

Being Instruments of God

Almost twenty years ago, I gave a series of talks called Great Themes of Paul: Life as Participation, which I still think is one of the most important sets I ever made. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–6) was dramatic and utterly life-changing. In my opinion, the resulting insights from this initial experience became central to all he taught for the rest of his life. While most of us experience many smaller transformations throughout our lives, the result should be the same. With only a few updates to my language, this is how I described it:

Before conversion, we tend to think that God is out there. After transformation, God is not out there and we don't look at reality. We look from reality. We're in the middle of it now; we're a part of it. This whole thing is what I call the mystery of participation. Paul is obsessed by the idea that we're all already participating in something. I'm not writing the story by myself. I'm a character inside of a story that is being written in cooperation with God and the rest of humanity.

This changes everything about how we see our lives. If we're writing the story on our own, we think we've got to write it right. We've got to be clever, we've got to figure it out. If anything goes wrong, we've only got ourselves to blame. That's a terrible way to live, even though a high degree of Christians do. And I would call that bad news.

The good news is a completely different experience of life. A participatory theology says, "I am being used, I am actively being chosen, I am being led." It is not about joining a new denomination or having an ecstatic moment. After authentic conversion, you know that your life is not about you; you are about life! You're an instance in this agony and ecstasy of God that is already happening inside you, and all you can do is say yes to it. That's all. That's conversion and it changes everything.

"Rohr," is the German word for "conduit" or "pipe"!

This idea of participating in the goodness and continual unfolding of God's creation reminds me of the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi that begins, "Make me a channel (or instrument) of your peace." I remember being so delighted when I learned my last name, "Rohr," is the German word for "conduit" or "pipe"! As I've often said, I'm just a mouth in the Body of Christ. That's my only gift. Before talks I try to pray that God will get me out of the way so God's message will get through.

Looking back on my life, I can see that God did everything. God even used my mistakes to bring me to God and God's wisdom to others! I hope this week will inspire you to look at what has happened when you also said yes to participating as God's instrument in the world.



Adapted from Richard Rohr, "Overview: Paul's Life and Letters,"

in Great Themes of Paul: Life as Participation, disc 1

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Prayer For Our Community

*Loving God, you fill all things with a fullness
and hope that we can never comprehend.*

*Thank you for leading us into a time
where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see.*

*We pray that you will take away our natural temptation
for cynicism, denial, fear and despair.*

*Help us have the courage to awaken to
greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another.*

*May we place our hope in what matters and what lasts,
trusting in your eternal presence and love.*

Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our suffering world.

Please add your own intentions . . .

*Knowing, good God, you are hearing us better than we are speaking,
we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God. Amen.*

