

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 1, Episode 6

An Embodied Path

Brie Stoner: Welcome to season one of *Another Name for Every Thing*, conversations 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: Paul Swanson—

Brie Stoner: --and 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 piles of laundry, pleasing the mother-in-law, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the sixth of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we will be discussing chapters ten and eleven, titled the "Feminine Incarnation," and "This is My Body." In this conversation, we explore Richard's ideas of creation as the first feminine incarnation of Christ. Mary, Jesus's mother, as an archetype of that incarnation, and the messy, fleshy reality of being human. A quick note: in this episode, Richard references the colors of spiral dynamics. You may already know this, but just in case, spiral dynamics is a system of categorizing human development and charting psychological and social behavior in evolution. Let's get started.

Paul Swanson: So, Richard in chapter nine of *The Universal Christ*, you kick us off by letting the world know that you were your mother's favorite child.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: I'm curious, how did you know that and how do your brothers and sisters respond to you being the favorite child?

Richard Rohr: How did I know that? My first memory is recognizing that I could expect my mother's eyes to light up when I entered the room. She was just always excited about what I wanted to do, and so forth. I do think it was harder for my older sister who, obviously was the first child; and, in fact, she's owned this in her later years, she was pretty hard on me my older sister, because I came in and took away her being the only child. We were around five years before the other ones came. And then I was clearly mom's favorite. So, I think it was very hard for my dear older sister. I don't hold any grudges, but she pushed me off the bike then.

Brie Stoner: Oh, my gosh.

Richard Rohr: She would. There would be a dog coming, and she'd get behind me and push me toward the dog. I don't know if she's an "eight," [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to the Enneagram types, which are numbered one through nine.] or what, but all that's forgiven and forgotten. But the younger two, of course, they're both

Fr. Richard. "nines," both my younger siblings are "nines," and they could care less. They just always would sort of joke about it, "Well, here comes mother's favorite." I'd say, "Stop it," and she'd say, "Stop it." But they just saw it clearly that she preferred me. Again, I can only recognize the gift of that, that I really got good mirroring. I think that's why I talk about mirroring so much. That's a gift that just has nothing to do with you. I'm sure you're both giving it to

your kids, but that looking in their eyes and being delighted in them, their mirror neurons are receiving that message. So, I would say I was made to order to believe the gospel, to be mirrored by God as special.

Brie Stoner: As we talk about your experience with your mother, I want to transition into a really incredibly revolutionary, at least for me, theme of your book, which is the feminine incarnation.

Fr. Richard. Mmm. Good!

Brie Stoner: Obviously, very healing to hear you describe the incarnation through a feminine lens, because for so many of us women, we feel like we're kind of on the outside of our tradition and made to feel like, "Well, you all caused this giant problem because of Eve." So much suspicion and exclusion over the centuries, over the millenniums, that, yeah, I wonder if you could share with us what you mean by the "feminine incarnation?"

Richard Rohr: Do I have an hour?

Brie Stoner: Actually, yes.

Richard Rohr: Let me just say a few, hopefully, helpful things. For me, I remember early in my preaching, in fact it was at a retreat in Latin America with lay missionaries, and they were very feminist lay missionaries. One just said to me outrightly, "I will not believe in Christianity till there's a feminine incarnation, until there's a Christa balancing Christos." But once you make the distinction that I'm trying to make in the whole book, that the first incarnation was Christ, and Christ has no gender, in a certain way, the problem is solved.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I do agree that Jesus came the Scandal of Particularity in a male body. We can't deny that. But the fact that he had such a feminine soul was-- By no Jewish definition was Jesus a patriarch. He just wasn't.

He acted in very feminine, nurturing, touching, healing, relational ways, never bought the domination system. So, at any rate, once we can accept that the first incarnation was Christ, creation from the beginning of time, then we naturally are going to look for, well, how did that express itself in a feminine way? Now, the readings we find in Proverbs and the Old Testament, and the Book of Wisdom, which I don't think is in the Protestant Bible, are these beautiful

Richard Rohr: passages about Sophia. Without any question, they always use a feminine pronoun to what's clearly the Divine. Now, you can tell this is just an intuition in a very patriarchal Judaism, that they call the Divine "Holy Wisdom." And it's almost always a feminine word. Is it *sabiduría* in Spanish?

Brie Stoner: *Sabiduría*. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Is that feminine?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative). La sabiduría.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It almost always is. But then here's my leap, and why I said I know for many people that's my most edgy chapter, but I'm convinced of it. Actually, as a Catholic, I do find it a bit embarrassing when I go to Europe, and just see Nuestra Señora everywhere. Well, you talked yesterday about carrying out the statue: Our Lady, Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Notre Dame, that really she was the feminine goddess of Europe. There's no doubt about it. She's everywhere. Because Catholics weren't that trained in the scriptures, we didn't see any problem with it even though Mary of Nazareth is mentioned very few times in the New Testament.

So, thank God again for Carl Jung, giving us this word "archetype," and saying that archetypes are not logical or rational. They proceed from the collective unconscious, and they fascinate. They fascinate. And there's no doubt, I watch Catholics in processions, their eyes are all on Mary. She's just what you were watching from your window in Madrid. This is an archetypal fascination with mother, *madrecita*, where most people, not all, but most people first experience tenderness, nurturing, safety, unconditional love. We now know that the first months they think they're the same as their mother. Your little baby, Paul, is probably still at that stage.

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That he's not sure you're even around yet.

Paul Swanson: I get a lot fewer smiles. It's a lot of wide eyes and, "Who's this guy?"

Richard Rohr: Isn't that interesting? The day when he recognizes "Who's this other person in the house beside me and mom?" And then when you, which you'll have no trouble doing, when you will choose him, that's the first experience of election.

Richard Rohr: So, I'm just trying to, some will say psychologize, and you hear me saying in the book. I know this Catholic approach, and Orthodox are just as bad or just as good, however, you want to say it—just icons of Mary everywhere, all over Greece and Turkey—it might be bad theology, but it's brilliant psychology. I keep saying we need a good anthropology to match a good theology.

Richard Rohr: So that was our attempt to see the feminine face of God. And so we painted nonstop this beautiful Mary. Normally the ones I grew up with, she always had her arms out like this, totally ready to receive the running child. Who of us didn't have that as a child? Now we got it from our mother too. I mean our father too. So, I think for those who are ready for it, it'll be one of the most exciting chapters in the book, especially for Protestants. Well, even Catholics who never understood we're dealing with an archetype, something that is true on about ten levels.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, it's interesting for me having grown up in that Protestant realm where there just weren't that many feminine archetypes to look to in Christianity. And even the ones that were offered, I have to say, I hate how Mary is so typically portrayed. She's so meek, and nice, and sweet. But we're dealing with an actual badass. I mean, this woman had courage, when you think about what her "yes" signifies, in the face of

all the cultural norms, what she was consenting to, and the power of that is just, it's remarkable. And so, I want to hear from you, what do you think an embodied path of that kind of Mary archetype would look like in Christianity? What does it look like for us to have that courage to say "yes," or to carry Christ within, with all that it means?

Richard Rohr: If I can call Mary, just to give a new word, she's a holding operation. She held these things in her heart and said, twice, I think, maybe three times, two at least in Luke's Gospel. And then this image at the end of "stand," and beneath the cross "stood," Mary, his mother, and other Marys. Remember all the Marys are the same divine feminine, really. But if you know, here's again where a little anthropological study is helpful, I just read this some years ago that a woman had a formal role in the whole Mediterranean world. In the presence of death, she is to wail, fall on the ground, scream, pound her fists against the enemy. And we see this even on news to this day, to protest death. And that Mary is signified with such dignity, she "stood" at the foot of the cross.

So again, she's a holding operation, holding the opposites, holding the contradictions, holding what I called yesterday "tragic realism." She allowed the tragic to be a part of the realism. That's, you're absolutely right, no meek and mild Mary. And if it's true, they think she would have been a 15-year-old girl, as the story is told when Gabriel tells her, a 15-year-old girl to have that much presence, capacity. And, of course, we have to believe God chose her. So, I'm sure God did choose a very fitting instrument, a woman who was whole already at that age. But just from the few texts that we know so much, and even the final scene of she's the only one mentioned at Pentecost that's a woman. It's a room filled with men and one woman. That she could stand her own with the guys and could join them in the upper room, if that's a correct account of it. Again and again, we see a whole woman, a sturdy, strong woman. I don't think that's a sentimental reading. I think it's implied, at least in the text.

Paul Swanson: Would you mind going a little bit further with that "yes"? I'm curious what are the implications for us with Mary's "yes"? What can we learn from that as we

Paul Swanson: look at our own place and say, social location in the world today, how does someone say "yes" so boldly, and how does that empower the rest of their calling of their days on this planet?

Richard Rohr: Maybe what it does is absolutely affirm the importance of "yes," because as we see the human psyche and the human mind, it actually prefers "no." I mean, just observe human conversation. Almost always we start with resistance, we start with, "Well, I disagree with that. I don't think that's always true." It's the way the ego defends itself and surrounds itself with boundaries is by starting with "no." I've known people who will begin many of their conversations, and it's not even logical, they'll say, "No." The first word out of their mouth is "No." I've known more than one that way. It reveals to me the nature of the psyche.

I'm going to resist being drawn into anybody else's ideas, anybody else's force field, intimacy. "No." And then there's always a redefining of the self. So, Mary's "yes" is

the ultimate attitude toward life. You've heard me say when people ask, "How long should I pray," and I say, "As long as it takes you to get to 'Yes.'" I would still agree with that, because I have to admit many days, today it was somewhere in between, that at morning prayer I'm often in a world, I don't know if it's the dreams I had, but there's a "no" in me. That I'm just, "Oh, God, another day. I have to go over and record with Brie and Paul."

Brie Stoner: "Oh, man, what a drag."

Paul Swanson: "Oh, those clowns."

Richard Rohr: I know if I in any way play into that, I'm dead in the water for the rest of the day if I don't get to "yes," by the time I get over here, or whatever. So, I hope that's a way of seeing it that it isn't too sanctimonious or Mary's grand "Yes." I think it's the basic soul attitude that allows encounter, growth, change, and love.

Paul Swanson: It was a continual "Yes." It wasn't just one.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Very good.

Paul Swanson: It started the perpetual motion of future welcoming.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And isn't that so much the experience of being a parent? I mean, don't you find, Paul, it is this constant having to say "Yes"? "Yes" to being not in control—

Richard Rohr: To being irritated— [inaudible @ 17'47"]

Brie Stoner: Oh, yes, to being interrupted constantly. There's this story that I've shared before of Jim Finley where I showed up at the Living School, and I'm just an exhausted mom. I'm just tired, and I'm trying to find space to do this contemplation thing, but I'm a young mom, and I've got a ten-month-old and a toddler.

Richard Rohr: Did you bring your baby to the early classes?

Brie Stoner: No.

Richard Rohr: I never saw you with a baby.

Brie Stoner: No. He was ten-months-old, but I was literally pumping and dumping to keep my breast milk supply up. So, all that to say that in the class, I remember asking Jim and saying, "You know, Jim, it's great that everybody else has all this ample space for contemplation, but my kids are waking me up. If I try to get up early, and I'm trying to have a sit, they'll interrupt it. It's like they have a radar." So, he says, "Okay, Brie. Okay. You be you, and I'll be God." He says, "Now, I love seeing you get up in the morning, and you just want to be with me, and it moves me so much. I can't tell you what it means to me that I have to rush into the bodies of your children and wake them up just so that I can know what it feels like to be held by you."

Richard Rohr: How does he do that? Brilliant, brilliant.

Brie Stoner: It's that moment that helped me realize that everything coming at me as a mother is really

just archetypal of everything that comes at us in life. These interruptions, the unexpected, the not being able to have our way, this feels to me like part of the ongoing “yes” that we’re being invited to say.

Richard Rohr: That’s lovely. I couldn’t say it half as well. Thank you. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Brie. I love that story.

Richard, there’s been a lot of pain in the Catholic Church with the exclusion of women in leadership. I’m curious regarding the divine incarnation as you lay it out in this work, do you see it as a potential for laying a new sense of embodied feminine leadership in the future of the Catholic church, or-- I’m just kind of wrestling with that as a sense of the feminine incarnation and then how women have been excluded from leadership roles within the Church. How do you see that potentially shifting in the future if this idea and way of being kind of takes hold?

Richard Rohr: From my perspective, it has to happen. Now how long it’s going to take, knowing that people who get promoted in the Church, the reason they get promoted, at least in my mind, is they’re blue loyalists. That’s what makes most institutions conservative, because the loyalists who follow the rules of the group tend to get promoted to higher office. And those who go into the orange level, the critical level, those so-called liberals look dangerous. And so, there’s the level of the fight right now between the orange liberals and the blue loyalists.

Richard Rohr: Until that’s rearranged somehow, probably by the force of history, and again, here’s where I always trust God brings good out of evil, I don’t know if this pedophilia crisis won’t contribute to that change. This is just not working.

This myth of celibacy and the boys club, when men get together, they remain immature. They just do. They create a culture of slap on the back, side comments, passive aggressiveness, all not very healthy things. So, until that happens, and hear this rightly, I do believe, although God bless the churches that are ordaining women, but I do believe that if, at least in the Catholic Church, we ordain women right now, they would be put into a model that’s patriarchal. Maybe they bring a little sweet feminine energy to it, but it wouldn’t be long, and I have seen this, too, in other churches, where you basically accept the culture that you’re a part of. You like all the pomp and circumstance and adulation that priests get, which is now received in feminine form. So, maybe it’s okay. I don’t know how many more years, I’d like to believe twenty, I don’t think it’s going to be much quicker than that. But it’s going to take a pope in our Church, who’s at the mystical level, at the yellow or turquoise levels, too, to have the courage to do it.

Now, Pope Francis is at that level, but I think he’s choosing his battles wisely. He’s making his edge into married priests in certain parts of the world. The foot is in the door for married priests. That will have to happen first. Once you have married priests, the next generation will be ready for women priests, and will stop our fixation that men are the sacred figures. That’s just my quick and naïve analysis.

Brie Stoner: It sounds like you’re saying though, I mean, it’s structural in nature. I appreciate your insight because I do think many of us as women are blind to, or perhaps swimming in the waters of a patriarchy, to the point where we don’t see that we’re actually being asked to step into a role

of leadership as a male in a structurally male way.

Richard Rohr: That's what I was trying to say. You got it.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And so, it's hard to not have a little bit of a like, "What would it look like?"

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes, of course.

Brie Stoner: Then, What would this shift be toward, I guess, a "wholarchy" as Ken Wilber describes it instead of a hierarchy. It's hard to imagine.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Maybe the Anglican Church and the Methodist Church, those and many churches now, have women ministers. They are already beginning to twist the Catholic archetype. I remember when I first saw Susan Sager who started St. Martin's. I attended her Mass, oh, this was in the early 90s, and it was a Mass where they baptized a baby. To see a woman baptizing a baby and then raising

Richard Rohr: it up to God and holding it to her chest, I said, "Boy, this is pretty natural, and it works. It works."

So, we're going to have to see it for our imagination to be changed. And that's where you're right, some people are courageously going to have to push the envelope. Maybe they're rebels, maybe they're a little too aggressive, but someone's always got to do that. So, I'm all for them, even though I can be pretty patient. I mean, it would absolutely split the Catholic Church. We would be two churches if he'd try it now, even if you tried married priests on a whole scale.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, change takes so long within an institution, and I just wanted to echo just my appreciation of taking a step back to see the structural issue at play in the Catholic Church as we look at other institutions as well, which is such a helpful way that you framed it of bringing too big to fail to these institutions. It's kind of an indicator or a signal that—

Richard Rohr: Idolatry is at work.

Paul Swanson: Yes, yes.

Richard Rohr: Now, does your Covenant Church have women?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Oh, you do.

Paul Swanson: I grew up with female pastors and my aunt was a pastor, so I just thought it was normal until I was about twenty. And then I realized that was not the case.

Richard Rohr: How about the Baptists? No.

Brie Stoner: Oh, no. Huh-uh. (negative).

Richard Rohr: They are as bad as us.

Brie Stoner: No. In fact I remember at times discussions about whether or not we should take it literally that Paul said we shouldn't braid our hair. I mean, it was just, wow, extreme. I think I was five when I asked my dad that question.

Richard Rohr: Really?

Brie Stoner: I remember walking into his study. His study always had that "aaahhhh" energy, it's like you're walking into the Holy of Holies.

Richard Rohr: With all the books.

Brie Stoner: All the books and a carpet. And so, I remember walking in and asking him, I was five years old, "Why can't I be a pastor?"

Richard Rohr: Did you?

Brie Stoner: Because I think in my mind that equated the closest I could be to God.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes. That's why I became a priest.

Brie Stoner: I think he quoted scripture. Yeah. I think he gave me some answers. I even think I nodded and walked away, but inside, I remember my heart—

Richard Rohr: There was a little resistance.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I remember my heart being like, "No, this can't be right. This can't be right."

Richard Rohr: Well, you're in good company. As you know, my favorite female St. Thérèse of Lisieux, she wanted to be a priest already. The conservatives who love "The Little Flower," don't want to talk about that, that she wanted to be a priest, a little French girl.

Brie Stoner: It's interesting that you bring up the mystics though, because I do think that that is part of what is so revolutionary about so many of our women mystics, is that in the face of so much silencing of women's voices, when you've got mystics who marched right up to the pope, and gave him a talking to. So, I really appreciate that that's a part of our tradition, and it was my own healing journey to discover that.

Richard Rohr: It will help you understand why in the Middle Ages so many women became nuns. The first step was to separate themselves from total reliance upon one man. I mean, that's not rebellious feminism it's, "I've got a life, and I can live it without depending on a man." They poured into convents to find their identity as individuals.

Brie Stoner: So, Richard, to shift into one of the things that you describe in this chapter is the bodiliness and earthiness of the feminine incarnation, which flies in the face of the anesthetized cultural aversion of that time against blood and flesh, and the Jewish need to segment that out and stay away from blood, and sickness, and bodiliness in a way. It's amazing that Jesus emulates that in that Last Supper, to say something so bodily like, "This is my flesh and this is my blood." What is so revolutionary about that in your mind?

Richard Rohr: The thing that human beings cannot deny, although we still have tried, is that we live in this

body our entire life. So, if we don't deal with embodiment, our own physicality, if we don't somehow deeply say "yes" to it, our receiver station

Richard Rohr: is destroyed, do you understand, for the whole message of soul and spirit. If the third element using the tripartite biblical person was body, soul, and spirit, when you eliminate one third of it by shaming it, which much of Christian preaching did-- I told you, I hate to quote these Protestant reformers, but—

Brie Stoner: We'll forgive you.

Richard Rohr: Luther saying, "We're a pile of manure." Calvin saying, "We're totally depraved," and Jonathan Edwards saying, "We're sinners in the hands of an angry God." The most famous American sermon ever published I'm told, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Our embodiment has been so shamed. This is the only receiver station we have if this can't be part of the equation and also named as "good." So, as you read in the book, that's my conclusion why Jesus took on an embodied symbol for the community ritual. He didn't say, "This is my spirit. This is my idea. This is my soul. This is my body."

And then that he uses the harsher Greek word sarx not soma. Sarx is almost like if we would use the word "flesh." It has a little dirty connotation. And that's the word he uses again and again in John's gospel, "Unless you eat my flesh," my sarx; my total embodied self.

I told that story years ago. I don't tell it much anymore. When I was a young priest in Cincinnati, and I was right in front of the front pews and giving out "the body of Christ. The body of Christ," a mother is holding a little one on the front of the pew, and he's watching me so closely. And then the way kids talk loud sometimes, he turns to his mother, and he says, "Does that mean Jesus's bottom too?" He said that, and the whole church laughed. But how smart? The body of Christ, "Is that Jesus's bottom too?" He got it.

Paul Swanson: Everything.

Richard Rohr: That is the shock of it. So, yeah, we've got such a good incarnational religion. But if we would have seen the elemental as simply incarnation taken to its logical conclusion instead of fighting about transubstantiation, or trans-signification, or trans-symbolization, whatever it was. Five hundred years we wasted on that, instead of recognizing bodily presence to bodily presence. Maybe it's because of the sexual connotations of that, the almost cannibalistic connotations that, "Eat my body." Oh my God, what are we talking about in church? Thank you for asking me.

Brie Stoner: But it's so refreshing. I mean, I think that mind/body split runs through our entire culture, but especially in our faith tradition, which is so sad because we're supposed to be about incarnation and yet we're not incarnate at all.

Richard Rohr: We're not. No, no, no. We've been an ascending religion, trying to get to heaven, trying to get out of our bodies; whereas, Jesus modeled a descending religion, into the flesh.

Brie Stoner: And how little space we give ourselves to permit bodiliness as a way of knowing God. I think about, there's a time when I came to your office in tears, and I was sharing with you an experience of falling in love, and just how it was rocking my world, and I hadn't experienced

anything at that complete overwhelm level. And you said to me—

Richard Rohr: What did I say?

Brie Stoner: You said, “It’s as if you have your whole life had an interior knowingness of God, but that this is the moment when you’re experiencing God at a cellular level.”

Richard Rohr: Wonderful. I’m glad I said that.

Brie Stoner: You’re pretty good sometimes, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. Until it gets embodied, it isn’t you yet. It’s just as we say, a head trip, and head trips don’t convert people. No, they just make you opinionated. That’s all.

Brie Stoner: So, as I imagine that, what would it be like for us to actually live this out in a way that encouraged us to ask that question, “Where am I experiencing God at a cellular level? Where do I feel the oxygen, and am I following the oxygen? Am I following that yearning, that longing? Am I even, dare I say, able to trust that as God?” That feels very different from—

Richard Rohr: Very different than almost any of us were allowed to think. You’ve seen that much photographed statue that’s in Rome of Teresa of Ávila in ecstasy where the cupid, it’s clearly phallic, is shooting the dart into? Oh my god, what a piece of sculpture! It just embodied, embodied, embodied, embodied. It’s so often pictured in books, which shows how it’s striking people, because we were used to these sanctimonious pictures of folded hands, looking up to the heavens, never showing breasts.

Brie Stoner: Or desire.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, or desire.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I mean, because we’ve somewhat vilified desire, longing, yearning, the physicality of being human, the messiness, the complexity. And yet there it is, and there is God in it as this expression of life. And, anyways, it’s refreshing.

Richard Rohr: I remember in Italy, Spain, and France—how do you say Mary of the Milk?

Brie Stoner: María de La Leche?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It’s an art form found in all those three countries, where her breast is fully exposed above the high altar, and there’s the little naked baby Jesus. There were only a unique, few centuries we could get away with that, and then we got prudish and we had to cover up her breasts, or deny them, and clothe Jesus, if at all possible.

Brie Stoner: Oh my gosh, this is reminding me of a story, which has to do with the Eucharist so there is a question in here, but I remember going to a monastery when I was breastfeeding Soren, my eldest son. And I’m sitting there at this monastery surrounded by all these men in these black robes, and I’m feeling so out of place. I’m nursing my son. I mean, what can you do? They’re doing their Gregorian chant, and I’m just like, “Sorry, guys. I got a baby and I got to feed the baby.” So, I’m sitting there and I’m nursing my son, and, of course, when you’re nursing you get so hungry. I mean you’re burning like 800 calories a day, so you’re just starving all

the time. So, it came time for the Eucharist, and Soren was finally passed out in his milk coma. I put him back in his little car seat.

Richard Rohr: Milk coma.

Brie Stoner: Oh, it's the best. I'm looking at this priest with a sanctimonious breaking of the bread, and all I can think of is, "I need to eat that. I need to eat that." And so, I had this somewhat bodily but also mystical experience of recognizing that is my hunger for Christ, and I'm not going to just be a sweet, meek thing in the face of all of these monks. So, I get up there and I didn't only take a tiny little piece, I broke off a hunk.

Richard Rohr: Oh, you were allowed to break?

Brie Stoner: This monk is looking at me like, "What in the world." I took that hunk of bread, and as I was eating it, I was like, "Christ, I eat you." I know this sounds weird, but it was like this desire, it was this permission. And I had the impression, not like words spoken, but the impression of, "You are already within me. Don't you see? You are already in my belly." That kind of reciprocity of beingness. Anyway, your describing Mary as nursing Jesus above the altar brought that up story. Do you have any experiential moments like that with the Eucharist?

Richard Rohr: Lovely, lovely. Yeah. A lot over my whole lifetime. Yeah, a lott, where thinking stops. It really is contemplative, and I've often wondered if that isn't why the Eucharistic churches seem to produce more contemplatives, because the Eucharist is made to order, to silence the mind, and to move it to the body knowing level. Yeah, it's wonderful. I can't say it happens at every Mass. Too often because I'm the highly visible minister performing all the functions, I let my role get in the way of the intimate encounter.

Paul Swanson: Kind of going with that theme, Richard, in chapter ten, you write about how if we sacrifice a reality in the elements, we end up sacrificing the same reality in ourselves. And that was one of those kind of gut punch lines for me, in light of

Paul Swanson: what you just shared in the Eucharist. Can you further unpack that quote? What does that mean if we sacrifice reality in the elements, that we end up sacrificing reality in ourselves?

Richard Rohr: Well, it goes back to my overused line, "How you do anything is how you do everything." And if this is just a symbol, well, it's not really Jesus, it's just pointing to Jesus, or a "memorial meal" is what a lot of groups like to use, then you're able to say the whole thing about theosis, the transformation of human nature into the Divine Nature. But because we were weak on that, you can see how we needed to do it in the Eucharist. So we did. In the Catholic we're all, "Yes, it's truly fully human and fully divine Jesus." But we never made that transfer back to the human person. We overemphasize the bread. You know, even in canon law, we had a line *sacramento pro populo*, the sacraments are not ends in themselves, they are for the people. They are for the sake of transforming human beings."

We have tended to worship the sacraments in the Catholic world. Maybe you did the same with baptism in your churches. It became a magical proof of something instead of, "Well, is this really drowning people into the mystery of Christ?" "No, it's just they got baptized and therefore they got saved." Yeah, so I would hold to that, that if we can dismiss it easily in

the brain, if it isn't possible there, then maybe it isn't possible here. Maybe the two can't be put together—divinity and humanity; matter and spirit. So, for me, as you've heard me say too many times, it's one continuum from the first incarnation in creation, to the personal incarnation of Jesus, to the body of Christ, to animals, and to bread and wine. It's all on one line.

Brie Stoner: This kind of sacramental view of seeing Christ in everything, and then every aspect of reality can change for us how we look at dying, suffering, or loss. It gives us kind of a new understanding, I suppose, and I think I'm grieving the loss of my grandfather right now. He just passed last weekend. I was grateful to visit him one last time. There was something very tender about in hospice, barely able to get words out. His bodiliness at that stage of dying was very luminous. So, I don't know. I'm grateful to this perspective that can shift what otherwise is culturally looked at as this sad, awful thing. I don't know, there is Christ in that, too, in the dying. I wonder if you could share your own thoughts about that?

Richard Rohr: I see Christ as the principle of universal life. I see Jesus, and don't hear this in a negative way, as the principle of necessary death. And when we say we believe in Jesus Christ, we're trusting both movements. The first includes the second, life includes death. In fact, I got two emails in the last few days, because these were my Daily Meditations last week on death and resurrection. People just that phrase that "death is a part of life" just that phrase, blew some people away. I think where Christianity malformed its own message was framing it in terms of reward and punishment, winners and losers, retributive justice. And that's the gospel most of us were given.

Richard Rohr: Once you get that, then death is a threat from God; death is a punishment from God. I daresay most Catholics seem to think of it-- You've heard our Hail Mary, which we read, "Now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Now and at the hour of our death. Amen." What's this great fear of death? You're praying all your life to endure the moment of tragic death. It's really a lack of preaching of the gospel, that death and resurrection, we call it the mystery of faith: Christ has died. Christ has also risen, and will come again and again in that form. That's the mantra of faith found in the earliest Eucharistic liturgies that the Eucharist was proclaiming this as the mystery of faith: life and death are one. Death is not the end of life, but the changing of life.

As we even say, in our Catholic funeral liturgy, it's officially there in the text: "Life is not ended, but merely changed." I don't think the priest who reads those words even often was trained to believe that. He thought it was ended. And even worse, ending with threats of punishment for every bad thing you ever did. What a loss. What a terrible loss. It just wasn't good news for the world that gave history hope. If this book does anything, I just hope it's giving a bit of hope to those who are ready for it in the midst of a very cynical world. Because we grew up, you're probably too young, but you've heard of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsay. How many books was that? Six or seven?

Paul Swanson: Millions.

Richard Rohr: It sold millions, yeah, but he preached the gospel of Armageddon, rapture, apocalypse now. I mean, you want to talk about heresy, that is missing the major point, that you're giving a tragic end to history. It has tragedy in the middle, but once you make the ending tragedy,

except for the few of us who are going to be raptured—

Paul Swanson: Fingers crossed.

Richard Rohr: --you've got a very despairing storyline. You don't have good news for the world. It was all going to end in a whimper. Is that the line and not a bang? Yeah. Oh, my.

Brie Stoner: It's symbolic of our fear of materiality though, really.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: That split that continues to exist. I'm thinking of that old hymn, "I'll Fly Away." It's like, "I'm just going to leave this [inaudible 00:47:05] and get out of here." But it's also evident in our cultural fear of aging. I think about like AI, artificial intelligence, and how much people are obsessing over wellness and anti-aging. I think that it shows us how uncomfortable we are with physicality as a whole. I feel the way you described in this chapter, this is my body, the bodiliness, the sacramental aspect of that really shifts that whole fear.

Richard Rohr: I hope so. Yeah, and that's what I believe Christianity was meant to do. I heard a song, I don't want to pick on K-LOVE, but I do turn it on because sometimes I find inspiring songs while I'm driving. "Take this world, just give me Jesus." Did you hear that? It's a real popular one, "You can take this world, just give me Jesus." There it is. It's in the 21st century, a popular song by a young person, and sung with great enthusiasm. "Take this damn world," he doesn't say "damn," but that's the energy of it. "I just want my private Jesus." Wow. An unembodied Jesus because this world and Jesus are the same thing. So if you don't like the world, you don't really like the Christ. But they weren't told that, I know. But thank you for hearing it so well. We're still in infant Christianity. After 2,000 years, we're just beginning to get the massive revolutionary implications of the gospel and the incarnation. Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: I'm just so glad you said that, because I think naming it as kind of infant Christianity or young Christianity allows us to grow into this sense of materiality, and shift the view of that dualistic split of death as the end, and that fear, which seems to be the driving force behind so much of spirituality, and why one makes choices based on religion is to get that ticket to heaven once you get to judgment day on your deathbed, or whatever it may be. So, how do you imagine us moving into a more feminine incarnation as a people following the way of Jesus?

Richard Rohr: I'm sure, given the different temperaments and personalities, there's going to be different starting points for different people. I do think in general, women have a head start here, so it's good you put just their fact of menstruation, labor, those two especially, which a young woman already experiences. She experiences the continuation of life through bleeding and through suffering. It's all body, body, body, body. It's just even, I guess you women count the days when you're—

Brie Stoner: Yes, Richard. That is a thing we women do. [laughing] There's a rhythm to it. I hear what you're saying. It's the rhythm of it.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I never think of that. I can ignore my body. Do you know when they discovered what they now think is the cave of John the Baptist in Israel, just about ten years ago, they realized

it became a shrine where people came to baptize people, and the archeological study has twenty-seven steps into the drowning pool. Exactly. They said the male had to be taught what the woman learned naturally, more or less, twenty-seven days is the magic number. And that this was often used in feminine rituals, the magic of twenty-seven. But the male, twenty-seven doesn't mean anything—twenty-seven steps into the drowning pool of John the Baptist. I don't think this was the question you asked. What did you ask?

Paul Swanson: I was asking about moving into that mature Christianity or materiality at the cellular level really comes alive and emboldened.

Richard Rohr: We'll have different ways. The woman has a head start. I suppose people who have had healthy, intimate sexual experience. I don't mean just having sex, you know that. I mean where there's been encounter, where there's been reverence, where there's been mutuality, intimacy, I think they will have a head start, because they know that this wasn't just dirty sex. I remember old-time Catholics used to say, "Why was it a mortal sin the day before we got married, and the day after we get married it's virtuous?" They said, "You just can't make that switch. It's dirty and sinful on Thursday, but suddenly it's sanctity."

So, when you've totally immersed, and I know individuals from confession, who it took him thirty years to get beyond that, that it's still dirty, their embodied self. So they weren't prepared to have an intimate, mutual give and receive, respectful encounter. So I think they'll have a head start. Often people, and I've seen this in hospitals, handicapped people, children who've already had a disability really young, who just had operations already before they're three, can you imagine, they have a certain respect for physicality. I'm ashamed to say, I give a lot of blood anymore because of all the stuff I'm going through, and every time I still wince when they take my blood. There's no pain whatsoever really, but I do not like a needle being stuck in me.

And I remember my mother, she would just put her arm out. She didn't think twice about it. I've seen children that way. I've seen them even on TV, St. Jude in Memphis, all these little kids who are filled with needles, and they have a head start, too, that the physical is almost their first experience of life. Their physical body being handicapped, limited, made fun of, weak, dying, all those things. Those of us who are just healthy might not learn that. I have to admit, I until my older age now, I took my body for granted most of my life. Part of it was I was never into athletic sports, so I didn't need to strengthen my body or look muscular. That was never any interest to me, maybe it would have been better if it was. And then becoming a celibate so young, I was able to just live an disembodied life in great part.

So I had to learn it through nature, through animals, through friends, through normal physical touch. But what I'm saying is we're going to come to embodiment in different ways, but those who get it in a tender, nurturing way, have a huge head start. And those of us, even if you've lived too much in competitive sports, where my body is simply a machine that can win over others, just being embodied is not the message. Because if my body is a machine to dominate over other people, to just win the Olympics, in your own way you could be disembodied. Why? Because you haven't awakened soul and spirit, and body without soul and spirit is equally problematic. In fact, it's lust instead of love. We even created a word for it, that it's embodiment without soul.

Brie Stoner: It makes me think of the growing edge of contemplation right now, which seems to be reclaiming contemplative prayer as a bodily, as a physical thing. When we do our sits, or whether we do drumming, or whether we are doing a labyrinth

Brie Stoner: walk, whatever it is, these practices, at least for me, have helped me reclaim sensation as a spiritual practice. And that seems to be a growing edge for us right now I think in the contemplative world.

Richard Rohr: I think you're right. Yeah. Did you enjoy that quote in there? I used to hear it a lot. "It's a sin to smoke while you're praying. It's a sin to smoke while you're praying, but if you pray while you're smoking, that's a virtue." [laughter] We didn't know how to put the two together. We had a priest who used to tell us that. "No, you may not smoke while you're praying, but you may pray while you're smoking." Oh, god, what was my point there? Just—

Brie Stoner: The growing edge of contemplation and physicality.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. --uniting us to physicality so we would have no trouble. Say, "Well, of course we can smoke while we're praying," you understand? Or dance while we're praying or—

Brie Stoner: Make love, or write music, or paint, or—

Richard Rohr: Because it's a much higher integrated level to be able to talk that way. So the fact that we're discovering drumming and dancing is just a great advance. I think I also say in the book how when I came out here to New Mexico in 1969, and worked with the Acoma Indians, how I just kept discovering how Catholic they were, if I can use that word, before we ever came. The sprinkling of corn pollen instead of Holy Water, the building of altars in the desert, and little prayer bundles they'd make where they'd leave their prayers. The bows to nature and the gesturing were just like our body wave of sign of the cross that Catholics make. They had embodied prayer, and the big feast days more than anything else to this day are dancing, dancing for God.

And if you've gone to them, you know that if they do it right, most of them do, I go every so often, they do not make eye contact all the time they're dancing. Their eyes are cast down. You're not doing it for the gringos who are watching you, you're doing it for God. How beautiful. So those are all kinds of things that should be a part of good liturgy. The Native peoples often had them already.

Brie Stoner: As we wrap up here, I want to ask you, where have you experienced the feminine incarnation of Christ this week?

Richard Rohr: This week. Well, just last night, I told you I watch the Nature channel. Well, there was a whole show on reptiles. It pointed out that reptiles are not like mammals where the mother feeds the infant and the whole mammalian world. And then they said but there's one great exception, a certain species of crocodile, and they showed it at great length, goes off to a secret place, buries all of its eggs in warm, rotting foliage to keep the eggs warm. She stands guard over that for three months. If any other animal comes near it, she goes chasing after them. Then waiting at the end of three months, when they start coming

Richard Rohr: out, she takes each one in her mouth and rushes to the water to keep it safe there.

Sometimes there's like forty little alligators, and she's going back and forth so earnestly, putting them in one little corner of the pond, they all just stay there. And when she gets them all together, then she guards them for two months in the pond. It's the only reptile that cares about their young, and it's this one species of alligator, or crocodile, I can't remember which one, but it was just, it brought me to tears, this vicious looking ugly animal that we think of how she cared at great cost to herself. They said she would sooner defend them than eat during that period. Isn't that beautiful? How can that not be the love of God? What else is that? It's the same divine flow. But yeah, that was just last night. So I'm glad you asked me, and I got to tell the story.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard. Thanks for taking the time to share with us today.

[music playing]

Paul Swanson: Yes. Thanks, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

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.

Paul Swanson: If you're enjoying this podcast, consider rating it or sharing it with a friend to help create a bigger and more inclusive community. To learn more about Father Richard and to receive his free daily meditations in your electronic mailbox, visit cac.org.

One more thing for before we go, we want to hear from you. Brie and I are having a blast being in conversation with Richard, and we would love to hear what questions are arising for you as you listen to this podcast or read the book. So if you have a burning question related to the themes of The Universal Christ that just won't leave you alone, head over to cac.org/podcast, and follow the instructions there to submit your question. After this season is over, we'll sift through the submissions, pour a glass of something tasty, ask Richard your questions, and then share his responses with all of you.

Paul Swanson: From the high desert of New Mexico we wish you peace and every good.