

THE LAW OF THREE (FROM A POST BY RICHARD ROHR) Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Cynthia Bourgeault, a faculty member at the Center for Action and Contemplation, explores the profound metaphysical Law of Three. Understanding and consciously participating in this principle can help us welcome new, surprising resolutions that free us from our usual binary and oppositional way of operating in every arena of life from personal relationships to politics.

Cynthia explains the foundational principles of the Law of Three:

In every new arising there are three forces involved: affirming, denying, and reconciling. The interweaving of the three produces a fourth in a new dimension.

Affirming, denying, and reconciling are not fixed points or permanent essence attributes, but can and do shift and must be discerned situationally.

Solutions to impasses or sticking points generally come by learning how to spot and mediate third force, which is present in every situation but generally hidden.

Let's consider a simple example. A seed, as Jesus said, "unless it falls into the ground and dies, remains a single seed" (see John 12:24). If this seed does fall into the ground, it enters a sacred transformative process. Seed, the first or "affirming" force, meets ground, the second or "denying" force (and at that, it has to be moist ground, water being its most critical first component). But even in this encounter, nothing will happen until sunlight, the third or "reconciling" force, enters the equation. Then among the three they generate a sprout, which is the actualization of the possibility latent in the seed—and a whole new "field" of possibility.

The Paschal Mystery is another example, with affirming as Jesus the human teacher of the path of love; denying as the crucifixion and the forces of hatred driving it; and reconciling as the principle of self-emptying, or kenotic love willingly engaged. The fourth, new arising revealed through this weaving is the Kingdom of Heaven, visibly manifest in the very midst of human cruelty and brokenness.

Imagine how the energies of our planet would shift if we as Christians took seriously our obligation to work with the Law of Three as our fundamental spiritual praxis. Face to face with the vast challenges of our times—environmental, economic, political—we would avoid making judgments (because according to the Law of Three, denying force is a legitimate player in every equation), set our sights higher than "winners and losers" (or even negotiated compromise), and instead strive in all situations to align our minds and hearts with third force.

Third force is not easy to attune to because our usual consciousness is skewed toward the binary, toward "either/or." The dualistic mind lacks both the sensitivity and the actual physical capacity to stay present to third force, which requires an established ability to live beyond the opposites. The capacity to recognize and consciously mediate third force belongs to what we would now call unitive or nondual consciousness, "the

mind of Christ.” Consistent contemplative practice is a non-negotiable in developing the alert and flexible presence that can midwife third force.