

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 6

Embodiment

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 our neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts. I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: We're staff members at the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst adopting stray cats, rocking out to Queen with my kid, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the sixth of twelve weekly episodes. Today we're addressing your questions on the theme of embodiment. How do we live into this incarnational worldview?

Paul Swanson: Well, Richard, today we are going to talk about embodiment and all the different manifestations and conversations that come up when we begin to think of ourselves as incarnate, as embodied beings. There are some themes that came up a lot as we sifted through the questions and one of them was around the energies of masculine and feminine. So, we wanted to kick it off here with this question that deals with the feminine and masculine from Susan from Oak Hill, Virginia:

One of my biggest spiritual challenges is the tension between the masculine and feminine forces in my life. Richard addresses what I believe to be the gifts of both. How can we—and is it still possible to—hold these gifts of disharmony while also seeking to find reconciliation and transformation in the period of waiting?

Richard Rohr: What a lovely phrase, “gifts of disharmony.” It tells me she's got it already. She's coming to the “reconciling third,” which is at the heart of everything we try to teach here at the center that if you let things stay at their static male, female, you're never going to get very far. They will become competitive and oppositional. But a “gift of disharmony,” you need a little asymmetry, a little off-ness to be recognized on both sides of any equation. And that, hopefully, calls both of us, first of all, to some humility about what we know and what we don't know, and who we are and who we're not, and leads us to what we might call the “reconciling third.” That's why I think this whole discovery of gender, I mean, National Geographic had an issue, which is not a lightweight magazine, you know, with genders and pictures of various people who all look like human beings with their stories inside. I didn't read it in depth, but we're revealing things that certainly when I grew up, I didn't even know the word “gay.” Well, it wasn't common in the forties and fifties, but then we moved into “transgender,” “cisgender,” and each time you've got to find the definition of it. It's just like coming into a whole world of mystery, which is undeniable once you meet a person. My gosh, where have they been? How did they suffer? I especially think that of transgender people. How did they suffer in previous history? Now, my suspicion is the use of that word “eunuch” in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, was already that biblical recognition: there are peoples who are neither one or the other. You see this much more visible and accepted in India where they walk around, openly effeminate like the native

peoples had the Birdash here among the Navajo.

And one of our Navajo brothers told me this, that instead of this person being excluded, they were considered to be the higher, just the opposite of us. They were considered more likely to be the medicine man in training, or medicine woman; healing woman. So my, what has been exposed in the last thirty years to show us how utterly ignorant we were. And it's as good an example of anything of the dualistic trap. I know I must feel like I'm beating it to death, but you just see it again, and again, and again. And so, I love this phrase that Susan uses—to hold these gifts of disharmony. It's asymmetry that makes something beautiful. We were just talking about Japan before we started recording and what an aesthetic culture it is. I got to give a number of retreats there, and they love the asymmetrical. If you're walking into a private home or park, you'll never have an angular sidewalk; it must be curving.

It's not efficient at all. And then in those curves are planted trees and rocks that are asymmetrical. It's nothing like the French garden or the English garden that's, you know, very symmetrical; almost obsessive symmetry. If you go to European gardens, you know, it's just the opposite. No, everything is a little bit of surprise like nature itself is. I mean, we'd all have to admit that every tree, if we look at it long enough, is asymmetrical. There's never a perfect balance. So, gender is emerging in our time as a huge teaching tool for about ourselves, and about the world, and one another, and maybe that's why there's so much pushback although it's lessening, at least in our culture, every year it seems, as the undeniable is becoming undeniable. Yeah. But I just keep thinking of the suffering that people must have gone through. On my huge collection of aunts and uncles—

fourteen on one side, twelve on another—I now am pretty certain there was a gay and a lesbian aunt or uncle on both sides. I don't think that would have ever entered any of my family's mind. They didn't have a concept for it. But they never married, and they ended up being rather good caretakers for my grandparents. It was a wonderful gift, but what sad and lonely lives they must have lived because they were lonely, I'm sure, because the idea of going out for a night with a friend, there was no such thing as that. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Brie Stoner: It seems as though that denial of the body that we've so adhered to in Christianity ironically being a, you know, religion all about incarnation.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: We've been disembodied for so long that that denial of the body has created so many deep wounds and problems for us, not just as Christians but as human beings, because I think Christianity has impacted so much of society. So you see this kind of mind/body split and the denial of our physicality. It makes me think of that, um, that line from Mary Oliver, like, you know, when she says I want to let the soft animal body love what it loves.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yes, "love what it loves." Yeah.

Brie Stoner: It's just, those words hit so deeply, because I think she describes it poetically so well: "the soft animal body." There's like a return to a compassionate view of, "Oh, yeah, these vessels that we're operating in are expressing something important and sacred.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I have nothing to add. I think that's so well said. My mouth was just open.
[laughter]

I think, part of that, that speaking to that complete acceptance of just the fullness of humanity, which includes these different energies, right, and the way that I think, particularly in the West, Christianity has said, "Stay in your lane," you know? "This is what a man looks like. This is what a woman looks like, and there's nothing in between."

Brie Stoner: Fear binaries.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And even to think about for those who identify as cisgender men, how do you incorporate the feminine when masculine culture is telling you, "No. No. This is what a man looks like. You need to aspire to that."

Richard Rohr: Yeah, and what he does to his behavior, his family roles, all determined ahead of time. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: And then we walk around living half-lives, because we're only identifying with half of ourselves, half of the energy.

Richard Rohr: At best. Yes.

Brie Stoner: At best, yes. So, segueing then into this next question, speaking to the division between mind and body and the messiness of bodily-ness that we often would rather not look at, Vicki from Perth, Australia asks a really amazing question. She says:

Since engaging in menstrual cycle awareness where I track my cycle and what is happening to me physically, emotionally and spiritually, something deep within me has been awakened. I'm beginning to be more in tune with my inner voice, with God who lives in me. I feel myself as more of a woman, more incarnate and I can feel more fully the Christ presence, and I am more aware of a divine feminine. Our body as women has a natural rhythm. It reminds us that there are times to play, create, to love, to initiate, but there are also times to rest, to let go, to speak truth, and be still. My faith has taught me that, but my body is teaching me in new ways. I would love to see more Christian theology and teaching around this area—the embodiment of the Universal Christ in a woman's menstruation. What does Sophia still have to unfold for us in a more open discussion about this kind of embodiment?

Richard Rohr: Well, who am I as a man--

Brie Stoner: Richard, would you like to give some reflections on menstruation? [laughter] You have a lot of experience in this area.

Richard Rohr: Who am I Oh, my gosh, just her saying it so gently and kindly, you know, there's no accusation, there's no shaming, it's just, "I'm discovering something, and it's good." But, most of us were given such an aggressive stance of denial and repression toward our body, to come back out of that and to say embodiment

is good; and as a teacher, this is just a whole new kind of Christianity. I have that quote somewhere in the book, don't I, from Nikos Kazantzakis "Someday Christianity will discover the other part and honor the body as well as the soul." If you find it in a moment, you can read it. It's at the beginning of some chapter. I forget what I wrote.

Brie Stoner: One of the things I so appreciate about her question and the way she asked it, is that you can see that for so long, and especially as women, we've been taught to feel shame about bodily-ness and it's been a tool of oppression. It's been a tool of keeping us disconnected from ourselves and disconnected from each other. And, you know, I mean, Vicky, you're already doing this. I feel like you're already giving us a Christian theology on the embodiment of the Universal Christ in our cycles. Even the way you're describing that there are times to play, to create, to love and initiate, but there are also times to rest, to let go, to speak truth, and be still. And I think that's one of the things that so many of us are longing to plug back into even when we talk about the desire to be more connected to nature and seasonality.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: It's that we realize that there's a natural rhythm to life, and that we're extremely unhealthy in our culture and how we live, and how we work, and how we think that we don't respect that natural rhythm and flow; that we're not giving room for letting go. We're just pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing, achieve, achieve, achieve. So, yeah, the, the rhythmic quality of our cycles I think has a lot to teach us as the cyclical nature of everything in nature does as well.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: We thought of the body as only the shell, you know, it's only the shell and so there became a dismissive quality to it. It's going to die; therefore, it isn't worth looking at, or trusting, or listening to. We just found the quote, it's on the beginning of chapter nine from Nikos Kazantzakis, his marvelous book, Report to Greco, and he says, "One day the religion of Christ will take another step; another step forward on earth. It will embrace the whole man. [Forgive his exclusive language.] It will embrace the whole man, all of him, not just half as it does now in embracing only the soul." Only the soul, yeah. And you hear me say in the book, "Why do we say body of Christ, body of Christ," and we tell people to eat it, which is I think intentionally meant to be shocking, sexual, cannibalistic.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: Use all the shocking words to get us beyond this, but that's why you've heard me say for years why my history professor said we were more influenced in many ways by Plato than by Jesus. And that sounds like a terrible overstatement, but when you think about it, it's pretty true—body was bad; spirit was good—because body died/ And that body let us on the journey and the body was the place of the training ground, the school of suffering, of delight, but we always thought of it as the shell instead of the participant. It wasn't making the journey with us as an equal teacher.

So, this is one of those many things that tell me we are still in early stage Christianity.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. When it comes to that Richard, of the split that is often even just celebrated between the body and the soul religious culture, what would you offer for those listening as ways to begin to cross over that split to see the wholeness of body, mind, and spirit and to not disembodiment on this path of transformation?

Richard Rohr: I remember talking, this was in the seventies back in Cincinnati, to a marriage and sex therapist. I don't know what I was talking to him about, I wasn't married, maybe he came to me for something, but he said that he had to counsel couples in the middle of their life, the middle of their marriage, where the spark had gone out of it, there wasn't much affection, or whatever to spend time, deliberate time, touching one another with no movement toward intercourse. Simply the gentle touching at great length, you know, looking, perhaps speaking, but stop this goal toward ejaculation in the male case, especially your orgasm in the female. It's just, "This is good. This is the body of God." And he claimed to me personally, he said the results of people who do this over a period is astounding; just astounding, because they rediscover embodiment in an inherently respectful way that this is good. This is the body of God. This is something that is an end in itself. But, he said he had to take away the end of orgasm and intercourse so that we could discover the medium is the message, that the body in its capacity for delight, for affirmation. And, you know, you think of what's happening in our—thank God in a way—but this Me Too Movement, I mean, do you listen to the news a single night where the word sexual abuse is not used? It's just we're tiring of it, but it's almost, I think, the body's revenge and not being affirmed, validated, and seen as good.

It's everywhere. So, I don't know if I ever used that word before, but it does feel like the body's revenge on the spirit and the soul: "If you're not going to honor me, I'm going to get your attention by showing how sick the body can become; how angry the body can become." And I think women are way ahead of us on this, because they've been on the painful end of it again and again seeing that this man is not loving me and to call this love making is just a total abuse of terminology.

Brie Stoner: It's interesting that we forget that these ideas of separating mind, spirit, from body, or body from soul, are just abstract theories. We've somehow decided that that's, you know, a concrete reality, then we operate from that reality. And, you know, your phrase, "the body's revenge," it's almost like we're seeing the results of that unhealthy philosophical framework. And I just wonder for me, when I read the way you talk about the return toward an incarnational worldview, it feels so healing and such a concrete response and a direct response to the gap that has been created by all of these splits.

Richard Rohr: Splits.

Brie Stoner: All of these, you know, "there's this, there's this, and there's that," and, you know, they don't interact. I don't know that that tripartite way of looking at being human is helpful anymore.

Richard Rohr: No.

Brie Stoner: And, and I feel like Christianity still relies on it so much that I think it's another one of those things that we're going to have to really heal and look at and turnover if we're going to

continue.

Richard Rohr: We're at the end of a long period of analysis over synthesis, where analysis was taking things apart, setting them—you just said it—in your separateness and working with it there. And now we know there's no such thing as anything living outside of an ecosystem of relationships. There we are back with the Trinity again.

Paul Swanson: Right. That's what just popped in my mind was the way that you're unpacking the Trinity as this flow, right, that the distinction actually can be problematic at a certain stage as you tried to understand that same thing with the human when we try to separate into three separate categories. I'm always amazed by the way our theology reflects our anthropology in so many ways and the way that that interplay, when one gets healthier, it's tends to deeply impact the other. And I think your work on the Trinity has helped with that owning of embodiment, as well, instead of that dissection.

Richard Rohr: I hope so. That even God needed embodiment it seems if "Let there be ... Let there be ..." and it all became forms of visibility. And the first day is, "Let there be light," so you can see the visual beauty and even the visual suffering of the world. Oh, it's amazing.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I wonder, too, if this isn't why so many of us have migrated toward—with great hunger—the mystics, you know, to want to learn from them, because they represent an unmediated experience of God that is embodied. It's an embodied experience of God. And it sort of reclaims the body as a location, the locus in which that kind of revelation can happen after so many years and millennia of just thinking that revelation has to happen, you know, for those of us who are in probably a more Protestant realm, but that revelation has already happened. It's done, or—

Richard Rohr: It ended with the death of the last apostle.

Brie Stoner: Right. There it is. --or, that it only happens intellectually through scripture, or you might receive consolations or—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

--messages from God, but it's somehow disconnected from bodily-ness and being. It's not experiential; it's more intellectual.

Paul Swanson: And that to me is the draw of pilgrimage that we're seeing resurge with—what's the one in Spain, again?

Brie Stoner: The Camino; the Camino del Santiago.

Paul Swanson. Yeah, where everyone seems to be going that direction because it is an embodied way of practicing, right?

Richard Rohr: It's amazing. I must get a letter every month on someone's report to me on the Camino. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Well, we're going to keep going here with this body/spirit split conversation with a question from Angus from Ontario.

My father passed away last year. I was with him throughout the process. The departure of his spirit from his body was stark and profound. After he passed, I remember moving around his body trying to see my dad. I couldn't even find an angle that looked like him.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Paul Swanson: Since then, I have felt a deep disconnection from body and spirit. On the one hand, I have never been more confident of the Spirit's journey with God, but I'm left saddened and confused by the disconnection of the body. I have felt that my body is just my vehicle for however long I am here, but surely there's a holiness to it that I am missing or at least not articulating. I rarely go to my father's grave rather feeling his presence in other places, such as his workshop that I now steward. But I like the idea of it as a place of reflection and conversation. I'm wondering if Father Richard could address his feelings of this connection and the Catholic/Christian response to the body/Spirit divide.

Richard Rohr: Boy, I hope we already in the last fifteen minutes have been responding to this. We just keep circling around this mystery of embodiment:

“the seeming departure of his spirit from his body was stark and profound.”

I guess those are the tears at a deathbed that what seemed like one now seems to be totally separated, and we spend the rest of our life trying to put them back together again: “How does he live? Where does he live? Does he live?” That's why grief work is just one of the very best entrance ways into the spiritual journey, because it's not a problem that you can logically solve. We were talking about it a bit in the previous recording, this whole notion of how we have made them disconnected, so maybe I'm just repeating myself.

What I keep getting in these wonderful questions that have been sent to us is you can see in every one of them, and I'm not trying to be nice to them, they already have the beginnings of the answer. I don't know that I have-- You're on the right course like he's finding him in the workshop.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: “I don't need to go to grave.” That's very New Testament, you know, although they first go to the grave, but then they find him everywhere else, even in the element of bread; in the company of people. That's the transference that I believe has to happen.

So, I don't know that he could ask for me to clarify this connection if he hadn't already experienced this connection. All I can really tell him to do is, yeah, trust it. You're right. You're right. This is the resurrection of the body that in some ways makes the person more real—not in all ways, but in some ways—more real after death than before because they're with you all the time; not their body, but their spirit. And it becomes a kind of energetic field that we call “embodiment.” Isn't that amazing?

So, if we have had no respect for embodiment our whole life, I bet we wouldn't access it

quite so easily, or long for it, or trust it, or allow it. Yeah. I even remember a priest when we were teenage boys speaking of the genitals as the “dirty parts.” “Don’t touch your dirty parts or anybody else’s dirty parts.” What? And, of course, we just believe what these elders are saying, “Oh, okay.” Talk about being split. I mean, everything is physical. That’s all we see. And what we’re saying in the Universal Christ is the respecting of that physicality in its wholeness is to see Spirit.

Oh, that’s good. Not the, “Oh, that’s just a piece of wood.” (I’m looking at a piece of wood in our beautiful beamed ceiling here.) It’s not just a piece of wood. It’s an epiphany into beauty, into life that all grew out of the earth. You can still see the knots on the wood where branches came out of the tree. Suddenly it’s a living organism that we’ve made into something that protects us from the elements, but that’s beautiful. But unless you take what we would call a contemplative moment to stop and say it’s not just a roof, it’s a living being that God made and yet we made.

You know, when we raise the bread and the wine at the beginning of the mass, we say this prayer from the Passover meal: “Blessed that are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness, we have this wine to offer: fruit of the vine [came from God] and the work of human hands.” It’s both. And we say the same about the bread directly from the Passover meal. And the good people say, “Blessed be God forever.” But there the synthesis is spoken. It’s God, but it’s us cooperating with one another. That’s the incarnational mystery. So, I hope that’s some kind of an inadequate response to Angus’ beautiful comment.

Brie Stoner: I wonder if we were to just for a second suspend the idea that we were like souls in a holding vault that then got shot down to earth and then got encased in these bodies, if we could just suspend that assumption for a while and consider them all as intertwined and interconnected, as the rest of reality seems to be, then maybe we could see our bodies as expressions of the inner soul. In other words, I think about the Velveteen Rabbit, you know—

Richard Rohr: Oh, I remember reading that when I was young.

Brie Stoner: --there’s a beautiful passage, and I’m going to butcher it, but it’s how do you know when things are really real? They’re real, when they are loved, and then they fall apart as they are loved. You know what I’m talking about?

Paul Swanson. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You’ve read that to your boys?

Brie Stoner: I haven’t yet actually.

Richard Rohr: Oh, you haven’t. Okay.

Brie Stoner: But there’s something about the body that I think is deeply connected with the soul and the spirit, otherwise we wouldn’t see these psychosomatic connections. We wouldn’t see the ways in which, they’re discovering how holding anger in your stomach results in certain kinds of stomach. It has come out in sick ways, in power-hungry ways, in abusive ways, but now it’s overwhelming us. cancer, you know.’ All this to say, what if we’re here forming a soul with

our body; with our spirit? What if it's all happening at the same time?

Richard Rohr: That's good. That's very good.

Brie Stoner: And I know it feels crazy to talk this way because it's so different than how we think. But then it makes me think, well, if we're in the process, if we're here to incarnate all of it together, then when we think about death, we think about resurrection, then we're manifesting that incarnation just as Jesus did. I think about his question—

“I no longer see my father in his body. It doesn't look like him. And yet I'm experiencing him everywhere else,” doesn't that sound like the story of the resurrection of Jesus?

Richard Rohr: It sure does.

Brie Stoner: It's like the cook on the shore, and the gardener, and the—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: Maybe there's something to this process that, but makes us so real, that God is making us so incarnate in this world that when we die, we join God in everything everywhere else. I mean, maybe. Who knows, right? But that's a comforting thought for me when I think about that moment when you look at a loved one who's died and you can tell, oh, this body, it doesn't look like them anymore. But you do experience them everywhere else.

Richard Rohr: Anybody trapped in a, “Oh, that's just a body” worldview would not have seen Jesus as a divine figure. It's the same dilemma in seeing any other member of the body of Christ. If I'm going to insist on your just Paul, you're just Brie, I won't get very far with knowing who Paul is or who Bree is by stopping at embodiment as just a shell. And we live in a world where the materialist worldview—I talk about that at the end of the book—really dominates so much so that Christianity is finding it hard to communicate its own position because our people are so materialistic they don't know how to put matter and spirit together. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's no wonder when you look at the climate change crisis we're in.

Richard Rohr: Very good. Go there.

Paul Swanson: We can't see that disconnect of the way we've perpetuated this and that Christians aren't even on the forefront of the one saying, “Hey, we have to change our entire way of participating in the world because it's killing our planet.” I think about that split often as I, you know, what does it mean to raise children in a way where I want to pass on this type of spirituality and theology where it becomes a sense of wholeness versus this is about getting you into heaven. If you could bring a few friends with you, that'd be great. Like, really seeing it as a planetary project.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It reminds me of some of what we were talking about in one of the previous episodes about what if there's an eternal consequence to our actions? Maybe that's what the concepts of heaven and hell were about. But again, because we've split everything apart, we didn't see the connection of eternal consequence in this life, in, in the future, what we're building, what we're doing, how we're acting; I mean matter matters. You know, that phrase that you

use and others use, it's like, matter matters. Why is that so difficult for us to accept? Why is it so hard?

On that theme, Leah from New York brings up the whole teachings of the Course in Miracles, and she says:

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Brie Stoner: A Course in Miracles teaches that physicality is an illusion; suffering and illness are errors in thinking and that Jesus didn't suffer on the cross because he knew "I'm not a body." I have many friends who are totally dedicated to this path. They wear tee shirts with bold letters saying, "I'm not a body." My friends tell me this is TRUTH [and she capitalized truth; all caps TRUTH], that it's Jesus's correction to Christianity. But I'm convinced of an incarnational worldview. Can you address the enormous popularity of A Course in Miracles, which I understand to be a spiritual worldview that claims to be dictated by Jesus and the truth about God?

Richard Rohr: Well, I have to start by pleading a good degree of ignorance. I didn't know the Course in Miracles taught that. I'd always heard their good teaching about forgiveness. And so, I've often praised the Course in Miracles that we didn't teach forgiveness enough, and they put it center stage. But, remember at the end of the book where I talk about the four worldviews.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: If what Leah says is the case, and I have no reason to doubt it, this is what I term the "spiritual worldview": "I'm not a body," and almost taking delight in it. "I'm not limited to my body," I could agree to that, but saying "I'm not my body," no, "I am my body." It might be a stage of teaching. I mean, I think we were all taught early that my soul's going to live forever, my soul is going to go to heaven, and there are ways that that's important to learn. But that's early stage Christianity, it seems to me. When Jesus says, "Store up things in heaven," not in this world where rust corrodes and moths consumes, it could appear that he's making that distinction. And, remember, I always say you've got to start with dualistic clarity—body, soul—he's trying to get us to see the invisible, the nontangible, but then the final, mature teaching of Jesus is the two are operating as one in his body even allowing it to be crucified, and it is body that is resurrected. That's no small point, that his body is resurrected.

And so, if what she says is true, I don't agree with that. I am my body, but I'm not only my body. Yeah. Okay.

Brie Stoner: I think it's dangerous—and I also am not familiar with the Course in Miracles—but but any ideology that teaches us that suffering and bodily-ness isn't real, feels like a dangerous foundation for a lot of the type of injustice, oppression, abuse that we see in our world.

Richard Rohr: That's the perfect answer to that. Yeah. I didn't respond to that, but you did. "Jesus didn't suffer on the cross, because he knew 'I'm not my body.'" That's not true I don't think.

Brie Stoner: And I suppose, too, the things that make us most human, like we've talked before about how much suffering connects us to each other; how it opens up our awareness and brings us

into, you know, transformative moments like to think that, you know, (sorry; I'm sorry), but I am thinking about childbirth, and I'm like, oh, no, that suffering was real. That was very real suffering. and I was very much in my body through that childbirth process and yet, you know—

Richard Rohr: Yes. You weren't just saying "I'm not my body. I'm not my body. I'm not my body."

Brie Stoner. Right. I did the whole hypnobirthing, ladies. I really worked on that, like, to be deeply relaxed and all the rest of it, but the idea that we're trying to extract the messiness or suffering out of the human experience, when it just seems antithetical to this move toward a healing, and wholeness, and softening, and respect, and justice. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Show me a person that you think is whole who's also not embodied, right? Like, everyone that I look up to in that way, there's this full acceptance of their entire humanness; the wholeness of body and spirit together. I think whenever I faced that distinction in a person, especially in the spiritual world, you kind of get the sense of they're trying to pull one over on me, or it's a bypassing ticket to a spiritual truth that doesn't have that weight behind it because it is so separated from the human experience.

Richard Rohr: And on the other side, you meet what we unkindly call anal- retentive people, but rigid people, they're always deeply repressing things in their body or their body itself.

Paul Swanson. Yes.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Always! That is so obvious at my age. People who even in their body movements you can see the resistance.

You can feel the repression.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Here we have a question here from Rachel from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and this will kind of continue the thread of embodiment and also how others view us, and how we view ourselves.

In a culture that has defined the ideal is cellulite free, thin, and looking like less than, perhaps, 1 percent of humanity probably. look, how can we reclaim the joy of our bodies embodying with joy and gratitude for the magnificence of very ordinary, even that shows cultural bias: non-skinny, yet fully alive and wonderful human bodies.

Richard Rohr: I'm probably showing my own bias. I brought over this morning, because I'm collecting a number of things, a bunch of pictures of when I was young and handsome, and it's so neat not to need to be that way. So, maybe we need to listen to elders more who know they are their body, can accept in this case being overweight, as I am right now because of this dang pill I'm on—well, probably because I eat too much, too, but—

Paul Swanson: Those pills are just jelly beans.

Richard Rohr: --I'll keep blaming it on the pill. But, why doesn't it bother me? Is that laziness? And I've

been asking myself that, but my physical attractiveness, I know now at a much deeper level, is not me. So, do we need people who aren't—we used to speak of these thin women as "Twiggy." That's before your time.

Brie Stoner: That is a long time ago, Richard. I know what you're talking about and that's like a solid—

Richard Rohr: Thirty years ago. Twiggy? I don't know who the present Twiggy is.

Brie Stoner: There are a few.

Richard Rohr: It's not good. As you know, I was recently in Mexico, and you'd see these lovely young Mexican girls, just gorgeous, and it was so clear in that culture that as soon as they have a baby, they start broadening out, you know? It was even pointed out to us, since we're on Mexico, that the icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe, she's a rather medium-sized woman, and they said that is just affirmed. Some people have made this case in the whole Mexican culture that's the ideal woman, a woman who's borne children and has her body to show for it. So, our model is very recent, very limited, and very condemning.

Brie Stoner: It seems that part of our issue here with bodily-ness is also just change. You know, we're so afraid of aging, of changing, of growing older. And I feel like society has, created an ideal out of a young body, whether it's male, or feminine, or female or, any gender. It's the use of the thing that we're looking toward, and just how unhealthy that is in terms of our own journeys of change, you know?

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Like, how much disrespect it shows to ourselves, to our bodily-ness, to the whole way of everything for us to somehow try to freeze time on one particular segment of our lives as though we could keep it that way forever.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: And I think kind of back to something you said, Paul, the women that I have met in my life that are most alive and most free—and I really want to emphasize the freedom—because that is what is absent in our culture of bodily-ness, or body obsession, you know, in terms of being thin, or young, or beautiful. We're not free when we're living from that obsession. But when I meet elder women who are free from that, it's the level of relaxation that I feel in my body and in myself, and the relaxation into being-ness period that I feel is so profound and is such a gift, and we need so much more of that—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --as an antidote to this madness.

Paul Swanson: Yeah,. I mean, in some ways, it's the gift of baldness.

Richard Rohr: Oh, thank you. Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: You know, I think about being a young man who went bald after having long blonde hair, you know.

Brie Stoner: Flowing. You forgot flowing.

Paul Swanson: Flowing, yeah; wavy.

Richard Rohr: You have to bring some pictures, Paul.

Paul Swanson: I should. I've got to bring them to this collection.

Brie Stoner: And I'll post online.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I was just thinking for you, Richard, you talk about how you don't care right now. When did that transition happen for you when you were able to kind of say, "You know what, these standards that are set by culture just don't matter"?

Richard Rohr: Somewhere in the '60s where I knew it was an impossible game to keep trying to look, you know, certainly when my hair was gone and when I lost my boyish figure, they say that begins at twenty-seven. Are you on the other side of twenty-seven?

Paul Swanson: I am, yeah.

Richard Rohr: At twenty-seven, you begin to lose your boyish figure. But you you can't help but want to be attractive, to go back to that, because it's what the culture admires. So, men face this too. It's not just women. Maybe it's not put on us as much, that's all.

Brie Stoner: Well, can I also present a foil to this, which is also another thing that I think we can fall into. I'll use myself as an example. In my 26-27 range as I was diving headlong into contemplation and the mystics, I sort of vacillated between indulging in my appearance to this opposite extreme of denying where all of a sudden I thought the spiritual thing would be for me to just shave my head and not care at all about how I look and in a way, which is true in some ways, but I went to this extreme, which I now lovingly call my contemplative frumpy phase where it was like, how can I make sure that you can't see a figure under here? How can I wear baggy clothing? How can I prove to everyone that I'm so spiritual by not wearing makeup and not caring, dah, dah, dah, dah.

And, you know, it was another extreme. So, somewhere between indulging and denying is a middle road of accepting. And I think for women, this is really hard because we vacillate I think in contemplative or spiritual circles between wanting to deny our femininity. I don't want to play into cultural, obsessive norms, right? But I also don't want to collapse into like back to my contemplative frumpy phases. In a way what I was doing was denying my femininity. I was trying to hide myself.

Richard Rohr: I can't think of a Catholic nun who wouldn't agree with every word you just said, because that's what we put on them, this temporary and probably appropriate thing, but imagine having to wear that your entire life and even to sleep in it, denying your femininity, denying your embodiment, pretending you don't have breasts, it's just horrible.

Brie Stoner: Or not wanting to look pretty for a date. It's like I don't want to guilt myself for putting on mascara one night, you know?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And the archetypes have been so much of the Virgin or the prostitute, right, in Christianity as those that have been like, I guess not an either/or, and I'm not—I know I'm in dangerous territory here even just naming that—but that's been like how far apart you either fall in the one category or the other.

Brie Stoner: And we live from that. I think that's part of the grief that I hear in Rachel's question, is that we're paranoid, or we're struggling to find the right avenue of just being in our bodies and to trust that this is good and to feel permission to express ourselves on occasion to want to get dressed up or not, but not become slaves to it either.

I think of the work of Mirabai Starr. She recently wrote a book about called Wild Mercy, the feminine path. She has some amazing passages, but in one of them she says, "You know what," she's like, "Yes, I meditate and I am one with the beloved and sometimes I'm sorry, I care about what my ass looks like in jeans." It's just so human of her to admit that, that when I read that I found myself laughing and relaxing and saying, "Yeah, let's make sure that we hold freedom all the way through and find that middle path of acceptance as hard as it is.

Richard Rohr: Well put.

Brie Stoner: Oh, [laughter] speaking of acceptance—

Paul Swanson: Are you looking at the notes?

Brie Stoner: No. I didn't even realize this was coming up next. Ernie from Ontario, Canada-- Wait, is that California? Yeah. Right?

Richard Rohr: Ontario, California.

Brie Stoner: So, Ernie from Ontario, California is asking this very question on acceptance. He says:

Do we have something that is built in that distracts and blocks us from accepting that we are fully accepted? And if we do, how do we get rid of it?

Richard Rohr: I think that is so real, and that's why Augustine, who had a lot of sexual self-hatred and guilt, coined that unfortunate phrase, "original sin." There seems to be something inherent in the human being that obsesses over its imperfection, which is an ego trip: what makes me think I in my separateness could be perfect? And really what I would say the only way to overcome it is union, not private moral perfection, but union with the whole body of Christ. We are holy. We are good. We are Christ.

It's an act of solidarity with the whole that allows you to accept your own privately being just a part. I'm a part, I'm not the whole. But our individualism here works against us again, because we want to independently be totally acceptable. So, it's an ego trip. I really think it is. Once we let go of that grain of wheat, as Jesus puts it, that set of boundaries, then my wholeness is in my connectedness, not my private perfection, not my private worthiness.

So, he asks is it built in us? Well, I've called it the fly in the ointment, that there does seem to be a problem in the human psyche, the human soul that sets us up for the drama, for the conflict, for the necessary tension. Yet it is very hard to accept that we are fully acceptable. And I've met very gorgeous women and good-looking men, intelligent men, intelligent women who suffer from it just as much. And those of us who are more ordinary will say, "Surely not you." They do. In fact, they almost have a race more to cover it up because they know that everybody projects onto them this, "Oh, you've got it all together."

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

And, Richard, can I ask you, what does that look like for you as somebody who people do look up to and know that those projections that that acceptance is not the acceptance that you're necessarily seeking?

Richard Rohr: That's been a problem much of my public life for thirty, forty years, that both people who hate me—there's probably some good reasons to hate me—but the one they picked out really isn't it. It's their own problem projected onto me, but on the other side, those who love me and think I'm this little God, if they only knew how imperfect—So, you've heard me say this before that you learn by the middle of life not to take either projection too seriously. People who think you are greater than you are and people who think you're a total hypocrite, fool, idiot. neither of them are people who usually know me. And I think that's why we all long for someone who knows the real me warts and all and can still believe I'm lovable. Don't we all, all long for that? Without that I don't know if there's ever grace to move ahead. And we started with that. I certainly started with that with my mom and dad. So, I got off to a good start that the whole room lit up when I ran into the room, you know, "little Dicky is here." We're all happy and we pass him around and kiss him, but then you spend the rest of your life wanting that moment to be repeated—someone else to pass me around and kiss me.

Richard Rohr: You don't have to constantly have a perfect mirror in your life. It's enough if it's there a few times. If you've never had it—now I have met people who, because they never had it, even from their parents, do feverishly search for it from God. I have met some people like that. They're wonders of nature, but for most of us, we need the mirroring from one other human being that fully accepts us in our lowliness, as Mary says in the Magnificat. People who think I'm wonderful who don't know who I am, it really doesn't do anything for me. Do you understand? But like you on the staff who've seen how ordinary I am, when you still put up with me, or like me, it means much more, and it's true for all of us, I think. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I'm just thinking about, too, when you said the baby, my son is seven months old now and the moment I walk into the room, he just starts smiling.

Richard Rohr: Oh, God, that must make you happy.

Paul Swanson: You just think, "I haven't done anything."

Brie Stoner: Pretty awesome.

Paul Swanson: I provide a lot less than his mother does.

Richard Rohr: You're daddy.

Paul Swanson: Every time I walk in, he just starts getting giddy. I love what you said that it doesn't have to happen all the time.

Richard Rohr: No, it doesn't.

Paul Swanson: It's enough that it happens where you have that felt sense of "I am fully accepted just as I am," and that could be enough fuel in the tank to walk through a lot of swamps and dark areas.

Richard Rohr: But only the contemplative mind will receive that, be imprinted by that, and own that. If you're just, "Oh, yeah, you like me." You have to taste love. You have to enjoy love. You have to let that love be imprinted on you.

Brie Stoner: I think, too, experiencing forgiveness, like the fullness of that moment like, and nowhere more for me than from my own children. I had a moment last week where, like you were, I was feeling like I'm a pretty great parent.

My son, Soren, who's nine, was hyperventilating about something, not literally, but just being dramatic and freaking out about some homework, and he's like, "Oh, I don't know if I'm going to get"--dah, dah, dah. And so, I walked him through this breathing exercise to slow him down, to calm him down, and we're doing this breathing exercise and I'm like, "Man, I am winning as a mom right now, like, I'm doing so great," and right in that moment as he's starting to calm down, Rowan, my six year old who's, you know, on the other bed in the room, he goes, "Mom, you know what sound you make when you're frustrated"? And I was like, "Uh, no." He goes [unintelligible sound]. And then he did this gesture with his hands outstretched and his eyes looking up at the ceiling [unintelligible sound]. And then he kept doing it. He did it like four more times, And it was so humiliating to realize like, "Oh, yeah—

Richard Rohr: How they've got all your mannerisms down.

Brie Stoner: They've got me down and they're seeing all my crap. As I put them down that night, I was so embarrassed and then I actually was giving them hugs, and I was telling them, "I'm so sorry that you see me frustrated sometimes. I'm sorry that I I'm not more patient or more kind," and the way that they receive that, and look at me with love and say, "It's okay, mama. I have hard days, too, mama. It's okay."

Brie Stoner: Isn't that beautiful?

Brie Stoner: That experience of forgiveness that I think, yeah, that helps me, and it doesn't feel like I can get to that acceptance within myself, but when I see it in them, I'm like, "Okay." I don't know. There it is.

Richard Rohr: That they know your ordinary and you're good.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Okay, we're going to shift gears a tiny bit here to talk about a question from Andy from Atlanta, Georgia, and he says:

I'm a lay minister and I encounter people who are so focused on issues of sexual immorality, talk about the evils of secularism and the sexual revolution, and how we need to uphold the church teaching on these matters. I never know how to respond. How does this, which is a concern for certain morals, fit within the contemplative context?

Richard Rohr: I know I've already quoted it twice, but let me do it once more. I find Ken Wilber's four-part distinction, so helpful. What he's talking about here is the first stage and the first necessary, and good stage, which he calls "cleaning up." Without an appropriate sense of boundaries, self-definition and even the ability to say no to yourself—we call it the "sacred no" in men's work, that's what early-stage morality needs to be. If you can never say no to yourself, you actually lose respect for yourself. You do. If you constantly give in and you say, "Is there anything here that has some kind of inherent value," that's the meaning of the necessary "sacred no." So, his parishioners are right in that, that we need to insist on a basic cleaning up. It's those people who go further, like Paul says, "I was the best of the Pharisees." He starts there with a kind of rigidity, I'm sure, about all the Jewish laws. But then as you continue to grow up, you realize purity codes—and that's the beginning stages of almost every religion—"Don't touch this. Don't go there. Don't align yourself with that kind of person." That is not yet love. It's the creating of the self, what I call the first half of life. So, you have to do that. People who create an ego are most prepared to let go of an ego. That's such a paradox. So, you want to affirm those folks, but you better not make that the be-all and the end-all of Christianity or you get into puritanism, moralism—we used to call it in Catholicism, Jansenism. It's all about purity codes, and I think we safely say, Jesus doesn't waste any time on purity codes. He assumes—well, you took care of that in grade school and high school—high school, especially, probably—learning the sacred no, learning appropriate boundaries, you know, you have a right to protect your body, and you don't invade other people's bodies.

Now, I know that takes the form of commandment, which is the only thing a seventeen-year-old can understand, filled with hormones: "You may not do that. It's a mortal sin." And now we say, "Well, you know, are we really upsetting God"? Probably not, but now we see that there's some real good social, cultural reasons. Wow. So, maybe your neighbors need you not to do that, and maybe you needed not to do that. So, we called it sin perhaps too easily.

So, cleaning up is the starting place. Those who do that well will be most prepared to go onto growing up. And that's most of your middle years starting, I hope, in college and going through the forties where you are just learning more and more about what works, what's helpful, what's real, what harms, what wounds. We go down all kinds of dead ends. We over identify with all kind of movements and groups: "This is the only answer; this one, or that one." And, usually the waking up, you're ready for the waking up around then. We talked about Pentecostalism on the first day. See, there was a waking up experience, but what they had to do is go back and clean up, and grow up, and most of them weren't willing to do that. They thought, "Well, I'm awakened."

You need all stages. The easy sequence is the Ken Wilber named—cleaning up, growing up—then you're ready to know what waking up means and what it doesn't mean. It doesn't

mean you're better than everybody else, right? It means I and the Father are one, and it's completely a gift of grace that is given to you, which then thrusts you naturally, not by guilt, not by shame, not by obligation, not by duty, thrusts you into the fourth stage of showing up: "My God, I've been given a gift of freedom and love, and with this kind of freedom and love, the only thing you want to do is hand it on to other people. So, that was probably more an answer than

Andy wanted.

Brie Stoner: It's so helpful because I think culturally we're obsessed with waking up but don't want to deal with the other stages.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: And especially, I feel like, in our millennial generation, everybody wants the quick access route to mysticism and transcendent experiences without the discipline of cleaning up and awareness of morality, the capacity, which you said, if you don't say no to yourself, you lose respect for yourself. Well, there is no discipline it seems—I shouldn't be so extreme—but it seems like there's such a lack of discipline in learning detachment or learning self-restraint, so then it just becomes this, everything goes, just find your bliss, like I'm just going to, you know, find my transcendent experience of oneness and then treat everybody like shit and then be a terrible person. But, look at me, I have my meditation and my, you know, transcendent moments.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I was lucky. My older brother one time gave me advice to make sure that you say your no to make room for the bigger yes.

Richard Rohr: That's lovely.

Paul Swanson: So, your no's help create that space to say yes—

Richard Rohr: That's lovely.

Paul Swanson: --and it's a different spin on discipline for me that has really helped hopefully for me in a way that that has created more potential.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And you talk about, Richard, that, again, back to our comment about if this is a relational universe that we're swimming in, then embodiment has to be about right relationship. It has to be about sensing the connectivity to the whole and living out of respect to that connectivity in some way. I feel like Josh from Portland asks a question that has to do with that connectivity as we wrap up here, he says:

My question for Father Richard is about his reference to the sacredness of the world—environment, humans, animals. He mentions respecting, protecting, and loving it. I was just curious if he was subtly referencing vegetarianism or veganism since it impacts global gas emissions, poverty, and animal abuse?

And I think his question here is, you know, pertaining to the bodies that aren't human and how do we need to be more responsible in our choices toward that relationality to the whole.

Richard Rohr: Once you learn the art of union and connection, it doesn't really matter what you're connected to. They all serve the same function, and your connection to an animal, or to the earth, or to a plant is serving the same function for your enlightenment as to another human being. Now, because we haven't emphasized that, people think the only meaning of the Gospel is to love other human beings. I guess I didn't have veganism, vegetarianism directly in mind, but I think that's a very good corollary. I don't think we want to now make a commandment out of it that then you go back to the purity code level, you know, but that some enlightened people are going to come to that conclusion that I just don't like ingesting animals—

Brie Stoner: Because of the whole impact it creates, yes.

Richard Rohr: Yes, what it's doing to the planet by having so many cattle. I mean, their analysis is invariably right. This can't continue if the world population is going to increase the way it's increasing. So, he's right.

I have always made a point of why didn't Jesus ever once emphasize diet at all? I think because he saw the danger of making it into a purity code, but I can't believe that he wouldn't have eaten very responsibly, caringly, contemplatively but just don't make a religion out of it, that's all, by which you will judge other people. And I must say very happily, most of the friends, in fact, all of them, that I have, seem so free about it. You know, I'll apologize. Now, I don't eat red meat, but because of my hypoglycemia, I need protein at most meals. So, I'll have chicken or fish, and I never feel judgment from my vegetarian friends, and I don't even need to explain it to them.

Brie Stoner: I think that the incarnational worldview that you're inviting us into helps us to feel a greater sense of embodiment and presence to our bodies in all of these ways that we've been talking about. But one that comes to mind as we're speaking about food, is the right relationship to food, but also the right relationship to pleasure, and joy, and abundance—

Richard Rohr: That's good. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --and how much that is also a part of being embodied. And as our closing question, I have a memory, I don't know if you have a memory like this, but I have a memory of sitting on the beach of Alexandria in Egypt, eating the world's most perfect orange, and I don't know why, every time I think about this, the sensation of pleasure of eating, I can put myself right back there on that beach. And I'm telling you that orange was like eating the sun. And so, I'm just curious, Richard, as we—

Richard Rohr: Do I have such a moment?

Brie Stoner: --close off this episode on embodiment, do you have a moment of deep joy, and pleasure, and tasting food that connects you in a way to everything?

Richard Rohr: You know, what just flashed into my mind when I was giving her a treat—I'm back in Japan—and I'm back in my little room. The window is open, and I'm looking at eye level at blowing grasses. I can still-- I think it was the sensitivity of the Japanese culture that made me more sensitive and everything is coming to life, maybe it's where I'm at, I'm in my forties then, but I just literally wanted to grab a clump of that grass, and eat it, and ingest it. It was

so beautiful. It was so wonderful. It was so it, whatever it is, I'm a part of it, and it's a part of me. I don't think I did, actually, but I imagine myself doing it, and wanted to do it in a way. I didn't deny myself. I finally got to the point where I could ingest its beauty without really eating it. [music playing] It's like tantric sex, you know, without really eating it. [laughter]

You better eliminate that.

Brie Stoner: That's so good.

Paul Swanson: That will be the episode title.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

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

Brie Stoner: The beautiful music you're listening to is provided by Birdtalker. If you're enjoying this podcast, consider rating it, writing a review, or sharing it with a friend to help create a bigger and more inclusive community. To learn more about Father Richard and to receive his free daily meditations in your electronic mailbox, visit cac.org.

Paul Swanson: To learn more about the themes of the Universal Christ, visit universalchrist.org.

Brie Stoner: From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.