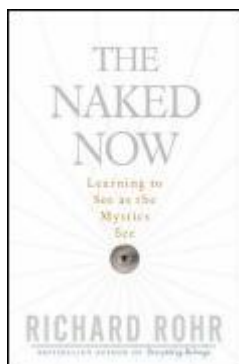


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Reality's clash of contradictions

by Rich Heffern



THE NAKED NOW: LEARNING TO SEE AS THE MYSTICS SEE

By Richard Rohr

Published by Crossroad Publishing Company, \$19.95

Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr's new book, subtitled "Learning to See as the Mystics See," extols the spiritual benefits of learning to live comfortably with paradox, with the process of conversion, with learning to change our minds as life comes at us with its messiness and disorder.

He claims that if your religious practice is nothing more than to remain sincerely open to the ongoing challenges of life and love, then you will find God -- and also yourself.

It's a bold claim, but Rohr offers sound reasoning to support it. Great people, he says, keep adjusting to what life offers and demands of them.

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?God?s love is so ingenious and victorious that I find God is willing to turn the world around to get me facing in the right direction. God seems to be totally into change. I know this every time I see how divine grace maneuvers around my sinfulness and human events, and how the entire universe itself is continually changing states from solids to liquids to gasses to seeming emptiness. Change is God?s clear pattern. Surely, we are not greater than God.?

Rohr presents the Christian contemplative and mystical traditions as enduring examples of ways of living animated by non-dualistic thinking.

Ultimate reality, he says, cannot be perceived by a mind that divides things into opposing categories, into black and white, failing to acknowledge the grayness of things, the paradoxical nature of much of reality. ?With such software, we cannot access things like infinity, grace, mercy or love -- the necessary and important things.?

Non-dualistic thinking honors and allows Mystery and was consistently practiced by Jesus himself, according to Rohr. ?So many of his sayings are so enigmatic and confusing that I am convinced that is why most Catholics simply stopped reading the Bible.?

Rohr is not concerned with being right, with a positioning in the correct ideological camp.

?God does not exist so that we can think correctly about him -- or her. God instead desires the flourishing of what God created and loves -- us ourselves. And it?s ironic, but we flourish more by learning from our mistakes and changing than by a straight course that teaches us nothing.?

Rohr wants us to squarely face and come to terms with the paradoxical nature of reality. ?If we are honest, everything is a clash of contradictions, and there is nothing on this created earth that is not a mixture at the same time of good and bad, helpful and unhelpful, endearing and maddening, living and dying.?

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We Christians call it the paschal mystery.

His book is an exciting and interactive presentation of contemplative spirituality, complete with prayers, walking meditations and exercises.

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