

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 1, Episode 9

Peter, Paul & Mary  
(minus Peter)

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

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

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner. We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst shoveling snow, lost keys, and the shifting state of our world.

Paul Swanson: This is the ninth of twelve weekly episodes. Today we'll be discussing chapter 15, "Two Witnesses to Jesus and Christ." This conversation takes us into the relationships that Mary Magdalene and Paul from two different entry points as two witnesses to Jesus and Christ.

One more thing before we get started, 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](http://cac.org/podcast) and follow the instructions there to submit your question. After the 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.

Okay, Richard, we are going to dive in to the chapter where you focus on Paul and Mary Magdalene. We're going to take some time to focus in on each one of them, but we thought before we take those individual deep dives, we would give you an opportunity to give a sense of the gestalt of their relationships to Jesus and The Christ.

Richard Rohr: I remember when I was writing this chapter, I really thought the editors wouldn't like it because, "Okay. Okay. Paul and Mary Magdalene," but one of them I remember telling me, "This really, for me, captures the two different perspectives," and I said, "That's exactly what I hoped it would do." He says,

Richard Rohr: "We have to keep it in the book." So, I wanted people to know that a certain amount of people will start with the Christ experience, which if the truth is told, it's really everybody, if Christ is another name for every thing.

We actually start with the universal. We don't know its Christ yet. So, to try to give a name to this reality, to try to give face to it, an interface, we're told about Jesus. So a lot of us think Jesus is our starting place, and He practically is, you understand? Paul and Mary Magdalene gave me just perfect examples right in the New Testament, because as you know, I say, I believe Paul started with

Christ, but in a very specific encounter with the Universal Christ, and that led him to a love of Jesus. But really, he doesn't talk about Jesus that much.

And you're shocked when you first hear that, he loves Christ, this cosmic Christ that we

talk about. Whereas, Mary Magdalene probably represents how many today would come to the Christ. They first fall in love with Jesus in a personal, relational, intimate, giving, and receiving way. And then maybe without even knowing it, they universalize from the interface with Jesus to the interface with everything else. That's probably the more common way today. Well, maybe not. I don't know. It doesn't matter, but they're both true. And I think it's no accident that they're both pivotal figures in the New Testament even though, as you well know, Mary Magdalene was underplayed in most of history, by putting on her a single image, which isn't even her main or correct image at all. So, we lost a lot of good timing with Mary.

Brie Stoner: I was just about to ask you why you think we haven't paid more attention to Mary's unique role in the Gospels.

Richard Rohr: Well, let's be honest. I think on one level, I'm not saying it's the only level, but the patriarchal diminishment of the feminine and of the woman's role, and the woman's importance, all we could make her into was a sinner. And then without any evidence, we made her into a prostitute. If that doesn't reveal the problem, I don't know what it's going to take. That, of course, I know there are many Marys in the New Testament, and the stories did get confused, so I can let them off the hook a little bit. But the only text that really could be used to possibly say she was a prostitute was she was exorcized of, was it seven demons?

Brie Stoner: Seven.

Richard Rohr: Seven. And, of course, the worst sin is always sex, so we said that was her sin.

Brie Stoner: We just filled in the blank.

Richard Rohr: Filled in the blank.

Brie Stoner: And by "we," I mean men.

Richard Rohr: That's true.

Brie Stoner: Yes, yes.

Richard Rohr: It's true. Yes. And yet we find evidence in the early church—I don't know if I say this in the book—but they go back to Sacramentaries in the first five centuries, and on the Feast of Mary Magdalene, the creed was sung. Now, the creed was only song, which still would be the case, on the Feast of the Twelve Apostles and Jesus. And yet, we sang it on July 22nd in the old Sacramentaries. So, this shows the early Church honored her as an apostle and gave her the dignity of an apostle. But suddenly, I don't know what century it is, sixth or eighth, we don't sing the creed. She's no longer a major feast, is what I'm saying.

Brie Stoner: It's interesting because it seems like our diminishment, the ways in which we have diminished her role, have coincided with the ways that we're missing the key story of her life and her example, and how that points to the Universal Christ. And I'm wondering if you could, just assuming if maybe some of our listeners don't know the story of the garden, could you describe the story of the garden and tell us what's so important about this moment when Jesus says, "Don't cling to me."

Richard Rohr: Yes, that's John's rendition. That full account is only found in John's gospel, which we usually assume John's gospel could have been written as late as the year 100, some say 110. But what that reveals to me is seventy years of reflection upon the Christ mystery. We have a much more developed Christology, all right, that we've moved beyond the mere historical Jesus to unite Christ to Jesus. So, in general, John's gospel is about the Christ—and I don't think that's being naive—whereas, the three synoptics are about Jesus. I know that's dangerous to make that too glib, but it's in general true, in my experience.

So, in John 21, is it, 20 and 21, there's this beautiful story of Mary coming to the tomb first, which of itself is telling already. Where are the boys?

Brie Stoner: Crying.

Richard Rohr: Oh, and she's crying.

Brie Stoner: No, no, they were crying. They were scared; crying.

Richard Rohr: Oh, I see, crying in that sense.

Brie Stoner: She was courageously showing up like women do.

Richard Rohr: Yes, she was showing up. Well, they were afraid to getting crucified, too, of course. That's right, which she would have had every reason to share the same

Richard Rohr: fear and yet she comes. And then, of course, it's really a lovely story. She totally is confused or correct, however you want to see it. She sees a man working there, and she thinks he is the gardener, and she asks him, "Where have they put him?" So, you can tell she's sincerely confused, or as I say, correct. And she assumes that it's not Him. Then when He speaks her name, the recognition comes.

We've moved to the I/thou relationship where there's intimacy, where there's communion, where there's tenderness. "Mary," all He says is, "Mary." The magical name in the New Testament for a woman. And correct me if I'm not

recounting the story correctly, and then she recognizes Him back as my teacher, "Rabboni." It's usually translated as my glorious teacher, my great teacher, my main teacher. Sometimes it's called "Lord," but I don't think it means Lord, as such. So, you could take almost that whole story and see how He's trying to move her from the circumscribed body of Jesus to the universal presence of Christ.

Then when this becomes very telling, although it took me years to recognize this. You know, the good thing about being a preacher is these passages come around once a year, and you've got to preach on it again, so you read it with a little more detail or a little more prayer. And we were always bothered by what is the most painted scene in European art museums of Mary Magdalene, where He's saying, "Noli me tangere" in Latin, "Do not touch me," and it always seemed aloof; exclusionary.

Brie Stoner: Kind of a jerk move.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Come on, “Don’t touch me”? Is He denying the intimacy that the closeness that they must have once experienced? But if we understand the Christ the way we’re saying, an un-circumscribable persona, “I must return to my Father and your Father.” So, He’s identifying His movement with what is to be her movement. “My God and your God. I must go back to this universal presence.” It’s really all there, if you analyze it theologically, that He is the gardener. He’s now universally available. So, “Don’t try to grab at me in one localized presence. I’m no longer one localized presence.”

So, He’s trying to lead her, we would say, to a higher level, to a universal, ubiquitous presence of God. It works. It really works. It’s, for me, a marvelous theological locus, as they called it, a place where you can uncover a whole bunch of truth.

Paul Swanson: Yes, and you named so well how that relationship shifted in that moment, in that scene. What is the invitation for us today to learn from that, what Mary’s relationship was with Jesus before and then after “Do not cling,” and

Paul Swanson: understanding that the relationship with Christ is a different exchange. What are we being invited to through the story?

Richard Rohr: Yes, a different exchange. Good word. Wow, what is it saying? It’s certainly giving us permission, and space, an invitation to do the same thing. To move from our momentary Jesus, without giving up our space-in-time Jesus, to knowing that the only way you and I experience Him is in a different way. And that’s why I paralleled Mary to Paul, because Paul experiences Him in a different way to begin with. Now, Mary is giving us permission to do the same.

You can start with what you were taught in Sunday school, Jesus, that’s a good place to start. But if you stay there—well, let’s make it very practical—you will

Richard Rohr: never get the social, historical, political, economic implications of the Jesus mystery. You will remain highly individualized, over personalized—

Brie Stoner: Privatized.

Richard Rohr: Privatized. There’s a good word. And a universal presence that now is equally present in Africa, and Latin America, and Asia, you have to deal with that. And I think that we’ve shown such little respect to other religions, other nationalities, and the earth itself, the planet itself, I think much of the first 2,000 years have perhaps partially known Jesus, but they’ve never taken the Mary Magdalene journey from Jesus to Christ.

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Richard Rohr: And all we can assume is that’s the journey she made because she doesn’t cling to Him. She follows His directions: “I can love you without holding on to you.” I guess this would make a wonderful passage for teaching on non-co-dependency. If Co-dependency is the new word for a lot of false love, can you love somebody without absolutely possessing them as your own? I think that’s very mature love.

Paul Swanson: That shift into a larger relationship that is beyond that one localization. Take the marriage example where it's two people. They choose to have children and that expands. You can't hang on to what it was at an earlier stage.

Richard Rohr: Once the child comes, that's right. That's the first bigger circle. Okay, "Now I can actually love my partner in taking care of his or her child." It doesn't have to be just looking into his eyes and going out to a Valentine's dinner. I don't even want to talk about tomorrow, I can imagine what's going to be happening.

Brie Stoner: For our listeners, it's the day before Valentine's Day today, that we're recording; so, obviously, we're so excited about it.

Paul Swanson: Yes. That's why I'm wearing red.

Brie Stoner: One of the things that you write about in relationship to Mary is you say that the inner knowing is her access point to the universal, which is interesting because you just described this very personal moment where He calls her name and she responds and that that's an intimate way of knowing. It's an intimate inner knowing. And so, I guess my question is, how does our normal operating mode, system, way of thinking, way of being in the world flatten that kind of objectless intimacy?

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's a great word, "flatten." Yes, our normal western, rational, educated way of knowing is to maintain the subject-object split, if I can describe it that way. Now, in fact, I can see reasons for that, that keeps your personality out of it, your agenda out of it, you know things objectively as an object. The irony is,

Richard Rohr: we have a world that thinks that knows things objectively. And look at our politics, it's anything but objective.

So, people who think they're objective and rational clearly are not, but they think they are. What spiritual knowing is, is knowing things not in an objectified way, keeping them separate from you, but subject to subject, which is allowing them to know you back, to speak their dignity back to you, to maintain some degree of autonomy, so I do not control them or possess them or think I can manipulate them. In fact, I wouldn't want to do that. I want to honor them in themselves, as themselves, for themselves apart from whether they do anything for me whatsoever

Can you see in that the real meaning of lust? That's what lust is. It's not loving the person in herself, in himself, by himself. It's okay, she can make me feel good. He can make me feel good. That is not to love her. That's maintaining the subject-object split. And the Me Too Movement rightly calls that objectifying the partner, or allowing yourself to be objectified. When you allow yourself to be objectified and are content with that, you pay a big price for it, because you lose your own dignity and you think you can relate to everybody else in the same way. We call it the transactional way of relating, a functional way of relating, a business-like way of relating.

So, in this beautiful encounter with Mary Magdalene, we see a totally personal, intimate, non-clinging, but truly appreciative way of relating. She allows Him His separate dignity. He allows the same in her. Is this not the relationship between the Father and the Son, if I can

speaking in a Trinitarian way, the pure relationship that is the Holy Spirit? I think so. And we're so indebted to Martin Buber's book, *The I Thou relationship*. Just that distinction between "I-it" and "I-thou," most of us can get that and it helps us see that most of our relationships are "I" yet and probably have to be.

Richard Rohr: You can't fall in love with the checkout girl at Smiths. I hope you can be nice to her, and you can show her respect, grant her dignity, but it can't be an intimate moment. There are degrees, but that we're at least capable of intimate moments when they're called for, or allowed, or possible. That's what worries a lot of us. I've had men admit it, middle-aged, late middle-aged on the men's retreats, and they usually say it was tears that, "I don't know if I've ever loved my wife. I've lusted my wife. I used her as an object that could excite my body, so it was still all about me."

I don't know that we can start with love. We probably all start with lust. What can his beautiful body, her beautiful body do for me? So I just want to bring it to the erotic sexual level so you know this isn't just theory. Lust is the "I-it" relationship, love is the "I-thou" relationship. And for most of us, like Mary Magdalene—how old was she at this point, we have no knowledge—but I think we can say she grew in her capacity for free love. Now I'm using free love in a different way than we used the term where it's really free from my side.

Brie Stoner: Like in an un-boundaried intimacy, like you see her in that moment. And I don't mean un-boundaried in an unhealthy way, but in the capacity to reflect that "I-thou" experience that she had with Jesus out at a cosmic level to then be able to recognize Christ.

Richard Rohr: Universal intimacy.

Brie Stoner: Universal. Yeah, exactly.

Richard Rohr: Universal intimacy is the final contemplative goal, which is why I think I say in the book somewhere, you can never be lonely again. Once you can really experience that "I-thou" walking down a path, it's just every little thing can give you joy. It really can. I wish people knew that.

Brie Stoner: That's why this story moves me so much because, first of all, it's so dramatic. You know what I mean? You're with Mary in the garden. You feel her anguish at missing the body of Jesus. And how many of us have felt that when we've lost somebody? It's that sense of, "But their body is gone." There's real grief. But then that awakening moment of her recognizing, "Oh, here's the Christ," and it's still personal, but it's no longer bound by this one body. I don't know, that really helps me, and I wonder is that part of why you describe her as a contemplative example for us? Is that part of our path as contemplatives?

Richard Rohr: Isn't that interesting that even the Mary and Martha story, and some say those are the same Mary, it doesn't matter, as you know, they're all the same Mary in a way. But that even in that story, Mary has made the contemplative symbol. So, I think she is the archetype of pure love, the archetype of intimate waiting, long suffering love. I think all of us wish we knew what the rest of Mary Magdalene's life was like. Did she go to France? What did she do?

I guess the fact that she disappeared "into the secret of his face" as Thomas Merton said, is probably the message, that we don't hear anything more about her. The contemplative

doesn't need to state a persona or present an identity. Did I respond to what you said at all?

Brie Stoner: Yes, yes, absolutely. We're dancing around in the story because there's so much there.

Richard Rohr: So much there.

Brie Stoner: I think for me, that moment of her ability to let go. I mean, I think of so much of what we're taught in contemplation about letting go, but it's not letting go for the sake of letting go, it's letting go to perceive something so much bigger and then to live from that perception of something so much bigger. And that really helps me a lot, yes.

Richard Rohr: That's one of the big mistakes early Christianity made, letting go for the sake of letting go was made a virtue. And we didn't see the ego in that: "I'm strong. I can let go." I mean, God bless you, you even see it in the Desert Fathers and Mothers—asceticism for the sake of asceticism. And if you read the Buddha story, that's the early path he went down, and you still see it in immature Buddhists. It's all about letting go of my thoughts as an end in itself. We would say, but what is the letting go for the sake of? We'd say for the sake of the presence revealing itself. There's room for otherness inside of me, but just being an ascetic, one who's highly capable of willpower actions that sacrifice the self, we Catholics wasted centuries on that.

Paul Swanson: I'm so touched by that human translation of the need to—I feel that's what you're saying, Brie—the need to allow for the relationship to grow from what it used to be.

Richard Rohr: From what it used to be. That's good. Good.

Paul Swanson: And knowing how we've all done that in our own ways, but for me [inaudible 00:26:16] about my marriage, and there's different seasons to that relationship, and I had to let go and mourn certain seasons so that it can actually grow into something bigger. And I feel that is what I've learned through Mary, is it's going to hurt like hell.

Richard Rohr: Yes, with your kids, too—

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I'm not ready for that. [crosstalk 00:26:36].

Richard Rohr: --when they become teenagers, and they don't want to have you in sight. "Oh, daddy, let me off two blocks from school." Oh, that'll hurt, I'm sure. I remember when my dad, I don't know what age I was, but I stopped calling him "daddy," which we all always called him, and I said, "Dad." And he said, "Would you always call me daddy?" I didn't know that meant anything to him. So all four of us to this day refer to our father as "daddy." But that's what he was experiencing that, "Oh God, I don't want to be their cold dad. I want to be their daddy." Yeah, yeah.

Paul Swanson: That's beautiful. So, I want to just circle back here to the recognition events of both Mary and Paul, and just recognizing that they are coming from different angles of entry points to how they relate to Jesus and the Christ. And for myself coming from the way that I came into the Christ mystery was through my personal devotion to Jesus. And as my theological viewpoint and spirituality expanded, there's part of me that I would look back on that as a little naive because my field is getting bigger.

Richard Rohr: Me too. Sure.

Paul Swanson: And so, my question is-- It's easy to downplay that. I'm sure that folks on the other end of the spectrum do the same thing where they will downplay their cosmic entrance. --how do we trust that experience of that entry point, and respect it for what it is, because for myself, I've been able to come back around and really refine and reinvigorate that devotion. But that's a lot of stumbling.

Brie Stoner: Yes, there are periods of shame. I think there's a time where you're kind of –

Richard Rohr: Yeah, like you were so silly.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, I think you said this, but you feel like you were so naive. You were just like, “Oh, that personal Jesus thing I went through, I'm embarrassed about that.” That's a great question.

Richard Rohr: In the last intensive—oh, you were there Paul, perhaps—I began to switch that phrase that I've used for years from Ken Wilber, hoping it's an improvement on it. I now insist on “include and transcend” in that order, not “transcend and include.” I'm teaching this to our students, and they all just love it. The more you can include, the more your boundaries widen out. That's precisely transcendence, do you see?

Brie Stoner: Oh, that's good.

Richard Rohr: Yes, it is. I'm going to be re-teaching that to all the students, maybe even this year at the symposium, but it's the same way here. So, okay, I'm including now even the little Baby Jesus that I started with that I'm now a little ashamed of how can I understand the Baby Jesus on a mature level? God is absolute helplessness. God is powerlessness. That's good. God is total vulnerability. God is weakness. And, of course, we never developed that. You know, from my

Richard Rohr: Trinity, or our Trinity theology, we had God Almighty, but we never had God all vulnerable.

So, to go back to even the Baby Jesus and say, “There's an adult way that that's really beautiful. It's really good. I don't need to be ashamed of that.” So, I think that's what we mean in the whole school here when we talk about, “We're not into deconstruction, except for a little while. You have to go through deconstruction for a little while. We're into reconstruction, and it does take a while. I can see when it happens to the students when the light goes on, “Oh, Richard is not really here to be a deconstructionist or to tell us, well, the gospels weren't really written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.” Who cares?

We take that for granted, but that doesn't build up faith to just keep teaching you that. Okay, the text is the text we have, let's deal with it. Let's approach it in a spiritual way, and let Luke say it, let Mark say it, I don't need to deconstruct. I got a couple of nasty letters in response to my daily meditations a few weeks ago where I appeared to be saying, “Jesus said,” and this Protestant minister says, “You need to go to The Jesus Seminar. Jesus didn't say that, Mark said that.” I said, “Well, I know that,” but there's no point in keep saying that to preface every time I say, “Jesus said,” “Well, Jesus didn't really say it, John said it.” You've lost your whole spiritual impact. You've created the critical mind. You see the well-defended mind that now can only half believe the text, because they're Mark's words, they're not Jesus' words. You probably didn't expect me to say all that, forgive me, but I want to make the

point where we're at in history now is what I call "reordering, reconstructing." You can't stay at the deconstruction, disorder stage more than a few years, and we're seeing this tearing our country apart.

Brie Stoner: I really like that nuance of include first and then transcend.

Richard Rohr: Then transcend, I'm glad I could say it here.

Brie Stoner: That's really helpful.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: It makes me think of, again, talking about how Mary is a contemplative example for us, because we tend to love the letting go, right? "Oh, you just have to let go." And like you said, we've turned it into its own thing unto itself. But, we also can't let go of what we haven't clung to. And in a way—

Richard Rohr: Oh, yes. Go ahead.

Brie Stoner: --that moment of clinging shows us a path of love that line of Rilke [inaudible 00:33:05], "Go to the limits of your longing." In other words, we don't discard what has come before as though it didn't bring us here or wasn't the gateway to

Brie Stoner: this universal moment. This moment for me when I see her in the garden, it's like this is the path, is to fall in love, to make mistakes, to see the wound, to name the wound in order to then be able to let it go into something bigger.

Richard Rohr: Well put. I perhaps use examples of Venus too much in the book, but about three days before she died, she came to my bed in the middle of the night, which usually didn't do. She slept in the next room, I suppose my snoring kept her away, I don't know, and I could tell she was in pain. She was pushing against the bed, and so I got down on the floor with her. It just comes to mind "clinging." I spent the whole rest of the night just holding her, clinging. "I'm sorry I can't take away this pain. I know." And she seemed to take comfort in that.

But if I hadn't, first of all, clung to her, I don't think the non-clinging of the moment I had to put her down would have meant anything. You have to cling, and I've even used this as maybe a distinguishing mark of Christianity from

Richard Rohr: Buddhism. Christianity says fall in love first. Take the risks of passion. We didn't teach you that, but I think that's what it's saying.

Brie Stoner: The risks of incarnation.

Richard Rohr: Of incarnation, there is what it means. And then, you know what? You're going to pay for it. You're going to pay for it. You love those children of yours as you do, but they are going to hurt you. They are going to move away from you. They are going to disappoint you. And the two go together, don't they?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: We have to attach before we can detach.

Richard Rohr: Detach. But we had too much talk of detachment from ascetic celibates who had never attached themselves to anybody. And that's what created this huge disbelief. "I don't like your detachment, detachment, detachment, which even John of the Cross said, but we know he was attached at least to God. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Can you talk about the symbolism of Mary needing to hear her name and Paul needing to be blinded before either one of them could transition?

Richard Rohr: Wow. Ooh. See, I haven't given that enough thought. She needed to hear the name to move from Jesus to Christ, because the one speaking it didn't apparently look like Jesus, it looked like the gardener? Okay. So, her eyes had to be changed by an interface, and the interface energy was right. That allowed her to change her eyes and to see that it was still the gardener, but it was also Christ. Okay. Now Paul, who thinks he understands religion perfectly, is a pharisaical Jew leading him to the justification of murder. He asked to be blinded for however many days to know that he was blind. Don't you think? Yeah.

Brie Stoner: To find that inner knowing.

Richard Rohr: To find the inner knowing. Yes, very good. That the way you see which has led you, a religious Jew, to kill other people, do you realize how upside-down this is? Now look, we don't know how long he was in Arabia. Is that just in Galatians where he says, "And I went to Arabia"? I would call it a long, extended retreat where he's shedding the pharisaism, sharing the legalism of thinking there's only one way to understand God. So that a righteous Jew would become what many call the founder of the Church, is really quite amazing. The only way he could do that and move his tribal understanding of Judaism to the Gentiles, to the pagans, meant he had to redefine what seeing meant. Yeah, that his seeing was incorrect.

I bet we're talking about months. I mean, I don't know what "Arabia" exactly refers to, but it was certainly south of Palestine. So, he must have made a major

Richard Rohr: trip on a camel, or, I don't know. That's very telling. And how many days before Ananias cures his blindness?

Paul Swanson: I can't remember.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, I'd have to back to the text, but at least we know he's blind for a certain time. And in that period, ironically, he learns how to see. Hallelujah! Is that good symbolism, or not? That's why I can't give up on the Bible. If you go to the metaphorical meaning, it's always brilliant. The fundamentalists were so afraid it was losing the meaning when in fact you're finding the universal meaning normally, normally, if you approach it with faith and love.

Brie Stoner: I found that to be really just stunning, and I hadn't thought about it before, that they both had a liminal, not-seeing time. Mary couldn't find the connecting point that she used to have in the personal; Paul couldn't see anymore. You know what I mean? It's a profound picture of what we go through often through these transitions as we move from the personal to the universal. I know many people who have grown up in the Catholic faith and have grown up with the Catholic Worker perspective. It's such a social, collective frame, and they

have a hard time finding the personal.

Richard Rohr: Yes, that's very true of many liberal Catholics. They're afraid to say they love Jesus or to pray to Jesus. That's absolutely right.

Brie Stoner: So, it's interesting that God takes us through these journeys of not seeing sometimes and that that's part of the process that we can trust.

Richard Rohr: That's the language of darkness. But really for the last 500 years, that was not taught. There was no teaching of darkness. It was all the cataphatic way of light, light, knowing, being certain. We're paying a big price for recognizing that darkness is necessary before you can understand what light is. [Note: Does Fr. Richard mean to say "not" recognizing in the previous sentence?] And, again, as I think I say in the book, light is not something that you see, as such, it's that by which you see everything else. In fact, in today's meditation, I don't know what it was right now, but I always find something wrong with what I said. I do. It's the one thing, and I wish I would have called Jesus "the flashlight" that allows us to see everything else in its fullness, because we've all walked through a dark space with a flashlight. So, I wish I could rewrite it, but that's all right.

Paul Swanson: Just to dovetail off that piece, I think why Jesus' words of "those who have ears to hear and eyes to see," like why that so electrifies me, because it is that, because in both those examples, "Where in my own life do I not have eyes to see or ears to hear what's actually being said?" And it's that inner knowing that comes through when I'm able to go into those spaces of blindness, or to be in the garden and not know who I'm seeing until that moment of recognition hits. And knowing that if I can hold on to that humility of knowing that I don't always

Paul Swanson: have eyes to see or ears to hear, then I can be surprised by the way that Christ is showing up.

Richard Rohr: The darkness normally reveals itself frankly by doing it wrong. Do you understand? Like you make a racist remark and you say, "Where did that come from? My God, there's a part of me that actually is racist," and you got to feel for two weeks like an idiot. Do you understand? Don't make the darkness a too airy-fairy kind of thing. It's almost coterminous with sin in many cases. You have to do it wrong before you understand what right is. That's why I say sin and salvation are correlative terms.

I know a lot of people would disagree with me on this, but I'm not sure you don't have to sin. I think it's part of the deal, I really do. And sin is part of the deal and that's Paul's notion of sin, if I can write about it soon, I hope to, this tragic, ridiculous absurdity that we're all caught up in, that we aren't right, we're wrong constantly. And it's that being wrong constantly that God uses to turn us around. Oh, that's good. That's so good. Why didn't someone tell me that when I was younger?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, I mean, that's so full of grace.

Richard Rohr: It is and it's so obvious.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Yeah. And forgive me, I feel like I keep bringing up Teilhard. Like, I'm showing my hand here at how obsessed I am with his work, but he talks about sin in a similar way like

you just said. He says, “If you think about all of us in this journey of evolution, the statistical chance of trial and error, of making mistakes,” and he talks about evolution as groping around in the dark, testing out different possibilities, and that’s how he describes sin. Sin is that the trial and the error groping around in the dark. There are going to be mistakes. There are going to be failures. There are going to be things that don’t go well.

I don’t know why that helps me feel a sense of, a fellow staff members says, “cosmic okay-ness.” Cosmic okay-ness in that, okay, this is part of the journey that we’re going to be groping around. We’re going to screw up. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And if we don’t forgive one another when we are in those places, and we always will be, we are condemning our brother or sister to stay in their shame. They will remain there, and we have the key, along with Peter to let people out of their prisons. That’s why I say forgiveness is absolutely central to the collective emergence of higher consciousness. If we keep people in their shame by reminding them how wrong they are—and isn’t that almost our image of Christians, reminding people of how wrong they are forever?—but I want to show how our politics is just as stupid as we are, because we didn’t teach forgiveness.

Richard Rohr: We hold people in the stupid identity they were in college. Well, I hope we’ve all grown since college. This is why, in my opinion, both Jesus and Paul are so hard on the law. Because if you just use the law, there’s no wiggle room. Law doesn’t give you any room for grace. And if it’s necessary to make mistakes before you know what the light is, then we’ve got to live in a different arena than law, the ocean of grace. But I think in my own church, my goodness, what it almost meant to be a confessor was to be a Canon lawyer and to tell people whether their marriage was legitimate or illegitimate, or valid or invalid, and how they could get an annulment. It’s heart-breaking.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That tees us up perfectly for transitioning to talking about Paul and really diving into your words about him and the Universal Christ. And one thing that you said is you talked about reading Paul as a witness to both personal and cultural transformation, which is not how he’s normally, right?

Richard Rohr: No, no.

Paul Swanson: And it’s such a helpful and different lens.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: How does this help us understand his revolutionary vision rather than being the moralizing taskmaster that he’s often portrayed as?

Richard Rohr: Thank God I footnoted in the book, this Lutheran-- Wasn’t he Swedish? Bishop Krister Stendahl, I think.

Paul Swanson: Okay. Yeah, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Your people.

Paul Swanson: I’ll claim him.

Richard Rohr: I think he was Swedish. Certainly he was Scandinavian. And for scholars, his rather small book, *Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West*, and this had to come from a Lutheran, a Catholic could have never said this, but he's a scripture scholar respected by all. And as a Lutheran, he says, we wasted 500 years on this privatized notion of Luther's justification by faith because I don't think that's what Paul is talking about at all. He really makes the case in a rather small book. He said that's the introspective conscience of a guilt-ridden German Catholic. He didn't say that, but we as Catholics, he was a good Augustinian monk. He just believed what we told him. It was all about merit and achievement.

So, thank God, he discovered grace, but unfortunately, he took the whole message to the individual level. And once we can break our addiction to reading Paul that way, I can tell you understand Paul, Paul—

Brie Stoner: What a big surprise.

Richard Rohr: --since you already said it in the way you asked the question. Unlock yourself from that filter, that lens, and recognize my God, Paul is talking about human history, society, the future. He's an evolutionary thinker. He thinks Jesus has come to change history, not to save souls for heaven, but to set us on a course that would bring heaven here. So, even think of the way we talk, "going to heaven," going to heaven as an individual soul—even there we separated soul from body—going to heaven meant you had to leave earth. So what does that leave unsacred and bad? Earth. I mean, just read how Lindsey's horrible books called *The Late Great Planet Earth*. I'm sure you never read them.

Brie Stoner: Well, now that you've sold us on them, I can't wait to pick that up.

Richard Rohr: Instead of ending with a wedding banquet, we end with devastation. That's about as contrary to the gospel as I can imagine. And there's a whole generation of American and American-trained Christians worldwide who are praying that Armageddon comes quickly. And, thank God, we've moved the capital to Jerusalem because that's one of the signs of the Great War that we're hopefully encouraging to happen, because that will bring about the Great War, and we Christians can be raptured into heaven. Really, God must just cry.

You've heard me say in many contexts, "If you want to tell a line and get away with it, tell a really big lie." Well, the really big lie that American Christianity has exported to much of the world is that this is all heading toward

Richard Rohr: *Apocalypse Now*, toward a giant devastation in which only a few will be saved. All the animals will burn in the fire. The planet itself will be destroyed by fire. No wonder so many Americans have mental illness. I mean that. I'm not trying to be clever. They say the rate of suicides among military and policemen is now at an all-time high because every day they have to see the seamy, incoherent side of life. And after a while, they just can't take it, and they go home and shoot themselves.

Because if the whole thing is going to hell in a handbag, which is what Hal Lindsey seems to have told us, and where this guy got all this authority-- But you know, his books were best sellers for fifteen years, twenty years? Whole generations grew up on this garbage. And, of course, I was bringing my Teilhard, which was Bonaventure 13th century. I challenge you to

read Bonaventure, no mention of hell, no mention of punishment. It's just cosmic optimism. Yeah.

We've got good teachers, and they are the perennial tradition. I mean, again, to make a connection, that the part of the world that had totally justified human slavery and created a religion that justified human slavery, by the Bible, that we would take it even seriously. I'm not talking about individuals, because I met

Richard Rohr: holy people, much holier than I, from Alabama and Mississippi, but the collective notion is hardly Christianity at all. It's almost anti-Christianity. Once you can justify the torture and enslavement of other human beings, you're no longer in the Jesus arena. And yet this is the very group that is the most righteous about how right they are and how saved they are. Scary, really.

Paul Swanson: I think that's why Paul's vision is so helpful pointing towards the corporate, right? Because if it's individualized—

Richard Rohr: Yes, keep going back to that, thank you.

Paul Swanson: --then it's, "That person is evil. That person is racist." Instead of we have this whole system that's set up from racist principles.

Richard Rohr: You and I have profited from racism.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, yeah. And the way I'm reading you through this book, is you're pointing to Paul saying that this is at the corporate level—

Brie Stoner: This corporate thing. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: --and that we can get side-tracked by focusing on the individual.

Richard Rohr: Trying to go to heaven.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I know it's only several paragraphs in the book, but this deserves a whole monograph so people have no doubt what Paul is saying, or at least what I think Paul is saying, because if we don't move this whole Christian religion to the natural basis, into a corporate level, I really don't see what good it is. I don't see how it's the hope of the world at all. It's going to justify further enslavement. I mean, look at the number of Americans that are all for racism right now, and most of them appear to be Christians. They found the appropriate scriptures that justify this narrowness.

Brie Stoner: I think that's why I'm so moved by this work of yours, Richard, is that it gives us the basis not just for a positive view, worldview, right, a cosmic sense of belonging, but it also points to what's getting in the way of the cosmic belonging. And so, it's both a return to a deep interconnected identity here on this planet as a Christ-soaked world—

Richard Rohr: Well put.

Brie Stoner: --but it's also pointing to here are the corporate evils, the systemic sins that are getting in the way of seeing the Christ-soaked world or living in the Christ-soaked world.

Richard Rohr: Just to ditto your point, I would go even further and say it's primarily the corporate sins.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: They're the big ones, what I call and will call in the new book, "the world and the devil," where we put all our concentration on the flesh, the individual sins of people. I mean, I hope you're not looking at Playboy, I hope you're not gambling. That's nice. But just you being pure and you being holier than thou is not going to save the world. But when you question the whole world of pornography and the subject-object split that's there—

Brie Stoner: Or dare tackle capitalism.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Capitalism being the really big one. --that at least for Americans is unquestionable. It's the God that is "too big to fail." I mean, we've made the word socialism an evil word. All you have to do is pull it out, "socialism." I don't know what you had in Spain, but most European countries have a Christian Socialist Party, Christian socialist party. They don't have any trouble putting the two together, but America, no sir, never the twain shall meet. I've told you the story. My first week in the novitiate when I was nineteen, I'm sitting there in my little brown robe, so happy to be a Franciscan. My novice master, one of the first days of the week, he says, "Well, boys, you have now become communists." Well, this is 1961. I mean, a Communist? We didn't know what to do with that. He says, "You do know we now own everything in common, right?"

Richard Rohr: And we give away all excess to the poor, right? You own nothing if you're going to take these vows." He really played it out, and I never forgot that. "I'm a communist." But ours was voluntary poverty as opposed to involuntary poverty, which I know makes a big difference. But even the Franciscans had the courage at that point to call us communists. Hallelujah. We had a freedom to recognize, "Hey, there's something real good here about sharing all things in common."

Paul Swanson: And you keep this thread going in the Universal Christ. I want to read a couple of quotes here before a question. You write:

I would insist that the foundation of Jesus's social program is what I call non-idolatry or the withdrawing of your enthrallment from all kingdoms except the kingdom of God. So, non-attachment is the freedom from full or final loyalties to manmade domination systems.

So, when I read that, I see myself wanting to participate in that freedom of the kingdom of God as you've portrayed it here.

Paul Swanson: And then to name these virtues of non-idolatry as a practice for prophetic, right seeing of systems, or maybe what we're calling "corporate sin," and the non-attachment as personal, creative agency in service to the world or the Christ-soaked world. Am I catching onto the vision that you're naming that comes from the other Paul?

Brie Stoner: The other Paul?

Richard Rohr: The other Paul, good. I'm glad you put yourself in his club. You deserve to.

I'll tell you why I seem to define it almost negatively, non-idolatry, because if you define it positively, so-called, you get into this oppositional, "I have to fight against the pagans, the idols," it creates oppositional energy. You're back in what Cynthia would call the "law of two." I'm now the righteous one attacking the kingdoms of this world. This is Cotton Mather again; this is medieval Catholicism. The "world" became a bad word, but simply non-idolatry is much more honest. When you withdraw your enthrallment from capitalism, it's no longer above question. I'd be quite content with that. Do you understand?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And it doesn't encourage righteousness, non-idolatry of the military industrial complex. I mean, forgive me, all this crying when we sing "The Star Spangled Banner," that's idolatry by every biblical definition, because the people on the other side of the Rio Grande aren't crying when they sing that song. But, see, we can't even see that, and a lot of people hate it when I say that because they are on bended knee before a whole bunch of idols. To really be non-worshipping of any false idol would be one way of describing a believer. There's only one, only God is good. And Jesus even says this of Himself, "Why do you call me good?" stop this "good" stuff. "God alone is good." There's one absolute which makes everything, everything, everything else relative. That includes the papacy, Pope Francis, the Catholic Church—I'm just looking at the Catholic idols—our style of worship and our style of architecture, whatever things we've idolized.

Brie Stoner: Patriarchy.

Richard Rohr: Patriarchy, yes. How did I forget that? (laughing) Yeah, we've all done it, and it's just what we're used to. Basically, we're always threatened by other-ness. It's the broadest way I can say it, that we're in so encapsulated within this ego-self that whenever we meet "not me," we're threatened—a Methodist way of doing it, or a Lutheran way of doing it, or a Catholic way of doing it, is just it's got to be my way. (singing) "I did it my way." Thank you, Frank Sinatra, for teaching us the gospel. (laughing) "I did it my way."

Brie Stoner: I mean, that's so powerful then to flip it and to hear if non-idolatry, non-attachment, what are we attached to? What are we idolizing? And then I'm understanding these things now as that which is not only getting in the way of

Brie Swanson: my experiencing the Universal Christ, but getting in the way of manifesting the Universal Christ or affirming the Universal Christ in others, as you were saying.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. You'll stay in a very small pond and a pond largely of your own making, of your own mind and other homogeneous people who have a mind just like you do. What good is it? I don't know how else to say it. How has it taken us so long to see that, the radical narcissism of the human person threatened by anything that's different than me and my group?

Brie Stoner: I think that when you say in your book that Christians are not so much leaving Christianity as leaving the Church in favor of realigning with groups that are living out these kinds of values in the world in a concrete way, everything in me was like, "Yep." It just resonated so deeply.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. You know how I love animals, so probably one of the primary channels I watch on TV are the several animal channels, and I get the sense that these people desperately care. I mean, some of them stay up all night feeding a little kangaroo that's been abandoned by its mother. Maybe they left the Church, but they haven't left Christ.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Richard Rohr: Where does this love energy come from to love an abandoned kangaroo at cost to myself? I see it constantly in people who are serving the poor, and less and less do they go to church. And I'm not trying to send people away from church, but you want to surround yourself with people who share your same values,

Richard Rohr: and they realize that the guys who care about the oceans being one-third plastic now are not the people who go to church. So, I'd sooner be with the people who are saving the oceans.

Can you imagine what it's going to be like in twenty years if we didn't do something about the plastic in the ocean? And it's still considered a politically correct issue, or something. So, yeah, they haven't left Christ, in many cases, when I see the goodness of their heart and the caring of their spirit. You've heard me say that there's outflowing people, you can recognize them in the first thirty seconds of meeting them, and there's "in-sucking" people. I don't think in-sucking is a word, but I've been using it, and you can recognize them. They won't smile at you. "Yes, next." Okay. But they're not going to give a night of their life to feed a little baby kangaroo. Do you understand?

So, the one who is outflowing, and flow is a good verb to describe the energy of God flowing through you, into you, and out from you, then it's not hard to recognize Christ people. They're inside the flow. They're not stopping the flow. I recognize it because I took this trip to this retreat last week, and I had to take several planes and go through airports. I recognize, and I've just learned this automatically, I look at the counter and I decide before what line I get in, whether the gal or the guy has a smile on their face.

Why would you go to the line where she's just, "Next"? You wouldn't. Why would you waste your time? She's just wants to get you out of her face. Now if neither of them is smiling, which is often the case, you just have to make the best of it. But all I'm saying is the recognition of Christ energy is second nature to you. This does not take a theology course, all right?

Brie Stoner: I just love that you present God and Christ as not being threatened by needing to have the label. It's like we don't need this label.

Richard Rohr: I could waste time on that anymore.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. We don't need the Christian label in order to see Christ people in the world.

Richard Rohr: We don't. We don't.

Brie Stoner: And they don't need the label in order to be Christ people in the world. That's powerful, cosmic vision.

Richard Rohr: It really is. And people say, “Well, are you throwing out the Church?” No, I’m really not. I still think there need to be some trainers to keep shooting it out there into the universe. You understand? And some of these people are coming back to the training camp in the second half of life to find spiritual vocabulary

Richard Rohr: for what they’ve experienced working or what they needed to have to keep working to de-plasticize the oceans, or whatever it is they’re doing.

Paul Swanson: It also feels like the invitation is to remove the period at the end of the definition of what Church is and expand it and say, “There’s church there. There’s church there,” even though it’s not within the building itself, which is a lot more life-giving to be able to recognize “church” outside of how it’s been traditionally manifested in the American West, and also knowing that that seems to be Paul’s vision. He’s not necessarily trying to set up buildings, but Christ people with a different consciousness than mass consciousness.

Richard Rohr: As an alternative church, that’s right. Yeah. I think it is fair to say if someone is hearing this conversation we’re having now with an open mind, they can see how true it is that you don’t have to be educated in scripture to recognize love people and dead people. And the wonderful scripture that Jesus gave us is, “Don’t believe those who say lo here, lo there.” I don’t know if it’s translated that way in your Bibles, but He’s almost telling us, “Don’t try to localize this truth--” (He’s talking about the kingdom of God) “--in any one place.” It’s not limited to place. It’s a relationship flow between. and you can’t capture the between.

How are you relating to the people in central America, to the people who are undoing our democracy, that’s the mystery. And you can never say she has it, he has it. He’s allowing it. He’s allowing the flow to flow through him to build bridges. But what’s half of our country obsessed with? Forgive me, building a wall. I mean, you want to talk about a metaphor for non-gospel that Christians would not recognize the delusion of building a wall. And even the arrogance in the original statement and then have other people pay for it. It’s like the completely self-centered statement, “I want to protect myself, but at your cost. Would you pay to protect me so I can have my world?” That Christians don’t see the pathological narcissism in that, it’s heart-breaking. It’s heart-breaking.

Brie Stoner: I wonder if we were to say, instead of “I’m a Christian, I’m a Christener”?

Richard Rohr: Oh, that’s nice. That’s nice.

Brie Stoner: “Am I someone who is Christening others or Christening the world?”

Richard Rohr: Christening reality, just baptizing everything with the mystery. Well, that’s like I say in today’s meditation, I think, my definition of a Christian, I think it’s in the book, is one who sees Christ everywhere else. I challenge you to misuse that quote. It’s just, “Oh, but I don’t know I can do it,” but you can’t use that for ill purposes. Do you understand? You can’t use that to exclude, to condemn, to hate. Maybe that’s why it took us this long to see it, “I don’t want to see Christ in everybody else.”

Paul Swanson: It brings us back to Paul and Mary Magdalene both with that recognition moment, right, of seeing.

Richard Rohr: Yes, perfectly said, both of them. Until seeing becomes recognizing, I think I say that in the Just This book, you don't have seeing, it's just visual, light entering your retina. But until it becomes a new gestalt and, "Oh my god, what is this I'm seeing? What is this saying about the nature of reality?" that's recognizing. When I suspect that's what we originally meant by the word belief, to believe was to go beyond the seeing to the full recognizing of what it signifies, or what it says, or where it's leading me.

Paul Swanson: Well, to wrap up this conversation, Richard, which has been so rich, I wanted to ask, where have you had a Damascus or a garden moment this week where Christ showed up, either personally, or cosmically, in a surprising way?

Richard Rohr: Well, this is embarrassing because it includes one of the persons in this room. But when four of you came over to my house to welcome me back to town, and over a beer, which helped a little bit, I think, (laughing) they hadn't seen the new copy of The Universal Christ book, and they had heard I had the first copy, which they sent to me. And I sat there, they were all on the floor, I was in a chair drinking their beer—

Brie Stoner: How very guru-like.

Richard Rohr: --watching Madeline do her little dances, just, "Why are they getting so excited?" I'm going to get all the credit for this book. I'm going to get all the praise, and they're excited about it. Michael couldn't put it down. Just, "Oh, oh, oh, I'm so glad you said that. I'm so glad you said that." And then looking at the names, you were just taking satisfaction in everything. I still am overwhelmed by people who care about other people more than themselves, you know, that it wasn't their book, even though they all contributed a lot to me being able to write this. But there's my big name on the front, and I'm going to get all the notice, but that excited them. Another Paul. Paul is the magic neighbor around here, you know, and Michael, and Brie, I don't know if Madeline was excited about that.

Brie Stoner: She was more excited about your toy dog.

Richard Rohr: And her princess outfit. But to just see three adults relishing this book coming out, that was a gardener experience. You know, who are these people who care that much, and why should they care about me, or the message? I think I said that early on and I will stop on this, have you all read, I'm sure you partner people have, the Love Signs book?

Paul Swanson: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: And I'm not going to ask you to reveal what your love sign is, but getting the gift, quality time—

Paul Swanson: Touch is one.

Richard Rohr: Touch.

Paul Swanson: Is it compliments, or—

Brie Stoner: Yeah, maybe.

Paul Swanson: Words of affirmation.

Brie Stoner: Words of affirmation.

Richard Rohr: Words of affirmation. What's the other one we're missing, the fifth love sign?

Paul Swanson: Money.

Richard Rohr: Money.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Just kidding.

Richard Rohr: No, it's a gift. We'll think of it before we leave. But I realized, and I think this is true, I mean, who doesn't want to be loved? I enjoy being loved, but I am more excited about people who love my message. I really am. You are some wonderful examples of it. Those are the people that I have no trouble giving my heart to. I mean, you've been loving my message for how many years now, Paul?

Paul Swanson: Eleven, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. He used to transcribe for days in just a little back room. We were nobody. Well, we're still nobody. Yeah. And you came to the school, Brie, without even knowing me face to face at all because you cared about the message. That would be my love sign, and I don't need for them to say they love me. It's nice, but I don't need it. It's just that's all I need, to know that you're trusting what I know is the good news. And we're lucky to have a circle of those people on staff. So, that's a long answer to your short question. My Damascus, gardener moments are when I see people in love with what I'm in love with, knowing it is no advantage to them per se. Yeah.

(music playing)

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard, and we do love your message, and we do love you too.

Richard Rohr: Well, you've shown that. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: That's true.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

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