

## *Franciscan Mysticism: A Cosmic Vision*

—Richard Rohr, OFM

**F**ranciscan mysticism is not primarily about Francis of Assisi; it is about God. In fact, when it fixates on Francis too long it invariably becomes sentimental, cheap, and harmless. Franciscan mysticism (a subset of Franciscan spirituality) is about an *intuition of Jesus as the Incarnate and Cosmic Christ*. Francis discovered and so powerfully loved this mystery in Jesus that he eventually became a living image of Christ. A “cloud of witnesses” who shared that same brilliant intuition—Clare, Brothers Giles and Juniper, Angela of Foligno, Jacopone da Todi, Anthony, Bonaventure, Catherine of Genoa, John Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon, Elizabeth of Hungary, Louis IX of France, and others—continued Francis’ particular mysticism. Most true Franciscans are unknown to history, but just lived gratefully and fully human lives that were spiritual in a way that did not look very spiritual. That’s the secret!

What we see, again and again, is a joyful and unitive consciousness that intuits and experiences what Duns Scotus called “the univocity of being.” By this, Duns Scotus meant that we can speak with *one consistent and true voice* about a rock, a tree, an animal, a human, an angel, and God! They all participate in the identical state of Being to varying degrees. *Deus est Ens*, he said:

“God is Being itself.” This eliminates any clear distinction between the sacred and the profane, because Christ existed in matter from all eternity (Col 1:15–20, Eph 1:3–11), ever since God decided to materialize and reveal who God is through creation. It is summarized on our Franciscan coat of arms by the Latin phrase *Deus Meus et Omnia*: “My God and All Things!”

We are the first generation to understand that this

Christ was revealed approximately 13.8 billion years ago. The human incarnation of that mystery, probably given *when consciousness was capable of widespread presence, encounter, and love*, happened only 2,000 years ago with the birth of Jesus. As Christians, we believe that the Jesus story *is* the universe story and the universe story coalesces and manifests in one man who is *fully* human and *fully* divine at the same time,

and thus fully prepared to tell us to “follow” him! Jesus is the microcosm of the macrocosm for us. He is the holon of the whole. If we get him, we get it all! The medium is indeed the message. The personal Jesus became the doorway to the universal intuition and cosmic love affair.

Francis and Clare fell in love with the unique person of Jesus, precisely in his incarnate and humble state, identifying with the excluded and little ones, “the least of the brothers and sisters.” The bias toward the edge and the bottom has always been at the heart of Franciscan mysticism, explaining its perennial identification with poverty and suffering. Big truth is hard to find at the top and secure center of nations, groups, and institutions. The alternative orthodoxy has to choose a kind of voluntary displacement or it gets sucked into conformity, “churchliness,” and far-too-easy

answers. (We Franciscans have often made that mistake when we ourselves did not go to the mystical level and instead accommodated the small system. I call it Birdbath Franciscanism.)

The cosmic vision, personalized in Jesus, was an intuition that Francis and many of his followers lived and experienced, but most of them did not formulate it in

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St. Francis of Assisi (detail) from mural by Dimitri, CAC Visitor Center, 2011.

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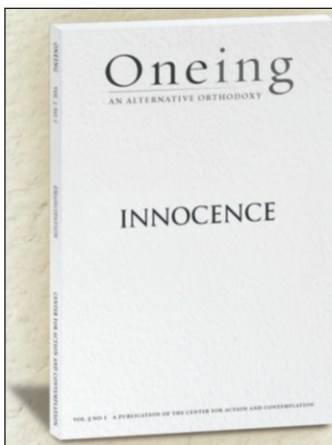
The question for us is always "How can we turn information into transformation?" How can we use the sacred texts, tradition, and experience to lead people into new places with God, with life, with themselves? — Richard Rohr, OFM

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## Getting to Know Our Donors: *Dulce and Willie De Castro*

All relationships begin with an encounter. The relationship between Jesus and the disciples John and Andrew began with an encounter by the Sea of Galilee (Mt 4:18), and Jesus' invitation to follow him would impact them deeply.

Our relationship with Fr. Richard began when, serendipitously, we picked up his cassette tapes (in existence then!) from a bookstore run by the Sisters of St. Paul. We were so impressed by his teachings that when a friend mentioned he would be speaking at a church in Long Beach, California, we decided to attend and finally had an opportunity to meet our spiritual "rock star"! Our first observations were that the "voice" had a "body" and that we were about the same height—being Filipino, this gave us much comfort! The meeting was not by the Sea of Galilee, but in a church basement. Nonetheless, that first encounter inflamed our hearts, refreshed our souls, and enabled us to "see" and love differently. It reminded us of our call to holiness and the invitation to prayer and spirituality.

Ever since that first encounter with Richard, we have considered ourselves his Filipino family. We deeply treasure our heart-to-heart conversations with him over simple Filipino meals of *adobo*, *pancit*, and *lumpia* and through celebrations of anniversaries, birthdays, and home blessings over the years. He truly is part of the fabric of our lives.

Richard's teachings at conferences in Albuquerque, the

numerous Religious Education Congress events in Anaheim, and his many books and recordings have brought about for us a radical shift in consciousness and who we really are in God. His wisdom has drawn us deeper into God's immense love. For all this, we are grateful.

As we continue our journey, we build upon these moments of grace with daily prayer and the discipline of our spiritual lives. May the seeds planted by God through Richard's teachings continue to take root and flower in a lifelong praise to Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

*Dulce and Willie De Castro have been friends of Fr. Richard and the CAC for eighteen years. Dulce is a pathologist in Southern California and Willie is a council member for a Filipino faith-based movement. They have five children and two granddaughters. They live in Rancho Cucamonga, California.*



## CAC Multiplier: *Fr. Rafael Garcia*

It was around 1999, while driving along the Los Angeles freeway, that a friend and I listened to a tape from a recent Religious Education Congress in Anaheim. It was a teaching by Richard Rohr. His spiritually relevant message struck me; I had not heard anything like it before. Upon returning home to my parish in El Paso, Texas, I ordered several cassettes, including *The New Great Themes of Scripture* and *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this was the beginning of a "continuing education" program that continues today!

In 2001, I went into a major depression—a Job experience. I have no doubt that Richard's tapes became God's instruments for my healing and transformation. Since then, I have listened to many cassettes and CDs and attended several conferences in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 2008, I was assigned to the Jesuit parish in downtown



Albuquerque. Richard and the CAC were now less than three miles away! Eventually I was invited to serve on the CAC Board of Directors, and did so for a full three-year term.

Grounded in the Scriptures, Richard's holistic understanding of creation, humanity, the material and the spiritual, together with the Christian mystics, have liberated my mind and soul. His ability to focus on needed reforms by offering restorative, radical options, is prophetic. Richard is the spiritual teacher who has most influenced me and my work. He is both liberal and conservative in the best sense of those words.

*Fr. Rafael Garcia, SJ, is a Jesuit priest who has served in parish ministry, ministry with impoverished immigrant families, and prison ministry in El Paso, Albuquerque, and now Kansas City. Born in Cuba, he grew up in Miami, where he worked as an architect prior to experiencing the call to Priesthood and Religious Life.*

## *Being a student of the Living School for Action and Contemplation has transformed my life*

I came to the Living School simply because Richard Rohr had been the first, in my experience, to pray to “Mother God” in a Mass. That became my moment of reintegration, when I felt whole again, able to join God with my full, female self.

I had lost my faith in high school and rediscovered it twenty years later, in a dark night of my soul following my mother’s death. I had been an activist longer than I had been a Christian, and I was much more certain of my activism than I was of my faith.

My experience at the Living School has transformed my faith and completely changed my activism. Understanding the framework of the ego and the divinely connected self, combined with strengthening my inner witness, has given me the ability to watch myself, reflect on my inner motivations, and choose more appropriate action. I now have the ability to see when, for instance, my desire to speak comes from woundedness or ego. I have a new ability to wait, discern, and incubate in lieu of forcing action when the external world isn’t quite ready for it. This is important to prevent replicating the oppression we are trying to transform—something I regret that I have done more than once during my years as an activist.

This ability to manage the inner experience and wait has changed how I show up, in my organization and in the



movements of which I am a part. I am teaching contemplation to activists and activism to contemplatives, because this pairing is so very illuminating and the world needs it.

My work as a cultural organizer with Transform Network involves compiling models for action borne out of our faith. We talk about nonviolence, faith-rooted organizing, anti-oppression, racial reconciliation, and other powerful models for moving faith outward into action. We love the integration point between action and contemplation. We find that some

people are naturally wired more for the internal experience while others are wired more for action. Either way, the integration point is the sweet spot for these two kinds of pilgrims on the contemplative path. I am committed to exploring the tensions, gifts, and integrality of these two components.

I write this on the eve of my departure for a pilgrim trip to Spain, to walk the Camino de Santiago and travel to Ávila to learn more from St. Teresa. The Living School has helped root me in a new-to-me tradition, and I will always be grateful to Fr. Rohr and all the amazing faculty and staff at the CAC for setting me on this path.

—Holly Roach

*Holly Roach is a graduate of the inaugural 2013-2015 Living School class.*

## *Meditation for our Living School Alumni*

Recently I had occasion to fly over the Mississippi River Delta. From 25,000 feet, I saw the broad, brown river divide, and divide again, many times. I was amazed by the complexity of its geometry, the sheer size of its reach, crossing many, many miles. It looked like a textbook illustration of an artery, dividing into smaller arterioles, splitting into many capillaries, bringing rich blood, loaded with oxygen, deep into the body. I thought the river delta an apt metaphor for our alumni. Perhaps it comes of living in the desert, but the flow of water, bringing life to a thirsty world, is sacred indeed. It molds the land around it, carves out channels, irrigates fields, and takes the path of least resistance on its insistent flow to the sea.

Let the river be the Perennial Tradition from which we all have drunk, deep communion with the Holy who just keeps showing up, generation after generation. We are broken saints who carry the river as best we can. We are not the river. We are the mud beneath the river, the stones which try (unsuccessfully) to block its way, the fallen branches which

impede its flow through our woven web of decaying leaves, the torn flannel shirt and ragged sock, now home to a colorful species of snail. We are the banks of the river, which we seek to build up with our own importance, only to be eroded away again—gently, over time, or fiercely, in a flash flood that leaves us with gaping holes, confused and angry. We are the long, slender grasses, lining the shallow places, which undulate with the waters in a dance of perfect responsiveness. In our grasses are schools of small fish which move as one, ancient turtles meditating through time on warm logs, and the occasional alligator which snaps everybody back to consciousness and the preciousness of our lives.

Our first cohort of students has gone forth as a new part of the delta, to carry the river to their own lands. The river is part of them, but also separate. They are not responsible for what the river does downstream. They are only to carry it onward, in faith, with joy, to the shining sea.

—Carolyn Metzler, Living School Spiritual Life Coordinator

## In Honor of the 2013-2015 Living School Students

They first met in the shining cathedral of technology,  
a bright screen the door into transformation  
where side-chapels carried names like  
Alternative Orthodoxy,  
Wisdom Lineage,  
Perennial Tradition.

There words pointed into stillness, stillness into action,  
action into love.

Their words spanned continents instantly  
(how many angels can dance on the head of a fiber-  
optic cable?)  
connecting them with stories, questions, perplexities  
that nudged them into Mystery.

Fluid time beckoned them into centuries past, where they  
sat at the feet of the Mystics  
and the words of the Teachers resonated again and  
again through the touch of a key.

And when they looked behind them, they caught a glimpse  
of what is being born each moment—  
The cosmic fulfillment of "Thy Kingdom come."

They came as pilgrims, with open hearts and shining eyes  
upon strange roads with other travelers, anonymous  
behind unfamiliar faces.

They came because they had a story that led here, to this  
place  
with the old black dog, howling peacocks,  
and llamas chewing contemplatively in the  
shade.

They came with their restless hearts and busy minds,  
They came with the questions that would not go away and a  
hunger which hoped  
*Perhaps!*  
here there would be a banquet of words  
punctuating the stillness  
where hunger and fulfillment meet.

They gathered again a final time like community—eye to  
eye, skin to skin,  
the deep silence still audible in ringing laughter.

This also is Incarnation: Love made visible;  
the transformation never complete as long as breath is  
yet drawn.

They returned to their lives, but never again in the old way.  
They have seen through the eyes that see, through the eyes  
that see all.

They have begun to open their fingers so that all that is  
chaff may fall to the ground,  
the ground which is the very body of God  
of which they are a living part.

They cannot own even their lives any longer.  
All is of the Holy One, to be spent in love for Love,  
the dance of *kenosis* for the healing of the world.

—Carolyn Metzler

## Spotlight on a Living School Graduate: Anjuli Seth Nayak, MD

Anjuli Seth Nayak, MD, takes nothing for granted. She came to the Living School as a certified allergist and immunologist who was struggling with cancer. She believed that the teaching she received here would form a major part of her therapy as she incorporated the Wisdom Tradition



into her whole person. What she has received, including the teachings and her deep experience of community, has brought life and breath into her journey. "My cohort is walking this with me," she says with feeling. "They have stepped into my shoes. They pray for me." She believes that her acceptance into the Living School at this time in her life, which has allowed her mind, body, and spirit to be transformed during this illness, "has to be the will of God."

The journey from dualistic to non-dualistic thinking has had a profound effect on her work and relationships. She feels that the spiritual exercises and insights on love have made her a gentler, more compassionate woman. Chanting and yoga have helped her embody the teachings: "Now I offer my body as a spiritual discipline." The fact that her body is broken with cancer only deepens, hallows, and strengthens that offering in the upside-down economy of God.

Now a Living School graduate, Anjuli's ultimate goal is to live out the Wisdom Tradition for the sake of others. Her integrative process brings together science and spirituality as she addresses groups of cancer survivors about the inner journey of the soul through suffering. She has included the Living School in her will to facilitate transformation for other hungry souls through a scholarship fund. She is enough of a scholar to understand all the thought, work, and love that has gone into designing the Living School curriculum and recognize its value for the world. She wants to help make those teachings possible, that others may also be transformed.

Anjuli does not know what lies ahead. After difficult treatment, the cancer has returned. She has decided to receive another round of intense chemotherapy and undergo a radical transplant procedure, hoping it will bring a cure. She is optimistic and pushes through the sickness because of her strong desire to live. She has two hopes. The first is that the cancer will pass so that she can resume her contemplative, healing work in the world. Her second, larger, hope is that, no matter what happens with the cancer, she is safe, enveloped in the Love of God. A great gift to the School and the world, she lives without fear, for that hope will never fail.



# Franciscan Mysticism: A Cosmic Vision

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theological words or clear concepts as much as in their lifestyles. Usually they picked it up by osmosis, through the Gospel and Franciscan lineage, becoming something that they partly knew and partly just believed was good, positive, and wonderful! Followers of Francis and Clare bore "fruit that remained" and invariably believed in original blessing much more than original sin.

Betsy Porter created a marvelous icon which depicts the Christ Mystery, standing, holding heaven and earth together, uniting human and divine, physical and spiritual, rooted in *things* and yet connecting to an infinity of stars. The Cosmic Christ makes all things one, just as Jesus promised and for which he prayed (Jn 17:21–24). Franciscan mysticism is not about Francis at all, but about a universal notion of the

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*Francis knew that only love  
is big enough to handle  
and hold truth.*

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Christ and, therefore, of all reality. In the Office for the Feast of St. Francis on October 4th, Francis is referred to as the *vir catholicus*, the truly catholic man. He pushes all seeing to the absolute edge by always including those whom other systems might too easily exclude: the leper, the non-Christian, the Muslim, the poor, the hated. When a mysticism rooted in Francis loses that *edgy* position, it might be mini-mysticism or even church mysticism, but it is never Franciscan mysticism. Francis knew that only love is big enough to handle and hold truth. Truth which is not loving, joyful, and inclusive is never the Great Truth.

*"Franciscan Mysticism: A Cosmic Vision," by Fr. Richard Robr, is excerpted from Radical Grace, Volume 25, Number 1. Copyright © Center for Action and Contemplation.*

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October 2015

Dear Friends,

The Feast of St. Francis, on October 4, is always a special occasion for me. Francis of Assisi died at the age of 44, on October 3, 1226; yet, in his short lifetime, Francis left a lasting impact on the world. This humble man might be embarrassed at the attention given him now, yet I believe keeping Francis alive in our memory can continue to transform the world.

In my preface to *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, I write about how Francis revived a stagnant Church:

Francis of Assisi was a master of making room for the new and letting go of that which was tired or empty. . . . Much of Francis's genius was that he was ready for absolute "newness" from God, and therefore could also trust fresh and new attitudes in himself. His God was not tired, and so he was never tired. His God was not old, so Francis remained forever young.

There are always new vocabularies, fresh symbols, new frames and styles, but Francis must have known, at least intuitively, that there is only one enduring spiritual insight and everything else follows from it: *The visible world is an active doorway to the invisible world, and the invisible world is much larger than the visible. . . .*

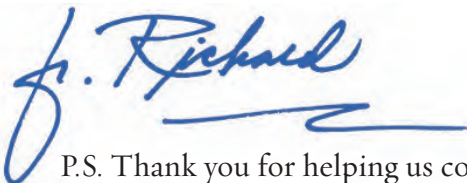
Our outer world and its inner significance must come together for there to be any wholeness—and holiness. The result is both deep joy and a resounding sense of coherent beauty. What was personified in the body of Jesus was a manifestation of this one universal truth: Matter is, and has always been, the hiding place for Spirit, forever offering itself to be discovered anew.

Here at CAC, we are trying to offer timeless traditions of thinking, being, and doing in new and relevant ways. Often this wisdom looks like iconoclastic foolishness. It turns everything around, inside out, upside down—but with the goal of healing and wholeness. Knowing the foundational and radical unity of all things has very practical implications for how we live our lives. I hope our work follows in the enduring Franciscan Way, catalyzing transformative change that long outlasts the CAC, myself, and you!

Thank you for remembering CAC with your prayers and donations on this Feast of St. Francis. As you are able, please consider making a donation to support the work of teaching a new consciousness. You can donate online or by mail, using the enclosed form.

I also invite you to honor Francis—and Jesus, the one Francis followed—by living in awareness of your union with Love. May we be always eager to love, to receive Love and let it flow freely from our hearts, mouths, and hands.

Peace and Every Good,



P.S. Thank you for helping us continue Francis' legacy of teaching ancient wisdom in new ways! Please use the enclosed remittance form and return envelope to send your gift to CAC, or donate securely online at [cac.org/support-cac](http://cac.org/support-cac).

# Saint Francis: The Key to Reading Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment

**T**he Ministers General of the Franciscan Family offer their joy and thanks for publication of Pope Francis' *Encyclical Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. In the letter Saint Francis is cited twelve times, making him the key to reading the entire text: "I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians."

Published officially on June 18, 2015, at the Vatican, the text makes current our charism at this historic moment in regard to respect for all forms of life. As Franciscans we have always and everywhere sought to offer witness and defend the environment and the human beings who populate it, aware that one who loves God cannot not love that which God has created: living beings and nature. The Canticle of the Creatures, expression of the lifestyle of Saint Francis, is a hymn to life in all its forms, both natural and human. Francis promoted a finely tuned relationship with all of creation, especially with the apex of God's creative activity, humankind.

It is this special relationship that inspires the Pope in his work for the poor and marginalized, for peace and reconciliation, and for care of the planet. He thus demonstrates prophetic qualities which arise from being in communion with God, with others, with himself, and with the created universe. Because of this Pope Francis has dared to embrace and advance the demand of Christian discipleship modeled on the example of Saint Francis of Assisi. His Encyclical challenges all of us to simplify our lifestyle, to divest ourselves and leave aside all that is not necessary, so as to rediscover the beauty that God has placed in us, in every human being, and in every created thing. Our vocation is to live in boundless solidarity with everything that God has created.

We thank the Pope for this Encyclical and pledge our prayers for him. Aware that a new approach to promote the life of the planet and humankind is emerging, we are energized by the words of Pope Francis and invite all people of good will and those responsible for the nations to take up their responsibilities to safeguard peace, justice and creation. On our part, in the name of the entire Franciscan Family, we commit ourselves to review profoundly our lifestyle, so that we might be consistent witnesses of that which we profess. We challenge all members of the Franciscan Family and those with whom we work to a more careful use of energy and water, to reduce our use of plastics and harmful detergents, to care for waste in a responsible manner, and to take other concrete daily steps to safeguard creation.

Fraternally,

Fr. Michael Anthony Perry, OFM  
*Minister General*  
*President CFF*

Sr. Deborah Lockwood, OSF  
*Minister General*

Fr. Mauro Jöhri, OFM Cap  
*Minister General*

Fr. Nicholas Polichnowski, TOR  
*Minister General*

Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv  
*Minister General*

Tibor Kauser, OFS  
*Minister General*

Rome, 16th July 2015

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*Aware that a new approach to promote the life of the planet and humankind is emerging, we are energized by the words of Pope Francis and invite all people of good will and those responsible for the nations to take up their responsibilities to safeguard peace, justice and creation.*

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