

# the Mendicant

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

◀ EMBRACING THE PAST, WELCOMING THE FUTURE ▶

## Sacred Giving, Sacred Receiving

BEN KEESEY, DEVELOPMENT & PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR

Even  
after  
all this time  
the Sun never says to the Earth,

"You owe me."

Look  
what happens  
with a love like that:  
It lights the whole sky.

—Fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz

exchange is harder to accept. The act of sacred receiving can be just as powerful a role as the act of giving. When we receive with an awareness of our interconnectedness, we invite the abundance of life to flow through us. In that moment, we can experience a profound and sacred joy.

One of the foundational concepts of Fr. Richard's Alternative Orthodoxy is the Trinitarian shape of God. This positions spiritual power in a circle, not as hierarchical or top-down. Both the outflowing (giving) and the inflowing (receiving) are necessary elements of this dynamic and relational shape of God.

Love is an infinite, inclusive flow of giving and receiving. God is an event of communion. God is relationality itself. Love is a dynamic, a process.

—Richard Rohr

In the heart of this ancient verse by Hafiz, I felt a truth that has altered my perspective on life. All life on our planet depends on the gratuitous outpouring from the sun, which it offers unconditionally, providing the energy for photosynthesis in plants, the heat making our atmosphere temperate, and less apparent features such as solar wind, which shields us from dangerous levels of cosmic radiation. The sun's continual outpouring makes all life possible. We don't pay for it, control it, or generate it. We can only receive it with appreciation and gratitude.

Acts of giving, kindness, and love enrich our lives and the world as a whole. The joy of generosity is not just in what we give, but also in the love and compassion that flow through us as we give. When we open our hearts to the needs of others, we discover a wellspring of tenderness that transcends the act of giving itself.

But, for many of us, being on the other side of the

why we aim for money never to be the barrier to accessing our teaching and programs. This is made possible by the giving (and receiving!) of generous people like you. We are deeply grateful for your participation at all points in this dynamic and interconnected process.



# Becoming a Disciple of the Big Picture

I thought I was going crazy. In 2016, my dream job in sports marketing was unfolding while something within me was unraveling. I felt “called to ministry” and had no idea what that meant. It made no sense.

I wasn’t raised in church. My mother made it clear when I was very young that there were things she disagreed with in her Catholic upbringing. Meanwhile, my friends were sharing experiences connected to certain denominational rites of passage. I asked Mom what our religion was, and she stated that she wanted me to choose for myself. *Now I lay me down to sleep* was a prayer she frequently guided me through as a child. It served as an opening to the idea that I could talk to God.



“I am drawn to Fr. Richard Rohr and the CAC because something about what pours out of both feels like it speaks to the heart of an expansive truth.”

Certainly, all these years later, God wasn’t now trying to engage in dialogue with me by causing a vocational earthquake . . . right? Yet the tremors in my inner world continued. The pull became stronger to explore becoming

some type of spiritual “something” for which I had no name. Amid my angst, I decided to talk back.

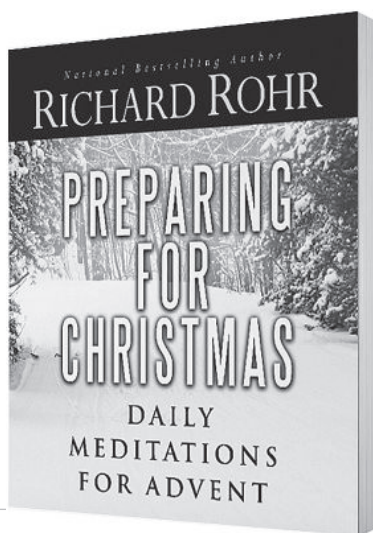
“Ok, God. If you want me to go and do this thing, then obviously I’m going to have to go to seminary.” My statement was met with an immediate “No” and a knowing that I was to learn directly from people who were serving, loving, and leading in ways that I wanted to emulate. I wasn’t to go about obtaining a piece of paper that could give the impression that I was accessing something that wasn’t readily available for all. I would have to trust that I would find my teachers, and they would find me.

Enter Fr. Richard.

I am drawn to Fr. Richard Rohr and the CAC because something about what pours out of both feels like it speaks to the heart of an expansive truth. It’s a truth that is beyond any title or validation I may receive and more about a way I can choose to be.

As I reflect on that period of vocational crises now, as a scholarship recipient and Sendee of the 2023 Living School, I am grateful to be blessed as a Disciple of the Big Picture. That feels like a place from which I can serve, love, and pastor, a place where our undoing can allow something to be done unto us, where access matters, and where “everything belongs.”

*Tia Norman is a teacher and guide specializing in spirituality and practices anchored in the mystical teachings of the Christian contemplative tradition. She leads workshops, retreats, and courses while serving as Pastor of Awakenings, Inc., a contemplative community based in Houston, Texas. She’s interested in helping communities discover ways to weave contemplative teachings into their context. Tia lives with her children, John and Kennedy, and their two adopted pups.*



A beautiful edition for special gifts or as a personal mini-retreat during this Advent season and for years to come. This book is designed to accompany the reader through each day of Advent, with reference to the Scripture readings for the day, and concluding with a reflection by Fr. Richard Rohr on those Scripture texts.

The mature insights shared by Fr. Richard will inspire you to deepen your openness to adult Christianity, “making your entire life, and the life of the church, one huge advent.” These daily reflections offer the promise of incarnational transformation. Available at [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org)

# Finding the Baby

*I was seeking a faith based on Love rather than certainty.*

At the end of my thirtieth year, I gave birth to a daughter. She ushered in extravagant joy and the realization that I couldn't raise her in the faith tradition of my youth.

That religious construct funneled women into motherhood and service. I internalized messages of compliance and obedience and called my invisible labor holy. I wanted a different life for the little bundle in my arms. Then I heard the rushing wind of Holy Spirit say, "If it doesn't work for her, then how can it possibly work for you?" Engaging with this question was the first thread I pulled from the frayed edges of my childhood.

I entered the Living School with a loose objective of rebuilding a spiritual practice after more than two decades of pulling things apart. I was searching for the proverbial baby in the bathwater. What, if anything, would I keep?

I was ready to explore the roots of Christianity and decolonize my spiritual practices by incorporating the sacred feminine and honoring our connection to the Earth and each other. I was seeking a faith based on Love rather than certainty. It was like being in school again, and I loved school!

However, a few short months into my learning journey, life offered up different lessons. A dear family friend was killed by gunfire. My husband's job changed, and our income dropped dramatically. I went from analytical learner and spiritual seeker to fiscally insecure griever. I begrudgingly applied for a scholarship.

It turns out, the baby in the bathwater wasn't where or even what I was seeking. I was deep in the curricula of my life, what author Carl McColman calls an unteachable lesson.<sup>1</sup> Muscle memory called me to independence. I prayed desperate prayers, asking the Divine for more energy, work, and strategy—even as I write now, I feel the residual capitalism still alive in my body, throwing shade at the concept of a scholarship. I freely admit that my ego would prefer lessons as a Sacred Giver.

In her powerful book *Living Resistance*, Kaitlin Curtice writes, "resistance is itself a living, breathing being."<sup>2</sup> Receiving as resistance is pushing against the internalized messages of *do more* and surrendering to the Divine abundance of a community that allows for provision



“I entered the Living School with a loose objective of rebuilding a spiritual practice after more than two decades of pulling things apart.”

without shame. Life handed me devastation and lack, and I was met with empathy, resource, and worth.

I am grateful.

What are you allowing yourself to receive today?

<sup>1</sup> Carl McColman, *Unteachable Lessons: Why Wisdom Can't Be Taught (and Why That's Okay)* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Kaitlin B. Curtice, *Living Resistance: An Indigenous Vision for Seeking Wholeness Every Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2023), 12.

*Betsy Cañas Garmon (Living School Sendee 2023) is an artist, writer, and creativity coach. She hosts workshops and online makers' circles at the intersection of creativity and spiritual practice and is the creator of the visual journaling course Soul Cartography. The parents of five grown children, Betsy and her husband Randy live in Atlanta, Georgia with their Goldendoodle Pax and rescue cats Luna and Sol.*

## the Mendicant

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# This Fella in the Straw Hat

I discovered a place that would alter the direction of my life while working at a small Bible College in western Canada. It was the winter of 2007, and I was reading *Geez Magazine*, a mischievous spiritual publication high on humor and low on religiosity. They mentioned this funky and long-winded place called the Center for Action and Contemplation. I was intrigued by what was stirred up in me by the name. An experience a few weeks prior—that I would later call “mystical”—flashed before me that I recognized had unconsciously prepared me to zero in on that title.

I looked up this Center online. Shooting past the mug of some fellow in a brown robe, I studied the list of their Eight Core Principles. Stunned and enamored with the idea that such pursuits could be guidelines, I began to cry. Before me was a list of how I wanted to show up in the world and live my life as a follower of Jesus. The principle that was the knockout punch was this: “The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. Oppositional energy only creates more of the same.” As a budding self-righteous Christian activist, this principle landed as the corrective lens that I needed. I submitted my resignation at the Bible College and applied to become an intern at this shop of contemplation and action.

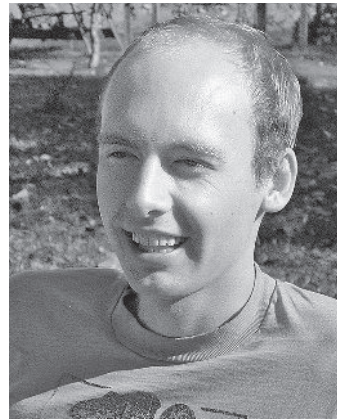
On the first day of the internship, I was sitting in the kitchen eating a big bowl of granola and watching this older fella in a straw hat walk by the window. Someone said, “There he is!” Another person rushed to the window, saying, “It’s Father Richard.” I didn’t even get up. I didn’t want my breakfast to get soggy.

It’s now funny to look back nostalgically on that naïve twenty-something young man. It had not fully registered that this Franciscan in the straw hat was the one who had founded the CAC and inspired its Eight Core Principles. I

quickly learned that these teachings had legs which had traversed the globe, inspiring folks to engage in the incarnational *and* of life, the space that holds, connects, and envelops *action* and *contemplation*.

The internship changed my life. Fr. Richard and the CAC encouraged me to deepen my practice, expand my theological horizons of possibility, support my neighbors, and face my shadow while celebrating my gifts, wrestling with community, and owning the joyful humiliation of being human.

Sixteen years later, I realize the past has arms that reach into the present with memories, stories, and sayings. The further away I get from my “discovery” of Fr. Richard and the CAC, the more I cannot help but shake my head at the mysterious grace that has shaped this little life of mine.



“These teachings... inspired folks to engage in the incarnational *and* of life, the space that holds, connects, and envelops *action* and *contemplation*.”

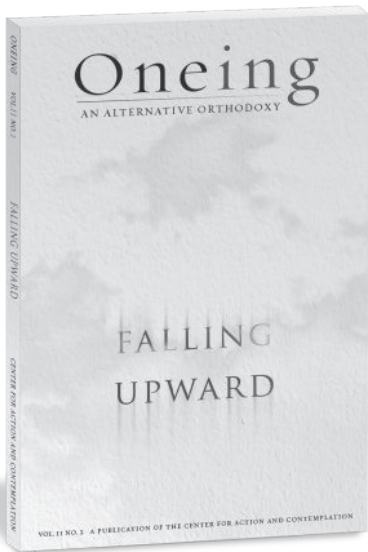
*Paul Swanson is on staff at the CAC. He is a jackleg Mennonite and novice in the new monastic Community of the Incarnation. Paul and his wife, Laura, have two feral and beloved children. Learn more about Paul's work kindling the examined life for contemplatives in the world at [contemplify.com](http://contemplify.com).*



In this fully revised and updated version of his earlier book *Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety*, Richard Rohr illuminates the way understanding and embracing wisdom can give us hope in difficult times. “Knowing the full pattern allows us to let go of our first order, trust the disorder, and, sometimes even hardest of all—to trust the new reorder. Three big leaps of faith for all of us, and each of a different character.” With this new lens, Fr. Richard’s book gives us the courage to push through great chaos to find a new way of being in the world. Available at [store.cac.org](http://store.cac.org)

# Oneing

AN ALTERNATIVE ORTHODOXY



Inspired by one of Richard Rohr's most popular books, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, this issue of *Oneing* features articles and poems from contributors who are struggling with the challenges of the first half of life, those who are entering into the second half of life, and those who have experienced both and are ready to fully move on to the "further journey."

In *Falling Upward*, Rohr helps us to understand the tasks of the two halves of life and teaches us that those who have failed, or gone down, are the only ones who can really understand the meaning of "up." Those who have somehow fallen, and fallen well, are the only ones who can grow spiritually and not misuse "up."

In the words of Richard Rohr's favorite English mystic, Julian of Norwich (1343–1416), "First the fall, and then the recovery from the fall, and both are the mercy of God."

We are pleased to present the following excerpt from Ilia Delio's article in *Oneing*, vol. 11, No. 2:

## Falling Inward, Falling Upward: God, Self, and the Liberation of Love

The process of individuation which supports Richard Rohr's concept of falling upward is complemented by the movement of theogenesis described by Teilhard de Chardin and [Carl] Jung. The first half of our lives is spent building an identity, establishing our security, defining our boundaries, creating a zone of safety, and having controllable order. We can liken this first stage of life to operating on lower levels of consciousness. Many religious people get stuck on the level of mythic consciousness, with a narrow, ethnocentric, law-and-order mentality. God is a superior being outside oneself, and fidelity to God means abiding by the laws of religion and church. Wholeness means nothing more than obeying the rules. Looking for one's center always outside oneself inculcates a basic sense of unworthiness, distrust of self, and subservience to those "better," "more qualified," or "superior" to counsel and guide.

What creates a breakthrough in consciousness, whereby authentic growth shifts from attention to authority outside ourselves to the inner law of the heart, is not simply growing old but, rather, it is growing inward in freedom: "If you make my Word your home," Jesus said, "you will learn the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). Freedom requires a breakthrough into unitive consciousness, a radical surrender and complete letting go, trusting the spiritual impulses of life. Humans have complex minds built on primal fears of survival, yet we have the capacity for more life and higher levels of consciousness.

The level of unitive consciousness does not negate the trials and difficulties of life. Life still breaks down as matter

weakens and expectations fail, but the one who lives on the level of integrated consciousness lives in moments of failure or disruption with a lightness of spirit, a sense of openness to divine love, which appears like light shining through the cracks of darkness. Suffering is where divine love radiates in hidden darkness, where God is fully human; the power of life itself in the midst of disruption. We become God when we cling to this power of life, finding that this power within liberates us beyond the threat of death because "fear is driven out by perfect love" (1 John 4:18). Living into our divine nature is the source of our freedom and happiness.

We cannot know this deeper divine reality if we live only on levels of mediocrity and self-preservation. We are created out of love and are made to energize the world in love. Time is the movement of matter, and matter moves by the gravity of consciousness. Aging can be either a life of nostalgia or a wholehearted engagement with the future. It is a disruptive process as things break down, friends and pets die, houses are sold, and memories of the past haunt the present. Months melt into years, and we find ourselves in the flow of life.

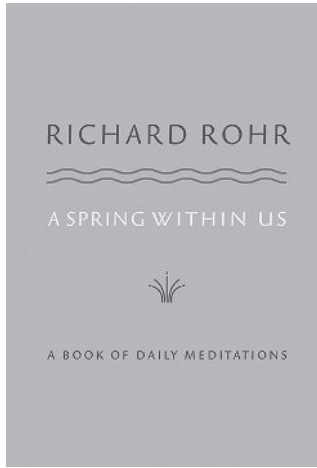
Growing inward by falling upward means learning from our mistakes or repeating them with a new sense of play. Even if the felt experience of life dims, we are invited to let go and surrender to the wild love of God, living into the endless vitality of life itself. Letting go into God is coming home to our true selves, where we discover that our root reality is infinite divine love, and in love, we are eternally free.



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*A Newly Revised and Updated Edition!*

## FALLING UPWARD

*A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

As we journey through the first half of life, we often think that it will end when we have achieved our goals or climbed as high as we can. *Falling Upward* challenges us to rethink this perspective, shining light on the idea that the end of our first path is not an ending, but a new beginning.

Drawing on the wisdom from time-honored myths, heroic poems, great thinkers, and sacred religious texts, Richard Rohr explores the two halves of life to show that the heartbreaks and disappointments of life's first half are actually steppingstones to the spiritual joys that the second half of life has in store for us.

This revised edition of the beloved book includes many updates that make the content more relevant to today's readers. Among these updates is a focus, in practical terms, on how we can live meaningful lives in a world of suffering and conflict. Available at [store.cac.org](https://store.cac.org)

