

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 1, Episode 2

Radical Inclusivity

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

Paul Swanson: 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're your hosts. I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: 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 washing dishes, broken hearts, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This will be the second of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we will be discussing the second chapter, "Accepting That You Are Accepted", and the third chapter, "Revealed in Us As Us." We step into some big conversations on the image of God, and take the thread from the first episode a step further in distilling Jesus and the Christ. With that, let's get started.

I'm curious, Richard, who were some of your greatest mentors, and did you drive them nuts like we drive you nuts?

Richard Rohr: Well, first of all, you do not drive me nuts. You mean in my world vision, huh?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, just in your story, the unfolding manifestation of this insight of the Universal Christ and where you are today.

Richard Rohr: I have to admit most of them were theoretical inspirations. They were lives of saints. They weren't necessarily people standing right next to me, but I was exposed for my thirteen years of formal education to that kind of literature, and those kinds of biographies, and that kind of theology. I knew when, usually, and it's still true, I knew in the first three pages of a book whether this was going to ring true. Well, this person had something to say.

I don't even know how I know that. I think a lot of people are this way. It's an intuition. It's a recognition of unique vocabulary. "Oh, yeah, this one is going to take me to a new place." You've heard me mention, of course, Karl Rahner, St. Francis, one that was a personal friend was Henri Nouwen. He died way too young, but I totally enjoyed his presence. Even though, and this is no revealing of any secret, he was more than a bit neurotic. This is told in all of his biographies. So, I was happy to know that I didn't need completely sane people to be happy with, but because I could see his sincerity, his earnestness, his desire to be a loving person, his eccentricity, his neuroticism didn't bother me too much. It was wonderful.

Brie Stoner: We do that, don't we? We like to set up our mentors in a similar way in which we've set up God, this image out there, up there somewhere perfect and separate.

Richard Rohr: And separate.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I recently found, I was telling Paul I found, oh, my God, I found my revelation charts, which you may wonder what that is.

Richard Rohr: The Book of Revelation?

Brie Stoner: Basically, yup, which as a child, I had to chart out in drawing the different stages of the end of the world. Of course, all my images of God were this up in the sky, separate from us, and usually male, angry, and an old man. So, I'm curious, when did your image of God begin to shift away from even just a man in the sky or male entity in the sky?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I have to say it was as late as the late '60s when I finally was being taught good theology and good scripture. It was after the reforming Vatican council, and I just delighted in the Bible. I just read it. I think I read it in those four years at least from cover to cover once but played with it a lot more than that. And just finding all the passages, where, of course, I was being guided by good scholars, but where God was not male, God was not violent, God was not punitive.

At that point, after being raised as a pre-Vatican II Catholic with a very punitive God, it was just like, "Eureka! Could this be true? If it is, let me preach it." Little did I think I would get so many chances to do just that, to tell other people what I had discovered. Then I just kept confirming, especially by the reading of the writings of mystics, and that's what made me idealize the mystics so much.

You know these people are different in a different category than everybody else. Typical mainline theology was still dualistic, retributive, law, law, law, finding out how to understand the law better as if it could get you there.

So, it was gradual, but I would say it began in the late '60s when the whole country, of course, was longing for some mercy because of the Vietnam war, the Civil Rights movement, the revelation of how we treated the poor. So, there was a longing for a merciful God in a lot of us. That's, of course, continued until our time.

Paul Swanson: In your book, Richard, you talk about how we focus on the cozy and lost the cosmic in the process of Christianity's unfolding and that we overemphasize the personal Jesus over the Christ.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: Can you share how that loss happened?

Richard Rohr: How that loss happened? Well, let me first give a sympathetic interpretation. I do believe the art of friendship is one of the greatest schools, one of the necessary schools. We do have to have people who mirror us properly, benevolently. And so, I can see why we wanted to make God into the friend-at-large, [7:13] the ultimate friend. That's good. That's necessary.

So, you don't want to dismiss it too lightly, but you used an interesting word there, I don't know if you got that from me, "cozy." When it became that He wasn't just the universal friend, he was the American friend, who reflected all of our wars, like the Christ in the Book of Revelation with the sword coming out of his mouth.

Where did this come from? He's your friend, but he's validating all of the worst aspects of civilization because he isn't complemented by a universal Christ. It's a "Jesus made small."

So, it was a cozy friendship. It was a self-serving friendship.

In my world, he happened to be Roman Catholic, and established the whole hierarchical system. We just can't see those things when we first learn them. So, friendship is good, but friendship defined as mirroring of my small self, that's not a good mirroring. We all like to be mirrored, but we're talking about the ultimate mirror, which means he's mirroring Hindus, and black people in Africa, and gay people, and handicapped people.

"Oh, I don't know if I want that mirror," that's what the ego first says.

So, it's good and bad. We need friendship, if you want to call that a cozy Jesus, but when it persists in that coziness too long, and you never see people moving out of their Mississippi culture, or Mississippi white culture, or Mississippi Christian culture, just to pick on one state, you could pick on any, then you have every good reason to question this isn't Jesus you're meeting. You're meeting yourself in a hall of mirrors, and calling it Jesus.

Paul Swanson: With that, how do we develop the capacity to have a practice of love of Jesus and love of the Christ?

Richard Rohr: How do we love both? Is that what you're saying?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, yeah, because we've so much focused on, or maybe just particularly modern traditions, focused on the personal Jesus.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. How do we move beyond Jesus is my boyfriend?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, without losing Jesus.

Brie Stoner: Reclaim it, yeah, without losing the connection to that personal.

Richard Rohr: Well, the point I try to make in the book, I still feel like I should, could do it much better, but I don't know how, is how do you let the personal lead you to the universal instead of stopping at the personal because that gives so much ego consolation. That's almost a question of maturity. A more mature person needs bigger seeing as they move into bigger worlds.

Now, if you never move into bigger worlds, you never experience that need. Why is it that I can't love handicapped people? Why is it I can't love people of a different religion? Well, you've never had a friend there at the personal level. You've never taken the time to befriend someone at the personal level.

So, I think Teilhard de Chardin said, "The most personal is the most universal." That's excellent. That's what I'm trying to say. But what we call personal is more cozy personalism, cutesy friendship of people who validate my kind of Valentine world, where we exchange equally silly Valentines, but to enter to a world where someone doesn't even know about Valentines, doesn't know how to play my game, who doesn't throw it back to me the way I want it thrown back, that's when your education

begins.

Now, if you never submit to that education, I think you can remain a rather nice person, and I do mean nice, but it's just so self-serving, and we've all been in little towns where, boy, those people are friendly, but you really wonder, though, I don't know. If I had a black face and was a poor man, would I get that same friendliness? You really wonder.

That's what Jesus meant when he said it. You were taught love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That's what all lower level religion, in effect, teaches: "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." It doesn't know it's teaching that, but unless it moves to the universal, it does. Now, that's what I'm calling Jesus religion without the Universal Christ, where Jesus is allowed to be made small, to fit my lens, and there's no universal notion that blows that to bits.

Brie Stoner: Right. There's a certain safety that the small Jesus world provides, and that I can live my nice life, have my nice things, give those nice things to my nice kids, and on and on we go, but then—

Richard Rohr: It's so true.

Brie Stoner: --but then I can ignore what's actually happening in our world right now—

Richard Rohr: What's actually happening, yes.

Brie Stoner: --or the needs that are right there.

Richard Rohr: That appears to be the majority of Christianity in every culture, not just ours. I just toured Europe much of the summer, yeah, same thing there. Christianity is a country club of select people. It self-identifies as such, but it isn't known for building bridges to other groups.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That's such a telltale, right? It's like what you're saying, Jesus is the gateway or the door to the universal. When a group that calls itself Christians hunkers down and draws a clear distinction, there's no gateway to the universal.

Richard Rohr: I'm glad you used that word "gate." "I am the gate." We made Him into a wall, into a hardened silo more than a gate.

Brie Stoner: This is making me think, this gateway from the personal to the universal. It's helpful for me to think about that in terms of prayer, because I think I've had a hard time even since I discovered the mystics and have been practicing contemplation, making sense out of how do I pray, or who am I praying to? Yeah. Who do you pray to, Richard? What does that look like for you? What's the connection for the personal universal piece?

Richard Rohr: Well, there are many levels to my prayer at this point. Most of the day is this deep desire to rest, not to make an occasional foray into unitive consciousness, but to rest in unitive consciousness as much of the day as possible. It's rather hard to do with

things that are constantly snagging you, grabbing your attention, your motivation, your emotions. That's my primary prayer, my primal speech, as one author calls it, learning how to rest in God, to use that language.

Now, I wrote a piece on this last year, I think sometime. I'm finding that as I get older a returning to what I did more easily as a little boy, and that's also the need to talk directly to someone who is a catcher's mitt. I like to pitch and know that it's being caught, that I'm not talking anonymously, I'm not talking to an empty universe, I'm talking to an active presence that wants to receive me.

I find, and this might just be my personality, that I'm needing to return to that, and I've seen a certain, I'm going to use the word coldness and dryness, emerging people who are above that or beyond that, "No, I don't talk to a personal God."

I know it became too cozy. I know it became too sweet and too manipulative. That's all true, but, boy, you can have the big field of unitive consciousness, presence twenty-four hours a day, as if I live that, but until you choose the presence by addressing it, allowing the presence to talk back to you, I don't think it becomes warm or alive.

Brie Stoner: Or incarnate like in a wheel [inaudible cross talk @ 16'52"].

Richard Rohr: Or incarnate, that's good. That's the form that incarnation takes to bring the universal to the specific, to bring the big picture to right here, right now.

Brie Stoner: I can really feel that how the pendulum has swung for me from that very cozy to then "No, no, no, I only meditate." Now, there is that desire again. Paul and I were talking about prayer yesterday. Sometimes it just feel like an occasional inward glance of my soul that just says, "Help. I can't do this alone." That feels like it's not directed to some kind of cosmic. It's very personal.

Richard Rohr: It's very center-to-center, subject-to-subject. Yes. That's what I'm trying to say. Thank you for understanding it. I am sometimes in the presence of people who will pray from their heart without any embarrassment, without any thinking they're artificial. I envy because, darn, I used to be that way. I envy that. So, I'm allowing myself to practice it more and not to live in some false sophistication.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I'm so grateful that that was a part of my formation of the church that I grew up in. I was really taught to have faith in Christ. And then, as I've worked with your book and you talk about how that weaves in to having the faith of Christ, can you speak to what that distinction is between the two?

Richard Rohr: I think it begins to happen when you stop relating—now, here's almost talking on the other side of what we just said, but they're both true—talking to God as an object over there, that's faith in Christ. When you start experiencing the flow happening in you, through you, as you, in spite of you, you eventually gain the confidence to say, "This is Christ, and this is the mind of Christ. This is an alternative mind, because when I live in this mind and allow this mind, and allow this flow, it feels healing, it feels joyful, it feels, again, the fruits of the Spirit."

You've got to always look for the fruits of the Spirit. When you see the fruits, I think you find yourself unafraid to say, "My, gosh, I am Christ." It seems so presumptuous at first, but that's the realization of the saints and the mystics, "I live no longer not I. I live no longer not I, but Christ lives in me, and I live in Christ."

That's where grace leads you. So, it's the movement from subject to object, to subject to subject, where you're a conduit of the flow. You're not initiating it. You can stop it, though. Isn't that interesting? You can stop it. You can't really initiate it. You can say yes to it. You can allow it. You can enjoy it, this flow. You can name it as Christ, you don't have to, but what you discover by doing it is that negativity, hatred, judgmentalism stops it when you will not allow yourself to be gracious toward that other and to know it subject-to-subject.

Whenever you want to objectify anything or anybody, it's the nature of the capitalist beast that once everything is an object of consumption, an object for profit, that's why I feel it necessary—I know it offends some people—to critique the capitalist mind. I'm not saying capitalism is inherently evil. It's brought much good to this Earth, but it also brought a mindset of the manipulation of reality for private purpose. That's what we're saying is objectification of reality. We do it with animals. We do it with the planet itself, and it is the price we've paid for what I have to call it, capitalism. I haven't found a better word to name this worldview. The fact that people are so defensive when you say that, so defensive, almost more than issues of race and issues of gender, and our own customer service department tells me that, when you critique capitalism, the hate calls come in.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah. People don't like that.

Richard Rohr: That reveals that it's shadow. When you're that defensive, "Are you telling me it is above criticism? Are you actually saying that to me, and you call yourself a Christian? And you're saying anything that is not God is above criticism, and a system created in the last thousand years, which has overtaken the West is now your God, you almost have to say that to people. I have to a few on the road. They have no answer to it. When you can't face something, something's dark side, you know you're dealing with the shadow self; the shadow part of something else. Sorry.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. No. I think that that inability to critique something is part of what plagues us in the Christian tradition. I want to bring up two hot button topics that many people get riled up about when we talk about the Universal Christ. That's, one, pantheism, this fear that we are somehow claiming—

Richard Rohr: We are God.

Brie Stoner: --that God is the tree, or that I am God, but then also, universalism. I wonder if you could impact why are those so triggering for people of our faith to explore or be open-minded about?

Richard Rohr: I hope this isn't unfair, but just to narrow the view. It is more triggering for people who were raised in idolatry of written words, which we call Protestants.

Brie Stoner: Let's get real.

Richard Rohr: Forgive me for using the word idolatry, but they so over-localized, first in the body of Jesus, but then in the word of God. Once the written word that has only been able to be reproduced for 500 years now became a substitute for immediate experience, you didn't realize that you rode on a conveyor belt for 500 years—forgive me for saying “you,” “we” because we did too—of overly honoring the part instead of the whole, the medium instead of the message. All things are words of God, of course.

“The word became flesh” that's scripture, John 1:14. The early fathers of the church, particularly in the East, however, really understood that as a not accidental statement that it doesn't say the word became Jesus. Jesus is not mentioned in the Prologue until verse 17. It's always this generic idea of God taking on materiality.

Now, that's the mystical mind that can know that, the mind that we called the “sacramental mind.” I don't know if sacraments were defined for you that way, but sacrament was a concrete thing that led you to the universal thing; a momentary instance of what is everywhere true.

I don't know how many Catholics understood it that way, but we were told it is a sacramental universe. So, it wasn't as big a leap for us to speak of things, and dogs, and trees. Did you see that series on the internet a few years ago? There was this war between the Catholic and the Protestant church. I think it was in Minnesota. They both had a poster out in front. The Catholics were saying, “God loves animals, too.” The Protestants, “No, he doesn't.” I bet you could still find it. It went on for months.

Brie Stoner: Oh, my gosh!

Richard Rohr: I'm not trying to pick on Protestants, but they over-localized the presence. It wasn't a sacramental universe. So, when I come along and talk about universalism, and what was the other word you brought up?

Brie Stoner: Pantheism.

Richard Rohr: Pantheism, yeah. Of course, I would, and you know what I'm going to say, make a very important distinction. I am not a pantheist, that God equals all things, all things equal God. It's clear that I'm not the center of the universe, that tree is not the center of the universe, but that it participates, its DNA came forth from the center, from the source, that's what I'm saying. Now, that's called panentheism in Greek: “God in all things.” But, you know, a little bit of God goes a long way. [laughter] I mean, really. All you need is the divine DNA in every creature, and it's worth kissing it. It's worth honoring it. How can anybody disagree with that?

It's almost like they want a straw man that they can shoot down, accuse you of being a pantheist. Now, of course, again, the word universal, that happens to be the word Catholic. The church in the 2nd century already took that name to itself without feeling it was heretical. The one holy catholic, small C, I admit, shows we weren't afraid of what we now call, as if it's something terrible, “You're a universalist.” They'll come up and accuse me of it like I'm supposed to wither in front of them, “Are you a universalist, Richard?” I say, “Yeah, I'm a Catholic.”

If it's true, you know what I am going to say, "If it's true, it's got to be true everywhere." It can't just be Protestant truth, Catholic truth, American truth, Iranian truth. Truth is truth is truth, and we are the people who say, "We're monotheists. There's one God, one God who created all things. If there's one God who created all things, then we should be the first to be universalist, that everything carries the divine imprint.

So, it's usually just get over the shock of it. The only reason it's shocking to you is you were never told it before. Well, I'm telling you now. If you accept the Universal Christ, or Christ, who you were chosen in from the beginning before the world was created, then it's all one template, one pattern, one reality, one matter-and-spirit amalgam that reveals everything.

So, it's hard as you're getting over the shock, once they get over the shock. Once I pick on my own group of little and say, "I admit. We were Roman Catholics, more than Catholics."

"Oh, okay. You're criticizing your group. Now, I can hear it. You were pretty Roman."

"Yes, we were." Yeah, but the noun was catholic. Roman was the adjective." It's often the case. You let the adjective overtake the noun.

Paul Swanson: You were just quoting John and talking about that Jesus doesn't appear until, you said, 17 verse.

Richard Rohr: Verse 17 of the Prologue of John, yeah.

Paul Swanson: So, as we approach scripture—

Richard Rohr: The very last line.

Paul Swanson: Right, right. So, as we approach scripture and the Gospels, how do you discern what is coming from Jesus of Nazareth and what is coming from the Universal Christ?

Richard Rohr: That is so helpful if you can answer that for yourself well. In quick answer—and this could help you discern the difference—in general, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are Jesus, John's gospel is Christ, in general, and that works. Now, once you can get the eyes to see that, you'll see that the one who's talking in John's gospel is always making declarative, dogmatic, absolute, universal statements, "I am the gate. I am the bread of life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am ..." whatever. There's a whole bunch of them. They're all lovely.

Frankly, to many nonbelievers, in particular, even some Christians, His talking like that, they say He's always bragging. You know what I mean?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, or being exclusive.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, and it sounds like He's saying, "Look at me. Look at me. Look at me." Well, once you know this is the universal truth speaking, it's an inclusive notion, not an exclusive notion. He's naming reality, the truth that is always true everywhere, all the time in India, in China, in Africa, and Mississippi. Okay, I can hear every one of those statements. This is a really open gate, you know? It's the keyless gate. There's no key. It's just open, in fact, the verse says "through which you can walk in and out," which to me is very telling, almost giving

us permission, “I don’t need to belong all the time. Maybe I can--” Now many of the best Catholics I know left the church for five years, gave up on the whole thing, and then re-meet it as an adult. I think that’s happened to a lot of evangelicals, too.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: So, Jesus is always talking in concrete, human, historical this moments. That’s almost embarrassing to a lot of people, that it’s one little leper on one little road; one little widow with one dying son. Jesus brings this whole universal truth to individual caring, to a moment of encounter. Isn’t it interesting that we needed three of those gospels, because we like highly theoretical, conceptual Christ stories that we can make a dogma out of, that we can make, unfortunately, dogmatic statements out of that can exclude other people because we didn’t understand the Christ, that only one of the gospels needed to be the Christ. You do not hear Jesus, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, walking around making many, some could be interpreted that way, but many universal doctrinal statements. He just doesn’t.

He’s talking about right here—this woman, this situation—which gives us permission, I think, to be pastoral, if I can put it that way, to be—

Brie Stoner: Personal.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, to be personal, to be, “Okay. I know all the big theories. Right now, this woman has not been to church in ten years. She doesn’t believe like I do, but I can still treat her with respect.”

So, this is amazing that we said we believed in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but we sure didn’t pattern our self on Jesus’s patterns, because we didn’t see it as the pattern, I guess. You do know he’s breaking the rules right now, his own Jewish rules. He’s making an exception to the universal to minister to the concrete again and again and again. Of course, if you weren’t raised to see Jesus as Jewish, you didn’t know the universal that he’s not supposed to touch a leper. He’s not supposed to care about non-Jews. He’s not supposed to work on Saturday. We aren’t shocked by what’s supposed to shock us in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That’s so helpful.

Richard Rohr: It is helpful.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It just really explains—

Richard Rohr: It clarifies so much.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I think, too, there’s the permission to live large love in small ways as in the synoptic gospels. Then as you talk about how Christ is represented in John, and that really expands “the way, the truth, and the life.” This is a question I know that gets asked of you a lot.

Richard Rohr: It just got asked this weekend again.

Paul Swanson: Did it?

Richard Rohr: It's often in the first ten minutes?

Paul Swanson: Is it, really?

Richard Rohr: Because people are so aware of that quote, John 14:6 has been used to exclude people, condemn people, to make me feel included, "I am the Jesus believer." We interpret it from the tribal level of consciousness that religion is all about belonging and about group, and about joining, "Come, join my club."

Now, if that's your premise that you're operating out of, that is the way you'll hear it. It's all about belonging to the right club, and Jesus is saying, "I got the true club." His very notion of the Father, which is used in that same verse, or the next verse, "No one comes to the Father except through me," is revealed as a universal God, not just a God of the Jews, but the God of Creation.

So, he's saying, "You can't get to the universal unless you put together matter and Spirit," which is encountering the Christ. Every time you find the material to reveal Spirit, every time you find Spirit hidden in one material moment, you have met the Christ, and you're on your path toward the Father. That has nothing to do with joining a group, nothing to do with belonging to my group, but that's the way we hear it, of course.

Brie Stoner: I'm just thinking about that that it's curious that we don't pattern our faith tradition by the very example of Jesus with radical inclusivity.

Richard Rohr: I know. I know.

Brie Stoner: Why isn't that the first thing that we learn or are given to follow as an example?

Richard Rohr: Here's my interpretation. I think, and this is understandable in terms of pedagogy and human growth, you first need to feel special. So, Yahweh did that for the people of Israel. He made them feel special, not so they could walk around and say, "We're special," although they have to do that for a while, just like your children do. None of you would hesitate to tell your children how special and wonderful they are, but the final effect, if that is internalized, is you have an excess of self-confidence. You have an excess of given-ness to know how to see, "Well, you know what? She's special too." That's grace.

So, Paul talks about this, if I remember right, in Romans 11, where he insists that God did choose His people, the Jews, but that their job was therefore to pass on that election to all the nations of the Earth, and he criticized them that they were not doing it. They simply became an ethnic religion, in his judgment, and kept saying how special it was to be a Jew.

I can't criticize that as a Catholic, because we did exactly the same thing. Then you evangelicals imitated us, and you did exactly the same thing. "Aren't we special?" Which means we didn't really internalize the experience of favor, or election, or grace, or specialness, when you know it was given to me undeserved. You have to absorb that undeserved experience, then how can I create any criteria for deservedness over there? It's always undeserved. It's by definition. As Paul says in 2 Ephesians, undeserved. That's what it means to be grace. So, you've got to get out of this whole world of meritocracy.

Normally, the people that happens then is people who've been forgiven for something they really are ashamed of or hate themselves for. Until you've experienced undeserved forgiveness from someone you expected to just nail you to the wall, and they don't do it, that opens up the soul space to experience grace quicker than almost anything else. That's why we often say the sinner, the prostitute, the drunkard, the tax collector has the head start in understanding the gospel.

Goody two shoes who's always done it right, he or she, really, it often takes them a long time to get there. Just put it that way.

Brie Stoner: That exclusive mindset is part of what I feel like shifts so much with this idea of the Universal Christ—

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: Good.

Brie Stoner: --because it includes everyone and everybody, and I think I'm one of many for whom there's been a loss of faith in the institutional church. I wonder, what would Christianity look like if we really did adopt this paradigm of this incarnational worldview? What would change in the church?

Richard Rohr: I would think it would become more a service station or what Pope Francis calls a field hospital on the edge of the battlefield, instead of a place that conducts services, a service station where anybody can stop in and say, "I need help. I got a flat tire. I need gas." We disconnect ourselves from this belonging thing.

I know we all need a family. I know we all need communities. I don't want to be naïve about that, but it's almost like this has become a feverish need because the nuclear family has been so neglected or so fallen apart that now we need family down at the church corner. Maybe that need could be a little less if we knew there were caring people at the service station, and we weren't all alone.

Now, I know this risks creating entirely utilitarian people, who just come when they need a fix, but the 12-step program seems to have given us a different model that, yes, people do come when they need a fix, but the depth of their woundedness, despair, self-hatred, even self-loathing, very often, not always, gives them an inherent desire to help other people, to be a sponsor for other people.

Brie Stoner: Their whole model is not hierarchical. I mean, that's what I think of is, would these very structures of how we hold power shift when we actually consider Christ in everyone and everything? It flattens our whole love of hierarchy.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It would allow other people to be Christ for us, and they don't have to be dressed up, or have a title, or educated in a fancy university, or seminary, but we don't allow the other people to be Christ when the wounded person draws the Christ mystery out of us, between us, much more than the ordained person.

You can't help but wonder if God isn't allowing the ordained phenomenon, as good as it can

be in some settings, but to be roundly humiliated. So, we start looking in other places for Christ.

I think that's inevitable. We're never going to recover from this pedophilia crisis in the Catholic Church. It is having the effect of flattening hierarchies at home and in all institutions.

Brie Stoner: It's being mirrored in the Protestant tradition with how many accusations of abuse of power in the pastors and sexual offenses. And so, yeah, that seems to be part of what I find so life-giving and hopeful about the Universal Christ is that maybe there could be a way of being Christian that doesn't rely on these power structures.

Richard Rohr: On experts.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Because that's what it is, creating an expert class. You know, the word clergy comes from clerics, which means "the separated ones; the separated ones." Why do we need to create this group? Now, I know I couldn't be talking now if I hadn't separated myself and gotten this magnificent education from the Franciscans. So, I'm sure we're always going to need teachers and people who have the time to educate themselves, but this is creating a different class that have an inherent authority.

It wasn't the gospel warning us against that by how often it uses the words, "the scribes, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law" as a word that was coterminous with phony. I mean, we were prepared, prepared to see this, and we didn't because we said, "Well, no, that's the Jews. They were phony, but not us." Now, we see.

Well, for me, from my men's work, it comes down to power, that so few males can handle power unless they've made journeys of powerlessness. That was an initiation, to take a male on a necessary journey of powerlessness, "Okay. Now, we can give him power. "

If you look at the three temptations of Jesus before he begins his public ministry, they're all three temptations to the misuse of power. Look at our politics, look at our religion. I hope we just elect loads of women in the next season—

Brie Stoner: What a great idea.

Richard Rohr: --to just make this point. You know there's plenty of women who are into power too.

Brie Stoner: Absolutely.

Richard Rohr: Still, let's give them a chance, at least. We have pretty much flubbed it up from our side, consistently.

Paul Swanson: The phrase that came to mind, which I've never thought of before, "incarnational exchange," that could happen when you receive something to pass it on, and thinking how incarnation is not a one-time event, but something that is continual and ongoing. Why do you think that's important for us to understand?

Richard Rohr: I think that's what we were hinting at. We spoke of the indwelling Holy Spirit. That implies ongoing growth. But, you know, almost all of Christianity was formulated outside of an evolutionary consciousness. I use the word evolution just coterminous with growth. If you're going to tell me about growth, you're talking about evolution; change. Use those words interchangeably, if you will.

The Christianity we were educated in was transactional, not growth-oriented, not change-oriented, not transformational; transactional instead of transformational. So, when those are your categories, how do we get the right transaction, make the right decision for Jesus, or make the first communion, you really don't understand change and growth.

It doesn't really have to affect me on the level that we would now call consciousness. But let's be fair, even that word "consciousness" wasn't roundly used until the last hundred years. So, it was just the soul, and the soul was a substance. The soul was an object. The soul was a thing that you saved. It wasn't awakened. It wasn't educated. It wasn't enlightened. It was saved. Do you feel the transactional nature of that?

So, I cannot blame this on any particular group. It's where the human mind was. The human mind in the last, really, fifty years, has come to use words like "growth, change, evolution, consciousness." So, we're finally ready to think transformationally instead of just transactionally. Did I answer your question?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. You're speaking how the language is catching up to what we've already seen occurring.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Very good. Yeah. Our language is catching up with it, and we almost have to adjust to the language and realize what it implies. Evolution implies change. We didn't think we had to change. We just thought we had to join. Can you feel that?

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh. The shift.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. "Join the group." "Okay. You're in now."

Brie Stoner: I appreciate that you talk about Paul's experience of the Christ as teaching us how to trust our own Christ experience. I think for many of us who've been so burned by the church, or maybe are taking some of that Exodus time as you described earlier, it's hard to not be cynical about our own experiences or even attribute them to the Christ. You just talked about how our words need to catch up with our frameworks, with our paradigms, right? Much of our religious language is stuck back here in a different cosmology, if you will.

And so, I guess I want to know how do we trust our experiences when to give it religious language sometimes feels like it's taking you out? Does that make sense?

Richard Rohr: Out of the moment. Yeah. Boy, that's true. The self we were told to trust, or taught to trust, was usually the false self. "Trust yourself," that meant that you can play the violin, or you can swim, all of which is good, but there's almost no education in trusting the true self. Again, we don't have language for that, which is really the language of faith, how to honor and recognize. You obviously heard me say that both Jesus and Paul somehow honored their inner personal experience against their own Jewish tradition, and in Paul's case, the newly found Christian tradition. It's amazing that we could have two people who had such

confidence in their true self in God, “I and the Father are one,” in Jesus’s language. Maybe it’s because we waste so much time trusting that we’re the best swimmer, or the best violin player, or we want to get on America’s Got Talent, which is lovely.

Brie Stoner: Is that a secret dream of yours?

Richard Rohr: Always wanted to be there. It’s too much affirmation of the passing self when you put all your energy into trusting that which is not objective but passing, is not your soul, or your substance, but merely your style.

Brie Stoner: Or achievements, or positioning.

Richard Rohr: We’ve created a world that is almost inherently moving toward superficiality, living on the surface, that “I’m great because I’m on America’s Got Talent.”

Paul Swanson. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: So, does that superficiality keep us from being able to have those authentic Christ experiences?

Richard Rohr: I think so.

Brie Stoner: Okay. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I really think it does. It has to do with where you place your attention. If your attention is all on fame, the horizontal world of mutual admiration, I know God isn’t up there, but we use that language of the vertical being named, apart from how anybody thinks about you. There’s got to be some place you allow that to be done that other people think, other people’s opinion of you, is not your primary nomenclature and self-image.

We have created a very unstable self. Very secular books like Charles Taylor, *The Secular Self*, I think, he said this is the only self left in the West is this. What we meant by the religious self was a self that was not defined horizontally, but vertically. When we can allow that to happen, there’s a very solid identity there. It isn’t fragile. It doesn’t come and go by the recent political correctness or by someone hating you. Now, we have people fall apart or kill because someone didn’t love them. That’s fragile. Oh, what a shame. I don’t say that with disdain. I say that with sympathy that everyday you’re waking up insecure, insecure, “I need to be noticed. I need to be noticed.” What a shame.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Trying to imagine risking love. How could you risk to love when there’s that fear of insecurity that you’re in, let alone loving another person but loving God.

Richard Rohr: Yes. You’re living out of a worldview of scarcity, where there’s never enough of me. I mean, this is why I’ve told you three of the weddings I had where the groom fainted. The male, in particular, who’s more guarded and surrounded by boundaries than most women, who thought, “There’s not enough me to give to one woman for the rest of my life, or the children that might come from this.”

It’s a very insubstantial self, a very insecure self. I’m actually surprised that 50 percent of

marriages—is that the present number—that don't end in divorce.

Paul Swanson: I think so. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's wonderful that it's even 50 percent.

Brie Stoner: In closing, we like to ask you this question. I'm going to put a little spin on it.

Richard Rohr: All right.

Brie Stoner: I really appreciate that you talk about how the Universal Christ experience is in sadness or in fullness. So, with our world that is still living and wanting us to live in that superficial self, that only seeks happiness as its goal, how have you—

Richard Rohr: Personal, private happiness—

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: --as if that could exist. Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Brie Stoner: No, no. What would be an example of your experience of the Universal Christ today in a way that embraced the wholeness, the depth, that maybe it wasn't just about happiness? What was a more complex experience of the Universal Christ for you?

Richard Rohr: It's been recently. When I'm tempted, and I am like all people are, to self-pity or feeling sorry for myself, or "This is a hard day," or "Why do I have to do this?" all those voices, when I can move from "I, Richard," to "We, humanity" then I am able now to consciously hold together with other people who really are depressed today, who really are unjustly imprisoned, or dying from cancer, or whatever, once I can move from "I" to "we," and maybe it's just giving a meaning to human suffering, but then I can always bear it. There's a meaning to my sadness. This is the universal sadness.

There's one chapter in the book on that, the "One Lump" chapter, that really works for me. When it's my sadness, and I "poor me," I have to walk over and dress up and have Mass together for this lady who's going to fall in front of me, I'm feeling sorry all for myself, all the things I don't like about having daily Mass. It all just compounds. Then when I can be shocked, you realize you're about to ritualize communion and you're not standing there in persona Richard, but in persona Christ, and you're holding all the sadness, all the self-pity, people who really deserve self-pity, then my little self-pity falls away. So, that's the only way I know how to do it presently. That's what's working for me is to universalize it.

Paul has a line in Colossians, "To make up in our own bodies, the suffering that still has to be undergone by Christ." What a line. "To make up in our own bodies, the suffering that still has to be--" There's somehow a collective sharing in the mystery of joy and the mystery of suffering, as you said, but suffering pushes us more.

It's easier to do it with joy, "Oh, I'm enjoying the happiness of all the world." But even that, to get beyond yours and to connect to your happiness to other mothers, to other fathers, that really expands it. You feel you're holding on to something much more solid. Your happiness

can pass in two minutes, but I'm still connected to the new mother who's just seeing her baby for the first time, or whatever it might be.

[music playing]

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome. So, it's always moving from "I" to "we." Conversion is always moving from "I" to "we."

Brie Stoner: That's so helpful.

Richard Rohr: It is. Yeah. So, thank you for letting me end on that. Yeah. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: The beautiful music you're listening to is provided by Birdtalker. Another Name For Every Thing with Richard Rohr is produced by the Center for Action and Contemplation thanks to the generosity of our donors.

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