

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 2

The Holy Spirit

Brie Stoner: 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 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 a neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts. I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst balancing and then blowing budgets in the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the second of twelve weekly episodes. Today we're tackling your questions on the theme of the Holy Spirit. Where does the Holy Spirit sit in the Trinity in relationship to the Universal Christ?

Paul Swanson: Okay, Richard, here we have a multitude of questions on the Holy Spirit and the Trinity as it really became a theme that emerged as we were combing through the questions, and we were quite elated to bring some of these to you. So, we're just going to dive right in here with the first one from Arabella, from Ferrisburgh, Vermont:

Richard refers to the trend in multiple podcast episodes. Richard, can you please explain what you mean by the Trinity, trinitization, etc.?

Am I saying that right? I don't know if I've heard that before.

Richard Rohr: Sure.

Paul Swanson: I only think of it as Father, Son, Holy Spirit. I've been basically an atheist/ agnostic for multiple decades. The Trinity seems to be more deeply symbolic than anything I've previously come across. So, Richard, can you take this opportunity to unpack what you mean by the Trinity?

Richard Rohr: Wow, that's the biggie, but because we didn't take the time to do that, I think we have so many people like Arabella is humble enough to admit that they become unknowing unbelievers. It's not even their fault, it's like this whole thing doesn't make sense. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three different personages, and then they have the masculine names. There is just a good dozen reasons to forget thinking about it. "I don't know how to process this." So, let's just offer people a way that makes it easier to process. Let's start, I hope this is helpful, by thinking of the Trinity as first of all a metaphysical principle, right, about the shape, the fundamental shape of reality.

If everything is created in the image of God, image and likeness of God, then we would do well to spend time and find out what is the shape of God. Now, for all practical purposes, we have persisted, despite the New Testament revelation, primarily in John's gospel, in a monarchical notion of God. And He was not just a monarch, He was not just an imperial, almighty monarch, but He was usually considered male, which is why even the words Father

and Son became applied.

So, we have to go previous to that, go a little deeper than the use of those words, even though I could understand the use of those words. And, what we're saying is that the Law of Two, which is the normal way the mind works to put everything in pairs, male-female, dark-light, gay-straight, Republican-Democrat, it's universal. We know that the mind prefers to operate in a binary system. Now the mind, when it is binary, is always an antagonistic mind. It chooses one side and defeats or dismisses the other as unworthy, inferior, wrong, heretical, and so forth.

Now, I'm still talking metaphysics. The Law of Three, as simplistic as it sounds, doesn't let that happen. You move from a pyramid, if visualization helps your thinking, you move from a pyramid to a circle where the third constantly undoes any antagonistic, binary argumentation. How do you choose between the three? You sort of just keep flowing. That's what we want to say God is, to pull you in to this flow of infinite love. You see, as soon as it's infinite, it has to be in a flow, in a movement. God is a movement. God is a verb, more than a noun. God is an action more than a substance. Now I'm moving into theology.

I have to ask you to trust me to go down this path. It will work. It will make sense. Now Jesus comes into this world and says, "I'm standing in this flow, and I'm handing it on to you, and I'm inviting you into it." Now, that's the theological language we've all heard, but most of us weren't told the metaphysics on which it was built, and maybe you don't need that. But more and more of the world does, or it just sounds like an arbitrary religion that is somewhat eccentric. "One, three, three, one, which one are we supposed to believe? Is God one, or is God three?" Whole groups of Christians have left over this. "No, we can't accept this," because they tried to understand a metaphysical, mystical knowing with a logical knowing.

You can't know the Trinity logically—and this is brilliant—you could only know it by standing inside of it. You can only know it by participation, by experiencing the energetic life flow, but you have to go deep. If you stay on the surface, you stay with your wounds, and your career, and your roles, and so forth. You go deep, you experience what the French called the *élan vital*, this movement that seems to be utterly vital, utterly life-giving, so life giving that it could integrate death. Now that's the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Before we get to Jesus's formulation of it where he says, "I'm a part of it. I am the one who receives this infinite love perfectly."

That's why we're called to imitate Jesus. We're called to receive this infinite love perfectly. And so, we chose two relational words building on his experience, Father and Son. The Father being the symbol of the source, the Son being the symbol of the receiver, and that began our entrance into the flow. Then when you enter into that relationship, you find yourself in a third something. I know you're going to ask me more questions about the Spirit, so I won't dive in there right now. But what that Spirit does, the Holy Spirit, is, in fact, keeps you in the flow instead of jumping out and reasserting your individuation, your autonomy, your understanding, your righteousness. The Holy Spirit is that wonderful word that John uses, "defense attorney." The Greek word was *paraclete*. Sometimes this word is translated in your Bibles as "advocate" or "comforter." I am told the literal first-level meaning is defense attorney, which gives you great comfort when someone's defending you.

That was probably a very wise choice that people experienced. There was a voice inside of them that kept them from believing their worst stories about themselves [TRANSCRIPTION NOTE: Did he mean to say this? It seems to me that the word “from” be deleted.]. That was the Holy Spirit. But their best story being, “You are the same relationship that is between the Father and the Son. You are the same thing.” Trust it, jump in line, and get in the flow.

So, I know until your mind adjusts to it, it sounds like it might be a little eccentric or crazy. It really isn't when you realize our now preoccupation with words like ecosystems, circulatory systems, and gravity. Everything is flowing. Everything is. There is no autonomous anything in the universe. Period. Psychologists now speak of “family systems.” You are who you are because of who your mom and your dad were, and they are who they are because of who their parents were.

Who do you blame? There's nobody to blame now. That's why I have the chapter in the book of the one lump that we carry, we all carry one another's goodness, and we all bear one another's sin. It's a collective. Once you're inside the flow, it's a collective, and this notion of individual salvation falls away and, you'll be happy to know, this notion of individual terribleness, or worthiness of death, or guilt, or shame, or hell, falls away, too, because, “I am because you are, too, and you've let some of your garbage rub off on me and me on you.” The phrase we use we're all in this damn thing together, and we're all in this wonderful thing together.

So, a Trinitarian God creates a collective universe where everything is collective. This is one reason it's so hard to preach the gospel in Western Europe and North America, because we have stretched individualism full length.

We think, I think, I'm an autonomous Richard, and I have self-created this self, and I am responsible. Is that why so many people have such low self-esteem? I think it is. Because I am to blame for all the crap inside of me. No, we are to blame. Can you feel the weight off your back? And I don't need to hate you anymore, and you don't need to look down on me. I think what it means to be a Christian is to be willing to carry the collective burden. And a word for that is the body of Christ.

So, now I'm jumping too much ahead, but I'm saying that if you have a Trinitarian notion of God instead of an autonomous and almighty notion of God—the word I failed to introduce was the word “vulnerable.” When God is an old man on a throne, He's always described as almighty. He's Zeus, basically.

When you have a trinitarian notion of God, you have a God that equally self-empties and pours out, self-empty, pour out, self-empty and pour out, and I can't pour out because I know I will be poured into. So, you have now almighty balancing with self-emptying. This is a different notion of God. Suddenly God is not up there pulling strings like a puppeteer, but God is the ultimate participant in everything beautiful and in everything tragic—let me repeat it—God is the ultimate participant in everything beautiful and everything tragic. He/She is not a magician who can flick a magic wand and make even the tragic go away.

But this God is saying, “I’m in the tragic with you, I promise.” That’s the meaning of the cross and why Christians say they’re saved by the cross. So, that’s the one we call the Son, the Son who fully received the love, and then made this kind of love visible in the material world; made this kind of love visible in the material world, both the gracious receiving of it and the handing on of it. And the handing on becomes, or is, the Holy Spirit. That’s lesson one.

Richard Rohr: And then we just build, build, build, build, all on that, but you’ve got to have that correct metaphysics to reality before you can understand, or begin, and you can never understand. You know what I’m going to say, “Mystery is not that which is not understandable, mystery is that which is endlessly understandable.” It never stops. You as a young person are hearing this as, “Wow, what does that mean?” That is the way you should be hearing it. Here I am seventy-six, and I’m still, even though I’m saying the words, I’m still saying, “Wow, what does that mean?” [laughter]

Brie Stoner: What I appreciate about Arabella’s question is that I also have people in my life who think that the Trinity is this antiquated thing. “Why would you care about that, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” It seems like these church fathers just made this up to make sense out of Jesus’s divinity. But, I think one of the things that helps me and one of the things I most love about a Trinitarian idea of God or a view of God, is that even in the Hebrew Scriptures, there’s an “us.” There is a community, “Let us make them in our image,” our image, and there is the shaheenah in the Jewish tradition that comes and rests on the Sabbath. So, there’s already in the tradition this intuition of God as community as opposed to God as individual entity like you said, authority over. And I even feel how much that changes me, what shifts in me, when I think about God as community, God as participatory community as a They not a He. That changes so much.

Richard Rohr: It’s huge. It’s huge. It’s much more likely to pull you up into its sweep instead of damning you by its judgments. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I grew up in the evangelical world, and I remember being taught, like being shown an apple and hearing, “This is like the Trinity. The skin is the Father. The meat is Jesus, and the center is the Spirit,” something like that. But the metaphor being so small and appealing just to logic, right? There’s nothing movement-oriented, right, nothing flowing—

Brie Stoner: Dynamic.

Richard Rohr: Not dynamic.

Paul Swanson: --no dynamism at all. And so, being given that, I went through an undergraduate in biblical and theological studies, I don’t think it was until I came here that I actually fell into the Trinity that was big enough.

Richard Rohr: Big enough. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Otherwise, I was controlling it through a shamrock, or an apple, whatever that antiquated metaphor was. And so, that’s what I am hoping we can retire, in a way, is

those antiquated metaphors—

Brie Stoner: Static nature of them. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: The static nature, the subject-object nature of them. Here we have subjectivity all the way through, and us being invited into that subjectivity that God never objectifies us. That's a different world than most people have ever thought of as God. In fact, only if we own our subjectivity, can we join in the dance. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I need to apologize to whoever Sunday school that teacher was that brought in that apple because I certainly didn't grasp-- My imagination--

Richard Rohr: Her feelings are probably so hurt. Cute little Paul.

Brie Stoner: You were just hungry for an evolutionary, hyper-physic and she didn't give it to you, Paul.

Paul Swanson: He didn't believe me.

Brie Stoner: So, speaking of the dance, which is a much better metaphor for us to think about that dynamism that we were just talking about of the Trinity. Mark from Kansas City says:

Father Richard, now that you've unpacked Christ into this beautiful universality, can you now circle back to how this universal everything-ness fits with the Trinity? I caught glimpses in the Divine Dance, of course, but now that you've shed so much light on Christ—no pun intended—I wonder if you could briefly revisit how we might understand the operation of the Father and Holy Spirit in this universal view?

Richard Rohr: So, he's wanting me to integrate Father and Spirit in what we've said about Christ?

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh, and the flow of it, I think, the unfolding nature of it, it sounds like.

Richard Rohr: Here's where language gets so difficult, because we end up attributing, because the mind needs it, different qualities to the three different persons. Actually, it's not true, all three persons have all qualities, but the mind can't work that way. It wants to say, "God is infinite. God is mystery ultimate." Let's give that a word, Father, okay, so we don't lose that notion of God. God is the one who wants to make himself visible and reveal to us the pushback, the problem, the resistance, the price of pouring out infinity. And let's call that one Jesus. And that lesson is so hard to accept that God incorporates pushback. God incorporates the negative into the movement toward the positive, that that's the part of God that had to become visible, that had to take on flesh. This is just a beautiful mythological way of talking that it frees you from thinking of them really as independent.

The flow carries all of these qualities. The Father knows about suffering in the pouring out of himself/herself to create the universe. That's the self-emptying of God. It's not only Jesus who knows about suffering. And in creation, he knows about visibility. So, it isn't just the Son—are you following me—so already he learned that from the Father, which is what he's always saying. "I learned everything from the Father."

Now, the Holy Spirit is the continuing, is the moving of it forward into complexity and

into connection. As you well know, I'm not a big athlete—I'm not a big artist either, sorry to say—so I called Michael this morning, and I said, "I want to make sure I use these words correctly." Do you play football, Paul? You're not supposed to be here.

Brie Stoner: Everybody listening, Paul Thompson is our engineer who is with us in all of these recordings. Many of you asked who the third Paul was.

Paul Thompson: And I don't [inaudible 00:21:53].

Brie Stoner: But I should say who the second Paul is.

Richard Rohr: Maybe basketball more? So, I clarified with Michael what the meaning of the scrimmage line was. Now, you know this, the other Paul? [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I love this conversation. I never thought this was going to happen in here.

Richard Rohr: I thought I had it right, but I didn't want to say something completely stupid. So, please put your spiritual thinking caps on. Let's picture the football as the Christ, the visibility that is constantly being thrown forward by its beauty, by its love, and pulling with it, the scrimmage line. We all move a little forward, a little forward, by effort against those who are defending. Now, it takes the throwing forward to make the movement forward happen with resistance to it. I never liked football, because it was too complex. I couldn't figure out where they were going, and they seem to move so slowly. As I think of it now, it's a rather good metaphor for the Cosmic Christ. And when the ball is thrown forward, it creates a momentary, temporary emptiness, if you follow me.

Paul Swanson: But the ball's in the air.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. And now we don't like the emptiness. We don't like the non- foundation. And that's what the Spirit—now let's move to the Spirit—the Spirit is what keeps us running forward, connecting with the complexity. The Christ being always out ahead of us, creates an emptiness-- Let me bring it to this historical moment. Like right now, culturally, I don't think there's any denying there's a huge emptiness in American culture, there's a huge chaos in American culture, and it's that emptiness that is actually remaking a whole bunch of intelligence, a whole bunch of creativity, a whole bunch of energy, a whole bunch of caring that's going to move the scrimmage line forward. But you've got to have that period of no thing, of no power, of no energy. Give me the phrase you liked so much—

Brie Stoner: "The undoing as part of the remaking." That's what you said.

Richard Rohr: That's all I'm trying to illustrate: the undoing is part of the remaking.

Brie Stoner: But that in-between moment is what you're describing as the Holy Spirit.

Richard Rohr: That's what the Holy Spirit fills, whenever there's chaos. Like, I have to believe the Holy Spirit is at major work in America today, because there is so much hatred, so much chaos, so much dualistic thinking, so much anger that that creates the emptiness that God alone can fill. So, the emptiness becomes the prerequisite for the new in-filling. Does that sound like the Trinity? Of course, it does. And that's the role of the Holy Spirit. Always filling the gaps,

filling the gaps that want to stop the whole process, that want to stop the whole dynamism. “Running interference,” that’s the word I was looking for.

Brie Stoner: Three people who know nothing about football, trying to talk about the Trinity as football. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: Who can tell me what running interference means?

Paul Swanson: Well, it would be like a flag, it would be like if you-- I’m such a basketball guy. This is going to show my—

Richard Rohr: Oh, you’re basketball guy. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: In football, a pass interference would be like an illegal play on let’s say the wide receiver so that they could not have an opportunity to catch the ball and me as the defender would harm them in a way, or get them out of the way, in a way that was not a part of the game. So, I’d be interfering the-- How do we say this? Pass interference.

Richard Rohr: Would there be a penalty for it?

Paul Swanson: There would be a penalty for that.

Richard Rohr: Oh, so the Holy Spirit is going to get a penalty for running interference?

Paul Swanson: “This has been Sports Talk with Richard Rohr.” [laughter]

Richard Rohr: I do love the phrase. It only came to me this morning, that’s why I called Michael. I do think that’s why they use “defense attorney, paraclete, comforter.” If we can believe there’s an ultimate friend who is always on our side running interference for us to fill in the gaps, to keep us toward that goal of the Christ symbolized by the football. And that’s what the Holy Spirit is doing in history in an unbelievably patient way. If the universe has existed for 13.6 billion years and there’s this extinction, there’s the dinosaurs, they’re extinguished. I’m not going to let the whole thing die, I’m on a keep it moving forward, even if it’s another billion years. You have to just fall in submission, who is this God?

And the two words that always have come to mind for me are God is very patient and very humble. God is not efficient at all; at all. Now that just drives us crazy because we want the product to immediately follow the supposed momentary victory. And it seems the momentary victories have to coalesce, and then we sort of edge over into a new level of consciousness, and we can’t think that slavery is acceptable. Where did that come from when we thought slavery was absolutely essential for American economic culture? And then suddenly a massive part of the country says, “No, it isn’t. It is not just not necessary, it’s evil.” And, of course, then that tears our country apart fighting over that principle, which appears to be another major pushback. Go ahead.

Brie Stoner: Well, I was just going to say what I like about, and I can’t believe I’m saying this, I like about your football metaphor is that—

Richard Rohr: It works. It does work.

Brie Stoner: --that you're incorporating resistance into it, and then that we're placing the Trinity dynamically over deep time. In other words, the Trinity isn't up there somewhere separate—

Richard Rohr: That's it. Very good. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: --from us but in the midst of us. So, would you say that what you're describing is Christ is in evolution manifesting through time that the Holy Spirit serves as the engine of that, the movement forward? Is that it?

Richard Rohr: Keeping the dead ends from being dead ends by forgiveness, by warmth, by caring in the individual and even in it arising in history. And I don't know what the goal post is, but it's what Teilhard would've called the Omega Point, which is beyond our knowability, but where God is taking creation and humanity in Christ, through Christ. Keep picturing Christ as the football moving forward.

Paul Swanson: I'm going to try to further this metaphor.

Richard Rohr: Please, go ahead.

Paul Swanson: Would you say that the game of football itself is the Trinity; and, therefore—

Richard Rohr: The game.

Paul Swanson: The game itself and the Spirit is the one that is making the play in action move forward, like the progress of the game is the Spirit in action?

Richard Rohr: I think you got it. I think knowing that spiritual things can only be known through metaphors. So, if somebody is listening to you and says, "Oh, isn't that that cheap, the Holy Spirit as a football game," but it's actually the only way you can know it. And this metaphor will show itself to be inadequate.

Do you remember literature 101? All metaphors limp, L-I-M-P, and that was supposed to make us humble about metaphors. They will be true, true, true, well, but it isn't true in this way. And, of course, critical, negative people want to jump right on the exception. "Well, that's not a perfect metaphor." There is no perfect metaphor, that's what makes it a metaphor. It's always an approximation, a simile. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Well, it makes sense then to think about the phrase, "the movement of the Spirit."

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: Because we do, we talk about the Holy Spirit as a movement, as an arising, as a sort of a collective, energetic, cohesive something-ness that causes a flow, causes an emergence, causes a change.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Wonderful. Yeah, dynamism is of the essence of the Spirit, all the images of flowing water, and descending doves, and so forth.

Brie Stoner: And the fire.

Richard Rohr: And even running interference, which I think is one reason I like that from football. The spirit is running with us in this human evolution, trying to smooth the path so the path can keep moving toward the football, Christ, which is the visible making of this truth that God and man are one, which is the final—this was yesterday’s second reading at Mass—God has descended, the New Jerusalem is here, the new heaven and the new earth. The final chapter of the Bible gets it. Gets it. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Well, our next four questions here are actually about football.

Richard Rohr: Oh

Paul Swanson: I’m just kidding.

Brie Stoner: But our football fans are going to be so happy.

Richard Rohr: They wouldn’t come to me.

Brie Stoner: No, apparently, we got some feedback about our disparaging comments about fantasy football. So, I think we’re atoning for our sins, “See, we’re okay with football.”

Paul Swanson: A question here from Jim from Auburn, Washington:

Richard, when you speak of the Universal Christ, in some ways it sounds similar to evangelical language regarding the Holy Spirit. Could you respond to this? Also, I do not hear you talking about the Holy Spirit very often. How would you describe the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer?

And I recognize we kind of already touched on that in that last piece.

Richard Rohr: We just did. That’s right.

Paul Swanson: But that first question, I wonder, Richard, if you could respond to the way that evangelical language tends to speak of the Holy Spirit—

Richard Rohr: Holy Spirit.

Paul Swanson: --sometimes gets conflated with what you’re saying is the Christ.

Richard Rohr: That’s good. That shows their sense of dynamism. As I’ve said that the book, *The Universal Christ*, is a sequel to *The Divine Dance*. I was hoping I had positively and quantitatively talked a lot about the Holy Spirit in *The Divine Dance*, and here I wanted to segment and say, “Okay, now how does the Christ and Jesus fit back into that flow?” So, this is a correct criticism. I did not highlight the Holy Spirit in the book, *The Universal Christ*. But, I hope my metaphor of the one who paves the path, runs interference, this dynamic flow, who keeps us from surrendering, from becoming a cynic, from disbelieving life. I hope that answers Jim’s question, because he is right, but it did sadden me a little. I said, “Oh, I didn’t talk enough about the Holy Spirit.” It’s the inherent problem when you do God-talk, it’s like the wise men touching the side of the elephant, “I’m going to spend the whole day on the leg.” And you can always say, “Well, you didn’t talk about the trunk.” And that’s true. But perhaps Jim hasn’t read *The Divine Dance*.

Brie Stoner: Well, as we spend some time talking about the Holy Spirit, we had a lot of questions from people who have come from a Pentecostal background. And so, I wondered if first for those of us who may not know what the Pentecost was, what the event of the Pentecost was in the scriptures, if you could describe that. And then, also talk, about the Pentecostal movement so that we have some context for where these questions are coming from.

Richard Rohr: It's going to take a few minutes, but I'm happy to do it.

Brie Stoner: Go for it.

Richard Rohr: So, let me start by saying I consider myself a part of the Pentecostal movement. In 1971, when I was preaching to these teenage boys who were all jocks, they began singing in tongues in my presence, but they pulled me in to this phenomenon that fifty years later I still can't understand what was happening. But the whole birth of the New Jerusalem Community in Cincinnati, we call it charismatic, because we didn't want to use the word Pentecostal. I don't know why. It was the same thing. I mean, I spoke in tongues, I can still speak in tongues. All I have to do is decide to do it, but it's not a big deal. It's as Paul says, "the least of the gifts," but it's still a gift.

Why is that important? Not that this is what Pentecostalism is all about. But it normally depends upon one moment where you're led to an experience beyond words in your body, in your body, to an experience that you cannot verbalize. It's, "ah, ah, ah," as the prophets say. That's what the gift of tongues means. Now, the trouble is an awful lot of people who have the momentary "ah, ah, ah," this is too much, too much, too much, holy, holy, holy. Because it wasn't followed up by good theology, they invariably make an idol of that Pentecost, momentary, highly, usually emotional, mystical experience, and they try to replicate it again, and again, and again, which is idolatrous. Whenever you do that you actually regress. Instead of it being a onetime gift, you want it to be a certitude that asserts your holiness, your transformation. I'm born again, and that's been the failure of most historical, Pentecostal movements.

I will never doubt the authenticity of the Pentecostal experience. They call it the baptism in the Spirit. And I was chided recently on the road by people saying—they were visitors here—"How come you don't talk about it more?" And I say because it became another absolute, and it became another way of excluding people who didn't have the experience. The baptismal Pentecostal experience is another one of those shortcuts—push the button you get there real quick, but when you think you're born again in one night, there's a whole bunch of dangers that go with that. Remember cleaning up, growing up, waking up, showing up, none of that has happened, not even cleaning up. People can be total drug addicts, and prostitutes, and be baptized in the spirit. It's just an invitation, and they have to go through all their cleaning up and growing up. Mostly what was lacking was growing up.

So, we started in the mid '70s in San Antonio, the Catholic Charismatic Bible School. I taught there for eight summers just trying to bring to these Catholic charismatics who'd had the experience; therefore, a very real love of God, very real love of the scriptures that came from nowhere; I mean, these jocks who could care less about the Bible, they brought their girlfriends and their notebooks, and they copied down everything I said. What happened between there and there, and why does God work this way? I still don't understand. So, I

know there is such a thing, do you hear me both affirming Pentecostalism and spanking it at the same time?

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: They're both true, dang it! Only a non-dual mind again—I make that the answer to everything, don't I—can deal with both of them, but that has determined, sort of, the trajectory of my forty-nine years as a priest. That happened the first year, the emphasis upon experience. I know experience is real. I know that once you have that parting of the veil, usually a highly emotional moment, I admit it is, usually. But then when you make it depend upon emotion and you try to replicate emotion, you remain an infant. You do.

So, you have to mend the heart with the mind. And that's been the failure of so many Pentecostal movements, why thirty years later you come back, and they're racist, and they're sexist, and they're homophobic, but they love Jesus. It's not their fault. They just didn't grow in the Spirit. They didn't realize the implications of this massive outpouring of infinite love, which a small container—which we all are—can never contain. Did I answer your question? What's your essential question?

Brie Stoner: I think I was wanting to create a context on the Pentecostal movement for the listeners who are going to ask about that.

Richard Rohr: Sure. Okay. Well, I mean the story—you've heard this. I'm not trying to make myself important, but since you asked—I was ordained in 1970. Right after our wonderful Vatican II, I was the first generation of highly progressive priests who had the theology of Vatican II. And then I'm at my ordination in Topeka, Kansas in 1970, and this woman points out to me that the very spot on which I was ordained was the spot where the American Pentecostal Movement began. And, I mean, you can document that. In 1900 in Topeka, it was exactly seventy years later on the corner of Seventeenth and Stone was a big mansion called "Stone's Folly." And a group of Charles Parham's bible study gathered in that house in the year 1900 to study the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they came out singing in tongues. Of course, in the somewhat limited world of Kansas—forgive me, fellow Kansans—but they were called "Holy Rollers," and they said, "We're not going to get any receptive audience here." So, they moved off to Azusa Street in California. If you know the history of the Charismatic Movement, that's where they say it began. It really began in Topeka, I'm not trying to be tribal, but it did, and then it moved to Azusa Street. And from there, it moved nationally. But she told me, this lady in the vestibule after my ordination in June of 1970, she said, "You're going to be used by the Holy Spirit to bring Catholics and Protestants together." She didn't talk about Pentecostals. Well, I forgot that. I was too much into myself. I'm a priest now. I can say Mass. And then it was only after these boys began speaking in tongues, and the Christmas afterwards, I go home to Kansas, I'm sitting there with my mother and dad, and I said, "I've have to tell you something happened in Cincinnati." It happened November 6th to 8th. I'm home in late December. I'm still alive with this awesome thing that's happening. It's still growing back in Cincinnati. And I can see my mother leaning forward in her chair, and turning over, and she says, "Don't you remember what that lady said to you in the vestibule?" "What?" She said, "Your job was going to be to bring together

the Catholics with the Protestants.” And we just sat there, “Oh, my God, it’s happening.” The main reason I wanted to tell that story is that it had nothing to do with me thinking I was doing that, trying to do that, even understanding that I was doing that. It was a mother’s wisdom, and a mother’s infinite trust in her son to be Jesus. He’s always the Messiah. She said, “That’s what it is.” I said, “My God, it is, isn’t it?”

So, it always gave me a great sympathy. Then I started reading the history of what became the Assembly of God. And they came back, and when they retraced their own history, they said, “Here’s where it began.” They came back to Topeka and, dammit, the Catholics had bought the corner [laughter]

Where we had our parish church. So, if you look right across the street from the church, there’s now a huge Assembly of God church, and they tell them, “This is the spot,” but actually ours is, as if it matters. God doesn’t care, but they have lost their own history of where it came from. But that’s now called the Assembly of God, which is sort of the mainline, Pentecostal church. Isn’t it wonderful, all of us get a piece of the Christ, and then we absolutize that piece, like we Catholics did maybe with the Eucharist, and then we lose a whole bunch of other pieces.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think you’ve said it so well, coming from evangelical background, the discomfort around the Pentecostal, charismatic side of things is, what you’ve named, is that the tendency toward idolatry of trying to recreate, and manipulate, and force those moments, those transcendent moments—

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Brie Stoner: That can’t be forced. And so, it feels—

Richard Rohr: It’s that we’re back into transaction.

Brie Stoner: Right, right. And superiority and, “I have the Spirit. You’ve lost the Spirit.” It just creates kind of a really damaging environment to be swimming in. But, yeah, so segueing here into one of the questions—

Richard Rohr: I’m glad you mentioned that, because a lot of people might think, as I did, that evangelical and Pentecostal are the same thing; and, in fact, very often evangelicals dislike Pentecostals more than we did because they were close in our way of thinking.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, and I have so many friends who come from that background for whom there’s a lot of wounds. And so, Daniel from South County, Rhode Island writes:

Richard, as someone who grew up with a Pentecostal background, I’m always intrigued, curious, and often even quite confused, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, his question to you is about how you perceive and see the work of the Holy Spirit, and we’ve already talked about the first part of his question here. He’s saying:

Foremost in the structure of the Trinity, but also through history and scripture leading into the New Testament. He says, It seems we see unique manifestations and an outpouring of

the Holy Spirit after Jesus's ascension and at Pentecost. Is this something unique and new for us post-Pentecost, or has the Spirit always been doing the same thing throughout all of time interacting with the Cosmic Christ and God the Father?"

So, I think in some ways what I'm locating in his question is, there is something that feels miraculous, special—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --about the outpouring of the Spirit in that way. And so, is that still happening even if the manifestations of that aren't quite so magical, or—not to put words in his mouth—but—

Richard Rohr: No. He asked the question very well, and I've often struggled with this, "Does every generation need a new Pentecost moment, or does every individual need a Pentecost moment?" Probably in some sense, yes, but it doesn't have to have all those same dramatic characteristics of the first one. How does God operate with such unpredictability? The control is always given to God's side. Can we go back to, if you don't mind the football metaphor, that if we could see the role of the Holy Spirit as the one who runs interference for us, with us, in us, comforts us, advocates for us, defense attorney for us, so that history doesn't end in a dead end. So, it is, first of all, an historical movement, but what the Holy Spirit does in history, the Holy Spirit does in the individual too. That when you are abused or are tempted to become cynical, what is that part of you that argues against it, that keeps you above it, and beyond it? That's your outpouring.

Now, most of us, apart from a deep love experience, don't know how to do that. We fall into the cynicism. So, I think that's why the Holy Spirit is so identified with love, with the outpouring of love. It's scary to me how it seems these Pentecosts don't happen enough. And yet when I see how the Pentecost of the 1970s, when the Jesus people, Godspell, Superstar, I mean, Jesus was in, in the '70s. That's when our community was built, Sojourners, fourteen other communities, we all exploded. And there was so much cultural understanding of it, but it never continued.

I don't know why God works that way, but maybe it's because I saw in most of those ecstatic Jesus movements of the 1970s, to make it very immediate, that most of them, maybe all of them, went sour. You used the right word, Brie, they all idolized one aspect or another. I'll pick on Michigan.

Brie Stoner: Oh, thanks.

Richard Rohr: The Catholic capital was, I won't mention the city, but it was a certain city in Michigan, and they sort of took it upon themselves to be the new headquarters of the Catholic Charismatic Movement. When they found out that down in Cincinnati, I had women in leadership already in '73, we had women heads of households. I, of course, was the big enchilada, but immediately we tried to spread it out as much as we could, and I was teaching them good Vatican II symbolic, non-literal understanding of the Bible. I was blackmarked. I was never invited to Ann Arbor. Oh, I said it.

Brie Stoner: Oops!

Richard Rohr: I was never allowed to preach at any major conference at Steubenville, or anywhere. And so, it sort of ended up being a gift because I was able to operate independently. Isn't it interesting how many good things have come from Michigan—the Calvinist Movement I mean many good things, but like the Catholic Church itself, they become idolatrous and worship one piece of the pie as if it's the whole pie. We had some of our early Community of Communities meetings at Hope College, Calvin College—

Brie Stoner: Calvin College.

Richard Rohr: Calvin College, because we found a ready home there, but it only lasted a short time. Pretty soon we were heretics.

Brie Stoner: It's interesting that, that which we cannot explain or contain, which is I feel like what you're talking about, the movement of the Spirit, that forward momentum through history and time that's keeping us cohesively moving toward that Christ goalpost, right, the difficulty that we have in not trying to contain or control that and the relationship between the transcendent experiences of the Pentecostal Movement, or mysticism, all of our mini mystics, and then the—

Richard Rohr: That's what it is, mini mysticism.

Brie Stoner: Right. And then the immediate backlash of wanting to control, or at least suppress, or turn it into idolatry, right?

Richard Rohr: Label it. It's this. It's not that.

Brie Stoner: Right. Or, like, we're having this conversation, we're turning it into idolatry where we're trying to constantly recreate some kind of high to synthesize. No, that's not the right word. To kind of hit satiate that need that we have for the transcendent. So, I guess this is a long way for me to say there's something for me in this conversation between that which we can't understand, the transcendent movement of the Spirit of mysticism, and then the desire to want to co-opt it, sell it, make it into idolatry, try to create a whole—

Richard Rohr: And not admit disorder. See, it's the desire to run back to the first box—order, order, order—the way we've experienced the baptism in the Spirit in Ann Arbor, Michigan is the only way to do it. We'll be allowed no disorder, no women in leadership, no critical interpretation of the Bible. And if I hadn't been given my good Catholic education by the fruit of Vatican II, I wouldn't have known how to do that, either. So, we all do it. And, of course, most Catholics thought we were the crazies inside the Catholic Church, too, because we were the new "disorder."

Brie Stoner: I was just going to say is that where the fruits, I really appreciate how you said that the levels of growing up, waking up, that we have these transcendent experiences, but so what if we don't follow it with the growth work, of growing up, and waking up, and showing up. Is that the fruits of the Spirit then? Is that how we know we can trust a transcendent experience is whether it leads us to the hard work of growing up, and waking up, and showing up?

Richard Rohr: That's almost perfectly said. I would agree with that. That's the fruits of the Spirit. When you don't see that, when you say right away, "I have it," it's the arrogance, I mean God experience

is like fire, it's very dangerous. And it inflates the ego about its specialness and its superiority. So, I can have sympathy for every generation doing this, but they burn down more than they burn, it seems, again, and again, and again without participating in that infinite love. So, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, has his heart "strangely warmed," as he puts it, and I think he had his own baptism in the Spirit. I don't know what the circumstances were, many Methodists seem to pick up that early "warming," but now we have the Methodist Church dividing over gay people. Oh, stop it. How do we lose the warming all the time? We lose the trust in infinite love. We always have to compartmentalize love. Love is uncontrollable, and we don't like that. We really don't like it.

But, you can say almost every authentic—and I would believe Luther was the same way—whatever turned this man on to stand up to the whole Roman Catholic Church when it was the only game in town, he had to have an inner God experience, because he says so many things so right. But we persecute him so much, we fight him so much, we paint him in a corner so much, and he comes back with claws bared, and even Lutherans will admit that. But there's that complexus of evil. Do we blame Martin Luther, or do we blame the whole complex? Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I think, too, of that romanticizing in experience versus the mystics who would have a transcendent experience and then take twenty years to unpack it and try to live into it, right? I feel like the cheaper route to go is to just try to keep recreating that fire versus how does that fire impact you for the rest of your days in unknown ways that don't feel transcendent, but in the mundane of cooking, of playing with your children, going to work every day with integrity?

Brie Stoner: It seems so many, and especially young people, are just desperate for the transcendent without the commitment to the discipline—

Richard Rohr: They are. They are. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: --of the internalizing of that transcendent experience into a life of committed action. In other words, what do we do with that? Everybody wants to have this God experience whatever their route to do that, without the integration of it into a life of committed action.

Richard Rohr: You know, one reason I believe that we do need Jesus to balance out the Universal Christ, or to give heft and truth to the Universal Christ, is what Jesus engenders in the soul is devotion, and that's what I see lacking in most liberal Progressives, except Covenanters.

Paul Swanson: Oh, thank you for saying that. [laughter] Close call.

Richard Rohr: That's true, and a few other groups. I've been saying we should put out a whole issue of our Oneing periodical on this notion of devotion.

Brie Stoner: Or, write a book about it, Richard?

Richard Rohr: Say it again.

Brie Stoner: Write a book about it. Richard? [laughter]

Richard Rohr: No, no more books. Something to show how the heart and the body and the person, which was Pentecostalism, has to be engaged with this beautiful metaphysics I talked about, or it doesn't become a religio. It doesn't become a reconnecting, it doesn't become a widening of the circle. I really do think some degree of devotion, heartfelt devotion, is necessary, or it doesn't continue. And that's the way you keep connecting with the fire. It keeps your heart "strangely warmed" as Wesley puts it.

Without that, it's just an ideology, and no one dies for an ideology. You don't. And I think I need to say that more in my later years to my fellow Progressives, and the cynics, that even so many baby boomers and now millennials have become. It doesn't work long term to just have right answers, and what isn't true, what isn't true, what isn't true. And, you know I'm using this word just to make the point, but that attitude, which has persisted for 500 years, started with why would you want to take to your name pro-test-ant? Why would you want to be a protester? Eternally? Is that your role? Why weren't you the Uniates, or something like that? Do you understand? It's nobody's fault. It's just where history was. We were teenagers in the 16th century. The psyche was at the teenage level of development. And so, the 16-year-old has to protest, but protesting doesn't create mysticism. And we're seeing it now called postmodernism, which knows what it doesn't agree with.

I see this in a lot of the young Democrats joining the fight for president. You better know what you're for; you better know what you're in love with. And I'm sure some of them are there, but I don't think all of them are there. And if we start another election cycle led by a protester where the primary energy is oppositional—and that's a great temptation—there's so much to be against right now. I'd be leading the charge. Thank God I'm not a political candidate, but negative energy is still negative energy. It's not God energy. Pentecost was the giving of a God energy to the starting of a positive fire energy. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Well, Richard, I think this book has been that for a lot of folks, and they're sensing the Spirit's leading in this book. So, I just want to say thank you for taking your time today to talk about the Spirit and how we participate in Spirit.

Brie Stoner: And, maybe as a closing question, I wonder, reflecting on that football metaphor that we've spent so much time on today—

Richard Rohr: I'm glad it's helpful from someone who knows nothing about football.

Brie Stoner: Hey, I'm right there with you. I'm like, "Wait. What?" --that idea of the movement of the Spirit, of that ball in the air, toward the goalpost of Christ, where have you experienced that rush of energetic flow that leaves you with that sense of love and hope, the fruits of the Spirit that we've been talking about, the sense that this is something that is growing you up, and waking you up, and helping you show up?

Richard Rohr: About ten days ago, the Lutherans of this part of America had a big synod here, and I was privileged to be invited to talk to them three times. And I think I said in the first evening, "Who would have ever thought that the Lutherans would have a Catholic Franciscan priest addressing them and give over two of their days to them?" But the reception I experienced from that group where I can say, literally, the room was not just filled with smiles, but people physically edging forward on their chair, physically edging forward on their chair. I

don't know, was I saying it that good, or what? I didn't get one question of pushback, and I was talking about this kind of stuff. I don't think most of them had read *The Universal Christ* yet, but that a Catholic priest could talk to a Lutheran synod—and I was critical of Lutheranism and Catholicism—and so receive it, talk about movement. Movement, I hope on my part movement, on their part, but movement of history that was so heartfelt. It was just an extremely energizing day. You've probably heard me say that—and I was glad when the center started describing me as an “ecumenical teacher.” I didn't choose that title, I don't think, but I love to talk to ecumenical groups. When they're all Lutherans, they're all Episcopalians, they're all Pentecostals, everybody's got their hackles up about their issue. “Does he mention the Covenant,” or whatever it might be. And when they know we're all in this together, “Well, he's just talking that way because he's a Catholic, but they let me talk that way, you see, if I show respect, which is easy to do, to the gift that each denomination brought.

So, I think ecumenism is the only future, whatever future to Christianity is, it's going to be together, and stop this infighting over what are invariably accidental issues, not essential issues. What? “In non-essentials, liberty; in essentials, unity, and in all things, charity.” It was the motto of Pope John XXIII. But we didn't recognize that, “in non-essentials, liberty.” It doesn't matter. Let them go the way they go. And I would say many of our fights, if not most of them, were over non-essentials that we made into essentials, because the ego could take control over when baptism happened, and who could do the baptizing, and what words were used when we baptized. God must just yawn, if God is allowed to yawn, I don't know. Who cares? Has the dipping into infinite mercy happened? That's the important thing. So, thank you.

[music playing]

Paul Swanson: And that's it for today's episode, *Another Name for Everything* 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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