

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 4, Episode 1

What is the Alternative Orthodoxy?

- Brie Stoner: [music] So, we're kicking off a new season, Swanson. I don't know if you knew that, but that's actually what we're doing here today, kicking off a new season of Another Name for Every Thing in which we're discussing the Alternative Orthodoxy.
- Paul Swanson: And I'm thrilled to be here because this theme is so ripe and juicy that I couldn't wait for us to dig into this with Richard.
- Brie Stoner: I know. I have been a super fan of Richard's Alternative Orthodoxy for the last four years in a mildly obsessive sort of way, writing long, long academic documents about my love of these tenets. But I think for me, it creates almost like a systematic approach to Richard's theology. And it's not Richard's theology, it's this lens that Richard holds for us of a liberatory, incarnational mysticism. And it gives us a way to break that down into specific steps and components.
- Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I think what's interesting, too, is you say the word "systematic theology," and a lot of people just fall asleep. But in conversation with Richard, these become so alive and I think that's what's different about the Franciscan Alternative Orthodoxy is that there's blood flowing through the veins of this theology.
- Brie Stoner: Right. It's a living thing, and it invites more participation. It's not just academic tenets that you can just dismiss or be heady about. It's every single one of these actually invites us into becoming more fully human, becoming more fully a part of the beloved community, manifesting God more on this earth. It's so juicy, as you said. It's so exciting.
- Paul Swanson: Yeah. And I really do feel like it orientates us to a freedom that is not always found in Christianity. And this freedom, as Richard speaks about, invites us to be free in relationship with God and God to be free in relationship to all of creation.
- Brie Stoner: Yeah. So many of us are in a place where our former systems of belief are definitely in deconstruction mode or have been deconstructed, and we're hungry to know, okay, I'm done with deconstruction. How do I now move into a reconstruction, a reorder? I feel like these tenets are a great way to begin because it invites us into a way of understanding belief, orthodoxy as orthopraxy, as a way of living that moves it out of the head, and into the heart, and into the body, and into action.
- Paul Swanson: Yeah. And there's no rigidity to it in the same way that some systems are so static. And we really get into how this is a dynamic theology [music] and how we get to participate and how that, also, helps us nuance and shape it within the context of our times.
- Brie Stoner: That's right. And then how the role of contemplation helps us live this out, I mean, in a very concrete way, how do we embody this through our practice
- Brie Stoner: with each other in community? So, with that, we hope you'll enjoy our Introduction to The Alternative Orthodoxy, Episode One.
- Richard, we're kicking off a brand new season talking about the Alternative Orthodoxy, and I feel like the first question we need to ask and clarify is where did this term "Alternative Orthodoxy" come from, and, specifically, what is it alternative to?

Richard Rohr: God, that's well asked. I don't remember hearing it in my formal studies. The way we used to speak of it was just "the Franciscan Opinion." And my professors would invariably teach the mainline opinion and then we'd say, "Of course we have our own opinion." But it wasn't said in a contentious way or anything, but it made us aware on point after point we're not really in total compliance, if that's the word, with mainline Roman Catholicism, even though we were clearly not in opposition to it. And how we pulled that off still amazes me. But then I think the term itself originated from the Franciscan School of Theology in California where they just said, "Let's say it, that what we're teaching is an alternative to the mainline position on point after point without being." Well, atonement really is in total disagreement with it, but a lot of the other things are shades, maybe, shades different, having to do with emphasis, like we emphasize love over truth, things like that.

For most people that's too ambiguous or vague to think about. But that's where I first heard it. And as the years went on here at the center, I realized that's what we're doing here. Of course, it came naturally to me, but God gave me a forum, with the support of all of you, and drawing in other teachers to actually actively teach it outside of just a Franciscan school.

Now did I answer all the questions there? What it's an alternative to? Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Yeah, what most people consider mainline orthodoxy. But in each case, we overlap with other groups, like the ecological thing with Celtic spirituality, you know, with the atonement theory, well, who do we? I don't know. Maybe we don't, until recent theology mainly coming from the nonviolent Christian communities like Mennonites, and Amish, and so forth, who didn't believe in going to war, the Anabaptists in a general way.

So, it's alternative, and let me say one more thing, I know that very phrase "Alternative Orthodoxy" seems like a contradiction in terms, like an oxymoron: well, if it's alternative, it's not orthodox. And yet, that's exactly the point we want to make that you can be orthodox and emphasize different things. In my book, *Eager to Love*, that's where I make the point. It's just about emphasizing different things, which even the Orthodox tradition would have to admit that it does that, you know?

Paul Swanson: Right.

Richard Rohr: So, we're not heretics. And by the grace of God, we were never declared heretics, but it was in the year 1318 when a whole bunch of Franciscans were burned at the stake, well, what we call the spiritual Franciscans. After that, which is only a hundred years after the death of Francis, we tightened up the ship to be more conformist, and you don't sense, for the most part, the radicality. Then add onto that the Council of Trent several centuries later, and the Franciscan tradition was largely lost until Vatican II told us all, all religious orders, "Go back to your founders." Little did they think the can of worms they were opening. And they said, "You each must rediscover your founding charism." And so, we're only fifty years into it and, largely, at the more critical centers of learning, places like Canterbury, Berkeley, Washington DC, where we had Franciscan Schools of Theology, now just Chicago.

Paul Swanson: And with that, Richard, knowing that you were, at least from the story you just told, you

were trained with that kind of mainline position and the Franciscan Opinion.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: When you first heard that Franciscan Opinion that we're calling the Alternative Orthodoxy, how did that land with you personally? Do you remember your response to that having been shaped and formed in this other mainline position first?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I don't think I, like most of my classmates, allowed ourselves to take it too seriously. We were still in the shadow of the pre-Vatican II church where, *Roma locuta est causa finita est*. Do you know what that means?

Paul Swanson: I don't.

Richard Rohr: Are you impressed? [laughter]

Paul Swanson: It sounds lovely.

Richard Rohr: We used to quote it: "Rome has spoken, the case is closed," or "The issue is closed." And that, once Rome spoke, there was no more discussion.

Brie Stoner: I think I will start using that line in every argument. [laughter] "Roma finita—"

Richard Rohr: "Roma locuta est." That's all you need to say.

Brie Stoner: I'll just drop that line in the middle of an argument.

Richard Rohr: So, there was sort of a delight in it because there was no forum to talk this way except in our own classrooms. Like, I was given the CAC, I was given New

Richard Rohr: Jerusalem, so I had a forum where I could talk about such things, but the typical young friar, my own classmates, sent to St. Clement Parish in Cincinnati, Ohio, they couldn't talk this way.

So, when you don't talk this way for a while, you actually sort of forget it. And I've had some of my confrères even say that to me, "You know, until I heard your recent tape, I forgot that we were taught that," because you fall in line with the mainline. It's just easier than answering letters from the bishop.

Paul Swanson: It's almost like you need an alternative community to help live into it and shape it.

Richard Rohr: Very good. You've got the point.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Well, it also makes me think about the fact that Jesus lived an alternative.

Richard Rohr: It's so obvious!

Brie Stoner: Jesus' whole life and ministry was an alternative.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: I don't want to say opposition, but an alternative creative, or I should just say a creative alternative to—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --what was the spirituality and religion and, also, the empire of his time, and the ways that they were colluding together. It seems that that word alternative is actually foundational to us, that we need to remember—

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it really--

Brie Stoner: --that that's part of our calling.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for hearing that. It really does feel necessary. I don't feel apologetic about teaching it, even to larger audiences. Yeah. And I don't get fought on it either, which shows how consciousness has evolved.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Maybe there are more folks who are ready for another way of looking at it.

Richard Rohr: That's it.

Paul Swanson: And it does remind me of that Emily Dickinson line of, "Tell the truth but tell it slant."

Richard Rohr: "Tell it slant," Yes. And I think reading, at least myself, several Anabaptist-based books, they use the term "nonviolent atonement." There must be half a dozen different books that have that in the title. And I realized that's what they're saying, but they just come at it from a little different angle, but they still are making the same conclusion. And I said we had the philosophical justification for that in the 13th century, a nonviolent atonement theory. And the recognition of how, without realizing it, we were validating violence all the way down. Because if there is such a thing as good violence, if violence is sometimes necessary, even in the will of God, which is what the Anselmian atonement theory is saying, boy, we hardly have Christianity anymore, at least in my opinion.

Brie Stoner: I want to read your definition of a mystic because I think it's important to frame how you emphasize orthopraxy and not just orthodoxy. You define a mystic as one who has moved from mere belief systems or belonging systems to actual inner experience. And I wonder if you could share with us how that understanding of mysticism, of prioritizing the inner experience, was important in your work and how you do this Alternative Orthodoxy in other words, and how you make the Alternative Orthodoxy about orthopraxy, about life lived?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That's a good one to start with because I think that's almost the underlying universal alternative nature—let's emphasize action, doing, existentialism, to use a modern word, over just essentialism. And in that sense, Francis was an existentialist: "You don't know it until you do it," he says in his early biographies. I don't know if

you in your churches use this term, but Catholics certainly did, “I’m a practicing Catholic.” Were you a practicing Baptist? Or you didn’t use that phrase, though?

Brie Stoner: I don’t know that we used that phrase, but—

Richard Rohr: No.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It’s almost like you’re all in or you weren’t. You were either a part of the fold or you weren’t, at least from my evangelical strain.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, and the faith and works thing was so big, so we had to stay away from emphasizing works.

Richard Rohr: A dualism created by Luther. I have to say, dear Martin, it wasn’t necessary—[laughter]

Brie Stoner: Thanks a lot, Martin. Marty.

Richard Rohr: --to make the dualism that much, that much. But anyway, history is what it is. What were we talking about?

Brie Stoner: How orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy, or how that’s been an important stream in your development of the Alternative Orthodoxy.

Richard Rohr: Well, you can see how if that’s the underlying alternative, it really isn’t, except in the case that you said this overplaying of faith and works, which was a major point in the Reformation. It doesn’t need to be in competition. They should be both/and. That’s why I named the center “Action and Contemplation,” that we need to emphasize and why I put the word action first—doing it over just believing it or talking about it.

Interiority has to be balanced by some degree of behavioral externalization, and that’s the link we’re trying to make in everything we’re doing here, I think, not that we’re doing it that perfectly, but until we really link those two, I don’t think we have effective or transformative Christianity.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: It’s ideological Christianity. What are we doing with what we believe? And perhaps in The Universal Christ book where I said it would be as if an organization forever kept repeating its vision statement and never wrote a mission statement. That’s what the creeds have become, endlessly reciting our vision and philosophy statement.

And what we found is, really, I don’t think I’m being unfair, there is little buy-in to that. It’s just a catatonic repetition: “I believe in one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth,” because there have been no actions implied from, like, one God created heaven and earth. We should have been the first people to understand the universal notion of God, but we never played out the implications. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that’s why I love your definition of mysticism so much because you’re saying you move out of the belief systems into inner experience—

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: --and inner experience has to be embodied in action. Inner experience isn't just apart from the lived interaction in the world, it has to be part of it. And so, I think what I appreciate so much about the Alternative Orthodoxy, Richard, is that it moves us out of this kind of academic, rational, disembodied God talk.

Richard Rohr: That's right, I hope.

Brie Stoner: I mean, really, because that theology has just turned into God talk—

Richard Rohr: God talk.

Brie Stoner: --and then moves us into incarnation, an incarnational mysticism of how are we going to live this and how does this impact our day-to-day reality and how we interact in our politics and our concerns in the world.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for hearing it that way because that's my hope. I have no desire to be an iconoclast. I've experienced it too much in my whole life, people who want to stand on the side and throw rocks. It's just a big ego trip, usually. I don't want to go there, and I don't want to empower people who go there by using the word "alternative."

Brie Stoner: Right. I was just thinking, too, we've got some principles at the center as well, and one of them that you talk about is that the best-- What is it? The best critique of the worst is the practice of the better? Is that right?

Richard Rohr: The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, there we go. But just if you think about that, that the kind of criticism that you're talking about, of throwing stones, is still disembodied, it's still attacking ideas, but that by practicing the better, by living into the better, by embracing incarnational mysticism, then we can hopefully bring that alternative to life in this world, bring an alternative to empire to life in this world.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And this for me really connects to the three freedoms you talk about within Franciscan spirituality. If you don't mind me reading here from *Eager to Love*, for those of you following us at home, it's on page 98. Richard, you write, "Good Franciscan spirituality, always tries to maintain three freedoms all at once. First, God's freedom to do what God wills, even when it's beyond our understanding. God does not need to follow our rules and God's will is always finally a mystery. Second, the maintenance of structural freedom wherever possible. Third, some form of contemplative prayer is the way to maintain that inner psychological freedom so that we can do the first two." And I find these just so evocative and effusive when I risk trying to live into them.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: And they seem to really undergird the seven themes to me with those freedoms. How do you see the seven themes of Alternative Orthodoxy relating to these three freedoms within the Franciscan spirituality?

Richard Rohr: Let me go back to Francis himself, and Clare, in terms of lifestyle, practice, doing it, not getting into the academies and fighting about definitions. But then it really is Duns Scotus, the famous Duns Scotus in my world. One reason we're told he was never canonized a saint—He's a "blessed but he's not a saint.—and even Pope Benedict, as recently as Pope Benedict, he spoke ill of Duns Scotus, which we didn't like very much because he was a voluntarist. Now you might not be familiar with that word. Voluntas is will in Latin, all right? The Dominican

Richard Rohr: school was the intellectualist tradition which arrived at the conclusion that truth was the goal. You see it in the Dominican model, veritas, and I'm not here to put down the Dominicans. There was certainly a good a needed place for that, but there's no accident that we were paired communities and had such influence for the first centuries after that.

In competition to the intellectualist tradition was the voluntarist tradition, that will is primary to truth, and that sounds shocking right at first. But here's the point, that we have to keep God free. We have to insist that God is free to do what God wants. Now that seems like a whimsical world to a real cerebral, rational person, like good Pope Benedict. He didn't like Duns Scotus at all. He blamed him for this. But we came back with, "Once God forgives," now you've heard me say this, I hope, over the years, "God is not following God's own rules." Is God forgiveness or is God reason? And the Franciscan school would say the primacy of love, and mercy, and forgiveness where God can, yes, have order, but introduce into it disorder and forgive his own mandates, her own mandates, and say, "Yes, I know I said that, but I love you more than--" That's what forgiveness means. Are we going to insist God is forgiveness, or not?

So, that became the starting point theologically, voluntarism, where Scotus laid the foundation for the primacy of free will, free will in God and freewill in people. What Pope Benedict didn't like was this led to an overemphasis on individual conscience. Right. That's exactly right. And really that's the first principle of Catholic moral theology—one must follow their own conscience.

Now, of course, we followed it quickly by the second principle, which was you have to form your conscience. And we quickly told them the way to form it was to follow Catholic teaching. [laughter] It sort of negated it right away with any great degree of freedom. But I think it's really why the Franciscan school was never really a part of the academic strain of Catholicism. We weren't highly respected in the universities because of this voluntarism and this lifestyle choice. So, then it led me to write those three freedoms that I talk about there.

Now, how much we really taught the third one of contemplation as a way to maintain the inner freedom, after the Spanish mystics—the Franciscan Spanish mystics are at the same time as John of the Cross and Teresa, but they're not nearly as well known, people like Francisco de Osuna, Bernardino de Laredo, they're all just lesser figures—but after that, we don't see it anymore at all, true contemplation. To be a contemplative is to want to be quiet all day, which might be true, but it doesn't hit the point. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: It's really fascinating to me how we as human beings, I feel that we're in an evolutionary shift right now where we're trying to move out of the need for rationality and reason to rule, a sense of certainty—

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --and to move out of that mindset.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: And I think in many ways, science and mysticism are going hand in hand and leading the way with this, right, because quantum physics is turning our simple equations upside down. Our sense of what's real, and rational, and predictable is being blown apart by what we're discovering in quantum physics. And so, I think in many ways it's mirroring the mystical intuition that God is an inherently infinite potentiality.

And so, I like what you're saying about the voluntarism. Am I saying that right? The will factor—

Richard Rohr: Yes, you are.

Brie Stoner: --because the will invites complete participation. So, it's not about knowledge through certainty of ideas of belief systems, which goes back to how you think about, how you define mysticism. It's not about knowledge through ideas, it's about knowledge through love and love through participation.

Richard Rohr: Very good. You named it. Voluntarism leads to the primacy of love because love is a choice.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. Okay.

Brie Stoner: And I would say it also seems to flow with creativity, with act.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: It flows with what you're saying is the relationship between contemplation and action, which is that love compels us to live differently, compels us to see reality in relationships so that we are responsible to each other and then therefore live in a different way that is alternative to the hierarchy of power.

Richard Rohr: Yep.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And it's that protection of freedoms that allows us to live into that without the fear of a punitive God.

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Paul Swanson: It's that freedom that I think that is so enticing and that we are, I feel, ready for it in this epoch more than we have been before because we've seen the end of the age of reason having all the answers. We're not more peaceful people.

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Paul Swanson: We haven't ended the wars. We're still in the milieu-- How do I say that word?

--of toxic Christianity.

Richard Rohr: It's okay.

Brie Stoner: Milieu. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Really, it's true. Now, you've probably heard me in other contexts say this in a bit of a different way. Now this came from one of my teachers riffing on the freedoms I described there, and he said, "Basically, it comes down to this: Our pastoral theology is to keep God free for people and people free for God" People couldn't remember that. Don't present a God that is inaccessible, you know, he's so beyond, and so legalistic, and making a list, checking it twice. And to keep people free from God is, well, Jesus says it, "Don't bind them up with obligations."

And I think that's why we have a great tradition of being good and kind confessors because we were trained to be that way, really. There are several novels where the hero is the Franciscan confessor who doesn't impose the law on the sinner but sees a way to invoke mercy. Darn! I wish I could remember those novels. [laughter] I think there are three different ones. We were so proud of it that we were made the heroes [laughter] in terms of morality, moral imposing. And it's the only place we could get away with it because it was done in what we call "the internal forum." In the pulpit, you can't get away with it that much, but in the confessional, which was very private, we could be very merciful. And it hardly applies anymore because no one goes to confession anyway.

Brie Stoner: I want to ask a question about the role of what is called in the tradition as *via negativa* of unsaying and unknowing in the Alternative Orthodoxy, and how that lives in tension with the *via positiva* of saying, and making, and knowing, and speaking. And I wonder if you could talk to us a little bit about that tension even in how we think about the Alternative Orthodoxy? Because I think we have a tendency to overemphasize the *positiva*, of being like, "You know, it's certainty. Let me cling to these seven principles and I'll hold them forever."

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes.

Brie Stoner: But the contemplative path seems to invite us to unsay and unknow in that spacious freedom that we've been talking about. I see you've opened up, you're ready to go.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. In *Eager to Love*, my book on Franciscan spirituality, I start with this, what I think is a marvelous quote from Neale Donald Walsch, "Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that. You cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new." I started with

Richard Rohr: this. It's so perfect: "The old will [always] defy the new; The old will deny the new. The old will decry the new. There's only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it.

Brie Stoner: So good.

Richard Rohr: It really is. And then the first sentence of the preface is, "Francis of Assisi was a master

of making room for the new and letting go of that which was tired or empty.” In his first biography, Celano says, “He was always new, always fresh, always beginning again.” What an astounding line! I wish I could have been in the presence of a person like that, you know, always willing to begin anew.

And I think that’s the one freedom that a lot of our saints didn’t have. They wanted to do the new, but the pressure, and the burden, and the weight of the old was so imposed on them, and you tied it up with the community before, you can only think insofar as the boundaries of your community allow. And if you’re going to be called a heretic every other day or every sermon you give, you stop saying it. And here, I’ve been lucky enough for most of my life to live in two alternative communities—New Jerusalem in Cincinnati, CAC here—where you would ask me to develop a theme. Really! In fact, these seven themes of Alternative Orthodoxy, I would not have written out except a previous director said, “Do it, Richard. What are the underlying themes of all the things you chatter about?” And I took several months, and I had a paper open on my desk and when one would become clear to me, I’d add it.

So, it’s been this volley between me and you that’s allowed, really, I’m not being nice, that’s allowed my theology to develop, and very few have that freedom. Even good Jesuits in a Jesuit university, they still have to abide by the canons of academia. Now, thank God a number of them have broken out of it enough, but it’s hard to do when your fellow academics write negative reviews of you. Now, I get my negative reviews, I’m sure, but I’m such small potatoes that no one cares about it, you know, and it’s given me freedom to say it. And history will judge if this was true Gospel, true Franciscanism, or if the term Alternative Orthodoxy is even a fair term. I think it is, but history will judge.

Paul Swanson: I so appreciate your willingness to let your work marinate and not have to cling to it in the moment but say history will be the teller of whether this is really giving life to the newness of what Christianity can become.

Brie Stoner: What I also see in you, Richard, a foundational belief in evolution—

Richard Rohr: That’s right. That’s what underlies it.

Brie Stoner: --that God is in evolution with us because without evolution, then we do cling to the past as our only stabilizing force for making sense of reality. And we cling to certainty and say, “No, no, these words. It has to be this way.” But you model,

Brie Stoner: even at the center, you’re very open to change and letting things evolve. I wonder if should just go through and just read them out real quick—

Paul Swanson: Let’s do it.

Richard Rohr: That would be wonderful!

Brie Stoner: --before we continue with our questions, just so that we can take a minute and notice them.

Richard Rohr: Let me make one point to build on what you said, Brie, about evolution. We got into this reactive mode against Darwin. You still see bumper stickers hating Darwin. It’s like, oh,

come on. We tied in evolution so much with biological species, and the way we use the term is bypassing that. We're not going to say "yay" or "nay." Although, I clearly would be a yaysayer and say we're talking about evolution of consciousness.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: So, we use the word evolution in a significantly different way than most people use it on their bumper stickers who want to hate Charles Darwin, which has been a massive waste of time. Go ahead now.

Brie Stoner: Well, we're going to read through the seven themes. So, maybe we can each take one, and before we continue on with our questions, just to give listeners an opportunity to familiarize themselves with them.

Richard Rohr: A good way to do it.

Brie Stoner: The first one is, "Scripture as validated by experience, and experience as validated by tradition are good scales for one's spiritual worldview." And we've definitely spent some time talking about that one on the podcast.

Paul Swanson: "If God is Trinity," this is number two, "If God is Trinity and Jesus is the face of God, then it is a benevolent universe. God is not someone to be afraid of but is the ground of being and on our side."

Richard Rohr: Number three: "For those who see deeply, there is only one reality. By reason of the incarnation, there is no truthful distinction between sacred and profane." The implication being all is sacred.

Brie Stoner: Number four: "Everything belongs. No one needs to be punished, scapegoated, or excluded. We cannot directly fight or separate ourselves from evil or untruth. Darkness becomes apparent when exposed to the light."

Paul Swanson: The fifth one: "The separate self is the major problem, not the shadow self, which only takes deeper forms of disguise."

Richard Rohr: Number six: "The path of descent is the path of transformation. Darkness, failure, relapse, death, and woundedness are our primary teachers rather than ideas or doctrines."

Brie Stoner: That one!

Richard Rohr: I know. I know.

Brie Stoner: Okay, and the final one, number seven: "Nonduality is the highest level of consciousness. Divine union, not private perfection, is the goal of all religion."

Richard Rohr: There they are. And someone's going to think of a few more, I hope, after us.

Paul Swanson: And I'm sure we'll get into that, too, in our conversations about how these evolve and how they stay dynamic and don't get trapped in just a static, dry look. As we think about these in their totality, there is a sense of humanity, we crave order, we crave a sense of order and so we

can create meaning out of and not just have a nihilistic worldview.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: How do you think that the Alternative Orthodoxy attempts to give a shape to our relationship with a wild and dynamic God who can't be boxed in no matter how great the themes are, God is always beyond. But how does this help give us a shape knowing that we have our desire for a sense of order?

Richard Rohr: I think that desire for order is legitimate or it is an irrational universe, and the psyche can't live with irrationality, which is the state we're in right now as a country and as a world reveling in untruth, irrationality, make up the story as we go along based on the ego's preferences. So, we're seeing the sad fruits of the rejection of all order, but it's the old pendulum swing. We're coming from a good century of overemphasizing order.

Now, the word for that was modernism, believe it or not. Where we idealized, there is a rational way of understanding everything, and that was the century or two where we made education the answer, not really spirituality, but education. Just get people rational and the world will be saved. And then, again, what country has more universities than any other? Germany, my people, and where the two World Wars come from.

So, we collapsed into a, oh, my God, you can have loads of order, but it can be extremely misused to dominate, to control, to punish, to separate, to divide in the name of what looks like reason, but it's just control. So, that's what led us to the thing I've just taught for the last year and a half or so, the so-called simplistic three boxes: order, disorder, reorder, that you have to put together the clash, and it is an initial clash between the first and the second box. And it's the resolution of that clash between order and seeming disorder, integrating

Richard Rohr: the seeming disorder into the seemingly perfect order that you come to a new quality of being. And I think that spiral never stops. It isn't one clash.

And let me say very clearly, I think the Protestant Reformation was the first strong permission for that in Western Christianity that we Catholics proclaimed a universal order, and you terrible Protestants came along [laughter] and threw a wrench in the works and threw in a necessary disorder. But the trouble was we set up camp there, revealed by the very word "pro-test." Who wants to be in eternal protest stage?

So, then only in recent times, have we been able to see the problem with that. And we're in this wonderful time of Holy Reconciling, to use Gurdjieff's term, where we're saying how can we hold both in creative tension, the rule and the exception to the rule? There are very few people who do that to this day. And the big mistake in the last fifty years is that people who are liberals or progressives think they're holding together both, but they're usually not, usually. There's still a permanent reaction against order, a permanent rebelliousness, and individualism, and arrogance, and all of the same. That's why our emphasis on contemplation is so important because it's teaching how to do both, how to hold onto order, what's good about it, and to plant your feet there, not to be swept up in every new idea as my generation was rightly accused of probably, but how to then integrate disorder without riding that boat into eternity where critique, critique, critique, critique is the only name of the game.

And I've seen that in the fifty years of interns and staff where so many, as good as they are, still think what it means to do our work here is to be an eternal critic, and they don't realize this gives them moral high ground. We can dismiss your faithfulness to Catholicism, or whatever it might be, Franciscanism, or Jesus, or the Ten Commandments as needless, needless order: "We don't need that anymore," but they've given us nothing to substitute for it just permanent dismissal. I call it "the demon of dismissal."

Brie Stoner: Well, and you're bringing up the role of contemplation. I wonder if I can ask you how you define contemplation and what the role of that daily practice has in what you just described in that order, disorder, reorder process of embracing change and dynamism, even as we think about the Alternative Orthodoxy?

Richard Rohr: Let me use that one that I used at the very beginning, and you've heard me use before from a Carmelite, "a long loving look," LLL, "at the Real," real with a big "R." That's good. And maybe the most important word is to look at it until you can love it. The word loving, keep gazing, which is almost a secondary meaning of contemplata, a gaze, a persistent looking at something else, which I call in the book Just This appreciating and thus recognizing, looking at it until you can see what's good about it, what's beautiful about it, what's right about it, what doesn't need to be dismissed. Gosh! That is a nonacademic description that all of us will spend the rest of our life trying to live up to.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Because it deals with perception.

Richard Rohr: Very good. Very good. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: And I think the looking part is like, okay, it shifts how we perceive, moving us away from that kind of reactionary, throwing the baby out with the bath water that you're talking about and able to hold the tension a little bit of the both/and that you speak to so much.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Let's repeat it once more: a long loving look of [unintelligible 00:43:34] a different word, at what is, not what I want it to be, not what I think it should be but what is, what's right in front of you.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And what an invitation to have all of life become practice then.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Paul Swanson: We have these dedicated times of--

Richard Rohr: Very good. Very good.

Paul Swanson: --contemplative practice, but also what does that look like in family life or civic life? How can we change that perception so that all of our life becomes a practice? And I think that sometimes what gets lost in contemplative conversations because there's so much focus on the morning sit, which is obviously very important for helping clean that lens and to shift that perception, but the rubber meets the road when we're out in our daily lives.

Richard Rohr: That's right, or when it becomes as real. I've had two, if not three, mothers who gave birth to handicapped children. And it took them, I'm sure a few days or weeks, but to say, "This

is what is, this is what God has given me.” I don’t know if they have to say it that way, but what courage it must take to recognize in one sentence or in one moment the rest of my life is determined that I’m going to have to care for this handicapped child. Wow! That’s “a long loving look at the Real.”

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Boy, I’m really struck by the ways in which in pain we do want to other, we do want to demonize, we do want to dismiss.

Richard Rohr: We do.

Brie Stoner: And part of the gift of contemplation that I see you’re inviting us into, Richard, and that you’re living into is the capacity to hold the inner tension that can appreciate, as you said, appreciate the gifts and that somehow it becomes a resurrection because it’s like, okay, you appreciate the gifts of what was in the

Brie Stoner: order stage even as you move into disorder, and in the reorder, you’re able to appreciate even more.

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Brie Stoner: I am thinking specifically about so many millennials and young folk who have left the church and feel a little bit like they’re in a wilderness because they don’t belong in that first order box that they once had. And yet--

Richard Rohr: Yes, and they’re looking for another order—

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: --instead of reveling, not reveling, but accepting disorder.

Brie Stoner: Exactly. And I think what is often handed to us in that disorder stage is cynicism, dismiss it all, throw it all away, it was all BS, none of it was real.

Richard Rohr: Garbage.

Brie Stoner: We also in that dismiss our own inner experiences that we had, and it causes us to live a life of self-doubt and just to live a very small dimension of living when we’re dismissing the depth.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Richard, I wonder if you could comment on the work of contemplation with that, that it’s not a passive reception solely as something that you just sit back, check out of life, but that there is a-- Maybe work is the wrong word, but can you speak to that kind of stepping into participation, co-participation of the work of contemplation?

Richard Rohr: I hope I’m not bypassing your very good question, but I think that’s why the masters, in my opinion, emphasized suffering so much. Suffering makes disorder unavoidable, “Okay, here it is. I’m stuck with it. This is the wrench in the works. I do not like that I’m suffering.” Who of us does? And that’s never going to change.

So, there's got to be a reason that the great saints and holy ones, again and again, talk about the importance of necessary suffering, which actually is a term from Carl Jung. Without it, we can go on our happy path of order and suffering forces disorder into our life. Now, I'm thinking, did I answer your question? What did you say again?

Paul Swanson: Well, I think in part, because—

Richard Rohr: In part--

Paul Swanson: --I think with suffering, right, it takes the work of contemplation to be able to integrate the negative—

Richard Rohr: Yes. Yes. Okay.

Paul Swanson: --into your worldview and your spirituality. Contemplation is not just a passive reception. There is also the work of showing up, working with what life has given you, how God is speaking and calling you. And part of how that came up for me, Brie, was your point about Millennials having a sense of order and then being lost in that wilderness and how there's no new order that's just going to miraculously arrive and you step into this—

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: --this ready-to-meet order. But it has a different feel to it, and there is a sense of agency within that, that you need to show up to do that work.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And my only addition to that, which was not really an addition, was suffering forces participation.

Brie Stoner: That's right. Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Whereas happiness, you can just observe it and let it sort of glide over you. But your very resistance to suffering pulls you into the game, pulls you into, "What is happening to me? Why is this happening to me? What is right about it? What is wrong about it?" It doesn't allow you to be a passive participant. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Well, it also makes me think about how the work of contemplation, just as the Alternative Orthodoxy, isn't a set of ideas, but as moving us into orthopraxy, contemplation is not, as you're saying, Paul, a passive mental exercise.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Brie Stoner: It's the building up of an embodied capacity to hold suffering and to learn how to be more comfortable with being uncomfortable. When we're in that—

Richard Rohr: Well put. Yes.

Brie Stoner: --really frustrating stage of disorder, it does not feel good. It's not pleasant.

Paul Swanson: No.

Brie Stoner: And yet I think the opportunity for so many of us who may be in that stage, who have left the Church and don't know what's next is that if we stay with it—and this is the invitation I feel like you're offering to us—if we develop, through contemplation, a long loving look at where we are and where we've come from and “trust in the slow work of [time].” Is that Rilke?

Paul Swanson: No, that's Teilhard.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah. [laughter] That's perfect. I didn't even know I was quoting Teilhard. It just happens. But to trust in the slow work of time to bring forth, like you said, Paul, the reorder, not like it's going to come landing down like a UFO, it's going to come out of the hard work of integration.

Richard Rohr: Well put, well put.

Paul Swanson: Richard, when you look at these seven themes, and you look at them as a whole, do you see them as a ladder building off of one another, or do you see them as almost like a buffet, like they're all offered at once? I'm just thinking about those listening to this and having never heard these themes before and trying to work with them, do you see them as building off of another or available all at once?

Richard Rohr: No one's ever asked that before. So, I'm reading them over quickly now, and it's striking me that they are of one piece. I don't know if you expected me to say that, but I think they are. If everything belongs, then the separate self is the problem. And the path of descent is letting go of what keeps us from not belonging. Nonduality is the only way to get there. For those who see deeply, there's only one reality, a Trinitarian worldview. Maybe the first one isn't necessary because that's more methodology, might be less tied in, but the other six, thank you for helping me to see that. Now, maybe I should take longer with it, but I don't think it's a buffet of separate ideas. I think they're organically, at a substratum level, very connected. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: They seem to be, to us as well, very—

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I had a hunch that you would say that.

Richard Rohr: That was your-- Good, good, good. I'm glad you thought that.

Brie Stoner: Well, and even with that first tenet, something that you often speak to is just how Jesus is a central reference point, is part of how we make sense of our experience and look at Scripture. So, it does seem to build, they seem to build on each other and there seems to be a dynamism in it.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you for seeing that and for helping me to see it. We've had these, Paul, you would know how many years now?

Paul Swanson: I think since 2012.

Richard Rohr: 2012.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Paul Swanson: I think internally, 2012. And then once the school got launched, you began to teach from them.

Richard Rohr: About eight years.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And we haven't felt a need to add any, have we?

Paul Swanson: Not yet. No.

Richard Rohr: Not yet. How interesting.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Okay.

Brie Stoner: One question I was going to throw in just at the end is, as we're looking at this from an evolutionary perspective, and as we're talking about this, and as, you know, I know that our CONSPIRE Conference series is coming to an end and that you as the faculty have been discussing number seven and then just how you each express it, do you feel like these tenets are living to a certain extent? Like, do you find even with the CAC faculty that you're building and nuancing some of these themes, or do you feel that they're remaining as they are? I'm just curious about what that process looks like with fellow teachers, too, and at the CAC.

Richard Rohr: It does feel like we're owning them, and this is especially apparent to me in the two new faculty members we invited who just buy into things like Trinity more than the usual teachers, how often the phrase "everything belongs" is thrown into a talk. Yeah, I think they've begun to land. They've begun to land. The "path of descent" is used a lot, just as a phrase in talks. Nonduality, people always speak of with a bit of embarrassment. I'm not sure why. Of course, it's nondual CAC said—nondual, nondual, nondual.

The very fact that there's a little resistance to it, I think, is the recognition of how far we're into it and where it's leading us, where it's leading us.

You're asking some very good questions. You're making me see things that I wouldn't see. I think these have begun to land. And even that methodology one—Scripture, experience, and tradition—I always half to expect when new teachers come on the scene, they'll challenge me in the back room, "I don't think that's said correctly." And I hope I'm open to that, but thus far, no one has, because there's a wholeness to it, I hope.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. It seems to be forming, the Alternative Orthodoxy, these themes, seem to be forming

a kind of a lens that helps us have a sense for the foundational theological teachings, and cosmology, and good anthropology, as you say, that need to go together, but a lens for the worldview that we're trying to help serve and manifest, and create from, and act from, and that's one of the things that I so appreciate about these tenets is that they do create a sense of, okay, these are the ingredients to the pie, I guess. And you see that reflected in the teachers as well, here at the CAC, is that they are teachers who are consonant with these tenets.

Richard Rohr: It's true. Yeah. They really are. It's not a conformity that has been forced on them. I don't think, I hope not.

Paul Swanson: And it feels like very much like it's not a prescription. It's a description of reality.

Richard Rohr: Description. Very good.

Paul Swanson: And paired with that long loving look, it gives a lifetime of practice in waiting.

Brie Stoner: Right. But the funny thing is, I wonder if in like twenty years we will have turned these into an orthodoxy, you know what I mean? It's just the human way.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I know. After we're gone, they'll say, "Well, they were naive." [laughter]

Brie Stoner: There will be some shrine to Richard. There'll be like a statue and—

Paul Swanson: Statues for each one.

Brie Stoner: --then there will be like, "These are the--" And somebody out there will be living an alternative to that, you know? The cycle continues. But I do think it's an invitation for us to have a different approach to these where we don't turn them into sacred statements. But I like what you said, it's description. It's not prescription, it's a description. It's an invitation to move into reality from a different stance, from a different internal posture.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). One of participation, embodied participation.

Richard Rohr: In the Catholic world, we just canonized Cardinal John Henry Newman, it might not be a name familiar to you, but he wrote this marvelous book that at the time in just the last century, previous, the 18th century, on the development of doctrine. And it was considered very edgy, dangerous, if not heretical. Now last month he was canonized a saint on the development of doctrine. And he just makes the case for what we're saying right here, why it has to develop.

Richard Rohr: Now, I don't know how many theologians in the intervening time have worked on that, but he exercised indirectly huge influence on the Second Vatican Council. So, I'm very glad they made him into a saint, which, of course, for us is the big stamp of approval. But he was an edgy teacher, spoke with this English clarity that only the English seem to have, just one sentence following another and made his point, made his point very well that why it must develop, or it could not be the work of the Spirit who is always, like another Englishman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Bent world with warm soft wings the Spirit is always fluttering." I

forgot the verb he used.

Brie Stoner: I'm wondering if, as a way to close, you'd be willing to read that opening of your preface again about making room for the new?

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Brie Stoner: And, Richard, if you'd be willing to open us in prayer for this season, too, to just invite us to hold that tension and space for the new, for the aspects of each of these tenets, that's going to be challenging for us to wrestle with and think about as well as to not dismiss the depths of tradition and the gifts that we've been given.

Richard Rohr: Well, I'll add to it, too, the end of the Parabolic Discourse in Matthew 13: "A disciple is a householder who brings out from their household things both old and new," or storehouse as it's sometimes translated. In fact, that had been my suggestion for our next series of conferences, the storehouse conferences. But Neale Donald Walsch: "Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that. You cannot hold on to the old, all the while declaring that you want something new. The old will defy the new; The old will deny the new; The old will decry the new. There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it," Neale Donald Walsch.

Oh, Holy One, we thank you for blessing us on this day, this cold morning, not too cold morning, but cold enough to make us uncomfortable. If some of these words still seem cold, we pray that they can be just cold enough to make us uncomfortable and seek something more, something new, something better, something that feels like you. We offer this prayer in Jesus's name and all of the good names of God. Amen.

Paul Swanson: Amen.

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

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