

TRINITY:

The Evolutionary Principle of Unfolding Creativity

By Cynthia Bourgeault

It was through the Trinity that Richard Rohr and I first connected—literally—one rainy, windy Lent at New Camaldoli Monastery. At the time, unbeknownst to one another, Richard and I were perched in adjacent hermitages, lapping up the same Lenten reading: Kathleen LaCugna’s marvelous study on the Trinity, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. How things began to rock ‘n’ roll once we learned what was on each other’s reading desk. From then on, it’s been divine dancing all the way!

While Richard and I speak in different ways, and no doubt to slightly different audiences, I think we share a common underlying vision. The key to reawakening the power of this primordial Christian symbol, we both believe, lies in shifting the Trinity away from an abstract theological speculation on the inner life of God, and re-imagining it as a *cosmogonic principle*—a template that is coded into all of creation.

Post-Einsteinian physics demonstrates categorically that life is not static, but dynamic. As our theological paradigm shifts away from a static universe to a universe in perpetual motion, the whole Trinitarian frame shifts with it. Like a key clicking into place, the Trinity reveals itself as a metaphysical code that unlocks theology and science, and illustrates a fresh understanding of a creative and contemplative engagement in the world.

For the late theologian Beatrice Bruteau, the Trinity is first and foremost an image of symbiotic

unity—in fact, it is “the original symbiotic unity.” The three “God-persons in community,” as she sees it, comprise the prototype and the prerequisite for the expression of agape love—the constituent energy of

the Godhead itself. In her 1997 book *God’s Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World*, Bruteau builds a detailed philosophical case for why threefoldness is the necessary precondition for agape love. She then goes on to demonstrate why threefoldness is by nature “ecstatic” or, in other words, self-projective. By its very threefoldness, it “breaks symmetry” (a term felicitously borrowed from the world of quantum mechanics) and projects the agape loves outward, calling new forms of being into existence, each of which bears the imprint of the original symbiotic unity that created it. “It is the presence of the Trinity as a pattern repeated at every scale of the cosmic order,” she believes, “that makes the universe a manifestation of God and itself sacred and holy.”¹

My own contribution to this ongoing Trinitarian conversation takes up at exactly the point that Bruteau’s leaves off. Her notion of a “necessary threefoldness” as the

driveshaft of evolution moves our understanding of the Trinity as a cosmogonic template to a whole new level. My goal has been to see whether it might be possible to anchor this necessary threefoldness in a deeper universal principle with which I had become familiar through my ten years of participation in the Gurdjieff Work as the Law of Three.

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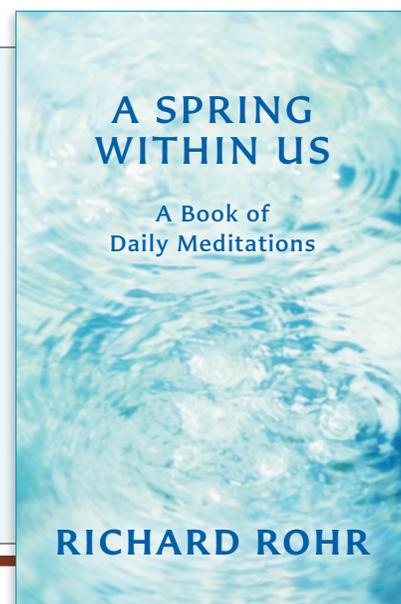
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Getting to Know Our Donors: Tim J. McGuire

Following the death of my beloved wife of thirty-nine years, a woman who had been my good friend and coworker thirty years earlier in Minneapolis heard about my wife's death on Facebook. Her husband had died a couple of years earlier, and she wrote expressing her condolences and offering grief advice if I thought I needed it.

We didn't connect right away. I slipped further and further into my own pit of grief. I despise self-pity, but increasingly I found myself being snappish, alienated, and alienating. I did not like the grief-ridden guy I was becoming, but I was fighting not only loneliness, but what I called "onlyness." My mind was a kaleidoscope of grief-driven thoughts and emotions.

I had close friends who were there for me, but I needed to connect with more people who had lost spouses. Finally I remembered the Facebook message and called my old friend Candace.

We talked for almost an hour, but I don't remember many details from our first conversation. I do remember feeling, "Hey, we're still friends." The conversation was incredibly easy, despite being out of touch for such a long time. We laughed as we got to know each other again. I also remember having the sense that my grief was natural, expected, and I was not going crazy.



Everything does belong, and Fr. Richard very much belongs to our recovery from grief and our delightful new marital journey.

One memorable piece of that conversation was discovering we were both huge fans of Richard Rohr. I even mentioned that I had quoted from Richard's book *Falling Upward* in my own book, *Some People Even Take Them Home*.

We also shared some of our favorite Rohr lessons and I told Candace about attending the CONSPIRE 2013 conference in Santa Fe. I distinctly remember her sense of awe about being at such an event. I decided that if the relationship blossomed, I would take her to CONSPIRE 2015 in Albuquerque. The relationship did blossom and we did go to that conference together. In 2016, we attended CONSPIRE as a happily married couple.

Everything does belong, and Fr. Richard very much belongs to our recovery from grief and our delightful new marital journey.

*Tim J. McGuire recently retired as the Frank Russell Chair for the Business of Journalism at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communications. From 1992–2002, Tim worked as the top editor at the Minneapolis StarTribune, leading the news organization into the digital era. Tim has been a Pulitzer jurist six times and was President of the American Society of Newspaper Editors from 2001–2002. He is the author of *Some People Even Take Them Home*, a memoir about physical disability and raising a child with Down syndrome.*

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Living School: A Moving Intensive

As we announced in the previous issue of *The Mendicant*, the Living School Intensive is moving. This is our third shift in location since the inception of the program and each shift has illustrated the dedication of the Living School toward the creation of an experience that aligns the mind, body, and heart with a space most conducive for this work. Rather than being holed up in a hotel (a lovely hotel, but still a hotel), we will be gathering at the Bosque Conference and Retreat Center which kisses the banks of the Rio Grande. The magnificent landscape, elegant southwestern structures, and



This dialogue between practice, teaching, and reflection fans the inner fire in each student's journey of contemplative action.

impeccable hospitality of the Bosque Center provides the perfect setting for Living School students to gather in their first year.

In this natural setting, students will be able to step into a contemplative rhythm, connect in person with their Circle Group, and glean from Fr. Richard's teachings. Students may notice a shift within themselves when they join their Circle Group for this week, especially given the vague and somewhat jarring title of "Living School Intensive." This gathering brings together a global cohort, away from normal work and family routines, to a small corner of the Albuquerque map. The rhythm of the week includes contemplative practices, processing circles, vespers, silence, reflection, and the joyful breaking of bread together. For many

students, one of the highlights is connecting with their Circle Group to discuss how this course of study, practice, and action is sensitizing them to the needs of the world. The bond that is formed amongst Circle members during this time is often a catalyst for the deepening that occurs during the remainder of the program. The Intensive is brilliantly led by Fr. Richard's teachings and anchored by the contemplative practices woven throughout each day. This dialogue between practice, teaching, and reflection fans the inner fire in each student's journey of contemplative action.

The Living School Intensive is indeed moving . . . moving deeper, into a contemplative rhythm and space that supports students on their journey toward integrating the experience and Fr. Richard's teachings into their whole beings—in service to the world.

—Paul Swanson, Director of Curriculum, Living School for Action and Contemplation

Please note that the prayer slip can be found on the inside flap of the remit envelope.

A Reflection by Living School Alumna Kirsten Oates

Growing up, I was extremely close to my maternal grandmother. Her life of service and striving for spiritual connection was an inspiration to me. On the last day of her life, the hospice chaplain asked her, “Norma, are you happy with your God?” For the first time that day, she opened her eyes and uttered her final words: “I am happy, because God is pure love.” I could tell she genuinely experienced that sense of God as love, and I felt her message to me was that *I too* could experience God in the same way—*right now!* That message led me to search for a teacher who could help me understand my grandmother’s words. In the process, I discovered the Center for Action and Contemplation’s Living School for Action and Contemplation.

Through Richard’s teaching on Bonaventure, I received my first clue to experiencing God’s pure love: “Our mind is now trained for the Sabbath of Rest.” It can “transcend and pass over not only this sensate world but even itself.” The Living School experience was a gentle, truthful way of waking up to myself, to God, to suffering, and to love. I saw a connection to God



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Above: Kirsten Oates with Living School core faculty member, James Finley.

as Love—a love that is palpable and contagious—and I saw in my teachers, and the mystics we studied, that what I sought is real. I heard their words and everything in me said, “Yes!” The Living School helped me to make sense of all the threads in my life, but not to be defined by them. I am more aware of my suffering, the suffering of others, and the suffering of the world—and now I am more driven to bring compassion and right action to these places.

Through grace and surrender, I have experienced moments of joining in my grandmother’s experience of infinite, pure Love, and I sense that she is very happy I received her message.

Kirsten Oates is a 2016 alumna of the CAC’s Living School. Prior to joining the CAC staff as Managing Director of Program Design, she worked with CAC’s Executive Director, Michael Poffenberger; Fr. Richard Rohr; and the Board of Directors on the CAC’s strategic plan. Kirsten is the former Director of Strategy for City Church San Francisco and its Newbigin House of Studies. A native Australian, she has been a strategic consultant with Bain & Company, The Bridgespan Group, and with non-profit and faith-based organizations.

Trinity *continued from page one*

Understood within the context of a universe in motion, and with the Law of Three as its template, the Trinity is no longer merely a theological speculation on the inner life of God. Rather, it becomes a dynamic mandala of God’s ongoing creativity in an evolving universe. It becomes, in fact, *the* evolutionary principle. The Trinity as a symbol of relationship invites us to trust the relationality of nature itself, and to reconsider what we understand about the very nature of love. It is no longer a pre-existent “property” of God, but an *emergent property* of the whole of creation, joined in that divine dance.

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Cynthia Bourgeault is a modern-day mystic, Episcopal priest, writer, and internationally recognized retreat leader. She divides her time between solitude at her seaside hermitage in Maine and traveling globally to teach the Christian contemplative and Wisdom path. Cynthia is the founding Director of both The Contemplative Society and the Aspen Wisdom School and serves as a member of the Living School core faculty. The author of numerous books, including The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three, Cynthia will be presenting together with Richard Rohr and Wm. Paul Young at the “Trinity: The Soul of Creation” conference, April 6–9, 2017, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For more information and to register, visit cac.org.

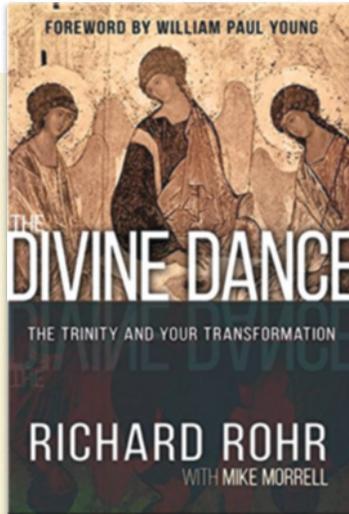
¹ Beatrice Bruteau, *God’s Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 14.



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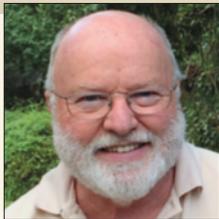


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