

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 3, Episode 3  
Old & New: WDWDWTB &  
The Tradition

Brie Stoner: [singing] “The B-I-B-L-E, because that’s the book for me.” Do you remember that song?

Producer: Wait, [inaudible 00:00:06]. Are you starting over from episode one?

Brie Stoner: No, no, no. Just this one, which happens to be--

Paul Swanson: No, this one.

Producer: Oh, all right.

Brie Stoner: Okay. Did I kick it off?

Paul Swanson: You kicked it off. Yeah.

[music playing]

Brie Stoner: Today on Another Name for Every Thing, we’re going to be discussing the Bible. Now, Richard recently wrote a monograph called What Do We Do With The Bible? And, in it, he helps us understand new ways that we can approach the sacred Scriptures. If you grew up like I did, as a more conservative Evangelical or Protestant, then this conversation is going to be enormously helpful.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It really helped me think through my own relationship to the Bible over my entire life of beginning in Sunday school, like I know you did, where we had sword drills—

Brie Stoner: Sword drills.

Paul Swanson: --where our Sunday school teacher would say a verse and then we’d have a little competition to see who could find it first, raise their Bible in the air, and they would be the Bible winner. And all the way to now where my relationship with the Bible is so different, it’s within the light of the Perennial Tradition, but it’s also the ability to read it at many more levels of depth of not only just the literal but also the symbolic. And we go through the whole seven layers with Richard of ways that we can interact with the text. And I don’t know what it would look like to do a sword drill at that level, but I’m going to just let that one go, I think.

Brie Stoner: Paul, did you grow up doing devotionals?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, “devos.”

Brie Stoner: You called them “devos”?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I called them “devos.”

Brie Stoner: That’s weird. Well, devotional, if you didn’t grow up evangelical, devotionals it was like our form of daily prayer. It was like our rosary, so to speak. And many of us grew up with this tradition where you would literally read the Scripture in a very meditative, contemplative way every single day and then you would pray or journal, and that was how you kicked off your day. It was a way to center yourself, and center, and orient your day around God. And now that I think about it, I am so glad that I grew up with that rhythm and that discipline,

because I do think it has taught me the value of beginning my day in that kind of space.

But I do know that for so many of us it's a little bit triggering. Thinking about the Bible is a little bit triggering because in some of our traditions, it was so central, and it was the only way that you could understand truth was at this very literal level that for many of us it was just very constrictive.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I think that's one of the gifts of what Richard, I think, has done for me personally is blown the dust off the Bible with his own passion and love for Scripture and the way it comes alive for what is it saying about today.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah. Right.

Paul Swanson: And that is contagious. I feel like my relationship to Scripture is just so much more alive. And one of the things in particular is the way he talks about the Jesus hermeneutic or how did Jesus read Scripture, and what he highlights, and what he leaves behind, and what he seems to emphasize gives permission to me to also do the same, which feels very dangerous to say that out loud coming from where I came from.

Brie Stoner: Right. Speaking of highlights though, how much do you love Richard's Bible?

Paul Swanson: Oh, my goodness.

Brie Stoner: He had it out on the table for just about every conversation in this season.

Paul Swanson: Right. It's right here too.

Brie Stoner: And you have to imagine—maybe we'll take some pictures of it—but you have to imagine this great, giant, old tome of a book. And you know when you can tell that somebody really loves the Scriptures because they actually spend time in it daily. And he has it highlighted with notes on the side, and it's like he lives in the Scriptures and the Scriptures live in him. I'm so grateful for the ways that

Brie Stoner: he helps us understand that there can be so many different levels of approaching this.

And I hope that you all find this as liberating as we did, as a way to reconcile ourselves to not just the Scriptures but our tradition as well. Like how do we orient toward our whole tradition? What of our tradition do we need to leave behind and what do we need to bring with us?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And just as you're talking about, I was slipping through Richard's Bible, every page is highlighted, every page is written in. And that just shows a lifetime of being in the Scripture in such a way where, like you said, it's impacting him and it's changing the way that he's viewing reality. And I'm just so grateful to have that kind of example of how one can interact with Scripture in a very relational and very adult way.

[music playing]

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Paul, I'm getting a little concerned. I think you should just put that Bible back on the table before you decide to stick it in your bag, because I already called dibs on Richard's

Bible. So, I'm going to need that back.

Paul Swanson: And it is covered in duct tape, which is awesome. Delightful.

Brie Stoner: Awesome. So, with that, I hope you enjoy this episode on Another Name for Every Thing.

[music ends]

Paul Swanson: Okay, Richard, so we use a phrase around here at the CAC that might be new to some listeners, although it pops up in your books here and there for sure, but that would be the Perennial Tradition. Can you say a bit about that? What do you mean by that phrase, or those two words, "Perennial Tradition," and what does that encompass for you?

Richard Rohr: The way I usually explain it, I don't know if it's the best way, but you've heard it too many times, "If it's true, it's got to be true everywhere all the time." It can't just be limited, cultural truth, American truth, Lutheran truth. Those are the little pop-ups, and what we try to do is track—if you're a student of the Perennial Tradition, track the pop-ups and notice the similarities. And this word was used by philosophers called the "Perennial philosophy," what were the ideas that kept showing themselves in Eastern philosophy, Western philosophy again and again? And that became the big "T" Tradition.

Now, I have really been shocked how few Christians, Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant, have really been exposed to the big "T" Tradition. When it hit me was, we had a course in college called "Inter-testamental Literature." It must not influence me too much because I can't remember the names of the books,

Richard Rohr: but it was a professor who had a Ph.D. in "Inter-testamental Literature," and he just led us through all the books that were written in that period between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures, and he would point out this very thing, "Well, this is similar to what the Jews are already saying. This is similar to what the Christians are going to say." And it gave me that wonderful sense of continuity.

So, when you start searching for continuity as opposed to "proof texts," that's a totally different approach to the Bible: Where is the continuity? Where is this coming from? Has it been said before, usually in different words? The one you've heard me use, but it's still in my brain, is in Exodus 14:14 when Yahweh says to Moses at the edge of the Red Sea he's hesitating to go, and he says, "You don't need to do anything. I'll do all the fighting for you. All you need to do is keep still."

That's the beginning of the Contemplative Tradition. That's the beginning of the grace tradition. Maybe not the beginning, but it's certainly a big dot in the Jewish Scriptures. Once you have chartered that, even in your mind, and a good Bible course, it really helps you the rest of your life to determine what you pay attention to and what probably is not one of those dots. It's an aberration. It's an anomaly. It's a lovely story, and I'm not saying you throw it out, but you don't give it the importance that those that are putting an exclamation point by the dots, by the continuities.

[UNCLEAR WHAT HE'S SAYING HERE]

It's a wonderful, self-correcting way to read philosophy but religion, too, religious texts. And I know this scares a lot of people, but it leads you to recognize—like I did in the Bhagavad Gita—that the Bhagavad Gita, which I was always thought was this pagan, ridiculous book—never having read it, of course—is about action and contemplation—the whole boo—at a rather high level. The Bhagavad Gita is a part of the Perennial Tradition. It's not Jewish, it's not Christian, but it's inspired. And if you say it isn't, you're just being dishonest about the big themes.

So, my very first set of cassettes, which they were then, that I made in 1973 are called The Great Themes of Scripture, and those were translated into two small books. I realize, as I look back, that was my obsession since the beginning. What are the great themes, you know?

Paul Swanson: Aha.

Brie Stoner: Mm-Hmm (Affirmative).

Richard Rohr: And all I've been doing since then is building on that. But that gave me the authority to talk the way I talk without thinking I am a heretic or a new idea. If it's true, it's never new. I've never said that before, that's clever. [laughter] It isn't if it's been said before you. It has to have been because the Holy Spirit isn't exposing all truth everywhere all the time.

Richard Rohr: So, I hope that gives you a feeling for it. But philosophers like Lloyd Knits, Alan Watts-- Who are the other ones? Forgive me. --but they use that phrase.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah, and part of what it does to you is it opens you up to relationships in other traditions instead of staying strictly in your lane or see the constellation instead of just the individual stars. You're mapping that out in a relational way.

Richard Rohr: "Map," that's a good word. Yeah. Excellent. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: That kind of scene though makes so many people uncomfortable though.

Richard Rohr: Most people.

Brie Stoner: Right? Because we feel more secure when we have a sense of what our borders are, like, "Wait. Wait. Tell me what's Christian, because I need to know. I need to feel safe." And the idea of the Perennial Tradition punctures that container a little bit to recognize that God is expressing God's self eternally in many ways.

But a question that I'm wondering if you could answer for us is where did this idea of orthodoxy come from? In other words, when did we start to feel that we needed such clear boundaries? When we look at our founder, Jesus, we see someone who doesn't seem to be trying to start a religion at all.

Richard Rohr: He doesn't seem to be concerned with that at all, does he?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, I think it would be helpful to understand how that came to be and what the human relationship, the human influence on this tradition, has been to create those strong orthodox borders.

Richard Rohr: Lord, help me to say this well. It certainly begins already in the 2nd century: “Who is holding the true teaching of Jesus?” And, of course, the Greek word “orthodox” means “right.” Who is right? Now, you and I had been trained to see that need to be right as an ego need, not a soul need. But I’m not saying it’s a wrong need entirely. If you don’t start with order, if you start with total unorthodoxy, what everybody is saying is true—equally true—you probably would have even much bigger problems. Okay? You can’t start with chaos, so I don’t want to put down our ancestors for being concerned with orthodoxy.

But what it lacked was a proper humility, a proper humility around words, knowing words are always limited, knowing formulations are always cultural, and as much as I admire them— I met an Orthodox couple yesterday. Many aspects of Eastern orthodoxy-- I’m a little bit disappointed that they named themselves that, because then they have to live up to it, you understand. And they haven’t lived up to it, in my opinion, any better than the Catholics have, or the Protestants have. Because once I got out—Now, I have seminary training. I do admit that probably Catholics of all three groups have, if they want it, if they have good professors, greater access to the perennial, larger tradition. Most

Richard Rohr: Catholics don’t want it, or feel a need for it, or have professors who themselves have been exposed to it. But for the rest of us, Orthodox have been, I’m afraid, trapped in ethnicity, and, you know, “We’re Greek Orthodox. We’re Romanian Orthodox. We’re Russian Orthodox.”

And not to say Catholics weren’t Italian Catholics, German Catholics, they sure were. But then Protestants have the harder time, usually, getting in touch with the meaning of orthodoxy. Now, this is going to strike you as funny, but I remember the first time a Protestant called me a heretic, I said—I didn’t say it, but I’m thinking it—“Well, you can’t say that. We say that about you. You can’t call a Catholic a heretic.” [laughter] But they said it with the same firmness.

Brie Stoner: Oh, of course.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Same firmness. And I wanted to say, forgive my arrogance, “By what authority do you call me a heretic?” [laughter] So, it wasn’t right by what they had been trained. And so, what Protestantism lacked was that connect the dots. They didn’t realize that the shouts of Martin Luther, “sola Scriptura!” only scripture, as a classic dualistic phrase. It set them up to pull themselves out of connect the dots and just find isolated Scripture quotes, and it left the individual believer, frankly, creating his own or her own orthodoxy. Yeah.

So, I hope I’m saying, it’s delicate, that I believe in orthodoxy. I call it “first order,” and until you know all of the rules, you’re not free to break the rules. So, I agree with that in principle. But we’ve all claimed we were Orthodox—Orthodox Catholic and Protestant—but we

all have major blind spots, major. And that lack of humility around our own Catholicity, universality, Perennial Tradition, is now doing us in, you see.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And I think it's even more so in the evangelical world. Maybe that's just my own bias from growing up in that sphere, but the leap from evangelicism to the Perennial Tradition, it felt very, very scary.

Richard Rohr: Did it?

Paul Swanson: And I remember reading Thich Nhat Hanh in high school under cover, because I was worried what if someone sees me reading.

Richard Rohr: Really? Thich Nhat Hanh in high school. Wow.

Paul Swanson: And to think about that now, it's laughable to think that I was looking at this dangerous material, almost like a dirty magazine, or something like that, in the

Paul Swanson: privacy of my own bedroom? Did you have a similar experience when you stepped beyond evangelicalism?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Paul, if you're asking me if I was reading Thich Nhat Hanh in high school the answer is, "No. No, I wasn't." No, I'm just kidding. But I do think that there's this zeal about "we are the ones who have this right," and the desire to prove how right we are comes with this package of disproving and proving how wrong everyone else is. And it fascinates me because it feels like the question that is underneath that is with what authority do I trust that this is part of my tradition?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. This is good.

Brie Stoner: And you have a methodology about how you understand, how you come to these conclusions, and you call that the "trilateral hermeneutic," which may be a new term for people if they haven't heard it before. And I wonder if you could unpack how you teach that in the Living School to help us understand, okay, this is how we gain a sense of where these perspectives that are in alignment with the Perennial Tradition come from.

Richard Rohr: In the first fifteen minutes, usually-- Was it the first fifteen minutes when you did it, Corey? --when I say, "I'm going to have you this whole week to communicate to you the methodology of the Living School: By what authority do I talk the way I talk, and by what authority are you going to be equipped to talk? And we have three correctives and that balance and regulate and encourage one another. And I call it the "holy tricycle." All right? The "holy tricycle" moves forward with three solid wheels. And the front wheel is the one that's most shocking to people because it's the one that, in my opinion, was held the least accountable; and, therefore, it was set loose to control all of us while not admitting it was driving us, and that is called "personal experience." All right? That how can you not filter Scripture and tradition—those are the two back wheels—through anything else but your personal experience? I don't mean personal, necessarily, in an individualistic way but a cultural way. You have to see how the word "father," the way the word "father" is presented in your culture: Is it attractive or unattractive? You have to see it in terms of the way of your family. How can you not? And once you say this to most people, they get it. So, we've

learned to be a lot more honest. Make experience the front [wheel].

But we are the first real generation that has the tools to critique that wheel too. Call it modern psychology; call it depth psychology; call it developmental psychology; call it the Enneagram; call it Myers-Briggs. Nobody really had those tools. Although, if you go back to the Desert Fathers, it's amazing how psychological they are.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: And go back to Jesus, I said that yesterday, amazing how psychological he is. It just isn't clinical psychological language.

So, when we stopped respecting the human psyche, the phrase—I've forgotten my Latin now—that's another one of those Latin phrases we had to memorize. It was, "Nothing is in the intellect that doesn't come through the senses." "Nothing is in the intellect that doesn't come through the senses." Again and again, it's in [inaudible 00:22:03] Thomas Aquinas, that's Duns Scotus, that's Bonaventure. That was just agreed upon—

Paul Swanson: Wow. Brilliant.

Richard Rohr: in the High Medieval Period.

Brie Stoner: That centers the body too—

Richard Rohr: Yes, it sure does.

Brie Stoner: --which is so different than how we think now.

Richard Rohr: "Nothing is in the intellect that didn't come—" I haven't quoted that much. God's inspiring us this morning. Old phrases are coming back. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: It's because you're drinking out of the Christ mug, Richard.

Richard Rohr: That's right, the Christ cup.

Brie Stoner: Richard has a mug that has a big "C" on it.

Richard Rohr: Pull me back into it. What am I—

Paul Swanson: Through the senses.

Brie Stoner: Experience. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Oh, experience. Yeah. So, the Catholic tradition overemphasized tradition but in a very culturally limited way. I mean, grand one that we have to admit is that we pretended we were the whole church, and after 1054 we were only half. That, by our own theology and history, we can't deny. And on our greater days, we'll have the patriarch and the Pope standing together, but it took till the 20th century for that to happen.

So, we were already half, and then we just kept halving, halving, halving again, and again,

and again. So, we were right to emphasize tradition—but this builds on the previous question—we didn't emphasize the Perennial Tradition. We emphasized orthodoxy as the Catholic tradition. And now, let's say, when we'll something like the presence of Jesus in the bread, we'll say, "And the Orthodox

Richard Rohr: also say, and the Protestants also say--" And by the time you get to the end of that, you have a much more balanced position. Whereas in my early education, it was just, "The Catholics say--" Closed. That wasn't fair. That wasn't honest.

Now, all those of you from the Protestant [tradition] said, "The Scripture says." And it's amazing how much they say that to this day because it's their only bandwidth of authority.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, that's right.

Richard Rohr: "Scripture says. The Bible says. The Bible says." Just turn on TV, it's, "The Bible says." They really leave experience totally unaccountable and don't give it credibility. And so, they end of being based in Mississippi, because they don't recognize that this is more Deep-South culture than it is anything Jesus ever said.

You know another thing that struck us? I don't know if I've said. Not that we were followers of Jesus even as well as most Protestant groups, but we always found you quoted Paul more than Jesus.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Is that true?

Paul Swanson: I think so.

Brie Stoner: I think that's pretty accurate.

Richard Rohr: It's probably why three of you on staff are named Paul.

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Brie Stoner: That explains it.

Richard Rohr: Paul, Paul, Paul. He was the founder of Christianity. And if you put Paul without Jesus, you lose all the radicality. Now with Jesus, you find Paul's radicality. It's a surprise. But at any rate, you ill-defined Scripture, we ill-defined tradition, neither of us held experience accountable. Our methodology was very poor. There it is. And I spend a whole week, when the students come to the Living School, just dancing around those three wheels, trying to explain them.

Paul Swanson: I wonder if to avoid the question that will come up from certain denominations of, "Where does reason sit within that?" because you'll see a hand shoot up in the classroom asking that.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Well, mainly as you know, the Wesleyan, the Methodists. And I really want to affirm

what John Wesley was trying to do. Of course, he was post-enlightenment, I believe, and where reason had taken over and so he had to give it its due or his good Methodists were not going to be taken seriously. What he really, in my opinion, unconsciously meant was a historical critical approach to Scripture. That was being reasonable and historical, but we didn't have historical critical studies yet at that time, so he spoke of the quadrilateral or four—

Brie Stoner: He had a four-wheeler instead of your tricycle?

Richard Rohr: He had what?

Brie Stoner: A four-wheeler instead of your tricycle?

Richard Rohr: Well, I think it was a table with four legs on. I'm not sure. I'm not sure, really.

Paul Swanson: It's more static.

Richard Rohr: More static, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Got it.

Richard Rohr: But I'm not sure I'm right on that. The four legs holding up the table were Scripture, tradition, experience—he had enough sense to honor experience—but the fourth one was reason. And I can see why he had to do that and really move the argument forward. And you still find that, I have at least, in the reasonableness, the lack of complete emotionality and complete, forgive me, irrationality that seemed to control some Christian groups in Methodism. It makes them kinder, makes them less prone to judgment.

But here's my response why I didn't give it the weight of a wheel or a leg. All right? I hope, in the Living School at least, the way we're teaching experience, Scripture, and tradition is a rather rational way; historical critical approach to Scripture, a long-term approach to tradition—let's read the whole history and not just French history or English history—and let's use some good psychology in relationship to our experience. So, I do honor reason. A lot of people would probably say too much. And maybe to a Southern Baptist I would sound like I'm being too rational. I don't know. I don't know.

Brie Stoner: This hermeneutic, I find to be so helpful not just in discerning the authority of what is Christian, what is our tradition, but just like in general.

Richard Rohr: In general.

Brie Stoner: In life.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Brie Stoner: To be able to consider how do I know this to be true or how do I trust this, and to align it first with the big "T" Tradition and say, "All right, where do I see this in the traditions, or the Perennial Tradition as well as my own tradition of Christianity?"

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: Scriptures, for me, also include the great body of mystical writings, and poetry, and work. This concept, this lens that you have, it can be useful and expanded into everyday life.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: So, allowing us to balance our experience with big “T” Tradition and Scripture, which I feel like is just the written word of wisdom through the ages.

Paul Swanson: There! Yes.

Richard Rohr: Wisdom Scriptures, and you don’t have to be afraid of reading other Scriptures. They might not be your “order”—from your perspective—they might be the “disorder,” but when you have the largeness of heart and the largeness of mind to admit that they’re saying very often the same thing, you’re ready to be a big teacher, a great teacher. Now, you have to weigh that and measure that, recognize that the majority of students will not be ready for that usually until the second half of life, because they haven’t got their “order” down yet. They’re still affirming their order. But once you really understand order, what looks like disorder isn’t. It’s a different formulation of order. Does that make sense?

Paul Swanson: It does make sense. It does make sense. What I love about the tricycle, too, there seems to be like an autocorrect. Right? If you take that—

Richard Rohr: Oh, that’s a good word.

Paul Swanson: --metaphor very concretely, like if one of those wheels were blown out, if you had no tradition, then you can’t quite go. You end up actually going in circles.

Richard Rohr: Circles.

Paul Swanson: So, I just appreciate the way that metaphor continues to, I don’t know, sink in and allow me to take that vehicle—

Richard Rohr: Oh, good.

Paul Swanson: --into every context like Brie was saying, it holds such a big vision for how we can be in the world and relate to others.

Brie Stoner: Well, and it also gives us the parameters by which we can trust our ongoing participation in this tradition. Which is kind of a mystery to me that we spend so much time looking backward, looking or considering what is orthodox as what has already been said, and yet we forget that we ourselves are participating in the living expression of it. And that that tricycle, it can help us discern as a collective, you know, Christianity is also evolving.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It’s basically, a collective art project, you’re saying.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: It thrusts you, not in a bad way in a good way, into the future because it creates a trajectory. That’s why we have two thirds of the Bible being the Old Testament, which doesn’t make it old anymore. It has created the runway on which Jesus can appear and be understood. You

take the Old Testament away, if Jesus came out of nowhere, out of no context, and said the things he said, I don't know that he could have been heard. I really don't know that he could have been heard. And he had to say them as a corrective to his own Jewish people, "You're getting it, but you're missing it. You're getting it, but--" "I'm still a Jew," he would invariably say, "but you don't understand the more important parts of the law." That was pretty clear.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: So, zooming in then on one of these wheels, the Scriptures, you've recently written a monograph called *What Do We Do With The Bible?* where you're exploring this topic of how do we approach Scriptures in a way that is in balance with the big "T" Tradition and experience. And in that book, you talk about that even within Orthodox theologians, there's at least seven ways of interpreting or understanding Scriptures.

Richard Rohr: Oh, God. I should have looked them up. What [inaudible 00:33:38] ?

Brie Stoner: Oh, we can look at them.

Paul Swanson: Why are you asking me that?

Brie Stoner: So, Richard, for today's test—

Richard Rohr: Because they're so uncommon anymore.

Brie Stoner: Well, I wonder if you'd be willing to even just share here. Can you look them up? You talk about that there's many different ways to interpret Scripture. Maybe just share with us the different levels of how we can interpret Scripture.

Richard Rohr: Well, let's start, while he's looking for the exact names, with the Jewish concept of midrash. Most people have at least heard the word, maybe it wasn't

Richard Rohr: explained for them. And you still will see it in the way Jewish people use Scripture today. They will sit in a group and invariably as lay people, maybe the rabbi gives the lead, but the group will, "Well, I hear Abraham's response, meaning this. I hear Abraham's response meaning that." No one is called a heretic normally. It unpackages the text and allows all of them to be true, or as Ken Wilber says, "Once you get the Perennial Tradition, everybody is right." Everybody's right.

Now, I know that sounds like fuzzy thinking, like relativism to people who are still building their box of order. I really respect that, but we had this from the beginning. I don't see Jesus saying, "This is the only way," except in regard to riches, and money, and pride. But most other things-- Yeah, here they are. It's on page five, "the seven senses of Scripture:" the literal, which is the one that was not dominant in the early Church, and you can check me out on that; the historical, just more or less reading it as an interesting history, and you love the stories, and so forth. And there are people right now, that's their level of Biblical history, Bible history, allegorical.

When you get to the mystical level, what blows open for you is the-- Well, I have the symbolic distinguished from the allegorical. The allegorical is more limited than the

symbolic. Remember at the end of the seed and throwing out the seed in one gospel—Is it Matthew? Yes. Matthew 13—the parable explained. When you explain “this means this, this means this, this means this,” that’s making it into an allegory. It’s rather limiting because it doesn’t leave the psyche, the soul, the heart, the mind, free to let it also mean other things.

And I don’t think, correct me if I’m wrong, in the other gospels it’s allegorized. It’s just symbolic, throwing out the seed. Now, your mind figures out what the seed is, what the dirt is, and who the planter is. The moral, which I think to this day, we’re far too eager to run toward, that Jesus just walked around making moral statements about what’s right and what’s wrong. If you’re moralistically inclined in your denomination or by temperament, that’s almost what you look for—who’s right and who’s wrong morally. I remember in philosophy we had a rather long few days or weeks studying if can you have morality without ethics. No, can you have religion without ethics? And the conclusion, as I remember, that we largely came to studying the tradition was, “Yes, religion is about union with God.” It will normally lead to ethical conclusions, but what happens is the ethical conclusions tend to dominate without divine union. There is no love of God anymore. It’s just, “premarital sex is wrong,” so we emphasize premarital sex being wrong among two people who really don’t love God at all. Isn’t this the way most of us were raised? Yeah?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: So that’s the danger of moralistic, eschatological, logical, what does this say about the final state of affairs? What does this say about where the world is going? What does this say about eternal life, eternal death? And for many

Richard Rohr: people, this is an obsession. It’s their first question and they’ll take it to heaven and hell, which is why I address it in so many of my books. Because I’d call it as much as 20 percent of Christians, all they want to know is who wins and who doesn’t win at the end. They were never given the big word “eschatological.” It is a rather big word.

Now, the primordial gained traction after Carl Jung when he changed the word to archetypal. And just now, for a generation, we’ve come to understand archetypal meanings, big symbols that are held inside your dreams. And even universally, African dreams and American dreams, might operate out of the same archetypal imagery, but primordial would’ve been the older word. It means, in Greek, “ruling images.” So, the biggies—life, death, mother, father, evil, good—every psyche finds ruling images for that, and they normally reveal themselves in the unconscious. But I do emphasize the word “rule.” You don’t change people’s archetypal images easily.

Now, that’s why we emphasize contemplative prayer, so the unconscious is open to adjustment; and even if I have a huge father wound, I’m ready for that ruling image to be healed, transformed, changed, limited, expanded, whatever it might be. So, I find archetypal very good. When I created the Men’s Rites of Passage, we created six big boards, and for years I collected in every airport, postcards of archetypal images of men in every state: king, warrior, lover, magician, father, son, male, female.

Now, who was it just last week sent me some pictures? They still use those. They’re so raggedy now they’re falling apart. But it’s become a word that the men, “The archetype

boards, where are the archetype boards?” And they like them, and we just tell the men during the silent time to come into the room quietly and define what images fascinate you, what images can you cannot withdraw your eyes from, they either make you angry or they make you infatuated. Those are your archetypes.

So, let me give you a big example. In the book of Revelation where, of course, we Catholic thought we understood it totally. We have the woman standing on the moon blocking the sun. You see it in the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It’s the same image as Revelation 12. But that’s no longer Mary of Nazareth, although it is Mary of Nazareth, it’s archetypal now. It’s a woman, literally, in the heavens, the divine feminine, the eternal feminine, the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

So, if you give weight to all of those as superficially as I mentioned them, you’re the first ones ever asked me to do this on recording, you’re going to let the Bible teach you in some very rich ways. When that really happened most to me was during my extended hermitages where sometimes I’d have three Bibles sitting around me. Just so people know, I do love the Bible.

Brie Stoner: [laughing] People are really wondering.

Richard Rohr: It was the archetypal and the symbolic that just, oh my gosh, it’s all there. It’s there. And it led to many of the books I’ve written to this day, because it was the big picture that was always true. So, I love the archetypal meaning, which is really another form of the symbolic.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Richard Rohr: Okay. But it wouldn’t emphasize so much the moral, you see? There’s nothing wrong with the moral, but don’t start there and end there, or you have ethics instead of religion. And many people think religion and ethics are the same thing. They’re not, really. Religion is about union; ethics is about perfection. And we get them confused all the time.

Paul Swanson: And then when ethics get codified, then we find the Pharisee kind of mentality more so, right?

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: Which is antithetical to who Jesus was.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Paul Swanson: I’m thinking about these seven different ways of interpreting Scripture and the way that you also so beautifully talked about how he wouldn’t understand Jesus outside of his own Jewish tradition and heritage.

Richard Rohr: [inaudible @ 44’44”]

Paul Swanson: So, how did Jesus read Scripture? Can you speak to what you’ve called the Jesus hermeneutic in your book, on your monograph, What Do We Do With The Bible? What does that mean?

Richard Rohr: I'm so glad CAC was willing to publish this little book, because if we don't give people a good tool, I just see with consciousness emerging the way it's emerging, I see most people, once they get to the orange level of consciousness—the critical level, the rational level—completely throwing out the Bible. Many feminists just say that to me directly, “I don't have time for that. It's so patriarchal. It's so violent.” And you can't disagree with that. It is. So, we recognize we better get a good hermeneutic.

Now, let me describe that, or define that, in a very simplistic way probably. But your hermeneutic is your science of interpretation: what are your criteria by which you interpret a text? And here's where fundamentalism has its severe limitation. It usually never declares its hermeneutic. It just says, “The Bible says,” and it's, of course, the pastor's interpretation. What else could it be? And turn on TV that's all, “The Bible says. The Bible says.” Change to Channel 6 and,

Richard Rohr: “The Bible says,” and it's completely different. Right? Because no one's declared their hermeneutic.

So, the one I feel is the only one that can really be helpful for-- Now, I'm saying “only.” Forgive me for being dualistic, but it's so simple that it's hard to teach. You say, “It can't be that easy, Richard, can it?” And yet it appeals to both conservatives and liberals. Interpret the Bible, as you asked the question, the way Jesus did. And, you know, I bet most of us were told “We interpret the Bible in the light of Jesus.” Maybe that was the phrase that was used. “The Prophets in the light of Jesus. . . the Exodus in the light of Jesus. . .” They were half right, but they didn't take it to its logical conclusion.

So, when we say interpret the Bible in the way of Jesus, let's look for the patterns again. And the patterns are that Jesus does not-- Check me out. Go home and do three weeks of reading. He doesn't treat all Scriptures equally. And so, to say that every line in the Bible is equally inspired, is clearly not represented in the teaching of Jesus. The books that represent an earlier level of consciousness, we'd call the purple or the red level in spiral dynamics like Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, most of Chronicles—well, that's more historical—he doesn't even quote. He only quotes Leviticus on its one positive line, “Love thy neighbor as thy self.” So, he's rather selective.

We could call Jesus a “cafeteria Christian,” or a “cafeteria Jew,” I guess. [laughter] He doesn't treat them all the same. Then once you recognize the truth of that, you have to almost go back again, what are the ones he honors and what are the ones he actively opposes? And it's true, those that are imperialistic, ritualistic, exclusionary, and violent. I'll center in on those four. He actively opposes, and he admits therein he said, “You killed all of the prophets.” He admits that his own tradition has those violent passages, and he's not going to back them up. He's not going to give them credibility.

Passages that are inclusive, egalitarian-- How can you read his parables and his stories? Why is he honoring the Samaritans, damn it? Why is he honoring the Syrophenician woman, damn it? Why is he honoring the pagan centurion? He's the Roman imperialist. More often than not, the heroes of Jesus's stories and parables are non-Jews. That's called inclusion. Right? And I dare you to disprove me on that. How did we miss the obvious, that we can't see that he was not into “we're better than you are” even though he loves his Judaism? Talk

about a non-dual thinker. Salvation is from the Jews. Okay, well, and yet his actions seem to say, “But not only.” Yeah, not only.

So, he’s inclusive, nonviolent, because we didn’t connect those dots, the word non-violence didn’t appear till the last century. But read the Sermon on the Mount. It’s overwhelmingly teaching on non-violence. We couldn’t see it because we had just come from reading— please forgive me Jewish brothers and sisters. You know I’m not criticizing you. But a lot of passages in the Hebrew Scriptures do legitimate violence to an extreme degree, telling them to kill all

Richard Rohr: the Canaanites. And good Jewish scholars admit this now, and see this now, as they developed the historical critical method and can say, “We don’t really think Yahweh said this. We just needed that legitimation of our most recent war,” sort of the way we do in America.

But you do see, talk about rational, that takes the ability for some rational thinking. Because if you don’t bring that to the text, I mean, it’s almost tiring how much of the Old Testament is very violent, very violent. So much so the feminists say, “I think it’s irredeemable.” Now, I’m not going to agree with that. I’m not going to give up on the Bible, because it’s all we have. But if you can follow the Jesus hermeneutic, honoring especially those four strands: nonviolent, inclusive, non-imperial, and-- What did I say? What’s the fourth one I said? Oh, Richard. Inclusive, non-imperial—

Brie Stoner: I can’t think of what it was.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It totally slipped my mind.

Brie Stoner: Me too.

Richard Rohr: Oh, it’s all right.

Brie Stoner: Non-violent—

Richard Rohr: Stop here and go back to what I said. I thought I said four before.

Brie Stoner: You did.

Richard Rohr: It is toward the beginning of this little book, I think. I tell the students, I don’t know, maybe it’s giving them too much self-confidence, but I say, “I would like to believe by the time you graduate from the school, you will have a template in your mind just naturally where you will see that text is moving us forward. You’ve got to know what your end point is, and your end point is the non-violent, risen, Universal Christ. That’s your end point.” Once you get that, you have your Alpha and your Omega. You know that it began good; and, therefore, it has to end good. You don’t need to be afraid of the violent texts anymore.

But if you don’t have that, if you allow every line to be its own standalone phrase, you’re basically created an eccentric, dangerous religion, which we have among crazy people— forgive the word—among angry people. So, I say, I think on the very second page or so, I’m not interested in changing the Bible if you think I am. I’m interested in changing the reader. That conversion has to precede Scripture study. And if you put the Bible in the hands of

selfish people, angry people, violent people, they will always murder it. They will use it for imperial purposes. They will use it to punish other people. It's a hammer. It's not a flashlight anymore.

Brie Stoner: Oh, that's helpful.

Paul Swanson: That's really great.

Brie Stoner: I also find it helpful when you talk about the fact that we know what the end point is, which is this inclusive, universal Christ, redemptive image, concept, reality. Then as we look through the Scriptures, it's like we can see where and how that has been showing up over the ages—

Richard Rohr: Yes, very good. Very good.

Brie Stoner: --and almost like a clue, weaving itself throughout time. But what it does for me is it allows me to hold the Scriptures as I hold my own humanity with grace for the growth.

Richard Rohr: Excellent. The common humanity; now you're whole.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Go ahead.

Brie Stoner: The process of evolution in which, yes, we have been through some chaotic times in which we justified violence. Hopefully, we're not there anymore, but we still are doing it. But, it's that capacity to continue to look with that big, deep time perspective.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: And, you know, the theme for the meditations this year has been the "Old and the New," as you've been talking about our tradition. I wonder if you could share the Scripture that inspired that theme and why you think that teaching is helpful for us in this time.

Richard Rohr: Mm-Hmm (Affirmative). I think it's found only in Matthew. Matthew 13 is called a "parabolic discourse" by many, not perhaps by all. And at the very end of the parabolic discourse, 13, verses 51 and 52, this summary line is given, "Have you understood all this?" They said, "Yes." And he said to them, "Well, then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven"—a disciple of the kingdom, all of us are learners, you understand, no one has it already—"he's like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old."

Talk about legitimation of what we now call liberal and conservative. He doesn't stand with one side, or what I'm calling "order and disorder." And your storeroom is your imaginarium of experience that you carry now. And go into that storeroom, and in your dreams, in your prayer, in your journaling, find out where the great tradition was, or your early Christian experience was validated, was confirmed, and also where it was critiqued and needed to be deleted and

Richard Rohr: replaced with something bigger. How could that not be true? How could a first grader understand these things in any kind of honest way? He or she has to understand it with the mind of a first grader. And if God is the mystery that we say God is, then it's completely movement, movement, movement—"Ah. Ah."—and it's a movement toward a bigger God, a more inclusive God, a less punitive God, a more forgiving God.

In general, I mean all these developmental psychologists say that thinking is most dualistic at the early stages, the purple and red levels, and almost totally non-dual at the yellow, turquoise, and coral levels. Forgive me for referring to something, but this will intrigue some people to look it up. You just can't think that way anymore after you've lived life. It's not either/or, it's both/and.

Paul Swanson: In the spirit of the old and new and how we relate and how we trust this process, a lot of folks look to you, Richard, as a wisdom teacher, as someone who is holding a flashlight that others can follow and guide them. And part of, I think, what you do so well is you always say, "Don't just—

Brie Stoner: "Don't take my word for it."

Paul Swanson: "Don't take my word for it. Check me out on this. Go to prayer," and all that. What do you think is our right relationship that we should have with our teachers, those who are holding that flashlight, and learning to trust our own experience?

Richard Rohr: If they are really a conduit of love, and truth, and hope, and faith for you, then I think you, as Ciroc says, you clearly owe them great gratitude and respect. But then there has to be a point where those values are yours, they're internalized, and you still like the old lady, or the old man, but you move beyond this worshipfulness, because it isn't good for either of you. It isn't good for the master/teacher to be worshiped too much, too long. And Buddhism faces this same thing. They talk about it often more directly. You have to have the guru, but you have to, we would say in psychological language, eventually withdraw your projection, but not too soon. Yeah, you have to know when, because the arrogant young man or young woman wants to say, "Oh, I know that. I've internalized that." They have to let the master/teacher carry it for them. The trouble with that is you eventually see their clay feet, their faults, their blind spots.

So, it's tricky. I wonder if this isn't why you need a spiritual director, but then you can do the same with a spiritual director to tell you it's time to leave the school, or stop reading Rohr books, or Henry Norman books, or Meister Eckhart books for that matter. If you don't withdraw the projection, you don't grow up. You remain a codependent child. And I've seen this—and I hope it don't hurt anybody's feelings—but a lot of people who quote me the most, when I meet them, I say, "I don't think you understand me." They're so certain they understand me, they so let me hold the projection, the hard work of integration,

Richard Rohr: owning my shadow, too, that I'm not perfect either, hasn't happened in them. And this is not uncommon. I'll see it in almost every session of the Living School where one or two students who have me on the highest pedestal, I want to say, "Oh, God—"

Brie Stoner: Here it comes.

Richard Rohr: “--here comes that Brie Stoner woman—”

Brie Stoner: Oh, God.

Richard Rohr: “--who doesn’t even begin to get it.” [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Yeah. What you’re talking about though, Richard, is interesting in light of that same concern that we have with the Scriptures. The question that I feel underneath our anxiety, about how do we look at the Bible, is how do I trust that God can possibly manifest in me and in this time?

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Brie Stoner: As I am, as we are.

Richard Rohr: That’s right. That’s right.

Brie Stoner: So, the trilateral hermeneutic, the tricycle, that you named—

Richard Rohr: Tricycle.

Brie Stoner: --I feel it can also help us when we think about our relationship to our teachers, right, because they’re part of that big “T” Tradition, but oftentimes we put them on the driver’s seat of our life instead of actually—

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: --allowing God to manifest in the unique expression of Christ as this voice, this annoying Brie Stoner who asks you all the questions in the Living School, this particular package, and then allow that experience to translate into authority of trust. I trust that Christ can manifest as this, even though I’m imperfect just like the Bible’s imperfect.

Richard Rohr: That’s very good transference to the human situation, bringing in theology to the level of psychology and anthropology, as I love to say. And the same trust that I try to offer to God has to be learned in the school of human relationships. Can I trust another human being? And don’t tell me that you can mistrust everybody and trust God. That doesn’t work. It isn’t true because mistrust is engraved in your soul, and God has to get through that filter of mistrust.

Brie Stoner: And that codependency that we have, too, where it’s like we’d rather project outward and worship God or worship Jesus as opposed to recognizing the Christ here in us, among us.

Richard Rohr: We would.

Brie Stoner: It’s easier to do that.

Paul Swanson: It would, because it can be a total fabrication with no correctives, no validations, It’s like young people don’t love the girl or the boy, they love their idea of loving the girl, the romance. It’s the same thing with God. You love the idea of being a good Christian, or the idea of loving God, because that’s what your parents told you, you should be, and you’re

pleasing mama and daddy. But to now actually love God, the best judgment is how you love other people, really.

Brie Stoner: Well, in closing on this episode, as we've journeyed through looking at the Scriptures and also tradition, I wonder if you could answer for us, how does the Universal Christ invite us into a new way of understanding the roles of Scripture and tradition? Does it expand something greater? Does it bring us more fully into our lives?

Richard Rohr: The first thing that comes to mind—I don't know if this is a direct answer. I hope it somehow is.—is a Universal Christ, because it was almost universally not understood, shows us how even the big Tradition can largely miss the point on some issues like we did on non-violence, like we did on misogyny, and sexism. Once you have this big universal picture, you say, "How come I never saw this before?" That's what half the letters are telling me right now. They accept that it's scriptural. They accept that it's narrowly in tradition, mainly in the early period, whoever wrote Colossians and Ephesians, which is extraordinary of itself, found rather clearly in the Celtic tradition, in the Franciscan tradition. But after that, not very much in all of our denominations.

So, it shows us all how wrong we can be. The first letter of John about who was in the right, we all missed it. Maybe this is a good way to join together how you started today: orthodoxy isn't really having the full truth. It's telling you what to pay attention to, and we think this is worth paying attention to. And, okay, we Catholics paid attention to some things, a fundamentalist paid attention to some other things, and that became their orthodoxy. And Orthodox paid attention to some other things.

If we would have defined orthodoxy that way, that would have been closer to what Brian McLaren calls "a generous orthodoxy." It's a beautiful word. Yeah, there is still a place for it, but it doesn't totally contain "this is truth" inside of these words. It's just, "Let's pay attention to this," and that's good. That's good that we all do that.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. All right?