

# Adult Faith

Growing in  
Wisdom and Understanding



Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC

ORBIS  BOOKS  
Maryknoll, New York 10545

Founded in 1970, Orbis Books endeavors to publish works that enlighten the mind, nourish the spirit, and challenge the conscience. The publishing arm of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Orbis seeks to explore the global dimensions of the Christian faith and mission, to invite dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions, and to serve the cause of reconciliation and peace. The books published reflect the views of their authors and do not represent the official position of the Maryknoll Society. To learn more about Maryknoll and Orbis Books, please visit our website at [www.maryknollsociety.org](http://www.maryknollsociety.org).

---

Copyright © 2010 by Diarmuid O’Murchu

Published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545-0302.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Queries regarding rights and permissions should be addressed to Orbis Books, P.O. Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

O’Murchu, Diarmuid.

Adult faith : growing in wisdom and understanding / Diarmuid O’Murchu.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.

ISBN 978-1-57075-886-7 (pbk.)

1. Life cycle, Human – Religious aspects – Christianity. 2. Maturation (Psychology) – Religious aspects – Christianity. 3. Adulthood. 4. Faith.

I. Title.

BV4597.555.O47 2010

248.8’4 – dc22

2010010251

# Contents

Introduction . . . . . 1

## Part One

### THE VANISHING COVENANT

1. Defining Adulthood . . . . . 7  
    A Cultural Shift / 9  
    Toward a New Integration / 11  
    The Enlarged Context / 15

2. Ruling in Order to Control . . . . . 18  
    Democratic Disempowerment / 19  
    The Historical Backdrop / 20  
    The Patriarchal Inheritance / 21  
    The Breakdown . . . / 23  
    Our Codependent Culture / 24  
    Anarchy Let Loose? / 26

3. The Religion of Fearful Submission . . . . . 29  
    Love and Power Confused / 29  
    Problematic Religion / 31  
    Beyond Dysfunctional Religion / 34

4. The Tyranny of the Rational Mind . . . . . 38  
    The Fallacy of Rationality / 39  
    Rationality and the Evolution of Agriculture / 41  
    Control from a Distance / 43  
    Robust Individualism / 44  
    A New Kind of Heroism / 46  
    Reclaiming the Vulnerable Adult / 47  
    When Heroes Give Way to Lovers / 48

5. Our Frazzled Institutions . . . . . 50  
    The Institutional Death Knell / 51  
    Institutions Disempower / 53  
    Networking: The Way Forward / 55  
    The Subversive Power of Cooperation / 56  
    Fluid Structures / 58

6. Theology from the Bottom Up . . . . . 60  
    The Paradigm Shift / 61  
    Theological Confidence / 65  
    Theological Bridge-Building / 67

**Part Two**

**HORIZONS OF QUANTUM POSSIBILITY**

7. Calling Forth the Adult in the Twenty-First Century . . . . . 73  
    Out of Modernity / 74  
    Characteristics of Contemporary Adulthood / 78  
    The Postmodern, Evolutionary Adult / 81  
    The New Consciousness / 84
8. Transformative Learning for the Protean Adult . . . . . 88  
    Evolutionary Readiness / 88  
    The Transformative Nexus / 91  
    The Lure of the Future / 94  
    The Beleaguering Mix / 96
9. Toward a Spirituality of Homecoming . . . . . 98  
    The Spiritual Cosmopolitan / 99  
    The Rise of Violent Spirituality / 100  
    A New Spiritual Metaphor: Homecoming / 103  
    Adult Spirituality / 104
10. Stages in Adult Faith Development . . . . . 109  
    From the Child to the Adult / 110  
    Adult Faith Development / 112  
    The Journey of Faith / 115  
    When Adults Do Theology / 119
11. Expanding Cultural Horizons . . . . . 121  
    Our Primal Belonging / 122  
    An Enlarged Context / 125  
    The Bewildering Paradox / 127  
    The Cycle of Creation-and-Destruction / 128  
    Engaging Paradox / 129  
    A Recurring Cycle / 130  
    Suffering as Paradox / 131  
    Revisiting the Paradox / 135

12. Embracing Embodied Relationality . . . . .	139
First, the Body / 140	
Programed to Relate / 143	
Embodied Sexuality / 145	
What Would Adult Eroticism Look Like? / 147	
Programed for Nonviolence? / 150	
13. Adult Governance in the Power of Networking . . . . .	155
Inherited Assumptions / 156	
The Controlling Power of Money / 159	
Quantum Theory and the Birth of Networking / 163	
Networking in the Information Age / 166	
14. Doing Ritual in an Adult Way . . . . .	169
People of Ritual / 171	
Sacramental Experience / 174	
Ritualizing the Gift of Food / 176	
The Adult as Ritual Maker / 177	
15. When Adults Die Gracefully . . . . .	181
Our Death-Ridden World / 182	
Reclaiming a More Adult Approach / 183	
The Dynamics of Death — and of Life! / 185	
Letting Go into Deeper Freedom / 191	
Notes . . . . .	195
Bibliography . . . . .	199
Index . . . . .	205