

What People Are Saying About *The Divine Dance*...

Humanity, says Richard Rohr, is a perfect rhyme for what Christianity, trying to express the inexpressible, calls the holy trinity. This human dance we're all in reflects a mysterious divine dance, one that we notice on our best days. Finding the sweet spot where contemporary science meets ancient mysticism, and theology meets poetry, *The Divine Dance* sketches a beautiful choreography for a life well-lived. In our joy or our pain, true life is always relational, a flow, a dance. (And was always meant to be.)

—Bono, U2

Seriously friends, this is Richard in peak form, doing what he does best: showing you how the best ideas for the future have actually been here, in the Jesus tradition, the whole time. In these pages it's the Trinity—that old familiar word—that suddenly gets infused with insight and electricity as you see just how practical and helpful and healing and inspiring and provocative and dangerous this conception of the Divine is. Our favorite Franciscan has done it again!

—Rob Bell

Speaker, teacher, and author, *Love Wins*
RobBell.com

More and more people are struggling with conventional understandings of God, like the big white guy on a throne with a long beard and a fistful of swords and lightning bolts by which you (or your enemies) might be smitten at any moment if you don't think or act correctly. For many, the concept of Trinity simply triples their God-problems. But in *The Divine Dance*, Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell explore the Trinity as a pathway beyond problematic understandings of God. This beautifully-written book can do far more than change your troubled thoughts about God: it can change your way of thinking about God entirely.

—Brian D. McLaren

Activist, speaker, and author, *We Make the Road by Walking*
brianmclaren.net

Rohr and Morrell have given us a liberating and yet totally orthodox invitation into the life of God. This book is a celebration of the Trinity, not as bad math ($1+1+1=3$), and not as baffling mystery to avoid, but as the divine movement of love. I'm grateful for a book that speaks God not with pretense and jargon, but with wisdom and genuine human experience. *The Divine Dance* is an example of why Rohr has had such a profound influence on so many Christians seeking to balance reason and mystery, action and contemplation, not to mention faith and real life.

—Nadia Bolz-Weber

Pastor, House for All Sinners and Saints
Author, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*
NadiaBolzWeber.com

The Divine Dance reminds us that God is a holy community—Father, Son, Spirit. And that humanity is created in the image of community, with a deep longing to love and be loved. This book calls us to be like God—to belong to each other, to be one as God is one, and to refuse to do life alone.

—Shane Claiborne
Activist and author, *Jesus for President*
RedLetterChristians.org

It's ironic that, while we have many religious institutions named after the Trinity, we are increasingly plagued by feelings of isolation and loneliness because we fail to truly experience this mysterious Three-In-One. With wisdom, compassion, and deep theological insight, Rohr and Morrell help readers begin to hear the music, understand the invitation, and feel the joy that leads our souls to enter into the Divine Dance.

—Sarah Thebarge
Author, *The Invisible Girls*
SarahThebarge.com

Richard Rohr is one of the great spiritual masters of our time, indeed of any time. His superb new book on the Trinity is vintage Rohr: clearheaded, provocative, inspiring, challenging, and, most of all, suffused with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity will of course always remain a profound mystery, but after reading Father Rohr's book, you will experience it as a mystery that can, and will, transform your life.

—James Martin, SJ
Author, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* and *Seven Last Words*

The Divine Dance is a joyful plunge into what is often dry academic mystery. Richard Rohr shares his exploration into the sacred and challenges us all to come along on the nourishing journey to community.

—Simone Campbell, SSS
NETWORK Executive Director, lawyer, advocate, poet,
and author, *A Nun on the Bus*
NetworkLobby.org

This is Christianity, awake. In *The Divine Dance*, Fr. Rohr and Mike Morrell inspire the mind and open the heart by exploring how a more robust Trinitarian theology can enliven faith in a way that's rooted not only in Christian tradition, but in wisdom, experience, and love.

—Michael Gungor
Musician and author, *The Crowd, the Critic, and the Muse*
GungorMusic.com

Part devotional, part theological (re)introduction to the Holy Trinity, *The Divine Dance* sheds light on a few of the moves that will get your pew-weary muscles up and moving again. But be warned—it's hard to dance without touching!

—Jennifer Knapp
Singer/songwriter and author, *Facing the Music*
JenniferKnapp.com

I would never call myself a mystic, or a contemplative. My life of faith runs at warp speed. The Creator inspires me to produce worship that is cacophonous and joyful; Jesus catapults me into battles for a more just society; and the Spirit tosses me into rigorous loving of neighbor and self. This lovely book caused me to slow down, to be present, to attend and be curious about the partners in the Divine Dance. I felt as though Father Rohr was sitting with me at tea, that Mike Morrell was with us, weaving language, painting an intimate portrait God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit—the mystery of the Trinity. Each Person is more alive, now, circling in my heart—is it a waltz? A two-step? Even hip-hop? This book must be on your shelf: clergy, lay leaders, activists, and academics. For reflection and sustenance. To remember our “likeness” with Holy. To be invited to the dance.

—The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis
Senior Minister, Middle Collegiate Church (New York City)
Host, Just Faith (MSNBC.com); author, *The Power of Stories*
JacquiJLewis.com

The three are one? Well, yes. One dynamic reality, one joyful noise, one glorious flowing explosion of sacred suchness! A daring doctrine indeed. As a Jewish Hindu Buddhist Sufi, I finally get it. God is love and love is unendingly unfolding—permeating and transforming and connecting All That Is. *The Divine Dance* may well be Richard Rohr's most important book.

—Mirabai Starr
Author, *God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*
MirabaiStarr.com

The Divine Dance is not only Richard Rohr's best book; it's the best book on the Trinity I've ever read. Tender, human, both pastorally and psychologically brilliant, this is the work Rohr was born to do—the theological master grid that illumines a lifetime of teaching. While the depth and the scope of the book are enormous, *The Divine Dance* is most marked by its shimmering, revelatory clarity. The writing, like our three-in-one God, dances. For Rohr and Morrell, the Trinity is not just the revelation of God but the revelation of everything. I wept, I worshipped, I started all over again. An instant spiritual classic.

—Jonathan Martin
Author, *How to Survive a Shipwreck*
JonathanMartinWords.com

This book is essential to anyone who has ever suffered under the impression of an angry King God who sits on a throne and judges the wicked. *The Divine Dance* illuminates the beautiful implications of a God who is truly Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whose very being is formed by relationship—and in doing so reclaims the essential good of Christian belief.

—Mike McHargue
Author, *Finding God in the Waves*
MikeMcHargue.com

The Divine Dance is a radical rediscovery of the Trinity for our generation, providing an expanded understanding of the divine flow of the Trinity and how it provides a framework for everything...our relationships, our sexuality, our self-worth, and our spirituality. It's an enlightening read for all Christians who have struggled to understand the Trinity beyond an impersonal doctrine, and illuminates how the integration of the Trinity sets us all on a path to spiritual integration, vulnerability, and wholeness.

—Kristen Howerton
Writer
rageagainstheminivan.com

The Divine Dance invites you into the heart of Christian mysticism: the lavish ever-expanding love of God. Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell show how the triune God is more than a philosophical concept—the Trinity is a joyous celebration of love and life, and we are all called to participate. This is not a book merely to be read or studied; it is meant to be *lived*.

—Carl McColman
Author, *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism*
CarlMcColman.net

One of the most misunderstood and underappreciated doctrines in the modern church is beginning to see a resurgence as humanity moves into a non-dualistic age of consciousness that is discovering the beauty and power of the mystery of our three-in-one, relational God. In *The Divine Dance*, Fr. Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell explore the depths of the Trinitarian mystery in a surprisingly accessible and refreshing manner, reflecting on how Christianity's triune conception of God holds the keys to personal and societal transformation.

This book is a truly vital re-presentation of the fundamental truths that lie at the heart of the Christian gospel for a new age. Rohr and Morrell have written a soon-to-be classic that will re-enthrall many with the beauty of the Christian tradition while causing us to expand and explore beyond the boundaries of rigid religiosity. This book is practical, profound, and inspiring, a must-read for every Christian in the twenty-first century.

—Brandon Robertson
Author, *Nomad: A Spirituality for Travelling Light*
BrandonRobertson.com

With the wisdom of C.S. Lewis and the accessibility of Rob Bell, Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell unpack our long-lingering questions about God, love, grace, and forgiveness, all through the lens of Trinitarian spirituality. This isn't to say that this book answers every question. Like all good mystics, Rohr and Morrell circle our questions, reveling in the mystery of all that is. Join them. Stand with them "under the waterfall of God's infinite mercy, and know that you are loved."

—David James Poissant

L.A. Times Book Prize Finalist; author, *The Heaven of Animals*
davidjamespoissant.com

Many years ago I had a vision—somehow I just knew—of the Trinity, dancing. In this dance God's persons were filled with great contagious joy. I remember wishing I could join them in that intimate, circular dance. You can imagine my great joy when Jesus took me by the hand and included me in it!

My dear friend Richard Rohr has once again given us a remarkable book on a subject that most Christians haven't really thought about or prayed about, and yet we all agree is at the very heart of Christianity: this very Trinity. Richard's heart is to reform Christianity from the bottom up by making clear the very shape of God, and in *The Divine Dance* he does just that. I am very privileged to endorse this marvelous book and to know that the wisdom contained within these pages will enable us all to join in the dance of life!

—Francis MacNutt

Healing minister and author, *The Healing Reawakening*
christianhealingmin.org

Though my heritage is in the charismatic movement, I've always had a spiritual curiosity that led me beyond the borders of my traditional upbringing. I believe that there is a faith available that far exceeds any fear of being deceived. If we are honest, all of us have questioned what we believed in the past in order to arrive at the beliefs we have in the present. *The Divine Dance* is the perfect catalyst for continued trailblazing.

I have a love affair with progressive thinkers like Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell who courageously challenge truths that have become static and have lost their relevance. Their generational collaboration with this work is critical for those of us evolving in our theological perspectives. Together, they demonstrate an intelligent humility, teaching the reader how to think instead of what to think.

Within these pages, I discovered that what I have known about the Trinity was not necessarily inaccurate, just incomplete. *Dance* is a perfect metaphor for engaging with mystery. Rohr and Morrell accepted the invitation of the Father, Son, and Spirit—an invitation that asks, "May I have this dance?" From the first chapter, I was taken by the hand and swept off my feet, gliding, dipping, and pirouetting into the deep insights of the Trinity. My heart is still dancing. This is, hands down, the very best theological treatise I have read in forty years.

—Dr. Randall Worley

Author, *Brush Strokes of Grace*
RandallWorley.com

I didn't think I needed to understand the hypostatic unity of the Trinity; I just needed to turn my life over to whoever made the Grand Canyon. Reading *The Divine Dance* gives me the same feeling—I want to get up and move!

—Kevin Prosch
Singer, songwriter, and recording artist

Richard Rohr has done it again! In *The Divine Dance*, Richard and Mike Morrell reveal the spiritual paradigm shift that is taking place for us to reexamine how we see God. God is not some far-away threatener but the life-source in all things! This book is life-changing and will make you take a second look at who God really is within creation. Well done! *The Divine Dance* is top-notch and a must-read!

—Jeremy Lopez
Author, *The Power of the Eternal Now*
Founder, Identitynetwork.net

The Divine Dance is a love story, calling us forward to embrace the fullness of God in the unitive three parts of God's self. Fr. Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell invite us to unleash our limited God images—often made small by our vision of singular or separated Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

These pages call us to consciously reunite our God of three to see the full expression of God's being—like a waterwheel, God flows freely as parts flowing into wholeness.

The Divine Dance offers us the opportunity to fall in love with a robust God, and in doing so, gives us the gift of a divine mirror, which sees and loves us completely, and allows us to embrace and fully love ourselves.

—Teresa B. Mateus, LCSW
Author, *Sacred Wounds: A Path to Healing from Spiritual Trauma*
teresabmateus.com

Richard Rohr is a friend and contemplative and has taught us so much about the joys of a deep inner spiritual life. In *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*, Richard maturely explains the nature and deep meaning of the Trinity, which has gone unappreciated by many Christians for much of the last seventeen hundred years. I strongly recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand the relationship between human beings and God more richly and deeply.

—Jim Wallis
President of Sojourners and editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine
New York Times best-selling author, *America's Original Sin*



THE DIVINE DANCE

THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION

THE
DIVINE DANCE

THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION

RICHARD ROHR
WITH MIKE MORRELL



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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THE DIVINE DANCE:
THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION
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DEDICATION

FROM RICHARD ROHR

To all the unsuspecting folks who do not know they are already within the Divine Flow.

FROM MIKE MORRELL

To my daughters, Jubilee Grace and Nova Rain. You embody Spirit's unexpected movements in my life!



FOREWORD

ONE alone

is not by nature Love,
or Laugh,
or Sing

ONE alone

may be Prime Mover,
Unknowable
Indivisible
All

and if Everything is All and All is One

One is Alone
Self-Centered
Not Love
Not Laugh
Not Sing

TWO

Ying/Yang

Dark/Light

Male/Female

contending Dualism

Affirming Evil/Good

And striving toward Balance

At best Face-to-Face

but Never Community

THREE

Face-to-Face-to-Face

Community

Ambiguity

Mystery

Love for the Other

And for the Other's Love

Within

Other-Centered

Self-Giving

Loving

Singing

Laughter

A fourth is created

Ever-loved and loving.

Relationship has always been the wild card, the court jester who appears in the midst of our human agenda and our hallucinations of independent self-sufficiency, revealing by any means that the emperor is naked.

When you even skim the edges of relationship, you submit to mystery and lose control. Marriage would be so much easier if there wasn't another person involved, but then it would be meaningless, too. Relationships are entwined, entrenched, elusive, messy, enabling, enrapturing, maddening, exhilarating, frustrating, exposing, and too beautiful for words. There are moments when we think we might finally have a whisper of control over our world, and then—*whoosh!*—in comes someone who knocks it completely sideways.

Yet it is relationship that provides the backdrop and framing for the art of our lives, apart from which our colors would simply disperse into the darkness formless and void, awaiting the hovering of the Spirit to collect them and—with Her shades and hues—breathe into us to set them free.

Bad theology is like pornography—the imagination of a real relationship without the risk of one. It tends to be transactional and propositional rather than relational and mysterious. You don't have to trust Person, or care for Person. It becomes an exercise in self-gratification that ultimately dehumanizes the self and the community of humanity in order to avoid the painful processes of humbling and trusting. Bad theology is not a victimless crime. It dehumanizes God and turns the wonder and the messy mystery of intimate relationship into a centerfold to be used and discarded.

There is a rising rumble, like a midnight train approaching through the wastelands. Not only do we hear it from the distance, but we can feel it if we put our hands on the ground or in the water or in the torn bread and poured-out wine. The rumor in the deep places of our souls is that there is a party going on, and we can scarce trust our invitation. Could there ever be a toast raised to us? Might a hand reach out and lead us into the *divine dance*, whispering in our ears that we were always made for this? And so we wait for the kiss, the breath in and out that awakens our sleeping hearts to life. We were made for this, utterly found within Relentless Affection!

There is a community of intelligent mystics who are speaking with profound compassion and authenticity, daring to accept this table fellowship themselves, and reminding us that *we, too*, received an invitation. Richard

Rohr and Mike Morrell are two of these voices, calling us forward and inviting us to actively change what we let into our hearts, calling us to consciously participate in this divine dance of loving and being loved.

We have watched the waters recede over the last few hundred years, and with this came a sense of ebbing hope. But as we challenge and change what we let into our hearts, we realize this: we have *not* been forsaken or abandoned, and what we thought we were losing was really a gathering. Waters made of many voices rise into a fountain of life that is collecting dreams—of expectancy and chronic wonder and longing love—the cusp of a new reformation and the release of renaissance. As wonderful as revival has been, it has never been enough. We have witnessed the shattering of the old wineskins and watched the bloodred wine be absorbed into the ground. For those with eyes to see, they look out from a towering, rising mass of living water that is about to crash upon this planet. For those whose eyes have not yet been healed—those “born blind”—although we cannot see it, we can feel it coming.

The children of this approaching re-formation of the very ways we think and see will respond quickly and easily. The elders of the empires will take much more work. They are not to be discarded, though, for love never rejects a single bit of bread or drop of wine.

The Divine Dance, along with thousands of other rising voices, is a violation of Empire and a celebration of Relationship. When one has seen the profound mysteries lovingly revealed here, one cannot un-see. When one has heard, there is no going back; suffering cannot wipe away the heart's smile.

God, You have never had a low view of Humanity.

May our eyes be healed, especially those of us “born blind,” that we might see what You do.

May our ears be opened to the music that heals, celebrating the entanglement of differences so that even in our discord, we hear that we ourselves are the melody embraced in Three-Part Harmony.

May our courage be emboldened to take the risks of trust, to live only inside the grace of one single day, to reach across Empire's borders and tear down the walls that mask our faces.

May we feel within us the eternal life of Jesus reaching through our hands—to heal, to hold, to hug—and celebrate the bread of our Humanity, the sanctity of the Ordinary and Participation in the Trinity.

As you read these pages and live your lives, may it be so!

—William Paul Young
Author, *The Shack*, *Cross Roads*, and *Eve*
Trinity Sunday, 2016



INTRODUCTION: “SIX IMPOSSIBLE THINGS BEFORE BREAKFAST”

The Blessed Trinity is supposed to be a central—even the paramount—foundational doctrine of our entire Christian belief system. And yet we’re told, at least I was told as a young boy in Kansas, that we shouldn’t try to understand it.

“Just believe it!” we were admonished. But there it stopped. Irish-born Sister Ephrem just held up the shamrock to my totally trustful third-grade class. We surely believed, if not in the Trinity, at least in her earnest Irish faith. (Although maybe that is exactly how the divine fow has to start! *With sharing a bit of earnest and deep goodness.*)

Yet it was indeed a mystery. Sort of a mathematical conundrum to test our ability to believe impossible things to be true. You would have thought “believing six impossible things before breakfast” was the actual goal of my pre-Vatican II Catholic training. But later, I found my Protestant friends had approximately the same approach to faith; it merely involved different impossibilities, usually things that happened in the Bible. They didn’t seem to appreciate inner experience too much, either.

And here I am, some sixty years later, presuming to try to breach this impenetrable mystery. Shall we dare to try?

I suppose this is the only real way we can join in the dance...

TRINITY: MIA

Let's begin with the shocking and oft-quoted idea from Karl Rahner, the German Jesuit who was such a major influence at the Second Vatican Council. In his classic study *The Trinity*, he said, "Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.' We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."¹

We would have to admit this was largely true until William Paul Young wrote his worldwide best-selling novel, *The Shack*, in the past decade.² For the first time since fourth-century Cappadocia, the Trinity actually became an inspired subject of conversation and rather pleasant questioning in homes and restaurants. And it continues!

But seventeen centuries of being missing in action—how could this have been true? Could this absence help us understand how we might still be in the infancy stage of Christianity? Could it help explain the simple ineffectiveness and lack of transformation we witness in so much of the Christian world? When you are off at the center, the whole edifice is quite shaky and unsure of itself.

If Trinity is supposed to describe the very heart of the nature of God, and yet it has almost no practical or pastoral implications in most of our lives...if it's even possible that we could drop it tomorrow and it would be a forgettable, throwaway doctrine...*then either it can't be true or we don't understand it!*

Since you're reading this, I'm going to guess that, somewhere, you believe it must somehow be true. In the pages that follow, I'm going to simply circle around this most paradoxical idea about the nature of God. And in truth, *circling around* is actually an apt metaphor for this mystery that we're trying to apprehend. There is no other way to appreciate mystery.

1. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 10–11.

2. William Paul Young, *The Shack* (Newbury Park, CA: Windblown Media, 2007).

Remember, mystery isn't something that you *cannot* understand—it is something that you can *endlessly understand!* There is no point at which you can say, "I've got it." Always and forever, mystery gets you!

"Circling around" is all we can do. Our speaking of God is a search for similes, analogies, and metaphors. All theological language is an approximation, offered tentatively in holy awe. That's the best human language can achieve. We can say, "*It's like—it's similar to...*," but we can never say, "*It is...*" because we are in the realm of beyond, of transcendence, of mystery. And we must—absolutely must—maintain a fundamental humility before the Great Mystery. If we do not, religion always worships itself and its formulations and never God.

The very mystical Cappadocian Fathers of fourth-century eastern Turkey eventually developed some highly sophisticated thinking on what we soon called the Trinity. It took three centuries of reflection on the Gospels to have the courage to say it, but they of this land—which included Paul of Tarsus before them and Mevlânâ Rumi of Konya afterward—*circled around* to the best metaphor they could find:

Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a *radical relatedness*, a *perfect communion* between Three—a circle dance of love.

And God is not just a dancer; God is the dance itself. Now hold on to this. This is not some new, trendy theology from America. This is about as traditional as you can get. Here it is in the words of Brother Elias Marechal, a monk at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia:

The ancient Greek Fathers depict the Trinity as a Round Dance: an event that has continued for six thousand years, and six times six thousand, and beyond the time when humans first knew time. An infinite current of love streams without ceasing, *to and fro, to and fro, to and fro*: gliding from the Father to the Son, and back to the Father, in one timeless happening. This circular current of trinitarian love continues night and day.... The orderly and rhythmic process of subatomic particles spinning round and round at immense speed echoes its dynamism.³

3. Elias Marechal, *Tears of an Innocent God* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 7.

Here it is: the “circle dance” of the Trinity is *very* traditional language. And yet if I showed the same courage to use such a risky theatrical word today, I would probably be called New Age, an esoteric—or a heretic.

Yet God is the dance itself, they said!

A SPACE AT GOD’S TABLE

Let’s observe this *divine dance* in an enigmatic story from the very first book of our sacred texts that we call the Bible.

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.”

“Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.”

Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.⁴

This account gives us a lot to chew on. The scene is set up as “*the LORD*” appearing to Abraham, but in the realm of discernable form, those appearing to him are seen as “*three men*.”

In the centuries of reflection, theology, and storytelling that have followed this original story, these three are often regarded as angels, and perhaps something more. Abraham—bowing low before them—seems to

4. Genesis 18:1–8 (NIV).

intuitively recognize this *something more* and invites them to a meal and a rest. He does not join them in the meal but observes them eating from afar, standing “*under a tree.*” A place at God’s table is still too much to imagine.

Abraham and Sarah seem to see the Holy One in the presence of the three, and their first instinct is one of invitation and hospitality—to create a space of food and drink for them. Here we have humanity still feeding God; it will take a long time to turn that around in the human imagination. “Surely, we ourselves are not invited to this divine table,” they presume.

This unique and multifaceted story inspired an equally unique and multifaceted piece of devotional religious art entitled *The Hospitality of Abraham*—also called, simply (and for reasons we’ll get into) *The Trinity*.

I believe all genuine art is sacred. Self-consciously “religious” art is often trying too hard and descends into cheap sentiment. But the particular form of artistic expression *The Trinity* belongs to—the icon—attempts to point beyond itself, inviting in its viewers a sense of both the *beyond* and the *communion* that exists in our midst.

Created by Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev in the fifteenth century, *The Trinity* is the icon of icons for many of us—and, as I would discover years after first encountering it, even more invitational than most. By my lights, it is the most perfect piece of religious art there is; I’ve always had a copy of it hanging in my room. The original is still on display in the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow.

There’s a story told that one artist became a follower of Jesus just from gazing at this icon, exclaiming, “If that’s the nature of God, then I’m a believer.” And I can fully understand this.

In Rublev’s icon there are three primary colors, which illustrate facets of the Holy One, all contained in the Three.

Rublev considered *gold* the color of “the Father”—perfection, fullness, wholeness, the ultimate Source.

He considered *blue* the color of “the Human”—both sea and sky mirroring one another—and therefore God in Christ taking on the world, taking on humanity. Thus, Rublev pictures the Christ as blue, displaying

his two fingers to tell us that he has put spirit and matter, divinity and humanity, together within himself—and for us!

And then there's *green*, easily representative of "the Spirit." Hildegard of Bingen, the German Benedictine abbess, musical composer, writer, philosopher, mystic, and overall visionary, living three centuries before Rublev, called the Spirit's endless fertility and fecundity *veriditas*—a quality of divine aliveness that makes everything blossom and bloom in endless shades of green.

Hildegard was likely inspired by the lushness of her surroundings at her Rhineland monastery, which I was recently able to visit. Rublev, in similar reverence for the natural world, chose green to represent, as it were, the *divine photosynthesis* that grows everything from within by *transforming light into itself*—precisely the work of the Holy Spirit.

Is that good or what?

The Holy One in the form of Three—eating and drinking, in infinite hospitality and utter enjoyment between themselves. If we take the depiction of God in *The Trinity* seriously, we have to say, "In the beginning was the Relationship."

This icon yields more fruits the more you gaze on it. Every part of it was obviously meditated on with great care: the gaze between the Three; the deep respect between them as they all share from a common bowl. And note the hand of the Spirit pointing toward the open and fourth place at the table! Is the Holy Spirit inviting, offering, and clearing space? If so, for what?

A (W)HOLE IN GOD

As magnificent as this icon—and this fellowship—is...there's something missing.

They're circling a shared table, and if you look on the front of the table there appears to be a little rectangular *hole* painted there. Most people just pass right over it, but art historians say that the remaining glue on the original icon indicates that there was perhaps once a *mirror* glued to the front of the table!

If you don't come from an Orthodox, Catholic, or Anglican background, this might not strike you as odd, but you should know that this is a most unusual feature for an icon. One would normally not put a real mirror on the front of a holy icon. If so, it is entirely unique and courageous.

This might have been Rublev's final design flourish. Or maybe it was added later—we're not sure.

But can you imagine what its meaning might be?

It's stunning when you think about it—there was room at this table for a *fourth*.

The observer.

You!

At the heart of Christian revelation, God is not seen as a distant, static monarch but—as we will explore together—a *divine circle dance*, as the early Fathers of the church dared to call it (in Greek *perichoresis*, the origin of our word *choreography*). God is the Holy One presenced in the dynamic and loving action of Three.

But even this Three-Fullness does not like to eat alone. This invitation to share at the divine table is probably the first biblical hint of what we would eventually call “salvation.”

Jesus comes forth from this Eternal Fullness, allowing us to see ourselves mirrored, as a part of this table fellowship—as a participant at this banquet and as a partner in God's eternal dance of love and communion.

The mirror seems to have been lost over the centuries, both in the icon and in our on-the-ground understanding of who God is and who we therefore are, created in God's “image and likeness.”⁵

My fondest hope would be that these pages would reposition you in the mirror of divine fellowship, with a place at the table.

I want you to take this image into yourself as you read. I invite you to recognize that this Table is not reserved exclusively for the Three, nor is the divine circle dance a closed circle: we're all invited in. All creation is invited in, and this is the liberation God intended from the very beginning.

5. See Genesis 1:26–27.

This divine intention—this audacious invitation—is embedded in creation itself;⁶ it later becomes concrete, personal, and touchable in Jesus.⁷ In other words, divine inclusion—again, what we rightly name *salvation*—was Plan A and not Plan B!

Our final goal of union with God is grounded in creation itself, and also in our own unique creation.⁸ This was a central belief in my own spiritual formation as a Franciscan friar.⁹ Our starting place was always *original goodness*,¹⁰ not original sin. This makes our ending place—and everything in between—possessing an inherent capacity for goodness, truth, and beauty.

Salvation is not some occasional, later emergency additive but God's ultimate intention from the very beginning, even "written in our hearts."¹¹

Are you ready to take your place at this wondrous table? Can you imagine that you are already a part of the dance?

Then let's begin to explore both how and why!

6. See John 1:1–18; Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 1:3–14; Romans 1:20; 8:18–25.

7. See, for example, 1 John 1:1–3; Hebrews 1:1–3.

8. See, for example, Ephesians 1:3–4.

9. See Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2014), app. I, 209, which explores how *Christ* and *Jesus* are two different but overlapping truths.

10. See Genesis 1:10–31.

11. See Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16.



PART I

WANTED: A TRINITARIAN REVOLUTION

SPIRITUAL PARADIGM SHIFT

*God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*¹²

*My Father goes on working, and so do I.*¹³

*The Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*¹⁴

Before you try to figure out why I started this section with these three separate citations about a very active and involved God, let me try to explain. And all I can ever do is *try*.

In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn popularized the word “paradigm shift.”¹⁵ He made clear that even in the scientific field, a paradigm shift is tantamount to what religion often calls “major conversion.” And it is equally rare in both science and religion! Any genuine transformation of worldview asks for such a major switch from the track we’re familiar with that often those who hold the old paradigm must actually die off before a new paradigm can gain traction and wide acceptance. Even more shocking is Kuhn’s conclusion that a paradigm shift has little to do with logic or even evidence, and everything to do with cataclysmic insight and breakthrough. German mystic Meister Eckhart called this phenomenon “boiling”!¹⁶

At the risk of sounding like I am making a serious overstatement, I think the common Christian image of God, despite Jesus, is still largely “pagan” (not that pagans are bad people, by the way!) and untransformed.

What do I mean by this? History has so long operated with *a static and imperial image of God*—as a Supreme Monarch who is mostly living in splendid isolation from what he—and God is always and exclusively

12. John 3:17 (NKJV).

13. John 5:17 (JB).

14. John 14:26 (NIV).

15. See *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

16. See, for example, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense* (Classics of Western Spirituality), rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 37.

envisioned as male in this model—created. This God is seen largely as a Critical Spectator (and his followers do their level best to imitate their Creator in this regard).

We always become what we behold; the presence that we practice matters. That's why we desperately need a worldwide paradigm shift in Christian consciousness regarding how we relate to God. This shift has been subtly yet profoundly underway for some time, hiding in plain sight—the revelation of God as what we have always called “Trinity” but have barely understood (*in the beginning was the Relationship*).

This slowly-dawning Christian revelation was supposed to have radically changed our image of God, but for the most part it did not. The old wiring was just too much in place. It has taken us two thousand years to try to make this shift; but now history, mental health, so many negative and angry Christians, cosmology, and quantum physics are quickly demanding it of us.

Kuhn said that paradigm shifts become necessary when the plausibility structure of the previous paradigm becomes so full of holes and patchwork “fixes” that a complete overhaul, which once looked utterly threatening, now appears as a lifeline.

I believe we're at precisely such a moment when it comes to our images of God. Instead of the idea of Trinity being an abstruse conundrum, it could well end up being the answer to the foundational problem of Western religion.

Instead of God being the Eternal Threatener, we have God as the Ultimate Participant—in everything—both the good and the painful.

Let me try to describe the two paradigms in stark contrast.

Instead of an Omnipotent Monarch, let's try what God as Trinity demonstrates as the actual and wondrous shape of the Divine Reality, which then *replicates itself in us*¹⁷ and in “all the array” of creation.¹⁸

Instead of God watching life happen from afar and judging it...

How about God being inherent in *life itself*?

17. See Genesis 1:26.

18. See Genesis 2:1.

How about God being *the Life Force of everything*?

Instead of God being an Object like any other object...

How about God being *the Life Energy between each and every object* (which we would usually call *Love* or *Spirit*)?

This allows God to be much larger, *at least* coterminous with the ever-larger universe we are discovering, and *totally inclusive*—what else could any God worthy of the name be?

Instead of the small god we seem stuck with in our current (and dying) paradigm, usually preoccupied with exclusion, the Trinitarian Revolution reveals God as *with us in all of life* instead of standing on the sidelines, always critiquing which things belong and which things don't.

The Trinitarian Revolution reveals God as *always involved* instead of the in-and-out deity that leaves most of humanity “orphaned” much of the time.¹⁹

Theologically, of course, this revolution repositions grace as inherent to creation, not as an occasional additive that some people occasionally merit.

If this revolution has always been quietly present, like yeast in the dough of our rising spirituality, it might help us understand the hopeful and positive “adoption” and “inheritance” theologies of Paul²⁰ and the Eastern Fathers over the later, punitive images of God that have dominated the Western church.

This God is the very one whom we have named “Trinity”—the *flow* who flows through everything, without exception, and who has done so since the beginning.

Thus, everything is holy, for those who have learned how to see.

The implications of this spiritual paradigm shift, this Trinitarian Revolution, are staggering: every vital impulse, every force toward the future, every creative momentum, every loving surge, every dash toward beauty, every running toward truth, every ecstasy before simple goodness, every leap of *élan vital*, as the French would say, every bit of ambition

19. See John 14:18.

20. See, for example, Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 4:5–7; Ephesians 1:5, 14.

for humanity and the earth, for wholeness and holiness, is the eternally-flowing life of the Trinitarian God.

Whether we know it or not! *This is not an invitation that you can agree with or disagree with. It is a description of what is already happening in God and in everything created in God's image and likeness.*

This triune God allows you, impels you, to live easily with God everywhere and all the time: in the budding of a plant, the smile of a gardener, the excitement of a teenage boy over his new girlfriend, the tireless determination of a research scientist, the pride of a mechanic over his hidden work under the hood, the loving nuzzling of horses, the tenderness with which eagles feed their chicks, and the downward flow of every mountain stream.

This God is found even in the suffering and death of those very things! How could this not be the life-energy of God? How could it be anything else? Such a big definition of life must include death in its Great Embrace, "so that none of your labors will be wasted."²¹

In the chirp of every bird excited about a new morning, in the hard beauty of every sandstone cliff, in the deep satisfaction at every job well done, in the passion of sex, and even in a clerk's gratuitous smile to a department store customer or in the passivity of the hospital bed, "*the world, life or death, the present or the future—all belong to you; [and] you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God,*" as the apostle Paul puts it.²² It is one Trinitarian Flow since the beginning.

Unless God's seers can begin to make this paradigm shift, there is no way that God is going to be able to "save the world." Courtroom scenes and penal systems do not inspire or change the world. They are totally inadequate to communicate the Divine Banquet and invitation; in fact, they make it largely impossible to imagine. It is not about being obviously religious. We have tried that for centuries with small results; it's about being quietly joyous and cooperative²³ with the divine generosity that connects everything to everything else.

21. See 1 Corinthians 15:51–58.

22. 1 Corinthians 3:22–23.

23. See Romans 8:28.

Yes, *God* is saving the world, and God goes on working even though we fail to notice, fail to enjoy, fail to pass on, and fail to fully live our one and only life. We become like the small god we have too often worshipped, and thus spectators at our own funeral.

How about this, instead:

*There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything.*²⁴

*When Christ is [fully] revealed—and he is your life—you too will be revealed in all your glory with him.*²⁵

A revolution is already underway; the old plausibility structures of divinity are diminishing; so much of religion is in rigor mortis. Are we ready to let go of what's no longer working and embrace the paradigm that has always been emerging and is always too much for us? As St. Augustine said, this God is "ever ancient and ever new."

If my instincts are right, this unearthing of Trinity can't come a moment too soon. Because I'm convinced that beneath the ugly manifestations of our present evils—political corruption, ecological devastation, warring against one another, hating each other based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation—the greatest dis-ease facing humanity right now is our profound and painful sense of *disconnection*.

Disconnection from God, certainly, but also from ourselves (our bodies), from each other, and from our world.

Our sense of this fourfold isolation is plunging us as a culture—as a species—into increasingly destructive behavior. While our world is not as doom and gloom as those who feed on a steady diet of cable TV and social media-driven "bad news" might conclude, it's true that the sheer scope and complexity of our disconnection is staggering.

I'm discovering that the gift of the Trinity—and our practical, felt experience of receiving this gift—offers a grounded reconnection with God, self, others, and world that all religion and spirituality, and arguably,

24. Colossians 3:11.

25. Colossians 3:4 (JB).

even politics, is aiming for—but which conventional religion, spirituality, and politics fall short of.

The religion, spirituality, and politics of worthiness games, belonging barriers, and achievement rewards will never be the cure: these are in fact part of the dis-ease. But God's joyous unveiling as Trinity can melt even the most hardened constrictions, illuminating the way toward a fourfold *re-union* of Spirit, self, society, and sense of space.

Are you ready to explore how a shift in our perspective from God as "removed one" to God as "most moved Mover,"²⁶ intimately participating in ongoing co-creation, makes such a joyous re-union possible?

If so, welcome to *The Divine Dance*. In these pages, we will indeed get to know the Trinity and the transformation of all things—including yourself.

DUSTING OFF A DARING DOCTRINE

Let me tell you a bit about how I came to more consciously participate in the divine dance. Some years ago, I had a wonderful extended time in a hermitage in Arizona during Lent. My main practices while there were to pay attention, listen, and keep a journal. Toward the end of my time there, I decided the appropriate thing to do would be to read through the journal that I'd kept to see if God had taught me anything; I wanted to see if there was any pattern to the unfolding of those wonderful and lonely days.

I went up to the Center Library, some distance from the hermitage, and there on a table was the late Catherine Mowry LaCugna's heady book entitled *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*.²⁷ It's a big book filled with footnotes, and it looked formidable. Even so, I felt a great urging toward it, even though I hadn't intended to read anything except the Bible during this sojourn.

So instead of reading my journal in those final hermitage days, I began to slowly read this highly academic book. As I read, while catching only glimpses of understanding, I still kept saying, "Yes, yes!" to new words and only slightly-captured ideas. I felt the presence of a Big Tradition, which

26. See Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

27. Harper San Francisco, 1991.