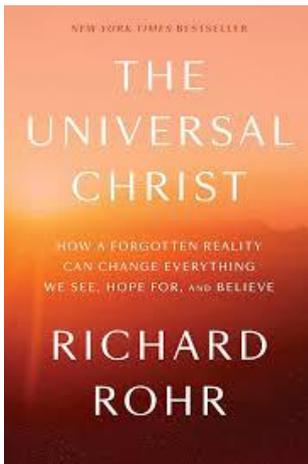


## Richard Rohr: The Universal Christ



Yet again, another book of deep wisdom and transformational insight condensed after a lifetime of thoughtful reflection by one of our leading contemporary theologians. Steeped in the Franciscan tradition, Rohr takes us back to Genesis: God in Creation, a fact illuminated rather than contrasted by God in Jesus. Salvation not for the individual so much as for the whole creation.

Rohr is critical of what he calls a stingy and exclusive expression of faith that sees itself in some ways an escape plan. For him, faith is not a demarcation but an open invitation to a fuller expression of life. He reexamines the theory of the cross, dismissing some of the more sadistic interpretations favoured by many churches today, reminding his readers that, unlike the deities of other religions, the God of Jesus does not require sacrifices from his followers; rather Jesus reveals a God who is making continual sacrifice for us. Salvation is not a transaction but a covenant, inviting us to wake up to the endless possibilities of love.

He notes that St Paul intuits resurrection in creation and then applies it to Jesus, rather than the other way round (“if there is no resurrection then Christ is not raised” I Cor 15:13). And he has an interesting notion that after the death of Jesus, people saw the risen Lord in ordinary people: a gardener near the tomb, a chap cooking fish on the beach, a stranger on a road to Emmaus. Tantalizing as this idea is, one has to wonder if this would have been enough to provoke a faith in the Risen Lord.

More traditionally, he sees the resurrection as, on the one hand ‘bodily’ but on the other as a ‘new creation’, thus allowing for the ‘new creating’ to be a continual process within our lives on earth and beyond. And more traditionally still – if we go back far enough in the tradition – he rejects modern ideas of hell, based more on Dante and Bruegel than what’s said in the Bible and notes that St Paul is fighting not against individual acts of nastiness, but corrupt systems (“powers and thrones”). The church is intended as an example of a new society and Rohr is critical of Christians who live according to the values of secular society but then ‘go to church’ without changing their everyday values.

He concludes, therefore, that faith is not so much faith IN Jesus as the faith OF Jesus, conforming our lives to the values and attitudes of Christ: a process he calls moving from Order to Dis-order and into Re-order.

Rohr writes with an easy style and explains things simply. The intellectual challenge of the book is not the technical language but the range of ideas that seem to pop off every page causing the reader to rethink stuff they thought they already ‘knew’! Not a book to tick off as ‘done’ but one to ponder for some time to come.