

Cynthia Bourgeault  
May 1, 2021

Dear friends,

By now the word is out that I am officially stepping back from active duty as a core faculty member at the Center for Action and Contemplation. As a newly minted “faculty emeritus,” I will **no longer actively teach** in the Living School or be a regular presence at CAC symposia and conferences. My course material will continue to factor prominently in the Living School curriculum for the foreseeable future, and the expectation is that I will keep a hand in with occasional special teachings and presentations.

I want to make very clear to all that this decision to step back is motivated neither by ill health nor ill will. Entirely au contraire, it rests squarely on both of these rather remarkable graces: of a still robust health and dear, trusted friends at the CAC who have given both support and wise encouragement to what the Quakers would call a “leading”—a strong inner prompt to accept a new invitation. In this time of global upheaval I have found myself increasingly **called to work** at the more esoteric edges of my Christian faith, more directly in the eye-of-the-needle of the transition from ego-selfhood to whatever lies beyond it, **relying on traditional teaching methods** long validated in inner work but often misunderstood—and risking unintentional harm—in large, broader-platform groups where direct interaction with the teacher is increasingly limited and now mostly delivered in online formats. The broader container simply does not, in my experience, provide adequately for the deepening of trust and the mutual gauging of strength that must be in place before a teacher can safely push the student through that eye of the needle—at least in such a way as can be recognized by both parties as spiritually respectful and trustworthy. That is why traditional esoteric work has always gone on in smaller, below-the-radar circles. Knowledge can be communicated widely, but Being can only be transmitted within a bond of mutual love, validated by mutual consent.

The “leading” has been steadily growing in me over the past couple of years to give my time more fully to that more intimate, experimental, and mostly on-the-ground work, with the aim of impacting transformation of consciousness (both individually and in the larger culture) at an immediate vibrational level, rather than through intellectual paradigms and social action initiatives. **Not** that the two are an “either/or” proposition, but I feel increasingly called to the former more than the latter: to work directly within the imaginal bandwidth with prepared students, following the path laid down for me by my four great lightholders: **Boehme, Gurdjieff, Thomas Keating, Rafe**—and now, joining them in their imaginal oversight, my “pure flame” spiritual sister **Cennet Jane Garland**. And as I find myself living more and more these days in that imaginal thin place, I sense them all very clearly pawing the ground from their side, urging me to get on with it.

More than anything else, it’s a sense that my post is being shifted out from under me, and the choice before me is either to accept or reject the new assignment. So many of those trained in the old school of spiritual midwifing are now on the other side, and it seems that a new group of us must step forward to hold as

best we can their vacated posts as imaginal gatekeepers. Ready or not, here we go!

“Hermeneutics is always a wager,” Rafe taught me: “a wager that if your premises are right, you’ll live it into existence.” For thirty years or more I have staked my teaching on certain premises—the reality of the imaginal world, the ongoing partnership with Rafe, energetic transmission between the worlds, the **Law of Three**, the encompassing presence of Christ, the causal validity of the beatitudes vis à vis right action in this world, the survival of selfhood (but not ego selfhood!) beyond death, the utter imperative of obedience to conscience, the growing recognition that **Being hides out in the gap between theory and practice**. I feel called to ratchet up the level of integrity, to challenge the clichés and perspectival roadmaps which have framed even the best of my own spiritual understanding to date, and to claim the space necessary to play out my hand with a measure of risk and vulnerability simply not available to me when I am carrying the weight of a spiritual institution on my back. My yearning, as with Thomas Merton as he embarked on the final season of his life, is “to be jerked out of the habitual half-tied vision of things...without trying to discredit anyone or anything—without refutation, without establishing some other argument.” Something like that.

Many of you know that Merton wrote these words less than two weeks before his death. Worry not; I assure you that I feel no intimations of my own imminent demise! But I do feel very keenly that I am entering a season of ultimacy, a time when one either does or does not clear the decks of the provisional (that which merely provides extension in the temporal realm) in order to play out one’s final hand with integrity and panache. I feel incredibly blessed to arrive at this point still sound in mind and body. As I watch dear friends being taken apart brick by brick by physical or mental diminishment, I realize the immense gift I have been given and the imperative not to waste it.

So know that I’m still out there, still doing the work as best I can, still teaching in appropriate venues, still writing, and still sailing my little boat toward open sea, steering as best I can by the compass of my heart.

To my friends, colleagues, students, both at the CAC and in my Wisdom and contemplative circles, the deepest of thanks—and stay tuned. The show ain’t over yet.