

A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR'S EMBODIMENT OF
DYNAMIC TRINITARIAN FLOW
IN THE ART OF SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

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ABSTRACT

This autoethnographic study explores my embodied experience of Trinity which occurred during a day of spiritual accompaniment (direction) sessions. It addresses the lack of detailed accounts in the literature of personal encounters with Trinity during spiritual accompaniment (direction). Engaging reflexively with the literature, personal journals, artwork, an ongoing practice of expressive dance called Embodied Prayer, contemplative prayer, and spiritual accompaniment I deepened my relationships with the Holy, others, and within myself. Through these methods I explicated the story of this experience and its significance. The experience that stimulated this study was an embodied relational encounter with Trinity which manifested as dancing movement beyond subjective personas. The resulting story to make sense of this mystical experience contributes to the sociological understanding of the art of spiritual accompaniment. Through this autoethnographic story I describe how *Dynamic Trinitarian Flow* has and continues to invite me into sustained, fluid presence in life as well as in practicing the art of spiritual accompaniment. The sacred relationship I experienced as *Dynamic Trinitarian Flow* has become my dancing partner in my quest to move beyond fears of causing harm in my spiritual accompaniment practice through embracing strength with humility.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my loving daughters,
Haley and Sarah, who are my teachers and inspiration.

May you know ever deeper the Dance of the heart.

And,

To my husband Barry, whose patient and loving support
allowed me to navigate the Way.

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The God Who Only
Knows Four Words

Every

Child

Has known God,

Not the God of names,

Not the God of don'ts,

Not the God who
ever does

Anything weird,

But the God who only,
knows four words

And keeps repeating
them, saying:

“Come dance with Me.”

Come

Dance.

Hafiz¹

¹ Daniel James Ladinsky, renderer, *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master* (Penguin Publishing Group, 1999), 270 , Kindle.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

This autoethnography is an exploration of an occurrence I had with what I have identified as the Trinity, specifically Trinity beyond the “persons” of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit found in the standard doctrine of the Christian Church. This occurrence took place during a single day in which I provided five spiritual direction sessions. Through the journey of writing this thesis I have developed my own personal relationship with Trinity which has vastly opened my awareness of the triune God. The manner through which this perception of God came to me was through an embodiment of what I call *Dynamic²Trinitarian Flow*.³ My use of this phrase refers to a continuous moving, a changing divine threeness that flows smoothly, effortlessly, and abundantly - otherwise known as Trinity. My first awareness of experiencing Dynamic Trinitarian Flow was in my practice of spiritual accompaniment; however, as I have explored and developed my relationship with this sacredness I can see it is essentially active within all there is. It is my hope that this research serves as an example of the possibilities of experiencing the Sacred creatively both within and outside religious dogma and spiritual accompaniment.

Definitions

Before continuing there are some essential terms I will be using throughout this paper which are used in various ways in the literature I will reference. Therefore, I will clarify my understanding of them here.

² Dynamic as defined in the New Oxford American Dictionary as “characterized by constant change, activity or progress.”

³ Flow defined in the New Oxford American Dictionary as “proceed or be produced smoothly, continuously, and effortlessly; be available in copious quantities.”

Doctrine – a belief or set of beliefs held and taught by a Church, political party, or other group.⁴ As a set of beliefs, I feel a doctrine is something I am invited to adopt in whole, part or not at all, without repercussion. Although in the literature doctrine and dogma are sometimes used synonymously, there is an important difference which is evident in the following definition.

Dogma – a principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true.⁵ Unlike doctrine, stating that dogma is *incontrovertibly* true means that if not accepted there will be negative consequences for not doing so, by a challenger being either excluded or punished in some way.

Tradition – the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation.⁶ In my view, tradition refers not only to a singular custom such as a sacrament, a song, or idea, but also an extensive group of traditions which make up something wide-ranging such as the Christian tradition.

Mystic and/or Mystical Way – is a person who, or an approach that, relates to the divine through direct experience. Christian mystic, Julia of Norwich called this “oneing” with God.⁷ Many mystics have described the necessity to let go of ego and willful ways that prevent one’s ability to directly perceive God. The mystic way goes beyond

⁴ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, iMac, version 2.3.0, s.v. “doctrine.”

⁵ Ibid, “dogma.”

⁶ Ibid, “tradition.”

⁷ Fr. John-Julian, *The Complete Julian of Norwich* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009), 151.

academic intelligence by engaging visceral and tactile senses. It is what Robert Sardello would call an “intelligence of the heart.”⁸

He says,

When this force is allowed to do its work, we bodily feel a shifting of our presence from the mental realm where everything is pre-known before being experienced to an immediate, bodily, perceptual, sensory unity.⁹

Theistic mystics might name the divine as God, Christ, Creator, Allah, and so on; while non-theistic mystics may articulate the divine in ways such as the Absolute, ground of Being, or currents of aliveness. It is interesting to note that there are mystics from many different traditions such as

- Jalaluddin Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet, theologian, and Sufi Mystic¹⁰
- Gandhi, the twentieth-century Indian lawyer, politician, social activist, and writer¹¹
- Those of the Kabbalah tradition, a Jewish theosophy (knowledge of God through direct intuition) that explores knowledge of the divine through emanations from God.¹²

⁸ Robert Sardello, *Love and the Soul: Creating a Future for Earth* (Berkeley, California: Goldenstone Press, Heaven & Earth Publishing, and North Atlantic Books, 2008), 101, Kindle.

⁹ Ibid, 130.

¹⁰ Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), xix-xx.

¹¹ “Mahatma Gandhi,” Britannica, last updated September 28, 2022, accessed October 19, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahatma-Gandhi>.

¹² *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. “Kabbala.”

Many Christian mystics include

- Hildegard von Bingen the eleventh-century German Benedictine abbess, author, composer, medicinal specialist, artist, and theologian¹³
- St. John of the Cross a sixteenth-century Spanish priest, poet, teacher, and co-founder of the Discalced Friars¹⁴
- John O'Donohue twenty-first-century Irish author, poet, and philosopher¹⁵
- Ilia Delio, presently a Franciscan Sister of Washington, D.C., author, who holds a chair in theology at Villanova University and is a Doctor of Pharmacology and historical theology.¹⁶

How I Arrived Here

No one was more surprised than I was in realizing that Trinity was to be the underlying concept of this work, for the doctrine of the Trinity has caused me much frustration and confusion. In fact, I admit to experiencing a visceral feeling of dread whenever I was asked about my thesis topic. My purpose in confessing this initial reluctance is to present myself as authentically as possible. I did not begin this research with an intention to look for the Trinity in any way. I was, however, influenced by a somewhat negative view of the doctrine, whereas Dynamic Trinitarian Flow organically

¹³ Mary Malone, *Volume II: From 1000 to The Reformation Women & Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 108-109.

¹⁴ Constant Tonnelier, *15 Days of Prayer with Saint John of the Cross* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2000), xv-xvi.

¹⁵ John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), back cover.

¹⁶ "Ilia Delio, O.S.F.: Villanova University," Center for Christogenesis, accessed October 19, 2022, <http://idelio.clasit.org>.

developed in my awareness despite this view. I have understood God communicating to me in many ways. Sometimes these messages may come in an overwhelming epiphany-like awareness in which I have a deepfelt sense. Other times it has been more discreet, catching my attention subtly. In these more restrained moments, my doubting mind is alerted, and I wonder if I am creating a message I merely *wish* to be from God. My doubting mind has served me well in these instances, helping me uncover something from the tacit domain that is ready to come into my consciousness. At other times it has brought me into a deeper relationship with God. My experience of Trinity continually appearing in my consciousness, undeterred by my doubts, has convinced me that this is indeed the trinitarian God.

The anthropomorphic and masculine imagery of the persons of the Trinity has been difficult for me to accept so much so that I have been inclined to dismiss the doctrine altogether. Despite this, I felt a continual nudge to ponder an invitation for relationship with this mysterious “threeness.” Perhaps the organic awareness of Trinity that kept enticing me came through Celtic roots I acquired from my Irish grandfather. There is something about the triquetra (Image A), the Celtic symbol popularly recognized



Image A: watercolor by Sandra Pihowich

as a symbol for Trinity, that evokes a sense of curiosity, mystery, and movement when I gaze on it. The smooth and seemingly simple lines exert a magnetic attraction on me as I trace the unending line of the interconnecting loops with my finger.

Growing up in the United Church of Canada, I was exposed to a relatively liberal Christian theology, but it was in the non-denominational Canadian Girls In Training (CGIT) group that my lived theological education really began. Despite the archaic-sounding name, this group encouraged pre-teen and teenage girls to take an active part in their lives and communities, both locally and internationally. Stories of girls and women who had made a difference were told and opportunities for CGIT groups to participate in helping communities in need were provided. From my perspective, the underlying narrative was the possibilities of what could be accomplished both in small acts and worldwide movements with God’s support. The CGIT purpose is as follows,

As a Canadian Girl in Training,
Under the leadership of Jesus
It is my purpose to cherish health, seek truth, know God and serve others
And thus with His help, become the girl God would have me be.¹⁷

Although we met weekly throughout the school year it was the summer camps that had the biggest impact on me. For one week we did crafts, swam, played games, learned about God’s creation, did camp chores, and slept together squeezed into little log cabins with four or five bunk beds in each – it was great! My favourite time of day was sitting around evening campfires singing our hearts out to heartfelt and fun camp songs. The adult and young adult female leadership was sincerely loving and authentic. How they worked with and guided us showed me that what I do in the world matters, and that God

¹⁷ “CGIT: Canadian Girls In Training Since 1915,” CGIT, updated 2022, accessed October 20, 2022, <http://cgit.ca>.

cheers and supports me in the doing of it. I have a very vivid memory of gazing at a ladybug one bright sunny summer day on the path to the lake and being overwhelmed with the little being's sacredness. I vowed never to squish another bug. I still try to avoid squishing bugs conditional, I must admit, on the type of bug I encounter!

Later in life, I spent almost a decade and a half in a slightly more conservative United Methodist Church that had another significant impact on me. Until this point my concept of the divine was a faraway male God in the clouds of heaven watching and doling out rewards and punishments as he saw fit. My relationship with this God was to do good and right, more out of a sense of appeasement than love. Stories from the Hebrew scriptures of God's wrath made a big impression on me, and I was quite suspicious of intimacy with a deity that volatile. At the United Methodist Church I was exposed to the possibilities of a personal relationship with God and Jesus through a weekly women's faith-sharing group and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. These Exercises and the faith-sharing group introduced me to the idea of using my imagination to visualize and interact with scripture, Mary, Jesus, and God. It took several months and some experimenting with picturing a feminine God before I was able to consent to allowing God into a more intimate relationship. The Exercises, and the people with whom I shared my faith within the United Methodist congregation, transformed what had been a faith by reason to become a faith that is lived and relational. Today my theology has expanded into a panentheistic belief that God or Sacred Presence is in all and embraces all. Regardless of this belief, I recognize I am undeniably influenced by the Western worldview in which I was raised and am immersed. I struggle particularly with the epistemological stance of a separate body, mind and spirit, and an inclination to

separate the world into dualisms of right or wrong, black or white, good or bad. Intellectually, I comprehend that dualism is false, and compartmentalizing parts of a person is not reality, yet I find myself forgetting this truth regularly. Adding to cultural dualism's influence over me is my *dual* citizenship in Canada and the United States, and my home that places me geographically on the threshold of these two countries. I live in a small exclave that is surrounded on three sides by ocean and on the fourth side by the international border. My daily walks take me quite literally along this political border. Therefore, I regularly experience the both/and of being part of yet separated from my country of origin and my country of residence. All these conditions challenge me to face the many other dualisms in life, inviting me to be present within the liminal spaces of the thresholds. The enduring power of the Holy Spirit's desire to be known has consequently been a saving grace to me living under these conditions.

Eventually, I began the Pacific Jubilee's SoulGuiding program for training in spiritual direction which was the beginning of another epistemological shift. The Pacific Jubilee Program (PJP) provided a spiritual worldview that opened a whole new - and at the same time an *old* - way of seeing life on many levels. I was introduced to a vastly different way of learning, seeing, being – a different paradigm, the way of the mystics. As I defined earlier, the mystical way is one of direct and personal experience with sacred mystery. To proceed with the Pacific Jubilee program, I knew I needed to let go of (at least for the time being) the linear processes I had previously used in generating papers and essays required for my MTS degree at St. Stephen's College. The PJP offered me embodied experiential practices and teachings that helped me begin to see in a non-dualistic way. However, I realized to enter fully into this new epistemology, I would have

to distance myself from the traditional, linear way of completing academic assignments at St. Stephen's. I felt compelled to step away from the old to be able to perceive the new. This underlined the great shift I was making in my attitude towards academic research. After learning about qualitative methodologies, I recognized my four-year journey in the PJP SoulGuiding and SoulMentoring program was also academic research – *qualitative research*: specifically, heuristic. At that time, I had no idea that what I was experiencing could be considered academic inquiry.

I felt my PJP education was also preparing me to let go of my Christian worldview that was still somewhat cognitive. I set out to explore religions outside my tradition and soon was faced with great doubts, fundamental doubts, doubts of my faith, religion, even of the existence of God, and the tenets of PJP. Through the work of facing the dark void and engaging my anger, I forged a new place of being with the mystery that is Creator God. This journey and my discovery of a golden thread running through various religious traditions helped me to see Christianity with fresh eyes beyond modernity's influences, beyond dogma and the punishment I understood it to come with, leading me to the realm of the mystics. It has been a joyous reunion allowing me a deep experience of panentheism that includes Christianity as my foundation, my framework. I choose to recognize that Dynamic Trinitarian Flow has always been active in me wooing me into a dance of relationship.

My journey of integration was further fed when I studied expressive arts with Markus Scott-Alexander. Learning that self-expression through art is primordial to being human was another epistemological shift. Once again I needed to go back to what

preceded my enculturation,¹⁸ back before I received the misguided notion that only talented artists made art which was for the sole purpose of being set apart and admired. In expressive art, the encouragement was to connect within ourselves and allow what wanted to be expressed to come forth in an art piece. We conversed with what we created to mine it for riches, for making sense of our experience. Then we shared our creations, talked about them, received others' responses of what they saw and felt coming from the artworks. We were relating to the art, each other, and to a Third presence.

During one expressive art activity, the task was to fashion a mandala. The mandala that emerged from me was a framework of sticks collected from the natural world. Once I completed it, the mandala communicated to me that it was my *foundation* and *framework*. From this framework I would be supported, enabling me to reach out into the world. This mandala showed me that by recognizing the limitations of the worldview I grew up with I was not to shun these traditions but welcome them, appreciate the gold within them, and see them as the foundation from which I grew. My Christian heritage had brought me to where I was on that day. Through honouring and recognizing this as a *foundational framework*, not the entire picture, I am supported, not restricted by it. In a sense, this is my living experience of what Ken Wilber calls "transcend and include,"¹⁹ enabling me to realize a new epistemology.

Entering into the journey of this present inquiry meant I was compelled to engage with the traditional and contemporary literature on the doctrine of the Trinity, a task that I

¹⁸ Markus Scott-Alexander, "The Mystic and the Artist II," (course St. Stephens College ARTST5872, Edmonton, November 25-29, 2019).

¹⁹ Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2000), 8.

resisted because of my prejudice towards the doctrine. However, I was surprised that, by forging a relationship with this literature, a richer sense of Trinity grew within me. As I write this today, it seems completely logical that a *relationship* is what began to help me make sense of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow since it is a fundamental element of Trinity. I became curious that there were already various translations and efforts to understand the Trinity by theologians. Soon my curiosity developed into respect for the wonderings and wanderings of the ancestral Christian theologians who tried to express their understanding of God in their day. As I struggled to investigate and communicate my own experience of the divine, I gained empathy for those ancient writers of the Christian faith who attempted to do the same. So, I ask for your patient perseverance, dear reader, in considering my humble exploration into this complex topic. I have found it at times a confusing, frustrating, humbling, liberating, but also exciting undertaking.

Spiritual Accompaniment: A Countercultural Practice

As I noted earlier, cultural values of certainties, dualisms and a job well done make walking a path of intentionally opening to spirit, mystery, and/or God's divine presence a challenge. Perhaps the tendency to need proof and concrete evidence of progress has caused the practice of spiritual accompaniment to be misunderstood, or under-valued, and is therefore not well known. Even within the churches I have attended, spiritual companioning is rarely offered or familiar to the congregations. An exploration of this practice with an openness to how it may be perceived as Dynamic Trinitarian Flow may bring this practice to light in a time when many in the world could benefit from receiving spiritual accompaniment.

Spiritual companions, otherwise known as spiritual directors, offer an uncommon relationship with those they companion which runs counter to popular culture. Although the term spiritual *director* is commonly used, directing, helping, or even guiding is not part of this relationship. Therefore, I have chosen to use the term spiritual *companion* or spiritual *accompaniment* throughout this thesis when referring to the practice of spiritual direction. If we understand companion as “a person with whom one travels,”²⁰ then Roshi Joan Halifax’s description of spiritual companioning is beautifully apt. She describes this practice as “a boat coming alongside another, drifting in the current and connecting with the other person.”²¹ I have come to see that navigating this role is more an art than a skill. This is not to say that skills are not required in spiritual companioning; however, there is an art to engaging skill, self, sacred presence, and more that is the art of spiritual companioning. Accompaniment in this way requires *kenosis*, meaning self-emptying,²² letting go of judgements or notions of how things and people *should* be. No matter how noble or compassionate a spiritual companion’s intentions are, coming alongside must always be the underlying posture as much as possible. In this way, spiritual companioning goes *against the current* of how our society normally operates. With the attitudes of Western society deeply ingrained, how does a spiritual companion employ and sustain this contrary way of being present that seeks both connection with the one they sit with and connection to the currents of aliveness, source of love and/or God? Embodied spiritual practices have been pivotal for me in nourishing my relationship with

²⁰ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, s.v. “companion.”

²¹ Roshi Joan Halifax, “On Being a Spiritual Companion,” presentation at the Annual Conference of Spiritual Directors International, Santa Fe, April 2014.

²² *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. “kenosis.”

the divine and in taking up a kenotic posture. In addition, the Christian tradition, the foundation from which I grew, has also been essential in my ability to be sustained in this practice. I believe Dynamic Trinitarian Flow led me to this exploration of spiritual companionship as influenced by my own embodied experience of Trinity through a journey that took me away from my Christian roots, to explore other traditions, and back to re-embrace the Christian tradition. Through this mystical way, my roots have been strengthened and I have been gifted with wings to navigate the mystery.

Throughout my time as a spiritual companion, being present in the manner of “coming alongside” has been an on-going challenge for me. Fears of doing harm with an overwhelming responsibility for the other and an ever-present sense of inadequacy have hindered my ability to do this work. Each spiritual companion must find their own way on this path and this study is the story of how I am travelling mine. The Trinity’s call whispered to me as one of the ways I might let go into the mystery of being present in this role as well as in life in general. The embodied encounter I had while conducting five spiritual companionship sessions within a single day was my first *physical* perception of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. Although I could not identify it as such at the time, I did have a sense of the dynamic nature and, more than anything, the important role flow played. It was not until sometime later that I began to wonder if this dynamic flow had something to do with Trinity. The powerful phenomenon of embodiment I experienced during this day of companionship went beyond my previous ways of knowing and being. Before each session on that day, I moved prayerfully to the music of flow as identified in Gabrielle Roth’s 5Rhythms©.²³ I had been introduced to an embodied practice based on

²³ Gabriel Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers: The Five Rhythms of the Soul* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1997), 51.

Roth's 5Rhythms© in the PJP, and in this instance, it was helping me to bodily enter a sacred dynamic flow – that I now understand as Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. I could feel myself surrendering into the continuous and effortless mystery that is God. I could not communicate this experience verbally at the time; however, I have come to know this as a realization of a guiding theological quest I have been on for many years. This quest is my desire to know:

How I can be fully present to my *strengths*

while at the same time hold an attitude of *humbleness*

The concepts of *strength* and *humbleness* seem oppositional. Paradoxes such as this have helped me to find deep meaning in many instances previously. The journey this time was revealing itself in the work I was engaged in at the time as a spiritual companion. Coincidentally, this quest first surfaced with the onset of my degree for which this thesis is the culminating requirement. Over the past few years, several ways of understanding this quest have enabled me to live into it in progressively deeper ways. With each new deepening, I have received a more profound embodiment of this paradox. I see that this quest has become a lifelong journey which is enriching my relationship with God, The Divine, or perhaps the term Sacred Mystery more adequately expresses how I perceive God now. This research is the latest response to this quest, and I feel sure it will not be the final one.

Methodology

As I began the process of writing my thesis, I looked back at my spiritual history and saw that each of the journeys I have had discerning **how I can be fully present to**

my strengths while at the same time hold an attitude of humbleness were heuristic inquiries, although I did not understand them as such at the time. It was then that I came to understand this thesis as an opportunity to delve further into this quest, this time as an autoethnography. In this way, I would be able to mine this extraordinary experience for significance and crystalize what this might have to say to the spiritual companionship community. I take delight in noticing that this study of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow within spiritual accompaniment has synchronistically come about through *relationship*. In this instance, it is the relationship, the spiritual, and the academic that form this particular trinity. Thus, this has become a fittingly triune endeavor for an exploration of Trinity.

Questions

Guiding Question

As a spiritual companion what is my embodied experience of Trinity as Dynamic Trinitarian Flow?

Further Enlightenment

- How have some theologians reflected on Trinity?
- What is Dynamic Trinitarian Flow being proposed in this paper?
- How do contemplative practices inform the concept of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow?
 - Meditation (or meditative prayer)
 - Spiritual accompaniment
 - Expressive Arts (visual, written, and embodied)
 - Personal Journaling

- How might Dynamic Trinitarian Flow help me to be fully present to my strengths while holding an attitude of humbleness?
- Could this autoethnography benefit other spiritual companions?

CHAPTER 2 - A CONVERSATION WITH THE LITERATURE

Essentially a literature review is a conversation with the literature. This research has granted me considerable appreciation for this literary conversation as it has fostered a relationship with and appreciation for the great work that has been, and is being, done in the areas of my study. It has highlighted how important conversation is in promoting relationship. As an essential aspect of the Trinity, relationship with others was necessary for me to proceed with exploring, reflecting, and making sense of my trinitarian experience. This review is a collection of several conversations pertaining to the key areas of my research; each conversation has fostered a fruitful relationship crucial to my study.

In the following pages, I address:

- The Traditional Doctrine of the Trinity
- Contemporary Interpretations of Trinity
- *Perichoresis*
- Re-envisioning of Trinity
- *Kenosis*
- The Practice of Spiritual Companionship
- Other Relevant Sciences that bring in still more enticing aspects of this conversation.

Conversations with the methodological literature of autoethnography and expressive arts as methods will be covered in detail in the next chapter.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

The standard definition of the doctrine of the Trinity is appropriate here since it is the ground from which this exploration has grown. This is the definition as found in the third edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, revised in 2005.

Contributions to this definition have been made by many notable theologians such as Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Jurgen Moltmann.

The central dogma of Christian theology, that the one God exists in three Persons and one substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one, yet self-differentiated; the God who reveals Himself to mankind is one God equally in three distinct modes of existence, yet remains one through all eternity.²⁴

This definition suggests a static and anthropomorphic understanding that does not translate well to many contemporary seekers. It fails to adequately communicate the mystery that is the triune God presented in the biblical scriptures and in the cosmos. It ascribes human masculine qualities to two “Persons” of the Trinity which can create a barrier for those who have difficulty relating to a masculine presence and are seeking to develop a deepening intimacy with the divine.

This doctrine arose out of a desire to consolidate early Christian leaders who were in heated conflict over the nature of God and how to communicate this.²⁵ Theologians wrestled with their expressions of God as these three “Persons” of the Trinity, and in 325 CE at the Council of Nicaea, the doctrine of the Trinity was established. It is important to note that Gregory of Nyssa (one of the three Cappadocian Fathers - leaders of philosophical Christian orthodoxy in the later 4th C) stated that although divine nature cannot be named, this doctrine was meant to *merely indicate a conception of divine*

²⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Trinity.”

²⁵ David Chidester, *Christianity: A Global History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 98.

nature.²⁶ Dear reader, I must pause here to stress my great surprise at discovering that from the beginning of the development of this doctrine one of its writers made the statement that it was not to be the only expression of the triune God, even though it would go on to become the central dogma of Christian theology as stated in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. In addition, Andrew Louth informs us that the Patristic period, from the late fourth to fifth centuries, was the formative period for both dogmatic *and* mystical theology, and that

these two aspects of theology are fundamentally bound up with one another. The basic doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, worked out in these centuries, are *mystical* doctrines formulated dogmatically.²⁷ [emphasis mine]

The discovery that the doctrine of the Trinity was mystical by intent from its inception feels affirming to my experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow wooing me towards wholeness.

As we look to the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity, we find the term Trinity itself absent in biblical texts, causing some to contend the doctrine is a distortion that relies heavily on inference from a select few scriptural verses.²⁸ However, this is a largely outdated opinion as Robert Wozniak and Giulio Maspero demonstrate in their book *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*. In this book they outline a new vision and understanding of

²⁶ Ioanna Sahinidou, “Christological Perichoresis,” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 04 (2014): 553, accessed August 8, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2014.44057>.

²⁷ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), x, Kindle.

²⁸ Anthony F. Buzzard & Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound* (Lanham, NY: International Scholars Publications, 1998), ix, accessed March 13, 2021, www.d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net, and R.F. Cottrell, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Review and Herald* (June 1st 1869), accessed March 15th, 2021, https://theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk/Articles_pdf/Trinity_doctrine_Cottrell.pdf.

trinitarian theology that developed in the first half of the twentieth century because of what some theologians saw as a deficiency in understanding the Trinity. They assert that out of an ecumenical dialogue between theology and various anthropological documents, “old hermeneutics is paving the way to a deeper understanding of trinitarian mystery from historical, ecumenical and philosophical perspectives.”²⁹ From the very beginning of trinitarian conception, consensus was elusive, and so it seems this trend continues. Once again I must exclaim my great delight and surprise at present-day efforts to acknowledge the mystery that is the trinitarian God and the desire to look deeper into another way of expressing this concept.

Some Contemporary Interpretations of the Traditional Doctrine

Finding Jürgen Moltmann’s writings on the Trinity was a welcome light amongst the density of trinitarian dogmatic writings. He chastises dogmatic thinking that presents ideas as formal proclamations. He instead advocates for theological discussions around any topic. As he puts it, “Truth is to be found in unhindered dialogue.”³⁰ I found myself greatly encouraged and inspired by this learned German theologian’s statement that Christian theology would wither and die without this dialogue, dialogue which of course it has had since ancient times. Having stated this, Moltmann goes on to develop his *social* doctrine of the Trinity which is derived from Greek or eastern orthodoxy. He painstakingly details the relationship between the three Persons of the Trinity and then

²⁹ Giulio Maspero & Robert J. Wozniak, ed., *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 78, Kindle.

³⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. (Minneapolis, MN: First Fortress Press, 1993), location 93, Kindle.

explains how humankind is drawn into this relationship. The idea that the Trinity is based in relationship directly coincides with my experience and with the practice of spiritual accompaniment. Unfortunately, I found it difficult to imagine some of his arguments as he goes into greater and greater detail of the history of the Persons, the suffering of God, and his concepts that extend further out into the future. Yet I am encouraged that he also describes the value of our experience of the mystery that is God as well as God's passionate experience of us:

If a person once feels the infinite passion of God's love which finds expression here, [referring to the captives in Egypt, and to Jesus' death cry] then he understands the mystery of the triune God. God suffers with us – God suffers from us – God suffers for us: it is this experience of God that reveals the triune God.³¹

These words of Moltmann embolden me in this my humble attempt to present my experience as trinitarian. In fact, through my investigation into the contemporary literature on this doctrine, I was surprised to discover many theologians exploring ideas that stretch out from the broadly accepted dogma of the Trinity. Living in the Western world where knowledge is synonymous with power, and where knowing something means dominating it, I have been too hesitant to present my experience as that of God – of Trinity. I have allowed my experience to be overshadowed by an unyieldingly negative view of the Trinity even though I found little value in it stated as dogma. Moltmann's claim that unhindered dialogue is the way to truth encourages me to claim the power of my experience of the Trinity while at the same time acknowledging the limits of my own single lens to view the mystery that is God – a paradoxical endeavour.

³¹ Ibid, 200.

Another theologian calling for a “rethink” of the Trinity is Aleksandar Santrac. Unlike Moltmann, who reworks the three persons to develop his idea of Trinity, Santrac argues that the orthodox Nicene formula of the Trinity relies too heavily on the Greek philosophical interpretation. In his article “Three I Know Not What,” he explains that the heavy influence Greek philosophy has had on the doctrine has led to the defining of Trinity as three distinct persons. This has been problematic, as Santrac views it, because even in the contemporary social Trinity the result ends up being polytheism, that is the three Persons of the Godhead.³² He, therefore, calls for a complete “dehellinisation” of the creed. His re-envisioning of the Trinity is based on biblical imagery from both Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Santrac investigates these scriptures finding a triune God who is loving, relational and overall *mysterious*, as Moltmann claims. Unlike Moltmann, however, who attempts to explain how the three Persons enact these qualities, Santrac claims that God who *is* love is God yearning for our salvation and carries this out through absolute mysterious triune endeavors.³³ He states that through the biblical framework a new expression of Trinity may arise, enabling us to experience God as mystery. Santrac does not acknowledge that there maybe those of us who have presently experienced or are experiencing the mystery that is the triune God. If he were to do so, I would assert his argument for a contemporary trinitarian formula would be strengthened. I was surprised and delighted, once again, to learn from Santrac that there are many theologians, not just him and Moltmann, who “transcend the traditional ontological view

³² Aleksandar Santrac, “Three I know not what: The Influence of Greek philosophy of the doctrine of Trinity,” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 47, no. 1 (April 2013): 3, accessed August 6, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v47i1.719>.

³³ *Ibid*, 5.

of Trinity,”³⁴ and are calling for a dialogue to restore the doctrine. I applaud Santrac’s request to reclaim the mystery of God by looking to scripture in reformulating the doctrine, yet I would go further to encourage attempts that explore and explicate contemporary, personal experiences of the triune mystery of God such as I have experienced. Although I agree with this recommendation to reexamine the influence of Greek philosophy, in my new relationship with trinitarian theology I have found that some Greek influences have been very instrumental in helping me to experience Dynamic Trinitarian Flow which I will clarify later in my conversation around *perichoresis* and *kenosis*.

Anne Hunt describes the Trinity through the perspective of the paschal mystery focusing on the concept of *kenosis*,³⁵ which the literature will show is also an important aspect in spiritual companionship to be discussed later. Hunt finds that cultural change demands a new theological method and style compared to the traditional and highly theoretical approach to the Trinity.³⁶ However, like Santrac she finds the social Trinity concerning in that it leads to an anthropomorphism of God. In her approach it is the self-giving, kenotic (emptying) actions of both Jesus and God that are key to trinitarian empowerment. Hunt explains that the extraordinary kenotic dynamic of love displayed by God the Father and Jesus the Son is only possible through the divine love that comes out of their relationship. God the Father willingly surrenders and abandons his Son, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son* (Jn 3:16 NRSV), and Jesus’ self-

³⁴ Ibid, 5.

³⁵ Anne Hunt, “The Trinity Through Paschal Eyes,” in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 472-490, Kindle.

³⁶ Ibid, 488.

yielding receptivity to endure death on the cross is made possible through the Holy Spirit, whom Hunt argues “is the power of the resurrection, the operating power of God.”³⁷ Additionally, it is through the *relationship* God the Father and Jesus the Son have that the Holy Spirit as Love manifests, and it is through this Love that divine self-surrender occurs allowing Jesus to pass over death to new life - the paschal mystery. This paschal mystery creates a dynamic, mutually abiding relationship of self-giving love that is the divine *perichoresis*³⁸ which is where we look to next in exploring Trinity.

Perichoresis

Perichoresis is a Greek word used in association with Trinity that, among other things, seems to indicate movement and relationship. It is integral to my proposed study relating to my experience of dynamic Trinity flowing. This is a difficult word to study as there are many varying and complex arguments around its translation and meaning. It seems that *perichoresis* was used by John Damascene (or St. John of Damascus) in the 8th century describing the triune nature of God portrayed in the Gospel of John.³⁹ Santrac would no doubt criticize this early theologian of the church as heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, who helped to shape how the doctrine of the Trinity is comprehended.⁴⁰ The Latin translation of *perichoresis*, *circumincession*, became the official term in the Christian church translated as the interpenetration of the Three

³⁷ Ibid, 482, 483.

³⁸ Ibid, 483, 487.

³⁹ Emmanuel Durand, “Perichoresis: A Key Concept for Balancing Trinitarian Theology,” in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), 177, Kindle.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 178.

Persons of the Holy Trinity. This Latin word literally means a “proceeding around.”⁴¹ However, theologians, including Hunt, have also described *perichoresis* in many other ways such as divine persons embracing each other,⁴² interdependent, dynamic,⁴³ and mutual indwelling.⁴⁴ An aspect of *perichoresis* that has been common more in the eastern Christian traditions is the relational quality between the three persons of the Trinity, which Moltmann and other theologians have used in developing a social Trinity.⁴⁵ Pierce Taylor Hibbs refers to the *perichoresis* of the Trinity as a communal relationship, a communion of love glorifying each other. In his linguistic analysis of John’s Gospel in which the Son proceeds from the Father as the Word, he draws the conclusion that “God the Father is the speaker, God the Son is the speech, and God the Spirit is the breath carrying the speech to its destination.”⁴⁶ This is a wonderfully intriguing and embodied vision of Trinity. Hibbs argues that *perichoresis* seen this way is a means to present Trinity as closing the gap between humans and between humans and God. Taken metaphorically and phenomenologically, this statement contains great

⁴¹ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. “circumincession.”

⁴² Pierce Taylor Hibbs, “Closing the Gaps: Perichoresis and the Nature of Language,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 78 no. 2 (Fall 2016): 304, accessed July 17, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=121047537&site=ehost-live>.

⁴³ Dwight J. Zscheile, “The Trinity, Leadership, and Power,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 45, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://arl-jrl.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Zscheile-The-Trinity-Leadership-and-Power-2007-Fall.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Durand, “Perichoresis: A Key Concept for Balancing Trinitarian Theology,” 189, Kindle.

⁴⁵ Hibbs, “Closing the Gaps,” 303; also in Ioanna Sahinidou, “Christological Perichoresis,” 552; in Richard Rohr, with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 2016), 44-45; in Bruce Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, 214; in Zscheile, “The Trinity, Leadership, and Power,” 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 312.

possibilities for envisioning a dynamic triune God. Speaker, speech, and spirit as God can be directly related to the activity of spiritual companioning. It could be said that this concept is an echoing of Gregory of Nyssa's words (earlier referred to as one of the 4th century Cappadocian Fathers):

It is not by separate *action* according to the number of the persons; but there is one *motion* and disposition of the good will which proceeds from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit.⁴⁷ [my emphasis added]

Perichoresis is also defined as revolution, rotations, and, depending on semantics, can also name the process of making room for another around oneself, or to extend oneself round about.⁴⁸ Bruce Sanguin, Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell have even used the encircling relationship element of *perichoresis* to interpret Trinity as “circle dance.”⁴⁹ Although some scholars are strongly opposed to translating *perichoresis* as dance,⁵⁰ my perception of trinitarian *perichoresis* as dance was key to the experience of Trinity which I have based this paper on.

Staying with the concept of *perichoresis* as divine motion, let us look to the Wisdom of Solomon: “For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things” (Ws 7:24 NRSV). Slobodan Stamatović translates “wisdom” in this passage as Sophia⁵¹ and Sanguin as “Sophia, the great Cosmic

⁴⁷ Peter C. Hodgson & Robert H. King eds., “Gregory of Nyssa: On the Trinity,” *Readings in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press 1985), 63.

⁴⁸ Sahinidou, “Christological Perichoresis,” 553.

⁴⁹ Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 31; also, in Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, 216.

⁵⁰ Slobodan Stamatović, “The Meaning of Perichoresis,” *Open Theology* 2 (2016): 307, accessed August 8, 2020, DOI: [10.1515/opth-2016-0026](https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2016-0026); and in Durand O.P., “Perichoresis,” 181.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 322.

Dancer!”⁵² The triune nature of God in which there is God (Speaker, Creator), Word (Speech, Creation) and Holy Spirit (Breath, Flow) in a communal *dance* of love is evocative. It points to embodied practices such as dance as effective methods to participate in Trinity, affirming my observation that dance has been my entry to a direct experience of Trinity.

Re-Envisioning of Trinity

Hunt,⁵³ along with others,⁵⁴ has described a much more intimate, active, and present God than the traditional doctrine portrays. This trinitarian God is much more fitting for the intimate practice of spiritual companionship as opposed to “God equally in three distinct modes of existence”⁵⁵ in the heavens throughout eternity. Yet beyond even these interpretations there is a radical re-envisioning of Trinity that well exceeds what I perceive to be limitations of the traditional formula.

Cynthia Bourgeault presents the Law of Three as an intriguing, if not somewhat confusing, and radical departure from the traditional doctrine, which she refers to as “Christianity’s hidden driveshaft.”⁵⁶ This phrase seems very similar to Hunt’s “operating power of God.”⁵⁷ Her concept of the Law of Three is a phenomenological interpretation

⁵² Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, 216.

⁵³ Hunt, “The Trinity Through Paschal Eyes,” 472-490.

⁵⁴Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 37; also Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, 214.

⁵⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, s.v. “Trinity.”

⁵⁶ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2013), 3.

⁵⁷ Hunt, “The Trinity Through Paschal Eyes,” 483, Kindle.

based on concepts developed by G. I. Gurdjieff.⁵⁸ It is a complex and dynamic process in which the Trinity is seen as a hermeneutical key revealing how God becomes a manifesting and creating love “bringing all things to their fullness.”⁵⁹

In Bourgeault’s development of the Law of Three, there is a first, second, and third force. When intimately and actively engaged in *relationship* with each other these three forces bring about a new arising. This new arising is then capable of engaging further in another trinitarian cycle which then has the possibility of creating still another new arising, and so on. An example she gives is the germination of a seed. First force is the seed, second force the moist soil, and the third or *reconciling* force the sunlight. The relationship between these three gives rise to a sprout. The sprout is the actualization of the possibility latent within the seed in which a whole new field of possibility emerges. Third force (Flow, Holy Spirit, Sanguin would use Sophia) emerges or engages only when first and second forces come into *relationship* which brings on the creation of a new arising.⁶⁰ Although sunlight, in this analogy, may be present before the cycle begins, the power of the sunlight to bring about a sprout (a new arising, to use Bourgeault’s phrase) is latent until the seed and moist soil come into relationship. Once this occurs, i.e. the seed is placed into the moist soil, then sunlight’s power is put into play, warming the soil, and feeding the new growth as it emerges above the ground. As

⁵⁸ G. I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949) developed an esoteric philosophy and established groups in the early 20th century to teach his spiritual exercises known by his pupils as “the work.” The activities included movements, rituals and “inner exercises” with the intention of leading one from the false personality to the true self. For more on Gurdjieff look to Carole M. Cusack, “Intentional Communities in the Gurdjieff Teaching,” *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* vol. 6, no. 2, (July 1, 2015): 159-178, accessed March 23, 2021, <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=118603864&site=ehost-live>>.

⁵⁹ Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*, 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

with other studies on Trinity, *relationship* is essential here. If the first and second forces do not open to each other in appreciative relationship (as in love, friendship, compassion, or perhaps merely curiosity in other applications) the flow of Spirit is stalled. It would seem this stalled state does not mean Spirit is not present or even powerless; it simply means the existing power or possibility is not engaged. If Moses had not turned to notice and engage the burning bush, he would not have entered into conversation with God to receive the important message that freed the Hebrew people. Just as in Hunt's paschal view of Trinity, this relational self-emptying can occur only with an appreciation between the two forces in play.⁶¹ Seemingly, this appreciation in vulnerable loving openness to the other unlocks the potential of the traditional "persons" of the Trinity allowing for the mysterious possibilities of God to manifest. Viewing Trinity this way, Bourgeault refers to her "Law of Three" as a metaphysical principle that is kinetic by nature, manifesting more fluidly than Trinity has previously been understood:

the real task before us is to have the courage to let go of the Trinity as Christianity's theological ace of clubs (using it only to prove that a human being was fully God) and to approach it instead in its cosmically subtle role as *an ordering and revealing principle*, of which Christ is its culminating expression. In misusing the metaphysical principle as a doctrinal prop, *we have missed the inherent energy for transformation*.⁶²[emphases mine]

⁶¹ An interesting aside here are the parallels to the Appreciative Inquiry method for human communities and organizations. "Appreciative Inquiry is, essentially, a collaborative and highly participative, system wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the 'life-giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system at its moments of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest future of that system." Watkins, Mohr, Kelly, "Defining Appreciative Inquiry," *Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Light* (San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer, 2011), 22, accessed March 23, 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=363471&site=ehost-live>.

⁶² Bourgeault, *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*, 20, 21.

In this way, Trinity is viewed as actively and intimately involved or at least existing as possibility in all the processes of creation past, present, and future. Where there appears to be stagnation, impasse, or altercation, the triune God is intimately present as possibility waiting to be realized. Rohr and Sanguin go so far as to suggest that this dynamic, kenotic, kinetic Trinity is evident even in the relationships of protons and neutrons and extending out to the planets in their orbital movements.⁶³

Kenosis

Earlier I explained how Hunt elaborates on the role *kenosis* plays in the Trinity as seen through the paschal mystery.⁶⁴ I too see the concept of *kenosis* as imperative to Dynamic Trinitarian Flow and spiritual companionship. The Greek word *kenosis* translated means “an emptying.”⁶⁵ Theologically, it has its foundation in Paul’s letter to his followers in the Greek city of Philippi

Though his state was that of God,
yet he did not deem equality with God
something he should cling to.
Rather he *emptied himself*, [emphasis mine]
and assuming the state of a slave,
he was born in human likeness. (Phil 2: 6-11)

Kenosis not only is crucial in the re-imaginings of Hunt’s Trinity but is also evident in the conditions Bourgeault explains are necessary for a “new arising” to take place in her Law of Three. Harmonious relationships of any kind are only possible with some level of *kenosis* (opening, allowing, sensitivity) to the other occurring. In this way the dynamics

⁶³ Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 55; and Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, 216.

⁶⁴ Hunt, “The Trinity Through Paschal Eyes,” 476.

⁶⁵ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, iMac, version 2.3.0, s.v. “*kenosis*.”

of Trinity are engaged and allowed to relate, communicate, interact with – *perichoresis* if you will – all leading to new manifesting possibilities.

This undefended stance of emptying oneself of judgements and preconceived ideas is also exemplified in Roshi Halifax’s recommendation for spiritual companions to embody “a soft front, strong back” approach.⁶⁶ In fact, it is a key component in practicing Zen, as Shunryu Suzuki explains:

If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few...All self-centered thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner’s mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless.⁶⁷

I find this description of the vast, boundless compassion within very compelling. As a Christian I relate to the possibilities in the beginner’s mind, the “mind of compassion,” as the indwelling of God, Love. The beginner’s mind is to be without agenda or preconceptions, to begin again and again with a clean slate of no judgement, no expectations, nothing to prevent one from receiving what is, like fertile ground, ready for the presence of God.

Kenosis and the beginner’s mind, although not entirely the same, are similar enough in concept that I am struck by the golden thread of spirituality they create running through many sacred traditions. Noticing this helped me to come back to my Christian foundation, seeing it in a new way.

Christian mystics have also written about the value of self-emptying, regarding it as a valued pursuit to foster relationship with the sacred. Mystics such as Mechthild of

⁶⁶ Halifax, “On Being a Spiritual Companion.”

⁶⁷ Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 2010), 2.

Magdeburg, Teresa of Avila, and Julian of Norwich, all of whom conducted themselves as a spiritual companion or mediator of some kind, wrote of various forms of emptying. Looking first at Mechthild of Magdeburg, we see that she also embraced living with compassion as she saw was Jesus' example. Through her mystical experiences she "learned to peel back the things that we affirm of God and find the no-thing at the core."⁶⁸

Carol Flinders explains that Teresa of Avila wrote "occasions of sin," meaning situations that enticed her into sin, had terrible detrimental effects on her. She described her interior prayer practice, or mental prayer as she referred to it, as "an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us."⁶⁹ Through the dedicated practice of this prayer she felt the "pull of the parlor" less and less. The parlor in her convent was a place from her former life full of temptations. Teresa was said to be socially popular and received many favors and delights from admirers in the parlor to which, she confessed, she was quite attached. Gradually, she began to feel the presence of God with her unceasingly through dedication to her prayer practice. Through this dedication she came to understand that her attachments could not be broken by force because she understood them to be expressions of an inner hunger that she had been attempting to satisfy through social praise and favors: "When that hunger is assuaged, attachments will fall away with almost no effort on our part."⁷⁰ What Teresa describes is *kenosis*, paradoxically, in that by gradually

⁶⁸ Mary Malone, *Volume II: From 1000 to The Reformation Women & Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 167.

⁶⁹ Carol Lee Flinders, "Saint Teresa of Avila," *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 171.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 171.

developing her relationship with God she was able to let go of her attachments to the things of the parlor.

Julian of Norwich is the last of the three mystics I mentioned regarding self-emptying. She saw that it was sin that stood in the way of her “oneing” with God, and throughout her writing she expressed great consternation at the existence of sin. She questioned why God allowed it to be. When Julian was gifted with this her beautiful prayer from Jesus she understood the grace that is God’s great love for us despite the reality of sin.

It is true that sin is the cause of all the pain,
But all shall be well,
And all shall be well,
And all manner of thing
Shall be well.⁷¹

This prayer is a straightforward yet powerful declaration of releasing into the arms of God. It is a prayer that encourages self-emptying and for me is a beautiful expression that helps me become aware of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. Through the purging pain of wrestling over the existence of sin, Julian came to a deeper realization of the Passion of Christ. In a sense emptying herself by striving with God over the issue of sin, Julian was filled with awe and compassion instead of consternation.

Like Julian, compassion is what Mechthild found by peeling back layers to find the “no-thing” at her core. Shunryu Suzuki too finds compassion and boundlessness through the path of beginner’s mind. When Teresa used her “occasions of sin” to better understand herself she found the great freedom of God’s presence accompanying her. These devout mystics have shown me how important *kenosis*, or some type of emptying,

⁷¹ Fr. John-Julian, *The Complete Julian of Norwich* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2016), 149.

is to aim for in spiritually deepening. Julian's attitude towards sin softening into compassion reminds me of my own softening into self-compassion. This way of being has been evolving in me out of a transformation of self-condemnation that keeps me from receiving God's grace. Like Teresa, I have unsuccessfully attempted to fulfill myself with the approval of others. Taking on an attitude of the beginner's mind, in the way Suzuki explained, has been a way for me to empty of self-condemnation, allowing me to be filled with compassion for the imperfect and blessed child of God I am, able to see others in the same light.

Turning specifically now to the practice of spiritual companionship we will see further the important role *kenosis* plays in all aspects of this art, not only during sessions, but in training programs for spiritual companions, in ongoing support, in supervision and in pre-sessional preparations.

The Practice of Spiritual Companionship

The term spiritual *director* is more widely used than spiritual *companion*; however, I have chosen not to use it in this work because it is also generally understood that the act of directing is not part of this role. John O'Donohue uses the Gaelic *anam cara*, soul friend, which he describes as "a person to whom you could reveal the hidden intimacies of your life."⁷² My perception of spiritual companionship or accompaniment encompasses his description, except that unlike a friendship there is no equal sharing of

⁷² John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2004), xviii.

intimacies of both companion and companionee.⁷³ In the practice of spiritual companioning, the one who comes to share and explore their inner journey (the companionee) will be deeply listened to and accompanied on the way by the spiritual companion. In the sacred agreement made between these two, the companion willingly agrees to put themselves aside so that total attention may be on that of the companionee.⁷⁴ Jean Evans states that the ability to articulate one's experience of God to someone who will listen, heed, and understand should be the primary benefit of spiritual companioning.⁷⁵ If the spiritual companion participates in divulging their journey as well, the focus will be drawn away from the companionee's holy experience as they will most certainly be influenced by this sharing. Not all who seek a spiritual companion have a theistic belief system so I would add to Evans' description of the primary benefit of spiritual accompaniment by including that it can also - or rather - be an articulation of one's experience of coming home to one's self, a way of caring for one's soul. Sufi spiritual teacher Kabir Helminski tells us,

In simple terms care of the soul is disengaging from the matrix – the false reality we are hypnotized to believe and conform to – and connecting to the true source of our Being.⁷⁶

⁷³ Since I am using the term spiritual companion, I have created the word *companionee* to refer to the one being companioned, in place of *directee* which is a commonly accepted word when using the term spiritual director.

⁷⁴ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), 3, Kindle.

⁷⁵ Jean Evans, "Experience and convergence in Spiritual Direction," *Journal of Religion & Health* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 27-32, accessed July 29, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=100371633&site=ehost-live>.

⁷⁶ Kabir Helminski, *Living Presence: A Sufi Way to Mindfulness and the Essential Self* (New York, NY: TarcherPerigee, 2017), 76, Kindle.

A spiritual companion who can be truly present and listen can make it possible for a willing companionee to “disengage from the matrix,” to come home to Source.

Spiritual companions bear a greater responsibility to those they companion than is generally found in friendships. First, a safe space must be created so that the one sharing may explore this soul journey assured of confidentiality, receptivity,⁷⁷ and room for internal exploration. In cultivating this space, the spiritual companion must be vigilant that they do not fall into the role of helping or guiding for this breaks the safe container of the companionee’s exploration and assumes the person sharing is not the expert of their own soul.

For the spiritual companion a quality of listening reverently, actively, and humbly to oneself, the companionee and sacred presence is foundational especially in trying to avoid helping or directing the other. This listening within is to notice any evocations, memories, or emotions that may appear during a session. It is wise to note these for pondering later, perhaps in supervision or with a peer mentor, for if something has appeared it will want attention and may be an opportunity for the companion’s own soul illumination. It is this awareness of one’s own self that allows the companion to be in a kenotic state which helps to create the capacity to deeply hear the other. To be available and observant of the movement of flowing presence, the current of aliveness, or sacred being in a session contributes to this quality of reverent listening.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 17-18, Kindle.

⁷⁸ Dennis J. Billy, “Spiritual Direction as Faith Seeking Understanding,” *Seminary Journal* 19, no.1 (Spring 2013): 29-30, accessed July 29, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=96118324&site=ehost-live>; in Teresa Di Biase, “Listening with the Ear of the Heart: Benedictine Values and Spiritual Direction,” *Presence Journal: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 15, no. 4 (December 2009): 18, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.sdicompanions.org/media/presence/presence-26-2-june-2020/mystery-in-an-age-of->

Support for facilitating the transparency and authenticity needed to be accessible in the manner just described is seen as being in service of the one being companioned and is a requirement within spiritual companion training and support programs.⁷⁹

Accountability is achieved through regular ongoing supervision conversations between a spiritual companion and their supervisor and/or peers.

Spiritual companioning can be found within many traditions, but its Christian roots emerged in the 3rd century of the desert mothers and fathers. Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century developed the practice by introducing a concept of listening while intentionally standing in a state of equilibrium and non-judgement.⁸⁰ This is comparable to a concept in phenomenology known as epochē, which Jean Evans defines as essentially bracketing one's personal judgments and empathy to keep them from affecting a person or situation.⁸¹

The Ignatian stance of non-judgement, like *kenosis*, humility and even listening, is not generally valued in Western culture, yet all these attributes are considered the very path to wisdom.⁸² There are many well-known contemplative practices to strengthen

[certainty/](#); in Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995) 228, Kindle; and in Guenther, *Holy Listening*, location 10 & 13.

⁷⁹ Spiritual Directors International Task Force, "Portrait of a Spiritual Director," *The Home of Spiritual Companionship*, last modified 2018, accessed July 29, 2020, https://www.sdicompanions.org/docs/portrait/portrait_of_a_spiritual_director.pdf; and in Pacific Jubilee, "Spiritual Direction Training," date modified not available, accessed July 26, 2020, <https://pacificjubilee.ca/soulguiding/>.

⁸⁰ Lou Ella Hickman, "Spiritual Friendship: What is Spiritual Direction?" *The Catholic Answer*, vol. 30 no. 2 (2021): 23, accessed March 17, 2021, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=114075221&site=ehost-live>.

⁸¹ Jean Evans, "Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction," *Journal of Religion & Health* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 269., accessed July 29, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=100371633&site=ehost-live>.

⁸² Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos*, 236.

one's ability to be in these states such as prayer, meditation, yoga, journaling, expressive arts, embodied prayer, soul friending, and silence, to name a few. Thomas Moore suggests it can even be something as simple as *pausing* in whatever we are doing for quiet reflection.⁸³ Pausing is certainly encouraged within a spiritual companioning session to simply wait, listen for another voice to surface, or hold reverently what has occurred. The clearing of external sound can create space to help the companion and/or the one being companioned listen for what is present but may not be said.⁸⁴ Once again allowing space for the movement of the divine, Trinity, *perichoresis*, the current of aliveness is essential.

Fostering interior space, or emptying oneself of inner clutter, is a basic principle the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (written in the fourteenth century) gives as instructions on how to do the work of contemplation:

Forget what you know. Forget everything God made and everybody who exists and everything that's going on in the world, until your thoughts and emotions aren't focused on or reaching toward anything, not in a general way and not in any particular way. Let them be. For the moment, don't care about anything.⁸⁵

This mystic teaches apophatic prayer, knowing of God in terms of what God is *not* rather than what God *is*. An apophatic advocate embraces *kenosis* to make room for the mystery that is God. The writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing* insists that God cannot be thought, only loved, but that “even meditating on God's love must be put down and

⁸³ Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 286.

⁸⁴ Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 90.

⁸⁵ Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Boston & London: Shambhala Inc., 2009), 11, Kindle.

covered with a cloud of forgetting.”⁸⁶ The author understands that any expectation of what God is gets in the way of the experience of God beyond all knowing. It is this very idea that makes me reluctant to attempt to make sense of my experience of the mystery that is God as Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. Yet I maintain the value of sharing my wonderings with you, dear reader, while expressing once again my cautious intention to not hold tightly onto this experience.

Moving on from the wisdom of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, let us now look to another source of Christian wisdom, Benedictine Spirituality, which also provides support for the practice of spiritual accompaniment in the vows presented in St. Benedict’s Rule. These three vows are obedience, stability and *conversatio morum* (Latin for continual *change*,⁸⁷ note the similarity to the word dynamic). Teresa Di Biase writes that the first vow of **obedience** is the English translation of the Latin word *obsculta* used in the Rule. It has traditionally been translated as *obedience* when in essence its meaning is closer to *listen*.⁸⁸ If this is so, the vow of obedience is much more nuanced and life-giving than obeying suggests. In the current Western culture obedience implies subservience, which is seen as negative in a culture promoting independence and forthrightness. Benedictine obedience is listening that encourages a commitment to actively listen to God, to those with whom we are in community, and to one’s essence in the desire to be spiritually formed. As has already been noted these qualities are all relevant to spiritual companionship,⁸⁹ and might be more specifically phrased as being

⁸⁶ Ibid, 21.

⁸⁷ Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 69.

⁸⁸ Di Biase, “Listening with the Ear of the Heart, 18.

⁸⁹ de Waal, *Seeking God*, 42-43.

obedient or actively listening to God (Creator, Spirit, the current of aliveness, Trinity), to the one we sit with (companionee), and to what is emerging within ourselves.

The second Benedictine vow of **stability** promotes a rootedness in the assurance of God's presence to free us from self-doubt and fear, enabling us to learn about our true selves, accept what is, and persevere.⁹⁰ In applying this to spiritual companioning, stability is an endorsement of presence to be with whatever shows up in the moment, to wait, and to listen. Maintaining stability has been one of the more challenging aspects of being a spiritual companion for me. At times when I am under duress, and/or have not been faithful to spiritual practices (such as centering prayer, embodied prayer, journaling, etc.), I am easily distracted from sensing the power of God's presence. Writing this autoethnography has helped to crystalize my awareness of God's stabilizing support, making it more prominent in my consciousness, which in turn has helped me to receive and embody this sacred groundedness in my practice of spiritual companioning. It is evident for stabilizing my spiritual companioning practice that I dedicate myself to regular spiritual practices, such as the ones named earlier, engage with literature that explores the spiritual life, and participate in relationships with what John O'Donohue calls *anam caras* or spiritual friends.

The vow of stability also aligns with what has been found to occur physiologically within the human body. It has been shown that the grounded spaciousness which occurs when a person takes several deeper breaths or meditates engages first the energizing effect of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), and then the calming influence of the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), back and forth in a

⁹⁰ Ibid, 59; and in Di Biase, "Listening with the Ear of the Heart," 56-57.

gentle rhythm.⁹¹ With both nervous systems in balance, it is plausible that a person can think clearer and avoid rash responses. Engaging the PNS also “quiets the mind and fosters tranquility, which supports bringing about contemplative insight,”⁹² a state beneficial to both parties in spiritual accompaniment. Calm stability (or a lack of it) affects the other person present in that it can be sensed, even to the point of effecting the level of calmness that person experiences. Markus Scott-Alexander concurs with this in stating that others can perceive one’s availability when a degree of stability is achieved. Availability here refers to presence, openness, receiving, ability to listen, all qualities that come when one is devoted to one’s own wellbeing, to developing a personal stability, and is conducive to coming alongside another.⁹³

Conversatio morum, the third Benedictine vow, is an awareness that life is in a continuous state of conversion or change. It is an acknowledgement that we are never stagnant, never complete, and neither is the journey.⁹⁴ Ester de Waal explains that this phrase is meant to persuade us to commit to a lifelong process of being transformed as we follow Christ. The quality of constant change is embedded in the fluid, flowing, dynamic nature of the conversation that is spiritual companionship. One can never know what course a session will take and so to accept continuous change can help the spiritual

⁹¹ Rick Hanson, *Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom* (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2009), 59.

⁹² Ibid, 59.

⁹³ Markus Scott-Alexander, “Aesthetics as Devotion: Art as Prayer,” (course St. Stephens College ARTST5865, Edmonton, November 26-30, 2018).

⁹⁴ Christine Valters Painter, *The Wisdom of the Body: A Contemplative Journey to Wholeness for Women* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2017), 60, Kindle; in de Waal, *Seeking God*, 69; and in Libby Vincent, “Mystery in an Age of Certainty,” *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 26, no. 2 (June 2020): 56, accessed July 29, 2020, <https://www.sdcompanions.org/media/presence/presence-26-2-june-2020/>.

companion get themselves out of the way, to enter without expectations in open *kenosis*. It is interesting to note that the common root of conversation and conversion is from the Latin *conversio*, meaning “a turning around, revolution”⁹⁵ which feels very close in meaning to *perichoresis*. This sacred spiritual conversation is necessary for the flow of a healthy relationship both between spiritual companion and the one being companioned. I would assert this is also necessary between God and each one sitting in the companioning session – a triune relationship. Jean Evans explains that psychology has identified this triune presence during times of deep open listening when participants have become aware of a Third Party – a divine presence in the relationship.⁹⁶ Could it be that the dynamic fluidity of spiritual accompaniment (as constant conversion) is a manifestation of the perichoresis of Trinity? In the dynamic aspect of living, as well as in spiritual accompaniment, we face the tension that is not knowing, or mystery. The tension that is *conversatio morum* calls us to trust in the currents of aliveness, Holy Spirit, Divine Trinitarian Flow.

Perhaps *conversatio morum*'s call to trust in the intangible mystery of Spirit explains how spiritual companioning can be viewed as an art more than skill. I have found the aesthetics of art and metaphor can open one to a deep experience of mystery, whereas skill indicates expertise that one strives for. Feeling one has expertise can lead to a power differential whereupon a companion may feel they know how to help the one they companion. Again, embracing *kenosis* or humility rather than acquiring skill is important to emphasize here. This is evident in the training and ongoing support of

⁹⁵ Dictionary.com, “conversion,” accessed May 14, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/conversion>.

⁹⁶ Evans, “Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction,” 273.

spiritual companions as artful, open, contemplative, and embodied.⁹⁷ Approaching spiritual accompaniment in an artful way can be another form of flowing with the constant change that is the Benedictine *conversatio morum* which invites an element of creativity and possibility.

As stated earlier, most of the literature on spiritual companioning clearly indicates that *helping* is not part of the practice.⁹⁸ The urge to help is strong in those of us desiring to be of service. However, as helper our desire to be in a position of equilibrium shifts to one who assumes to know what will help. This disturbs the balance of a companion coming alongside without judgement, collapsing the spacious, sacred container of possibilities. Empowerment (known as agency in the field of psychology) is taken from the companionee in this situation, and it denies that God is an active participant in relationship with the companionee.⁹⁹ The companionee is the expert of their own self. A spiritual companion is not privileged with the knowledge of how Sacred Love is present to the person they sit with either before, during, or after a session; therefore, it is best to leave helping out of the relationship.

Other Relevant Sciences

The final part of my review considers a small sampling of literature from the sciences of physics and neurology. It is exciting to see how interconnected and relevant

⁹⁷ Pacific Jubilee, "Spiritual Direction Training," date modified not available, accessed July 26, 2020, <https://pacificjubilee.ca/soulguiding/>.

⁹⁸ Billy, "Spiritual Direction as Faith Seeking Understanding," 31; in Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, location 168; in Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 1-2; and in Spiritual Directors International Task Force, "Portrait of a spiritual Director," https://www.sdicompanions.org/docs/portrait/portrait_of_a_spiritual_director.pdf.

⁹⁹ Evans, "Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction," 270.

the main ideas of my study are with other areas of academia, an indication of the intrinsic nature of Trinity. A more detailed look would involve much more complexity that is beyond the intent of this research. Therefore, this will be an attempt to suggest that there is another interesting conversation to be had between quantum physics, Chaos Theory, neuroscience, and theology. These fields share some intriguing concepts.

Chaos theory suggests that systems which appear to be orderly have, in fact, chaotic behaviors such as are apparent in weather patterns. It also suggests the opposite, that despite appearing chaotic, some systems have an underlying order. For example, a wild forest appears chaotic and random, but looking closer it is evident that each part is working together in cooperation for the life of the forest. Chaos theory shows up throughout the natural world demonstrating that the only prediction to be made about it is its unpredictability.¹⁰⁰ Is this the constant change, the *conversatio morem*, of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow? Adding further to this mysterious connection, quantum physics reveals that individual objects do not occur as isolated entities. The atoms of objects consist of particles that are not made of any substance but instead consist of *dynamic* patterns continually changing when observed.¹⁰¹ Physicist Fritjof Capra makes this astounding statement:

At the atomic level, then, the solid material objects of classical physics dissolve into patterns of probabilities, and these patterns do not represent probabilities of things, but probabilities of *interconnections*. Quantum theory forces us to see the

¹⁰⁰ Hena Rani Biswas, Maruf Hasan and Shujit Kumar Bala, "Chaos Theory and its Applications in Our Real Life," *Barishal University Journal*, Part 1, 5 (2018): 123-140, accessed March 27, 2021, <https://bu.ac.bd/uploads/BUJ1V5I12/6.%20Hena%20Rani%20Biswas.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Fritjof Capra, "Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 8, no. 1 (Berkeley, 1976): 22-26, accessed March 28, 2021, <http://www.atpweb.org/jtparchive/trps-08-76-01-020.pdf>.

universe not as a collection of physical objects, but rather as a complicated web of *relations* between the various parts of a unified whole.¹⁰² [my emphasis added]

Is this describing the relationship aspect of the Trinity, *perichoresis*? What an exciting question.

The field of neuroscience brought into this conversation previously showed the related ideas of the Benedictine vow of stability in the workings of the PNS and SNS.

There is also evidence from this branch of science which demonstrates that deep meditative states cause neurons to fire and wire together creating new neurological structure that allows us to break even firmly habitual patterns such as the engrained behaviour of scanning for danger in every situation.¹⁰³ It has been shown that even in moments of simple savoring we are allowing for other parts of our brains to activate bringing a more peaceful, receptive presence in place of instinctual reactions.¹⁰⁴

Neuroscience has shown that contemplative practices affect our brain in such a way that it becomes more sensitive to subtle realms of experience which then affects our whole body, mind, and emotions.¹⁰⁵ Could this mean then that one might train oneself to be more receptive to the flow of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow? Here is another enticing question for future research, and one that spiritual accompaniment training programs seem to believe is possible since a good deal of these programs are to expand the trainee's capacity for receptivity, availability, and holding what simply is.

¹⁰² Ibid., 23.

¹⁰³ Hanson, *Buddha's Brain*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Newberg & Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 159-160.

A Gap in the Literature

In my literature review I was surprised to discover no discussion of Trinity in relationship with the practice of spiritual companioning; therefore, I intend to begin the conversation that can fill this gap with this thesis. Dennis Billy is the only writer on spiritual companioning that I have found who refers to the Trinity at all, yet his reference is not specific to the process of spiritual companioning. He states that through theology we “attempt to reflect upon our experience of the Trinity dwelling in our hearts.” He believes it is the goal of the spiritual direction process to allow for a reflection of Trinity to occur but leaves out what, or if, the actual experience may look or feel like within a session or even if it occurs.¹⁰⁶ Nowhere have I been able to find an indication of Trinity actively or specifically participating in the practice of spiritual companioning. Evans does allude to what seems to be a trinitarian presence identified in psychology as a third party or presence, but she stops short of naming it the Trinity.¹⁰⁷ This gap has motivated me to explore Dynamic Trinitarian Flow in my experience of spiritual companioning. By sharing what this has been for me, I hope other spiritual companions might become open to the possibility of an embodied trinitarian experience.

Now that relationships have begun through conversations with the literature from pertinent topics, let us move on to see how autoethnography as a methodology is so beautifully conducive to this complex inquiry of embodied trinitarian experience.

¹⁰⁶ Billy, “Spiritual Direction as Faith Seeking Understanding,” 29-30.

¹⁰⁷ Evans, “Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction,” 273.

CHAPTER 3 - THE METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Andrew Sparkes explains that autoethnographies “are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding.”¹⁰⁸ Keeping with this definition, my writing draws upon my very personal experience of Trinity to extend a sociological understanding of spiritual accompaniment. As with other qualitative methodologies, autoethnography realizes that maintaining strict researcher objectivity is not possible, or at the very least difficult to achieve.¹⁰⁹ It appreciates that researchers can never refrain from influencing their study, and inversely cannot help but be influenced by that which they study. Embracing this influence is recognized by this methodology as liberating data rather than tainting it. This is precisely what I have found in conducting this autoethnographic study. In fact, I had to accept that this research would never be finished influencing me, or I would not have been able to move into the explication and write. As Holy Trinity continues to work in, around, and through me, this autoethnography will never be truly complete in one sense. How appropriate autoethnography is then for this exploration of the Trinity which has unfolded, is unfolding, and will continue to unfold despite the glimpses any of us may feel we have glimpsed of it. As Tessa Muncey states, to conduct

¹⁰⁸ Andrew C. Sparkes, “Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 17 (March 2000): 21, retrieved Sept. 21, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279673793_Autoethnography_and_Narratives_of_Self_Reflections_on_Criteria_in_Action/citation/download.

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Wall, “Easier Said Than Done: Writing an Autoethnography,” *IJQM*, 7, no. 1 (March 31, 2008): 42, retrieved July 14, 2021, <http://uournals.library.ualberta.ca>; also Nicholas Holt, “Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story,” *IJQM*, no. 2, article 1 (Winter 2003): 2, retrieved August 27, 2021, <https://sites.ualberta.ca>; and Heewon Chang, “Autoethnography,” *Autoethnography as Method* (Left Coast Press: Walnut Creek, CA: 2008), 43-44, retrieved July 7, 2020, eclass.srv.ualberta.ca.

an autoethnographic study “one has to first recognize that there is no distinction between doing research and living a life.”¹¹⁰ What I offer here in this paper then is how I have made sense of an experience at this particular moment on the journey.

Since researcher and what is researched are so closely entwined in autoethnographies, they take the form of a narrative. However, these writings differ from other narrative-oriented studies in that they look beyond the self to investigate the cultural connections between self and others in society.¹¹¹ Although they all contain a narrative component, autoethnographers will make a choice to emphasize either the research process (*graphy*), the culture (*ethno*), or the self (*auto*).¹¹² The emphasis for this study will be the culture of spiritual accompaniment as experienced by myself.

As well as analyzing the relationships between the outside world and the individual, this methodology is a way to look at what is occurring within the researcher themselves. This reflexive nature is meant to be ongoing throughout the study,¹¹³ which makes autoethnography well suited for exploring the relationships of my embodied experience, Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, and what light these may shed on spiritual accompaniment. By conversing with the literature, data gathered from my journals, and

¹¹⁰ Tessa Muncey, *Creating Autoethnographies* (Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks: 2010), 3, Kindle.

¹¹¹ Heewon Chang, “Autoethnography as Method: Raising Cultural Consciousness of Self and Others,” *Studies in Educational Ethnography*, 12 (January 2007): 2, retrieved July 7, 2021, <http://ltinocorws1302.weebly.com/uploads/7/0/7/6/7076889/autoethnography.pdf>

¹¹² Ibid 2; Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research Second Edition* ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2000), 740 retrieved July 14, 2021, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254703924>; D.E. Reed-Danahay as quoted by N.L. Holt, in “Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2 no. 1, (2003): 2, retrieved August 27, 2021, https://sites.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/2_1/pdf/holt.pdf.

¹¹³ Holt, “Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography,” *IJQM*, 2.

expressive arts, I have inquired into the relationships among Trinity, spiritual companionship, and myself to discern my experience and what it can offer the practice of spiritual accompaniment.

Initially I had planned to use a heuristic methodology for this study, which is closely related to autoethnography; in fact, Sarah Wall even claims that it is a form of autoethnography.¹¹⁴ Heuristics helped me to realize that what I have named as my ‘spiritual journey’ is also an academic quest. Clark Moustakas describes heuristics as the process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and then goes on to write,

From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration.¹¹⁵

Self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery are precisely how my spiritual life has and continues to unfold. It accounts for the emergence of the question that has focused my journey for the past several years. This question which I have referred to earlier as a *theological quest* is: how might I be fully present to my strengths while at the same time holding an attitude of humbleness? Discerning this question has enticed me to live into it in progressively deeper ways.

Thanks to heuristics, I now understand and embrace spiritual endeavors and academic studies as part of the same journey. In reflection I can now see that the training I had in spiritual companionship and two courses of studio art therapy both followed the

¹¹⁴ Sarah Wall, “An Autoethnography on Learning About Autoethnography,” *IJQM*, 150, handout from course SSC5710, June 15, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* (Sage Publications, Inc: Newbury Park: 1990), 9-10, Kindle.

heuristic methodological process ¹¹⁶ in which *living* experience is studied.¹¹⁷ Moreover, I realize I have been immersed in heuristic inquiry throughout my life from earliest preverbal experiences to the present.¹¹⁸ However, I realized delving into a new heuristic inquiry would prematurely divert me from the experience of spiritual companionship I wished to explore in this thesis, for I had not yet begun to harvest this experience for its significance. I saw that autoethnography would allow me to engage in a deeper exploration of what had already appeared to me. The theological quest I referred to earlier is the foundation of this current research. It began to manifest in 2013 coinciding with the beginning of my studies at St. Stephen's, which I find to be an intriguing synchronicity. At the beginning of my degree, Norbert Krumin, chair of the Master of Theological Studies Program at St. Stephens College at the time, encouraged me to ponder a thesis topic. I fruitlessly struggled for something that I thought might meet the college's requirements. Given my unfamiliarity with qualitative spiritual inquiry methodologies at the time, I was not cognizant that my thesis question had already appeared to me. Not until the last class of my coursework, in Leslie Gardener's inquiry and research class, did I learn that my theological quest would be a crucial part of how my thesis would develop. In exploring my *lived* experience through self-introspection, consideration of the literature, and my reflection upon it, my intention in writing this

¹¹⁶ Sandy Sela-Smiths, "Heuristic Research," *JHP* (Summer 2002): 83-85, download June 18, 2020, eclass.srv.ualberta.ca.

¹¹⁷ Nevine Sultan, *Heuristic Inquiry: Researching Human Experience Holistically* (SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks: 2019), 3, Kindle.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

autoethnography has been to discover the nature of these experiences¹¹⁹ and to make sense of them.

I have found journal writing to be an effective tool to sort through life experiences. This personal narrative style of writing is an autoethnographic method,¹²⁰ which I used to facilitate the exploration and recollection of my personal experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. I also used the personal narrative style in developing a conversation with the culture of spiritual accompaniment. Therefore, this research follows the tenets of an autoethnography by describing and analyzing my personal experience in understanding the cultural experience¹²¹ of spiritual accompaniment. As I emphasize the autobiographical element of this methodology, I weave in the theoretical content relating to Trinity and spiritual accompaniment.

Tacit knowledge, a concept from heuristics, is implicit knowing that is deeply embedded and often unconscious.¹²² This dimension contains the internal knowledge of experiences, feelings, and meanings forming a person's internal frame of reference, from preverbal life to the present. A person's internal frame of reference governs behavior and determines how experiences are interpreted.¹²³ Tacit capacity can allow one to "sense the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or

¹¹⁹ L. Richardson as quoted by Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning About Autoethnography," *IJQM* 5, no. 2, article 9 (June 2006): 6, retrieved June 15, 2020, eclass.srv.ualberta.ca.

¹²⁰ Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning About Autoethnography," 6; and Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams & Arthur Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12, no. 1 (January 2010): 277, retrieved July 7, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294>.

¹²¹ Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, "Autoethnography," 273.

¹²² Sela-Smiths, "Heuristic Research 53.

¹²³ Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, 26.

parts.”¹²⁴ Sandy Sela-Smiths provides an example of someone with a learned fear of snakes jumping at something appearing to slither in their peripheral vision. This vision is part of a whole story possessed by this person concerning the meaning of snakes causing them fear. It triggers a reaction that is seemingly involuntary.¹²⁵ As such, these areas are sources for personal revelations that can ultimately lead to spiritual and personal transformation. Polanyi states, “We can *know* more than we can *tell*,” [emphasis mine], to explain that all knowledge and ways we understand our world come out of tacit knowing.¹²⁶ Deep significant experiences can be difficult to verbalize and, if deemed unacceptable in some way, move out of one’s awareness to reside in the tacit realm, as D.N. Stern determined.¹²⁷ The banishing of these experiences, in a sense sent underground, creates *flawed* tacit knowledge affecting the truth of how the world is perceived.¹²⁸ Employing the methods of visual, embodied, and written forms of expressive arts can facilitate access to the tacit field. Using these very methods myself has greatly benefited me in the past to ultimately make sense of my experiences. I have been able to realize important shifts and transformational moments that have unearthed many layers of meaning and forged connections between my experiences. Connections between a researcher’s personal experiences and a wider cultural setting are the very

¹²⁴ Ibid, 20.

¹²⁵ Sel-Smiths, *Heuristic Research*, 62.

¹²⁶ M. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), as cited in Moustakas, in *Heuristic Research*, 20.

¹²⁷ D. N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), as cited in Sela-Smiths, “Heuristic Research,” 62.

¹²⁸ Sela-Smiths, “Heuristic Research,” 62.

things which are known to become apparent through autoethnographic study.¹²⁹ Making such connections in this study has allowed me to explicate and develop my own deeply embedded knowledge concerning Trinity, Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, and spiritual accompaniment.

I found that my spoken language could not adequately express what I had experienced after that day of spiritual companioning five people. Sela-Smiths writes that, like me, many who have experienced deeply meaningful global events have a desire to express them despite the inadequacy of language. Unfortunately, spoken and written language are limited both by the speaker and how the speech is interpreted, a conundrum often found during heuristic research.¹³⁰ My expression of the experience in this paper may be close to what I experienced at the time, limited by the language with which I communicate; however, as I move through the days and weeks of my life being acted upon by external and internal forces, my perception of this event will most likely change. You, gentle reader, may be perceiving something quite different than I can perceive as you read this work because of how you relate to the various words and phrases I use, your life experiences, and the Holy working within you. Perhaps all these variables in communication and experiences may help us to understand why one version of the Trinity may fail to communicate effectively to all Christian seekers. The traditional doctrine of the Trinity is but one attempt to capture an experience or understanding of the triune nature of God in a time far removed from this day. Despite being vigorously contested, as is evident by the heated debates over time concerning its accuracy, many

¹²⁹ Holt, "Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography," 6.

¹³⁰ Sela-Smiths, 61-63.

insist this doctrine is the one correct view. As I have discovered, there are many other expressions of the Trinity that exist in the theological arena. I suspect there are others outside theological academic circles who have had experiences of Trinity that transcends their ability to communicate it. It is my hope that offering my experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow for consideration will provide encouragement to others who have also had experiences of the Trinity beyond the dogma, or perhaps still others may recognize in my experience one they have had which is yet unnamed. Therefore, further conversation for enlightenment could be had. As Moltmann says, “Truth is to be found in unhindered dialogue.”¹³¹

The various understandings of Trinity I presented in my literature review are only some of the alternative interpretations available. The wide range of views on Trinity suggest that many theologians have followed their own emerging questions around the traditional doctrine of the Trinity as they wrestle with communicating their own sense of it. Learning about the tacit domain from my study of heuristics has caused me to wonder if changes in one’s flawed tacit knowledge might lead to a more receptive attitude towards the multiple expressions of Trinity. If so, this receptivity could bring a deepening of sacred experience to a wider population, even to those for whom the Trinity holds little or no meaning presently. This research certainly has changed my concept of, and relationship with, the Holy Trinity that has enriched my life.

Margot Duncan tells us autoethnographers assume “reality is neither fixed nor entirely external but is created by, and moves with, the changing perceptions and beliefs

¹³¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: First Fortress Press, 1993), location 93, Kindle.

of the viewer.”¹³² Therefore, instead of presenting a record of life in a culture visited by the researcher, autoethnographers show how they have made sense of a culture in one moment in time. If we look at Christian culture today, this desire to make sense of one’s experience continues as society in general continues to change and theologians struggle with the dogma of the Trinity. “Making sense” is how autoethnography has served me in researching my experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. The phrase “making sense,” in relation to one’s experience, was introduced to me in an expressive arts class.¹³³ I chose this term purposefully to differentiate from *finding meaning* in which the meaning of an experience is meant to be found, captured, or to be an undeniable truth, as we find in the definition of dogma. This methodology has functioned to help make sense of my experience when it happened and in reflecting on it since. “Making sense” acknowledges the dynamic nature of what happened considering my capacity at the time of the event, and how it has worked within me since then. I prefer to use this phrase to avoid concretizing meaning, which I believe can result in a dogmatic or an unwavering view.

My original idea for this thesis was to attempt to recreate my experience with an expectation for a perceived outcome. This seemed dangerously close to testing the reality of a mysterious and sacred experience. Instead, autoethnography offered me the opportunity to fully explore the mystery of what did occur without the need for a hypothesis. It is a methodology which permitted me to surrender to what was ready to be

¹³² Margot Duncan, “Autoethnography: Critical Appreciation of an Emerging Art,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 3, no. 4 (December 2004): retrieved Sept. 30, 2021, 4, http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/backissues/3_4/pdf/duncan.pdf.

¹³³ Markus Scot-Alexander, “The Mystic and the Artist II” (course St. Stephens College, ARTST 5872, Edmonton, November 25-29, 2019).

illuminated and eventually explicated in one moment in time. By recognizing that whatever is illuminated may not be an empirical truth, autoethnography helped me to *make sense* of a dynamic experience that may have resonance for others.

Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner have written that

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity.¹³⁴

Writing about my epiphany as an exploration of how it reflects on the culture of spiritual accompaniment affirmed my desire to explore my experience without fearing any self-indulgence. The story of my experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow has offered me a more grounded knowing and a deeper relationship with the sacred in my life and my spiritual companioning practice, which has enabled me to be more available to the one/ones I accompany. Beyond what I have gained personally from conducting this research, I hope readers of my story will find some interesting concepts, a new way to connect with the divine, affirmation of their own embodied sacred experiences, or perhaps permission to look for their own experience. Some may seek to engage a spiritual companion for their personal journey or, for those already receiving spiritual accompaniment, to recognize their own capacity for offering this practice to others in cooperation with the Trinity.

Methods Used

My data collection required that I review and respond to both my written and art journals, as well as writings I completed as part of my training as a spiritual companion

¹³⁴ Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, "Autoethnography, 276.

and my degree. Throughout the data collection and beyond, I continued my spiritual practices of

- Centering Prayer
- spiritual accompaniment
- personal journaling
- expressive arts – visual, written, and moving (in the form of Embodied Prayer)

These methods facilitated the self-reflexive part of this autoethnography required for accessing tacit knowledge and intuition. In the following section I will explain each of these methods and how I used them to conduct my research.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer was revived from the ancient tradition of contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer was a major part of early Christian clergy and laity's daily life during the first sixteen centuries of the church. Unfortunately, the tradition was virtually lost by the twentieth century, but eventually revived by a group of Trappist monks in the 1970s in the form of Centering Prayer along with the tradition of *lectio divina*. At the core of Centering Prayer is the practice of letting go of attachments, self-doubt, desires, and opening to what is, as is found in the writings *The Cloud of Unknowing*.¹³⁵ Basically, it is a practice of *kenosis* through which one consents to God's presence and action

¹³⁵ Thomas Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2002), 121, accessed September 13, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/foundationsforce00thom/page/n3/mode/2up>.

within. It is a method to deepen one's *relationship* with Christ, so that apart from prayer times, one can find God's presence everywhere else also.¹³⁶

The Centering Prayer practice has been developed further into a process of healing by Thomas Keating which he named "divine therapy."¹³⁷ When practitioners access a level of deep rest during the prayer, Keating observed that hard packed "emotional weeds" which have been mounting over time, loosen up and rise to conscious awareness. The unresolved emotional material that can appear may manifest in the body as powerful sensations such as fear or pain. The psyche's release of this unresolved emotional material has the potential to create space for new self-knowledge and the awareness of divine presence within.¹³⁸ Bourgeault describes this process in her "Welcoming Practice." She advises the practitioner to stay present to those sensations that arise and embrace an attitude of welcoming towards these feelings.¹³⁹ She makes clear that we are not welcoming the memory of a specific loss or an event which initiated the "emotional weed" to be retained. The discipline is to welcome the sensation. In this way a witness consciousness is entered into in which one separates oneself from the story that gave rise to the feeling, making way for clarity and choice to enter. In this manner the practitioner has the freedom to move on from being a victim of their emotions and be fully present. From this position of witness, possibilities can be realized, and choices made freely. This practice of divine healing, or welcoming, is a kenotic *way* of being - of

¹³⁶ Ibid, 118.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 133.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity I Theory and Practice* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2016), 90-92.

living a contemplative life. In my experience when a memory or thought has triggered a strong emotional response in my body, I have used this practice to center, and I ask myself what is true and/or not true about the thought that has created my feeling. Only when I have addressed this question, and dealt adequately with the emotion that arises, am I able to feel release from its grip on me. In this way the practice has been instrumental in enabling me to begin to enter a state of *kenosis*. Often this “Welcoming Practice” requires time (perhaps days, months or in some cases years) and patience; however, it is a method that has been of great help to me in opening space for the authentic self-search necessary in creating integrity in my study.

Spiritual Accompaniment

Throughout this study I have regularly received and variously offered spiritual accompaniment in one form or another. This took shape as formal one-on-one sessions, formal group spiritual companionship, as well as informal accompaniment opportunities. The latter were conversations with friends, family and/or fellow church members whom I found myself companionshiping, or being companionshiped organically. It is understood autoethnographically that experiences and processes such as these influence the researcher and their work. This reciprocal affect was evident as I carried out this research in that what I was experiencing in the process then impacted what and how I experienced and processed my research and world. This too is apparent within a spiritual accompaniment session. I am affected by what and how my companionship¹⁴⁰ shares their story, which can then impact them, and so on. Such is the nature of the human condition

¹⁴⁰ One who receives spiritual accompaniment.

which the methodology of autoethnography recognizes and accepts.¹⁴¹ It makes me wonder, dear reader, what the consequences of reading of this paper will be for you. The interactive aspect of this research approach affirms my position of the inherent quality of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow within all.

Spiritual direction practitioner, Libby Vincent, provides another quality showing how spiritual companioning is an appropriate method for this study. She writes that spiritual accompaniment can help one embrace mystery rather than fight against it, which leads to the freedom that accepting not knowing can bring.¹⁴² In helping to create *kenosis* within me, spiritual accompaniment paradoxically has helped me to loosen my grip on needing to know what was going on. Once this space was created I was open for a new way of experiencing – a new way of knowing that has brought me to this research.

Rose Mary Dougherty describes an attitude of carefree abandon when entering the mysterious domain of spiritual companioning by describing it as “wasting time with God.”¹⁴³ I find this phrase a delightful way to describe a position of emptying when I am the spiritual companion. “Wasting time with God” is free of the pressure I tend to put on myself to “do” the emptying when I approach a companioning session. It also assists me in staying away from notions that I must help. Dougherty’s approach helps to empty the spiritual companion of goal-oriented ideals and instead embrace the mystery of *conversatio morum*.

¹⁴¹ Muncey, *Creating Autoethnographies*, 37.

¹⁴² Vincent, “Mystery in an Age of Certainty,” 57.

¹⁴³ Dougherty, *Holy Listening*, location 254.

As a companionee spiritual accompaniment has aided and continues to aid me in sorting through, discerning, and exploring my life, as well as helping me to know God's presence. It frequently amazes me how pertinent spiritual companioning is to the journey of my life, and thus to this or any autoethnography. Even on those occasions when I wonder what I could possibly have to speak of that day, I have never come away from a companioning session without a feeling of sacred presence. I try to journal after each of my spiritual companion sessions, whether I am the companion or companionee, as part of the process of discernment.

Personal Journaling

By personal journaling I am referring to a regular practice of writing in a, more or less, stream of consciousness style. I also include art journaling in this method, by which I mean creating visual art collected in a book or folder through the mode of expressive arts. I will expand on this method of art journaling in the next subsection under expressive arts.

My personal journaling practice (written) has continued for many years. Like with an old friend, my entries ebb and flow, yet I know it is always there to receive what I choose to write in all the messy ways stream of conscious writing entails. Journaling has always proven to be a meaningful and essential practice for my deepening. I have found by writing down my thoughts, feelings, ideas, desires, agonies, defeats, and so on, a sacred sorting occurs. What may be swirling in my head is held, helping me to observe myself in that moment in time. Or the writing of it works in me afterward, initiating and sometimes catalyzing, what has potential to nourish or unburden me. Over the years my

journaling has taken on the form of letters to God, whom I address as “Wholly, Holy One.” As I communicate with God in this way, sometimes I imagine God speaking back to me. I inscribe my voice in cursive writing, while God’s imagined voice is printed.

Not only is journaling a practice of giving voice to my thoughts, but I also receive through re-reading them. Every so often I will return to the writing I have done in the past month or two. The distance of time can bring some clarity and/or an awareness that I have more work to do. At other times it can help me see connections or patterns in my life. It is as though in my journaling I am spiritually accompanying myself with God.

Expressive Arts

Using the term expressive arts, I am referring to various modes of creative expression such as visual, written, dance, or expressive movement. I focus on the expressive arts of movement and visual creations to connect with my internal, spiritual world, along with a small amount of written art (poetry). These methods foster receptivity to feeling modes that aid in accessing the tacit domain. Sally Atkins states,

In this field [of expressive arts], art making is seen as a primary mode of inquiry combining creative imagination with embodied experience. The arts, when approached in this manner, offer a pathway that can open us to a fuller experience of being and becoming in the world.¹⁴⁴

Atkins further demonstrates a synchronicity with autoethnography in the following:

working with the expressive arts in a process-oriented way with presence offers a powerful way to witness and respect each human story and to awaken and nurture each person’s own resources for living.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Herbert Eberhart and Sally Atkins, *Presence and Process in Expressive Arts Work* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014), 25, Kindle.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

Using these methods to employ my heart and intuitive knowledge, I was able to work around the limitations of the linear world of language and traditionally academic modes of understanding. I could enter the world of mystery and unknowing where sacred experiences dwell, like the one on which this thesis is based on.

Clearly the methods of expressive arts are very appropriate for proceeding with autoethnographic research. Expressive arts are a means to engage and explore feelings which can then be an entry point into the tacit domain. Through these methods a reconstruction or correction of flawed tacit knowledge can begin leading to the transformation Polanyi writes of, which I would call spiritual formation. Entering the process of expressive artmaking helped to shift my Western worldview of objective Newtonian science in which I was enculturated and allowed me to see the world as interactive and interconnected.¹⁴⁶

As I engaged with my past journal entries I followed Pat Allen's method for "artmaking as a spiritual path,"¹⁴⁷ which is also one I learned from Markus Scott-Alexander in his expressive arts courses.¹⁴⁸ Allen uses the terms *Creative Source* and *Divinity* to refer to an ultimate source, and what I would call God or Wholly One. Her description is very much congruent with my own Christian-based theology in which I am exploring Trinity. She describes her method as a means "to enter, to play with, to dance with, to wrestle with anything that intrigues, delights, disturbs, or terrifies us."¹⁴⁹ She

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 24.

¹⁴⁷ Pat B. Allen, *Art as a Spiritual Path* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc. 2005), 1.

¹⁴⁸ Markus Scott Alexander, "Aesthetics of Devotion" (course St. Stephens College, ARTST 5865, Edmonton, November 26-30, 2018).

¹⁴⁹ Allen, *Art as a Spiritual Path*, 1.

goes on to explain that “art is a path to meaning.”¹⁵⁰ Her playful, open way of describing entering the artmaking process resonates with the idea of opening to mystery in spiritual companionship that Dougherty described as “wasting time with God.”¹⁵¹ Allen’s artmaking is also an ideal way to work through Keating’s “divine therapy,” or what Bourgeault calls Centering Prayer practice. I have found it useful to keep an art journal to collect expressive visual art especially during the challenges of doubt or what St. John of the Cross called *the dark night of the soul*. It provides me with a means to move through these times.

A “path to meaning” is what is known in the expressive arts field as *poiesis*. *Poiesis* is the third of Aristotle’s ways of knowing which are knowing by observing (*theoria*), knowing by doing or acting (*praxis*), and knowing by making (*poiesis*).¹⁵² Through the creative act of *poiesis*, we know, we make sense, we create soul. It helps us bypass our enculturated biases and reach into the tacit domain to allow a connection with Divine Source, Holy Spirit. As autoethnographer Duncan states, reality “is created by, and moves with, the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer.”¹⁵³ In harmony with *conversatio morum* and *kenosis*

poiesis happens not in accordance with intellect and will but through the experience of surrender to a process which I can neither understand nor control in advance.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Dougherty, *Holy Listening*, location 254.

¹⁵² Paolo Knill, Ellen G. Levine, Stephen K. Levine, *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005), 32, Kindle.

¹⁵³ Duncan, “Autoethnography,” 4.

¹⁵⁴ Knill, Levine, Levine, *Principles and Practice of Expressive Arts Therapy*, 40, Kindle.

Poiesis then, requires surrender (*kenosis*, emptying), and in acknowledging there is a process, poiesis is akin to *conversatio morum*, dynamism or constant change.

The movements created when I practiced the expressive art of Embodied Prayer became a doorway to the dance that is this research. It has been and is a poiesis of moving art. Art-based researcher Celeste Snowber captures how this art has been a method of inquiry for me,

There is a secret the body holds. How you access your imagination, intuition and perception lies within the body. Making a practice of listening to your imaginative, intuitive, and perceptive abilities activates the energy that lies dormant within your own pulsing body.¹⁵⁵

There is an understanding in expressive arts therapy that for something new to be created a de-centering, or chaos, is necessary to shake up the old and make way for the new. What I describe next is the Embodied Prayer practice which provided me with a method to shake up and make way for the new that would become my understanding of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow.

A subcategory of expressive arts is a movement practice I have engaged in based on Gabrielle Roth's 5Rhythms™ that she developed in the late 1970s. I came to know this practice by the name of Embodied Prayer, yet it should be noted that there may be any number of ways to participate in a type of embodied prayer, such as walking prayerfully, Authentic Movement©, liturgical dance, etc. The embodied prayer practice I was introduced to during the residencies at my spiritual companioning training is a version of Roth's called Embodied Prayer. This specific method is what I will be discussing here. The 5Rhythms© are states of being, rhythms or energies experienced in

¹⁵⁵ Celeste Snowber, *Embodied Inquiry: Writing, Living and Being Through the Body* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), location 231, Kindle.

living and are expressed through various music styles.¹⁵⁶ They are flow, staccato, chaos, lyrical, and stillness. Roth, like Snowber, “discovered that the body can’t lie; put it in motion and the truth kicks in.”¹⁵⁷ Individuals or group participants of Embodied Prayer are invited to move to music in free form, allowing the whole self or parts of the self to respond to music in whatever way is accessible to them. Roth calls the body “the womb of the soul,” and “soul retrieval” moving to the rhythms is healing the wound caused by a cultural separation of body from spirit.¹⁵⁸ Bringing body, mind, and spirit into relationship through Embodied Prayer, the intention is to expand the capacity to experience more fully who we are as God’s incarnate beings, sensing the sacred everywhere by utilizing all the senses. Just as in Centering Prayer, poiesis, and expressive arts, *kenosis* is an important part of engaging an Embodied Prayer practice. Participating with others in the manner I have been describing - allowing the self to go inward, fully sensing, and moving organically to music - requires one to empty oneself of self-imposed limitations and ego as much as possible. In such a vulnerable place our relationship with the Holy can open, flourish, and/or deepen.

I engage in an Embodied Prayer practice regularly, and as part of this research it became another means of reflexive inquiry. Since being introduced to this practice, I have found it compelling in my journey to make sense of my experience. In fact, Embodied Prayer is largely responsible for how my research question first came into my awareness. Roth defines the rhythms she identified specifically and in detail. However, among the

¹⁵⁶ Sandra Pihowich, “Embodied Prayer” (flyer, Ladner United Church, Ladner, BC., September 24, 2019).

¹⁵⁷ Gabrielle Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers: Movement as Spiritual Practice* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc. 1997), xxi.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

practitioners of Embodied Prayer I know, I have found that people's interpretations vary. The movements of living are perceived uniquely by individuals depending on their life experiences. It follows then that each person experiences the 5Rhythms© of Embodied Prayer uniquely. I encourage this open range of expression when I am facilitating Embodied Prayer sessions to motivate what is authentic for each person. This supports my premise to *make sense* of our experiences as opposed to a focus on finding meaning, defining them, or looking to fit one's own movements with a rigid definition.

A brief description of the 5Rhythms© will suffice here until a more extensive explanation is provided in chapter four, *The Story*. What follows are what I believe are generally accepted characteristics of each of the rhythms. Flow is where we begin with smooth, continuous movements to help us enter the practice. It is here that we set our intention to open to the presence of the sacred moving within, without, and all around – to never settle in one place. Next, we move abruptly into staccato. The obvious, short, sharp feel of staccato music can manifest in robot-like, broken, or marching movements. This rhythm is comparable to the energy of checking things off a list or running from one thing to another to accomplish a task– it is about doing, acting.¹⁵⁹ After staccato we move through the wave that is the practice into chaos. In this rhythm anything goes! Chaos is for loosening up the backbone and letting the music shake up the body, mind, and spirit. It is unpredictable, as is life. In the chaos of Embodied Prayer we practice non-resistance. We connect with things primal, letting the logical brain and controlling mind go, along with our inhibitions.¹⁶⁰ After the shaking up of chaos we need lyrical to

¹⁵⁹ Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers*, 83-84.

¹⁶⁰ Roth, *Maps to Ecstasy: A Healing Journey for the Untamed Spirit* (Novato, CA: Nataraj Publishing, 1998), location 38, Kindle.

provide us with an opportunity to try on a new way to move out of chaos, to be, and see. In lyrical we can be playful, dramatic, flamboyant, even sensual.¹⁶¹ The feel of lyrical is ‘dancey,’ and light. Finally all the rhythms come together in stillness. Stillness is movement punctuated by pauses. Tai Chi and yoga postures can represent the rhythm of stillness.¹⁶² Here we can physically explore creating space for the movement of the Holy. According to Roth, “Stillness allows us to disappear in the big energy that holds us all so you can start the whole process over again.”¹⁶³

Each of the methods I have discussed - Centering Prayer, spiritual accompaniment, personal journaling, and the expressive arts - served me well in facilitating each stage of this autoethnography. From gathering the data of past journal entries, making sense of them in dialogue with the literature, engaging reflexively, making connections, to discerning what my experience has to say about spiritual companioning, these methods illuminated the concept of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow that has created a rich research experience. I regularly returned to the literature to maintain a relationship with those who have considered the Trinity as meaningful for living in today’s world and with those who practice the art of spiritual accompaniment. I also discussed my progress and process with my thesis supervisor, spiritual director, spiritual friends, peers, and mentors. As I continued to facilitate spiritual companioning sessions, I took with me the knowledge and new depth of understanding that was being brought to

¹⁶¹ Pihowich, *Embodied Prayer Lent 2021* (session notes for the 5th week of Lent, April 2021).

¹⁶² Lois Huey-Heck, “5 Rhythms – Embodied Prayer” (handout during PJP SoulGuiding residency, Bowen Island, BC, Sept. 2018).

¹⁶³ Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers*, 194.

my consciousness. Ultimately, I was able to sort through layers of significance, discovering and creating relationships between concepts and experiences which has given birth to:

*A Spiritual Director's Embodiment of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow
in the Art of Spiritual Accompaniment*

CHAPTER 4 - THE STORY: DANCING WITH TRINITY

An Invitation to Dance

We were seven months into the SoulGuiding program of Pacific Jubilee’s two-year training for spiritual direction. I entered this program lured by the promise of a rich contemplative pilgrimage, but I certainly never thought I would become a spiritual companion. We, the participants, now allies on the journey of soul, sat together in a circle. Some of us snuggled in comfy over-stuffed chairs and others were on the floor of what had come to feel like the “family room” of the Rivendell Retreat Centre where we lived during each of five residencies. Sitting together like a contemplative family we were ready to discuss the video we had just watched of Roshi Joan Halifax whose calm and warm voice described the work of a spiritual director:

Our work as spiritual companions is not about guiding, it’s not even about empowering; it’s about coming alongside like a boat coming alongside another, drifting in the current and connecting with the other person.¹⁶⁴

I felt a ‘yes’ come up from somewhere inside me. “Wow, could it be?! Yes Sandy!” (personal journal entry Nov. 3, 2016). I shared the newfound awareness that I just might be able to do this work with my fellow trainees and mentors in the circle and was startled by the burst of support and laughter, affirming what I apparently was the last to realize! When I had been thinking about enrolling in the SoulGuiding program the enticing description of the curriculum evoked excitement and longing for sacred connection. The program brochure read,

SoulGuiding seeks to explore the interrelationship of body, soul & spirit... Integrative elements including the arts and mindful reflection are consciously

¹⁶⁴ Roshi Joan Halifax, “On Being a Spiritual Companion,” video presentation at the Annual Conference of Spiritual Directors International (Santa Fe, April 2014).

woven into each day. Prayer, silence, and study further enhance the contemplative dimensions.¹⁶⁵

All of me - body, mind, and spirit - responded with a hunger for each of these components. Although I had been receiving spiritual direction for many years, I could not fathom being a spiritual companion myself. The voice of fear inside my head shouted, “What if you say something wrong? What if you don’t say the right thing? What if you miss noticing something crucial to the companionee’s wellbeing?” Even though I had trained as a small group facilitator with ten years’ experience, this fear continued to live in me. Perhaps that was because I felt that in a small group I could hide behind the material we studied and had a shared responsibility for individual wellbeing with the rest of the group. I was far too overwhelmed by the many “what ifs” for me to see myself as spiritual companion, so I was able to acquire permission to enter this tantalizing program with the stipulation that I would NOT have to become a spiritual director.

Once the program began I was gathered into loving companionship, gentle invitation, and purposeful opportunities to deepen and expand which I delved into with this community open-heartedly. After listening at the ‘feet’ of Roshi Halifax, I was beginning to realize I might have capacity for this work.

I had dived into the beautifully organic and heartfelt curriculum of SoulGuiding eager to learn about heart, mind, and body wisdom. This whole-bodied way of being and learning was new to me yet there was something deeply familiar that I seemed to respond to on a visceral level. Was this Trinity enticing me into the dance of life? I can now say definitively “yes” it was a beginning awareness of a capacity that I have for the work. I

¹⁶⁵ Pacific Jubilee SoulGuiding brochure 2016-18.

did take up the call to practice spiritual accompaniment and went on for another two years to receive further training in the SoulMentoring program.

Trinity as Dance Partner

After becoming a spiritual companion and entering the SoulMentoring stream, the first requirement was to put into writing my intentions for the next two years of mentoring: “I hope to be able to cultivate a groundedness so as to embody wise and powerful Lion energy while dancing the incredible lightness of being that is Hummingbird.”¹⁶⁶ Lion and Hummingbird were important guides that came into my awareness during my spiritual companioning program. Lion came to me in a dream and Hummingbird in several personal encounters. They each have become a type of spirit guide that mirrors significant ways of being or energies living in me for assisting me in this work and my life in general. In my SoulMentoring intentions I wrote,

The lion energy is a source of confidence in who I am, an understanding of the possibilities I possess, with the readiness to act or not act if called for. This is a sense of the solid ground beneath me despite what may be whirling about me either outside or within.

Hummingbird’s wisdom gives me access to the subtlety of a light touch; to know when to sit back and observe, wait, sense, and the ability to maneuver lightly with agility in all four dimensions! Hummingbird energy is a way of being embodied/incarnated with lightness. To dance the dance of life with joy, sorrow, chaos, passion, or whatever is called for. Hummingbird can dart in all directions or sit perfectly still. I also embrace the light that illuminates the dark with this energy – holding onto the hope of a spark while inhabiting the darkness.¹⁶⁷

As I heard myself speak my intentions for SoulMentoring to my mentors and fellow companions, I sensed an excitement and an assurance that I was on to something essential

¹⁶⁶ Sandra Pihowich, *PJP SoulMentoring Intentions 2018* (Bowen Island, B.C. 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

which put me in a state of receptivity for how this might unfold. Although I did not comprehend how at the time, I shared my sense that it was Trinity that would somehow be the way to realize the energies of Lion and Hummingbird in my spiritual companioning practice. In reflecting on this now I believe Lion and Hummingbird were making themselves known to me then as possible partners for trinitarian dancing in my SoulMentoring program, in being a spiritual companion, and in living a life that flows.

As I considered my earlier theological quest which was ***“How might I be fully present to my strengths while holding an attitude of humbleness,”*** I saw that the wisdom of Lion and Hummingbird were inviting me to experience a new solution to this quest. Lion is a representation for me of the groundedness and wise strength I desired to assert. Hummingbird wisdom shows me a new expression of humbleness. This new expression of humbleness was being able to sense if or when to dart back, sideways or under instead of forging ahead with an agenda or an idea. Hummingbird energy helps me perceive when to lean back out of the way of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, allowing for possibilities not yet seen to manifest. The humbleness of Hummingbird is also *light*. The following definitions of light pertain to the wisdom of my Hummingbird guide followed with descriptors of how this pertains to my Hummingbird’s lightness:

- The natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible – Hummingbird humbleness can allow for what is to be seen, for other things or people to come forward.
- Understanding of a problem or mystery; enlightenment; spiritual illumination by divine truth – Hummingbird enlightenment often comes when one stops striving and/or empties themselves of ego.

- To make something start burning; ignite – lightness of Hummingbird can create space for whatever fuel is present along with oxygen to ignite into a combustion of possibilities.
- A window or opening in a wall to let light in – Hummingbird humbleness creates openings.
- Illuminate – humbleness can allow what was mystery to be revealed.
- Not taking a situation, person, or event too seriously, adopting a humorous outlook – lightheartedness acknowledges human frailty, adds humour to an over-heavy situation and can put self and others at ease; keeps the heart and mind open.

The lightness of Hummingbird wisdom comes from an understanding of the Benedictine *conversatio morum*. Since life is changeable a light attitude, so as not to attach too firmly on any thing or state is conducive to more flow in life.

The way I have come to perceive them, Hummingbird and Lion guides communicate to me something similar to the affirming and denying principles from Bourgeault's Law of Three, a form of Trinity. Applying the Law of Three, Lion Wisdom could be the *affirming* principle, Hummingbird Wisdom the *denying*, with relationship as the *reconciling* principle. When Lion and Hummingbird are dancing with me (in relationship with me), the grounding of Lion empowers me to step out into a situation with presence, compassion, and power. Hummingbird presents the light of humble awareness and intuition to inform and equip me with how to navigate and when to employ the power of Lion wisdom. Lion's strength is also in play as a restraining force, to hold back when what is needed is space to allow for another person's wisdom and/or divine wisdom room to emerge. In this way the new arising that occurs is whatever

manifests from the interaction. As with *perichoresis* between the participants of the Trinity – Lion, Hummingbird, and I in a relationship of *perichoresis* enables moving out into the world manifesting more fully with love and compassion.

Likewise, Lion and Hummingbird can reverse their Law of Three roles. In this case Hummingbird is the *affirming* principle, the agent of action deftly darting about, seeking, and gathering using her navigational skills to plan, reveal, and carry out while Lion sits and gazes at the land from his perch taking in the terrain,¹⁶⁸ allowing for the action of Hummingbird, watching that all remains peaceful and in harmony, ready to spring into action when necessary. The latter case would be yet another role reversal where Lion is the affirming principle again. Therefore, like flow and *conversatio morum* Dynamic Trinitarian Flow is fluid.

The key to these ideas of Trinity, or Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, is *relationship*. These two energies or wisdoms must be in a constant dance of relationship, *perichoresis*, for the holy to manifest, or to use Bourgeault's phrase, for a new arising to be expressed. Without relationship between the Creator and the Created there can be no love. Perhaps relationship is the Holy Spirit of the doctrine of the Trinity, for relationship animates two participants in the same way that Jesus animated the disciples with the breath of the Holy Spirit:

Jesus said to them again [after being crucified, buried, and resurrected], "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jn 20: 21-22.

¹⁶⁸ This image of Lion was given to me in a dream. It is important to note that he is a male lion, not the female huntress of the species, which will be important later in this chapter. Paradoxically a male lion in nature exhibits the feminine principles of receiving, watching, surveying; however, he can use his power instantly when called for which engages the active masculine qualities. This description of Lion exemplifies the energy I hold and is similar to the Nine energy in the Enneagram.

There is an affinity between relationship, *perichoresis*, and interpenetration. It is the Speaker and the Word coming into relationship through the Breath that speaking is manifested, as Hibbs wrote. When the Breath brings the two into relationship, speech comes to life. This dynamic flows from, through, and with the three – Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. As Rohr and Morrell suggest this trinitarian relationship is like the dance of two. Without the dance they are merely two individuals, but the dance brings them into relationship with each other. Reaching out and responding to each other, they attune to the subtleties of each in creating the dance.

Stepping Onto the Dance Floor: The 5Rhythms©

The way I came to perceive and experience what I have named Dynamic Trinitarian Flow is the embodiment practice introduced to me by Lois Huey-Heck during my spiritual companioning training.¹⁶⁹ I have since shared this practice based on Gabriel Roth's 5Rhythms© many times with small groups. With her permission I have borrowed Huey-Heck's term of Embodied Prayer. In an excerpt from a flyer created for one of the groups I facilitated, I describe this practice I have used based on Huey-Heck and Roth's teachings:

This is a contemplative practice inspired by the work of Gabrielle Roth. She identified 5 archetypal Rhythms or energies experienced in music and in life. The practice of mindfully moving to the Rhythms can help us be more fully present in our bodies in a prayerful, and meditative state.

In practicing Embodied Prayer we move in "free form" allowing our incarnate [selves] to respond to the music in whatever way each person is comfortable. We may be conscious of the others in the room – both participants and Holy Presence - as we focus on our own body's experience of sacredness. Letting these rhythms "inhabit" us, and consciously giving gesture and movement to them expands our repertoire of movements – physical, mental, and spiritual.

¹⁶⁹ Lois Huey-Heck, *Pacific Jubilee Program: SoulGuiding 2016-18* (Bowen Island, B.C., 2016-2018).

With each of us being vulnerable in front of God and alongside each other, a deep prayer experience is possible.¹⁷⁰

This practice provides me access to my body's deep visceral sensing. I find myself expressing the music I hear instinctually without my figuring-out-mind interpreting it first. The music and expressions offer the opportunity for me to open in heartfelt and vulnerable ways that are not normally allowed for in our everyday living. The five archetypal rhythms Roth so wisely chose for this practice echo the rhythms of living. What follows is a detailed look at how I have so far come to understand the five rhythms of this practice for myself. With each description I have included a footnote containing a link leading to an example of music that demonstrates the rhythm discussed.

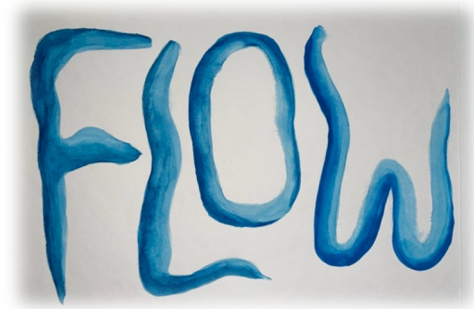


Image B: Watercolor by Sandra Pihowich

¹⁷¹ Moving to flow music can feel fluid, continuous, smooth, dynamic, and perhaps organic or earthy.¹⁷² The movement can be like flowing water, or wispy, floating clouds, circular, continuous motions, effortless. Flowing movement is an effortless and inviting rhythm, making it easy to enter the practice.

As a rhythm in life, flow can be experienced when one is captivated by a project of some kind and the ideas seem to come pouring out or through one's being, manifesting effortlessly in the same way that some composers describe how an inspired piece of

¹⁷⁰ Sandra Pihowich, *Embodied Prayer Flyer* (Ladner, B.C., 2019).

¹⁷¹ For music that exemplifies flow go to: Jenna Linville, "Quiet Streets," track 1 on *Pandemic Piano: Contagious Calm in the Midst of Chaos*, recorded 2020, YouTube streaming video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhFRXdbe4R0>.

¹⁷² Gabriel Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers: Movement as Spiritual Practice* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc. 1997), 51-52, 118, 159, 161, 180-181.

music comes to them. Some types of conversation can seem to flow. At times like these one can wonder how the time flows so quickly. Flow experienced as cessation of resisting can be when one surrenders to a notion, a person, or falling into the arms of God. Flow as surrender can call for courage to be vulnerable which is also what is required in practicing Embodied Prayer since we do not often move in this organic way with others or alone. With courage our hearts are open as we move into the wave that Roth calls the 5Rhythms©. She tells us, “The rhythm of *flowing* connects us to the flow of our individual energy, our base current...In *flowing* there are no separations or distinctions between things, there’s only continuous change.”¹⁷³

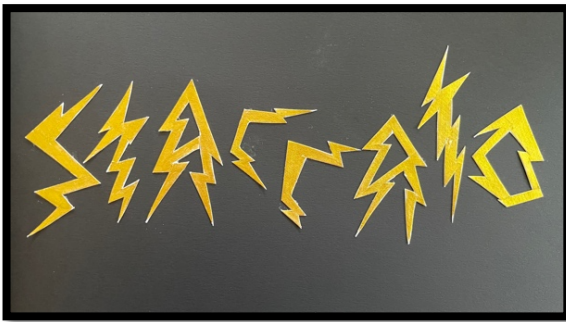


Image C: Watercolor and cut paper by Sandra Pihowich

the rest of the world.

In our lives this rhythm can be experienced in the energy of organizing and planning for a meeting, in a lively or fiery conversation with someone who disagrees with us, yanking out weeds, making a commitment to someone and following through with it, or moving systematically through a plan for accomplishing a task. This energy is about

¹⁷⁴ Staccato movements can be angular, fiery, and active. With strong, decisive, and percussive action from the heart, staccato promotes connection with

¹⁷³ Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers*, 51.

¹⁷⁴ For music that exemplifies staccato go to: OneRepublic, “Love Runs Out,” track 2 on *Native*, recorded 2013, YouTube streaming video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OWj0CiM8WU>.

carrying out actions, not just thinking about them. It is knowing one's limits and creating boundaries.¹⁷⁵

Staccato can help us to stay the course, but I have found that sometimes the staccato energy can show up by knocking me off my feet, catching me off guard, or stopping me in my tracks. In these times I find staccato vividly points out the ineffective way I am being or moving in my life. It can feel like walking into a wall or tripping over a root – I am stopped abruptly. Staccato that manifests this way points out a situation where I have become blinded to other possibilities as in attempting to continually fit a square peg into a round hole. These situations feel abrupt and staccato-like.¹⁷⁶



Image D: Collage & Watercolor by Sandra Pihowich

¹⁷⁷ Chaos movement needs little description. I find moving to chaos the most satisfying probably because of my tendency to contain my emotions, especially my anger. I do not want to be an angry, reactive person so when something has triggered anger in me I hold it back tightly. I have learned that anger, or any strong emotion, does not

dissipate in me unless expressed. Expressing this emotion bodily to strongly chaotic chaos music provides me with a safe and effective means to vent. Then I feel a release from the strength of the emotion, enabling me to think clearly about what to do next.

¹⁷⁵ Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers*, 83.

¹⁷⁶ Sandra Pihowich, Embodied Prayer Lent 2021, Word document.

¹⁷⁷ For music that exemplifies chaos go to: 2Cellos, “Vivaldi Storm,” track 7 on *Let There Be Cello*, composer Antonio Vivaldi, recorded 2018, accessed on YouTube streaming video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUBQPIk9Wh8>.

Chaos happens in life regardless of the planning and care we take to avoid it. The unpredictability of this energy is crucial to its chaotic nature. Chaotic situations are what make for great slapstick comedy: everything is going wrong and even attempted solutions just seem to add fuel to the problem. It can be amusing to watch slapstick comedy routines precisely because chaos is so familiar to us all. Chaos scenarios are relatable, but suffering in a chaotic situation can be excruciating. Circumstances such as when a young child runs loose in the clothing racks of a department store, a tornado or fire is out of control, a wild bird caught inside a room, or a deadly virus causing a worldwide pandemic are all types of chaos that we would rather do without. It is possible that chaos can be experienced as gleeful or liberating. My three-year-old daughter felt utter joy and freedom running through those clothing racks! However chaos is experienced, it is an integral part of the natural order of things because it helps to initiate evolutionary possibilities. Chaos is necessary to accommodate human beings' free choice – if there was a predetermined plan, free choice would not exist. Without the unhinging and shaking up of stagnation and life-limiting barriers, life could not move forward. This rhythm jars us loose of the notion that we can control the course of life by saying or doing the *right things* or being *good enough*. When the chaos music begins in embodied prayer, participants are invited to loosen their backbones, and everything connected to it. In doing so we can help to release what it is that blocks life from springing forth! We can break free from our illusions and practice the present moment of being physically in our

bodies. Taking the journey from “I can’t” to “I will” is chaos’ gateway to the big mind.¹⁷⁸



Image E: Watercolor by Sandra Pihowich

playful, dramatic, flamboyant, even sensual!¹⁸⁰ It is the rhythm of spiritual transformation.

This rhythm is evident in the energy of children playing outside on a playground, nature bursting out in springtime, the happy bubbly reunion of good friends catching up with exaggerated stories eliciting everything from giggles to gasps of disbelief. It can be a sensual realization of our physical body being an agent of re-creation. In lyrical we practice coming out of chaos by dancing the rebirth that emerges from chaos. Chaos shakes us up and shows us how little control we have. Then in lyrical we can realize the creative freedom to choose how we react. We are permitted to re-make ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We can create a new dance in lyrical. It helps us realize we are part of and connected to timeless rhythms such as the cycles of the moon, nature’s seasons, seasons of life, the dawn, day, dusk, and night.

¹⁷⁹ In lyrical the movements are light and ‘dancey.’ We can practice not taking ourselves too seriously in lyrical by being

¹⁷⁸ Gabrielle Roth, <https://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/what-are-the-5rhythms/> accessed Nov. 2017.

¹⁷⁹ For music that exemplifies lyrical go to: Charlie Puth, “Left, Right, Left,” track 8 on *Nine Track Mind*, recorded 2016, accessed on YouTube streaming video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-eg-bBCQJM>.

¹⁸⁰ Sandra Pihowich, “Lent Embodied Prayer 2021” (lecture notes for online workshop, March-April 2021).



Image F: Watercolor by Sandra Pihowich

into stops, and as we move and change our bodies carry stillness within.

The rhythm of stillness gives us the opportunity to practice good endings in a humble and mindful way, connected to ourselves. It is the accumulation of all the other rhythms coming to rest. In life we experience stillness in endings such as the exhaustion one feels after a long hard cry, a sleeping child after a day full of learning, the end of a movie when the credits slowly move up and off the screen, the space between the notes in music, meditation, or the ending of a life. Nothing is not stillness, for stillness moves in and around us. In our breathing in... and breathing out... there is stillness *and* there is movement. Our bodies can be vessels moving in the stillness, and/or vessels of stillness moving. I identify the stillness rhythm with the biblical notion of Jesus as the vessel of divine love poured out for us, and in doing so showing us how to pour out love for others. It is in the pouring out of love into stillness that we are paradoxically filled again. This is how we can know we have found our calling, deep meaning, a connection with the Sacred One - because we are re-energized by the doing of it.¹⁸³ Stillness is the energy of

181 In stillness the body can shift through various shapes, holding at times and letting go in another moment. The attention is drawn inward, awake, and aware.¹⁸² We can move in slow motion in this rhythm settling

¹⁸¹ For music that exemplifies stillness go to: Bobby McFerrin, “The 23rd Psalm,” track 12 on *Medicine Music*, recorded 1990, accessed on YouTube streaming video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn2zKKhhF3I>.

¹⁸² Roth, *Maps to Ecstasy*, 33.

¹⁸³ Roth, <https://www.5rhythms.com/gabrielle-roths-5rhythms/what-are-the-5rhythms/>.

Lion when sitting on the precipice surveying the land, ensuring all is well. It is this stillness I felt during the silent day of companioning, the stillness of being empty of ego, of expectation, of self-criticism, which made room to be filled with holy contentment. At this point, aware of and embodying the stillness we settle into a contemplative meditation practice of sitting or Centering Prayer. As Roth declares “the fastest way to still your mind is to move your body.”¹⁸⁴

An interesting aspect of the 5Rhythms© is that within one piece of music more than one rhythm can often be discerned, just as in the rhythm of life we can find there is complexity within a single event. For example, in listening to Nina Simone’s *My Baby Just Cares for Me*,¹⁸⁵ you may be able to feel the lyrical along with the prominent staccato sensation. Some people may sense rhythms that others cannot within the same piece of music, and from one mood to another you may find rhythms you did not feel previously and/or the reverse. There seems to be general agreement among most practitioners concerning which rhythms are heard or at least are most prominent, yet there are differences and sensitivities in what people hear.

Learning to Dance by Heart

Embodied Prayer is the practice by which I was able to enter the dance floor of this trinitarian experience. When I enter the Embodied Prayer space, I find that an intelligence other than my concrete, logically thinking mind takes over. I have come to

¹⁸⁴ Roth, *Sweat Your Prayers*, 20.

¹⁸⁵ To hear this song go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZS7iKdRo5Q>.

know this as dancing by *heart*, with heart intelligence. The format and content of my training program helped bring participants to this place of heart and presence. Along with the teachings of Embodied Prayer, the entire cohort was steeped in many meaningful teachings and practices which effectively primed us for moving into the next stage of the training. Some of these teachings were:

- The 5Rhythms© (or Embodied Prayer)
- The Practice of Presence
- Ancient Wisdom traditions

The Practice of Presence involves repetitive movements done simultaneously with chanting or simple singing. The movements change slightly, and the result is a bit like rubbing the belly while patting the head: it takes concentration which served us well in developing the capacity to be present while being aware on more than one level.

Ancient Christian wisdom such as that of the 3rd century desert mothers and fathers, along with Christian Hermeticism, were drawn together in the program with early Sufi teachings to nurture the roots of contemplative life we were growing.¹⁸⁶ One aspect of these teachings involving the territory of the heart has become especially significant for me. The heart referred to by these wisdom teachers is not the seat of our affective emotions to which we so often fall victim to, instead the heart is viewed as

an organ for the perception of divine purpose and beauty. It is our antenna, so to speak, given to us to orient us toward the divine radiance and to synchronize our

¹⁸⁶ The Christian roots of spiritual companionship can be found in the teachings of the desert mothers and fathers of the 3rd century. Christian Hermeticism (as recorded by Valentin Tomberg and interpreted by Lois Huey-Heck) is part of a Christian wisdom tradition which provides spiritual exercises in learning the art of meditation, study, and spiritual effort to engage the deep inner work. Although not Christian, Sufi master Kabir Helminski draws from his tradition's wisdom teachings in explaining that the subtle capacities of the heart go beyond the intellect to include wisdom, intuition, aesthetic, and creative faculties similar to that of 3rd century Christian understandings of heart. These contemplative wisdoms, and more, provided the spiritual underpinning for me to learn to "dance by heart."

being with its more subtle movements. The heart is not for personal expression but for divine perception.¹⁸⁷

I can now recognize that my capacity for divine perception was precisely what had been growing within me since early on in my PJP training and came to flower on my companioning day of intense presence.



Image G: Photo by Sandra Pihowich

Not long into my training I was increasingly experiencing God's presence in the things around me communicating messages for my wholeness. Sometimes I perceived aspects of myself being mirrored back to me, such as occurred with this beautiful black slug (Image

G). Coming upon this little creature I was overcome with affection at its beauty and the intense joy it seemed to be engaged in while gorging on this dandelion amongst an entire field full of dandelions. Using a process akin to *lectio divina* (which I will develop more later), I saw this little being as a reflection of my own tendency to be sluggish, something for which I had condemned myself harshly. Looking lovingly at that little black slug I began to appreciate this aspect of myself as one that appreciates and savours, the contemplative part of myself. In the ancient wisdom tradition's understanding of the heart,¹⁸⁸ the encouragement is to be liberated from being acted upon by strong emotions and thus from letting ourselves be carried away in the story of past wounds or a romantic

¹⁸⁷ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 34.

¹⁸⁸ Ancient wisdom of the Christian desert mothers and fathers is also seen in Christian Hermeticism that was taught in the PJ program. Also known as the perennial philosophy (Aldous Huxley) or perennial wisdom (Richard Rohr, and others), the wisdom tradition is not unique to any specific religion or system of thought but shares common concepts.

notion. Instead, when these stories trigger a flood of emotion, the teaching is to feel and notice what is going on in our bodies, which brings us into the present. In these situations, focusing and identifying the feeling helps one to see what *is*. This helps prevent getting lost in various stories such as “she hates me,” “I’m a good teacher,” or whatever has been brought into our attention out of a wound from our past. Admiring the little slug on the dandelion helped me appreciate the “sluggish” part of me. The story I told myself that “sluggishness” made me inadequate was not true. I can be released from this false story by replacing it with the knowledge that my tendency for *pondering* (not sluggishness) is a yearning for contemplative being. The phrase, “gorging in a field of glory,” came to me from this slug in a field of dandelions, meaning that even in a seemingly mundane slug and dandelion there is glory to be found.

After the slug, there was a hummingbird, raven, lion (from a dream), heron, a gorgeous green bug, and many more creatures that each had something to show and teach me about the divine incarnate within the world and myself. This way of relating to the world is what Clark Moustakas identified as the heuristic process: “an unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness.”¹⁸⁹ Meister Eckhart’s phrase captures this contemplative way of being for me,

The eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye is one eye, and one sight, and one knowledge, and one love.¹⁹⁰

When asked at the time by one of my PJP contemporaries just what it was I was seeing in these creatures with whom I formed relationships with, the answer tumbled out of my

¹⁸⁹ Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Meister Eckhart, translated by Claud Field, *Sermons of Meister Eckhart* (e-artnow, 2022), 21, Kindle.

mouth without me being cognizant of it: “The Majesty of Divine Light!” I can acknowledge now that this phrase came straight from my heart intelligence, the centre of knowing that perceives things divine or sacred. By seeing the world through the eyes of my heart and engaging with it, I am in relationship with the holy, incarnate everywhere. In the fecund state of “seeing by heart” I find myself dancing by heart, and this dancing by heart lead to my encounter with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow that day at Rivendell Centre.

All these experiences at the PJP residencies, as well as my own efforts and intentions were “weaving the basket of the heart.”¹⁹¹ This phrase describes what occurs when the three centres of knowing come into relationship, head, heart, and gut (body or intuition). I was becoming more aware of the depth below the surface of things, an attunement with sacred beauty, a sensitivity to The Majesty of Divine Light. In seeing with the eye of the heart, I was perceiving patterns and making connections beyond the surface. Going deeper, I recognized that sacred presence is all around. The heart instrument that recognizes this sacred presence out in the world also sees it within me, which can lead to the integration of head, heart, and body wisdom. As a being of flesh and spirit woven together in the basket of the heart, I was able to *dance by heart* with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. At the time of the PJP residency while companioning those five dear people, my logically thinking mind did not fully comprehend that heart intelligence was operating, but something in my body and heart centre at the time quickened as I recognized the truth being expressed.

¹⁹¹ Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 92.

Choosing the Music

Eventually I moved into the SoulMentoring program of my Pacific Jubilee education. It was during the third residency that I had the experience of what I now name Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. We had returned to what had become the warmly familiar and intimate setting of the beautiful Rivendell Retreat Centre on Bowen Island, cradled on a hilltop among the trees, rocks, and other native inhabitants. The third day of this residency was a day of silence for the participants. Each of them would receive spiritual companionship provided by their assigned program companion. Being one of those program companions meant I would be hosting five spiritual accompaniment sessions in one day. I could feel the anxiety within me as I struggled to stay grounded with the awareness of what I was being asked to do. Being a fresh graduate from the training program, I had yet to accumulate much experience with one-on-one spiritual accompaniment. I walked a thin line between a state of calm openness, yielding to mystery, and that of a nagging feeling of inadequacy. I refused to allow the old broken record playing in my head to push me off balance: “Why do you think you can do this work, Sandy?!” Instead, I went about focusing my efforts on preparing the small space I was provided for our sessions with a candle, matches, two chairs spaced just so (angled slightly for the purpose of being inviting but not intimidating), tissue available but not obvious, and finally a book at hand with sacred readings to begin with if called for.

In the time before each participant arrived, I felt a desire to play the music of flow. I felt sure *flow* would help me enter the sacredness of these sessions and bring me into full presence. I offered an invocation to God to accompany the sessions as I allowed my body to move organically, soulfully, prayerfully to the music. I was embodying the

act of offering or surrendering myself into the arms of the Holy. I let go of my thoughts around how I would *do* this session and the fear of what *might* happen, and instead focused on the music and how my body wanted to move to it. What I experienced in doing this was a calm yet viscerally heightened sense of aesthetic awareness. I had a feeling of being present during those sessions in a way I had not experienced until then: “The benefit of that physical manifestation of FLOW in me allowed me to keep that energy present in sitting with each person,” (personal journal Oct. 30th, 2019).

Before each person came for their session I would again enter into *flow* where I sensed Spirit invoked, allowing me to let go into movement with body, mind and soul. The flowing music received each person as they came from their silence to meet with me and helped carry me into our session together. The time seemed to move seamlessly from session to session. By the end of the day I was in amazement at what had occurred. I had never felt so present for such a sustained amount of time. The “I” that normally gets in the way of my essential self relaxed and leaned back out of the way during this day. I was completely present for each companionee who came to meet with me, and the time flew by.

Debriefing with my mentor later, I was unable to put into words what had happened; I even had difficulty remembering specifics of the sessions. It was as if I had been in a different space or dimension. Surely my mentor must have been alarmed meeting with me later wondering just what had occurred, especially since not only was I not able to verbalize my experience but I was overwhelmed with tears of emotion. Since this experience, I discovered the work of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who co-founded what he calls the science of flow in which he has recognized and identified

experiences such as the one I just described.¹⁹² He describes states of flow as situations many have experienced when self-consciousness disappears, one is completely focused, challenges and skills are balanced, and time seems distorted (such as the feeling of time flying by). He labels these times *flow experiences*, and activities which induce these experiences as *flow activities*. Unlike most of the flow experiences Csikszentmihalyi describes, I was not left with an easily measurable product or result to give me any outside feedback for confirmation of this event. The only evidence of my experience was my subjective self-observations and a few comments from those I companioned.

Eventually, I was able to recall the sessions from notes I had jotted down. I knew I had experienced something deeply sacred. However, my inability to adequately verbalize what had happened and the lack of significant empirical evidence caused me to question my experience. For the rest of the residency, and to some extent even the rest of the SoulMentoring program, I doubted myself. D. N. Stern describes what I believe was true for me in this situation: “that language can have an alienating effect on self-experience when what is experienced at the level of core and intersubjective relatedness is not able to be verbalized.”¹⁹³ Reading Stern’s words affirmed my experience as valid. Through this research I have come to understand this body-based experience was connecting me to something within my tacit domain - an experience, or experiences of holiness that I had much earlier, perhaps even in my pre-verbal life before I came to conceive of the divine as only outside of myself. At a core level I was cognizant of the divine indwelling. Being influenced by attitudes suspicious towards abstract concepts

¹⁹² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York, New York: Hachette Book Group, 1997), 32 & 34, Kindle.

¹⁹³ Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, 62.

and mystical ways of knowing as I grew up, I learned to tuck away relating to the life around me in a direct and mystical way. I came upon evidence of this early way of being in a little worn notebook from my early childhood in which, written with my new and unpolished printing, are the words, “God is love,” written repeatedly on the pages. True, these words were most likely echoing something I had heard, yet they obviously made a significant impression on my young self to record. Spirit manifested as whirling feelings in my little child belly while I swung up to the heavens on our backyard swing singing, from deep in my soul, “the hills are alive with the sound of music!” I classify these memories as aesthetic manifestations - encounters with the holy. The inability to empirically prove any of these experiences as God only assures for me that I was and am in the realm of sacred reality, holy mystery, experiences of God.

Two Left Feet

For the remainder of the SoulGuiding residency, I was immersed in the role of facilitating the participants as we all learned to navigate a new peer mentoring process. My responsibilities in the program became my focus and I lost a real sense of that grounded presence, the sacred dynamic flow that I remembered it as. Self-doubt prevented me from entering that flowing dance with the same effortlessness, yet deep down I knew the experience had been sacred. By the time the Pacific Jubilee program ended, the self-doubt became a lens of negativity. This lens kept me from flowing freely into full presence and coloured how I saw myself as a spiritual companion, confirming my feelings of inadequacy in this work. Even positive comments given to me of how I conducted myself were transposed negatively in my mind. Under this seeming spell of

pessimism, I misinterpreted a tremendous compliment that was given to me at the end of the program. I was told the Magician archetype (from Christian Hermeticism) was at times alive in me. According to Huey Heck, the Magician represents

the state of concentration without effort i.e. the state of consciousness where the centre which directs the will has descended (in reality it is elevated) from the brain (figuring out mind) to the rhythmic system, where the “oscillations of the mental substance” are reduced to *silence* and *rest*, no longer hindering concentration.¹⁹⁴

This seems to be describing the state of flow that Csikszentmihalyi has documented. At the time of the comment I had forgotten this Hermetic teaching and, in my suspicious mood, jumped to the conclusion that I was being accused of magically deceiving them into believing I could do the work but not carry it out. However, in fact, this comment indicated I had truly been seen, for embodying the Magician archetype was a way of naming what I had experienced in dancing with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. The Magician is the first and fundamental principle of the deep inner work of Christian Hermeticism which can be represented by the method:

- 1) Learn first concentration without effort
- 2) Transform work into play
- 3) Make every commitment you bear easy and every responsibility you carry light.¹⁹⁵

In my attempts to “transform work into play” – to find the dance in my accompaniment practice again - I turned to my guides, Lion and Hummingbird. My persistent efforts in doing this frustrated a friend who had journeyed closely with me throughout the program. He exclaimed, “You are not a lioness! You are not a

¹⁹⁴ Lois Huey-Heck, “A Work in Progress based on Valentin Tomberg’s work on Christian Hermeticism” (paper, PJP SoulGuiding, Bowen Island, B.C., March 16, 2018), 14.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 4.

hummingbird! These are ideals. Just be content with being the chick hummingbird. You are a learner,” (personal journal July 21, 2020). My friend had misunderstood what these power animals meant to me, and it shocked me to hear these words stated so adamantly. The misinterpretation of my spirit guides and the directness of these words shook me. However, the comment clarified for me what I was *not* attempting. I was not trying to be *Lioness* or *Hummingbird*. To begin with, my Lion guide was male not female. Lion and Hummingbird had come to me as aspects of what was already a part of me. I was not Lion or Hummingbird. Those energies both lived within me. They are part of who I am, latent or active. When I heard him say I was a learner, my negative lens reinterpreted this as being inadequate. Mid-way through the mentoring program, the mentors had given my fellow companions and me the title of “adepts.” We were seen as having become adept at this work. Therefore, my “figuring out mind” reasoned, if I was merely a learner then I was not adept after all and therefore failed my mentorship. I could not see that being called a learner is not a criticism. To be adept requires the ability to continually adapt as situations change, to be proficient at learning from mistakes as well as successes along the way. Unwillingness to adapt and *learn* generally results in one who is authoritarian or dogmatic. As I stated in chapter one, I am averse to dogmatism and so I wholeheartedly embrace being a learner today!

It is painful to re-live these situations of my own making, but I share them here to demonstrate that being brought to a place of emptiness was how I eventually came to dance with Trinity again. The feedback I twisted to fit my self-condemnation had the effect of causing a type of chaos in me – I was shaken, angry, hurt even. The feeling I had not lived up to my potential grew in me. I felt physically and emotionally exposed,

my flaws laid to bare. In hindsight, I see that this turmoil was the catalyst that eventually shook my feet free from the mud of self-condemnation in which they were stuck. There is nothing like chaos to help rearrange what has been immobilized. When what has been restrained is finally released, an emptiness is created, a space for holy possibilities to come into play – or put another way, a kenotic dance floor on which to dance! In my emotionally exposed state, I was not a *good* spiritual director, nor a *good* program companion, not even a *good* person. I was none of the labels with which I identified. I simply became Sandy, my essential self, stripped of ego identification – *kenosis*. Now there was room for holy dance partners.

This was an unpleasant process, but I was committed to letting go of dance steps that were awkward, to remembering forgotten ones, and learning new, life-giving steps. This process of walking through dark confusion and insecurity intentionally to a place of enlightenment is one that became clear to me through the way of the Hermit, another archetype in Tomberg's Hermeticism. The Hermit is a place of synthesis and reconciliation between two antinomies. The Hermit walks on the earth with lantern in one hand, a staff in the other, wrapped in a mantel. The mantel represents the willingness and ability to be in deep discernment while being with uncertainty. One might see the mantel of the Hermit as the stability to which St. Benedict's vow points, to stay the course assured of God's enduring presence. The lantern is symbolic of human intelligence in concert with Divine intelligence. According to this teaching our trusting, reasoning, thinking mind, in cooperation with the Divine, provides just enough light to

see the next step. The staff represents security, questioning, feeling for the ground before we take the next metaphorical step.¹⁹⁶

So the Hermit walks...steady, rhythmic, spirit & matter...
This is the place of the union of head & heart
The endeavour to draw light from darkness
The territory of the heart
The terrain of peacemaking
The realm of love.¹⁹⁷

Throughout the process that began with my first experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, through the dark void filled with stumbling over self-doubt, to the chaos of misunderstanding, nine months had passed. Nine months of gestation and labour that gave birth to what became my conscious awareness of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow (personal journal July 29th, 2020). Although the labour was difficult, I treasured that experience on Bowen Island and pondered it in my *heart* - my organ of divine perception - for those nine months. It reminded me of a time when my, then, United Methodist pastor quoted a scripture to me to describe how he saw my participation in his Bible study: “And Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19 [New Revised Standard Version]).

Although the honest comments given to me at the end of the mentoring program were difficult, I am grateful for them. Without them I may not have been propelled into this journey of research and discernment. Through wrangling with my ego, journaling about my frustrations and sorrow, meeting with my spiritual companion, and, of course, physically dancing out, in, and through the practice of Embodied Prayer, I gradually came to a place where I could step back and see more clearly. Throughout this

¹⁹⁶ Huey-Heck, “Meeting the Hermit” (handout, PJP SoulGuiding, Bowen Island, B.C., 2019).

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

discernment, I had great and dear *anam caras* (soul friends) who were essential for this journey, my fellow soul companions from the PJP.

Lectio Divina: Dancing with Aesthetic Devotion

Julie Elliot, the first program companion I encountered in my PJP training, gave me a suggestion to help me progress with my first assignment which eventually became the vital method that brought me into relationship with the shiny black slug and all the other many creatures who fostered my ability to see with the eyes of my heart.



Image H: Watercolor by Sandra Pihowich

Julie invited me to notice what was drawing my attention on my daily walks. For example, I caught sight of a dead leaf from the previous year that had been speared and was being lifted by a new green and growing shoot (Image H). This became a meaningful metaphor of the old being lifted and carried by new vibrant growth. I photographed this and other images and came home to paint and meditate on them. I soon realized what I was doing was a type of *lectio divina*¹⁹⁸ in which the text I was reading was the natural world. Author Christine Valters Paintner describes this as a type of *lectio divina*, “to listen deeply for the stirring of the holy in the sacred texts around us.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ *Lectio Divina* (divine or sacred reading) is an ancient contemplative prayer practice developed by the Benedictine’s with the intention of gradually opening to God through the scriptures in four steps of 1) *lectio* – reading, 2) *meditatio* – reflection, 3) *oratio* -response or prayer, 4) *contemplatio* - rest or contemplation. See E. Glen Hinson, “Meditating on the Word: The Mind of Christ,” in *Companions in Christ: A Small-Group Experience in Spiritual Formation* edited by Dawson, Gonzalez, Hinson, Job, Thompson, & Wright (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2006), 86-88.

¹⁹⁹ Christine Valters Paintner, *Water, Wind, Earth & Fire* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2010), 37, Kindle.

Lectio divina viewed in this way is a practice in aesthetic devotion, whether it is the ‘aesthetics’ of a piece of sacred writing, nature, music, or visual art. My use of the word aesthetics here comes from the methodology of expressive arts where aesthetic response is seen as

our human capacity to be touched and moved by beauty. This is a response of bodily origin happening in occurrence with the imagination. It is sensual, imaginal and often surprising, whether pleasurable or painful. The aesthetic response can be profound, soul stirring and breathtaking. Aesthetic responses, says Knill, are deep responses that have the capacity to open doors to the soul.²⁰⁰

The beauty referred to in this type of aesthetic response is not culture’s consideration of what is beautiful. Instead it is that which offers food for the soul, that enlivens and intensifies our awareness of an experience. *Lectio divina* and an aesthetic response require coming into relationship with whatever it is that is engaging us. This sacred relationship is the dance with Trinity, with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow.

During the explication for this research, a challenging job offer came to me. Once again it was Julie, from my spiritual companioning training, who brought me this invitation. The job was to spiritually companion four people on their silent retreat for *three* full days – three days of four sessions consecutively, a challenge, indeed. Although part of me began to resist this invitation, my body immediately knew I was being given another opportunity to stand posed at the edge of my capacity. This time I was accompanied by a cognitive and physical awareness of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, so with excitement and some trepidation I accepted this job and while carrying it out I had yet another meaningful *lectio divina* with nature that was also an aesthetic devotion.

What follows is the story of how this unfolded.

²⁰⁰ Sally Atkins and Melia Snyder, *Nature-Based Expressive Arts Therapy: Integrating the Expressive Arts and Ecotherapy* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 71, Kindle.

Mushroom Messengers: A Story of Aesthetic Devotion



Image 1: Photo by Sandra Pihowich

The fall of 2021 brought a combination of humidity and cool temperatures that created just the right conditions for fungi to thrive more so than in any of the seven years I had been living in the Pacific Northwest. In the same way mushrooms swiftly erupt from the soil, a lovely, albeit challenging, invitation surprisingly popped up. It involved an opportunity to spiritually accompany four individuals over three days during their silent retreat. Was this an echo from the past? Déjà vu? My last opportunity to companion at a silent retreat had been a compelling experience of dancing with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. Since then, I had gained some experience accompanying small groups and some one-on-one sessions, but nothing had equaled that powerful encounter with the Holy. This time, however, I would be conducting *twelve* one-on-one spiritual companioning sessions all within three days, which just so happened to equal the total number of sessions I had hosted over the entire previous year! I eventually accepted this challenge, and it became an opportunity to be emptied of what ‘gets in the way’ (*kenosis*) allowing Dynamic Trinitarian Flow to take the lead in each session I hosted.

On my lunch breaks, I would take a break from the intensity of holding space for my companions and go walking in the forest and on the beach near my home. I regularly take these walks and will often practice a form of *lectio divina* or devotion to aesthetics in which I attempt to ‘read’ or perceive the divine in the natural world. My

intention is to be in relationship with what I encounter. While out walking, I will open my senses to subtle aesthetics. Usually my eyes, ears, and skin notice messages of sacredness but often my sense of smell is activated by the marine air, sweet cedar boughs, or the sting of smoke from someone warming their home with a log fire. In summer months I fully engage my tastebuds in the pleasures of blueberries, raspberries, and the ever-abundant blackberries.

During my lunch break that day, which was particularly gloomy and moist, a crowded cluster of mushrooms (Image I) were gifted to me. These guys absolutely lit up the little plot of earth they inhabited in the dark, rainy forest. It was as if they were calling out to me, “Look at us!” very pleased with themselves, like a bunch of scruffy, wild kids with scrapes and dirty faces. How could I turn away from these delightful beings? So I knelt down and got to know them. A word I had recently learned from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, came to me. *Puhpowee* is an Anishinabe word for “the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight.”²⁰¹ Yes, I thought this was a wonderfully descriptive expression for this force. Saying this word seems the very auditory representation of that precise energy. Until encountering these plump little bright beings, I had little appreciation for the need of the word *puhpowee*! I am grateful for the wisdom of the Anishinabe people for giving name to this very specific action. Aware of fungi’s ability to seemingly spring up overnight like this, I was struck with the metaphor this little group communicated to me.

The synchronicity of how these fungi surprisingly appeared on my walk in the same manner as the companioning invitation emerged was not lost on me. Their

²⁰¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 49.

appearance pointed to a force I felt pushing up from within me almost instantaneously as I heard this new request to companion on that silent retreat. A very familiar little voice in the back of my mind likes to whisper demeaning messages when I'm feeling insecure about spiritual companioning: "You can't do this work Sandy! Who do you think you are?" However, the voice from the tough little puffballs was stronger than my ego voice. It came from deep in the ground of my being through roots that I have been cultivating for some time - much like the extensive mycelium system that was supporting this little group of fungi laying in the rich moist soil of the forest. I recognized that my own roots were being fed through the ground of my spiritual practices, relationships I have nurtured with soul friends, mentors, fellow companions, dreams, as well as the presence of God. This different voice had been rising up within me for some time, but suddenly - *puhpowee*, with the appearance of these mushrooms, an embodied knowing was communicated to me. I knew I was dancing with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow in my companioning sessions again, present in a way I hadn't experienced since that other powerful silent retreat day of companioning almost exactly two years previous. This knowing I was feeling was not confidence, for I have known the painful experience of falling from a position where I felt confidently certain that I knew best! No, this was a grounded presence fully aware that being in my humanness I *would* stumble, and there would be ground full of roots and wisdom to break my fall. Embracing my inner toddler, I realized that when I fall, I can choose to get right back up and perhaps try a new way to walk or simply take a pause. Did you notice the scrapes on those little puffballs (Image I)? They were perfectly imperfect, yet they shone out in the forest and shouted their glee of being to me! What a wonderful message of heartfelt imperfection they are.

At the end of the week I went back into the forest to look for the puffball messengers. I was eager to see their bright shining faces again and thank them, but they weren't to be found... Then I understood. I was not to go back to what was. I had found a new *dynamic* way, holding the memory of the spunky puffball mushrooms in my heart. Just as I turned to go I heard a loud *whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!* It was my old friend Raven. In another place on the journey, Raven wisdom taught me that it is she who holds the *truth* of the stories I tell myself. This time Raven had not come to point out the fictions I might be trying to tell myself with her coarse caw-cawing as she had in the past. This time only the sound of Raven's wings whooshing on nothing but air was audible. She was affirming that I could soar on with the new true story I now held within my heart.

Perichoresis: The Sacred Dance of Spiritual Accompaniment

Continuing with the dancing metaphor of my story I return to the ancient Greek word *perichoresis* to emphasize how intimately Trinity contributes to my spiritual accompaniment practice. As I showed in the literature review, *perichoresis* has stimulated controversy due to its various interpretations. However, the translation I first came upon is what prompted me to know Trinity as dynamic and integral to spiritual companionship. This is *perichoresis* as divine motion, movement round about, mutually abiding, and self-giving relationship, and most significantly *perichoresis* as dance. In my literature review, I asked whether the dynamic fluidity of spiritual accompaniment could be a manifestation of the *perichoresis* of Trinity. My answer now is yes, I believe trinitarian *perichoresis* is present in the practice of spiritual accompaniment whether it is

engaged or not. As I testified to earlier in this chapter, I experienced Dynamic Trinitarian Flow during sessions, within myself as spiritual companion, and as companionee. My awareness of this divine *perichoresis* subsides and flows as I companion new people with different concerns and experiences, and as my capacity fluctuates. Knowing I have experienced the sacred flow of God's active presence with me, within me, and around me is comforting and exhilarating especially when I enter a situation that stretches me as spiritual accompaniment does.

As I bring together the final pages of this chapter I have realized Dynamic Trinitarian Flow is not just within myself, my companionees, and my spiritual accompaniment practice, but within all that there is and beyond. This awareness of God is more intimate than my own breath, the space between the atoms of my body, and the energy moving the quarks within the atoms of my cells. Expressing the intimate presence of God has become increasingly difficult to communicate as each time I try I see its inadequacy. These efforts seem to be, paradoxically, both cataphatic and apophatic in conveying God – meaning that each expression conveys something of God's nearness (cataphatic) yet is also not adequately God (apophatic). I realize I am not alone in recognizing this, however, during this research into my relationship with God, dancing with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow has become an even deeper experience of this sacred intimacy.

CHAPTER 5 ...AND THE DANCE GOES ON TO THE RHYTHM OF THE HEART

The Methodist Quadrilateral

Relationship is a fundamental aspect within Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. As I pondered how to begin concluding this work I thought back to when I first became aware of God's desire for a personal relationship with me which I recalled occurred through the teachings of the United Methodist Church. I will be ever grateful for this teaching, and much more from Methodism, as well as my Methodist church family who helped to foster the new roots and shoots that contributed to my spiritual education, eventually leading to this research. To summarize and reflect on the validity of my experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow I will apply the discernment process I learned from Methodism: the quadrilateral. The quadrilateral is a four-fold process of discernment or theological reflection which looks to 1) scripture, 2) tradition, 3) reason, and finally 4) experience for understanding and clarity.

Scripture:

Although the word 'Trinity' does not literally appear in scripture, a "deeper understanding of trinitarian mystery from historical, ecumenical and philosophical perspectives,"²⁰² has come out of conversations between theologians and anthropologists who study ancient biblical documents which have been more recently unearthed. Through interdisciplinary cooperation, these documents have not only brought new

²⁰² Maspero & Wozniak, ed., *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology*, 73, Kindle.

insights but have also shed new light on the translation of existing documents. Thus, even the Bible, often considered the definitive word of God, is influenced by *conversatio morum*, or at least our understanding of it is changing. Aleksandar Santrac writes that it is precisely through the biblical framework that a new expression of Trinity may arise. He, along with many other theologians both past and present, find examples in the Bible of a triune, relational, and mysterious God who *is* love, yearning for our salvation through mysterious triune endeavours.²⁰³ St. Augustine is one of these theologians who suggests that the verse, “for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), supports the case for a trinitarian God since *love* can only exist where there is a *being who loves*, and *that which is loved*, thus, God (love) is three in relationship.²⁰⁴ Divine wisdom (Sophia, the great Cosmic Dancer) as “more mobile than any motion” (Ws 7:24) points to the validity of my experience of Dynamic (constant change, activity) Trinitarian Flow (smooth, continuous, effortless, copious). Anne Hunt has presented her convincing exegesis explaining the power of Trinity comes through the biblical concept of the paschal mystery. The driving force of the Trinity (according to Hunt and Bourgeault) is loving relationship. Loving relationship is the only means by which Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension are made possible.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Santrac, “Three I know not what,” 5.

²⁰⁴ William F. Rusch, translator/editor, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1980), 128, Kindle.

²⁰⁵ Hunt, “The Trinity Through Paschal Eyes,” 472-490, Kindle.

Tradition:

God as Trinity is itself a traditional concept. My research led me to discover the extensive support that exists in the tradition of Christianity for alternative deliberations on the Trinity. The very first imagining of a triune God (that we are aware of) came out of discussions offering examples, and metaphors for attempts to express the nature of God. Gregory of Nyssa himself, one of the first to contemplate the Trinity, stated that Trinity was but one understanding of the divine.²⁰⁶ Pierce Taylor Hibbs continues the tradition of pondering Trinity in his metaphor of God as speaker, speech and the breath carrying the speech. My own Christian tradition of the United Church of Canada explains that although its members are not required to adhere to a creed or doctrine, it does have a statement of faith that affirms

With the Church through the ages,
we speak of God as one and triune:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
We also speak of God as
Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer
God, Christ, and Spirit
Mother, Friend, and Comforter
Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,
and in other ways that speak faithfully of
the One on whom our hearts rely,
the fully shared life at the heart of the universe.²⁰⁷

The different names of Trinity presented within this faith statement seem to endorse alternative expressions of the trinitarian God as I have done in this paper. The tradition that identifies a divine *perichoretic* relationship within Trinity indicates a movement, interdependence, and dynamics that all describe Dynamic Trinitarian Flow.

²⁰⁶ Sahinidou, "Christological Perichoresis," 553.

²⁰⁷ *We Cannot Keep from Singing: Images from A Song of Faith/ A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada* (Toronto, ON: United Church Publishing House, 2007), 24.

The traditional vows of St. Benedictine provided me support for exploring Trinity as Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. Obedience and/or listening kept me searching, open, curious, and receptive to this divine manifestation. Stability, through honouring my spiritual practices, carried me during the confusing and erratic times of fleshing out this experience and in discerning how to coherently communicate it. *Conversatio morum* has provided me with the permission to trust in a new and fluid means to be with God and helps me to be conscious of embracing a state of *kenosis*, especially in times when I find my figuring-out mind is stuck in a particular way of seeing or being.

Reason:

As opposed to looking to provide a reason for a particular experience or idea, this step of the quadrilateral is used to determine the *reasonableness* of a concept, encounter, reflection, etc. It could be argued that gauging the reasonableness of a mystical experience is illogical; however, the methodology I have used for this inquiry supports the validity of personal, mystical experience. As you may recall, autoethnographies “are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding.”²⁰⁸ Dynamic Trinitarian Flow has helped me to expand and deepen my capacity to offer the art of spiritual accompaniment which I hope will contribute to the broader understanding of this spiritual practice.

Considering that many theologians, mystics, and more have explored the mystery that is the triune God in varied ways, I feel well supported in dancing with God the Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, especially considering the mystical intent of the doctrine

²⁰⁸ Sparkes, “Autoethnography and Narratives of Self,” 21.

of the Trinity from its beginning.²⁰⁹ Mystic Teresa of Avila envisioned the soul as an interior crystal castle to illustrate her process of moving toward union with God. My exploration of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow is similarly creative, using movement as a means of encountering the divine. It is reasonable to ponder that God who moves over the waters (Gn 1:2) and speaks out of a whirlwind (Jb 38:1) could also be God who dances. Further, it seems reasonable to imagine God, Trinity, or Dynamic Trinitarian Flow participates in Embodied Prayer (the 5Rhythms© that led me to Dynamic Trinitarian Flow), especially since not only my experience, detailed in this writing, but the experiences of many others whom I know of have also experience the sacred during this practice.

Experience:

The final step of this theological reflection is to look for authenticity from experiential faith. The importance placed on the experience of one's faith is another teaching I greatly value from Methodism. It is based on its founder John Wesley's spiritual experience in which he felt his "heart strangely warmed"²¹⁰ during a reading of Martin Luther's work. Here again, the methodology of autoethnography verifies the legitimacy of this inquiry as noted in the previous section stating that it draws upon experiences of the researcher. It was a focus and practice of body, mind, and soul awareness that brought me to the experience of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. It has been

²⁰⁹ Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*,” x.

²¹⁰ Joe Iovino, “Holy Spirit Moments: Learning from Wesley at Aldersgate,” The People of The United Methodist Church, accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/holy-spirit-moments-learning-from-wesley-at-aldersgate>.

through the prayerful inquiry into my own reflexive experience since then that I have explicated a deep awareness and invigorated my relationship with the divine. Identifying the trinitarian dynamic has enabled me to recognize this holy movement on other occasions since that day on Bowen Island when I was so strongly pulled into the sacred dance. With a bodily sensed knowledge of divine presence, I opened to the divine dancing Partner(s), and in so doing I have found it possible to dance with dynamic Trinity in other spiritual accompaniment situations, as well as other areas of life. When I can move deeper into relationship with this triune God of dance, I perceive God's presence running under life like the heartbeat of living rather than something I need to consciously think of to be aware of.

It is liberating and exciting to know that the notion of God as Trinity has roused so much investigation throughout history. In line with Bourgeault's Law of Three, a new arising of Trinity has evolved in me through being in relationship with God, theologians, mystics, *anam caras*, advisors, and within myself. Previously, I perceived Trinity as confusing and burdensome, but now my perception has been transformed into a radical and life-giving experience.

Possibilities for Further Learning

My literature review led me to the readings on Sophia from the Wisdom of Solomon. I discovered that certain eastern orthodox theologians consider Sophia as "the active and dynamic pivot or force within nature."²¹¹ Thomas Merton has written an extensive exploration of *Hagai Sophia*, (Greek for Holy Wisdom) as this active and

²¹¹ Christopher Pramuk, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton* (Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 2009), 242, Kindle.

dynamic force. The writings on this subject seem intoxicatingly similar to (or at least related to) *perichoresis* and other notions of Trinity. What association does Sophia have with Trinity if any? Is Sophia Trinity? Is Sophia one of three in the Trinity? These questions certainly warrant further study.

In researching literature on Benedictine vows I detected a connection between the vow of stability and the field of neuroscience. The vow of stability can provide grounding and an assurance of God's presence that liberates one from fears during whatever situation presents itself. It is common knowledge that several deep breaths can result in a physical sense of calming and soothing. Taken further, neuroscience has shown contemplative meditation engages both the energizing effects of the sympathetic nervous system and the calming influence of the parasympathetic nervous system in a gentle rhythm.²¹² Rather than regarding this as disproving the grounding presence of God, I see this as affirmation of God's calming presence. It demonstrates that the effects of time-honoured spiritual practices such as meditation empower us to reach out and receive the peace of God. Organizations such as the HeartMath© Institute have conducted more recent studies on the body, mind, and heart connection and have shown additional evidence of the effects of meditation and offer extensive support.²¹³

Still further research from neuroscience explains what mystics and theologians have practiced for hundreds of years, which are the benefits of prayer. By savouring pleasurable moments for at least several minutes a more peaceful, receptive presence can

²¹² Hanson, *Buddha's Brain*, 59.

²¹³ Rollin McCraty, Ph.D., *Science of the Heart: Exploring the Role of the Heart in Human Performance* (Boulder Creek, CA: HeartMath Institute, 2015).

replace instinctual reactions.²¹⁴ Studies have demonstrated that deep meditative states cause neurons to fire and wire together creating new neurological structure that allows us to be present and at peace. Could spiritual accompaniment play a role in nurturing this in its practitioners? Is it possible one might train oneself to be more receptive to the flow of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow? An interdisciplinary study of neuroscience, theology, and psychology that investigates the connections and similarities in the areas of meditation, other spiritual practices such as spiritual accompaniment, Eastern practices such as yoga, and psychotherapy would be illuminating.

Other areas I became curious about in relation to this topic are physics and Chaos Theory. I was intrigued how the act of expressing chaos during Embodied Prayer was so liberating and provided such a physical release. Perhaps psychology is an appropriate area to probe concerning this phenomenon; however, the rhythm named chaos led me to search out the theory of chaos. Chaos Theory notes that unpredictable systems appear at first to be orderly, and that underlying order in systems seems initially to be chaotic. Paradoxically it made me think of *conversatio morum*, in that one cannot make firm assumptions or expectations based on the present situation as situations may not be how they seem and/or will change. More broadly, physics showed me the essential components of our world are not solid but in constant motion and are in fact “a complicated web of *relations* between various parts of a unified whole.”²¹⁵ This is stunning to me as a whole new area of possibility to explore, *conversatio morum* and Trinity within physics!

²¹⁴ Hanson, *Buddha's Brain*, 44-45.

²¹⁵ Capra, “Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism,” 22-26.

Then there is the science of flow. What would a collaboration of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, practitioners of the 5Rhythms©, and theologians discover together? Do others experience flow as an entry to Trinity? Is flow a way to connect Christianity and the 5Rhythms© with the practice of Sufi whirling dervishes?

In reviewing my writing at this final stage I realized my view of the art of spiritual accompaniment has changed. I do still feel that this is not a technique to be perfected. It is an art in which each companion practices according to their own abilities, style, and relationship with the sacred ground of being. However, I have come to recognize more fully the use of skills can be practiced artfully and in partnership with the currents of aliveness (or divine source). I now acknowledge the skills of spiritual accompaniment can be learned and improved upon through repetition, just as a sailor can learn skills to take advantage of the wind or a gardener gains skills in growing plants. The sailor cannot control the wind in the same way the gardener cannot make the plants grow.²¹⁶ There is a relationship within one's self, with the one who comes for accompaniment, and with the Great Spiritual Companion (or Dynamic Trinitarian Flow). Dancers themselves have basic steps they practice and learn to help in practicing the dance.

If there are other spiritual companions who resonate with my experience or become curious about an expression of Trinity within their own practice, my hope is that they explore this curiosity and share their experience. Perhaps some will gain a sense of community in knowing there are others who encounter the holy in this way during their spiritual accompaniment. For spiritual companions who have been promoting a relationship with living Trinity in their practice, I wholeheartedly offer encouragement to

²¹⁶ Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to Christian Practice of Contemplation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54, Kindle.

communicate this with the academic community. There are papers on the practice of spiritual accompaniment/direction and many more on experiences of God; however, I was unable to find any works detailing how sacred presence as Trinity has manifested within this valuable, contemplative practice of spiritual accompaniment. Possibly this story of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow may open hearts anew to noticing the movement of Trinity in spiritual accompaniment and/or anywhere in living life.

Beyond Validation

My reluctance to begin the process of writing down my experience stemmed from feeling I was about to commit something akin to heresy, based on the fear of attempting to define the mystery that is God. Once I moved beyond this fear and into the journey, I became quite attached to my experience. Would being filled with expectations of Dynamic Trinitarian Flow put me at risk of closing myself off from other opportunities to experience divine presence? Hopefully, I can continue to embrace the state of *kenosis* that led me to this new realization of Trinity. As I look over the process I have undergone in the work, I am grateful for the great gift this touchpoint of mystery is. The effect on me has been deeply felt. So, while I know all that is God is not confined to Dynamic Trinitarian Flow, I also know - in my body, heart, and mind - that God is revealed in Dynamic Trinitarian Flow just as God is revealed in a shiny, black slug.

Practicing spiritual accompaniment led me to the embodied experience of Trinity as Dynamic Trinitarian Flow. Through this experience and the journey that has become this research, I know that engaging in a dance-like relationship with Trinity brings me into the dance of living more fully as the dance of life. In hindsight, I have felt Dynamic

Trinitarian Flow calling me into this scared dance all my life as I swung towards the heavens on the backyard swing, when I sang my heart out around the campfire as a child at Camp Muskatoon, and in the darting, dancing presence of Hummingbird in her many visits to intentionally see me. Trinity has led me in a dance of *being fully present to my strengths while holding an attitude of humbleness*. I embarked on that seemingly illogical quest out of a dualistic worldview that does not reconcile the paradox of being both/and. Non-dualistic Trinity shows me that, although I am not fixed as one or the other, powerful or humble, I am invited to flow into power or into humbleness (or move in staccato, chaos, lyrical, stillness or other) as needed in an intentional dance of being present. Like the dancer holding her partner, it is in the very act of holding in awareness those things which bring me to humility that I am empowered to dance with strength.

All of who I am comes to the sacred dance floor whether I realize it or not – my blessedness and gifts as well as my shadow self and ego identities. Dynamic Trinitarian Flow shows me that all of who I am is welcome in the arms of my Partner(s). All of me brings valuable insight and gifts that inform who I am and how I can be in relationship to others, the cosmos and God. Knowing well my tendency towards feelings of inadequacy gives me understanding and empathy in coming alongside others. The recognition that I have condemned another for something I have been guilty of myself brings humility into my spiritual accompaniment. Being in relationship with all my humanness and in partnership with Dynamic Trinitarian Flow strengthens my practice of accompaniment. I am more approachable, more compassionate, and more flexible in coming alongside companions exploring their journey when I am in dynamic relationship.

As science reveals more and more about the cosmos, mother earth, and the smallest particles of which all is made of, we are learning nothing is solid despite the appearance of solidity. At subatomic levels of protons, neutrons, and electrons even seemingly solid matter dances. My experience tells me that God is more than the heavenly bodies and the force creating their orbits, more than mountains and the power that pushes them into being, more than electrons, quarks, and their movements. This God who causes movement is also God who moves. The dynamic God with whom I am in relationship deeply desires to create in concert with creation, in a partnership where we are invited to participate in crafting dances of possibilities that enliven, bring life, build bridges, and help us to live even in the sorrow and struggles of being human.

Dynamic Trinitarian Flow means I do not have to try to relate to an anthropomorphized God or even to imagine myself separate from God. I can instead imagine God, the Wholly Holy One in all, moving all and holding all. I image Dynamic Trinitarian Flow as two dancers embracing each other in the dance to music; one leads, one follows, both in harmony with each other, the music, the subtleties of body, mind, and spirit, while bringing into creation a mutual dance of embodied sacredness. Trinity.

I Hold Lion's Paw: A Creative Synthesis

During an internet search I came upon a poem by Hafiz. I was immediately captivated by the title "I Hold the Lion's Paw." In light of my relationship with Lion these words painted an evocative image. In bringing my work to a close, I submit my own poem inspired by the poem of Hafiz.

I Hold Lion's Paw

*I hold Lion's paw
whenever I dance.*

*I know the sound of Raven's wings
whooshing whispers of truth in my ear,*

*And Slug and Hummingbird
sometimes argue over
whose beauty will seduce me while we dance.*

*I hold Lion's paw
whenever I dance,*

*As the Majesty of Divine Light
weaves her ribbons in the basket of my heart.*

*Can you see I am enraptured with
desire for Dynamic Trinitarian Flow?
Then come, come and dance with us!*

*Sandy
Is eager to share the ways she has found
to dance in the Flow.*

*Indeed dear ones,
Sandy is so very willing
to share all of how she dances with
The Beautiful, Fecund
Threeness...*

*I hold Lion's paw
whenever I dance.*

*I know the sound of your heart's wings
will whoosh whispers of truth in your ear,*

*And Slug and Hummingbird
may someday argue over
whose beauty will seduce you as you dance!*

*So dear one, come,
and hold Lion's paw
whenever you dance!²¹⁷*

²¹⁷ Created by Sandra Pihowich February 22, 2023. This poem is based on the poem "I Hold the Lion's Paw" by the Sufi mystic Hafiz. I borrowed some of Hafiz's words and adapted others, along with creating new ones to make this poem my own. To read Hafiz's poem please see the Appendix.

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APPENDIX

I Hold the Lion's Paw

I hold the Lion's Paw

Whenever I dance. I know the ecstasy of the falcon's wings

When they make love against the sky, And the sun and moon

Sometimes argue over

Who will tuck me in at night. If you think I am having more fun

Than anyone on this planet

You are absolutely correct. But Hafiz

Is willing to share all his secrets

About how to befriend God.

Indeed, dear ones,

Hafiz is so very willing

To share all his secrets

About how to know the

Beautiful

One. I hold the Lion's Paw whenever I dance. I know the ecstasy of your heart's wings

When they make love against the Sky, And the sun and moon

Will someday argue over

Who will tuck you in at

Night!²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Daniel James Ladinsky, renderer, *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master* (Penguin Publishing Group, 1999), 57-58, Kindle.