

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 1, Episode 12

Feast on Your Life

Paul Swanson: Welcome to season one of Another Name for Every Thing, with Richard Rohr, exploring the core themes of his new book, The Universal Christ.

Brie Stoner: As mentioned previously, this podcast is recorded on the grounds of the Center for Action and Contemplation, and may contain the quirky sounds of our neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner. We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition, amidst getting the oil changed, awkward first dates, and the shifting state of our world.

Paul Swanson: This is the final of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we are concluding with chapter 17, "Beyond Mere Theology to Practices." In this episode, Richard leads us in two practices that exemplify The Universal Christ in daily life. At a point in this episode, Richard will refer to a third person in the room, and that is our sound engineer, Paul Thompson. We couldn't have done this without him.

One more thing before we get started. We want to hear from you in two different ways. The first invite is for your participation in a podcast listener survey. We want to know what you think is working so far, or what we could do better. The second invitation is for those of you that have a burning question related to the themes of The Universal Christ. Please send them our way. After this season is over, we'll gather as many listener questions as we can and bring them in to conversation with Richard, and then share his responses with all of you. To participate in the survey or to submit a question, head over to [cac.org/podcast](http://cac.org/podcast) and follow the instructions. We want to thank you for all your time listening to this series. It is you, the listeners, that help spread this message around the world. Thank you.

Okay, Richard, we're so grateful that you included a chapter on two practices that help ground this work in contemplative embodiment in a lot of ways. We thought it would be helpful for all those listening, just to show these practices rather than just talk about them.

Richard Rohr: Talk about.

Paul Swanson: So, we just wanted to have you welcome and introduce the first practice that you include in the book, which comes from the same author of The Cloud of Unknowing—

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Paul Swanson: --which is a lesser-known book.

Richard Rohr: Lesser known.

Paul Swanson: Can you give an outline of that and then enter us into it as you see fit?

Richard Rohr: As best I can.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Okay. Well, you gave the proper introduction. I really took to this only a few years ago. I don't know if I had even read *The Book of Privy Counseling*, what a unique title, when I was young. You've heard me speak of "the hour of the wolf." When I say this to crowds, I'm not kidding—older people, in general, even younger—when I describe "the hour of the wolf" as those unique hours between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning, for most people, where you're beginning to come out of your deep sleep, and you're in this twilight zone. That is when, for some reason, the unconscious has been unhinged, and you will have your most scary dreams, attacking dreams, fearful thoughts about what you got to do the next day. They're completely exaggerated. They're way out of context, but you wake up in a fright about what could go wrong, or whatever it might be. Just to tell this to people, is a great relief. Because then they know they're not so unusual that, "I guess a lot of people have this."

So, in that context, when I was suffering from this, for whatever reason, when I was waking up in the morning and just having anxious thoughts that were largely irrational, where my mind would construct a gestalt of what was going to happen, or what could happen, or whatever. I needed something that was more than an idea. I found it in this little exercise offered in *The Book of Privy Counseling*. I'm going to largely quote the author, whoever it is.

Take God at face value, as God is. Accept God's good graciousness as you would a plain, simple, soft compress when sick.

Now, I admit, as a little boy, I can remember my mother putting compresses on me, either cold or hot, depending on what I had. There was always a memory of a comfort in that. It was a physical memory of being covered, something being protective. The author goes on:

Take hold of God in the same way as you would take hold of the compress. Press God against your unhealthy self, just as you are. Second, know how your mind and will, will play their games. Stop analyzing yourself or stop analyzing God. You can do without wasting so much of your energy deciding if something is good or bad, grace-given or temperament driven, divine or human.

If this was written in the 14th century, that's real psychological subtlety. Yeah.

Third, be encouraged. Offer up your simple naked being, in your fears, in your doubts, in your negativity, whatever it might be, your simple naked being to the joyful being of God, for you, too, are one in grace, although separate by nature. And finally, don't focus on what you are, but simply that you are.

That was the line that most helped me. Because when I go to the "what," I'll start writing commentary on why I'm inadequate, why I'm not good enough, or I'm a phony, or whatever else it might be, but simply the naked that you are, that I exist at all. How hopelessly stupid would a person have to be if she or he could not realize that he or she simply is?

Now hold the soft, warm compress of these loving words against your bodily self. (I'm writing this, I think.) Bypass the mind. Bypass even the affections of the heart, or the whimsical nature of the emotions, and forgo any analysis of what you are and what you are not and just take comfort in the fact that you are at all.

Works for me, “simply that you are.” And I end by saying, I like this practice, because it can become a very embodied experience of what we’ve been talking about in the whole book.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Your own body, in its naked being, with no doing involved. We’re human beings, where before we’re human doings, becomes the place of revelation and the place of inner rest. Christ then can become de-spiritualized. It’s not an idea, it’s a body knowing. It’s a body safety. It’s a body validation. But you’ve got to stop that judging mind, which even critiques the practice. It says, “This is stupid,” which I do. I teach these things and then when I do them, I say, “This is stupid.” That’s just my ego trying to retake control, because it doesn’t like moving beyond rational control. When you find the spirit of dismissal saying, “This is stupid,” or whatever your mind might say, you can be pretty sure that’s what the medievals would have called “the evil one.” We don’t have to attribute it to the evil one. You get what they were trying to say.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. You talk about, in this chapter, that practice is more about unlearning than learning, more about un-knowing than knowing.

Richard Rohr: Unknowing.

Brie Stoner: It helps us rewire—I know you use that word a lot—rewire a different way of knowing. I think about that, how little we trust our embodied sense of anything, or our bodily way of knowing, our incarnational sense of it. That line of like, the compress, press it against yourself, as you are, as your body is. I can feel the way my rational mind wants to spin out.

Richard Rohr: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: It brings me into my body, into sensation, which I can feel where I’m moving from. I’m moving from my head into my heart, into my bodily, sensory self.

Richard Rohr: You know, if what Myers Briggs says is true, as I remember, that approximately 80 percent of humanity is sensate and only 20 percent is intuitive. I’m an intuitive. I’m often amazed why people read my books, because they’re so intuitive. It’s all intuition. Intuition. If 80 percent of humanity is sensate, then the notion of a compress will really work for them, much better than a chapter of one of my books. Well, this is a good argument for practice in itself. You give a lot of people a concrete, body-based practice where the rewiring is happening even though they don’t know it, and you’re probably doing much of humanity a huge favor.

Now, in favor to my own Catholic tradition, which I criticize so much, this is what I do think the sacraments achieved, particularly Eucharist. Eucharist done correctly, is a body-based experience. Now we made it wordy. We made it decorative, and all the rest. You whittle it down to the core experience, and it’s about eating, and chewing, and swallowing, and tasting, “Taste and see how good is the Lord.”

That was trying to do the same thing, but we pulled it back into words. I said that

to the priest I was talking to last week. I said, “Don’t you all admit the Mass is so wordy?” Just on and on, words. Because we intuitives like it that way. Just have naked, quiet, handing over food to your body, and you slowly digesting it. There’s the whole message, really, of communion. Yeah. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Since you just named the Eucharist, in your book, you talk about, there’s been all these embodied practices within the tradition. With the addition of so many words to explain them, we’ve kind of lost that embodiment, or that felt sense of that as a contemplative experience. I’m wondering if you could just name some of those, because I think it’s helpful.

Richard Rohr: Some of those that are what?

Paul Swanson: The sacraments, or things that are sacramental, like pilgrimage.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, sacramental is better.

Paul Swanson: Sacramental, sorry. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: The seven sacraments in the Catholic tradition, became co-opted by the priesthood, where the center figure is the priest, not the experience, it seems to me. By sacramentals, we meant all the other 7,000 access points, and I think that’s really what we’re opening up in our teaching of contemplation, that I don’t need to go to the church to have a priest absolve me of my sin. Maybe sitting in a forest gazing at a dead tree for fifteen minutes can allow me to forgive broken reality. That’s sacramental, knowing of the same thing. And maybe much deeper than the, forgive me, hocus pocus, that we became associated with. We deserve that. You know where that phrase came from?

Paul Swanson: No.

Richard Rohr: Hocus pocus. Oh. When the Mass was in Latin, the words, the sacred words, of consecration, were “hoc est enim corpus meum.” “This is my body,” in Latin. Protestants making fun of us good Catholics. They would come in, and they’d hear this Latin, and they’d say, “All that Catholic hocus pocus.”

Brie Stoner: Oh my gosh.

Richard Rohr: “Hoc est enim corpus meum.” Yeah. You see? There, you learned something. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Not that you need to know it.

Paul Swanson: It’s good to have in my back pocket. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I’m sure it sounded exactly that way, “hocus pocus.”

Brie Stoner: But that line even, “This is my body.”

Richard Rohr: So good.

Brie Stoner: “This is my body,” and the way this book helps to expand where that body is. As you just said, in a forest even. As I think about when I was nursing my sons, the quiet presence, this embodied way of being, this contemplative way of seeing is accessible to us through so many different routes.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: I appreciate that you’re leading us into this way of seeing. In the book, you talk about the second practice that you offer. I wonder if you’d be willing to read it for us, the divine mirror, the mirroring?

Richard Rohr: Oh, that whole thing?

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: You want me to?

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: All right.

Brie Stoner: Is that all right?

Richard Rohr: Well, of course, it is. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: Okay, good, because, again, it’s a re-frame for us to recognize how we are changed, how we’re transformed.

Richard Rohr: I was just wondering, is anybody getting this? So, the fact that you want me to read it makes me think at least one person got it. Thank you. It’s on page 226.

The Divine Mirror

A mirror receives and reflects back what it sees.

It does not judge, adjust, or write commentary.

We are the ones who do that.

A mirror simply reveals.

And invites responsibility.

A mirror, the sun, and God are all the same.

[In a certain sense, of course.]

They are all there, fully shining forth.

Their very nature is light, love, and infinite giving.

You can't offend them and make them stop shining.

You can't offend a mirror, or the sun, or God.

You can only choose to stop receiving and stop enjoying.

As soon as you look, you will see they are there!

And fully radiating.

And always have been.

And their message is constant, good, and life-giving.

There are only the lookers and the non-lookers,

[Those who look back at the mirror, look back at God, look back at the light of the sun.]

Those who receive and those who do not receive.

When we learn to love anything or anyone,

It is because they have somehow, if just for a moment,

Mirrored us truthfully yet compassionately to ourselves.

[That's when your heart goes out, when someone has just, "Oh my God, you know who I am and you have accepted it," you just melt.]

And we grab on to it! Why wouldn't we?

In this resonance, we literally "come to life."

But have no doubt, it is an allowing from our side.

And such pure, unfiltered Presence,

Is accessed only by presence in return.

Nothing more is needed.

Presence comes to us from Christ's side,

And then presence from our side knows what it needs to know.

If that mirror is withdrawn for any reason,

It causes sadness, emptiness, or even anger.

[This is what we call the grief experience. The mirror is gone. I don't know who I am. Often lasts for a whole year.]

We are normally disoriented, even heartbroken for a while.

We die in some way. But why?

Because we only know ourselves in another's eyes.

[That's fully Trinitarian. We create one another. We can un-create one another by rejecting that imaging.]

We receive our identity—all of it—good and bad,

From another.

[We're much more relational than we ever wanted to admit.]

The other both creates us and saves us.

"No man is an island, entire of itself," says the poet John Donne.

This is what we call the pure gift of holiness!

Or, if you'd prefer, wholeness.

[It's gift. It's not a moral achievement.]

We are always a giving, a resonance, never a possession of our own.

The universe is relational at every level, and even between levels.

Relationship is the core and foundational shape of Reality,

Mirroring our Trinitarian God (Genesis 1:26-27).

Every object serves as a mirror, another kind of presence.

[Every object, or it can if we'll allow it.]

You can find such mirrors in all of nature, in animals,

In your parents, lovers, children, books, pictures, movies,

And even in what some call "God."

Remember, "God" is just a word for Reality—with a face!

And occasionally Interface (which some call "prayer" or "love").

God is a mirror big enough to receive everything,

And every single part of you,

Just as it is, rejecting nothing, adjusting nothing.

Often,

For the sake of an even deeper love.

We will experience a kind of Universal Forgiveness.

A Divine Sympathy for all of Reality.

Or what some have called the "Divine Pity."

And It will fall on us.

Whatever is fully received in this Mirror, is by that very fact  
“redeemed.”

And all is received whether we believe it or not.

You do not have to see the sun to know that it's still shining.

If your Divine Mirror cannot fully receive you in this way,  
Then it is certainly not God.

[Why didn't someone tell me that when I was young?]

Remember that regret profits nobody.

Shame is useless.

Blame is surely a waste of time.

All hatred is a diversionary tactic, a dead end.

God always sees and loves God in you.

[That's what the mystics say in so much and so many different formulations.]

It seems like God has no choice.

This is God's eternal and unilateral contract with the soul.

If you cannot allow yourself to be fully mirrored in this way,

You will never fully know who you are, much less enjoy who you are.

Nor will you know the heart of God.

Any loving gaze that we can dare to receive can start this Flow:

Creation itself, animals, humans, are all the divine gaze

If we allow them to be.

[Then I quote Paul.]

“The knowledge that I once had was imperfect,  
but then I shall know as fully as I am known” (1 Corinthians 12:12b)

[So, you could call heaven the full mirror, full receptivity.]

One day, the mirror will reflect in both directions,  
And [you] will see over there what [you] allowed [God to see] in here.

This is full-access seeing—and being seen:

Most have named it “heaven”

And it begins now.

Let this Divine Mirror fully receive you.

All of you.

And you will never need to be lonely again.

This probably, you know, every time I say I should have said that differently. No matter how many times I tried to refine this, I was never satisfied with it. So, I think the reader has to almost stop after a few sentences and put in their own words. Because these are still too much my words. They have to put in experiences that match their experiences. But I at least want them to know that this experience is possible.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: As I was listening to you read that, the words “resonance, allowing, presence, flow, relationship, relationality, relational, giving, and receiving, that kind of mutual affirming, these are the gifts of that practice for me, that I think I can feel how you’re giving us a blueprint of these are, in a way, the fruits of this contemplative heart. This is what it feels like, what it looks like. Here’s how you can trust it—

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: --in your own life, and then begin to orient yourself to it. I know we've talked about the role of practices in, sort of, aligning ourselves to this blueprint.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: But it's interesting because I think so many of us, when we start a practice, we come at it so rationally and from our heads. Oh, I got to do this 20 minute sit.

Richard Rohr: Technique-y.

Brie Stoner: I got to get this right.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I appreciate that some of that is okay.

Richard Rohr: It is okay. That's where you start.

Brie Stoner: It's okay to come at it just to start. I wonder if you could describe what that early stage of practice looks like and maybe validate it for those of us who are wanting to try to this out, wanting to try out this way of living, and are new to it.

Richard Rohr: You know, I wonder if it doesn't have to almost have to be technique-y at the beginning and that you have enough sense of commitment-seeking that I will submit to this technique until it begins to teach me, and then when the teaching begins to soak in, you'll usually become less rigid about the technique because you'll know it was just a finger pointing to the moon. But once you touched upon the moon, you would get less preoccupied with the finger. Or thinking there's only one finger, which is I think the mistake most people make, "The way I came to my God experience is the way you should." That's just not true.

As John of the Cross says, "There are as many ways to God as there are human beings." That a Spaniard Catholic would say that in the 16th century, it's an extraordinary sense of freedom, and God's freedom, and our freedom.

So, learn some practice. Have the commitment, dedication, and devotion to commit yourself to it, even though it will seem humiliating at first. It's actually the scandal of the particular, "Oh, just doing this isn't going to matter." Your mind will find all kind of reasons to disagree with it. I see this in students in classes. Well, that isn't always true. It's the post-modern game. That isn't always true. They don't realize they are just trying to absent themselves from what is true about it. It's going to ask too much of them, so they say it isn't always true. I have grown so used to this response. It's almost always in the first five minutes of any question or answer. I will even say, "I'm not even asking you to think it's always true or forever true, but would you try it long enough to see it's a little bit true?" That takes humility, I guess.

Does that respond? Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It brings to mind a memory of me when I first start to practice. I had just read A Zen

Christianity by William Johnston.

Richard Rohr: Oh, wow, that's a good one to read.

Paul Swanson: It was my segue into contemplative practice. I remember, I was twenty-one years old.

Richard Rohr: Wow, you started early, Paul.

Paul Swanson: Well, I stumbled early and then kind of found my form. I was so, rigid about it. I'd light a candle, sit cross legged and stare at the candle, thinking that this was the only way it could be done. Like you said, that form, or that forming, loosened as time went on. But at first, it was the only way. I had to be alone, and I had to have a candle. The number of times I was looking for a candle, because you can't do the sit without a candle.

Richard Rohr: Makes total sense.

Paul Swanson: I fell into it, but was really able to expand from there with practice.

Richard Rohr: People who don't go into the expanding stage are the ones that become very rigid then demand that same repetition from another person. A lot religious teachers are still at that level, teaching one practice.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, I also had that experience of clinging to the perfectionism of the form. But at the same time, I think I also just want to honor my enthusiasm. I was just so excited—

Richard Rohr: That's right. That's right. Lovely.

Brie Stoner: --to find a new way of connecting to presence, connecting to God, that I was thrilled to be doing it. I remember early in the Living School, having the experience of feeling like I had to do it perfectly twice a day. I'm looking at all these retired folk who had all the time in the world to do practice, and here I was as a young mom, trying to juggle working, and two kids at home, and partnership, and reality, and there were all these interruptions. I think have a little bit of a "one" in me Richard, because I would—

Richard Rohr: Oh, "ones" and "fours" have a lot in common. [Note: Brie and Fr. Richard are referring to their Enneagram types. There are nine Enneagram types.]

Brie Stoner: Oh, man, disruptions to my practice were like the worst. I would find myself, like, "Okay, I'm in this flow and I'm doing my practice," and then I'd hear one of my kids wake up, and I was like, "No."

Richard Rohr: Yeah, how dare you wake up.

Brie Stoner: I think over time, I began to realize that the disruption is the practice, just as much as the practice.

Richard Rohr: Another chance to choose God deliberately—

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --and not your own success.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: See, what we tend to take satisfaction in is our own success and call it taking satisfaction in God.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: Do you see how we're getting fooled there? And so, God has to grant us non-success so we can re-choose God and not ourselves.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: It's brilliant. It works.

Brie Stoner: I also think in our kind of capitalistic culture, it's not like you can win at contemplative prayer. You're not really achieving in it. It is short circuiting so much of how we think.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: Where you're like, "Is this actually doing something?" You feel like you're kind of just dying. It's just a daily death.

Richard Rohr: It's an exercise every time in assured failure. So, if you're living the worldview of Washington, D.C. that it's all about winning, you'll never try contemplation. You won't go near it. It undoes your whole schema at the most radical level possible. It makes you comfortable with losing, with not winning, and finding there's an okay-ness at the bottom of that that's even better. Now, I admit that we need some successes, we do. I'm looking at, forgive me, I'm having vain thoughts when I look at this new book and say, "Oh, look at my name on there." [laughter] We need a few of those, just don't take them too seriously or entertain them too long.

Paul Swanson: I'm thinking about those, Richard, who are hearing this and they're thinking about beginning a practice. One of things you named so well in this chapter is that you can be met by resistance that comes up internally. I don't know if you've heard of this book called *The War of Art*?

Richard Rohr: No.

Paul Swanson: Beyond the clever title, I think one of the best things about it for me was, talk about, whenever you're content on a creative pursuit, he says the resistance shows up in some form whether it's, "I'm going to go clean my junk drawer," or, "I'm going to go check my email." Just these things that aren't necessarily bad but they're distractions or things that dis-empower you from what you actually showed up to do. If someone is just thinking about starting a practice, what kind of wisdom would you offer as far as acknowledging that there is the resistance that will show up, or as you said earlier, "This is a stupid idea. I don't need to do this." What kind of advice would you offer for someone just brand new at this?

Richard Rohr: Maybe, correct me if I'm wrong or delete this if it isn't applicable, what comes to mind is Cynthia's beautiful teaching on third force that whenever there's a new arising, as certain as the dawn, and as Newton said, "Every force will be met by an equal and opposite reaction," every action, and if that's true, and I have a feeling it largely is, then you see the movement against the resistance as you're rightly calling it, as part of the deal. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to Cynthia Bourgeault. Cynthia is a Core Faculty Member with the Center for Action and Contemplation.]

Now, because we didn't own that—let me make a jump to an application, but I think that's why we murdered the Bible. You read the Bible and recognize every forward moving message in the Bible, the resistance texts, are in the Bible. They're included in the Bible. People who are at the level of resistance prefer those texts, "Kill all the Canaanites, women and children included." "Yes, sir, the word of God says that." The intuitive sense of a person in the mind of Christ knows that God didn't say that, do you see? But for some reason, included in the Bible and in the human psyche, and apparently, in the evolutionary un-flowing of creation, there is this necessary death principle.

I think I say in the book how I believe Christ is the life principle, Jesus is the insertion in the middle of history when we're perhaps ready for it, we clearly weren't, of the death principle. That the only way that this life momentum will keep moving forward is if you can integrate the pushback, integrate the negative, forgive the sin, if we use the term that we're familiar with. Once you know that pushback creates the momentum that leads to holy reconciling, and allows something new to happen, then you're not so upset.

You know when I get upset is when I watch my nature shows. I see these wild dogs killing a little fawn. I just really have to turn away. I can't look. Why does God let these wild dogs kill this little fawn who's only existed for one hour. Everything in me is just, "No, no, no." If I don't have a bigger frame, that somehow in the great scheme of things, this life/death mystery is leading to another level of life, I would go crazy in this world. That's all it is every day. Watch the evening news, local or national. It's all about the pushback. It really is. It's all about the pushback and so little about the movement forward. And yet, with all of this pushback, we can't deny that the movement forward is happening.

On any particular day, I think most of us are overwhelmed by what's not happening. So, all I'm doing is repeating what you already said. This does not satisfy the rational mind. Your rational mind will still name it "bad," good, bad, there are two big alternatives, and that the bad could possibly include some level of good is hard for us to admit, and that our good, so-called, usually has a few levels of bad in it, is equally hard for us to accept.

This is that human tragedy that I think Paul recognized. If you need a visual symbol, we've all seen the Taoist symbol, the white circle with the spot of black, the black circle with the spot of white. That's pretty good, because that's the way it is. That's the way it is, the complexity of human evil and human goodness. Once you agree, okay, if Jesus could live in this world, that's what we're accepting from the cross. If you can say, it's okay to trust this, "All right, I'll trust it. Even though it doesn't make a bit of sense. There's going to be a day coming in each of our lives where that's going to be the only thing that's going to get you through the day, to say, "Okay, I don't like it. I don't trust it. I want to get out of it. It's wrong. It's stupid. It's unjust, but Jesus, if you hung there"—Again, think of the cross, not as

an atonement, but God's radical solidarity with the human situation. God's radical solidarity with the human situation. In the original rising, in the pushback, and in the transformation.

We've got a good religion, but it's just so hard to teach it at the good level. It really is.

Brie Stoner: It's really a profound overview of what we're doing in practice, this trusting the desire. So, desire moves in us toward, to say, "I really want to develop this way of seeing," and then to not resist the resistance that comes back.

Richard Rohr: Resist the resistance.

Brie Stoner: Which is the, "Oh, but I don't like this. I don't enjoy this. My mind doesn't like it. My body is resisting," and to hold the tension of opposites there. To let that collision of opposites—

Richard Rohr: You said it. That's it.

Brie Stoner: --happen within you in a trust of a bigger cosmic hope of, "I believe this is developing something within me that is part of the Christ mystery. I believe that this is part of the path." Yeah, it's striking me as you just gave a deep theological overview of what's happening in our very bodies when we do practice.

Richard Rohr: You know the proof of that in the pudding, if you are honest about yourself, you'll see that afterwards you're more compassionate, not less. Your soul has expanded, not tightened up, or constricted. So, there's the resurrection. Now it's a hard-won resurrection because you were in hell for a few hours, or days or minutes, but you're less righteous the next day. You're less certain. It's a holy uncertainty willing to hold the ambiguity, "Well, she wasn't a total, evil bitch I made her into," that was more me talking than really her.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: When you see those arisings in yourself, you know that God's victory has been achieved now.

Brie Stoner: This is reminding me. I know I keep making you read things, Richard, you know what I mean, but why not?

Richard Rohr: I just love that you even know what page they're on.

Brie Stoner: Where is it, what I'm looking for, "The Love after Love"?

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Brie Stoner: Is that right here in the epilogue? There it is.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Derek Walcott. He was a young man when I first met him.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, would you share where this poem came from and then just read it for us?

Richard Rohr: When I was pastor of the lay community in Cincinnati, which grew very quickly in the first years. Wow, did I get invited to the island of St Lucia? I must have. How else would I have gone down there? I didn't set up a trip. Well it was the Charismatic Movement, and I was

known as a charismatic preacher, and it was very strong on that island. I came down to give a workshop. This poet, who was introduced to me, Derek Walcott, the name meant nothing at that time, but then, it was so ironic, on the very day that he died, March 17, I was beginning to write this book, 2017, I first read this poem of his. I didn't remember it. It's called "Love After Love."

The time will come when with elation, you will greet yourself, arriving at your own door in your own mirror. And each will smile at the other's welcome, your own self, seeing your own self in your own mirror. And you will say to yourself in effect, sit here, eat. You will love again this stranger who was yourself. Give wine, give bread. Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you all your life. Whom you ignored, for another who knows you by heart. Take down the love letters from the bookshelf, the photographs, the desperate notes. Peel your own image from the mirror. It's just an image. Sit, and feast on your life.

I don't know if he wrote that close to his own death, or not, but it sounds like an end-of-life poem where there's been this absolutely acceptance of the self. As I say in my commentary, "I probably should not have added this. I hope this book has helped you to experience and to know that the Christ, you, and the stranger that he speaks of in this poem, are all looking out with the same set of eyes." But you only know that at the end of your life. That God's eyes are not, other than yours, and your eyes, when they're doing it right, are not other than God's.

Brie Stoner: I'm so grateful that you added that line actually. It really, for me, brought the whole book home.

Richard Rohr: Oh, good. Well, that makes me happy. Yeah. I think he just died. And I think he just came to my talks because I was the only thing happening in town that day. I remember meeting him.

Paul Swanson: It felt like a very pastoral way to end, with these practices, which are just so much of being and receiving and participating in the Trinity, particularly of the mirror, "The Divine Mirror," and then to end with that poem, it felt like that was your mic drop.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Paul Swanson: The lasting resonance just walks away.

Richard Rohr: Wow, you are making me so happy that those things hit you in that way.

Paul Swanson: Richard, it's been such a treat for us to be able to walk through The Universal Christ with you in this way. You've been so gracious, too,

Richard Rohr: Oh, I'm not being gracious.

Paul Swanson: With our questions and our ponderings.

Richard Rohr: I'm enjoying it totally.

Paul Swanson: Oh good.

Brie Stoner: Oh, that's good to hear.

Richard Rohr: Thank you, thank you.

Paul Swanson: Knowing that sometimes it's a roundabout way of talking about the big things of life.

Richard Rohr: Getting me to say things that you already know what I'm going to say, but we need to say them. Yeah, thank you.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I know there's been a lot of folks who have taken this journey with all of us through this book in this way. What do you hope for those who have been with us, whether they're doing the dishes and listening to it, or they're on a run, or in their car? What do you hope they take away and walk away with as they try to integrate some of this into their life?

Richard Rohr: I don't know why it comes to mind, but that line from Walcott's poem, "take the image down the mirror and feast on your life." "That God has come to you disguised as your life," as Paula D'Arcy says. That there's no big ideal moral achievement that you must achieve, and the irony is that radical self-acceptance, that accepting that you are accepted, will paradoxically probably allow you to do some very generative, sacrificial, if I can use the word, caring things for our world. But you'll know now, that it's coming through you as a flow, not as a self-initiated generosity.

So, that's incarnation come to its full conclusion, when I can know that I am the image of God, and I put together humanity and divinity, in my feeble life just like Jesus did. What else would the final state of incarnation be? Yeah.

So, if this book, even a chapter of it, has the beginnings of that affect for anybody, I will be extremely grateful. Because I think, as I look at our culture, as I've taught in especially Western Europe, but the rest of the world, too, I see you a humanity that is burdened with lack of self-esteem. It takes a thousand faces, but human beings think they're nothing, and are trying to overcompensate in the most superficial of ways—driving the fastest motor car. Oh, that's okay to drive a fast motor car, but is this just putting off the peeling off of your image from the mirror, and knowing your inherent goodness without driving the fastest motor car? The problem is solved at the beginning. You don't have to play all these achievement games. You don't have to live up to all these performance principles.

I think especially see it in nervous teenagers. They're trying so hard to be loved, to fit in, and to be famous. I know they have to do it. You know, I didn't even know how to swim. When I tried to get the swimming merit badge, I can still picture the moment in the swimming pool, where I just couldn't admit to all the other fourteen-year-old boys that I didn't know how to swim. "Okay, you've got to swim down to the end and back." "Okay." I must have looked like a complete fool. I got about four feet and I'm falling in the water. I just was sure my determination would teach me how to swim. Oh, what a horrible night that was. I did the same thing with baseball. I thought I could fake it.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: So, maybe I had an excess of self-confidence, but it was to win the self-esteem of my peers, and anything to fit into that group at fourteen and to make them not call you an idiot, or whatever they might call you. You, who are parents, I'm sure you're going to have immense sympathy for your kids when they go off to high school or middle school. It must be torture.

Brie Stoner: Well, Richard, it's a sign of what an embodied wisdom elder you are that you're describing how you were at fourteen, which is how I would describe most adults in America.

Richard Rohr: Still, at 54.

Brie Stoner: Still very much in that trap of trying to find that deep sense of selfhood, of belonging, of cosmic okay-ness. I feel that this book is pointing us in that direction.

Richard Rohr: I hope so, cosmic okay-ness. You've heard me say it, I guess I say it in the book, it is very hard to heal individuals when the whole thing is going to hell in a hand basket. That's what we're dealing with. The whole thing is incoherent and yet I'm supposed to tell you that you're wonderful, and then send you down to a typical bar. There's nothing wrong with going to a bar, but if it's a totally negative environment, there is something destructive about going to a bar, or anywhere. I mean, a lot of families are worse than bars.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Richard. We're so grateful for this.

Richard Rohr: Oh, we're done?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. We just want to offer our deep gratitude for going on this journey with us over so many weeks, and so many hours, and for modeling the incarnational worldview that you talk about for modeling the embodiment of Christ and for giving us a chance to talk about it, to see it, to name it, and hopefully now, to go off into our lives and live with it, and live into it.

Richard Rohr: If I could do that at all, it was because I was in the presence of three very loving people, and I felt safe here. I felt accepted here. There were no mine fields, or no inherent mistrusts. Whenever I've had a crowd in front of me like that, which I've been lucky enough to often have, it brings the gospel out of me. I do believe the preaching of the gospel is a symbiotic affair. If you have a hostile, heresy-seeking crowd in front of you, you'll say outrageous things either on the right or the left. But you all represent such sweetness, I don't know what else to say.

So, thank you, for being the symbiosis that I believe the body of Christ is supposed to be.  
Thank you.

[music playing]

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

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