

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 2, Episode 10

Healing Division In A World  
That Others

Brie Stoner: Welcome to Season Two of Another Name for Everything: casual conversations with Richard Rohr responding to listener questions from his new book *The Universal Christ* and Season One of this podcast.

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

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst calls from school nurses, late night grocery runs, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the tenth of twelve weekly episodes. In this episode, we're diving into your questions about how do we heal division in a world that others?

Paul Swanson: All right. So, the theme of this conversation is healing division in a world that others.

Paul Swanson: Richard, we wanted to begin this conversation with a question that I know that you've been writing about a lot. You've mentioned it here a few times on Paul and corporate sin, and some of the ways that we have misunderstood that, and I feel like this question from Michael in Nashville really helps kind of get to—at least how I'm hearing you talk about it—some of these ideas. Michael writes:

My question has to do with the notion of corporate sin. In discussing corporate sin, I feel some internal pushback. I can understand that an individual can be a racist, but how can a population or a group be racist? Do we not diminish the importance of individual choice by classifying this type of sin as corporate?

Richard Rohr: No. His response is probably a very understandable one that you would think you're letting the individual off the hook, and that's not true. You know, the way I teach it in the school, which I don't think is in the book, there are three sources of evil: the world, the flesh, and the devil, in that order. At first there's a whole matrix of agreement on violence, or wealth, or racism, then I individually act out. I'm just saying that's the flesh. The devil we won't even get to right now. But, up until now, he's expressing how most people think sin is totally localized at the second level—flesh. And I think the much better moral teaching, which I find, you know, very clear in St. Paul is you better critique first of all at the corporate level to recognize it.

Richard Rohr: We've all agreed that killing is necessary if it's going to protect America. Let's just pick a big, difficult one for everybody. Now, we all know the commandment is "Though shall not kill," but we're going to make a giant exception and create a rather broad culture of murder. Every country has done it. I'm not picking on us individually, but this is the schizophrenia at the heart of our moral positioning, and I think the real moral insecurity of so many Christians. We name it good at the corporate level, invisibly so, though. It is so agreed upon by the corporate that it's hard to recognize it as really evil at the individual. So, we're not saying either/or we're saying both/and. So, would this be, I don't know—I don't want to hurt your feelings Michael—it's an understandable response but, really, it's a red herring.

Richard Rohr: The whole population can be racist. Absolutely. I mean, look at the map of where people are lynched. It's very clear there are centers of concentration where somehow lynching was legitimated because the number is so overwhelming. So, it isn't your fault, but it comes from a lack of any kind of in-depth moral teaching by totally localizing sin at the individual level and letting the corporate off scot-free.

Paul Swanson: It connects to what you were saying previously about white privilege where that can only exist if there's a system that will give that privilege to people, white people.

Brie Stoner: And encourages a lack of awareness of it because then we don't see that we're benefiting from it.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, it's almost like the waters we swim in, it's hard to locate because we're in it so deeply, but part of what you're helping us see, Richard, is that part of what we need to heal is our capacity to both see that kind of collective sin; recognize it's there so that then we can make a different choice.

Richard Rohr: Uh-huh. It might have to do with our common notion of the imputing of guilt, and he's probably used to imputing the guilt to the individual: "You are guilty of sin." But saying that there are cultures guilty of sin, none of us have had any training in that. If we'd listened to the prophets, we would've got it, because that's where the prophets start: "Israel is sinful." Now, I don't know if this man is a biblical man, but just read the prophets. They start with corporate sin and that's where we learned this: the world, the flesh and the devil. But I admit that in recent centuries, neither Catholic nor Protestant has been raised that way.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: Jenny from Australia asks an interesting question related to corporate sin. You've already explained to us a lot about the relationship of the individual complicity in corporate sin, but she says:

I struggle with how to not get upset by both personal and societal injustice.

So, she's talking more about the response here. So, she says:

What do I do or think when I feel I have been unfairly judged or treated; what am I forgiving, and how do I help reduce the injustices I get upset by?

So almost like the response side of it, when you do notice it—and I think it sounds like she's saying in her case when she's being treated unfairly—what's the loving response to that without indulging it?

Richard Rohr: That shows maturity, too, because I think it is a thin line. How do you name it without making it part of your now superiority from above, because I can name it? How do you name it without identification with it and think, "I am now the moral person because I can see it"? What am I forgiving? That's so good: how do I help reduce the injustices I get upset by? You've got to go ahead and work, but check your thermometer of motivation

every two hours, you know, “Am I coming right now from a righteousness place, a superiority place, an exclusively angry place”? A little bit of anger is okay, but it better be tempered by recognizing intense anger is your ego’s identification with the hurt and with being offended, which you certainly have a right to for a while. That’s why I’ve quoted so much over the years, that line in the New Testament, don’t let the sun go down on your anger. That’s different than saying don’t ever be angry. It’s identification with your anger, and I’ve seen it in so many people who work for social justice that become angry people. They’re gruff. They push things around. You feel pushed around—not in all cases. Please don’t hear that as a generalization, but it’s more common than I would have liked to admit.

Brie Stoner: Do you think that Jesus can be a model for us? What a funny question: “Do you think Jesus could be a central reference point, Richard”? But I mean in particular to the ways in which some of his more zealous disciples wanted him to tackle the problems of injustice of his time through the systems that created it. In other words, they wanted him to tackle empire via empire, whereas his approach of nonviolent resistance was through loving, healing, and inclusion of those who are being most impacted.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: And I just think in a way, like, we love throwing around nonviolent resistance when in reality we’re just talking about resistance that’s very violent in our hearts. And I’m just not sure—

Richard Rohr: Often.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I’m not sure we’re capable of imparting or making a change with nonviolent resistance unless we can get to that nonviolent place within.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I don’t know what distinction I’m trying to make here, but there’s something there for me in that instead of trying to tackle problems of injustice via the avenues that cause it, which tend to be through these corporate, systematic, you know, empire based. What is it about Jesus’ healing ministry that gives us a different path?

Richard Rohr: What Jesus does, it seems to me, is he models the alternative. As you know, that’s one of our core principles: the best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. So, I’m going to do it in a different way. And one of the first levels of doing it in a different way is a quiet but very real, non-cooperation, non-involvement; even in the systems of oppression, and empire, and domination; even when they are the synagogue or the temple. He doesn’t fight them directly. Is this damning them with feigned/fake/faint praise? I think maybe it is. He ignores them.

You’ve heard the example I often use because it’s such a real one. If you look at the geography of the world Jesus grew up in—he grew up in Nazareth—there’s only one city being built and growing in that region in his lifetime. It’s nine miles down the road. It’s the regional Roman capitol called Sepphoris. Sepphoris is never mentioned

in the New Testament. There's no note that he ever went there. If he was a carpenter or a man who worked with his hands, that's where all the work would have been. Did he and his dad, Joseph, just ignore the place? I don't know that they did, but it's a visual example of there are the Romans doing their thing.

Richard Rohr: We're not going to help them build it up.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: All I'm saying is you could make that case. And his teaching in the countryside, he does go in the temple, but several times he has some pretty bad things to say about it when he enters into it, and yet he honors it: "This is my house," but it is a house of prayer and not a place for the gathering of bandits where he saw the misuse of money for religious purposes.

So, all I can say is once you're given this pair of eyes to see Jesus was a quiet, non-cooperator with stupidity, with oppression, with domination, and with exclusion. Just go put that lens on, if you can risk doing it, and re-read the Gospels and say it's implied in most stories. He's not a joiner of the dominant system. He's a critique of the dominant system.

Someone did a study of Luke's Gospel, and recorded every time Luke's Gospel uses the word the crowd, and he comes to the conclusion the crowd is always wrong, always, either by infatuation, or opposition. He is not a part of the crowd. That's why he's taken his three on the road, and his twelve on the road are up mountain tops, even visually creating an alternative consciousness, while not throwing out the temple, or not directly attacking the priesthood; although, in truth, in Matthew 23, he's directly attacking them verbally.

Richard Rohr: We just were never given the eyes to see that. I know when I first was given those eyes, I was shocked at how much I had not seen in the New Testament because I read it from the eyes of the dominant consciousness and pulled Jesus into that: He's talking about my group. He's actually talking against my group most of the time.

If you're the dominant or the-- I don't know how everybody understands the word dominant, but I mean the group with the power.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: And as soon as you're in the group with the power by any criteria—gender, or race, or religion, or ethnicity, or money—you have good reason to be afraid of the Gospel, because it's going to critique all of those levels. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And it's so contrary to the way you've been talking about systems, and we talked about it in the last season of the podcasts, of too big to fail; of any system that's too big to fail, it should be a warning that it is a little bit like the crowd in the example you just gave, especially thinking about the model of Jesus was not too big to fail.

Failure is a part of the path and is inherent and be ready for it.

Richard Rohr: Excellent. Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: We got a number of questions about capitalism. And so, one here is from Bubba from Fairhope, Alabama—

Richard Rohr: Was this from the book? Did I talk about capitalism?

Paul Swanson: No, this was in Season One. We were talking about capitalism.

Richard Rohr: Oh, okay. I didn't think I took it on.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. So, we wanted to bring it up.

Richard Rohr: Good. Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: And this was a question from Bubba where he says:

Richard seems awfully hard on capitalism. In fact, he paints us all with one stereotypical brush. His comment, 'I hope you don't look at Playboy or gamble, but then, Oh God, there's capitalism.'

Richard Rohr: Did I ever say that?

Brie Stoner: You must have [laughing].

Richard Rohr: I can't imagine I'd say it in that way. But, anyway, go ahead.

Paul Swanson: And then he says:

Richard, can you further expand your thoughts on that?

And I've got to say that the part that we cut from this question was just him being so thankful for the podcast, and for all three of us, and excited to someday connect.

Brie Stoner: It shows such lovely maturity.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, so it shows he's just being honest by his experience. I guess I should start by what I heard from our own Customer Service Department. They expected that my critiques of theology, of morality, of gender, would engender the most negative male. And they were surprised to discover that the most negativity came from my critique of capitalism. That really surprised me. But it showed me what a sacred cow it is. I don't know what else to say. And you know how we think of it is anything above criticism will soon be demonic. I'm going to repeat that: Anything above criticism will soon be demonic. I usually speak of rigid capitalism and helpful capitalism, a capitalism that is really empowering people and we can't deny that it has for much of the world. I'm sorry, in the segment he heard that he didn't hear that.

Richard Rohr: So, if I paint us with one stereotypical brush, I don't think I want to do that. If I did come

across that way, it's the inability to give any nuance in one little comment on this, or that, or whatever. But what I suspect I was doing in that context was, again, trying to broaden sin beyond individual sin—looking at Playboy or gambling—and capitalism, which I can damn the guy who was looking at his Playboy. I probably wouldn't, but I'd say it's just sort of stupid. It's not going to make you ever grow up, but I can't even say that about capitalism. I can say it about Playboy, and no one's going to get upset. They might feel guilty, but why can't I critique capitalism? And that's all I'd offer Bubba here. Why would that be a fearful thing to do?

Richard Rohr: You know, even Pope John Paul II who was raised in communist Poland, he in his encyclical letters—I know this is just to Catholics—but he said there's good capitalism and there's bad capitalism. There's good communism—you wouldn't call it communism, then you'd call it socialism—and there's bad communism. But we're not used to thinking both/and. Talk about one fatal swoop: capitalism is good: communism is bad. That's too easy. I mean, you know that story of when I joined the Franciscans and in one of the first classes in front of our novice master, he said, "Now boys, I want you to know you've just joined a communist organization, right? We own all things in common that when you take the vow of poverty next year, you will give up the right to personally own anything. You may use things"—and in the early years, we'd have to write inside of our books: *ad usum simple cem*.

Richard Rohr: That's Latin for the simple use of, and you have a magic marker and your *ad usum simple cem*, Friar Alexander—my name was Alexander—and I felt such pride—is for the simple use of. Now we don't do that anymore, but I can see what they were trying to teach us, "That isn't yours." So, it taught us detachment. It taught us non-consumerism. When capitalism has no idealization of the virtue of simplicity, simple lifestyle, what the poor have to teach us, that the meaning of life is the increasing of consumption and production, that's demonic. That is not the meaning of life, [thumping sound] period. And we can't let them get away with it and think we're Gospel people when we are worshiping this sacred cow of rigid capitalism, and the very fact that so many people responded tells me this is a sacred cow.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Your religion is the American economy, are any other country's economy for that matter. So, it doesn't sound like he's being an unkind person himself, but you better watch it, Bubba.

Brie Stoner: We love you, Bubba.

Richard Rohr: The fact that we can't critique it reveals that it's on a bad course.

Brie Stoner: And that sets up this next question so well, because I do think Christianity has been conflated into sort of co-opting or adopting a lot of these corporate sins that we don't like to look at.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: And, as you just as you just mentioned ownership and consumerism, Andrew from Vancouver brings up the impact of that behavior. He says:

The concept of a Christ-soaked world feels pressing and important when considering human

caused environmental issues like climate change and the breakdown of many formerly functioning ecosystems around the world. How does the concept of a Christ soaked world inform the relationship we ought to have with nature and how we use the natural world?

I think he's saying as opposed to subdue it, which has been our kind of Christian relationship to nature.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. For me—and, of course—it's, I think, theologically probably too much. But until you redefine the substructure, the fundamentum, the base, and say, "What does reality grow out of," you can't reform it because the base keeps showing itself.

Now, if the base is, "this is just matter; this is just secular; this is just an object of consumption," that makes you live in a very different world. So what theology does, at least for me and I hope to some degree for you or anybody who reads this book—is they're able to say, "No, the fundamentum is sacred." It's not that we come along and add a little sacred by putting a cross on it, which has been our model up to now, you know, or pouring holy water over it, that's Formica-top Christianity. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: I like that.

Richard Rohr: That is largely what we've had, you know, where it isn't inherently sacred. In fact, it's inherently useless except insofar as it makes money, or is good for me right now. That's the unsafe grid universe most human beings live in today.

So, only religion is prepared to say what the utter final metaphysics is. Metaphysics means that which is beyond the physics or beyond the physical. And we're saying that beyond the physical is the sacred. So, you better not pour pollutants in this and think that you're being good. You're being unholy. But we haven't seen that as sin. Again, we could pour it in one spot, and just leave it there until 10 years later. Some poor people want to build there, and here it is back at us. And this isn't just our country, this is the whole earth that the earth has been ravaged, polluted in many ways, that we'll never recover in known history.

Paul Swanson: One of my heroes is Wendell Berry.

Richard Rohr: Oh, wonderful.

Paul Swanson: Whenever people ask him or say like, "I love the environment," his response is, "No, you don't." And because it's too big to say the environment is too—

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's good.

Paul Swanson: --there's nothing there. So, like, what's the place you love it? What's the plot of ground that you love, or the flower—

Richard Rohr: No, you don't.

Paul Swanson: --or the animal that connects you, right, that particular gateway into the environment, to use his example. I love that kind of pushback of—

Richard Rohr: Yeah.



Paul Swanson: It's very easy to fall into just broad categories that actually loving the thisness that you talk about.

Richard Rohr: The thisness, I was going to say, that's Duns Scotus. Yeah, how can any of us love the environment?

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: That's an illusion, but you love your little piece of earth. Let's be serious about that, and then we realize we're not even serious about that.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Or a concern with a particular creature, you know, like you always talk about your nature shows and people who for whatever reason are given to protect one species of an animal. It's interesting, because what you're bringing up, Paul, is that we all need a personal touchpoint in order to connect to the universal. And so, even with this concern of the environment, where is the personal touchpoint that we can connect with—

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: --and live out an alternative, as you've been saying, Richard, of what is the Jesus alternative to that, that sees Christ in it and can respond with that kind of respect?

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh. This is a funny example, but I'm going to go back to my chickens. We have two chickens and one of them does not produce eggs. And there's a thought in my mind of like, well, it's a useless chicken, you know, but like, can I just appreciate it

Paul Swanson: in its chicken-ness--

Richard Rohr: Without making any money for you--

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --or breakfast for you.

Paul Swanson: but just enjoy it and know that it's got a companion. Like, is that enough? Can that be enough?

Richard Rohr: That's interesting. That's a perfect example.

Brie Stoner: I'm going to be thinking about that.

Richard Rohr: Along with the individualistic mind that has destroyed our understanding of the Gospel is the utilitarian mind.

Brie Stoner: Yes. Yes.

Richard Rohr: You could almost do a whole book on contemplation as the alternative of utilitarianism.

Brie Stoner: Someone could do a whole book on that, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Someone could!

Brie Stoner: Someone could write a whole book on—[laughter]

Brie Stoner: Our next question here as we kind of shift from some of the systematic thinking on this to how we also can just other individuals, and Tom from Michigan sets us up with this, where he writes:

If there is somebody who I don't see eye to eye with, to be honest, I don't like the person. Is it reasonable to try to put myself in that other person's shoes and consider that perhaps I am picking up on the other person's protective walls because of some sort of suffering they might be enduring; and, also, that the other person may be representative of a part of me that I don't like, and God is inviting me to look at myself and the plank in my eye before seeing the speck in the other person?

Any thoughts on that, Richard?

Richard Rohr: He's already answered it. You're there, Tom. Yeah, that's beautiful. But even "is it possible that," do you see he's left this opening for grace. He's left this opening for the other to not be other. The first sentence is—maybe this distinction helps—loving is not liking, and I don't think that's been clear to most of us. You quite naturally will not like a lot of things—the chemistry is off, the interests, the temperament is off—that doesn't mean you wish that person ill, but you wouldn't join them for a beer tonight, you know. But even if you had to, you'd make the best of it. And we've all done that a thousand times. Like when I go out with you, Paul, I just grit my teeth, you know. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Oh, God, give me the grace to endure.

Richard Rohr: He's so boring; boring. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: That's perfect.

Richard Rohr: We all have—Yeah. And to demand that of ourselves that I should like everybody, no, it just doesn't work that way. Human nature is too complex, too multi-layered, and there is a meaning to friendship. If we're all given the gift of friendship now and then, then there are other people who are acquaintances, coworkers, but they're not necessarily friends. It doesn't make them bad. In fact, the social scientists say, if I remember the number right, deep friends, the most you can have in your life are three or four; deep friends, three or four. The psyche can't handle more than that.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: So, transitioning from the distinction you're making of there's a difference between love and liking to how sometimes that's carried out to straight violence, of not loving, not liking, to the point of violence, Andrew from Belfast, Ireland, he says:

In the podcast, Richard referred to the inclination towards scapegoating of the other. In

Northern Ireland recently, we have seen the tragic killing of a twenty-nine-year-old journalist in Derry, a shocking death coming after many years of an admittedly turbulent peace process. What advice does Richard have on how Christians in Northern Ireland can best engage with those individuals in the community that are so fixed on and blinded by this tendency to scapegoat the other to a point of violence? How can we best act on a daily level to help encourage society to go beyond the dualistic mindset of them versus us that still dominates in Northern Ireland twenty-one years after a peace process that was meant to have concluded?

Richard Rohr: You can see why religion did become so seemingly individualistic. Let me explain. After a while, the only way any of us will stop scapegoating is by resolving our own inner anxiety, hatred, negativity. There's no way around it. The healing of the individual is necessary for the healing of culture. And negative people who grew up in dysfunctional, hateful families, alcoholic families, they have to project that somewhere, and it's always going to be on the other; although, really, it'll come home to roost and it'll be on your own family too. Scapegoating is creating a problem. It really is. I will decide that, you know, Catholics or Protestants in this case are the problem, and I will fit my worldview around that which will allow me to mistreat them with impunity. I won't have to feel any guilt.

Richard Rohr: The sad thing is it doesn't work because this guy is going to—without knowing it—he's going to have a lower self-image. He might have a righteous self-image the next day after he's killed the other, or tortured the other, or misused the other, but he cannot think well of himself because he has operated contrary to his fundamental identity, which is love.

Now, that love has to be allowed to bubble up. When I was in Ávila in Spain where you grew up, they have a beautiful shrine to John of the Cross. You're familiar with Catholics having holy water fonts where we dip in and bless ourselves, but this one's right central in the room and this one little bubble just keeps coming up from the bottom of the holy water font and bubbling through the top of the water, and then they had a wonderful quote from him there.

Richard Rohr: That's what you have to get in touch with. Now, call that inner healing call, call that peace, call that freedom, call that forgiveness. But this is where—I don't want to make light of the individual healing ministry of the church—angry people are going to be scapegoating people for certain. If you do not transform your pain, you will with certainty transmit it, and maybe it doesn't even need to be on the other. In some cases, it's your own children. You keep them in submission, you dominate over them, you curse them, and this is not uncommon.

Brie Stoner: It's shocking to me how big of an impact the transition from seeing myself as an individual who therefore can scapegoat, right, because only individuals can scapegoat, as you've said. There can only be a them if there's an us and there's a boundary between us.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: And yet, the Universal Christ teaches us that there is no us and them; there is only we. And so, it's this profound antidote, but like you're saying, we have to practice and live into it to actually let this idea become embedded and be digested into our very being to the point that we no longer look at people as a them.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Talk about fundamentum, that's the foundational message of the book. There is no other, and why we must insist on the Universal Christ.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Or, we have, again and again, the legitimation of us and them.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: Our group has him; your group doesn't. It's a lie. They all have it whether they know it or not.

Brie Stoner: Right. Can I bring this a little closer to home?

Richard Rohr: All right.

Brie Stoner: If it's okay, I'm going to skip ahead to this question, because I feel like this is very much true in our country today.

Paul Swanson: Do it.

Brie Stoner: Lorraine from New York talks about:

Since our country is so badly divided between liberal and conservative thinking, does Father Richard see any third way or reconciling of these opposites? What can I do to help in the reconciling and healing of these opposites?

And just to add a note, to see how much we are othering each other and our country, both from the liberal sort of intellectual elitism that dismisses values, and tradition, and communities of belonging to those that feel maybe uncomfortable with some of the more liberal values or liberal leanings. We've created such a polarity. How would you answer this question? How do we help in reconciling and healing in our country today?

Richard Rohr: I guess that was my deepest hope in writing the book to offer the world a truth that could not be separated, divided, earned, excluding. There was no room for exclusion inside of it, because you're so right as the question puts it, I don't know how we're going to get out of this without a universal vision that isn't dependent upon anything except God being one, and God's love being one, and God's love being universally given, and potentially universally received. But that's the problem. There are people on both sides who don't receive it. They think they're going to resolve it by fighting, by eliminating the gays. Let's just eliminate the gays, or whatever else, whatever other group. It might satisfy need for--

Richard Rohr: --superiority, but it isn't going to solve the human dilemma.

Brie Stoner: It's the same with how we look at Trump supporters. Those that are more in the liberal camp have that same tendency to other Trump supporters and to dismiss. And I do feel like this message from your book is an invitation for us to consider how we can begin to soften our hearts—

Richard Rohr: Soften our hearts.

Brie Stoner: And begin to see ourselves as a “we” and really in this together.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: Back to your point, Paul, about Wendell Berry’s statement, you know, we tend to think of politics with the big “P” out there in Washington DC, like, “Well, what am I going to do? Well, I guess I’m going to vote in the elections and, you know, get mad at my family members and have arguments at Thanksgiving.” But what if the “P” could be the small politics of the art of relationship? What if it’s about how we relate to the people in our communities, how we interact, where are we othering those in our very midst that we need to ask forgiveness for, and listen to, and connect with, and maybe have a meal with? I mean, that feels like a little bit more of a tangible first step for me when I think about this problem.

Richard Rohr: Uh-huh.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh. Owning our own complicity in this bigger issue.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And, Richard, there’s something that came to mind with this kind of invitation of healing and reconciliation. I wonder if as a kind of a way of closing and healing that division of othering, you went on a trip recently to the border to visit, stand in solidarity with, those who are being so othered. Can you share what that experience is like, because I feel like it some of the things that you have shared puts flesh on the reality of these are not just ideas. These are people who are being torn apart in their families and ridiculed when they come into the United States. Again, I’m not trying to make this a political in any way, but just the way that you have shown up recently since that just occurred.

Richard Rohr: 40:55 You know, in the refugee camps where we stopped, even after being a jail chaplain for fourteen years, there I could say, “Okay, most of these people did something bad or deserve some kind of restriction, or punishment.” But the hard thing in the refugee camps was these are people running for their lives.

Richard Rohr: 41:22 Seldom have I experienced power and powerlessness in such clear opposition—clutching their babies, holding their children’s hands tightly, the little

Richard Rohr: 41:34 children looking up at me as the white man who could hurt them or help them. It was horrible in a way. And then the young men and young women who, if I’d sit down, they would just gather around and here I couldn’t even talk Spanish, but it was just like—of course, Elias had told him I was a priest. He said, “Sacerdote. Sacerdote.” So, they’d all gather around because this trust they have in a priest. And I’d have to begin with “lo siento: I am sorry I can’t talk to you,” so Elias would translate. But they hung on my every word, and I don’t even know that I said anything, but it’s like we want to hear truth, wisdom, hope, from the other world. Many of these people spent three weeks walking, carrying their children. The only way you can separate yourself from that is not to see it.

Richard Rohr: 42:50 Once you see it with any degree of honest freedom or any real photography, every

cell of your body says, “This is inhumane.” America has come to this? We were heroic when we were killing people over in Flanders’ fields, but now making life difficult for mothers with children? And then believing the lies that the government is telling us that they’re rapists and they’re terrorists. And then we increase the problem on the other end by taking away all the money that we had been giving to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Let me just say it’s pretty clear that we do not want to solve the problem. We want to punish. But do you see how that was our same view in our theology of hell? We don’t want to heal people; we want to punish people. There is no evidence that the present U S government wants to solve problem.

Richard Rohr: 44:10 It wants to punish the problem, literally punish the taking away of shoe strings, the taking away even of shoes. Two women came to visit me this morning who were down there earlier this week, and they said, now, in many cases, these boys—it’s maybe just the last few blocks—but ICE is taking away their shoes and all their possessions in their backpacks. So, they literally come here with nothing. And so, when you give them one, they said tears come down their cheeks and someone cares. Can you imagine how cold the world feels? And here we’re running into this country and they’re humiliating us from the first step. I do know that most of America, if they saw that, would say this is intolerable, but it’s easier just to listen to Fox News and accept the dualism. And, I do convict news sources like Fox News, not because they’re usually Republican, but because they’re so totally dualistic.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. They’re contributing to it.

Richard Rohr: At least CNN will almost always have one person on the panel who disagrees and states the alternative position. But when people only listen to—I know there are other news sources than Fox, but they’re the easy, easy one to pick on. And I say that strongly, they’re so easy to pick on. They exemplify dualistic blindness. And it’s always taking the side of money, power, and war, not calling it that, and white privilege, but calling it, I don’t know, laws have to be obeyed. Now, we Christian people, we’re the people that were supposed to know that divine law superseded human law. I think we talked about this in previous [podcasts], but it bears repeating. Where did this idolization of governmental law come when it contradicts the law of the Sermon on the Mount, the law of even in the Hebrew Scriptures of welcoming the stranger? But suddenly these people who say they love the Bible appear not to have read it. I don’t know what else to say.

So, we got our problem. and Pope Francis has said worldwide, he sees immigration as the problem of the rest of this century; the rest of this century. Now, when we got a government that isn’t even trying to solve it, but actually trying to exacerbate it by the emphasizing of us being the victims, “We’re the victims of these terrible brown people coming across the border.” Ah, that’s just evil.

Brie Stoner: What does your prayer look like, Richard, when you feel these things and when you face them so squarely? What is your prayer in these moments, if you don’t mind sharing?

Richard Rohr: First, I don’t want to pray. I really don’t. There’s so much disdain in my heart, so much anger in my emotional life. I don’t want it to be softened. I resist any softening. So, I resist prayer first of all. I know I’ve got to pray for the president and those who are representing power and money. And lest anybody doubt, I do know that the Democrats represent power and

money, too, maybe not to the degree, but they're in the same ballpark of, you know, America first at all costs. That's how they got elected. They wouldn't have been elected if they weren't-- I'm off the point. I have to not just pray for Republicans, but Democrats, that we can have some stateswomen, and I say it that way because they seem to be at this point the more likely to emerge. The statesmen just aren't there even in the Democratic party.

Richard Rohr: So, people don't think I'm just picking on Republicans. They're almost unknown at this point in the Republican party. I really don't know how many of these people can live with themselves. They were always the party that—I'm not answering your question again. I'm sorry.—but that's what happens in my prayer life, that I go back to my anger, I go back to my disdain; just disdain. And where does disdain come from? It comes from Richard thinking he's better. He's above that. He's beyond that. Who's going to pour some love into these hard-faced politicians? I don't know how to do it. I don't, but I can ask for it. I can wait for it. That's the praying for the miracle that their hearts could be softened. And so, it's no surprise that they're not going to make any trips down to the border. And if they do, they're going to be highly planned, so you won't see very much.

Brie Stoner: Well, thank you.

Richard Rohr: I didn't really answer your question about prayer.

Brie Stoner: No, you did. You did. In that you're showing us with great humility, your own struggle with this.

Richard Rohr: Definitely.

Brie Stoner: And that's allowing us an insight into something that you said earlier, which is the healing of the individual is necessary—

Richard Rohr: It really is.

Brie Stoner: --as the healing of culture, for the healing of culture. And so, in a way, you're showing us with great transparency that when our hearts harden, and when we struggle with these issues, we have to first recognize that our hearts are hardening—

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: --that there is disdain in there, that we are judging, that we are othering, and then ask for God's mercy to help soften our hearts so that hopefully we can be vehicles of that softening in others, too.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: That's it. That's when an evil comes home to roost. And if anybody thinks we're just emphasizing corporate sin, no. It's individual sin, too, that you and I have hard hearts, and we find ways to justify that hardness almost every day by what we saw on the news last night, on either side.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: So, I can see why Jesus speaks so much of vigilance, keep watch, keep watch, or it's going to take over. You will drink the Kool Aid, to use our modern metaphor.

[music playing]

Brie Stoner: Well, thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Thanks, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you! Wow, what good questions; heavy stuff.

Brie Stoner: Heavy stuff is right.

Paul Swanson: And 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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