

# MENDICANT

## Jesus, Christ, and the Beloved Community

RICHARD ROHR, OFM

The Franciscan philosopher and theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), whom I studied for four years, wrote that “God first wills Christ as his supreme work.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, God’s “first idea” and priority was to make the Godself both visible and shareable. The word used in the Bible for this idea was *Logos*, which was taken from Greek philosophy, and

which I would translate as the “Blueprint”

for reality. *The whole of creation*—not just Jesus—is the beloved community, the partner in the divine dance. Everything is the “child of God”—no exceptions. When you think of it, what else could anything be? All creatures must, in some way, carry the divine DNA of their Creator.

Unfortunately, the notion of faith that emerged in the West was much more a *rational assent to the truth of certain mental beliefs, rather than a calm and hopeful trust that God is inherent in all things, and that this whole thing is going somewhere good*. Predictably, we soon separated intellectual belief (which tends to differentiate and limit) from love and hope (which unite and thus eternalize). As Paul says in his great hymn to love, “There are only three things that last, faith, hope, and love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). All else passes.

*Faith, hope, and love are the very nature of God, and thus the nature of all Being.*

*Such goodness cannot die. (Which is what we mean when we say “heaven.”)*

Each of these Three Great Virtues must always include the other two in order to be authentic: love is always hopeful and faithful, hope is always loving and faithful, and faith is always loving and hopeful. They are the very nature of God and thus of all Being. Such wholeness is personified in the cosmos as Christ, and in human history as Jesus.

So, God is not just love (1 John 4:16) but also absolute faithfulness and hope itself. The energy of this faithfulness and hope flows out from the Creator toward all created beings, producing all growth and healing, and every springtime.

*No one religion will ever encompass the depth of such faith.*

*No ethnicity has a monopoly on such hope.*

*No nationality can control or limit this flow of such universal love.*

These are the ubiquitous gifts of the Christ Mystery, hidden inside of all that has ever lived, died, and will live again.

I hope the vision is coming clearer. It is, in a way, so simple and commonsensical that it is hard to teach. It is mostly a matter of unlearning, and *learning to trust your Christian common sense*, if you will allow me to say that. Christ is a good and simple metaphor for absolute wholeness, complete incarnation, and the integrity of creation. Jesus

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—not just Jesus—  
is the beloved community,  
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# The World of the Christ

KAITLIN CURTICE

When we moved across town last December, I had the opportunity to get to know the trees in our new backyard. At our old house, I'd become especially close to a pine tree in the far left corner, a tree that I'd visit and pray with, one that consistently led me to God.

Our new home is nestled beside a giant water oak, the kind that shelters and shades in the summer time, the kind that knows how grand they are. During Lent last year, I went out to officially introduce myself. I gently touched the rough skin of their trunk, greeted them in Potawatomi and in English, and wandered the yard, listening.

The world's creatures speak of divine things, if only we would listen. There are welcoming presences all around

hungry and thirsty for a reminder that we are not alone. Then the wind blows, and the waters lap against the tree trunks at the edge of a lake, and a kind of language only known in the heart and soul, only spoken by what is sacred and holy in the world, tells us again: *Don't be afraid.*

The promise of healing rings in those words.

We are not alone.

The creatures of the earth, our kin, are not alone.

The Christ, *Kche Mnedo*, never leaves us alone.

And, as Fr. Richard says, "everything belongs."

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 139.



The world's creatures speak of divine things,  
if only we would listen.

us, if only we would take the time to notice. Maybe then, we'd treat the earth better than we have. Maybe then, we'd understand that it's our duty to care for all creatures and, in so doing, to care for one another, our human kin.

The worldview of humanity is often grim and painful. As Frederick Buechner once wrote, "Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid."<sup>1</sup> I have held on to these words as a writer, a mystic, a mother, a friend, and a human being. We hold inside of ourselves and see in one another the full range of what it means to live on this earth and inhabit both deep joy and unending grief.

The universal Christ, whom I might call *Kche Mnedo* or *Mamogosnan*, Great Spirit or Creator, is the one who holds all things together, whispering of healing, whispering for us to hold on.

To return to the gifts of creation, to *Segmekwe*, Mother Earth, is to acknowledge that, in our smallness, we are

KAITLIN CURTICE, an enrolled citizen of the Potawatomi Citizen Band Nation, is a writer and speaker. Her book, *Glory Happening: Finding the Divine in Everyday Places*, is a collection of fifty essays and prayers from her life that focus on the idea of glory. Kaitlin has contributed pieces to multiple publications and is featured in the current edition of *Oneing*, CAC's literary journal. To learn more about Kaitlin, please visit <https://kaitlincurtice.com/>.

"Christ came on earth, not to wear the awful cold beauty of a holy statue, but to be numbered among the wicked, to die as one of them, condemned by the pure, He Who was beyond purity and impurity. If Christ is not really my brother with all my sorrows, with all my burdens on His shoulder and all my poverty and sadness in His heart, then there has been no redemption. Then what happened on the Cross was only magic, and the miracles were magic without purpose."  
—Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

# The Bow

PAUL SWANSON

*When you cannot do anything except bow, you should do it.*

— Shunryu Suzuki

While I was strolling on a trail in the desert heat last week, drenched in silent sweat, a jackrabbit blocked my path. Long ears perked, throwing side eyes at me, she froze, just inches away from my dusty feet. In my experience, once a rabbit gets a whiff of my humanity, she usually scrambles for cover. Not this one. We held one gaze. I recalled Living School teacher James Finley, echoing Suzuki above: “If you ever find yourself in a situation where you don’t know what to do—bow.” So, I bowed at my fellow creature. She stared at me, then bowed her head. We held our humble posture for a few breaths. We agreed we couldn’t stay like this forever, so she went her way and I mine. She darted off and my eyes followed. The graceful bounds of this rabbit’s run were the mirror image of my daughter’s sprint to the swing set across the park lawn.

The Living School for Action and

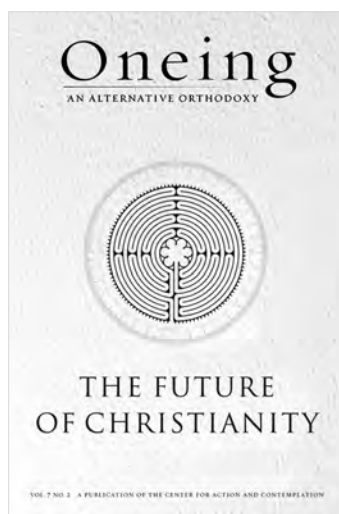


Bowing is a practice of embodied humility that honors the other.

Contemplation only matters if students soak up the teachings, community, and practices and bow to the reality of their lives. And the Living School only matters if it can bow to the hardships, injustices, and questions of student realities amidst its contemplative depths. The exchange is where the “and” of Action and Contemplation resides. So, when students come to the Living School, they bow a lot. Staff and faculty do too. Not a fancy bow, just hands folded (or not) and a bend at the waist so the head dips below the heart. We barely notice the bowing after a while. A bow will often naturally unfold after a heartfelt sharing between students, a teaching, a contemplative sit, or when we do not know what to do when a jackrabbit blocks our path!

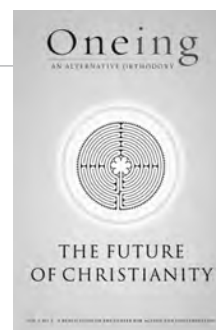
Bowing is a practice of embodied humility that honors the other and the mystery of an endlessly knowable God. So, when we bow, we bow to what we don’t

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**“How can we even begin to imagine the future of Christianity without first recognizing how it has managed to sustain itself—for better or worse—for over two thousand years?”**

Each of the contributors to this inspirational edition of *Oneing* brings a surprising perspective, in the spirit of the CAC’s vision and mission statements, to the challenging concept of engaging an unknowable future for a church with a very long history. Included in the edition are Richard Rohr, Diana Butler Bass, Brian McLaren, Nontombi Naomi Tutu, and other critical thinkers.



This edition of *Oneing* is also available as a PDF, designed especially for our international readers who have requested a digital, downloadable version.

To purchase this limited edition of *Oneing*, CAC’s biannual literary journal, please visit [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org).



# The Wholly Holy Black Female Face of God

CHRISTENA CLEVELAND

What if we took seriously the truth that God is not male *or* white?

I received more death threats and hate mail than ever when, in 2016, I wrote an article about Jesus' blackness for *Christianity*

*Today* magazine. The fact that many people have a visceral, violent reaction to the idea that God isn't white says a lot about how we have been culturally conditioned to defend the idea that God is not just a man, but a *white* man. So, I'm not surprised that, while the idea of a female God perhaps raises eyebrows, the idea of a *black* female God literally disgusts people. Our conditioning has taught us to automatically perceive femininity as untrustworthy and blackness as dirty. So, black femininity is perceived as wholly unholy.

There's something very evil about the way black women in particular are perceived as distant from the Divine. It brings to mind the Jezebel stereotype, the idea that black women are lascivious by nature, which has long plagued black women. Sociologist David Pilgrim explains: "Historically, white women, as a category, were portrayed as models of self-respect, self-control, and modesty—even sexual purity, but black women were often portrayed as innately promiscuous, even predatory."<sup>1</sup> The Jezebel stereotype flourished during slavery as justification for the consistent raping of black female slaves. White men convinced themselves that black women had insatiable appetites for sex. Therefore, they were always "asking for it."



The Jezebel stereotype continues to thrive today. Recently, a white male spiritual leader asked me for help. His mostly white community needed a music leader and he wanted to hire a person of color. I immediately thought of a black woman I knew who'd potentially be a good fit. When

I suggested he contact her, the pastor said, "Ugh. No. She'll probably just sleep with everyone on the music team."

I could tell you one hundred more stories like this one, which is why I walked over four hundred miles last November in search of black female representations of the Divine. On my pilgrimage, I visited eighteen Black Madonna statues in remote French village churches. Though my muscles were weary, each step felt a little like balm to my black female soul because

each step brought me closer to images of black women as holy and trustworthy. Indeed, each step brought me closer to the Divine.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David Pilgrim, "The Jezebel Stereotype," *Ferris State University*, July 2002, edited 2012, <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/jezebel/index.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about my walking pilgrimage and join my ongoing Virtual Black Madonna Pilgrimage, visit [patreon.com/cscleve](https://patreon.com/cscleve).

CHRISTENA CLEVELAND, PhD, is a social psychologist, public theologian, author, and activist based in North Carolina. She is founder and director of the Center for Justice + Renewal and the author of *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*. To learn more about Christena Cleveland, visit <http://www.christenacleveland.com/>.

## Jesus, Christ, and the Beloved Community

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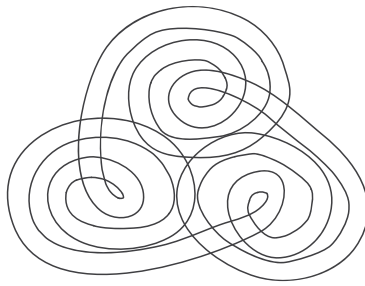
is the archetypal human, just like us (Hebrews 4:15), who showed us what the Full Human might look like if we could fully live into it. Frankly, *Jesus came to show us how to be human much more than how to be spiritual*, and the process still seems to be in its early stages.

Without Jesus, the sheer scale and significance of our deep humanity is just too much, and too good, for our ordinary minds to imagine. But when we rejoin Jesus

with Christ, we can begin a Big Imagining and a Great Work.

<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1975), 1548.

*This article is an adapted and edited excerpt from Richard Rohr's book The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe. Used with permission. Learn more about the book at [universalchrist.org](http://universalchrist.org).*



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## The Bow

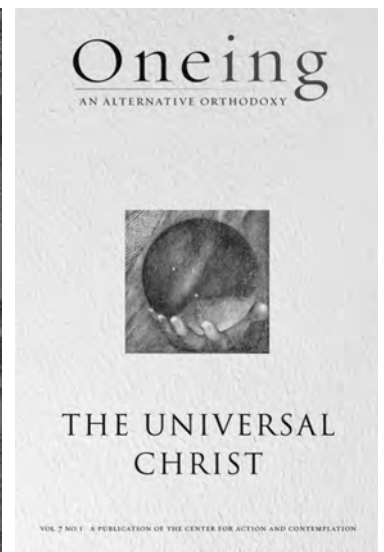
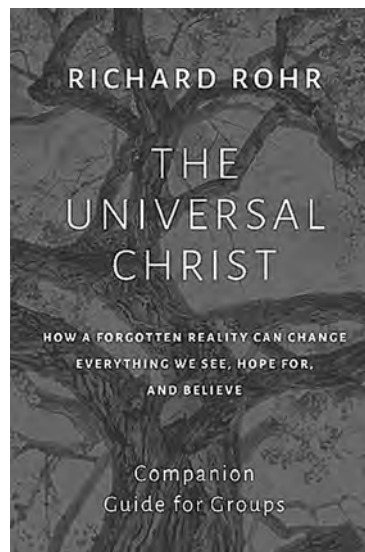
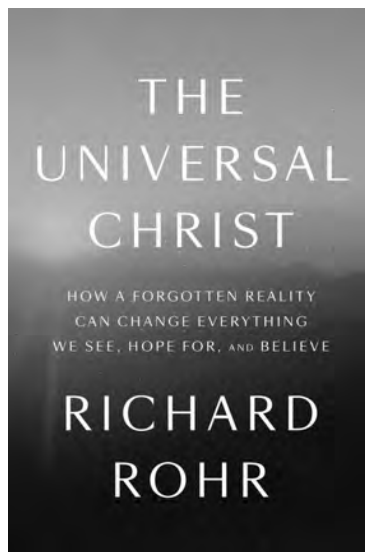
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know, to what reality can teach us, to a Creator who delights in our worship, to a Christ who abides in us, to a Spirit who nudges us onward, and to a community that gathers in faith that it will one day fully live into its own belovedness.

And we bow to you, dear reader, as we meet each other on this desert trail of contemplation and action.

PAUL SWANSON, former curriculum director for the Center for Action and Contemplation's Living School, currently serves as a program designer in the CAC's Department of Planning and Programs. Paul has been on staff at the CAC for eleven years.

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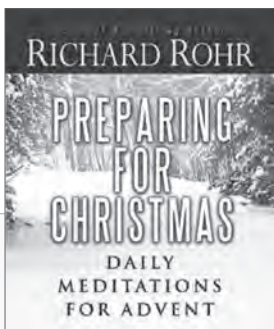




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