

## FACE - TO - FACE - TO - FACE

BY WM PAUL YOUNG

When I am asked how I could write a story for my children that involves the loss of a character like Missy, a five-year-old girl who is abducted, I often reply that a tragedy of this magnitude asks the best questions. I would rather that we didn't live in a world where horrific losses could be perpetrated, but we do. Our own niece was killed in a terrible accident the day after her fifth birthday. What if something like this, or similar, happened to one of our grandchildren? What would I want to say to my own children in the face of such heartbreak? I wrote *The Shack*, in part, to respond to that question.

How does one face this worst of tragedies: the loss of a child? While the activity of evil raises a million questions, the god I grew up with was of little comfort. In fact, that god was routinely considered the ultimate originator of evil, a distant deity who had a *plan* that even included the torture of a child (Jesus). How can one run to god for help or comfort if god is the perpetrator?

If you have read the novel, you know that Mackenzie, the father, believes in the god who is one, alone. God the Father was a distant deity, hidden and holy, a darkness somewhere behind Jesus, with a different character than Jesus. That god was usually disappointed, if not angry;

was unknowable, unreachable; and was watching from the infinite distance of a disapproving heart. That god was the one whom Mack went to meet in the shack—but when that god was a no-show, Mack lost it, destroying the place with the fury of a father bereft and a lover betrayed.

The reason that this one-alone god did not show up is that this one-alone god does not exist, except in minds

darkened by religious indoctrination and our own pain. That god has no answer for us. In some perverted scenarios, Jesus comes to protect us from that god's vengeance or justified retribution. That god needs to be appeased, and failure is met with wrath and judgment.

If God has ever been alone, there would be neither a basis in the universe for love nor a framework for relationship. Love is other-centered and self-giving,

so if there was no "other" in the beginning and God was alone, then God could not be Love; merciful, perhaps, but not Love.

In part, this is why the triune God matters to me. Yes, I believe in *One* God, but this One God is a relationship of Three Persons, who have forever been in the great dance of face-to-face-to-face. This divine dance is full of life and light and music and laughter and joy and wonder and submission and goodness. Theirs is the mutual interpenetration of One with the Other, without any

*continued on page five*



Three Sisters, compound volcano in Oregon. USGS photograph by Lyn Topinka, 1985.

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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: Kay Noble

Some thirty-five years ago, friends and I attended a conference at Kanuga, an Episcopal conference center in North Carolina. While wandering around after the conference ended, I saw signs for another conference, led by Richard Rohr,

so I sneaked in and listened to his teaching. I was blown away, because his words were what I needed to hear.

From that point on I have followed Richard through his books, meditations, and CDs. I have attended several conferences and also did a nine-day internship at the CAC.

At a conference in Lafayette, Louisiana, Richard introduced the

book, *The Soul of Sponsorship*, about Bill W, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and his Jesuit spiritual director, Fr. Ed Dowling. This has been an important book in my twenty-nine-year spiritual journey in alcohol recovery.



### BUCKET LIST

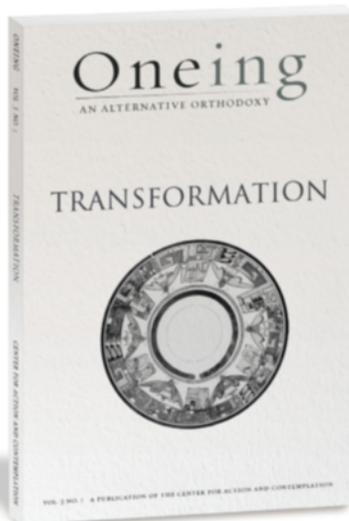
*Ride on motorcycle.*

*Kay Noble, right, with Lynn Broussard.*

Now I am living with terminal cancer. I wrote to Richard, thanking him for all he has done for me these past thirty-five years, and he responded by saying, “We will meet again on the other side.” Because of Richard’s teachings and my own inner experiences of God, I have accepted death and am at peace. I will probably be listening to Richard as I pass over!

“Love is Stronger than Death.”

*Kay Noble is a longtime friend and supporter of CAC.*



*Etymologically, transformation means to change form, move across, or even what is now called a “shape-shifter” in the world of story. It implies actual development, evolution, and change of consciousness, image, and form. The word is used to imply looking out from a genuinely new source and center, which usually means seeing things in a larger and more holistic way. — Richard Rohr*

The “Transformation” edition of *Oneing* features both scholarly reflections and stories of transformative experiences from Paula D Arcy, Wm Paul Young, Cynthia Bourgeault, Sam Shriver, poet David Whyte, and many others.

This limited-edition publication will be available in CAC’s Bookstore by mid-April.

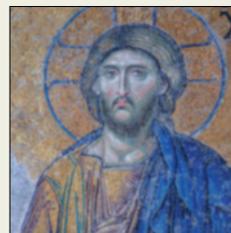
### Upcoming Events from CAC’s Contemplative Friends



#### Movies & Meaning Festival

*Hope in the Dark*  
April 27–30, 2017

Albuquerque, New Mexico  
[moviesandmeaning.com/festival](http://moviesandmeaning.com/festival)



#### World Community for Christian Meditation

*The John Main Seminar 2017*  
August 7–13, 2017

Houston, Texas  
[wccm-usa.org/upcoming-events](http://wccm-usa.org/upcoming-events)

# Living School: *Why Do We All Bother?*

BY RICHARD ROHR

**W**e have just accepted our fifth cohort of Living School students to begin the program in 2017.

Each time we have to turn away at least three for every one we can accept. This is so hard and so sad. Time, space and staff only allow us to accept approximately 165 applicants each year, and it seems so wrong to turn away what are surely some extraordinary and good people. Many of them are humble enough to apply a second time! Thank God, I am not on the committee that makes the choices and the cuts.

Of course, it is also exciting and affirming that so many people are seeking something—usually at considerable cost to themselves—that might seem esoteric, optional, or dangerous to some. As so many theology schools, seminaries, and retreat houses have been closing in recent decades, we are often asking ourselves “Why?” Why do they want to come here? Why would they trust us?

As the form of religious life that I grew up with when I joined the Franciscans in 1961 seems to dwindle and even die, a new form of serious spiritual seeker is clearly emerging. To be honest, some of them put us friars, monks, priests, and nuns to shame by their dedication and integ-

riety. We “religious” attained immediate status and security, whereas lay people often have to give up status.

There is certainly a sacrifice in attending the Living School. The cost of tuition, airfare, and accommodations surely bites into their security systems, especially for those on limited incomes or who come long distances from other continents.

Before being considered, applicants have to laboriously fill out ten pages of questions, with more essays than boxes to tick! When I see the stacks of applications each year, and all the beautiful, vulnerable, and searching statements inside, I am in awe at the sheer goodness



*The urgency, dedication, and passion that we see in so many of our students is deeply humbling to all of us.*

and deep humanity that is out there in our world. There are so many who feel “like sheep without a shepherd,” as Jesus put it (Mark 6:34), and many others who can’t seem to get enough of God, wisdom, and holiness—and their True Selves.

So again, we ask “Why?” Among the many common reasons students give me when I meet them are ones that sound not at all esoteric, optional, or dangerous. They often use words like “necessary,” “I had to do this to retain my sanity,” “I could not continue as a Christian (or a believer) without it,” or “I do not know how to survive in the USA anymore.” The urgency, dedication, and passion that we see in so many of our students is deeply humbling to all of us at the CAC. To be honest, it is a daily goad and inspiration to the faculty, CAC staff—most especially the Living School staff—and the CAC Board of Directors. The students are rubbing off! This is the way goodness always works.

Why do we bother? Well, believe me, with this much eagerness flying around, it is anything but a bother. I am energized each time I sit in front of a new cohort with their pens in hand, laptops charged, eyes and ears wide open, with the fervor and humility that we used to associate with young novices. Many students are mature adults with academic degrees and experiences that often surpass mine.

The question that haunts us is, “Why do *you* bother?” The only answer we can come up with is that *people go where the Spirit chases them!* You did not choose us, and we did not imagine you; we have both been chased into one another’s arms. It is anything but a bother.



## A Reflection by Living School Student Brian Mogren

**R**ing the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." These inspired words from American poet and prophet, Leonard Cohen, were shared at the closing liturgy of the January 2017 Living School intensive. Our group had been together at the Bosque Retreat Center alongside the Rio Grande River for a week, learning from Fr. Richard Rohr and each other about our rich, mystical, contemplative heritage.

We were also given spiritual practices and plenty of quiet time and space, opening ourselves to grace-filled moments of the Holy Spirit—alive in the world, manifested through each other and the natural world that surrounded us. We noticed that when we moved beyond our dualistic minds, the birds, the plants, and even the stones that inhabited the region came alive to tell their stories, reminding us who we are and how we too fit into God's "family of things." For me, it was an awakening to the power of Being—simply being who I am, in all my humanity, in Christ. I came to see that my striving



*I came to see that my striving so hard to keep the world from cracking actually kept me from being present and loving as it necessarily cracks.*

so hard to keep the world from cracking actually kept me from being present and loving as it necessarily cracks.

We are living in times when many of the institutions in which we've found our identities and placed our trust are revealing their unworkability and brokenness. Unless we are grounded in a Bigger Story and Truth, the falling apart of the system could also be our own undoing. CAC, with its Living School, is a beautiful example of what an institution can look like in this new era—powerfully midwifing those of us who come to its door to give birth to God's Light within, allowing us to become more fully who we are. In so doing, we are liberated to move out into this broken and blessed world of ours to do the same.

*Brian Mogren is the director-in-residence of the St. Jane House, an urban retreat center and house of hospitality operated in conjunction with the Visitation Sisters of Minneapolis. He is also the founder and executive director of Alafia Foundation, an organization that champions purpose-filled leaders who are transforming life in north Minneapolis. Learn more at [www.bewhoyouare.info](http://www.bewhoyouare.info).*

## Face-to-Face-to-Face

*continued from page one*

diminishment or absorption of Person. This is the grand celebration of relationship in which all creation is created. This is a God who *is* Love—a God who cannot be anything that is not Love.

Frankly, I don't need a god who knows how to be alone. When I am in the middle of devastation and loss, I need a God who knows how to be *with*.

So, when God the Father comes bursting out from inside Mackenzie's shack, God the Father is not Gandalf with a bad attitude; not a white, distant, grandfather god; but Papa, an all-consuming fire of relentless affection, wrapped in the person of a

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large, African woman. And She is not alone; with Her are Two, and the Three together are One.

"Then," Mack struggled to ask, "Which one of you is God?"

"I am," said all three in unison.

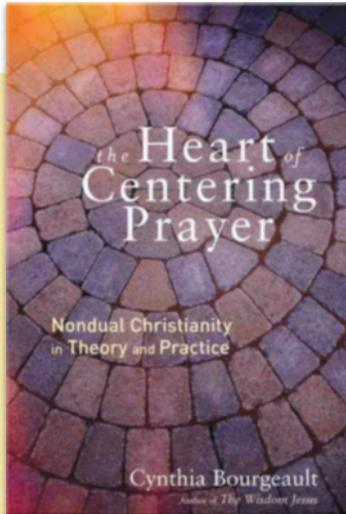
*Wm Paul Young is author of the best-selling novel, The Shack. In this innovative, yet true-to-Scripture, exploration of Trinity, Paul wrestles with the timeless question, "Where is God in a world of suffering and pain?" Paul has "the imagination of a writer and the passion of a theologian," as Eugene Peterson says. Paul will be presenting together with Richard Rohr and Cynthia Bourgeault at the "Trinity: The Soul of Creation" conference, April 6–8, 2017, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For more information, visit [cac.org](http://cac.org).*



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*Nondual awareness is not so much a place you pay attention to as a place you pay attention from. As you come to dwell there, life becomes seamlessly whole.*

—Cynthia Bourgeault

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