

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 12

Spiritual Practice

Brie Stoner: Welcome to season two of Another Name for Every Thing: casual conversations with Richard Rohr responding to listener questions from his new book, The Universal Christ and season one of this podcast.

Paul Swanson: As mentioned previously, this podcast was recorded on the grounds of the Center for Action and Contemplation and may contain the quirky sounds of our neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts. I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: And I'm Brie Stoner.

Paul Swanson: We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst getting hangry, bouts of fitful sleep, and the shifting state of our world.

Brie Stoner: This is the final of twelve weekly episodes. Today we will be discussing your questions on spiritual practice. How do we live out the Universal Christ in practical ways in our lives?

Paul Swanson: So, Richard, the theme of the questions that we're going to be presenting to you today and be in conversation with are all about how do we live this out? How do we bring practices into our community and into our personal lives that all revolve around the Universal Christ. So, we wanted to kick off with this first question from Jason from Maple Grove, Minnesota.

I've read the Universal Christ and listened to your Another Name for Every Thing, as well as the recent interviews on The Liturgists Podcast with Father Richard where he said, 'I think I was writing to sincere seekers and hoping that there's still some sincere seekers inside the fold of Christianity.' This is an extremely apt description of me as I'm a Lutheran pastor, but from way before I sense God calling me into ministry, I identified as a seeker and still do publicly to this day, identify as a pastor and a seeker. Something I love about the ELCA is that coming from our reformation heritage, we recognize the need for ongoing reform, both of the Church and our theology.

Richard Rohr: That's right. Very good.

Paul Swanson: And here's his question:

I love how the Universal Christ frames the holiness of Holy Communion in the holiness (aka Christ's soakness) of all creation. That has been a powerful theological reframing of that sacrament for me and my congregation. This has left me pondering, how does the broader theological framing of the Universal Christ repaint the power found in the sacrament of baptism?

Richard Rohr: Baptism. Well, let's dive in with the notion of the centrality of water. Life as we know it, even on other planets, cannot exist without this thing called H2O. Isn't that amazing—

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: --that one element would be essential for all life. The other reason I love the metaphor of water, you've heard me say it in other places, it always seeks the lower place. It always fills the lower place. It's just such a perfect metaphor for humility and for God's self-emptying. So,

I mean, it's just wonderful to me that we have our initiation rite being a drowning in water, diving into water, being buried in water, use whatever wording you want, but it's good stuff. It really is. It is a primal symbol. The Hindus discovered it in the Ganges. The Jewish people discovered it in the-- What was the wonderful name for the bath that a woman took?

Brie Stoner: The mikvah?

Richard Rohr: Yes, the mikvah. And John the Baptist was building on all of this, not those other traditions beyond Judaism that he wouldn't have known about, but it's, it's primal archetypal symbolism. When I read a book when I was creating the Men's Rites of Passage, they had just discovered the cave in Israel—I don't know if you've heard this—that they think was the cave of John the Baptist. And only a woman I'm told could appreciate this, but there are 28 steps into the water. That they saw twenty-eight as the cycle of life and death. That is good stuff. That's really good stuff. But the fact that John the Baptist, the son of priests on both sides of his family, who would have been been Jewish royalty as it were, you know, who would've been fully expected to become a priest himself and that he would create his own offbeat ritual outside the temple, this had to have created problems with this family or at least with the neighbors. And that's partly revealed in that story of why don't you name him after yourself, Zachariah, as there were some struggles between what the family thought he should be and what the father supports him in, "No, he's John. He's his own man." That's the way I read it. But the creating of a water-based nature ritual, not in the temple, not in any building made by human beings, is fantastic. Now, we pulled that back inside the church, made it extremely ecclesiastical. You know, in Florence we surrounded with marble and gold and built a tower above it, which is lovely architecture, but there's no connection to nature anymore and not really much connection to water. Your Baptists must be loving all this, Brie.

Brie Stoner: I was just, I was just sitting here swimming in, if you will, pun intended, the sacred waters of my own tradition.

Richard Rohr: Yes, it really is.

Brie Stoner: I was thinking about that though, you know, how have we screwed this up in a way?

Richard Rohr: We really did.

Brie Stoner: Because I was reflecting on the fact that from my Baptist background, it was almost seen as like a two-part stepped action that you needed to take for salvation: step one—accept Jesus into your heart; step two, you seal the deal with your baptism in which you express your commitment, you know.

Paul Swanson: So, Jesus can't leak out?

Brie Stoner: That's right. But, you know, I can still remember the experience of being submerged.

Richard Rohr: Can you? Wow.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh. I was nine years old. And I think because there was so much intentionality around this ritual—

Richard Rohr: Of course. Of course.

Brie Stoner: And, you know, I had been invited by all of my Catholic friends to their First Communion—

Richard Rohr: First Communion, that's what took its place.

Brie Stoner: Right, and this was the thing that I got to invite my friends to. And so, all my friends came, watched me, you know, be submerged in this little pool inside this building. It wasn't a natural setting unfortunately, but I remember the experience of submersion and that has stayed with me, the physicality of it.

Richard Rohr: Yep. That's good.

Brie Stoner: When I hear you say things like, "We live in an abundant universe," even your work "Breathing Underwater," it's like there's so much about this ritual that can inform so much about the entirety of our lives if we let it.

Richard Rohr: If we let it.

Brie Stoner: And if we were to reframe it, which I hope we do, I hope we reframe it to have this Universal Christ spin on it, what would that look like for us to baptize each other in that way?

Paul Swanson: And as a fellow Minnesotan, Jason, I had the experience of being baptized in a lake and that profoundness of being in nature in a place that I would go swimming, and that's actually the same lake where I learned how to swim.

Richard Rohr: Really? Oh, my God, is that neat?

Paul Swanson: And then to have the pastor, when I was submerged, hold you down just long enough—

Brie Stoner: Just a little bit. Yep.

Paul Swanson: --to know that, like, are you going to come up?

Richard Rohr: A little bit of drowning; that's very good.

Brie Stoner: It's a little bit of drowning.

Paul Swanson: And, I think, I had that similar experience of it helped me in a way, I think, participate in a Christ-soaked world without having that language yet because I was in the natural world, and I was—

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Having that moment of panic of, you know, am I going to come up?

Brie Stoner: Right. Right.

Paul Swanson: And there's something about that I think when our rituals reflect that the depth of the tradition instead of just the ceremonial sprinkling, and I'm not knocking that—but maybe I am a little bit.

Richard Rohr: Well, let me knock it.

Paul Swanson: You take it from here, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Because I have to say where we lost it was this whole after 313 identification with empire, and we had the “NN” and the doctrine of original sin, and we had to get everybody saved as soon as possible. So, like I was baptized eight days after I was born; knew nothing about it. So, it had to become magical thinking, and it maintained us at the level of magical thinking far too long. So, how unfortunate.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: These sacraments they need to all be reclaimed, because they're so good.

Paul Swanson: All; 100 percent.

Brie Stoner: They're so good and so meaningful. Peter from Johnson City, Tennessee says:

Okay, I get the idea of being fully accepted. Okay. That everything and everyone belongs. And, also, that in early stages of life, that container must be built. So, how do you propose a program of formation for the Universal Christ in a parish setting?

Richard Rohr: Well, the study guide we put out to accompany the book, it's very well done, if I can say. I didn't do it, but people who are more expert in curriculum and pedagogy did it very well. So, I'd point you there first of all, but it's the both/and language that I'm obsessed with; forgive me, but there is a way to name the initial sense of the good, the true, and the beautiful in a concrete way, in a substantial way, but always leave room for growth, for development. We don't have to talk in such absolute language to talk about transcendent language. Now, I know that's hard to imagine. Doesn't God language have to be absolute? Yes, but not in a punishing way; not in a threatening way, but in an awesome way. And a lot of evangelical songs certainly achieved that.

We had, “Holy God, we praise thy name,” so I know God isn't God unless God is somehow perceived as awesome. But we substituted for awesome; threat—we really did—and a threat is negative awesome, if I could put it that way. So, just watch that kind of language, or that kind of desire. But otherwise, I bet a person like you, Peter, can just trust your Christian, common sense. Don't overreact like a lot of the Progressive's did. Don't overreact and throw out the baby with the bathwater. Uh, everything we teach here in the Living School is both/and, or as we say now, “include and transcend”—include the previous stages; always include the previous stages, and that is transcendence. I don't think people know how revolutionary that is. There's no reformations or revolutions in history that knew how to do that.

Really, it was always, forgive me, “Kill the bastards. Kill the previous people who were wrong.” It wasn't “include and transcend.” This is high-order thinking, given us by

Christ—Jesus in the gospels—that in fact, we transcend not by throwing out the old, but by sifting it and recognizing what is substantial, what is real, what is worth containing and maintaining, and what isn't worth it. I think wisdom is distinguishing the essentials from the non-essentials. And if you have an elder who can teach you how to do that, beat a path to her door or his door. That's wisdom. That's essential. You just read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "The law says" [. . .] "I say" [. . .]. Is it six times in a row? Something like that. "The law says" [. . .] "I say" [. . .]. "The law says" [. . .] "I say" [. . .]. He is a magnificent sifter who gets to the core of what it really means and what it doesn't mean.

But I've found in my lifetime that is a rare gift. Most of our reformations were, in my opinion, based around nonessentials that were partially essential, but then we absolutized the formula, or the timing or the who whom administers the sacrament? Is it a man? Is it a woman? Is it a non-ordained person? Even we in the Catholic tradition had wiggle room in most of these that if death is imminent or threatening, anybody can do it, you know? It doesn't take a priest, which shows it doesn't really take the priest. Those are the things we argued about, because that's the nature of the ego to want to say "only." That puts you in control as soon as you can use "only" language. And that's—God bless Martin Luther. I love him—but once he said "sola" (only) "scriptura," he set us up for dualism for 500 years.

How can there only be one source of truth? And now we're all seeing that, that it sent us down a path of fighting that for the most part wasn't worth it. We fought and died for things and killed people for things that were non-essentials. Did I quote the motto of John the XXIII the other day? "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity." I think he got it from someone else, but they do say it was his motto. That's a good one.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And, Richard, part of what I hear you saying to Peter's question is that you don't actually need the pastor or the priest to be the one who needs to set the program in the setting, but to also find a few and be able to let that bubble up; and if they were using the Universal Christ as a guide, that it doesn't need to be a whole church program but could also just be a smaller group within. It doesn't need to be so formulaic in a way.

Brie Stoner: It doesn't need to be sanctioned the whole parish in order for it to be—

Richard Rohr: Well, you know where we're seeing this is we started thirty years ago, the Men's Rights of Passage and in different parts of the country—I don't know if it's in Minnesota yet—these wonderful group of fathers, and uncles, and grandfathers are getting together and creating a parallel, maybe just one day, today set of rituals and experiences for the young man. Those have all been created by locals, and, you know, they're imitating what we did. I think it's really beautiful, and we've seen very creative things created.

Paul Swanson: I love that. Oh, I guess I should say, too, if you do want that study guide, you can get it for free at universalchrist.org. You can download the study guide there free of charge. So, our next question comes from Andrea from Maine, and she asks:

In one episode, Richard said, 'Jesus never punished. He always healed.' My question is yes, he never punished, but he did confront; a lot. With long years of contemplation, I have managed to starve my urges to punish, but I still struggle with when to confront. I'm also

aware that the object of my confrontation often experiences it as a punishment. Do you have any insights on how to discern when to confront evil and when to simply pursue the good? I experienced this dilemma in my family life as a wife, mother, and grandmother and in my professional life as a church musician, especially the latter.

Richard Rohr: Andrea, you're just being honest, and it's a necessary honesty because, some people hear this as an unhealthful softness that to be a Christian is to say everything is beautiful; everything goes. I always jump back to you must succeed, first of all, at dualistic clarity. Then your response is non-nondual and non-punitive. But, you know, it's—and I've had to learn this as a one—I always thought that I was just truth-speaking or confronting, and maybe I was; maybe I was even right, but the energy in my voice, I think hurt a lot of people over the years, and I didn't hear the energy in my voice. I just heard, "Well, I just said to her this or that," and as a one justifying what I had done. It's energy that matters. It's energy that people hear. It's certainly energy that children here.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh.

Richard Rohr: And so, there's a way of confronting with righteous zeal, with superiority, with a bit of a desire to you humiliate or to defeat, or to expose the other person. I think I did that a lot as a young man, convinced I was on a pedestal of righteousness and invariably my cause was correct. But, you know, I started with this youth community, and I was 10 years on them. When it started, they were seventeen; I was twenty-seven. And for the next ten years we're growing up together building this community. And, believe me, there was one of me and hundreds and hundreds of them. And, I mean, they were young kids filled with hormones, and filled with energy, and filled with power needs, and all the rest. And so, I got thrust into this role of being the—what?—the controlling parent, "This is not acceptable. There's a line in the sand." I don't know if I used that phrase in those days, but it wasn't even that people disagreed with me.

But in those intermediate years, there was many a tearful conversation where people would have to come in and say, "Richard, I needed your approval so much, and I was so trying to please you. And the way you said that just devastated me." And then I, of course, felt devastated because I was totally surprised that I said it that way, not knowing how much they were trying to please me and how much they needed my approval. Now, put that on a parent, like your little ones need your approval. So, every parent must struggle with this "How do I put necessary lines—Jimmy, this is not good," but have a little rise in your voice at the end. "This is not good. This is not good. This is not the way we do it in our family."

Brie Stoner: It seems like it's very apt for relationships, as well, like, you know, partnerships; romantic partnerships. What I appreciate about what you're saying is the importance of the purity of heart and spirit first, which is rarely what we want to do.

Richard Rohr: Yep.

Brie Stoner: Usually it's, "I feel some injustice has happened. I need my feelings need to be validated," you know. "Don't you dare invalidate my experience of how you said that," you know? The difference between that and actually going away and taking the time to work out, to sit

with, to let go of, everything that needs to be let go of, of the wounded ego, or the sense of self-righteous judgment, and then to come to the person and say, “Hey, remember yesterday when you said that thing, that was really hard to hear, and it brought up this in me.” This is such a different energy behind that.

Richard Rohr: You’re still being very honest; very clear but not condemning; not humiliating. This is nonviolent communication.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. But so many of us, I think, get caught in the throes of reactivity and don’t even know it, which is why, you know, contemplative practice creates the ability for us to begin to observe that reactive part of ourselves that wants to just be self-righteous; justified: “I’m going to go tell this person what they did.”

Paul Swanson: . It’s like being caught inside the emotion, and so the emotion being like a vehicle of like what you’re actually experiencing, right?

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And, boy, I think in my own journey of embodiment, I’ve been able to tell a lot more when I’m actually upset and when I need to speak to that.

Richard Rohr: I’m still learning it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, it’s a lifelong process, right? Like, “Oh, why does my stomach hurt in this way”?

Richard Rohr: “Oh, why is there that tightness in my throat”?

Paul Swanson: “Oh, I’m still carrying that wound.”

Richard Rohr: Well, I’m sure we could talk on and on, but I do find those of us of a more progressive nature are in some ways even more guilty of this righteous language, righteous emotions, taking offense at nonpolitical correctness, and it’s always by what we’ve decided is politically correct. We’ve got a lot to learn in this regard, and it’s caused huge political problems in this country that the left has not learned how to speak with respect for the other side.

Brie Stoner: Or psychologically, too, I think we live in a culture that places such high emphasis on therapy and, you know, healthy psychology to the point where it’s like everything is about your feelings, right? And that becomes exhausting, because it’s like—

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Thanks for saying it. I can’t say that, but it’s true.

Brie Stoner: At the end of the day, I hear that you’re feeling this, that, and the other thing, but there has to be a selfhood underneath all of that emotionality or else we are just swimming in constant reactivity.

Richard Rohr: Very good. Wow, for a four to say that, too, you know. It’s not going to get us anywhere if we keep absolutizing. You heard me say in my days when I talked more about the true self/false self, when Paul says in Corinthians, “Love takes no offense,” and I always said, the way you can tell your living in your false self is the false self always takes offense. It’s just sitting around waiting to be offended. You can’t—believe me; trust me on this—you can’t offend

the true self. And so, all this therapeutic talking about my feelings were offended, that's as far as therapy can go cause because they can't talk about the substantial self in God, the person who knows who they are "created in the image and likeness of God." You can't touch me there. That's easy to say, and I know it's much harder to do. I'm sure I'd be the first one to take offense, but I can say in all fairness, even to myself, not in the long term. The next time I go to serious prayer, I see it was my false self that was offended, and my true self can see right through it. It was my need to appear good. The need for people to like me. The need to appear smart, or holy, or Christian. The need to appear is the false self. You understand? There's nothing wrong with being holy, but the need to appear holy, yes. There's nothing wrong with being right, but the need to appear right, you have a problem. That's so subtle.

Paul Swanson: I think it speaks to the need of constantly forgiving yourself, right, for living out of that false self.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That was a very fruitful question.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, turning now to how we live out this message of the Universal Christ in relationships of difference where people are on different pages, Brian from Texas says:

Father Richard spoke about the fact that God mourns the fallen Taliban warrior as much as the fallen U.S. infantry men, [I'm paraphrasing.] but he also cautioned against going too far and falling into the relativistic morality of the president when he talked about the Charleston violence and said that there were good people on both sides. He talked about using the dualistic mind almost as if it were a tool to help us employ discernment in these situations. Part of my personal journey of deconstruction of the last few years has also been slow, still incomplete, waking up to my own privilege, and my responsibility as a fellow citizen, and beyond that. The more I listen to Father Richard, the more I realize it's actually my responsibility as a fellow beloved child of God to be an active ally to those who are suffering from injustice.

Here's his catch. He says:

My 76-year-old father has taught me, by example and in his words, the value of outspoken love and generosity. But he has also taught me how to be misogynistic, racist, homophobic, and anti-liberal. He's a diehard Trumper who employs a migrant worker to mow his yard, and he overpays him so that he can feed his kids.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brie Stoner: Does Father Richard have any advice for someone like me who wants to be a mediator between complicated people like my father and those who are suffering in the service of this sort of cosmic reconciliation the CAC seems to be working toward?

Isn't that just beautiful?

Richard Rohr: That really is.

Brie Stoner: Talk about not othering, right?

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Brie Stoner: It's like, here's the complex person of my dad. He's this, but he's also that.

Paul Swanson: He really sees him. That's beautiful.

Richard Rohr: Yeah—both/and; both/and; always both/and, but that he has the eyes to honor both/and, even in his own father. The teenage boy would say, “You’re a hypocrite, dad,” you know, would be quick to point out the inconsistency, but you both use the wonderful word “complex.” Isn’t compassion and forgiveness really a recognizing of complexity and judgment, rash judgment we used to call it, is always insisting on a simple either/or. That’s all you can expect from a teenager. It really is. And even in his father, that yes, he employs a migrant to mow his lawn, but he does overpay him so he can feed his kids. So, there’s his father even being both/and. He’s undoubtedly—he’s the same age as me, seventy-six—he’s a victim of his generation where misogyny, racism, homophobia was allowed to last and was the very name of the culture. I see he’s from Texas. No offense, but there are parts in the United States where those cultural values overrode the Gospel—you could say all the Gospel—but they were parallel universes. We’d say one thing on Sunday morning, or hear one thing on Sunday morning from Jesus, but Texas culture—or any other state—says the opposite on Sunday afternoon, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, which one’s going to win, you know? Culture trumps religion in almost every religion in every part of the world. And if your religion does not give you the skills to critique your own ego and, remember, culture is extension of your ego that’s the farthest it can go. It will never get into self-critical thinking. It really can’t see that. It sounds to me like your dad is a good man, huh, outspoken love and generosity. And I believe that, and you obviously believe that, but he’s a victim—and I do use the word victim—of a self-referential culture; the stereotypical person we call a “Bubba” in Texas, you know? Where do those metaphors come from, because they’re 10 percent true. Now, if you live inside of that 10 percent, it is truth for you, even with a good heart; even with a good heart.

Brie Stoner: What I so appreciate about the gift of your question, Brian, is that it gives us an example almost of one of the things we’ve been talking about is how do we work toward healing division in a world that others, and this is such a concrete example of choosing to see your dad, and may this be a lens for all of us choosing to see those that we most tend to dismiss as being the cause of the problem. It’s those people that do this, or it’s this type of person, or it’s the people who voted for Trump, or it’s the—whatever that lens is—

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Brie Stoner: Or it’s the radical, you know, liberals and their agenda. It’s whatever the other is that we tend to create the them around to have the eyes to see them in the same way that you see your father: “Look, he’s this, and he’s that. He taught me about love and generosity.” And like you said, Richard, he’s a product of his time in these particular ways.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: It’s such a loving gaze. I hope I can remember this as a lens through which I want to look at everybody, you know, in that same kind of compassionate complexity.

Paul Swanson: Richard, I'm curious, for you when, you know, part of the temptation in any of these kinds of relationships is to dehumanize the other by saying "They're only this," right? "They're only this [fill in the blank]." What do you do when you're tempted to, within your own mind—

Richard Rohr: Oh, God, I'm terrible. [laughter] Go ahead and ask the question.

Paul Swanson: When you're tempted to do that, to otherize somebody, do you have any cues or practices that help you kind of sink in to see the Christ within them, even if it is Christ in the tomb?

Richard Rohr: I have to first shut up and not speak, because as a one—I'm a gut person—my first response is from the gut: "Well, that man is a fool. That woman is an idiot." And I'd be dishonest if I didn't say that's what's there, right away, you know? So, I can't speak the first words out of my mouth. And as long as feeling—here's that feeling question again—is dominating my psyche, I just best keep quiet. I don't have much to contribute to the conversation unless I can find some place of greater depth, greater peace, greater freedom, the soul, the indwelling Holy Spirit—use whatever word you want—and there are times like that. I'm just so angry at the stupidity—of what I judged to be the stupidity of another person—that I can't speak in a fitting, appropriate, calming, loving way. I don't really love them. You've heard me say this before, the only answer I've been able to come up with when I'm still in that space is to say to the person, "Well, I have to think about that." It's not taking them on; it's not challenging them, it is withholding my participation, withholding my "yes" without throwing it at them, either. And I've found myself having to do that, "Well, I just have to think about that." Now, unfortunately, because I'm considered an important person, all eyes turn toward me then, "Why is it you have to think about that," you know? So, I'm usually forced to explain myself, but usually that calms me down. "Why do I think about that? What do I think about that?" Not just feel about that and usually then I can give at least half-fitting response.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah. That's really helpful, and it explains why whenever I ask you a question, you say, "Let me think about that." I'm just kidding. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: You're terrible question, Paul.

Brie Stoner: We now we know the secret phrase that indicates what Richard is a really thinking.

Richard Rohr: I'm really cussing you out in my heart. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: Long periods of silence. Our next question comes from Neil who resides in Nashville, Tennessee.

Are there any practices, techniques, methods for living with a worldview so different than the rest of the community? Once they integrate the Universal Christ understanding, how do I find fulfillment in mass when the practice feels oriented to the previous, not lower, levels of understanding? Can you open your toolbox and share? What ten techniques do you use to access the unity consciousness during your sit time and out in the world?

Richard Rohr: Let me start with this, which probably isn't, because not everybody's my age, but it's become easier and easier as I get older, because I don't have any battles to fight. When you're middle aged, you do. You're still trying to create a world that you like; that you can be at home

in. You have to do that, you know? Now I have less skin in the game, as they say. It's like, "Well, I guess this is the nature of the world. It's always going to be this way." But I can only find that if I can go to a non-angry place within me, a place that is truly empathetic for the other. I feel that even in regard to the church, America, that I know I'm nearing the end, so I don't have much—I'm going to use this strange phrase again. (I don't know where it came from.)—I don't have that much skin in the game of needing to change America anymore. I'm leaving it to you. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: No pressure.

Richard Rohr: And it's a great freedom not to get so damn invested that I have to make it right, which is certainly where I was from thirty to sixty-five: "I have to make it right." I don't feel the need for that. Now, I hope that doesn't make me patronizing, I'm afraid it does, towards some people. This is going to sound terrible, and it is, I don't take them seriously. So, not taking them seriously is to, not in my world, not to feel the need to fight them, correct them, or change them. I really don't. Well, God gave me a lot of years to grow up. You're still a 35-year-old young man. God's going to give you a lot of years to grow up, but it is not incumbent upon me to be your mentor in this moment. Now, if that person in another context would ask me for mentorship where I see their space for it, then I'd be glad to give it. I hope that there's some toolbox in there.

Brie Stoner: I really like the fact that you're saying, "I have less skin in the game." I think what comes to my mind is you seem to have less skin in the game in terms of reactivity, right? Like, "Oh, I have to make this right," or, "I have to tweak this," or, "I really need to fix the fact that this community is saying this wrong." You seem to have less of that kind of skin in the game, but more heart, more love, more generosity of spirit—

Richard Rohr: I hope so.

Brie Stoner: --that tends to allow, and that, that gives me something to kind of orient myself toward in Neil's question where it's like, "How do I find that connection when I'm in a mass where it's like, Oh, this feels so rote"? Or, you know, it's so appealing to this kind of the first-half-of-life consciousness. What if it's not about us and what we're getting in that moment? What if it's about what we bring but with presence and love? Yeah, I appreciate what you're offering us.

Richard Rohr: Well, thank you. I think I'm speaking honestly when I say that, but it came from the gift of time, you know?

Paul Swanson: I'm going to have to think about that. [laughter] I'm just kidding.

Richard Rohr: Paul is a terrible person—I want all of you listeners to know that—very terrible person—

Brie Stoner: Oh, my goodness. [laughter]

Paul Swanson: This whole podcast is a project just to orientate me towards a different life.

Richard Rohr: --passive aggressive.

Brie Stoner: So, moving onto Tristan from London. He says:

In this book and podcast, a lot of emphasis is placed on the value of having a contemplative practice. I'm a Quaker, so I come from a contemplative tradition. How can those of us for whom contemplation is already part of our lives, expand and deepen it to become closer to the, to the Christ, and to let it live more fully in the world?

This is such a great question, Tristan, because I think this gets to the great and between contemplation and action, and action and contemplation

Richard Rohr: And for you to state and own that the Quaker tradition was one of the few, but not the only, in later Christianity that valued silence.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: None of the rest of us got that except contemplative monks and nuns who took a vow of silence. Yeah. Do you think his question is primarily about practice and the value of something already a part of his life expand and deepen?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I think maybe one of the things that comes to my mind, Richard, when I read his question is the ways in which we do tend to separate contemplation from embodied action during the day.

Richard Rohr: We do.

Brie Stoner: You know, we even segment, "Oh, my contemplative practice is what happens when I'm doing sit," as opposed to "my contemplative practice is the whole of my life." So, I wonder if you can speak to that relationship that you've basically based your whole life teaching.

Richard Rohr: Well, that's the movement you want to start seeing happening, that what you momentarily experience, hopefully, in the structured moment, what we're calling a "sit," which most of the world doesn't know what we're talking about when we even say that, but when you begin to see that moving beyond those boundaries and that you can maintain it in the office, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, in the other parts of the day, when you can see that movement begin, then it's happening. And notice what circumstances you were in just then that allowed you to do that—you are nonreactive; you are not needing to prove someone else wrong. You are not—Now, where did that grace come from that I didn't need to win over my wife, or my husband. It will be a space of non-need, non-urgency, non-demanding and there, for a moment, I'm doing the same thing that I momentarily experienced in the sit; the structured sit.

But for most people, you seem to need the structure in your life to continue for that to be the validating point; the reference point. This is what freedom should feel like. This is what seeing should feel like. This is what knowing should feel like. It's non-aggressive knowing. It's not opinionated knowing. It's non-dualistic knowing; the word we probably use too much. It's non-either/or knowing. It's not knowledge that needs to humiliate anybody else or prove that I'm right. It's non self-referential. I'm sure you all know people—you see it joked about on TV a lot—people who no matter what the conversation is, they bring it back to themselves. "Oh, that reminds me of myself."

Brie Stoner: You know what that story reminds me of? Me.

Richard Rohr: When you see you're not in that kind of space, you are not the reference point. It doesn't need to remind you of you, couldn't it remind you of what those women are going through on the board, or with their babies? Yeah.

Brie Stoner: We talk a lot at the Living School about skillful means and enlightened action. This place where we begin to see how personal transformation yields a different kind of presence in the civic sphere, in our social interactions, in how we organize ourselves as human beings. And one of my favorite lines that I've ever heard is from Walter Brueggemann. I'm not saying his name right. Walter Brueggemann. Right?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. You did. You did.

Brie Stoner: Somebody said that they saw him at a conference, and somebody said—

Richard Rohr: It was a year ago today that I met him.

Brie Stoner: Was it? Oh, my gosh.

Richard Rohr: They sent me a picture.

Brie Stoner: Somebody said to him, "Walter, what would you say the most urgent thing is in our time to live out as Christians"? Something along these lines, you know.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: And he said, "What is most needed in our world today is non-anxious presence."

Richard Rohr: Wow. Non-anxious presence.

Brie Stoner: And that line has stayed with me—"non-anxious presence." And I realize that so much of what's happening with me in sit lately, in my own practice, is locating and relaxing these points of anxiety. You know, as I let go, as I watch what comes up, sometimes it's not even watching a thought as much as noticing where in my body I'm just so tightly bound up thinking that I have to fix this, or I have to do that, or if I don't do this, somehow the world's going to end. Like, where does that kind of narcissistic thinking come from? But as I relax myself, I feel then I'm able to move into my day and into the world from a different place.

Paul Swanson: Uh-huh. It reminds me of Merton's Letter to a Young Activist where he talks about, you know, the energy with which you bring to these causes can sometimes be more destructive than actually the work you're trying to do.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And we don't often think in those terms when it comes to how we bring a contemplative presence to any of our actions, whether it's works of justice, or whether it's parenting, or at our jobs that we can create more and more, trauma or turmoil for those around us by

bringing a non- contemplative stance—I can't of a better phrase than that—to our spaces.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And also, as kind of an end point to that question—and, Richard, I'd love your input on this—it seems like our culture is one that values and celebrates the frenetic pace. What was it that I said to you in the car yesterday? It was like the addiction to the illusion of urgency. that we live off this adrenaline that's addicted to the false notion of a perceived urgency. And so, it sort of feeds the ego self- importance because everything has to be like one thing after the next and, you know, put in more meetings, and let's do more afterschool activities. And so, I just want to name that as part of what the waters were having to kind of swim against a bit as we really decide to make choices intentionally about I don't want to live into that frenetic pace of believing that, you know, I have to do this. I don't know. Does that make sense to either of you?

Richard Rohr: Sure, it does. Sure, it does. Sure. Busy-ness has become a status symbol. If you can say, "Oh, I got so much to do today," you must really be important that you have to do all these things. Well, you understand, I'm really serious about that. and I'm guilty of it. I mean, you all see me rushing through the center because I developed a momentum in my middle life of "I've got to save the world," and "I've got to write this book and make this set of tapes," and so forth, and it gave me a sense of value' importance. And that's why for years I would go off to hermitages during Lent. It was the only way I had to stop the momentum entirely, you know, and my greatest books came from that. In fact, the first draft of the Universal Christ was written, and that's really the skeleton of the book that persisted until the end was written in a hermitage space. But I, because I am a type A personality driven toward doing, fixing, and so forth, I don't know any other way to get off that treadmill except by giving myself some absolute lines in the sand. My little house that I call a hermitage is really my primary line in the sand. It's not just a statement about physical quiet, but it's more a statement—and I've told the Franciscans this—that I'm not going to accept every social engagement that I'm invited to, or every dinner out, because what I've found halfway through my life is you could have a dinner out every night and I don't want to be at the end of my life, I had a lot of good dinners, which I have had. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: You don't? [laughter]

Richard Rohr: And I want to take this occasion to—The Quaker tradition must be recognized and praised for holding onto holy/wholly quiet. I don't know how much training they got from the older tradition, what they learned to do with their silence, but that they so made the connection between quiet and especially nonviolence, that their politics was invariably critical of establishment—English and then American politics. I know it got defeated just like we all did. I mean, Nixon was a Quaker. So, we've had plenty of Catholics who still use the word and the reality is lost, but the reality is still essential to Christian identity, and they held onto it better than most.

Brie Stoner: It makes me want to offer a quick plug for Paulette Meier, who's a Quaker, who has put a lot of Quaker sayings to music, and I sing a lot of them with my kids and they're profound teachings in and of themselves.

Richard Rohr: Wow. I'll remember that—Paulette Meier.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Brie Stoner: So those of you listening, it's powerful Quaker teaching. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Good call. So, Richard, we come here to the last question of this episode from Dana from Kansas.

Richard Rohr: From Kansas.

Paul Swanson: One of your people.

Richard Rohr: One of my own.

Paul Swanson: My question is about the idea of the Universal Christ and what that means for our definition of spiritual experience. I was raised fundamentalist and for a long time I was comfortable with that. As I moved and grew away from that way of thinking, my fear was that I wouldn't have anything left of my faith.

Richard Rohr: Yep.

Paul Swanson: I realized that it couldn't be my knowledge of the Bible or adherence to certain rules. I didn't know what else it could be. I heard mystics and others say that their spiritual experience is what kept them in the faith, but because I have never had a miraculous experience happen to me, I thought that was impossible for me and envied my friends who did have those sorts of experiences. As I read your book and listen to your podcast, it occurred to me that if Christ is in everything, maybe my non-miraculous experiences counted too?

Richard Rohr: Wow!

Paul Swanson: Maybe God hadn't neglected me, and any experience that I had, however ordinary, could be a spiritual experience—loving or being loved by another person, being struck with wonder in nature, or eating really good food. Have I understood this correctly? I'd really appreciate your thoughts.

Richard Rohr: See, those Kansas people are just smart; spiritually smart.

Brie Stoner: This makes me cry. It's so profound and meaningful.

Richard Rohr: She's got her own answer there. When the ordinary becomes extraordinary, you don't need the extraordinary anymore. You stop looking for it. And I say that as a Catholic who loved to have apparitions and visions and, you know, holy places where Mary appeared, and all the rest. So, we were experts at this, looking for the supposed miraculous, but I think that keeps you at early-stage spirituality. It really does, and Dana is already there, to recognize that, you know, the fact that I'm breathing, the fact this body is all working with all of its different elements, that I will have never seen—you've never seen all your bodily organs, and they've been working for you all your life, you know? But, you've got to take a moment of wonder and awe to appreciate that.

And you think you're so smart, could you create a kidney, or do you even know how the kidney works? Or if it doesn't work, think of the people who are attached to machines, like my own sister, for the rest of their life. Then the wonder that we can create machines, like a dialysis machine, that's another level of miracle. You don't have to say that because it's man made, human made, that isn't to the wonder of God, the glory of God. When I look at modern architecture, just modern construction, and that is giving glory to God, that human beings have achieved all these building materials and all the wires, and pipes, and that you put a bunch of people on the site for five months, and then this skyscraper stands there and all the toilets flush, I guess, and it's just miraculous the glory God has given to humanity to create wondrous, wondrous things once you get excited.

I mean, haven't you thought that in New York? How can all those toilets flush, and all those showers work it, in all those big buildings in New York? That's enough to make you not just give glory to God, but to give glory to God's presence in humanity, to care for all these different things, to understand all these different things. And some people take that understanding to a level of passion about it, you know, discovering a fabric that will be rain resistant, and now there's ten different ones that are. Someone had to care to create raincoats. I'm just saying the first things that come to my mind, you know, but then the ordinary has become extraordinary, and the whole world is God-soaked, in this cake case, God releasing the soaking, I don't know, with the raincoat, but it's a—[laughter]

Brie Stoner: Well done.

Richard Rohr: That's the mature position.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: It reminds me of that line—I don't know what poem this is from. We'll figure it out.—from Mary Oliver, where she says, you know, "Listen, maybe attention, attention isn't the perfect prayer, but it must be close." You know, it must be close because it puts us in touch with that walk, that awe and wonder, the ability to see Christ shining through all things—

Richard Rohr: Shining through.

Brie Stoner: --even if it's the dirty dishes and one more diaper.

Richard Rohr: It's a diaphanous universe.

Brie Stoner: Diaphanous. That's the word I was trying to think of.

Richard Rohr: Light shining through. I was mad at myself that I didn't use that word in the book—diaphanous, but most people would have to look it up, because I did, too, you know.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. So, Richard, we've covered a lot of ground in this season with these questions from all these listeners from the Holy Spirit, to parenting, to here we are now, as we kind of close out this chapter and the season of Another Name for Every Thing, do you have any words of hope to offer folks as they try to integrate this in their lives, to take one step further of what it means to participate in the Universal Christ?

Richard Rohr: The best advice I can give many people who write to me is—and it sounds so naïve, so simple, but you must trust yourself. You must trust that God is within you. And that’s why I can tell you to trust yourself because God is within you. That is to trust your best self. So, then you overcome the split between God and self. Then you have a good theology and a good anthropology. And for too long those have been separated. I try to say this somewhere in the book, that to trust your own experience could be the only way to trust God? My God, that sounds dangerous at first, and I hope I quote in the book, Joan of Arc who had her court case, and was accused of trusting her own voices: “Do you think God speaks to all of us through our own voices”? And she apparently was sort of stunned by it, and she said, “How else would God speak to us”? [laughter]

And you say, “Yeah. Yeah. But when you make so much of the Church, or so much of the Bible, the price we’ve paid is we don’t know how to listen to that phrase that has become so common “to the better angels of our nature.” After a while you can tell when it’s your best self and when it’s your stingy self; when it’s your best self and when it’s your reactive self. You’ll learn that by middle age if you just give it respect, start giving it respect in your young age, that some of your thoughts are God’s thoughts, some of your feelings—be careful for—some of your feelings are God’s feelings, all right? Richard, one, some of your angers, be careful, are God’s anger; some of them, and you’ll learn to feel the difference. So, that’s a closing offering.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

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

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

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

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