



FOREWORD BY WILLIAM PAUL YOUNG

THE
DIVINE DANCE

THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION

RICHARD ROHR

WITH **MIKE MORRELL**

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WHITAKER
HOUSE

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PART I:

WANTED: A TRINITARIAN REVOLUTION

SPIRITUAL PARADIGM SHIFT

*God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*¹²

*My Father goes on working, and so do I.*¹³

*The Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*¹⁴

Before you try to figure out why I started this section with these three separate citations about a very active and involved God, let me try to explain. And all I can ever do is *try*.

In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn popularized the word “paradigm shift.”¹⁵ He made clear that even in the scientific field, a paradigm shift is tantamount to what religion often calls “major conversion.” And it is equally rare in both science and religion! Any genuine transformation of worldview asks for such a major switch from the track we’re familiar with that often those who hold the old paradigm must actually die off before a new paradigm can gain traction and wide acceptance. 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 cataclysmic insight and breakthrough. German mystic Meister Eckhart called this phenomenon “boiling”!¹⁶

At the risk of sounding like I am making a serious overstatement, I think the common Christian image of God, despite Jesus, is still largely “pagan” (not that pagans are bad people, by the way!) and untransformed.

What do I mean by this? History has so long operated with a *static and imperial image of God*—as a Supreme Monarch who is mostly living

12. John 3:17 (NKJV).

13. John 5:17 (JB).

14. John 14:26 (NIV).

15. See *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

16. See, for example, *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defense* (Classics of Western Spirituality) rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 37.

in splendid isolation from what he—and God is always and exclusively envisioned as male in this model—created. This God is seen largely as a Critical Spectator (and his followers do their level best to imitate their Creator in this regard).

We always become what we behold; the presence that we practice matters. That's why we desperately need a worldwide paradigm shift in Christian consciousness regarding how we relate to God. This shift has been subtly yet profoundly underway for some time, hiding in plain sight—the revelation of God as what we have always called “Trinity” but have barely understood (*in the beginning was the Relationship*).

This slowly-dawning Christian revelation was supposed to have radically changed our image of God, but for the most part it did not. The old wiring was just too much in place. It has taken us two thousand years to try to make this shift; but now history, mental health, so many negative and angry Christians, cosmology, and quantum physics are quickly demanding it of us.

Kuhn said that paradigm shifts become necessary when the plausibility structure of the previous paradigm becomes so full of holes and patchwork “fixes” that a complete overhaul, which once looked utterly threatening, now appears as a lifeline.

I believe we're at precisely such a moment when it comes to our images of God. Instead of the idea of Trinity being an abstruse conundrum, it could well end up being the answer to the foundational problem of Western religion.

Instead of God being the Eternal Threatener, we have God as the Ultimate Participant—in everything—both the good and the painful.

Let me try to describe the two paradigms in stark contrast.

Instead of an Omnipotent Monarch, let's try what God as Trinity demonstrates as the actual and wondrous shape of the Divine Reality, which then *replicates itself in us*¹⁷ and in “all the array” of creation.¹⁸

Instead of God watching life happen from afar and judging it...

17. See Genesis 1:26.

18. See Genesis 2:1.

How about God being inherent in *life itself*?

How about God being *the Life Force of everything*?

Instead of God being an Object like any other object...

How about God being *the Life Energy between each and every object* (which we would usually call *Love* or *Spirit*)?

This allows God to be much larger, *at least* coterminous with the ever-larger universe we are discovering, and *totally inclusive*—what else could any God worthy of the name be?

Instead of the small god we seem stuck with in our current (and dying) paradigm, usually preoccupied with exclusion, the Trinitarian Revolution reveals God as *with us in all of life* instead of standing on the sidelines, always critiquing which things belong and which things don't.

The Trinitarian Revolution reveals God as *always involved* instead of the in-and-out deity that leaves most of humanity “orphaned” much of the time.¹⁹

Theologically, of course, this revolution repositions grace as inherent to creation, not as an occasional additive that some people occasionally merit.

If this revolution has always been quietly present, like yeast in the dough of our rising spirituality, it might help us understand the hopeful and positive “adoption” and “inheritance” theologies of Paul²⁰ and the Eastern Fathers over the later, punitive images of God that have dominated the Western church.

This God is the very one whom we have named “Trinity”—the *flow* who flows through everything, without exception, and who has done so since the beginning.

Thus, everything is holy, for those who have learned how to see.

The implications of this spiritual paradigm shift, this Trinitarian Revolution, are staggering: every vital impulse, every force toward the future, every creative momentum, every loving surge, every dash toward

19. See John 14:18.

20. See, for example, Romans 8:14–17; Galatians 4:5–7; Ephesians 1:5, 14.

beauty, every running toward truth, every ecstasy before simple goodness, every leap of *élan vital*, as the French would say, every bit of ambition for humanity and the earth, for wholeness and holiness, is the eternally-flowing life of the Trinitarian God.

Whether we know it or not! *This is not an invitation that you can agree with or disagree with. It is a description of what is already happening in God and in everything created in God's image and likeness.*

This triune God allows you, impels you, to live easily with God everywhere and all the time: in the budding of a plant, the smile of a gardener, the excitement of a teenage boy over his new girlfriend, the tireless determination of a research scientist, the pride of a mechanic over his hidden work under the hood, the loving nuzzling of horses, the tenderness with which eagles feed their chicks, and the downward flow of every mountain stream.

This God is found even in the suffering and death of those very things! How could this not be the life-energy of God? How could it be anything else? Such a big definition of life must include death in its Great Embrace, "so that none of your labors will be wasted."²¹

In the chirp of every bird excited about a new morning, in the hard beauty of every sandstone cliff, in the deep satisfaction at every job well done, in the passion of sex, and even in a clerk's gratuitous smile to a department store customer or in the passivity of the hospital bed, "*the world, life or death, present and future—all belong to you—and you belong to Christ—and Christ belongs to God,*" as the apostle Paul puts it.²² It is one Trinitarian Flow since the beginning.

Unless God's seers can begin to make this paradigm shift, there is no way that God is going to be able to "save the world." Courtroom scenes and penal systems do not inspire or change the world. They are totally inadequate to communicate the Divine Banquet and invitation; in fact, they make it largely impossible to imagine. It is not about being obviously religious. We have tried that for centuries with small results;

21. See 1 Corinthians 15:51–58.

22. 1 Corinthians 3:22–23.

it's about being quietly joyous and cooperative²³ with the divine *generosity* that connects everything to everything else.

Yes, *God* is saving the world, and *God* goes on working even though we fail to notice, fail to enjoy, fail to pass on, and fail to fully live our one and only life. We become like the small god we have too often worshipped, and thus spectators at our own funeral.

How about this, instead:

*There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything.*²⁴

*When Christ is [fully] revealed—and he is your life—you too will be revealed in all your glory with him.*²⁵

A revolution is already underway; the old plausibility structures of divinity are diminishing; so much of religion is in rigor mortis. Are we ready to let go of what's no longer working and embrace the paradigm that has always been emerging and is always too much for us? As St. Augustine said, this *God* is “ever ancient and ever new.”

If my instincts are right, this unearthing of *Trinity* can't come a moment too soon. Because I'm convinced that beneath the ugly manifestations of our present evils—political corruption, ecological devastation, warring against one another, hating each other based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation—the greatest disease facing humanity right now is our profound and painful sense of *disconnection*.

Disconnection from *God*, certainly, but also from ourselves (our bodies), from each other, and from our world.

Our sense of this fourfold isolation is plunging us as a culture—as a species—into increasingly destructive behavior. While our world is not as doom and gloom as those who feed on a steady diet of cable TV and social media-driven “bad news” might conclude, it's true that the sheer scope and complexity of our disconnection is staggering.

23. See Romans 8:28.

24. Colossians 3:11.

25. Colossians 3:4 (JB).

I'm discovering that the gift of the Trinity—and our practical, felt experience of receiving this gift—offers a grounded reconnection with God, self, others, and world that all religion and spirituality, and arguably, even politics, is aiming for—but which conventional religion, spirituality, and politics fall short of.

The religion, spirituality, and politics of worthiness games, belonging barriers, and achievement rewards will never be the cure: these are in fact part of the dis-ease. But God's joyous unveiling as Trinity can melt even the most hardened constrictions, illuminating the way toward a fourfold *re-union* of Spirit, self, society, and sense of space.

Are you ready to explore how a shift in our perspective from God as "removed one" to God as "most moved Mover,"²⁶ intimately participating in ongoing co-creation, makes such a joyous re-union possible?

If so, welcome to *The Divine Dance*. In these pages, we will indeed get to know the Trinity and the transformation of all things—including yourself.

26 See Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

27. Harper San Francisco, 1991.