

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 9

Reframing The Great
Commission

Paul Swanson: Welcome to Season 2 of Another Name for Everything, casual conversations with Richard Rohr responding to listener questions from his new book, *The Universal Christ* and Season 1 of this podcast.

Brie Stoner: As mentioned previously, this podcast was 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.

Paul T.: And I'm Paul Thompson.

Brie: 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 failing brakes, trying to make it to the gas station before you run out, and the shifting state of our world.

Paul: This is the ninth of twelve weekly episodes. Today we discuss your questions on the themes of *The Universal Christ* and how does that relate to the gospel and a new Great Commission.

Brie: Well, Richard, this podcast episode is very close to my heart having grown up as a missionary. We got a lot of interesting questions about what is the new Good News and the new commission? And, in particular, I want to kick it off from this question from Lisa from Kandern, Germany:

I grew up in a typical Evangelical church in Canada. World missions has always been a huge part of our theology. The Great Commission at the end of Matthew being fundamental to what we as Christians are to do—to go into the world proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples. As I've thoroughly enjoyed listening to you three dialogue, I'm struck with the almost audacious way that we've done this, this bringing our colonized Jesus to other nations in a way that is totally within our contextual, social, and national frame of mind often viewing those who we are coming to serve as the "lost." [She says]: Insert cringe emoji here. My husband and I currently work at a missionary boarding school in southwest Germany—

Brie: I have to pause here. Lisa, Black Forest Academy to any missionary kid is so well known. It was where I was going to go to high school.

Fr. Richard: Really?

Brie: Yeah

Fr. Richard: For heaven's sake.

Brie: I have so many friends who have gone there. So, she says:

My husband and I currently work at a missionary boarding school in southwest Germany teaching kids whose parents are missionaries in Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa. As I have been unpacking the container of the first half of life—and thank you, Richard, for this analogy—I've been increasingly uncomfortable with how we do missions and how we interpret what the Gospel really is. This narrow understanding of knowing God in

one transaction to gain salvation just seems so devastating to me now. So, my question is twofold: What is the true Gospel? What is that Good News that we're meant to spread, and what must missions look like in the world today?

Fr. Richard: Well, the true Gospel—who am I to put it in a form of words—but it is announcing that God has come to earth permanently to stay, that the transcendent world and the world here have become one world. As that famous passage in the end of Revelations puts it. So, I admit this utterly changes our notion of mission. But let me try to understand why God must totally understanding our way of working. If I wanted to create a great people, what I've got to do is get them outside of their country, their religion, their nationality, by saying: "Go give the message to everybody else," and then you will find yourself converted by the people you thought you were supposed to convert. We call it "reverse mission." And this woman is fully experiencing this; that, "My gosh, here I thought I was giving it, and I am." I don't want to take away that she has brought some good truth and love to the people she's teaching—but that we're always on the giving side and the others are always on the receiving side is a myth and even a lie. It's not true. And until that changes and we allow those we think we are teaching to teach us, the great flow of the Trinity and the Body of Christ has not begun to happen. But I can still understand why okay, to get this yeast flowing, I've got to get some fervent people on the road out of their world to think they've got the whole truth, and they are fervent enough, like your parents were to move to Spain from Michigan.

Brie: Yeah, well, Michigan and Indiana.

Fr. Richard: And Indiana. I mean, you've got to say they were beautiful souls that they cared enough about the larger world; other people. So, God's choosing some select folks here to go to the next step, and it usually takes a number of years. Your first years—and I learned this from my years of giving retreats to missionaries; Catholic missionaries—I can't remember a single exception to what I'm saying, a single, both brothers and nuns, and priests, that they would say it even stronger than I could, "You know, these people are giving me far more than I'm giving them."

Or, when I went to Nepal and the Jesuits were forbidden to baptize a single person, and they simply went there to give humanity a broadness of vision, admittedly, even to the upper class of Nepal. I just met a man from Nepal three days ago, and he said that very school where I gave the retreat now has been opened up, and they are allowed to. It was a real surprise to me that they don't impose Hinduism as the only religion.

Now, the Jesuits had to wait fifty, sixty years for that, but they have created the elite of Nepali society. They really have. They've educated the elite. Now, I know a lot of them will use it for their own purposes, but a lot of them will use it for bringing Good News to all the people, and I don't mean just talking Jesus language. I mean caring about the water. Nepal is a fifth-world country—low development; low resources—you can't get lower than that. And even when I was there, almost thirty years ago, all of the people that I met (that's a limited amount, for sure), but who were working on water projects, farm work, were graduates of this Jesuit school who had no freedom to make anybody Catholic. So, they had to wait fifty, sixty years. I don't know the exact year.

Brie: Well I think you're putting your finger on a really Important distinction, which is the

distinction between proselytizing and converting, and service.

Fr. Richard: Yeah.

Brie: And I think that's part of what I'm locating in Lisa's question, because growing up a Baptist Missionary, we were technically, according to all the churches supporting us, we were there to convert people, right? And yet my parents' work actually oriented towards service. They worked with the Spanish Government. They created anti-drug programs, a youth center—

Fr. Richard: Ah, they were doing it.

Brie: --they did basketball tournaments. My mom took care of some members of our community who were dying of AIDS in a time when that was just considered—

Fr. Richard: Wow.

Brie: --you know, nurses wouldn't even go in the room, you know?

Richard, Yes.

Brie: So, I think part of what's difficult for those of us who grew up Evangelical is that is so much of our entire storyline and worldview. We're here to bring this news via converting other people, bringing them into this theological mindset also it's a little bit colonial.

Fr. Richard: More than a little bit.

Brie: It's like let's go into these countries—I know. That's probably the understatement of the century. It's colonial. It is colonialism.

Fr. Richard: It takes a while to see that.

Paul: Uh-huh.

Brie: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: Don't hate yourself, yeah. Just—

Brie: Right. So, even when I look at my parents' work, they were oddballs because they wanted us as kids, my brother and I, to go to Spanish public school. They wanted us to be fully integrated in the culture. They invested themselves in relationships in a way that was very unusual because they believed in that kind of cultural humility. So, I guess, back to Lisa's question, for those of us who come from an Evangelical background, does the Gospel change from a theological conversion to how do I just serve people? Is that what you're saying? Like, it becomes just about serving humanity, serving people, serving the world, serving our ecology, nature, without needing to convert?

Fr. Richard: Let me offer a word previous to service—solidarity—and then let the service come

out of that; that the way God emptied Himself and came into this world is the way you, your parents, it seems, came into Spain. They let go of Midwest American culture and came there to live in solidarity with Spanish culture and all it was offering them. That led them to service.

If the service does not come from solidarity with, it is colonialism. It's your keeping your superior position, "I'm always the giver and they're always the taker," which maintains you in your superiority and your arrogance, and we can't do that anymore. But isn't it interesting that it took us this long in history to clarify those kind of things; and, I mean, our missionary orders are decimated because the earlier one was so vigorous in its goal and intention; Maryknoll being the grand example, they send nuns, and priests, and brothers to the whole world in the 1940s, and 50s, and early 60s, and then we had to face this "My gosh, they're giving to us." And that changes everything. Of course, the ego doesn't have all the confirmation now of being "I'm the higher one; the greater one, the smarter one, the one who is gaining heaven by doing this."

So, our egocentricity has been revealed. This doesn't mean we were bad people. We were, again, caught in a cultural matrix—that's why I keep saying evil is cultural, collective—and you went over there and identified with that cultural matrix. It seems that even AIDS occurred in that time, and your mother had the ability to stay with it wherever it's leading us. That's good. That creates big-souled people, and if you don't mind me saying it, creates people like you and your brother, who are now the beneficiaries of a much bigger world. You know, just staying in Kansas and thinking—not that everybody has to leave Kansas—but thinking that's the whole world is never going to create big enough people for the work of God.

Brie: I think one of the ironies of growing up as a missionary kid—and I wonder, Lisa, if this is an experience you have as well teaching so many missionary kids—is this phenomenon that they call "third-culture kid" where you don't really belong to one culture, and you don't really belong to the other, but you're somewhere in between. And I think the great irony of a lot of missionary kids maybe why Evangelicalism is now, maybe we're facing a crisis in terms of what mission—maybe; I don't know.—is because so many of us kids grew up with that experience of being immersed in a culture that we had been told was not our own, and we knew that technically speaking we were supposed to be converting people, and yet, how do you not then just fall in love with the culture you're in and experience Christ there and know that this can't be right; this can't be right. These people cannot be lost. I am not superior. How could this be?

Fr. Richard: When you meet one little Hindu woman, or in your case a Catholic woman, I guess—

Brie: All kinds of crazy Catholic people that I just fell in love with.

Fr. Richard: --and I can't deny that she's a good person.

Brie: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: I'm not the giver anymore; I'm the receiver.

Paul: Uh-huh.

Fr. Richard: Thank you.

Paul: And, Richard, when you started your response, the first thing you said was, "Who am I to put into the words the Gospel, which, of course, harkens back to what has been ascribed to St. Francis: "Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." That seems to be at the heart of a lot of what you're saying that orthopraxy can be the best evangelism versus the teaching and the conversion tactics.

Fr. Richard: Yeah. There's a whole order, the Little Brothers of Jesus, who just go to poor parts of the world and live there. No mission beyond presence. You want to talk about self-emptying to wake up each day and place one foot in the other.

Paul: Yes.

Fr. Richard: "What am I doing here," you know?

Paul: That's solidarity, right? Our next question comes from Danielle from Tucson, Arizona.

If all of the religions of the world describe God in some way, and one can know God from any religion, is there still a place for disciple making or evangelism? If so, what does that look like? If not, then the whole foundation of Evangelicalism crumbles. And, that is what I am trying to figure out: how to let go completely? My purpose shifts dramatically but then deconstructing is so difficult and so terrifying. I feel like my whole life has been a waste in many ways. How invested being in the world is being discarded, which is okay, but I'm so uncertain how to articulate where I am now.

Fr. Richard: What you see in Danielle is an utterly good energy and that's all that matters. It's your positive energy that changes reality. Your exact vocation, role, career, job, that's secondary, you know. It's your life task, but it's not really your life. And it's your life that generates more life. So, positivity is going to create more positivity, but she is—hallelujah—going through the second box of disorder. I don't know, Danielle, that we don't all have to do that to come to a point: "Was the first half of my life a big illusion"? That's what projects you into the second half of life. Somehow asking that question, "My God, I got it all wrong," and not hating yourself for it, that you were wise enough, humble enough, to stay on the path to come to this moment of this Damascus Road awakening has been the work of God, and it all probably had to happen that way.

I mean, certainly when I left Kansas and went off the seminary, I was a product of pre-Vatican II Catholicism that I clearly thought I was going to save the world, which appealed totally to a young boy's ego. I'll get educated so I can help others. Well, I was helping myself by getting a very, you know, admired career in that period of history. So, it was for very inferior motives, mixed motives, which is how we do everything. Don't hate yourself for it. That's why God is so essential to the equation, because God loves imperfect things and imperfect people who operate with impure motives. You and I don't know how to do that, but that you've come to this radical humility to see "My gosh, did I waste the first half of

life”? Deconstructing is so difficult and so terrifying. You can tell she’s in the belly of the beast right now. Beautiful. Hallelujah! That means you’re heading toward, an already largely in, reorder or the resurrected state.

Paul: That’s often after going through that deconstruction, right, Richard, would you say where you can see the gifts that you’re unable to see when everything looks like folly.

Fr. Richard: Just fake, fake, fake, I was a big fake.

Brie: Right.

Fr. Richard: You’ve got to go through that for a while. That’s the necessary humiliation. Humiliations wouldn’t be humiliations unless they’re humiliating. [laughter] That’s the only way they work their magic.

Brie: Right.

Fr. Richard: Where’s it’s got to pull out the rug from beneath what you had built your persona on; your identity on. And, in some way we all have to say, “I was all wrong,” but not fall into self-hatred, and only humble people will do that. That’s why so many of our saints and even the Bible says, you know, “The proud man cannot know God,” the proud woman, too, I’m sure, can’t, because they insist on maintaining that first persona in all of its glory and all of its delusion.

Brie: One of the things that I, um, feel like is kind of a sad symptom of the deconstruction process, of the disorder box that you’re describing, with a lot of my friends who are former Evangelicals is that I hear in them that language of “Huh, I was totally wrong,” or “I was completely duped.” And yet, part of the grief in that is that I think they doubt even the positive experiences that they had of God, and they kind of lump it all together, which I am hearing you say that that is part of it, that’s necessary, but to believe, like you were saying, Paul, there does come a time when you can look back on that period of your life, and actually feel the grace of those moments and they become true again. You don’t have to dismiss them or become cynical about them.

It’s like, so, my concept of Jesus was very Evangelical, and it was very much like my blankie o like, you know, Jesus is my boyfriend, but the encounters that I had with Jesus, those were real, and the encounters transcend even the language, or the pictures that I needed to let go of, but it’s hard. I think it’s hard and it’s sad because so many of us when we’re in that disorder place, we dismiss every experience we’ve had.

Fr. Richard: Everything.

Paul: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: It’s without both/and you can’t do any of these things. You can’t—I keep saying it ad nauseum—incorporate the negative. And, you see how it’s the ego at work again. I want to be a part of a perfect something. I will not be a part of an imperfect anything. But, you know, to just play on two words, what we can’t realize when we’re doing that, is we are not acting, we are re-acting, and re-acting leaves the other party, or event, or person, or

institution, in charge. When you act, you place one foot in front of the other with freedom, not because the previous step was totally wrong. It incorporates the previous steps.

So, how do we say it here: include and, thus, transcend. And the more you can include, the more you transcend. Once you see it, it's so clear, it really is, but we were so trained in exclusion. But to turn this boat around and say, "Let's move forward by inclusion,"—and even inclusion of the church that did us wrong—yep, part of the deal.

Judaism did Jesus wrong, you could say, at least some of the things he says about the Scribes and Pharisees seem pretty brutal. So, you have to believe that he was ravaged—let me use that word—by the Judaism of his time, and yet, it is very clear he never leaves Judaism. He's quoting the Psalms on the cross at the very end. "My God, my God," and he uses the Jewish name for God. So, he's our resurrection person. He's our archetype of reordering. Now, many have come after him, too. I don't want to limit it to him.

Paul: I think an example of—what we've all talked about here many times—is the, especially us who grew up Evangelical, our devotion to Jesus—

Brie: Yeah.

Paul: --and going through that deconstruction that all of us in cages need a little bit of space right now to be able to come through, and Jesus is much more freer to speak at so many more levels than when it was contained in such a way that Jesus was so ordered and, you know, in so many ways, probably so white and so just purely spiritual, and now the Jesus that I feel such deep devotion to is—

Brie: So much bigger.

Paul: --so much bigger.

Fr. Richard: So much bigger.

Paul: And, like, what a gift to be able to meet Jesus again. I think there's a book by that title, "Meet Jesus Again for the First Time" in a whole new way.

Brie: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: Well said. It probably is as hard for you—I'm just guessing—if you'd go to an Evangelical church next Sunday and listen to a typical sermon, as for me to go to a typical Catholic mass.

Brie: Oh, yeah.

Paul: Uh-huh.

Fr. Richard: I get it. I know what they're saying. I know what they're trying to say but, wow, are they saying it poorly. It's in such a tiny box, which sounds very arrogant. I know that. That's the danger of it, too, if that is said from an arrogant place, it's not so good, but eventually you want to say it from a sad place: if they only knew what they're missing out on, and I know even that risks arrogance.

Brie: Even just the ability that you're describing of being able to say, "First of all, to even be there let alone be able to say "I know what they're trying to say," it creates a lot of grace and okay-ness –

Fr. Richard: Yes.

Brie: --to let people be where they are without so much of that reactionary judgment that you were talking about before.

Fr. Richard: Reacting. Reacting is not acting.

Brie: That's so good.

Fr. Richard: Acting comes from freedom. Well, thank you.

Brie: So, to turn to some of the gifts of evangelicalism, we have a question from Janet from Gilroy, she says:

I work with at-risk youth in the school system. You shared religion at Spiral Dynamics level one is concerned with cleaning up an individual. I understand disillusionment due to that same religion's tendency to stagnate transformation; however, some children need to transform into level one because they are in chaos. The only religion that I see actively reaching out to these kids in the schools and community is evangelicalism. They offer refuge, support, and a message telling them they are loved. They are a grateful presence. What religion besides evangelicalism actively and effectively reaches out into the community to at least invite a non-religious person into stage one?

Fr. Richard: I can answer that quickly: Mormonism. Mormonism does the first half of life very well. So well, that they see no need or interest, forgive me, in the second half of life. They don't develop mystics. Now, they're breaking through in little ways, right now, in all fairness. And who would not be impressed by a Mormon group of kids, you know, not on drugs, not drinking, sticking together, helping one another? I mean, they put us Catholics to shame! See, and yet, it's a closed system.

Paul: Uh-huh.

Fr. Richard: So, I'm glad she's free to say and recognize that her evangelicalism is doing some good things. There was a little confusion, the three levels of Spiral Dynamics are not the same as cleaning up, growing up. They probably would overlay in many ways, but don't equate those two explanations. I probably use too many systems to try to explain things, but, yeah.

Brie: I think that the other thing that comes to mind in response to this question is some of what you've mentioned about parachurch organizations.

Fr. Richard: Go ahead.

Brie: I think to some degree we don't need to look backward to look forward. In other words, because there are wonderful efforts by the Evangelical churches, or Mormonism, I think the way you're saying this allows us to welcome, to be grateful for their presence, not to reject

and be like, “Oh, gosh, I wish there were something better than this,” but to also say I think we have an opportunity to embody and live this out ourselves. In other words, to create the kinds of level one maybe organizations, or group centers, or the youth centers. I think about the youth center that my parents founded, you know, it was very much to create a safe place for young people where they could just be loved, where they could just have a place to go after school. And so, I think in some ways we can learn from the Evangelicals in their capacity for outreach, and just for presence, and for love, and consider what types of organizations we might birth in our time.

Fr. Richard: I think you do fellowship. Do you still use that word a lot?

Paul: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: Yeah. You do it much better than Catholics do.

Brie: Oh, yeah.

Fr. Richard: When you're the dominant consciousness, I'll use Spain: “We're all Catholic here,” you don't need to do fellowship. You think you don't need to do fellowship but what you create is a very anonymous kind of Christianity, and this another one of the gifts of evangelicalism—creating small community.

Paul: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: And I can do nothing but praise you for it. Evangelicalism does so many things right. You don't grow—well, you do grow beyond it—you grow through it. Is that a better way to say it?

Brie: It is. It's nice.

Fr. Richard: Yeah, you grow through it, and collecting all these little jewels along the way, which prepare for the next stage of consciousness. And so, you might think you've left, you really haven't. I haven't left, really, my pious pre-Vatican II Catholicism in Kansas in a certain way, and people who know me, know that's true. I mean, I still get excited about the feast days and the liturgical seasons, and a beautiful piece of religious art or sculpture, still just infatuates me. It's early brain stem development, which you do not change. You do not change.

Brie: I think about some of what you've talked about Paul, the relationship devotion to Jesus—the closeness of the experience of Jesus and how for many of us growing up in the evangelical world, we do have such good training on an immediate access to God.

Fr. Richard: Yep.

Brie: It's there. You know, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus, your daily devotionals taught us discipline—

Fr. Richard: You got it. You got it.

Brie: You know, our love of the Scriptures taught us respect for tradition.

Fr. Richard: Respect for people--

Brie: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: --which we don't have much more in America.

Brie: I even think about our worship sessions, which I now somewhat cringe over because it seems so manipulative now, but I think how good it is to teach people to relax their rational minds and be more embodied and to breathe together, and sing together. These are good training.

Fr. Richard: Yeah. Because what really changes us is culture, not religion--

Paul: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: --and that was a culture that had many good aspects to it. Like when a young person is polite to me, I almost always know they were raised evangelical. [laughter]

Brie: That sounds like a stretch, but okay.

Fr. Richard: They'll say "sir." It's lovely.

Paul: That is so true. I found my love for community because having, you know, these little old ladies care for me in Sunday School or have an intergenerational community where people would know my name when I was five, ten, however old I was, and then as I got older to have mentors in high school who didn't matter that we were so different, but that outpouring of love and "I'm praying for you," and I think that is one thing that I haven't found as much in a lot of progressive Christian communities. They don't have that tightness.

Fr. Richard: I would agree.

Brie: Uh-huh.

Fr. Richard: As I said yesterday, we don't do devotion very well.

Brie: Huh-huh.

Fr. Richard: And we don't do dedication very well, and without that, there's not a lot of heart. When you pull heart out of the equation, and it won't be long lasting. Like, our Vatican II progressive thinking for all of its brilliance, we can statistically prove that Vatican II parents did not pass on their faith to their children. Almost all of them have left—not with anger, just with boredom.

Paul: So, this next question comes from a local. It's from Justin for Albuquerque here in New Mexico. He asks:

In regards to having an incarnational lens on the world, I've been deeply concerned about the rise in violent attacks in places of worship throughout the world—churches, mosques, and synagogues. It appears to me that the fundamentalist worldview that have succeeded in multiplying themselves effectively, while in the incarnational understanding remains on the fringes, how can we reverse this trend? Can the contemplatives evangelize? What might that

look like?

Paul: I think, you know, we've covered some of these ideas, but what do you think about reversing that trend of being on the fringes?

Fr. Richard: Yeah.

Brie: Like fundamentalism.

Paul: Yeah, that incarnational worldview is more on the fringe instead of a central lightning rod for what people think of when they think of Christians in the world.

Fr. Richard: Again, apparently it can be statistically proven that conservative groups with sharp edges, clear mission and message, clear in and out, communicate themselves better than others, because there is something clearer to communicate. Progressive groups—and let's put it in the political realm for a moment—you know, Tea Party Republicans have a fervor—well, we don't use that word anymore—have a fervor and finality about their worldview that on a certain level is much more—they have the truth then liberal Democrats will ever have. Look at our thirty-something liberal Democrat candidates, all of which are nice, but not in agreement very much. This is a dilemma I have yet to solve. And that's why I am glad I wrote the book *Falling Upward*, because the only way out of it is for first half of life, we do need the best of the conservative. People who start thinking they're in the second half of life like Vatican II kids, we all thought well we got the new church, but it wasn't really that heartfelt or that exciting. It was easy to join and easy to leave. If it's too easy to join, it will be just as easy to leave.

You had a little system, I'm talking to two evangelicals here, which was a little harder to join. It had sharp edges, clear edges, you know who you were and you weren't Catholic so you weren't whatever else. I'm afraid that's the way the ego has to form. It begins by, opposition is too strong a word, but what I'm not. Then it can enjoy the luxury, and the fruit, and the consolation of "But I am one with." I don't think that can come until you first experience the differentiation. So, I think Justin is right. I don't suppose contemplatives can evangelize. We're much better leading people into the stage of growing up, or stage 3 of waking up, but we don't know how to people how to clean up.

Brie: What's interesting about what you're saying is that I think it touches on the perceived sense of lax morality that can often accompany—

Fr. Richard: Perceived sense, that's a good point.

Brie: Yeah, that can often accompany contemplative circles or spiritual kind of, you know, I mean even the Wilbers Institute—

Fr. Richard: It's very true.

Brie: I think many people try to leapfrog over that first half of life container to get to this place where you can touch into that "I am one with everything" as a way to justify, you know, unhealthy behavior. So, I appreciate that you're making that distinction, and I also appreciate that there's a gift to conservatism that I think we need to name, which is values, belonging, I

think—

Fr. Richard: Discipline.

Brie: Discipline.

Fr. Richard: Liberals have no discipline. That's an overstatement, but I'm glad I made it. [laughter]

Brie: Now, Richard, don't be extreme.

Brie: So, here's a question from Richard in St. John, and I'm going to put a little bit of spin on it, if you'll allow me. He says:

How can we remain in our church families when the greater part of what we hear preached from the front and in bible studies centers around substitutionary atonement? It's so hard to not get all closed up and judgmental and then to end up feeling hideously superior. It's the opposite of how I want to feel. I would like my presence there to bring only love and grace, but I end up pulling back from so much because the roots feel so toxic. Advice on how to navigate this would be really helpful.

So, I'm going to let you answer and then maybe I'll—

Fr. Richard: Are these questions, are you quoting them verbatim?

Brie: Yes.

Fr. Richard: We have very articulate people writing to us, don't we?

Paul: Yeah, it's amazing.

Fr. Richard: I mean, again and again they're so articulate, I began to think they're brushing these up, you know, because most Americans are not very articulate, so this is certainly an example. Oh, his name is Richard. I can see why. [laughter] Richard from St. John, Indiana. [laughter]. Isn't that terrible?

Brie: How do we not become superior in our, you know, in our, "Well, I've got these people are way behind me. They just really don't get it. They don't get anything about the Universal Christ." How do we not become superior in our thinking, or dismissive?

Fr. Richard: Spiritual pride is the most devious and the most dangerous kind of pride, and there is an ego inflation that comes with spiritual awareness. I think that's why St. Benedict insisted on *lavora*, working with the earth as it was largely defined, as necessary accompaniment to *ora*—*ora* being prayer—and why the Zen teachers insist on Zen tasks even in the middle of a Zen retreat: "We want you to go and clean the toilets," and he's facing that. He names it so well: "hideously superior," because even if you have come to a new enlightenment, it was given to you by someone else. It says little about you. You should be grateful to someone but not thinking you are of a higher order. But, the ego goes through that, what Jung called ego inflation: the balloon blows up for a while. There have to be things in your life that puncture that balloon that let you know that your superiority is not leading you to be a more loving person. You have to have concrete experiences of that, that "I'm not more loving, I'm more

arrogant. I'm more falsely self-assured. I'm more judgmental." And I've certainly had to face that my whole life that it's a temptation every day when you stand up in front crowds like I have all my life being the teacher. Talk about ego inflation: "I know," and "I'm the giver of truth."

But remember, to see it as Richard here is seeing it, is sixty percent of the transformation, at least; at least sixty percent. It's not seeing it. I don't think he is going to be trapped into being "hideously superior," because he spotted it; he spotted the demon. Now, I don't know if he wanted us to center in on the notion of substitutionary atonement.

Brie: I think it sounds like me it's that tension point of how do I remain in a community that now teaches things that are so different from what I currently believe without being judgmental? It reminds me of some of the conversations we've had about how to stay in communities of faith, or do I leave. And you said to be careful and to be mindful of any impulse of, "Oh, I ought to," or "I should," you know.

Fr. Richard: Yeah, "should's" and "ought's."

Brie: In some ways, is it part of the healing journey to not being superior to say, "You know, for right now being in this environment where this type of teaching is happening is making me feel that sense of, like, 'arghhhh' tension that's making me feel superior? Is part of the path toward humility to accept that impulse, and maybe allow that to be perhaps by creating some space between himself and this community for a little bit, or am I asking that question right?

Fr. Richard: You're saying it very well. I think that's the case to be made for detachment, for temporary separation, for getting new perspective, for pulling back. Without it, you lose perspective.

Brie: Yeah, and sometimes we're trying so hard to do the right thing, like, "Oh, I should be loving; I should be perfectly non-judgmental," and we trap ourselves into another impossible system of—

Fr. Richard: You know an example of this that's happening to us right now is, even ten years ago, we didn't use the term "white privilege." Where did this come from that now we can see it? Some people have the detachment, the freedom, the change of perspective—white people I'm talking about—to stand back and see what none of us could see twenty years ago, you know, that we started with a huge given, cultural advantage and head start which we took advantage of. Why wouldn't we? But don't praise yourself for it. That's an advance in consciousness. It really is. But I don't remember that term "white privilege." In the sixties and seventies, there must have been people who used it, but we were just facing the evil of early-stage segregation, that was the focus of our recognition of evil, and it had to be. So, enlightenment comes through stages.

Paul: That's so good and so helpful, too, as an example. And then there's also there's those who can give voice to that, you know, which--

Fr. Richard: That's right.

Paul: --maybe Richard's-- And there are folks who are called as their sense of mission is to stay put

in a community, which can be a much harder path. I'm not saying that's his path, but for those who recognize what you were saying earlier, Richard, about their mere presence there can sometimes be a healing or an opportunity to create space for a new way, or a different way of being in the world or in that community.

Fr. Richard: Lovely; lovely.

Paul: Our next question here comes from Christine from Lansing, Michigan. She writes:

I am mulling over Philippians 4:13. 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.' It seems as if the meaning changes from my old understanding of Jesus Christ the individual person strengthening me to an understanding that I can do all things through all the Christs around me. These thoughts bring up the idea of strength through communion with others; strength through so much more than on the reliance of the single Jesus but rather strength through the Universal Christ. Could you expand on these thoughts?

Fr. Richard: It seems Christine is maturing at a rather quick rate. Now, when she comes to the full synthesis as always, it will be both/and. You need the particular to strengthen the communal. I need to surrender and draw upon one loving face to recognize the loving face everywhere else. I need to draw upon one place where universal love is promised before I can risk seeing it in ordinary people where I'm not so sure. So, but I love the way she's saying it: "I can do all things through all the Christs around me."

So, what we're talking about—and here's the geometry of the cross at work—she's learning to balance the so-called vertical—not that God is up there, but that's the way the mind thinks—with the horizontal, when they're matching. And when the vertical has become the horizontal and the horizontal is included in the vertical, you've got the full gospel, you really do, and that's where she's headed. That's directly where she's headed. What was Rahner's wonderful word for—not prevenient grace, God bless him, that's Calvin. You went to a Jesuit school.

Paul: I know. How embarrassing is this?

Fr. Richard: Well, you might have never had this; yeah, I'm sure you did, and it doesn't matter. Oh, the supernatural existential.

Paul: Yes.

Fr. Richard: Talk about two big words. No wonder you forget them.

Paul: Yeah.

Fr. Richard: That in existence, the supernatural is already planted, and when that becomes a full experiential knowledge, you have put the vertical line of the cross together with the horizontal; you have a wholistic religion. But you can't leap to that except through trial and error. You don't in the first grade learn the supernatural existential. You can't; you can't. It's only learned by walking the journey of testing it, relying upon it, and seeing, "My God, it can be relied upon," but I guess you're seeing that coming through so many of our questions today, this notion of inherent grace. That changes everything. You know, the frontest piece to

the book since I quoted Karl Rahner if you open the book correctly. after my dedication to Venus, you're going to read a quote from Karl Rahner: "The only real absolute mysteries in Christianity"—that's a strong statement—

Paul: Uh-huh.

Fr. Richard: --"are the self-communication of God in the depths of existence,"-- (Who of us was told even that?)

Paul: Right.

Fr. Richard: --"which we called grace, and in history, which we call Christ." That's the whole book in two sentences from a German Jesuit, God bless him.

Paul: Leave it to Rahner.

Brie: Yeah, I was just thinking like that's a great summary point to end on as what I feel like folks have been asking about is what's the new commission?

Fr. Richard: Uh-huh.

Brie: Like, what's the new Gospel to be able to express it in that way—

Paul: Uh-huh.

Brie: --here is God in our midst and we did not; we do not know. Let's awaken to that reality together. Let's see it in each other.

Fr. Richard: Uh-huh.

Brie: Thank you, Richard.

Paul: That's beautiful.

Fr. Richard: What other world would God want us to live in except that kind of world where grace is everywhere, where God is everywhere, which is what we thought we believed! I don't know why people think that's pantheism—of course God is everywhere; where else is God? [laughter] Okay.

[music playing]

Brie: Thank you.

Paul: Thanks, Richard.

Fr. Richard: You're welcome.

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

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Brie: From the High Desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.