

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 4, Episode 3  
Foundation | Theme 2

- Brie Stoner: [music] On today's episode of Another Name for Every Thing, we dive into the second theme, which is: 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.
- Paul Swanson: One thing that I was not expecting in this conversation is the way that we also saw how this Living Tradition evolves. We begin to play with some of the language and ask how can this shift to be a more incarnational sense of how we're becoming in relationship to the Trinity?
- Brie Stoner: It seems to be such an important part of Richard's legacy, is his radical humility to be open to playing with some of these terms and saying, "You know what, I haven't thought about that. Maybe we should think about how ground of being and ground of becoming work together." I find that so awe-inspiring and such a legacy for us to live into, that level of humility that's open to change all the time.
- Paul Swanson: Yeah. Someone who basically is the one who has curated these seven themes of the Alternative Orthodoxy and is also open to the way that they need to evolve and grow so they can be more true to the reality of our experience.
- Brie Stoner: Yeah. I really loved in this conversation how we moved Trinity from being a concept of this self-enclosed community to this dynamic, creative principle at work in evolution and in our lives and onwardly, outgoing, constantly manifesting. I mean, I didn't grow up with that Trinity. Did you?
- Paul Swanson: No, me neither, no, much more static. I also enjoyed how, strangely, you and I both had a bathtub story to help bring this theme to life.
- Brie Stoner: That was not planned, but it did happen. We both had bathtub stories, which you will get to hear shortly as we now turn to Episode 3, the second theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy.  
[music ends]
- On today's episode, we're taking a look at the second theme, which is: 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. Paul, do you have a story to put flesh on this one?
- Paul Swanson: I do have one. So, the one that came to mind for me was, it was post college. I was in heavy deconstruction of my faith, trying to figure out what I believed, and I was actively trying to leave the Church. I just felt like I needed space.
- Richard Rohr: You wanted to make the case, huh?
- Paul Swanson: Yeah, exactly. I was working in a group home with young adults with developmental disabilities, and it was my first day on the job, had gone through
- Paul Swanson: all the training. My job that morning was to bathe a young man named Kevin who was known and prone to have violent outbursts. Go into the bathroom, tentatively nervous about how you bathe another human being. I've actually never done that before.
- Richard Rohr: Most of us haven't.

Paul Swanson: Kind of fearful about that. His first move is he grabbed my wrist and scratched me, and my hand started bleeding. So, I bandaged myself up, and I just sat there, and I said, “I can’t do this, I can’t do this.”

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Then a voice within said, “He is Christ,” and this internal prompting that I was asked to bathe Christ.

Richard Rohr: Mm.

Paul Swanson: All of a sudden, I was in this flow with it. He is Christ. I am Christ. I am washing Christ. Then all of a sudden, I was in this new flow of how I was seeing Christ in the world show up in this young man and through this very simple act of bathing someone who couldn’t bathe themselves. It, in a new way, reshaped how I was approaching what it meant to be a Christian, how I saw God showing up in my daily life. So, it’s a very vivid story for me about Christ in the bathtub and me showing up to wash Christ. So that’s the one that popped to mind for me. How about you, Brie?

Brie Stoner: Wow, that is so beautiful, bathing Christ. I also have a bathtub story—

Richard Rohr: Really?

Brie Stoner: --that is the one that I was thinking of.

Richard Rohr: I’m going to have to find one really quick, a bathtub story.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, Richard, you work on a bathtub one. We’ll complete the trinity of bathtub stories among us. [laughter] I was reflecting back on when I started the Living School, and you actually had us start with Bonaventure, which I was very, very disappointed by, Richard, because I wanted a nuptial mystic. I wanted something with more drama. I actually found myself really falling in love with the way that he talks about the Trinity and how you described his description of the water wheel.

I was giving Soren a bath, and at the time he’s just a little guy. He was two. He was in the bath. As most parents of toddlers know, you don’t do anything once.

Brie Stoner: It’s all repetitive. All play is again, again. So I was pouring water from way up high down into his little outstretched cupped hands, and he just was giggling with delight at this activity. The water was hitting his hands and splashing up and splashing his little naked body. He was looking at the light through the water, and he just loved it.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brie Stoner: So, he’s, “Again, momma, again, again, momma.” The first several times, I wasn’t even there. I was just somewhere in my head.

Richard Rohr: Somewhere else.

Brie Stoner: I was somewhere else. By the third or fourth time, I was enraptured by this act and by his

wonder. And his wonder opened up my wonder at water and the cyclical nature of water. Because I had been immersed in Bonaventure—thank you, Richard—I was drawn into this kind of mystical experience of seeing this water that I’m baptizing my two-year-old with is the steam off of animals’ backs. It’s the steam from breath of human beings. It’s snowflakes. It’s rivers. It’s oceans. All of a sudden it was like the great history of time in this little trickle of water coming down on my son, and it brought me into such a depth of flow, and presence, and love, and wonder that I don’t even know how many “agains” we went through. I know that the water was cold by the time I pulled him out because it was this radical opening, almost like the veil parted, and there it was. There was the Trinity. There was this lifecycle, unending flow, and I was a part of it.

Paul Swanson: You probably don’t remember this. That was our first interaction. You were a Living School student, and you emailed me about that experience.

Brie Stoner: You’re kidding!

Paul Swanson: I remember, again, I showed Richard the email saying, (the Living School is brand new) “Look at what one of our student’s, look at what’s happening.”

Brie Stoner: That’s amazing.

Richard Rohr: I don’t remember that. Forgive me. How neat.

Brie Stoner: Oh, no, I didn’t remember that I emailed it, but it was a profound experience. So, by the way thanks for starting with Bonaventure.

Richard Rohr: They don’t do that anymore, do they, start with Bonaventure?

Paul Swanson: Early in the first year, yeah.

Richard Rohr: It’s early. Okay. So, I guess, I don’t have a bathtub story I can think of. [laughter] Mine is going to sound so canned and priestly. This year now I will have been a priest fifty years, and to celebrate Mass so often over the years, even though I don’t do it every day like most awesome priests do, I don’t know how you keep doing it fresh and present. You have to put on those vestments and go through the rote words in many cases. That must have begun to happen twenty years ago or so. I realized the only way I could celebrate Mass with sincerity and reverence was to really believe that all those bored looking faces out in front of me were the body of Christ.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: Mm.

Richard Rohr: Even if they didn’t believe it, I was going to believe it for them. I’ve done that as recently as, I think, the day before yesterday. I just have to do it regularly or what I slide into, I’m ashamed to say, is a kind of careless cynicism. All these dang people are just going through the motions, and it appears that many of them are. They’re coming up the aisle to go to Communion, nudging one another. The teenage girls

are giggling. The teenage boys are looking at the teenage girls. It's like, how are these the body of Christ? But when I can choose, no, this is objective truth. It has nothing to do with that even they subjectively are appreciating it in this moment, the Mass is always wonderful, always, but it demands a change of foundational perspective from my side.

Paul Swanson: That's interesting that all three of us brought up the idea of flow or exchange.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes, yes.

Paul Swanson: I'm thinking, as we dive into this theme and the Trinity, Richard, how do you see the Trinity participating in flow and evolution?

Richard Rohr: Well, what Trinitarian flow allows and makes happen is that there are no dead ends although it might look like it in the short order. Step back from it and wait until April. You know what I mean? Step back from it, the tragic situation, and realize it raised two people to immense maturity. Nothing seems to completely die. I mean, please don't think this is any way validating the things as horrible as the Holocaust and Etty Hillesum, [inaudible 00:10:19] and Anne Frank, and Simone Weil, rise out of that. There's some kind of persistent flow that will not be stopped. It will not be stopped.

Richard Rohr: Then when you take that the Universe itself is still expanding and expanding at a faster pace of even more creativity and more creativity, it receives a universal metaphor. So, once you choose to see that, you can see it, even in very dark situations. And I admit, it's not easy very often.

Brie Stoner: I feel like many of us grew up with a notion of the Trinity as this self-enclosed community.

Richard Rohr: Self-enclosed.

Brie Stoner: I think you quote her work. Is it Catherine LaCugna's work on—

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: Is it God for Us?

Richard Rohr: God for Us.

Brie Stoner: --in which she opens up this vision, and you open up this vision for us, too, Richard, of that not being an enclosed community but a participatory, in time, through time, incarnating, manifesting, creating. It puts it almost in a dynamic lens that we're in the midst of it, too, that we're in that community with the Trinity.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: That's such a big shift. I remember in the Living School being blown away by this

transition from it just being an enclosed community of, like, okay, Father, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, they're just up there having a party, and then that's it, to actually bringing it into a wheel of motion through time that we're a part of.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: It does give us that resilient hope that you're speaking of that the story isn't over. The Trinity is still unfolding, manifesting.

Richard Rohr: You have to have a way to take any notion of a singular God that assures that that singular God is love, otherwise the whole thing is built on a wobbly foundation. How do we not know if God is not whimsical, doesn't change God's mind, doesn't get pissed off, forgive me? Trinity achieves that.

There's a fancy phrase, the great discovery of, Karl Rahner makes much of it, a number of Trinitarian theologians summarized in just a couple of sentences. The great revelation is the Deus ad intra, God in the interior shape of God, which is what you're talking about, is the Deus ad extra. The Deus ad intra is the Deus ad extra, that this pattern is the pattern of everything. Until you get to that point, you don't have a pastoral, fruitful, exciting, clarifying notion of God. But now we've got a God who is assured of being love. He isn't a God who changes his mind and one day is loving and the next day hates the Egyptians, which we were allowed to think for a while.

Paul Swanson: You've said before, "Every metaphor limps" but when it comes to metaphors for the Trinity, we were often given metaphors that not only limped, but just were completely static.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, distort.

Paul Swanson: Like, I think again of the clover or an apple as being some of these descriptions I was taught as Trinity—

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: --and they were just kind of stuck.

Richard Rohr: The apple?

Paul Swanson: It was so simplistic. It was like the core, the meat, and then the peel, or the skin of the apple—

Richard Rohr: Oh, I see. Very static, good word.

Paul Swanson: It just doesn't have that same vibrancy that is needed to understand—

Richard Rohr: No, no, no.

Paul Swanson: --how we actually would participate in the Trinity.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. You have to have dynamic language and metaphors of flow, a differentiation inside of deep connection. Yeah. Well, you both are good students, good graduates from the

Living School. You got it.

Brie Stoner: We're coming back around to this recognition that, without the foundation of an evolutionary worldview of the cosmos, of Creation, we do tend to orient more towards static statements. And so, I wonder—and this is more out of curiosity—is, you know, how we refer to God as the ground of being, and I know that Eckhart talks about that a lot, but is it inaccurate to say the “ground of becoming” if we're trying to embrace a more--

Richard Rohr: Oh, let's try that.

Brie Stoner: --dynamic principle, evolutionary principle? And here's why, maybe let me flesh this out. I think a lot about how the perfectionism that many of us experienced in Christianity, that we had to be perfect, that we had to almost eschew our humanity. A lot of the foundations of that wasn't [was in @ 15:25] a static state—you're good or bad. You made a mistake, you were condemned. But when we think about in principles of becoming in an evolutionary worldview, we're all in process, and we're all in that growth principle that we talked about in the last episode. When I think about God as the ground of becoming, it's that

Brie Stoner: loving inclusion of my imperfection that I feel permission for, for the first time, as if, “Oh, if I'm in relationship with that kind of God, then it's okay for me to not be fully arrived. It's okay for me to make mistakes. I can forgive myself and others.” So, does “ground of becoming” work to talk about God?

Richard Rohr: I think it works very well. Let's just build on what we said a moment ago--the Deus ad intra is Deus ad extra, the inner workings of God are the outer shape of the Universe. Let's say the ground of being is the ground of becoming.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. That's nice.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it is nice. It works because we can think evolutionarily, we never came up with that. Someone must have already said that, I'm sure, but it works. I'm going to have to try it in the Living School.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, and Teilhard does talk about the evolutionary view, but what is beautiful to me about the way you said that ground of being is the ground of becoming—

Richard Rohr: Is the ground of becoming—

Brie Stoner: --is that that then is a benevolent universe.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Brie Stoner: It makes it benevolent.

Richard Rohr: Because everything can be healed, and grow, and change.

Brie Stoner: It's not over. Nothing is over. I've been spending some time lately reading Brené Brown's work. I don't know if you're familiar with her work.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yes, oh.

Brie Stoner: She's so popular, and I've been fascinated by the distinction she makes between shame and guilt. She says shame is when we take on the full identity of "I am a mistake. I am a failure." Guilt is when we say, "Oh, I made a mistake. I need to make that right." That same distinction seems to be part of what we're looking at here, because if we are in the ground of being, the ground of becoming, then I can see those mistakes and flaws in myself as growth opportunities, not identities to get hooked by. Thank God.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes. Well said, thank you.

Paul Swanson: And so, thinking about that, being is the ground of becoming, there are a lot of us who carry wounds from the image of God that we had where it was a sense of God in control of everything. Every corner is kind of rounded or preplanned, versus a God that's participating with us. How out these two polarities, how do

Paul Swanson: we heal the one, the sense of God is in control of everything and almost like a, and I say it's a deep wounding, that's something that I experienced in my own evangelical upbringing, and shifting into God that is participating with us.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: How do you recommend someone learn to lean into that participation with God in the flow of Trinity versus this almighty from top down, not from within?

Richard Rohr: Well, let me say, first of all, that it does need to be healed, because you stay with the God who is almighty, you have just created fifteen major theological problems for everybody, or they go into denial. Religion is a language of pretend, but not a language that has anything to do with the real world or my real life. So, it has to be healed. I'm not saying that our ancestors who probably died with that notion of God weren't beloved of God, but we made the journey very hard for them because it was all static, quantifiable, countable, measurable, retributive, enforceable. Oh, that's a cage you just can't get out of.

So, once you move from that economy, which is an economy of meritocracy as we call it, to what I believe is the true understanding of the Gospel, you stop counting. You have time when you stop counting to recognize the flow, the participation, the uplift, the waves of grace that continue to flow through you, toward you, even on your bad days. But as long as you measure and count, it stops the flow. It really does because you have a quick certitude about whether she deserves, whether I deserve, whether she's right, whether I'm right.

You stop this closed-down counting and measuring, what happens is your quality of perception gets much more subtle. While you're driving down the street, you can say, "What is this vivifying? I want to deny it. I want to say it's not there, but it is there. There's a part of me that wants to appreciate, that wants to forgive, that wants to start again, that wants to love, that wants to understand." All of those are broadening of a static universe. Static doesn't allow any of those that I just listed. It doesn't allow you to understand, to forgive. It just, I have my conclusions: Two plus two equals four, I know, and it's over. You're a bad person.

But Trinitarian flow is movement, movement, movement. Let go of that narrative. Let go of that certitude, even toward yourself. We all have stories by which we've created our own narrative, as Brené Brown says, to shame ourselves or hate ourselves. If you have a narrative

toward yourself, you're going to have it toward everybody else, that she doesn't deserve, he doesn't deserve because he did this. Without forgiveness, the Universe is going to freeze into another glacial period, I think.

Brie Stoner: Well, I think what you're saying is bringing me into this awareness of the critical element of relationality to love, that love is relationship, that love is a verb. It's acted on. I know Beatrice Bruteau has an expression where she's talking about

Brie Stoner: the Trinity in God's Ecstasy, her book on the Trinity. She says, "God is Godding, and we are Godding with God." [laughter] And the role of relationship and community to mirror back those stories, like you were saying, and then to liberate each other from them is so important because we almost don't realize how stuck and static we get ourselves with our stories.

I recently had an experience where I had this deep reckoning with a significant mistake that I had made, a very, very costly mistake. I went into a full-on shame spiral. I mean, I was just like, "I am a terrible person," on and on, days on end in sweatpants and destruction. I had a conversation with my spiritual director. Her name's Carla. "Hey, Carla." I was talking to her, and she looked at me, and she said, "You know what, Brie? I forgive you. I forgive you."

Richard Rohr: So, if I can, it's doable.

Brie Stoner: Yes. It was this shattering moment of love where I realized even though I had made a mistake and it was significant, it was costly, I was still worthy of love and forgiveness in that.

Richard Rohr: Lovely!

Brie Stoner: What it made me realize though, Richard, is exactly what you're saying. It was like, "Oh, my gosh, I am such a perfectionist, I'm holding that lens on everybody else?"

Richard Rohr: Yep. That's the price you pay.

Brie Stoner: The grace of that moment was that it opened me up to vulnerability, that in receiving love from her, I could then be in that flow of love with everybody in my life. I don't know. It was a very transformative experience.

Richard Rohr: Well put.

Brie Stoner: But thinking about that, as the role of the Trinity as helping us remember that we can't do any of this outside of community and relationship. There's no flow of love without relationship. It seems obvious to say.

Richard Rohr: It's the training ground. You will get no training or no practice if you isolate yourself.

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I've been having, this past year, I've had these two recurring dreams. One of the recurring dreams, it was in gray scale, black and white, and everything was very predictable and static. The other recurring dream was bright colors. There was

Paul Swanson: no sense of where the exterior began and where the interior began, of buildings, of how people participated.

It was funny you mentioned your spiritual director. The night before I was supposed to begin with my spiritual director, these two dreams converged into one dream. When I was talking to my spiritual director, we named one the insurance template and one the vivid template. And so, to hear you talk about vivifying just really resonates for me because one is the known that feels safe. I think a lot of that has to do with my own sense of some of those woundings and some of the vapor trails of those woundings, how they still inform me internally.

Richard Rohr: Vapor trail, that's a good metaphor.

Paul Swanson: Then this other vivid template, that I'm being drawn into the wildness of God. How do I hold these two, one that kept me safe and served me for a period of my life—

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. Again.

Paul Swanson: --I can bless that and thank it, but it is no longer of use for me for deepening into how I'm supposed to participate in the flow.

I bring that up as a way to talk about my own sense of how you don't necessarily always just jump from one to the other, or a new sense of how the Trinity is alive in me and I'm alive in the Trinity, but that it is a deep calling that feels like there's risk in it for those willing to seek out a new way of being in God. Could you speak to that, Richard? Does that resonate for you? Or am I off my rocker again, back in the bathtub? [laughter]

Richard Rohr: Well, when you use the word "risk," I couldn't help but think, if you get in the flow, that means the flow is going to move you from here to there, over which you will have little control. So, it is a risk. We don't like a dynamic God.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Richard Rohr: In fact, I find people would prefer a God who condemns them, maybe not eternally, but who judges them harshly. It's been proven, at least in the past, people appreciate fire-and-brimstone sermons because they at least know what they should feel guilty about. They feel properly guilty, and that now makes them worthy. But to actually live inside of a flow where God is constantly letting go of this wave, moving us into another wave that is better, that is also surrender.

Paul Swanson: Mm.

Brie Stoner: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: We hate the unknowable. We just hate the uncontrollable. So we don't really want a dynamic God, I don't think. The basic name of that is forgiveness. We don't want a God who forgives because, damn it, if he forgives my faults, he forgives Saddam Hussein or whoever else you want to pick. Who of us likes that? We're out of the realm of retributive justice now, which gives us false comfort. Only the ego would like that comfort.

Brie Stoner: I know I bring this up a lot, Richard. Sorry that I do, but for me it's this image of creativity. Of course, if God is Creator, if Trinity is in this creative process of manifesting, the invitation for us is to join in that process, and it is a risk. It's not knowing.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: It's that self-emptying love in the creative act that is the growing edge of our lives, of our love, of our work together, but it isn't comfortable. That's the thing. It's uncomfortable. And so, I'm thinking of Barbara Holmes because she has a way of describing contemplation in a Trinitarian kind of way where she says the work of contemplation is, in her words, "entry, engagement and effect."

I'm going to read some of her work here from *Joy Unspeakable*. She says: "Entry denotes a shift from the everyday world to the liminal space that worship creates. Engagement refers to the willingness to involve body and spirit in the encounter with the holy. It is upon this ground of covenantal reciprocity that relationship becomes paramount," like we were talking about a minute ago.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: [quoting Barbara Holmes] "Effect is often specific to the participating person or community. Those caught up in this intimacy with God explain that their experience expands their knowledge, awakens a palpable and actionable love, and is either a profoundly restorative resting in Divine Presence or a fire shut up in the bones that inspires action." Isn't that marvelous?

Richard Rohr: It sure is. You have to read it twice [inaudible @ 00:29:30] at least.

Brie Stoner: What I love about that idea, though, of contemplation is entry, engagement, and effect is it moves us into that Trinitarian lifecycle in how we think about contemplation because it's not just about the inner, like you were saying. Just like the Trinity isn't just God within, but it's what happens in that flow of the inner, the connection that happens in engagement that results in some creative outcome and effect. I don't know. That helps me think in a Trinitarian lens toward practice if that makes sense.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. You can't sit still with the inner action, the inner aliveness. It's still happening. It's still happening. It's happening while I sleep. It's happening even when I'm unaware.

Brie Stoner: Would you say, Richard, that, if we understand that or if we try to live into how she's describing contemplation as that flow—

Richard Rohr: Yes?

Brie Stoner: --are we also the face of God then, in this principle, or do we have an opportunity to at least manifest that more?

Richard Rohr: I think that's the final effect. Maybe not the final, but it's the goal. We used to say "sacramento pro populo," the sacraments are not an end in themselves, they're for the sake of the people. They're for the sake of the transformative effect in human beings. If we

just had obeyed that, at least in the Catholic Church, is this redoing Mass every day or a Confirmation every year changing anybody? The preoccupation became doing the ritual right, validly, licitly, correctly, with the bishop wearing the right outfit. We lost the whole point. It has to be becoming face, becoming a person, becoming a human being, becoming a relationship. What's that book of C.S. Lewis that I used to quote so much? When something has faces?

Paul Swanson: Until We Have Faces?

Richard Rohr: Until We Have Faces, yeah. I always just loved the title, [laughter] and I've often thought the incarnation was able to happen 2,000 years ago, the personal incarnation, because humanity was beginning to have face, which is capable of interface. Until you have the capacity for subject-to-subject relationship, you don't have full encounter. Now God loved everybody before that, but they couldn't enjoy, in general, the full fruits of that, whereas you and I are given the grace, the freedom to enjoy a face-to-face encounter, as it were.

Paul Swanson: Which speaks to the vulnerability of God, right? How could God—

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Paul Swanson: --not be vulnerable if this is not the way we are in relationship?

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative). You two get it. [laughter] I'm so glad you're my inquisitors, my questioners. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: I read this interview with Wendell Berry recently where he's talking about there's a lot of fear about artificial intelligence replacing human work. He said that one of the things that artificial intelligence can't do is they can't do work with love. To me it seems like that is part of how not only the gift of being human—

Richard Rohr: Wow, that's big.

Paul Swanson: --but the gift of being human in relationship with the flow of Trinity is that we can do this work with love, whether it's doing the Mass or whether it's bathing our children, or coming to work every day. When we add or show up with love, we have that potentiality to reveal the face of God to one another and be that gateway. I was wondering if you could reflect on that, on doing work—

Richard Rohr: Gee, I want to quote that. Who said that?

Paul Swanson: Wendell Berry.

Richard Rohr: God, he says so many good things.

Brie Stoner: I know.

Paul Swanson: I love him, yeah.

Richard Rohr: "Artificial intelligence can do many things, but it can't do them with love." Wow. I don't know how I comment on it except that I'm in awe of it, of the truth of that. That's why

love is the changing quantity, the changing quality that moves ordinary action to not just a human but a divine action. Without it, we really are just rational animals, which is-- You know the definition of homo sapiens that persisted until recent era: rational animal. The human being is rational. It's not bad, but it's not very exciting either.

Paul Swanson: I recall a recent experience of when we were traveling over the Christmas holidays. My family was on a bus to go catch an airplane. Having two small children on a bus is not very fun, but the bus driver, speaking of work with love, she asked my children's names and then started singing songs about them over the intercom.

Richard Rohr: You're kidding.

Paul Swanson: It made a moment that could have been tedious and frustrating, which had been the morning up to that point.

Richard Rohr: Wow, lovely.

Paul Swanson: It just changed the whole travel day.

Richard Rohr: Oh, isn't that neat?

Paul Swanson: I was like, wow, she just revealed the love of God—

Richard Rohr: Isn't that dear?

Paul Swanson --through her singing to my kids on a very mundane bus ride. But, to me, that is the work, work done with love, has that opportunity.

Richard Rohr: That's beautiful. When you have two little ones, an experience I'll never know, but you just can't be unaware for thirty seconds on a moving anything. Two of them, oh!

Brie Stoner: So, as we wrap up this episode, we've been thinking it'd be a great way to end each of these themes by asking, "How do we practice this one?" In many ways, Paul, what you just offered from Wendell Berry is a profound invitation of living out the Trinity, to do our work with love. But I wonder, Richard, if you have any invitation for us of how we can practice this tenet, how we can live into the ground of being as the ground of becoming and trust the benevolent Universe that is in flow with us?

Richard Rohr: I hope this makes sense. There's a certain way where we can soften our gaze. There's a hard gaze. You can see it, speaking of on the way to an airport, in so many people traveling. It's a hard gaze of anxiety, irritation, rush. Every twenty people, you'll meet one who has a soft gaze, and you just want to rush toward them. What did they do to achieve that? Seeing that immediately makes me aware. How often am I carrying a soft gaze?

I remember one time right here in the Albuquerque airport, there are the escalators going up to the departure area. I'm late for a plane, and I rush right ahead of somebody. It really was rude. Once I got on, I turned around to apologize, and it was one of the students in the Living School. [laughter] You could tell—

Brie Stoner: Oh, that's awesome.

Richard Rohr: --they were rather shocked, “Well, this is Richard in the real world [laughter] he pushes old ladies to the side.” Oh, God, I felt stupid. I felt so phony, but I’m sure whenever you’re rushing you have the hard gaze. You do, determination, focus, over-focus. What made me think I was going to get there any quicker rushing onto that elevator? I apologized, but I’m not sure she believed it. [laughter] It was my humiliation for the day.

How do we practice it? It starts with the way you gaze. There is a choicefulness in softening your gaze. I’m delighted in this last year even, how I can feel myself much more capable of that because I’m not on a timetable like I was most of my life. There is just much more time to do that, much more freedom to be present. How many opportunities I must have missed by spending fifty years on deadlines. That God taught me anything is amazing. Once you soften the gaze, then you soften the heart. It comes quickly right afterwards. That doesn’t seem too abstract; does that make sense?

Brie Stoner: No, I think it’s deeply practical—

Richard Rohr: Good.

Brie Stoner: --to look at each other and look at reality with a soft gaze that is present to wonder. I mean, it brings me back to both the bathtub stories that we shared. Because without that loving gaze, we miss the flow. So how we can hope to enter into it if we’re not present to where it is?

Richard Rohr: There you go, well put.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: The practicality of just stay out of Richard’s way in an airport.

Richard Rohr: In the airport, just watch out.

Brie Stoner: Wherever you are, if you see Richard, run.

Richard Rohr: He’s going to charge in front of you and—

Brie Stoner: Dive to the left or right.

Richard Rohr: --push old ladies to the side so he can get to his damn plane.

Brie Stoner: Poor Living School student.

Paul Swanson: Should we turn to a couple of the voicemail questions on this theme?

Richard Rohr: Oh, sure. Let’s do it, let’s do it.

Unknown Speaker: I reflected on the second theme, Foundation. God is the ground of being and on our side. Jesus is the face of God. In this reflection, I realized a truth, that Jesus cannot give ultimate solution to our problems in life, which is our concern most of the time because he himself had the same destiny which he knowingly accepted in his [inaudible @ 00:40:20].

This was in order to accomplish a mission of compassion and saving love. We understand this as a good foundation which will build us up, but to follow him, it requires a change in one's own heart and not expecting a change outside that. It takes courage to make a radical decision to discover every day some new creative practice to be in the likeness of Jesus in some form, even when it is not at all easy. Am I right? In fact, I am trying to practice it this way with many failures. My question is, how can I sustain such awareness and practices?

Brie Stoner: What I heard her saying was she's realizing that this foundation is an invitation to practice daily the creative flow, an opportunity to live as Jesus did daily.

Richard Rohr: Daily.

Brie Stoner: But she says, "I'm trying to practice this with many failures." She says, "How do we sustain such a practice?"

Paul Swanson: Beautifully said.

Richard Rohr: Sustaining is a good word because what makes you give up is the humiliation of not succeeding.

Brie Stoner: Mm. Oh, man.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. You have to say to yourself "I want to learn this because I do." It is, "What part of me is so damn humiliated this time?" you know, because Richard wasn't perfect again, or Richard didn't do it right again, or people think less of Richard, who wants to be thought well of. That's the discouragement, the lack of courage to move ahead.

Now, once you are too humble to be humiliated, if I could just put in the way James Finley would probably put it, you don't get discouraged because—now I'll quote Anthony DeMello, "I'm an ass. You're an ass. What can you expect from an ass?" [laughter] Once you live in your properly humbled state—in in this case humbled is not a put down, it's not a lack of dignity—it's discovering your dignity at such a foundational level, and that it has nothing to do with your meritocracies. Your practice is to not let your failure humiliate you. To the degree your failures humiliate you, to that degree you're still trapped in ego. To that degree you're still narcissistic. Believe me, that is still totally true for me at my age. I don't know that it ever changes. Who of us likes to fail, in our own eyes or other people's eyes? [laughter] But you can get a little better at it, at least it seems to me you can, a little.

Brie Stoner: It seems like that also gets at the kenotic principle, the self-emptying principle that we talk a lot about, and that wheel of love, of love emptying itself, which is that, in that humiliation, we are emptied of ourselves that get in the way of love in a way, if that makes sense. But I'm experiencing this so deeply lately, just kind of facing some mistakes and recognizing the opportunity to soften into that and see my own imperfection is the turn of love within myself so that then I can look at others with that kind of absolute, accepting love.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: So, I do see what you're saying, Richard. It's an invitation to see failure differently, which is why I think one of your tenets is that that is the path.

Richard Rohr: Falling upward, you got it.

Brie Stoner: It is.

Richard Rohr: Well, it's Jesus's path.

Paul Swanson: It speaks to what you were saying earlier about your experience with your spiritual director, of learning to have to forgive ourselves because we can't sustain it on our own, and so, that willingness to forgive and try again.

Richard Rohr: You make yourself incapable of grace. You don't want grace. You want to pull it off by yourself.

Paul Swanson: Last question.

John Glinsman: Hello, my name is John Glinsman, and I'm a current student in the Living School. My question is about Core Principle Number Two. For me, this question is a practical question. It comes out of my lived experience. What I'm wondering about is, as we look at the future of Christianity and these seven Core Values and how these would interface with the global era that we live in, I am wondering about countries like Sweden, where I used to live, which is one of the most secular countries in the world, and words like "Christ," even "Universal Christ," and "Jesus" are not words that are typically received well, and that typically probably do not lead to a further place of conversation. And so, what my question is, is without that specific Christian framework, what are the ways to inspire hope that truly is universal that is not referenced around Christianity or Trinity?

Richard Rohr: This is largely true of the United States, or maybe I should say increasingly true. It's what we call secularism, that the sacred, if it points to true transcendence, is an embarrassment. It's almost not allowed. The trouble is, if you water down the notion of sacred and it doesn't point to true holy, holy, holy, beyond, beyond, beyond, big, big, big, it doesn't work its magic, if I can say it that way. It's dangerous. But you have to start there. We struggle with this here at the Living School, as you've probably sensed. We want to use a universal language.

I ran into Margaret Wheatley last month, the wonderful woman who develops leaders, and she told me the book she's writing right now is on sacred words. She promised that she would send it to me as soon as she finishes it. She says, "Once you try to make the case," I can't wait to hear her case, "that once a culture stops using authentically sacred words like Jesus, like Trinity, that leave us out of control, out of understanding, that it's very soon that a whole culture becomes secular. You have to have sacred words to retain a sense of the sacred."

So, all I'm saying is don't accommodate so much or don't be so eager to please that you lose your own sense of the sacred. That's what's happened in a lot of Western Europe and is now accelerating here at a very quick pace. Now that's furthered, in my opinion, rather cheap way, God language, Jesus language is thrown away in America. The people who use it use it so glibly and as ammunition and as certitude. So, I'm afraid we're driving people in this

Richard Rohr: direction. I can understand your question. We're being driven away from sacred words because people use sacred words in such an un-sacred way, without due respect.

You've got to almost meet an authentic believer, like when Barbara Holmes, in several conversations I had with her, when she speaks of God, you wouldn't think of dismissing it. It comes from an authentic place. Anybody who's suffered seems to have a greater ability to use sacred words. Forgive me, this is unkind, rich white people who've never failed at anything, [sigh] when they use God language, it just is no longer credible. It's no longer believable. Maybe that's what you're facing. And, I mean, I have nothing against Sweden, Paul right here—

Paul Swanson: Uh-oh.

Richard Rohr: --looking at me—

Paul Swanson: With my Swedish face.

Richard Rohr: --is Swedish. But it is a very white country, huh, a highly comfortable, successful country. It doesn't make them bad people. There's a whole bunch of things about the Gospel that are going to be very hard for them to know, devotion that you talked about, Brie. Devotion won't come easily. I hope that speaks some or sheds some little light on the question. But, in principle, I agree with what you said. The whole school tries to do that. But I am always warning the school against, "Don't go too far. Don't go too far or you become that."

It worries me sometimes that a lot of our people, I never hear them pray in the second person, to God. They pray in the third person, about God. That's one of the first steps away from subject-to-subject interface. So, thanks, and may what I have said contribute to your compassion and understanding, not discourage it.

Brie Stoner: Beautiful. Thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Richard.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Paul Swanson: Okay.

Richard Rohr: Those damn Swedes.

Brie Stoner: Those Swedes.

Paul Swanson: The Swedes, they get in the way. You know what's funny though—

Brie Stoner: They're so secular, those Swedes.

Paul Swanson: --in Scandinavia, you're born into the church, so you're a member unless you go revoke your membership.

Richard Rohr: Same in Germany.

Paul Swanson: What that does is just creates no agency and choice in what does it mean to be a part of the community.

Richard Rohr: That's it. That's it, yeah. And it's the Lutheran Church?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Which, the Covenant Church that I grew up in did not like that. It was a pietist movement. They were kind of the rebels that moved away from that, which is—

Brie Stoner: The rebels.

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Paul Swanson: Pious rebels.

Corey Pigg: [[@ 00:51:31](#)] A lot of my friends, they were like me. My dad, he belonged to the Lutheran Church. I didn't grow up in the Lutheran Church. But my family paid me money just to go through the catechism class. In Germany, a lot of my friends, their families were the same way. They were Lutheran by tradition—

Paul Swanson: By culture, yeah.

Corey Pigg: --but they would give their kids money as a gift if they completed a Catechism class.

Paul Swanson: How interesting.

Corey Pigg: How weird is that? It's almost like it's, I guess, an insurance that you'll maybe continue the tradition. I don't know.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. [music]

Richard Rohr: Well, all right.

Brie Stoner: I'm loving this Alternative Orthodoxy.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard. 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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