

## NO SUCH THING

BY MIRABAI STARR

Julian of Norwich is known for her radically optimistic theology. Nowhere is this better illumined than in her reflections on sin. When Julian asked God to teach her about this troubling issue, he opened his Divine Being and all she could see there was love. Every lesser truth dissolved in that boundless ocean. She tried with all her might to line up what she had learned from the Church and what her Beloved directly revealed to her.

“But the truth is,” Julian confesses, “I did not see any sin. I believe that sin has no substance, not a particle of being, and cannot be detected at all except by the pain it causes. It is only the pain that has substance, for a while, and it serves to purify us, and make us know ourselves and ask for mercy.”

Julian informs us that the suffering we cause ourselves through our acts of greed and unconsciousness is the only punishment we endure. God, who is All-Love, is “incapable of wrath,” and so it is a complete waste of time, Julian realized, to wallow in guilt. The truly humble thing to do when we have stumbled is to hoist ourselves to our feet as swiftly as we can and rush into the arms of God, where we will remember who we really are.

For Julian, sin has no substance because it is the absence of all that is good and kind, loving and caring—all that is of God. Sin is nothing but separation from

our Divine Source, and separation from the Holy One is nothing but illusion. We are always and forever connected in love with our Beloved. Therefore sin is not real; only love is real. Julian did not require a Divinity degree to arrive at this conclusion. She simply needed to travel to the boundary-land of death, where she was enfolded in the loving embrace of the Holy One, who assured her that he had loved her since before he made her and would love her until the end of time. It is with this great love, he revealed, that he loves all beings. Our only task is to remember this and rejoice.

In the end, Julian says, it will all be clear. “Then none of us will be moved in any way to say, *Lord, if only things had been different, all would have been well,*” she writes. “Instead, we shall all proclaim in one voice, *Beloved One, may you be blessed, because it is so: All is well.*”

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Mirabai Starr is an author, speaker, and retreat leader who focuses on the interspiritual teachings of the mystics. She is well known for her translations of the Christian mystics John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, and Julian of Norwich. Mirabai is the author of numerous books, including *God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* and *Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation*.



Portrait of a Woman with a Winged Bonnet, circa 1440, by Rogier van der Weyden. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.



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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: Damien Faughnan

### TRANSFORMATION

**T**his word scares a lot of people. I don't know that I have ever said, "Oh, I think I'll transform myself." In my experience, transformation has occurred when I was an unwilling participant, when I was clearly not in control, and during what Fr. Richard Rohr has called "a liminal time." For me, transformation always follows grief—in particular, the deaths of my mother in 2001 and my father last year.

I continue to experience transformation in the following ways:

**TURNING.** For me, transformation is about a *turning* toward God, the Divine, Jesus, in a new way. It is about submitting (once again) to the big question: "What is your will?" Mostly, it's a turning that happens when I have exhausted my own resources and know I need something more. A significant life event almost always precipitates a turning.

**INCLUDING.** The image of turning can give the impression of turning away from something. I like to think of it as turning toward *and* including. Men's work has taught me to include the most broken parts of myself in any turning. We can't partition the darkest parts of our experience, nor can we exclude our shadow. When we turn, we have to include the parts of ourselves that we believe are not salvageable or that are shocking to ourselves or others. It all belongs—it is all necessary. My continual turning to God means bringing *all* of me and *all* of my experiences to the table, so that I can open myself to grace and love.



*Transformation involves asking for help and guidance.*

**PRAYING.** For almost thirty-five years, I've tried (emphasis on *tried*) to practice contemplative prayer. I know the territory well. And I am learning that, in times of transformation, I need to bring that one question—"What is your will for me?"—into my prayer. It is sometimes a disposition, sometimes desperation or broken-heartedness, and sometimes an open-hearted prayer. Transformation involves asking for help and guidance.

**MATURING.** Transformation means becoming more "grown-up"—at least that's what it feels like! Sometimes I hear myself say, "You are fifty-two and you are only seeing this now?" In our men's work, we quote a modified version (with apologies to my sisters) of 1 Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a boy, I thought as a boy. Now I'm a man; I live as a man." Transformation is about continuing to embrace an adult faith, with no judgments about my immaturity.

When opportunity for transformation arises, I have been fortunate to find community—within men's work, the CAC, and with my soul brothers/sisters. I don't know that I could ever do this work without a community to support me. I'm grateful to serve as a board member for an organization that provides such community.

*Damien Faughnan has been involved with the CAC for nearly fifteen years. He serves on the CAC Board of Directors and is the former board chair of Illuman, the organization charged by Fr. Richard with continuing his men's work (for more information, visit [Illuman.org](http://Illuman.org)). Damien lives in Phoenix and is an executive coach and trusted advisor to CEOs.*



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is now online!

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## My Living School Experience: A Reflection by Nathan Hadley

Perhaps one of my unstated reasons for enrolling in the Living School was to save my Christian faith. Like many other millennials, the doctrines and practices I had been taught weren't working well anymore. The multitude of voices in this Informational Age added to the confusion. The Evangelical voice—which I heard growing up—was usually simplistic, tribal, and small-minded. I've grown tired of trying to "fix" my outdated doctrines of hell, sin, salvation, and God, or replace them with updated systems. Even my new beliefs—coming from good books, good professors, and, recently, the Living School—were sometimes beginning to feel like contrivances. How was I to know that even these were true? Am I falling into the no-truth reality prevalent in our time? I hope not. I don't think we were meant to live in an incoherent world.

I didn't realize this before starting the Living School, but what I need is a new way of knowing, not a new set of doctrines and beliefs. This is what Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, and Jim Finley are after when they

talk about teaching a "contemplative epistemology." The Living School has given me permission to seek this new, contemplative way of knowing. It has given me permission to stop trying to save my identity as a Christian (or, at least, what I thought it meant to be a

Christian). It has taught me that every pulling away is an opportunity to re-choose—giving me permission to let go of my childhood faith, the one that has nurtured me and held my hand for over twenty years. I'm not angry. I am thankful for it, but it's time for it to go. In short, the Living School has invited me to begin a new pilgrimage, one in which I can already feel the openness and freedom.

*Nathan Hadley is a Seattle-based climber and photographer.*

*Some of his work can be viewed at [nathanhadley.com](http://nathanhadley.com). Nathan and his wife, Liz, are both Living School students in the 2018 cohort.*



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### ERRATUM

In the Spring 2017, Volume 7, Number 2 edition of *the Mendicant*, Brian Mogren, in his reflection on the Living School on page 5, refers to Leonard Cohen (1934–2016) as an "American poet and prophet." Leonard Cohen was Canadian.

## A Generous Life

The late Father Brian Fenlon (1940–2016) served as a priest for many years in the Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, and as a hospice chaplain. Near the end of his life on Earth, Father Fenlon prayed that his friends, family, and loved ones would discover "increased gratitude for their particular life and the mystery of love it reveals." We are grateful for the generous gift that



Father Fenlon left to the Center for Action and Contemplation in his will. His legacy lives on as we seek to awaken more love in our world.

Please consider including the Center for Action and Contemplation in your estate plan. To learn more about remembering CAC in your will, contact Corinne Carmony at [ccarmony@cac.org](mailto:ccarmony@cac.org) or 505-242-9588 x123.

## A Reflection on the Living School: Alumna and Staff Member Kirsten Oates

Through the teachings of the faculty, texts from the mystics, group discussion, and opportunities for contemplative practice, the Living School seeks to help students embody the mysterious, flowing, relational, compassionate, evolutionary force we call God. This is much more than imparting knowledge *about* God; it is an invitation to an internal experience *of* God, as described in the works of the Christian mystics. When students attune to this flow, it moves them toward loving action in their lives and awakens in them a sense of love in the world. Because of this, the Living School is a very different kind of institution. “Success” is less about black-and-white metrics and more about the subtle movement from the head to the heart—in attunement with the heart of God. In this process, success includes the necessary chaos and descent that can bring forth a new kind of clarity and relationship



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with God, the self, and all things.

The curriculum continues to evolve as the faculty and staff evolve in their work, which includes learning from actual student experiences. The challenge for faculty, staff, and students alike, is to stay open to this mysterious, flowing, relational, compassionate, evolutionary force. In doing so, we are more able to embody its gifts. As a graduate of the Living School and a CAC staff member, I experience myself as a lifelong student of everything I have learned in the Living School. I am so grateful for the growing community of staff, students, and alumni who are committed to finding ways to more intentionally awaken in the world the love for which we all yearn.

*Kirsten Oates, Managing Director of Planning and Programs for the Center for Action and Contemplation, is responsible for ensuring that the Center’s program design is aligned to the Christian contemplative lineage.*

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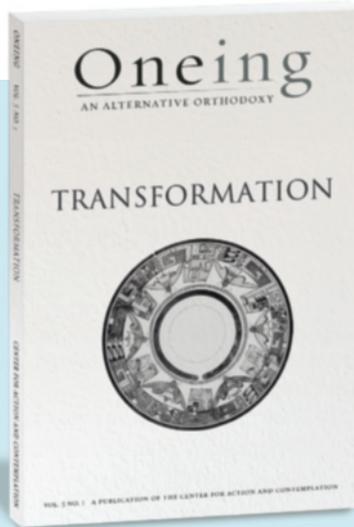
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This issue of *Oneing* features both scholarly reflections and stories of transformative experiences from Paula D'Arcy, Wm Paul Young, Cynthia Bourgeault, Sam Shriver, poet David Whyte, and many others.

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