

DISCOVER THE LOST TRADITION OF MYSTICAL CHRISTIANITY

THE ENLIGHTENMENT YOU SEEK IN OTHER RELIGIONS HAS been present in Christianity from the beginning. Richard Rohr, a global leader in spiritual awakening, helps you recognize the forces (such as ego resistance and dual thinking) that separate you from your deeper self. Then, drawing from the Gospels and the greatest Christian contemplatives, he shows you what it means to be spiritually awake. You'll learn:

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- What is useful about popular ideas such as "the law of attraction"
- What Jesus, the first mystical leader in the West, can teach you
- How you can enhance spiritual awareness without sacrificing reason

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"*The Naked Now* is a deep breath of fresh air. Richard Rohr invites us, all of us, to slow down and to find God, or be found by God, in all the places we never thought to look." — Jim Wallis, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Great Awakening*, President of Sojourners



THROUGH THE STORIES, MEDITATIONS,
AND TESTED PRACTICES IN THIS BOOK,
RICHARD ROHR WILL HELP YOU:

- Awaken your desire for God
- Free yourself from the fears that can cripple you
- Connect to the joy already within you
- Transform yourself and inspire others
- See as the mystics see
- Live in full awareness of the Naked Now

RICHARD ROHR is a revered speaker and million-selling author. He is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, a guest on the radio show *Oprah and Friends*, a regular contributor to *Sojourners* and *Tikkun*, and the author of books such as *Adam's Return*, *The Enneagram*, *Everything Belongs*, *Simplicity*, and *Things Hidden*.

Cover design by George Foster

A Crossroad Book
The Crossroad Publishing Company

\$19.95 U.S.

Spirituality / Religion

ISBN: 978-0-8245-2543-9



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THE NAKED NOW

Learning to
See as the
Mystics
See

RICHARD ROHR

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *Everything Belongs*

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

The Gift Is Already Given

Our hope is not deceptive. The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

—ROMANS 5:5

You already know. The Spirit is with you and the Spirit is in you.

—JOHN 14:17

The future is by definition the unsayable and the uncontrollable, filled with paradoxes, mysteries, and confusions. It is an imperfect world at every level. Therefore the future is always, somehow, scary. We attempt to build for ourselves many protections against this imperfection, even in the patterns of our mind. This unsayable future — preparing for it and also fearing it — determines much of our lives. Thus we search for predictability, explanation, and order to give ourselves some sense of peace and control.

Even much of religion itself has become a search for social order, group cohesion, and personal worthiness, or a way of escaping into the next world, which unfortunately destroys most

of its transformative power. True spirituality is not a search for perfection or control or the door to the next world; it is a search for divine union *now*. The great discovery is always that what we are searching for has already been given! I did not find it; it found me. It is Jacob's shout of *Eureka!* at the foot of his ladder to heaven in Genesis 28:16-17.

Union and perfection are two different journeys with very different strategies. Common religion seeks private perfection; the mystics seek and enjoy the foundation itself — divine union, totally given. Personal perfection insists on private knowing and certitude. Surprisingly, union is a much better way of knowing. It is *a shared knowing* that is much more solid and consoling. I promise you that this will make more sense as the book unfolds, but in the meantime just ask anyone in love if this is not true.

The most amazing fact about Jesus, unlike almost any other religious founder, is that he found God in *disorder and imperfection* — and told us that we must do the same or we would never be content on this earth. This is what makes Jesus so counterintuitive to most eras and cultures, and why most never perceived the great good news in this utter shift of consciousness. That failure to understand his core message, and a concrete program by which you could experience this truth for yourself, is at the center of our religious problem today. We looked for hope where it was never promised, and no one gave us the proper software so we could know hope for ourselves, least of all in disorder and imperfection! Worst of all, we did not know that *hope and union are the same thing*, and that real hope has nothing to do with mental certitudes.

WHEN YOU SURRENDER TO FEAR AND DISTRACTION

If you surrender to the fear of uncertainty, life can become a set of insurance policies. Your short time on this earth becomes small and self-protective, a kind of circling of the wagons around what you can be sure of and what you think you can control — even God. It provides you with the illusion that you are in the driver's seat, navigating on safe, small roads, and usually in a single, predetermined direction that can take you only where you have already been.

For far too many people, no life journey is necessary because we think we already have all our answers at the beginning. "The church says, . . . the Bible says, etc."

A second group tries a different approach. They choose to whistle in the dark, look the other way, or just keep busy — seeking various ways of being important, or as Jesus put it, trying to "build bigger barns." For them, life becomes a series of manufactured dramas, entertainment, and diversionary tactics intended to help them avoid the substantial questions. Here, what some call *intensity* is frequently an avoidance of what I will call *presence* — intimacy with ourselves, with life, and with others. This avoidance is symbolized by what we call the consumer culture, which in our current economic situation appears to be falling apart.

This group also represents a large percentage of humanity, especially in the developed world. Governments encourage this pacification by various distractions, what used to be called "bread and circuses." They know it will keep us small, content, and uninterested in those "weightier matters of the law: justice,

mercy, and good faith" (Matthew 23:23) that have attracted all great souls.

A third group does seek various forms of transcendence and spirituality, but in a mixture of mature and immature ways. One major theme in this book is that, unfortunately, so much religious seeking today is immature transcendence, dualistically split off from any objective experience of union with God, self, or others — what Owen Barfield would have called "the desert of nonparticipation."¹

If it is authentically experienced, Christianity is *the overcoming of the split from God's side once and for all!* Sadly, most of us remain split inside of a heady set of formulas and religious jargon, a place where deep constant hope cannot be found — to say nothing of joy. We need to leave the desert for a much better land, a "final participation" that can be partially enjoyed now.

WHEN YOU JOYFULLY SURRENDER TO GOD

Mature transcendence is an actual "falling into" and an "undergoing" of God, as James Alison so brilliantly names it.² God is "done unto us," and all we can do is allow it, as both the similar prayers of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane make clear. What we fall into is what Christianity would call both "an abyss" and an "utter foundation." What a paradox! But in God, they are not opposites.

When we do get there, we almost wonder how we got there. We know we did not *do* anything nearly as much as we know we were *done unto*. We are being utterly and warmly held and falling helplessly into a scary mystery at the very same time — caught between profound desire and the question, "Where is this going

to take me?" It has been said many times that, after transformation, you seldom have the feeling you have found anything. It feels much more like Someone found you!

You find yourself having been grabbed, being held, and being Someone's beloved. At first, you do not even know what is going on. All you know is that it is a most wondrous undergoing, but an undergoing nevertheless. You know you have been "had" (see Jeremiah 20:7-9 or Isaiah 6:4-7). You are in Someone Else's grip. How else will anybody freely and rightly give up control? They won't. They'll use religion itself as a disguised way of taking control, or try to control God by their good behavior.

Finally you allow yourself to stand before *one* mirror for your identity — you surrender to the naked now of true prayer and full presence. You become a Thou before the great I AM. Such ultimate mirroring gives you the courage to leave other mirrors behind you. "Human approval means nothing to me," Jesus said. "Why do you waste time looking to one another for approval when you have the approval that comes from the One God?" (John 5:41, 44). Henceforward, as Teresa of Avila said, "You find God in yourself and yourself in God," a discovery that precedes, outdoes, and undercuts all of the best psychology in the world. Think of the thousands of dollars you can save in therapy!

Most people in our whimsical culture live in a hall of mirrors, and so we find ourselves with fragile and rapidly changing identities, needing a lot of affirmation. We see this especially in so many young people. Their identities are built on feelings, moods, and ideas that are easily manipulated by everything around them, including advertising and its selling of superficial images.³

You have been given something so much better, so much more joyful and more substantial than that! Divine presence, and the faith, hope, and love that accompany it, are a gift — you cannot control it — but nevertheless a gift that can and should be asked for (Luke 11:13). *Asking for something from God does not mean talking God into it; it means an awakening of the gift within ourselves.* You only ask for something you have already begun to taste! The gift has already been given. Most people, quite sadly and with disastrous consequences, do not know that the gift is already theirs. The teachers of the early Christian centuries, along with many of the later saints and mystics, were clear about this. Yet most Christians today still seem to be like the citizens of Ephesus in apostolic days, saying in effect, “We did not even know there was such a thing as the Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2).

DISCOVER YOUR BIRTHRIGHT

It’s true that you cannot risk telling people with an immature or dualistic consciousness about the Great Indwelling before they have actually experienced it, because they will always abuse it or trivialize it for purposes of superiority, libertinism, or control. This is probably what Jesus meant by one of his more offensive images, “throwing pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6). At the same time, we surely did not have to deny it or keep it such a big secret! Perhaps this occurred because many of the clergy had themselves never experienced divine union and so could not teach others about it. Catholics and Orthodox make the Holy Spirit depend on membership and sacraments; Protestants make the Spirit depend on a personal decision or faith as a technique.

In both cases, *we* are back in charge; *we* are the doers. There is no undergoing.

Only people who have undergone some level of conversion can be told they have the Holy Spirit and be prepared to understand what one is talking about. Life will then “fan it into flame” (2 Timothy 1:6), but they will always and forever know that the fire was given from Elsewhere. There is absolutely nothing you can do to earn or get the Holy Spirit; there is nothing at all you can do to attain the divine indwelling (e.g., Romans 8:10, Galatians 3:1–5).⁴ Don’t try to “believe” in the Holy Spirit as one doctrine among others. Instead, *practice drawing from this deep well within you*, and then you will naturally believe. Put the horse first, and it will draw the cart.

At the same time, there is nothing you can do to *lose* the Holy Spirit; the most you can do, as Ephesians cleverly says, is to “grieve” the existing Presence that is “sealed” within you (4:30). You can, therefore, be ignorant of your birthright. You can neglect the gift, and thus not enjoy its wonderful fruits. That seems to be the case with many people, and is what we mean by “sinners.” The word signifies not moral inferiors so much as people who do not know *who* they are and *whose* they are, people who have no connection to their inherent dignity and importance. They have to struggle for it by all kinds of futile performances. What a waste. Thus, do not hate “sinners” or look down on them. Feel sorry for what they are missing out on!

Why do we have this gift and yet not realize it? Perhaps God does not want to force anything on us that we do not actually desire or choose for ourselves. So a lovely dance ensues between God and the soul that preserves freedom on both sides.

The gift is objectively already within, and yet has to be desired and awakened by the person. But you never know that it is within until after it is awakened! This is another paradox. Faith is often *clarified and joy-filled hindsight* — *after we have experienced our experiences*. But the path ahead still demands walking in trust, risk, and various degrees of darkness. Henceforth, you will remember in the darkness what you once experienced in the light. But the path ahead will always be a necessary mixture of darkness and light.

In the Judeo-Christian creation story, humans were created in the very “image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:26). Our DNA is divine. The divine indwelling is never earned by any behavior whatsoever or any ritual, but only *recognized and realized* (Romans 11:6, Ephesians 2:8–10) and fallen in love with. When you are ready, you will be both underwhelmed and overwhelmed at the boundless mystery of your own humanity. You will know you are standing under the same waterfall of mercy as everybody else and receiving an undeserved *radical* grace, which gets to the *root* of everything. Without that underlying experience of God as both *abyss* and *ground*, it is almost impossible to live in the now, in the fullness of who I am, warts and all, and almost impossible to experience the Presence that, paradoxically, always fills the abyss and shakes the ground.

PRAYER — PRACTICING HEAVEN NOW

“Everything exposed to the light itself becomes light,” says Ephesians 5:14. In prayer, we merely keep returning the divine gaze and we become its reflection, almost in spite of ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:18). The word “prayer” has often been

trivialized by making it into a way of getting what you want. But in this book, I use “prayer” as the umbrella word for *any interior journeys or practices that allow you to experience faith, hope, and love within yourself*. It is not a technique for getting things, a pious exercise that somehow makes God happy, or a requirement for entry into heaven. It is much more like practicing heaven now.

The essential religious experience is that you are being “known through” more than knowing anything in particular yourself. Yet despite this difference, it will feel like true knowing. Throughout this book, we will interchangeably call this new way of knowing contemplation, nondualistic thinking, or “third-eye” seeing. Such prayer, such seeing, takes away your anxiety about figuring it all out fully for yourself, or needing to be right about your formulations. At this point, God becomes more a verb than a noun, more a process than a conclusion, more an experience than a dogma, more a personal relationship than an idea.⁵ There is Someone dancing with you, and you are not afraid of making mistakes.

No wonder all of the great liturgical prayers of the churches end with the same phrase: “through Christ our Lord, Amen.” *We do not pray to Christ; we pray through Christ*. Or even more precisely, Christ prays through us. We are always and forever the conduits, the instruments, the tuning forks, the receiver stations (Romans 8:22–27). We slowly learn the right frequencies that pick up the signal. The core task of all good spirituality is to teach us to “cooperate” with what God already wants to do and has already begun to do (Romans 8:28). In fact, nothing good would even enter our minds unless in the previous moment God had not already “moved” within us. We are always and forever merely seconding the motion.

To live in such a way is to live inside of an unexplainable hope, because your life will now feel much larger than your own. In fact, it is not your own life, and yet, paradoxically, you are more “you” than ever before. That is the constant and consistent experience of the mystics — their vision that can also be your own. “God, you were here all along, and I never knew it” (Genesis 28:16).

CHAPTER TWO

The Great Unsayings

Do not utter the name of God in vain.

— EXODUS 20:7

I cannot emphasize enough the momentous importance of the Jewish revelation of the name of God. It puts the entire nature of our spirituality in correct context and, if it had been followed, could have freed us from much idolatry and arrogance. As we now spell and pronounce it, the word is *Yahweh*. For those speaking Hebrew, it was the Sacred Tetragrammaton YHWH (*yod, he, vav, and he*). It was considered a literally unspeakable word for Jews, and any attempt to know what we were talking about was “in vain,” as the commandment said (Exodus 20:7). Instead, they used *Elohim* or *Adonai* in speaking or writing. From God’s side the divine identity was kept mysterious and unavailable to the mind; when Moses asked for the divinity’s name, he got only the phrase that translates something to this effect: “I AM WHO AM. . . . This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations” (Exodus 3:14–15).

This unspeakability has long been recognized, but we now know it goes even deeper: formally the word was not spoken at all, but *breathed!* Many are convinced that its correct pronunciation is an attempt to replicate and imitate the very sound of inhalation and exhalation.⁶ The one thing we do every moment