Richard Rohr: I'm going to read a poem from Mary Oliver. As you know and the students know in the school, she's one my favorites. This is from her book *Evidence*, and I'm only going to read a part of a longer poem. It's called “To Begin with the Sweet Grass.”

“For one thing leads to another.
Soon you will notice how stones shine underfoot.
Eventually tides will be the only calendar you believe in.

“And someone's face, whom you love, will be as a star
both intimate and ultimate,
and you'll be both heart-shaken and respectful.
And you will hear the air itself, like a beloved, whisper:
oh, let me, for a while longer, enter the two
beautiful bodies of your lungs. . . .

“The witchery of living
is my whole conversation
with you, my darlings.
All I can tell you is what I know.

“Look and look again.
This world is not just a thrill for the eyes.

“... 
It's praising.
It's giving until the giving feels like receiving.
You have a life—just imagine that
You have this day, and maybe another, and maybe
still another.”
She never disappoints, does she? I use her a lot for years in trying to teach contemplation, and I thank the planners who suggested this idea of a preconference because as you know we say it in many ways at the Center that without the contemplative mind, all the rest of each doesn't go to any depth, doesn't transform, doesn't enlighten, and I think this is the immense disappointment in the doctrinal history of so much of Christianity, and it's not to be overly critical, but it's just to recognize the pattern that all of our attempts at reformation really didn't resolve, because we find that every reform usually began with what we call dualistic thinking, an argumentative mind that needed to prove its new understanding of Jesus or the gospel was the right one and the previous group was 100% wrong. That's never been true, and it left us all in a great big ocean of confusion. You see, it's not so important to tell people what to see. What our job is as I think Jesus does beautifully, teach people how to see, and the human way of thinking is we think we need to know something before we can possibly lend ourselves to loving it. The divine way of thinking is that you must love at first and then you know it. Did you hear what I just said? That’s a complete turnaround, and if I had to describe the contemplative mind in a few words, that's granting the moment, granting the situation a kind of compassion, respect, reverence where you don't try to understand it in parts or explain it in parts, but you allow it to be what it is in its wholeness. It's a long loving look at the real. It’s a silent steady gaze of acceptance toward anything, and when you can look at it in that way, it opens up, and it opens you up which is the great surprise I think, and we don't realize until that moment that so much of our life has been beginning with analysis, beginning with calculation, beginning with a self-referential way of looking at the person, the event, the object, what's in it for me, will this make me money, will this make me look good, will this get me a new girlfriend. It’s just it’s too small. It’s not the way God sees things, and so the contemplative mind approaches insofar as humans can the mind of Christ, the mind of God to see things in their completeness, not simply in how they refer to me and when you allow that what emerges is always sweet grass as Mary Oliver would say, a sweetness, a goodness inside of things, even people that you couldn’t see goodness in before.

I didn’t read this book in its completion or in its completeness. Maybe some of you picked it up. It's rather daunting book as you can see written by one of those English smart people Iain McGilchrist, and it’s called The Master and his Emissary. The divided brain, he is a neuroscientist, the divided brain and the making of the Western world, and he goes through every century a bit as a historian and different cultures to recognize what half of the brain formed that century or what half of the brain formed that culture and then the implications of that. This quote that was often attributed to—Is the sound gone? No, okay—was his inspiration. Apparently, it's not an exact quote from Einstein, but people who have studied him say it is an honest description. “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift; the rational mind is only its faithful servant.” We have begun to worship the servant and defile the sacred gift. He ends this whole book again leading you through daunting science and neuroscience. I'm going to read a bit if you don't mind from the very concluding paragraphs. We need to show definitively that the two major ways, not just of thinking, but two major ways of being in the world are not related to the two cerebral hemispheres. If we did that, I would be surprised but not unhappy. Ultimately, what I've tried to point to is that the apparently separate functions—I know this sounds scientific but stay with it—in each hemisphere fit together intelligently to form in each case a single coherent unity. There are not just occurrence here and there in the history of ideas, but consistent ways of being that persist across the history of the Western world, and they are fundamentally opposed though complementary too in what they reveal to us and that the hemispheres of the brain can be seen at the very least as a metaphor. So, what he is saying is don’t just say left brain, right brain. We’ve talked that in the last maybe 20 years or so. He says that is probably oversimplified. It surely is. But he says, nevertheless it is a physical metaphor that we do have in our brains two independently operating hemispheres; a metaphor for the two—points out again and again how people have represented those two different minds, a poet like Mary Oliver would, of course, represent what we call the right brain as our musicians will, but we have got to know that Western
civilization in the last several hundred years has been almost entirely formed and that's the case he makes by the left brain which is rational, engineering, calculative, mathematical, good, necessary. It is obsessed with being right, and I think we have seen that in our country in the last 18 months. It's about the only mind we have left. It doesn't have much concern for truth. It's simply and I am not making this as an overstatement, it's simply concerned about winning, that's all. The meaning of life is winning, not truth. That’s what happens when the intuitive mind as he has called it here is completely suppressed because the intuitive mind is able to know things at a much deeper level. The divided nature of our reality has been a consistent observation since humanity has been sufficiently self-conscious to reflect upon it. That most classical representative of the modern self-conscious spirit, Goethe, the German poet, he declared that there were two souls in the human breast, Schopenhauer described two completely distinct forms of experience. Bergson, the Frenchman, referred to two different orders of reality. Schleiermacher described the human being as a citizen of two worlds and said that all great European philosophers like Kant who use the same formulation had seen the same. Remember, of course, I had to study scholastic philosophy, Aquinas and Scotus and Bonaventure, and they all three agreed there was a rational mind and an intuitive mind and that they were needed like the two hemispheres to balance and regulate one another. I can't emphasize enough because no one is always telling us this although McGilchrist makes the case here that the emissary has become the master. The mind which was supposed to help has taken over, because there is nothing wrong with rational thinking. We wouldn’t have the scientific revolution, the industrial revolution. You wouldn’t be sitting here right now if we wouldn't have enjoyed the fruits of rational thinking. He says what all this point to is the fundamentally divided nature of mental experience. Now see, that's what people who speak of meditation and contemplation in all of the world religions, they recognize that early on and that somehow you had to find a way to relativize this overly linear calculating rational mind, or it would take over. Now that's what has happened. It has now taken over, and you live in a culture where people call that thinking. Yeah, they call that thinking. I think a good mystic would call it obsessing, or Meister Eckhart says, most human thinking is repetitive and useless, repetitive and useless, and I hate to humiliate you in that way, I tell this to the students in the class, but observe the way you think and there is one universal addiction previous to alcohol and drugs and sex and consumerism, and it's every one of us in this room is guilty of it, we are all addicted to our way of thinking, and unless someone tells you that you don't realize it, and when it takes over and calls itself truth, we are in trouble, alright, because the ego has won, the private individual self and its way of thinking now is able to demand its truth of the entire country or Congress or whatever else it might be and dialog comes to a halt. There is no room; there is no space around words. There is no humility around concepts. There is no intuition around reason. He says when one puts that together with the fact that the brain is divided into two relatively independent chunks, which just happened broadly to mirror the very dichotomies that are being pointed to, alienation versus engagement, abstraction versus incarnation, you see why we use the word incarnation so much, the categorical versus the unique, Scotus’ haecceity. So the categorical loves to come down with an ideological conclusion that has created postmodernism that denies there are no overall truths. There is only contingent truth, temporary truth, and so the whole thing gets undercut at the core, the part versus the whole and so on. It seems like the metaphor and he admits it’s a metaphor, of the two hemispheres of the brain. Nevertheless the evidence is there is some literal truth to this, that you and I have two brains, and we've been educated in one, the higher educated you are in this room I hate to uncompliment you, but you probably have a bigger problem, you know. Now we can see why Jesus whenever the disciples were getting into their heads, what does he do? You know, brings a little child, because the little child hasn't developed the left brain yet, and he says if you could only know like they know you would know correctly, and this is, of course, almost humiliating to us educated Western people, this idealization of the mind of a child. He says if it turns out to be just a metaphor, this is his last sentence in the book, if it turns out to be just a
metaphor, I will be contempt. I have a high respect for metaphor. It is how we come to understand the world.

Now the people who recognize that the entire world is symbolic, alright, everything is a metaphor for a mystic. It’s not the thing in itself, it’s always pointing to the thing in itself. Now when you allow the whole world to become metaphorical, to become symbolic, when you can allow everything to be a pointer to what it represents, you're in the early stages of the mystical journey. You'll never be lonely again. The world comes alive, every animal, every plant—change of weather. Am I doing something to make that go off? Okay. Now once we can accept that, only you older ones would remember this, when we used to have cinemascope movies, and the curtain would go back, we say, oh, gosh, we get see a great big movie now. Well, that's what you're doing when you're moving from merely left brain knowing to full access knowing is what I want to call it, or mystical knowing or spiritual knowing. You are widening the screen, and what you will see you do maybe without consciously realizing it is you move from depreciation to appreciation, take my word on that. The analytical mind loves to dismiss. It loves to minimize. It loves to say just. It’s just this, or it's just that, or it is only this, or it is only that, whittle it down so I can be in control of it. I hope you had a completely different experience as I read Mary Oliver. If you were hit—you to bigger worlds, to wider worlds, but we don't stay there comfortably. You know why, because it doesn't give us a sense of control. Am I leaning against this wire? Is that what I am doing? Oh, it’s the signal, just use this. Okay, alright, thank you. Thanks man.

And the more I have observed human nature, I think it is fair to say I'm being dualistic which we are very much against, but it is always the way to start understanding something and then you see it is not adequate, but you start, and I am just going to start by saying as I've observed myself and as I have observed other human beings, there are appreciators and depreciators, and those of us who are depreciators, we need contemplation even more. By temperament as a one, I am, and if any of you who understand the enneagram, certain of us see the cup half empty. I have to work daily to see the cup half full. My natural tendency would be to become a cynic, not a mystic. My natural tendency would be to see what's wrong with things. It's my worst fault, and dammit, it's my greatest. It gives me this critical mind and allows me to see what's wrong with the way we are preaching the gospel or the church or myself or you I am sorry to say, and that’s the burden of all of our gifts. You have a gift but it always carries with it its dark side, and you have to bear the burden of the gift. So we have to bear the burden of the gift of our left brain, of our rational, analytical, dismissive, depreciator—minimize things that wants to make less of things. So you have to choose to widen the screen, widen the screen, and you have to learn how to recognize when you are narrowing it. Whenever you are saying, it's just this, it's only that that's what literalism does. Any of view who have attended my scripture classes, you know, built on the early fathers of the church, this isn’t unique to me, I'm saying what they said that literalism is the lowest level of meaning, the least helpful level of meaning, and yet it's that form of religion that is overtaking all of the world religions. We call it fundamentalism. There is only one meaning, and isn't it interesting, I just happened to have it, the one who is saying it. Community is no longer possible, only conformity. Can you feel the difference? We are going to be talking about the Trinity. One of the many genius revelations of the doctrine of the Trinity is it resolves what we call the first philosophical problem. When you study philosophy, it's certainly introduced in the first year after your initial epistemology and that is called the problem of the one and the many. How can this all somehow be a universe, universes turning around one thing? How can there be any connection, any coherence to this universe, and yet look 1800 different faces? How do we resolve this when you don't resolve the problem of unity and diversity? Here is what you do, you insist, you confuse unity with uniformity, that’s the identity politics that we have, that’s the low-level theology that many of our churches have. The genius of the Holy Trinity is that it preserves absolute unity, God is one, and yet right out of the other side of our mouth, we say but God
is three, the Father honors, that the Son is not the Father. The Son honors that the Spirit is not the Son. The Spirit honors that the Father is not the Spirit. They defend and protect and allow and encourage one another's diversity. So human unity is uniformity, divine unity in fact protects diversity. Now that might seem, oh, that's a small philosophical point, but sisters and brothers, the fact that we haven’t resolved that point is why we still have racism at the highest levels of Christianity, why we still have homophobia, why we still have sexism, why we still have classism, why we still have people making these artificial distinctions because they have not recognized the ground of being, and that's the contemplative mind that sees beyond the diversity to the core, to the fundamental, to the real, to the true, to the universal, but now at this point in history, you have to be trained how to do that because you've been trained in the opposite, to notice first how she is dressed, how good-looking is he, what can I get from her. It's always, always personal advantage which leaves the ego in charge. So, it leaves us at a very low level of seeing, a very low level of experience, a very low level of knowing. So I have said for many years as many others have said better than I that all of the world religions discovered this, that most people could not see very well, and so the early training we see it already in the desert fathers and mothers was to teach a different way of seeing, and the word contemplation already emerges by the second century. Frankly, we think because that word “prayer” that we all grew up with and is common in the Bible had already become corrupted or minimized. We made prayer into something functional, utilitarian, practical. It was a way to make God happy I guess. If we talk to him God was lonely, he needed us to talk, or to tell God what we needed. If you check the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus deliberately says you don't need to do either of those things. God already knows. You don’t need to make announcements to God, but because the ego mind sees everything in the utilitarian, what's in it for me way, the idea of simply seeing all day every day in this comprehensive way was recognized as different than the way most people understood prayer, but now you can understand why Paul says twice in his letters that we could or should pray always. Now if we are going to be able to pray always, that it can't be verbal, it can't even be just mental, it has to be an entire life stance. Now it takes your whole life to develop that stance, and the way you do it by and large is by recognizing when you're not doing it. You have to fall into the pit again and again and again and again and recognize your dualistic, argumentative, judgmental, dismissive mind, and it takes over within a few seconds, few minutes, let’s give ourselves a little longer.

I have been using lately with the last two classes in the Living School what I also have learned from neuroscience, you never say it real well, pray that I can say it better now, but apparently there are two ways that the mind captures reality. One is like Velcro and one is like Teflon, and according to these neuroscientists, if something has a problem to it, if something is negative, gossipy, fearful, or in any way presents itself as difficult, we grab around it like Velcro. It’s just the way the mind works. Now I don't want you to take my word for that. You've got watch your stinking thinking, and you alcoholics know who I am quoting, alright. Bill Wilson was smart when he said a lot of thinking is stinking thinking. Well, it has a whole new meaning with those of us who are trying to teach contemplation, because this is Velcro mind that wraps itself around any kind of fear or anger or hatred or gossip. You just love it, admit it. Everybody buys into it, just start the gossip circle and everybody's interested. Now, I hate to tell you that the Teflon mind is much better, much happier, much more peaceful, but when you think a positive happy thought like when Mary Oliver said to you a few minutes ago, it's like praising. It's giving until the giving feels like receiving. You have a life just imagine that. Anything positive like just giving thanks for God's goodness. There is no problem. We even had to make the death of Jesus on the cross an answer to a problem. We don't know how to operate without a problem, and as we say in the school, the Bible begins with Genesis I, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was very good. There was no problem in Genesis I. The problem is presented in Genesis III, and wouldn’t you know it, nine-tenths of the churches except for us Franciscans of course, they jumped into Genesis III. We've got to start with the fall. We’ve got to
start with some kind of problem that Jesus came to resolve. When you start in the pit, when you start with a negative, you almost never get out of it. You just stay in a boxing match with a problem, and I believe we were given a much more beautiful creation story. I am not calling it lately or in my next book Original Blessing, but I'm calling it as you see in your children Original Innocence. Before we were wounded, before we start arguing, before we start our oppositional, dualistic mind of taking sides, and I have got to say it in its most forthright way, the way the dualistic non-contemplative mind works is it operates in binaries, and all I ask, don't believe me, watch your brain. You divide everything into Republican/Democrat, black/white, Catholic/Protestant, gay/straight, American/Canadian, or American/Mexican now I guess, and that just gives people this false sense of comfort. It’s so stupid, I just don’t know why people haven't seen beyond it, and not only do they divide into two, but they wrap themselves around one side. That's American politics today. There is no hope of enlightenment at that level. It will think if I yell louder or tell bigger lies, I can win the argument. That's all you have left, that is all you have left when all you teach a culture is dualistic thinking. So of course, they asked me to do this today, so we could prepare you for what we are going to dive into tonight and tomorrow with Cynthia and Paul, the doctrine of the Trinity. The first time Cynthia and I ever taught together was in Canada and Ontario, was that 15 years ago, Cynthia? Something like that, and it was on the Trinity, and as we both came up to the stage, we saw, my gosh, we are parroting one another. She says much more intelligently frankly. I just sort of walk around it as I'm doing now, but we recognized we had the same goal, and what we both recognized is that the Trinity which was shelled as an abstruse concept, not to have any real pastoral or practical meaning was in fact made to order, and I mean it, made to order to defeat the dualistic mind. Now because we didn't want our dualistic mind defeated, you know, what we did? We shelved the Doctrine of the Trinity, because we like to think oppositionally. The Law of Two as Cynthia will be telling you is inherently antagonistic. If you stay with two, you watch your mind; don't take my word for it. Whenever you divide anything into this or that, either/or, you will within a nanosecond choose sides. You do it automatically, the stating of preferences. Male/female, males are better, that’s what men think. It is automatic, and some women even think that, because you have to choose sides. God gave us in the very shape of God, which I think was the name of that weekend we did together, the Shape of God. You have to get on what Bonaventure will later call a waterwheel of flow, of three self-emptying outpouring themselves knowing they can outpour, knowing that their bucket will be filled, and it’s infinite outpouring, infinite self-emptying without end. I know without knowing most of you personally that is an entirely new notion of God and it is hard to picture. It can only be as Michael said at the beginning, it can only be experienced as a flow, as a community, as a relationship, as an inherent connection, as your soul actually, and I don’t want you to picture it. For me at least this is important and why I asked this diagram to be put in front of the podium, you notice there is one line here connecting. Don't try to picture Trinity as three separate flows. In fact, that was condemned as a heresy in the first thousand years of the church. There might be moments where you’d say this is a Father experience, this is a Christ experiences, this is a Spirit experience, but I want you instead if you can and I hope this image helps, I want you to picture a spinning whirling top of perfect infinite love that is planted inside of everything. It's called the soul in the human and in all of creation. It might be called in the biological world photosynthesis. It might be called in the human world sexuality. It might be called in the physical world gravity. Well, what we recognize is that everything is attracted to everything, that life is attracted to life, that love is attracted to love, and what it means in Genesis 1:26-27 says everything is created in the image of God. It says that God planted this whirling, alluring attraction of life toward life in everything that God created and that's why we entitled the conference “the Trinity, the Soul of Creation.” Now once you allow the entire universe to become that alive for you, you are living in an enchanted world. Nothing is meaningless; nothing is able to be dismissed. It's all whirling with the same beauty, the same radiance. In fact, if I had to name the Big Bang in my language, I’d call it the Great Radiance. It began 13.7 billion years ago. The inner radiance of God started radiating, and here we come along 13.7 billion years later, we
are the continuation of that radiance in our small segment of time on this Earth. We can either allow it and to let the flow flow through us or we can deny it, which is to deny the divine image, but this is nothing I can prove to you. This is nothing I can make logical or rational. It’s only experiential, and it's only known in the mystery of love when you surrender yourself to it, when you grant the other, the plant, the animal, the tree, the sky, Brother Sun, Sister Moon as my Father Francis put it, when you can grant it what I am going to call subjectivity that you don't objectify things, this is the different contemplative mind. It refuses to objectify. It grants similarity, likeness, symbolism, communion, connection, meaning. Use whatever words you want, but suddenly you live in an live universe where you can never be lonely again. You aren't ever alone again. I think the reason we have this postmodern problem of so much mental and emotional illness, so many people who appear to be alienated from themselves and society and even their own families is because we've been told we are alienated. You are all on your own. You are all disconnected, and we don't know how to put Humpty Dumpty together again. We have been overly reminded of our individual nature, not our inner deepest connection. Now the word that emerged in all of the great world religions for that deepest connection is soul, the soul of things. I bet it’s the way every one of you uses the word, and yet we've come to doubt the existence of the soul, not just of ourselves, but pretty soon everything else. You see if you don't have it, nothing else has it. It's a symbiotic relationship. Once you find it here, you'll see it over there. If you can’t see it over there, my bet would be you haven’t discovered it in here or surrendered to it in here. Like knows like, and so the work of spirituality is to just keep reminding the children of God that they are children of God, and for the most part, we were not told that. We were told that this divine identity was something we had to work toward, maybe we would get it if we went to church enough, or obeyed Commandments enough. It was always tentative. It was always a carrot on a stick. It was always held out in front. That for me is the antichrist. That is the non-gospel that saves nobody. It leaves you in perpetual insecurity, perpetual self-doubt, perpetual lack of self-esteem, no inherent dignity, and when you have no inherent dignity, what you have to do is find your dignity in all the wrong places by how you dress and whether you have hair and whether you—all the things that don't matter, that’s easy for me to say. And that's our world.

I have gone in houses of clergy and nuns I had to admit it that on their coffee table, they are reading People magazine. Now I don't want to dissent the subscriptions to People magazine. I'm sure it's wonderful, but we have so much more to offer the world than People magazine, do you understand? If you you’re going to compare yourself to Britney Spears or Brad Pitt, you are going to lose, you see, and you are going to live in this competing world, they are even out of date now I guess, aren’t they? I am showing my age. You've been given something so much better than that, something that doesn't go up and down, something that doesn't invite comparison or competition. That's why the Psalms already said God is the rock, the rock of salvation, and I don’t think most of us have discovered that rock our own soul because we are caught up equally in the world of comparison and competition, who is popular, who is good looking. You know I became so much more popular after I was on Opera. That doesn’t mean anything. I was very glad to meet her, but in the equation of eternal life, you know, but that's the only criteria we have. We got to judge by does he know, does she know someone famous. When you don't know your divine identity, you create a culture of celebrities and fame and now it largely has to do with how much money you have, let’s admit it. We really think they can run the country because they are rich. There is no logic to that, so that's the ultimate irony that people who are reasonable end up being the most unreasonable of all. Why, because their ego is still in charge. So now you know why the Buddha and why Jesus said this whole contemplative mind relies upon one thing, the displacement of the centrality of me. Someone has to pull out the rug from beneath this Richard-self thinking that Richard is the center of anything. Now a lot of people just they can't live without that. So usually it has to be done to us. We will never invite this on ourselves, but only then will you start living in the flow. The flow will be obstructed and stopped if you fill it with too much of me, too much I. It’s simply isn't the conduit. It simply isn't the flow. I would like to
end with a poem by an Irishman Brandon Canales, I think he is still alive, is he? He is born in ’36. It's called A Giving, and I find it to be one of the most beautiful descriptions of this flow and how this different mind is different than understanding. In fact, I've often played on the words it's not understanding, it's standing under, and maybe we have to be taught how to stand under reality and let it teach us, grant it dignity so it can dignify us. You see, unless the whole thing has dignity, it's very hard to give you individually dignity. It won’t last, and I say that after giving retreats worldwide for 47 years, I tried my best to heal people, to give their dignity back to them, and it would usually last two or three days unless they discover the whirling top inside of them, their own soul. Brandon Canales, here in this room, this December day, listening to the year die on the war fields and in the voices of children who laugh at the indecisive light, at the throes that but rehearse their own, I take the mystery of giving into my hands and I pass it on to you. I give thanks today to the giver of images, remember everything is an image. The reticent God who goes about his work determined—I have been doing it. The reticent God who goes about his work determined to hold on to nothing, that’s Trinity, embarrassed at the prospect of possession. He distributes leaves to the wind and let's them pitch and leap like boys capering out of their skin. For such things and bearing in mind the midnight hurt, the shot bride, the famine in the heart, the demented soldier, the terrified city rising out of their own rubble, I still give thanks. I listen to the sound of doors opening and closing in the streets. They are like the heartbeats of this creator who gives everything away. I do not understand such constant evacuation of the heart, wow! I do not understand such constant evacuation of the heart, such striving toward emptiness. No one ever told us that God was self-emptying. We were always told God was Almighty. Do you realize that’s only half of the equation and that's why so many people gave up on this God because if God is Almighty then why Syria? I’d be damn angry at God too. You have every reason to give up on faith, but if God is a perfect combination of self-emptying and outpouring, we've got a different equation for the shape of the universe. We've got a different equation for the soul of everything, back to the psalm, I am preaching now, sorry. I think, however, of the intrepid skeleton, the fear definition, I grasped today a little of the giving and I hold it close as my own flesh. It is this little that I give to you today and now I want to walk out and I want to witness the shadow of some ungraspable sweetness passing over the measureless squalor of humanity, like a child's hand over my own face or the exodus of swallows across the land, and then his final line, and I now know it does not matter that I do not understand. It’s what faith is. When you can live happily, contentedly without perfectly understanding, but you will not be granted that grace until you're in that underlying flow of gratitude and compassion. Once that flow is constant and you know you can draw upon it, you can endure that which I admit it’s a negative metaphor, you can endure the measureless squalor of man. What we have done to one another in all of history and what undoubtedly we are going to continue to do, but if we in the Christian world, in all of the world religion do not begin to raise up people who are deeper than that, bigger than that, larger than that, more in touch with love than that than how in any way are we the hope of the world. We are no alternative, we are no future, we're only the past repeated over and over again. So, for us, the contemplative mind is the pearl of great price, the gift that makes all the other gifts accessible, understandable, even without needing to perfectly understand. So, the gospel invites you into that humility. It invites you into that freedom and it is a freedom - I got a book recently entitled the Sin of Certitude. I really liked that title, but no one told me that that the expectation of certitude is not just an illusion, but for a believer, it should perhaps be a sin. You’ve been granted a much broader knowing, a much bigger knowing, a much better knowing, and it’s with that mind though I hope we can approach the next day. Now I am going to leave and three other of our teachers are going to come up and move my too many words now to the experiential level, so you won’t just try to figure out what I'd just tried to say, because I'm still trying to figure out what I just tried to say. But now you can say, okay, don't work it up here specially in the left part, but move to full access knowing, and we are going to do that through music, we are going to do that through walking, we are going to do that through listening in a better way. Thank you.
Kirsten Oates: Well, I explained to you that as an Australian, there is a letter in the alphabet, it comes after Q and before S, and I can’t say it, it’s the letter R. So, if you misunderstanding me, just add that letter, and you’ll probably get it. I am going to start by introducing my panelists, I am going to start down the end with Paul Swanson and Brie Stoner who are on the program design team with me at the Center for Action and Contemplation. They are both passionately committed to the mission of the Center, and I am so grateful to be working with them. Paul has been on staff at the Center for nine years. He received his Master’s degree in Christian spirituality from Creighton University in 2013. His interests of late include talking to the moon with his 2-year-old daughter, losing to his wife at backgammon and hosting the podcast Contemplify which I highly recommend. Brie is a mother, musician, writer, and 2015 graduate of the Living School for Action and Contemplation. She is enrolled in the Chicago Theological Seminary graduate program working on her Master’s degree. Next to Brie is Darlene Franz. She is a freelance oboist, music educator, singer, and composer residing in Seattle, Washington. Since 2006, she has been composing chants and facilitating mindful singing workshops throughout the US and Canada. Her music is an active use at Wisdom Schools, retreats, and Centering prayer gatherings across North America and beyond. Darlene will be leading us in chants throughout the conference and then leading workshops in chants tomorrow and Saturday, and we are very lucky to have her with us. Jonathon started Walk2Connect in Denver, Colorado, in 2012. Walk2Connect is an innovative worker-owned cooperative working to create whole health working programs focused on connection to others, to the places we live, and to ourselves. Through Walk2Connect, Jonathon guides hundreds of personal, social, communal, and spiritual walking experiences with individuals and organizations throughout the country. Jonathan created the self-guided walking experiences that came with your program. There was a card that was inserted in your program, and he will be going through that towards the end of our presentation today. Wake up, I have slides that you will see in a moment. We are going to be talking about contemplative practice as the doorway to experiencing Trinity, but before we get into the presentation, I am going to start by sharing a personal story which shows why I am excited to be talking to you about contemplative practice today. My story is a little vulnerable, and I am little nervous, so I am going to read from my notes.

In my early 30s, I was going through a difficult time. A relationship was ending that I thought would be permanent. I felt sad, afraid, afraid about the future, and alone. Around that time, I made a new friend, and as I shared my struggles with her, she started to share her faith with me, and she talked about how much God loved me. All that sounded strange and a bit out there to begin with, but I listened, I started to feel an overwhelming sense of a loving, comforting presence like I had never experienced before, and I knew I had found my path. I started going to Church every Sunday, and each week I heard a sermon that was intelligent, and I was learning things, but as life got complicated, that deep inner sense of God’s presence was fading fast, and Church wasn’t helping me know how to find it again. It did, however, help me find my wonderful husband. We were introduced on the steps of my church, and you have to know that is a very strange story for an Australian. All my friends found their husbands drunk at a bar. A few years after I got married, I went through another challenge when I found out that I wouldn’t be able to have children. That hit me really hard. I felt disappointed, I felt ashamed, like I was broken somehow, and I felt isolated from my friends and my community who were all becoming mothers. I kept going to church, but it felt dry, and I longed for a sense of God’s comfort like I had felt years before, but it felt further away than ever and that was incredibly confusing. I went searching for answers, a why, some kind of comfort, some kind of peace. During that search, I found Father Richard’s teaching, and although I couldn’t understand a lot of it at first, I felt the resonance of what I was searching for and I was so grateful. As I delved into more of Father Richard’s work, I realized that Father Richard himself resonated with what I was searching for. Father Richard lives out of a deep inner experience of God, and his very presence
showed me that the love and peace I was longing for is real. Attempting to follow Father Richard’s teaching on action and contemplation, I started a daily contemplative practice, and over the years, I have felt a slow growing sense of that inner resonance of love of God in my being. So, although I will never feel the joy of having my own child, I am grateful for the way this path opened up to me and fulfilling more awake to the only thing that can truly fulfill me. I am also very grateful and excited to be able to share this presentation with you today, and my hope is that whether you are a beginner or someone experienced in contemplation that this can be a time where we can slow down and practice being more open to what God is revealing to us in this very moment and over the moments to come throughout the conference. So, we are ready for the slides. Yay! Okay, so here is where we are going today.

We are starting with Trinity as our reality that can be experienced. I am going to start by situating us in what the conference is about, God as Trinity, as our very reality. We engage in a contemplative practice to become more than just mindful. We do it to awaken to this deep reality that is hard to experience in the busyness of life, and so it is helpful to start with these concepts from scripture and our tradition in mind. Then we will look at contemplative practice as a way to help us more fully experience reality, which will hopefully support us to be more present at this conference and in life. Then, we are going to engage in some contemplative practices together. As you will see in the presentation, I am going to be using a lot of quotes from Father Richard. I am not just trying to pin it to my boss, I promise. I really and truly just can’t say it better than him. So, here we go. This is from Father Richard, and if you can’t see the slides, I am going to be reading every word from them, so don’t worry. So, Father Richard says, Trinity names the dynamism that had been growing in me for 30 years. Trinity is not a belief, but a very objective way of describing my own deep inner experience of transcendence, and what I will call here flow, my prayer is that you can say I know this, I have witnessed it to be true for myself, and that’s what this presentation is about, is about finding this truth for ourselves. If we are to believe the Judeo-Christian scriptures, than the Trinity as circle dance of love, flow, communion, and relationship which is the very nature of God is the template for everything created. Every created thing is the self-emptying of God. God is not first of all a being that loftily decides to love good people and punish bad people. Instead absolute love stands revealed as the very name and shape of being itself. So, knowing that we have a self-emptying absolute love of God wouldn’t that be nice to experience that more often? Being part of the cosmic dance of love can only be known experientially. Father Richard says that’s why he teaches contemplation and tries to use meaningful religious rituals and practices. Contemplative practices lead you to a place of nakedness and vulnerability where your ego, identity falls away, where your explanations don’t mean anything, where your superiority doesn’t matter. I can let go because I trust I will always be filled up again. That is the pattern of reality. We tend to live life at such a fast pace that we are rarely awake to this deeper potential for our lives and that’s where intentionally engaging in a daily contemplative practice can helps us slow down and teach us how to take an internal stance of trust and openness to the flow of Trinity always in our midst. But just to be clear, contemplation is simply awakening to what is always happening, our true reality as a flow of love, and so in a way the practice doesn’t achieve anything. It is all God and it is always present.

I wanted to introduce you to some components of contemplative practice. I pulled this together from the teaching I received from our Living School faculty, but this is more of an art than a science and throughout this conference and over time you might find other instructions that are helpful to you as well. I am going to ask you to try these components as I explain them to you. So, I invite you to gently close your eyes. In the beginning this is an inner experience, so we try and minimize external distractions. The first component is vulnerability. I open myself wholeheartedly to the immediacy of God’s flow in me. Take a moment to remember what it’s like to be a child with openness and wonder about life and about the world. We try and recapture a child-like sincerity openness and wonder.
knowing we are in the presence of our infinite source of life and that presence is in us. Holistic presence, I am aware of myself through the sensation of my body, head, and heart. Being present means being present in the entirety of our being. We tend to get very focused on our thoughts and lose touch with the rest. With your eyes gently closed, let’s see if we can get out of our heads for a moment. Can you sense your feet touching the floor? Can you sense the breath in your belly? Can you feel the sensation of your thoughts rather than thinking them? See if you can stay attuned to the sensation of your feet, the sensation of your breath, the sensation of your thoughts. All of these sensations are taking place without you having to do anything, so you can just relax and observe them. Surrender, I am aware of all that is arising but I surrender any focus. As we engage in a more holistic presence, we are trying to slightly detach from our normal day to day operating system and observe it or witness it instead. We will no doubt lose this sense of detachment and start thinking our thoughts and get start backing our heads and that is when we practice surrendering that locked-in focus. We notice we are thinking our thoughts and we gently release that focus and move back to observing the sensation of our entire being. Can you feel your feet, the breath in your belly, the sensation of your thoughts? Moments of rest, I feel a sense of trust that I am being held and guided by absolute love. Now this doesn’t happen every time we practice, because practice can be very frustrating especially when we first start, but every now and then in practice and every now and then in life, we get a sense of overwhelming peace or love or flow. With your eyes gently closed, try and remember if you have had a time when you felt this kind of all-encompassing peace or love. As you remember, notice all the sensations in your being. If you can’t recall anything, you can just listen to my description. This kind of experience is a holistic sensation beyond just a thought. It takes us into a sense of childlike sincerity and wonder. When this kind of moment arises, we find ourselves completely surrendering to it. This is becoming present. Compassion, I watch myself compassionately from a little distance. As we try and surrender any locked in focus on thoughts, we have completely compassion for ourselves in the ways we get stuck in our thoughts and are unable to surrender them. This compassion for ourselves is critical because if we believe that we are trying to awaken to our flow of love as our very being, criticism and anger towards ourselves will only take us further away from who we really are.

Please gently open your eyes, and as you open your eyes, try to stay in that attunement of your entire being continuing to feel your feet, the soft breath in your belly, and the sensation of your thoughts arising. Father Richard talks about contemplative practice this way. At first, it does not feel like me. It is unfamiliar territory, because up to now, I thought that my thinking was me. I believe this is the meaning of Jesus’ teaching on losing oneself to find oneself. Cynthia Bourgeault who is one of our core teachers at the Center and a presenter at this conference says this about practice, we practice so we can be fully present to God, and at the same time, fully present to the situation at hand giving and taking from the spontaneity of your own authentic surrendered presence. Cynthia is describing how we can move towards contemplative action through becoming more present through our practice. We can take insight and action from the flow. Father Richard carefully named his center the Center for Action and Contemplation because he believes our contemplation is nothing without action. If God really is self-emptying love, than how could it be any other way. We have tried to create this conference with lots of opportunity for you to engage in contemplative practice, because we really believe that practice is just as important as the teaching in the process of growth and transformation. And, you can engage the entire conference in a contemplative manner by applying the components of contemplative practice that we just went through, so you can be in that state of practice as you listen to speakers, engage in contemplative prayer. We are going to be doing chanting together, and we have activity sessions tomorrow afternoon and Saturday afternoon with Tai Chi, Yoga. Darline will be running chanting workshops so you would be able to engage in those contemplative practices, and then you can also be contemplative movers as you move in and out of the spaces and engage with each other. We practice like this because eventually we hope to participate in all of life as a practice,
surrendering to this flow. Father Richard says, as I grow older, faith in me has become a daily readiness to allow and to trust the force field knowing that it is good, that it is totally on my side, and that I am already inside of it. How else can I really be at peace? So before we start engaging in some contemplative practices together, each of my panelists are going to talk about one of these components of contemplative practice from their own experience. So, Jonathan is going to lead us off and he is going to talk about vulnerability. Thanks John.

**Jonathon Stalls:** Thank you, Kirsten. So, when I think about vulnerability for me and some of the experiences that I have on a daily basis with my own life and with Walk2Connect the group that I help co-run in Colorado, we are walking with everyday people, all hours of the day all days of the week, and so we will be spending 20, 30 minutes, hours, alongside, physiologically alongside all kinds of different people and I just want to bring you into a quick story just as an example of that. About a month ago, so we do a lot of just different programs and partnerships, and about a month ago I've been—and I've been pretty connected to our local refugee community in Denver, and there was a community I was getting connected to, specifically an Iraqi refugee community, and I was invited to just listen in on some program opportunities to help this group connect more to just the different ways of being healthy, and it started out as a physical health conversation, but eventually as we sat in the meeting we—and this was a walking meeting, I am always doing walking meetings, and as the conversation evolved, it really turned into like they're scared, they're scared to be outside, they are scared of people coming inside, and it’s just it’s their reality. This refugee community has been here for roughly seven or eight years mostly from the Iraq war, so all that to say we started a walk and they started four weeks ago, and it was an hour-long walk. These refugee families are all picked up and dropped off so they go from one interior to the next. They literally live—they are in a building or they are at home. They travel in a van and they get dropped off in what’s called an adult day care center, and from that space the plan was to take them out on a walk and get them outside, and so it was as I started—bringing vulnerability into the space, as I approached this building in this adult day care center, I recognized my own vulnerability, my own messy like I don't speak Arabic. I am going to be the only white person in this location, and I'm to take them on a walk, all these doubts, all these different things that would come up, trusting, trusting the flow, trusting what lives in between, trusting that it's so much bigger than what my brains is going to slice and dice as I get closer to this invitation and I go into the room and the women are all—the women are on one side and the men are playing cards on the other side, and most of them are all wearing their hijabs and they are wearing full-on dress outfits and fancy mall shopping shoes and I am like great, here we go, and so I just continued trusting, I continued trusting and I walk into this room, and they're all looking at me like strangers, fuzzy hair, like big hair, big guy with a backpack and a walking stick, freaked out, and within minutes, I organized the group, explained them we had an interpreter, and she helped explain what we're doing and we were outside and right away being outside away from the interior started to calm them, being under our true ceiling, underneath a tree and the shade together, they started to relax, you could feel it in their body, and then we started walking and we started moving together. It was that simple, and now as everything that Richard was saying earlier and things I've picked up in the Living School a lot that theme center to center really started showing up. We were shoulder to shoulder with each other, we were crossing streets and going over curbs, and again they are in their mall shoes and their dresses in there and now 20 minutes in, they're starting to laugh and lighten up, and then we get to a creek that’s just outside of this location and this is the first time they have been to this creek. They have been going to the same adult day care center for 8 years, and they have never been to this one of the most popular creeks in Denver, the Cherry Creek, and so they are just shocked and they are excited and they are lighthearted, and we get to the creek and we wind down, and two of the women, I will never forget this, they have cups of water because we didn’t have water bottles, so I just told them to bring cups of water and they started to just go to the creek to fill up water, and I said, I hope they are not drinking that, but I am going to
wait, I am going to wait, and the two women are filling up cups and then they go and pour water on
the other two women on the walk. It was incredible and after that period of time 30 minutes in, we
started walking back, and we were laughing, we were in harmony, and then at that point I started
hearing stories about how they had lost their son in the war or how they lost their husband in the war,
and how their experience here supporting the US in the war in Iraq was so tangible and moving with
them, tears started to flow in one of the ladies’ eyes as she started to share. Thirty minutes of that
kind of invitation where we are outside, we are alongside of each other and moving, that was the
practice in vulnerability for me and a practice in how vulnerability shows up when we create is really
special invitations. One of the things I'll just—to close that story, we lead this walk every week, and
all these things come up all the time, but one of the things that stands really loud and this is actually
in The Divine Dance in Richard's book is the theme being undefended, the vulnus, the term from
vulnerability, the Latin root vulnus meaning to wound that for us to just try and I often say it doesn’t
have to be this big long walk to get it out of us, but just 30 minutes of vulnerability, 10 minutes of
vulnerability to go into our own families, our own neighborhoods, people we don't understand, or
people that are different, or people we disagree with, with that in mind that I might get wounded
going into this conversation, but it's worth it, it’s bigger, so thank you.

Darlene Franz: So, for me, I would liken the experience of holistic presence to that of riding a
bicycle, and perhaps not all of us have this memory, but if you can think back to what that was like,
know this is possible. You have seen other people do it. You have an understanding that this
must work, and yet, maybe you get on that bicycle for the first time and you are pretty nervous, there
is an emotional component to this that you didn’t realize, and it actually has to do with vulnerability.
Eventually you are riding this bicycle and everything comes together, and if you remember that
moment, it’s probably not what you thought riding a bicycle. It becomes pretty ordinary once you are
used to it, but that first time when it all comes together, I am staying upright on this bicycle and my
body is involved and my sense of my feelings is involved because I was so scared and now I can be
confident that this is going to work because I am actually doing it, and now I know. It’s a real sense
of holistic knowing, of holistic presence that I know what riding a bicycle is, and it’s practice and it’s
knowledge and it is something that you can return to, and so chanting is like that as well, singing. We
all have various experiences of singing, might be confident performers, might feel like, that’s not for
me, I am not a singer, so there is that emotional component. Singing involves our bodies in the most
natural way possible. It’s our birthright really to be able to sing, and it also involves us in community
just as when you learn to ride a bike you realize, now I get this. I am in. I know the secret of riding a
bicycle. When we sing together, we form connections with other people in even more literal ways as
that resonance feels the room, and so being with ourselves physically, emotionally, and in our
understanding not as analytical mind, but as seeing the whole and comprehending our place in it,
that’s what this kind of practice-oriented things are about for me. So, our practice of singing this
weekend and in our workshops is not at all intended to be for people who already know how to sing.
If you are a person who has always wanted to sing, but feels you don’t have the right voice or you
feel you can’t carry a tune or any of that, it’s not going to be about any of that. It’s going to be about
the practices of being awake and alive to vibration in our bodies, to our aliveness here and now and
how the vibrations of our voices can really help us settle into that and about the connections we make
with other people about the emotional resonance of what we are learning in the moment while
singing just about what is it to be fully present to myself, and so in a way it’s about singing and you
might have breakthroughs. People sometimes do in these workshops, but in a way it is not really
about that. It’s about coming to a more holistic sense of presence of what it is to be alive, awake, and
intentional about placing ourselves in that flow and to provide some tools to take into the larger
sphere of daily life. The choir becomes a microcosm of the community and presence while singing
becomes a microcosm of being present to our whole lives and to the divine dance within us.
Brie Stoner: I am so happy that I can share my vast experience of surrender. I had such a long life. I was playing with my son Rowan not too long ago. He is 4 years old, he is standing on the edge of the sofa, mommy, airplane, mommy airplane, you all know what this is, right, you like lay back and you put your legs up. The problem is that before I even had my legs up, Rowan is already in the air, and luckily I caught him and I found myself about to stop him and say, Rowan, honey, mommy needs to actually be ready for you before you jump off the couch into the air, but then I realized I don’t want to stop him from trusting me that much. I hope he always trusts me that much. I am sort of just being in awe of what Richard was saying earlier, the capacity for children to still be in their bodies, but I am noticing this a lot as a parent, I am watching my kids in how embodied they are, and I am so fascinated by what is it exactly that we switch and go into our minds and associate ourselves by how we think, what we think that analytical brain that Richard was telling us about. It’s almost as if we have this idea that we are this computer, and if I just enter the word surrender, then I am going to come out surrendering, but in reality what’s actually happening is I am standing on the edge of the sofa of life and I am looking down at God, I surrender, but I am going to stay right here on my sofa, because doing something is completely different thing than thinking about it, and I feel like contemplative practice has really opened that up for me. I am realizing how much of my life I have spent thinking about faith, thinking about belief, talking about the fact that I trust God, when in reality I am still very protected, very defended, not in my body at all, not in the flow of the Trinity, I am just thinking about it. So, when we are in these practice sessions of contemplative prayer, it might be a little bit of a different version of prayer than many of us grew up with or are accustomed to, but essentially what we are doing is we are practicing that sensation of jumping off the sofa into a love that is bigger than our categories, bigger than the left brain, right brain, it’s the whole thing. It’s the whole thing together. It’s bigger than my neurosis or my ideas of who I think I am supposed to be. So, essentially what we are doing is, we are learning how to go from this inner stance, this posture to this, and that’s the thing that I think has been so incredible for me in the last few years with my prayer practice is realizing surrender isn’t an idea. It’s a gesture. It’s something I do with my body, and it’s something that I do with my life, and so I think as we are playing with this, and as we are in our practices if we can remember this differences between this gesture and this one and to do it not just when we are having our prayers sits, but even as we are interacting with one another as we are doing our walks, as we are chanting to notice when we get into that inner sensation of clinging and gripping and moving slowly into more defended stance, and remember that what’s happening there is we are staying on the edge of the sofa of life, and so that’s part of what I am trying to learn how to do is how to have the courage to be that vulnerable and that free like my son Roan just jumping into the air.

Paul Swanson: So I am going to share about moments of rests, and Kirsten said earlier, they often will arise out of nowhere. So I thought the best way to illustrate that was through a couple of stories which are very different, one of which stems from moment of rest that came out of contemplative practice and the other that came from within the chaos of life. So my first story is I was on a personal retreat here in the Jemez Mountains in New Mexico, and I was doing my contemplative sit. I had a nice lawn chair brought to the edge of the Mesa and I did my 20-minute sit, and then once that sit was over, I began to feel the sensation of deep peace flowing through me. So, instead of scurrying back to dinner, I lingered and surrendered to the moment, and I could feel awash with equanimity of existence and pleasant presence of present tense as God in me. And when that moment of rest ended 2 hours later, I returned to dinner very hungry with a deep abiding sense of peace. My second story comes from when I was on a long distance bike ride through Montana, and one particular day for about 50 miles into the day we stopped at this remote gas station because they had water, which is very important, and we were having a snack and I went inside to call my parents to check in and to make sure that they knew that I was still doing well on this bike trip and when I checked with my parents, they told me that a dear friend of mine has been killed in a car accident, and I completely
lost it. I was sobbing, snot flying everywhere, and the gas station attendants had no idea what was going on, and they ran to me to comfort me, and when I found I was able to kind of clear my tears and look up, one of the attendants was holding her baby boy just inches away from my face, and that baby’s blue eyes held my gaze and I returned my gaze, and it was as if mirroring that was going on. And in that wide-eyed wonder and deep sense of trust that I saw in that child’s eyes, I could feel myself turning into that mystery of life and death right then. And although I only held this child’s gaze for maybe 5 seconds, but it felt like an eternity, and I was able to simultaneously hold the sorrow for my friend and the trust and wonder of this new life, and all I could do was turn to those old restful reassuring words of Julian, all should be well and all manner of things should be well.

**Kirsten Oates**: I am going to talk about the final component, compassion, and being compassionate with myself as I try and engage in a contemplative practice has been a practice in itself because in daily life, I have realized that I like to achieve things. I set goals and I like to achieve them, and deeper than that, I realize the way I achieve my goals is to criticizing myself and being afraid of not achieving them, being afraid of failure, and so as I began to gaze in a contemplative practice, I noticed the same mechanism arising, and so we have just been talking to you about the importance of surrender and how I meant to surrender, and so I would sit in my practice and I am meant to surrender, and I am not surrendering, and now I am criticizing myself, you are so bad at this. What is wrong with you? You know you are meant to surrender, and it’s been 10 minutes and you haven’t—where have you gone, and then I am criticizing myself and then I have compassion for myself and surrender that criticism too, but then you can see where this can go with me, because then I start criticizing myself for the fact that I was criticizing myself. It’s like you know you are not meant to criticize yourself when you do this contemplative practice, and so then I have to surrender again and again and again, but I found gradually as I combined the contemplative practice of surrender with compassion, that I start to live and act more from my heart and less from my head, and I think what you’ve witnessed with these amazing panelists are people who are starting to live from their heart and speak from their heart and not their head. So, this has been a wonderful experience sharing that with you.

**Session 2: Conversation with Rohr, Bourgeault, and Young**

**Richard Rohr**: I can’t tell you what a dream this is, what a fulfillment of a dream to have these two wonderful friends and to talk about something together that we are also excited about. I don’t know if you are aware of this, but because I guess the movie *The Shack* is number one on the New York Times bestseller list for the sixth week in a row. After it was on—was that 3 years ago—49 weeks in a row.

**William Young**: Forty-nine and it was nine years ago.

**Richard Rohr**: Nine years ago, but the movie brought it back. Do see it. I wept all the way through it, and it was beautiful. And then, of course, you all know Cynthia, or if you don’t, you will after these 2 days. Cynthia has an amazing gift of teaching the mystical path in a way that intellectual, thinking, academic, metaphysical people can’t dismiss. They can’t write it off as fuzzy Christian emotion and that’s so needed, of course. Ever since the enlightenment, much of the scientific and academic world just doesn’t take us seriously. They think we are just talking about feelings I guess, and Cynthia is very much in her heart, but she’s put the head and the heart together like few teachers I have ever read. So, we are so honored to have her in the school and here today. Thank you both. They asked me to lead off and I am going to lead off with a poem that I wrote somewhere in the middle of writing this book, and I call the poem “A Dance Partner for God.” Time began when you
emptied yourself into all created things. Patiently you waited for billion years until that same creation could invite you back into yourself, got it, until that same creation could invite you back into yourself. The book I’m about to —I hope to write pray that I can on the Christ, I change the supposed title of it every three weeks, and the title I gave them last week was “God Loves Things by Becoming Them.” We will see if that ends up being the title, but that’s what I was trying to say here. Until that same creation could invite you back into yourself by one perfect and loving yes, from one single Earth mother whom we call Mary. Now let me throw in. I believe and you might willingly disagree with this, but I believe the first incarnation is creation, the feminine incarnation is creation, and the feminine symbolized by Mary said yes to this re-invitation of God into creation. It creates a beautiful symmetry, but I know many people have told me over the years I am not going to believe in Christianity till we have a feminine incarnation. I think Paul is addressing some of this in his book, Eve, and I think you women are probably much more aware than we men are how much the feminine has been denied, but if we can recognize the Trinitarian nature of God, it isn’t two guys and a bird, but in fact a flow and an incarnation that has all the character of the feminine to it. At any rate, God does not come uninvited. Then, I am quoting from the Book of Wisdom 18th chapter, I know that’s not in the Protestant Bible, but there is a beautiful line. You leapt down from your royal throne, and the dance between you and yourself began in free-form in freefall everywhere. The circle is still completing itself as the divine dance continues, so that’s why we were able to get the permission of St. Gregory of Nyssa Church in San Francisco to make as our backdrop this wonderful dance of the Saints. We just took a swath of eight representative saints, and I know you might have expected the Rublev icon to be at the center, but we want to talk more about the fourth person at the table, and the fourth person at the table is you, and that's why the mirror is on the front of the table, the observer is to see himself sitting inside of the divine communion sitting inside or dancing inside of the divine dance. Now again, Cynthia is going I am sure prepare us for that in a way that will really make sense to you metaphysically, ontologically, psychologically. Now I ask the folks that I had supper with what should I say, how should I get this started, and they felt or maybe I felt, I don’t know, that I needed to at least ask you this is not a contest, but how many of you have read The Divine Dance, if you don’t mind. Maybe half. Does that look like half?

Cynthia Bourgeault: More than half, I’d say, more than half.

Richard Rohr: Okay, I just don’t want to bore you. You know, if you've said, oh, God, we have heard that already, Richard. Okay, knowing that half of you and I'm very grateful, half of you have not read it, that’s fine. It’s not necessary for salvation. Now, his book might be necessary for salvation to read The Shack, but not mine. But we have to hammer this home, because you've got to know your early Sunday school classes, your catechism classes, your almost every piece of religious art you’ve ever seen, Santa Claus reappearing every December have emblazoned in your hardwiring a notion of God that will not be easily displaced. It is so hard not to think of God as a being instead of the one in whom we live and move and have our being as Act 17 says, but we always had this, and it was expressed by the mystics and even fathers of the Church, and of course, the term they use, they took from Greek theater, any of you’ve studied theology, you know the word I'm going to speak, Perichoresis, periphery, choreography, that already in the third and fourth century Eastern fathers in the church dared to say something that I would be afraid to say today without being accused of being a lightweight esoteric new ager from San Francisco, alright. They said God is a circle dance, mind blowing, but it had almost no effect on subsequent history. Now those you were here this afternoon where I talked about the law of two and the law of three which Cynthia will develop much better, when you're trapped inside the Law of Two, you have no “I” for the dynamic flow three. Two is oppositional, three is dynamic. It’s no surprise quite frankly that most of Christianity or at least a lot of it bitterly fought any notion of evolution, because we had a static notion of God, we had a static notion of the human person, we had a static notion of the universe, but
brothers and sisters that was all undone in your lifetime by one simple—well, number of things, but by the one most simple is something called the Hubble telescope, alright. You are the first generation that got pictures back from what we now know is an ever expanding universe. When I was in college, I was told there were billions of stars. Now it seems to be agreed upon that there are billions billions which the mind can’t imagine, billions of galaxies, so we have to have a God that is at least keeping up, at least half as big as this ever expanding universe, and maybe on a subliminal level I’m sure this is why a lot of people have given up on faith, because they were told a beautiful story, an inspired story, the Biblical story that creation myth and all that follows from it was highly evolutionary from the beginning. Do you know the very first line in the Bible, has the spirit hovering over chaos, and the verb that’s used is the verb that is used to describe a mother hen, it’s a feminine image warming the egg of creation. It’s already a growth metaphor, already a feminine metaphor, the very first line in the Bible, but we couldn't think in terms of flow. We couldn't think in terms of growth. You know growth itself, even psychological growth, you therapists know this, is a concept that really only emerged in the last hundred years. Most of the theology you and I were given was what I call transactional, not transformational. You were just supposed to believe certain transactions took place. Mary as a virgin bore Jesus, believe that and you are Christian. Jesus died on the cross and satisfied the wrath of the father and saved us from our sins. This is what and I’m not trying to be disrespectful or arrogant, but this is what the postmodern 21st century mind, it can't make any sense out of it. It doesn't fit the psyche, and these aren’t rebellious people. These aren’t hateful unbelieving people. They are just people who have formulated a vision of the world, and they need a God who can keep up with it, and the idea of a God was an old white man, he is always white, and he has always got a white beard, now if that’s already sounding like Santa Claus, don't be surprised, alright. The operative image of God for—and I say this as a spiritual director. When you start with someone on the journey, and you say who is the God you believe in, and it always comes back to a male who is on a cloud somewhere, usually a throne, and the worst part of all is he's usually upset. You've got to know if you start with that, you've created an unsafe and unhappy universe. If the guy in charge is wrathful, I say this as a Catholic, I am sure we had hymns just as bad, but I know I often turn on Kayla of Living Proof recently, but I say this every evangelical song have to talk about the wrath of God. The word almost always gets in there, and of course from years of men's work which started with so many men talking about their absent father, their abusive father, their alcoholic father, their father who is emotionally unavailable, I mean, I think half the human race was just programmed to believe in an angry father God, and we just backed it up. We said, yeah, that’s who he is. Now then a few of us were given a way out of this. We were cajoled into thinking, well, if you offer enough sacrifice, this was the Catholic game at least, you can placate, you can please this angry distant God, but he isn’t naturally on your side, and what was terribly called the Substitutionary Atonement Theory, which we Franciscans never believed for 800 years, but was roundly accepted in most evangelical churches, just solidified that understanding that, yes, indeed, God is violent, which legitimated violence all the way down, necessary violence for the salvation of the world. You see the message of the cross at least in my opinion, and I hope you agree, is not a statement about divine violence, it's a statement about human violence. That repositions the whole thing, but I don't think we were ready to see that. Men’s capacity to crucify God’s creation, to destroy what God has created, but again I think a lot of people were just programmed to understand God not just as a spectator from afar sitting on a cloud, but a critical spectator, not one who is benevolently inclined, certainly not infinitely compassionate, but seemingly infinitely pissed off, excuse me, and much of the human race was simply ready to believe that. So given that, I won’t talk much longer, I want to get these two involved, but I want to read little bit for this is page 35 in The Divine Dance at the risk of sounding like I'm making a serious overstatement. I think the common Christian image of God despite Jesus, Jesus gave us no backup for believing this garbage, quite the contrary, just read the story of the prodigal son. The father of Jesus is entirely trustworthy, entirely loving, so despite Jesus, it’s still largely a pagan notion. I deliberately used a word that might be a bit offensive. I know pagans aren’t
bad people, but we want to say the Christian gospel didn't really reform the shape of God. It was just too much in the hardwiring. Now I point out several pages back, I was the last generation of priests that had to learn Latin, any of you who learned Latin, you know the Latin name for Deus, D-E-U-S. Does that sounded all like Z-E-U-S? Of course, it does because it is the same word. Zeus, the Greek God who is sitting on a throne on Mount Olympus throwing down thunderbolts on everybody that he doesn't like, we didn't progress much beyond that, and I know as a priest you know reading John's Gospel often from the pulpit and once I get into John 14, 15, 16, 17 it's just - the eyes just glaze over, at least Catholics, I am sure evangelical eyes or Episcopalian don't glaze over, but Catholics just - I don't know what he's talking about, the Father is in me and I'm in the Father, and I gave you the Spirit and the Spirit comes from the Father, and we both give you the Spirit, I am in you and you are in me, it's absolute nondual thinking. Most people if they've never been trained in what we talked about this afternoon have no ability to understand the most mystical of all gospels, the apex of the New Testament which is John's Gospel, and I know Paul has written some great stuff on this. Anyway, history is 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 he is always called a he, this God is seen largely as a critical spectator, and his followers do their best to imitate their creator in this regard, to be critical and spectating, not participating. We all three love this word participation. We become what we behold. If God is a torturer, torturing is legitimated all the way down. If God is a critical spectator, most of you got a PhD in judgmental thinking. You did! I had it by the third grade in a good Catholic school with sweet Irish nuns. I mean, they were sweet themselves, but they had to teach what they have been taught. It’s amazing they remained so sweet. This is just a rapacious God. In his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Thomas Kuhn, this is a classic, if you've been raised in or trained in any philosophy of science, Thomas Kuhn was the person who popularized the word “paradigm shift.” It is part of our normal conversation, probably educated conversation, but he made clear that even in the scientific world, a paradigm shift is tantamount to what religion calls major conversion, and he says it's equally rare in both science and religion, and he said this as a scientist. I was taught scientist just followed the evidence. He says that’s not true. Isn’t our politics showing us? Evidence has little to do with it. Truth has little to do with it. It’s what your ego has already decided you want to believe and he proves this is true in the world even of science who we thought were objective and logical people. Any genuine transformation of worldview asks for such a major switch from the track that we are familiar with that often those who hold the old paradigm, he says this must actually die off before a new paradigm can gain traction and wide acceptance. That's how tied we all are to our opinions. Now you know why the Buddhists teach you detachment. If you can't detach from your own ideas, you are attached, you are compulsive, you are obsessive. It's all about you. It’s not about truth anymore. The ego wraps itself around its opinion, and if that’s true in science, and now we see how true it is in politics, you put God behind it, God said and you can pull that God said line out whenever you want, the ego is almost untouchable. One of the safest ways to avoid God is God, God language at least. That's why Meister Eckhart said, I pray God to rid me of God.

So 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 what he calls cataclysmic insight and breakthrough, almost the same as the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan said. He says until the moment of insight comes that rearranges your psyche, you can't really think in a new way. I think it’s what the Eastern religions call enlightenment, and we were supposed to call salvation that moment where you move from the economy of merit to the economy of infinite grace where you stop all quid pro quo, measuring, weighing. One of my favorite women mystics Therese of Lisieux, we call her the Little Flower in the Catholic Church, she said in one of her letters, God knows all the sciences, but there is one science God has no interest in, mathematics. You see what she was trying to say. God stops all counting. Now you and I who were raised in counting, measuring, weighing, calculating, I gave this much, I
deserve this much, until God dips you in the ocean of unearned love, unearned forgiveness, you really don't get it, and you live basically in what we would call know and much of our country lives there in a worldview of scarcity. There is never enough, never enough healthcare, never enough housing. It's killing us, because we're all in this world of not enough, not enough, I got to protect my own. Until you’ve been dipped into the ocean of this infinite flow that we are going to spend time with this weekend, you don't understand infinity. You can only understand measuring and counting and weighing and calculating so that's why I think the three of us think this notion is so crucial, because it's not just going to change your theology, it is going to change your philosophy, your psychology, and I hope your politics. That this world we are living in, I can see why John's Gospel and Paul too say it's all gone, it’s devolving. It’s going to hell in a hand basket is the way we put it, because it has no notion of grace. So our personified notion of grace is over there in Rublev’s icon. I’ll talk to you about it more tomorrow.

Let me stop at that, and I want to invite my two friends into the conversation because they don't need to say it my way, and I just want them to say it, and this mystery, you've heard us say many times that mystery is not something that's not understandable. Mystery by definition is something that is infinitely understandable, that is why you can live with mystery or with not knowing, because I'm not there yet. Well, that’s another piece, another piece, another piece, another piece, but you'll never have this God in your pocket, while Santa Claus sitting on a throne you can have that in your pocket. You can calculate the whole thing and figure out who's going to get coal on Christmas and who is going to get presents. It’s all a reward/punishment system. This is not a win-lose God, and I will stop in this. This is a win-win God, a win-win God. Now, if you've never tried to live inside of a win-win universe, this God will be heard to accept I warn you ahead of time, because you are going to lose your walls, you are going to lose your defenses, you are going to lose your explanations, you are going to lose your container, and the human ego likes all that. So, let me shut up and who wants to dive in first.

**Wm Paul Young:** Not me.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Okay, I will do it quick, bridge. First of all, a disclaimer, I didn’t do the two guys and a bird.

**Richard Rohr:** Who did you get that from?

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** That I believe was Elizabeth Johnston. It was one of that, one of Elizabeth’s theories, but they were doing it as a quip, and I am pretty sure it was Elizabeth Johnston, pretty good, pretty good, in good company. I wouldn’t ever have had so much nerve. But I…

**Wm Paul Young:** What kind of bird?

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** That’s for you to tell, but I did sort of bridge, because I want to engage you Paul that I know, I know less well than any of us, but let me try and set up my way into that by saying I actually know two people that woke up in the middle of the Trinity, and Richard was talking just a minute ago about that paradigm shift, that thing that cataclysmically changes how you look, one of them was perhaps a predictable thing. He was a Trappist monk. He was actually a Vietnamese born, but raised Christian, ancient old monk who had grown up in that very strict Trappist tradition, back in the Latin era, back in silent Trappist absorbing a lot of that imagery that you were talking about, the stern God in the sky, the judgmental language, the Deus every day, and one day he woke up in the midst of this mystical dream that was just he tried to explain it afterwards that he found himself just in the flow of this most delicious sweetness, which was everything he said. And, you could see that it was a kind of watershed moment that completely changed his nature of not only did
it make him completely forgiving of everything, and completely expansiveness, but it also gave him a way inside things, he could counsel married people not like a priest who has never done it trying to tell you what to do, but like a…

Richard Rohr: I think I know what she is saying.

Cynthia Bourgeault: …but you know with the heart he says it’s just all love and every part of the love is connected to every—he just had it. So, he woke up in the Trinity in the divine flow, in the dance. The other person who woke up inside the Trinity was a little bit more unusual that up to that time, she had been an undersecretary attaché in the Reagan cabinet, hard, practical minded, rightist, Republican all the way, numbers all the way, anagram eight all the way, and same thing. She woke up in the middle of the Trinity, same results. Everything, everything shifted by being dynamically immersed in a field that wasn’t an idea, but was a living, vibrant comprehensive stream of radiating, forgiving, creating love, and she could no more deny that than she could deny her own skin. So, it began a long journey as you said the box flew apart, and she began a long journey that took her through chaplaincy training and through all sorts of stuff, but it definitely shifted the way she was present in the world, and I think that when we break through the Trinity in that kind of a way, whatever we have to say about our theologies, about our ideas, that it’s clear that we need to find that living stream, and touch it and swim in it and drag others in so that we are all swimming in this stream. So, it’s in that sense that I want to very, very concretely situate the work we are doing this weekend, the prophetic work we are doing in the midst of a stream, in the midst of a world which will certainly trivial it, and in the midst of a collection of people that don’t actually often get together, I mean that how many of you here are basically more or less of the catholic persuasion or of that side. Yeah, good. How many do we have that are of the evangelical persuasion? Yeah, look at this, we have got a group that have come in with this guy, and it’s like having the hearts of these traditions together to begin, to talk and find our way. I mean, when I read The Shack, what I felt like was that I had seen once again what these other people said that all of a sudden we gotten plunged into this living stream of love, and I am going to ask you to unpack that for me in just a little while, but if we could text this and I know I have been doing enough of the scuttlebutt to know that you took some risks with your tradition.

Wm Paul Young: Really?

Cynthia Bourgeault: In order to do this.

Wm Paul Young: Including my mom.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Oh, my goodness, yeah, there is a cost, isn’t there? There is a cost, and when you started flopping off that title about what God loves God becomes, I can just hear people saying pantheism, pantheism, but how—how to language and live and set up a right frame in which this living and dynamic and active intelligence of love that we manifest in the Trinity can move how we can jump into this and how we can be part of it in a world that I don’t think is going to hell in a hand basket. I think we are turning a corner, and I think we are already turning a corner, because of extremely good sensitive Trinitarian work that is already being done just in the hearts of how people come together. I am going to unpack a little bit more what the Law of Three works and how we can use this to relate the Trinity to where—to what’s happening in the world, but for me, it’s all about love, it’s all about the healing if Mack is the world, and if we are being led forward stumbling and broken, you know, I wanted to reach out to love, but it hurts too much, so I am going to just ask you some questions, so…
Wm Paul Young: Fire away.

Cynthia Bourgeault: So, when you got this idea to write this book, how was it that you saw that the image of forgiveness, you know, there is a plot and a subplot in this, and the big plot, of course, is at least as I read it is the trauma that Mack goes through and how he finally finds his way to the redemption of it, but what made you think that it had to be a Trinity that delivered this healing?

Wm Paul Young: It’s a great question. My background is modern evangelical fundamentalist, missionary kid firstborn preachers’ kid, right. A year old, I was growing up in the highlands of the interior New Guinea which was a pioneer mission at the time. We were the first in, and New Guinea is over 800 unrelated language groups, and ours was a large tribal context, 40,000 to 60,000 members over a 100 square miles and it was called Cannibal Valley, not because they thought it was a great name, but these were Spirit worshiping, warring, and they practiced ritualistic cannibalism, really safe place to raise a child, but this was a time of missions where the idea was that if you did the work of God, God would take care of the children, and a lot of us and our generation were sacrificed in the name of the gospel, and that was the context of the way that I grew up. So that's my tradition, and I had a writer when the book first came out and for those of you who don't know, I never intended to be published author. I wrote a story for my kids at the behest of Kim, my wife, who is here and one of our daughters who is here, one of the six that I wrote the story for for Christmas, got it done, made 15 copies at Office Depot that did everything I ever wanted this book to do, and went back to work, and it was six went to the kids, Kim got a copy, and the extras I gave to my friends, and they start giving it away, that started the chain reaction, but a woman, a writer, a Leeann Stewart from Nashville wrote me when the book first was put into print in a large-scale way, and she said I don't know who you are or anything about you which was pretty much true for everybody, but she said my sense is that Missy, who is Mackenzie's daughter who is the one that is abducted and evidence found that she may have been murdered, evidence that is discovered in a shack way up in the eastern part of Oregon, she said my sense is that Missy represents something murdered in you as a child, probably your innocence, and Mackenzie is you as an adult trying to deal with it, and I showed that to Kim, and she said, boy, she nailed it, right, and we've had the shock losses in our lives. Kim and I were married not long year and half or so when her mother went in for gallbladder surgery made routine but had diabetes that had flared up and over the course of about three days passed away, but three months before that, my 18-year-old brother Stephen was killed, and three months after Shirley died, my five-year-old niece was killed the day after her fifth birthday, so we know about loss, because all of us do. I don’t care about our religious affiliations and our politics and all that, everybody in the room knows about loss, and there is enough gray hairs in here that I know you know, and so in the context of tragedy, I grew up with a God who is like my dad and my dad didn't have chip for being a father. His father had broken it before I ever showed up. He was geared to be a pioneer missionary, because he was a hunter trapper, and he was a very angry young man. He was part of a generation that did not know they had baggage and wouldn’t have known what to do with it if they had known they had baggage, right, and so he did not know how to be a father. Now as a child, you don’t know that. You don’t process, right, so the fury of a parent becomes your understanding of God and the absence of the parent would do the same thing. You just have a different kind of God. I laugh sometimes with all the arguments between religious perspectives, and I'm going like what are we talking about. Christians don't even believe in the same God, you know. This is part of my growing up is this evangelical exactly what Richard was talking about, a God watching from the infinite distance of a disapproving heart, the darkness behind Jesus that needed to be appeased and sacrificed too, the darkness whom Jesus came to save me from. So in my understanding that Jesus came to save me from God the father, and a lot of our theology was wrapped around that, so when your heart is broken as a child, where do you run? To your head. If you want to look at broken heart as a culture, look at the West. When it runs to the head and lives in
the head, you know that the hearts are all broken, and we've done that for a few hundred years. So, my view of God was this distant disapproving deity, and Zeus, Gandoff for the really bad attitude, and I began struggling—and here's what introduced me to the whole question of the Trinity because it is part of my religious affiliation. We talked about it. We had analogies for it, like three parts of an egg, or three parts of time, or water in three stages, right, we had all these analogies none of which were relational, none of them are relational, but that's how—that's the closest we got to it and then we'd put it back on the systematic theology shelf and go about our business, and the introduction for me to the conversation about the Trinity came through the issue of women. It came through the doorway that opened up with the issue of women, because most of the damage in my life was caused by men, not just my dad. In the tribal culture before I was five years old, sexual abuse began. When I was sent to boarding school at six, the big boys would come and molest the little boys at night. There was nothing that will break the human heart and tear apart the fabric of the human soul like sexual abuse. So, what do you do? You know, you begin to be a performer. You hide inside your head and you try to appease God, who is like your dad, and that's what Leanne Stewart was referring to. I think that Missy represents something murdered in you as a child. It's no coincidence that Mackenzie Allen Phillips and Melissa Ann Phillips both spell MAP, because they're different ways of approaching the conversation of loss and the character and nature of God.

So my journey into the Trinity came from saying is there a hierarchy in the Trinity, because that is only basis that I could legitimize any sense of the way that we related to women, and it was women who showed up at different points in my life and threw me some kind of a lifeline, it was men generally who had done the damage, and the more that I looked around the planet, the more I saw that men were the ones that were creating the wars, that were fighting over territory and property, that were the ones that were dominating inside the prison system because it was all about territory and property. Women largely were imprisoned because of relationships, and here we've got—I mean, how many brothels exist on the planet for women? Right. Something's wrong, and then you look at scripture and it is saying through one man sin entered the world and it says it eight times in the New Testament like don't you understand part of why Jesus, part of why the word who is God incarnates in male form is it got to go to the greatest point of loss to recover us all, right. And, so this is about a second Adam, this is what Paul talks about. So, I am going like is hierarchy legitimized? And the more that I worked on it, the more it became obvious that throughout history every Christian tradition agreed about this one thing, that the idea of the eternal subordination of the son to the father was heresy, Christian Orthodox and Catholic—I mean, Protestant orthodox and Catholic, all of them agree. So, I'm going like so there's no hierarchy in the Trinity and that goes back to the dance, that goes back to the circle, but if there is a big God behind the little God Jesus, right, if there is a big God back there, then he is the real God, and now you got a problem, all kinds of problems actually. But that monad, that one solitary being, if that God ever has been alone, if God has ever been only one, only alone, then that God does not by nature love, because love is defined as the presence of an other, and that's what started opening up the Trinity. So, I'm dealing with the issue of hierarchy and going like there is no legitimate basis for this, not in the being of God, and I am going like wait a second, if God is alone, there is no basis for love or relationship either. It is something that God might express love, but it is not because he by nature is love, and this goes back to Athanasius. What was God to do being good and seeing his creation on the road to ruin and about to lapse into non-being, that's on the incarnation of the Word of God written in 3:20 something by a 21-year-old North African man who basically help save the early community, and understand this, throughout history, we have been looking for ways to try to use metaphor, language, story—even the word perichoresis which took them hundreds of years to iron out, even by the end of the New Testament, they are still struggling for language. John’s Gospel which was probably the last epistle or book written historically that is in the canon of at least the Protestants, it's still trying to wrestle with these things. Well, this wrestling has continued, and we are still—here's a great question, what if we are still in the
early church if the consummation of the age isn’t for another 40,000 years? We are in the early church, so relax. The reason we haven't got a lot of this figured out yet, right.

So that is my background that drove me into the Trinity and so when I'm writing a story for my kids, because that is what Kim asked me to do, she said, you know, someday, because I had written things all my life, but poetry and songs and short stories and stuff that you give your friends and your family and they love it because they are your friends and your family, and she said, you know, someday as a gift for our children would you just write something that puts in one place how you think because you think outside the box, and part of that is growing up multicultural, part of that is being embedded in a sense of not belonging and trying desperately to find somewhere to belong, and if someone coming from our herd and our tradition, our background doesn't find someone to belong too, we never belong anywhere. It’s part of the environment of a third culture kid, you know someone who grows up in a different culture than their parents transported to their parents' culture, where they don't fit and by the time they get back to the one they grew up in, they don’t fit that either, and the whole world is increasing numbers of third culture kids, refugees and people who have lost, but a lot of times at least they get to take their communities with them to some degree, which is helpful. So, in my journey of trying to deal with the losses of my life, suddenly the idea that there is a God who has been face to face to face in relationship gave me the understanding that from eternity, there has been an other and suddenly you had a basis for love and relationship, which is very contrary to the distant deity behind the back of Jesus, and that just sort of exploded up into a whole bunch of things, and when I am writing this for my kids, I'm going like I don't want you to try to build a relationship with God I grew up, because I don't think that God even exists. Every great paradigm, paradigm—I have to figure which is kind of the right way to say it now, but every great shift like that in terms of our relationship with God involves us to move through atheism because we have to deny the God we thought existed. So when Mackenzie goes back to the shack and he has his—he blows up because he had this glimmer of a hope that the God that he grew up with might show up and give him some answers and he is a no-show, that's my statement that that God does not exist, and I am in unison with so many of my atheist friends because the God that they don't think exists I don't think exists either. By the way, when the book actually got into print, Kim said you know I was thinking like four to six pages, so that gives you a little of the framework for how I walked into this conversation and it came through dealing with my losses, trying to find a way to come to wholeness, and the only place that I ended up running to was inside this circle of relentless affection that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and within which we were created, because there is nothing outside of that. All of creation is created in him. Not anything that has come into being has come into being apart from him, right, and that’s kind of the conversation that we are involved with.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Cynthia Bourgeault: You know it’s funny that when you get me thinking both of you about how it is that the images that we get to God in our childhood create—it’s like…

Richard Rohr: Hardwiring.

Cynthia Bourgeault: …hardwiring that makes it so hard to do anything, you know. I grew up in a rather odd cobby hole tradition that my parents raised me Christian scientists and that was sort of the ultra-rational God that we were actually—it tended to pray to a principle which was infinite mind and that in which it was a 7-year-old I had to learn to proclaim that matter didn’t really exists and that everything that was created was evil and that everything could be solved by taking it back to infinite mind, never cured my stomach aches very well, but that was the image of this —you know it
was the rational God of the transcendentalist run amuck, and what actually began to turn me around was singing in a high school choir and we did the—it was a really good high school choir, really fabulous conductor, and we were dawn when I was in high school Faure’s Requiem, and we were just bringing it to production and one of the kids, one of the younger kids, a tenor, was killed in a tragic car accident, and his parents who were good Catholics asked if we would do the mass, do the Faure’s Requiem as part of a mass for the St Anthony de Padua Church down the road, so we did, and something broke wide open inside my 16-year-old being, because up to that point, I had only heard that while death was the ultimate failure in Christian science, it was the major practice malformation, death, but what I saw was how novel what we could do was comfort each other and love each other and give to each other in beauty, in tenderness, and honestly hold hands in the immense peril and beauty of our fragility with each other. And from that moment, everything changed. I didn't have Trinity language, but I had a relational baseline, that I knew at that point that God was love and that love was relationship and it was in the flow of that relationship, that something would change that would bring out the hearts of human beings and the heart of God as well. So, it was not math, but just my own effort like yours to try and claw my way into some sort of how does this thing make sense.

Wm Paul Young: And if the central and the deepest truth about God is relationship, the implications are profound, right, which is you know this tells you why men are so much more damaged in that sense because relationship is an absolute mystery, you know, generally speaking. There is this great scene in the movie for those of you who have seen it where Octavia Spencer who is Papa, she is there, and she has got her sun glasses on, and Sam Worthington, Mackenzie comes up and goes like, so God has time to catch a few rays, right, and she says, honey, you have no idea how much I'm doing right now. And that starts as little conversation at one point, you know he—it’s the first time he uses the term ‘Papa’, in the whole movie and it's a struggle even then, right, but he does it because this is the movement that he wants to take toward relationship, right, because there is something about distance about calling God just God, right. There is something that happens different when the songs start to say my God, and then when you get down to Jesus going Abba, it is always like, okay, this is the movement of relationship, and he goes like why do you still - why do you still come after me for in all of my pushing you away and all that, and she said, well, this is what love does. He goes like, oh, I really don't understand relationship very well, do I, and she gets up and shakes her head and says, men, such idiots sometimes, right, and he goes like, did I just hear God calling me an idiot, and she goes, the shoe fits, honey, the shoe fits, but again the centrality of relationship, when you enter a relationship, you enter a mystery, but the intention is to keep moving, you know. When you enter a mystery that is a relationship, you lose control, ask any married men here, right, and part of that problem is you are not going to ever get to fully comprehend that person. They keep moving, they keep growing, they keep changing, right, like an expanding universe. There is something that engages us in terms of the mystery of relationship that by its nature you are never going to be able to control and that's what creates so much of the tension in our lives because we are control freaks. We would rather have religion and doctrine and practice than take the risk of trust. Trust, especially for those of us who have broken hearts, that's the great journey. That's the thing that is so hard for us and that’s exactly what brings us toward freedom is beginning to exercise relationship within a community and not just the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but God has designed this so that we absolutely can only come wholeness within the community of people who are God with skin on and that’s the fourth.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, beautiful, it’s beautiful. Different message, isn’t it?
Richard Rohr: It’s so different. So, take your head off, shake it, and put it back on, alright. Unless you're willing to do that, it isn’t going to happen. You will keep reverting to the lizard brain early experience which really wasn't experience. It was just doctrine.

Wm Paul Young: Let me give you an illustration of how powerful a paradigm is. I'm with the Holy Spirit on paradigm. So, there is a word I am going to use, and I am sorry if it’s offensive, but it’s in the Scriptures, it’s just not translated properly and Paul uses it, it’s the colloquial street level term for poop, and if you want to translate it right, it should be translated shit, because that is the colloquial use. The Greek words is skubalon, he uses it, I consider it all, and it has got all these nice translations, like dung or nothing or waste or all this.

Richard Rohr: Garbage, garbage.

Wm Paul Young: Garbage, yeah, but Paul is right, and he knows, right, so here is the illustration. I had a women came up at a conference, and people wear their losses in their body, right, and so even as you change in terms of coming to healing and freedom, your voice will change, your posture will change, and it just happens and you could see that she had carried a light years of loss, shame, and for one thing, shame always draws your face to the ground. That’s one of the markers of shame. The early church kind of refused to pray with their eyes closed and head bowed, because it was a sign of shame, and there was no shame in the kingdom at all. Guilt is I have done something wrong, which is that's a legitimate issue we have to deal with. Shame is I am something wrong, that's not legitimate. Shame has no plans inside the truth and the reality of God, and we are made in the image of God, but shame as in terms of how it impacts us and how powerful it is in our lives as it is probably one of the primmest motivators for our brokenness and our darkness, that shame drives our eyes to the ground and her eyes were to the ground, and she tells me this story. She said, let me tell you the power of the paradigm, and we are talking about the lenses through which we see that then become our way of defining the universe deciding who God is, who you are, who I am right, and we do not want those lenses tampered with. We are addicted to being right. We are addicted to holding on to our paradigms, and this is what she's talking about. And, she is saying this is how powerful they are. She said when I was growing up as a child as a little girl, I prayed every night to God, I begged God to change the color of my eyes to blue. She said every night I prayed and begged God please, would you just change my eyes to blue. Her dad was an alcoholic and kind of a mean drunk, and when he got under the influence of alcohol, he would start ranting at her, raging at her, and one of the consistent things he said to her you know what, you have the ugliest eyes in the world. Your eyes are the color cat shit, and he said that over and over and over to her until she prayed to God please God change the color of my eyes, and she's telling me this with her head dropped and she looks up at me and she says, Paul, tell me the color of my eyes, and I am looking into a pair of the most beautiful blue eyes I've ever seen, and I am thinking in my head, did God change the color of her eyes, and she said, I didn't know until I was in my 30s that this was the color of my eyes. This has always been the color of my eyes. You understand the power of a paradigm, and so many of us have been hurt in our childhood and how our parents brought what they had to the table and a lot of them with the best of intentions did a huge amount of damage because they just didn't know any better, or they didn't know how to deal with their stuff, and those things have dominated the way that we see ourselves and humanity and the character and nature of God even though Jesus comes to reveal the Father we don't believe him, we go right back to Zeus, and it’s just astounding the power of this and this is why this has to involve revelations, involve the activity of the Holy Spirit inside the darkness that has consumed us, but it costs, right, to change the prescription of your glasses, it costs, because a lot of times that's the only thing that gave us a sense of certainty or power or significance or meaning, and this is a hard road in some senses. So when you feel that internal cognitive dissonance between the head and the heart and all this kind of struggle, understand this is exactly where the Holy Spirit is
inside of you in order to heal you, the darkness, and the lies and everything else that is not true has
got to be exposed, and so as a Canadian I can say all kinds of things about American politics, but no.
We just don't commit ourselves enough to be engaged in pretty much anything, but we do apologize
a lot, just so you know. And also as an abider in Jesus, I look at the political stuff that is going on,
and I see this as a time of exposure. The politics is not creating the problem. It's exposing what's
been just their beneath this thin layer of visibility, which is I think, yeah, so I think we are on a cusp,
and I think that three of us agree about this, we are on a cusp of a major transition in terms of
reforming of the very way we think because the ways we have been thinking were necessary to get
here in certain respects obviously the Holy Spirit has not been sleeping for the last 2000 years, but
we're in the cusp which will involve a reforming of how we think, how we see is really more
accurate, and then with that will also come a Renaissance, not just of the arts, but of the sciences, of
economics, of ditch digging, of being a mom or an aunt or a father or a truck driver or a nurse or a
scientist, all of these things will be penetrated by the centrality of this relationship in which we begin
to understand not only ourselves, but the character nature of God in all creation.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, yeah.

Wm Paul Young: Not bad for a Protestant, right?

Cynthia Bourgeault: Hundred percent right on brother, because I think that’s what we are up to. We
are not just putting together angels dancing on the head of the pin conference. There is a real sense
that this thing that is there in the Trinity is so important to helping swing that shift, because when
you learn how to use it, it’s got whole different images of who God is, who different images of how
you jump into the flow of this perichoresis, how we engage in skillful problem-solving, which I am
going to talk about a little, and I do use in the start of my Trinity book a story that was actually told
to me that was a true story about a friend of mine. He is now dead. He was a spiritual teacher in
British Columbia for a long time, born in Turkey, and after the region right after World War II, he
was out doing ranching in a real, real primitive area of eastern Turkey and fell onto a good friendship
with a little family, an old man, an old woman, they were peasants out there, and they’d come over
for tea, and he’d have tea with them every day, and they felt talking about the son, they had the son.
They had a son they loved him so much, but he’d gone to Istanbul and he’s doing well. He is a
merchant, but we never see him anymore. So, one day when my friend come to tea, there the wife
was just bursting her buttons. She says, my son, he sent us this new tea cabinet, and there it was and
this big huge honking piece of furniture, and she had already put her little cups on it and everything,
and he kept looking at and saying, why would he send her a tea cupboard, darn, and he began
thinking for something who is supposed to be a storage cupboard doesn’t have much space, so he
finally said, would you mind if I take a closer look at this tea cupboard. He turns it around, pulls off
one final packing, strip, and out swing the door, inside is a ham radio. That was what it was, and it
was intended to connect her to her son and relationship to connect him to the world, but they were
using it as a tea cupboard, and I think the church has used the Trinity as a tea cupboard to hang up all
our doctrinal china, you know. Who really gives a damn? What it is is an absolutely profound inter-
realmic communications tool, that shows us how love, how relationality, how communication, not
only with this world, but with other worlds helping us, continues to result in a continuous dynamist
new creation, new love, and if we know how to read this symbol and work with this symbol and play
with this symbol and can let go as some of those little tea cups up there, we have got a tool that is
world class for moving into the nondual world with dynamism and into the broken world with heart,
and it's this that we are going to explore. Over to you, Papa.

Richard Rohr: Come on, excellent. You know if I can go theological again, you were setting me up
for —and you might be able to correct me a little on this history, but the Trinitarian theology was
much more developed in the Eastern Church. The monastic tradition and the contemplative tradition was much more in the eastern church. We've got to know how we are all victims of history. In 1054 when the patriarch of Constantinople and the bishop of Rome very kindly and mutually excommunicated one another, basically to this day, we have two major hemispheres of Christianity like the two hemispheres of the brain. We stopped studying the eastern fathers for the most part and that's where the contemplative message was—that’s where the much deeper reflection on the Trinity was. Now, because monasticism also developed—you see once you have this much greater depth, you have people imagining strange things, and I do mean that like celibacy, alright. Are going of into the…

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** That you figured it out.

**Richard Rohr:** …into the desert and living ascetically. When you’ve touched upon the substantial, you can imagine a very different world, and it creates monasticism, which has a very different shape, and there was a figure that most of you probably are not familiar with, the Egyptian monk called holds John Cassian, and John Cassian is the first one known to have brought the Egyptian monastic tradition to Europe, and if you go to Marseilles, France, there in the harbor are still the ruins of the monastery of St. Victor. The other interesting piece of this is that it was the Victorian tradition that continued to teach nondual consciousness, becoming the great monastery of St. Victor in Paris. We see it being nondual consciousness is being systematically taught in the west as late as the 11th century even into the 12th, because my own community the Franciscans who come the next century are largely influenced by this, and there is a man called Richard of St. Victor and this so sets me up for what you were saying Paul, Richard said, for god to be joy, bliss, freedom, love in this force then God must be three, and he uses the example of the excitement of new parents over their child, and you've all been on a vacation, I know I have many times, where I am seeing a beautiful sight and saying if only he/she was here, I can’t enjoy it fully because she/he, my friend is not enjoying it with me. When two people enjoy the same thing together, that takes on a life of its own, and so that’s why the Holy Spirit was called precisely the relationship between the Father and the Son and what Jesus came to promises is I'm giving you that relationship, I am planting it in you as a stable foundation. So we call the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence, the stable witness, and if you look in the famous Rublev icon which I will talk about a bit more tomorrow, you see the Son is in the center Jesus the Christ and there is a gaze of love between the father and the son. The father is on your left side. He is largely dressed in gold, and the Spirit was green who greens everything, Hildegard Veritas, who makes everything grow, he is or she is offering a gesture that we call the epiclesis gesture, the giving of the spirit, and you could also see it as he/she is inviting us to take our place as the fourth person at the table. I have been struggling with the words he and she, but look how artists can say things that

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Or maybe you are more Protestant.

**Richard Rohr:** Or maybe I am more Protestant, and the good Episcopalians bring us together.

**William Young:** The Bridge.

**Richard Rohr:** Richard says for God to be good, God can be one, for God to be love, God must be two, 11th century. There has to be a communion, a connection, a giving and a receiving, but then he takes it further, and he says for God to be joy, bliss, freedom, love in this force then God must be three, and he uses the example of the excitement of new parents over their child, and you've all been on a vacation, I know I have many times, where I am seeing a beautiful sight and saying if only he/she was here, I can’t enjoy it fully because she/he, my friend is not enjoying it with me. When two people enjoy the same thing together, that takes on a life of its own, and so that’s why the Holy Spirit was called precisely the relationship between the Father and the Son and what Jesus came to promises is I'm giving you that relationship, I am planting it in you as a stable foundation. So we call the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence, the stable witness, and if you look in the famous Rublev icon which I will talk about a bit more tomorrow, you see the Son is in the center Jesus the Christ and there is a gaze of love between the father and the son. The father is on your left side. He is largely dressed in gold, and the Spirit was green who greens everything, Hildegard Veritas, who makes everything grow, he is or she is offering a gesture that we call the epiclesis gesture, the giving of the spirit, and you could also see it as he/she is inviting us to take our place as the fourth person at the table. I have been struggling with the words he and she, but look how artists can say things that
theologians can’t. I want you all to examine that picture, many of you have already, the figures are entirely androgynous. You can’t say are they male, are they female? Rublev knew exactly what he was doing I believe, and they are each holding a little walking staff. Jonathan will love that. If you know the story in Genesis 18, they are called the three travelers. So, already, if you want to see the three travelers as a Trinitarian motif in development, you have an evolutionary moving God, and we are invited to move with him. So, Vanessa in decorating our place, she put four of those staffs right in front of the painting, the icon, and the fourth one is for you to join the walk, to take your place as the fourth person at the table. Now I hope I get more time to develop it tomorrow, but I just want to present to you, can you re-imagine what is the nature of salvation, and now you know why Jesus primary metaphor for eternal life was a banquet, was a wedding banquet to which all were invited, good and bad alike, it says. But most of us didn't grow up with this, hardly any of us did. We grew up with the very dualistic notion and again to praise the orthodox which seemed to have gone much deeper with this, probably my second favorite icon after this one is the one called anastasis where the Christ has his legs spread, perhaps you have seen it. You can buy it in any good orthodox icon store, and he is pulling souls out of hell, just pulling them out of hell, and all the saints on each side are rejoicing, and there are chains flying in every direction. It's Christ the overcomer of death. The big enemy was not gentile Jews, Catholics, Protestant, that’s directing you in the wrong place for your irritation. The big enemy is death, alright. That’s where he oriented us toward find the meaning of death and your way through death and you will triumph. You are indestructible, and I want you to compare that classic orthodox icon with the Christ legs spread is pulling out Adam and Eve and souls out of hell to our wonderful catholic Michelangelo Sistine chapel. I am sure many of you have been there in Rome. It costs quite a bit to get in, but if you want to see Michelangelo, you better go, alright. What do we have? Jesus who has been pulled out of the Trinity is an angry hand-raised judge. It’s no longer sweet, meek, and humble of heart. It might be great art, the Sistine chapel, but at least the back wall is horrible theology. It’s horribly dualistic where if you look at it, he is standing in the middle the angry judge, half the people he is damming into hell and the other half he is inviting into heaven. Now if you were raised in a win-lose worldview which most people are and most people prefer, you have no trouble with the Sistine Chapel, because it is the way you would prefer to think. We want that party who voted for the other candidate to all burn for all eternity, don’t we? That's the way the untransformed mind thinks, but I say that to just give living example that we Catholic or Protestant assuming that's most of us and protestants I hate to tell you this, but you are a child of Catholicism, alright…

William Young: And Judaism.

Richard Rohr: And Judaism, and you took the best, but also the worst from both of us and what I'm saying here is it was largely dualistic theology. It was win-lose theology, and the next - the earlier date that I should've given to you which really began the devolving of a meek and humble and nonviolent God was of course the other date 313. In 313, Constantine makes us the official religion of the Roman Empire and from then on we read the gospels not from the bottom, not from the side of the poor, not from the side of the losers, but supposedly from the side of the winners. We made the gospel into a winner script, and it's so strange here and we Catholics make it very graphic. We have our bloody crucifixes hanging in front of the church. We clearly worship a loser because he is telling us that it really is not losing at all, but we are all because we are good Americans, we are into winning, let's be honest. It's all about winning while we dare to worship a losing God. We dare to worship a suffering God, because we only got half of the waterwheel of love, we got the almighty part, but not the all vulnerable part. We got the infilling part, we didn’t get the self emptying part. This is why I think all three of us are saying that we believe a proper understanding of God is Trinitarian love is not just a theological gift to the universe, I think it’s much bigger than Christianity. It’s a gift to the very shape of how we understand reality. If what genesis 1:26, 27 said,
and I invite you to open your bibles, you go back to the hotel, take out your Gideon bible, look up Genesis 1:26, 27 and you should be rightly shocked, because that sentence is going to use two plural pronouns. Let us create in our image, check it out, I am no heretic, alright.

William Young: And another beautiful part is Genesis 11 in the Hebrew in the beginning Elohim,, Elohim is not only a plural noun, it is at least three or more, there is another form that is used in the Hebrew for dual, and they didn't use it, and so in the beginning God is three or more and that becomes then an introduction to verse two were Ruach the spirit, the breath of god is feminine and then you introduce to the unpronounceable name of god which is Adonai or Jehovah or Joshua or Jesus, but it’s god with us and then there is this beautiful verse in Genesis 3, where it says and they hid because they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the cool of the day, that's what it says in the English. Here is what the Hebrew says. They heard the sound of Elohim Yahweh walking in the Ruach, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, right, and it was all relational and it was the denial of relationship that drove them into covering up and religion, and from that point on, God then submit to them, climbs into the religious language in order to rescue them from it.

Richard Rohr: Wow, thank you. You know, I know this must sound scary, but I would ask you to just look for the fruit that I can promise you in your life. What we are all three trying to say is not going to make you more afraid, it’s going to make you less afraid. It’s not going to make you more coldhearted, you are going to find streams of compassion, and you didn't know where they came from. Well, they have been flowing there all the time, and so you know Paul says you know by the fruit, well, Jesus says that and then Paul lists the fruits of the spirit, but I promise you the fruits of the spirit and he names them, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control at the end of Galatians. I see people with the Trinitarian spirituality in our history they almost always became mystics. In fact, they were the only ones who spoke like Julian of Norwich, completely Trinitarian, just assume that god is this flow of infinite love, but the mainline Christianity, the store —the street corner church in most of our cities, they meant well, I'm not saying God didn’t love them, God loves everybody and infinitely, but they weren't able to enjoy that love very much, because it was all based on weighing and measuring and calculating and earning and at that game, everybody loses. I call a carrot on the stick theology and we clergy not realizing that this is what been given to us to the we love all that carrot on the stick out in front of you, if you're just a little more moral, you will achieve union with god not knowing that you were created in the Imago Dei, you are already objectively, ontologically, metaphysically, really already one with god and all you can do is make that image into likeness. Now that was the next verse, Genesis 1:27, we are created in the image and likeness and the fathers of the medieval centuries wrote tombs on this, what is image and what is likeness. Image was the objective identity that absolutely levels the playing field in this room. Every one of you equally carries and exemplifies the image of god, but to protect what we see visibly, well, some people don't look very much like God, rather hateful and grandpa was still cursing on his deathbed, he didn’t look like God too much, that was likeness. So you have the objective truth that levels the playing field. Racism is over, sexism is over, homophobia is over, classism is over, all of it means nothing. You were supposed to be a social revolution of the gospel, but we got to be honest about it that not all of us appropriate, access, awaken use —the word you prefer your inner image, but you have it, so it is an inside out job, got it. You don’t need to get it out there by some outer form or outer symbol. They help, they do help. I don’t want to be against the sacramental universe, quite the contrary, but we've got to recognize that the primary hope is what Paul calls an implanted hope. It’s planted in you and that why I gave you this afternoon that the image of the spinning whirling top, an inner generator that has been planted inside every created thing that mirrors the image of god, and when you learn to access that, when you learn to trust that, awaken that, allow that, let it fan into flame as one of the epistle says, then you'll know your dignity is inherent, and this it seems to me is what human nature so desperately needs now, a sense of its inherent dignity. The low self-esteem that so many of our
young people suffer from, people who have been put into any kind of minority group or rejected group or excluded group, I mean the one universal and you therapists all know this, is they all hate themselves, because they have no inherent dignity, they have no trust of this flowing life that is already within them that has identified them at their very core. So, maybe we will just forget about 10 minutes if both of you would like to say something more, yeah, add on to that or…

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Well, I have a dinner engagement at eight, so you know.

**Richard Rohr:** Well, we will let you out there, we will let you out there.

**William Young:** So, I will be quick then so you can get to your dinner engagement. On wholeness, holiness, wholeness, W-H-O-L-E-N-E-S-S, wholeness, wholeness is when the way of your being matches the truth of your being. Wholeness is when the way of your being matches the truth of your being, so the question is what is the truth of your being? And if you begin with total depravity, I am just a piece of crap, I am worthless, you have no way especially within religion to cover it up well enough that you have any sense of assurance or cohesiveness in your life. It’s not the truth. The truth is Jesus or the fruit of the spirit or the revelation of the father. The truth is you are a very good creation before anything got broken. If we start to understand the truth of our being, the way of our being will naturally match it, but if we believe the truth of our being is worthlessness, all you have is cover up, all you have is cover up.

**Richard Rohr:** That’s right, that’s right.

**William Young:** And it is a no-win situation, you are just going to put as much energy into covering up what you really think about yourself, what you really conceive of yourself as the truth of your being. This is about us beginning to realize that the declaration of God is you are not only a good creation and a very good creation, but a new creation in Christ and guess what, by nature you are kind and good and patient and long-suffering and pure of heart, that is the truth of your being. May the Holy Spirit teach us to learn how to agree with the truth of our being so that the way of our being can match it. That is the journey that we are in. You want to know the truth of your being, everything that the Holy Spirit says about the fruit of the spirit, that's the image in likeness, that's the image, the likeness it takes billions of us to get composite sense of who God is like. One last thing, I want to flip Rublev’s icon a little bit and just to give you a sense of how this works. Instead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I want to put a man and woman and a baby, a man and a woman and a baby, because we're talking about a god who submits by nature which is really different from our bipolar thinking or our monad thinking, right, a God who submits by nature. When Jesus kneels down to wash, it is not just because it's a good teaching opportunity, it is because this is the very nature of god. Everything throughout history tells us that this is a god who submits by nature, and where more profound than when two human beings through whatever motivation or intention join together and create an eternal being together. Even now you go on YouTube and they have got it slowed down enough that the point conception, there is a flash of light that they haven't figured out what it is, so guess who the fourth in that picture is? It's God because God looks and sees in himself this beautiful picture of creation of eternal beings in a world where God is submitted, right. The communication is look to your own lives and see the likeness and image and drive that back into the nature of god. Just don't look at God to try to figure out what the image and likeness is. Look at the deepest things that are true about you, the way you love your child, the way you love your niece, or nephew, or your grandchild. This unrelenting affection that would step in front of any bullet, right, this mystery of relentless affection, let the things that are true and right and good and beautiful drive your understanding of the very character and nature of god. If you've got a guy who's not a good as parent
as you are, your image of god is false to that degree, right. That's the kind of shift that we are trying
to explore and talk about it in all of this.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Session 3: Wm Paul Young

Wm Paul Young:

“But I know you better now and I don’t fall for all your tricks,
And you’ve lost the one advantage of my youth.

“You kill a black man at midnight just for talking to your daughter,
Then you make his wife your mistress and you leave her without water;
And the sheet you wear upon your face is the sheet your children sleep on,
At every meal you say a prayer; you don't believe, but still you keep on.”

Larry Norman was invited to the White House, and they told him just don't sing anything political
and that's the song he is singing. God doesn’t heal us because he wants to use us. He heals us because
he loves us, and then he invites us to play as we are going to do. We are going to play. I am so
thrilled to be here with you I can't even begin to tell you. Ten years ago, I was shipping out soldering
tips and cleaning toilets and working as a hotel night clerk and doing food processing and web
conferencing on the side, whatever it took. Kim got a job at the high school bakery two and a half
blocks away that I could walk to the train. I wrote a little story for my kids, made the 15 copies at
Office Depot. Wrote it in part because there was nothing else to give him that year. We had a
really—we had a difficult year the year before this, lost pretty much everything material. It was part
of the healing process. Nothing like dealing with the fear of financial insecurity like losing
everything. That’s when we learned that the opposite of more was enough. The opposite of more is
enough, and we always had enough. Couple of scattered thoughts to begin with.

I have a friend, Brad Jersak. He is a theologian out of British Columbia, and Brad is a patristic
theologian, but he works deeply with some of the broken parts of our humanity, particularly with
women who have been trafficked, and he wrote a piece, because you know my family, that's my
Christian heritage family, modern evangelical fundamentalists—you know, they are the ones who
won't read The Shack and don’t like it. Did I tell you about my first protesters? Oh, my! It was in
Orlando, and it was like 100 degrees out and I got to the venue and there were about this many
people coming to hear me talk and there were protesters with the pickets and the big banners and the
bullhorns and all that, and I thought it was an anti-abortion rally, and I said what if—but I wasn't sure
so I said, what are they here for? For you. I have got protesters like how cool is that? They know I
was cleaning toilets, right? Now, I got protesters. And it was really hot and I felt a little bit, you
know, responsible. So there were these cases of water inside the venue, so I asked if I could have
one? We took two of them, a friend of mine, Mike Fernandez, and I—we took them and started
handing bottles of water to the guys who were protesting, and about 3 or 4 minutes into it, one of
them turns to me and he says, do you work here? I said no. He said, then why are you handing us
water. I said I wrote the book you are mad about. What? So, they all gather around and for like 50
minutes we talk. The first question was why did you make God a fat black woman? I mean that's
exactly the first question, right. Well, I come to find out that none of the protesters had actually read
the book. I am thinking, you are so my people. I said, you guys, you can now put the picket stuff
down, you can come in. Oh, no, no, we can't do that. Okay, just know that the door is open. So as I
am walking, they are back in the bullhorns, this violates the principles of God, this is, you know, and the whole thing, and I am going like, oh, my people.

And, it's true because I understand my people. That's where I come from, and we are so afraid of trust that we are attracted to religion. We are scared, right? We want certainty, and we have learned to climb inside our heads to find it. That's why doctrine and theology matters a whole lot more than relationship. So, I want to frame this inside just a very simple picture. I tell people—in fact I just told Richard, the smallest group I have ever been in is four. You will figure it out.

So, in the beginning was the word—now this is John. Now John is old guy at this point and the community of faith have been asking John to write his perspective of the life of Jesus. He is an old guy, and I mean, they have been after him. Wise guy, we have got three versions already, you know, and they said, no we really want you to—and by this point, the communities of faith have started to gather together, things are going sideways in a lot of places. Paul has been out there not causing any waves at all, but you get the sense. And, you got to read sort of what's going on in the community of faith inside of the words of Paul. So you get this little phrase for example where Paul is writing to Timothy and Titus, and it's very pastoral, right? Because they are actually working with people of faith and you can see the nuance in this when he says—in Titus—he says this is a statement that is true and worthy of full acceptance that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind, especially believers. That's kind of like Timothy Titus, you have just got to remember that believers are also safe. You just, you know. So, John, he says all right. So he gathered everybody and they prayed—this is what traditions say, they prayed and fasted for 3 days and he sat down and wrote the prologue. John is the last we think, the last part of the New Testament. So we have got Genesis and John, and John I believe is actually a commentary on Genesis. It begins the same way—in the beginning, right?

So in the beginning, Elohim, but in the beginning was the word and the word was with God, but the Greek word, “pros,” doesn't mean with, like side by side, right? It means with, turned toward—turned toward. The Father and the Son turned toward. When the son looks into the gaze face to face with the Father, what do you not see? You don't see flinching, you don't see anxiety, you don't see any sense of abandonment, right, face to face. Now, when Richard writes some of his beautiful little daily thoughts, some of my people get a little nervous, and I am grateful for Cynthia for her going like, pantheism, you know, I love that. I thought that was super brilliant. Because when Richard starts talking about the cosmic Christ, it's a big deal. I want to suggest to you and he can correct me later because I haven't had this conversation—by the way, we didn’t script any of this time. Last night wasn't scripted. Here's what the script was, I think we should wing it. That was me, then Richard, I am good with winging it, and Cynthia, well, I think I am going to ask him one question about being a Protestant, that was our script. So we haven't had any conversation about how this mills. This is about trust. Trust in the Holy Spirit, not only in ourselves but in the other and in you as the gathered community, right?

When this begins with this circle of relationship, this is the beautiful thing that John does. John, he has got three other versions of the life of Jesus, but he doesn't go back to Moses, he doesn't go back to Adam even. John the Baptist is a mark, but he doesn't go back to Adam, he goes back before and he sets the framework for the entire cosmos. In the beginning was this relationship. Guess what? This is all there is, but it is everything. Guess what? We are going to be told right away that not anything that has come into being has come into being apart from him, Jesus, the cosmic Christ. And, here is where the Protestants get a little bit nervous and this is where I think I am going to have—Richard can validate or affirm or say, no, you didn’t quite get that right. I think what he is saying is that the logos is the cosmic Christ, that the logos who becomes flesh Jesus is the cosmic Christ. That there is no like two—it's not like even the logos is bipolar here, right? But the problem with the Protestants
is, and I think religion in general, is that we didn’t begin with the unity of relationship, we began with separation, and every religion on the planet has some sense of separation. There is no separation here. And, in fact, when it states that creation is created in him and not anything that has come into being has come into being apart from him, and then you read Ephesians 1, then you read Colossians 1, and they are all saying the same thing. Karl Barth, the theologian says, if you are not in Christ, you will lapse into non-being, because anything that is, is in him. So if you have a question about whether any other person you meet on the planet is in Christ, let me settle it, they are in Christ, right? That's just the truth about creation, and guess what, in the finished work of Jesus where the cosmic Christ, and this is the problem I think that Richard is trying to address, is that we as religious people end up with a very small Jesus. We think of him as a response to Adam's big problem. In fact, Adam ends up in Protestant circles as being way more powerful than Jesus ever thought of being, right? But what we did was in denying this, we created this, the one God alone, which kind of makes sense, because here we are—if you remember Genesis, it starts with very good—I mean good, good, good, very good, very good, so here's a question for you, does anything that is not good originate in God? No. Does anything that is not good originate in God? No. Where does it originate? In us. The first not good, and in the Hebrew, Adam perceived that he was in a separation. It is a different phrase structure that is used in Hebrew for like I am alone, like I am solitary. That's not it. This is something way more profound than this. If you start following this theme throughout the Book of John about aloneness, you will see that Jesus is constantly going after it, because aloneness is the first not good. Why? Because it's a lie. This is a God who has never been alone, that one is, and if we build a theology on that God, all of a sudden, every word we use means something different. Holiness, while holiness in here is the antiseptic purity of God, some high level of perfection, and you are not separation, right? But guess what? This God was holy before there was any sin, right? So holiness fundamentally has nothing to do with sin. Everything about the language we use has to be rooted in this relationship or we end up swinging over to this solitary being. The truth is that creation is created very good and created in Christ, not anything that has come into being has come into being apart from him. Everything is held and sustained in him. This is the mystery of John 13 through 17 that boggles the mind that were included, and he comes into our humanity, the Cosmic Christ, and submits to the Father and the Spirit. Born of the Spirit and conceived by the Spirit, right, apart from the will or the flesh of the male, and he comes into this world, a world that is full of darkness as the light, with a connection, with a relationship with the Father and the Spirit. You know that Jesus when he was 12 years old, we don’t have any record ever in Jewish history of where any Jewish person referred to God as my Father prior to Jesus as a 12-year-old. It would not have been taught in the schools, it would not have been taught in the culture. When he says I have to be about my Abba's business, my Abba's work, first time he was already incredibly aware of his family of origin. What is your family of origin? Let me tell you, it's the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's your family of origin. We get caught halfway in the story line, right, inside of the darkness, but the thing that Adam, even in the Christ, he turns his face away from a relationship and declares that he is alone. This is even before she is brought out. This is why through one man sin enters the world. He is not alone. He is surrounded by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So a lot of what we say is going to be the conflict between understanding this relationship versus this God that we have created. This is the God I grew up with, distant, unapproachable, unknowable, unreachable, watching from the infinite distance of a disapproving heart God, and everything changes because this is all about performance. You have got to win your way into the—you have got to keep, you know, that love trip—we use the word mercy in the chant. The word mercy comes from the same root in the Hebrew as the word womb. Every time you use the word mercy, you are talking about the womb love of God. The word in Hebrew actually means gated or hidden waters. That is right here. This is the womb love of God. Here mercy is—well, I am having a good hair day, so yeah, I will give you some, but it's not because I really want to or who knows why, it's just I am sort of ambivalent and so I will give you a little, right? And, we relate this way about everything. We will overhear you will actually pray for patience. You know
nobody in the New Testament prays for patience. Well, we know why, because of that mean God, you know what that God is going to do to you if you pray for patience? He is going to put you in a really difficult situation and force you to learn it.

Do you understand how powerful this imagination is? Why does nobody pray for patience in the New Testament? Because they know that it is who they are by nature. They are made in the image of God, and guess what, God is patient, fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is not a set of bowls in heaven that contain different commodities. It's a description of God. Therefore, it's a description of who you are in your very good creation. It is the truth about who you are, and they knew it, so they didn’t have to pray for it. When you act impatiently, you are going contrary to your nature, the truth of who you are. Let me suggest that that psychology and meditation and all these practices, rituals, everything, is not to create something that wasn't there, it's to uncover the truth of what was there the entire time. This whole thing, this relationship versus this, this, we got caught into this, and everything became about cover-up. You know when God comes and says, who told you, you were naked, because he was naked and ashamed, who told you that you were naked? Most of us don't realize that is a rhetorical question because there is nobody else, right? It's kind of like Isaiah. Remember that Isaiah, God is high and lifted up, and he goes into this temple and is filled with all this stuff, and God says, who will go, and Isaiah is the only one there. What's he going to do? God says, who told you that you were naked? The answer is I did. You are designed to be naked and unashamed. You are designed to live uncovered, right? This is why secrets are so destructive. This is why hiding is so contrary to light. We cover ourselves with our own darkness. So what does God do? This God goes, oh, can't stand darkness, I am out of here, right? So we are going like where did you go, right? You have got to be around here somewhere. So maybe I just need to pray enough, and we turn this relationship into magic. I need to do enough of the right stuff to trip God's love wire, because this God doesn’t love by nature because he was alone. So you have got to do something to cross the separation, and we have this mythology in the Protestant side very strong. It's as if God took creation and blew it out like a soap bubble. You know when you blow that soap bubble and it then disconnects from the wand, right? And now creation is floating out there in what? Well, can't be space because space is created, so don't know, but it's just out there, and God is over here. And then, they really mess themselves up so God sends Jesus over to the soap bubble to build a bridge back to God. Sounds familiar? It starts with separation. This has no separation. When it gives you a list of the things that cannot separate you from the love of God, what's in that list? Anything present, anything future, not death—that will mess with you, not life, nor any created thing can separate you from the love God. There is no separation here.

That is all about separation and as soon as you believe in separation, all of a sudden you are at the risk of anybody who will tell you how to get unseparated. All you need is somebody with an expertise in how to get unseparated. You need to do this, this, this or you need to have enough faith. I remember when Kim's mom passed away, and at that point I was still a very dissociative person, that is I could compartmentalize anything to do with my humanity and function totally out of my head, and which is very helpful in certain crisis situations. You are the one that is the go-to person. So, Kim's family is healthy. They are like crying and grieving and in the process, and it took her a few days. Well, Kim and I—the doctor wants to talk to us so we go in and the doctor says, Kim, your family has to make a decision because your mom is on life-support and with no brain activity whatsoever, and it is the machine that is keeping her body alive, so you need to make a decision. So with that burden, we walked back into the family. Kim has got a huge family. She has five sisters and two brothers. Her and her five sisters are called The Force. Kim was born in Minot, North Dakota, and there are no 50 shades and nothing. So we go back in there and one of Kim's sisters at that time had a boyfriend who was in the face of the family, some of them who were not even connected as followers of Jesus in any kind of overt sense, and he is saying to them, you
know if you had enough faith, your mom wouldn’t be in there dying. So I said to him, I have a question for you, is this like a majority thing, like if, you know, 50% of us have enough faith or 51% of us, would she be okay? He goes, yeah. I said, well, let me ask you another question, what if one person has enough faith, will that be enough? Now, it's just one, if one person here has enough faith, will she live? He said, yeah, I said good, you are it. If she dies, it's your fault. Magic, right? It's magic, and what happens when religion believes in separation and not relationship, you end up trying to twist the arm of God through magic, behavioral magic—if I pray enough, if I do something enough. It's not about the mystery of trust and relationship, it's about the fact that I have got to do the right rituals and the right things. I have a bat, blood of a newt, plus abracadabra gets love potion #9, right? That's that God, that omni-being, and worse. When Jesus goes, it's like this is the God that has the scales of judgment and needs to be appeased and is retributive.

Let me tell you how this works or let me begin with something really basic, which is so basic it will blow your mind. This God has never been a religious being. Yeah, true. Think about it. There has never been like—so who's doing the service this weekend, right. Where are we meeting anyway? I mean there is no ritual to this community, right? This is a relationship. This is like when the king of the planet is telling all of his emissaries what to do and in runs his daughter who doesn't care about position and title and cares about him, right? There is no religion at that point unless that person is so broken, and some of us, I am sorry, some of us are. I had a conversation with two of my family, not my immediate family, my religious family, and they were asking me about universalism and inerrancy, which I get asked about quite a bit, they said—so we were talking and I said, you know what, a lot of my ideas about God changed when I became a father, maybe when you become—because they were young guys, you know, and I said, maybe when you become a father, it will have an impact on how you view God as a parent. And, one of the guys says, well, I have two sons. I thought great, I walked into that one. I said, well, let me ask you a question. What if God has elected your two sons to be an expression of his retributive justice forever? How are you going to feel about that? He looks at me and he says, not only would I be ecstatic about it, I would have to be. And, you wonder why religion can do so much damage. There were two follow-up questions that I could have asked him at that point. One, how long have you been struggling with pornography because when you separate your head from your heart by that distance, something has to fit into that gap. And, pornography is the imagination of a relationship without the risk of a real one. It's like bad theology. So the other question would have been, tell me about your dad, because something got broken here so that you can be so disconnected. The beauty of this, that this is a relationship, always is, always will be, and you are always in it. Creation was created in Christ and when Jesus comes, this view is that God has got to pour out his wrath on his son in order for what? For some scales of justice to be met, right? So this God turns his face away. This is the way this God is. Let me tell you, if that God can do that one time, you can never trust that God. In here, there is no abandonment, there is no forsaking.

People say, well, Jesus cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's Psalm 22, that's a hit Psalm. David wrote a hit Plasm. Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the cross, Psalm 23 the Psalm of the grave, Psalm 24, the Psalm of the resurrection. Psalm 22 starts exactly like that. What's going on? What's going on is that we have a God who submits by nature, a God who has never been religious, and this God—or let me even back up a bit and start from that direction and come to the same question. I told you this God has never been religious. Do you know what that means? That means that every element of religion has been brought to the table by us, every bit of it. Everything about religion that is contrary to relationship, we have brought as part of our darkness to the table. And history, if you open up—if you look through those lenses, like if you look at the Old Testament or the Hebrew Scriptures, you will see that this is a God who's going to climb into the darkness of our religion and speak its language in order to destroy it from the inside out through love. I will give you
a really good example that will bring us back the same spot. When I was growing up as a missionary kid, we had this great story line about Abraham and Isaac, and it was like—the message was basically that if you wanted to do the work of God and be involved in the kingdom of God, you need to be willing to sacrifice your children on the altar of God's purposes. That's how we told the story, that either Abraham didn't know himself if God was a priority so God was going to test him to prove to him that he needed to be first, that God needed to be first, or God didn’t really know and he was testing Abraham to find out. Either way, the whole thing was sort of a test to prove to Abraham that God needed to be first in Abraham's life. So what is he going to do? He is going to run up right up against this unbelievable love that he has for his own child, and he is going to create a conflict inside that in order for Abraham to establish a priority that God matters more than his child. Is there something about that that sucks, right? So what really is going on? Do you remember where Abraham is from? Ur—do you know anything about Ur? Do you know how many seminaries are in Ur, how many monasteries, right? Do you know how many churches in Ur? Like zero. There is a big temple there, but it's to Nanna and Ningal, the Moon God and Goddess, right? Now, on a scale of spirituality, we started from A to Z, where would you put Abraham? I am talking about, you know, some were not yet, like full-blown, we got it. I mean Abraham has got to be to be like with—he has got to be an A, because that's where the Hebrew scriptures are starting, like we are going to take a guy, he has got to be an A. Well, not just an A, I think he has got a foot in B because he hears voices, and nobody around him hears voices, not like this voice, right? So he's looking around wondering why, how come nobody else is hearing these voices. But he has got a foot in B, so he's in A with a foot in B. Now where does God come to talk to you? Now, God is a good communicator. A lot of us don't believe that because we think that He needs to talk to us in a language we don't understand, because that's how he talks to those people, right? So we are always trying to incorporate somebody else's experience to validate our sense of separation. This is a God who is a good communicator, so good that you take for granted the communication of God because you think it's just who you are. It's so natural to you, because he knows your language. He knows how to speak your language, he speaks Paul, but I thought I needed to have some kind of this experience like those people did in order for God to do so I could hear. I didn’t realize that he is so good at communicating that he knows how to speak inside my world with ways that I get. I just discount him because I am so full of shame anyway that I can't possibly hear anything from God. But if God is going to come talk to Abraham, he is not going to come in Q or R or Z or Z if you are Canadian, and be going like, Abraham, get over here, right? No, because Abraham has got a foot in B, and by the time he puts both feet in B, guess what? He thinks everybody in A is an idiot. And he thinks everybody in C is nuts, bunch of new age pantheists. We are going to build our church here. This is where God led me. He got me out of A, thank God. It's kind of like Queen Elizabeth going like I have no idea what I am doing here, but I am still glad for hoop dresses so I don’t have to look like a dork, right. Malcolm X is going where is all the other black people in this room. Origin is going, oh, so glad they don't have Facebook yet.

You know, you see the look on their faces, looks like a bunch of white guys trying to dance. So anyway, we are going to build a church in B because to be or not to be, that's the question at this point—C people, uh ah, A people idiots. So you know that's where Abraham is, so what does God do? Guess what? God's going to come, speak Abraham's language. When you go into a different culture, you don't go in speaking your language thinking like what's wrong with these people, you speak their language. So guess what language Abraham knows? In fact, if you go to any religion on the planet at the time of Abraham, doesn't matter whether you go to South America, doesn’t matter whether you go to the Middle East, to Africa, every religion on the planet is about sacrifice and appeasement and magic. So God's is going to climb into Abraham's world and speak sacrifice, appeasement, and magic because that's the language Abraham knows. So what's one the first things that he tells Abraham, sacrifice your son. See we have a little bit of an advantage because we can step outside of this process for Abraham and we can stand on the other side of Jesus, and we can
look right back through Jesus and through the prophets, and we can go like, okay, we got the bigger picture here, and guess what, God hates sacrifice, hates it—listen to the prophets, you think I want sacrifice, the blood of bulls, they can't change anything, right? I hate sacrifice. Daniel is going like, hey, there is one coming who will put an end to sacrifice. So we know right from—from our side in the perspective is that no matter what we think is going on back there, we know something about God, he hates sacrifice. Yeah, but he set up a whole system. Well, he did it because they wanted it. He let them have a king too and a whole bunch of other things. At Mount Sinai, God invited everybody up to have a big party, read it, and they said no, and they stuck Moses out there and created a priesthood. God says, you don’t want relationship, you want law, oh boy, I got a few for you.

So he comes and he speaks Abraham's language. Hasn’t it bothered you that when God says, kill your son, he goes, okay, like what kind of a human being are you. I hope if God comes to you and says, kill your son, you are going to go like hell no, go figure somebody else to do it. Because this is wrong, but Abraham doesn't know that, his whole world is about sacrifice, and guess what the highest order sacrifice is—a child, a flawless child. We have a granddaughter who was adopted from Uganda, and it took 8 weeks for our son and daughter-in-law to get her out. After we had done all, we had to work our way through the bribery system and all that. She was a disposable child and that's a whole different story—but while Andrew was in Uganda in Jinja, six little boys went missing within a I think 2-mile radius and two of them showed up a few weeks later dehydrated and very sick. You can for $80 US, you can buy a child in parts of the world who will be sacrificed to the local spirits and then part of their body put into the corner pieces of businesses and startups in order to bless them. For $80 US, you can still sacrifice a child. Now, we wouldn't do that. I mean we are way more sophisticated than that. We will just create hymns and a whole system of military so that we can sacrifice their children and justify it. Military systems are sacrificial systems, rights? So are economic systems, right? We are surrounded by sacrificial systems. We have just civilized them to the point that we can find a way to justify them. The reason those two boys were let go was they were both circumcised so they weren't perfect enough to be sacrificed. Abraham's world is full of sacrifice. This is why he doesn't object, and he goes along with it. From the best we can understand, his son is about 30 years old at the time. We always think he is like a 12-year-old, you know, but at the same time, as soon as this story ends, it announces the birth of who will become his wife, and if you look at the timetable, the son's has got to be about 30, which means that he has to be willing, because he is going to take his dad out, but he has got to be willing to climb on to the system. That's the power of religion that you are willing to give your own life to it, and for 3 days, his son lies dead in his heart. And, Hebrew says, in reference to this passage, that by faith, Abraham did this because he thought one of two things was going to happen, either God was going to give him a new boy or resurrect the one that he killed. Abraham gets there, sacrifices on the altar, raises up a knife about to come down, and God says, stop. Consistently, when God tries to move you from B to C, there is a revelation of the character and nature of God by which it changes everything you think about yourself and the world, and a lot of times it happens in the Hebrew scriptures by God saying, let me tell you something new about me that you did not know, and here is one of them. This is the first time this word is used in the Hebrew scriptures, and at this point, it says, and Abraham discovered that God was Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides, and this is what God says, Abraham, if you need a sacrifice, I will provide myself, but let's get this straight right from the beginning, I do not require the sacrifice of children. That's what that story is about. This is a God who hates sacrifice but is going to climb into our religious inclinations and perspectives and assumptions and begin to dismantle it from the inside out. When Jesus is sacrificed, it's not to appease this God. It is not sinners in the hands of an angry God; it's God in the hands of angry sinners. We turned our face, we despised him, we esteemed him stricken by God and afflicted, and it wasn't the truth.
Even our translations struggle with these passages, and he laid upon him the afflictions of us all—that is not what it says in Hebrew. The word is pagah, which means to encounter. It was in Jesus that the Father and the Spirit were able to encounter our darkness in a way to destroy it. So what we have here is a God who climbs in, so when Jesus was on the cross and when he was going toward the cross and he begins to sweat blood, it is not because he is terrified by the torture device. Let's talk about that a second, who originated the cross? Who originated it? Was it God? Because that's a torture device, right? It has no other purpose than to keep a human being in as much pain as possible as long as possible and then forcibly extract their spirit, their breath from them. That's the point of a cross. But going into creation, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit know. You know what this means to, this means this is the best creation. It also means that there was no way to create this high order of being, human beings, who would not say no. So Jesus is slain from the foundation of the world. On what? On our cross. We brought the cross to the table. It originates in our darkness. It is the iconic symbol of a torture device where we put our fist in the face of life himself and said, damn you, that's called iniquity, and that damn you is there from Adam. Job says, don't be like Adam who covered up the iniquity that was in his heart. Yes, Adam and Eve both transgressed, she through violating betrayal, he through choice. She was thoroughly deceived. Both references in the New Testament. Adam was never deceived. He walked in to this with his eyes wide shut. Don’t be like Adam who hid the iniquity in his heart, who covered up the iniquity.

So here we go, torture device. How does God destroy this iconic symbol of our devastation? He submits to it. The incarnation is submission. This is a God who submits by nature. Because why, the Father and Son and Holy Spirit have been submitting one to another forever. This is the way they are. It's not something they do, neither is love something they do. It is the way they are. It is their ontology. They cannot act apart from love; they can't do it. We are so broken that we know how. That's the darkness that we have brought. When you turn—because this is light, right? The only way for darkness to show up is for us to turn away from face to face relationship, and it casts a shadow, and then we define that shadow as reality. And, then we build a reality from within that shadow that defines everything and everyone. The call of the gospel has always been return. And, the gospel is not that you can receive Jesus into your life. The gospel has always been that Jesus has received you into his life, into his anointing in the Holy Spirit, into his relationship with the Father. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why? Guess what? Whose cry is that in Psalm 22, verse 1, whose cry? It's mine, because in my darkness, I couldn't hear, I couldn’t sense the presence of God for years. Even though there was a longing toward God, I couldn't, and when Jesus cries my cry on the cross, it's the most precious cry that he ever makes, and he is not playing. The wonder is that the cosmic Christ has become anthropos, human, but more than that, sarks, which is flesh, and then Paul says becomes sin, becomes the very darkness that cover-up, and Jesus knows going in to this weekend that he will no longer sense the affection and the love of his Father, something that he has always known from pre-incarnation forever, but he has got to go to where we are and we are lost in our darkness, and we can't sense the love and the affection and the kindness in the words and the grace of God.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? First line. You know how that Psalm ends, and he finished it. Psalm 22, and he finished it. Do you know what it says halfway through, for He, God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted—listen carefully, nor will He turn His face from Him, and when He cries, He hears. See Jesus knows the whole Psalm, not just verse 1, and even though He can't sense the presence of the Father and the Spirit, even though he can't feel the embrace because he is lost in our darkness, he knows not intellectually but relationally the truth about his Father, and he knows, they don't do abandonment, they don't do forsaking, and therefore into your hands I will give you my breath. This thing is not going to take my spirit from me; I am going to give it to you. He would have never cried that out unless he believed the Father was fully present in the embrace of
the spirit. Some of the oldest icons we have on the planet show the Spirit and the Father nailed to the cross behind Jesus. Paul, the apostle says, you want to know where God, the father, was? Let me tell you, for God, Papa, for God the father was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting their sins against them. There is no abandonment here. Everything has got to start inside the circle. This also destroys the secular spiritual divide because all of creation is created inside this and you can't get out of it. You know, whatever you think hell is, it's either a created thing or a non-created thing. If it's non-created, it's God. Something about hell—it if it's non-created, that's when you face the love of God that all your crap starts to show up. If it's created, it can't separate you from the love of God, and everybody gets assaulted with fire and fire has always been restorative in its intention, always. There is one word in the Greek for retributive, punitive anger, and it's never used of God, it's only used of the way human beings relate to each other. All the other ones, the Chelesis family, the Croesus family, they are all about the potential for transformation and restoration, and every parent, grandparent knows this kind of love, the fiery fury that is opposed to anything that hurts the one that they care for. That originates not in us; it originates in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So how much time do I have? 12 minutes, okay. All right, which direction we want to go here. Okay, so a lot of that—this becomes the backdrop to a lot of the conversation that we are going to have today and tomorrow is because this is what a lot of us grow up with, and we are saying this does not exist, this is a figment of our imagination, there is a darkness, right? We are going to talk about the light, the truth of who you are, because this is your family of origin. This defines who you are as a human being and the work of the Holy Spirit is to teach you how to agree with the truth of this and disagree with the lie. It's an ongoing thing. I wish there was an extreme soul makeover, right? Send me to Disney World and fix me by the time I get back. Give me a red pill or a blue pill. Is this process tough? I hate it, right? Because it—because part of the reason I hate it is it brings up all my stuff to the surface, and I have to deal with it and I am already so ashamed that I have hidden it all. This is the beauty of exposure; this is the gift of exposure. The gift of exposure opens up the possibility of wholeness, but as long as it is covered up, as long as you keep your secrets, as long as you stay in isolation, hiddenness, to that degree, you are not whole.

Let me give you one of the implications of this relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the fact that we are in this and always will be, always will be, whether we know it or not. Love is unconditional, relationship is conditional by necessity. We have six beautiful children. If one of them says, I don’t want to be your child anymore, it doesn't change their ontology, and it doesn't change whether I love them or not. That love is unconditional, but it does impact the relationship because relationship is respectful to the other, and if there is no-no that matters, no-yes matters either. In order for your yes to matter, your no has to matter. This is a God who has a high view of humanity and will relate to you in a way that is respectful. To put it another way, God will not heal you apart from your participation. There is a work of what has been accomplished in Jesus that you have to participate in, in order to get this stuff to the surface and healed. God will not heal you apart from your participation. We know this in terms of our relationship with our children. The point is not to keep them in an infantile state, but as they grow, they move into face to face relationship in which the other has their own mind, their own heart, their own thoughts, and our reflection of you in the unique way that you could not have imagined. All of us together are this unique reflection of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

My friend, Baxter Kruger, who is a theologian, ran into Athanasius in his senior year at the library at Ole Miss. There is a library at Ole Miss, but it's a pub. Baxter's father would say how come I am getting bills from the library, why don’t you just take your books back on time. Well, Baxter runs into Athanasius on the incarnation of the Word of God in the Ole Miss library. He is the only one who has ever taken it out and it takes him on a journey into Aberdeen, Scotland, and you may not
know this, but the Celtic Trinitarian tradition goes right back to the Eastern fathers and mothers. It's embedded in it, and he studies with the Torrance brothers, two of the most beautiful Trinitarian theologians on the planet. Baxter, a Southern Mississippi reformed Protestant, ends up a Trinitarian theologian. One day he is flying from Atlanta to Seattle and he has never been to the West Coast at this point, and he wants to see the Rocky Mountains because he has never seen them. So he gets a seat at the back of the plane on the window, and it's kind of an odd flight because there were a lot of empty seats, which was not normal anymore, and more strange, the jet pulls out of the jet bridge, stops, and gets pulled back into the jet bridge to let one more person on. That never happens, right? I am sorry. You are not even there 10 minutes before they shut—if they shut the door, I am sorry, even if they are going to sit there for 20 minutes. So Baxter is kind of curious and he looks down the aisle, and here comes Indiana Jones, right? I mean this guy looks just like him. He's got a hat, he's got a satchel, he's got high boots. He looks like he has five days' stubble on his face, tall, handsome guy. He doesn't have a whip because they wouldn’t allow it through TSA I am sure, but he is—and Baxter is thinking like, I know where he is going to sit, and sure enough, he passes all these empty seats and sits next to Baxter. Now Baxter is a good old Southern Mississippi boy, and Baxter says, so how is your mom and them, and they start a conversation. How is your mom and them, that's a Southern thing. It's like bless your heart, which in the Pacific Northwest, we call the Southern curse, because you are allowed to say anything as long as you add it. He is such an idiot, bless his heart. So Baxter is—they introduce each other by name, and then Baxter says, so what do you do, because Baxter is curious, and the guy says, I am a systematic microevolutionary botanist. Baxter says, what the hell is a systematic microevolutionary botanist, and the guy says, well, I study plants and in fact I just got back from Central America where I had been going through the jungle for the last week looking for plants. Baxter says, really, tell me more about that. So the guy takes out a piece of paper and he starts to write out the names, the scientific names of these plants, and draw pictures of them. Now, Baxter says to me later, he says, usually the only time I have ever cared about plants is if there was a bass hiding behind one, but he says, I am kind of intrigued by this, and the guy is saying, okay, so these are the plants that are on the verge of extinction, these are the plants that we know that they are out there, so that's the ones I am looking for because we want to—they have got these incredible properties to them and we want to find their seeds so that we can save them for generations, you know, that whole thing. And for an hour and a half, they talk plants, and Baxter is absolutely caught up into this man's passion. Finally, the guy says, Baxter, I am so sorry, I have been talking about myself the whole time, I mean what do you do? Baxter says, well, I am a theologian. The guy goes, I suppose you want to talk to me about evolution. Baxter says, I don’t really care a lot about evolution, just tell me some more about plants, and off again. About half an hour later, Baxter says, okay, I do have a question for you, where did your passion come from for plants. I mean is Aunt Sallie Mae a botanist or your parents, are they scientists, or like where did your passion come from? The man says, you know, I don't know, nobody has ever asked me that, I have never thought about it. Baxter says, absolutely. Where? Baxter takes out a piece of paper and draws this. He says this is the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and all creation is created inside this affection and relentless affection, and guess what, when you are out there looking for those plants, you are caring for God's creation, you are doing the work of God. He says, how come nobody has ever told me. Baxter says, well, I just did.

Inside this circle of relationship, all of our humanity matters. God does not become something that is not good and God becomes fully human. We need to change our view of who God is and God climbs on to our torture device and not only destroys its power but transforms it into an icon and a monument of grace so precious to us that we wear it on our rings and in our jewelry, a torture device, but it doesn't mean that anymore because God has climbed into it. You know what that means? There is no darkness that you can bring to the table, no sorrow, no tragedy, no loss, no addiction so deep.
that God won't climb into it with you, and with your participation, transform it into an icon and a monument of grace to the praise of his glory. Amen.

Session 4: Richard Rohr

Richard Rohr: I won't be nearly as entertaining as Paul was, or nearly as intelligent as Cynthia will be as you know I just walk around it and try to say it in different ways. I'm sort of like a circular Trinity in that sense. I eventually get to the point, but I hope somewhere in there you'll hear what God wants to say to you, what word, and usually it’s only one word we need that opens the heart space. Some of the staffs have been saying not without truth that Cynthia is the head and Paul is the heart and I am the gut, so if you know the three parts of the Enneagram, so I am all gut. So, forgive my gut, I will just dive in. In fact, this book I am writing on the Cosmic Christ in the next month, my editor told me or previous editor said, you know how you write Richard, I said, no, I really don't know. I just start, and he says, you just dive into it and then you move back to the beginning and the end, and I said, my God, that's what I do, I never thought of that. So I guess I am going to dive into it now, but thank you Paul for that wonderful, wonderful. You gave us not just a good theology, but a good anthropology, and as you know, to me that's crucial because so much of Christianity has not had a good anthropology, a good understanding of the human person. Now, in the middle of the book I have a bit of attempted explanation at that, but I think it is a fairly good one. Maybe it will only appeal to those of you who have a background in philosophy. Probably the single biggest thinker, well, Plato and Aristotle are maybe somewhat the same, but certainly Aristotle was the huge Greek mind that formed philosophy for the next 1500 years, and he was trying to explain the nature of being which you did so visually with the three chairs. It’s just that the very nature of being is relationality. You've got to switch your mind to think that way, and what the mind you have to switch from is the Aristotelian mind. Aristotle looked at being the most universal category, and he listed what he thought were the qualities of being, and he said that the highest quality of being was that it was substantial, substance. Now, what Paul just said to you, and what we are trying to say all weekend is that we disagree with that, that the highest quality of being is relationality. He did have that as a quality of being, but it is about fifth or sixth. This is major. We are putting it back as number one. The nature of being is that it is relational, and it took us till last century to create words like ecosystems, ecology, to understand things like the holographic universe, everything is all a holon, the part imitates the whole. Now, all the sciences are affirming this. There is no such thing as separation in the universe. It's an illusion. We are all radically connected, but there was a figure who you probably heard of even less than Aristotle, he lived, what, in the seventh century or so, I am not sure, a man called Boethius, and Boethius was a key figure between so-called paganism and early Christianity, no he lived in the fifth century, I see his dates here, 480 to 524. He wrote a highly influential book called “The Consolations of Philosophy.” This won’t get too abstract, stay with me, and here is how Boethius building on Aristotle then defines the human person. This is the definition, I quote, an individual substance of a rational nature. We disagree with every word in that sentence, right, an individual substance of a rational nature that led to the enlightenment of the 17th and 18th century where rationalism took over. What was supposed to be the helper became the lord, those two minds I talked to you about yesterday, and we are still living in the effects of that in what we call postmodernism that we keep being trapped inside this small box of supposed rationality and supposed individualism and nothing works. It just creates unhealthy people because it isn’t a proper definition of the human person. We are not individuals, we are not rational, and we are not a substance. We are and both Scotus and St Aquinas said this to the Catholic world, we are a subsistent relationality, forgive the big words, but they were already Trinitarian. We subsist in relationality. Now that’s why all of us come into this world in families. It's there where you get the initial mirroring. The word mirroring which has been popularized by Kohut and some recent psychologist.
and therapists I find very helpful not just for Trinitarian theology, but for again the understanding of how you and I first come to our sense of personhood, alright. It is mirrored to us, and they say a child who is able to run into the living room stark naked as you’d probably say and have the parents eyes just thrilled with delight at your naked existence, alright, not what you are, but that you are, that you exists, that begins the mirroring process, and now neuroscience says if you get that delighted mirroring at the very beginning, they take it one step further, this is just the last 30 years or less, what it creates in the person is what we call mirror neurons, that if you are once mirrored, you for the rest of your life have the capacity to pass on that delight. The reason some people are psychopaths and sociopaths is they have no mirror neurons. They can actually sadistically torture another human being which is sort of unthinkable to most of us in this room I hope, but if you have no mirror neurons, you have no capacity to feel what another person is feeling. Those of you who have developed capacity for empathy, sympathy, compassion, communion, connection, you got to thank your mom and your dad, alright. Someone delighted when you ran into the room naked when you were two years old and were just thrilled. I remember still when I came home from the seminary back to Kansas and walk in the door, mom and dad just run toward me, and it still delighted me, I was in my 30s and 40s, but I still could always rely upon these two mirrors that told me who I was and that what I was was good. That's the gift of your deepest personage. Now, the word persona, forgive me that I'm sounding so philosophical, I don't mean to, but philosophy is just the love of understanding, and if we can rebuild at the philosophical level, a good psychology and a good theology will often follow from it. The word that you and I use for person, you each think of yourselves as a person, is much more built on Boethius then what the word was originally chosen for. I bet you don't know this, I didn’t know this till I studied theology. Just as the Greek fathers took the word perichoresis from Greek theater, they took another word from Greek theater, it was Greeks. They just had it all. It’s amazing what they put together, and you know what they didn't have is what I am enjoying here and it's working very well today, a microphone. Because they didn't have microphones, if they wore and perhaps you've studied Greek theater in college, they wore huge stage masks. If you’ve been to the theaters in Asia Minor and Greek, you see that they were amphitheater style, and they wore these stage masks. If you’ve been to the theaters in Asia Minor and Greek, you see that they were amphitheater style, and they wore these stage masks. They had a mouth in them with usually large lips, and they served as a megaphone, didn't have microphones, so the voice had to be magnified. Now, guess what those stage masks were called, personas, alright, which means mask. The original word and both in the Greek and the Latin, per—forgive me, personare, you can figure that much out, per—through, sonar—sound, they were soundings through. Stay with me, you can see where I am going, why they chose these words. They said these three intimate, loving relationships that never stopped flowing in the one direction of love were the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. Now you’ve all grown up with that language, but the word that we now use for an individual substance of a rational nature, you and me, which isn’t true at all, of course, but we turned the word around 180 degrees, alright. The word was originally chosen for a shared identity, the Father is the Father and yet he is the Son and the Spirit, remember, resolves the question of unity and diversity which we have yet to resolve in our politics. You’ve got to know how foundational this is. We don't know how to connect unity and diversity. Right now, we are moving toward diversity, because there's no—in postmodern thinking, there's no meta-narratives, there's no universal truth, there is no truth is what we have now. When you pull out of that, you have the post truth society that we live in now because everything is not a movable feast, but a movable famine, alright. There is no solid ground to stand on, but we have to find an ontological, philosophical, metaphysical—Cynthia will be much better at this than I—foundation for the connection between this person and the divine persons. Now if what Genesis 1:26-27 said is true, let us create in our image, check it out, two plural pronouns as I said yesterday, then somehow this whirling communion, this whirling top of infinite outpouring love has been planted in each of you. So, to know the self at its deepest level is somehow to know God, and I bet if I could read your spiritual journals, those moments when you came to those levels of deep insight about who you are at the deepest level, and deep acceptance of that, it is simultaneously an experience of God.
Karl Rahner, the German Jesuit who is such an expert of the second Vatican Council, he says basically self-knowledge and knowledge of God move forward in a parallel fashion, and finally they are the same understanding. People who deeply—I don't mean, now don't go to the psychological self. I am not talking about the psychological self or your Enneagram number or your Myers-Briggs ENFP or whatever you think you are, all that is great stuff for surviving in this world, but it's what I would call and Merton would call the false self, it's just passing show, it's passing identity, gender is the same way, and this is all Western people think they have, and they grab on to these personas, these stage masks that are passing away whereas why the Greek fathers chose the word person for the three persons of the Trinity is it was precisely an identity that was always received and let go of, let go of and receive. In our Franciscan tradition, as you know, Francis was just an Italian layman, not an intellectual, only basic education, but a spiritual genius. So the first generation of Franciscans, we immediately needed to make ourselves credible, because we were just layman. We weren't educated like those Dominicans, well the Jesuits weren’t around yet, so we set our guys off to Oxford to Paris Cologne, to Bologna. These were the great Catholic centers of learning, and we infiltrated there to try to get smart too, so we could think like the smart people and talk to them, and the two most outstanding names that you would know are St. Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus, now you probably never heard of Duns Scotus, but you know if you follow me, I talk about him a lot because I had to study his philosophy for four years. So we were the only religious order that studied him and that's why we created the term which you've heard in our Living School alternative orthodoxy. We were never considered heretics, believe it or not. In fact, they called us the first Protestants, you know, but somehow we found a way to survive inside the monolithic Roman Catholic Church which was the only game in town at that time, so you had to find wiggle room and so we do is identify with our founders, our saint, whoever it was, and they were more our North Star than the Pope to be perfectly honest, but it gave the Catholic Church a lot more wiggle room than people imagine, and Bonaventure who of fact it was part of the great debate at Paris about the atonement theory which we never agreed with, again we were an alternative orthodoxy, but we were never kicked out, we were never called heretics, it was quite amazing, and it was sort of like the Supreme Court is now. You’d have a majority position and a minority position. We Franciscans were almost always the minority position. I'm glad I live not till the 20th century because now our position is rising to the surface and that's really true again and again like the nonviolent atonement theory of the Franciscan school is now broadly recognized, this has to be the case or we end up with the silliness that Paul was talking to us about it why God was so unlikable for so, so many people. Back to Bonaventure. Bonaventure was an Italian, and Etienne Gilson, in his massive study of medieval philosophy, says he would call Bonaventure the supreme mystic philosopher and seldom you put together such a brilliant mind with such a mystical heart, and he gives several metaphors for the Trinity; one is the fountain fullness of love pictured like a waterwheel. I already referred to it yesterday. So picture three buckets on a moving waterwheel. You’ve perhaps seen them in rural areas of Europe or here usually with more than three buckets, but each bucket empties out, swings back, and the reason it can empty out and swing back is it knows it will be filled. See, you can't risk letting go, you can’t. That's why so much of our culture is so fear-based. It can't risk letting go because it isn't sure it will be refilled. Once you got infinite love out of the center of the universe, we live in a scarcity model, that's the model we are living in now that has created this mean spirited world to be perfectly honest that we live in where all there is not enough, there is not enough, there is not enough love to go around, there is not enough mercy to go around. Some of the poor Cardinals are upset because Francis wants to do terrible thing of letting people in the second marriage go to communion. Wow, this is a major problem, you know. There just isn't enough grace to go around, no. We are going to hoard it. Whenever you see the hoarding instinct, you know the Holy Spirit is not at work, alright, is not at work, but it is the only world and I say this, there are sincerely people, you've got to know this, although I thank you for mocking them a little bit this morning Paul, because Jesus did give the scribes and Pharisees a hard
time. They're trapped inside of dualistic quid pro quo of measuring and counting as I said yesterday, and they can't help it. As long as you are in that frame, everything has to fit inside that frame, and until you are taken out of it by infinite love, you can't understand the universe. Well, you've been taken out of it by infinite love I hope, but that can't just happen by an intellectual agreement. I am sure all of you want to agree right now, yes, God is infinite love, but Catherine LaCugna, the marvelous theologian at Notre Dame who in her large book God For Us charts the entire history of the development of theology of Trinitarian theology. She toward the very end of the book, she says, if this is true, if God is an infinite waterwheel of love infinitely self-emptying, infinitely outpouring, then any notion of God as angry, wrathful, resentful, pissed off is a theological impossibility and a theological absurdity. There is no backsplash in God. Now, she doesn’t this light—you had to get through this big a book to understand, to know that this wasn't said in a lightweight way, the way I talk, alright, I am just a popularizer, but I have to read these brilliant people to be sure that what I'm saying is orthodoxy, and I think partly the reason we have never been shutdown, at least I will say this about the Catholic bishops is they know it’s the truth. They know it's the gospel. Maybe just intuitively, maybe just indirectly, but there's nothing worth saying here that is outside the great tradition. Now, when I say the great tradition, big G, big T, I mean what we call in the Living School the perennial tradition. What if we were going to connect the dots, what are the patterns that keep recurring over and over again, and if it’s the truth, it's got to be true everywhere, that should be common sense, which means I hate to upset some of you, but I mean Hindus are going to discover it too, alright. If it’s true, it’s true in India, and it was true in India 5000 years ago, and if it's true, the native religions are going to understand it. The reason I first came into New Mexico in 1969, I was assigned as a Deacon at Acoma Pueblo one hour or so west of here, so my first ministry was with native peoples, what a gift to recognize natural spirituality, without all the headiness. I have told the story many times, my job that summer of the summer of '69 was to drive my orange pickup all over the Laguna at Acoma reservations west of here and have the lucky opportunity to take the census, so I got to visit every single family on the two reservations over the course of the summer, and I drive my orange pickup early in the morning, I was wearing my brown robe then. They liked us to look like real Franciscans, but I’d often stop my car as I approached the fence or the gate, because if I came early enough, the mother was still standing on the east side of the house with her beautiful little native children lined up next to her. They wouldn't be speaking. It was all quiet. They are much more introverted than we are. They think we are so loud. We talk way too much for the native peoples. You can just tell they are more naturally contemplative, but I would watch the mother, she would begin this gesture looking at the rising Sun and all the little ones would watch mother and there they went, original blessing, and I said we, Franciscans, came here in the 16th century thinking we were giving them faith. What absurdity! All we did was give a lot of words, and I am here to defend the intuitive truth of those words. So, don’t hear me in a dualistic way that the religions of—the intuitions of religion are invariably correct, but they are stated in metaphorical symbolic language, and what people do is they wrap around the metaphor. They wrap around the symbol. They defend the symbol in its Lutheran form or its Presbyterian form or its Catholic form, and then we fight about the symbols just like politics today. It's not a love of truth anymore, it’s a love of your symbols system. Some scholars said, I am making this a chapter in my next book, religions are almost always right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny, hold on to that, alright. Religions are always right in what they affirm, and if you look the foundational affirmations and this is our big foundational one, that God is relationship itself, that God is communion, God doesn't choose to love, God’s very nature is love itself, and unless we learn how to swim in that river, we cannot know God, that's the natural empathy, sympathy, point of connection between the human person. So, if you choose to be very practical, if you choose to be hateful, resentful, negative, oppositional, filled with resistance, identified with your defended state, which is always resisting reality, you cannot at that state know God. So I can understand why the biblical tradition I know we all feel they overdid that word sin, and most of the postmodern world has just thrown it out entirely,
but what they were trying to do was name that state of resistance, because when you're in that negative state of hate, you cannot hate. You just can't don't go there. Even in your mind, you can’t hold on to hatred of the woman who flipped the bird at you yesterday, all right, you can’t. Or as long as you do, you cannot know God. Like knows like, that's the principal, and you must find the resonance, the mirroring between the self and God and that self you have to keep cleaning the mirror as the Buddhist would say, so knowing that you are ready to resonate love, to mirror love because you are love, and at that point, you will fall into your deepest and truest identity.

Now, brothers and sisters, that's no easy thing. I know you are thinking of a nice Hallmark card that said be loving, alright. It has to be chosen almost every hour, because where your over-defended ego and your highly monkey mind is always going is to be picky, let me just use that word, I don't know why it came to mind, but maybe it’s because I see myself being picky. You start picking and choosing what you like and what you don’t like. You start stating preferences. She is worth my time, he is not worth my time. Preferences are lethal. They really are, because they make you the reference point. You see, a spiritual master would say to you when you start saying I like this, or I don't like that. They would say, who cares what you like. Some of you've heard this story, I just say what’s coming to mind, but this came to mind, for years, when I was flying around the world, I remember taking a terrible transatlantic flight somewhere to somewhere in Europe, and behind me nothing against teenage girls, but there were three teenage girls for the entire eight-hour flight. Oh, god! I like, I don't like, I love, I hate, I can't stand, don't you hate, I didn’t do it, but God was I tempted, I knew it wouldn't work, of course. You see, that’s the postmodern world, defined by the individual substance of a rational nature what I like is important and what I like gives it importance. No, it doesn't. It doesn't anything to it. There is no value added whatsoever. Here is the wonder of the nature of God's love, God's love is not determined as human love is. Human love is allured foreword by the worthiness or the beauty or the dignity or the good looks of the object. Now, as long as you do that, you remain and what we call in contemplative teaching, the subject-object split. I must object over here, I objectify that over there, and I keep it an object, is it worthy of my consumption or not, is it worthy of my reverence or not. The French-based word respect means to look at something a second time. There is the first gaze and there's the second gaze. The second gaze I hope for the rest of your life can be the contemplative gaze, re-spect, where you see it not in whether it's good looking, whether it has money, whether he is a celebrity, but just it is what it is what it is in its naked existence. I wrote Cynthia a few months ago, I just discovered the second part of the book she teaches from so much, the cloud of unknowing, and the same wonderful author wrote a little book, sort of a sequel to it, I think you say, what, centuries later, not centuries later, but years later, yeah. He couldn’t have lived centuries, and it is called by the unusual name the Book of Privy Counseling, it's really a Christian classic but not very well known, and the author advises you that in contemplative prayer what you must draw close to your chest, he describes by the beautiful metaphor of a warm compress, a warm compress. He says you must allow God and this is very helpful to me when I'm anxious or worried about many things or whatever, because I have to experience the love at a body level, and he goes on to say, draw this warm compress of infinite love toward your chest, just your breathing changes, because the two identities are becoming one, and then an even more beautiful line for me at least. The author says, do not just recognize that this God wants to come close to what you are, but to that you are. Can you feel the difference? See, if you stay at the what, you will keep critiquing the what. Well, I am not a very good what, you know. I am not a very worthy what. I sinned yesterday or I had a selfish thought this morning, but the naked existence draw the infinite love toward your naked existence. God delights that you are. See you have no way out of that except disbelief. You are your trapped inside of a cycle that can’t be stopped. You know there are so many things since this book came out last year. People have written me the most wonderful letters. I haven’t got one hate letter yet, I can’t
believe it. I think they so wanted to be true, but of all the many letters I got, I got two from electricians. Maybe there are some electricians in the room that will just love this. They said, Richard, why didn't you use the metaphor of electricity? I said, probably because I don't understand electricity, and he said, you know, electricity is not one directional. It can only operate inside of a circuit. Oh, my God. He said it's perfect, it's absolutely perfect, and the only way you can stop is to cut the circuit. If you cut the circuit, electric, but it never just shoot from those big telephone poles we see or electrical lines into us. There has to be a giver and a receiver and that's the gaze of love between the Father and the Son. The relationship as I said yesterday that we call the Holy Spirit is the shareability of that relationship, The Holy Spirit is the shareability of God. Now remember every time we speak theologically, all we can use are metaphors, everything is a metaphor, because Christ is the shareability of God. The Father is the source of all shareability, so what you can say of one, you can finally say of all three, and yet the way the mind works we almost have to differentiate roles, but that was called a heresy in the early church, to differentiate three different roles, because they were one. What one does, they all do. So, we just resort to this metaphorical language to aid your experience, to give you deeper access to the experience, but now we see and isn't it interesting we know we keep going back to Genesis 1, but right after the spirit hovering the chaos, the first feminine image of God in Genesis 1-2, what is the very first thing God creates is light, let there be light. Now, why might that be true? Why would light be the first thing created, and we are lucky enough to now live in the age of nuclear and quantum physics and astrophysics, and what they're telling me now and I don't have a scientific education to know I'm understanding it right or communicating it right, but the ones I'm reading are saying, get ready for this, there is only one light in the entire universe, and the light on the farthest galaxies and the light shining through that window right there are connected. Oh, my God! You said, no, there are light years of darkness in between. But you know what they discovered? They are called fractals, and now that we have the cameras big enough or good enough or deep enough to take pictures of darkness when they go closer and closer, even the darkness is filled with light. Does that sound like John's prologue? Exactly even the darkness is filled with light. There is the mystery of death and resurrection. As a Catholic funeral liturgy says nothing dies, life has not ended, it has merely changed. So we thought we had to prove the resurrection of Jesus as if it were a one-time anomaly. This shows our religion is the true religion. God raised up Jesus, God didn't raise up Buddha or Mohammad, we win. That's why we became a competing religion, a tribal religion, a small-level religion instead of universal truth. Simon Weil, that wonderful French resistance fighter, a mystic of the highest magnitude in my opinion, he said the trouble with Christianity, I wish I had the exact quote here, is that we became a competing religion instead of recognizing the Christ was a message for the reform and transformation of all religion and at the heart of that was the taking away of this myth of sacrifice, which we develop a lot, the whole research of Rene Gerard and the scapegoat theory and so forth. We have all the pieces. We really do. Now, I know we are living in a time of tremendous apology for Christianity. There is far more recovering Catholics than there are practicing Catholics, do you know that. They are the second-biggest denomination former Catholics. I bet a lot of you are in this room, and it wasn't like you that you were bad-willed people or malicious people or egocentric people or overly individualistic although any of that could be slightly true, but it's just that the whole thing didn't cohere, it didn't resonate, it didn't name your soul, it didn't speak a universal truth. It felt like a small-level truth. So, when we speak of the perennial tradition, we are meaning the big truth that is always true. Now, Jesus had a metaphor for that and he called it the reign of God, the kingdom of God. Our phrase would be the big picture, and if you've read the parables of Jesus, there almost seven, eight of them begin with the same phrase, the Kingdom of God is like, the Kingdom of God is like, the big picture. You've got to get the big picture. So in my next book I am going to repeat what I had written in an earlier book, Joseph Chilton Pearce called this the cosmic egg. The cosmic egg, he said, was like those Chinese dolls where one encloses the other. The inner doll is my story, my little psychological personal self with its wounded-ness and its storyline. You have to start there. Every one of you has
that. You have to forgive it, you have to accept it, you have to own it, you have to suffer it, which is called the passion, the suffering of your own finitude, your own brokenness, your own imperfection that you are not God that you just appeared 50 years ago or so. This is much of the humiliation and the suffering of the middle of life. So the small inner doll is my story, the smallest dome of meaning. That is surrounded by a second, which is called our story. Now that’s our politics, our nationality, our ethnicity, our family, those little social units that told you who you are. Lot of people have completely reverted. They can't find any meaning. They are so angry at their nationality and their country that they simply go back to personal individual psychology, personal therapy, just get me healthy, but I don’t know what to do about the politics of America or the Roman Catholic Church. It’s just too good. Some are gifted at one level, some at the other. But what I want to invite you into is the whole picture, and there's still a larger dome and that would be called by religion at least the story, the patterns that are always true. Paul was describing it this morning as the Christ. That's just our code word, that’s our shortcut like you have on your computer, you want to get there quick, click. If you want to get there quickly, just push the Christ button, you've got the whole thing explained, you really do. I am not trying to make you into a bona fide Christians. I am just giving you a shortcut, alright. You can dismiss it if you want and say I'm not going to demean myself by using the Christ word, or you can accept what the New Testament came as a shortcut to an exclamation of what is happening everywhere all the time and the pattern of transformation and it is not transactional, it is transformational. It does—it isn't just little magic things that happen in the heavens. It includes you. Let me tell you a good part of human narcissism, at least I think it’s a good part. Human beings don’t tend to be interested in something unless it includes them. You just aren’t. Now, that’s why I had to talk a little bit about mothers, you know, you women might not think I'm on your side. We always want someone to be on our side. Once we know they are on our side, we can listen to them, we can hear them, you know. Now, what we have been given is a God who is on everybody's side all the time, and you can’t parcel up Christ as Paul says in Corinthians, although we have done a pretty good job calling them Orthodox and Catholics and Lutherans and all the rest. We have been parceling up this great mystery for centuries. The future of Christianity is ecumenical and that's why we delight at the Center to have conferences like this that we assume, I assume, and I know the other two teachers do to that we are talking here to an ecumenical crowd and there is a great freedom in that. See if these were all Catholics, I would be walking through a minefield. Oh, my God! They’d be already texting the Bishop, you know, and you apply this all to your own church. If you're just in your closed group, you've got your little boundaries and your little perfect symbols and that word is always used that word, but see you are granting me a little grace. You are saying, well, I guess he is a catholic, they talk that way. Actually, Catholics don’t talk this way either, well, some do. But it puts space around the words when you talk to an ecumenical gathering. That’s why it’s only in this kind of space that the future of Christianity can be borne, that we can rebuild from the bottom-up. First layer of this rebuilding is redefining the way you did visually this morning with those three chairs, because most of us think spatially. We need to have a visual. We need to have a graphic and that’s why I think the word became flesh. Jesus is the graphic of the Christ, alright. If you want to know what God is like, the image of the invisible God as Colossians puts it, then look at Jesus. That’s not bad stuff, but you've been trained to think of it as tribal. I'm trying to get you to join my religion. I'm really not. I'm trying to get you to fall into Christ which is to fall into everything. My second title for the book which the editors didn't like was “The Universal Christ, Another Name for Everything.” They said, oh, those evangelicals will not buy the book. You know what evangelical is and one of their worst words I can't imagine why is universalism. They will come to me at talks, are you universalist? I said, well, you know, do you know the meaning of the word, Catholic? Do you know the word Catholic was already taken in the year 108 by Ignatius Antioch as he is traveling from Antioch to Rome to be eaten by the Lions in the Colosseum and he is traveling across Asia Minor going through area after area, town after town, and he meets—and this is 108, John's Gospel has just been written, and he keeps meeting these various tribal groups, different ethnicities and
languages and they are already calling themselves Christian, Christian, Christian, and he says this is a truly Catholic people, a universal people. That was not a parochial term. It was not a tribal term, and that’s why those of you that recite the Nicene Creed at your Sunday morning service like the good Anglicans do, I guess Lutherans do too, a lot of you do, you still recite the creed. It’s sort of boring to be perfectly honest, but you say you believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Now, some right that word Catholic out. They just don’t want to be Catholics. We are not talking about Roman Catholic at this point, alright. We are talking about the whole enchilada, alright, the whole thing and so they use that word with pride that we are the universal people, so tell your evangelical friends, yes, you are universalist, alright, but for them, that means everybody’s going to heaven, and they for some reason just don’t like that. Don’t you think that should make you happy? If Venus isn’t in heaven, it’s not going to be heaven for me, alright. It’s all got to be there, how could it possibly give you joy if everything you’ve ever loved is not there with you. It's one communion; it’s one flow. This was done for me by a volunteer at the center, this lovely weaving here, and I liked it because it's surrounded by the flow, and by a line that never ends and never begins and that's the whirling top of love that has been planted in every living thing, not just humans, not just animals, not just plants, but the very generativity of the minerals and the earth itself. There’s nothing disenchanted in our universe. I love to say at this point welcome home. That's why you can never be lonely again once you know you're not separate from anything. I don’t know what the stinginess was that made us, you know, limit God's love which we call salvation to the human species, why? That’s our stinginess, not God's stinginess. God is not stingy, but if you grew up with a God it was not just stingy, but punitive torturing his enemies for all eternity. This is unworkable brothers and sisters. It’s the virus at the core of Christianity that basically we gave people a God who was not trustworthy, who was not lovable, because the most cold-hearted person in this room this morning would not torture his enemies for all eternity, none of you. Maybe for a day some of you would do. We created an ogre God. It’s just it’s got to fall apart. It won’t work. It simply won’t work. I’ve got a CD I don’t know if it’s for sale here, I should have warned them, it’s called Hell No, and I have not based it on Richard Rohr’s thought. I am going back to the early fathers of the church who said very close to what I just said. As one of the desert fathers said that anybody would be tortured and separated by God’s choice from all eternity from God and this was the phrase he used, love could not bear that, love could not bear that, and that was repeated again and again by the fathers. Love could not bear the exclusion of some of the creatures. I don’t know how to negotiate that, I don’t know how to explain that when the apostles asked Jesus about such things, he says, nothing is impossible with God. And, it’s not our job to figure out how, who, where, when? Why we’ve wasted so much time deciding who is in and who is out? That’s not your problem, got it. That’s god’s work. It’s not your problem and it’s your ego that wants to explain who is in and who is out and isn’t it interesting that you always put yourself and your group in. Does that give away the bias that we are not talking about the soul here, we are talking about the ego, the small self, the false self. The self that does not yet know how to love. So, how should I draw this together? I hope I didn’t talk all over the place, but this mystery of transformation that is mirrored, that is received by resonance, by communion, by connection, by relationship comes down to your capacity for presence. Now, when we teach you as Cynthia did so well this morning how to be contemplative, that’s where we are based. It’s not a new technique. Please don’t hear it that way, but it is for the monkey mind of the western person, trying to teach you how to be present. When you can be present to what’s right in front of you, you will know what you need to know in that moment. I just made that as an absolute statement. You will know all you need to know when you can be truly present. Now to be present and this is the whole world of spirituality is to recognize how your mind is usually the primary thing keeping you away from the present. As Eckhart Tolle said so well, the mind can do two things, it can repackage the past over and over and over again, which is why people don’t know how to forgive, and it can worry about the future over and over and over and over again when you can’t do a thing about it. What the mind cannot do is live right here right now. It can’t. The moment feels boring, feels empty, feels not
enough. Oh, if I could be with the better-looking person, alright, a more important person, a better-dressed person, a person who wasn’t handicapped, always wanting to change so I don’t have to be present, that’s sin, that’s sin, because you will never know what you need to know if you are always changing the equation so you can be back in control. Now, that the mind the meditators recognized was the enemy number one, but the second was the heart. Cynthia uses so much in her teaching, though which went back to the early how do you bring the head down into the heart. We are not saying throw the head out, but you have to bring it to a more spacious, more compassionate place, and you’ve all read these books on the heart math solutions that now we know there might be as many connections here as there are up here, some say even more, that all this poetry we thought we were reading, that said the heart knows they weren’t getting, and that’s why there are—they can now document, I bet you all know at least one example of people dying from a broken heart. When this falls apart which I think is what’s happened in much of western civilization, you are, of course, going to have an addictive society. The immense emptiness, the immense meaninglessness, the soul cannot live without meaning, and when you don’t have meaning, you don’t know how to push the Christ short-cut and get to the big truth quickly. You will fill it up where cheap sex or cheap drugs or alcohol, that’s all you have. It totally follows, and the third locus or chakra maybe they would call it today, not just the head, not just the heart, but the body itself, and this is why the Christ mystery is such an important piece for us. Spirituality is not a Gnostic exercise, a flying into ideas or theories or pious nose gaze of churchy talk. Usually that’s fleeing the incarnation, when the word became flesh, we have in Christ the putting together of what seemed like the platonic split world of matter and spirit, they coexist as one, and to me it’s a supreme irony and supreme sadness that the Christian religion which is the only religion that formerly claims the infinity God became finite flesh in Jesus, that’s our trump card, that’s our belief system that you would think we would have the most developed body theology in the world. We would have the least shame about embodiment, physicality, the earth, sexuality, emotionality, and yet that’s where most of us carry our shame. The body carries this sense of inferiority, so we punish the body through anorexia, bulimia, obesity, endless addictions. We just cannot believe that this could be in its wholeness the image of God. So, when your heads face, your hearts face, your body, are all of the same moment, present and accounted for, you are not hating your body, you may not hate your body. Your body is the body of Christ. You may not destroy your heart, your heart is the sacred heart to use our Catholic language, and your mind is not to be thrown out. All we want to do is help you let go of all the monkey mind stuff that isn’t worth thinking anyway, that’s all, so you can think at a greater level where the mind is operating together with the heart and with the body and when you can do that, you will be present and you will know whatever it is that you need to know. Thank you, thank you.

Session 5: Cynthia Bourgeault

Cynthia Bourgeault: So this afternoon, I want to really change gears and begin to approach the Trinity from a whole different perspective, a whole different way of framing it and thinking about it. What we have been doing and what we have been looking at the Trinity is this morning is a theological principle, and we have been unpacking it theologically. What I want to shift to this afternoon is to think of it as a cosmological principle, or to use the really correct word, a cosmogonic principle, which means a principle that has to do with, it governs dynamism and new creation. So when we think about the Trinity theologically, which is almost entirely where the Christian attention has been drawn on it, what we get drawn to are the dimensions of relationality and personhood and the nature of love, and you have heard a lot about that this morning, that both of Richard and Paul in their own way have really come back to that and have highlighted beautifully certain aspects of that, but that’s a function of thinking about the Trinity theologically. When we think about it
cosmogonically, what we are going to see is not—is the how to of it. We are going to pay attention to lines of action, how it becomes a template that encourages and sustains this new life. If there is this space and this icon that invites in the whole world, how does it do that, what's the mechanisms, what—and are there principles built in there that we can use and work on to deepen a feedback loop between the Trinity understood as a theological mantra and our own practical work in the world, our moral work, our ethical work, our strategic work. So that's the kind of questions that I am going to be asking here. I would like to say that these are complementary perspectives. Remember the old—the old sort of fable of the five blind men describing the elephant, and the view from the trunk is really different from the view from the leg, but they are still describing the same elephant, and the glory is that the elephant is bigger than all the descriptors so we can put them together.

So the cosmogonic or cosmological viewpoint is not intended to be an opposition to any of the wonderful stuff you have said today, but just to flush it out and to carry it out into the question that I think is really uppermost in almost all—not only Christian hearts, but spiritual hearts, which is how can I help. So this is—this topic I am going to get in and the work that I have actually been doing for the past 20 years on the Trinity is basically in the spirit of that, how can I get, how can I help, how can I bring skillful means to a situation that connects the theological universe with the moral universe in my own being, in my own action. So that's where we are going. I’d have to say that to make this transition, I am going to have to basically ask you to start with a clean slate, which means to forget everything you think you know about the Trinity because we are going to go into brand new ground and if you keep trying to relate it back and say, well, how does this fit with what this is or how does this fit, before you get enough of a sense of the picture of what I am doing, it's just going to be confusing, and your own anxiety about, well, how does this fit us, this—what Richard said or is it not—that kind of anxiety is going to force you into your mind.

So I would ask you to approach what I am going to do this afternoon particularly, as simply handing you a useful perhaps new tool, a new frame, a way of setting up things almost like a new program like QuickBooks or something you downloaded that will hopefully allow you to run your universe in a slightly more interesting way, a new way of framing a situation. So that's what I am going to ask us to look at and this new way of framing the situation is something that I call the Law of Three. So this afternoon, we are going to play with what this thing is and how it works, and then tomorrow, Insha Allah, I will try to tie it in to the Trinitarian view of the elephant that we have had from the theological viewpoint. So that's the game plan, so I am not going to be focusing a lot on Trinity today, I may not even say the Trinity word more than a dozen times or so because I want us to look at the Law of Three. So I said I call it the Law of Three, but that's not quite true, I didn't invent this term, that I got this term, I first learned about the Law of Three from 10 years of work in a wonderful underground one of the pioneering schools of inner transformation in the West known as the Gurdjieff Work.

Gurdjieff, that's the name of the teacher in question, G.I., George Ivanovitch, Gurdjieff, who was a spiritual teacher. I think his dates are generally agreed upon is 1866 to 1949, so he was a teacher basically in the first half of the 20th century, who for various reasons that I am going to detail shortly got on to the question of how do we begin to become more mindful, alert, conscious people, and he developed the pioneering teaching on that, that the name, even 10 years ago, it probably would have had no recognition, no name recognition, but nowadays the name is a little bit more familiar because among his other credits, he was the person who first introduced the Enneagram to the West in 1924 in a study house outside of Paris in France. So that as the Enneagram of personality has become more and more popular and as people have moved beyond simply using it as a quick fix on personality typing into trying to discover the real kind of cosmological roots it emerges from, his name has been back in much higher profile. So I found my way to this work early on and it had
always remained kind of under the surface by its own choice. It even to this day doesn't advertise, is a little bit hard to find, and yet there has been thousands of people around the world at least that have passed through this very interesting system of training. I bumped into it in 1980 basically in response to a question that had been tormenting me. The torment was this, I was already—I had been ordained Episcopal priest for some time at that point, and the question was for me why is it that a religion which arguably formed around one of the most high teachings on love, one of the most inclusive, loving, open-hearted, compassionate, out-of-the-box thinkers, why should a religion that formed in that ambiance always wind up expressing itself in formats that are rigid, exclusive, annul frankly, and argumentative? What happened? What's wrong with this picture? Is there a missing piece? And that anguish about there must be a missing piece, we can't get here from there without something gone berserk. So that set me on the journey and it was in response to that journey that the—as always happens when you ask the cosmos the real question, you begin to get the information you need. Trust me, it works.

So little by little, the books came to my hand and the connections opened, that I found my way into this work. I joined a group in Canada and worked basically with—it's still my basic connections with the Canadian folks in the maritime area and then in Ontario. So that was my way in but Gurdjieff had done the same thing, maybe a 100 years before me, asking these same questions. And he understood that to call yourself a Christian wasn't a casual thing. You didn't get it as a perk of being born in the dominant culture in North America. It's a very high thing. To call yourself a Christian means your willingness and some degree of an ability to actually live this extraordinary high teaching of radically inclusive, nonjudgmental Christian love.

So Gurdjieff was looking for, are there still places that exist in the planet that remember what it means to be a human being, what the context of the work is, what the high vocation of the Christian is rooted in, and does it remember the practices that would take up that missing piece. So I went looking and I got taught a number of them, but the 10 years I spent in the work were the initiation that changed my life forever. I will not say it was easy, but it was profound. It cut like a karate chop through the sentimentality, the emotional pathos, the emotional manipulation that is so much attendant in the Christian way of doing theology and put me in touch with some real practices that are proto-mindfulness practices. So I owe it a great debt of gratitude. Meanwhile, Gurdjieff was not just a spiritual technician, he was a cosmologist as well, and he brought back in creating this great frame a whole wonderful teaching that was based around two laws, the Law of Three and the law of seven—the Law of Three being known as the law of world creation, the law of seven being known as the law of world maintenance. In other words, the Law of Three tells you how things come into form, the law of seven tells you what happens once they get in form, how they progress, how they proceed, and the two of them put together form the original symbol of the Enneagram. Remember the triangle in the middle and then the thing that looks like a grasshopper on the sides, that's the Law of Three and the law of seven intersecting and overlapping at points, and the whole thing is about how they share energy and how they define jointly the path that anything follows as it proceeds into creative form and beyond.

One of the Gurdjieff teachers used to say that if you could really read the Enneagram, you didn't need any books, not even Richard's, you know. You had the whole mystery of the cosmos right there before you. So that was the background and it was in that way that I learned the Law of Three. Now, a word—just from the start, when I say the Law of Three, we are not talking law here in the religious sense. We are not talking like the Ten Commandments or Canon Law. We are talking more like the second law of thermodynamics. We are talking about what he meant by this is a basic principle that describes and predicts how whole, huge bodies of the natural world operate. So it's the kind of law that invites experimentation and validation, not the kind of law that some esoteric philosopher sort of
summarily drops on your plate. It's like try it, if you think this is right or if you are interested, try it. See where it gets you, see if the data that you find actually conform to what it says. So over the years, many, many, many people in the Work have tried it.

The one thing about the Work is that it tends to attract very competent people. Probably the most famous person who is now identified with this is Jacob Needleman, but other people, Frank Lloyd Wright was in the Work, and over the centuries in Europe and North America, there have been a whole slew of highly positioned and highly qualified people trying out this law in all sorts of domains, from physics to politics to natural sciences to theology. So there's a whole body of data out there that confirms the fact that it actually works, and every so often, as I am about to describe, you will find a scientist of completely secular origin who stumbles into the thing and puts it forward as a scientific principle having no idea that it's connected to this body of ancient esoteric teaching in which it's been understood for many years. Gurdjieff incidentally didn't invent the Law of Three. At least by his counts, he discovered it, it was transmitted to him when he finally found his way to living wisdom, transformational schools in Central Asia. It was basically on the backside of the Himalaya slopes that were kind of the mainspring of the cultures of Buddhism and Christianity and Sufism that at the time were flowing out into the world as kind of streams of what Richard loves to present as the perennial philosophy, ancient pieces of one universal truth. So that's the backdrop to the Law of Three, and what I would like to do in this session today is to simply walk you through how it works and my goal will be well met if you get some sort of sense of what it is, how to work with it, and what kind of interesting perspectives it opens up working with it. This is the material that's in my book, The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three. If I had to write that book again today, I think I would put it in a different order because I put the stuff about the Law of Three in the front end of it and people say, oh, this is esoteric, this is too hard, and so they can't identify with the frame I am working with and thrown it in. If I had flipped it and done the part that I am going to do with you tomorrow first, then I think I would have had higher audience retention, but you learn as you go. Anyway, I do want to just take you through this because I think this is basically a damnably useful law, and you can take it out and you can apply it to the 2016 political election, you can apply it to all sorts of things. You can apply it to getting your high school grand kid into the college of her choice. Where there is people coming together and things that need to happen, you can find a way to get things into this format, and it often opens up new space, but we will see that. We will see that in a minute.

So basically, the Law of Three states that in any new arising, that is anything that comes into being that wasn't in being before, in any domain and at any scale, that means whether you are talking about stars or microbes and whether you are talking about politics, biology, sociology, theology, your love life, anything that comes into being is the result of the interweaving of three independent forces or lines of action, which were called by Gurdjieff, somewhat I think diceyly, affirming, denying, and reconciling, or sometimes just first, second, and third. So you may say, well, that sounds like Hegel, but there is a big difference here because what we are talking about is we are—we are not dealing with thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. We are not talking about the third coming out of the play of the two. We are talking about thesis, antithesis, and “X’ equals synthesis, okay. Three complete different lines, just like you need three to braid your hair, like three to make these things stand up, that the basic solid element that allows a new creation to stand is the interweaving of the three. And if I were Paul up here, I could demonstrate it by simply coming up here and taking the back thing and unwinding it, the thing would fall over and I would have a beautiful teaching on three-ness. Anyway, three independent forces—so my favorite analogy of how this works comes from sailing. Everybody will tell you that a boat, a sailboat goes through the water because of the opposition between the wind in its sails and the water, the gravitational frictional force of the water on its keel, and that's right, but it’s not quite right. That's what I learned in eighth grade science, but I had to completely
unlearn that when I got my first sailboat. Because a boat in that position doesn't go through the water, it rounds up into the wind and stops, and it's only when you add the third force, which is the helmsman holding the tiller that the opposing forces come into a relationship that lets forward motion go. So you see what I mean here, and you may say, oh, but that's obvious, but it's in the obviousities that we get so screwed up. It's obvious but it's subtle. Because as long as you are thinking it's just these two things banging back and forth between each other and the boat is going to go through the water, you are going to sit there at the starting gate while the whole fleet goes beyond you. So there is always three-ness, and if you look carefully, you can find it in anything. And very often in fact the law will say is that when you find constant impasse, it's because the third is missing or blocked, and very frequently, it's already there in the situation but you just don't see it, chiefly because of your own kind of polarized, dualized identified thinking, but that's a whole another issue.

So the second most important thing for people to keep in mind as you are beginning to work with the Law of Three is that these three, if we will call them forces for the moment, but you know, it's a bad word, the best word is lines of action, and these are—these are simply three lines of action in a situation. Affirming is not a permanent identity. We are so used to thinking in terms of substance theology that people will immediately start saying when I say there are three identities, affirming, denying, and reconciling, you can't help it go into the Trinity. Well, which one is God? Is God the affirming? Is Jesus the reconciling? And you can't think that way. The biggest problem I have teaching—teaching the Law of Three to Christians who have grown up in substance theology is this absolute compulsion to take it back to substance and to assign permanent identities, and when you get this mixed up with the Yin and Yang gender, it gets even worse. Affirming is not the masculine force, denying is not the feminine force. No, don't go there. Just think that—think in pure physics, the affirming force is the pushing force. It's the thing in any situation which initiates, which provides the agitation, which provides the initial forward motion. And that can be either "good" or "bad," so don't get tripped up on the word affirming. The denying force is the resisting or the pushback force, and sometimes pushback can be passive. When you think about water flowing through a delta for example, the delta is the denying force. It's pushing against—it's the pushback to the water just flowing through, but doesn't mean it's bad. It just has the function of retarding or bearing as it were the ongoing, the initial force. You know the initial force has to express itself in terms of or in relationship with the denying force. And the reconciling force is the force that allows the two to come together so that they don't just self-cancel. So those are the three lines of action, and it's important to realize that they are morally neutral. There is an old Sufi saying that says a knife is neither good nor bad, but woe to him who grips it by the blade, and so it is with the Law of Three. I have seen a lot of people who have come up and said, well, the reconciling force must be grace, right, must be the Holy Spirit. Well, fine, until you look at November 9th, 2016, and discover third force, was Donald Trump. If you want to call that grace, go for it, but you get what I am advocating here, because most people who have trouble applying this law get into trouble because they import the association with these kinds of ontological, archetypal categories. It's a bad theological habit that we get in the Christian West. If you can approach this just as a physicist, you can be in a lot better shape that in every situation the first step in learning how to apply the Law of Three is to look carefully at what's right under your nose and without judgment examine the situation and see what's contributing the pushing force, who's got the ball in this play and is running it down the field, what's the pushing back force, and then you can begin to look more carefully about where could reconciling happen, okay. So that's the basic ballpark in this. The other thing that I would want to say really importantly here and I am going to come back and emphasize it in just a minute is that all three forces are indispensable. That when you work with the Law of Three, and this is one of the big reasons why it's not dualized thinking, the denying force is never the enemy. If you pull the denying force out of the situation, the whole thing collapses. You have no more possibility of new creation. The denying role is as legitimate and as essential in the birth of something new as the affirming, and
the something new is never going to be identical with the affirming. In other words, Richard was talking this morning about isn't it interesting that we always put ourselves on the winning side and we set up the situation thinking that whatever we are is the affirming force and that the goal is to get rid of the opposition and then have it the way we want. Well, that's how it works in tug-of-war maybe, but that's not how it works in new creation. What makes new creation new is that all the pieces are enfolded in such a way that the situation moves forward and everything takes on a new configuration and new identity. That's precisely how you can tell it's a real Law of Three and not just a mediated short-term kind of compromise. It creates a genuine new beginning in which the old lines of action are released, new players and new situations step in.

So that in a nutshell is what it is, and so in order to get some idea with it, most of all when were playing with laws and principles, the way to do it is through example. So I would like to start right away with a challenge that kind of came up as we talked, and say, okay, what would it be like that perhaps to apply the Law of Three to The Shack, and with Paul's permission, I am going to try a couple of, or even without Paul's permission, I am going to try a couple of ways of looking at this. I have actually come up with a couple of them and you can even see which one you like best. But in the first one, my first take, you could say that affirming force, the pushing, the initiating, the holding force, belongs with Papa and co., with a whole love of God reaching out, creating, doing the only thing that love can do, which is to reach out in love and widen the circle. And denying would be Mack's wounds, his deep devastation at what's happened with the brutal murder of his youngest daughter, Missy. And what then is the reconciling force that allows the impasse to break up? Well, you could say that it's Mack's surrendered heart. You know, for me, the crucial moment in this book comes early on when he gets the note in his mailbox from Papa, the typed note that says meet me, been a while since I saw you, and rather than just sort of throwing it over, if you were really wounded and you got completely closed in your cynicism, and say, you know, hell with that, God can't type letters, but there's something in him that is still alive and warm and has nothing to do and he realizes it very clearly, he has to surrender to the possibility. Remember that incredible line from St. Paul and the thing we all read at weddings and talking about love—love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. To believe all things doesn't mean to be an idiot. It doesn't mean, I believe I am going to win the lottery. It's to always in a situation whenever where there—there is a higher way of acting and a lower way of acting. There's a way of acting that opens possibility and leads on. There is a way of acting that closes things off and shuts the door, and to believe all things in the context of love means to always act in alignment with the higher possibility, and that's what Mack does here. It's not a question of whether God could actually type a letter. It's this, his surrendered heart intuits that that's the higher possibility, that if he says no, the door is completely closed, so he takes it. And what the new arising then is, is of course the resurrected life that on all fronts, across the board, there is healing. His soul is healed, his religious doubts are healed. The anguishing question mark of what became of his daughter is solved and he's able then to take this and move out into the world, and with it, actually get action, you know, fill out the missing pieces of the case that arrest the little lady killer. So if you look at it in that way, you can see how it's working. What really strikes me is that it's a completely pascal configuration. You can take it, we are going into Holy Week now, that if you start out and look at the crucifixion, it takes exactly the same configuration, that there is—God so loved the world, that's the affirming force. The gospel of John makes that clear. It's God's love for the world that is the affirming force. The denying force is the hatred, the anger, the cruelty, the darkness that Jesus becomes the scapegoat for, and the third force there is Jesus' surrendered heart—not my will but thy be done oh Lord. And out of that, again the outcome is resurrected life. So in my sense, what this means is that The Shack is deeply and profoundly, archetypally a Christ-centric book and a Paschal book. It's another playing out of the ancient and beautiful version of the Paschal mystery. And to me, I just can't figure out why some of the opposition that once again with his proverbial tendency towards anality that seems to characterize
theology, is saying it's not just Christic because it's not talking about how we are washed in the blood of the lamb or it's allowing you—it's admitting the possibility of universal salvation. You know, get a life. The whole thing is right centered in the Paschal mystery and even the fruits of it come forth that way as greater love, as greater wholeness, as greater joy, as greater insight. So if you're not seeing that, you are just looking at the trees and not the forest. What applying the frame of the Law of Three allows us to do here is to break it open in a more spacious perspective to see the lines of action that are working in it rather than get hung up on whether God is a black woman or if Papa is a black woman. So there's another way of playing this too, that I like too that you could say that affirming would be Mack's love, his unbreakable yearning love for his daughter, and for the reality of love that he tasted there. The denying is the great sadness, the depression and the sorrow and the helplessness that has dropped down on him. And the reconciling force in this way where you could say it was that Trinity itself, but what's really interesting in the story if you look carefully, and I hope I'm not reading this in, the reconciling forces in a deep way, the thing that brings them together, is Mack's wife, who throughout the whole ordeal—what's her name in the book Paul? Pardon—Nan, yeah, I could only think of Kim. Hi Kim—but her constant sort of continuing on in her life of faith and she's the one that introduces the word for God, Papa, which without even really knowing it is Jesus' word and is exactly the word that his heart needs to hear, Mack's heart needs to hear in order to move forward. So Nan really plays the role of reconciling force in this story that allows what was an impasse between what looks like a hopeless love and a hopeless sadness to resolve in joy. So you see a little bit of how that would work—does that work for you Paul? Yeah, great. He said yes. That's the hard part.

Okay, I am going to give you a couple other examples, probably just two in the interest of time. One of them does literally come out of science because I want you to once again get the idea that this is not a theological principle, but is a general testable, empirical law on the world. So after I had published The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three, the first conference, the first talk I ever gave was in Atlanta, and at the break, somebody came up to me and said, have you seen this book, have you seen this book, and she puts it in my hand and says, here, take my copy, I think you will find it interesting. So it's called Design in Nature, it's a book—I think it got on the best-seller list, by Adrian Bejan, who is a professor of engineering at Duke University, and it describes his—he was studying from the point of view of engineering and was wondering why it is that things as widely disparate as river basins, like the Mississippi delta, our lungs, and tree branches and roots all tend to take the same structure. They take the same shape, and there are pictures in the book that show you a diagram of a human lung and a diagram of the Volga river basin, and you can't tell the two apart, they look so much—so he says this can't be just coincidence. He says there's got to be a law governing it and so he came home from a conference in which he went face to face with Ilya Prigogine on this. He came home writing what he is now propounding as the constructal law. And it reads like this—for a finite flow system to persist in time (to live), its configuration must evolve in such a way that it provides easier access to the currents that flow through it. It's an absolutely classic example of the Law of Three; for a finite system to persist in time, in other a flow system is something flowing through a structure, whether it's water, whether it's sap, whether it's information, whether it's people in an airport, so for a flow system to persist in time, it has to arrange itself in such a way that it maximizes access to the currents that flow through it. In other words, in this one, the medium flowing through it is affirming force, the thing it's flowing through, whether it's the Volga river valley or your tissue in your body or the earth from the tree or the Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, which is one he uses as an example of it, that's the denying force. The reconciling force that allows them to come together is essentially this constructal law which is the protocol of maximum efficiency. He discussed this with Voila, he puts it up there right along with the second law of thermodynamics, this is the third law he says, the third basic law of the cosmos. Gurdjieff would love it, yes brother, and he uses it to show how you can predict. You know, the one that was most interesting to me was to
show that you can design things like airports and like access systems to freeways in ways that they 
maximize up the flow of traffic, you know, and there are actually algorithms you can use now to take 
a look at things and say what particular combination of resisting force and affirming force leads for 
the fastest movement of passengers through an airport or commuters through a town system. It's 
 wonderful stuff and it's classic affirming, denying, reconciling. So I was just delighted to see this and 
I always love it when a scientist, and particularly one who goes out on the limb as far as Bejan does 
to pronounce his disdain for all spiritual interpretations of anything. Why stop for the principle that 
has been stated in almost exactly the same terms by a spiritual teacher a 100 years before drawing on 
ancient knowledge—I love those things, you know. It's the saboteur in me I guess. Anyway, I want 
to take one other example of this just to give you another domain and this has to do it with—I was 
applying with the Episcopal clergy one day at the clergy conference, and like many people in 
mainstream America, there is a deep spirit of depression if not despair about where we are. The 
circumstances are really clear, the churches are losing population, the people that come to church 
seem to be by and large dispirited, stuck in the past, and the Millennials, don't look for them in 
church, you know. What's happening? So there's this great feeling of where—you know, where the 
dinosaur graveyard, and yet you come and you try it up, perk them up, and try and move beyond this. 
So we started playing with the Law of Three, and I asked them how it was that they would picture 
the situation. So of course, for them, affirming was God's will, God's will for God's church, God's 
wish that the church is one foundation as Jesus Christ or Lord, however you say it, that's got to be 
thing in the driver seat, and denying, then they quickly identified as secularism. You know, it's the 
sunny morning soccer practices, it's the erosion of moral, it's consumerism. So they couldn't find any 
third force. It felt desperate, you know—what do you do? Has God betrayed you? So, I said, what 
would happen if you flip it around, and that was—one of the neat things about the Law of Three and 
why I emphasize not getting stuck in permanent ontological lines of goodness and badness is it 
encourages this reframing.

So, in this one, we said, what if you make affirming force, the pushing force secularism? Because it's 
carrying the wave of the new legitimately, and what if you saw the church as the denying force being 
the integrity, the dignity of received tradition, so that there could actually be a lineage so that people 
didn't run around having to reinvent the wheel, but that it bore the post of passing on, of holding 
sacred the wisdom that had come through this lineage. Well, in that configuration, when we flipped 
first and second force, they could all of a sudden see what third force was, it was to hold the post 
consciously with the eye toward the future so that rather than seeing secularism as the opponent, 
rather than seeing it as the evasion or the betrayal of God's purposes or are trying to apportion blame, 
they could see that what they had to do was to hold the sacred post in the new arising because, 
remember, no holy denying, no new arising. And that was all it took for this particular bunch of 
clergy to look back at their work with new dignity, new hope, and a new sense of that it was all 
working well to the future. So just tiny little bits of reframing that way can sometimes just allow the 
kind of flexibility that Richard is talking about, which is not just a moral aptitude but a learned skill. 
How do you turn the picture around, and if you have got a tool like the Law of Three, it's really 
encouraging you to use your intelligence kaleidoscopically, so you shift the parameters to see, well, 
how does it work, which way of framing this, which line of action, gives you the best way of seeing 
where the stuck point is and where the resolution has got. So I'm not going to pile up additional 
examples. I just want to draw this particular section to a close by saying what do I see as the 
advantages of beginning to work with his tool? I would say first of all it gives us a tool for spacious 
or impartial reframing. In other words, without immediately having to go to I like this, I like this, this 
is good, this is bad, it gives us a bigger tool to put on any situations and say, well, let's look at it more 
closely, let's observe it like a scientist and see how the action is actually configuring assuming that 
everything that's there has got a right to be there, and that if you are expansive enough and flexible 
enough, you can find a way to accommodate what looked like stone wall opposites and put them in a
new relationship. So that's the first advantage, spaciousness. The second is that it is paradox tolerant. It teaches us a practice for moving forward in life, and this has once again been one of the things that Richard has been bringing to us consistently for about as long as I have known Richard, that dualistic thinking is either/or, as simplistic as let's name the bad guys and get rid of them. Paradox tolerance which is a fundamental intellectual and ethical capacity for living in this planet at this time, paradox tolerance is really the ability to endure process, to endure messiness, to ensure ambiguity, to trust in a greater trajectory of creativity moving through things, and to not truncate the action, not strangle the action by immediately having to create certainty again, create structure, create rigidity. So the Law of Three is a marvelous tool for teaching practical paradox tolerance and suggesting that the resolution of dualism or two-ness may not be in the direction of the one, but in the direction of the three—hold that thought. The other thing about the Law of Three that I really love is that it's creative. One of the things that you learn about people is that you can't—you know that nobody thinks well in annul mode. I think most writers learn very quickly that they can't write and edit at the same time. You sit down and you write what you have to say and you go back and edit it because they are different functions. If you start fussing about a, and, or the when you are in the middle of it, you lose your train. So what's always depressed me is that theology has become such an anal mathematical art that it's only in theology that we seem to go for this mathematical, one means the other can't be true, and I have always asked if Bach is right, does that mean Mozart's wrong?

You know, it would never occur to you to ask that question in music. So why do we ask it in theology? Why do we say if universalism is true, that Christo-centrism is wrong? Why do we have to do it in that frame? Because we are using the editing mind rather than the expansive and playful. So the Law of Three encourages people to play, to think creatively, to think expansively, nonjudgmentally about problem solving. One of the best ones I have ever had was I was at a conference with a leadership conference of women religious. There was a wonderful woman out there who is—Nancy Sylvester, a beautiful soul, for many, many years has been teaching the Catholic contemplative sisters patterns of open contemplative dialogue and listening. I think it's one of the main reasons why the standoff with the Vatican came through as well as it did because those sisters were using skills that Nancy had learned, and one of these was the Law of Three. So we were working in this conference and I gave the groups in the room two real hard paradoxes to resolve. One had to do with congressional debates on something. The other was the standoff with the Vatican and the sisters at all, I said, take them into your buzz group, use the Law of Three to come up with a solution to it. Well, they came back and they said, well, you know, if the women in there, their spirit of free innovation and inquiry was affirming and the canon law and the bishop's authority was denying, this is—well, what's the missing reconciling, and somebody had said, well, nobody is in their bodies, and they came back and said, well, what if we instituted dancing, what if we turn the Sistine Chapel floor into a ballroom and they danced? Well, there you had it, but it was just such a hilarious image of all these sort of stumbling over themselves, red-hatted gentlemen dancing with these execrable nuns that everybody just burst into gales of merriment. You know, laughter is the best expander of vision. It was just an amazing moment of intimacy and wholeness, but that's the idea. This encourages creative problem solving, so that's a wonderful way by not judging, demonizing and identifying, but to hold an open space with the conviction that since creation has been going on since creation that there is some precedent for new creation. Things are moving, things are changing, so it's stupid to think that anything is every going to stay the same. It's moving, it's moving, it's moving—so how can we tweak it, how can we enjoy the ride?

So those kinds of questions are there, and finally of course, obviously, it aligns us through its three-ness with beginning to ask the questions about, is that maybe another thing that's being said in this symbol, what if it isn't just here to remind you of the beer you are going to have later, but is like a DNA implanted in the heart of everything, like a new kind of double helix that unfolds a certain way
that things progress, shape, and form in the world, and what if the Trinity is not only a mandala of
the relatedness of God and the relatedness of everything, but has all along been given to Christianity
as a seed to say, if you want to follow and get on this dance of divine unfolding, which is the divine
heart at play, then perhaps we should look to this Law of Three and say and take it as a precious
template of how we as those aspiring to be Christians actually jump into this dance. More on that
tomorrow. Thank you.

Session 6: Cynthia Bourgeault

Cynthia Bourgeault: So, we are going to do part 2 this morning as I promised, and I think your
general itinerary for this morning is that for the first hour I'm going to mess with your mind and then
for the second hour Paul's going to blow your mind. So, that’s what we are about, and I am going to
continue with the Trinity and the Law of Three Part 2 and maybe try to tie together some of the
threads that we—that I—or maybe even harvest some of the seeds I planted yesterday. I've heard all
sorts of good comments as people come up to me and are already starting to work with the Law of
Three, is this how it’s working, is this how it’s working, so good. That kind of experimentation and
grappling to make this your own is going to be very, very useful ground for any of the theological
talk, and as I try to say yesterday, you don't have to couple it with the Trinitarian theology. I mean
you can use it as a separate box just as an interesting and useful way of reframing and working your
way through situations in your life. So I—I encourage you to play with it in that way and then when
and if the connection with the Trinity comes online for you and becomes useful, great, that really ties
in the good knots. So, I am going to give you some pointers in that direction, but really take this
material at your own speed, find what's useful to yourself in it, and integrate it in your being.

So where I’d like to start this morning is to come back to something that Richard said very, very
powerfully yesterday that as Christians we really—we really proclaim that the world is real and
good, and it's an essential place that God loves, for God so loved the world, that God values that God
inhabits with God's presence that this is not some sort of illusion, it's not a mistake, it's not a training
ground for heaven, that there is real substance, real presence to be gained here. It’s innately valuable
and so valuable and this is the staggering thing that Christianity proclaims, God so loved this world
that he sent his Son or gave his Son that it took becoming incarnate to really completely affirm and
inhabit the goodness of this place. So we are not a place here that God does not occupy. Right now,
we are in the midst of the whole greater present-fullness of God, so this is what Christianity is hung
onto this infra—incarnation world-loving heart and granted the incarnation model has often been
hard pressed from early on when Christianity first began creating its own meta-narrative, it reached
around and grabbed heavily into platonic categories, and so a lot of our early thinking, particularly in
mystical theology unfortunately, got infected with some basic platonic dualisms, the separation, you
know, the opposition of spirit and matter which allowed us to sort of slip back into the very frame
that Christianity had come to replace of thinking of this world as bad, as alien, as not loved with
God, as somehow deficient or coarse or gross, so there has always been that tendency to do some sort
of Platonic version of beam me up Scotty about this world, and it does infect our mystical theology
which is one of the reasons why I think the churches often not completely owned its own tradition—
mystical tradition sometimes, because it smells a rat in here. I remember Richard’s story, I ought to
leave Richard to say it himself, but I got the floor, so talking about the last minute of the last hour of
the last theology class after four years in seminary in Rome, the professor backing out the door and
saying gentleman, the one thing you must remember is that Christianity has been far more influenced
by Plato than by Jesus. So, that’s our tradition, and against that it’s hard to hear that shocking
comment that I read from Bruno this morning that this world is not a deviation from the path of
Christ. This world in all its messiness and untidiness and process is the inevitable, legitimate playing
out of the kind of energy that was put into the world in Christ, and we have to not forget that, because if we do and just—let's blow this one off and get another one. If we start doing that, we forget the very essence of what our—what Christ came for, okay, and what gives us our unique and precious identity epicenter as a Christian path. So what are the reasons that Richard began to bring to the fore again the whole idea of the alternative orthodoxy and what we really work with as the cornerstone in the Living School and the CAC is this renewed vision of the goodness of creation and the hear-ness that this is a sphere inhabited for God by God and absolutely necessary so that love may be full that there's a wonderful, wonderful to quote from the—from the Sufi tradition that God speaks and says, I was a hidden treasure and I love to be known and so I created the world, both visible and invisible, that—that God too is moved by the most powerful, powerful yearning that is the innermost yearning in us, the yearning for self-disclosure, for the perfect yearning to be seen in all of our nakedness and goodness, and so the world becomes in a deep sense the mirror of God’s yearning for love, and in that sense, it's absolutely precious God would not be complete without this world, and we have a very, very precious play—part to play in the unfolding and in full expression of that reality of divine love. So the alternative orthodoxy has in various ways been proclaiming that all along. We are bringing it back into the fore again and trying to help people to live that confidently and robustly, and as that happens inevitably, the symbol of the Trinity emerges front and center, and one of the reasons as we have spent the time to put together this conference and thank God that so many of you are interested in this is that we realize the two go hand in hand, the alternative orthodoxy, the presence of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself is of such importance and is captured in this symbol of the Trinity. So, I wanted—I want to talk a little bit about this that—that what we realize is that the symbol of the Trinity in the same way as being refashioned. It's not the same Trinity that you may have encountered when you did, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit very quickly coming into our church, but we are seeing the Trinity in a whole new old way and right along with the reclamation of the—the of the alternative orthodoxy there has been a reclamation in what you might call a revival of our understanding of Trinity and what we're really doing here is to try to bring you guys all on board with that and help to walk you through some of the consequences of that in all realms, theological, but more important ethical, practical, pastoral, how we live our life, what difference it makes. So what we are coming back to more is the idea of to use the word a cosmotheandric Trinity. Now that may sound like a really, really big world. It was invented by Raimon Panikkar who I am going to introduce you to shortly who put more words into the English language than anybody but Shakespeare, but it means to understand the Trinity as a kind of beautiful inter-circulation between not only the three people, the three persons of the Trinity, but between the realms separating, bridging whatever gap you may have felt through the teachings of transcendence that God is somewhere else, connecting all things cosmos, the world, theos, God, andros, man understood as humanity, and one great vast inter-circulating circle in which all things are made new and in which all things are driven forward, so we are going to be looking at this concept today and see if we can wrap our mind around it. I want to—I want to do a little bit of historical level, historical way into this by talking about four—three people, I will be the fourth, on the reclamation of the Trinity and bringing us back of this wider concept, this cosmotheandric, cosmogonic Trinity that we are invited to step into and feel our way around. So as Richard alluded yesterday, by about the mid-20th century, actually by 1967, was the nadir of Trinitarian theology in the West. In that year, Karl Rahner wrote a book in which he proclaimed that our understanding and the relevance of the Trinity had fallen to such an all-time low that if a secret Council of the theologians was to get together and decide it was a heretical and needed to be eliminated from Christian doctrine, he said most people would not even notice its absence. That’s how irrelevant it had become. It was reduced to just that little crossing yourself, that the Sunday that all theologians, all priests say to preach on as Trinity Sunday because people know they are going to enter this arcane description of the inner life of God, so yeah, it had divided, it had gotten split, bifurcated into two brands, two sort of avenues of Trinity specialization, an imminent Trinity which had to do with basically speculations of the inner life of
God, angels dancing on the head of the pin, just so co-opted and shanghaied by scholastic jargon that it was basically impenetrable and then what was called the economic Trinity which was the also round, yeah, the Earth, and so there was the whole picture had gotten broken up. We no longer saw us at the table. We only saw that the Trinity was about this little thing a God loving himself in a big old way that doesn't have anything to do with anything, and as Rahner says, it’s irrelevant. Most Christians would rather take their kids to soccer practice on Sunday morning than hear about that. But right away, sometimes all you have to do is name the obvious before it starts to turn and very shortly afterwards one of Rahner’s students, the woman that Richard referred to yesterday, Catherine Mowry LaCugna published an extraordinary book called God For Us: The Trinity in Christian Life, and she was a professor at Notre Dame. Her life ended tragically quickly. She died of cancer in I think 1997 just beginning a career that would otherwise have rocked the world, you know she’d be up here I am sure instead of me giving this talk, but she published the book as a popular press, HarperSanFrancisco published it, and she traced the development and the defeat of the doctrine of the Trinity over the course of about 1400 years of Christian history as it moved from being an original participative civic symbol of how God is involved in all of his oikonomia that's where we get the word economy, the whole of creation, the realms visible and invisible, cosmotheandric joined together, and it had stopped being that and become this just annul obsession with the inner life of God which was at the same time pronounced inevitable—ineffable, so how can you know what's ineffable anyway. So anyway she says we’ve got to put it back together the Trinity began as the symbol of God's complete immersion and fusion and participation in the world and we’ve got to get it back to that, the imminent Trinity is the economic Trinity. Rahner had said that, LaCugna picked it, carried it further, and all of a sudden tens of thousands of people were reading that book, because it got on the bestseller list for a while. Funny how God works. Anyway, so that was the start of what you might called the Trinity turnaround. Meanwhile, out in the pastors of Santa Barbara, Raimon Panikkar was working away. Panikkar is one of the most extraordinary scholars and theological presences of the 20th century. He was born of a Hindu Brahmin father and a Catholic mother and was one of the first people to really take inter-spirituality and inter-spiritual understanding to a new place. He taught at the University of California Santa Barbara for many, many years and was just a great guy, worked on the Trinity all his life. His very first book was on the Trinity, his very last book in 2010, the year he died, was on the Trinity in which he could come to this jaw-droppingly simple thing of saying by the Trinity I mean simply the ultimately threefold structure of reality. Take that one in your pipe and smoke it for a few years, but Panikkar contributed a couple of things which were crucially important to this revisioning of the Trinity and first was the whole notion of God moving cosmotheandrically, or in other words the Trinity bridging the worlds of and you can play with this gesture, you know. One of the things we saw yesterday was how much fun it is when you start working with physical props when Paul's getting up there messing with the chairs, you begin to get Trinity in a better way. So, to understand what I mean by cosmotheandric rather than trying to stuff it into your brain up, get a little bit of space so you don’t bop your neighbor and start making a circle with your hand just going around like this rotating, it’s kind of a funny thing to do because the muscle at ball socket in your—in your shoulder knows how to rotate around and put your hand in a different position, but think about it and think about it as you go now Father, Son, Spirit, Father, Son, Spirit, and then think about it as cosmos, this world, theos, God, Andros, humanity, including Christ in the midst all inter-circulating the realms of the invisible and the realms of the visible carried in hell together in emotions, and this is Panikkar’s notion of cosmotheandric. The Trinity is moving like that great wheel joining the realms together, and it’s very interesting that in this understanding, that you see a solution to the problem that Richard was talking about yesterday, the law of the one and the many, you see that in this beautiful cosmotheandric circulation, you’ve got the Law of Three dynamic setup. The first force let’s call it the one, second force, the many, the denying, and the third, what is the thing that allows them to be together and get out of impasse? Motion. When you set the whole thing in motion so that nothing is getting stuck in one place, but everything is giving,
everything is moving, everything is flowing into something else, so motion or perichoresis becomes third force in a perfect Law of Three which allows—which allows the two, the quandary of the one and the quandary of the many to be perfectly preserved and come not into impasse, which it always does in Greek philosophy, but into motion, and what’s the new arising that comes out of that, the oikonomia, the wholeness of everything in which God can completely suffuse creation without getting trapped in it. Some people call that panentheism, but I don't like that word because it spins off of pantheism, you know, and cosmotheandric is a brand new ballpark. It's a positive saying rather than negative one. So, both unity and particularity are preserved by giving-ness, by flowing-ness. It’s a law of three, it’s classic. It resolves the dilemma and allows you to realize fully that there is no place in you where you stop and God begins. Try and find it, I dare you. There is no place in you that God stops and you begin. You are not a place that God doesn’t occupy. The whole thing is in God, but God doesn’t reduce to just being you, because this greater flowing-ness allows the one and the many to be held together. Okay, so that was one of Panikkar’s great contributions. The other that I think is very, very cool is that he said—the Trinity is actually an original in Christian theology, original because it originates in the mind of Christ. Now, yeah, it’s true that historically we didn’t get Trinitarian doctrine fully formed till the 4th century, but one of the basic when you are doing Trinitarian theology is like who really cares when the downloads a new time, because down beyond time is this great world of alternate causality in which time is not a factor, okay. So, then our little world that lives under the law of time and is really, really, really it says to find out, what happened to Jesus during this 30 years of this early life, did he go to kind of, you know, you think you have to have an origin for something in the liter—in the linear causal world, no. Your origin for things is in the greater world that the heart already accesses that lives beyond time. And anybody at any time can download the fullness of truth and history changes on the dime. So, what Trinity—what—what Panikkar says is that the Trinity gives you a timeless mad mirror, a mandala, an icon of how the mind of Christ works, once again around this many and this one, and he looks inside, uses his mind, and sees first of all the statement, the divine Paul, I and my Father are one, and then he looks at the human, that contingent, Abba, Papa, Paul, of creature-hood, and how he says that both of these experiences are ultimately valid for Jesus, as they are for all human beings and that what holds them together so I don’t walk around big for my preacher saying, Oh, I am god, I am god all the time, I am divine. You know, you don’t do that, but neither do you shrink from the divinity of your very being, because in the practice motion of kinesis, of flow, of giving it away, you are able to access without getting stuck in both of these irreducible truths of your being, just like Jesus, and it’s in this cosmotheandric model that you can claim that great passage in the farewell discourse in John 17 that Richard was bringing us to as you father are in me and I am in you, may they be in us, I in them, you in me that they may be completely one. Okay, you get it? That statement, the gospel of John of the farewell discourse, which is the ultimate statement of the mind of Christ, is a cosmotheandric mind inner-circulating, is a Trinitarian mind, self-giving, being the third force that allows divinity and humanity one in many to coexist in a complete outpouring reality, okay. So those are Panikkar’s great contributions. He staggeringly laid the foundation for what we would call our contemporary alternative orthodoxy Trinitarian dynamic theology we are laying before you.

But meanwhile while he is sitting there in Santa Barbara allowing these thoughts to come to fruition, out in by this time North Carolina in the hills not far out beyond Winston-Salem, a little lady that nobody has ever heard of, who happen to be probably the most brilliant theologians who ever walked the planet is taking this step further. Her name is Beatrice Bruteau. Any of you ever heard that name? She is one of these incredible underground geniuses of 20th and 21st century theology, was one of the first women to get a graduate degree at Fordham University, double degrees, philosophy and mathematics, founded the American Teilhard Society in New York, just a brilliant, brilliant mind, also deeply trained in Vedanta. So, she picked this up and began to take it one step further building a lot on Teilhard and evolutionary theory, and she said, okay, maybe the template is more, maybe it’s
more than just this cosmotheandric, because you still don’t see in this how does the world get involved when you made your hand, you didn’t have it going out this way. It was still working on a single plane. How is it that the Trinity drives forward, and she was the began—who first began to look at it as a cosmogonic template. Remember I talked about that yesterday as a law, as something that builds within it by the very way it's structured, the impelling imperative to drive outward and bring new things into creation. So she says the Trinity must do this. As a matter of fact that she—she sees it like think of that as DNA, think of that as embedded in every seed and every marrow and every quirk of the universe and you will be thinking like Bruteau. She says it is the presence of the Trinity—it is the presence of the Trinity as a pattern repeated at every scale of the cosmic order that makes the universe the manifestation of God and itself, sacred and holy. So what if this thing is not merely talking about love going around in circles? What if there's something in it that forces it to drive forward into new creation? So that's the question that Beatrice asked in her wonderful book, God's Ecstasy. I think one of the brilliant books that was ever written on the planet. And she says she brings her attention to two things that make the Trinity inevitably a cosmogonic principle. The first thing is symbiotic unity. This is what the biologists would call what we've been talking, three in one, one in three, and it is as Teilhard first pointed out and as she picks up and drives home chapter and verse, it's the core evolutionary principle. When you look at how we got from the Big Bang to now, we got to it by what she calls in her wonderfully North Carolina simple way, clumping. In other words, things come together and stay together to form new units. The two H say to the O that's floating around somewhere, hey, what if we all got together, put our acts together and form something new? And, da, da, water, and you notice that when you do that, there is no backing out. You know the two H’s can’t give out—gang up on the O and the O says to hell with it. It has a new unit. It has what scientists now call emergent properties that belong to the whole and not the parts. But over and over and she traces and any biologists or physicists will do the same, that the way we've got from something to nothing, or from nothing to something is when things form these newer and newer and more complex units. At every stage, we go from polymer chains that are just sort of floating out there, making endless dominos or crystals, to boom. Some of them say let’s get together and form a new unit and we will call it the cell, and inside the cell we are going to have differentiation of function. You guys are going to be the exoskeleton, and you are going to keep bad stuff from getting into me; you guys are going to be the DNA. You are going to tell us how to do it. You guys are going to be the protoplasm, and you are going to hold the whole thing together and transmit information within me, differentiation of function within a single whole symbiotic unity, Law of Three all the same and once you got the sales, the floodgates opened, right, all of a sudden you got the tree of life with everything in it, elephants, mammals, you know, little plants. It’s, you know, we move on that way, and as a matter of fact, many are saying and I believe this that the next evolutionary stage for humanity is not going to be enlightenment of individuals or even a thousand people in the room getting enlightened simultaneously. It's going to be the capacity to form out of let's take this as a sample body a new coherent unit with the same specialization of function and emergent properties that exist in a cell, you know, and I watch myself as I am teaching you and walking with you, whether the group remains coherent, and it does it brilliantly. You know, you guys 2000 strong have an energy to hold your own, to hold attention, to help one another when someone is getting screwed up, and oh, that’s confusing somebody else's got it and the energy so that we create a learning and an expressing vehicle that’s harder than the—bigger than the sum of the parts, no backing out. It's not co-exist, it’s coalesce, so we, we are stumbling around here just doing the next step on the evolutionary, the symbiotic—symbiotic-unity dance that’s been done forever. So, she saw in that way that the Trinity is a symbol of a template of the evolutionary principle. It pushes us into new forms, into new holes with new emergent properties. Because of that, the other thing about it is because of its three-ness. The physicists have a word, the nuclear, the atomic physicists, which they call symmetry breaking, and she picks up that word and puts it right down in the context of medi—of—of metaphysics that basically things that are in binary form come to an equilibrium, yin and
yang, good and evil, Republicans and Democrats, you know, stasis is the basis, pendulum, but three-ness whenever it enters the equation can’t reach an equilibrium in itself. It has to move forward. It has to assess initially move into a different dimension in order to resolve itself. So, physicists have pointed out that symmetry breaking is an evolutionary principle. She goes back and demonstrates in a—she, Bruteau, in an argument closely like the one that Richard was giving to us yesterday from Bonaventure, why three-ness is also the necessary condition for what she calls the emergence of agape love, divine love, because love that is all in itself is loveless, and love that is entirely focused on the thou becomes essentially meta-narcissistic. You simply are completely absorbed in each other as anybody who's ever fallen in love with the beloved knows in those first six giddy weeks of your romance, it’s only the other. The rest of the world can go to hell. And then love matures into another step where you begin to realize that if you really love another, you have to love what the beloved love, not out of codependency, but because you so—the beloved’s heart has so much become your heart that they become a single field that looks out in the world that if your beloved takes joy in golf, that your sense of your beloved taking joy in golf becomes part of you taking joy in golf. It's not dependency. It’s a way of reaching out to expand the full pneumatic wholeness of the other. And that's what she calls the I, I, the deepest self to deepest self. And it's that kind of love that three-ness that characterizes and differentiates agape love from erotic love, which is the love of two, you know. So in that way, she says that the Trinity would have to be three-ness because otherwise you just get—it would self-contained, but the three-ness is by nature cosmogonic, symmetry breaking, forcing things into new configurations and taking more and more of reality. So, that was her work and she imagines when she talks about God's ecstasy, she goes to the word ectasia which means standing outside yourself, and she says creation is God's ecstasy because by the nature of its three-ness and its symbiotic unity, God has to stand outside God self-project outward and expand the field of God-ness so that it incorporates the whole world. It incorporates the world in all dimension, ongoing-ness, okay. So that's the vision and that’s inherent in that, that little cosmic DNA. Does that make some sense? Okay.

So all I did then was to—was to take one little small jump off her diving board. Being a good Hindu, she never heard of the Law of Three, as a matter of fact, nobody. The Law of Three was never in the conversation pit. Gurdjieff was never in the conversations pit to allow a few others like Rus Hudson began to put them in, but you can see that what this does is it simply is a template. What she is describing as they—the symbiotic unity and the three-ness has already been talked about in the Law of Three as the interaction, the necessary action of three lines of action. So all I'm saying is that another way of looking at the Trinity is to see that it's symbolizes, instantiates, and personalizes the whole idea that yes that the mechanism by which new creation arises is through the interaction of three-ness, yes, it’s symbiotic unity because that symbiotic unity is contained in affirming, denying, reconciling. Symmetry breaking is affirmed in affirming, denying, reconciling, and you’ve seen how I've already used the Law of Three earlier today to try and show you how it can help resolve that paradox of the one and the many. So what I've done and a lot of people kind of get—they’ll come and say, are you taking our beloved Trinity as it is full of persons and just sort of delegate it down into a cosmic principle? No. What I'm doing is when you overlace things, you don't cancel out the identity at any one level. What I'm saying is when the persons come through as the instantiation as the feeling tone of the reality of intimacy and carrying and love that come through within this field. It's not just a transpersonal thing. It is saturated with love, which is what happens when agape love moves through this pattern. I actually have a symbol. My formula for love is again a kind of law of three pattern that agape love is eros, submitted through kenosis or letting go. And then you begin to get agape, and the three persons of the Trinity symbolize and instantiate for us that when you step into these principles and when you step into using them in life and that the whole world of God, the whole which is us is suffused with a personal. It's not pitiless, it's not indifferent. So I'm not taking away the relational dimension of it; I'm simply trying to move it beyond dependent on three persons,
and we always will still hear persons as people. It’s not dependent upon three people loving each other and we loving our people. It is the nature of—it’s picked up in the heart as we understand when we open our heart to the feeling tone of the mystery that is deeply, irreducibly personal, that everything we know in love is what we know in this field. It's not a pitiless law working in the world, but it’s a law that allows the very expression of God's heart to become real in manifest. Does this make sense at all? So the personal doesn't go away. It just gives us a way to jump into it, and I think working with the Trinity from the perspective of the Law of Three doesn’t sort of reduce it to a principle, but it connects the principle to the lived reality of our heart, and so I wanted to just sort of draw this to the close by summarizing the three main takeaways for me of what’s the advantage in trying to overlay the Trinity as Panikkar and Bruteau and Rohr and all these people are trying to reclaim it as the field, the dance, the relational loving how we—what’s the advantage of trying to layer on yet that next layer. Oh, yeah, and it also mirrors and reflects and coincides with the Law of Three.

Well, I think it gives three—three new purchasing points. First of all, it deeply and powerfully upholds that incarnational theology. For God so loved the world and the whole motive, the whole momentum in trying to vision the Trinity as a cosmogonic principle really doesn't just say, oh, God’s up there saying nice world, nice world. God so loved the world that God makes the world the very body of God's ongoing self-disclosure in love, okay, that because this evolutionary principle is built right into the thing through the Trinity, we don't have to turn our backs away from the world and look for God's reality in this illusory world called spirit. We don't have to look for God in the de-material, that right here God is in the world reconciling the world to himself and Christ here that is holy reconciling okay, that, we are part of the ongoing self—self revelation of the heart of God in all its physicality. So the Law of Three really affirms that this is the mechanics of how this works. It's not going to go away, that God is going to continue right on wrapping this whole thing, world’s visible and world’s invisible together as the one pulsing, changing, kaleidoscope revelation of divine possibility and creativity right here, right now. We are not some remote isolated random corner of forgotten Earth. We are where God's heart is happening, and it allows us to draw on that and take it deeper and take the fundamental dignity and accountability that comes with that, take that deeply to your heart and live like a human being. That's the message there.

The second is that I think it builds a bridge between theology and science. You know that that terrible schizophrenic divide that went through that got started, you know, in the early squabbles around the flat Earth, you know, about the sun and the Earth and which revolved around which, all that stuff that finally ended in this uneasy truce which separated the domains of science from the domains of theology with the implicit agreement. Well, the theologians can talk about the world theologically in their little theological universe and science will talk about the world here resulting in the separation of these two worlds, like I sometimes talk about when you go to church, it's like going into the Jesus theme park because it's beautiful. We got our theological rides. We know universalism. We now, you know, we know all of the aboves, but then we come back out into a world that's playing by entirely different rules and that's crazy making, and I think the Law of Three because it has been tested out and vetted, and we’ve got—we’ve got good documents and documentation in various fields of science, political science, that it works as a frame for accounting for how the world works that it offers a bridge to build these—bring these two separated worlds back together. All we have to do really all, is to recognize that when we work in the world, we're playing out the theological code that was put there in the Trinity, we are living it that way, and to realize that when we are working in the world, we're giving flesh and bones. We become God's ecstasy, you know, exemplifying the Trinity, so it brings the two things. It brings the world together, and I think that's really, really important because we've got to—we are dying in Christianity I think, because we don't have a cosmology as big as the world we actually experience, and I think that seeing the Trinity
and then connecting it to the Law of Three allows us to begin to put Humpty Dumpty back together again here. Finally, I think it gives us a bridge between theology and practice, okay, because so often it’s absolutely crazy making to try and be contemplative in a world that is still working this thing that divides the world into these—these two hemispheres called contemplation and action and then equates contemplation with sitting on your navel being very, very quiet, and action with going out and tearing down walls to get built and doing all the good work of the world. That’s nuts. It’s based on a false and artificial dichotomy, and in the law of three it really encourages us first of all to go out from our meditation cushions and consider what if the Law of Three was entrusted to Christianity as our particular variety of special of what the Buddhists calls skillful means; what if we began to move in the world this way looking at the world in different ways, not getting stonewalled into right or wrong, good or bad, saved or condemned, but seeing in every situation there is something that wants to switch, move, resolve the impasse and move on, what if we could play with it. There is a whole teaching that I can go into today that really connects the dots, because the teaching is that third force is usually there, always there in every situation, but we don't see it in our identified dualistic polarized state. As soon as we do either/or, my team, really, you know, we get identified with our cause, with our vision, we lose the capacity to see the whole situation. We put our own finger over the camera lens, okay, so the very spiritual practices that live in the contemplative quadrant, teaching non-identification, teaching finding a deeper sense of selfhood, teaching—teaching deal with the separate self, not with the shallow self, all that sort of stuff helps us become third force amenable.

When we are not judgmental, when we are relaxed, when we are patient, and above all and this is an important one for me, and if I get time, I will finish here if I get the guts, when we enter that space in contemplation, and when you do your centering prayer in the morning and for a while you drop in all the thoughts and all the things and all the worries that keeps pulling you back to usual sense of self, you float for a a little while in that timeless heart of the heart of God, in that light flowing, maybe you could picture your little self as the chalice right there on the table, and there you live in that unbounded, timeless, synchronous causality rather than the linear one that we work in real life. You—you intuit the God that is always creating that is always downloading, that is making all things new. You become part of that newness, and you carry a little bit of that back with you off of the meditation cushion. That's what lets you heal yourself. A lot of psychotherapy is beginning to discover you don't heal your false self by doing something that fixes it. You just learn to trust this larger and this part of you that was never broken to hold and heal the other. So as contemplation begins to let you do that, it's not so that you, oh, I can just go and spend the rest of my life in monasteries, it’s so that you begin to draw on the instantaneous, complete icon of that wholeness that lives there to allow you to let go of all that dualizing self, walk into the situation at hand, open your heart, take in the picture, see what’s needed not to make you right, but to make it work, and in that point, you become a conscious servant drawing your energy from—from the whole, the unbroken wholeness of God as it joyously spills into the many and comes back together. You draw it from the whole thing and walk fearlessly into situations knowing that you don't need to sit on your pillow for 10 hours a day to be protected and immediately in God and knowing that work in the world is not going to drain you down and lets you get identified with it. So you move out in the world, you sometimes wonder why people like Mother Teresa, you know, or these people can be—so the Dalai Lama, or I think in his own way, Barrack Obama could be tireless activists without getting their contemplative life drawn down, because they refresh themselves in the great wheel of this wholeness and move into the world as the ineffable overflow of the ecstasy of God. Does this make sense? So it's a completely revisioning of contemplative selfhood and a breaking down of that artificial dichotomy. We are called to be co-creators or what I'd like to say, co-revealers of the divine heart in the act of revealing yet more and more dimensions of divine possibility, of divine love, and when you read the Old Testament in a certain way, I love to see it as a great story of the evolution, of the revelation of the divine heart, and it’s a feedback loop. As humans evolve to a place where they're able to take a little bit more of it, God is able to show a little bit more of it, so we move from animal
sacrifice like those Paul was taking about yesterday, human sacrifice, into a new level of understanding relationship covenant, and then all of a sudden there's the next upwelling, I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will write the law in your heart and you will become my people, and I will be your God, and then you will dwell in your land, you will dwell in your own skins in the land your father gave you, so that level, and then Jesus says the master cardiologist to do this surgery. What is God going to reveal next of God’s divine heart when we are ready, and even in the midst of reversals, even in the midst of atrocities, even in the midst of what looks like going backwards, as we enter that place of trust in that wholeness and move forward out of it as conscious servants of the cosmogonic principle of love, we find what we are to do, and we take hope not just in the fact that someday it’s all going to come out right, but in the fact that right now in this square patch of ground you occupy, you are in the fullness of the divine heart expressing itself in love as you and through you to the whole world and becoming. And, so with that thought, I am going to leave you.

Session 7: Wm Paul Young

William Young: Don’t be conformed, there are two words in the Greek for form. There is morphe and schema, and we get schematic drawings from schema and morphe is the unveiling or as used for metamorphosis, right. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, that's the Greek word that is used, it's the mount of the metamorphosis and it's the revealing from the inside out. So it says, don’t be conformed schema, which is your external mode of operation, how you live your life, don’t be conformed by this world but be transformed, metamorphosized, let your true being and nature be revealed from the inside out, right. And then it says as we are transformed in our minds, we are transformed by the renewal of our minds or the blowing of your mind, right? So thank you Cynthia. And, as far as what I am going to say, everything she said. So in the honoring of this season of time, I am going to tell you a story. Now, you have to understand, I grew up in a tradition where lent was something you did with your tools, all right, and you never talked about the passion because that was virtually sinning. It's probably one of us that translated the word in the Hebrew for the many breasted one, El Shaddai, because Shad is the Hebrew word for breast, but to say the word breast for us was to sin, so we came up with like lord of hosts or something. I was in Grand Forks, North Dakota, yeah, and I was speaking to quite a large group that had gathered and a lot of them are farmers and ranchers. These men and women, I mean they sit out there on tractors for most of everyday or on horses and all they do is think up stories, so they are great storytellers. Afterwards, we met in this big room at the Grand Forks country club, which looks like a fifth wheel, and they had a separate room for about 40 of us and it was in a big horseshoe shape, and for about an hour and a half, all we did is told stories. I tell you, we laughed and laughed, and these stories were just incredible. In one corner of the horseshoe shape was an elderly couple of the room, and he was very quiet, demure. He would sit there with his arms like this and he would chuckle and stuff, but he didn’t say anything, but his wife was gregarious, very active, very involved, and finally, he goes, ahem, and the whole room, and he says, well, you know you have been married a long time when your wife gives up sex for lenting, you don't find out till Good Friday.

I was on the floor and I thought that was like the one of the funniest things I have ever heard in my whole life. And, to be delivered by the man who did was just absolutely perfect. I don’t know how many of you ever kind of like to read about social science experiments or biology experiments. I love science, and you have to realize that inside this circle of relationship is where the Law of Three happens, right? It's inside the circle of relationship that microbiology and quantum physics and golfing happen, right? And fishing and digging around in your garden—this is all happening inside this. So when Cynthia or Richard are talking—Cynthia is talking about the Law of Three, and
Richard is talking about some things that seem like for those of us who are Protestant in background, seems esoteric. But what they are doing is grounding real exploration. You do know that God never told us everything, right? And so we get to explore this, not only this community but everything that this community loves, which is the creation, which is one another, and this is all happening inside this relationship. I love to read about—there are some people that get grants to stuff that you wouldn't believe, right. Like there are wildest things. Well, there was this one, and this was a while back, but this an experiment that was done by the US Navy, but it was also done by a research facility with one of the major universities, and what they did is that—the Navy used water as a deterrent, but the scientists used shock collars, you know shock collars? They give you a good enough zap that you are quite aware of their presence, but otherwise they are not inhumane—to some degree. But what they did is they set up this room and they built a platform in the middle with stairs going up to it and they hung a banana in the center of the platform so that it could be reached and they put five monkeys in there, right. Here's where the scientific brain kind of goes sideways because you are thinking like, what are they doing, while the five monkeys come in and they are playing around, and finally, one of them notices the banana. If you know anything about monkeys, their whole world view is summed up in banana, right. So one of the monkeys goes tearing for the banana, he gets up there and as he grabs it, the scientists shock the other four. So you got one monkey going like, this is the greatest day ever, and you got four monkeys going like, what the hell just happened, right? So they put another banana up there, and sure enough, money goes up, grabs it, they shock the other four. It takes about three bananas before they are starting to get the idea, and now when they put the new banana out there, there are four monkeys looking at each other going like, no, you don't be touching no banana. And they refused to touch the banana. Well, after a while, the scientists were thinking like, well, this is kind of boring. So they took one of the monkeys out and put a brand new monkey in there, right, and a monkey that didn't even have a shock collar on. Well, this new monkey sees the banana and he makes a beeline for it, and four monkeys get in his way, going like, un-uh, and it's confusing to this new monkey. He is like we are monkeys like banana. They are going like, un-uh. So after a while, I mean every time he tries to get to the banana, four monkeys in his way. Well, they take another shock collar monkey out, put another new monkey in there, and that new monkey then goes for the banana and four monkeys are standing in his way, three with shock collars on, and one like, don't know what the hell is going on here but you cannot have that banana. Eventually, they replaced every monkey except for one shock collar—actually they replaced all of them, and then a new monkey comes in and goes for the banana, and four monkeys with no shock collars are going like, un-uh, and that's tradition.

I like to put it in theological terms you know. There were five theologians and one of them heard the voice of the spirit and it shocked the other four. I like theologians. There is so much—when I talked about A to Z yesterday, A to Z, that whole movement of spirituality—to be more accurate, it should have been a circle, right, because Jesus is the alpha and omega and it's a complete circle. This is the circle that we are inside of, that we were created in, and there is a lot of scripture about the validity of what is being talked about here and we are learning how to find language and bridges so that we can have our minds blown so that we can then participate in the truth. Who is Jesus? Who is this relationship? And Jesus, who is God who enters into creation in order to go down to the darkness that they have brought to the table and defeat its power, something that we have clutched on to, and when Jesus comes, John's gospel, remember he is the last writer, and it's full of these I am statements, which are the declarative statements about I am, the I am—I mean it's rooted in the Hebrew scriptures. There are seven of the major I am statements, so there's no question about the fact that Jesus who is the presence of the cosmic Christ, the word incarnate, who is Emmanuel, God With Us, that he is fully human and he never draws upon his cosmic power to function outside of a life of trust with the father and the spirit. Remember there were all these little things that he would say like,
I don’t do anything unless I see the father do it or I don’t say anything unless I hear the father say it, right? I mean that was kind of a mantra of his that would show up all the time. And if you read the gospels, you will see it pop up all over the place, and he's not talking about dictation, like an automatic writer of some sort. He is talking about relationship. And you can see it happen and is confusing if you are someone from my background where the word of God—you just skip over these parts because they are kind of like, what. Let me give you two examples. One is where Jesus' mom—you know, at this point Jesus is like 30 years old, he hasn’t even gone to college, he has got—he is not even a good woodworker. How many parables did Jesus tell about carpentry? Like zero. There is no memo going around as, you got to go to Nazareth, there is this guy that makes perfect doors, his tables are always level. When Gavin was—he is our firstborn grandchild—when he was, I don’t know, 5 or 6, he asked his dad, so dad, do you think Jesus ever made mistakes? And Chad is a very wise man, much wiser than I was at his age, and he says, well, a lot of people have asked that, what do you think? That's in the history of Jesus where you ask a question to a question because the person in front of you matters more than the question they ask, and it's an invitation into a relationship. What do you think? Gavin things like, yeah, I think he made mistakes because would he have ever learned anything. I think that's a pretty good answer. So Mary says, Jesus, we have got friends who are going to be embarrassed unless you do something, I mean I know you have got your friends and stuff but remember you are like God, like do something. What is Jesus, woman—he doesn’t even say mom, and you have got to see the twinkle in the eye—and he says, woman what do I have to do with this, my time has not yet come. Now, she's a Jewish mom, whatever, hey, you guys, whatever he tells you to do, do it—and he does it. What just happened? What happened was that in 30 seconds from my time has not yet come, he hears, now your time has come—and do you think that it didn't change the life of every one of those servants, do you think that this story didn't go down through the generations. You won't believe what happened with your grandfather. There was this day that this guy showed up and we got to carry the water. I mean like, at the time they are going like, what, we got to carry the water, but because of their participation, it opens up a moment where the father says, now you time has come, and Jesus who lives inside of that relationship, is going like, cool, 30 seconds later. How about the time where his brothers come to him and say, come to the big party—not party, but they might have said that. I have eaten Jewish food so—but this is the festival of booze, right, this is the big party of the year. So they are all saying come in and it makes a big deal about it in the gospel story, like they were repeatedly asking him to go with them and he kept saying to them, no, I am not going. And he is very declarative, it's very right there—no, I am not going, you go, you enjoy yourselves, you go, I am not going. So they go and as soon as they leave, he goes, and they are going like—and by the way, when he is talking to them, he says, my time has not yet come, same phrase, and he goes. And you go like, did he just lie to them or what—no, you have got to understand the dynamic movement. This is about a relationship. This is not about having a set of principles that you refer to and find out what you are supposed to do. This is about being able to listen to the Holy Spirit. This is about living in the Holy Spirit. By the way, when he gets to the big party, he stands up and makes this beautiful sermon, declaration of what it's like to live in the rivers of living water that flow from the inside out. Do you know that there is one ego, I, me, which is the I am statement in John that does not come out of the mouth of Jesus, and John does it very purposefully. You will be surprised. There is a guy in John's gospel that I identify with and I think it's because John intends him to represent entire humanity, and it's the man born blind, John 8. The story of the man born blind, you have got this really great setup. You have got Jesus walking along with his disciples and this guy, who was born blind, and the intimation of the text is not that he is just eyes glazed over like he's got some kind of eye disease, he literally has nothing in his eye sockets. There is a lot of reasons to believe that this is true, including the fact that they had trouble recognizing him. It wasn't like his just cleared up. And there was this big question, is he really him, you know, that whole thing. And the other thing is that they have said, there's never been a miracle like this since the creation, and this is John's commentary on creation. And this man born blind
represents us. This is why the movement of trust is the movement of scene. This is why the process is to have our eyes opened up that we can then participate, and this guy who is an outcast, he has been excommunicated from the church because he has a physical impairment, therefore he is unclean, and he makes his living like begging on the side of the road, and he becomes an object lesson for a Sunday school class. Because they are walking by, he has no clue who they are, this is an uneducated man, and here comes this conversation and they immediately get into this theological twisted up thing where they are going like, so did he sin or his parents sin that he's like this. And Jesus totally ignores it like he does with most questions, and he goes like, no, this is so that the glory of God can be revealed in him today. Now, he is not saying, so God did this to him so that we would show up on this day. He is saying, your theological conversation is irrelevant, we are right here right now with this man in this moment, and this guy, he is sitting here listening and suddenly he hears, puff, and all of a sudden, bam, and this guy says, now go wash it off. Do you know what the word glory means? The glory is the essential nature of a person, place, or thing. A lot of times we think of God's glory as this effervescent light or this, you know, the glory. It's the essential nature just like Jesus is the essential nature of the Father and the Spirit and he is the essential nature of God. That is why we are as creation created to be the glory of God, a human being fully alive and fully free. Jesus didn't come to start a religion. He came to show us what's it's like to be fully human, fully alive, in a relationship with the Father and the Spirit. So you watch and take time sometime to read John 8 because this is a fascinating story where he then begins to take this man—this man goes on a journey. Now, if you know anything about evangelism, Jesus did it all wrong. He didn’t even say, by the way, the one who just put mud in your face, my name is and here's my card, and we need to have a conversation about four spiritual laws and then you need to have this transactional—I mean there— he doesn’t do any of that, he just leaves. Why does he leave? Because he's someone who trusts the Father and the Spirit in the life of this man. How many of us—we don't trust the Holy Spirit, we try to play the Holy Spirit. Jesus trusted the Holy Spirit so he can leave. This guy goes—John loves a good irony—so he goes down to the place that Jesus sends him, a fountain called Sent, so he sent him to Sent and John thinks that's pretty funny, and he washes off and he has eyes and he can see. And starts this whole journey because he is now going to become a conundrum inside the theological community and it's gonna to stir up all kinds of political issues, and he's like—you know, by the time you are halfway through the story, you know that he wants to put a sign on his back that says, I was blind, this guy came—in fact, that's what he says, this guy came up to me and anointed my eyes.

You know, it's mud made out of spit and dirt, right, but suddenly you look back at your life and you begin to realize that the interaction of God in your life has become something way more than it appeared at the time. He anointed my eyes, but he wants a sign that says, I was blind, he put mud in my eyes, I washed it off, I can see. Because everybody's asking him and they are trying—is this really him—like it's me, this is the ego, I, me. And they kept asking him, who are you, and he said, I am. That's the other I am that's in the Gospel of John, is the man born blind. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to reveal to us the truth of our being so that the way of our being can match it. And in that process, he gets—I mean you see him move from, well, maybe he is a prophet. Because they are telling him, this is great, bless God and tell us, you know, because obviously he is not a prophet. He is going like, you know, it just comes to mind. I am wondering do you know any prophets that have been able to do this. Like, who but a prophet could do this, and you see his movement, and Jesus is not even around. So he's listening to them and they are in their theological argumentation convincing him about the truth of who Jesus is, and they are trying to shut him down, and so they end up at the end where they are going like bless God and curse this man. And he goes like, so you don't want to become disciples too, do you? He's moved, right, so what did they do? They excommunicated him. Remember his parents came in and going like, is he really your son, and they are going like, yeah, but we don't know what happened to him. Because they don’t want to get excommunicated, that's what it says right in the text. So they excommunicated him. The beginning of
the day Starts with him being excommunicated, the end of the day starts with like, it's not that big a
deal. And he is wandering around, trying to figure out, what do I do with my life. Have you ever seen
Life of Brian? There is this one scene and it's so great, tell you. Monty Python was overseen by the
Holy Spirit. But in the Life of Brian, there is a scene where there's all these beggars and there is a
guy with really clean skin, a little loin cloth on this stuff, and he is going, alms for an ex-leper, alms
for an ex-leper, and they go like, what do you mean, an ex-leper. He says like, I was just begging,
and this man, Jesus, came by and healed me, and I don’t know I have a clue what to do with my life
now.

You have got to know this guy's feeling a little bit like that. And he runs into a man, and the man
says, so tell me your story. And he says, this is what's happened, and he said, do you know who it
was who healed you? No, but if you could tell me, and Jesus says, it's me. That passage in John 8,
and this man worships him, but that passage in John 8 starts with, and Jesus declared to them, I am
the light of the world. I am statement and you got a blind man in this, us, right? How many
scriptures—and we can, you have to realize that even if you understand the scripture was inspired by
God, the translators weren't. I had his dear sweet lady come up to me at a conference and she goes
like, what are you talking about, like the original languages, look. She had a King James, and I am
going, well, it originally was written in a different language. But she says, what do you mean, it's
right here. I am going like, you think Jesus spoke English? Well, look, it's English. I mean that's a
hard thing to try to get around. So we all come with our paradigms, but there is a lot of passages.
You know when Paul the apostle talks, the only time that he talks about it when he tells his own
story of Damascus road—you will love this. So we lived for 17 years in a little town calling
Boring—Boring, Oregon, home of the Boring Baptist Church. They eventually changed their name.
After I wrote The Shack, after a little while, we moved to Happy Valley. It's a true story. Boring,
Oregon, right? Happy Valley, Oregon. There is one town in between. If you want to get from Boring
to Happy Valley, you have to go through Damascus. True, Damascus, Oregon, is the town right
between Boring and Happy Valley. The one time Paul talks about his own story, he says—he gives
his pedigree, you know, and he says, I was out to try to destroy the church, the community of faith.
And he said, God who would set me apart from my mother's womb, and he's talking about every
single human being in this because he is using his own history as an expression of the truth of ours.
He said, God who would set me apart from my mother's womb, which means that that included all
these destructive vehemence against the community of faith—when God who set me apart from my
mother's womb was pleased to reveal his son, which is Damascus road, and the translators, they
cannot themselves because they bring their own paradigms to this, paradigms of your Richard, and
we say too because the narratives are that the light was there and Jesus reveals himself to Paul. That's
not what it says. When God was pleased to reveal his son in me—that revelation happened from the
inside out, not the outside in—so that I could preach the gospel in the Ethnoi, in the Gentiles, or I
could preach Jesus in the Gentiles. Galatians 1, read it, right? This is talking about the fact that we
are included. That's the gospel. We just don't know it. I get the accusation of being universalist all the
time, and you know, with good reason. There are parts of universalism that I don’t ascribe to, so I
always have to ask that person, what do you mean by this? And there are some of my family, my
evangelical tradition, who can read something and actually see the exact opposite of what it says. It's
kind of miraculous. It's a learned skill, let me tell you. So I had this thing on one of the pages of The
Shack where Jesus and Mackenzie are having a conversation, and Mackenzie says, so do all roads
lead to Papa? And Jesus laughs and says, no, most roads don’t lead anywhere, but I will go down any
road to find you, which is the incarnation, right? Well, my family can read that and go like, see all
roads lead to heaven or all roads lead to God. I mean it's the exact opposite of what it says, but it's
that skill. So when Jesus says, I am, ego, I, me, the way, truth, life, we are talking about the cosmic
Christ. You cannot separate your existence in any sense from Christ or from Jesus who is the
expression in human, fully human form and being, that is the same as us in our humanity, and he
then becomes the darkness that we brought to the table to tell us the truth about who we are. He has
to destroy the darkness. He has to bring us out of the darkness. He has to declare to us the truth of
who we are.

So you but you have got this running through the scriptures. If by universalism, do I mean that
everyone was saved in the salvific work of Jesus? Yes—not even kind of yes, right? This is a
statement truly worthy of full acceptance that Jesus Christ is the savior of all mankind and especially
believers, and if I be lifted it up, I will—and here's a problem because we like an old English word
that doesn't mean what it does today but it fits our paradigm better, so we kept it—I will draw all
men to myself, which to us means like an invitation, like come on, what do you think, I got a better
idea than those people. That's not the word. That was only used three times in the New Testament,
one when they had so many fish in the boat that they had to drag it on to the shore, once when Paul
and Silas were dragged in front of the council. That's the same word—if I be lifted up, I will drag all
men to myself. And second Corinthians comes along and says, look, when he died, you died. Why?
Because this is the Christ. Everything that is consistent has its being, has its being in him. This is
why everyone is a child of God according to Paul on Mars Hill, quoting the hymn to Zeus of all
things. The hymn to Zeus and he is saying, even buried inside your religious ideology, I am there,
you just don't see it. And this is the beauty of a God who submits, who climbs into our religious
assumptions and values and respects what we have brought to the table, but wants to dismantle
anything that is not of love's kind. There is a lot of beautiful things about religion and God will
respectfully protect it at the same time as dismantling anything that is not about authentic
relationship.

I am going to read you something because it's easier than to try to quote this many pages, and it's
something that I wrote that exemplifies this and I think it will be hopeful to a lot of you. What's my
timing now—15, okay. 22, do I get 25? So I got into this conversation with a friend named Carol.
Carol is a publisher in Germany and I am kind of thrilled that most of my publishers around the
world are non-Christian publishers because it is sort of like a death knell to me—Christian fiction,
are you kidding? You have to be dead to write these in Christian fiction, Marilynne Robinson and
Madeleine L'Engle, but you look at the inklings and all that and it's like, what happened to us, you
know. So my publishers in Germany, my main publishers, Allegria, which is the number one esoteric
publisher in Europe, new age for those of you who don't know the word esoteric, and I am their
Jesus guy. It's so great—I get to go and talk about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And you what,
they—sorry—we who are of that persuasion at the moment love the conversation. I had a black
suited three, you know, short narrow tie in Europe. Brother stands up and goes like, you do know
that the esoteric sort of adopted you, right? And I am going like, yeah, isn't that great? Obviously it
wasn't. he says, what do you mean? I said, obviously you are not talking to him, right? I said, what
do you think Paul talked about when he is saying being all things to all people? That means I don't
have the inabilities based on my gender, my color, I don't live inside that reality, right, but I am
respectful because the life of God is in me and it's kind and gracious and good. So I was in this
conversation and I ran into Carol at a hotel lobby in Orlando and we started having a conversation.
She said, what are you working on right now? I said I am kind of working on the four spiritual lies,
and I had a great conversation yesterday with someone who is a friend of Bill Bright's, who—and I
understand that if you work at it, you can make sense out of those four things. But they were a
problem to me and they were a problem going up because whether the intent or not, the way I heard
it was not like life-giving. So the second of those four spiritual laws, or as my friend says four
spiritual flaws, the second one says, you sinned and you separated from God. And they quote
Romans 3:23, but they don’t bother to tell you about Romans 3:24, but that's okay because, you
know, it's always trying to find a proof text to prove what you know is to be the truth. And it starts
with separation like all religion does, and after that, that then they build the bridge and all of that
kind of stuff. But the first of them sounds true, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Sounds true and I can see where you could take it and go like, yeah, the purposes of God are good, He loves you. For those of us growing up in the modern evangelical tradition, it was a very difficult thing because all of a sudden we were put into the place where God over here who doesn't really like you unless Jesus is around—this God has a wonderful plan for your life so you better figure it out. And the big question for us is what is the will of God? So it even got more technical than that because even those who were teaching us about it were confused.

So they talk about the—because they realized that we were really a bunch of messed up human beings so they came up with the perfect will of God versus the permissive will of God, and you can begin to see how religion starts getting things more complicated. Hey listen, if it doesn't work for children or first century slaves, it's probably not true. But the perfect will of God was like the real perfect will of God and the permissive one is if you screwed up badly enough, you would make you a janitor or something. You know, like, what are we going to do with Paul? Like he totally surprised us. You know, it's all based on God coming up with some kind of big plan and us then trying to figure out what it is so that we can maintain this relationship. Now I am a missionary kid so I get in trouble for things that I don't even understand, and I am going like, how many sins does it take to screw up a perfect will? I am thinking like one. So what iteration am I on, like how many down the road am I, like a lot. But well, we have the permissive will, I am going, this is really complicated. Well, it gets worse.

So I am having this conversation with Carol and I don't know the back story to the conversation. There is a tiny—I think every conversation and every interaction with a human being is a two-way street. I do. Even if I get to say something, it always is coming out in a way that I am thinking, okay, that's helpful to me, right? And a lot of times I am hearing something in the course of that interaction that is really helpful to me and to them, right? But that's part of the mystery of relationship. And so I am having this—I am just telling her what I am working on and I said I am really focused on the first one because it links the will of God to his love and I got a problem with that, you know. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, and so inherently, it's like, His love is connected to me figuring out what the perfect will of God is. Here's the back story I didn't know. Carol has a very good friend, a young man who is an athlete, and not long before this, he had been involved in an on-camera live stunt in Munich, Germany, and it went terribly wrong, and he ended up a quadriplegic, being able to move one finger. And he was a person who loved Jesus, and well meaning Christians, you know, us, that art—we intend well but say stupid things because we just don't know any better and so people are coming and saying, God has this great plan and your son now is able to declare the—to tell people about Jesus in a way that he couldn't before. And they were—and this young man's mother almost walked out of a relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because it says that's not true. All right, so for my birthday, actually she sent it to me on Mother's Day, which is almost six times out of seven is my birthday, and depending on leap year, its five times out of seven, and so she sent me this and she translated a passage from the German to the English of a writer named Martin Schleske, who has become my friend, and Martin is a world-class violin maker, and I want to connect the dots for you by telling you what Martin said. So here's how I started this when I wrote this little piece, and there is a little surprise at the end that I will tell you about that I just love. There is an impassable chasm except perhaps in our darkened imaginations between a God who takes ownership for creation along with all the havoc it has produced and one who authors that devastation within it.
Do you understand? There is a huge difference here. The first you might learn to trust a God who, that is a God who takes ownership for the havoc. The first you might learn to trust, the latter, twisted lip service at best. How often we have heard well meaning and intentioned words such as, it must be part of God's plan, really? Might it be that it's just wrong? And we are in a room full of losses and there are a lot questions about some of the things that we have experienced, and you know what, some of it was just flat out wrong, and the right response to things that are wrong is fury. I believe in an angry God in that sense. I don’t want some emotionalist being. My fury at everything that would hurt my child and my grandchild originates in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The wrath of God in that sense is the love of God because it is for you and against anything that would hurt you, including the darkness that you have started to call your sanctuary, and God will find a way to be with you in the middle of your darkness, that's Jesus, in order to destroy that which hurts us. You know what, for a bunch of us, it's going to hurt like hell because we want to hold on to our darkness. We loved it. It gave us a sense of certainty and power and ability to be us versus them, it give us a right to not trust. George McDonald says, if you trust the nature of God as good, you will run to him with your arms wide open and you will say, please come and judge me to the core and burn out of me everything that keeps me from being fully human and fully alive.

There is no justification for a lot of what we have brought to the table. What has been done to us, what we have participated in ourselves, this is wrong. Even if God has the creative audacity to build purpose out of the evil we create, it will never justify the evil. Even the salvation of the entire cosmos doesn't justify the cross. This is not a God who is the means to the end. A God—although we like that, that God would submit to our darkness and transform this dark machine into an icon and a monument of grace says more about the nature of God than any blinded attempt to justify evil. Does God have a wonderful plan for your life, my life? Does God sit and draw up a perfect will for you and me on some cosmic disconnected drafting table, a perfect plan that requires perfect response? Is God then left to react to our stupidity or our deafness or our blindness or inability as we constantly violate perfection with our own indelible ink? What if this is about a God who has greater respect for you than you do and greater respect for you than the plan? What if there is no plan, but there is a relationship in which God constantly invites you to co-create, respectfully submits to the choices we bring to the table because he has a high view of humanity and because this God is love, will never be satisfied until only that which is of love's kind remains.

So here is what Kay, Carol, gave me a gift, and it was a little piece by Martin Schleske called God As Artist/Creator versus Construction Designer, and Carol makes these initial comments. At first Martin—this is from Carol and I will tell you when I am quoting Martin—at first Martin uses a lot of fascinating things about the wood that he uses in the violin's body. Only one sort of tree from a certain area in the mountains are formed by rough weather and winds and meager ground which produces resilient wood that is elastic at same time. Martin sometimes spends months seeking the right tree by tapping on them with a tuning fork. In the old days, violin builders found their singer trunks, that's what they called them, singer trunks, at the rivers where the wood would be harvested. It would float down. You know, in the old logging days, they just them in a river and then they would all come down. Well, they would—the violin makers would meet at where the rivers join because the logs would bang into each other and they could listen for the singers. Some trunks made melodic sounds when bouncing into others, these revealed themselves as the singers. Listen, every hardship the tree experienced made the roots go deeper and the structural fibers stronger, but all crooked, and a little this or that way. If a tree—this is absolutely fantastic—if a tree close to the chosen one, the singer, fell, the different angle of light and wind made the whole trunk twist a little bit, which also shows up in every fiber. Other characteristics emerge in every millimeter of wood and each is absolutely unique. The wood is then stored for years in the workshop under certain heat and
humidity conditions until it's ready for its purpose to become a violin body. Now, the violin builder starts to cut the body's bulge or curvature out of it that is uniquely crucial to giving that violin its unique sound.

Now I am quoting Martin. It would be cheap to force one's perception on the wood. The art is in seeing what the fiber requires. Someone fixated on the ideal or right shape only follows the laws. The artist who also knows about the laws of acoustics sees something else. He honors what is crooked and what has become in the fibers and knows that these must not be cut in the wrong places. Only then is the evolution a spiritual one where inner wisdom and knowledge of the wood and its needs are uppermost and not blind perception to a form. The perfectionist is content with fulfilling the law. The artist fulfills the sound. Martin says, Romans 8:28 describes a similar process, and those who love God know that all things work together for good for those who are called in accordance to purpose. Those He fore-knew He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. These He predestined, He called—then these He called, He justified, and these He justified, He glorified. He let them become fully what they were always created to be. And he says, it's really quite similar to working on a violin's bulge or curvature. The wood is carefully chosen, called. The good violin builder respects the texture of the wood, and under his fingers, he feels the character, the solidity and the density. This shows him both the possibilities and the limits of the wood. Each of this wood's quirks and characteristics has an influence on the sound that it will bring forth. Some trees like people have suffered staggering hardships and overwhelming wins in their life. The course of our fibers become difficult, one-sided, crooked and scarred, but like the wood, we reveal our true selves during the small and great ordeals of our lives. These knock on our life and thus make our fiber, our inner structure audible. If I, as a violin builder, am working—I am willing to work with the kind of fiber I get and start creating with what has already become and what is difficult and crooked, how much more will God do so. God's wisdom knows what is necessary to build a unique sound with our texture, our fiber, and our sometimes difficult histories. That is what is meant to be called justified and glorified in the text.

I will only become a master artist, creator if I am willing to work with it despite—despite this particular flaw, this odd structure, this damage. I will give this wood its voice, I will make it sing. While I am working on the curvature or the bulge, I sometimes feel the planer—you know the planer—I sometimes feel the planer take a different approach. This shows me here I have to leave the idea of the curve that I had in my mind, it may not be pretty but necessary. Everything that has happened to the wood requires a symmetry. If the fibers were lines definable by math, one could construct an ideal curve, an ideal form already defined before the work even begins, but the fiber course is not perfect, it's not ideal, and thus the making of a violin body is no construction site, it's an act of creation. Listen, it is an act of creation because it is not the wood that yields to the master, it is the master that yields to the wood. It is an act of creation because it is not the wood that yields to the master, it is the master that yields to the wood. Do you remember that verse that we were taught while growing up? Train up a child in the way they should go, and when they are old, they won't depart from it. That was that God. It was an act of discipline. You know what the Hebrew says? It's right inside here. Train up a child in their way, and when they are old, they won't depart from it. What is that child's way? What you use as a discipline with one child will be totally counterproductive with another. Every child has their way. This is why love and knowing are rt inextricably connected. This is about you submitting to the wood as you parent a child. The artist has to ask himself what he has on hand. How did this wood grow? What can it become? The intent of the process of creation allows for promised possibilities to unfold. This cannot happen through a rigid plan. Everything depends on the esteem and wisdom of the master for the creation. For our view of life, it is a great difference if we see the world as a creation or a construction. It is not the idea of evolution that robs faith of his breath, but thinking that the world is a divine construction site. This is
the difference between a plan and a promise, between subordination and a dialogue between religion and faith. An almighty engineer subdues the material. Faith in God then means to submit to God. Building violence has taught me otherwise. Creating relates to both what is given and to what has already become. Faith means to trust in the indwelling wisdom of the creator and the promised possibilities. This is proven in the process itself. The wood find its own voice in being born again. When I feel the fibers through the roughness of my planer, it is like a dialogue with the wood. Only while I am working on it do I get clarity on how the curve should be. The wood has its say in this joint creation. A construction is a forcing of a determined ideal on the material. Everything has to yield to the idea. Now we are at the heart of legalism where life is coated in and subdued by unrelenting ideal conceptions. We have arrived at the curse of religion. The justification of men in Romans first and foremost means that there is a wisdom at work that does justice to life. The real fibers of our life are respected and given a voice. It is an act of love that embraces the imperfect and sees its worth. Love sees all the beauty, joy, desire, and hope—the possibilities of the soul, but it also sees all the weaknesses, the disappointments, the sadnesses, and the pain—the crooked fibers. God's wisdom gets involved in a dialogue in which we have a natural say, our life is not a construction, it's not done on a drawing board. Creation means that everything that is in the making is becoming in regard to what has already grown. This is brilliant. In a construction, everything that is in the making is under the constraint of what is wanted. That's insufficient, it's pathetic. Scripture shows me that God has the heart of an artist, not a construction planner. If the world were the work of a cosmic engineer, he would be in a constant state of discontentedness. We would all suffer from the nagging, constant nagging of a dogged engineer whose plans just never work out like he intended or expected. Reality could never live up to his spotless, wonderful construction plan, but a true creator knows he not only has to shape but endorse and allow. Wisdom allows things to grow and unfold. It is fascinating to view the whole world as a composition, a painting or a sculpture or scenes from a great work of art. Works of art can be beautiful and sometimes odd. Look around.

I am certain that God having the heart of an artist has no intention of forcing reality to obey Him at all costs. Wisdom does not know grim determination. The thought of seeing every person is a work of art in progress and ever exchanging and changing unique expression of God changes our whole view of ourselves and others. Suddenly you can see the odd, authentic, fascinating, enjoyable, staggering interplay of what is created and what has become of it, what was put into this person and what was grown out of it, what is in the making. If we could see people as forms of expression of a great artist, expressions that yearn to be seen, read, and heard. That would change everything. I have a friend, Rob Parsons—I am almost done—and he just published a book by Hutter called Wisdom House. Here's an excerpt that bears on this conversation. It isn't just seeming physical disadvantages that can turn into a strength, but life experiences also. A lot of us here in this room, we had things stolen from us, but we had no say in it, and because we were broken, then we turned around and began to break things. This is this part of our experience, even ones that other—that normally we would run and naturally run from. Some years ago, he writes, a friend of mine attended a lecture on stem cell research in Oxford given by a world famous geneticist. During the question time, the scientist was asked whether in the future it would be possible to clone Beethoven—would it be possible to clone Beethoven? His answer was a brilliant, yes and no. Yes, you could probably teach this twin to play the piano to a reasonably high degree, but no, because you see, Beethoven's father who was also his music tutor was a violent alcoholic. The young Beethoven was very close to his mother who died when he was a teenager and he became responsible for raising his two brothers as his father lapsed deeper into alcoholism. He lost his first and only true love. He lived in poverty weighed down by debts. He suffered from manic depression, and like his father, turned to alcohol. Then just as Beethoven began to lose—began to have some interest in his compositions, he began to lose his hearing. The culmination of all of these...
experiences, the tumultuous feelings of rage, love, despair, passion were poured into his most famously pounding six symphonies, numbers 3 to 8, which are what we now revere as classic Beethoven. More accomplished musicians may now play or conduct his works, but they can never capture his greatness because that quality was born out of his expression of his own life experiences, of being true to himself. He's a singer trunk. And finally from George MacDonald, writing in 1868, the scene is in Robert Falconer, and his righteous grandmother has burned his violin, his fiddle, the one that his father had and his grandfather had, and she burned it in case it led Robert astray. But through the loss of Miss St. John and the piano, as if that were the last blow, his sorrow did not rest there but returned to brood over his Bonny Laddie, his violin. She was scattered to the winds. Would any of her ashes ever rise is in the corn and moan in the ripening wind of autumn? Might not some atoms of this Bonny Laddie creep into the pines of the hills where soft and soul-like sounds had taught him to play the flowers of the forest on those strings, which like the nerves of an amputated limb yet thrilled through his being, or might not some particle find its way by winds and waters to Sycamore fields, forests in Italy, and there creep up through the channels of its life to some finely rounded curve of a noble tree on the side that ever looks sun-ward and be chosen once again by a violin hunter to be brought into a new and fame-gathering instrument. Could it be his Bonny Laddie had learned her wondrous music in those forests from the shine of the sun and the sighing of the winds through the sycamores and pines? For Robert knew that the broadleaf sycamore and the sharp needle pine had each its share in the violin. Only as the wild innocence of human nature uncorrupted by wrong, untaught by suffering, is to that nature struggling out of darkness into light such and so different is the living wood with its sweetest tones of obedient impulse answering only to the wind that bloweth where it listed, to that wood chosen, separated, individualized, tortured into strange almost vital shape after a law to us nearly unknown, strung with its strings from animal organizations and put into the hands of a man to utterly feel the feelings of the soul that it passed through like history. This Robert could not think yet and had to grow able to think it by being himself made an instrument of God's music.

I am today a unique sound that I will not be tomorrow and tomorrow could not be but for today. What if—what if there is a God who could gather up all the broken bits of the two fish and the five loaves of my life and create purpose out of that which was stolen from me and what I then broke and make certain that nothing was lost and nothing wasted. That would change everything. The day I wrote this, I finished writing this on my computer and there was a knock at the door, and UPS delivered a box to me. A friend of mine, Bill Wynn, who is a pastor, but is also a forger, and he finds these pieces of metal from the 1800s and then uses 1800 smelting techniques to turn them into beautiful gifts. He had no clue that I was working on this at all. He lives on the other side of the country. And a knock at the door and I get a box and I open it up, and he has made me two planers—two planers. I am telling you that your life matters and even all the things that went sideways and were wrong, the things that were done to you, God can gather them up, and they then are woven into the sound that you become. You are a singer trunk, you, and all the adversity God submits to, but he knows the truth of your being as well, and this is why this is not a static adventure. This is a moving, flowing one in which you are completely and utterly embraced, because this is a God who not only is love but knows you and is involved in the details of our lives to the praise of his glory. Amen.

Session 8: Q&R with Rohr, Bourgeault, and Young

Richard Rohr: Well, it was a delight. It was a delight to sit in the front row and not have to produce myself, but to hear such wisdom. I told Cynthia personally that she has this marvelous ability to talk with intellectual brilliance, and sometimes people are afraid it is going to go over their head or be too abstract or too distant, but she always as she teaches in prayers, she brings it down into the heart, and
I felt that she only got better and better and better as the head and the heart just work together so beautifully, so thank you, thank you so much, alright. And then Paul, I know you are just so aware of what all of us I think are aware of in our bodies and our guts, the amount of shame and disfigurement and indignity that the human race carries that it comes out in just thousand ways and that I think we both feel or all three of us feel as people of the church representing the Christian religion that we just haven't helped with that problem, that often we've contributed to it, almost as if we had to create the problems to make sure you’d feel sinful and guilty, so we could run in and say and we've got the answer and it was a sort of canned Christ, if you will, little what you call so well, transactional religion. We've got the transaction, not the transformation very often, and I just loved the images of the wood that you used for how transformation happens and that God is enough in relationship with us that he lets us our little bit of humanity determine the shape because he gives us, she gives us an initial shape, and it's not ideological religion, therefore, its relational religion, and once you have relationship, that implies change on both sides and hardly any of us were trained to think that way. We had an Almighty in earth, substantial God sitting on a throne who didn't change. But once you have the three, you have dynamism, you have flow, you have change on both sides, and so many of the mystics throughout the centuries leading to Teilhard de Chardin in our own century, last century recognizing that God in fact is the energy of change itself, and I say so often, but I deeply believe it's true that it is such a shame that we have fought any growth evolutionary notion of history itself because we didn't have a growth evolutionary notion of God or of Christianity, therefore, of ourselves, it's all of one piece, so we just close down any discussion of change, and of course Jesus’ first words and leads to the Gospels usually unfortunately translated repent which has largely moralistic connotation, but it quite literally means change your mind, change. So, the first word out of his mouth is change, and we have a religion that has been devoted to the status quo, unbelievable when you think of it. What you said this morning is just so true, it’s like our capacity for turning the meaning around 180 degrees is astounding. It's almost demonic that you can read one thing and get it to me in the exact opposite, the exact opposite, but anyway, I'm sure I’ve done it to, it's what the ego does, but at least you are the enlightened people now who I hope, well, who can recognize that that my gosh, this is what we do.

**Wm Paul Young:** You can help us from becoming a religion.

**Richard Rohr:** There you go.

**Wm Paul Young:** Oh, by the way, I know I drove a one on the Enneagram, but it is John 9, just so you know.

**Richard Rohr:** Jim told him Richard kept saying, it’s not John 8, it’s John 9. See that’s what we do, we are just picky.

**Wm Paul Young:** That’s so much fun, it’s almost worth keeping it at John 8.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Yeah, I know, yeah, thereby proving that God is one, but God is never a one.

**Richard Rohr:** I hope that God is not a one. Okay, Michael, we hand it back to you.

**Michael Poffenberger:** It’s always interesting, it seems like these conferences always revolve around the same, many of the same impediments to giving ourselves permission to really go with what—for me at least the heart speaks to listening and the resonance of this message, but the same blockages seem to consistently come up in each conference. We had over 200 questions submitted and have called them and—and there's a few that are always the ones that cause the most challenge,
so I am definitely grateful for everyone's questions and look forward to chance to talk about them with you three. So, the first one is the most common questions that was submitted in terms of how we deal with evil and unjust suffering in the Trinity, and both broadly and then Cynthia specifically within the Law of Three, if we can assign moral values to affirming, denying, and reconciling, where does evil fit into that, in those forces and do we not want to avoid the mistake of not naming it when it is one of the forces?

Wm Paul Young: Can I see it if I can?

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, you go for it. We will leave evil to the evangelicals.

Wm Paul Young: Yeah, really.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Episcopalians do grace.

Richard Rohr: They are good at…

Wm Paul Young: Now, this is the first time I have been in a conference where Cynthia was at, and I got to tell you, I trusted her all the more when last night we were taking a family picture and she came in between Kim and I, put her arms around us, and suddenly she lifted her feet and we were holding her in the air. Anybody that can play like that is good in my book, but if I understood correctly, in dealing with the Law of Three as something that is its—it is not disconnected or disinterested in terms of the relational morality of the Trinity. We are dealing with an instrument that we can use to understand how things move and change and what their being is, so that the ascription of morality is not necessary to that part of the conversation, and I think that distinction is really important. It is like saying, so, what about microbiology and the existence of cancer cells, you know, we got to—to have a conversation about the morality of that is a very different conversation than to talk about the biochemistry of it and what that means? Did I get that right?

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, exactly.

Wm Paul Young: Okay, I just thought I’d start before you answer the question about evil.

Richard Rohr: So you answer.

Cynthia Bourgeault: You know it’s hard to do metaphysical thinking at 2 in the afternoon, but—so and I have shot my metaphysical wand for the day, but the—what’s coming to mind first is a place to go to is the quandary of Teilhard as an evolutionary—you know, as a paleontologist and also a deep Christian mystic and how he got busted in the first place by the Jesuit tradition was when he was writing a paper in response to Adam and Eve, because as a paleontologist who can see clearly that the first signs of human life go back 125,000 years modestly, it's very hard to pin the origin of evil on the world on a pair of primordial parents who subscribed more to the young earth scenario. Yeah. So, how does evil get in and what Teilhard says, he has a beautiful word in French, tatonnement, which used to be translated as groping till that term got a bad rap, so now we are calling it trial and error, but that his idea and I think it’s a beautiful one is that over a course of time, every combination will be tried, every dead-end driven down, and something is just in like this, and that that is the sort of shadow that comes as part and parcel of the freedom of choice that’s made possible by the play in the system. So within that then I think that the way we should locate evil is not ontologically like this was—is this part of God or is this not, we need to look at it as one of the formations that arises within the created order, and by created order, I don’t mean within our psyche like individual
personal things, but I think evil when it rises, what for me distinguishes evil from just run of the mill neurosis is it begins to take on a larger than life and collective dimension, and for me evil is really real and it’s not just the product of human neurosis. It does taken on a force that you can find the way that it becomes an egregore that takes shape and we’ve watched that in our own culture and in our own world so many times in this - in this century, but the way for me of kind of bringing this into the picture is very much along the lines of what you were working with Paul with the idea of the tree and the singing tree and that as we worked to collectively as much as anything because I think evil needs to be addressed collectively because that’s where it is created that as we work to transform the product, the byproduct that emerge is that it unfolds it and changes its nature. It’s of a different and more powerful and more heart-full combination than that original kind of depersonalized notion of good. We can live the singing even into the evil and bring forth a new facet of God, so that’s where I live with it basically where the rubber hits the road. I don’t find much profit in sort of solving it metaphysically or solving it psychologically, but here it is, it’s a given of our condition, the river of pain runs deep, the river of evil runs deep, and as we stand collectively, it too with the mercy of God can be wrapped in and reconfigured by love and that’s our job that in every, every inch of the way to reach those moments and do the best we can with the transformation, so that’s how I deal with it.

Richard Rohr: Would it be fair to say I just want to make sure I am applying the Law of Three correctly, if holy affirming, the new arising is first of all life, is that fair?

Cynthia Bourgeault: Well, Holy affirming and the new arising aren’t the same thing, yeah.

Richard Rohr: But every new arising amounts to a holy affirming.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, you can do that, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, if that’s the case, then the holy denying is almost inevitable, or else we would idealize the Holy affirming, wouldn’t we? We make an absolute god of one thing that which is the only experience we’ve had, yeah.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, exactly.

Richard Rohr: It keeps everything flowing, because we can’t have it forever. Everything passes away, and I believe this is what I believe by reason of my Christian faith that this everything that passes away is also reborn in God, that the circle comes full circle, but without that, I can see where most of the world has grown quite cynical understandably because in a way all suffering, all suffering is unjust suffering. Who would deserve any of it? Is there a just suffering? I don’t know. Maybe.

Wm Paul Young: You know, here I come as an evangelical person.

Richard Rohr: No, it would be fine.

Paul: So, I don't think that suffering existed prior to our turning away from face-to-face to face relationship. I don’t think it’s an intrinsic part of the Trinity, and so suffering is not necessary to be whole, right, because it doesn't exist in the relationship of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. I really do see that God is light and in God there is no darkness at all as an ontological statement about the being of God and that darkness is not an ontologically existent entity or thing. It is actually the absence of light, and I think you can take anything where light can exist without darkness. It has
speed, it has wave, it has particle, right, so anything that is real can exist without the absence of it, but anything that is the absence of it cannot exist without what is real, so freedom can exist without bondage, but bondage can't exist without freedom, right. So you can take everyone. Death can't exist without life, but life can exist without death, and I really do think we are such a high order of creation that—that our ability to choose to turn our faces away from light, love, kindness, goodness, you know, the very being of God cast the shadow within which we now live, and we became the first perpetrators whether you want to identify it as the Adam and Eve story or whatever, but we want to think we are in some kind of a magical world in which something else was the perpetrator of the evil and that’s I think where our Gnostic ideas of this big war in heaven and therefore you have to be kind of in a defensive posture with the right magic words to stop the dark force, you know, and that's not the reality. I think the reality is that we are the perpetrators, but that means if we own it, we can also participate in changing it, right, and that we are not just stuck in some kind of cosmic, defensive posture, and I want to read you something because it struck me when Cynthia was talking, and this is kind of profound, but it will bend you a little bit, mostly because it's from a nine-year-old and a couple of things, the three chairs I got it from Brad—I mean from Baxter Kruger, KR-U-G-E-R, who is a phenomenal Trinitarian theologian. This comes from Brad Jersak who is another amazing theologian from the Orthodox tradition and so according to Dominic Morgan Jersak, which is Brad's son, they were having this conversation and his age is 9, he reported that Jesus told him the following and Brad says I've written it twice, once as a whole actual dialogue and once as a summary, but here's what it is:

Dominic (unprompted): Hey, dad, fallen angels and demons aren’t the same thing.
Brad (surprised): Who told you that?
Dominic: Jesus.
Brad: When?
Dominic: Just now.
Brad: What’s the difference?
Dominic: I don't know.
Brad: Well, ask him.
Dominic closes his eyes for a—listens for about 20 seconds says this, Jesus says “Demons are created by people out of the ashes of war, the tears of those who are afraid, and the stuff that people want that doesn't belong to them, than they take on a life of their own and turn on you.”
Brad: Then what are fallen angels?
Dominic: I don't know.
Brad: Well, ask him.
Dominic closes his eyes for about 20 seconds, he says, “Fallen Angels are angels that were in heaven but wanted something that didn’t belong to them, so they got darker and darker until they fell out of heaven down into the sky where they fly around.
Brad: So, could you ask Jesus how to deal with them?
Dominic listens, “With fallen Angels, God uses a spiritual sword to cut off their wings and they fall, fall to the ground so we can put our feet on their heads.” He had never heard of Luke 10:18, Romans 16:19, or Revelation 12:4.
Brad: What about demons?
Dominic listens, he says, “With demons, people just have to deal with their issues and they dissolve.

The above is verbatim including the numerous scriptural illusions and symbols that he has added none of which he was aware. This is not normally how he talked nor did it come out of a conversation about these issues, but was spontaneous. I asked him how do you know, he said Jesus told me. I had not thought of it this way before, but then later found that the desert fathers and the gerardians see the part about Demons exactly this way, the part about fallen angels confuse me.
because it's easier for me to see and image a whole realm of unclean spirits the way Dominic described the demons, but the fallen angels are awkward, because the way Jesus frame that, still sounds like we read it somehow metaphorically or mythopoetically. Nevertheless, my friend Peter Dippy who has known the last three Popes has done a fair amount of work in the world of exorcism, he affirmed Dominic's description and said that in his experience 90% of what he has encountered is demonic as Dominic describes it which is to say largely a psychological phenomenon, part of our darkness being expressed, but he did insist that one-tenth that he had encountered seem more like the fallen Angel category. Even so if such things exist, I follow you, he is talking about me writing Eve, because this came out of a conversation about Eve. I follow you in seeing that the first fall in that sense is as that of Adam originates all of this darkness, and I still resist attempts to literalize the Babylonian back story. The point is sin brokenness that which is a divergence from the original is our deal whenever demonic or Angelic evil seem to be symptoms of the human problem, does that make sense, and I wrote back and said, it makes total sense. So, there is another big backdrop to this conversation, and in passing too, let me mention that we on our side of the conversation had declared sin just like we did God’s control with that one alone deity back here, right, the one chair, and sin then became missing the mark of that perfection, right, but the Greek word itself is hamartia, and if you are going to watch the whiteboard right here, ha is an alpha that is aspirated and martia which is in the Greek, you can see right here, martia, right there. Well, this ha is a negation, it means like dis- or un- and martia comes from origin or form, so anything in our lives that is the negation of our origin in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is sin, right. It is you not being true, and you can cover that up with religious stuff and religious language and performance and ritual and all that and it is a much sin because it is not an expression, it is a negation of that which is your origin and being. Makes sense?

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah. You know that I would just add one little—one little thing that I would invite us maybe to be really careful in our usage and not equate darkness with evil, you know. The darkness is simply a physical condition and that I can't believe you know I've always thought that John was stealing—veering towards dualism when he says in God there is light and there is no darkness at all. I am much more intrigued with psalm 1:39 which I—which I read or spoke to you before, when God if I say surely, the light around may shall turn to dark you know. Darkness is not dark to you. The light shall shine as clear as the day, darkness and light are to you both alike. And the world as we know it cosmologically is created not out of only light, but out of dark energy and dark matter and if we didn’t have these in the universe and they are two-thirds of them, nothing could emerge, because they seem to be the mother of gravity which is the source of the clumping which gets the whole thing going. So, to learn to live comfortably in the physical conditions of the world without letting it be a metaphor for evil I think allows us to understand that a lot of evil goes on right in the light, you know, and to be —and to continue the path which I think is functionally the only path that’s ever going to get us out of the syndrome, which you’ve named so beautifully, which is to develop that deep equanimity they can be okay, you know. I'm perfectly content that in the moment that death closes my eyes, what I see is darkness, that’s what I am used to from sleep. I don’t believe that I need any sort of blinding light to validate the trajectory of my life, and I hope the trajectory of my life lives so that I can tame all conditions, taming in the sense of being comfortable with them like the little prince. Anyway, just a footnote on—on Western symbology. Next, unless you have something to…

Richard Rohr: No, no more.

Michael Poffenberger: Exactly, 199 to go. Now, that we have dealt with the problem of evil, the second most common question is just in regards to understanding how we understand the role of the passion and the nature of salvation through Jesus, and so one of the questions, so Jesus didn’t die for
our sins, what was the purpose, and others, you know, what do you do with the versus especially in John's gospel, you know, if anyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life and those kind of ways of understanding those passages?

Richard Rohr: Who wants to start?

Wm Paul Young: Go ahead.

Richard Rohr: Don’t let me take too much time. Any of you have read my stuff, you know I said it even the other day that my own Franciscan tradition always had an alternative theory of atonement, so it’s sort of second nature to us, that the cross was not trivial as it ended up revealing the seemingly necessary violence of God, but in fact the real point was to reveal the violence of humanity, that humanity crucifies what it should love, and that's why so many of us quote Rene Gerard so much. I am convinced that by the next, well, even in 20-30 years, I hope his name will be a household name because like few other teachers, he's given us a window into understanding the whole notion of sacrifice and help us recognize the way we put it following our own teacher Duns Scotus and just in two sentences Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity, it didn't need changing. Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God, and there it was. Now it took him tombs to get to validate that, but much of what was based on what he always protected in his entire theology is the absolute freedom of God and once you say God has to do this, that God can freely love and forgive God’s own children, he thought we had an incoherent universe and that as he put the Christ, the Cosmic Christ, he put it this is the first idea in the mind of God as if God had ideas, but that’s the only we can speak and that first idea was to manifest God’s self, so in the Franciscan school, Jesus was plan A, and what he felt most of Christianity had surrendered to was making Jesus plan B, merely resolving the problem of sin and then secondarily to that, it placed sin and I think this builds on what you were saying before Paul, in a far too central position you know and we see this in Christianity this obsession with sin instead of a grand optimistic vision stated at the beginning, all things created in Christ, all things reconciled in Christ, the problem answered at the beginning, so in my school of theology, Christmas was already Easter, if you can follow that, it was the early Franciscans who popularized the Christmas you enjoy today. In the first thousand years Easter, rightly so, I understand was the great feast, but for Francis he said once God said yes to flesh, the problem is solved, but he didn’t see it as just becoming flesh in the body of Jesus but saying yes to materiality, physicality, earth bound-ness, all of it became the habitation of God. So we never bought into what was later called, I don’t know, when did that term emerge substitutionary atonement theory, 19th century or…?

Wm Paul Young: And there was pieces of it that go way back.

Richard Rohr: Well, probably all the way Anselm, I suppose?

Wm Paul Young: Exactly Anselm is the first.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, there is Margaret Barker and who worked in the Old Testament says that it was there at the beginning because they simply took the Pascal Temple Theology…

Richard Rohr: Temple metaphor, yes.

Cynthia Bourgeault: And immediately put it on Jesus so it was actually the earliest way of picturing it, and she talks about how that was actually in place within 30 years after that.
Richard Rohr: Really

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, it’s fascinating scholarship.

Richard Rohr: Because the metaphors are there, you have all read them, ransom, sacrifice, propitiation, atonement, Jesus died for our sins. It all looks if you are going to follow the temple metaphors, it looks transactional, which is the level of consciousness for those of you know spiral dynamics that we’d be at the red and blue levels of consciousness, which is when most the Bible was written, it understood things magically, transactionally, not for the most part except those deeply informed by grace transformationally, and so we ended up with a transactional notion of God's love for human and that in my opinion that did not satisfy the soul. It doesn't feed the soul because it looks arbitrary. If God has - if your dad had to be bought into loving you, wouldn’t you for the rest of your life doubt whether your dad's love was really reliable? Of course, you would. And I think that's the instability that a lot of Christianity is trying to build on. It’s a whimsical God whose love is not a rock, whose love is not reliable. So, I have said enough.

Wm Paul Young: I think too that the target of crucifixion was death itself, I think that's the enemy, and through one man, you know, sin entered the world and death, and so it was death. Now how does God who is life encounter death? Becoming fully human, submitting our violence, and we kill life himself, right, and so part of this is the destruction of death. Death no longer has power. Death has lost its sting and then when he dies we all die because he is the creator and when he rises, we all rise, all of us. Now that's different than saying that we all understand it, or agree with it, but I'm sorry our God only counted on one of your elements of participation, that was to kill him. It was the only thing God counted on. Everything else God did in terms of the results of that, and so he included you apart from your vote and you can say no potentially forever, that's the tension that is held in the New Testament, and that you potentially because of the high view of humanity. How we could do that? I don’t know, but how we did in the first place? I don’t know either, and so there is this from the Protestant evangelical side of the conversation, a lot of those words are being re-formed or allowed to emerge differently, propitiation and the other theological words, that's an ongoing task, and in a way that’s coherent and beautiful and part that fits right inside the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Cynthia Bourgeault: Yeah, I would just sort of nuance that to say that and you probably imply this already that the last enemy is not so much death, but thralldom to death and the fact that we see it in such a way that it affects our actions and makes us define life in opposition to it, but just a little example of how I entered this whole Paschal mystery thing, some of you've heard me say this before, but I always resent and you know feel sad on Monday, Thursday, when you hear a sermon, you will be hearing it in a week now, that says well, Jesus says he has gathered with his disciplines, he is going to have that Paschal meal, he is going to have this little unpleasantry going on of crucifixion but on Easter he will pop out back up again, and the idea that the reason that he could undergo the crucifixion was because he knew that he’d live I think puts the hope and the action and the real freedom in the wrong place. The point is this that if he knew he was going stone-cold dead into oblivion, there was nothing, no redemption on the other side, no big daddy God to pick you up, and you had only one final choice left in your life which is to either go like Job or you know Job was asked to do, curse God and die or to go like this into your hands like in my spirit, which would Jesus do, do you think? Find it in yourself that but I think you will find particularly if you have done centering prayer and practice, the letting go, that you just can’t do this motion because it is harsh, because it’s anti-love, and without any need for reward, you open into love, and there’s the freedom. We die, we all die. Jesus may have taken away death, but death can become a passageway into a life upon life and I'm not talking about being risen from the dead. All of the great spiritual teachers talk
about the only death we face is the face before we die, and if we get through that one, you know, the actual dissolution of the body house isn't the problem, never was the end of me. It’s the freedom that we need to move forward, and so Jesus neutralizes death by love and he finds love in the total freedom and consent, and as we can learn to walk that path, then we learn to already begin to walk in resurrection life regardless of outcome, regardless of duality.

**Michael Poffenberger:** Thank you.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Some easier ones.

**Wm Paul Young:** Let me add one thing, the focus of the New Testament writers is not even on the resurrection, it’s on the ascension, it’s on the ascension, and let that reform the whole passion story because you know on the amount of transfiguration when Moses and Elijah show up, two friends to say, to encourage Jesus, it's all about the ascension, because that is what the goal is here, and then when Stephen is being stoned, again the Greek, but he said - it says and he sees the son of man. This is a human being now fully restored coming out of — eke out of the right hand of the Father, not just sitting next to him, but coming right out of the Father, right, so the focus on the ascension is really profound and it needs to—we need to look through that lens at the passion and the incarnation.

**Richard Rohr:** Just to agree with you and show you I am a good protestant, Martin Luther said that, he felt that the ascension was terribly underplayed for an absolutely central port of the whole journey, and unless we get the last piece, the full circle isn’t formed, yeah.

**Michael Poffenberger:** So the theme for next year’s conference, I thought the Trinity was the big thing we had to get it now. No, just teasing.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** You spent too much time in college.

**Michael Poffenberger:** Next question, one close to my heart, I sure folks who are here have a variety of relationships that we are going to ask, Christianity or religion of any time. For the few research, the latest polls have shown that Millennials especially, but across the board all demographics are not only the highest rates of defection from the Church, but the speed at which people are defecting continues to accelerate.

**Wm Paul Young:** Younger people are faster.

**Michael Poffenberger:** So, help unpack for us why the three of you or to what extent the three of you—how you understand the relationship with organized religion so to speak. We spent a lot of time kind of throwing stones at what is not working in it the last couple of days.

**Richard Rohr:** I can take off since we partially made this point that I believe the absolute sin centeredness has not that it should—I am not saying it should be this way, but it is this way, it seems, is uninteresting. What the most millennial are facing and most of Western secular civilization is not sin, maybe they should again, don’t go there. I am just saying, the real problem today is loss of meaning. It doesn't mean anything, and the soul can’t live without meaning, and the Millennials have a certain kind of honesty that my generation didn't have. We persisted in it even though it wasn't that meaningful to us, and I say that observing Catholics at mass who look bored to death. They sit there in a passive aggressive stance, come lately, leave early, just get their communion and run out and this is ridiculous. It’s you can tell there is no honest belief there. It is just along for the ride as many have said before me, a fire insurance religion, and they pay their fire insurance dues each Sunday. So I
think my generation, or even those who were right behind me, tended to in fact have left but we didn’t have the honesty to really walk out in terms of what we really believed, you know. And you got to hand it to the Millennials that they will state their disagreements, but it's keeping them right now at least on a more honest search. I find their questions often—not always, I am not making saints out of all Millennials, but I feel their questions are more honest and more sincerely seeking. They don't have that practical atheism that I found so much of the baby boomer generation had. They pretended to believe, but it's clear they didn’t. So, who knows if this isn't third force playing its way out, I would think so.

**Wm Paul Young:** You want to respond?

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Sure, well, I kind of said it yesterday that I when I was giving you my possible models, I see the church as really now the organized institutional church standing in the role of holy the denying in other words the resisting breaking force and remember the denying doesn’t mean evil, it’s a necessary role in the transmission, so that we're not running out and reinventing the wheel. There is beautiful, beautiful juice that flow through these structures, and without it, we would be lost. I also believe really strongly that the Christian religion as a religion, however, it got here probably by accident has a piece of the puzzle that’s precious. I remember Teilhard saying that if Christianity isn't seen to be the most realistic and organic of religions, nothing has been understood of its so-called mysteries, and the integration of the human, the earth plane and the spirit plane in one is so powerful and the hard presence of Christ so persuasive that I would hate to see the vessel that celebrates it in all its beauty and in all its history and in all its gravitas simply disappear off the face of the Earth. However, I don't see the juices flowing through the organized religion at this point. I think that what's really happening is a new shape and a new format for the old and is yet to be tested wine is reformulating and again that is consistent with the change model we have been talking about, so like you Richard, I think the best place to be is right on the outside of the inside.

**Richard Rohr:** Edge of the inside.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Right at the edge of the inside and that from that position all sorts of wonderful stuff can happen.

**Wm Paul Young:** I think institutions have less life than rocks, right. They are only a figment of our imagination because they are not eternal, thank you. Hi Vivian—granddaughter. She was just agreeing with me. So, the issue with institutional systems and structures I tend to go to the Book of Revelation and say your religion is - it looks like a lamb but has the voice of a dragon and political institutions is just a mash up of all kinds of beasts because everything is about power and control, right, but we live in a world full of them and the question then becomes how do we be in this and not of it, and we as human beings we are the ones that energize institutional structures and systems. I grew up framed a lot of my thinking is framed inside Jacques Ellul, if you're very familiar with Ellul who is always kind of—he is a sociologist probably the best of the 20th century and he wrote 20 books on theology and 20 books on sociology, and—but again he's the unmasking of the institutional structures and systems and saying like it's human beings, don't confuse the church with an institutional structure. Recognize—and that’s what we did. I mean, when I was growing up, you couldn't even ask a question about it because to ask a question about the system was to tantamount to confronting God, you know God did this, but it’s not good. You know so much of it, the way it treats women, hierarchy, the whole thing, right, but here we are in a world full of them, so how do we be in them and not of them and this goes back to what do you hearing the Holy Spirit telling you, right. Recognize and I think the millennial are—I am with them in this sense that in a world full of institutional structures, they are looking for something that actually changes things and matters, right,
and the issue of meaning like you are talking about is front and center and they got really good crap
detectors, right, and so they are drawn to authenticity, they are drawn to meaning, they are drawn to
something that actually changes things not just in their own heart but in an outward kind of flow and
so it's like you, you know, I am not so upset that the institutional structures are shaking, and I think
this is a really healthy thing. We live in a world where 50 years ago the reason that these systems
were able to maintain their power is because you didn’t have the information of what was outside of
them. You were so locked inside of them that you didn’t even know other people thought differently
than you, and if you did, they were them, right, because you knew you had the truth so they had to be
them, and that's not true anymore. You take a swipe on your iPhone and you are into a world of the
way other human beings think that crosses your boundaries and that means either you got entrenched
yourself and I think this is the shadow side of the - of the Millennials openness, and they are in a
position where if they don't be on guard, they can get sucked right back into some form of fascism,
because they're so change fatigued that they just want somebody to tell them how to think, right, so
that's one of the dangers sides, but overall I am such an optimist because of the presence of these
young people who are engaged and at the same time let me say I'm watching all kinds of different
expressions arising all over the planet in terms of people going like, so how do we do this. Well, you
know this could be about relationships with each other. I mean, we could actually be eyeball to
eyeball, you know and a lot of our issues are going to resolve themselves as we have to work out
relationships, because relationships always end up breaking the rules anyway.

Michael Poffenberger: Thank you. Yeah, there are more questions of this nature, I just want to
follow up with one more that all seemed to be getting aback at this notion that we are in the midst
seismic paradigm shift, excuse me paradigm shift, of how we understand God in relationship in our
reality, and how do we deal with these in between spaces and moments, and so there were two more
just to raise these ones on a more practical level, when liturgy is no longer work, when liturgy is
based on old theology that seem violent or harmful are the liturgies that we've grown up with or
participate in, how do we remain wholehearted as we participate in our communities, and the other is
prayer forms, when the old prayer forms, you know, this person raised specific intercessory forms of
prayer don't seem to carry that same richness or resonance anymore, but fall dry and don't nourish
the spiritual life. How you handle those in between spaces?

Cynthia Bourgeault: Well, I don't— they are the same question.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, two questions.

Cynthia Bourgeault: And to speak first of all about the old prayer forms, you know, I have heard a
lot about the old liturgies they don't carry it, what do you do with the violent prayers, what do you do
with the violent psalms, what do you do with the—I think this is putting far too much emphasis on
the form and that what I've seen over and over again is beautiful souls taking old forms and filling
them with a life of love, you know, and I watched this just really point blankly with a, you know, a
number of really loving monastic communities that got the revised catholic liturgy put back down on
them, and but it didn't take people back because they learn how to hold it and still convey energy
through it. I think we are still—it’s a green mean trap that we are still too focused on the words, on
the cognitive content, and not enough yet on the energy and the intention flowing through the
liturgies that I think that if we could in some sense deprogram our mind. I mean I’ve watched people
go through and take every he out of every God language thing, and people are still angry, they are
still defensive because they got to be—it didn’t get at the program. It’s not just—it’s not the fix for
what we want. The fix has to do with a deeper and undivided energy of love that can flow through
any form. So, I admit it's a give-and-take here, but I would really say that the forms are not the
problem, the energy that they are containing and evoking is, which means that if we are bringing a
new energy, we can take even the most ancient of forms and imbue them, and even theologies that we disapprove of, I have watched monks chant the psalms that have a lot of violent passages in them without becoming violent, but knowing that this is really a way of engaging and owning the shadow and passing it on. There is more to it than meets the mystery. SO, that would be my one sort of reorientation of the focus of the question, and I will let you guys go at it from there.

**Wm Paul Young:** I think it’s great.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Yeah.

**Richard Rohr:** You know when we did our men’s rights of passage that five-day event that started in May of 96 up here at Ghost Ranch, we had created a powerful—what we thought were very powerful rituals for the man, and it was partially based on some of research of people who now get doctorates in things like liturgy, ritual, ceremony and they helped me understand when they said there is an essential difference between ritual and ceremony, I don’t know if this will speak to it at all. Ceremony, let's use the example the Fourth of July parade, ceremony allows no revelation of the shadow side. It’s all aren’t we wonderful raising flags, tooting horns, and everybody has to buy into it, and they say, true ritual what makes it so transformative is it always reveals the shadow. Now you think of our classic Eucharistic liturgies in the Eucharist churches, they always began with the penitential rite. The public statement Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy that always remind Catholics as you know in the Catholic rite before we come to communion, we say, Lord, I am not worthy, alright, sometimes I don't always do this, but I say, did you just here what you all said, you said publicly before the whole church that you were not worthy. Now why is it that only you worthy ones are allowed to come forward and receive communion? There is an inherent contradiction. We try to name the universal unworthiness and then we deny it. Well, we didn't really mean that, Lord I am not worthy, in fact I am worthy, because I am in my first marriage or I am heterosexual or I am whatever I think I am. Just stop it. Go away. As long as we have ceremony instead of ritual, I think we will continue to attract a low level of commitment. They come to know that words don’t mean anything. We just say Lord have mercy, but I am not really in need of mercy. Thank you very much. I am here because I checked all the categories of worthiness. We can’t keep having it both ways, alright. It’s as Pope Francis keeps saying we must see the church and the Eucharistic meal as medicine for the journey and that it's not a reward for the perfect, but that's what the ego does. It takes the beautiful rituals and makes them away to have our own Fourth of July parade. We are the one who are all true Americans, or true Episcopalians or whatever we want to be. All I am saying is I think we’ve got to get a lot more honest about the power of true ritual for transformation. Any of you who’ve done initiation rites, you know, the man always say, it's not the words, it's the rituals that blow them out of the water. When it’s done gutsy, earthy, honest, the only remaining ritual from the ancient initiation rites that has persisted in Christian history is Ash Wednesday, where the boy was stripped naked, told to role in the dust and said, boy, you came from the dirt, and you are going to return to the dirt and don't forget it. Now that’s life-changing ritual, and I live here in Mexican-American parish 10 minutes from here, and there is only 2 days of the year where the parking lot fills nonstop from morning till night, the feast of the incarnation called Christmas and believe or not Ash Wednesday. Why do Catholics—at least Mexican-American Catholics just love to get their Ashes, do you know? Of course, we cynics say whenever Catholics get anything free, they come. Tomorrow, they will get their palms.

**Wm Paul Young:** Nothing like getting your ash handed to you.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** Yeah.
**Wm Paul Young:** You know coming from a non-liturgical background, you know for us the early church was 7:30 service, and…

**Richard Rohr:** I never heard that before, the early church, that’s great.

**Wm Paul Young:** But as our walls have come down more and more and we’ve engaged with those of other traditions, we find value in things that you’ve lost interest in, and I think that’s part of…

**Richard Rohr:** You’ve seen that.

**Wm Paul Young:** …that is part of the dynamic of this being a moving conversation, not a static one, and I think a lot of times we want to land on a set of rituals that then gives us a sense of power and control and certainty, and God is like, when are you going to learn, right? This is not about the temple, right. This is about participation. If you don't know already that you're significant, you are going to try to find significance as something outside of yourself to tell you you are rather than I know I'm significant, therefore, I can do anything. I can clean toilets, I can involve myself in someone else's expression of liturgy, and find incredible meaning in it because my relationship transcends the liturgy, right, and I think that's where a lot of folks got lost, and it's not like the Protestants haven’t created—the low church Protestants haven’t created their own sense of liturgy or the charismatics or the Pentecostals, they have their own.

**Richard Rohr:** They do, they do.

**Wm Paul Young:** It’s little more free-form or whatever but as soon as the chord goes to a certain place, you know what you're supposed to do. So, we are all kind of in the same bind as that we don’t like the mystery of the relationship, we want the certainty of the conformity because then we know who we are and who they are, and all of that. It all kind of goes together in this conversation.

**Michael Poffenberger:** Thank you, so just going to do one last quick pass we're out of time and so if you guys can give any final practical recommendations somewhere to start with this stuff when they go back to their homes and their communities, a whole lot of people ask for that. So, give us one less piece of wisdom and sent us on our way. No pressure.

**Richard Rohr:** Whatever you do, don't take anything we've said as an overlaying ideology. Keep what Paul and Cynthia have both being saying, keep it relational and the avoidance of relationality knowing your neighbor on each side of your house and building a bridge right there is ideology. We’ve seen now what ideology have done our politics, but I don’t think we have seen how much it is overlaid religion too, and it takes the form of law but it takes the form of overarching explanation, so I don’t have to be in relationship with you.

**Cynthia Bourgeault:** I’d just say, stay faithful to your practice, your meditation practice or your practice of silence. Don’t expect to understand everything that's been laid before you at this point because the mind that you usually bring that we spend most of our culture training is not the mind that is ever going to understand this. Richard got us started and the very first thing he said about the contemplative mind at the pre-session on Friday, and the contemplative mind is a mind that doesn't thinking in either/or, or logical propositions or linear causality, but grasp the whole thing through the heart in a way that grows slowly, and the meditation practice is probably the most reliable paddle point for beginning to grow that mind. It comes slowly, but as you are faithful with the fact that really the journey is about rewiring your operating system, not learning new facts. Then you can let all you’ve learnt be, take the parts that have moved you the most, and call them close to your heart.
and grow into the rest of it as we all transition to this new metamorphosis. Paul, yeah.

**Wm Paul Young**: Awesome, so one of the things that helps me daily and I talk about it all the time, especially when I'm one-on-one with people because it always comes up and that is a learning, and it is a different way of saying a lot of what's already been said, but learning how to stay inside the grace of just one day, that's how I put it, learning how to stay inside the grace of one-day. Children until they're taught that they need to survive or be safe know how to do this. They know how to live inside the grace of one-day. This is the entire universe is what's right here right in front of me this day. Children know how to trust until someone teaches them that it's dangerous and so there's all these elements of childlikeness that we have to move back toward and trust is right at the center of all this. We can talk about everything, but we're going to come back to the question of trust. Is God a good God all the time and can I trust God? And if I can, than I can stay inside the grace of one-day. When you deal with fear, you got one of two choices; control or trust. There isn't a third option here, and the issue with like first John says to the degree that fear dominates your life, to that degree you don't know yet how much you are loved, right. The perfect love casts out fear the one who fear is not perfected in love; there is no fear in love. So, learning how to stay inside the grace of the day means you let go of your survival mechanisms that are based on control, and one of the biggest ones I call future tripping, creating imaginations that don't exist, and trying to spend today's grace because it's sufficient to the day as the grace thereof like sufficient to the day as the evil thereof, you know take note of that tomorrow. Tomorrow has got enough issues of its own. In other words, you will get tomorrow's grace tomorrow, but you only get today's grace today, right. So, don't try to spend real grace on things that don't exist. And most of our lives, we are constantly churning out a whole bunch of outcomes, things that don't exist. The truth is control is an absolute myth and this is about being present inside the grace of just one day, and this is a hard discipline because we just will do it a thousand times a day. We will spin out like you know—I don’t know about you, but I’ve been to my own funeral a whole bunch of times, and I was only one who cried, right. My kids have had all these diseases and been in accidents and I have lost my jobs and I’ve had—you know, we even have this imaginary conversation that hasn't happened yet and we will end a relationship rather than actually engaging in a real one, and we will be justified in it somehow. I mean and we are wondering why how come there's no joy in my life. Well, guess what, joy is in the presence of God, and the presence is right here inside the grace of this day, right. When you learn how to live inside the grace of one day regardless of how the circumstances and how difficult they may be, joy will become a constant companion, not because joy ever last. It’s because you ran away into some imagination that doesn't exist, and so part of what is a focus for me is like for me I'm not Jewish so it’s from when I wake up to when I go to sleep, you know, otherwise it would be six to six, I think or something but it’s like for me it's the grace inside this day and when I live inside the grace of the day, I find there is always enough, there is always enough. When I try to spend it on things that don't exist, I get depleted, I get exhausted, I get anxious, I worry, all of these things and we are not designed for that. We are designed to be the child in relationship with parents who know what they're doing and that is the goodness and kindness of a God who is good all the time, who knows you intimately, and involved in the details of your life.

**Session 9: Contemplative Practice with Cynthia Bourgeault and Darlene Franz**

**Cynthia Bourgeault**: Good morning one and all, and where did the celestial banquet go? Yeah, the room feels a little different, doesn’t it? So, just take a look around and get used to the configuration that we are going to be working in today and realize it's just as friendly, and just as fine and don’t go back into Pavlovian, oh, this is an auditorium and I have to ask questions kind of mode. We are all just holding it because we are preparing so that we would set the scene because this evening guaranteed another celestial banquet is going to emerge, and it requires this shape. So this is where
we are working today, this is how we are working, and we are going to be the one human family working this way. Well, again, meditate using centering prayer or whatever form of silent meditation is comfortable for you for about 20 minutes again in solidarity with the whole world and with the deepest heart opening to the intentions particular and general that are needed in this planet but without thinking of them in any particular way, just allowing that great collective mass of the pain body and the aching and the yearning of humanity, and also of God for humanity to flow through you in that deep quiet. As a start, I thought I would read a wonderful one liner from one of my own brilliant spiritual teachers, Father Bruno Barnhart, who was a Camaldolese monk, died just a year or so ago, but in his book, *The Future of Wisdom*, that I am going to be referring to in my talk later today, he has this wonderful paradoxical statement, the apparent eclipse of Christian wisdom by history is an optical illusion since history is itself an unfolding of the event of Christ, talk about paradox, history is itself an unfolding of the event of Christ, but we will lean into that paradox today as we work our way through what the Trinity has to say about it. Meanwhile, we begin with a chant that is going to—that underneath that undertow of feeling of separation and polarity that sometimes pops into our spirits that affirms that Trinitarian inter-abiding flow and gives you a chance to get right into the middle of it. It’s a two-part chant, and as Darlene introduces it simply, the bottom line, the easy line is absolutely simple, you just in tone on a single note, “Thou of I, I of thou.” The whole line of this comes from Saint Teresa of Avila who in a beautiful prayer palm said Christ speaks, she says, beloved you must seek yourself in me, seek me in yourself. So, it’s a beautiful chant of inter-abidingness and the I of thou is just a monotone baseline that runs like a pedal point through the whole thing. We will introduce that first and then you hear Darlene and the musicians introducing the beautiful chant “Seek yourself in me, seek me in yourself,” and you can hop on that and sing that if you want or stay on the monotone chant or go back and forth between the two, but as you jump into this chant, let this be an experience of inter-abidingness. Remember I started two days ago talking about people waking up and finding themselves in the Trinity? If you really allow yourself to sink into the inter-abidingness of this chant, you can perhaps wake up and find yourself certainly in that flow. So, we will chant that for a bit and then we will go into 20 minutes of silence and we will be off and about with our day. Okay, ready gang?

Yes.

Never pray with your back to musicians.

[Chanting]

**Chorus**: Thou of I, I of Thou. Thou of I, I of Thou. Thou of I, I of Thou. Thou of I, I of Thou. Seek yourself in me, seek me in yourself. Seek yourself in me, seek me in yourself.

**Cynthia Bourgeault**: One of the things that is really important in a quiet way when you come out of meditation is to come out gradually, consciously, not snapping back into attention, because it’s in that transitional route—movement between those two states of being that if you do that lovingly and gently, it allows you to bring that quality of remembrance of the larger into more of your day.