

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 4, Episode 2
Methodology | Theme 1

Paul Swanson: [music] This was a really fun episode for us to dig into the first tenet of the Alternative Orthodoxy, which, in shorthand, is Scripture as validated by experience and experience as validated by tradition are good scales for one's spiritual worldview. That's a mouthful.

Brie Stoner: Yep.

Paul Swanson: But we talk about how these balance each other and help us begin to look about how our personal experience is in relationship to tradition and Scripture.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I was looking at you because I thought you were going to rap it and perform that because it is a mouthful, but I thought you were going to speed it up a little, just give us something juicy.

Paul Swanson: You want me to rhyme?

Brie Stoner: No, no, no. Well maybe we'll save it for later, but Richard himself says that this really isn't a theme even though it's the first theme, it's not really a theme. He says it's a methodology.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: So, it gives us a way to understand how even the rest of the themes came to be. And it gives us a way to understand how we can live into a new worldview when our old worldview is changing. So, if we are leaving a set of belief systems behind and moving into a new way of seeing and a new way of perceiving, and a new way of acting, how do we know how to trust that? This methodology helps teach us a way to balance that and hold our new experiences in tension so that we can trust what is unfolding and what's emerging.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's a very expansive methodology because it allows us to bring the fullness of reality into the conversation. And that's what it feels like. This methodology feels like a conversation between three different kinds of pulls [or poles? @ 00:01:30] that help us create this beautiful, cohesive image about how we want to participate in the life of God.

Brie Stoner: Right. And it's tricky for so many of us because if we're talking about Scripture, experience, and tradition, well, for many of us, there's a lot of baggage around Scripture and tradition. In this episode, we explore how do we do that faithfully when our traditions are evolving or need to evolve. How do we look at Scripture as maybe incorporating more sacred texts than just the Bible, and how do we allow that then to validate and balance out our experience, and hold that to a sense of accountability to something more?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Because I think what we've found is that often within traditions we were raised in, one is emphasized more than another.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: So, then how do we help—

Brie Stoner: B-I-B-L-E all the way.

Paul Swanson: Sola Scriptura! --and how do we help create a healthy checks and balances to build a more vibrant relationship so that we don't miss out on the goodness of what happens when we're

in relationship with these three tenants within this one beginning starting place. [music]

Brie Stoner: Yeah, and to see them as living.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Brie Stoner: A living tradition, the living Scripture, our living experience, then changes how we understand our spiritual worldview isn't static, it's becoming, it's growing, and we're growing with it. And I found that to be extremely helpful and soften the edges around my baggage with some of these things. So, I hope that you find it helpful as well as we dive into Episode 2, exploring the first theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy. [music]

Paul Swanson: All right. We are now diving into the first theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy, which just as a reminder to all of us here and then for you listening at home, that first theme is Scripture as validated by experience and experience as validated by tradition are good scales for one's spiritual worldview. And one way we thought to put a little flesh on some of these themes, so to not have them just fly off into the land of esoteric or just ideas, was how do we embody or experience these in our lives? And so, Brie, can you kick us off by telling a story from your own life how this theme first landed for you?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, I mean I think it's, retrospectively right, that I can see how this methodology is true. I'm going to use a little bit of liberty here with the idea of Scripture because if I'm really honest, Scripture as validated by my experience and experience as validated by tradition hasn't always worked for me in terms of Christianity because as a woman, I haven't had a lot of that mirrored back to me with full permission of embodiment, right? The characters that I needed to look to in Scriptures, the permission that I may or may not have felt within the tradition to speak. So, growing up Baptist, my tradition was I wasn't going to have an option to be a teacher or speaker.

So, if it's okay, I mean, I don't know if this works, but for me, one of the foundations of my childhood, Richard, was that my parents gave us a lot of really great literature to read and in a way, some of it became a form of a sacred text. So, Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, and there were certain values and storylines in that that did validate my experience, and that my experience did in turn validate that formed part of a sense of belonging to something bigger, that for me was a

Brie Stoner: big "T" Tradition. And maybe because it was literature, it opened me up to that sense of what is possible as being beyond what was just in our reality and allowed me to live into it further.

I guess an example of that, I'm thinking of Lord of the Rings, for me, the sacredness of some of those characters like Arwen and Eowyn, these really badass female characters that sought to heal, and participate, and give themselves to this quest, now, I could get behind that. I had a hard time getting behind the idea of a very meek and mild Mary, but I could get behind these characters as being an invitation for me to live into something bigger.

So, I don't know if that's fair to say that, Richard, but in terms of the methodology working for me, the sacred text, if we expand what we mean by that, were validated by my experience and that in turn allowed my experience to be validated by a bigger tradition, and allowed—

Richard Rohr: A bigger truth, yes.

Brie Stoner: --yeah, allowed the creation of a worldview to take place. And maybe it was because those novels were in tandem with the tradition I was being handed as a Baptist, they went well together because it almost was like those novels were the Alternative Orthodoxy to the orthodoxy that I was being given. [laughter] Paul, do you have a story that's probably more concrete than mine?

Paul Swanson: [laughter] I do have a concrete story of one. It was actually just last month, where as all good stories start, this one starts with laundry. We live in New Mexico and so we don't have a clothes' dryer because the New Mexico sun can dry our clothes just as fast. Keep that in your brain. And then this was one Saturday morning, there's a knock on my door, open the door, and it's one of my neighbors who's just irate. He is so upset. I'm like, "What's going on?" And he said, "Well, you don't really know me." He's like, "I live across the street catty-corner to your house. And I saw someone come onto your property and steal some of your property." I said, "What? What's going on?" Just kind of befuddled by what's going on.

And he said, "Yeah, I saw a guy steal one of your shirts from your drying rack." And I'm just trying to let this all soak in. And he's saying, "I've called the police, they're not doing anything. You've got to call the police. Tell them that it's your property that was stolen." And again, I'm just holding my one-year-old son and just trying to make sense of the situation. And I said, "Say more, tell me more about what happened." He said, "Okay. There's this guy who was ambling down the street, kind of pudgy and shirtless," and so I'm like, "A shirtless man stole one of my shirts?" [laughter] And I just chuckled because.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And then immediately the line of Jesus of "If someone asked for your shirt, give them your cloak, too," or the other way around.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: And I just like, "You know, it's okay, I'll follow up as the way I see most appropriate, which is not to call the police but offer a little prayer for this newly shirted man as he's going on his way." But it really helped me in a way, like that personal experience of somebody needing a shirt, taking a shirt.

Richard Rohr: Taking it.

Paul Swanson: But it really helped validate that Scripture passage for me of how do I live in this life of generosity where everything is not just about what is mine and how I protect what's mine, but how do I live in this exchange of openness and vulnerability even when it comes at the cost of my own favorite shirt my mom gave me for Christmas five years ago. A bit of a particular way for me that I had a sense of Scripture being affirmed by that own, my own experience.

Richard Rohr: Wow. This is a good starting point. As you were both speaking, and I would take your

advice on this, sincerely, I know we haven't changed these wordings too much, but do you think it would be better to say, "Sacred Scripture as validated by experience," because I think if we keep saying Sola Scriptura in any way, especially now that we're in contact with the whole Eastern hemisphere of the world and we find so much wisdom in Confucianism, in Hindu Scriptures, Sacred Scriptures as validated, and leave that fuzzy, leave it deliberately, and let's say when you read Tolkien and you're the fiftieth person to have told me that, that Tolkien became—I can't say he did for me. I never liked all the Wars.—but for so many people, Tolkien's writings are just apparitions of different meaningful, it helps them to plumb the depths of God experience, inner experience, their own experience. Give that some thought in the school.

Brie Stoner: I think that's what I was in a really messy—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, well, that's what I heard.

Brie Stoner: --roundabout way trying to get at, is that I think what really made this methodology come to life for me and really has, is the broadening of Scripture as understanding it as sacred texts, which does include beautiful works of art and also includes poetry too. Sometimes there's in a line of poetry or in the storytelling—

Richard Rohr: Oh, how can you doubt that?

Brie Stoner: --you do find something that comes from that that rings true and helps produce that depth of a spiritual worldview.

Paul Swanson: Richard, would you say the same about tradition? Would you add, I know this has been a conversation amongst the faculty, would you add an "s" to, say, traditions?

Richard Rohr: No, I'd say, "by the Perennial Tradition."

Paul Swanson: Okay.

Brie Stoner: A big "T" tradition?

Richard Rohr: Because I've always heard it used big "T," but we've evolved even on that. What do we mean by the big "T" as validated by the Perennial Tradition, but is there one perennial God? How broad do you make it before it's meaningless? So, why doesn't the curriculum committee of the Living School give that some thought.

Brie Stoner: Get on that, Paul. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: You have my permission and encouragement because when I see how many years it took me to write that book, *What Do We Do With The Bible?*, and to be confident that I was not writing something that everybody would attack me for, I realize what's a little sixteen-year-old boy in the Dominican Republic going to do with the Bible? We've got to get a broader understanding of the Bible real quick because so many

stories for the same reason I disliked Tolkien's, so many wars, will read the books of Kings, read war after war, killing after killing. A young man, that's all he reads and that excites him. It's an archetype that appeals to him.

So, we've got to honor our own Scriptures. I'll still give them a centrality if I'm going to call myself a Christian. It's the Scriptures of all the world, really—

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --even though I would still give centrality of place, I hope, let's put it very practically, after I pass, I would hope we'd still read the daily Gospel each day because I know the push will be, "Let's read Hindu Scriptures," just be careful. That's all I'm saying. Let's honor them, but if you make it too wide, the widening never stops. It never stops.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Take my word for that.

Brie Swanson: Right.

Richard Rohr: There will always be a new one offering a critique of this, you know, "Well, why don't we put George Orwell's writings—" And there's a truth to that, but you have to have some key Scriptures or key texts even if your understanding of them broadens. I mean, I'm thinking of our own American Declaration of Independence. How this has been really parsed and re-understood right now with "All men are created equal and certain inalienable rights"? Well, how come we thought we understood that and now we know we didn't understand either of those central statements, central. So, we have to do the same with our own Scriptures, I think.

Brie Stoner: Well, and I think what you're doing by broadening Scriptures to include sacred texts and by broadening tradition to be the big "T" Tradition—

Richard Rohr: Big "T."

Brie Stoner: --of the Perennial Tradition, what it does is allows us a little bit of room to breathe and find—

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brie Stoner: --like follow the oxygen to where God might be inviting us to grow. Because I'm thinking of many Christian mutts, who like me, who maybe have gone through a season of deconstruction in their lives, where it's very difficult for them to pick up the Bible. And I wonder what you would say to them with this methodology then, of would you recommend mystical texts as part of our sacred text canon? Would you say, "Yeah, maybe pick up Julian of Norwich or John of the Cross and read *The Dark Night of the Soul*," or would you in that also include the Perennial Tradition sacred texts?

Richard Rohr: My approach there would be to bring them in under the rubric of tradition, which in

effect, balances out the Scriptures because once we start arguing about which of the sacred Scriptures, there's no stopping it.

Brie Stoner: Right. Right.

Richard Rohr: So, we want The Interior Castle to be taken seriously, but under the rubric of tradition. And is it in contradiction to Scripture? I don't think so, but in the very ability to say that, it makes you go deeper with the Scriptures, I hope, and deeper with Teresa of Ávila.

Brie Stoner: I like that a lot.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: That's actually really helpful, because when I'm thinking about like what Tolkien, the role that Tolkien and C. S. Lewis had in my life, wasn't that it didn't become my Scripture, it was that it helped elucidate the truth of Scripture. So, maybe I would put them in the camp of tradition as well.

Richard Rohr: Uh-huh (affirmative). Or, the way to read literature.

Brie Stoner: Right. Because what it did is it allowed me to, as I grew, to appreciate Scripture even more and to fall in love with Scripture again.

Richard Rohr: Yep, that's what I'm trying to validate right here.

Brie Stoner: Okay. That's a helpful clarification for me to think about.

Richard Rohr: That each of the three validate the other two in a rich way.

Paul Swanson: It helps bring an imagination to it.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, very good.

Paul Swanson: And I'm wondering, Richard, just knowing that this could be something that someone listening to trying to be wrestled, how does this work with their own life? Can you give an example of, say, something, a Scripture from the Bible about how that would play into this methodology? How you would work with that in that same way to balance it out by tradition and personal experience?

Richard Rohr: Some experience I've had?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. If there's one that comes to mind.

Richard Rohr: I was able to trust that experience because I found a Scripture story or mystic saint who said the same. Gosh, there's probably so many, because that's the way I almost lived the last fifty years of my life. It's everything is this little billiard ball game of these three hitting on one another, and it gave me the self-confidence that I speak with, which sometimes, I'm sure to many people, seems arrogant. But the reason I trust my experience to sometimes, probably, in many people's minds, an arrogant degree is because both Jesus and Paul gave me permission to do that. That both of them trusted their own experience. Just look at the

whole corpus of their words against their religion, Judaism, which is just amazing.

I don't know that many seminarians are told that, that they highly critiqued Judaism and drew out from that storehouse things both old and new. That's been my whole life. Now, where did I get that freedom? Where did I get that courage? Where did I get that confidence? Where did I become so foolhardy? Because I don't think most young priests, at least, even old priests, have that freedom to do that. They feel they've got to repeat clichés that do not knock on experience, and they don't need to read the mystics to validate the Scriptures they're preaching from each Sunday.

When Luther said Sola Scriptura, he had no idea what a bag of worms he was opening, because he highly narrowed the source of authority and limited the source of spiritual authority for 500 years. And now to broaden it back out and to allow poetry, to allow theater, to allow drama and novels to enter the scene-- Now I'm not answering your question anymore, but I'm finding it hard to answer because that's the only thing I've done.

Brie Stoner: Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. What you're speaking to is how sometimes without the interplay of these three, Scripture can be very binding.

Richard Rohr: Yes!

Paul Swanson: It can feel like a rule book versus a conversation that invites a level of freedom that one cannot even imagine when you're only in that one lane. I love the billiard ball image because it's constant movement about how they all interrelate.

Richard Rohr: There you go. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, and that the way that you define the mystic is moving to trusting that inner experience.

Richard Rohr: Inner experience.

Brie Stoner: And how I'm seeing you emphasize it in this tenant, it is very different than how we traditionally organize in Christianity.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Brie Stoner: And we've talked about this before, but we seem to be so much more comfortable when an authority figure is telling us what it is, and what the rules are, and how I can do it perfectly. And it's like we're so hungry for that certainty principle that what happens is we stop participating, we stop experiencing or trusting our experience.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Which really means, if you don't mind, that we stopped praying, because I think what we really mean by prayer is an inner dialogue of trust really, and the inner dialogue of pitch and catch, that's experience. But because prayer became this asking God for things and telling God things instead of an inner dialogue of trust, I think prayer became, for many people, a very narrow concept, not a helpful life concept.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It seems to be that shift from transaction to relationship.

Richard Rohr: Very good. Yes.

Brie Stoner: Again, we often talk at the center about how Jesus is our central reference point, and would you say that this tenant is hinting at that reality? Because really—

Richard Rohr: Is what?

Brie Stoner: --is hinting at the reality that Jesus is our central reference point, because when I look at Scripture as validated by experience, experience validated by tradition, it seems like it's showing us that Jesus as hermeneutic. It's showing us how Jesus lived from that oneness where he held his experience and his tradition, intention with his experience of God that was animating him into action in a way. Where does that principle of Jesus being our central reference point, where does that sit with this tenant?

Richard Rohr: I bet most of our churches use some kind of phrase, and tell me if it's true, "We interpret the Scriptures in the light of Jesus," did you?

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Yeah. But no one really drew out what we were saying by that, that he was the lens, it wasn't that all the Scriptures were directly pointing to Jesus, but the way he used them is the key. That's very different; whereas, I thought all of the Scriptures are foretelling Jesus. They are, but they aren't. They really aren't. But they lay an entire field inside of which a Jesus person can emerge and can say the things he said apart from individual revelation from God, He was building on the "our story," the second dome of his Jewish religion. He wasn't just relying upon what God told him secretly in the wilderness. He was, but what gave him the confidence to hear that was he was a good Jew. What gave me the confidence to hear that is I was a good Catholic. Really, you being good Covenanters and good Baptists, you've got to give them credit. They narrowed the field and focused authority enough to give you confidence that you weren't crazy, that you weren't making up these ideas. That's certainly what the Catholic tradition did for me; Franciscanism even more.

Paul Swanson: And Richard, I'm thinking about, Brie, what you had said about how Scripture and how it hasn't always been life-giving because you couldn't see yourself in it or-

Richard Rohr: Yeah, pursue that.

Paul Swanson: And Richard, with you, spoken with your love of Scripture, it's always fun to see your Bible and how marked up it is, and how weather-beaten and has been a companion for you, but have you ever had a season where Scripture has been

Paul Swanson: dry, where it just hasn't been life-giving? You don't have that same conversation with it?

Richard Rohr: I'm sort of in it now. I told you yesterday, I don't read that much, that includes the Bible. Because I've developed such a critical mind, seeing how this just keeps being misused, keeps being misunderstood. So much of the Jesus hermeneutic, the knowledge of literature, the knowledge of symbol, metaphor, the nature of truth, the nature of truth inside of contextual

community. Look, it took me seventy-seven years to get to this. Yeah, please don't take too much from this, but I'm there right now. I'm not reading the Bible much. Oh, it's nice when I find a verse that confirms what I already believe. Forgive me, I've got to reveal my egocentricity. I'm there more than ever right now.

Now, I'm not saying that's the goal that you all should aim for. The only times I read it is when it's the Gospel for next Sunday, and then I read it two or three times, including the first and second readings. Yeah, I guess I've answered your question. I hope it isn't too scandalous.

Brie Stoner: No, I mean I think it's so human and honest to say, again, if we just limit the field of Scriptures to our own Christian text, then we need to expect that it's going to move in and out of our lives with rhythm and seasonality. But I'm also reflecting on the fact that as a Franciscan, that teaching, that nature is the first Bible, that's another sacred text.

Richard Rohr: Huge. Foundational.

Brie Stoner: And the study of the natural world with awe and wonder is another part of that sacred contemplative gaze of allowing that to validate experience and tradition, too, to live in relationship with it.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Yes.

Brie Stoner: And you're certainly doing that a lot these days, Richard, with all your nature shows.

Richard Rohr: I really am. I didn't watch any last night.

Brie Stoner: I'll still call you a Christian. [laughter] So, shifting out of the Scripture component and looking a little bit at experience and tradition, what does experience as validated by tradition mean today, now, when the traditions mean vastly different things to different people? By what do we hold ourselves accountable when so much of it actually needs to change? I'm even thinking about the Christian tradition. I know that's a very monolithic way to describe it because there's many Christian traditions, but when we need to be evolving tradition, how do we hold that intention with this principle?

Richard Rohr: Experience as validated by tradition, how do we do that? I mean, you're naming the complexity, especially when there's so many traditions. I was with a wonderful Methodist minister recently, and he kept very sincerely and healthily, kept referring to the Wesleyan tradition, and, "We Methodists," and I didn't disagree with anything he said, but I would have never said it that way because I wasn't trained in Methodist vocabulary and emphasis.

Let's just settle on this, that our God clearly is comfortable with diversity, and there's no indication in the entire known universe, the seas, or the heavens, or the land that God is interested in uniformity—everything [is] different, different, different, different. In my nature shows. I'm just fascinated by how they keep going deeper in the ocean and they'll say, "And now you're probably the first human being who's ever seen this squid." [laughter]

Brie Stoner: That's amazing.

Richard Rohr: It's just, "Come on!" and it creates its own light down there at the bottom of the ocean, and I guess it's happy. I hope it's happy, but let's just celebrate diversity more. Now, I feel free to do that, if you don't mind my arrogance in saying it, because I have a deep belief in unity that there's an "underlying unified field," to quote Annie Dillard. Once you're grounded in the unified field, then a new discovery of diversity; a Methodist way of saying it is, "Oh, that's novel. That's a little different, but I don't have any need to dismiss it."

Brie Stoner: You're not threatened by it.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, or to lighten its weight. In fact, usually it's able to expand my own Catholic theology, or affirm it, almost all of this, really.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Keep pulling on this thread of that diversity. I'm thinking about one of Brie's earlier points about those whose experiences aren't reflected in tradition, whether it's women—

Richard Rohr: Mm, yes.

Paul Swanson: --or people in the LGBTQ+ community. What words of hope do you have for folks who aren't seeing their own experience represented in a sacred text or tradition?

Richard Rohr: Thank you. This is so important. I remember I was given a retreat to lay missionaries in Venezuela. It was thirty years ago, and this group of fine women, I mean, really, they weren't rebels. They gave their life to work in the missions, but they said, "I can't fully commit myself to Christianity until I recognize there has been some form of feminine incarnation." At first, it sounds, "Oh, stop being so feminist." Once I can get over that overreaction and recognize, I put myself in their shoes, "How would I feel?" Now, that's why I made the point in *The Universal Christ* of creation being the first incarnation and being the feminine.

Richard Rohr: The feminine came first; the mother preceding the son. It took me thirty years to say that in a book.

So, it's there, but we have to have more theologians, and teachers, and catechists. If it doesn't reach the local level, it isn't going to hold many people inside of the Christian mystery for me to say it, and what percentage of humanity will ever read one of my books? So, so what? This has got to get to the catechal level. That's the power Pope Francis has already offered our church, that he's being quoted by little catechists in Brazil, *Laudato si'*, especially. How many generations is it going to take for this to filter down? I am a little frightened. Is it going to take collapse, catastrophe for us to read the Scriptures in a human way, a natural way, an inclusive way? I bet it is because if it's true that we don't change until we suffer, there's probably going to be some communal suffering presented to us.

Brie Stoner: I'm reflecting on how you distinguish between the institution and tradition. I feel like this might be something that we need to really spend time on—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --as we think about this methodology, because Scripture as validated by experience, experience as validated by the living tradition, the living Perennial Tradition, which by the

way, is bigger than the institutionalization of Christianity—

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yes, it is.

Brie Stoner: --that turned it into a hierarchy of power and patriarchy, and that has manipulated it into racism and damaging exclusionary systems of oppression. And I think there's something there that we have to really distinguish between the institution that functions through power over, and the living Perennial Tradition that has always been about that unity and diversity that you're speaking of, Richard, That is the communion paradigm that invites us into it. So, that's helpful for me because, I mean, I obviously struggle with this piece. I got into an argument with a friend over the summer, like I do, [laughter] about Catholicism, and I said something like, I mean, I'm practically Catholic at this point, but I just can't, I could never actually go through with it because I struggle with the lack of recognition of feminine leadership or the authority of a woman in the midst of this.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: It boggles my mind, and I was saying this to him, and he's like, "Ugh, that's such a Protestant thing to say." [laughter] He's like, "As if I can leave my tradition."

Brie Stoner: He's like, "I don't like it either, but I'm a part of it." But I still pushed him on it because I was like, "Yeah, well then do something about it. You're in it."

Richard Rohr: He said that to you?

Brie Stoner: No, I said it to him.

Richard Rohr: Oh, you said it to him. Got you. Got you. Got you.

Brie Stoner: I said, "Well, if you're going to stay in your tradition and be happy as a Catholic, then what are you doing to evolve it and move it forward?" And that's the tension point that I think you invite us in when you talk about the edge of the inside, which is: Okay, let's not confuse the institution with the living tradition. Let's continue to evolve it. Let's participate in changing it. I hope.

Richard Rohr: You know, our new notion of organic food might be a helpful metaphor here for the living tradition, that it's still the same beet or carrot, but it's been fed by much better nutrients. It's been fed by much better soil, or whatever, no pesticides, and we're calling that organic food, and we're willing to pay more money for it. That just came to me just now, but when you talk about the living tradition, --every metaphor limps, but let's try to think of the living tradition as organic food. It isn't made by the usual easy glib methods of—

Brie Stoner: Processed crap.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, processed, using all kind of pesticides, and everything else. But, no, we selectively feed this with good food and don't let it eat bad food. That's the living tradition. I never thought of that until just now. I hope it helps. Let's give that some thought.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. There's an openness to what we've been talking with the newness and change. And I'm thinking of a story of Mr. Rogers. It's been fun to see him resurge into the public conversation. But, apparently, when he was filming his children's show, "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," there were times early in his career where, say, he was walking on the street and he would come across a woman, and he would say to his T.V. audience, "She's a housewife. She doesn't have a job." And then years later what he would do to keep his message evergreen in light of the times, he would go back and refilm that scene, and talk about how important her job is as a housewife. If that's clear. He would go back and adjust—

Brie Stoner: So, he was editing himself.

Paul Swanson: He was editing himself. He would go put on the same sweater, you know, and the same shoes, and get the same actor if possible so that knowing that he didn't want to communicate something that was not going to be uplifting or true to his message.

Richard Rohr: Isn't that genius.

Paul Swanson: I found that so touching and beautiful.

Brie Stoner: It's so— [crosstalk @ 00:35:44]

Richard Rohr: Really--

Paul Swanson: I'm wondering for you, Richard, how do you see the role of change in this methodology, of allowing things to evolve because of truth that is sprouting up in that organic way that maybe wasn't there forty years ago?

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Was Mr. Rogers a nine? He had to be. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to the Enneagram type "nine." There are nine Enneagram types.]

Paul Swanson: I think so. He had a stillness about him that was—

Richard Rohr: Have you seen the movie?

Paul Swanson: No, not yet.

Richard Rohr: I haven't seen it either. But the little snippets I see, he's got to be a very healthy nine. Yeah. So, you go see it and get affirmed.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Something for me to look up to.

Richard Rohr: I've said only recently that growth, and I'm glad you used that word, is simply the normal word for evolution, and growth is the nature of everything. It's how can you deny growth? How can parents ever deny growth? You've seen it. This little baby turned into an adult, every springtime, it starts over and over again, but I don't think that was the gist of your question.

Brie Stoner: No, I want to build on that, Richard, because if that growth principle is in this, if we were to say that Scripture as validated by experience and experience as validated by tradition, are good scales for one's growing spiritual worldview, that it's always growing. It's always evolving. It's always including and transcending, as you say.

Richard Rohr: Excellent! I like that.

Brie Stoner: I feel like then we can see some of that dynamic principle of tradition isn't stuck. It's not a static thing. Scripture isn't stuck. We can evolve how we interpret that, too, and we can include other sacred texts in that. I find that growth factor really helpful in this.

Richard Rohr: Well, good. I mean, maybe the fruit of our dialogue is we're going to rewrite all seven of these themes. [laughter] Someone coming to this for a first reading, if they see growing spiritual worldview, it'll probably push their panic button. Now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't use it. We aren't trained to think of growth because we came from transactional Christianity, where it wasn't about transformation or growth. It really wasn't.

Paul Swanson: I feel like that also allows us to forgive the past too.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Richard Rohr: Oh, you said it.

Brie Stoner: And include it.

Paul Swanson: And include it.

Brie Stoner: I do feel like so many of the foundational problems that we run into is that we're not building on the foundation of evolution, and change, and growth.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: But if we do, if we do start with a foundation that this is dynamic, that we are growing, that we are in-process, then I think it builds in that kind of forgiveness to say, yeah, everything does belong. The rest of the tenants start to fall into place too. Yeah, I don't know. I feel that so many of your teachings are built on that framework of embracing evolution, and change, and growth.

Richard Rohr: Oh really, yeah, and I didn't even realize I was doing that until recent years. Catholics who might be offended by this kind of talk, forgiving the past, how else can you Protestants ever be friends with us if you don't forgive our past? We should welcome this idea, forgiving the past. A forgiving Protestant is going to be accepting of the mistakes of Catholicism, "Oh, yeah, maybe we should like these guys."

Paul Swanson: We have a lot of forgiving to do.

Richard Rohr: Well, it's true.

Brie Stoner: Well, even of ourselves, too, in our own experiences, you know.

Richard Rohr: And yourselves, your own early, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Thinking about like, “Okay, if I’m orienting myself toward my growing spiritual worldview, then my posture toward other people is one of humility, because I realize”—

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brie Stoner: --“I don’t have it all yet. This is not a set-in-stone thing.”

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: Richard, as we start to wrap up this conversation, I have a really funny question that feels almost like a tabletop-dinner-discussion question that you pull out of a box. But I’m curious, if you were to recommend to somebody one book of the Bible, if you were to pick one book of the Bible to survive, I know I’m putting you in a tough spot.

Richard Rohr: I’m glad I didn’t read this first because I would have given it a half an hour of thought. Now, wow, what a good question. Well, it wouldn’t be the book of Revelation. I can say that. Honestly, it wouldn’t be John’s Gospel because it demands nondual consciousness because most people aren’t there yet. Wow. What would it be? One book. You’re only going to grant me one?

Brie Stoner: I know. Well, I was going to expand it because I’m like, maybe we should just say, “Go ahead. More than one.” Because then you can say the Gospels and then you’re liberated from the tension of having to choose.

Richard Rohr: I guess it’d be Mark’s Gospel, or maybe Luke’s, which one would it be? Yeah, Luke’s Gospel, a little “p.s.”?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, you can change the roles.

Paul Swanson: Then grab a second one on your way out.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And I know most people will never take the time, nor do they need to, but Paul’s critique of law and tradition in Romans, for me. So, I’ll say Luke’s Gospel and Paul’s critique in Romans, which to me is just a masterpiece. You see it in my book, *What Do We Do With Evil?* If that isn’t in there, every religion seems to become legalistic. Every denomination becomes legalistic about its first-half- of-life discoveries and engraves them in stone, and wants everybody to come to God the way they think they came to God. That’s why I love Paul so much. I still think he’s a spiritual genius, but he’s the second-half-of-life teacher. And without him, you can understand even Luke and his wonderful parables of mercy in a probably rigid way. So, give me those two—Luke and Romans. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Richard, we thought it would be a nice way to round out each of these deep dives into each theme by asking, how do we practice this? How do we practice this theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy, this methodology?

Richard Rohr: How do we do it? For people who are called to be teachers, or writers, or communicators, I

think you've got to do your homework, and yet you have to submit to some lineage, some good education. You don't have a right to just say the first thing that comes into your head. We've suffered from too much? slaveholder religion and televangelism in America, and you say, "Where did you get the freedom to talk this way? Who are you subject to?" And yet these are the teachers that are filling the mega churches. And you'd love to know, at least, I'd love to know what are your credentials?

Now, for the ordinary person on the street, the mother of five children, she just has to be given the freedom to present herself to some good teachers, or good mentors, or move around until she finds them. She doesn't need to be one. But when we trap her inside of one little storefront church and its limited perspective, yet I hesitate to say that, I think the amount of Black people who, in storefront churches, have come to a liberating interpretation of the Gospel. It might be a limited liberation. You remember last year I was disappointed that so many of my Black brothers and sisters understood liberation in regard to race, but were not at all congenial to the idea of liberation in regard to gender or interfaith.

What happens when you have the lack of good theology? Your work can only go so far and we need big-screen teachers right now, who are grounded in a lineage and can free other people to meet a free God because it's obvious that God is free. Our God could not have created—you use the word "wild" in here—could not have created such a diverse universe that there are no two planets alike, apparently; no two stars the same, apparently. Wow. We have been given permission to eat generously of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to make mistakes, to do it wrong before we learn how to do it right. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I'm feeling like one of the things that we've spoken about on this podcast that I know is so dear to your heart right now, Richard, which is devotion, that the thing that really makes this methodology run is the fuel of devotion.

Richard Rohr: That's well said, Brie.

Brie Stoner: That without deep love and a deep experience of God and devotion to God in that mystery of God, right? To not limit God, but to continue the pursuit, the relational longing and pursuit of God and relationship to others, this doesn't work. But when we do have that—

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Brie Stoner: --it sort of animates and motivates—

Richard Rohr: That's lovely.

Brie Stoner: --the growing edge of this change and how these things work together.

Richard Rohr: It's too heady, it's too overly, falsely self-assured if there isn't some place where you can kneel and kiss the ground.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Really, it's not helpful. It's just ideas and more ideas. And I say that to myself because I've loved ideas all my life and I know the periods of my life where I get caught up in the ecstasy of my own ideas. Even the statue of the Buddha, that's most authentic, has one hand cupped upward and the other one touching the ground. The hand touching the earth is devotion. Don't fly off with these ethereal, transcendent ideas unless somewhere some practical where you're in love, you're committed. That's why most people are called to marriage, to coupling, to having children, because there your love isn't universal anymore, it's particular. That's real good.

Paul Swanson: Speaking in particular should we turn to some voicemails that pertain to this theme? We have a couple of questions from some Living School students and alumni that come from the particular areas of their own life.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And here are a couple of voicemails from our listeners.

Unknown Speaker: The first theme of Scripture as validated by experience and experience as validated by tradition, took me back to my roots as a United Methodist and the John Wesley Quadrilateral. John Wesley believed that the living core of Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified by experience and confirmed by reason. I noticed that you leave out reason. I think you do. It does seem that reason may not belong. It may not allow for a paradoxical thinking. I'm curious, what place does reason have, if any, within the context of this first theme or principle that you've laid out?

Richard Rohr: Thank you. I'm invariably asked this good question by a Methodist, and I think it's very legitimate, but I did intentionally leave it out, and I'll try to explain why. I was aware of the Quadrilateral, but here's my fear. I'm not sure that my fear is justified, but given the nature of Western civilization, I'm convinced that reason will take over, will dominate: Is it reasonable, what we'd call orange on the spiral dynamics ledger. So, here is my way of saying it to the students. Maybe you haven't been in the class yet, at the intensive.

That I hope what we're teaching here is a reasonable approach to Scripture—the historical critical analysis, a reasonable approach to tradition, which includes many traditions that are not in direct conflict with the Perennial

Richard Rohr: Tradition, and a reasonable, rational, even if you will, approach to experience. Reason is in there, but I'm not going to give it a wheel, or make it into a cart.

Brie Stoner: A Go Kart?

Paul Swanson: Big Wheels?

Richard Rohr: [laughter] Because I'm so afraid it will take over and that might not be warranted, forgive me. I have a pretty good sense at this point that among educated people who the primary people who come to our school are, being reasonable is the way we think. And I want to get them into the mythic imagination, the right brain more than more left brain. That's why I dropped it. And people are free to correct this after I'm gone, if we see it's led to bad results.

Paul Swanson: That's a very reasonable answer.

Richard Rohr: Oh, good. A reasonable answer.

Brie Stoner: Good one, Swanson.

Paul Swanson: All right. Here's our next question.

Unknown Speaker: I've spent most of my life avoiding Scripture and tradition. Growing up, my family attended mainline Protestant churches in a mostly liberal college town, and I don't remember much emphasis on either liturgy or memorizing Bible verses. By the time I was fourteen or so, I was pretty much done with the Church and youth groups. New Age culture was commonplace as I grew up, so in high school, I used that language to frame my experiences with the ineffable. Entering adulthood there were many years of a tamped-down spirituality. When our four-year-old son was convinced by his babysitter that he needed to be baptized, I found myself joining a small local church.

I became immersed in the good works part of church membership and spent the next two decades busy on the edge of the inside, but never felt completely comfortable. I now live in another town and still attend church, even lead Sunday school, but I've never been able to embrace either Scripture or tradition. Richard's talked about order, disorder, reorder, as a pattern of transformation. I feel like both Scripture and tradition live in that first stage of order. Is it possible that for some of us, we start from disorder, going to reorder, and keep cycling between them like a sine wave or maybe even a spiral?

Richard Rohr: Wow, is that well stated! Every step of your journey seemed reasonable as you expressed it. I could see myself walking on that same path. Is it possible to spiral between disorder and reorder? I don't think you'll do it well or easily if you're not tethered somewhere. Now, as I listen to you, I think you are tethered somewhere. The fact that you're not in major rebellion, that you'd go back and

Richard Rohr: teach Sunday school. You're a very humble man. You might be tethered by Scripture and tradition more than you think. I don't know for sure, but there's not rebellious spirit. You're accusing yourself of it, but I don't hear it in the few remarks you made here.

I'd like you to trust that at least on the unconscious level, you're more grounded in a basic, essential, essential order than you yourself might even realize. And that's why you can do this so well and even do what you just well-described. I mean, I identify with that, that I'm in the last thirty years of my life cycling between disorder and reorder because my feet are back there in my youth and in my training in Catholic theology. I can't go back there in literal form anymore, but I'm still there, darn it. Or should I say hallelujah? I'm there more than I realize. People outside of the Catholic world see that. People who are Catholics think I've completely thrown it out. That ain't true. And you who are Protestant, see, "He's so Catholic." [laughter]

And I bet I'd say the same about you if I knew you well. It doesn't have to operate at the conscious level. In fact, it's probably more operative when it's firmly entrenched at the unconscious level. You don't throw out themes like incarnation and Jesus as my central

reference point, or whatever else it might be.

Brie Stoner: I feel like one of the things that I hear in this question is the relationship between tension and evolution. Because if we don't hold these three things in tension and our experience becomes the only reference point, that can be dangerous, too, right? Like we can just glibly and narcissistically determine and create a worldview that serves us. And now, I'm not hearing that in your question, by the way. I hear something very different, which is what Richard is saying, which is if these things are in evolution, if Scripture is in evolution, if our experience is evolving and our tradition is a living tradition that is also not finished, then I think it gives us a permission to embrace Scripture and tradition, not as being stuck in the order phase. It's not static, it's moving with us from order to disorder to reorder.

I think that in my disorder states, okay, maybe I wasn't able to turn to the Scriptures as much as I wanted or used to, but there's certainly a lot of disorder Scriptures in there. I think about the Psalms—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: the Psalms are basically a whole story of where are you? What's happening? What's going on? So, I don't know. I think both the evolutionary principle and thinking of these in tension helps me.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And Richard, your phrase that helps me hold that tension, when you say, "Do I say 'Darn it' or 'Hallelujah'?" And it's that I don't know yet. It's that growing

Paul Swanson: edge of that spiral between order, disorder, and reorder. I thought that pithy, "darn it or hallelujah" is often my prayer.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. That's lovely. Lovely. Well, it's nondual thinking and you've achieved it more than you realize when you can say both of them and mean both of them at the same time. Good for you. Yeah. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thanks Richard.

Brie Stoner: Thanks Richard.

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

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