

# CENTERED IN THE PRESENCE

Richard Rohr

**M**ost religious people I've met—from sincere laypeople to priests and nuns—still imagine God to be elsewhere. Before you can take the *now* seriously, you must shift from thinking of God as *out there* to also knowing God *in here*. In fact, that is the best access point! Only inner experience can bring about a healing of the human-divine split.



Transformation comes by realizing your union with God right here, right now—regardless of any performance or achievement on your part. That is the core meaning of grace. But you have to *know* this for yourself. No one can do this knowing for you. I could tell you that God is not elsewhere and heaven is not later, but until you come to personally and regularly experience that, you will not believe it.

Authentic Christianity overcame the *God-is-elsewhere* idea in at least two major and foundational ways. Through the Incarnation, God in Jesus became flesh; God visibly moved in with the material world to help us overcome the illusion of separation (John 1:14). Secondly, God as Holy Spirit, is precisely known as an indwelling and vitalizing presence. By itself, intellectual assent to these two truths does little. The Incarnation and Indwelling Spirit are known only through participation and practice, when you actively draw upon such Infinite Sources. “Use it or lose it!”

Good theology helps us know that we can fully trust the “now” because of the Incarnation and the Spirit within us. It’s like making love. We can’t be fully intimate with someone who is physically absent or through vague, amorphous energy; we need close, concrete, particular connections. That’s how our human brains are wired.

Jesus teaches and is himself a message of now-ness, here-ness, concrete-ness, and this-ness. The only time Jesus talks about future time is when he tells us not to worry about it (see Matthew 6:25-34). Don’t worry about times and seasons, don’t worry about when God will return, don’t worry about tomorrow. Thinking about the future keeps us in our heads, far from presence. Jesus talks about the past in terms of forgiving it. Some say forgiveness is central to his whole message. Jesus tells us to hand the past over to the mercy and action of God. We do not need to keep replaying the past, atoning for it, or agonizing about it.

Yet, as practitioners of meditation have discovered, the mind can only do two things: replay the past and plan or worry about the future. The mind is always bored in the present. So it must be trained to stop running backward and forward. This is the role of contemplation. □

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Living the Eternal Now* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2005).