

Reflection on the Trinity

Obi Wan Kenobi to Luke (in *Star Wars – A New Hope*): the “force” is “an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together.”

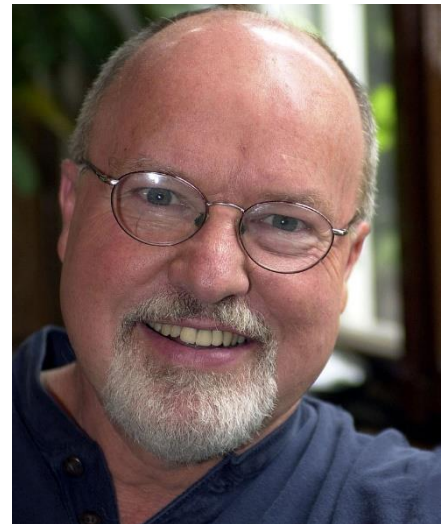
Whether the creator of Star Wars, George Lukas, meant it or not, this is trinitarian language!

Author and mystic, Richard Rohr also talks of the force: God is a divine threesome, “a life force of everything flowing through us and all creation”.

You can see the similarity!

Rohr continues to talk of God as a “Divine Wave” rather than a “static, particle God,” because “the energy in the universe is not in the planets, or in the protons, or neutrons, but in *the relationship between them*.”

Richard Rohr, (born 1943) is an American Franciscan priest and writer on spirituality based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church in 1970. He has been called "one of the most popular spirituality authors and speakers in the world. His teaching have not found universal acceptance, though.



Some Catholics and conservative writers have condemned his as heretical, and even tried to have his excommunicated! Yet, he remains a priest in good standing, and while his revelations on the trinity might seem a little “out there” and New Age”-like, they are biblical based, and provide a way of re-embracing a concept that we might otherwise put aside as to perplexing to bother with.

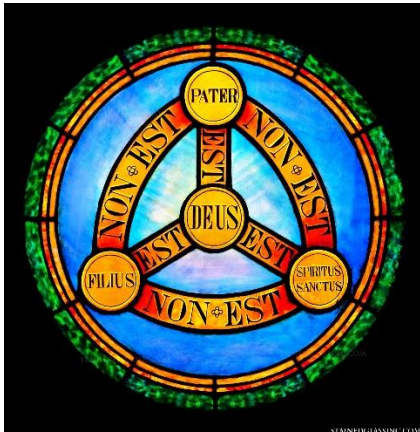
Today I am using quotes from his book, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your transformation*, to challenge our thinking on the trinity, and develop a new appreciation for the concept.

There is nothing new when Rohr says that, in the trinity, we see: “God for us, God alongside us, God within us.”

This formula connects with the apostle Paul, speaking in Athens about God “in whom we live and move and have our being.”

This idea of God is easy to enough to grasp, and is a trinitarian formula we are familiar with.

But we get into difficulty when we try to understand the trinity as in our first hymn: “God in three person, blessed trinity”. God must be three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



Is God three persons in one, or do we see three attributes/faces/personas to God? This traditional depiction holds the Creedal depiction of God as three persons.

Of this difficulty Rohr says, “Don’t start with the One and try to make it into Three, but start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One. This starting point, along with the contemplative mind to understand it, was much more emphasized and developed in the Eastern church, which is frankly why it still sounds foreign to most of the Western churches.”

He goes on to say, “Of the word, Trinity: It wasn’t until the third century that Tertullian (150–240), sometimes called “the founder of Western Christian theology,” first coined this word Trinity from the Latin trinitas, meaning “triad,” or trinus, meaning “threefold.” Again, the word itself is not found in the Bible; it took history a while to find a proper word for this always-elusive [concept].

This is because the idea one in three, and three in one, is a mathematical conundrum: it is a puzzle that leaves more questions than it answers.

Rohr says, “Circling around” is all we can do. Our speaking of God is a search for similes, analogies, and metaphors. All theological language is an approximation, offered tentatively in holy awe. That’s the best human language can achieve. We can say, “It’s like—it’s similar to...,” but we can never say, “It is...” because we are in the realm of beyond, of transcendence, of mystery. And we must—absolutely must—maintain a fundamental humility before the Great Mystery.

If we do not, religion always worships itself and its formulations and never God.”

There are other attempts that may be more helpful when we think about the trinity as relationship, such as the triquetra, shown here in two forms.



Rohr's preferred image is the one used on the cover of his book. It is the icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev.

He says about it, "When we take the depiction of God in Rublev's *The Trinity* seriously, we have to say, "In the beginning was the Relationship."

This icon yields more fruits the more you gaze on it. Every part of it was obviously meditated on with great care: the gaze between the Three; the deep respect between them as they all share from a common bowl.

And note the hand of the Spirit pointing toward the open and fourth place at the table! Is the Holy Spirit inviting, offering, and clearing space? If so, for what?"



The answer is—us!

We are invited into that fourth place. And not just us, but all creation is there at the table, in relationship with God.

At the heart of Rohr's understanding of Trinity is this idea of *relationship*.

The relationship is where the power is. This is true of the atomic forces in atoms, and it's true of us as humans. So it is with God.

Look again at our lectionary reading from John's gospel today:

¹⁴ *He (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

¹⁵ *All that the Father has is mine.*

For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

This is the intertwined relationship of love at work, which is what God does because that is who God is.

Rohr says,

"God does not decide to love, and God's love can never be determined by the worthiness or unworthiness of the object. But God is Love itself. God cannot not love, because love is the nature of God's very being."

And he adds,

"Love is not something you do; love is someone you are. It is your True Self.

Love is where you came from and love is where you're going.

It's not something you can buy. It's not something you can attain. It is the presence of the triune God within you."

Rohr says there are three reasons why trinity needs to be revived today, instead of being discarded as western churches are effectively doing.

First—The humility of transcendence

Trinity offers us a deeper understanding of our inner experience of transcendence.

Liberals and academics throw out the baby with the bathwater, conservatives and fundamentalists drown in the bathwater. A better approach is to allow the water to flow over and through you

Experience of the transcendent can come through (1) awe and wonder, and (2) suffering.

Awe and wonder opens us to mystery and new experiences of God. I can experience awe in the smile of a baby, the beauty of a flower, the clear night sky, and almost anything, really.

Suffering leads us to the point where we cannot make sense of things anymore, and the only way forward may be radical change to our belief systems – a paradigm shift in our thinking. This is what we see in the reading from Romans today.

Paul speaks of his sufferings in a most positive way:

“we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

The second reason to revive trinity is a broadened theological vocabulary.

The interface with science, and other religions demands this, and trinity will help this: it offers a grounding for interfaith dialogue, and it expresses the realization on the part of both contemplatives and physicists that "the foundational nature of reality is relational: everything is in relationship with everything else."

The third reason is an expanded understanding of Jesus, and the Christ—our Earth-based atonement Christology breaks down if there is life on other planets.

Paul: there is only Christ: he is everything, and he is *in* everything.

Rohr: “*The Christ* is a cosmic and metaphysical statement before it is a religious one. *Jesus* is a personal and historical statement.”

Rohr’s concluding prayer brings this all together, and with it I finish my reflection on Trinity:

God for us, we call you Father,
God alongside us, we call you Jesus,
God within us, we call you Holy Spirit.
You are the Eternal Mystery
that enables, enfolds, and enlivens all things,
even us and even me.
Every name falls short of your
goodness and greatness.
We can only see who you are in what is.
We ask for such perfect seeing.
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be. Amen.