

the Mendicant

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

◀ EMBRACING THE PAST, WELCOMING THE FUTURE ▶

Growing Down: Letting Go and the Path of Descent

DREW JACKSON

I was introduced to the CAC and Fr. Richard's teachings in my early twenties, very much in the throes of the first half of life—I was fresh out of college, a new seminarian, and focused on making something of myself. At the same time, however, my life was being turned upside-down. My mom, who had been a rock and the center of gravity for our family, was sick with breast cancer. She passed away at the age of fifty-six, when I was just twenty-three years old.

I had experienced the death of family members before, but I had never lost anyone as close to me as my mother. At the time we lost her, I felt like my life was just beginning—newly married, new to vocational ministry, fatherhood just around the corner—but the reality began to sink in that I would not have the chance to experience any of these things with my mom. She was gone, and I was undone.

It was at this point that a friend introduced me to Fr. Richard's teachings. I remember devouring *Eager to Love* and *The Naked Now*, but what grabbed my heart initially was his teaching about letting go. I can't remember exactly where I read it, but I recall him talking about Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) and “a spirituality of subtraction”—the concept that all healthy spirituality eventually leads us downward, on the path of unknowing. This wasn't new to me, as my mom had talked to me about this for years, but something about losing my mom opened my soul to this teaching in a new way.

If great love and great suffering are the paths to transformation, as Fr. Richard often says, then I had experienced both with my mom, and the suffering of losing her was preparing



me for something new. Buried in the experience of my mom's death was an invitation for me to let go of the life I had imagined and had come to expect would take shape. If I kept trying to hold onto the life I thought I was supposed to have, I would miss out on “the life that is truly life” that I was being invited to embrace, “for whoever tries to save their own life will lose it, but the one who loses their own life will find it” (Matthew 16:25).

To help me reflect on this spirituality of subtraction, I wrote a short poem called

“Growing Down”:

Know that growth
more often looks like
letting go
than adding more;
having all the extra
stripped away
until all that's left
Is Love.

There are so many more things I could share about the impact that CAC and Fr. Richard have had on me, but I hold eternal gratitude for how they have been guides for me on this journey of descent.

Drew Jackson is a poet, speaker, and public theologian who serves as the Director of Mission Integration for the CAC. He is the author of God Speaks Through Wombs: Poems on God's Unexpected Coming and Touch the Earth: Poems on The Way. Drew lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Genay, and their twin daughters, Zora and Suhaila.

A Journey of Grace

What a happy day it was in 2012 when Carolyn Woo, then CEO of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), forwarded to me CAC’s Daily Meditations, introducing me to Richard Rohr. Carolyn knew that my life had been changed by profound encounters with extraordinary people living in cow-dung huts in Northern Kenya, that I moved my family one thousand miles to join a nonprofit dedicated to global equity and justice, and that I had studied with liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. She likely guessed that the focus on contemplation and action would resonate. Now, each day begins for me with the daily meditation.

In 2016, I was spiritually yearning for more, but the CAC’s Living School didn’t seem right for me—until after my husband and I walked the Camino de Santiago. We travelled light, carrying only what we needed, and fell into a daily rhythm of morning prayer and meditation, ten to fifteen miles of prayerful walking, then journaling and a pilgrims’ Mass. What Fr. Richard teaches was revealed to

As I look back, Fr. Richard became my spiritual teacher on that very first day of the Living School. He transmitted to me the model of “practice” that informs me today: contemplative prayer, study of Scripture and the mystics, embodiment, and action—putting our faith to work for justice. The teachings of other extraordinary faculty changed who I am, how I show up in the world, and my approach to leadership and problem-solving. My Living School circle group, a small cohort of fellow students instructed to meet biweekly for the two years of the program, still meets after five years and sustains me.

Today, I am most concerned about our society’s crisis of faith and spirituality and its implications for the world. In 2020, I co-authored an article on the role of faith-inspired organizations in the social sector and came to see that Fr. Richard, the CAC faculty, and the Living School team are onto something very big that the world desperately needs. While the Catholic Church, as an institution, provides 20 percent of the world’s education, 40 percent of Africa’s healthcare, and is the largest nonprofit provider of basic needs in the US, we also know that people are leaving the major faith traditions in droves because their spiritual needs are not being met. Thirty percent—and rising—of US adults are religiously unaffiliated. As the world hungers for spiritual meaning, purpose, and connection, helping the CAC and other innovators from across many faith traditions is a top priority for me.

Jeri Queenan’s “deep gladness”¹ is in working with teams to solve society’s most pressing problems, including serving from 2007–2023 as Partner at Bridgespan, a nonprofit strategic advisor to mission-driven nonprofits and philanthropies advancing justice globally. She is blessed by Charlie Queenan, her soulmate and spouse of forty years; their four adult children; and a close extended family and connected community.

¹ Reference to Frederick Buechner’s description of vocation as “the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” in *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 95.



“Fr. Richard became my spiritual teacher on that very first day of the Living School. He transmitted to me the model of “practice” that informs me today.”

us in profound ways: God in all things, the many faces of Christ in those we encounter, the Trinitarian flow. Then, the Living School made sense, and I was blessed to join the 2020 cohort.

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A Lesson in Loving-Kindness

May I be filled with loving-kindness;
May I be healthy and well;
May I be peaceful and at ease;
May I be happy.
—Traditional Buddhist Meditation

My husband’s family was drawn to Fr. Richard Rohr’s light several decades ago as early supporters of the development of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque. As a family, we are deeply honored to aid in the work of the CAC and to support Fr. Richard in his pursuit of clear, compassionate loving-kindness for all.

When I first met with Fr. Richard to prepare for my wedding in 2006, I was struck by his deep, contemplative, and thoughtful nature. He guided my fiancé John and me through the Enneagram, quickly learning that we were remarkably similar in temperament. He shared that this could mostly serve us well but might cause problems if we were not diligent. He encouraged us to look inward with rigor and sincerity and work through our challenges with grace and dignity.

Years later, I had an opportunity to put this wisdom to good use. I still remember the hushed sounds of the life-support machines to which I was attached in the Pulmonary Intensive Care Unit at Intermountain Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah. At that time, I had been intubated and awake for several hours. To calm down and stay sane, I tapped into loving-kindness meditation. I repeated the mantra above for the four days that I was intubated, unaware of how close to death I was. I only knew that I just needed to stay calm.

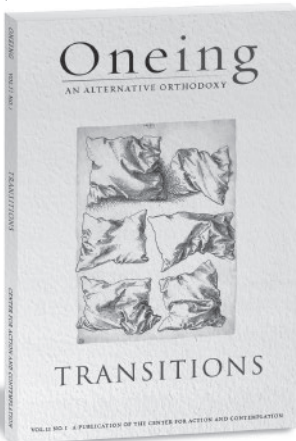
At the end of my fourth day in the ICU, the nurses pulled the intubation tube from my throat, and I was able to speak again. They were quite surprised and curious about how I had managed. “You were the calmest intubated and awake patient that we have ever seen in this unit. What did you do to stay so peaceful?” “I practiced loving-kindness meditation,” was my simple response. Meditation may have saved my life and most certainly helped me retain my sanity.

We are indeed blessed to have been touched by Fr. Richard’s wisdom. I am thankful for the insights and resources that he has shared with us over the seventeen years of our wonderful friendship.



“Loving-kindness meditation may have saved my life and most certainly helped me retain my sanity.”

Elaine Walsh Carney, Founding Principal of Pathfinder Philanthropy Advisors, has specialized in philanthropy, facilitation, mediation, and negotiation for thirty-two years. Elaine’s passion is developing and supporting a “culture of philanthropy” in the organizations that she serves. Her current volunteer leadership is focused on climate-change mitigation, democracy, and resilience. She lives in Jackson Hole, Wyoming with her husband of seventeen years, John Carney.



TRANSITIONS

ONEING: VOL. 11 NO. 1

Fr. Richard Rohr faithfully wrote the Introduction to each biannual issue of *Oneing* from its inception in 2013 through the Spring 2022 issue. As Fr. Richard transitions away from his many responsibilities at CAC, and the Center mindfully explores what it will look like when Fr. Richard is no longer its central animator, an issue of *Oneing* on this critical theme of *Transitions* made sense—especially during a time of multiple global transitions from peace to war, from democracy toward authoritarianism, and amidst major shifts in the earth’s ecosystem, to name only a few of the many critical issues humanity is facing today.

available at store.cac.org

Transparency in Action: CAC's New Financials Webpage

The Financial Philosophy provides a new grounding for our ongoing experimentation and reflection on how organizations like ours can help realize our mission through an alternative praxis around money. Ultimately, our aim is to build relationships that help us all to wake up to the sacredness of everything and relate to money as nothing more (or—perhaps even more daringly—nothing less!) than a tool for building a world which reflects that reality.

—Michael Poffenberger, Executive Director

At CAC, we believe that how we approach our finances is a direct reflection of our worldview and values. This belief inspired the adoption of a set of key financial principles in 2020 that are built upon our founder's theological philosophy regarding money. For the past two years, these key financial principles have served as a solid foundation for all aspects of our financial management practices and offered guidance on how we spend, steward, and share our financial resources in support of our mission. In this way, our financial philosophy embodies our commitment to align our fundraising efforts and other financial decisions with our organizational values and spiritual lineage.

We adopted a total of six financial principles, one of which is, "We practice transparency." One way we are putting this financial principle into practice is by making



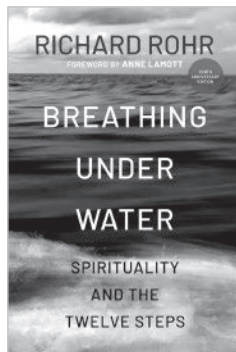
Our new financials webpage

our financial statements more available and easily accessible on our website. We believe it's important that supporters like you can see both how we are stewarding your gifts and the impact of your generosity as partners in our mission.

We invite you to explore CAC's new Stewarding Our Financial Resources webpage by visiting <https://cac.org/about/financials/>. This newly created webpage houses the last seven years of our audited financial statements, 990 Forms, and annual reports, and it will be regularly updated to include our latest financial documents as they become available.

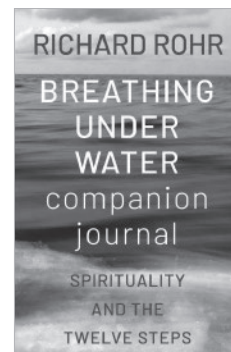
As we continue to weave our financial philosophy throughout our financial practices and operations, we aspire to meet our financial needs from a place of love that supports our organizational health and promotes the common good. We are grateful for your trust and generosity as partners in this work.

Breathing Under Water Tenth Anniversary Edition



available at store.cac.org

Breathing Under Water Tenth Anniversary Companion Journal



Disentangle cultural cycles of sin and emptiness in the Tenth Anniversary edition of Richard Rohr's *Breathing Under Water*. If you are ready to break negative patterns and experience greater internal freedom, begin your journey with this bestseller from Fr. Richard, with a new foreword by Anne Lamott.

Learn to apply key concepts from Richard Rohr's *Breathing Under Water* in this Tenth Anniversary companion journal which offers reflections and discussion questions designed to invite you deeper into both the source and solution for the dependencies unique to your own life.

Contemplative Christianity:

A New Way of Seeing and Being

I grew up in a Presbyterian church that gave me a sense of order and stability during my formative years. I went to church on Sundays, read my Bible, and believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. My understanding of faith was having the right beliefs about God so that I would go to heaven when I died. In the Christianity of my childhood, life was simple, and all the pieces fit together—until they didn't.

I moved to Philadelphia in 2013 as a bright-eyed aspiring social worker and accepted a job at a disability-rights organization. In this role, I visited people in their homes who were undergoing deeply painful experiences like poverty, neglect, racism, food insecurity, addiction, and eviction. I also had the privilege of working alongside some of the most loving, resilient, empathetic, and joyful people I had ever met.



“This new way of seeing and being started to change everything for me. Religion became transformational instead of transactional.”

Richard Rohr says that great love and great suffering are the two universal paths of transformation. For the first time, I felt like I was part of a community of transformed people working together to repair the world. What perplexed me was that most of these loving people weren't Christian, and many of the Christians I knew weren't very loving. If God is love and Christians are called to care for

the poor and the oppressed, why weren't there more transformed people sitting in the pews?

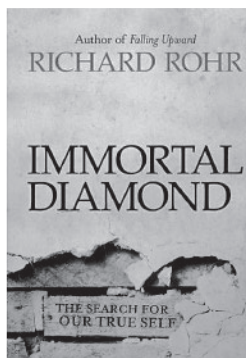
Around this same time, I was introduced to mindfulness meditation in graduate school. I was interested in the psychological benefits of mindfulness, so I started a daily practice. It didn't take long for me to experience an interior life that I hadn't accessed before. I started to notice that this practice was somehow strengthening my spiritual life too. Mindfulness helped me to encounter God's presence, but this felt disconnected from my understanding of Christianity until my mom gave me a copy of Fr. Richard's book *Just This*.

Just This opened me to a whole new world of Christian contemplative traditions that transformed me and my understanding of God. Christianity became more than affirming correct doctrine for personal salvation. It became a dynamic, relational religion that inspired loving action and communal restoration. I realized how many parables are about clear seeing. I recognized that contemplation helps us enter into the ongoing trinitarian flow of love. This new way of seeing and being started to change everything for me. Religion became transformational instead of transactional.

I'm deeply grateful for the many ways this little book on the practices and prompts for contemplation impacted my life. Especially now that I have the joy of being on the CAC team in an official capacity, I'm inspired to share this wisdom with others who might be searching for a transformative Christianity that also transcends and includes the Christianity of their childhood.

Danny Torrance is a Development Manager at CAC and joined the team in 2023. His focus is to help build a relational and values-aligned approach to fundraising and financial sustainability with CAC's donors. He lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and enjoys a good cup of coffee, long runs along the river, and surfing when he's visiting his home state of California.

In *Immortal Diamond*, Fr. Richard Rohr likens the True Self to a diamond buried deep within us, formed under the intense pressure of our lives. In this book, Fr. Richard helps readers search for and uncover who we really are, separated from all the debris of ego that surrounds it. Required reading for our online course *The Immortal Diamond*, this transformative work explores the deepest questions of



identity, spirituality, and meaning in Fr. Richard's inimitable style.

In a sense, the True Self must, like Jesus, be resurrected, and that process is not resuscitation but transformation.

“Profound, intelligent, wise, and passionate, this book continues Richard's great work in showing us what vibrant, Jesus-centered faith looks like.”
—Rob Bell



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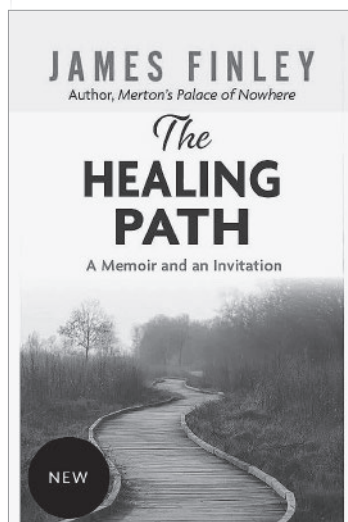
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We also invite you to remember CAC in your estate plan. For more information about making a charitable contribution, including stock transfers and bequests, please email development@cac.org.

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"James Finley brings a whole, wonderful balancing act to theology and spirituality. Jim is a healer. I believe his poetic words will help many people on their healing journey."

—Richard Rohr, author of *The Universal Christ*

This book is a contemplative reflection on the spirituality of healing, the fruit of the author's lifetime in conducting spiritual direction and psychotherapy, drawing on his lessons from Thomas Merton and study of the mystical path. It is largely written in the form of a memoir of his own recovery from the traumatic wounds of his life—abusive father, abuse by his confessor in the monastery, a dysfunctional marriage—and his road to healing and wholeness. But it is not just about his story. It is also an invitation to the reader to reflect and resonate with the lessons that apply to their own stories.

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