Author of Falling Upward

RICHARD ROHR

IMMORTAL DIAMOND



IMMORTAL DIAMOND

That Nature Is a Heraclitian Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection



Flesh fade, and mortal trash,
Fall to the residuary worm; world's
wildfire leave but ash;
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he
was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch,
matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, S.I.

IMMORTAL DIAMOND

The Search for Our True Self



Richard Rohr



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INVITATION: THE IMMORTAL DIAMOND OF THE TRUE SELF



The fact that life and death are "not two" is extremely difficult to grasp, not because it is so complex, but because it is so simple.

KEN WILBER

We miss the unity of life and death at the very point where our ordinary mind begins to think about it.

KATHLEEN DOWLING SINGH

In the first aborted ending to Mark's Gospel—the oldest Gospel—the text ends on a very disappointing, and thus likely truthful, note: "They ran away from the tomb frightened out of their wits. They said nothing to a soul, for they were afraid" (16:5–8). What a strange response after having just talked to an angel who told them not to be afraid!

Such running from resurrection has been a prophecy for Christianity, and much of religion, just as in these early Scriptures. I interpret this as the human temptation to run from and deny not just the divine presence, but our own true selves, that is, our souls, our inner destiny, our true identity. Your True

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Self is that part of you that knows who you are and whose you are, although largely unconsciously. Your False Self is just who you think you are — but thinking doesn't make it so.

We are made for transcendence and endless horizons, but our small ego usually gets in the way until we become aware of its petty preoccupations and eventually seek a deeper truth. It is like mining for a diamond. We must dig deep; and yet seem reluctant, even afraid, to do so. Note that even the ending that was later added to Mark's Gospel still states three times that the disciples did not believe in the Resurrection (16:11-15). And Jesus "reproached them for their incredulity and their obstinacy" (16:14). This is no high note or happy ending by which to begin a new religion. The first disciples themselves were not the "true believers" that we now try to be. One can only presume it was historically true or they never would have said it this way. (Or maybe it is a recognition that doubt is the necessary partner to real faith.)

The question the three women ask in this first moment of would-be resurrection is still ours: "Who will roll away the rock?" (16:3). Who will help us in this mining operation for True Self? What will it take to find my True Self? How do I even know there is

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an "immortal diamond" underneath and behind all this rock of my ego, my specific life experience, my own culture? Up to now, it has been common, with little skin off anyone's back, to intellectually argue or religiously believe that Jesus' physical body could really "resurrect." That was much easier than to ask whether we could really change or resurrect. It got us off the hook—the hook of growing up, of taking the search for our True Selves seriously.

As many in the Perennial Tradition¹ have said in one way or another, when the "wrong person" uses the right means, even the right means will work in the wrong way. But when the "right person" uses the wrong means, he or she will know how to do midcourse corrections and make it right. I would preferably work with the second person anytime. You must get the "self" right. Otherwise even seemingly good and moral actions will have a tight, stingy, and corrosive character to them. Conversely, the right "self" can even do the wrong thing, and somehow it can always be worked out. You know this from your own experience. We must know who is doing the action and who is doing the reflecting. Is it "your" self? The God self? Or a mere chameleon? That question is foundational to mature spirituality of any stripe.

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There is one other thing to take note of here. Mark also says that Jesus "had showed himself *under another form*" (Mark 16:12). Could the radical transformation that resurrection implies be the problem? Is that why so many could not recognize Jesus? I think it is, and it is also our first major clue on our search for the True Self.

We are not so at home with the resurrected form of things despite a yearly springtime, healings in our bodies, the ten thousand forms of newness in every event and every life. The death side of things grabs our imagination and fascinates us as fear and negativity always do, I am sad to say. We have to be taught how to look for anything infinite, positive, or good, which for some reason is much more difficult. We have spent centuries of philosophy trying to solve "the problem of evil," yet I believe the much more confounding and astounding issue is "the problem of good." How do we account for so much gratuitous and sheer goodness in this world? Tackling this problem would achieve much better results.

Somehow resurrection—which I am going to equate with the revelation of our True Selves—is actually a risk and a threat to the world as we have constructed it. After any "raising up" of our True

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Selves, we will no longer fit into many groups, even much of religious society, which is often obsessed with and yet indulgent of the False Self, because that is all that it knows.

Whether human beings admit it or not, we are all in love with—even addicted to—the status quo and the past, even when it is killing us. Resurrection offers us a future—dare I say a permanent future—but one that is unknown and thus scary. Humans find it easier to gather their energy around death, pain, and problems than around joy. I know I do. For some sad reason, it is joy that we hold lightly and victimhood that we grab onto.

The True Self and its resurrection are always a threat. In the Resurrection of the Christ Body, we are not talking about the resuscitation of an old thing, but the raising up of what will always appear to be an utterly new thing. Resurrection is not about a man returning to his body, nearly as much as a universal man leading us into a universal future—and doing that by making use of all the past and transforming it (Ephesians 4:15–16). Note in all the Resurrection accounts in the four Gospels, the marvelous images of running, rushing, excitement, joy, eating, catching a huge harvest, and jumping naked and free into the

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water. This is all freedom for the future, because the past is over, gone, and totally forgiven.

The clarification and rediscovery of what I am going to call the True Self lays a solid foundation — and a clear initial goal—for all religion. You cannot build any serious spiritual house if you do not first find something solid and foundational to build on — inside yourself. "Like knows like" is the principle. God-inyou already knows, loves, and serves God in everything else. All you can do is fully jump on board. I would call that jump consciousness, and I believe the Risen Christ is the icon of full consciousness. In the human mind of Christ, every part of creation knows itself as (1) divinely conceived, (2) beloved of God, (3) crucified, and (4) finally reborn. He carries us across with him, assures us it is okay, and thus models the full journey and final direction of consciousness.² That is my major thesis about how Jesus "saves us."

The Perennial Tradition, the mystical tradition that I will be building on here, says that there is a capacity, a similarity, and a desire for divine reality inside all humans. And what we seek is what we are, which is exactly why Jesus says that we will find it (see Matthew 7:7–8). The Perennial Tradition invariably concludes that you initially cannot see what you are

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looking for because what you are looking for is doing the looking. God is never an object to be found or possessed as we find other objects, but *the One who shares your own deepest subjectivity*—or your "self." We normally called it our soul. Religion called it "the Divine Indwelling."

I believe the Christ is the archetypal True Self offered to history, where matter and spirit finally operate as one, where divine and human are held in one container, "where there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female" (Galatians 3:28). This Christ is going before us into an ever new territory, into "Galilee," which was the forgotten backwater of the Roman Empire and the Jewish religion.

"You are one of *them*! Even your accent gives you away," they say to Peter (Matthew 26:73). "Prophets do not come out of Galilee," say the chief priests (John 7:52). Yet "it is there that you will see him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:7). Perhaps the True Self—and the full Christ Mystery (not the same as organized Christianity)—will always live in the backwaters of any empire and the deep mines of any religion.

Some will think I am arrogantly talking about being "personally divine" and eagerly dismiss this way

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of talking about resurrection as heresy, arrogance, or pantheism. The Gospel is much more subtle than that. Jesus' life and his risen body say instead that the discovery of our own divine DNA is the only, full, and final meaning of being human. The True Self is neither God nor human. The True Self is both at the same time, and both are a total gift.

Such radical newness is threatening, even though it reveals itself in the oldest, truest, and deepest self that we are. Jesus' Resurrection was an absolute refusal to identify with victimhood or create any victims in retaliation. This is an utterly new story line for history. Unlike Lazarus's resurrection (John 11:1–44), Jesus' Resurrection is permanent and definitive for human history. *He is a stand-in for all of us*.

In this excerpt from "They Have Threatened Us with Resurrection" Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel says what I am grabbing for beautifully:

It is something within us that doesn't let us sleep, that doesn't let us rest, that won't stop pounding deep inside, it is the silent, warm weeping of Indian women without their husbands.

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it is the sad gaze of children fixed somewhere beyond memory, ...

What keeps us from sleeping is that they have threatened us with Resurrection! Because every evening though weary of killings, an endless inventory since 1954, yet we go on loving life and do not accept their death!

... because in this marathon of Hope, there are always others to relieve us who carry the strength to reach the finish line which lies beyond death.

Join us in this vigil and you will know what it is to dream! Then you will know how marvelous it is to live threatened with Resurrection!

To dream awake to keep watch asleep, to live while dying, and to know ourselves already resurrected!³

Only our True Self can talk this way and mean it. To the False Self—the self driven by ego and its limited concerns—such poetry is surely and merely poetry, a cheap greeting card, forgettable, and a poor attempt to whistle in the dark. But *there is* a True Self, a risen presence, and it is "something here within us which doesn't let us sleep." So let's try now to roll away the rock, clear the debris, and get back to mining for our True Self. You will find a diamond.



Since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, we must now turn to the pagans.

PAUL AND BARNABAS, ACTS 13:46

am writing this book for secular seekers and thinkers, believers and nonbelievers alike, and that huge disillusioned group in recovery from religion itself. Surprisingly, these are often more ready to see and honor Mystery than many religious people are. I can no longer wait for, or give false comfort to, the many Christians who are forever "deepening their personal relationship" with a very tiny American Jesus—who looks an awful lot like them. I would much prefer to write for those like Jane Fonda, who said recently, "I feel a presence, a reverence humming within me that was, and is, difficult to articulate." Well, Jane, we are going to try to articulate and affirm that humming here.

Because far too many religious folks do not seriously pursue this "reverence humming within them," they do not recognize that something within them needs to be deeply trusted and many things must be

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allowed to die—not because they are bad, but because they perhaps cannot get them where they want to go. Spirituality tends to be more about unlearning than learning. And when the slag and dross are removed, that which evokes reverence is *right there waiting*!

Many religious people seem to think that God, for some utterly unexplainable reason, loves the human past (usually their own group's recent past) instead of the present or the future of this creation. As Jaroslav Pelikan so wisely put it years ago, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living, and I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives Tradition such a bad name." We can do much better than substituting mere traditionalism for actual God experience.

Our identification of God with the past has done the present and future no favor. Old mistakes are still mistakes, and we do not need to keep repeating them. For much of the world, this preoccupation with the past comes across as a divine approval of everybody else's death (non-Christians, heretics, Native peoples, "sinners," women, the poor, slaves, and on and on), and never our own. Many people have lost all interest in our grand spiritual talk and our Scriptures because they too often have been used by people who are themselves

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still small (who are stuck in their False Self). It does not help to deny that we are stuck, and yet it does not help to stand arrogantly above it all either—as if we do not all share in the one great human crucifixion of reality, the one "world sorrow" (*Weltschmerz*, the Germans call it). We Christians affirm the communion of saints in the Nicene Creed, but I think there should be an equal belief in the "communion of sinners." We are all fully a part of both groups.

My hope is that this book will above all else clarify for you, and especially confirm in your own experience, a few things that are true for people of any religion or no religion at all. I will use God language, because it is still the language of 95 percent of the world and 99 percent of history, but I think you will agree that what I say about grace, death, and resurrection is true for everybody and does not need specifically religious language at all.

The following three paragraphs came to me very clearly in a very short time while walking along the sea during my Lenten hermitage in 2012. In some ways, they summarize this book at the very beginning:

1. The goodness of God fills all the gaps of the universe, without discrimination or preference. God

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is the gratuity of absolutely everything. The space in between everything is not space at all but Spirit. God is the "goodness glue" that holds the dark and light of things together, the free energy that carries all death across the Great Divide and transmutes it into Life. When we say that Christ "paid the debt once and for all," it simply means that God's job is to make up for all deficiencies in the universe. What else would God do? Basically, grace is God's first name, and probably last too. Grace is what God does to keep all things he has made in love and alive—forever. Grace is God's official job description. Grace is not something God gives; grace is who God is. If we are to believe the primary witnesses, an unexplainable goodness is at work in the universe. (Some of us call this phenomenon God, but that word is not necessary. In fact, sometimes it gets in the way of the experience, because too many have named God something other than Grace.)

2. Death is not just physical dying, but going to full depth, hitting the bottom, going the distance, beyond where I am in control, fully beyond where I am now. No wonder it is scary. Death is called "the descent into hell" in the early Christian creeds and in other sources, "the pit," "the dark night," "Sheol," or "Hades." We all die eventually; we have no choice in

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the matter. But there are degrees of death before the final physical one. If we are honest, we acknowledge that we are dying throughout our life, and this is what we learn if we are attentive: grace is found at the depths and in the death of everything. After these smaller deaths, we know that the only "deadly sin" is to swim on the surface of things, where we never see, find, or desire God and love. This includes even the surface of religion, which might be the worst danger of all. Thus, we must not be afraid of falling, failing, going "down."

3. When you go into the full depths and death, sometimes even the depths of your sin, you come out the other side—and the word for that is resurrection. Something or someone builds a bridge for you, recognizable only from the far side, that carries you willingly, or even partly willing, across. From all that we hear from reputable and reliable sources (mystics, shamans, near-death visitors, and "nearing-death experiences"), no one is more surprised and delighted than the traveler himself or herself. Something or someone seems to fill the tragic gap between death and life, but *only at the point of no return*. None of us crosses over by our own effort or merits, purity, or perfection. We are all carried across by an uncreated and unearned grace—from pope, to president,

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to princess, to peasant. Worthiness is never the ticket, only deep desire, and the ticket is given in the desiring. The tomb is always finally empty. There are no exceptions to death, and there are no exceptions to grace. And I believe, with good evidence, that there are no exceptions to resurrection.

In this investigation of True Self, False Self, resurrection, and transformation, I will be using all New Testament Gospel accounts, along with Paul and John's letters, and Acts of the Apostles too, but if Scripture is not a natural authority for you, you can ignore the citations! While I hope these spiritual intuitions and ideas will stand on their own apart from the Bible, *I will cite Scripture generously to demonstrate that these are not just my ideas*. I am standing on the Judeo-Christian tradition and in that light will also be quoting scholars, saints, theologians, and poets to get us to the perennial truths that all religions share.

I will be trying to use the three-pronged methodology of Scripture, Tradition, and inner experience, which balance and affirm one another when all three live in mutual honoring and respect. Personal experience for me is the underdeveloped "third something" needed to overcome the tired and dualistic food fight Preface XXIII

between Catholic "tradition" and Protestant "sola Scriptura." Critical reason is then precisely what it takes to coordinate these three principles in a fair way.²

THE APPENDIXES: PRACTICE-BASED EXPERIENCE

Since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, there has been little emphasis on spiritual practices and pathways wherein you could know holy and true things for yourself. John Wesley, the father of what become the Methodist tradition, tried with his various "methods" and practices to bring people to God, but it does not seem that as many hearts were as "strangely warmed" as his was. We still had our wonderful "contemplative orders" in the Catholic church, but even they had lost the older traditions of the prayer of quiet and "prayer beyond words."³ Catholics and Orthodox and Anglicans have their sacraments and liturgies, but too often they became rote repetition, often encouraging unconsciousness instead of consciousness, especially among many who were most tied to them. The ego, it seems, will find any way to take over, especially in the dangerous world of religion, and it often does, with the most XXIV PREFACE

clever of disguises. As Zen Masters are known to say, "Avoid spirituality if at all possible; it is one insult after another." They know that true religion "insults" your ego and does not give it easy comfort.

Up to now, we have been more driven by outer authority ("It is a sin if you don't" or "The church says...") than drawn in by the calm and loving inner authority (the in-dwelling Holy Spirit) of prayer, practice, and inner experience. This has a much better chance of allowing you to meet and know your True Self. For all practical purposes, this change of identity is the major—almost seismic—shift in motivation and consciousness itself that mature religion rightly calls *conversion*. It is the very heart of all religious transformation ("changing forms"). Without it, religion is mostly a mere belonging system or a mere belief system, but it does not radically change your consciousness or motivation.

We must return to practice-based spirituality where the vantage point switches *from looking at God to looking out from God*. That will become clear and inviting as the book unfolds, I hope, and in the practices offered in the appendixes at the back of the book. Christianity is much more about living and doing than thinking. As Thomas Aquinas, no Catholic

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lightweight, put it, *Prius vita quam doctrina* ("Life is prior to doctrines").⁵

Whatever I will try to say in this book, it is for the sake of one thing: life—"life more abundantly" (John 10:10) and life for all groups. Life in multitudinous forms has clearly been given to us from known time—beyond the boundaries of any one religion, any one nation, any one ethnicity, any one time period, and any single ideology. And life is not just the unique possession of humans.

My only job, and yours too, is to imitate God in the same love of life.⁶ And if God has given such grace and given life so abundantly and so broadly (Acts 11:22), then who am I to stand in God's way (11:17)? The best any of us can do is to back up what is already and obviously happening. Perfect spirituality is just to imitate God

IMMORTAL DIAMOND