

God as Flow

—Richard Rohr, OFM

Why is it that Christian believers hardly ever think of, or talk about, God as Trinity—and yet Eastern and Western mystics reveal a strongly Trinitarian vocabulary and consciousness?!

Remember, I see mystics as those who have experiential knowledge of divine things, as opposed to mere book knowledge. It is not that prior generations of Christian mystics believed in a highly orthodox way, and thus used formal and proper Christian vocabulary. Instead, I think their primal experience of God, as *an active, life-giving flow, toward them, through them, and even as them*, made the language of Trinity an honest description of what they knew was happening to them—*every day, in every way*. For a Trinitarian believer, God is a verb much more than a noun.

It also is not that we must believe intellectually in the Trinity and thus become orthodox and holy. Rather, we can learn how the very subtle and positive shape of a believer's inner world, their wholeness and grounded goodness, finds honest and descriptive language in words like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and also Mother, Bride, and Guest. Such believers were never trapped in a static, punitive, or threatening notion of God. It is all divine seduction! So, to get off to a good start, we need to avoid the seeming gender implications of these classic words, which is not the point and will lead us down a long and unnecessary detour!

Those we call saints, mystics, and prophets deeply knew they did not create this flow. *They found themselves to be already living inside of it*. A Relational Flow was their deepest identity and the very structure of their soul. So they

needed and found words that implied solid protection, inner guidance, intimacy, endearment, beloved giving and receiving, trustful reciprocity, and absolute, unquestionable friendship. They also employed metaphors like wind, fire, flowing water, and descending dove—exactly as Jesus himself had done.

However, even though Jesus used this language, it was confusing to people who never went as deep into their inner experience as he did. It took the Christian community three centuries to clarify what he was talking about. Although they coined the word Trinity (which is not found in the Bible), it was then largely shelved and ignored, as most Christians emphasized external practices, rituals, moral behavior, social prayer, and belonging systems, rather than an inner experience of God.

The giveaway that someone has really discovered prayer is that their sense of God will be dynamic, active, and deeply personal. In other words, God will be a flow, an inner aliveness, a dynamism, moving forward and toward, and never a static Zeus figure sitting on a throne, who must be placated and feared.

Since we have always highlighted St. Francis around his October 4th feast day, I leave you with this beautiful prayer he composed two years before his death in 1226. Note that it is not a theological

treatise, nor is it trying to be “politically correct” for the church authorities. It is, however, highly Trinitarian—an abundant flow of adjectives and descriptors that can only imply that Francis was fully and personally involved in what I call “The Divine Dance,” which is also the title of my forthcoming book.

This prayer implies experiential knowledge of God that Francis reveals as fully possible—for all of us!

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The question for us is always "How can we turn information into transformation?" How can we use the sacred texts, tradition, and experience to lead people into new places with God, with life, with themselves? —Richard Rohr, OFM

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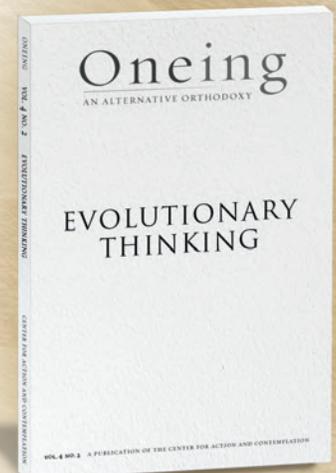
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The whole creation is eagerly waiting for the full revelation of the children of God. . . . From the beginning until now, the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth. —Romans 8:19–22

The Fall issue of CAC's spiritual, literary journal explores the creative unfolding of life and love. God and God's world are not static, but growing in complexity and beauty. An inner dynamism moves creation in a positive direction, toward greater wholeness.

"Evolutionary Thinking" features Richard Rohr, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Michael Dowd, Micky ScottBey Jones, and others.

This limited-edition publication will be available in CAC's Bookstore by October 21.



Getting to Know Our Donors: Sallie Ann Hart

Fr. Richard Rohr came into my life almost ten years ago. In 2007, Bob, my husband and the love of my life, suffered three heart attacks exactly one month apart. I felt as though an ominous, tornado-spawning cloud of despair and uncertainty was following us around. As a lifelong Catholic, I prayed constantly, asking God for some small sign of hope.



On a gloomy, rain-drenched morning, I made my way to our mailbox, which was usually stuffed with catalogues, bills, and various advertisements. On that day, however, the box contained only a small, padded envelope from one of our very close friends. Inside was a note that read, "If you do not know Fr. Richard Rohr, I believe he is the one to help you as you face this difficult time. Love, Nina." I listened to my first Richard Rohr CD that day, knowing as I did so that God had heard my prayers.

Soon after that, Bob had emergency open-heart surgery. I read Fr. Richard's books to him as he recovered. That began a profound spiritual journey that led to Bob's conversion to Catholicism four years later. We traveled to Assisi in the summer of 2012 for a small conference on St. Francis, the Franciscans, and Christian Mysticism, with Fr. Richard and Cynthia Bourgeault. While at the conference, we were invited by delightful new friends to join them for

dinner in a charming restaurant in the hills of Assisi. I was seated next to Fr. Richard! The group began to discuss the Enneagram, which I knew nothing about, so I simply observed and took in as much as I could.

The Assisi conference was followed by Bob's enrollment in the first cohort of the CAC's Living School for Action and Contemplation, three more Rohr conferences, and

a cruise to Greece and Turkey to follow Fr. Richard in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul. Most recently, we attended CONSPIRE 2016 with our two grown sons. It was inspiring to see the impact of Fr. Richard on the next generation of our family as we listened and learned together about Divine relationship.

Sallie Ann Hart was born into a political family in Washington, DC. Her grandfather was Henry B. Steagall, co-author of the 1933 bank-reform Glass Steagall Act. Her father, a Purple Heart recipient, became a Catholic when he was injured in World War I. Sallie Ann sings in the choir of Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish in Ponte Vedra, Florida, where she is a leader in the "Christ Renews His Parish" retreat program. Sallie Ann and Bob are founders of the Sister Parish Ministry in the Dominican Republic, where they serve as missionaries for part of each year. They have four children, six grandchildren, and their beloved dog, Mary Magdalene, whom they call "Maggie."

New Intensives Venue for Living School for Action and Contemplation

The Living School for Action and Contemplation faculty and staff are excited to announce that CAC will hold future first-year intensives at the Bosque Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, a few miles upriver from CAC, beginning in January, 2017. Now entering its fourth year, the Living School continues to evolve. This evolution includes moving the intensives to a local retreat setting that is conducive to small-group work, contemplative practice, and silence.

During the intensives, students receive foundational grounding in the Perennial Tradition and the opportunity for contemplative practice and small-group processing. The Bosque Center's grounds, labyrinth, and chapel provide a suitable backdrop for integration of the intensive experience and learnings. The venue's silence will support the students' silence as they seek to deepen and live from their authentic selves in God.

We look forward to this relationship with a retreat center housed

on property dedicated to spiritual formation since 2001. In addition to moving to a simple, natural setting congruent with Franciscan values, we will also be able to provide all meals for our students so they can more easily focus their time on the intensive. We trust that this formative time will nurture the seeds of transformation God has planted within our students, seeds that will grow and bear fruit as students integrate what they have learned with the various ways they are called to serve in the world.

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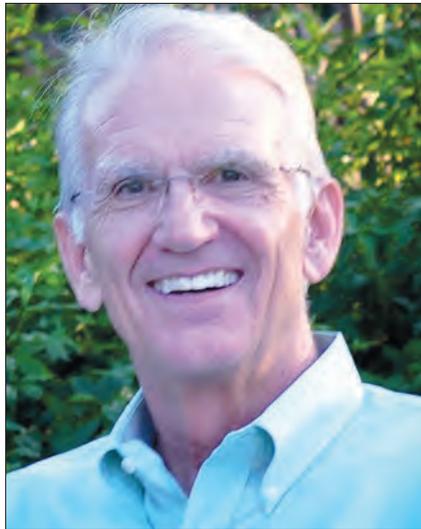
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Getting to Know Our Donors: Jack Willome

I resonate with the name "Center for Action and Contemplation" because it inspires me to be a person whose action is rooted in a contemplative stance. As an Enneagram Type Three, I have built my "separate identity" around the appearance of success. My early definition of success was impressing the "other." The "passion" of the Type Three is deceit and, since so much of my motivation for approval and acceptance has been subconscious, I paradoxically became the one most deceived, thinking that my worth as a person was determined by my performance. While this motivation resulted in many action-based accolades, the painful consequence was that I became a workaholic.

Several years ago, I was drawn to contemplative prayer but failed to develop a consistent practice. I would practice for a while but, as a "good" Three, I would then become discouraged as I judged my performance a failure because of the stream of distracting thoughts and absence of mystical experience. Then I was introduced to Fr. Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer and it was as if a switch went on within me. His simple instruction is to sit with the intention to "consent to God's presence and action within." It hit me that all I had to do to be successful was to be intentional. Somehow, that completely satisfied my performance drive.

Later, it occurred to me that intentionality precedes any significant accomplishment in life, so I began to pay



attention to my intentions. Keating also instructs the novice not to expect God's presence and action to show up during "sit." Rather, the possibility of a mystical experience showing up in my daily life is a result of the practice. And it really happens!

In the Living School's session on Non-Dual Unitive Consciousness, I learned that I couldn't think, plan, learn, or act my way to non-dual unitive consciousness. Instead, I had to sit my way there. Consequently, I committed myself to two contemplative sits each day, which I've practiced faithfully for nearly three years. I have faith and confidence that this practice will produce a life of action rooted in a contemplative stance. I'm

beginning to see the fruits of the "divine therapy," as Keating calls it, healing my subconscious and slowly dissolving my "separate self," making way for a sense of oneness with my Creator and the whole of creation.

Jack Willome had a twenty-four-year career with a major homebuilding and real estate development company in San Antonio, Texas, where he ultimately served as CEO. Jack has served as a board member for several businesses and faith-based organizations. A practitioner of "values-based leadership," he has led numerous retreats on Integrating Faith into All Aspects of Our Lives. He has also facilitated leadership team retreats to help faith-based organizations achieve clarity on strategic direction. Jack was a student in the Living School's 2015 cohort and currently serves as Treasurer of CAC's Board of Directors and Chair of the Finance Committee. He and his wife, Dee, have three adult children and five grandchildren. They live in Boerne, Texas.

Trinity: A Reflection by Living School Alumnus Mark Longhurst

When my three-year-old son pitter-patters into our room at 2:30 in the morning, calling out, "Daddy, I'm scared of the shadows," my internal response is, "Not again." If I grip spinning thoughts about how much sleep I can stitch together before a packed day, I feel annoyed and anxious. And yet, I've noticed something: If, instead, I wrap my son in my arms and sing to him while rubbing his back, my sleep-deprived edge disappears. My heart softens and participates in a flow of life greater than me.



The Trinity is like a fountain, in the memorable image of St. Bonaventure, in which God's love overflows from the fullness of Father to Son to Spirit to creation. The Flemish mystic Jan van Ruusbroec took the water imagery a step further, comparing God's relational dynamism to a whirlpool or eddy. Father, Son, Spirit, and universe are all participating in the stream of God's love.

The CAC's Living School for Action and Contemplation prepared me to be transformed by the flow

of God as Trinity. Even as a pastor's son, a theology nerd, and a minister, I previously had zero interest in the Trinity. The Living School changed this: It taught me that the doctrine's essential power is lost when it becomes a cordoned-off theological VIP room. Instead, God-as-Trinity is the dynamic centerpiece of reality's constant evolution. The three-in-one, flowing God affirms the divine and human foundational truth of mutual, self-giving, intimate relationships.

God's Trinitarian waterfall is always flowing. Gripping or controlling reality, however, only builds dams against God's propulsive love. Softening our hearts allows the current to circulate through us.

Mark Longhurst pastors the First Congregational Church in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He is an alumnus of the 2015 Living School cohort and has recently launched the crowdsourced contemplative website "Ordinary Mystic," which you can visit at www.ordinarymystic.net.

God as Flow *continued from page one*

The Praises of God

You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.

You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.
You are the almighty king. You holy Father,
King of heaven and earth.

You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;
You are the good, all good, the highest good,
Lord God living and true.

You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility,

You are patience, You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are security, You are rest,
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope, You are justice,
You are moderation, You are all our riches to sufficiency.

You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,
You are strength, You are refreshment. You are our hope,
You are our faith, You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:
Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Savior.

Francis of Assisi, "The Praises of God" (Edition Duane Lapsanski and Kajetan Esser), *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume I*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. Wayne Hellman, and William J. Short (New York: New City, 1999), 109.



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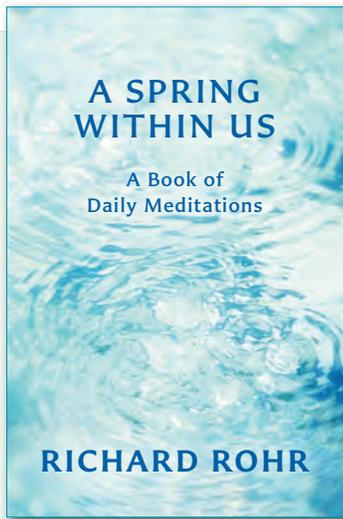
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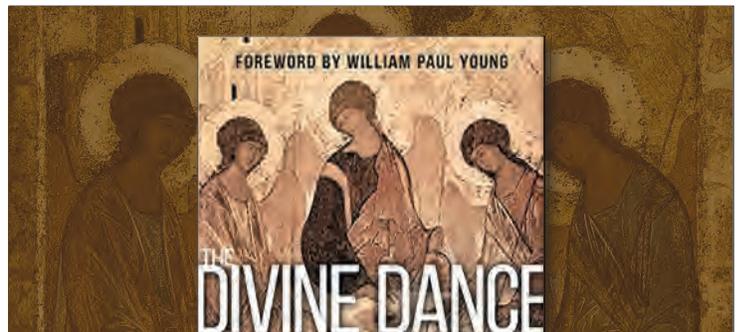
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THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION

RICHARD ROHR
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In his new book, with Mike Morrell, Richard Rohr brings to life the early Christian image for the Trinity: *perichoresis*, a circle dance. The unending flow of giving and receiving between Father, Son, and Spirit is the pattern of reality. God is not only a dancer, but also the dance in which we all participate.

This book is a welcome meditation for long-time followers of Richard Rohr and a perfect introduction to his life and work for new readers. As Fr. Richard says, "This is the most important book that I have written."

Visit thedivinedance.org to pre-order the book
(available October 4, 2016)!