

Another Way to See the Bible: Lesson 4
The Tricycle: Scripture, Tradition, and Experience
Richard Rohr

Unedited transcript of audio excerpt from the Living School for Action and Contemplation two-year program. Carolyn Metzler, referenced in this recording, suggested the “tricycle” image in place of the usual “stool” analogy.

Richard Rohr: What I've introduced in these first few minutes is what we call our Tricycle. It was Carolyn who first gave me this metaphor, The Tricycle, because it was a dynamic movement. I said 'A Stool' in the very first class and she came up and she said, "I think you should use 'Tricycle'," and so we've been using it ever since, because it's a much more dynamic notion. So, the three wheels of the tricycle are scripture, tradition, and experience. And in fact, I know this is going to scare some of you, I make experience the front wheel, because that's the one that wins out anyway. And the reason I can risk saying that to you is because we're teaching you the contemplative mind. With the contemplative mind you're going to be trained in a filter that helps you see your egotistical nature of your experience, you know, and when it's all about you. I couldn't say to a typical Catholic in the 1950s when I was growing up in Kansas. I couldn't have said, "Trust your experience," because the assumption is it would have been entirely culturally bound, in my case German Kansas' 1950s culture and it would have been bound inside of Roman Catholic culture, which had no dialog with anybody else but itself. I mean, I hardly met Protestants, much less Hindus and Buddhists, or lived in a total ghetto as maybe some of you did. So, we Catholics shouted tradition, but we usually lived in very recent traditions. Many Protestants shouted Scripture, but used Scripture entirely inside of their own culture and their own biases, paying attention to certain texts, absolutely ignoring other texts, we all know that now. It just—and which is why we've lost massive credibility worldwide, and I don't need to speak for your children and grandchildren. Most of them don't even give us the time of day. We're not even—Christianity is not worth looking at. It is produced in their mind, I'm not saying I absolutely agree with that critique, but nothing of value, except small-minded people. Often racist people, often bigoted people at various levels. And so, the world has given up on us. But we've earned it. We've lost 500 years now of trying to be rational ourselves, without really being rational. But fundamentalism, believe it or not; I know it doesn't appear very smart, but it's actually a form of rationalism, do you understand? It's trying to come back with certain truths. You see this in most conservative people, a mania for certitude. They will not admit that, in fact, the biblical notion of faith is a balancing of knowing with not knowing. Now, there's where our mystics are the big teachers. If you don't balance knowing with not knowing and not even needing to know, because you're being held at a deeper level, you cannot, in my opinion, understand biblical faith. And we took the notion of biblical faith, which is clearly how to live in a certain degree of darkness comfortably, a high tolerance for ambiguity, for not knowing, not needing to be certain in the rational form of certainty. And we pretty much, after the Enlightenment, turned it around 180 degrees. So, what was supposed to be a people who could walk in darkness and still be okay, we created people who had an absolute need, and thought they had a right for certitude, you understand? There's a more holistic way of knowing that includes the mind, but we would say it includes the heart, it includes the body, it includes the intuition. That's full-access knowing, full-body knowing, full-person knowing. That was the spiritual way of knowing, and ironically, it has more to do with loving that it does with knowing.