

God is Good

Richard Rohr

In most ancient religions on every inhabited continent, God was seen to be “controllable” through some form of sacrifice, even fellow humans. Around the time of Abraham, the sacrificial instinct was transferred from humans to animals (Genesis 22:13); ancient Hebrew and other religions sacrificed birds, goats, sheep, and bullocks to please a seemingly fearsome God. This was still going on in Jesus’ time. When Jesus said, “It is finished,” before he died on the cross, some believe he was saying that the very notion of sacrificial religion was finished and

It is almost impossible for humans to believe that we can be good or worthy without some kind of “payment” to earn that dignity. The free flow of unearned love, what we call grace, is almost a punishment for most people. They fiercely resist it. This view of scarcity, as opposed to a God and a worldview of infinite abundance, must be radically transformed for the Gospel to even make sense. In my opinion, only a small minority of believers actually live inside the world of grace.

The amazing wonder of biblical revelation is that God is much different than we thought and much better

we can seek and ask for. Contemplation is a vast opening to inner experience. Walter Brueggemann, in his monumental *Theology of the Old Testament*, says that the Jewish people came up with a “credo of five adjectives” to describe the God they met on their historical journey. YHWH was experienced as merciful, gracious, faithful, forgiving, and steadfast in love. You must realize what a breakthrough that was in human history and how it allowed one such as Jesus to emerge from such a worldview.

The only people who know this to be true for themselves, and not because someone else told them, are those who sincerely seek, pray, and, often, suffer. Outside of inner experience, these descriptors of God are just words. Outside of your own inner experience of this kind of God, most religion remains ritualistic, moralistic, doctrinaire, and largely unhappy; that is true on both the Right and the Left. It is the contentious religion that we see all around. □

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shown to be fruitless.

But the sacrificial instinct remains ingrained until you can fully accept that you are accepted wholeheartedly. So, today’s “civilized” cultures have evolved it into various forms of self-sacrifice and moral heroics, still found in most people and groups who do not emphasize inner experience.

than we feared. Paraphrasing an evolutionary biologist’s statement about the strangeness of the universe: “God is not only stranger than we think but stranger than we can think.” That changed way of thinking is what we call the contemplative mind. It is indeed a gift, but a gift that