

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 2, Episode 1

Jesus, Incarnation, and  
The Christ Resurrection

Paul Swanson: Welcome to season two of Another Name for Every Thing. Casual conversations with Richard Rohr responding to listener questions from his new book, The Universal Christ, and from season one of this podcast.

Brie Stoner: This podcast was recorded in a tiny hermitage on the grounds of the Center for Action and Contemplation, a nonprofit founded by Richard Rohr located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Because of that, you may hear neighborhood sounds such as sirens, dogs, and the occasional peacock scream. That's a real thing. Look it up. We are your hosts. I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: And I'm Paul Swanson.

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 broken heaters, calls from school nurses, and the shifting state of our world.

Paul Swanson: This is the first of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we're tackling your questions on the theme, Jesus, Incarnation and The Christ Resurrection.

Brie Stoner: Well, Richard, we spent the first season of Another Name for Every Thing exploring the themes in each chapter of your new book, The Universal Christ. It was so rich and so deep that we realized this conversation is just far from over. There are way too many things we still want to talk about, and circle around, and spend more time with. So, we asked our listeners to turn in their most pressing and burning questions, and Paul and I were just overwhelmed with the vulnerability and the care, and the concern, and the curiosity to want to talk about these themes more.

Richard Rohr: Really? Wow. It makes me happy.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, as we continue this dialogue on The Universal Christ through these questions, we wanted to begin with an episode that serves somewhat as a review to the this concept, as an overview between the relationship of Jesus and Christ, and the distinction, because it's so challenging to absorb the first time through, right?

Richard Rohr: It is. It is. I do understand that. I had years to work with it, so it isn't shocking to me anymore. But if you never heard this, it sounds unorthodox. The irony is it's supremely orthodox. Of course, that's my opinion. But I think it's true.

Brie Stoner: Well, thank you for your willingness to just spend some more time talking about this.

Richard Rohr: Sure.

Brie Stoner: To kick us off, here's a question from Joseph from New Castle, Pennsylvania. We love this question because it's sort of the ultimate overview of the whole enchilada. He says:

Yes, Jesus and Christ are not the same thing. I get that. Christ existed from the moment God created matter. Christ is the logos, the blueprint for everything. Christ is the eternal union of spirit and matter. Every Bush is burning and always was.

Richard Rohr: He got a lot.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, right?

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Brie Stoner: He goes:

I get that, but is/was the Christ in Jesus? Did the Christ reside there in Jesus while he walked on earth as the Christ resides in us? Jesus was fully God and fully man. Am I fully God and fully man, or only a tiny little bit of God and fully man? Am I fully God, but I just don't know it yet? Jesus was this manifestation of God and man, but the Christ was in every human since the beginning of creation, wasn't he? So, do Christ and Jesus meet if they are separate? I'm sorry if this is a little confusing to this aging Catholic, former Catholic, former fundamentalist, Jewish sympathizer, sinner, healing human.

Richard Rohr: Wow. There are a lot of questions in there, but they're very basic. I can see why you started with this. So, yes, Jesus was objectively Christ from his birth in Bethlehem, his conception in Nazareth, just like you and I are objectively Christ. Now, his human journey, again, just like us, was the slow coming to that realization. Like when Peter calls him, "You are the Christ," he doesn't say, "You're wrong," but the very fact he asked the question tells me—at least that's a good interpretation—that he's still coming to awareness. So, it's the difference between objectivity and subjective awareness of that objectivity. Forgive me for the big words.

Brie Stoner: The question you're referring to is when Jesus says, "Who do they say I am?"

Richard Rohr: Yes. So, let's start with Jesus. I would say, I think we're saying, he is fully God and yet only by reason of his unity with the Father and the Spirit. I know the normal language doesn't require that, so I'd say, "Okay, he's fully God. Yeah," but really if you want to be consistent, it's his union with the flow of the Trinity that makes him fully God, and I would say he was fully human. Now that's been the harder and slower one for us to recognize and accept. You and I are fully human, which gives us all kinds of permission and freedom to be imperfect, to make mistakes. It's not a limitation. It's actually a freedom, "I am just, and I am always human." But we're not fully divine.

We're implanted divinity, we're participatory in divinity. The language I've been using, I don't know if I used it in the first set: he is the includer; we are the included. He is the universal savior; we are the saved, but we are a part of that union and that salvation. That's it, that we've been drawn into, this mystery of the Divine and the human coexisting. But for us, it's a gift; for him, it's an identity, his Divine/human amalgam, if I can call it that. Does that answer some of his questions?

Brie Stoner: It brings up the question of when Jesus is inviting us to walk the path of becoming as he is, "Be one as I am one with the Father, my Father and your Father." I think one of the things that's so difficult for us, and that I think is the wrestling point of Joseph's question is, "Well, am I also capable then of attaining that same level of union with God, or is that just sort of a unique manifestation that could only happen in a particular way in Jesus?" So, is that accessible to us?

Richard Rohr: Well, I think of that line, is it John 14, where he says, “You will do what I have done. You will do greater things than I have done.” That is pretty amazing. There is a clear passing on of identity, that “What I am, you also are,” which he has just said in John 14. John 14 is one of the best studies on the Spirit, and we’ll get to that I’m sure later. So, we get to realize our divinity according to our own capacity. I can’t pretend that I am the Christ since the Big Bang, at least I have no memory of being around at the Big Bang. But Jesus, once he came to his full realization, which is his risen state, I would think his human mind came to that realization. You and I, and it’s already mind-blowing, we had it from our Big Bang, the moment of our conception.

I’ve often thought we should celebrate our conception day more than our birthday. I told that to my mother once, I was home on June 20th. I said, “You know what, mother, today’s my conception day.” She said, “What do you mean by that?” I said, “Well— She said, “Don’t talk about that.” Typical German.

But, do you get my point that according to our capacity? When our capacity is to be a limited version, but still a very real version, objectively, of the Divine Image, but we’re not the Eternal Christ, but we’re Christ.

Brie Stoner: Like holograms.

Richard Rohr: That’s good. Yes. Like holograms. Perfect.

Paul Swanson: This ties in well with our next question. I know that you get this question a lot in different variations, but I’m just going to bring it here in the words of Chelsea from California:

Richard, how would you explain the difference between pantheism and this theology of the Universal Christ?

Richard Rohr: That’s real good to get that clarified right at the beginning. It seems like just inserting a syllable, but it’s a completely different worldview. All right. Pantheism, “pan” means everything, “theism” refers to God. So, pantheism is, a simplified way of saying it, is everything is God. Everything is divine. The Orthodox tradition insisted on making a necessary distinction that we can’t live up to being the agent. We just can’t. We started all of this and we are the same? We’re coterminous with God? It gives us an arrogance that we can’t live up to. So, by inserting an “en” right in the middle, panentheism, God in all things that was deemed to be acceptable. In fact, not just acceptable, but the message itself that God is in all things.

So, I’m sure I’m being criticized for being a pantheist, but that’s really lazy thinking. It’s a cheap shot, as we say, for people to say that, because they know there’s a difference, but it’s a way of calling you a heretic, I guess, or wrong, with one word. So, I’ll give them one word back. I am a panentheist. Now, our word for that is incarnationism. In the early church, it was the Epiphany, too, the showing forth of the Divine through the human, the manifestation. But it does take a little intellectual rigor, and I do mean little, it doesn’t take much thinking to make that distinction, but it almost seems ill-willed how people want to accuse you of something simplistic so they can dismiss it. It’s, as they say in logic, a straw man, that’s easy to blow down.

You know? “Oh, Richard Rohr is a pantheist.” No, it just isn’t fair.

Brie Stoner: Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: I think of that phrase, “a Christ-soaked world—

Richard Rohr: You’ve always liked that phrase.

Paul Swanson: I can’t keep it off my lips, but just the way, if the world is soaked with Christ, that is a much different way of explaining panentheism versus pantheism, which I think is a helpful reframing for folks trying to wrap their mind around this.

Richard Rohr: Then you have the incarnation of Jesus coming out of the world instead of coming into the world. I know it’s going to change your perception of Christmas. Maybe it isn’t as dramatic, because he was here all the time. Well, the Christ was here all the time, but the personification came out of the world that was already Christ-soaked from the beginning, as Ephesians says, three times, in the first chapter, “From the beginning.” But, who of us can think in those big terms? We can’t, so you can’t blame anybody. As I keep saying, I just think the mind was not ready to imagine such magnitude, such infinity.

Brie Stoner: It points out the ways in which we’re so much more comfortable with that dualistic split that you’ve been helping us see. It’s far easier for me to just say, “Nope, I’m fallen. I’m human. God is perfect, and unchanging, and up there somewhere.”

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brie Stoner: So, that whole pantheist question, it’s like it’s trying to collapse it into a duality. It’s a new muscle and that much harder to locate the panentheism, the incarnational instinct of, “I’m part of this.”

Richard Rohr: Excellent.

Brie Stoner: So, I have a responsibility then, “Wait, I’m actually participating in the life of God.” Well, that changes everything.

Richard Rohr: It really changes everything, because I don’t have to steer the ship now. It is being steered. All I have to do is be a willing, conscious, loving participant. And I don’t have to be a control freak, which is I think really the disappointment of a lot of people and a lot of Christians. They appear to be control freaks because they’re thinking they have to do it right, or they have to figure it out. We don’t.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. We can summarize the entire collapse of our religious traditions as the end of the control freak era. But I think that’s why we struggle is because it’s the loss of control that that indicates.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: The idea that we’re in this flow, we’re in this movement. That’s a lot harder.

Richard Rohr: A lot harder. Yeah. I'm sure you remember, the point you're making so well is the way I wanted to end the book, where I said, "You're already on the train." Let me get it. "Yes. I am saying, that the way things work and Christ are one and the same. This is not a religion to be either fervently joined, or angrily rejected. It is a train ride already in motion. The tracks are visible everywhere. You can be a willing and happy traveler, or not." That's how I wanted to end the book, then we added on all these appendices, but that's okay too.

Brie Stoner: Well, that ties in with a question from Nathan from Lynchburg, Virginia, where first he wants to say:

This book is one of the most profound and faith-altering books I've ever read. Now that I've finished it, I need to read it again.

Richard Rohr: I keep being told that.

Brie Stoner: I think most of us feel that way. He says:

Can you describe more of what you mean when you say, 'Resurrection is just incarnation taken to its logical conclusion'? Can you give examples of this? How does this relate to your comment that incarnation is already redemption?

I think this is kind of where we're headed.

Richard Rohr: Very good. God, you're picking good letters. If the Divine has implanted itself in everything that comes forth from the Divine, then the Divine doesn't die. "It's a seed of endless life springing up from within us," as John's gospel says. Now I admit that you can live a life that doesn't recognize that, doesn't live out of that, and that is why logically, people's logical mind, needs some notion like hell to give the permission for people not to jump on the train. I think that's pretty obvious. So, it's just that it's a shame that it made God into a torturer, but put that to the side. If you don't have some notion of non-participation, you don't have free human beings. So, we want to maintain the notion of freedom.

Now, once we've done that, let's still say that the incarnation is setting the train in motion toward inevitable resurrection. And it isn't even resurrection. It's eternal life, because God doesn't die. Now, you can choose, I'm back to what I was saying before, you can choose for God to die in you by being hateful, by being cruel. So, you have your freedom, but things left to their own resources created by God have a seed of immortality. And this is why we say this is scandalous to some, why we have to-- Well, this was the second reading yesterday at mass, where the Bible is promising "a new heaven and a new earth." It doesn't say the old one is destroyed it's just made new. So, it's not just humans, but it seems to be the whole of creation is moving toward this full maturation of the Godseed planted within it, which makes you, on some level, an evolutionist.

Brie Stoner: I was just going to ask about that. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Once you start thinking, it's obvious. It's obvious. History is unfolding. And now our scientific mind has helped us to think that way. When the Hubble Telescope tells us it's still expanding and even at a faster pace, if that's the shape of the universe, then that's the shape of what God is doing. He's unfolding. As you know, I think I say later in the book, for me,

that's the meaning of the second coming of Christ. There was the personal body in Jesus, now the unfolding mystery of the body of Christ is the second coming, and the second coming is nonstop.

Brie Stoner: You talk a lot about your love of nature shows. I love them too.

Richard Rohr: I do. I was watching a show on horses last night.

Brie Stoner: I watch them as well with my boys, and I'm also learning to see the world through their eyes of wonder. But when we are able to actually perceive the wholeness of this cosmic mystery that we're in, and participating in, it helps to locate me as a part of this Divine expression in incarnation. How could it not already be redemption? Look, just look. I think we think from our perspective the things that are happening. We do, we have the insight and consciousness to see everything that's wrong and everything that we're doing that's wrong. And yet I find that the ability to look with wonder at this created universe is a little bit of my access point to what you wrote about resurrection is incarnation taken to its logical conclusion. Resurrection is happening all the time in millions of ways and in thousands of expressions.

Richard Rohr: Everywhere all the time. And it's the pushback of death that makes it hard to see. That it pushes forward, but then it's undone, pushes forward, and then is undone. And that's why the cross had to be given as this dramatic symbol of even the best will be undone. I don't know why God created the universe that way. I really don't. That the undoing is the part of the remaking, and that's what we're saying in that thing you'd get tired of hearing me say: "order, disorder, reorder." It's so hard to integrate disorder. The undoing of the doing. It's the big fly in the ointment of almost everybody's mind. If it's moving toward resurrection, we want a straight line of Western progress. It's the undoing. Like, there's no doubt that our culture, Western culture in general, American culture in particular, is in a severe phase of undoing. Look at the amount of mental illness. I was just in a supermarket yesterday, people screaming. Why are you screaming in a supermarket? What makes so many angry, unhappy people?

And so, if you give in to that, which is easy to do, this is the shape of the whole world, the undoing, it's very hard to lose faith that this is all going somewhere. Maybe that's at the core of the biblical notion of faith: "This all means something. This is still good, and this is still going somewhere," and that is planted in us. That's the Divine. That's the seed, because illogically we can't create that. Logically, our democracy is being undone right now to be very honest, it's being undone, and we just can't believe it. No, this could never happen to America. But because I do love animals so much, I said it in one of my books somewhere, the thought that almost every animal in nature, and even as a family pet, dies a painful death. Almost every reindeer goes out and sits in a field and dies from a liver disease. I don't know what reindeer die of but, boy, this is nonsensical. That's going to be my first question of God: "How come you shaped it that way?" But the cross is telling us, "This is the shape. Don't be afraid of it." We're still afraid of it though. I am, and I just don't like it.

Brie Stoner: I don't think any of us do, and I just want to pause on what you said because it's hit me in such a profound way, this phrase, "the undoing is part of the remaking. The undoing is part of the remaking", and what a profound summary that is—

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: --of the relationship, of the hope, between Jesus and Christ, that it's like somehow in the outpouring of his life, a violent death, because of his threat to the empire, which for most of the disciples, most of the people watching, would be this feeling of absolute loss. Like, "What a waste"? What a waste—

Richard Rohr: It's the only world they ever knew.

Brie Stoner: --of this gifted prophet, person, rabbi, however they saw him. And yet the idea that you're saying is that nothing is ever wasted or lost. Somehow, the outpouring of our lives, the outpouring of everything that happens, is woven into this remaking of something bigger, something good that takes an eternity perhaps to manifest. But I don't know, I guess—

Richard Rohr: No, that's good.

Brie Stoner: --I'm needing to sit with that for a second because it is so—

Richard Rohr: Nonsensical, really.

Brie Stoner: It's like it's opposite to everything that our, like you said, our culture likes to see things very linearly in terms of you go to A, and then B, and then C, and the progressions are always—

Richard Rohr: Building.

Brie Stoner: --building, and it's not cyclical. It's not the way that you just described the order, disorder, reorder of the cross.

Richard Rohr: So, our worldview is both cyclical and linear.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Okay.

Brie Stoner: That's why the spiral is so helpful in my mind because—

Richard Rohr: The spiral. It really is. It is.

Brie Stoner: --it puts both of those together.

Paul Swanson: Right. I like the way theologian Walter Fluker talks about hope is a belief in a stranger future.

Richard Rohr: Stranger future.

Paul Swanson: So, it's something beyond that which you only can even imagine. So, I feel like if that's part of the resurrection hope, is like, you cannot see the resurrection in the midst of crucifixion, right? And so, it's that hope in something beyond even our own understanding of what is



possible.

Richard Rohr: You got it. It will always and forever be a mystery. I don't think there will come a moment in history where we say, "This makes sense." It will never make sense. So, people who, as Paul says, are tied to logic or religion as a way out of this, what he calls "the Jews and the Greeks," he says, "they're going to both be disappointed, because there's no way out of it." It's the absurd universe we're in, and only the trust in an infinite love gives you a way out without becoming a total cynic.

Brie Stoner: And we have these practical examples of that too. I'm just, again, thinking about how my experience as a mom, as a single mom, there's a lot of undoing. There is a lot of like, Paul and I were talking about this getting ready for this season, but there are a lot of kitchen floor moments where I feel myself as undone. I feel my limitations. I feel unworthy, incapable enough of this role of being a parent. And yet, somehow in my relaxation into that reality, here are these children who are themselves remaking and building up.

Richard Rohr: Building, growing.

Brie Stoner: Building themselves into something new and I'm participating in that mystery and yet I have no idea where it's going to go. I have no sense of what that future is or even what their future is, but that act of faith is just the continuation of participating. It's the not giving up. So, I guess I'm saying that to say that I think there is, I know you're saying the word nonsensical, and it is. It doesn't make sense to our minds and yet we have so many examples of what you're saying in our lives that the undoing is the remaking.

Richard Rohr: Is the remaking. Yeah. Where does this burgeoning life constantly reappear from? And it's never undone despite our best attempts, and we certainly need to hold onto that right now with what's happening to this planet. Has it ever happened at this bigger rate? What do they say? There were four extinctions, mass extinctions, or was it five? I don't know.

Brie Stoner: I'm not sure.

Richard Rohr: I don't know why I'm saying this, you can delete it, but the only thing that survived were cockroaches, cucaracha.

Brie Stoner: Where did you get this Richard? Which show were you watching?

Richard Rohr: Cockroaches survived the mass extinctions. That makes it even more nonsensical.

Paul Swanson: Right. Why not elephants?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Why not elephants?

Brie Stoner: On that note—

Paul Swanson: On that note, we're going to shift gears here a little bit with a question here from Karen from North Carolina. This has to do with historical Jesus.

So, Richard, do you believe that the historical Jesus was created and is different from the rest of us? Do you believe he was born, no human father, of a virgin who was sinless all

of her life, and that he himself lived a completely sinless life? Or, do you believe he was a human being just like the rest of us, except in the fact that he consciously realized his true relationship with God in Christ, which we have as well, and so was able to live his life from that perspective?

So, there's a lot there.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I know that it has to be asked.

Paul Swanson: I wonder, first, if you could define "historical Jesus" for folks who that's not a part of their lexicon.

Richard Rohr: Vocabulary. Yeah. By the "historical Jesus," we mean the Jesus who actively, physically lived on this earth for thirty-some years, not the portrait that was created of him thirty years later in the gospels, and Paul's letters, and so forth. Or the memory of Jesus that we live in now. So, do I believe that this historical Jesus is different from the rest of us?

I do. Now that's also an act of faith. I don't think it's necessary to make that act of faith to enjoy the gift that Jesus offers humanity and offers the soul. So, let me make that very clear. That's almost a gift to help believers. Well, I keep using that phrase "shortcut." If you want to get there quickly on the computer, you push the shortcut. Well, he becomes the shortcut so you don't have to argue about so many stages and understandings. But I'm going to still hold, and I think the orthodox tradition would insist, there was uniqueness to Jesus. Keep using the words "exclusive and inclusive," that he included all the rest of us in his identity, which is why his love could be infinite. You and I, we're more exclusionary. We can't handle that much. We can't hold that much as Jesus seems to be able to hold symbolized by his dramatic holding of suffering on the cross.

So, now, do we have to believe he was born of a virgin with no human father? Again, I can understand the archetypal symbolism of that belief. So, I'm not going to throw it out. If I found out tomorrow that Joseph really was his father, it really wouldn't bother me, but I've had years to study theology. I can still hold onto the archetypal symbolism, and what is that, that he was fully human and fully divine. So, to say that, "We've got to give him a divine father," in this case, "and a fully human mother born under the law," that's good archetypal transfiguration. So, I can see why that was our belief.

Now, do we have to make her sinless? That was a Catholic preoccupation with—this is getting so complex for most people, but—our notion of sin as moral purity. Whereas you and I, I think, here at the school anyway, would have come to understand sin as a chosen state of separation from God, not just moral purity. Cleaning up is the first stage. When you're still at the first stage religion, you never get to growing up, you never get to waking up, you never get to showing up. You will define Mary as the "sinless one." Okay. I'm not going to bother to throw it out.

Brie Stoner: I'll throw it out.

Richard Rohr: You were raised a good Protestant, right?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You had the freedom to do that.

Brie Stoner: No, but I think what I'm noticing is that it's, like you said, that that was the moral purity. How much of that may have just been the theological, patriarchal need to justify, "A woman's body could be a vessel for the sacred?"

Richard Rohr: Well, it has to be morally untouched.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, I'm with you on that. I really am. I'm just trying to not upset people. When I go to the mat, I want to go to the mat for the right thing, and I don't want to go to the mat for something that's largely symbolic language. So, I just, "Okay. I can accept that symbolic language," and if you want to believe it had metaphysical identity to it, maybe it did. Maybe Mary was immaculately conceived from the moment Catholics believe that. I can see what they were trying to preserve. But in the 21st century, we don't have to have that to be true to love Mary. In fact, we find her more lovable if she's just like us, but that's a different mind than the earlier centuries had. They connected sin with moral impurity and usually sex. We just can't agree to that anymore.

Richard Rohr: So, no, I don't. Do you believe he was really a human being just like the rest of us? Yes. He consciously realized his true relationship with God in Christ, but we can consciously realize it. Did he have to realize that he was the one and only? I don't know. I don't know. It seems to me not necessary. That he knew he was one with the Father, yes, but even that realization I believe was gradual, and Luke's gospel seems to say that, "He grew in wisdom, age, and grace." So, there's room for development, but did he have to believe he was the "one and only"? I don't know.

Paul Swanson: I think that's one of the things I love about these types of conversations from the historical Jesus study, or even to name it as the historical Mary as well, it really alleviates some of the real fleshiness of who Jesus was and who Mary was without having to wrestle with things like , "What was the context Jesus lived in? What was the religion he was in—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, very good.

Paul Swanson: --versus always just pairing him as the Godman? Then it's harder to relate, right? Then it becomes like superhero Jesus versus—

Brie Stoner: The rest of us.

Paul Swanson: --he relatable one that I can really connect with. Yeah, the "son of man."

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: It's almost an avoidance technique, and that's why I have that chapter or section, "The Great Comma," that avoiding his real life, his real humanity, his real teaching, by endlessly arguing about this complex of human and Divine. There's a place for it but get over it after a while.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, I think that's one of the things that's happening with what you're writing about, but

also the collective interest in what you're writing about, which is, are we ready to have the capacity for interpreting things at complex levels? Which means it can be literal, it can be symbolic, it can be a metaphor, it can be mythical. All these levels of meaning can coexist. Did that factually happen? Did it actually-- Was the resurrection real? It's the need to clarify these questions in such a stark black and white, dualistic way, I think is starting to relax. But it's hard. It's hard to do that when so much of the water that we're swimming in, particularly in religion, still wants to clarify things at that literal level.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's like the facts and truth. Can the truth exist without knowing all the facts?

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Paul Swanson: My wife and I tell our story of how we met. The facts are different, but the truth is there. We each have our own storyteller's license to it.

Richard Rohr: That's lovely. Truths and facts. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: I'll take her version.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I would trust her more than me. So, there's a follow-up question to this that I think will speak for itself. When you speak of Trinity, do you mean Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, or Father, Christ, Holy Spirit?

Richard Rohr: Well, I'm going to be picky, but neither of them. I mean, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. So, it's closer to the Christ. But the reason Father, Son words were chosen is because they're relational. And if God is a relationship, inherently we had to establish the centrality of relationship. Then in my understanding, the Holy Spirit is the personification of that relationship, which is given to us, planted within us. But I certainly would not say Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Jesus did not exist from all eternity. I know that's shocking, but that's because we put Jesus Christ together. The Christ existed from all eternity, so I could live with that. Let's try this so they're not patriarchal-- Lover, beloved. Lover, beloved. That's the beginnings of the flow, and that flow is so infinitely true that it becomes itself, and that's called the Holy Spirit, which is shared with everything. Does that work?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think that's helpful to think about those words not as the nouns they represent, but the relationships that they verb.

Richard Rohr: It's all about relationship.

Brie Stoner: Is that even right? That they represent through the action of what they're doing? That helps me a lot.

Richard Rohr: That's unique to, not unique, but starting with the Cappadocian Fathers in the 4th century. They call them "the relations, the relations." You must get the relations. The scholastics in the 12th and 13th century said the same thing. The substance was the relations. Think about that for a minute, that substantial reality is a set of relations. Now, why don't you and I have? The atom. There it is if you need a visualization, I know it's more complex than proton, electron, neutron, but in our own now physical way, we are saying the basic building block of reality is relationality. And if you destroy that, you have the atom bomb. Isn't that

amazing?

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Brie Stoner: It really is.

Richard Rohr: You can't destroy that. You can't destroy absolute relationship. We've got such a good metaphysics, if I can call it that, but it was projected onto God instead of understood as the pattern of everything.

Brie Stoner: So, speaking of that pattern of everything being as you named an eternal ultimate system of relationships, I'm going to pivot to a question about the role of the crucifixion and resurrection and in that ultimate relationality. Matt from Greenville, South Carolina asks:

So, if Christ has been here from the start in everything, and yet Jesus was the full expression of God in human form, does everything still hinge on what Jesus did on the cross and resurrection, or is Jesus's death and resurrection just a story to outline [the] order, disorder, reorder path?"

Which I am intuiting he means is happening all the time anyway. So I guess just to kind of summarize what I think he's asking is, what role, then, does the crucifixion play?

Richard Rohr: The cross is a dramatic image, story, truth. It seems to be a historical happening to communicate the universal pattern that has been true since the beginning of time. So, in that sense, it doesn't hinge on it except insofar as it is communicated by that. A lot of people began to surrender to the mystery of necessary suffering through gazing upon the cross. But in fact, necessary suffering was happening in the four mass extinctions to keep picking on those. Necessary suffering has been the shape of the universe. So, he says that, seems to be getting it very well, "Is Jesus' death and resurrection just a story to outline order, disorder, reorder?" But we don't want to say just a story. It's a mythic, archetypal, classic compelling, compelling story.

Order, disorder, reorder is not compelling, at least to the heart or to the soul, and to the mind, maybe. And that's why I use it to help the mind come along. But the simple believer, most of the world will never think philosophically like I was trained to think. But those of you with a more major education, suddenly order, disorder, reorder, "Oh, okay." My mind stops fighting it. But for most people in history, all God had to appeal to, was the heart and the body and the instinct, and that the story of the cross and resurrection works very well.

Brie Stoner: Like it's "The" story, like, The, capital, "The" story of this great relationality we're swimming in. I'm thinking about the fact that love is order, disorder, reorder.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: There's no experience of life that doesn't have that.

Richard Rohr: There is no love relationship that doesn't go through disorder. The only reason I hesitated on "The" is because the Hindu might say, "Well, we had Vishnu and Krishna," and who am I missing? Who was the third God? Brahma? They had the destroyer God too. So, we don't

want to say we're the only ones that have this story. You've heard me say this 100 times, "If it's true, it's true everywhere," and so it will be discovered by other cultures in other symbolic systems. For us, this is the story that works.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. This brings us to the next question here from David from Australia:

Listening to the podcast before, during, and after the Easter season and, therefore, in parallel with the Easter readings, how do you think the apostles understood the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus? And what Old Testament scriptures do you think Jesus and others referenced, especially given the ruling paradigm was the whole sacrificial system? When they say Jesus had to die, would their readers assume the Old Testament sacrificial system?

This plays into me, too, with the last question on order, disorder, reorder, and how would the disciples have viewed the path that Jesus was taking, and would they have seen it in light of the Old Testament?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, there's that story on the way to Emmaus, that he opened all the scriptures. What we've usually assumed, rightly or wrongly, but it works, is he was referring to those passages in Isaiah that we call the "suffering servant." Those are pretty dramatic descriptions, either laid onto Christ or fulfilled in Christ, however you want to say it. The only frame they would have had to understand would have been the Hebrew Scriptures. He couldn't have created a new frame for them in a short journey if we're going to take the disciples on the way to Emmaus as the paradigm for this changing of paradigms. I think that's why these words that have been so problematic for us: propitiation, atonement, sacrifice, paying the price, ransom, and a few others, made their way so strongly into the New Testament, because that was still the sacrificial system that made sense to them, that Jesus was undercutting all quid pro quo thinking. He was throwing them into a universe of mercy where there is no tit-for-tat anymore, where there's no counting, or measuring, or weighing.

Now, we know that from the parables, of the equality between what you give and what you get is gone. But look, that has persisted strongly until our time in what we call "retributive justice." This is the frame that the human mind prefers: tit-for-tat, this much sin, this much suffering, or merit. It is just very hard to get out of that frame until you yourself have experienced something coming from nothing. That has to be experienced on the soul level, on the heart level, on the undeserved level. How can you manufacture that for people?

I can't hate or pity people who aren't there anymore. They just insist on some notion of purgatory, or hell, or negative karma. It comes down to punishment. Evil is to be punished. That is hard to get out of the human psyche because it gives you a sense of logic, fairness, as you would describe fairness, probably so. I can understand that. So that's why the whole gospel story radically depends on being thrown into this ocean of mercy where all boundaries disappear to where it is God's love began or end. That's normally an experience of undeserved forgiveness, undeserved love, really, undeserved life. You and I didn't ask to exist, here we are, it's all unmerited, undeserved; the utter, and I mean utter, U-T-T-E-R, utter gratuity of everything. And once you can sink into that quicksand of the utter gratuity of everything, you stop weighing, you stop measuring, and you stopped counting. So that's why, you know I love Thérèse's little statement, "God knows all sciences except mathematics." That woman was a genius.

Brie Stoner: You got in trouble for that one by the way. There is a question—

Richard Rohr: Oh, is there?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. People were like, “Wait a second, Richard, mathematics is the whole-- There wouldn’t be music without mathematics. There wouldn’t be--” But I get what you mean—

Richard Rohr: I know you do.

Brie Stoner: --and what she meant, right, which is more that the transactional nature of this plus this, equals this, and that the idea that you couldn’t get more complex than that, which is profound.

Richard Rohr: And remember, nondual thinking is not the elimination of dualistic thinking. We need dualistic mathematics, which is absolutely dualistic, to explain a whole bunch of things. We’re not excluding it, but you get to the world of the soul, you must move beyond your mathematics, logical equations where two plus two equals four.

Brie Stoner: This is something that, I don’t know if it’s something that Cynthia said about the word “mercy,” that she draws a comparison between the root of “mercy” and the route of “merchants.” So, the idea of it being about exchange, that instead of it being a transaction, it’s this flow between.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: That really helped me because I think the word mercy for me still feels as though I can interpret it through a more transactional language, almost like a pity, like, “I take pity on you.” But thinking about mercy as swimming in the abundance of the relationality that is unmerited, changes everything.

Richard Rohr: Everything.

Brie Stoner: I can feel in my body how that shifts the way that I breathe. It just relaxes me into a different orientation toward life.

Richard Rohr: I’ll call it the “big shift,” and unless you make that, which can only be done by grace, you will keep creating, “He’s worthy. She’s unworthy,” by reason of physical good looks, physical ability, intelligence. You’ll create some category, which the mind always does, to create up and down, in and out. It never stops, and it’s very humiliating to see that in yourself. Many days, my only prayer is, “Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.” I don’t know how to get out of this world of counting, and I’m a one. We love to count, and yet it never makes me happy. It never frees anybody else. But even that gives me sympathy. Look at all I’ve been given in my life and even all the spiritual teaching and good theology, and I’m still counting. So, when I see other people doing it, again, “Okay. He hasn’t fully drowned in the water of mercy yet, because I haven’t either.” It gives you an exit clause for everybody, not just for yourself.

Brie Stoner: That’s so helpful to hear you say that there’s no end to our judgmental nature.

Richard Rohr: There's no end.

Brie Stoner: I think that is, it's like that also helps to relax us into recognizing our humanity in this, that, "Okay. I'm doing it again."

Richard Rohr: Doing it again and doing it again.

Brie Stoner: "I'm judging the crap out of that person right now." So, speaking of this nature of, or speaking of our tendency to want to think in transactional terms, we had so many questions about atonement, a couple of them here, Rex from Hartford, Connecticut, and Melanie from Georgia. This one is from Rex, and I'll weave in Melanie's as well. He says:

I grew up in a fairly fundamentalist church and the thought of a nonviolent atonement wasn't even in my imagination [which Melanie was also asking about in what you describe as the "Franciscan Option"]. So, while this alternative way of thinking about the cross is both somewhat logical and appealing to me, I have a hard time reconciling so much of the biblical writer's interpretation of the cross."

So, this gets into this, "It's there! It's in the scriptures," this transactional language. So, he starts listing Isaiah 53, and Romans 3:23-26, and 2 Corinthians 5:21, and Galatians, and 1 Peter, et cetera.

He goes:

As gruesome as this concept seems, these all seem to paint a picture of a Jesus who had to die to atone for my sin. So, how do you, Richard, interpret these and other similar passages?

Richard Rohr: I'm going to try, I hope this is, because I don't understand sports, I hope this is correct use of the term. I'm going to try to do an end-run and answer it in a little indirect way. It comes down to your understanding of causality. And until the modern period of history, the only notion of causality was what we call "final cause" and "efficient cause." So, everything is attributed to this caused that, which does lend itself to transactional language. I admit the Bible is filled with it, starting in the Hebrew Scriptures where Yahweh got angry; Yahweh scourged the Pharaoh. It's just the easier way to talk. It's the mythological way to talk. Believe me, this is a struggle for me because I know that the little peasant from Guatemala picking up the Bible doesn't even know what the word causality means, nor does he or she need to.

So, they'll probably keep saying, "Sin caused the cross, and the cross caused the liberation from sin." I can live with that. If the effect of God being an ogre does not come along with it, and if a legitimation of legitimate torturing and suffering does not come along with it, and in the heart of a good person, it won't. That's why a pure heart, a clean heart as the Psalms say, is almost a precondition for if you put the Bible in the hands of someone with a pure heart, they will do good with it. They really will. But you put the Bible in the hand of an angry power-seeking person, I talk about this in the little red book, in *What Do We Do With the Bible?* You put the Bible in the hand of an unconverted person, is what it amounts to, and they will find these transactions.

It is the nature of the language at that point in history, even in the New Testament. This is



problematic because I can't expect people to understand it the way I'm able to do it, but by "final causality," we mean God. "God made me do it. The devil made me do it." That's final causality. Efficient causality is there's a direct line from God to this tornado this afternoon in Oklahoma. That's just the easiest way for the mind to think before it grows in subtlety. The unfortunate thing is this is leading an awful lot of people to throw out the Bible when their mind moves beyond mythological thinking.

Now, you and I have had enough time to hold on to mythological thinking and knowing it's mythological and that mythological is not untrue. It's just a different level. But how do we teach that to the little peasant in Nicaragua who doesn't have time for major education like you and I do? That worries me. Is each generation going to have to go through this? I fear that it will.

Brie Stoner: The issue of causality I feel is almost the primary philosophical problem, if I could name it that, in terms of how we experience suffering and evil, because the idea that something caused this, "Who caused this? What happened? Who did this? Why did this happen?" I wonder if our collective desire to relax into trusting and understanding that suffering difficulty, death, is part of this complex nature of this cosmos, it allows for a different orientation toward even how we think about Jesus and the cross, because then it's, "Yeah, he was a nonviolent resistor to the empire. Of course, he got killed." We can begin to frame it in more historical ways so that it's not just, "Okay. He died for our sins. He died in order to save us," but it doesn't exclude that either, as you said.

Richard Rohr: No, that's right.

Brie Stoner: I find that that shift from the causal to just the process is something that I'm working on. I think about the fact that there was this giant tree in my backyard before I got divorced. I was in the middle of my own process of grief in making that decision. One day that tree just collapsed.

Richard Rohr: No kidding.

Brie Stoner: And we discovered that the inside of the tree was half rotted.

Richard Rohr: Was hollow, yeah.

Brie Stoner: So, it was half dead and half alive. And I was having a conversation with my parents about that in a very parallel way as processing my divorce, and saying—

Richard Rohr: Sure. Good metaphor.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, "Why? Why? Why does this have to happen? Why can't I fix my marriage? Why can't I just make it better?" I'll never forget my mom saying, "It's like that tree, you didn't make it happen, and you couldn't have stopped it."

Richard Rohr: Your mother said that?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: How dear is she? My goodness.

Brie Stoner: It could have lived another twenty years. or it could have collapsed on your house. It didn't collapse that way; it collapsed this way. And somehow something about that very visual metaphor was very helpful for me in my own grief, and something I've come back to a lot. There may not be a direct causal line to these things, but somehow in our acceptance of it, it can yield something else of life.

Richard Rohr: Excellent.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You know another thing we're drawing from science—you've all read this and it's completely counterintuitive—that watching a measurement changes the outcome. You've heard that.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And they insist it's true! They insist it. I still don't understand that. How can that be true? Watching it changes the outcome. Well that's what you just said. Your ability to see this, is this the core meaning of faith, our participation in the event? Seeing it as made true for me by that symbol of the half-rotted tree allows it to be transformative. God, it works. It really works. The way I set it for years was just people who believe in angels experience angels. Isn't that interesting? What does that mean?

Brie Stoner: The observer impacts reality by-- What is it you say? You know, "You can only be received in the manner of the receiver."

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes, yes. Of course.

Brie Stoner: Say it better because I just butchered it.

Richard Rohr: Everything that is received is received according to the manner of the receiver.

Brie Stoner: There it is.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It always comes to my filter, and now what we're saying is we're adding a little, "My filter matters." I think we all know people, I know people, who are really good people. I'll use it because it's so common in America today. Their normal stance toward everything is the victim stance. Sometimes I think it's half of America. If that's your filter, "I did not deserve this, and you need to pay me back because I had to suffer this," I just see now at the end of my life, people who played this victim game for forty years, they're still playing it. It's become a storyline of their whole life. Always there has to be a victim, and I guess it's me and someone's got to pay because I've had to suffer. They can be eternally upset over race relations, gender relations.

It's refusing to take responsibility for evil, for sin. I will stand above it and judge it. Don't ask me to carry any of this unjust suffering. I would easily say over the years, not that I do

as much counseling as I used to, but I would say a third of the people I've worked with in counseling, that's where they're trapped. They cannot let go of, "I deserve," and, "I didn't deserve," and it's a dead end, because they will apply that to every new scenario. What a freedom to get out of that. Jesus could have said, "I don't deserve," but, boy, if you're trapped there, you're trapped there. Maybe I'm repeating myself. Forgive me. It's a hard trap to get out of, it really is.

Brie Stoner: Well, it seems to get at that, the ways in which we try to build identity around a static noun and a static identity, a static sense of self when what this conversation is moving us into is an idea of process, of relationship, of how our interior stance influences what we become and what we see and how we relate. So, I think what I'm hearing you say is that, that line from Jim Finley, which I love, "You are not what has been done to you," which is that ultimately, despite the—

Richard Rohr: It's so simple.

Brie Stoner: --great injustices that are true, right—the oppression that exists, the sexism, the racism, all those things—that there is an inner point of freedom beyond that that has to do with this flow of moving out of a mentality that keeps us imprisoned, or static, or internalized in what has been done to us.

Richard Rohr: You said it. That is almost a perfect line. "You are not what has been done to you." That's giving this system far too much power. Did you have any identity previous to that? Now, in this secular culture, most people don't have any identity previous to that. They started creating identity when people started persecuting them. Now, I don't want to be glib about that. It must be very easy to do if you've been a slave all your life.

I've got a Franciscan friend who's working over in Vietnam, and he's saying he just can't believe it. There's none of this, "Your country screwed us," in the Vietnam culture today. He says they're the most happy, faith-filled people, and their answer is, "That's the past." He says, "It's a culture of forgiveness." And we have a culture of paying the price, even on the left, in various forms of political correctness, and naming the perpetrator, and there's truth to that. But when do you let go of it because it's become an albatross around your neck, you know, because the past is not going to go away. We white people enslaved black people. Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, but don't let that be your identity, or you've got a negative identity. So, you have to find an identity deeper than that, previous to that, while integrating that disorder. So, order, "I am who I am in God," positive. Disorder, "This damn thing of slavery happened." Now, when I can put that order together with that disorder, I have moved into reorder.

Brie Stoner: That seemed to be the thrust of Jesus's entire ministry of healing.

Richard Rohr: Entire.

Brie Stoner: "You are not what they say you are. You are not what has been done to you. You are not this paralyzed person, this person who doesn't belong, this sinful woman."

Richard Rohr: That's excellent.

Brie Stoner: You are more than that. He seemed to be moving us into the recognition of our oneness with God as our original identity.

Richard Rohr: Boy, that's going to help loads of people, what you just said, to recognize why there's so many healing stories in the New Testament. That's a good, solid interpretation, why Jesus doesn't punish people; he heals people.

Paul Swanson: Okay, Richard, this is from Katherine from Wales. I will not do a Welsh accent. She says:

That in listening to podcast nine, I'm thinking about the personal Jesus and the Cosmic Christ. I'm thinking about how can I remember, too, and recognize in my neighbor, the person, or persons, I am with at any given moment, the Cosmic Christ whom I love wholly, or at least desire to, albeit poorly, whilst loving my neighbor as Jesus who I love wholly, or at least the desire to, albeit poorly. I'm thinking about how can it benefit recognizing the Christ in another and practicing, including and transcending, accepting where they're at, knowing and trusting they're more, and maybe encouraging the more they are in the sense of being like salt for each other to bring out the Christ flavors in each other. Can Richard talk about the balance between the personal Jesus and the Universal Christ, and how it affects the relationship when we're doing our best to love our neighbor? In gratitude for the book and the mirror—

Richard Rohr: That's nice. What does the "X" mean?

Paul Swanson: Good question.

Brie Stoner: Like "XO" would be a kiss and a hug.

Paul Swanson: This might just be just a kiss or just a hug.

Richard Rohr: Just a kiss. I didn't get a hug.

Brie Stoner: Katherine just sent a big kiss. Thank you, Katherine.

Richard Rohr: Okay. Wow. I don't know if I really make this point clear enough at all. I certainly don't make it strongly until the second half of the book, and one of my theses is that we've got to keep the two in really good balance. Now, that will come naturally by grace. Jesus being the personal; Christ being the universal. Jesus being the intimate and the urgent, the cosmic being, the long-distance historical. Now, by temperament, some of us need more of one than the other. But I do think we're offering people a good religion, if I can call it that, in offering people both, but asking them to differentiate them and then overcome the differentiation. She taught me something in the way she asked the question.

Paul Swanson: Was it that salt line?

Richard Rohr: Yes. How did you know that was going to be the one? "Encouraging the more they are in the sense of us being like salt for each other, to bring out the Christ flavor." That's really nice. I like that. The Christ flavor is already the objective identity, but until someone sees it, names it, honors it, respects it, in me I can't see it in myself, which is, I guess, why she mentions the mirror at the end. It is why I put the mirror in there, and in one of the early iterations of

the book, I had used the word mirror too much already starting toward the beginning. The editor said, “I don’t think most people will be able to follow you.” So, I just ended with that major piece at the end. But it is received as resonance, as mirroring. If you three, and you clearly are rather loving people, then you better thank somebody for that. You had a little mommy, a little daddy, a little mommy who gazed at you as a little Paul and said, “You’re just the cutest thing in all the world.” If that wasn’t given to you, it wasn’t received. It had to be given. That’s what that quid quid recipatur line meant, “everything is received,” with the exception that there’s one implanted mirror, and that’s the soul, that’s the Divine Identity. But there has to be an inner resonance with an outer mirror, an outer one who is saying, “It’s true.” Talk about a relational universe, that we’re all just a hall of mirrors mirroring the truth and marrying the lie about one another.

So, I think if I read this rather humbly asked question, I think she’s right on. Even her “including and transcending,” she’s got it in the proper order now. The more I can see, the more I can include, the more I have in effect transcended. Are you hearing any question in there that I missed?

Paul Swanson: No, but I was thinking about a throwback to last season as far as the way we used to end it. Just to ask you in reference to this question, who has been the salt that has brought the Christ flavors out into your life this past, say, week or so?

Richard Rohr: This past week? Hmmm. I think my assistant, Elias, went home to Mexico to visit his dying mother. I just didn’t realize how much I depended upon him. He’s one of these people who’s a natural nurse. Some people could do nursing easily, a lot of us do it awkwardly. I realized with him not here all last week, there was like a big gaping mirror. It was just such a relief to have him back. It gave me great comfort, not just to my physical body, but to his ability to be present in such a nurturing way. Is that not what married couples are made for? Now to rise to that occasion, I’m sure, takes a lifetime of forgiving, and so forth. But, yeah, I had it this past week from Elias, who has become a staff person and one of his major jobs is to take care of me when I can’t take care of myself. Yeah, he would have been the mirror the last week.

[music playing]

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard. That’s it for today’s episode of Another Name for Every Thing with Richard Rohr. This podcast is produced by the Center for Action and Contemplation thanks to the generosity of our donors.

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