

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 4, Episode 8

Goal | Theme 7

Brie Stoner: [music] So, Paul, apparently, you've arrived. [laughter] I don't know if you knew this, but I think Richard, in this episode, officially christened you as a non-dual master.

Paul Swanson: Yes, you know you can take my course online for \$99.95 to also become a non-dual master. [laughter] No, I was flattered, elated, that Richard sees something in me.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: I just try to receive it and hold it lightly because I was not expecting him to offer such kind words upon me.

Brie Stoner: Well, isn't that just, I mean that's just the example that I feel like he's offering us, of deep, profound humility where we can look at this concept of non-duality that we often get so heady and achievement-oriented about, or kind of equate with some sort of blissed-out state, and he translates it into incarnation, into it looks like you, Paul. It looks like the ways in which you hold space for us. It looks like the person down the street. He brings a fleshy, human approach to this tenet, which I'm going to read out right now: Non-duality is the highest level of consciousness. Divine union, not private perfection, is the goal of all healthy religion.

Paul Swanson: We really lean into that perfection piece, which we've noticed comes up quite a bit in our conversations, and how that is not, this old model of achieving perfection is actually a barrier to our leaning into the stance of non-duality.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. We also spent some time in this episode talking about how divine union isn't a static thing. It's not a one-and-done. It's not just a place you hang out, but rather, divine union seems to be inviting us into action, into manifesting. It's a part of that creativity on behalf of the whole that moves in and through us with momentum, with dynamism, which I found really helpful, so that it wasn't just this idea of, like, yes, take the elevator up to the seventh floor of non-duality, and from there, you will see everything and know everything.

Paul Swanson: I also love the way that those values that we've talked about—simplicity, simplicity, devotion—and public virtue, are such a part of this. Those are not lost. Those are a lot of how this looks like with flesh on it.

And then, gosh, I was so grateful that Richard offered a little bit of guidance for those in our first half of life about how one should approach non-duality.

Brie Stoner: What does he call them? The four splits?

Paul Swanson: The four splits. [music]

Brie Stoner: It was so practical. We found them to be immensely practical, and it's something that I'm going to be taking with me as I continue to try to live into these tenets a little bit more as ways to see where I am cut off from the whole. Where am I not functioning from union or unification or the act of "oneing"? We hope that you'll find this conversation helpful in unpacking the seventh theme on non-duality. [music ends]

So, Richard, we have made it to the seventh theme.

Richard Rohr: Yep.

Brie Stoner: I feel like the seven-story mountain, like we just got to the pinnacle here. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: It is funny that we concluded with seven themes.

Brie Stoner: After all.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I'm going to read the seventh theme out loud just to begin our conversation today.

Richard Rohr: Sure. All right.

Brie Stoner: The seventh theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy is non-duality is the highest level of consciousness. Divine union, not private perfection, is the goal of all healthy religion.

Paul and I kind of thought maybe you could kick us off, but we were thinking about instead of sharing a story as we have been with each of these themes that helps us put flesh on it, we wondered is there somebody in your life that really embodies this tenet for you, that pointed the way, that helped you see that this tenet can be true and can be actualized and realized?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. There are actually a lot of them over the years, and you'll be happy to hear this; usually, they're Nines.

Paul Swanson: My people.

Brie Stoner: I knew you were special and holy for a reason. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: Not that the rest of us can't learn it, but to Nines, it just comes naturally. It's like, yeah, why wouldn't you do that? It's your gift. It really is. I wonder if that's why in the Enneagram the Nine is put at the top as the archetypal simple human being. They refuse complexity if it isn't necessary. Now, there's a good meaning to complexity, but there's a bad meaning. The bad meaning is the splitting of an issue or a problem into two alternatives and thinking because you chose one you're smart.

So, most Nines I've ever known, going back to the New Jerusalem days, they were the peacemakers, they were the resisters, and yet they did it consistently in such a non-showy way, such a non-pretentious way. In fact, you'd find out they'd been doing something for months and the rest of us didn't even know about it. It's really your gift.

But do you want a single name? Well, one's sitting across from us. Paul Swanson. [laughter] He is. That's your gift. Everything I just said is true of you. You resist drama, and you resist pushing yourself forward, and that non-egocentricity allows you to be a kind of non-dual person a little more quickly than the rest of us. I'm not saying you're naturally enlightened. You have to go through growth and—

Paul Swanson: Oh, I know that. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: --growth and suffering like everybody else, largely in terms of purifying your motives

and choosing love again and again. It always seems like you have a head start. It's wonderful.

Paul Swanson: This has suddenly become my favorite episode. [laughter] You know, something that came to mind for me is someone who lives here in Albuquerque. His name's Chuck. He lives a very radical lifestyle. Very radical. He lives on less than like \$500.00 a year. He invites anyone who needs a place to stay into his home. All of his food comes from what everyone else wastes. But I think it's been that radicality that has been the gateway for him to live out of this union.

He also has a very deep prayer life. He begins the day in a couple hours of prayer, just abiding in that presence. I've never heard a judgmental word come out of him—

Richard Rohr: I haven't either.

Paul Swanson: --from those who live. Yeah, you know him well, too.

Richard Rohr: Sure.

Paul Swanson: That spirit is so contagious to me, of this is what happens when someone lives in deep, abiding union.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. That's true. I've passed him on his bicycle many times over the years and feel so guilty in my little Honda. The Franciscan rides by and the true Franciscan rides his bike. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: How about you, Brie? Anyone come to mind?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, I think it's almost like I catch glimpses of this in little moments with different people. It's almost like little shards of colored glass, you know, that you get this little glimpse at character traits that really seem to come out of non-duality, or that seem to be the outcome of that inner stance.

One of the things that I think about with this tenet is one of our faculty members, James Finley, just his humor. His sense of humor, the way he is just so fully free, almost like the perfect embodiment of the holy fool, right? He'll give these incredible talks, and then he'll come down from the stage and be like, "Yeah, I don't really know what I said. They're all listening, and, you know, they think I'm a master. I don't know what I'm saying."

It's just like this lightness and not taking himself so seriously, but considering that the challenges that he has lived through in his life and the trauma that he has experienced—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, and still is. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: --to have that kind of lightness of spirit that is so, it's delightful, and it delights in others, and it allows others to then feel delight as well. There's just this effervescent quality to Jim that anytime I'm around him, I'm just like, yeah. There's something

about that energy that feels like it's the product of deep, divine union.

Richard Rohr: Yep.

Paul Swanson: Well said.

Brie Stoner: So, as we jump into this topic, I think one of the greatest foundational dissonances that we're still living with in Christianity that we've been talking about on this season is the idea of consciousness or union as state, as if it's a static floor in a building that we just need to climb up to or take an elevator to.

I hear in the conversations we've been having this week a shift into dynamism, to be thinking about these concepts in relationship, and in creativity, and in evolution. It kind of takes on a different tone when we shift into that because it becomes more about an inner creative stance as opposed to this static floor that we're all trying to climb up to.

How does Jesus's prophetic example, lived, creative, dynamic example of his life, influence how you think or talk about non-duality?

Richard Rohr: Well, of course, he's my stamp of certification that this is legitimate even though he never uses the word. But if you look at his teaching method, he's always leading people to non-reactionary, non-choosing sides, and the way that he has to do that very often is to identify with the rejected side, but not in a sense of punishing the perpetrator. It's very clever. It seems like we didn't have the eyes to see that, but it's clear that he does.

So, even now, preachers don't tend to point that out. They just settle for a miracle or the healing of a leper, like we had this morning, which you don't know what to do with until you know that the leper was not a Jew. Leprosy was considered sinful or a sign that you were sinful. You have to read the whole context of most of Jesus's stories. It's the relationality that is revealed in the story that reveals the real message.

Relationality is complex. Like you say, it's dynamic. It's not one issue. It's about six issues coming together. I don't know how we're going to train people to rethink that way because I listen to political discourse, I listen to most of the theological discourse, at least within my Church, and since the Reformation, between churches, and it's always binary. Always oversimplify your right answer, and oversimplify the enemy, why he is wrong. It's just, "Oh, stop doing that." It's never going to get us anywhere.

So, Jesus didn't succeed thus far in teaching it very well because, sorry to have to keep saying this, we made his life into a set of transactions that were supposedly wonderful. Well, they were wonderful, but the medium was never the message. It was always the conclusion was the message, and we were supposed to go, "Wow." But a lot of "wows" don't add up to non-dual consciousness on either side where you [say], "Yep, we got it. It's settled."

There's something about non-duality that leaves you deliberately, intentionally, partly, unsettled, but settled enough to be unsettled a little bit, if that helps. I think it's the

change that changes everything, if that doesn't seem like an overstatement. I think it's the pearl of great price. It's our epistemology, or should have been. You know the meaning of epistemology. A lot of people don't, but I had to have a whole year of it in college, and it's a science of knowing how do you know.

And so, we spend a whole year studying theories of knowledge. How do ideas get settled in your brain? I think it's almost unhelpful to teach people theology or political conclusions without forcing them, or inviting them, or teaching them what's your, how do you know what you know? Because you read it in the National Enquirer? [laughter] Because you heard it on television? That's where most of our country is, and much of the rest of the world. You just watch politics in most countries.

Brie Stoner: Well, it seems like what you're saying is that fundamentally non-duality is an ongoing epistemology. It's an ongoing way of knowing—

Richard Rohr: That's right. That's right.

Brie Stoner: --an ongoing posture of being open to the flow of love, which is uniting. We don't ever arrive. This isn't something that you can arrive in and be like, "Ding! I'm on floor seven. I got to non-duality," but rather, it's an inner stance that allows us to channel the flow of loving more deeply—

Richard Rohr: Beautiful.

Brie Stoner: --in relationality to the whole and to God. That helps me a lot, Richard.

Richard Rohr: It does because people don't feel you're laying a new ideological trip on them with this new clever word. You know something that might help in this conversation is, again, the master, Ken Wilber's, distinction between stages and states. So, you made the point that, and I think that's right, no one achieves it as a permanent state. Take what the Twelve-Step people call the confusing moments "HALTS": hunger, anger—

Paul Swanson: Loneliness.

Richard Rohr: --loneliness, tiredness, and stress. When you're in any of those five states, you will momentarily regress to a lower stage, but once you've touched upon what non-duality feels like or can achieve, you're forever fascinated by it. That's real helpful so none of us can walk around saying, "I'm permanently there."

I'm always glad we have this story in the Gospels of Jesus sort of being an idiot with this poor Syrophenician woman and calling her seemingly a dog.

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: He must have been hungry, angry, lonely, tired, or stressed that day.

Brie Stoner: He was having a bad day.

Richard Rohr: But the wonderful thing is he reverts then to a non-dual apology and praises her within the same conversation, but he slips into it for a moment. It's an important text that it's in there, that even Jesus didn't achieve non-duality as an absolutely settled permanent state. He must have lost it now and then. There's no evidence. Well, maybe when he was teaching the elders at thirteen, but there's not strong evidence that he had it from his birth to thirty, even. What was he doing all that time? Maybe he was chewing out people, I don't know. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Did you ever hear that John Prine song, "Jesus: The Missing Years"?

Richard Rohr: Oh, no.

Paul Swanson: It's a funny song just about his own imagining of what Jesus was up to, you know, falling in love, going to college, becoming a hippie.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it's transferred to our period.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. But taking this thread and continuing to pull on it, thinking about how Jesus has often been put on the pedestal of, well, Jesus was the son of God, therefore union was in the bag.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: So, how can little old me even achieve, to use the wrong word, but participate in union? How has Christianity set up kind of that false, the falsity that we also cannot live in union through moralistic trappings? You talk about in this tenet it's not private perfection, but as a system, that's kind of been the set up for union for a lot of us, as we've seen how do we participate in the life of God from a deep sense of union?

Richard Rohr: Well, I'm sure you know what my answer is: Because we worship the messenger instead of the message. I'm not saying we should even worship the message, but the way I usually say it is, "We worship Jesus as an icon of specialness and absolute uniqueness instead of following him." It's very clear in all four Gospels, he said, "Follow me." He did not say, "Worship me."

In John's Gospel, he says, "What I have done, you also must do." That's a significant change of position, of strategy. If we can see Jesus as the model, as the mentor of what union looks like, what union feels like, and what we also can do. I don't know that we're going to get very far until we do that. It's no small issue. All this worshiping of Jesus. I know you've got to do it in the first half of life to find your focus. You need devotion. You need to fall to your knees. You need someone to say, "You are my Lord and my teacher." But then we don't really let him be our teacher. We just keep worshiping the icon instead of letting the transposition of place take place.

In *The Universal Christ* book, I talk about how good Catholics, who I'm most familiar with, they will come up to Communion, not the largest majority of them but enough, and after you've handed them the body of Christ and they receive it, they will turn toward the tabernacle where the reserved bread is kept and genuflect, which shows they didn't get the point: You're now the tabernacle.

It's, "No, I am not worthy." Well, what's the point of this whole communion thing? It was just given to you. The state of communion was given to you in your unworthiness. We're

back to our earlier themes, how they're all building on one another. Now I can walk with a dignity that I don't have to apologize for, or prove, or earn. That's our big message, that incarnation is continuing in the body of Christ, and we do that by continuing into symbolic elements. I admit they're symbolic. That's not saying they're not real and giving those elements for people to eat and then, you stand there with your dignity restored.

But we keep them at the lower level where they're still fawning and fretting about their worthiness. What a way to miss the message. Of course, we're unworthy, but do you really think you're ever going to get to a place where you're not?

Paul Swanson: Right. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Yeah. But that was the set-up trap for so many of us—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, the trap. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: --within Christianity, to think that we were going to just get to that place of perfection—

Richard Rohr: Someday.

Brie Stoner: --and that we had to deny our humanity, and all the things that made us human, which gets to your question.

Paul Swanson: And deny the divine image within us.

Richard Rohr: Within us.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Like I remember—

Richard Rohr: You got it.

Paul Swanson: As foundational.

Brie Stoner: --I remember coming across this and thinking for the first time, could it be possible that I am also incarnating Christ? What? As me? Even with all my daily momentary mistakes?

Richard Rohr: Sure.

Brie Stoner: I think what I'm picking up on, and what you're saying, Richard, is that this concept of union, you just used the example of Communion, the Eucharist, for example. It's not something that just happens once and is done—

Richard Rohr: No. No.

Brie Stoner: --so if we use this dynamic principle, the act of union is "unioning," It's "oneing,"—

Richard Rohr: "Oneing," very good.

Brie Stoner: --to your use of "oneing," it seems to be an act that is continually happening. And picking up on some of our previous themes of the Trinity and the path of descent, that union results



in an outpouring. It moves us into manifestation. What do you think is the relationship between non-dual union and creativity or outpouring in love?

Richard Rohr: Well, I don't know that your creativity can be truly generous and free from ego unless it's founded in a deeper connection than "I'm doing this. I'm the dancer. I'm the artist. I'm the poet," which you are, but it's because you're standing in a deeper stream whether you know it or not.

Again, Jung's phrase, "Called or not called, God is," which he had written over his doorway. Named God or not named God, God still is acting. God's action really doesn't depend upon us. It might be increased on us believing there is a God. God is still acting because you are still his living icon.

That came about through a rather massive, unfortunate understanding of the word "believe" because I do know or have faith. Most of our Bibles translated "believe" or "have faith" as a mental exercise. If we had translated it as "trust," to trust that God is good, you are good, God is here, you are here, that would have born much more fruit, and it's certainly legitimated by the Greek word in the New Testament that we usually translate belief or faith [as] have trust. It's a much more dynamic, fruitful word. It really is. So, when I get to read the Gospel in church, I just change it. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: The Rohr translation.

Richard Rohr: I'm terrible. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Richard, not to butter your bread too much, but I'm thinking about some of the ways that you've spoken in this podcast where when we brought up The Universal Christ, you'd say, "Did I write that?"

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah, constantly.

Paul Swanson: To me, it's such a model of how you are that vessel. You are that glass that the light is shining through, and that you sometimes—

Richard Rohr: One. I'm one.

Paul Swanson: One. Yeah. Sorry. Not the only, but you're even surprised by the way that God is also working through you.

Richard Rohr: Constantly. Constantly. And I say, "Why me?" I do. "Why me?" I think he picked someone in this case of medium intelligence and medium morality so I couldn't think I earned it, or, "Oh, boy, I'm a little superman," and I believe that with all my heart.

Paul Swanson: And a little bit smelly.

Richard Rohr: And a little bit smelly. [laughter] I put my deodorant on this morning.

Brie Stoner: I'm really appreciating, I know we've been saying this a lot, but how these tenets are building on each other. We were speaking before about personhood as one through whom the whole resounds. Seeing reality as one reality that is a system of relationships that is relational so that

we have that sense of connection to the whole and hopefully live from that.

I wonder if you could talk to us a little bit about Paul's description of the mind of Christ, and how is non-duality connected in your mind to his description, and how might that be related to this wholeness that we keep talking about, the mind of the whole or the connection to the whole?

Richard Rohr: I don't know that he gives a fully proper definition, does he, of the mind of Christ? He uses the phrase, but the context in which I remember it, you're already going in the right direction, it's only held by the whole, by the whole body in its connectedness, in its love, in its union, is the mind of Christ. The isolated individual can reflect it, can participate in it, can draw upon it, but for me, or you, or anybody to think we have it by ourselves in a state of separateness, that's what's not true.

Even in Catholic theology, of course, we gave a great deal of authority to the Bishop of Rome who we saw as this successor of Peter, and who's the man who says it wrong the most in the New Testament? It's Peter. So, right there we're given an exit clause that the one who supposedly speaks for the whole still is fallible. That's why no pope has invested himself in his supposed own infallibility. Before he proclaims a doctrine to be true, he has to read the whole body of Christ and say, "Am I reflecting that?"

But the trouble is in these first 500 years since the Reformation, we thought the whole body of Christ was the Eastern Church and the Western Church and largely ignored the Protestants because we were too able to exclude you as heretics. We really wouldn't do that anymore, I don't think.

Brie Stoner: Thank you. Thanks for including us. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Good to be back. Richard, it seems like the implications for us would be to live as those for whom the whole resounds through. Is it right to say do we tune our minds to the whole as our ethical work in contemplation?

Brie Stoner: As the mind of Christ.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, as the mind of Christ.

Richard Rohr: That's lovely. I like that. That takes time. Well, I'm glad I entered at the point I entered on. I don't expect everybody to be a scholar or a historian, but to make some attempt to understand did other people ever say this? That's the critical way you've got to be attentive to the whole. Did the Eastern Church ever teach this? Did any Protestant theologian ever teach this? That's the humility that's required to be attentive to the whole.

Invariably, if you take the time to do that, you'll see that the great truth keeps recurring in century after century, group after group; less so in one case, more so in another. It really takes humility to be attentive to the whole because you have to let go of your central position as the whole enchilada and "defer to one another out of obedience to Christ," as Paul says.

The title, and Pope Francis has made a great deal of this, that the title from the early

centuries we gave to the Bishop of Rome, it's written on stone all over the city of Rome, is Pontifex Maximus. That's Latin. It literally means "the great bridge builder."

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Pontifex, to build a bridge; Maximus, the greatest bridge builder. Oh, if only he'd done that, you know!

Brie Stoner: If only we all did that.

Richard Rohr: Well, but he didn't model it for us, but Pope Francis is making a great deal of it. It's written everywhere. If you ever go to Rome, look on a stone. It'll say, "Pontifex Maximus." This pope or that pope, "Pontifex Maximus." That it never hit them that they'd taken that title to themselves, but the only bridge they were building were the little clans within Catholicism. They didn't know how to reach outside, or how to reach to the Eastern Church very well. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Hmm. It's reminding me a little bit of thinking about the symphony and how in the very beginning the first chair violinist gets up, and then everybody tunes to—

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes. You always hear that.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. That to live this out would be an invitation to constantly be listening and tuning ourselves to the whole.

Richard Rohr: That's a wonderful metaphor.

Paul Swanson: That is a beautiful image.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Yeah. I like it. I like it.

Paul Swanson: So, Richard, thinking about someone who leans into this inner non-dual stance, what do you see as their role or responsibility back to their local community, whether it's a church or their own post in their local context?

Richard Rohr: Of course, the obvious first answer is their first responsibility is to model it, to represent it. Their second responsibility is to know it'll be roundly misunderstood. It will look like a false moral equivalence. It will look like refusing to take a stance, like not being prophetic. It's really a shame that it looks, to the person who immediately takes sides overly eagerly, they don't admire it first of all. They will seek to shoot it down as weak thinking, or pandering to the enemy, or the heretic, or whatever it might be.

So, I think if you don't teach the non-dual mystic, contemplative—use whatever word, just Christian, as it should be—some ability to carry the cross of rejection. I have to believe that's why Jesus was rejected. I mean, because we say, "Why would anybody reject anybody so loving and so sweet?" Well, you just heard why. It doesn't look like strength. It looks like weakness. It looks like standing for nothing. It looks like refusing to take a stance because you don't join my stance on right or left, and that's why it's an equal opportunity critique of both the conservative position and the liberal position. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: But it also seems to be prophetic, too, right?

Richard Rohr: Oh, go ahead. Please.

Brie Stoner: That it's not a stance that, as we've been saying, results in passivity where we don't have the moral courage to stand up and speak out for those who are being oppressed. And so, your whole life in a way, Richard, has been so about this prophetic action piece, which is why—

Richard Rohr: Maybe. Not my whole life. Little pieces of it.

Brie Stoner: All right.

Richard Rohr: Little pieces of it.

Brie Stoner: --but even in the desire to bring "action" into the name of the center, Center for Action and Contemplation. Where do you see the role of prophetic action being a part of this tenet or maybe needing to be a part of this tenet? Because even when I read divine union, not private perfection, sometimes in my mind, I find myself wanting to be like, "Divine union that's embodied in prophetic action. Divine union that is manifesting prophetic action."

You know, I find myself wanting to add the action piece almost as a reminder just to myself that this isn't a private, internal stance. That it has a bearing on our actions in the world.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It has a public face.

Brie Stoner: Yes. It was that public—So, what would you say is the role of prophetic action, and where would you put that into this tenet, or is it in this tenet for you?

Richard Rohr: You know, Thomas Merton says in one place, if your virtue-- I'm giving my own words because of my faulty memory, but I think this is the gist of it: If your virtue is entirely private, individual, inner virtue, which is mostly what all of us have been taught. We weren't taught about public virtue. It was all I'm individually humble. I'm individually charitable. We ended up not being very well able to do that because we didn't move it to the public forum.

But, anyway, back to Merton's understanding. He says that's altogether too private if it never has a public face, and that's what secularism is dealing with, and Millennials are dealing with that they're sort of afraid to show their cards. I admit certainly old-time Catholics and Evangelicals didn't just show their cards, they sort of pummeled you with their answers. We can't go back to that, but is there any place, and I think there has to be, for public virtue?

Let me give an example that might not please everybody, but I always have thought that if Hillary Clinton had spoken more openly and calmly of her Methodist faith, showed a more nuanced bridge-building opinion between supposed pro-choice and supposed pro-life, I bet she would have been elected. I really do. But she ended up allowing herself to be seen as a secular liberal. Do you understand? She didn't know how to bring, that's pretty much Protestant theology. It didn't develop the secular city, and how to live with faith in the secular city. Not that we Catholics did it much better, but we at least had it on paper that we should do that.

So, I have to use an example like that that we all can relate to, so it doesn't become theoretical.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I really think it was her election to lose, and now look what we have. It's heartbreaking, really.

Brie Stoner: It's helpful to bring in the public virtue into this tenet for myself. I'm thinking that in a way it's as if you're saying the public virtue of divine union, not private perfection, is the goal of healthy religion—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --so that the public virtue component is of a lived response and action of coming out of divine union. That's helpful for me to move it into an external flow so that it doesn't just stay in that private inner perfection that you're distinguishing from.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Right now, it's—well, it's always been—I think it's crucial. If we don't bridge that gap everybody trying to be privately saved, and so forth, but it has seemingly no effect on their public attitudes. In fact, they're a little embarrassed to quote anything that is spiritual, Christian, faith filled. We've got to speak to the public forum, or we're going to end up being totally rejected, I think, because we have nothing unique to offer, really.

Brie Stoner: Or helpful, practical. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That's right. That's right.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, and I'm thinking about with this private perfection, how some folks after seeing this will translate it as like my new pursuit is non-dual enlightenment and, again, kind of on that private lane still. I know you've said before and written before like, you can't catch the wild ass by chasing it, but you also can't—

Richard Rohr: Not chase it.

Paul Swanson: --not chase it. So how does one approach this without the sense of non-dual being an end goal but more of the dynamic process that one leans into or shows up with?

Richard Rohr: Well, let's go back to what we introduced a few minutes ago about this being our epistemology. It's not yet our metaphysics. If we studied epistemology the first year, the next three years, we'd study metaphysics. Metaphysics is the nature of what is. How do you know what is than what it is? Now, that's a task of a whole lifetime: What's reality? What's truth? What's good? and so forth.

Unless we start engaging at that level, I think we just keep refining our epistemology over and over again. If I had any possible critique of some Buddhism, that would be it: is it anything more than refining your epistemology? Now because they've done that, they end up doing it very well, I might add. Much better than we do. So, we need to learn to do it. How do you know what you know? Through what lens are you seeing?

We Christians have to get started more seriously on that path, but the goal is finally to exemplify a unified life. The most radical statement of union is with the divine, “I and the father are one.” You can’t get more radical than that. Then, “I and the neighbor are one. Whatever you do to the neighbor, you do to me.” But then Jesus pushes it to the limit, “Not just the neighbor, but the least neighbor: the least of the brothers and sisters.”

Then, the whole message of the divine indwelling is calling you to trust union with yourself. I don’t know which comes first. I think it differs from person to person, but I know some degree of union has to be experienced here in me before I have the courage to imagine it anywhere else. Before I can honor the Big Spirit in trees and grasshoppers, I-- Union sees union; union honors union. So, I don’t know what bridge you’re going to take. You’re going to start with God, make the big leap. It’s usually pretty superficial if you haven’t first celebrated union with at least one other person, or one grasshopper, or one least of the brothers and sisters.

So, the more common path that I would trust is people who do human love well are ready for divine love, but there are, I have met people who early in life, like little kids who their First Communion is just a magical day for them. They believe it, and they never have doubted it. They floated around for a few days afterwards. They almost start with God, and then they try to love the other unions little by little. Did I speak to what you said?

Paul Swanson: You did. You did it beautifully. Thank you.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Brie Stoner: So, if non-duality then, if we shift our mindset to not think of it as something that we’re trying to get to, but rather to see it as how love is changing the lens that we have for reality and ourselves, that as we continue in this transformative work of love, we are being unified to that one reality. We are healing ourselves from the fallacy of the separate self. We are moving into the flow of the Trinity, so that in essence, all of these tenets then become true because it is about this flow, and trust, and path of descent. That this entire journey is one of shifting how we perceive so that we can join in the flow of love better, and more, and more deeply.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes. Yeah. Really, to be seemingly simplistic, I don’t think you can love without some degree of non-duality. How could you unless you overcome the split between you and your partner, you and the other? All of our issues, all of our issues—political, social, personal, religious-wise—for their resolution demand some degree of non-duality to overcome unfair, artificial dichotomies and dualisms.

You’ve heard me say this. Of course, I love language and the roots of words, but diabolos—dia, through; bolos, ballein, means to throw—so the diabolical is when things are thrown apart. We live in a world where everything is thrown apart. In that sense, everything is diabolical unless some people come along who reunite it, in their mind, in their heart, and say, “Those two are not separate—those two races, those two religions, those two people.”

Gee, you could take all of the sacraments, all seven of them. Marriage being the most symbolic, you know, “You are not two, you are one.” Don’t separate it. Penance, saying you

are not separate from your sins. Learn from them. They're forgiven but learn from them. The Eucharist itself, of course, which you rightly call Communion. But go down the line. It's always overcoming splits to experience wholeness, to be whole and, therefore, to see wholeness over there.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thank you, Richard, and I'm thinking now of, knowing that we have a lot of listeners who are in their first half of life, how do you recommend that someone in that first half of life approach this tenet of non-duality and not try to bypass into some of what you have called, like, second-half-of-life spirituality? What kind of guidance would you offer those in their first half of life?

Richard Rohr: Good question. In the practical order, it's going to amount to not being jerked around by your hormonal, emotional life, which is overly invested in your younger years. God probably gave it to us to give us a kick in the pants, to get us started, and passionate about something, zealous about something. But that's why Meister Eckhart says, "Detachment, detachment, detachment."

So start practicing already in your twenties and thirties a non-identification. Cynthia speaks of that so much. A non-identification with your own feelings, your own zeal, your own righteousness, your own self-image, your own group, and you will see the fruits of it by the middle of life. You will be a Pontifex Minimus. You'll be a little bridge builder. [laughter] I never said that before.

Brie Stoner: I'm making a tee shirt.

Paul Swanson: That's great.

Richard Rohr: There are four major splits from reality that we all have made, I think it's fair to say that, in varying degrees, to create our false self. If you remain split in regard to even one of these, you haven't fallen into the beauty and goodness of the True Self.

First of all, we split from our shadow self, which we talked about earlier in the week, and pretend to be our idealized self. That split has to be overcome. That was the meaning of confession of sin. seeing your shadow. So, these aren't new psychological ideas. They had old language.

Secondly, we split our mind from our body and soul, and live in our minds. That's what most mature religion understood, and why they encouraged some form of meditation, to get away from that idolization of thinking that led to the low point in Western philosophy, "I think, therefore I am." "No, you are not your thinking," the mystics and saints would say.

Third split. We split from death and try to live our life without any death. There's Ernest Becker again, *The Denial of Death*. Let's just live comfortably. Let's try to maintain our beauty, which you only have for a while. Enjoy it, you young people. [laughter] It's very lovely while you have it. Slowly surrender to the inevitability of death, and that whatever this embodiment is, as I presently know it, is not going to last forever. So, you've got to find the life on the other side of death now. You can't wait until you die. Once you know, then, "What did I ever lose by dying? It's okay."



Fourth split. We split ourselves from other selves, and try to live apart, superior, and separate. Now, if you achieve all of those, which a lot of people do, that's almost their job in the first half of life—deny their shadow, deny their intimate connection with other races and religions or people, run from death—it's almost impossible to have authentic religion because you can't experience union with God at any depth. You can be religious in some sense, but you won't be holy. And do remember we're real lucky in the English language that the words "whole" and "holy" are clearly the same word. Now, in Spanish, too, *santo* is "healed"?

Brie Stoner: Sanidad. They have the same root.

Richard Rohr: Roots, yeah. Sanidad means healed, right?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. So, there was this deep recognition in language, yeah. I like to make it that explicit, and then people know we're not talking theory. We're talking about very real journeys, very real surrenders, and recognitions. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: That's so helpful because—

Richard Rohr: It is. It is.

Brie Stoner: --as we've been journeying through each of these tenets and wanting to end each of them by asking, "How do we practice this one?" I feel like you've already in a way given us a way to practice his tenet because you're pointing us to these four ways that we tend to split, these four ways that we tend to split off and split apart, to pay attention to them, to look at each of those four tendencies that we have, and to move with God into a healing and wholeness and a whole-making process where we can be brought back together into union in each of those four ways.

Richard Rohr: Perfect. Thank you. Thank you for understanding. Nothing satisfies me more. It's always toss and catch, pitch and catch. When someone catches it, the message is real. Until that incarnation happens, it's just hanging out there. That's been my great gift to have people like you around who, wow, not just catch it, but appreciate it, and to know why it matters because a lot of people don't. They're good people, but this is when Jesus talks caught up in the worries of this world, the other three kinds of soil, that they don't have time to know why this matters, often until the end of life, hospice workers tell me. Sometimes, they put it off until the last five months, five days, even five minutes, to finally say, "Oh, my God, all that mattered. Now, I'm going to surrender to union. I have no other choice except to put myself in the hands of love," and according to the hospice workers I've talked to, and I mean this, they say, "Most people do, at the very end."

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Good to hear. Hope so. But they could have had a much happier life if they'd done it earlier. I got to complain a little bit.

Paul Swanson: I mean that's such a great invitation for us in the first half of life to begin now. So, thank you



so much for offering that. Should we turn to some questions from the voicemails?

Richard Rohr: Yes. Please do. Please do.

Unknown Speaker: So, my question relates to principle seven, which is our non-duality being the highest level of consciousness, and what I'd like to ask, Father, is can you possibly cast a vision for what you see as a correspondent, creative orthopraxy for common good that relates to this Alternate Orthodoxy? So many of the models created by church worlds still maintain a vertical or an acceptable dominant posture of privilege when assisting those deemed underprivileged. So, I'm looking for your creative or prophetic imagination around what you see as a democratic society of people that really are more horizontal, are truly living with and for each other?

Richard Rohr: Thank you. You know because non-duality—I and the Father are one; I and the neighbor are one—is such a high goal, you ask for a practice. and I think that's right on, you have to practice acting as if. At the beginning, it'll almost feel like pretending. It won't feel like experiential knowledge yet. Like when we go to communion at the Eucharist. Well, okay, I'll receive this. It's a nice little blessing for me. But it really takes a whole lifetime to gradually sink into the level of cellular knowledge.

So, my advice would be act as if you're one with God. Act as if you're one with yourself, and don't allow the splits to define you. Act as if you are one with your neighbor. Act as if you are one with the trees and the sky because most Christians think of that as Paganism or animism, we used to call it. So, they're afraid to go there. Well, I mean we created put-down words like "tree-hugging." Well, I'm encouraging tree-hugging. [laughter] Yeah. Act as if, and you will soon know as if, that it wasn't wrong to embrace this beautiful tree, or anything else.

Brie Stoner: I love that she brought up prophetic imagination in relationship to this final tenet because it seems like what this whole path of kenosis, of self-emptying, of love manifesting, incarnating, is also its intention with unknowing, and unsaying, and undoing—

Richard Rohr: That's right. That's right.

Brie Stoner: --in a way the unhelpful, and unhealthy, and dominant systems of how things are done. So, there's a tension between that unknowing and unsaying, and moving into emptiness so that we can actually move into the potentiality of God manifesting something new in our time, through us, as us, that we can't-- Who is it? Is it Einstein who says that we can't solve a problem at the consciousness that created it?

Richard Rohr: That's right. That's a great line.

Brie Stoner: Isn't that amazing?

Richard Rohr: Oh, it's great. Did I let you finish it because they should hear that?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. That "problems can't be solved at the level of consciousness in which they were created."

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brie Stoner: So in a very real way, I think we have an opportunity as contemplative creatives to move into the problems of our world knowing that we're not going to be able to solve them together, these urgent crises that we're facing. We're not going to be able to solve them together at the same consciousness at which they were created.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: So, what a holy invitation for us.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Invitation.

Paul Swanson: As I'm hearing both of you, part of what landed for me was that acting as if, and this unknowing and undoing and creative potentiality, it reminded me of almost this sense of cultivating the good soil and allowing things to grow that you may not otherwise have known were possible.

Richard Rohr: Perfect. Yep, yep, yep. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thank you. All right. Next question.

Daniel Kwenshe: My name is Daniel Kwenshe of the 2020 Cohort. My question is about the theme number seven: non-duality is the highest level of consciousness. In particular, my question to Richard, Brie, or Paul, is for them to reflect on my sometimes all too frequent discouraging feelings of failure with my being impatient or otherwise unloving to my spouse, in particular, but others too.

In the context of the wonderful and saintly people we read about in the Living School, do you have, or have you had similar feelings, and what do you do as a practiced response?  
Thank you.

Richard Rohr: Since he gave you two permission to answer, please take the lead.

Brie Stoner: I'm laughing only because of course I know what you're talking about. I think we all do. One of the things I have loved about this season, Richard and Paul, is how much perfectionism has come up.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: And it's even in this tenet: private perfection is not the goal. It's not about perfectionism, understood as that non-human, never making mistakes, never failing those you love, never having to say, "Yeah, I really screwed that one up, and I'm sorry."

So, I think what your question is inviting us to do is re-think, reconsider, and reframe non-duality to include our imperfection. It's not that we get to non-duality when we're perfect, we arrive in a non-dual stance when we can hold our imperfection with love and tenderness and still see divine union somehow mysteriously manifesting through even our mistakes.

I feel like even this week, there have been moments, Paul, where you have mirrored back love to me after I do something stupid. This is a small example, right? But the gaze that you have

of full acceptance as a friend allows me to continue to relax my boundaries and edges that hold me in that separate idea that I'm not capable of union. I'm not capable of non-duality. God couldn't possibly incarnate as this mess.

Paul Swanson: That's very kind to hear. I think for me the school of love has been my greatest spiritual teacher, particularly in my relationship with my wife, Laura. When I am impatient with her or speak out in a way that is unkind or unloving, the way that we've been able to playfully acknowledge that has been so helpful to not have like this tight reign of like, "I messed up, and I'm blaming you," or as in that glass incident spoken of earlier, but just to be able to play with the hurt feelings at times so that they don't become something we can't talk about.

For us, it often starts with a playfulness and then leads into a deeper conversation that kind of jolts us out of holding one another up to this sense of what does it mean to be the perfect married couple. We have to relax and allow ourselves to fall and laugh at ourselves before sometimes we can reengage into the seriousness of the school of love.

Richard Rohr: Wow. You know a terrible thing has been done to our generation in this phenomenon we call post-modernism, that almost what it means to be educated is to be a critical thinker. Translate that an antagonistic thinker. To point out the opposite.

On the road, I almost feel like I'm sort of lucky I'm getting old because public discourse, especially with young people, and they don't know they're doing it, but the first hot shot will point out how this book shows that that's an overstatement, and now I've regained control of the ball. Please don't be offended by this, but even one person told me who'd listened to our first set of podcasts, said, "Oh, Brie and Paul are just fawning over you." And I hope you're not, but what it means to have a critical mind is to be critical.

So, when you love something, people are a little embarrassed by it. They're a little embarrassed by appreciation, gratitude. I got to show that I went to college, and the way I show I went to college is by picking, dismissing. For the last four years, or so, it's been the first question in every question-and-answer session. It's the hand that's waving the wildest is always, "Well, I'm going to one-up you and show you why what you just said is not always true. They don't realize what they're denying themselves, you know? Can't you just appreciate it a little bit before you depreciate it?"

This is no small thing. It's the nature of the Western mind now, and I think it's why we're so angry, because you can't live in a dismissive, depreciating mind all day to prove how smart you are, how clever you are, by putting down anybody's thesis about anything, anything. They do that to one another, and now fortunately, I've had many by the third day of a retreat or conference who would come up and quasi-apologize because they get what they're doing, but some don't. They just write you off as a patriarchal pig, or whatever, or a Catholic, or a white man, or a pick your category. But once you find your way to dismiss, and then you can see the ego sitting there with smugness, "Gotcha!"

Paul Swanson: Starting with the no instead of the yes.

Richard Rohr: Starts with no. We speak of these "gotcha" moments. Liberal people are notorious for this. It's just I've regained my authority, and they particularly do it in relationship to spiritual

truths, which are trying to take away some of that smugness. I can see why initiation rights were necessary, particularly for the male in history because that's the normal path of the male, but now it's the path of the female too, "I got to show I'm smarter than the teacher," and you probably are in this case, but you're going to end up very dumb if you go through life just shooting down every new possibility as, "Well, I read a book that shows that isn't always true." Okay. Did I say it's always true? Usually, I try not to, but I guess I sound like that sometimes. You hear what I'm saying. It's monumental now.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, and especially—

Richard Rohr: It's killing us.

Brie Stoner: --in relationships. What I hear you saying is that we're conditioned to, in relationships, to pick each other apart, to not forgive, to kind of have a tendency to hold these things over each other, which results in that ongoing separateness.

Paul Swanson: To not overcome the split that we had just talked about.

Brie Stoner: Yes. Exactly. So, that's a beautiful invitation for us to pay attention to how that's happening in our relationships and move toward wholeness in ourselves and with each other.

Richard Rohr: Then, I'll get these people and these letters, who will preface it by three different, "Please correct me if I'm wrong. I might have misunderstood you, but you're not saying--" They'll even do that in private on the edge of the room to save you any possible embarrassment. I don't want to dismiss the need for a critical mind. I need people to criticize me, but you can see the two ways of doing it. One, I've exposed you publicly and regained status in the group; the other, eager to maintain both of our dignities by saying it personally. How are we going to teach this to a world that really doesn't understand it anymore? Because it's all about winning. That's the American remaining philosophy of life: I win, therefore I am.

Brie Stoner: Power over. It's power over, instead of power with.

Richard Rohr: I win, therefore I am. I win the conversation. I win with the more rude vocabulary. I win by speaking loud. They've proven that in studies. The senator that speaks loud is taken as the one who has truth. Oh, God, it's probably just the opposite, you know?

Thank you for letting me tack this on the end because it's huge. It's really huge, The failure of public discourse. I know, Brie, you're helping other people trying to address this in American culture. I hope we can. How do you unlearn aggressive discourse, which is really violent discourse? Yeah. [music]

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.

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