



EVERYTHING BELONGS

An Alternative Orthodoxy
with Brian McLaren

Mike Petrow: Hey, everybody. Welcome back to the Everything Belongs podcast where we're talking about living the teachings of Richard Rohr forward. This season we are reading Richard's book, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, and just a reminder, you don't have to read the book to listen to the podcast, but you are absolutely welcome to read along with us as we go through. This week we'll be talking about chapter six, *An Alternative Orthodoxy: Paying Attention to Different Things*. Drew Jackson, my friend, it is so good to be here with you today. This is our first episode together.

Drew Jackson: It's our first episode, Mike, and I'm happy to be in conversation with you about this topic of an alternative orthodoxy, paying attention to what matters.

Mike Petrow: My friend, it is such a gift to work with you. It is such a gift to learn from you, and I'll bet most people would have no way of knowing that you and I also, if memory serves, may have both been pastors at the same time in the same corner of the great state of Pennsylvania back in the day.

Drew Jackson: I think so, yeah, and it's so odd. We say it's a small world and it's like we didn't discover that until we connected over at CAC.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, what a gift, what a gift. I love getting to talk with you about this book in particular because I know it was the first of Richard's that you read. Before we jump into it, 60 seconds, what do you love about this chapter?

Drew Jackson: I really love the invitation to pay attention to what matters, what it says right in the title, because I think that's at the heart of it. It's really less of a command, it's an invitation, how are we paying attention to what matters most, and that question has always been, and really as of late, so resonant with me of just getting close attention to what matters.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, what a great way to set up this entire episode, that it starts with a question, what is most important, what matters to me, who gets to determine what I pay attention to. Oh my gosh, I hope all of us, listeners included, can sit with that as we go through. Paul and I are going to zip over to Richard's and have a conversation with him, and then, Drew, I can't wait to be back here with you to talk to our dean here at the Center for Action and Contemplation, Brian McLaren. From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Drew Jackson: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs. Richard, thank you for having us back and we're excited to talk about chapter six, *An Alternative Orthodoxy: Paying Attention to Different Things*. This is such a centralizing force I think that we've seen in your teachings throughout the years in the Living School and how this has really brought so many things together to instruct and to share with students and learners and seekers of all types to pay attention to different things with this Franciscan alternative orthodoxy. Before we jump into that chapter on the book, we wanted to begin by asking you about New Jerusalem, your early days as a Franciscan. Were you-

Richard Rohr: You two are always surprising interviewers.

Mike Petrow: We try.

Richard Rohr: You ask me things that I wouldn't think you're going to ask. Go ahead.

Mike Petrow: We're trying to keep you on your toes.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, well, it's working.

Paul Swanson: I hope.

Mike Petrow: So New Jerusalem is this alternative community-

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: ... whose roots are pretty well known. You're welcome to tell that story if that sparks interest to you. But how did New Jerusalem spark the seeds or plant the seeds of thinking differently about the spiritual life for you? What was it about that community that offered different things to pay attention to?

Richard Rohr: We were the strangest combination of conservative Catholic. Now you'd have to let me describe what I mean by conservative in terms of we love the sacraments, and there wasn't this slavish loyalty to the Pope or the church but it was assumed. No one openly questioned the doctrines of the church. Those just sat there as givens, and we worried about different things which more were present tense joys revealed in our liturgies which people came just to watch us do mass because it really was quite inspiring the way they sang, the songs they created. It's a shame we didn't record all of those. It was very joyful, as charismatics are known to be, but most people don't trust the joy. It looks superficial.

We were dangerously liberal, we were considered the liberal group in Cincinnati in the Catholic world which was half of the city at that time. We kept in good touch with the bishop, but we emphasized different things, contemplation and action. They are the two words which stayed with me enough that I came out here and named the center that. The kids loved to study scripture which wasn't very Catholic. Oh, if I'd say I'm going to start a course on Romans on Saturday mornings, they'd all be there taking notes.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: That isn't the way Catholics think. They liked courses on natural family planning or something, issues of justice, issues of international politics. Those were, I could bring up in a Sunday sermon and they'd all be with me.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: This was before the divisiveness we're in now. It was just like, well, doesn't everybody realize this, doesn't everybody realize justice is the shape of love and it's about being a liberal radical. It's doing the works of justice. I think living in this lower middle class neighborhood helped

because the stories were our neighbors, and that was part of Franciscan alternative orthodoxy. It was downward mobility and living in a different place. He lived down in lower Assisi where he moved from upper Assisi, and there you see the daily issues that the poor have to confront.

Mike Petrow: I'm so struck with this image of... so listening to you talk about when you're all building the New Jerusalem community and then it becoming something which is fundamentally Catholic but also something brand new, and I think about this image that always stays with me of Francis rebuilding the church, right?

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Mike Petrow: Isn't there that something that happens when he's young and he's literally trying to physically-

Richard Rohr: Literally.

Mike Petrow: ... brick by brick rebuild a church.

Richard Rohr: That's why you've got to go to Assisi and see those two churches that are still standing. You look at the rocks and it's not very good masonry, but know that literally Francis of Assisi and his early brothers put those rocks there.

Mike Petrow: And I love that he started with this calling that he felt he was supposed to rebuild this literal physical church in one place and they did it brick by brick. But then he sort of, he kind of rebuilt the church in general, with a capital C, by expanding what the church could be and should be by moving out into the community, by being among the poor and being out in the world and even getting outside of the building. How do you think Francis did rebuild the church? How did he expand our understanding of what the church could and should be?

Richard Rohr: Well, the story goes, it's painted in the Giotto's fresco in the upper basilica that when he and his brothers walked, and they did walk from Assisi to Rome to visit Pope Innocent. I don't know if it's an attractive legend that we created, but the story goes that Innocent the night before had had a dream and he saw a little man, that's the only reason he trusted him, a little man, and Francis was little. He was probably built like you, Michael.

Mike Petrow: I believe it.

Richard Rohr: In many ways like you, yeah. This little man was holding up the church of St. John Lateran which was where Pope Innocent lived. St. Peter's hadn't been built yet. He saw him leaning against it with his arm holding it up and he didn't know what it meant. And then when this little man walks in and speaks with such fervor, you'll hear the sermon in Brother Sun, Sister Moon if we watch it this October. You've got to order it, and I've got to talk Michael into showing it. He falls to his knees. I mean it's romantic, I admit, but then gives, with tears in his eyes, his vision of Holy Father. It's so simple and you just want to be that simple. You just want to be that trusting.

Zeffirelli just shows the feet of the Pope stepping down these almost golden stairs from his high throne and he says, “You have revealed the gospel to us with simplicity and joy,” and he kisses him. Now whether it was that romantic, but it was against all odds that this little layman nobody from Assisi that’s off the beaten track should come to Rome, get an audience, and get the blessing of the Pope. It’s just, how. He had no credibility.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, and I love that idea that he... this chapter is called Alternative Orthodoxy: Paying Attention to Different Things, and it seems like that’s what Francis did. He brought that simplicity of the gospel back.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah.

Mike Petrow: So I’m curious, when you talk about the alternative orthodoxy, you’re drawing on Francis, you’re drawing on the entire Franciscan tradition. What do you mean when you talk about alternative orthodoxy?

Richard Rohr: There’s a number of points, I never say them correctly, different listings at different times. But first of all, it’s the world is not divided into sacred and profane. It’s all sacred. So it’s a step away from churchiness that you need statues and priests. The whole thing’s already sacred. You don’t need to bless it with holy water. It’s already baptized. Where did he get such courage to think that way, to believe that way? I’m sure he loved holy water. If he would’ve been sprinkled with it, I’m sure he would’ve made a good Catholic sign of the cross, but I don’t think he needed it. That’d be the first thing.

Secondly, I think he was unimpressed by roles and titles. Now he had to wear a costume because that’s all they understood in the 13th century. You had to dress according to your state. So he gave us the robe of the peasant with a hat built in which they called a cowl. The only real change he made was replacing a belt with a rope because everybody knew the belt was where you kept your money. A belt was a wallet, and so he was not going to give any sign that he was walking around with any money and he became the symbol almost of the Franciscans was the rope. It was an alternative way of being churchied because it wasn’t clerical and for, given the examples that we had up to that point, Benedictine and Augustinian. Not that he was against them, but I wrote my bachelor’s thesis on this quote, “Don’t speak to me of Benedict, don’t speak to me of Augustine. God has shown me a different way.”

It is not even classic religious life. He seems to have accepted celibacy. I don’t know his reasons for that, but he didn’t demand it of the Third Order. Only the First and Second were expected to be celibate. They couldn’t think outside that box. To be fully dedicated to Christ, you had to be not dedicated to a sexual partner. We don’t have to think that way, and I’m glad you don’t think that way, but that’s later consciousness that doesn’t need it to be so literal. So what am I saying? It was a *forma vitae*. That’s the word Clare uses of her rule. A *forma vitae* would be translated a way of life, not a religious order rule, although it was treated like that.

Mike Petrow: One I’m assuming not a set of beliefs.

Richard Rohr: No. It was the first iteration that Francis took to Rome was one cardinal, you Protestants will love this, he supposedly threw it. This is nothing but a bunch of scripture quotes. This is no proper rule of a religious order, and I can imagine Francis just being utterly shocked. Well, of course it's bunch of scripture quotes. We can't do any better than that. That's why Francis was called by some the first Protestant. He really emphasized scripture, but he emphasized different scriptures, not the formal theology of Romans and Galatians, but the practical theology of the Sermon on the Mount. He was a Sermon on the Mount Christian, can say that without any doubt. He took it literally, thought we were supposed to do just that. Walk two by two, take nothing for your journey, and greet everybody on the way, don't let the world create enemies for you.

He was just a natural spiritual genius who knew how to simplify, and like the artistic world says, he was a minimalist. Get back to the minimal, minimal basics. Don't emphasize anything you don't have to which then became formalized in William of Ockham, the English Franciscan, and it was called Occam's Razor. Do I talk about that in this book? I don't.

Mike Petrow: No, you talk about it in *The Tears Of Things*, the book that's coming out next year.

Richard Rohr: In *The Tears of Things* I do. Finally got to it.

Mike Petrow: And Occam's Razor is?

Richard Rohr: They were debating about how you find truth, and this was at the height of 12th, 13th century scholastic philosophy and Ockham William of Ockham says, "You find it by seeking the most simple answer, or shave away," he said, "all assumptions. The answer that demands the fewest assumptions is most likely the true one." What a stroke of genius. Once you have to prove all your assumptions, you fight about all of those and you never get to the truth.

Mike Petrow: I love that. As we bring this conversation to a close, I always have loved immersing myself in how you talk about the alternative orthodoxy, and you said it, there's different lists in different places, all similar. We talk about the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy. We have a list of your alternative orthodoxy, the seven themes that drive your teaching. We encourage, in the Living School, our students to think about big picture alternative orthodoxy as a whole different way to think about the entirety of Christianity's gift to the world. But as a parting invitation for our listeners, how would you invite them using Occam's razor in the simplest way possible to lean into the alternative orthodoxy? I'm assuming it's not going out and studying all these lists and researching them.

Richard Rohr: No. I think the way that I tried to do it and Francis tried to live it is summed up in that phrase, it's a path of descent, not a path of ascent, which is why I was so attracted to the later French saint, Thérèse of Lisieux, who talked about the little way and the little way was trying as hard as you could to be the littlest flower in the garden that no one had to notice instead of the big rose or hyacinth or iris. I'm just a little violet in the corner of the garden. The path downward are what later was called a spirituality of subtraction. It's more about letting go than taking on, taking on more beliefs or more doctrines or more dogmas or more morality. I'm not weighing how moral I am and why I'm more moral than other people, but it's almost Buddhist, Franciscan spirituality, in its seeking of emptiness. Now Francis's word

for emptiness was poverty, and it probably got confused too much with physical poverty.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: I think most of us would agree to that now, and they were both radicals about it. They just wouldn't let go of it. Clare wouldn't die down there in Assisi, up there in Assisi till the Pope said in writing the promise that they could be a convent of nuns without any benefices, without any foundations, without any grants, without any dowries. That's what allowed convents to endure. They were often girls from rich families, and she said, "No, we will never accept any of those." Are you kidding? You can just hear, "Well, you won't last," and she held onto it. They sent word to Rome, she's going to die soon and she's not going to die until she has her privilege of poverty in her hands, and it came and two days later she dies.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Grasping this written thing, "I will not be like, really, other nuns." I don't think even Franciscans recognized how radical that was.

Paul Swanson: It's an amazing way to close just thinking about that radicality being caught, not codified and made a list to live out, but you have to lean into that faith, that quiet confidence of what you're being drawn to.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: So I'm sure everybody listening feels inspired and probably rightly terrified-

Richard Rohr: Terrified.

Paul Swanson: ... in an awesome way of what they're being invited into. Thank you, Richard.

Mike Petrow: I also want to say I really appreciate what you just said about. That really helps me a lot to rethink the Franciscan vow of poverty and that it's not just financial and the sort of poverty of spirit. We talk about this all the time. I love the desert fathers and mothers teaching on apatheia, letting go of what you don't need, not caring about what doesn't matter so you can care about what does, and it's only right now that I'm realizing how similar that is to the Franciscan vow of poverty.

Richard Rohr: Oh, really it is.

Mike Petrow: It's tough. We live in a culture of accumulation. So that's pretty cool.

Richard Rohr: You two are such good students.

Mike Petrow: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Drew Jackson: Welcome back, everyone. Today we are in conversation with Brian McLaren about the themes of chapter six, *The Alternative Orthodoxy: Paying Attention to What Matters*. Brian McLaren is the dean of CAC faculty. As a former evangelical pastor, Brian is a champion

for more loving, inclusive, and contemplative Christianity. As faculty member at the Center for Action and Contemplation, he teaches ways to reconnect with the message Jesus lived and died for, unconditional love. He's the author of *Faith After Doubt*, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, and most recently, *Life After Doom*. He hosts CAC's podcast, *Learning How to See*.

Mike Petrow: We just want to let our listeners know Brian was kind enough to join us for this recording by phone. Hurricane Milton knocked out power and internet in his area, and from that place and space he still found time to have this conversation with us. So we hope that you enjoy it as much as we did.

Drew Jackson: Hey, everyone. I want to welcome you, our listeners, as we jump into discussion around this chapter in *Eager to Love* on an alternative orthodoxy, and I'm so excited to be excited in this conversation and digging into the richness of what this chapter brings us.

Mike Petrow: Drew, I'm so glad you and I finally get to do an episode together.

Drew Jackson: Yeah, I'm excited about that, Mike. It's good to be in conversation with you.

Mike Petrow: And what better way for us to kick off our first episode together than to be in conversation with CAC's Dean, Brian McLaren. Brian, how are you doing, my friend?

Brian McLaren: Well, I am first of all super happy to be with the two of you, and so looking forward to talking about Richard's book and ideas and where they lead us. I am sort of catching my breath. We just evacuated from our home for Hurricane Milton, and we were fortunate enough to be welcomed into the home of some kind friends, one of whom is a Living School alumni or alumna. We got back home, we have electricity now. When we first got back there was no electricity and now we're still waiting for internet, but I'm really glad that on a phone signal we can have this conversation.

Mike Petrow: This is amazing. Thank you, thank you, thank you for making the time to talk to us in the midst of all of this chaos. We're so glad that you're safe. We're so glad that you're here. I have to ask, Brian, before we jump into talking about this chapter and this book, knowing what the last few seasons of your own podcast have focused on, how does it feel at exactly this moment to be watching these hurricanes roll in, everything that's happening ecologically around you?

Brian McLaren: Well, for folks who have listened to *Learning How to See*, they know I'm not surprised by more hurricanes and more intense hurricanes because we have baked this into our planetary system by burning fossil fuels and by so many other of our activities that harm this precious earth. So I'm not surprised by that. I suppose obviously every time you have to evacuate there's a lot of stress with that, there's a lot of unknown.

But I suppose the thing that does surprise me is how durable people's denial is about our reality, and it's actually relevant to our topic today because there are not only theological orthodoxies, there are economic orthodoxies and political orthodoxies, and often people get so tied into their orthodoxy that it becomes a kind of confirmation bias that keeps them from seeing any reality that might challenge it. And so that's what I'm feeling sort of on a deeper level. But I think like all of us, the next hurricane comes, the next wildfire, the next

tornado, and we just feel great empathy for our neighbors and a desire that we humans would take more seriously the pursuit of a sustainable and respectful and loving human/earth relationship.

Mike Petrow: Goodness gracious. I so appreciate that, Brian, and as we're about to jump into this conversation, this chapter is *Alternative Orthodoxy: Paying Attention to Different Things*. It begs the question, what do we choose to pay attention to, especially when it seems like the earth itself is trying to get our attention. Before we jump into that, I have to back up, and I don't want to introduce light conversation in the midst of very serious things, but for some of our listeners who are coming to this conversation from Richard, I have to ask, and I honestly don't know if I remember the answer to this question myself. Brian, how did you first encounter Richard and the work of the Center for Action and Contemplation?

Brian McLaren: Well, I'm sure I'd heard of Richard from various sources, but the first book of his that I read was called *Things Hidden*, and someone recommended it to me because they said, "There's this guy Richard Rohr, he's Catholic and you're a Protestant, but it feels like you two guys are on the same track." When I read *Things Hidden*, I certainly felt that, and I also felt Richard was smarter than me and wiser than me and ahead of me in the road in many ways. But the first time I heard him used the term alternative orthodoxy, I don't remember when or where that was, but I just thought what a fantastic way to frame what he saw St. Francis and so many of the mystics and contemplatives being about, because when traditional orthodoxies are in charge, they force people to define themselves as either agreeing with them or being unorthodox or heretical. What Richard did by framing this idea of alternative orthodoxy is he challenged the dominance of traditional orthodoxies just in the framing. Does that make sense? I just remember thinking, "Man, Richard's brilliant."

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's so good, and I love how he did it in the footsteps of Francis.

Brian McLaren: Yes, that's right, and Francis is such a perfect example of it. If we allowed ourselves to be dominated by a traditional orthodoxy, we would either call ourselves orthodox or we would boldly lift up the term heretical. We're heretical and proud of it, again, in the spirit of transcending and including together. Yeah, it's not that we just want to define ourselves by what we're against. We want to pay attention to what are to us deeper and bigger and more existential questions.

Drew Jackson: Absolutely, Brian, and you mentioned St. Francis, and obviously Richard is looking at and learning from and pulling from the life and the witness of St. Francis as he's talking about this idea of alternative orthodoxy. And so I'm curious, Brian, how did you first encounter Francis of Assisi, and how did Francis's life and witness land for you back in the day maybe when you first encountered him?

Brian McLaren: Yes. Oh, Drew, thanks for that question because it puts a smile on my face. I'm one of those nature lovers, right? I love wildlife, I love plants, I love animals, I love weather, I love the planet, I love astronomy. I just love all of that stuff. It's been part of me since I was a little kid catching garter snakes and keeping them for a few days and then letting them go. So I always have just been that kind of person, and so I heard that that's what St. Francis was too, that he was a person who loved living creatures and so on. So I had kind of the typical, what do they call it, the Franciscan birdbath idea, you know the statue of St. Francis as part

of a birdbath, but some guy who's close to nature, and that made me like him even before I knew anything about him.

I think the first biography I read must have been Chesterton's biography, and I think I have read more biographies of St. Francis than any other person. So he just became a deep interest of mine, and I went from one biography to the next and appreciated many different vantage points on him. Because I grew up Protestant, I also read a lot of biographies of Martin Luther, and I always felt that Martin Luther, he was a reformer because he questioned certain issues, but I never felt that Martin Luther went deep enough compared to St. Francis. I felt that St. Francis had some deeper intuition. What needed reform was more than just a doctrine or more than just an ecclesial structure. So I think, Drew, that's what drew me to him as from the very first biography that I ever read.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's so cool. Brian, in our last episode with Carmen Acevedo Butcher, we talked about my favorite Franciscan sing, and I apologize in advance for saying this out loud, but preach the gospel and if necessary, use birds.

Brian McLaren: Yes, I love it.

Mike Petrow: Love of nature. I'm so excited to get into this idea of the alternative orthodoxy with both of you. One of the things, especially in our essentials course of engaged contemplation, Brian, which you and I have worked together on, we've gotten into this idea that when we talk about alternative orthodoxy, we're very often here at the CAC talking about three different but very, very complementary ideas. The very first one is the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy, and this is an idea that was explored by sort of like post-Vatican II Franciscan theologians. After the Second Vatican Council, the resource movement was going on. Richard learned about this from William Short at San Diego Franciscan School of Theology, and it's a way to look at the Franciscans in the context of the church emphasizing different things as a sort of a minority report. Drew, I know that this is the first of Richard's books that you read, and I feel like you might have a bit of a passion for the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy. Can you tell us a little bit more about what we mean when we talk about alternative orthodoxy from the Franciscan lens?

Drew Jackson: Yeah, so you're right, Mike. Eager to Love was the first of Richard's books that I read, and this vision of Francis in the Franciscan orthodoxy, alternative orthodoxy really did capture me. And so when we talk about Franciscan alternative orthodoxy, it's really referring to just that, that minority position that the Franciscans held inside of the Roman Catholic Church in the larger Christian tradition. And so, listeners, you might be familiar with Richard using the phrase of living on the edge of the inside, right? So that space on the edge of being inside of the institution, not outside of it, but still very much in it, but on the edge and not quite in the center in the sort of the accepted orthodoxy of what was being put forth at the time.

And so with the Franciscans, it was like they were not called heretical by any stretch, but they were emphasizing different things. And so they never bothered with fighting popes or bishops or arguing about this scripture or that scripture or this doctrine or dogma, but they were interested in quietly, as Richard says, quietly but firmly paying attention to different things like simplicity, humility, nonviolence, contemplation, solitude and silence, earth care, care for all of creation, focus on the least of the brothers and sisters. And so that was really

at the heart of Franciscan alternative orthodoxy. To really, I think, kind of sum it up, it's really an emphasis on orthopraxy, meaning right practice over orthodoxy or right doctrine or belief with the focus or the goal to tell us being love. Love was the highest category in the Franciscan school of thought.

So yeah, that idea really captured me as something that just felt resonant for me at the time. I think one of the things that was resonant for me is as I read about Franciscan alternative orthodoxy is being able to see the thread kind of going back to the ministry and the way of Jesus, that there was something about how Jesus was positioned, positioned himself within his own religion and tradition, that he wasn't necessarily focused on being seen or identified as orthodox for whatever that would've meant, but his focus was on the goal of love and practicing that way in the world and inviting others to the practice of that way in the world. If that practice of love transgressed the boundaries of what was said to be orthodox, then so be it, right?

So I'm curious, Brian and Mike, both of you, how do you see that thread between Francis and the alternative orthodoxy and Jesus and the way that he was positioned even within his own religion and tradition?

Brian McLaren: I'll respond. I'd love to hear what your thoughts are on that too, Mike. Drew, as we're having this conversation, I'm remembering one of the other places I felt I got a lot of insight into St. Francis was when I read a historical novel. I don't know if either of you read it. It was a very thick novel called *The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco wrote it, and it gave me a sense of the political upheaval of the period of time in the few centuries after St. Francis. The Catholic Church in Europe made a decision that it would use physical torture as a way of controlling people who dared to disagree with the authority of the church. With that political reality that if you disagree you could be tortured, in some places killed, and banishment had been another thing that the church had done centuries earlier, you suddenly feel, gosh, how can you be honest anymore. Your very honesty is undermined because you have to conform or you'll be punished, right? It's force rather than freedom.

This to me feels like an issue that people struggle with in every religion across time because there are varying levels of force in high control religious communities still today. Parents will kick out their child if their child doesn't conform to the beliefs of the parents. People are cruel to each other. People want to pass laws to make one another illegal based on things their religion tells them they have to do. So to me, that dimension of alternative orthodoxy that says, "Look, the powers that be have all the power and they can punish me in very ugly ways if I question them. It's not worth it to get into an argument with them. I'm just going to get on about my life, focusing on the things that I think are most important." I don't know. To me that is perpetually relevant, but very, very relevant in our times, both in political and economic and social as well as religious sectors.

Mike Petrow: Gosh, that's so powerful, thinking about just the simplicity of a gospel that includes as opposed to a gospel that excludes by deciding who's in and out. Drew, I love you've phrased the question. It's one of the things we talk about a lot is Jesus wasn't a Christian, Jesus was Jewish, but I actually don't think Jesus really cared what he was defined as one way or another, right? He in his own religious context was paying attention to different things than what Jewish and Greek culture were telling people mattered most. And then I think

about sort of that whole movement starting where Jesus is sort of pointing our priorities in different directions. And then of course in history, Christianity at a certain point is persecuted because it's going against the primary culture, and then it becomes the main religion and it becomes the religion of empire, and suddenly Christianity becomes a way to climb the ladder and advance in society and culture.

And then you have this movement of the desert fathers and mothers who are like, "Nope, this is not what we signed up for. We are not following Christ or this message of love to get ahead in culture and empire." And so they just headed out into the wilderness and into the desert and practice and taught this concept they call *apathia* which sounds like apathy, but it's not not caring. It's not caring about what doesn't matter so that you can care about what does which again is paying attention to different things. So I say all that long ramble to say what I hear in all of this, going back to Jesus and the desert fathers and mothers and so many different engaged contemplative Christian leaders and then Francis, is this call to step back and pay attention to who's telling us what matters and ask if that's what really matters and if that's what we want to care about. That's a pretty profound question and a good one for me to ask myself right now. Does that make any sense?

Brian McLaren: Yeah, makes a lot of sense.

Drew Jackson: Total sense, yeah. And Mike, it reminds me to even bring it specifically to something that Jesus said in conversation with the religious leaders of his day. I'm reminded of that portion in a couple of the gospels where it's recorded Jesus's, his woes. Woe to you, religious leaders, and he would go through, and particularly when he talks about woe to you, you tithe the mint and the dill and the cumin, yet you've neglected the weightier matters of the law. Justice, mercy, fidelity, these you should have done without neglecting the others. It's like this focus on, this laser focus on this is actually what's at the heart. This is actually what matters. The other stuff, sure, we can do those things, but let's not elevate them to the place of being so central to what matters.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Isn't there a translation where Jesus says, "You're focused on the wrong things. You strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel"?

Drew Jackson: Exactly.

Mike Petrow: Goodness gracious, and it's so easy for religion to become co-opted and to become a tool to get us to care about the things that empire and culture want us to care about and not about what really matters most. It's such a profound invitation again to consider what are we paying attention to. So we have this idea of the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy. Another way that we talk about alternative orthodoxy around here at the CAC is we talk about Richard's personal alternative orthodoxy which shows up in seven themes that have shaped a lot of CAC's content. Listeners who've been around for a while might recognize them as showing up in our seven CONSPIRE conferences.

Richard tells a story about one of the directors of the CAC asking him what his personal underlying major themes are that keeps showing up. And so Richard took a few months to go off and reflect and really, really ask him himself what the themes are that shape his writing and his teaching and the CAC and the living school, and he came up with these seven

themes that our listeners may recognize, and they are scripture as validated by experience, experience validated by tradition, and recognizing that these are good scales for examining our own spiritual worldview.

Another theme is this idea that if God is trinity and Jesus is the face of God, then we're living in a benevolent universe. God is not someone to be afraid of, but is the ground of being and on our side. The third principle is that for those who see deeply, there's only one reality. By reason of the incarnation, there's no truthful distinction between sacred and profane. And then of course, the fourth idea that this podcast is named for, everything belongs. No one needs to be punished, scapegoated, or excluded. We cannot directly fight or separate ourselves from evil or untruth. Evil becomes apparent when exposed to truth. The fifth theme that the separate self is a problem, but not the shadow self which only takes deeper forms of disguise.

Richard tells us in the sixth theme the path of descent is the path of transformation, that struggle, failure, relapse, death, and the woundedness that we all experience are our primary teachers rather than just ideas or doctrine. And last but not least, this notion that non-duality is the highest level of consciousness. So for those who want to know more about those seven themes, I just want to remind you that Richard's previous podcast, Another Name for Every Thing, has an entire season on that. Brian, I want to ask you about a different way to think about the alternative orthodoxy, but before we breeze past those massive seven ideas that shape Richard's career and thinking, Brian and Drew, is there anything that stands out for you about the genius of those seven ideas or even how they all fit together?

Drew Jackson: Yeah. When I consider these seven themes, I think the thing that really stands out to me is this thread that runs through them, really kind of culminating in that seventh theme of non-duality being the highest level of consciousness. There's not this language in there or this energy in there of exclusion or setting up the themes in opposition to this thing or that thing. But it's this whole sense of transcending and including that really runs through these seven themes, and really, like I said, culminating in that seventh theme where it's like, what is this consciousness and this worldview that is not so focused on, that doesn't view the world through either/or, putting things in a box of right or wrong, but has this both and, this yes and, this oneness view of the world and holding together the seeming opposites and contradictions. So I think when I hear those seven themes, that's what I hear throughout them, and to me that is just, that's the genius of it.

Brian McLaren: Well said. It strikes me every statement has a context that's pretty obvious, right? For Richard to articulate seven themes, he's doing this because of a context that he sees these as seven sticking points, seven problems, and he's trying to articulate a positive constructive value that will help us get through that sticking point, that problem area. Gosh, I mean, there's a long tradition of this. You think of the prophet Micah in the Bible, in Hebrew scriptures where he says, "Look, everybody's sacrificing. Are we going to argue about how many bulls and sheep that we have to sacrifice at the temple? What really matters boils down to three basic things," he says, "doing justice, love and kindness, walking humbly with God." To me, that's an example of him presenting an alternative orthodoxy.

In the gospel, somebody comes up to Jesus, "What's the single greatest commandment?"

The different rabbis are arguing about all these different commandments. What do you say is most important?" And Jesus offers a very clever answer. He says, "There's just one commandment, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. And then there's a second, and it's equally important to the first, love your neighbor as yourself." I mean, that was a brilliant and fascinating answer on many levels. But both of those summaries of key issues are responding to a set of problems that were created in that context. I grew up with the same set of problems that Richard was trying to solve and addressed with those seven themes, and I think millions of people have grown up with that set of problems. We inherited them from our religious upbringing, and I think that's why those seven themes have resonated so well with so many people, and I think it's why Richard's work as a whole has resonated so well. He had that sensitivity to what are some deep sticking points, were some problematic areas.

Mike Petrow: I so appreciate that, and I think I so appreciate the honesty of him doing the introspection and saying, "Regardless of my location as a Franciscan, as a Christian, as a spiritual teacher, I recognize that these are the things that drive my spirituality and my public-facing teaching." I did spiritual direction training with a group called the Guild for Spiritual Guidance, and one of the most valuable things they taught me was as a spiritual director and as a person who moves in the world, they said, "You have a personal credo. You have a personal series of spiritual beliefs that drive how you move in the world, and regardless of what groups you join or things you ascribe to, you have a very, very personal internal guidance system." What they said was make that conscious and know what it is so you're in dialogue with it. And then also, if you're encountering other people and someone violates or crosses or disagrees with one of your primary guiding principles, you know what it is and you know why, right?

So for me, they had us sit down and write it out, and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I believe love is the most important thing in the universe, and all people are inherently good but wounded, and all wounds are inherently transformative," and so on and so forth. I sit down and I update that once a year, and it is such a valuable exercise for me, and I also remember how deeply personal it is, even though it's formed by so many wisdom systems.

Brian McLaren: And I think that's something all of us feel deep gratitude to Richard for the fact that he was willing to stick his neck out, and the fact that he listened to his own deepest intuitions and tried to articulate that personal credo. It takes a lot of courage to do that. I live in Florida, and Richard has a lot of fans down here, but I know there are a couple of important people in the religious world who really don't like Richard and don't want him coming around here because he was willing to challenge, he had the courage to challenge some of the status quo.

Drew Jackson: I can say that's been one of the gifts that I've experienced from Richard is the way that, as you said, Brian, he stuck his neck out there and the freedom with which he did that to articulate what was most resonant with him in terms of his own conscience and experience of the divine experience of divine love. That's just such a gift. Brian, one of the things that you have been helping us see in our Essentials of Engaged Contemplation course is there is the alternative orthodoxy as a way of approach. Can you share some of your thinking on what the alternative orthodoxy means for each of us? I mean, do we each craft our own alternative orthodoxy? So yeah, I'd love to hear you reflect on that, Brian.

Brian McLaren: Yeah. It might be helpful for me to share a little insight that came to me many years ago that's helped me just as a kind of a little maxim in life. Here it is. Yesterday's solutions create today's problems, and today's problems will inspire tomorrow's solutions, and tomorrow's solutions will create another set of problems. In other words, if we want to get things figured out and get the solution that never creates another problem, I just don't think that's going to happen. We're always in process. If we go back to what Richard, when he talked about scripture, tradition, and experience, I think that's why that little triad there, that little kind of tricycle on the move becomes so important.

We have this incredible library of documents called the Bible. Now I know some people were taught to read the Bible as if it were giving timeless truths, but if you more honestly read the Bible you realize the Bible contains arguments and it contains kind of like the strata of sedimentary rocks. We go in and excavate them and find fossils, and we can actually figure out the path of evolution by digging through the different layers. The Bible shows us the evolution of people's thinking about God over many, many centuries.

So the Bible gives us this kind of trajectory of evolution, but then the Bible ends, and then we have church tradition that shows us how the tradition of the church has tried to continue that story through these 2,000 years since Jesus walked the earth. And then we have experience, and experience says the process is continuing in my life and in your life of each new generation, and one way I say this sometimes is I say we each inherit the version of the Christian faith we inherited from our parents and their generation. When we pass on, we pass on a form of the faith that is either exactly what our parents gave us, or it's slightly or majorly worse than what our parents gave us, or we try our best to take our inheritance and improve upon it in what we pass on to the next generation. We can even say, if we don't like the word improve upon it, we could say adapt it to the unfolding realities.

If I could offer one quick example that's obviously very relevant to me and to all of us dealing with a world with more and more extreme weather events related to climate change and the larger problem of ecological overshoot, no creed through Christian history up until now has talked about our relationship with the earth. It was a fine point. It didn't make it into the top outlines, right? When Richard articulated his seven themes, we could see how they have implications for our relationship to the earth. But my suspicion is that for children growing up today, if our articulations of what really matters, if they never mention our relationship with the earth, it will feel like they're from a different time because this is something we're having to wake up to now as never before.

Mike Petrow: It's such a profound thing to have to wake up to new things. One of the sub-themes of this podcast is living the teachings forward and it's being willing to ask new questions. Asking a new question of an old truth doesn't invalidate the old truth, even to the point that this podcast is called Everything Belongs, and a running, not even an in joke, it's a comment that I always have is that I say my favorite question to ask Richard is if everything belongs, why does it have to hurt so bad. That question doesn't invalidate the teaching. I think it actually gives it gravitas. And then what's interesting is when we ask new questions and when we pay attention to different things, it also changes the way we look back at the wisdom traditions and the ancestors that give us good spiritual resources, right?

I'm wondering, this is a nerdy question, so, Drew and Brian, tell me if it makes sense, but

if we apply this concept retroactively and we look through the entirety of Christianity's existence with the notion towards an alternative orthodoxy, a group of folks maybe who beyond denomination, organization, or culture, have paid attention and prioritized different things, right? I think about the folks that are most meaningful to me in Christianity, whether it's my great spiritual parent origin or the desert fathers and mothers, or Eastern orthodox monks called dendrites living in trees, or more recently, Dr. Barbara Holmes' teaching on the contemplative practices of the Black church and indigenous folks, Cassidy Hall's Queering Contemplation, how these folks invite me to open my eyes wider and wider to see more and more that's there.

I guess my question is, can we look at the contemplative Christian tradition as an alternative orthodoxy or a sub-stream in many different places with many different faces and many different types of spaces across continents, cultures, and centuries where folks have chosen to pay attention to different things? Does that question make sense, and if it does make sense, how does it land for you personally and your understanding of it?

Brian McLaren: Well, let me jump in on that first, and then, Drew, I'd love to hear your thoughts. Mike, I think, as you say, it rings true. It rings so true. Just a quick example that pops to mind, in the Hebrew scriptures, we read a passage that says, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life." To me that sounds barbaric and brutal, meaning if you knock out somebody else's tooth, then we're going to pull you up and we'll just keep passing on the violence. We'll keep replaying the violence in a kind of cycle. But if I understand, a more primitive way of thinking is if someone hits you, you hit them back 10 times. If somebody knocks out one of your teeth, you knock out all of their teeth. If somebody offends you, you'll burn down their house. And so you realize, oh, that was a big step forward to say, "One eye for one eye, one tooth for one tooth." But we don't want to stop there. We want to keep going.

Jesus comes along and says, "Yeah, let's move beyond that." It's time for us to grow up now and learn to forgive 70 times seven. Go be reconciled with your brother. The person who's offended you, don't just write them off. Go try to reconcile with them. Be peacemakers. So now Jesus moves beyond saying, "Instead of just redressing wrongs, let's make the conditions that work for peace." By the way, this was a big message and part of the wisdom of the Buddha that we have to pay attention to the conditions that create certain actions rather than just paying attention to the actions. What that would mean is for us in a certain sense, and this is what Richard does through this phrase alternative orthodoxy, he's saying there's not just one way to do it. It isn't defined by one group of people for all time. That itself is in process.

Just one other quick example, in the 20th century in South Africa, a group of theologians got together and they came from very strict traditions that had very strict creeds that defined orthodoxy in very high level detail, and they said, "You know what? We have a racist society and none of our creeds address racism." And so they wrote something called the Belhar Confession, and it was one of the first significant ecclesial documents in Christian history to address head-on the issue of racism. In the decade since, a number of denominations have added that Belhar Confession that arose in a certain time and place to address a certain set of problems, they've added it to their church's foundational documents. To me, what's so beautiful about that is it's a way of saying we continue to grow, we continue to address new

issues, and so the process unfolds.

That would shift our understanding from orthodoxy as a list of statements to a quest, an ongoing quest for the truth, and this is what it means to be part of a faithful community. We're part of a group of people that's never finished. We're looking for the next frontier where we have to grow in wisdom. So those are a few of my thoughts. Drew, I'd love to hear your thoughts on this.

Drew Jackson: There's so much in there, and I love when you say part of a people that are never finished. That phrase just is so resonant to me. We are always in the process of becoming. But I think about your question, Mike, and can we look at the Christian contemplative tradition as an alternative orthodoxy that's shown up in different places with different faces and different spaces across continents and cultures and time. It's funny because the first thing that pops into my head is my own mother. She is a Black woman who grew up in North Philly, who spent time in the Black church but also in Baptist church spaces that were predominantly white in culture. She came into this deep understanding of what I might call the contemplative tradition and learning from the mystics, though she would never have used that language. She didn't know the language, the Christian contemplative tradition.

But what she boils down and what she says to me, and this is funny, after I go through seminary and I'm learning all these things, she says to me, "Learn what it means to abide in Christ. Everything else will take care of itself." For her, it was this real zeroing in on, okay, out of all the things, this is the thing that matters. It was her way of articulating, hey, if you can learn what it means and to have the experience of waking up to and living with an awareness of the fundamental divine union, your union with the divine, your union with divine love, live out of that, then the fruit of love is going to flow out of that. Let that be what your focus is. For me, it's like, oh, I recognize, like that became a part of my own alternative orthodoxy, the thing that is part of my own personal credo.

Another example of this too that I'll name is in one of the mothers of the civil rights movement, Fannie Lou Hamer, and her insistence on how she talked about freedom and liberation, and when she would say, "No one is free until all of us are free." I'm not free unless we're all free. I could trace that back to Christian contemplative tradition and this view of oneness and the oneness of all things and every one and everything. It's so steeped in the Christian contemplative tradition, but it's articulated in a particular way through the mouth and through the lens of Fannie Lou Hamer and other activists within the civil rights movement that landed in a particular way in that context, in that time that has been so resonant for me and I've carried forward. So those are some of the things that I think about when I think about the Christian contemplative tradition as an alternative orthodoxy in all of these different times and places and spaces.

Mike Petrow: God, I love that. It reminds me, we just had a conversation with one of our Living School faculty, Randy Woodley, and he was talking about this concept of *eloheh*, the harmony way, and it's one more way along with the *tikkun olam* or the *ubuntu* or the Christian notion of the *apokatastasis*, one more way of recognizing that I am not whole unless all of us are whole together. What a profound invitation, and I think it's a great inspiration to sort of go out on a question that we can leave our listeners with too. If the alternative orthodoxy is paying attention to different things, Drew, I know you've kind of just answered this, but I'm going

to ask it again, Brian and Drew, what are you paying attention to these days?

Drew Jackson: Yeah, I just named those things of no one is free until all of us are free which to me is just so profoundly important for our time as there is so much talk about liberation and what it is in all of us who are inspired toward justice. It's like this idea of liberation that is so grounded in not just my liberation, not just my freedom, but the freedom of the whole, including the land, the earth, right? So that's one of the things that I'm focusing on now, what does it mean for me to participate in that sort of liberation.

Another thing that I'm paying attention to now that has really become a part of my own alternative orthodoxy, if you will, is the idea of what the Austrian poet, Rilke, talks about when he talks about living the questions, and this idea of the questions being the place that ends up being so much a part of our own transformation, and staying with the questions and not just falling into easy, pat answers because they're easy to grab hold of, but what does it mean to live the questions, to stay with the questions, to stay present to how the questions are changing me. He says, "Maybe in some distant day in the future, you will live along into the answer, but the important thing is to live everything, to live the questions." And so it's another thing I've been focusing on is what does it mean to live the questions in our time where we have so many big cosmic questions that we're all facing.

Mike Petrow: Oh man, I love that. My favorite mystic and teacher origin in the first great book of christian theology on first principles, he says, "We have to remember that this is about discussion, not definition, it's exploration, not explanation." What a great reminder, the quest in the questions. Brian, what are you paying attention to these days?

Brian McLaren: I love what you just said, Drew, because defining ourselves around questions keeps us on a quest, and some years ago wrote in a book that if we're obsessed with statements, it keeps us in a state. There's a difference between a state and a quest. The state is not going anywhere, it's not growing, it's arrived. A focus on questions keeps us on the quest. It seems to me to sync this with something that is true both of St. Francis and of our dear beloved Franciscan brother, Richard Rohr. We're in a quest for a better relationship with the earth and all of our fellow creatures and the living systems and the physical systems of this earth. It's a matter of survival. We're in a quest for a new relationship with each other. We've let race and class and politics define us. We need a new relationship and a new understanding of a desired relationship with each other as fellow humans.

We need a new relationship with money because our kind of sick relationship, our enslavement to money is fueling our bad relationships with each other and the earth in so many ways. On such a deep level, we are looking for a new relationship with ourselves where we're in some way more conscious of how we're curating our own development as individuals. Rather than just being individuals reacting to this and driven by that, we actually become more conscious of our own unfolding development, and that's a quest. I suppose those very basic questions stay with me each day, no matter how old I get.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, what an invitation to be on that quest, and for all of us, like Jesus, like Francis, like Richard, like Brian, like Drew, for all of us to be on our healer's journey. We put our healing in the service of healing the world and our human family. Friends, this has been such a rich conversation. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Listeners, thank you for coming

along with us as we invite all of you to live into your own questions and to quest your own healer's journey as well. Oh my gosh, Drew, what a conversation.

Drew Jackson: So, so good, Mike. So good to be in conversation with you and Brian. There's so much richness and depth to what we talked about.

Mike Petrow: Man, I loved, loved, loved first that question that we started the episode with, what are we paying attention to and who gets to determine what we pay attention to. Starting with that and then leaning into the alternative orthodoxy and thinking about it not as a statement of beliefs but as a series of questions, that's kind of a game changer.

Drew Jackson: That really is what I have seen in the way that Jesus moved through the world was questions, asking questions, inviting into wrestling with questions and staying with them. That's almost what it meant to be in the school of the way of Jesus. To be a student is to sit with questions, is it not?

Mike Petrow: Yeah, indeed, and absolutely. The quest really is in the questions, and I said this, I love this mantra, that it's about discussion, not definition, it's about exploration, not explanation. I also want to mention, as a fellow son to a wise mom who's guiding me from above like yourself, I so appreciated you bringing your mother into the conversation because it reminded me it's not just what I pay attention to, but whom I'm paying attention to.

Drew Jackson: That's so good. That is so good. Not just what but who. Yeah, my mom has been such a guide for me and continues to be. She's not with us anymore, but she's actually one of the people that helped me to ask the question, who am I paying attention to, what voices am I paying attention to.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's really good. I think your mom and my mom might've gotten along. My mom was never afraid to push back on the status quo, help powerful and influential people not take themselves too seriously, and ask me good questions to rethink my own intentions and motivations, and gave me the practice of asking for wisdom every single day. I also really, Drew, I loved you bringing that Rilke poem into the conversation.

Drew Jackson: That quote by Rilke has been so important and foundational for me. It's from a book called Letters to a Young Poet, and in that book he's writing correspondence. It's like letters back and forth with a young poet named Franz Kappus, and this young poet has tons of questions about life, love, writing, and he's bringing all of these to Rilke. Rilke says at this one point, and this is the quote that I mentioned, but I want to read the full quote here, and I want to offer it as an invitation for our listeners to sit with themselves, to meditate on, to bring into their own quietness. Rilke says, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them, and the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

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Dorothy Abrahams: Dorothy Abrams.

Brandon Strange: Brandon Strange.

Corey Wayne: And me, Corey Wayne. The music you hear is composed and provided by our friends, Hammock, and we'd also like to thank Sound On Studios for all of their work in post-production. From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.