

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 3

Hell, The Devil and
The Afterlife

Paul Swanson: 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 from season one of this podcast.

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

Paul Swanson: And I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: We're staff members of The Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst late night grocery runs, laundry overwhelm, and the shifting state of our world.

Paul Swanson: This is the third of twelve weekly episodes. Today, we're addressing your questions on the themes of hell, and the devil, and afterlife.

Brie Stoner: Richard, one of my favorite stories that you've shared with us is about Teresa of Ávila being asked about hell.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Do you believe in hell? How does it go? Do you believe in hell?

Richard Rohr: You know, we've got to be honest. We're not sure it's historical.

Brie Stoner: Okay.

Richard Rohr: But some insist it is. I've never read it footnoted. But the story is that the sisters asked her, "Do you believe in hell?" She said, "Oh, yes," because she had to keep her orthodoxy with the Spanish Catholic Church. Then she's supposed to have whispered to the side, "It's just that no one is there."

Richard Rohr: You can see what she's trying to do, which is probably what I would try to do too, but maybe for different motivation. I'm not afraid of the Roman Church now, but I can see why you have to posit the idea. Maybe not a torturing place, but the idea of an eternal "no" has to be granted to human nature.

Richard Rohr: Now, what a lot of the saints also said was that once the human soul observed even for half a second, if observe is the right word, the infinite love of God, no one could resist it. Now, is that moment of possible resistance what we meant by purgatory? I bet it is.

Brie Stoner: But it seems like we got a lot—I mean we got a lot—of questions about hell and the devil. That's really the theme that we're going to be focusing on today, but it as though some of this has to do with that causality thing that we were talking about in the last episode.

Richard Rohr: Yes, good.

Brie Stoner: Like, who deserves to be where for eternity seems to still be a primary concern for so many of us.

Paul Swanson: Before we dive in with that first question, Richard, does that surprise you that we got so many questions about hell and Satan, after knowing our conversations in season one and then—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: --the themes of The Universal Christ? What's your response?

Richard Rohr: Well, let me say this. First of all, if you had that idea planted in you as a little girl in Sunday school or a little boy in catechism class like I was, remember I say things that you learn early about eternity or divinity place themselves in the lower brain stem for want of a better word, especially when they're filled with fear. I mean, how would you not? Oh, my God. This is the shape of the universe. There's a torturing God, and I live inside of it.

So, even I find otherwise very well-educated people will still have some notion of hell, some fear of hell, and it's often the underlying reason, not always, but often why they reject the whole Christian parable, because it just creates an abhorrent universe for them. If the center is punitive, is making a list, checking it twice, is hateful, a lot of people just went off the boat. Maybe they haven't processed it that way, and I wouldn't doubt that that might be necessary for their sanity.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It's interesting. I think for a lot of our listeners, the idea of the Universal Christ seems incompatible with the idea of hell. So, I think that's why we got so many questions as well.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes. Let me offer this if it helps any at all. When I found that even Buddhism had a notion of hell and Hinduism had a notion of hell, it wasn't always configured exactly the same way, but I came to realize there's some problem they're trying to solve here, and it's basically that—this is my language—I think they're trying to say human freedom matters. We're not robots. We're not on cruise control. Because if you declare any notion of universal salvation, or God loves everybody in the end, and there's no consequences to human action, it does become a meaningless, moral universe. And so, to maintain morality, you have to say no is possible and death is possible.

Once you hear that—I've over the years had many people just breathe a sigh of relief. "Oh, I see the problem it's trying to solve." The trouble is the iconography of fire, and torture, and eternity just muddied the whole well of hell. It was just this is an intolerable universe.

Richard Rohr: But, can you see where we were trying to say the same thing that a number of the Eastern religions were trying to say when they spoke of karma? What goes around comes around. Just our normal sense of morality, we look at people who are loving, and generous, and self-sacrificing, and we look at other people who are totally selfish and malicious. This isn't hard to prove. It's everywhere.

So, they wanted to name it by creating a metaphor that was urgent and ultimate, that became hell, a metaphor of urgency and ultimacy. But unfortunately, now we know it appealed to the lowest level of the brain stem, which is fear, and a lot of people just stayed there with their theological PTSD. It's just, "Ugh." Rather than even try to process it, they just stay away from Christianity or any religion that appears to be saying this.

Paul Swanson: Right. It became the whole storyline instead of just something to help the plot thicken.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Well said. Very well said. That's exactly right. You know, very good novel has to have a dilemma, has to have a perpetrator, has to have a villain to make the plot thicken, as you just said, to create the storyline itself, but we just took it too far. This is why I always say literalism is the least helpful level of understanding of scriptural or biblical text, or spiritual text. It doesn't help in the end, because you struggle with the literalism instead of the message. I don't know why God took that risk of knowing that people would take a spiritual text literally.

Brie Stoner: That leads well into our first question, because when we read the gospels and we encounter Jesus, there are references to what we have interpreted as hell.

Richard Rohr: Well said.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Richard, I'm going to butcher this, Gloucestershire. Is that right?

Richard Rohr: Gloucestershire, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Is that how you say it? Gloucestershire.

Richard Rohr: Gloucestershire.

Brie Stoner: Gloucestershire.

Richard Rohr: I was there once. I should've remembered.

Brie Stoner: Right. Sorry, Richard. You can't trust us Americans with these things. From the United Kingdom, he says:

As well as being inclusive and welcoming, Jesus often seems to refer to the concept of separation—sheep and goats, Lazarus and the rich man, a sword rather than peace, and so on. Our images of heaven and hell come as much from these scriptures as from the likes of Dante. My question for Richard is to ask if he can please explain to us more about how he reconciles these depictions of separation attributed directly to Jesus with his vision of the universally loving God?

Richard Rohr: Well, let me come at it from several angles. First of all, I have said in so many contexts, you first have to succeed at dualistic thinking before non-dual has any transformative power, you see, like you take Matthew 25, the story of the sheep and the goats. I know often I've been reading it in church. You can see everybody trying to take in the message, even though it's a little difficult because we're afraid we're one of the goats, of course. But then when it ends with this huge threat, you can just see everybody lose heart. It was supposed to be a challenging, inspiring text, but it ends up on a punitive line, and that's all everybody remembers.

Now, forgive me. I know I'm psychologizing, and unfairly, but I'm still going to risk it. Most of the passages that talk about eternal fire or eternal punishment in one

phraseology or another, are in Matthew's gospel, so I always say I think Matthew had punitive parenting. If that's the way you were raised, and a lot of us were, with parents ending with a threat, "If you don't do this, you're not going to get any candy," it became the way to tell a serious story. I admit they're there, but I would point out they're mostly in Matthew, not all, however.

The other important piece are the words "Gehenna," which is the dump outside of Jerusalem, still there to this day, "Hades," "Sheol," which were simply the place of the dead withholding judgment as to what happened to people. That was the most common ancient understanding—Sheol or Hades—simply the place of the dead. It was sort of our Catholic notion of limbo: "We don't know. We'll just leave them there."

Paul Swanson: The waiting room.

Richard Rohr: Waiting room is a very good word, yes. A hopeful waiting room in a way, but sort of a dead waiting room too. So, I wish we would have withheld judgment and understood that Gehenna was the garbage dump where the fire never went out. I remember looking through that spot in the wall of Jerusalem, and it is still smoldering, at least twenty years ago when I was there. I don't know if it still is. That is the final verse in Isaiah, "where the fire never dies and the worm never leaves," or something like that. They use those final verses from Isaiah as a metaphor in contrast to the metaphor of Jerusalem itself. There was living in the city with the people, with the temple, with God, and there was being dumped through the wall: Which one do you want? So, they set the people up for a good, dualistic choice.

Richard Rohr: Now, if you want to call people to choice and to decision, I think it's probably a rather effective way to do it, especially, I would say, for people in the first half of life, to use my language. They aren't mature enough yet, subtle enough yet, to be appealed by love motivation. I mean that's the case even with children. You bribe them with candy. So, childish minds tend to really—I don't want to insult anybody—but they tend to really buy into this reward-punishment worldview. Everything gets framed inside of that, and the trouble with that is it creates what we now call a win-lose worldview to the ultimate degree. There are winners and there are losers. It creates a competitive universe so much so that win-win, which I'm convinced is the gospel, is actually an abhorrent notion. We don't want everybody to win. We won't allow God to let everybody to win. Who are we to say God can't love everybody? That's we who can't love everybody, because we cannot form with our human minds the notion of infinity or eternity.

Actually, just Sunday I checked that out again with a neuroscientist. He said it's probably true, that the human mind closes down, as we do with huge numbers, with the words infinity or eternity.

Brie Stoner: Can't process it.

Richard Rohr: Can't process it. So, that was a double whammy. When we talk about eternal punishment, I don't even know what to do with that, so the easiest thing is to run out

of the room. Really, I think we're responsible for a lot of Atheism and Agnosticism. I don't know how to process that. It's an inane universe if it's all ending this way when, you know, I'm just here for a few years. How am I supposed to figure it all out and make sense of it all?

That's why I made that CD years ago, Hell, No! At least for a while, it was the bestselling one. I think it was because people were looking for liberation from this terribly dead ended universe. Because, and let me stop on this, if our moral theories were true and our salvation theories were true, the vast majority of humanity went to hell. Who wants to live in that kind of universe? As Chesterton said, "Your religion is not the denomination you belong to, but the cosmos you live inside of." Well, if that's the cosmos where most people go to hell, so I live my whole life so I'm not one of those most people, you end up living a life of comparison, and competition, and judgment, not love. Let me repeat that: You end up living a life of comparison, competition, judgment, exclusion, add a few more negatives. It doesn't teach you how to love. It really doesn't, and that undoes our whole storyline.

I'm glad you're asking me about it, because if we don't get this clarified for history, I'm not sure how the Christian message, as it's portrayed here, as you've just asked me, it's never going to make sense to much of the world. It's not going to be Good News for all the people, which is what the angels say at Bethlehem. Yeah, it's a problem.

Brie Stoner: I really appreciate how you are framing this around the importance of educating the power and impact of choice—

Richard Rohr: Oh, good.

Brie Stoner: --and how much we as humanity need to have a sense of that. One of the things I'm wondering about is if really what was happening is we projected out into eternity what is just true for us now.

Richard Rohr: Right on.

Brie Stoner: So, instead of thinking of hell later, it's here in accordance to our actions. I'm thinking about even the impact of choice on global warming, for instance.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Like our brains kind of shut down when we think on the long term, the big picture, the cosmic impact that we're having. We can't really imagine it. So, it's almost like we needed stories, we needed images, we needed something that could say—

Richard Rohr: Excellent, excellent.

Brie Stoner: "Hey, this is serious."

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: Our choices matter, and our choices have impact eternally, which I think it makes sense that we couldn't hold the tension of the now and the eternal together, because that's new for us. That's hard for us, as opposed to just kind of projecting it outward: "Oh, well if I live my life

well now, I get a reward later.”

Richard Rohr: Later, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Not, “If I live my life well with intention, I will be having an eternal impact.”

Richard Rohr: Well said. Thank you. I just watched a nature special last night on Glacier National Park. Did you see that in Montana? They were thinking in twenty or thirty years the glaciers would be gone. It’s now ten years. There will be no more glaciers. Now, you see, if you talk even that in educated society—I mean it really is urgent now. It’s that real.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You’re considered hysterical or a zealot. You can see how human beings do need but resist shock language. They don’t like it. Apocalyptic language, which the hell language is, is deliberately shock language to awaken the soul to the urgency of the message. But you said it so well, the urgency now, not, “Okay, after the glaciers all melt, now it’s going to be urgent.” Until the soul hears that and chooses to see differently, live differently, now it isn’t going to make much difference is there’s a reward or a punishment later.

Paul Swanson: With that, I’m thinking about just the neutering of agency in that when it is that eternal kind of, “If it’s all going to happen for eternity, then do my actions matter now”? You talked about it being a helpful metaphor for those in the first half of life, this kind of eternal consequence as a way to kind of help shape them in a way. Are you able to offer an alternative metaphor instead of hell that would be something that could be a placeholder but have that same sort of mythic impact of agency and choice and that your actions matter for right now, but also for the long term, for ancestors that have yet to be born?

Richard Rohr: The only honest word, and it’s still a negative, maybe the ultimate negative, is the word “death,” that it must be possible for human beings to choose death, or we’re not free. That still has a big impact.

Now, of course, here’s part of why we created hell. We said the soul is eternal, but I think we have to participate in that eternity by saying “yes” to life. I’m not going to let that override the possibility that human beings can choose death. That’s perhaps the truth of Teresa of Ávila saying, “Oh, I believe there’s a hell,” but she’s saying it has to exist as a logical possibility, or we are not free. I just don’t think she’s saying that anybody would be so stupid once they see ultimate life, ultimate love, that they’d still choose death. But we don’t know that yet, so we have to maintain the logical possibility. You can choose death now. That makes sense to all of us, because we all know people who are clearly choosing death day after day after day, and imposing death on other people.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, yeah.

Brie Stoner: It makes me think about how you were talking about the trinity as an image of all of reality, of the nature of reality as being based in relationship and relationality. If all of reality is a network of relationality and we call that love, in a way it seems like what you’re saying is

when we choose death, we're choosing to undo, untie, disconnect from those relationships.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: In essence, choosing a life of isolation and loneliness—

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: --as opposed to a life of connectivity, and joy, and meaning, and hope. At least for me, as I think about like, speaking of hell, how in the hell do I talk about hell with my kids, who are hearing some of these concepts in some of their Christian circles? And so, for me bringing it into the present and trying to frame it as when we choose death, we choose a life of isolation; when we choose love, we choose a life of joy, meaning, service, and connectivity. I don't know. I don't know.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I'm sorry, just to go ahead. I had one little short. The French existentialist Sartre said, "Hell is other people." That's what a person in hell would say. There's that ultimate isolation: "Hell is other people." Now, there have all been days where we've thought that, I admit, but if that becomes your philosophy, hell is other people, that's the state of hell to think that way.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I think that, Brie, what you were saying, I so appreciate that Gehenna unpacking, Richard, because the image of Jerusalem, of the walled city and being within the confines of safety, connection, and then the trash heap, that's such a helpful metaphor versus—

Richard Rohr: It really is. It works, yeah.

Paul Swanson: --eternal punishment—

Richard Rohr: Punishment.

Paul Swanson: --and just the feel of that.

Richard Rohr: Persistence in hatred for something.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I mean—and you know what I'm going to say here—if the God that Jesus believed in taught forgiving seventy times seven and loving your enemies, we suddenly have an incoherence in the heart of God, because God doesn't observe God's own message. God does not love God's enemies, and God does not forgive seventy times seven. That for me is the clincher. It tells me it can't be true. It can't be true. I'll take that over taking some metaphors literally. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Our next question here comes from Deb from New York. She says:

Hi, Richard. I heard you talk about heaven and hell. Can you explain Lucifer or Satan's reality in this world? How does that fit in?

Richard Rohr: Okay. We're going to build on what we just said. Lucifer, as you perhaps know, means the light bearer, which is very telling. He was actually the day star, the first star you could see in the morning. It goes back to an obscure passage in Isaiah where it says, "The day star fell

from the heavens.” That became the whole story of the fallen angels, but the truth it was trying to maintain is that evil first looks like light. It first looks like the answer. It first is attractive.

Richard Rohr: As Thomas Aquinas said, “No one intentionally chooses evil. They choose what they think is good.” What they think. That’s a good explanation of why we need to name something Lucifer. Satan or Satán means the accuser. Now again, these words are so archetypal really. That negative voice inside of every one of us that first of all wants to negate us, “You’re not. If you are the Son of God. If you are the Son of God,” trying to plant the doubt. Always the planter of doubt. Why Jesus probably calls Satan the “father of lies,” telling you lies are true and truth are lies. The names themselves are good. They’re telling. They’re archetypal.

Now, how did we get to this personification of them, again this literalization of them? Well, I’ll go back to my own theological education. I think I was the one who raised my hand and said—I was a 26-year-old cynic; well, not really a cynic, but wanting to be. It was the late ‘60s—do we really have to believe in this, that there’s a devil?—my systematics professor closed his eyes for a minute and then said, “Well, let me just start with this, that no imagery would persist this long in almost all the religions of the world”—I mean go to temples in all of the East. You will have demons at the door or evil spirits somehow personified—“if you would not have to take them seriously.” It persisted that long, and we call that an archetype, an image that just keeps reappearing, reappearing, because the psyche needs it. Why does it need it? It doesn’t take that concept seriously without personification.

I think that’s why we tell myths, and stories, and legends, and now we watch movies. We need personification to take concepts and abstractions seriously. “Okay, now I can stop fighting it.” I’m not really believing nor teaching that there is a red-tailed devil with a pitchfork flying around the world, but I’m not saying that evil isn’t real. I’m not saying you shouldn’t take evil seriously.

Now, let’s add onto that. Maybe Freud’s idea of a complex or psychological idea of an obsession where a bunch of ideas are operating together as one, and they have great power over us at the non-rational level, at the irrational level. We know it’s not true, like little kids thinking there’s something under their bed or something. Freud would say there’s a complex at work of fear, of demons, of badness. We’ve got to take that badness seriously, which is why your kids, I don’t know if yours do at any stage?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, my daughter right now is having dreams of monsters.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, okay. I’m glad I asked. They’re needing to personify the agency of evil. “It might be here. It is here. What if it’s here? How do I protect myself”? Let’s, those of us who think we’re educated or progressive, not be too quick to throw it out, because, I think, as our present politics is revealing, you end up being very naïve about evil. We’ve got a whole country on left and right that’s very naïve about evil. They’re all pointing in the wrong direction, really, left and right. They can’t see it.

Richard Rohr: Lucifer and Satan are very needed images, archetypes, metaphors, symbols, words for something we’d better learn to address. I use the word address in particular. Give it voice and recognize that it’s non-rational. Nazi Germany, most people consider the Germans the most

educated people in the world, still to this day—education, education, education, church, church, church. You were either Catholic or Lutheran, one or the other, and two World Wars happened there. Was that not a message for humanity, that you can be really intelligent and still not have the eyes to recognize evil?

: It's scary, I know. Why did I use the word scary? This whole notion of evil as something that possesses us, that overcomes us, that blinds us, it is meant to be scary. Could I be that blind person? Could I be blinded? As Jesus says in John 3, "Because you say, 'I see,' you remain in your blindness." Don't be so certain that you see love or you see truth. It forces us on an inner journey that honors complexity, deviousness.

Well, Paul says it in 2 Corinthians. Is it chapter 11? I think. "The angels of darkness must disguise themselves as angels of light." That's straight from Paul. "The angels of darkness must disguise themselves as angels of light." Now, progressive people say, "Well, let's just dismiss angels." Well, he's making a better point than that, a much better point than that. The whole nature of evil is that which disguises itself as good.

The other point I often make with the students is from C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* is worth reading someday. He says something to this effect: If evil wants to enter England, it will not come with a red tail and a pitchfork. He will come wearing a three-piece suit and talking with the Queen's English. That's how evil will get into England. That's not an exact quote. That's a paraphrase, but you get the point.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I mentioned yesterday this theologian Walter Fluker. An example that he uses in the same way is he talks about white supremacy is a shape-shifting ghost. It will appear as an angel of light to certain folks in a certain way. Even the language of a post-race society allowed for white supremacy to kind of rise up, because it was not true, right? There's that long hidden wound of racism in America. But then how it can pop up and look completely different at a different time.

Richard Rohr: Wow. That's excellent.

Paul Swanson: That image of shape-shifting ghost has really made me think about the demonic, and devils, and angels in disguise.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: It also seems so necessary I guess. Maybe this is the first time I'm actually recognizing that, that it's so necessary, like both how you represent the metaphor or personification of Lucifer and Satan, one as that which disguises itself as light, which looks good on the onset, and then the second, that which causes you to doubt. Both of those things kind of go together.

Richard Rohr: That's excellent, yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: The fact that we're not sure what to trust in each other, in ourselves, in systems creates a sense of doubt. Almost like that need to question and to second guess as an important piece to being a mature spiritual whole being that isn't just going to at face value think, "Oh, I'm definitely doing the right thing. I know I am. Of course I am."

It leads me to this question from Ellen from Dayton, Ohio, because I feel like she's trying to get at essentially are we creating Satan or is Satan influencing us, so back to that causal question. She says:

In your book, you reference the demonic path and the accuser, Satan. I would like to know if Richard believes there is a satanic being [which we've been talking about] that are attacking us trying to keep us from God, or is it just our innate nature of evil? Is Satan prowling around like a roaring lion seeking to destroy us?

I feel like her question is, are we creating Satan, or is Satan influencing us?

Richard Rohr: I hope I'm not avoiding the very real dilemma she creates there, but I think it's both. In other words, probably a lot of our notions are projections of our own self-hatred, our own self-doubt. You want to account for that for sure, but don't do it so much that you take away this has a life of its own, which is really a death of its own. I'm not just being clever. This is a death of its own apart from my projection.

That's why we use the word possessed. There is an outer force to evil that really has the power to possess us, to blind us. I see many cheering crowds in political rallies where just I really want to say they are possessed. They're possessed. I'm not saying they're going to hell. I'm just saying there's no freedom, that when this political leader says his funny line, they have to cheer. They have no choice, because the person on left, and right, and behind, and front are all cheering. That's possession by a demon, and that's a power outside you. You want to recognize, yes, it's partially projection, but it's partially when you feel a loss of freedom, "I have to do this," I'm going to go so far as to say that's always an evil spirit.

When you experience the Holy Spirit, there's an expansion of freedom, all right, the freedom to or not to do. The wonderful thing about the reign of God, the realm of God is that God honors that freedom so much that God fully lets us sin. I'd sooner keep you in a realm of freedom and have you make mistakes now and then, as long as you learn from them. That's all. That's all that's required. God honors freedom.

Richard Rohr: You've heard me quote Duns Scotus or the Franciscan school where the whole work of theology is to keep God free for people, and most theology doesn't. It makes God very obscure, very distant, very untouchable, very unlovable. The second part is to keep people free for God. Two freedoms. God, that's a good definition of what I think a minister, a spiritual leader should be. How do you keep God free? How do you keep us free?

That's how you can recognize the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit. You can feel yourself being constricted, "I have to," and in that sense, there's the ultimate irony. Probably a lot of our early religious actions were not so motivated by the Holy Spirit, "I have to go to church on Sunday. If I don't, God will hate me." That was more an evil spirit. I know that sounds shocking to most people, or maybe it was a baby evil spirit.

Brie Stoner: It's kind of a cute one.

Paul Swanson: In training.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: A cute evil spirit, but it's not the Holy Spirit.

Brie Stoner: In a nice Sunday dress.

Richard Rohr: The Holy Spirit doesn't operate by shoulds, and oughts, and musts, or got, because they're always dualistic, "If you don't—" I don't think the soul moves forward that way. It moves forward by allurements, by attraction, by seduction, by being enamored. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Even the gestures you just made that our listeners can't hear is you were extending your arms almost as if you were hugging.

Richard Rohr: Oh, thank you.

Brie Stoner: It's a welcoming. It's the sense that this is a move toward mercy—

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: --towards spaciousness, towards more-ness. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yes, thank you. Thanks for speaking my gestures.

Brie Stoner: Gesture translator.

Paul Swanson: We're not going to share all the gestures. Our next question comes from Todd in San Diego, and this furthers the conversation on Satan:

Richard, how do you think about the concept of Satan given the weight you place on René Girard's concept of scapegoating? How do those two connect?

Richard Rohr: Boy, you're sequentially handing me these questions in very good order. I can see perhaps what Todd is thinking, that isn't most people's notion of Satan a projection of their own evil onto some invisible being, "The devil made me do it" kind of language and an avoidance of their own choice-fulness for evil or violence? I think there's a lot of truth to that, but I wouldn't want people to think that I'm saying that Satan is only a projection. As long as you're not using Satan that way, "The devil made me do it. The devil's evil but I'm not." No, there's a part of me that wants to damn other people. There's a part of me that wants to exclude other people, because that makes my ego feel superior.

I know you've heard me say the ego wants three things. I've upped it to three. For years, I said to be separate and to be superior, but it also wants to be in control. Those needs in you, when you exonerate yourself by saying, "The devil made me do it," you never have to face your own inner life—your control needs, your superiority needs, your separate needs.

I'm not sure exactly what question he's asking, but I hope I have ever so slightly addressed them. I could see why he would wonder after my emphasis on René Girard why he still believes in a devil. I believe, I observe, the misuse of the devil because of René Girard's work, but it builds on what we've already said here in the previous questions. I know it's getting subtle.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, no, but it's helpful, because I think to some degree the act of scapegoating is our denial

of our own complicity, participation, or even propensity to behave in unloving ways.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: It seems like a little bit of a connecting point, at least in my mind, between Satan, the concept of an exterior evil and scapegoating is that as long as I continue to say, “Oh, no, they’re the problem.”

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Brie Stoner: “That person’s the problem,” then I can continue to blindly participate in evil myself. In a way, it’s a helpful question for me to wrestle with, too.

Richard Rohr: Okay. I hope so. You ended with a good phrase there, “to wrestle with.” I think all spiritual concepts deserve, in fact demand, wrestling. It’s not going to be a simple little catechism answer, it’s all settled. I’m happy that people are asking these complex questions. That shows they’re in the middle of the wrestling match. If you’re not willing to wrestle with it, I don’t think it’s very spiritual for you. There has to be ambiguity. There has to be a duality to it, and by that I mean good sides and bad sides. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I feel like Laura from Escondido, California, her question is exactly what you’re describing as wrestling. She says:

My question is regarding the afterlife. You taught that the church actually bases much of its thought more on Plato’s mind-body dualism than on Jesus’s teaching. I was enjoying letting go of that and seeing my thinking transform until I thought about the afterlife. I then realized that I still cling to the comforting notion that my spirit lives separately and continues on after my body dies, the old Protestant, “Save the soul and don’t worry about the body.” But if that is overly dualistic, how do you think about what happens to the soul after the death of the body? Does any aspect of me live on? Thanks so much. Laura, an evolving evangelical.

Richard Rohr: She asked it well. Well, here’s where the early creeds of the church help us. They say, “I believe in the resurrection of the body,” that just as Jesus’s body resurrected—and that doesn’t mean resuscitation. It means returning in a different form, as Mark’s gospel says—so, we actually do for all eternity put body and soul together again, but that wasn’t made clear to most Christians.

We want to know where mama’s body is right now. It appears to have died, and we placed it in the grave. What I think certainly most Christians did is withheld judgment on where the body is right now, but we didn’t say it’s gone. I think that’s why they put the phrase in the creed, “We believe in the resurrection of the body.” That somehow our physicality is in on this deal, but it’s not, as we know from the resurrection of Jesus, the same physicality. He isn’t recognized. He passes through doors. He bilocates. He looks like the gardener. He looks like the stranger on the road, the cook on the shore.

: Maybe this is what Buddhists meant by the subtle body. It always intrigued me why they used the word subtle. Maybe this word comes even closer, now from science, force fields. Is there a force field that has the character of materiality to it, physicality to it, that is Paul, that

is Brie, that is Richard? That's the best I can do.

You can see Paul struggling with this in the whole of 1 Corinthians 15. He just comes at it from every side, not all of them clarifying. Sometimes it's more confusing and it's more confusing, but he says them all with great certitude. It will be a body, but it'll be a different kind of body.

Richard Rohr: I think where we all get confused is this notion of time and body, matter and energy. Now, Einstein is trying to help us with that. I'm not sure most of us are smart enough to know, but maybe time is an illusion. I don't know how to go there. My mind doesn't know how to go there. But I hope just that little reflection shows again—I hate to sound so Christian—but where Jesus was right. I'm not a Platonist saying body dies and spirit is eternal. I'm saying the body expressed my spirit, and God loves that embodiment and will honor that embodiment in some shape, in some form that we don't need to worry about.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It reminds me too of the kingdom of God is here but also not here, not yet fully here.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes. That's very good.

Paul Swanson: It's that subtle body—

Richard Rohr: That's very good.

Paul Swanson: --in Jesus's language.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think for so many of us, as well, there's an experience of those who have passed on, loved ones that have passed on—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Go ahead with that.

Brie Stoner: --of sensing their—I don't know how else to describe it—but their essence or their energetic signature in a way that is very particularly them, that makes you feel a sense of I don't know what's on the other side, but I can tell you I have sensed my grandfather or other teachers who've gone before, that every now and again, it's like they show up, or I can feel them in the room, or there's that sense of connection. I'm sure many of our listeners have had those moments, too.

Richard Rohr: Yes, almost everybody.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. There must be something. There must be something of us that uniquely lives on. Who can say? Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That brings us to potentially one of our favorite questions.

Brie Stoner: Yay.

Paul Swanson: We were just so delighted by this one.

Richard Rohr: Wow. I can't wait.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: This comes from Adam from the United Kingdom. It's a bit of a setup, and then an unpacking, and then a couple of questions here, Richard, so I'm going to read through this.

Brie Stoner: Okay, go ahead.

Paul Swanson: I have been reflecting on your comment that there are 10 banquet metaphors and one courtroom scene. The sheep and the goats does end on a very threatening note, but I have noticed for a long while that the ending doesn't fit the internal logic of the parable. While it presupposes the great chasm of Luke 16:26, the kingdom criteria that Jesus's words outline are all about the crossing of boundaries to shrink the distance between rich and poor, clothed and naked, free and imprisoned.

Brie Stoner: Oh, I love that, "shrink the distance."

Richard Rohr: "Shrink the distance." That's very good. Then why would he then expand the distance right after doing that?

Paul Swanson: Right, right.

Richard Rohr: Go ahead. That's wonderful. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Then Adam continues with:

The parable ends with the eternal not emphasized, but Jesus's words require, that those in paradise would immediately seek to mingle with the condemned. They would do so instinctively and intuitively. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been selected for paradise. It makes sense to me—

Richard Rohr: God, that's good.

Paul Swanson: Isn't this good?

It makes such sense to me that such a cycle of healing, of crossing and re-crossing boundaries requires eternity to operate and never resolving itself in a neat, dualistic way, but uncovering new layers of truth and divine mercy. In my imagination at least, it would be a perichoresis of mercy, which is never exhausted—

Richard Rohr: Wow! Wow!

Paul Swanson: --with truth and mercy, yes and no, acting almost like magnetic poles within God. Please, could you say something about how you see this?

Richard Rohr: I can't say it nearly as good as Adam just said it. If we can understand restorative justice with our little human minds, how could this not be the nature of infinite love? How could God be satisfied with a dead end to what he created? What allows you to be in paradise, so called, is the willingness to leave paradise—I'm again being too literal, but people get the point—to visit those imprisoned, which is what the New Testament says Jesus did, the harrowing of hell, to visit the imprisoned. That is just wonderful. You've given me a lot to meditate on.

Brie Stoner: That phrase of that eternity, or that crossing and re-crossing boundaries, would require an eternity to fulfill itself.

Richard Rohr: That, too, oh.

Brie Stoner: I mean, oh, man, that is so good.

Richard Rohr: Wow. You've given us a gift, Adam. I hope by repeating it here and swallowing it with great delight we're handing it on to some other people, too.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Adam has a second question here that I wonder if you might want to comment on, too, Richard, where he says:

Where might we find echoes of the process and practices such as soul friendship, meditation, or confession, that practice of re-crossing and crossing the boundaries? Where do you find echoes of that process and those practices?

Richard Rohr: Every act of forgiveness, which is-- No friendship persists or is rightly called friendship if it hasn't gone through several forgiveness's. That's how you know their love is unconditional. So, it's a crossing of a boundary, so much as if it's saying, forgive me, that the boundary now doesn't matter. We've crossed it together and let go of what was largely a self-created hurt. Or even if it wasn't self-created, I'm not going to let me destroy me, or bother me, or ruin our relationship. That is excellent.

Brie Stoner: Meditation.

Richard Rohr: Go ahead, please.

Brie Stoner: I was just going to say, for me there's something in the quiet process of observing myself, and my own tendency, and my own thoughts that is an experience of forgiveness in and of itself within, because I fight it, and then I fight myself doing it, and then I have this perfectionistic notion of, "Oh, wait. I'm supposed to be letting go of thoughts. God, I really suck at this." But then also, there's something that is being developed in me through meditation, which is a softening toward myself, a forgiveness of my own humanity, an observation—

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: --of my own implicit actions and tendencies that then allows me to cross the boundaries with the other with greater ease, or at least with greater sense of recognition. Like, "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I do that, too."

Paul Swanson: I love that he had confession in here, too. I mean as a Protestant, it's not something that I

practice with a pastor, but just amongst friends or my partner.

Richard Rohr: Yes. It doesn't have to be—

Paul Swanson: It can be such a healing re-crossing into the relationship, right, where like a wound has been created and the distance that can happen when it's not acknowledged. Then those moments of confession, of acknowledgement, and honoring the vulnerability and the broken trust, and that chance to re-cross back into the relationship between the two. I mean those are some of the holiest moments of my life, and I think Adam gave me language in a way that—

Richard Rohr: Yes, he sure did.

Paul Swanson: --I didn't have before.

Richard Rohr: I don't think I'll forget it. It gives me a new notion of eternity as this infinite space that God is going to give us to allow us to absorb what we have done to one another, how we can let one another out of our prisons, how we can redo it. This is eternal life. That's rich. Wow, that's very rich.

[music playing]

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Paul Swanson: That's it for today's episode of 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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