

## Session Four // Fast Food Christianity

**Watch The Film:** *Fast Food Christianity* with Fr. Richard Rohr

<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/fast-food-christianity>

### Going Deeper:

What is the character of God that was presented or taught to you? How do you feel about that God?

When you bring up your ideas about who God is for observation, what is the image of God you carry in you? Can you love that God? Can you name God differently today?

What are the benefits of a “fast food” Christianity? Of the reward/punishment theology? How has it served you or not served you well? Is there a "Fast-Food" word you used to describe God that you can replace with a word naming God's goodness?

What is the “home base” belief you return to?

Consider what your life would be like if your responses to life were expressed out of the Great Yes who always was, who agreed to all creation-kind vs. the inner No so many of us were programmed by fear to react to/with. Just spend some time with God as “Yes”.

Consider Fr. Rohr's description of "a benevolent universe where God wins, and God is really victorious." Is there an experience or a memory that drifts to mind, that informs how we see God? Have we mapped our image of God using our characteristics from our father or mother, for instance? Verbally, or in writing, share the story.

### Reflection:

*"If you start with no, if you start with accusation, negation, judgment, if you start the conversation with an immediate dismissal of a person or idea...it's almost impossible to get back to yes. It is!"* —Fr. Richard Rohr

I started with "no." Born to young parents in a volatile relationship and sent to live with my godparents, my very existence felt inappropriate. Young Danielle believed that she was a mistake and therefore tried very hard to prove that she belonged. I

used good grades, being clean, making jokes, and blind obedience to earn my place in the classroom, my family, my church.

My worldview did not grow as I aged. I employed my "be good" strategy as an adult. Always be the bigger person. Never make mistakes. Do not miss a gathering, meeting, or service. Your feelings and desires do not matter if they do not align with the greater good. Sickness or tiredness is weakness.

Warped Christian messages confirmed the voice of my inner critic. I needed "amazing grace" to save a "wretch" like me. I was the "pile of manure" Martin Luther described, in need of the "snow" of a Savior. It was a perfect narrative to accompany my belief about my inherent wickedness.

This belief system worked in the short term to keep me out of trouble. I didn't get pregnant during high school or college (which was everyone's fear). I never got drunk or failed a class. While at Baylor University, I protested college parties and even quit my sorority because of my religious convictions. I felt pretty Christ-like. A spiritual smug-ness even.

*"When you start with no, you start with 'the universe is a great big reward-punishment system,' and 99.2% of everything that God created from the beginning of the universe is damned to hell."*

—Richard Rohr

What my beliefs did not bring me was real joy. Beneath the veneer of a humble missionary, there was a rolling boil of anger. I was angry at the state of the world. Angry that God did not reward my goodness. Pissed off that "bad" people still seemed to be blessed and rewarded, which was so unfair.

I joined the pastoral staff of a spiritual movement and cultural arts organization when I was twenty-two years old. I was going to be the change I sought in the world. Twelve years into operating with my belief system and a long list of rules left me exhausted, feeling abused, and ashamed of being away from my new baby for too long and not bringing nearly enough back.

Something had to change.

*"When you start with yes, the announcement of a benevolent universe.  
God created it and it was good, your core is not bad, it's good.*

*Now you got something to go back to.  
You got something to fall into."*

—Fr. Richard Rohr

I began a journey of Contemplative Prayer. In my time of stillness, silence, and solitude, the criticism I had for myself would disappear in the presence of the Divine. The voice of God would speak to me about my goodness. The nudges of the Holy Spirit weren't harsh or even corrective; God was gently working out from within me incorrect beliefs about my goodness.

My perspective on myself became more compassionate. More positive. What happened next was the inevitable, remarkable thing that happens to humans who work to grow into loving God with all our hearts, minds, and strength—a softening toward humankind that allowed me to begin to love others as well as I loved myself.

Do you know Franciscan mystic, scholar, and theologian, Bonaventure? He believed in a benevolent, loving God. His thought leadership attempted to experience God through a fusion of faith, rational understanding, and mystical union with God. His most significant contribution was the bringing together of the Roman and Greek churches, which was frowned upon, and he died under "mysterious circumstances" the very same year.

The work and hopes of Bonaventure are not lost on me. It's been a privilege to walk alongside folks experiencing the union he spoke of. I've since stepped down as a pastoral leader. A better fit for me in this season of my own life is coaching others to discover and reconnect with their Original Good through my private practice. I have never seen such transformation. Self-observation becomes self-awareness, and through contemplation, the Divine reveals our true identity.

I have to work to see and operate from within my true self continuously. To bring a continually renewing and transformed person to my new work, I have the privilege of engaging in many forms of contemplative living practices.

I learned a technique called the Quick Coherence Technique, developed by the wonderful experts at the Heart Math Institute. According to their research, there is a heart-brain connection that can be cultivated to increase the quality of our lives.

Coherence is a word that means a state of sustained positive emotion and a high degree of mental and emotional stability. The Heart Math Institute teaches that "In states of psychophysiological coherence, there is increased synchronization and harmony between the cognitive, emotional, and physiological systems, resulting in efficient and harmonious functioning of the whole."

That integration of faith, rational understanding, and mystical union with God manifests itself through science!

When conversations, memories or present situations trigger us and campaign a message of "no," "badness," or whatever specific message of rejection is damaging to you, there is a practice that we can use as a prayer to bring our souls back into connection with God, the Creator of a benevolent universe, who called you "Good."

*"The soul is that part of you that knows who it is. Inherently, intuitively, instinctively knows, I'm God's boy. I'm a beloved son; I am a beloved daughter. When you have that as a home base, all you have to do is keep teaching people to go back to home base." —Fr. Richard Rohr*

### **Contemplative Prayer and Practice: Getting Back to Home Base with Heart Math**

The experts at The Heart Math Institute have worked for years to research and develop ways to bridge a connection between the intelligence of our hearts and our intellect. The goal of Heart Math is a heart-brain connection, establishing heart coherence and emotional well-being. I believe their work continues Bonaventure's lineage of discovering God anew by encouraging union with faith and reason.

What is physiological coherence? This term refers to a scientifically measurable state characterized by increased order and harmony in our mind, emotions, and body.

The experts at The Heart Math Institute created a method of bringing coherence to the body called the Quick Coherence Technique.

The Quick Coherence Technique brings the body into a state of coherence, creating a flow of oxygenated blood, a steady heart rate, and synchronization of the body. When in coherence, we are in the optimal state for health and learning.

The goal is to bring attention to the heart and mind connection as a means to transform stress into more authentic care and greater resilience. This sounds like union with a benevolent God to me! I use this technique as a form of contemplative prayer.

## **Experience the Quick Coherence Technique:**

### **Step 1:** Heart Focus

Focus your attention on the area around your heart.

### **Step 2:** Heart Breathing

Maintain your heart focus and while breathing, imagine that your breath is flowing in and out through the heart (5 seconds in, 5 seconds out)

### **Step 3:** Heart Feeling

Activate and sustain a genuine feeling of appreciation or care for someone or something in your life or recall a positive feeling and make a sincere attempt to relive that feeling.

How did you feel after experiencing the Quick Coherence Technique?

Did you feel any movement around your heart space when breathing into it?

What comes up for you as you experience this simple exercise?

How does it feel to shift your attention to God as a "Benevolent God of Coherence" instead of a "God of Consequence and Punishment?"

**The Commission:** *I bless you to enjoy experimenting with a benevolent God and lavishing in you today.*