is only accessible in the experience of created reality. Within Christianity it is a false and deadly division to separate the two. And the Church still does it – see the reaction to these reflections! It has been revealed, once and for all, that creation and nature cannot exist independently of grace. Life and being are now God's way of being present to us. To experience one is to experience the other.

(Horizons of Hope pp26,27)