

The Universal Christ - by Richard Rohr, reviewed by Alicia Gilmartin

"The realization of our oneness with Christ is the only cure for human loneliness. For me, too, it is the only ultimate meaning of life, the only thing that gives meaning and purpose to every life." Confronting the reality of the Christ in the Universe, the World and our lives -- the book's entire message examines this thought -- and finally the way or ways to hopefully get to that place.

The Christ meditation beginning on page 155 is an astounding exercise in putting ourselves in Jesus' place and also putting Him in our place -- in our lives directly, in His full humanity. When I heard the lines about his outstretched arms, I understood for the first time in my life WHY Jesus died on the cross -- instead of one of the many other ways he could have died. His outstretched arms say it all -- his complete openness, love, sacrifice and acceptance of us and our humanity -- and, with His open arms, pulling us towards His Divinity. In His perfection, walking with us in our imperfection, giving us hope.

And then to know that it's not just US but ALL of US - everyone and everything in God's creation is included in his outstretched arms - and when we view the world that way, view our lives and the lives of every living thing that way - that is when real inclusion and Love will become fully how we operate and how the world operates.

"What if Christ is *another name for everything* - in its fullness? ... Everything visible, without exception, is the outpouring of God."

Another of the many important ideas in the book is the concept of binary thinking vs contemplative thinking - the binary or dualistic way (the Western way) most of us learn to make judgements offers only two narrow choices between 'right and wrong'. It's a limited way of viewing any idea or concept. Conversely, the contemplative mind can "see things in their depth and in their wholeness instead of just in parts." The binary mind limits itself when dealing with the most important life matters such as love, death, suffering or mystery. So, to explore and understand the deeper meaning of life and God, we must open our minds to a deeper, less comfortable way of considering these things. It's not an easy adjustment to make.

As I worked my way through the book with its dense content and ideas, which I sometimes struggled to understand, the message always came through clearly -- the sense of God and the Christ - and therefore, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, everywhere, in everything and everyone. Further study, re-reading and the daily practice of meditating on these ideas, are already bringing about the change in worldview which is essential for growth and ultimate change. This is the real meaning of the Universal Christ, so above Religions, and finally the goal to be longed for and in some measure, achieved.