“A Harvest of Holiness”:
The Theology of
Danielle Rose’s *Mysteries*

In the autumn of 2002, Pope John Paul II gave to the Church his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (*RVM*). There he reiterated his devotion to the rosary that he had proclaimed soon after his election as pope, the rosary to which he dedicated the twenty-fifth year of his pontificate. He reaffirmed what the Church has taught for centuries: when properly understood, the rosary is not a Marian obstruction to but rather a powerful form of Christocentric prayer, a means of praying with Mary to Jesus. Underscoring this point, he proposed a group of five new mysteries—the “luminous” mysteries or “mysteries of light”—which augment the rosary’s traditional joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries and center on the public ministry of Jesus: his baptism by John in the Jordan, the wedding at Cana, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and call to conversion, the Transfiguration, and the institution of the Eucharist. John Paul appealed specifically to young people:

With God’s help, a pastoral approach to youth which is positive, impassioned and creative—as shown by the World Youth Days!—is capable of achieving quite remarkable results. If the
Rosary is well presented, I am sure that young people will once more surprise adults by the way they make this prayer their own and recite it with the enthusiasm typical of their age group. (§40)

Near the end of the letter, he called upon the clergy as well as “brothers and sisters in every state of life,” once again singling out “young people”: “confidently take up the Rosary once again. Rediscover the Rosary in the light of Scripture, in harmony with the Liturgy, and in the context of your daily lives” (§43).

I suspect that those already critical of John Paul II viewed this apostolic letter as yet another symptom of his ostensible aloofness, his enthusiasm for the rosary as yet another sign of his supposed stubborn traditionalism. The rosary as a prayer for the young people of the twenty-first century? Yet the late Holy Father was quite clear: the rosary is not an outdated remnant of a medieval, Tridentine, anti-modernist, or pre-Vatican II past, but rather here and now “retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer” (§17). “Simple yet profound,” the introduction of the letter proclaimed, the rosary “still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness” (§1).

And so already it has. A year later, a gifted young American songwriter, vocalist, and musician, Danielle Rose Skorich, was among those in the crowds in St. Peter’s Square for the beatification of Mother Teresa as well as the celebration of John Paul II’s twenty-five years as the successor to St. Peter. In fall 2003 she published a double-album CD titled Mysteries, the impetus for which was the papal letter, as she makes clear in her album acknowledgments: “Pope John Paul II, thank you for loving the young people of our Church as Jesus does. The inspiration for this album took place on October 16, 2002, when you gave the Church the letter on the rosary and the Luminous Mysteries” (World Library Publications, B00012CTTM). Musically, devotionally, and theologically, the album is a notable
achievement that deserves a wide audience. *Mysteries* consists of twenty-three original songs, twenty of which are devoted, respectively, to the twenty mysteries of the rosary. They are framed by an introductory and a final song as well as “Hail, Holy Queen,” a musical interpretation of the *Salve Regina*, one of the traditional concluding prayers that follow the saying of the rosary. In effect, this young woman has composed a beautiful sacred song cycle for our times based on the rosary. The album is striking proof that serious engagement with this most traditional of Catholic prayers is thriving among those who were not yet even born when Karol Wojtyła was elected to the Holy See. It demonstrates that the rosary remains capable of inspiring fresh artistic expressions of exuberant love for Jesus, Mary, and the faith. At a time when many American Catholics are in various states of anger, disappointment, or spiritual numbness from the recent, self-inflicted ecclesial harm, we would do well to be aware of countervailing expressions of conspicuous sanctity within the body of Christ. Despite its production by a small liturgical publishing company (World Library Publications), *Mysteries* should not be allowed to pass beneath our religious radar. It has hearts to touch, souls to inspire, and work to do in the world.

In her vocation as a Catholic music missionary, Danielle Rose Skorich is known by her first and middle names, “Danielle Rose,” in honor of a rose that she received from Blessed Mother Teresa shortly before the latter’s death in 1997. She spent that summer, before her senior year of high school, working with the Missionaries of Charity in India, before going on to the University of Notre Dame from which she graduated in 2002 with a double major in theology and music. In fall 2001 she published her debut album, *Defining Beauty* (also published by World Library), which revealed an uncanny capacity for fusing religious devotion with musical expression. It seems inadequate to refer to her creative efforts on *Defining Beauty* and *Mysteries* merely as “songs”—they are, rather, musical prayers of religious poetry and biblical exegesis, original hymns that express the
full range of Christian spirituality in multiple musical genres. Since graduating from Notre Dame, she has worked as a full-time traveling musical minister in North America and Europe, playing at liturgies, performing concerts, and helping to conduct retreats for parishes, schools, universities, and conferences (including World Youth Day in Toronto in summer 2002), save for the two months in spring 2003 when she recorded *Mysteries*.

In sharp contrast to most commercial Christian music, which is aesthetically insipid and ill-suited as a genre to what it seeks to express, the music on *Mysteries* is carefully crafted and theologically serious. If one had to put a single label on it, the best might be “Catholic folk,” provided that such a rubric includes the diversity of genres and variety of instrumentation represented on the CD. The core of Danielle Rose’s music is her solo voice—a voice of expressive, crystalline clarity—accompanied by her own acoustic guitar, a combination that forms the heart of several songs on the album. But this is the midpoint on a spectrum that stretches from the haunting a cappella solo, “Crown of Thorns” (third sorrowful mystery), which lilts and echoes like a timeless Irish ballad, to the driving rhythms of the track that precedes it, “Crucify Him,” which includes discordant, electric-guitar distortion. “Rejoice!” is an upbeat, bluegrass number written for the second glorious mystery, the Ascension of Christ; “Simeon’s Joy,” the song for the presentation of Jesus in the temple (fourth joyful mystery), is a slow, almost twangy country waltz; and “Wedding at Cana,” the piece for the second luminous mystery, fuses flamenco syncopation with its five-string classical guitar accompaniment and the refrain’s subtle Spanish background lyrics. There are two additional a cappella songs—“Holiness is Faithfulness” (fourth sorrowful mystery) and “Listen to Him” (fourth luminous mystery)—in which Danielle Rose sings solo against background vocals in four-part harmony. “Star of Bethlehem” (third joyful mystery) makes use of a children’s choir, while “Be God’s” (third glorious mystery) is constructed antiphonally between the solo lead and a
choir of some thirty-five people. In short, despite the album’s unity of subject matter, it is neither repetitive nor predictable in its musicality, the aesthetic and technical quality of which has been integral to its success. Quite apart from its religious depth, the CD is simply good music. Danielle Rose’s voice is beautiful, the accompaniments are tasteful, and the tone is reverent. Despite its wide-ranging use of popular idioms and instruments, Mysteries is sacred music from start to finish. Indeed, the creative spectrum of musical styles is theologically significant: just as the rosary (like the lives of Jesus and Mary that it depicts) spans the full gamut of human experience, from the joy of Christ’s birth to the agony of his passion, so it is only fitting that this range be expressed in a wide variety of musical forms.

The variety and nuance of Mysteries reaches well beyond its musicality. Danielle Rose’s confident grasp of the faith is evident in her bold adoption of different, sometimes almost startling, perspectives in her songs, in order to convey the dramatic character of the rosary’s mysteries. The tracks are not general or generic, but sung, for example, in voices such as those of the Angel Gabriel (Annunciation), Jesus the preacher (proclamation of the Kingdom of God), or Peter (Transfiguration). No less than the range of the musical expression, these specific points of view help to render more fully “the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory” (RVM, §19). Some of them we might have imagined: for example, the serenely beautiful “Jesus Within You,” the song for the Visitation (second joyful mystery), is cast as a dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth. But immediately following this, how arresting is it to hear the star of Bethlehem singing about the birth of the Lord and have the approach work so brilliantly? Each of us wonders what she can do for God on her own, in order to make a difference in the world, for which the star of Jesus’s birth suggests an original metaphor:

I am only one among the millions
Look at all the different stars up in the sky
What can I do for my Lord Jesus?
He was born in Bethlehem this starry night.

We are tempted by self-doubt and thoughts of our own insignificance. Yet as John Henry Newman put it, “God has created me to do Him some definite service” and “has not created me for naught”; he has a plan for each of us, the discernment of which is our life’s work and in which we find our fulfillment. The star was called by God to point the way to the baby in the manger:

I cannot give you gold or frankincense or myrrh
I do not have a glorious gift to sacrifice
I am only one small star
but I’ll lead children from afar
To behold the child who made the stars of night.

No trivial speck of light in the night sky, one star made all the difference. We are called to do likewise, whatever our specific vocation, and so the refrain shifts from the star’s initial “I was chosen to shine the light / to show the way to our Lord Jesus Christ!” to a children’s choir—those led to see the child who made the stars—which sings “We are chosen to shine the light . . .” Similarly, who could have foreseen a song about Jesus’s crowning with thorns sung from the perspective of the spiked rosebush branch destined to become the crown? The song (cowritten with Michael Downs) is a seven-stanza ballad of great evocative power. Stanza four:

They bent me round
And wove a crown
And placed me on his head
My petals found
Crushed on the ground
Like tears of God turned red.
With each small sin
I was pressed in
I pierced with self-disdain
In thought and deed
I made him bleed
My selfishness, his pain.

Another powerful interpretation is offered in “Crucify Him,” the song for Jesus’s scourging at the pillar, which takes the position of the contemporary mob of Jerusalem (understood broadly to mean all of us). As such it indicted the listener with purposeful directness:

We wash our hands of the thoughts that slip through our minds
Like Pontius Pilate, we blame others for the atrocities of our times
Do we stay silent while the world screams out its lies?
Sell your body, buy your beauty, live at the cost of others’ lives.

Throughout the CD, Danielle Rose reveals a gift for poetic compression. Here, one line is enough to critique prostitution, consumerist vanity, and our complicity in the radical socioeconomic inequality that marks our society and our world, in all of which Christ continues to suffer.

By shifting her own voice and inhabiting, as it were, the experiences of those involved in the rosary’s narrative arc, from the joyful through the luminous and sorrowful to the glorious mysteries, Danielle Rose’s cycle of sacred songs opens up rich vistas of spiritual reflection. We are there; we feel what they feel; we are moved by their triumphs and struggles as these are subtly, variously intertwined with our own experiences. The more we listen to the songs, the truer does this become, beginning with the bewilderment of the “peasant girl from Galilee” upon Gabriel’s visit in the first joyful mystery and concluding with her coronation as the “Queen of Peace” in the fifth glorious mystery. Images and incidents are foreshadowed and recalled throughout, giving the whole a cumulative power. Although Danielle Rose is obviously not a Jesuit, her musical prayers
stand both squarely and freshly within the Ignatian tradition of the composition of place so central to the *Spiritual Exercises*. Her powers of empathy are profound: it is little short of astonishing that an unmarried woman in her early twenties wrote and sings with such feeling “The Finding,” the song about locating Jesus in the temple (fifth joyful mystery), from the perspective of Joseph as first an agonizing and then a relieved father, and does so with such convincing probity. Most of us have, at times, felt abandoned by God, an experience blended with the pain of a bereft Joseph:

Where did you go, Jesus?
I’ve been searching for days
Calling out your name with every prayer I pray
See the tears of a father in search of a son
I’m so afraid I did not know quite how to love.

What father hasn’t questioned his adequacy? And yet how remarkable is it for someone who has never been a parent to render the experience so movingly? “Never has one day felt so long,” the distressed Joseph sings, searching for his missing boy, asking himself “What have I done wrong?” and “Why would God cause me such distress?” Elsewhere the song gestures toward the parable of the prodigal son as Joseph sings, “All I know is that my son was lost / and has been found again.” Danielle Rose’s maternal empathy is no less penetrating: “A Mother’s Song” was written for the crucifixion of Christ (fifth sorrowful mystery) and is a stunning ballad about Mary’s love for Jesus. Rather than describing the crucifixion itself, the song recapitulates a series of scenes from Jesus’s life from the perspective of Our Lady of Sorrows. At the beginning, she cuddled her newborn baby and “wept with joy at the sound of your cry”; after Golgotha, the grieving mother cried again, cradling his corpse, and “wept bitterly—my child was crucified.”

*Mysteries* can be truly appreciated only by listening, but the lyrics and theology of its songs, as well as the album’s overarching con-
ception, are themselves impressively condign to their subject matter. This in itself is quite wonderful and certainly noteworthy at a time when so much popular Christian music is so trite, and when so many young Catholics regrettably have little knowledge of or serious appreciation for the treasures of their tradition. As in most great works of art, multiple elements—here, the twenty-three songs, written with variety and vigor from diverse perspectives—are unified by recurrent themes, just as the rosary itself is composed of spiritual elements (its constituent prayers and mysteries) and material elements (the beads and crucifix) that form a coherent whole. The specific order of the joyful, luminous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries lends a chronological structure to the artistic expression, following the prayer’s own narrative and spiritual logic. John Paul II wrote in his apostolic letter that the rosary should be thought of “as an outpouring of that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved,” and that “To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love” (RVM, §§19, 26). Danielle Rose’s songs demonstrate how exceptionally well she understands this. In its paradoxical simplicity and complexity, love is the principal unifying theme of Mysteries: God’s love for us in Christ; Christ’s love for us in his passion, death, and resurrection; and our call to love others in Christ, having first been transformed by his love. The words of the evangelist might be a fitting epigraph for the album: “since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another” (1 Jn 4:11). This theme underlies and often surfaces in the CD’s individual songs, knitting them together as a whole from beginning to end. Before the five numbers that comprise the joyful mysteries, the album’s preparatory track, titled “True Love,” deliberately echoes John Paul’s words elsewhere about the “beautiful love” for which young people long:

I want my love to be beautiful
I want to be who you’ve made me to be
A love given up for all
Only the cross reveals true love
The cross reveals true beauty.

The three transcendentals—Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—are the object of human desire, not as distant and abstract ideals, but as concretely embodied in Christ, who is simultaneously love incarnate and our model in love (other lyrics of the same song proclaim, “Though the world tries to teach me / the truth of love / My Jesus is truth alone”). Danielle Rose writes in the album notes, “This longing [articulated by John Paul II] is an invitation to discover the true love of Jesus. May this song prepare your heart to contemplate the life of Jesus with Mary in the twenty mysteries of the rosary.”

By listening to the twenty songs that follow we enter into this contemplation in the order of the mysteries, meeting the varieties of Christian love at every turn. In the joyful mysteries, we encounter the unfulfilled love of the aged Simeon awaiting the appearance of the savior (“You know that I love you / but when shall my heart be consoled?”) and the grateful love of Joseph after frantically searching for and finally finding his lost twelve-year-old:

I love him as my child
but revere him as my God
I’m the chosen father of
the Lord’s own perfect love.

In the fifth luminous mystery, we find the overwhelming, almost disconcerting love of Christ for us, which knocks us off balance with its professions and questions:

All I want to do
is fall in love with you
May I call you my Beloved?
You do not know
how strong my love is yet.
The varieties of Christian love in the sorrowful mysteries include the agonized, questioning love of the Son before his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane in the first sorrowful mystery (“Do I believe that you really love me? / ’cause if you love me / must you ask me for this yes?”) and the anguished yet unshakeable love of the Mother of God for her little boy and crucified savior, who at the very moment of the Pièta tells him,

And I loved you then  
I love you still  
I will love you till forever passes by  
From the cradle to the grave  
My love remains the same  
You will find me by your side,  
by your side.

These diverse forms of Christian love extend to the fifth glorious mystery with the Lord’s reciprocal love for his mother, crowned in glory as the “Queen of Peace”: “Let me give you the heavens, for you gave your life to me.”

The CD’s concluding song, “Reason to Believe,” which follows “Hail, Holy Queen,” is both a challenge and an exhortation. Having sought the meaning of life (“True Love”) and found it in Christ in the song written for the rosary’s twenty mysteries (for “the life and prayer of believers is centered upon Christ” [RVM, §36]), pointed questions with eucharistic overtones prompt us to love as we have been loved by the Lord:

Why should the world believe?  
Why should the unloved believe in love?  
Am I living a consecrated life  
To reveal the True Presence  
To a world that denies it?

The same line of interrogation and call to conversion characterizes the line repeated in the refrain: “Do I live a life of such love / so as
to be a reason to believe?” We are called to be God’s active, loving presence in the world, without which our faith is empty and unconvincing. Blessed Mother Teresa said this repeatedly and embodied it with unreserved abandon in her life, as have so many saints. “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves” (Jas 1:22). Is it any wonder that secularization proceeds apace amid Christians whose lives are indistinguishable from those of unbelievers? Proper understanding and experience of the rosary, as the preeminent Catholic contemplative prayer, should propel us to loving action in the world, not to self-indulgent retreat from it. As the late Pope wrote in his letter, “Far from offering an escape from the problems of the world, the Rosary obliges us to see them with responsible and generous eyes, and obtains for us the strength to face them with the certainty of God’s help and the firm intention of bearing witness in every situation to ‘love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony’ (Col 3:14)” (RVM, §40). This is precisely the point of “Reason to Believe.” This same urgency to love concretely in the world is prominent in “Be God’s,” the piece written for the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, in which the choir intones the italicized imperative:

If you want the world to change, be God’s love
Use your gifts to bless this day, be God’s love
God has greater plans for you, be God’s love
Plans to make a saint of you, be God’s love.

“The Rosary,” John Paul wrote, “reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the very heart of Christian life” (RVM, §3), and since that heart is love, this CD inspired by the rosary explores brilliantly the many facets and the incomparable drama of Christian love.

If love means first and foremost the selfless gift of oneself to others, then the supreme act of Christian love is Christ’s self-offering in the Eucharist, the re-presentation of his passion and death.
Danielle Rose writes in the album notes that “the rosary is a eucharistic prayer,” a conviction reflected in numerous songs. Eucharistic theology and imagery loom large as a corollary to the guiding theme of love. As quoted above, “Reason to Believe” would have us “reveal the True Presence / to a world that denies it.” The track further suggests that “the real miracle” is “when your heart changes / from water into wine,” and proclaims that “Transubstantiation must occur / with each person that I meet.” In the song for the Annunciation (first joyful mystery), “Let It Be Done unto Me,” the Incarnation is overlaid with eucharistic elements:

The first Holy Communion took place
that blessed day.
Christ came into her body
When Mary chose to say
“Let it be done unto me!”

Even at his Ascension, in the refrain of the song “Rejoice!” (second glorious mystery), Jesus addresses his followers with a eucharistic promise:

Rejoice! Rejoice! I’m with you always
Till the end of time
Though I’m taken into heaven
I’ll return in bread and wine.

Similarly, the refrain to “The Kingdom of God is at Hand” (third luminous mystery), written from the perspective of Jesus the preacher, includes references to the Last Supper (and to the liturgy of the Eucharist in the Mass):

The Kingdom of God is at hand—this is my Body
The Kingdom of God is at hand—this is my Blood
The Kingdom of God is at hand—the body of Christ, I believe,
Amen!
Now the Kingdom is in your hands!
The piece devoted to the institution of the Eucharist (fifth luminous mystery) is titled “A Love Song from Jesus,” also written in the savior’s voice. His total gift of self in love is again thoroughly eucharistic:

I give you my Blood
I give you my Body
I give you all of my love
Will you take this gift
Or have I not given enough?

The rhetorical question suggests the absurdity of being somehow dissatisfied with Christ’s supreme gift, as if he could or should have done more than suffer and die for our redemption in the first place, as if it were somehow inadequate that he continues to offer himself under the elements of consecrated bread and wine. “And my desire is to share this love,” the Lord says in another verse of the same song, encapsulated in the paradoxical line, “My passion will never die”—his passionate love for us, given until the end of time in his suffering, broken body on the altar.

Besides being a eucharistic prayer, the rosary is a biblical prayer. Eighteen of its twenty mysteries are taken directly from the New Testament (the Assumption and heavenly coronation of Mary are based indirectly on Scripture). Mysteries consistently reflects this biblical basis, rendering the word of God poetically yet recognizably. The album’s use of Scripture is faithful to John Paul’s comment that the mysteries of the rosary “easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel,” for “it is not a matter of recalling information but of allowing God to speak” (RVM, §§29, 30). The opening of “Behold the Lamb of God,” for example, the piece for the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River (first luminous mystery), closely follows lines from all four Gospels and is sung from the perspective of John the Baptist:
It is I who need you and yet you come to me (Mt 3:14)
I must grow smaller, so you will increase (Jn 3:30)
God said, “This is my Beloved, Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22)
So this joy of mine has been made complete. (Jn 3:29)

The song’s title and refrain are taken directly from John 1:29—and from the priest’s words at Mass during the elevation of the consecrated host—“Behold the Lamb of God / Who takes away the sins of the world.” The next song, “Wedding at Cana,” sung from Mary’s vantage point, opens with words that are based directly on John 2:1–4, intertwined with overtones of Marian and (again) eucharistic devotion:

I was with Jesus on the third day
at a wedding in Cana in Galilee.
I am always watching over all my children
at the table of the living feast.
I noticed when the wine ran short; I said
“Son, their cups no longer overfloweth.”
He said, “How does your concern affect me?
My hour has not come yet.”

In “Jesus Within You,” the beautiful Visitation dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth, the latter sings the words incorporated into the “Hail Mary” (Lk 2:43), then continues with the immediately subsequent verse in Luke: “Blessed are you; blessed is the fruit / of your womb! / Who am I that God should come to me in you?” Mary responds with lines modeled on the opening of her Magnificat (Lk 2:46–47): “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord / I rejoice in he who blessed me, God my savior.” The song moves from the conversation between the two pregnant women, and Elizabeth’s recognition of God within Mary (“I see Christ, I see Jesus within you”), to the exhortation that we all today recognize Christ’s pres-
ence in one another without exception, “young and old”: “We must cherish Jesus’ presence in every human life / The first to worship Jesus was John, the unborn child.” There is more than a hint here and elsewhere on the album about the sacredness of human life. The refrain of “Crucify Him” refers to “every child torn from the womb”—just as it refers to “every prisoner on death row”—as ways in which Christ continues to be crucified in his members.

“Jesus Within You” and “Crucify Him” exemplify the way in which songs on the CD move seamlessly from biblical foundation to theological reflection to moral imperative and historically from ancient Israel to the contemporary West. Yet the music bears the message without strain so that one is aesthetically satisfied, devotionally moved, and theologically educated, all at once. This is a remarkable feat, as anyone who has endured dreadful liturgical music, sappy religious poetry, or theologically vacuous homilies will appreciate. Moreover, because the musical prayers are so clearly based on Scripture, one can expect that many non-Catholic Christians will also find Mysteries to be a deeply satisfying work of sacred music, as was true of the response to Danielle Rose’s first album. One can only hope that her latest CD will abundantly prove the truth of John Paul II’s exclamation in his apostolic letter that “if properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!” (RVM, §4).

An analysis this brief cannot do justice to the theological richness or poetic quality of Mysteries, though the lyrics already quoted here give some indication. Images and doctrines implicit in the songs reinforce one another, strengthening the whole devotionally and catechetically. In the late Holy Father’s words, “The Rosary is also a path of proclamation and increasing knowledge, in which the mystery of Christ is presented again and again at different levels of the Christian experience” (RVM, §17). Mysteries follows this pattern, and consequently is greater than the sum of its parts. In the case of the CD, the music is indispensable to the overall effect, without which the
words are akin to a black-and-white photograph of stained glass windows. Yet Danielle Rose’s lyrics are consistently impressive in their unobtrusive combination of theological gravity and poetic imagery. The refrain of “Easter Morning,” for example, the song written for the resurrection of Christ (first glorious mystery), manages to involve Christ’s passion, resurrection, redemption, and incarnation in an effortless seven lines:

And the cross becomes a crown,
The crown of thorns becomes a rose,
And he rose from death to life
Out of love he chose to give it all away
Become transparent to our pain,
Make our suffering his own—
To become human.

The double meaning of “crown”—first the glorious crown of the resurrected Lord contrasted with his suffering on the cross, then the crown of thorns associated with that suffering—is followed immediately by the double meaning of “rose,” which infuses literary liveliness into the theology of the refrain’s first three lines. (The imagery also recalls “Crown of Thorns”—the song in which the rose, its petals, its beauty, and its thorns are entwined with the Lord’s passion—and points ahead to “Queen of Peace,” in which all of Mother Mary’s “grateful children want to offer you / little roses as they pray the rosary.”) The refrain of “Easter Morning” pivots in line four on the love—that is, the loving action—of Christ for us, so central to the album’s main theme. Entirely “given away” on the cross, that love made possible our redemption: God through Christ was willing to “become transparent to our pain” because he truly became incarnate, he became human.

The song about the Assumption of Mary (fourth glorious mystery), “With You in Heaven,” is marked by a similar combination of poetic insight and theological astuteness. What better way to imply
the bodily assumption of Mary than to construct verses that begin with parts of her body, which “are now with [God] in heaven”? Danielle Rose draws out the devotional significance of Mary’s hands, eyes, and heart, despite how surprising it might seem to open a sacred song in such a manner:

Look at those hands:
The faith they’ve held onto
The things they’ve let go
The tears that they’ve dried
These hands held my Lord
When he was crucified
Mary’s hands—
they are now with you in heaven.

At the same time, these lines bear their doctrinal load with the lightest touch. Beyond Marian devotion and the dogma of the Assumption, they convey the Catholic view of the human person, not through abstract philosophical language but by poetic implication about the experiential union of body and soul: when she was on earth, Mary’s active, physical hands were the means by which she exercised her faith, her renunciations, her compassion in drying the tears of others. In lines that echo those of Our Lady of Sorrows from “A Mother’s Song,” these same hands held her crucified son after his descent from the cross—and they are now with God, in heaven, because he brought her there to be with him. Mary’s eyes, too, are there, “gazing with love upon bended knee” and “gathering all her visions of wonder and sorrow,” as is her heart, “pondering the mysteries held deep within.” The bridge verse of the song builds upon Mary’s wholeness in heaven, offering a moving supplication about God’s providential care for each of us, body and soul:

Lord, bless my hands, my heart, my breath
Each step of my feet, each hair on my head
You have built of me a temple out of mere flesh and bone
You have given me a body for my soul’s eternal home.

Yet again there is no conspicuous mention of doctrine, even though
the final two lines imply our createdness by God and the resurrection
of the body, respectively. Likewise, the song’s concluding lyrics
shift explicitly to the listener and imply the communion of saints as
well as the salvation of individuals, even as they articulate the deepest Christian longing: “Bless us, Lord; we’ll soon be with you in heav-
en / Bless me, Lord; I’ll soon be with you in heaven.”

In his “Letter to Artists” in 1999, Pope John Paul II explicitly stated that the Church “needs musicians”:

How many sacred works have been composed through the
centuries by people deeply imbued with the sense of the mys-
tery! The faith of countless believers has been nourished by
melodies flowing from the hearts of other believers, either
introduced into the liturgy or used as an aid to dignified wor-
ship. In song, faith is experienced as vibrant joy, love, and con-
fident expectation of the saving intervention of God. (§ 12)

One could hardly imagine a better description of the creativity of
Danielle Rose throughout Mysteries. Her sense of the mystery behind
the mysteries is palpable; the melodies flow from her heart, and will
certainly nourish the faith of others, as did the songs on Defining
Beauty. Vibrant joy and love radiate from the music and lyrics, the
theology and the poetry, the doctrine and the devotion of the sacred
songs on Danielle Rose’s album. Mysteries is a direct response not
only to Rosarium Virginis Mariae but also to the Holy Father’s appeal
to artists in his letter to them, for “the creation awaits the revelation
of the children of God also through art and in art. This is your
task” (§14).

Mysteries makes plain that Danielle Rose is a person of exceptional
talent and profound spirituality, at once a songwriter, vocalist, musi-
cian, theologian, poet, exegete, catechist, and evangelist. All these gifts are synthesized with taste, beauty, and insight. She sings the truth and the faith, the love of Christ, and the tenderness of Mary for us, exploring their multiple facets without ever losing sight of their interrelated wholeness. She proves a worthy guide through the twenty mysteries of the rosary, from the Annunciation to Mary’s coronation. In his conclusion to Rosarium Virginis Mariae, the late Pope wrote that “a prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the Christian community” (§43). Danielle Rose’s Mysteries is both a conspicuous example of how that rediscovery is already taking place and a means that will help others to rediscover it in turn. It is an inspiring work by a young woman unabashedly in love with God and the faith, notwithstanding the shortcomings of his Church and the challenges faced by his people. Mysteries manifests the “new evangelization” in a dramatic, unexpected form. While standing fully within the tradition that she has inherited, Danielle Rose has demonstrated that being a member of the living body of Christ consists not in the mere repetition of what one has received but, rather, in responding wholeheartedly to the living God within it, offering one’s gifts freely to fellow brothers and sisters. She has made thoroughly her own a prayer not of her own making and used it to craft a work of Catholic creative brilliance. Even (and perhaps especially) in difficult times, we should rejoice in this musical harvest of holiness and let it touch our hearts.