

Quiet Day Reflections

The Rev'd David Head led us in two reflections that he had prepared in response to Richard Rohr's book 'The Divine Dance'.

In response to a number of requests David has sent me his talks. We pray that these may provide a springboard for reflection and nourishment for your souls.

Blessings,
Jane

Introduction to the Book

"The Divine Dance" by Richard Rohr

Session

One:

Richard Rohr confrontingly says that "Bad theology is like pornography, the imagination of a real relationship with God without the physical risk of one." Karl Rahner says in his famous and important book on God called 'The Trinity': "Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere monotheists. We must be willing to admit that should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as fake, the major part of religious literature would remain virtually unchanged." So, it is important to explore what the Trinity really means for us and to try to make it truly meaningful for us in our lives. Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a radical relatedness, a perfect communion between Three – a circling dance of love. God is not just a dancer, God is the dance itself.



RUBLEV'S ICON uses three primary colours. He saw gold as the colour of the Father—perfection, fullness, wholeness. He saw blue as the colour of the human and of the human realm of sea and sky, and therefore, God in Christ taking on humanness is the colour blue. His two raised fingers tell us that he has put spirit and matter, divinity and humanity together within himself. Green is the colour of the Spirit and is the quality of divine aliveness that makes everything blossom and bloom in endless shades of green. The hand of the Spirit is pointing toward the open space at the front of the table which is the faith space. Recent studies show that originally there was a mirror glued to the place where the dark square hole is in the front of the table. This mirror enabled the viewer to see themselves as the fourth person at the table. This invitation to share at the divine table is what we would really call the offer of salvation. Jesus comes forth from the Eternal Fullness of God the Trinity allowing us to see ourselves mirrored as part of this table fellowship, as an invited partner in God's eternal dance of love and communion.

God is not 'a being' but 'Being' itself. The God whom Jesus talks about, and who includes himself, is presented as a totally positive and inclusive flow in one never-ending circle of direction, a waterwheel of outpouring love that never stops. Any talk of anger in God, or wrath in God, or unforgiveness in God, or holding back in God, is theologically impossible. Nothing human can stop the flow of divine love. We cannot undo the eternal pattern even by our worst sin. God is Eternal relationship and this cannot be broken. People in our society and on our news bulletins who are toxic, psychopathic, or sociopathic in behavior are always those who cannot maintain or sustain nurturing relationships. They are loners

or people with whom any relationship is difficult. Such people are usually totally dismissive of God, because a relationship with anyone let alone a stronger higher power is very confronting and too difficult.

Metaphor is the only language available to us when we seek to speak about God. All love, goodness and holiness are reflected gifts from God. You take all things in creation into yourself by gazing at them with reverence and the Holy Spirit completes the circuit of love, because this is how creation is looking back at you. The inner life of the Trinity has become the outwardly seen life of creation. The very nature of God is like a centrifugal force flowing out, that becomes a centripetal force drawing in (similar to a tidal movement out and in, or, looking in a mirror that takes us both looking out at and equally into ourselves). Thus, we can rightly have the expectation of some sort of creation resemblance between ourselves and every other living creature. The Trinity allows our scientific and spiritual cosmologies to finally operate as one with no inconsistencies. If God the Creator creates all things, then there has to be a DNA connection as it were between the one who creates and the entities created.

DIAGRAM OF ATOM: Look at the inner pattern of atoms – neutrons, protons and electrons – in a divine dance as the basis of all life and all things. Sin is always a refusal of mutuality and a closing down of interrelatedness into separateness. The work of the Spirit is to keep you growing, is to keep you vulnerable and open to life. Notice that the major metaphors for the Spirit are always dynamic, energetic and moving: elusive wind, descending dove, falling fire, flowing water. Spirit led people never stop growing and changing. We are always in the flowing river of the Spirit.

POEM: As the late Irish poet and priest John O'Donohue puts it:

"I would love to live/ Like a river flows/Carried by the surprise /Of its own unfolding."

The flow doesn't have to do with you being perfect. It doesn't have to do with you being right or belonging to the right group. Jesus never had any check list test before he calls or heals anybody. He just says, as it were, "Are you going to allow yourself to be touched by me?" The touchable ones are the healed ones. There is no moral test or acceptability test. The one question is "Do you want to know me and be healed?" If the answer is yes and we are truly open, vulnerable and trusting, then the healing, both spiritual and physical happens. God's weakness is stronger than human strength (1Cor 1:25). How could God be weak? God's weakness, if such can be the word, is inter-other or inter-being not autonomy. God's mystery rests in mutuality. We humans like control. God loves vulnerability, God loves being always open to love and so is constantly involved in energy renewal. God endlessly creates and allows diversity. The Trinity displays diversity and yet also oneness in

mutuality. The diversity of God is both the three in one and one in three and the invitation to us all individually to be part of the divine dance.

In Scripture, the conflict between the world and the Spirit is not a conflict with creation, but, with the culture and the system we have created, and with the way we humans structure reality. If there is only one God and if there is only one pattern to this God, then the wonderful thing is that we can expect to discern that pattern everywhere. What physicists and biologists and contemplatives alike are confirming is that the foundational nature of all reality is relational: everything is in relationship with everything else. In the understanding of Trinity, start with the Three and know that this is the only nature of the One. The basic building block of our entire universe is what we call the atom and the atom is simply understood as the orbiting structure of three particles – proton, neutron and electron – in constant interplay with one another. In breaking open the atom, a huge explosive energy of nuclear power is found. This can be used positively or negatively: for good in supplying nuclear power or for appalling evil in the destructiveness of a nuclear bomb. Theologians and Contemplatives describing the 3 in 1 dance of the Trinity are not unlike physicists describing the mystery of atomic energy. God breaks open the power of the Trinity for our good, but if we humans try to break the Trinity open and mess with God's power by manipulating God or pretending to be God ourselves then only evil can ensue.

If the cosmos as we know it originates from a "Big Bang" – or in theological language from a divine "Let there be" – then this means that the one point just explodes with life and gives eventual birth to the many of creation. But at what point does the one not contain the many? This is what the relational pattern of the universe is teaching us from Godhead to geochemistry and everything in between. The shape of the cosmos is triune. Both scientists and mystics alike say the same sort of thing: "Be present! Experiment! Stay curious!"

Each person is created by God as unique and irreplaceable. Each person is one to whom God has transferred and communicated God's divine image in relationship. Each person can in turn communicate and reflect that image to all other created beings. Personhood is not a static notion that exists between the divine persons and with each human person. Personhood is entirely dynamic and relational by reason and gift of our creation. Sin is the refusal to move in the direction of our deepest reality as love. God knows and loves us before God wills us into being. We are loved into being. This first perfect and totally free act of love is that God chooses us to exist. We are never an object to God. God cannot help but love God's own created image in us. We are constituted by that same relationship that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are created inside the substantial and

infinite love of the Trinity. You cannot get to or achieve such a place; you can only rest and rejoice in such a place. So, God is not a being that decides to love good people and punish bad people. Instead Absolute love stands revealed as the very name and shape of Being itself. Love constitutes the very nature of being. God as Trinity gives hope to society as a whole because it is based on the very nature and not on the ups and downs of the behaviors of individuals, which are always unstable. Let us look at little children, and it is also exemplified in the animal kingdom through, for example, dogs. These are both interesting examples of the best way to describe the way things should be. Why? Because little children and dogs are still filled with natural hope and expectation that their smiles and their tails wagging respectively will be returned in some positive way (unless of course there has been abuse to them in the past). What we see here is pure being. This is the uninhibited flow of love. Surely this is why Jesus told us to be like little children. There is nothing stopping the pure flow of love in a child or dog and why nearly all of us respond with warmth and love to a baby or a puppy. They are at that moment the very essence of God. God is genderless. Male and female names ascribed to God are mere metaphors to describe attributes of God. What matters in the Trinity is the relationship between them not any specific names or genders or even if you like non-genders of the Three. Our Triune God is a riot of expression, transcending and including all possible metaphoric labels we can give. The Trinity is totally inclusive irrespective of cultural, religious and lifestyle choices. Jesus consistently makes the cultural outsider the hero or the positive example in his parables and the outsider is the one who becomes the recipient of God's multifaceted grace. The intriguing thing about the mutuality of the Trinity is that the names and roles and energies are really interchangeable. We of existence itself should not try to typecast the Father as only the infinite one, or the Son as the only imminent one, or the Spirit as the only intimate one. All is absolutely given to the other and interchangeable. When all three of those divine ways of being draw you in and when you are at home with Infinity and Immanence and Intimacy, then you live fully within the Spirituality of the Trinity.

Session

Two:

The all-important thing is to try to understand the energy and quality of the relationships between these Three. That is the essential mystery that transforms us. A helpful metaphor for this may be our understanding of a Mum and Dad and their little child. All little children love to crawl into bed with Mum and Dad. Why do they do this? Because it is where all the energy and security and safety and tenderness is to be found, right there between the two parents. The child literally rests in the space of the relationship of the parents. It takes one person to be an individual, two people to make a couple and it takes at least three people to make a community. Because the Ultimate Reality of the universe is a community of

persons in relation to one another then the way of ultimate being for us is in mutuality and community.

Baptism is not in the name of Jesus but into the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism is into the divine dance and divine flow of love. The sign of the cross the priest makes on the forehead of the baptised is in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We can also personally make the sign of the cross over our whole selves moving from the forehead to the middle of the body and then shoulder to shoulder and back to the heart. It is a dance in itself and takes the mind down to the body and up to the shoulders, symbols of our strength and then back to the heart. This recalls symbolically Jesus' command to us to love God with all our mind and heart and strength and soul, and thus we are symbolically contained in the Trinity of flowing love. God does not love you because you are good. God loves you because God is good, and we are made in God's image. As we tune our hearts in through prayer, meditation and contemplation, we'll begin to experience God almost like a force field, to borrow a metaphor from physics. We are all, by our birth, already in this force field, whether we know it, or recognize it, or not. So, as equally created sons and daughters of God, we are alongside peoples of all colours, races, creeds and genders. God doesn't build walls or create borders. God's force field is all-encompassing. Contemplation is learning how to abide in and with that force field, and how to inhabit and allow the divine flow into us of this love and this force field which we call the Holy Spirit.

God dwells in all the myriad forms of creation, flowing here, loving there and positively enjoying it all. We name this flowing, creative, inhabiting action the Holy Spirit and this is precisely the indwelling of God in all things. This indwelling is witnessed in that first and ever continuing pattern that Christians call the Incarnation. It began right at the "Big Bang" with "Let there be Light" and it is still expanding outward. So, Incarnation is not just about God becoming human in Jesus, but began with Christ the Word, or the Logos, speaking and loving life into all things at the beginning of creation.

If God is the great I AM, then evil/Satan/The Accuser is the "I am not" and makes negation, oppression and the creation of separateness his primary task. Neuroscience tells us that fear, negativity and hatred have the capacity to stick like Velcro to the nerves while positivity, gratitude and appreciation slide away like Teflon. That is until we are able to savour or choose them for at least 15 secs. Only then do they imprint and stick. The positive loving, non-argumentative savouring of the moment is what we call contemplation. Three people can be exposed to the same events and stimuli and come away with three different experiences. When you take in events, moments, relationships and ideas in a

readied, meditative and vulnerable way, allowing even the Beyond to show itself to us, your likelihood of experiencing the Beyond is far greater.

Even Quantum Physics and Biology scientists now realise and insist that the observer necessarily changes the content and results of an experiment. Each of us sees, to some extent, no matter how careful we try to be, only what we desire or are subconsciously wired to see. Jesus uses this reality in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. At the end of the story the Rich Man pleads with God that Lazarus be sent back down to the earthly dimension to warn his brothers. (We note that the rich man doesn't himself have a name perhaps suggesting he is out of relationship with the rest of humanity.) But God from heaven, through the Patriarch Abraham, replies: "They will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead" If you are not open to things of the Beyond, you will not allow yourself to experience the miraculous. "Deep calls unto deep" as Psalm 42:7 says. Really, it is only the God deep within us that is capable of understanding the things of God. We are called to take this seriously and know how it operates in us, and with us, and for us. The failure to access our own operating system created by God has kept much Christianity very immature and superficial. Much of the realm of mystery including the idea of the Trinity, and of all mature faith, remains static in the inanimate form of dogma or doctrine which is highly abstract and largely irrelevant to life unless we allow its deeper growth into the mystical dimension of our own lives and thus enable new and deeper experiences of God. This is really a paradigm shift in understanding of faith.

There are basically two paths that allow people to have genuinely new experiences: a) the path of wonder and awe, and b) the path of suffering. When you allow yourself to be led into awe and wonder, when you find yourself in an "aha!" mystical moment and you allow yourself to savour it for at least 15 secs then you will hopefully have a genuinely new experience. Fundamentalist religion is terribly uncomfortable with awe and wonder. It likes to take full control of the incoming data, and 'mystery' is out of reach of such data control. In the moment of awe, all we can truly do is circle around in the mystery and eternal motion of the divine in such a way that invites us into the dance of faith.

The other path to genuine new experience of God and Faith is suffering. Although this is often at great cost to the sufferer and even may risk the total closing down of the soul. But it must surely be worth the risk to God since suffering is such a regular part of existence and seems for many to be a most powerful way to eventually grow in faith. Of course, that is provided we don't invest in too many insurance policies that seek to shield us from the results of suffering as much as possible. Hence Jesus says how difficult it is for a rich person to understand his message and to enter the Kingdom. Suffering is the only thing

strong enough to break down our control systems and logical paradigms and our desire to be totally in control of our lives. God generally has to lead us to the limits of our resources so that we are forced to say “I cannot do this in my own power and in my present state.” This limit is suffering and often happens when we face a major illness or traumatic accident or when faced with the death of a loved one, or a marriage breakdown, or job loss, or failure of reputation and self-meaning and self-worth, as with athletes and others who fall from grace or who are no longer at their peak of performance.

Think of the seemingly endless infinity of space which is mostly made up of empty space with the occasional planetary and star systems and with unseen areas of dark matter and black holes. None of this is subject to our control. In all this infinity of orbiting, exploding, expanding and even of unexpected contracting, God’s infinite love is at work. Everything we see is the self-emptying of God into infinite physical and visible forms. In other words, Infinity is forever limiting itself into finite expressions and this could even be called the suffering of God. Christ himself learned this self-emptying, or what is theologically called ‘kenosis’, emptying himself from his eternal life in the Trinity to become human. The cross is the visible symbol of what is always going on inside God – this continuous self-emptying into creation and the subsequent suffering as God grieves in love over all life’s inadequacies and imperfections which must be there in order for there to be a difference between the creator and the created.

For years, there has been a mass exodus from institutional faith. Research studies show that of those with no faith, as expressed in the census, 42% describe themselves as both non-religious and non-spiritual, 37% as spiritual but not religious and 18% describe themselves as still actively religious. We seem to be in a paradigm shift where all dogmatic and narrow exclusivist forms of faith must in time die in order for a truly cosmic and love-centred spiritual path to be born. The cosmic circle of freedom, in an open embrace of the whole of creation, is also a circle of suffering. When the mystics pray to feel some of Jesus’ suffering, are they merely sado-masochists or spiritually unbalanced in their fervor? No. Communion, participation and solidarity with the mystery of the Trinity also necessitates participation in the suffering of love.

BOOK: Etty Hillesum, in her wonderful and powerful memoir, wrote as she awaited her death at Auschwitz: “I somehow want to suffer with you God. All this suffering is somehow your suffering too and I want to participate with you in it.” We all eventually discover that our hearts and souls will not be fed at the pleasurable trough of hedonism and self-seeking. This all proves empty when suffering, as it inevitably must, overtakes us. Even in her tremendous suffering, Etty Hillesum lived an astonishing existence of peace, love and communion with God, and she created little spaces of freedom in all the horror both for

herself and for others. This is full reality. It is so full it can include the downside completely in the cycle of mystery, drawn into a life larger than her own. When we encounter suffering, we can find our own capacity to endure and to grow in life if we stay connected to the divine flow. Obviously, even then, we have to block out a certain degree of deep raw suffering, for our own self-care and self-survival. We as humans can't take it all into ourselves, but God can. That's the symbol of the cross – God taking in all the pain and suffering of history. In a way, there is only one suffering and one cosmic sadness and that is the very suffering of God. And we all share in it. The Trinity is the all-in-all God and is thus everywhere without exception. If God could be said to have a favourite place, it would always be in solidarity with those on the margins of life and power. During his entire, if relatively short, life on earth Jesus went wherever pain was and his disciples follow him into such places, often with confusion and lack of understanding.

The Rev'd David Head,
Rector, St Mary's Anglican Church, Morwell.

Men's Retreat at your Cathedral of Sale:

from 9:30am to 3:00pm, on Saturday, September 1, 2018

Cunningham Street SALE, Victoria.

Yesterday members and friends of the Anam Cara Community met at St Mary's Morwell for a day of reflection, silence and mutual encouragement.

Theme: The Way of the Son into the Far Country

Led by: The Rev'd Nikolai Blaskow

Morning Tea and a simple *Lunch* will be provided (by all means bring your own, if you wish) just let us know of any dietary requirements.

To cover costs, **Registrations** are \$10-\$20 donations for the day.

Contact: nikolai@nikolaiblaskow.com, or ring 0428167724.

Support on the journey

The Anam Cara Community's ministry is to be a support to those who are on the inner journey into God. Each person's journey is different, and we recognise that there are some for whom the Christian tradition is difficult or not supportive. We're committed to finding ways to hear the needs of each Associate, and support them as we can.

Contacts:

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 - Diocesan Director of Professional Standards (*to make complaints or express concerns about our ministries*): Ms Cheryl Russell [0407 563 313](tel:0407563313), cherylr@gippsanglican.org.au
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Love and prayers

Jane Macqueen

On behalf of the Servant Leaders

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