

# MENDICANT

The year 2020 has been a deeply challenging time for all of us. We recognize many of you have experienced difficulties and loss. Here at the CAC, we have had to find new ways to imagine our path forward, as have all organizations during this pandemic. When we first envisioned the theme of Order, Disorder, Reorder for the Fall 2020 edition of our literary journal *Oneing*, little did we know how well it would help to frame our times. As we have continued to work from our separate homes, we have looked deeply into what it means to come together in work and prayer. For this edition of *the Mendicant*, we decided to share glimpses of how the pattern of order, disorder, and reorder has affected the CAC staff since it was determined that we needed to leave the Center and work remotely from our home offices because of the COVID-19 virus.

## Order, Disorder, Reorder: A Time of Unveiling

MARK LONGHURST

I first sat down in my new home office on March 2, 2020 to begin work as the Managing Editor of *Richard's Daily Meditations*. I had hung and stacked everything in place: the Bill McNichols prints of Mary Magdalene and a meditating Jesus; bookshelf contents organized by Fr. Richard's works, CAC faculty writings, history of mysticism, and more. I propped open my shiny MacBook Air, with a nearby cup of coffee steaming, and jumped in with my whole heart.

For an initial two weeks, I stewarded the Daily Meditations team. This team is remarkable, and I name them so you too can know who they are: Program Designer Cliff Berrien creates Saturday contemplative practices; Publications Director Vanessa Guerin proofreads; contractor Therese Terndrup hunts citation sources; contractors Judy Traeger, Leslye Colvin, and Ali Kirkpatrick curate and edit. I remember the flutter of excitement when I pressed "send" to email Fr. Richard my first proposed week of meditations.

Then the pandemic spread, the shutdowns started, and the schools closed.

My kids crawled on me during the CAC staff's virtual morning sit. We stumbled and started remote schooling at home, while unimaginable suffering extended across the world and around the country. Many could work at home on our computers; many could not. Reality was revealing something collectively to us—but what?

We chose "A Time of Unveiling" for the *Richard's Daily*



*Meditations* 2021 theme because it seems that reality is being unveiled in our moment. Reality has been here the whole time, of course, just as God Is Who God Is (Exodus 3:14). But never—in my lifetime, at least—have interwoven crises forced us to reckon with reality in quite so challenging a way.

On the one hand, it may feel like "end times," not because the world is actually ending, but because our sense of normalcy has been so upended. One key inspiration for the 2021 theme comes from the word "apocalyptic," which—contrary to popular

belief—does not mean destruction or the end of the world. The Greek word for "revelation" is *apokalypsis*, which means an unveiling or disclosure of deeper truth and meaning. In the United States and elsewhere, the pandemic joined forces with other pandemics, such as racism, poverty, and climate change. This time of disorder has ripped off the band-aid of denial. Once we see, we can't *not* see.

But it's not only the difficult truths that are being unveiled; it's also the hopeful ones. Even while the temptation to despair might be great, Fr. Richard Rohr's teaching affirms and challenges us to recognize that the universe is still trustworthy and benevolent, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Christ is not Jesus' last name, Fr. Richard tells us in *The Universal Christ*; it is the unity of matter and spirit from the very beginning and through time, until the very end. Christ holds our lives

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It seems that reality is being unveiled in our moment.

# Order, Disorder, Reorder: Embracing Disorder

TISHA FORD

When I was first approached about writing a piece for *the Mendicant*, informed by the second element of Richard Rohr's three-phased framework for our evolutionary journey of human consciousness, I was both excited and perplexed. What had I demonstrated in my time at the CAC that would indicate such familiarity with Disorder? Immediately, the intimate nature of this particular pairing became clear to me and I was suddenly thrust into an entangled dance with the disorder that has always shaped my life.



## WITNESSING DISORDER

I was born with a bleeding disorder—more accurately, a form of Hemophilia. Oh, the upset it caused in the local medical community! This *disorder-inducing* instigator—a *black girl with a white disease*—seemed annoyingly incomprehensible to the medical teams, no matter the evidence to the contrary. In extreme cases, I recall being refused immediate treatment during frantic midnight Emergency Room visits. I can still see my mother's face, hear her voice, and feel her fear as she battled (begged) with the doctor to see me—and then comforting me, telling me to hold on, while driving me to the next ER, hoping for a more favorable outcome. I can also recall just as much fear in the faces of those medical experts who refused to accept my diagnosis, their sense of *order* dissolving with every piece of presented medical evidence challenging their established beliefs.

## EXPERIENCING DISORDER

Imagining a future for myself was not a luxury I could afford. The exercise of *possibility* was futile, leaving that muscle dormant. The fact that I would not live into adulthood wasn't verbally acknowledged in my home. However, my anticipated fate hovered over and informed the design of my life. Urgency was the driver, and my life moved at warp speed. I was tasked to fit a big life into this little body.

Then, quite miraculously, I woke up one day, my body fully grown, and people were standing before me, demanding I share my hopes and dreams. I had rarely touched on the possibilities of life; rather, I wholly embraced the probability of death. Dare I say: I surrendered to her courtship. The disorientation of this new reality was unparalleled, to the point of paralysis. This incredible gift had been handed to me, and I was unable to open it. All that I knew, believed, and had prepared for, with a literal snap of a finger, was no more. I was tasked with the

glorious mission to pay attention to, care about, and live into this new reality. Thus began the dismantlement of all that I knew about myself and the world. In order to survive, I had to remove my face (mask) and release it to the heavens.

## EMBRACING (INVITING) DISORDER

One night, years later, I came across a job post for Managing Director of Production and Outreach for the CAC. Upon reading its description, I could feel the call to a new adventure, and I had no choice but to accept. The third interview into my vetting process, I realized I had to clear my path to the CAC. I put my New Jersey condo on the market, and within a few weeks it sold. The CAC's offer still pending, I quit my job, packed up my home of nineteen years—alone—and moved my life to my parents' home in Delaware. Within a week, my fate was sealed, and I would be joining the CAC, moving again—almost two thousand miles away from my family and friends, and, most potently, leaving my mother to care for my father with his long-standing health issues. The call to adventure was undeniable and a new city, new job, new apartment, new faces, and new way of life, was my path.

I spent Christmas 2019 in Delaware with my family. Four generations under one roof—a truly rare and fortuitous moment in time. Most precious was the time I shared with my father. Rubbing his cheeks, leading him into contemplative and somatic practices each morning, and simply sitting in silence with one another, these are

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I was suddenly thrust into an entangled dance with Disorder.

# Order, Disorder, Reorder— and Resolution

DOUG MURRELL

I learned that organizational growth comes through disruption and discomfort.

In the 1970s, the record player was a standard fixture in many households, and our home was no exception. In fact, my first words as a toddler were “record player,” or, as I would say, “wrecka-p’ayer.” Having grown up with a “wrecka-p’ayer,” I absolutely, positively loved music—and I still do: all genres, from classical to hip hop to jazz to gospel. In my opinion, music expresses the human condition in a manner that cannot be captured by mere words.

If someone were to ask me, “Why, why do you love music?” I could boil it down to one single thing: resolution. Musically, resolution is when the music moves from a sense of suspense or chaos to a sense of stability, structure, or resolve. Hearing a symphony, quartet, or choir resolve from the complex and disconcerting to the steady and calming is one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed. And to actively participate in resolution as a musician is indescribable. Butterflies erupt in my stomach when I know that the second I play this note, at this moment, combined with others playing their notes, we will create a sound that is steadfast, firm, and warm. Resolution: A word you may not connect to music, but we all know it when we hear it, sense it, and, more importantly, feel it.

I discovered my love for resolution when I embraced jazz music. Jazz, a genre full of dissonance, distortion, and improvisation, grew my appetite for more difficult melodies. The more disruptive the melody, the stronger its resolution. Ironically, the most challenging and complex melodies may never resolve, leaving room for mystery and the unknown.

In systems or organizations, the musical concept of resolution translates to order (and reorder)—this notion of accepted and agreed-upon structure, boundaries, and norms. This idea of order provided a place of comfort and certainty for me as a young leader. Therefore, it is no surprise that my professional career has included time served in two of the most rigid and structured organizations on the planet: the military and the institutional church.

One of the first principles of church leadership I ever learned was that things

are done decently and in order. Decently and in order. Cue the Hammond B3 organ and pass me the tambourine (in that order, please). This principle, coupled with my military training, molded me into someone who played it safe and rarely took risks. As a leader, I recognized the initial container of order within organizations, and the absence thereof. Like my discovery and love of jazz, I also learned that organizational growth and change comes through disruption, disorder, and discomfort. Whether the growth journey evolves as linear or non-linear, the starting point is the same. It begins with the initial container, order.

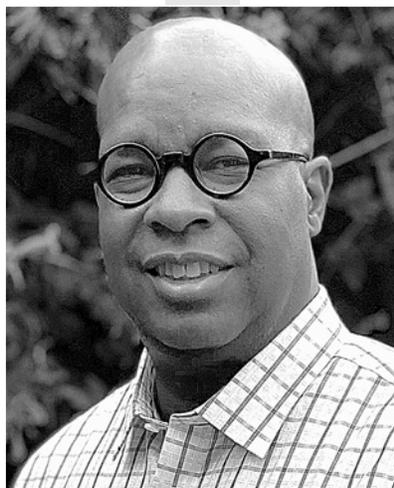
Jazz, with its cycle of dissonance and resolution, is where I first learned the concept of order, disorder, and reorder. Many years later, as a leader searching for deeper truths, I identified the cycle once more in Fr. Richard Rohr’s wisdom pattern of order, disorder, and reorder. This teaching resonated deep within my soul before I ever actually understood it intellectually, and that inner knowing is what makes it beautiful. About order, Fr. Richard states:

A sense of order is the easiest and most natural way to begin; it is a needed first “container.” But this structure is dangerous if we stay in its safe confines too long. It is small and self-serving. It doesn’t know the full picture, but it thinks it does. “Order” must be deconstructed by the trials and vagaries of life. We must go through a period of “disorder” to grow up.<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2019, I assumed my current role as Chief Operating Officer for the Center for Action and Contemplation. My charge was to operationalize our organizational strategy and lead our fifty team members to understand, align with, and fully support our strategic goals and plan for growth. (That sounds like order.) I welcomed the challenge of developing an organizational infrastructure that is both scalable and sustainable, leveraging both my faith-based and operational experience to ensure proper alignment, fiscal strength, and desired outcomes.

My initial impression of the CAC was

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# Order, Disorder, Reorder—and Resolution

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that the organization was deceptively complex. Behind our many outputs (i.e., daily meditations, events, podcasts, publications, online courses, and two-year Living School program), there exists an intricate set of processes and sequencing that involves much collaboration and care. After a few months, I recognized a pattern and began my attempt to establish an initial container—to establish order.

As a part of our 2020 annual planning, I introduced an organizational rhythm (referring to the intent, frequency, and duration of meetings that occur annually, quarterly, monthly, and weekly); ensured the approved budget was balanced, yet aggressive; and provided clarity around our 2020 priorities via a written operations plan. With an emphasis on project management, using our favorite Asana platform as a tool, I felt confident 2020 would provide the foundation required to build the future CAC.

However, I forgot to remind myself that this starting point, this initial container, was only temporary if I truly desired growth for the organization. Like the feverish pitch of music building to a crescendo of chaotic dissonance, we all began to watch the sustained notes of uncertainty play out in the world. On March 16, I made the decision to shift

We watched the notes of uncertainty play out in the world.

our operations from our physical office to remote work due to the COVID-19 virus. While this disruption has hindered the efforts of many organizations, the CAC has weathered the storm, ensuring our team was cared for and simultaneously increasing our productivity.

As my body waits with great anticipation for the warm feeling of resolution that will come from a return to normalcy, I know in my deepest knowing that we will never return to that initial container. During this time of collective disorder, informed by lessons learned, lives lived, and hardships experienced, we have grown tremendously.

And to that I say, “Let the music play!”

<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr, “Order, Disorder, Reorder,” *Richard’s Daily Meditations*, July 14, 2017, <https://cac.org/order-disorder-reorder-2017-07-14/>.

DOUG MURRELL is a decorated Navy officer and a former executive pastor with twenty-five years in operations management. He holds degrees in human and organizational development and public administration and was the director of global faith engagement at Habitat for Humanity International before joining the CAC as Chief Operating Officer.

## Order, Disorder, Reorder: Embracing Disorder [continued from page 2]

memories I will forever treasure, a true teaching in silence and stillness.

Six months into my tenure at the CAC, COVID-19 hit, and plans were a foregone notion. Most of the world was being thrown headfirst into unknown waters. Soon after, my father’s health quickly deteriorated and, on Easter Sunday, April 12, six days after my forty-ninth birthday, my father died. He was

Six months into my tenure at the CAC, COVID-19 hit.

gone and I was across the country, alone, quarantined, and unable to be by his side, to grieve in the presence of my family or be held by a friend. Space, which I have always loved and devoured, felt constrictive and suffocating for the first time.

A month later, George Floyd was murdered at the hands of police officers and, as history will cement, racial unrest reached an undeniable pitch. As the daughter of a recently deceased black police officer, my emotions spanned the

diverse global landscape of the moment. It all felt so familiar, and yet I experienced a newness through the wide collective eyes of a socially conscious CAC, and of a nation—all staring back at me. It was no longer a peripheral, at-a-glance injustice, but rather a central heartbeat with reverberations, far, wide, and deep. I recalled my father’s stories of his early years as

a cop, a time when it was not uncommon to call a black man the N-word and a police officer, *pig*. He loved being a police officer; he loved being a black man. What did I love? How did I want to be present to and have an impact in this moment in time?

When I joined the CAC, there were the obvious life changes I knew would occur. I understood that inevitable adjustments and discomforts would naturally follow. The

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# Order, Disorder, Reorder: A Time of Unveiling

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and the cosmos together as Alpha and Omega, and, in the broadest scheme of things, we are “going somewhere good,”<sup>1</sup> precisely because we are “in Christ.”

Fr. Richard’s threefold schema of Order, Disorder, and Reorder has been helpful to me as I navigate life in these unprecedented times. We are still collectively in the hurricane’s eye of disorder. Who could have imagined how challenging the past year would be? Yet the disorder of our current time is nevertheless pregnant with the ever-emerging truth of *reorder*. The whale spit Jonah back onto land, and God raised Christ after the third day. Reality *is* hopeful, even if it’s devastating. There is always, as Fr. Richard writes, “life on the other side of death, victory on the other side of failure, joy on the other side of the pains of childbirth.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact of reorder is primarily more about God’s *faithfulness to us and to the universe* than it is about anything we can do ourselves. Perhaps our primary task is to receive and trust the hope and promise that God offers us in these times, and all times. Such a posture does not absolve us of committed action and collective problem-solving, but rather aligns our intent and impact. CAC teacher James Finley says, “My spiritual practice is to sit each day in childlike sincerity with an inner stance that offers the least resistance to being overtaken by the God-given, godly nature of myself just the way I am.”<sup>3</sup> In doing so, and even in spite of what we are facing, we access a deeper love and joy that is authentic and true. We are able, as Wendell Berry counsels us, to “be joyful, even though we have considered all the facts.”<sup>4</sup> Just as reality unveils the suffering of our lives, so too does it unveil resurrection.

Wherever you find yourself on your spiritual path—

Reorder is primarily about God’s faithfulness to us and to the universe.

in the abyss, on the mountaintop, or both at the same time—the CAC is here to support you. *Richard’s Daily Meditations* is one program amidst CAC’s growing list of opportunities to embrace the transformation that comes from a contemplative practice and life. Each week of this year, the Daily Meditations team will offer different ways to support the unveiling of God’s love for you and the world. We will also “unveil” several new opportunities to encounter Divine Presence, whether through Creative Team member Jenna Keiper’s contemplative photography banner-images project, or the option to explore Saturday contemplative practices through video and sound.

Similarly, the staff and faculty are putting *so much* attention and loving care into publications, podcasts, online courses, events, and Living School symposiums that will be unveiled in 2021. We do this because we are thrilled to serve the CAC’s mission, with the belief that the spiritual journey is always important—perhaps now more than ever.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (New York: Convergent, 2019), 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>3</sup> James Finley, Living School curriculum, Unit 1, as quoted in Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation “Oneness: Weekly Summary,” September 28, 2019, <https://cac.org/oneness-weekly-summary-2019-09-28/>.

<sup>4</sup> Wendell Berry, “Manifesto: Mad Farmer Liberation Front,” *The Country of Marriage* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2013), 14.

MARK LONGHURST is a writer and pastor who served United Church of Christ churches in Massachusetts for a decade and was a student in the first cohort of the Center for Action and Contemplation’s Living School. He is now the CAC’s Managing Editor of *Richard’s Daily Meditations*.

# Order, Disorder, Reorder: Embracing Disorder

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true call to adventure, however, has become the direct confrontation with significant external events, coupled with the unique makeup of the CAC, a combination that would systematically attempt to crack me wide open. What I read in the job description on that cool, dark night was only part of the story. The real story would unfold through a series of events that would rigorously work to break down (through) the personal and social conditioning in which I nestled and force me to tap into the muscle of possibility beyond what I believed to be my capability.

What does that look like? I don’t know yet, but what I do know is that there is no turning back. I have the rest of my life to discover—and that is truly the greatest gift this time of disorder has given me.

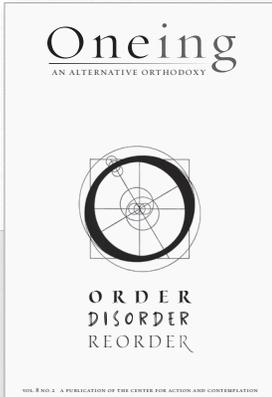
TISHA FORD is a dancer who supports the creation of pathways for personal transformation as Managing Director of Production and Outreach at the CAC. She has danced the lead in multiple ballets, led a diversity procurement initiative for the Super Bowl, overseen the Art of Dying Institute, and is a certified yoga instructor and life coach.



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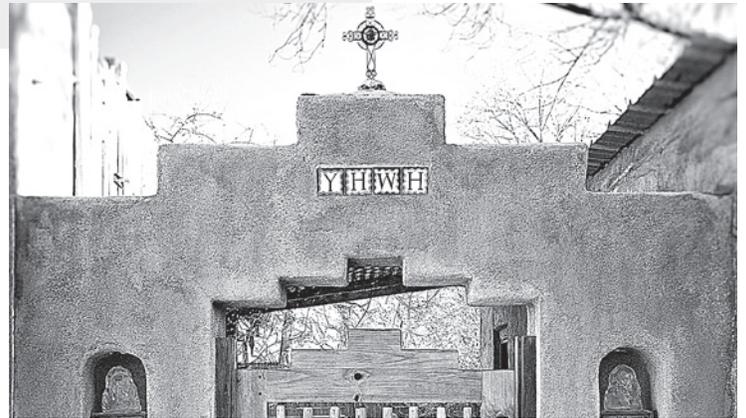
“Every original ‘order’ learns to include an initially threatening disorder, which morphs into and creates a new reordering, and we begin all over again.”

—Richard Rohr

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