



Portraits of Christ Part 2

Doug Olena • August 1, 2021 • Life Together at Evangel Temple

www.extravaganzi.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/First-Ever-Portrait-Of-The-Lord-Jesus-Christ-1.jpg

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (New York, NY: Penguin, Random House, 2019).

Quoting G. K. Chesterton, “Your religion is not the church you belong to, but the cosmos you live inside of.”

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, 16*

*Page numbers are from Apple Books edition on my desktop.

Tim Rohde

- Tim Rohde as exemplar of this conflict. He has given permission for me to use his circumstances. And in addition to talk about our use of this book in restoring a faith overthrown by what's left of his childhood imagination of what Christianity should be.
- Fears of rapture, fears of redemption, one sin = ticket to hell, the “iron curtain”, perpetual guilt, and desperate apologies to God, etc.
- He found this book in a FB group for ex-evangelicals seeking to restore their faith, or at least explain their loss of faith.

The First Incarnation

Book of Nature, the First Bible

- This session is an invitation to look at Christ from a universal perspective.
- Richard Rohr invites us to see a distinction between the roles of Jesus of the second incarnation and Christ of the first, the Universal Christ.
- Rohr is not a pantheist or panentheist, though some think of him as a process theologian. He invites us to contemplate Christ from the perspective of a universe enchanted with its designer and creator. Every bit of this universe has his stamp and is a signpost pointing to him.
- Rohr invites us to see religion as a means of reconnecting with God, “To help us see the world and ourselves in wholeness, and not just in parts.” 16

- Rohr doesn't promote a heresy as if Christ is a different person. He is fully content that Christ in the hypostatic union is all God and Jesus all Man along traditional Christian theological lines.
- His interest is in the different roles the title Christ embodies in contrast to the position of Jesus the son of man.

“Truly enlightened people see oneness because they *look out from oneness*, instead of labeling everything as superior and inferior, in and out.”

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, 14

“He came to unite and ‘to reconcile all things in himself, everything in heaven and everything on earth’ (Colossians 1:19).”

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, 17



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Let there be light!

First and second incarnation

- Is it any wonder that the first chapter of John begins at the beginning of the universe by claiming that the *arche* of the universe is Christ himself? John calls on Genesis to make a point. Jesus is the Christ who created the universe.
- Rohr asks whether Jesus and Christ have different roles in our religion. I think it's a fair question.
- Also, can it be that in the first incarnation, creation of the universe is a set up for the second where Jesus can finish the job of preparing redemption for his universe and us and say "It is finished."

- "Everything visible, without exception, is the outpouring of God. What else could it really be? 'Christ' is a word for the Primordial Template ('Logos') through whom 'all things came into being, and not one thing had its being except through him' (John 1:3)." 23-24

- "If you can overlook how John uses a masculine pronoun to describe something that is clearly beyond gender, you can see that he is giving us a sacred cosmology in his Prologue (1:1-18), and not just a theology. " 24

“What must be made clear is that apparently we cannot so simply and naïvely assume that what lies behind the name of Christ is known from Christian piety, literature, art and tradition.”

Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, p 129.

I repeat this from the May presentation because Küng realizes that these sources are limited, even as the Bible is limited to particular culturally embedded expressions that often fail the test of universality.

In this I believe we must consider adding Science to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to more fully encompass our current apprehension of the universal qualities of the theological enterprise. Without the science, our imagination would be limited to the some 5000 stars we could see with our bare eyes.

I point to science, without also the deterministic slant of the atheist for whom spirituality and indeed freedom are fictions of a deluded mind, without also the corrupted intellect of those who would treat the cosmos as an accident in need of constant repair and adjustment.

I point to Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and even Albert Einstein who retained the mysteries of religious sentiment in a universal sense. As well the large portion of working scientists who are laboring under the influence of a God-saturated universe.

At this point...

Standard Evangelical Story

- At this point, it should be fair to ask how evangelicalism got to the place in its theology where its members could tell:
 - who was saved and who wasn't
 - who could be saved and who couldn't
 - who was in and who was out
 - how the pagans and Christians are different from each other.
- How did the universal Christ become so quickly particularized to Western Christianity, so that it became a tool of colonization, repression, and culture war? My suggestion is that they lost sight of the universal by descent into the political.
- My hope is that we could aspire to something higher than politics.

- “We daringly believe that God’s presence was poured into a single human being, so that humanity and divinity can be seen to be operating as one in him—and therefore in us!” 25 All of us.
- “Jesus came out of an already Christ-soaked world. The second incarnation flowed out of the first, out of God’s loving union with physical creation. ” 25-26

“Intellectuals in the last century have denied the existence and power of such great wholeness—and in Christianity, we have made the mistake of limiting the Creator’s presence to just one human manifestation, Jesus.”

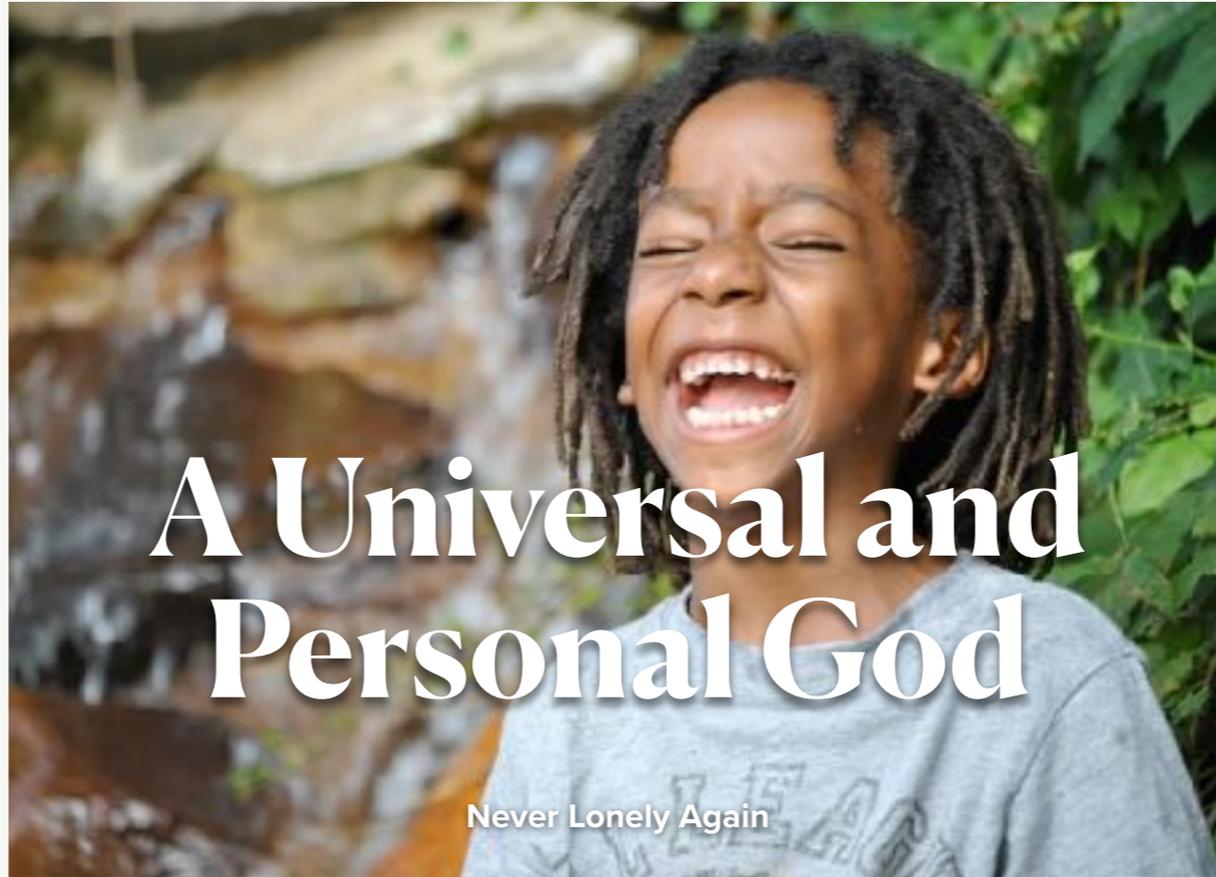
Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, 27

- “But God loves things by becoming them.

God loves things by uniting with them, not by excluding them.” 27

- “When Paul wrote, ‘There is only Christ. He is everything and he is in everything’ (Colossians 3:11*), was he a naïve pantheist, or did he really understand the full implication of the Gospel of Incarnation?” 28

- * “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and is in all.”



A Universal and Personal God

Never Lonely Again

<https://www.openhorizons.org/christian-process-theology-and-richard-rohr-on-the-universal-christ.html>

But...

Rohr's Universal Christ

- “Numerous Scriptures make it very clear that this Christ has existed ‘from the beginning’ (John 1:1–18, Colossians 1:15–20, and Ephesians 1:3–14 being primary sources), so the Christ cannot be coterminous with Jesus. But by attaching the word ‘Christ’ to Jesus as if it were his last name, instead of a means by which God’s presence has enchanted all matter throughout all of history, Christians got pretty sloppy in their thinking.
- “Our faith became a competitive theology with various parochial theories of salvation, instead of a universal cosmology inside of which all can live with an inherent dignity.” 28-29

- “If Jesus is not also presented as Christ, I predict more and more people will not so much actively rebel against Christianity as just gradually lose interest in it.” 28
- “For the first two thousand years of Christianity, we framed our faith in terms of a problem and a threat. But if you believe Jesus’s main purpose is to provide a means of personal, individual salvation, it is all too easy to think that he doesn’t have anything to do with human history—with war or injustice, or destruction of nature, or anything that contradicts our egos’ desires or our cultural biases.” 28-29
- “Without a sense of the inherent sacredness of the world—of every tiny bit of life and death—we struggle to see God in our own reality, let alone to respect reality, protect it, or love it.” 29
- “What I am calling in this book an incarnational worldview is the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally ‘every thing’ and ‘every one.’” 30

“A merely personal God becomes tribal and sentimental, and a merely universal God never leaves the realm of abstract theory and philosophical principles.”

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, 32

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An Exit from Creation?

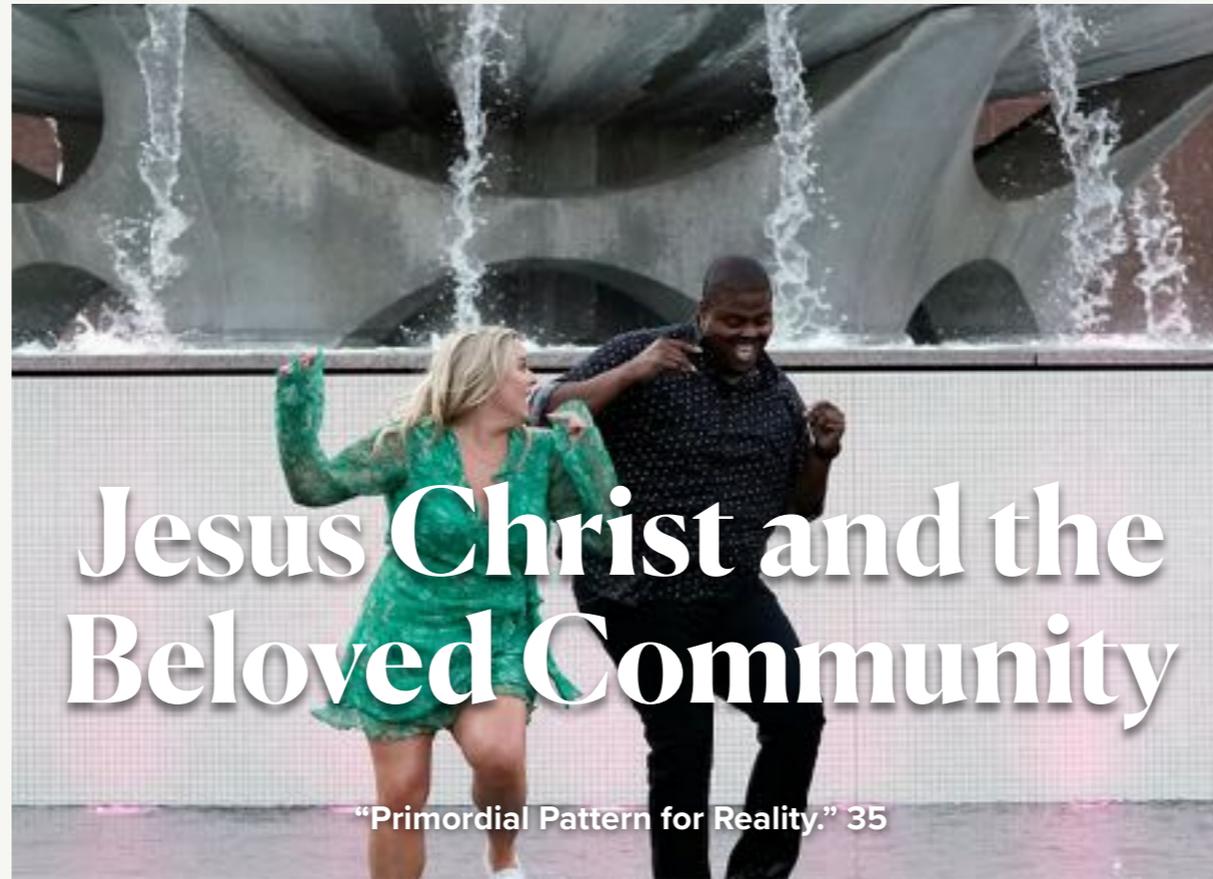
Rohr's Universal Christ

- “Sadly, we have a whole section of Christianity that is looking for—even praying for—an exit from God’s ongoing creation toward some kind of Armageddon or Rapture. Talk about missing the point! The most effective lies are often the really big ones.” 33
- Many of us have grown up in this environment. But it has eviscerated our souls. Tim Rohde offers himself as an example of this. And some of us have children who have just lost interest in Christianity because of it. We can take the respect for God and his Word from evangelicalism, but abandon the grimy sectarian impulse, the insider/outsider template of a particular Christ that it promotes, and find the universal Christ in contrast.

A New Template

Built like the Trinity!

- “Jesus is a map for the time-bound and personal level of life, and Christ is the blueprint for all time and space and life itself.
- “Both reveal the universal pattern of self-emptying and infilling (Christ) and death and resurrection (Jesus), which is the process we have called ‘holiness,’ ‘salvation,’ or just ‘growth,’ at different times in our history.
- “For Christians, this universal pattern perfectly mimics the inner life of the Trinity in Christian theology, which is our template for how reality unfolds, since all things are created “in the image and likeness” of God (Genesis 1:26–27).”



Jesus Christ and the Beloved Community

“Primordial Pattern for Reality.” 35

<https://www.openhorizons.org/christian-process-theology-and-richard-rohr-on-the-universal-christ.html>

“The whole of creation—not just Jesus—is the beloved community, the partner in the divine dance. Everything is the ‘child of God.’ No exceptions. When you think of it, what else could anything be? All creatures must in some way carry the divine DNA of their Creator.”

*Richard Rohr, **The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe**, 35*

Rational Assent?

Built like the Trinity!

- “Unfortunately, the notion of faith that emerged in the West was much more *a rational assent to the truth of certain mental beliefs, rather than a calm and hopeful trust that God is inherent in all things, and that this whole thing is going somewhere good.*” 35
- *“No one religion will ever encompass the depth of such faith.*
- *No ethnicity has a monopoly on such hope.*
- *No nationality can control or limit this Flow of such universal love.” 36*

“Frankly, Jesus came to show us how to be human much more than how to be spiritual, and the process still seems to be in its early stages.”

*Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, 37*

Buy *The Universal Christ* from
Amazon <https://amzn.to/3fziqp9>