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# Richard Rohr, Mysticism and Neoplatonism

## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores key themes and doctrines in the writings of popular Franciscan priest Richard Rohr. It examines and evaluates Rohr's incarnational worldview. It argues that Rohr's mysticism must be understood in the light of pagan Neoplatonism. Rohr follows Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism by asserting that God lives in the deepest part of every human being whereas the New Testament teaches that God lives in every person who welcomes Him. God dwells in people by His Holy Spirit when they repent and believe the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.*

**Keywords:** Richard Rohr, mysticism, Neoplatonism

## 1. Introduction

Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan priest, is a very popular ecumenical teacher who is a best-selling author. Rohr is often spoken of in glowing terms and his books have been enthusiastically endorsed by Bono, Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, Shane Claiborne and Jim Wallis. He is a passionate proponent for what he calls an 'incarnational worldview'. In his book *The Universal Christ* he explains this mindset in the following way. "What I am calling an *incarnational worldview* is the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally "everything" and "everyone" (Rohr, 2019a:18). In this paper we will outline and then critically evaluate Rohr's 'incarnational' worldview.

## 2. Neoplatonism in Rohr

Rohr begins his book *The Universal Christ* (Rohr, 2019a) by narrating at length an experience from the English mystic Caryl Houselander (1901-1954) when travelling on the London Underground. All at once, as she looks down the train, she suddenly sees 'Christ' in everyone and everything—the 'universal' or 'cosmic' Christ who is in all, whether we realise it or not.

This is the heart of Rohr's incarnational worldview but in order to understand where Rohr is coming from we need to briefly outline the philosophy of Neoplatonism. Rohr writes many things that come directly from Plotinus (204-270 CE), the pagan philosopher. We would do well to remember that St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and countless Roman Catholic mystics and theologians are in thrall to Plotinus. So who was this great sage?

Plotinus was the founder of Neoplatonism. This mystical philosophy teaches that the universe flows from the impersonal and mysterious One. This god lives in a realm beyond space, time and every possible distinction. This god is silent. From the One emanates the Divine Mind which provides a home for the forms or ideas that Plato revered so highly. From the Divine Mind flows the World Soul which animates and gives life to the universe. At the very bottom of this chain of being is Matter which is the realm of darkness.

Plotinus wrote:

God is not external to anyone, but is present with all things, though they are ignorant that He is so (*Enneads* VI. 9. 7).

Plotinus contended that God is 'in' every person. This is sometimes referred to as panentheism (God lives within all things). This means that God was even 'in' Caligula, the outstandingly cruel Roman emperor, although Caligula was ignorant of the divine presence hidden in the very centre of his soul. Why did Plotinus believe this? As a pagan who rejected the Christian faith, Plotinus followed Plato in saying that the 'immortal soul' of a person is a divine being (*Enneads* V.1.10). Unfortunately this divine being had fallen from its true home in heaven and is now embodied in flesh, blood and bones (*Enneads* VI. 9. 9).

Instead of contemplating truth and beauty, this divine 'spark' is now imprisoned in a smelly, dirty and decaying body. The 'immortal soul' is trapped in a physical prison. This pagan story of the fall of the soul into the physical realm is sometimes called the Orphic myth and contrasts strikingly with biblical teaching which presents the earth as a good home for humans (Genesis 2:15). As an apologist for the pagan faith, Plotinus had a solution to this tragic state of affairs. He offered a way of salvation.

Plotinus believed that a person must turn inward, purify his/her divine spark and then begin to contemplate higher, spiritual realities. This act of contemplation might include gazing at the perfect triangle or the sublime perfections of quadratic equations. Further to this, Plotinus urged his disciples to break every fetter with the outside world, to practise silence and solitude and so to coax the inner divine being back to life. At the end of this mystical process, Plotinus stated that the soul would eventually merge with God and completely vanish (*Enneads* VI. 9. 10).

In this mystical wonderland, there are no individual creatures. There are no Hitlers, Stalins and Caligulas. Everything and everyone has merged into a Cosmic Oneness. Some contemporary mystics call this 'nondual awareness'. Plotinus concluded by saying that 'the vision baffles telling' (*Enneads* VI.9.10). In other words the mystical experience is impossible to describe.

This is the very heart of the mystical journey. We begin as unenlightened, sordid souls who ignore their divine sparks by indulging in sensual gratification on a daily basis. We cultivate the silent contemplation of higher, mystical realities. This is why we meditate. At the end of the journey we have nurtured the divine spark in the very centre of our soul and then we vanish into God.

We should also add that Plotinus believed in reincarnation for those who refuse to nurture their immortal souls. He asserted that the ignorant would be reincarnated in both animals and plants (*Enneads* III. 4. 2). Like Plato, Plotinus also believed in spirit guides who would offer humans help on the mystical journey. Indeed Plotinus dedicated an entire chapter of his famous work *Enneads* on the question of how our spirit guides can help us on the mystic path (*Enneads* III.4). It is often unnoticed that the Neoplatonic tradition is infused with spirits and gods who mediate between humans and the divine. We could say that pagan deities have replaced Jesus as the mediator between God and humans. It should not surprise us that Plotinus also attended séances and had unusual clairvoyant powers.

Finally we should note that Plotinus offers us a panentheistic reading of Plato. It affirms the goodness of the world in that all things are impregnated with the divine. Plotinus did not agree with the Gnostics who asserted that the physical world is evil and to be avoided.

### 3. Rohr's Incarnational Worldview

So how does Rohr follow Plotinus? In his book *The Universal Christ*, he writes as follows:

What I am calling in this book an incarnational worldview is the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally “everything” and “everyone.” It is the key to mental and spiritual health, as well as to a kind of basic contentment and happiness. (Rohr, 2019a:18)

This is exactly what the pagan mystic Plotinus taught. Further to this, Rohr is refreshingly honest about his panentheism. Panentheism asserts that God lives within all things whereas Pantheism holds that the universe is God. Rohr comments:

But Paul merely took incarnationalism to its universal and logical conclusions. We see that in his bold exclamation “There is only Christ. He is everything and he is in everything” (Colossians 3:11). If I were to write that today, people would call me a pantheist (the universe is God), whereas I am really a panentheist (God lies within all things, but also transcends them), exactly like both Jesus and Paul (Rohr, 2019a:43).

So Rohr does not hide his panentheist convictions. Without doubt, Rohr is deeply influenced by Neoplatonism but he does not embrace all aspects of this pagan philosophy. For example, he does not hold to the doctrine of reincarnation.

#### 3.1 On the Cosmic Christ

Rohr rejects the orthodox Christian view that Jesus uniquely is divine. He writes as follows:

But in this book, I want to suggest that the first incarnation was the moment described in Genesis 1, when God joined in unity with the physical universe and became the light inside of everything... . The incarnation, then, is not only “God becoming Jesus.” It is a much broader event, which is why John first describes God’s presence in the general word “flesh” (John 1:14). John is speaking of the ubiquitous Christ that Caryll Houselander so vividly encountered, the Christ that the rest of us continue to encounter in other human beings, a mountain, a blade of grass, or a starling (Rohr, 2019a:13).

Rohr contends that the incarnation was something that is referred to in Genesis chapter 1. He says that God ‘materialised’ with his creation at the Big Bang (Rohr, 2013:132). He calls this the ‘cosmic’ or ‘universal’ Christ. We should notice how strikingly similar this is to Neoplatonism. For Plotinus, the visible world has in panentheist fashion, sprung from God. In technical terms the world has ‘emanated’ out of the One who is supremely divine. Alarmingly this means that God is responsible for all the wars, rapes and murders that humans engage in. Rohr does not seem to notice that his incarnational worldview leads to a Neoplatonic conclusion. Evil comes from God. We will say more about this towards the end of the essay.

This panentheist perspective on the ‘first incarnation’ invariably downplays and demotes Jesus who is no longer Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). He is just one of the many enlightened gurus who have emerged in human history.

It is also important to notice that Rohr’s mystical worldview denies that Jesus Christ is the unique mediator between God and His people (Hebrews 9:15). Rohr, along with many other mystics, believes that humans can directly contemplate and know God without the need for Christ’s sacrificial death upon the cross. This denies very important teaching in the book of Hebrews.

### 3.2 On the Atonement

Rohr radically rejects New Testament teaching about Jesus' sacrificial death upon a cross. He explains as follows:

This is what Jesus is exposing and defeating on the cross. He did not come to change God's mind about us. It did not need changing. Jesus came to change our minds about God - and about ourselves - and about where goodness and evil really lie (Rohr, 2019a:151).

Traditionally Christians have believed that the death of Jesus has brought the forgiveness of sins, the hope of the resurrection body and the decisive defeat of Satan's power over vulnerable sinners (Acts 26:18)<sup>1</sup>. Notice that Rohr has reduced the significance of the cross to a psychological state of affairs. For Rohr the death of Jesus has merely changed some of our thoughts about God. Like many liberal theologians, Rohr denies that the blood of Jesus has any salvific or saving function. Many people were crucified by the Romans in the first century and the death of Jesus was just one more death among thousands. Indeed Rohr claims that the darkness over Israel (Matthew 27:45) and the curtain being torn in two (Matthew 27:51) must be understood symbolically (Rohr, 2019b). He asserts that Jesus' death should be understood as God 'showing solidarity with humans' (Rohr, 2019a:147). In other words Jesus' death has not conquered death, decay, sin and the devil. Colossians 2:15 tells us that Jesus' death has brought a great victory over dark, demonic powers that enslave humans in the darkness of idolatry. Rohr would deny this.

### 3.3 On Jesus as Master Teacher

Rohr places Jesus on the same level as the Buddha, Mohammed, Rūmī, St Teresa of Avila etc. He unfolds this theme like this:

Perhaps you have noticed that master teachers like Jesus and the Buddha, St Francis, all the "Teresas" (Avila, Lisieux, and Calcutta), Hafiz, Kabir, and Rumi talk about dying much more than we are comfortable with. (Rohr, 2013:36)

This radically undermines New Testament teaching about Jesus sitting at the right hand of God in his glorious ascension (Romans 8:34). However much I admire the gifted Persian poet, Rūmī (1207-1273), I would never dream of praying to him. Rūmī is dead and in the grave but Jesus has been raised from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20-21). He is willing and able to hear and answer all our prayers. Rohr's incarnational worldview refuses to honour the Lord Jesus as the Messiah who has been glorified in heaven; fully able to rule His creation from this exalted place (Psalm 110). To compare the sensual Sufi mystic, Rūmī with Jesus is profoundly unbiblical.

### 3.4 On Demons

In a Youtube clip<sup>2</sup> Rohr asserts:

Perhaps it surprises some of you that we would begin with an account of an exorcism. I think modern/postmodern people are somewhat embarrassed by how much of Jesus' ministry is driving out devils. And we all know they don't exist. And we're sort of embarrassed by the thought and so why do we have to read these silly, useless accounts?

Rohr argues that demonic possession should be reframed as 'curing addictions'. We should notice that Rohr is radically reframing the New Testament worldview in terms of secular and materialist assumptions. Precisely how does Rohr know that 'demons do not exist'? It would seem that Rohr has bought into an Enlightenment worldview that radically rejects unseen,

1 We have summarised some of the huge blessings that Christ has won. There are others.

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcjsX-o-Nnl> 'Exorcism stories articulating Addiction.'

supernatural entities. This mindset invariably assumes that angels and demons do not exist because everything must be purely physical (materialism) or purely sensory (empiricism).

### 3.5 On Idolatry

Rohr ignores biblical teaching about how idolatry dehumanises and enslaves human beings. Psalm 115:8 tells us this - "Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them." When we worship an idol of the Hindu goddess Kali, we begin to resemble the dark goddess of destruction. Just as Kali murders, so too do her followers. The Thug cult of early 19th century India perfectly illustrates this. Scholars have argued that the followers of Kali, dubbed 'Thugs', were responsible for murdering millions of innocent pilgrims on the dusty roads of India. This was ritual murder in the name of Kali.

How many innocent men, women and children have suffered terrible afflictions as the wealthy and comfortable serve Mars, the god of war? Consider the idolatry of weapons companies that garner vast profits as they serve the 'martial spirit'. Why does Rohr ignore idolatry? Behind idols lurk invisible demonic powers (Psalm 106:37-38). Behind the gruesome idol of Kali, evil spirits are gleefully seducing idolaters into breaking the first commandment. In modernist/postmodernist fashion Rohr does not believe in the hidden, demonic darkness of idol worship.

### 3.6 On God's Anger

Rohr asserts that there is no wrath or anger in God.

To sum it all up, I do not believe there is any wrath in God whatsoever - it's theologically impossible when God is Trinity. (Rohr, 2016:140)

How does Rohr know this to be true? Clearly the apostle Paul asserted in Romans 1:18-19 that: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them."

Has Rohr had a mystical revelation that this theme in the book of Romans is profoundly wrong? It would seem that Rohr ignores any biblical teaching that is in tension with his incarnational worldview. Rohr simply 'knows' that Hitler has both the divine spark in the centre of his soul and also that Hitler is saved, happy in heaven, enjoying God's love and approval. This is why it is so important to recognise the Neoplatonic themes that often appear in Rohr's many books and articles.

We need to stress that a loving and holy God does become angry when humans worship and serve worthless idols like Kali, Mammon and Mars. Jonah's prayer seems so apt. "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." (Jonah 2:8). A God without wrath has no love. He is profoundly insipid. Is God angry with murderers and torturers? Yes.

The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. (John 3:36)

### 3.7 On Universalism

Rohr asserts repeatedly that everyone is already 'in Christ':

All of us, without exception, are living inside of a cosmic identity, already in place, that is driving and guiding us forward. We are all en Cristo (*sic*), willingly or unwillingly, happily or unhappily, consciously or unconsciously. (Rohr, 2019a:43)

This universalist thesis is connected to his 'incarnational worldview' which he defines thus: 'the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally "everything" and

“everyone” (Rohr, 2019a:18). Again this so-called incarnational worldview is strikingly similar not only to Neoplatonism but also to Hinduism. Hindus often greet each other with the word ‘Namaste’ which means “I bow to the divine in you”. If everyone has the divine presence in the centre of their being then logic demands that everyone is saved. Everyone is ‘in Christ’.

It would seem that Rohr is encouraging his followers to worship each other because of the divine spark/Christ mystery/Universal Christ which lives in everything and everyone. This explains why many Hindus worship snakes, rats and cows. If ‘Namaste’ is correct then all things should be worshipped. Let us remember that Hindus worship millions of gods, including minerals, animals and humans. Indeed there is a temple in India devoted to the worship of ace cricketer Sachin Tendulkar. This is a radical rejection of the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3)

### 3.8 On Contemplative Prayer

Rohr is passionate about contemplation and centring prayer. He writes as follows:

If we have some good teachers, we will learn to develop a conscious nondual mind, a choiceful contemplation, some spiritual practices or disciplines that can return us to unitive consciousness on an ongoing and daily basis. Whatever practice it is, it must become “our daily bread.” That is the consensus of spiritual masters through the ages. The general words for these many forms of practice (rewiring) are “meditation,” “contemplation,” any “prayer of quiet,” “centring prayer,” “chosen solitude,” but it is always some form of inner silence, symbolised by the Jewish Sabbath rest. (Rohr, 2019a:209)

Let’s unpack for a moment what it means to develop a conscious ‘nondual mind’. In, for example, centring prayer you choose a sacred word like ‘Jesus’ or ‘Love’ and then you meditate on this word. If thoughts crowd into your mind you brush them aside and then return to your sacred word. The aim of this kind of meditation is to connect or fuse with the very centre of your soul which is pure and sinless. At the very core of your being lives the hidden, silent divine spark. Feed this god with silent, thoughtless meditation for this god dwells in a silent realm where all distinctions have vanished.<sup>3</sup> The repetition of the sacred word is designed to leave behind discursive thoughts (everyday logical thinking) and then the meditator enters an altered state of consciousness (non-dual mind) in which everything fuses into a mystical and silent oneness. Centring prayer is the means by which we regain our divine and sinless status.

It is helpful to contrast the biblical God, Yahweh with the mystical Neoplatonic deity. Christians know that the only true God is the one known in the Old Testament as Yahweh. Yahweh is a person who speaks and reveals His purposes and plans (Jeremiah 33:3). He is not silent but delights in His wonderful world (Proverbs 8:30). Yahweh expects humans to worship Him with psalms and jubilant celebration. Yahweh calls us to seek Him with all our hearts and minds (Psalm 105:1-4). Yahweh is more than one person in nature but the full revelation comes in the New Testament where God is revealed as triune – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

The mystical god, however, is totally silent because ‘it’ is not a person. No multiplicity or division is conceivable in the Neoplatonic One. The divine in the mystical mindset transcends all distinctions and dualities. The mystic mirrors the silent, nameless One by cultivating silence. This leads to vows of silence and ascetic rejection of God’s good creation.<sup>4</sup>

The powerful influence of pagan Neoplatonism should be recognised when we consider Islamic mysticism (Sufism), Jewish mysticism (Cabala) and Christian mysticism.

3 Plotinus believed that the highest state of consciousness was to enter a realm where all dualities have ceased to exist.

4 I do not have space in this paper to show how monks and nuns who make vows of silence are mixing Neoplatonism with Christianity.

### 3.9 On the Occult

As a pagan philosopher, Plotinus was involved in pagan ceremonies that included séances (contacting spirit guides) and clairvoyance (inviting spirit guides to furnish inquirers with occult knowledge). We should not be surprised that Rohr encourages pagan ceremonies and practices.

For example, 'Kything Prayer' was popularized at the Centre for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, founded by Richard Rohr. This is an occult activity. Catholic apologist Eddie Russell describes the practice:

"This is a way of calling up another person's spirit to enter you, so that you can use their energy and gifts for yourself. You can also let others "centre" into your spirit to call your spirit to them. You can do this with saints as well as others who are dead and it's all done in the name of Christian Prayer." <sup>5</sup>

## 4. Critical Evaluation of Rohr

It is important to acknowledge some good insights in Rohr's work. Many strands of evangelicalism lack insight into what theologians call the cultural or creation mandate. This is the acknowledgment of the goodness of God's creation and God's expectation that humans will unfold and develop His creation project. Rohr is correct to point out that many conservative expressions of the Christian faith are otherworldly, austere and life-denying. In other words 'pie in the sky when you die'. Rohr does reject a pietistic and dualistic form of Christian faith. This kind of pietism often negates curiosity, imagination and joie de vivre. Pietism tells us to focus on church activities and church programmes. Pietism is focused on getting souls to heaven. Pietism does not encourage believers to take an active interest in art, business, sport and philosophy etc. All of these 'cultural' interests are 'worldly', 'temporal' and 'profane'. Pietism isn't much fun and Rohr understands this.

Nevertheless there are significant heresies in Rohr's incarnational worldview.

### 4.1 Rohr on Scripture

Rohr's way of dealing with Scripture is highly misleading. In his book *The Divine Dance* Rohr unpacks 1 John 4:16 thus:

Anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him." If I had said that independently of St. John, many would have called me a lightweight New Ager from California. (Rohr, 2016:82)

It is clear that Rohr is using this verse to persuade us that God lives in every person. This verse supports his Neoplatonic reading of Scripture. However when we look at the verse in context we get a strikingly different interpretation. Let's look now at the three preceding verses:

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1 John 4:13-16)

It is clear from the longer passage that John is not saying that 'God lives in every person'. Rather John is telling us that those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God are the ones in whom God dwells by His Holy Spirit. The book of Romans makes this point very clear:

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5 For more on this <https://www.thebereanall.org/content/mystic-madness-spiraling-down-pit>

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of God, he does not belong to Christ. (Romans 8:9)

#### **4.2 On Belonging to God**

We have unpacked the connection between Rohr's Neoplatonic conviction that the divine spark/Christ mystery/universal Christ is present in everything and everybody. This then leads to Rohr's universalism: everyone is saved because everyone is 'in Christ'. Without doubt this is an attractive interpretation of the Christian gospel but is it biblical?

Consider for a moment Jesus' interrogation of the Pharisees in John 8:42-47.

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

It is clear that Jesus did not embrace the universalist mindset of Richard Rohr. There is no spark of the divine in the scribes and Pharisees to whom he was speaking. Tragically it is possible to belong to the devil. The New Testament supports a worldview that understands evil and suffering as the consequence of a battle that is raging between Jesus Christ and Satan. C.S. Lewis put it like this:

There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan. (Lewis, 1967:33)

On this crucial topic of the devil, Lewis would firmly rebuff Rohr. Again and again the reality of unseen powers, rulers and authorities is affirmed by the New Testament writers (Ephesians 6:10-18). Acts 13:4-12 tells the story of the intriguing encounter between the apostle Paul and the sorcerer Elymas. Paul doesn't mince his words when he rebukes the false prophet: "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!" (Acts 13:10)

#### **4.3 Panentheism and Evil**

Rohr radically side-lines and ignores evil in his incarnational worldview. How do we make sense of Auschwitz if every torturing Gestapo officer has the 'Cosmic Christ' at the centre of his soul? How is God fully present in a seedy brothel in Mumbai? Should a Yazidi rape victim worship her Islamic State 'owner' as he brutally violates her? Shouldn't she be grateful that a divine being is honouring her with his sexual cravings?

Biblical teaching emphasises that evil is an alien intrusion into a good creation. Evil is real but God has nothing to do with the brutality of evil men and women. They are cut off from God's mercy and grace and they need to repent and trust in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-5). The Neoplatonic worldview has always struggled to make sense of evil because evil ultimately flows from the Silent One. This tension pervades Rohr's books and articles.

Yahweh, the God of the Bible and the Father of the Lord Jesus is a holy God who has nothing to do with evil and darkness. "God is light; in him there is no darkness." (1 John 1:5). Indeed the Lord Jesus has come into the world to destroy the devil (1 John 3:8). He has appeared in order to defeat death itself (2 Timothy 1:10).



#### 4.4 Rohr on Guidance

It might seem strange to conclude this essay on the issue of guidance but this will allow me to bring together some key pastoral concerns in Rohr's incarnational worldview. This is what Rohr says about guidance.

In fact, you can trust after a while that almost everything is a kind of guidance – absolutely everything. (Rohr, 2016:97)

This comment by Rohr is very naïve in its downplaying of evil. We have already noted that the Neoplatonic tradition is infused with 'spirit guides' and 'guardian spirits'. Many do not know that Socrates, himself, claimed to have a 'daemon' who guided him throughout his life (See Plato, *Apology* 40a). Indeed the famous philosopher Plato mentions spirit guides in several of his dialogues (See Plato, *Apology* 31c, *Symposium* 202 d-e, *Republic* 620 e). This now brings me to the New Age Movement which affirms so much in the Neoplatonic tradition. Consider this narrative that connects spirit guides to a New Age deception.

Neale Donald Walsch is an American 'spiritual' author of the best-selling *Conversations with God* series of books (for example, Walsch, 1995). He was born into a Roman Catholic family but is now a popular evangelist for Neoplatonic ideas. In 1992 he was feeling grumpy, irate and frustrated with life. He decided to write a letter to God with his angry thoughts and questions. As he finished the letter he claims that the pen began moving on its own (automatic writing) and he found himself pouring out words as though taking dictation like a secretary. Walsch asserts that he 'knew' this was the true God having a conversation with him about the meaning and purpose of life.

Walsch contends that God is not the personal God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Walsch, like Rohr, believes in a panentheist god who lives within every human as a spark of the divine. This is the 'god within' so popular in New Age circles. Walsch rejects the authority of the Bible and replaces it with the 'Higher Self' (the god within). The Lord Jesus told us that we need to repent and believe in the gospel of the kingdom. Walsh denies this and informs us that there is no need for repentance. As sparks of the divine we have not sinned and we need only to re-own our intrinsic divinity. Further to this, Walsch asserts that Jesus is not the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29 & Rev 5:9-10). The 'god within' informs us that we are all saviours because we are all divine like Jesus. The biblical theme of atonement is also rejected because sin is as illusory as the material universe.

It should also be noted that Walsch rejects the existence of evil. He even claims that Hitler did a great deal of good in causing the deaths of millions of people.<sup>6</sup> Like the Greek philosophers Plato and Plotinus, Walsch contends that death is not a tragedy. Death is to be welcomed because it releases the soul from the prison of the body. He also states that the devil does not exist and hell is also an illusion.

It should be clear by now that Rohr is fundamentally wrong in assuring his followers that there are no dangers in guidance. Neale Donald Walsch believes that he is being guided by 'God', but his heretical message comes from a demonic power masquerading as the true God (2 Cor 11:14-15).

In this paper we have explored key themes and doctrines in Richard Rohr and we have come to the conclusion that Rohr's incarnational worldview is not biblical. It is heretical. Rohr believes that God lives in the deepest part of every human being whereas the New Testament teaches that God lives in every person who welcomes Him. For Rohr God lives in murderers, rapists and torturers as an immortal but hidden divine spark. Jesus denied this. God has nothing to do with wicked people like Hitler or Stalin. God dwells in people by His Holy Spirit when they repent and believe the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

6 For Walsch on Hitler see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtjbKfIMU9E>

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