



## Parish of the Nativity of the Lord

Book+Circle – January 2021

*Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality* by Richard Rohr, OFM

### About the book

This book provides a way to read and interpret the Bible that is wholly grounded in a single premise: God loves all his creation. From this premise comes an inspiring and illuminating portrayal of the mis-steps humanity has made throughout history in trying to understand who God is and what God wants, and how these mis-steps have been redeemed and redirected through God's grace. The author describes the Bible as not just a set of books, but in terms of a process of maturing – from the Law, to the Prophets (calling out all those, especially in power, not applying the Law as God wants), to Wisdom (combining the two in a way that comes from and leads to God). He delivers many insights into how interpretations of the Bible over time have been affected by events and debates outside the Bible: e.g. Roman Empire decisions in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to stop persecuting Christians and then make Christianity the state religion; debates between Dominicans and Franciscans about the relative importance of logic and grace; and the landmark Second Vatican Council, when God's love started to come centre stage in mainstream theology again after centuries of 'Churchianity' in which rules were everything and God was so often treated as a vengeful exacter of retribution. Throughout, Richard Rohr emphasises how in Scripture Jesus tells, shows and is the way for everyone, and also how trying to achieve salvation through exclusion is counter to His way.

### How did the book make us feel?

All readers enjoyed the book overall and the many "nuggets of gold" it contains. It was felt to be a really refreshing way of looking at faith and the Bible.

Readers found the title *Things Hidden* apt, as the book contains many useful reminders and points to note: e.g. in the account of Creation, that the first and second days (separation of light from dark, and heavens from earth) are not described as 'good' like the others, and how much of the Bible is about creating unity; the way the disciples were empowered in their mission by the realisation they had been chosen; also the statement "God does not love you because you are good, God loves you because God is good."

For some the book felt oddly close to current events in the USA and the UK, as reflected in quotes from the book such as: "domination hierarchies need both violence and binary thought patterns to survive," and "laws can only give information, and even helpful information, but they cannot give us transformation." Rohr writes these things in the context of the whole history relayed in the Bible, but shows how things and people have changed little over the following centuries, noting how "healing and forgiveness have not

been in the forefront of human history, even though these are almost the only things Jesus does.”

It was agreed that the book needed to be read quite slowly, in order to absorb its riches. The author’s reminder about Jesus telling his disciples not to talk about what he taught them was felt to be appropriate with the book as well, as it requires a lot of thinking in order to take on board properly and express what it conveys about sacred Scripture.

### **What did the group think were the book’s main strengths?**

The book made most readers want to reread it because of the richness of its contents and the style in which they are shared. The author covers profound subjects in conversational language that makes them accessible and intriguing (e.g. why it’s not possible to talk about light without talking about the dark, Jesus’ abilities to live with unknowing and work with mustard seeds). The book is full of phrases and sentences that leap out at a reader, encouraging a ‘lectio divina’ type of mulling over.

The author reveals clearly how spirituality and faith are about union, becoming one with God in the here and now, rather than perfection (of which human beings are incapable), and how sin is all about living outside union with God rather than just disobeying a set of rules. As one reader put it, the book shows us that “we can’t always be correct but we can be connected.”

The discussion of suffering, a recurring theme in several books previously covered in the Book+Circle, was felt to be particularly helpful. The author’s clear exposition of apparent conflicts in the Bible was also welcome. Several readers said they wished they had read the book a long time ago, to put their efforts to be ‘personally holy’ in the wider context of what God actually wants for all his creation.

The book convincingly brings out the importance of accepting mystery, rather than getting caught up all in the time in analytical abstraction. It also inspires with its discussion of salvation history as covenant history, and its affirmation that in and through the Mass we can know we are participating in the life of God. The author’s familiarity with the good to be found in other faith systems, e.g. Buddhist contemplation, is welcome.

Richard Rohr clearly loves the Bible, and its role in moving us from “mental belief systems to Presence itself”. The author’s comparison of two different translations of a Bible sentence at the beginning of Chapter 10, respectively emphasising Platonic perfection and divine union, is an enlightening example of the barriers that can arise to that happening if we are not aware.

### **And what were the book’s main weaknesses?**

Some readers found it hard to maintain focus around the middle of the book, as it wasn’t immediately clear where the discussion was heading. However, the last chapters of the book regained their attention.

Any questions email Anne or Teresa  
[astjohnhall@gmail.com](mailto:astjohnhall@gmail.com) OR [teresaroux@bdifferent.co.uk](mailto:teresaroux@bdifferent.co.uk)

The typesetting of the book, with headings all in lower case, was found distracting by some who would have preferred better sign-posting through the book.

**Would we read another book written by the same author?**

Yes.

**Would we recommend this book to someone else?**

Yes, to someone who is: already a fan of Richard Rohr's work; wanting to grow in their faith; keen to know why the Bible and religion in general seem so focussed on violence; wanting to understand God's loving plan and our part in it; still interested, despite having lost their faith, in the why, what, how and who of it.

**Next books**

*The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, by Mitch Albom

For May: *Praying the Rosary Like Never Before*, by Edward Sri

**Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 3 March 2021, 8 pm, to be confirmed