



## Richard Rohr – Day Two of a Three-Day Workshop for Spiritual Directors & Those in Training

- We need to learn to be present to every moment – this “being present” is not somewhere we can get to (by way of this or that); we can only *be* there.”
- *New creation* and *transformation* emerges out of our interiority. It is only when this happens that religion is what it should be – a transformational system! Sadly

(and typically) many many churches remain simply “**belonging systems**” concerned with rules, about who’s “in” and who’s “out”, about the defining of identity by being over and against the other etc.

- Rohr has a huge fondness for the poetry of **Mary Oliver**. He read two of her poems to illustrate the contemplative life – *Snow Geese* and *Mindful* from her collection of poetry, “*Why I Wake Early*.”
- Contemplation is “a loving LOOK at the real. \* Notice the use of the word “look” and NOT “think.” Don’t think, just look. Jesus, “*you won’t enter into the Kingdom by thinking about it; look at this little child...*”
- Busyness and “more & more” ultimately never satisfy.
- The first half of life is “text”. The second half of life is commentary. In the second half we need more space, less stimulation and experience. We need to work with what life has gifted us, to make sense of it – to grow in wisdom. In the second half of life we grow to become “wisdom people.”
- In Hindu culture there are three stages of development: (1) Student (learning and learning how to learn); (2) Householder (marries and raises children, i.e. the school of relationships); (3) Forest Dweller (someone who goes beyond life as usual. They leave the world they have created and “go” on a journey; they move out of their comfort zone into mystery and the unknown and (4) Wisdom Stage (They come to the place where “everything belongs.” Rohr calls this the non-dualistic stage; the place where we hold the irresolvable; we hold differences rather than polarize around difference. There is no black & white – there is only the insight of wisdom. It’s about “synthesis,” integration and wholeness. It’s a spacious place to be; a vacuum that God fills.
- Churches need to learn how to help people nurture and protect an “open space” (room for God; attentive and fully present to the moment). “It is so important” if people are to grow and deepen in their God-created humanity; if they are to find that deep space where (without being aware) they have **always** loved God. I thought of Augustine’s restlessness and “God-shaped space” that only God can fill.
- There is only one thing more dangerous than individual narcissism and that’s group narcissism – for example, a narcissistic church.
- Contemplation is “God’s therapy” (an expression attributed to Fr. Thomas Keating)

- Your conscious mind is what you think you know.
- Only 5% of our mental processing is conscious; 95% of it occurs within our unconscious mind.
- When churches throw out mystery, symbols, colour, texture, the senses, metaphor, art, poetry, story, dreams, a rich music tradition; **all** you are left with is sermons! Sermons which are largely unable to touch the unconscious; the deep places within which and from which change and transformation happen. He talked about movies and the way that images, and the visual move us and touch us deeply (and often transformatively) – we experience joy, sadness etc. Sermons seldom bring us to this place; they leave us in our heads. Now he's not undermining the value of sermons; I imagine sermons are important for our formation in the "first half" or first-"stages" of faith development. The point is that if we stay there we never grow; we are never transformed inwardly, we never locate and become our true selves. **Sermons are largely unable to touch the unconscious level at which healing occurs.** It's invariably easier to change behavior at the level of the subconscious when our defences are down or circumvented. I wondered if this was a part of the significance of Jesus telling parables?
- If you do not transform your pain, your hurt, your brokenness, your addictions and your woundedness, you will **always** transmit it – will always relate to others out of it!
- Addictions numb us!
- Grief, sadness, pain and woundedness are often doorways to the unconscious; to the place of healing and transformation. The means though which our true selves are discovered, nurtured and formed.
- As long as religion **ONLY** remains concerned about external belief (and assent) and right thinking; about right doctrine, and about "belonging systems" ("closed set" thinking) there will be **NO** transformation. This kind of religion is concerned with loyalty; it thrives on fear and control. It represses rather than transforms. It's not really concerned with "good news" and its embodiment. It stops and right belief and remains in the head *alone*.
- Rohr told the Zen story of the finger pointing to the moon to illustrate his point. Junk religion gets obsessed with the finger (it's self-identity; its self-differentiation; its defining of itself over against other 'fingers' – the Catholic 'finger', the Baptist 'finger', the Anglican figure etc). It's much more concerned with its identity structures; so much so that it forgets it's a pointing finger; it's pointing to something far greater (in the case of the Zen story, the moon. We should read the triune God ad creator of ALL that is seen and unseen. We obsess about the finger and miss (more likely "forget", put to one side, or put in a box and shut the lid) God!
- In contemplation, as with a true mirror, we receive what is before us; we receive it without distortion; we receive it as it is. In contemplation we **receive** without judgment and distortion.
- You can't understand Jesus before a trinitarian understanding of God. Without this, Jesus simply becomes a teacher, a sage, guru etc.

- When we argue about the names of God, about God's gender, we miss the point. We miss the essence of trinity which is relationship.
- We come to God through our imperfection not our perfection!
- Contemplation leads us to live more undefended lives.
- Sadly prayer has become pragmatic, functional and manipulative. It's become about talking God into doing something *for* us; for **me**. We need to learn (and thus recover) the deeper significance of prayer, of praying THROUGH Christ NOT to Christ. The Spirit praying IN me.
- Romans 8 has been a significant passage these last two days. Rohr keeps coming back to it.
- God prayers in me, through me, for me and with me.
- Catherine of Genoa – “My deepest *me is* God.”
- In relation to the first commandment Rohr reminded us that what was at stake was in our saying the name of God and thinking that in so doing we possess God; God becomes ours, and we reduce God to our own proportions. A God we presume to possess is never a BIG God – our God becomes too small! That's the wisdom the first commandment.
- Jesus told his generation he would give them only ONE sign – the sign of Jonah. For Jesus the Jonah story is an invitation to a liminal space (the whale); to the dark place of struggle with and against our ego's; what we might also call our shadow-selves. It is the place where we fall into the hands of the living God; and in that falling we become transformed after the likeness and example of Jesus. Jesus, in his humanity, goes to this place head of us. It's the place of *kenosis* and letting go of self (i.e. self surrender and self-emptying). It's the place of *metanoia* (of going beyond the mind; of going beyond the first half of life; of growing in wisdom. Of seeing things as they really are; of confronting the unreality of our own diminished lives. It's the place of longing for the grace needful for transformation and the formation of our true selves. It's the place where God begins to destabilize and break-down our egos of false selves. It's a place we resist, and sadly in so many cases, a place we resist our whole lives. It's the dark place within which we learn we are held and loved. The “hidden years” become necessary for a fully human living!
- Rohr highly commended Gerald May (died in 2005) and his books, especially May's *HarperSanFrancisco* published (2004) book: **The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth.**
- Rohr had (and I agree) a very critical view of the theory of substitutionary atonement. It is so damaging to our sense of self and God. He was grateful the Franciscans held to the teaching of [John?] Duns Scotus when it came to understanding Jesus' death. He asked an interesting question and sought to answer it via Duns Scotus – “was it necessary for Jesus to be crucified?” Again, I think James Alison's book *Knowing Jesus* is very useful at this point.
- The two-halves of life are illustrated in the NT in so many ways – “milk” and “solids” (in Hebrews); Law and Spirit, Fear and Love etc.

- Spiritual directors are so important in accompanying and helping those transitioning between these two halves; this transition can't be accompanied from the pulpit.
- Carl Jung (despite his own un-wholeness) has much that is useful to teach us. He's written a whole treatise on the two halves of life.
- Reformed theology has a "negative anthropology" (total depravity). Rohr believes that despite its many faults Catholicism has a "positive anthropology"; one that is particularly needful to a wider degree in Christianity. It's a gift.
- Galatians 5:18.
- The Law is only the container; it's not the contents of the container. The law cannot transform us. The Law creates what psychologists call a "limit situation" – inevitably and necessarily we will bang up against it. It's the point at which we come to the end of ourselves and realise we can't keep it. We need another to break through; to make a way. The law holds you in the needful crucible of struggle within which we discover our need for God.
- The two halves of life (or the two "tasks" of life) are wonderfully illustrated by Jesus telling Peter (John 21) that when he was young he dressed himself; when he is old others will dress him and take him where he would rather not go. The deeper dimension to the story has to do with what Rohr and others have been describing as the two halves of life. In the first we are initially dressed (given identity) by others and at some point we begin to dress ourselves (we built our own identity and sense of ego-self). **We "clothe" ourselves**, are concerned with how we look and who we are relative to significant others. **It's to do with self-determination**. (I thought of the wonderful NZ novel, *The End of the Golden Weather* and the notion of being "self-made" – a self-made-man!). The **second half**, however, has to do with self-relinquishment; has to do with giving up control; of living without masks and defences. Someone else (God, not others, not culture etc) gives you your identity – you are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased! We become defined in relation to God and God's love. Love of God compels and animates us.
- In the first half we learn self-control. We need law if we are later to move beyond the containment of law. We need teaching. We need instruction. We need boundaries. These are needful and we suffer for their lack in this half of life. We can't however stay there – there's so much more...The Law gets us started; but its not the place we stay.
- The second half is about surrendering, of giving up control. It feels like losing. Unlike the first half we're not accompanied by what society defines as "being a success". It's a hard place to be for the ego is broken down. It's a hard place to be for it entails giving up, and the world doesn't get it; can never understand it nor does it want it. Those in the second half see that in giving up, in surrendering, they paradoxically become more (more in the likeness of Christ the prototype of what it means to image or to be made in the image of God – which is to say, to be what I call fully human, completely free, and fully alive toward God, self, and others (in fact, all of creation)).

- Jesus gives us a loser’s script, not a script for winning.
- In the first half of life you fight the devil, while in the second half you fight God (like Jacob?). God always wins and expands your world. Grace is pain and discomfort for the ego.
- The Centre of Action and Contemplation have produced a little booklet titled “Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life.”
- We come to God by doing it wrong!
- As ministers we always walk the fine line between maintaining the external form of the life of the church, and developing and nourishing the inner form – The transformative dimensions of belonging.
- Our job as pastors and spiritual directors is, from inside the economy of grace, to use wrong-doing, brokenness, suffering, and struggle to light the fire of deep transformation.
- Brueggemann (somewhere) illustrates the stages in terms of the OT. The first stage is *Torah* (religion as a belonging system). The second stage is seen in *The Prophets* (we become capable of self-critical thinking. We expose the illusions that ‘feed’ our egos. We see the reality of who we are and our need for God. The prophet is critical reflection and commentary from *within* a group such as a church. The third stage is *Wisdom* (Job exemplifies this like no other OT story. At this stage we develop the ability to live with irresolvable dilemmas - see the notes from Day 1.). E.F Schumacher’s little book, “Guide for the Perplexed” is useful in describing these stages.
- Church-types can illustratively (in a generalized sense) be laid over Brueggemann’s schema – Conservative, Liberal, and Radical.
- “The church is always both whore and bride.”
- The opposite of faith is Jesus’ teaching is not doubt; it’s fear. Jesus never criticizes doubt; it is always fear – “why are you afraid?” etc.
- “Breaking down becomes necessary in order to break through!” This is the place of transition.
- Liminal space. The place of being in-between. The place of not having arrived. A place outside of our comfort zone, i.e. a place of discomfort. Our task is to wait in this place, to trust in this place, to watch in this place for the transformational invitations of God. To often when we find ourselves in this liminal space we either retreat to the familiar / the comfortable, OR, we rush out of that place into a new place of our own making, not God’s making. This liminal space is the place of discernment of spirit’s; the place of discerning and setting our sail in the face of the wind of the Spirit.
- Many people are in living space but they don’t realise it because the bottom hasn’t dramatically fallen out of their lives.
- Romans 9:16 (JB translation).
- God’s work is best done in darkness, quietly under the radar, when we’re out of the way. When we come to the end (or incremental endings) of our ego-selves.
- In churches we give ourselves over to the easy tendency to control from above (and at times this is needed especially in the formative stages) rather

than allow transformation from below ; from *within* persons and communities, given that those persons and communities have the capacity and grace.

- You have to believe in something before you can react against it. You have to be for something before you can react against it. Construction must be before and after de-construction.
- Love becomes the only subversion for those who lives solely in their minds.
- “Fundamentalism has **everything** to do with psychology (the need, amongst other things, for certitude) and **nothing** to do with theology.” You don’t address fundamentalism at a theological level.
- We ask a different set of questions in the second half of life; questions having to do with how we can be transformed in and by our brokenness and sin.
- That which causes us to stumble (the crisis, the “stumbling stone”) contains within it the invitation to transformation, aliveness, freedom and wholeness. The “stumbling stone” is the “precipitating event.” Normally the ego needs to suffer destabilizing humility – the veneer and the facades we prop up our sense of self fall away. We are exposed under the loving eye of God.
- As I’ve listening, I’ve thought often of Margaret Silf’s excellent 2006 published book (Lion publishing, Oxford) *The Way of Wisdom*. She says that to embark on the wisdom journey is to let go of the need for certainty. It is to realise that we never overtake God. It is to learn the more human, more life-giving, the more Christ-like way of responding in the present moment.