

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 4, Episode 4
Frame | Theme 3

Brie Stoner: All right. So, on today's episode, we're exploring the third theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy: For those who see deeply, there is only one reality. By reason of the incarnation, there is no truthful distinction between sacred and profane. This was a really exciting and interesting conversation.

Paul Swanson: I love this theme.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I think there's something about growing up in the Evangelical Tradition. There was such a clear marker between sacred and profane—Christian music, secular music—

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: --Christian movies if you remember those, and secular movies, it was so stark.

Brie Stoner: So stark, and we created a whole subculture of belonging, right? So, if you like, whatever the band is, if you like Nirvana, then you're going to love-- I don't know. I should remember who, like Newsboys? I don't know.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, something like that.

Brie Stoner: Do you remember all the Christian bands?

Paul Swanson: Right.

Brie Stoner: Oh, man. And, basically, you weren't a Christian if you weren't participating in that subculture of what we thought was sacred and "In the world, but not of the world."

Paul Swanson: Right. Your street cred as a Christian depended upon that.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Paul Swanson: I think that's why this theme is so healing to see that one reality and to see that that distinction is false. And Richard really helps invite us into seeing the wholeness of reality and that there is no profane, that it is all one sacred universe.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And it's also what the mystics invite us into, that they glimpsed in their experiences of the Divine, the sense of oneness and one reality. And we take a look at that about how mystical experience is essentially the veil parting to reveal this one reality.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I love that scene from that sense of oneness, and I think it is only through the examples of teachers and mystics who can help guide us in that and can

Paul Swanson: help those scales drop from our eyes so we can see reality as it truly is, and celebrate the "sacrality" of it all.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, which doesn't mean, however, that we shy away from prophetic action.

Paul Swanson: That's right.

Brie Stoner: But it means that we move into prophetic action with a different energy. Instead of being reactive, we become creative—

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Brie Stoner: --participators in trying to heal, and support, and manifest that one reality even further.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I love how that complexity demands that creativity from us to be true agents of change in the world.

Brie Stoner: So, with that, we hope you'll enjoy this episode on the third theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy. [music]

Paul Swanson: All right. This is very exciting. We are ready to go with the third theme of the Alternative Orthodoxy, which is: For those who see deeply, there's only one reality. By reason of the incarnation, there is no truthful distinction between sacred and profane. Brie, I wonder if you would kick us off, if you have a story that connects to this theme that helps to ground in our own experience.

Brie Stoner: Well, you know what, before, we started recording, we were talking about U2, and I think that for me growing up in a very conservative Baptist background, the sacred was anything that happened in church was the sacred, right? And music, therefore, the only sacred music was that music that said Jesus about a million times, where Jesus was your personal boyfriend and you were singing to Jesus, and God, and the Spirit. So, I remember growing up and having that whole sacred/secular issue especially around music. I remember growing up, I was only allowed to listen to Christian music and Christian bands.

Richard Rohr: That's common.

Brie Stoner: And then when I finally had enough money from babysitting and I bought my first two secular albums, which were by the way Mariah Carey and Alanis Morissette, which I feel like says a lot about me. [laughter] But that sense of that dualistic split that I grew up with around music. And as we were just talking about U2, I remember the moment when I realized that there could be music that was sacred that didn't have to be church music, and U2 did that for me.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brie Stoner: I remember album after album being like, "This is Scripture. This is sacred. This is helping me live and inspiring me." And I think for so many of us, it kind of restored a sense of faith during times of deconstruction. But if I'm totally honest with you both, I am still really struggling with this. I can feel the ways in which I still try to separate, this is the holy sacred camp and this is the secular camp.

I just put out an album recently, and I could feel my discomfort in releasing that. What are the Contemplatives going to think about this? This isn't Gregorian chant. It's electronic pop music. So, I'm still trying to integrate this idea of the one reality and to embrace that fully in my body and in my life. What about you, Paul?

Paul Swanson: Well, the story that came to mind when I was thinking about this was back in the day, I went on a bike trip on bicycle from Calgary, Alberta down to Fort Collins, Colorado.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brie Stoner: Holy cow.

Paul Swanson: It's just an easy way of transportation, right?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, yeah.

Paul Swanson: It just takes a few weeks. And we got outside of Billings, and I checked my voicemail for the first time, and I had a lot of messages. And I'm not a person who's on the phone very much so I was very confused. And I had tried to listen to the voicemails, but my reception was off. So, we went inside this little country store, and I called my parents and I said, "What's going on?" A friend of mine had been killed in a car accident. So, here I am in this small country store receiving this news, and with my friend, and I tell him, and we just both start bawling. And we're hugging. We're in this little convenience store just sobbing.

We eventually, I recall, falling on the floor just like we've just lost a friend, who was, I think, twenty-one at the time. The owner of the store came over, and she was holding her baby in one of those Babybjörns, those little carriers.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: And the baby was looking right at us, and she's asking us if we're okay, what has happened. I just recall feeling the immensity of the grief of losing Antwon and then looking in this baby's blue eyes. And I had this moment of one reality, of life and death all in that moment.

Brie Stoner: Oh, wow.

Richard Rohr: Really?

Paul Swanson: And I knew everything was going to be okay, I knew everything was not okay. But it was the totality of reality that was just pouring through that baby's eyes.

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Paul Swanson: And even now sometimes as I look into my son Arlo's eyes, I have flashes of Antwon because of that experience of that one reality. Yeah. So, I hold that memory in the grief and, also, the lightness of this mystery of life and death and resurrection.

Richard Rohr: Mm.

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Paul Swanson: So that, not to bring it down a level, but—

Brie Stoner: Stop being such a mystic, Paul.

Paul Swanson: --that's just where it really pierces my heart.

Brie Stoner: No, that's profoundly beautiful, and I think what I appreciate in that story is that you're bringing together the experience of death and life as one reality. We don't look at the world and life like that.

Richard Rohr: No, we don't. And you did it with sacred and profane.

Brie Stoner: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Of course, I approach everything too theologically, but I hope it gives a foundation and permission for what both of you just said. I don't know if I ever taught you in the Living School, Karl Rahner's phrase-- Well, you probably learned of it at Creighton. --the "supernatural existential"? Two big words, I know but—

Brie Stoner: It just feels like an Abba song. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: Once you have that resolved, this whole thing is, well, yeah, that on the existential level, which is let's just translate that as a real present-life pastoral, you probably wouldn't say pastoral, level. This is where it happens. He said, I'm sure he gave me permission to talk this way, that there's no truthful distinction between sacred and profane. The supernatural is the existential, is the existential. That isn't something that most Evangelicals were taught.

The division was very clear. There was the natural, and there was the supernatural. And by the way, we older Catholics were the same way too. It's a huge and wonderful leap. Let me add this to it that the one is the sacrament of

Richard Rohr: the other. You still can appreciate your beautiful Christian song now and then if it's beautiful—

Brie Stoner: On occasion. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: --because it's pointing so directly to the other songs in your life or affirming them or validating them, and this little beautiful child's eyes looked through the death of your friend, a sacrament connects the sacred and the profane and says, "You know what, this is not profane, it's sacred." I mean, take water, bread and wine, any sacramental action, it's not the thing in itself, but it points to the thing and says it's in on the deal, "Look at that, don't look at me."

Until Christianity makes that movement to the supernatural existential, that the supernatural is found in the existential moment, I think our religion will continue to be, I'll call it a sideshow. It's a sideshow. It isn't the main act because it doesn't make all of this meaningful or true. And this is all most people have. So instead of calling them sinners or superficial, and maybe some of them are, I am too so who cares, but you're on to something good. Thank you for starting with this third theme, in this way.

Brie Stoner: Well, thinking of the ordinary mysticism of the supernatural existential—that needs to be a song—I’m reflecting on Thomas Merton’s passage of Fourth and Walnut, and I’d like to read it and then maybe we can talk about this experience that he had that I think points to this tenet so clearly of the one reality.

Richard Rohr: It sure would, yes.

Brie Stoner: So, he says, “In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness of spurious self-isolation in a special world.”

“This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. I have the immense joy of being man, a member of the race in which God Himself became incarnate as if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me now that I realize we all are. And if only everybody could realize this, but it cannot be explained. There’s no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

“Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no”

Brie Stoner: [quoting Thomas Merton] “more greed. But this cannot be seen, only believed and understood by a peculiar gift.”

Richard Rohr: The guy was a master.

Brie Stoner: As I read that, I think certainly not in such an eloquent way could I have articulated it, but I think I’ve had moments like this. And I wonder, Richard, if you could share with us an experience of Fourth and Walnut in that way that you have had—

Richard Rohr: Which one?

Brie Stoner: --where you were able to kind of see through the veil into that moment of oneness, one reality?

Richard Rohr: Which one would be worth telling or capable of being told? And I don’t want to say by that, that it needs to be something super emotional, ecstatic, or special. Where my mind most quickly goes is back to my many hermitage experiences whereby the third week, I maybe hadn’t talked to a single individual for three weeks, usually hadn’t talked. I’m thinking of the Arizona ones now as I did four, I guess, in Arizona.

I just fell in love with every cactus. I fell in love with every little roadrunner and little Javelina, these little pigs that run around in the Arizona desert. I just would stand still and stop walking. It’s like, “It doesn’t get any better than this. This is it. If this is not heaven,

what would heaven be? How could it be better?” It was total satiation, total contentment. It was even better when the whole cosmos got in on it, and it was usually sunset, more in the evening than in the morning. And the lights would just play on the ground and on the cacti.

Yeah, I almost would have trouble to start moving again because I thought I'd lose it. And you can't stay there though. You know how at the Transfiguration, which is the same message really, Jesus tells them to walk down the mountain with him and don't talk about it. Why? Because you can't talk about it. And here we are, all three of us trying. And we still have to try.

Yeah, the Really Real, I used to say at New Jerusalem, put a capital R on both of those, Really Real is ineffable, unspeakable, and yet we have to try for the sake of our sisters and brothers, to let them know there is something more, and they're not alone, and it's a safe universe.

Paul Swanson: And I think with the transfiguration and the temptation, the disciples, “Let's set up a tent so that we can keep this experience going.” I wonder if you could speak to that, too, about not clinging to those experiences, but allowing them to take their course and teach you whatever they need to be.

Richard Rohr: This, I tell it just because it's a little humorous and you could delete it if you want. Now, you've probably heard that as you know the Franciscans owned everything in the Holy Land where Jesus did anything. And own the top of Mount Tabor, too, and there's a lovely friary up there with about four old, sweet guys living. And so, after the tour group that I was leading had to go back down to the village where they were staying, I got to stay up there for the night.

And two rather humorous things happened to make your very point. And I'm not making this up for the sake of a good story. First of all, Mount Tabor at night, all the tourist buses must leave. So the only people up there at night are the four or five Franciscans.

Brie Stoner: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Oh, it just gets so quiet and so lovely. I see nailed to an olive tree is “No Camping.” I wonder do they realize the absurdity of this that this is a biblical story itself. “No, you may not put up a tent here.” But it was very serious because everybody begs to stay up there overnight, and those dang Franciscans send you back down the mountain. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Oh my gosh.

Richard Rohr: Because they don't want it to become filled with outhouses. I can see why they're protecting it. Then the other one was either better or worse, I don't know. It's very common in our houses in Europe and the Mediterranean not to have screens. Screens are sort of a American phenomenon. So, I finally could get myself to go to sleep and said, “I'll never live on Mount Tabor again.” I turned off the light and crawled in my little bed, and pretty soon gnats are just buzzing around my ears, and flies. It was horrible. [laughter] It was absolutely horrible. I'm in this holy place—

Brie Stoner: And you're miserable.

Richard Rohr: --and I'm miserable. Mount Tabor, and I cannot spiritualize this, "There are mosquitoes in Paradise," as one book said years ago. I know both of those experiences were intended for me.

I guess the point I'm really trying to make in this context is don't try to manufacture such moments because if they're manufactured by the ego, they will fail you just as quickly, you know?

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: That seems to be so much what we have done in Christianity is try to manufacture those experiences. But one of the things I appreciate about the

Brie Stoner: stories that you just shared, Richard, is that it's so both/and. It's like you're in this holy place and you're miserable, and there's gnats. I find that I was able to really sink into this tenet so much more with your work on *The Universal Christ*—

Richard Rohr: Oh, good.

Brie Stoner: --because it allowed me to see the one reality as the Christic reality. I wonder if you could share with us how this tenet relates to *The Universal Christ*?

Richard Rohr: Wow. It's essential. That's why I had to write that book. Some of my books, I didn't have to write, but *The Universal Christ* I had to write. And I'm glad God gave me the time to do it. The very word *cosmos*—Barbara Holmes probably says this in her book, I don't know—means harmony, harmony. The *cosmos*, they had an early word for ecology, and it was *cosmos*. I don't see how a religion can be a proper religion unless its cosmological. If God is any smaller than the namer, the holder together, the harmonizer of the whole *cosmos*, you have a mere ethnic religion, a textbook religion, but not a true religion. It has to include everything.

Now, where I gained that conviction so early, you've heard me say many times, many people think they bought that book *Everything Belongs* just because of the title. And I say why was that true? Because I think our deep intuition as believers is, "You know what, that has to be true. If there's one God who created all things, and God is everywhere"-- Now, those are in the first sixteen questions of our Baltimore Catechism. Those are the direct one-line answers that we had to memorize: "There is one God who created all things and question sixteen, God is everywhere." --it would seem this would be the first corollary of that, and we're always afraid to unpack the implications.

Now, I have a terrible suspicion about that, and you've heard me say it in different contexts. I think it makes our clergy role less important. [laughter] It's called the theology of suspicion. If God is everywhere and there's one God who created the whole Universe and it's all sacred, certainly our job of preaching and "sacramentalizing," and us doing the healing, or whatever it might be has significantly dropped, significantly. It just doesn't keep us central anymore. I wish I didn't have to say that. I'm not saying we don't need some form of leadership in the church, but this huge distinction between clergy and laity is itself a product of sacred and profane being separate.

Clerus, from which the word clergy came means the separated ones. So we wore different outfits. We had titles. And in that, by-and-large, Protestantism did not reform Catholicism. It wanted to. It really did want to—the “priesthood of all believers” of Calvin. But now we have Presbyterian ministers, I guess. We’re Covenanters sort of priesthood-of-all-believers Christians?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I mean, there are still just distinct roles of pastoral staff, but I think in theory that was in part of theology.

Richard Rohr: In theory, that’s what I thought, yeah. But the Baptist minister—

Brie Stoner: Same hierarchy.

Richard Rohr: Yes. That’s what I thought. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Just different names, different outfits, Richard, but the same. What’s fascinating about this, is that we’ve been talking about the distinction between power over versus power with.

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: And in one approach, the clerical approach or the sacred and profane approach, separateness requires a power over. It requires a hierarchy of power over.

Richard Rohr: That’s right.

Brie Stoner: And that perpetuates separateness. So it’s a little bit of a chicken and an egg creating separateness and creating these hierarchies of power and domination wanting to control, wanting to create order and certainty, and then in this other paradigm, the communion paradigm, the power with paradigm where God is everywhere and in everything, you have to let go of that hierarchy and certainty, and move with.

Richard Rohr: You have to.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Brie Stoner: And this strikes me as so much more consonant with the Trinity and the idea of a flow, and trust, and love.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yes. That doesn’t mean, and I know you weren’t saying that, that after that question has been resolved in your heart and mind, that some form of leadership cannot be reintroduced.

Brie Stoner: Correct. Right.

Richard Rohr: But now you’re not tied to it. It isn’t overly sacralized. It doesn’t have undue power. Now, you know, Ken Wilber makes the distinction between actualization hierarchy like a mother is, a father is. I better be a hierarchy for those little ones especially when they’re little because they don’t know. They don’t know they’re going to hurt themselves, and you do know. You have to use your knowing to

Richard Rohr: protect their unknowing. That's an actualization hierarchy. But what we've had in most of history, even in parenting, is domination hierarchy.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Richard Rohr: Well, you were saying it—with and over. And what we're trying to do now is turn that corner from domination hierarchies, the trouble is we're so used to yelling at every hierarchy and shooting it down that the so called orange levels and green levels of Spiral Dynamics, those are levels of consciousness, they can waste thirty years on being anti-authority.

Brie Stoner: Trying to flatten it off.

Richard Rohr: The whole goal is to get rid of leadership, that all leadership is bad. It's really a supreme waste of time and after a while puts you in such a rebellious mode that it's your first response to everything. I say this probably with too much emphasis because ever since the founding of the center thirty-two years ago, that's been a third of the staff. They don't know they're there. They have to go through that, but orange and green are still below mystic.

When you get to the mystical, non-dual level, no one is keeping you back from union. No one. In fact, you need a little kicking to experience union. I don't think it's our authority job to inflict that kicking. It's one of those paradoxes.

Paul Swanson: I think about, too, especially in spirituality and religion, the professionalization of elders versus the natural elders who embody that.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: And when you give some twenty-five-year-old the position of priests or lead pastor, whatever it may be, that internal experience is not there. I think this is part of why we don't see some of the vibrancy of the Universal Christ present in communities is because they haven't tasted it themselves. There haven't been enough natural elders within the community. I see that in my own church community where I'm drawn to elders who have that energy versus someone who may have that post.

Richard Rohr: I'm with you. I wrote an article once. I think it's the only major article I ever wrote that the Jesuits accepted [laughter] in a magazine called America, and it comes to mind because I never got a lot of feedback on it, positive or negative so I thought it just fell flat. And just two weeks ago, I got a letter from a Jesuit saying, "Can you find that article for me?" He said, "You do know it was required reading for all Jesuits in America before ordination?"

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And the title of it, which I never knew had appeal to anybody, was Archetypal Priesthood is Not Always Ordained Priesthood. That was the title. And I defined archetypal priesthood, which is the way we need to move toward the feminization of priesthood is that's just my dealing with the archetypes. The priestly wise man, wise woman archetype is the one who takes rabbits out of hats. Let's just play with that. Who says, "This looks like bread, but

it's really Jesus." Always transforming things, saying it looks like this, but it's this.

That's the core that is in every priestly, even ancient mythologies and legends. And unless a person has the gift to transform things, this looks like suffering, but it's really redemption. Just go down the whole list. This looks like sin, but it's really going to bring you to God. That's the archetypal priesthood and many ordained priests have none of that gift, or ministers, they just are in positions of order, again. Whereas, the priesthood has to put together disorder with order and that's archetypal priesthood, much rarer.

I won't be around to see the evolution of this feminization of the priesthood, but I would love to believe that it will hone in on this, that what we need are feminine archetypal priests that they transform things by the way they talk, by the way they communicate, and they don't need priest-craft, you know, special vestments and signs of the cross. It's okay, it's okay. I do it myself, but it's not it of itself. I have to find that article again.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I'd love to read that.

Richard Rohr: I've never given that to the school, have I?

Paul Swanson: No, I don't think so.

Richard Rohr: It's a rather short article, about four pages as I remember.

Paul Swanson: I'm thinking about this tenet, and the no truthful distinction between sacred and profane, someone could flatten and just say, "It's all good."

Richard Rohr: There you go. Very good, very good.

Paul Swanson: How do we embrace this tenet with moral courage and integrity while also seeing that there's no truthful distinction between the sacred and profane?

Richard Rohr: You have to separate things before you can fittingly unite them. There is no unity unless there's first of all separation. There's one of those paradoxical things. You have to see that there's this and there's this. Otherwise, and I know you've heard me say this, you have mere uniformity, and we're not searching for uniformity. We're seeking unity in the Spirit where we say, "Yes, to look at it, this looks profane, this looks secular. To look at it, this looks sacred, this looks holy, this looks churchy. This is where the priests are in charge."

Richard Rohr: Okay. Now suffer, and I use that word intentionally, suffer that division for a while and see the implications. See where it leads you and long for some unification. Long for something that says, "No, no. They are separate but they're also one." I mean, Catholics are doing this every time they go to Mass, and they don't get it. It still even as you receive it and your mundane body looks like bread and tastes like wine, but it's Jesus. So, it's not denying the distinction, it's overcoming the distinction at a deeper level.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: I'm thinking about how we were discussing the Trinity and how if all of reality is relational

and in relationship—

Richard Rohr: Yes, which it is.

Brie Stoner: --if the foundational image that we have for reality is of community, then in a way what helps me try to see this tenet as true—there's only one reality; no distinction between sacred and profane—and yet I do have that prophetic urge and the call to moral courage to act.

I think what helps me hold that tension is that if I see all reality as relationship, then my urge or my calling to participate and act in healing is wherever that relationship or relationality is being broken. So, where in this Great One Reality is relationality being abused? Where is that power over a paradigm coming in and trying to destroy, or oppress, or hurt? There I have the moral responsibility to act in resistance to that because I have a responsibility to this One Great Reality to continue to perpetuate the One Great Reality. Does that even make sense?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, it does. It makes a lot of sense.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's not that most people abuse it, they just don't see it.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, that's it. It's just unconscious.

Richard Rohr: They deny it.

Brie Stoner: It's not even there.

Richard Rohr: They deny that there's any connection between this and that.

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Richard Rohr: The little cliché that's been used so much for the last fifteen years of the flap of a butterfly's wing in China, affects the air over here. Or maybe that's—

Brie Stoner: That's Chaos Theory. That's actually true. There's a scientific-- Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Well, that's it. I know. It isn't that hard to believe. Physicists are trying to make that point. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that wonderful? You and I can't see it. We can't prove it, but apparently there are people who can. It's all connected. And that even the galaxies are spiraling in some kind of relationship to one another.

Brie Stoner: I mean—

Richard Rohr: It just gets bigger and bigger and bigger.

Paul Swanson: Too much.

Richard Rohr: This so wonderful. You don't need churchy language to be brought to awe and wonder. And for me, as you know from the book, *Just This*, awe and wonder are the foundational religious

instincts. If you've never had a moment of awe, never had a moment of wonder where you want to figuratively kneel and kiss the ground, I would doubt the depth of your religiosity. It's not bad. It's not as good as it really could be.

Paul Swanson: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Another thing this theme brings up for me is some of your teaching on integrating the negative, or what we deem is negative, and I wonder if another way to say it, too, Richard, would be to welcome or invite in whatever we call "the other" as a way to bring into that one reality. And I think how does that language sit with you knowing that especially in our current climate of "otherizing" another political party, another race, another gender, another sexuality, can you speak to that, how we integrate or welcome "the other" as a part of this theme?

Richard Rohr: Otherness is our essential spiritual gift to get out of our own entrapment in egocentricity, and it never stops. Maybe that's the problem that most of us, with some effort, overcome it in an attempt to sustain a marriage, or relationship with one other person, if not that, with our children. Most can do that far, you know, but some don't do that. If we can move beyond that, that school of otherness, of family, points beyond itself to what we'd call the extended family or the bigger race.

Now, most people limit that to their ethnic group, their religion, their neighborhood, and their country, their religion. Each one is a step into otherness and each one is a threat. You can pretty much tell where most people stop. And most of them stop pretty early that people who just use a different language. I have to say that one because we in America are probably the most linguistically challenged country in the world. Maybe Canadians are close behind. Well, no, they're French. That's right.

Richard Rohr: We can grow up never hearing anything but English. I can remember being irritated as a little boy. We had Mexicans in the town in Kansas where I grew up and my little mind, "Well, why don't they talk right?" [laughter] "Why are they talking this strange language?" No one told me that I was the one who had to meet otherness in the Spanish language. We got a little education in it because of our idealization of Latin in the Catholic Church, but still, otherness is a great gift and Jesus stretches this gift to the extreme in telling us to love the enemy.

This is otherness at its absolute point—the one who is not just other, but oppositionally other, at least in your perception. And Jesus says you have to even overcome that. Talk about the unitive consciousness!

Brie Stoner: Right.

Richard Rohr: How can we question that Jesus understood that, or was teaching that, or inviting us into that, when he told us to love the ultimate other, the enemy?

Brie Stoner: That's huge.

Richard Rohr: That's huge, yes.

Brie Stoner: And even just thinking about how the sacred and profane dichotomy allows us to live in that othering world where it's like, "As long as that's true, then I can be the good guy and you're

the bad guy.” Or whenever I feel pain and suffering, and I don’t want to feel that anymore, I can scapegoat that out, project it on to someone else, and say, “They’re evil, they’re the problem. I’m going to write them off as a monster, done and over.”

This tenet seems so foundational for that transition into that unitive consciousness that can see us as inextricably interrelated to each other where we can no longer split each other apart in that way and dismiss each other.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. There seems to be a foundation, too, with how we relate to God as God as other or is there an I/Thou relationship, and how does it flow out of that? In some ways, if God is other then, of course, everything else, every other person, the planet is all other.

Richard Rohr: Is also other. That should be the card Christianity plays, that incarnation overcame that gap of God as other and yet, dang it, we recreated it—the Lord Christ became other instead of Immanuel—God with us, God in us. What a loss to history that we wasted these 2,000 years recreating religion as separateness and fear of the wholly other, W-H-O-L-L-Y, which wasn’t H-O-L-Y, the holy other. Yeah, sad.

Paul Swanson: Which I’m wondering as we play with these two distinctions, can you give an example of something that you maybe previously categorized as profane that

Paul Swanson: categorization has dropped or that label has fallen away, and you no longer see as profane just to put a little concrete example on that.

Richard Rohr: That’s easy for me—

Paul Swanson: Is it because of me and Brie?

Brie Stoner: It’s us. It’s us.

Richard Rohr: --because I’m celibate for the wrong reason. I mean, in that era, sex, marriage was profane. It was necessary to continue the human race. I’m sorry that you submitted to this lower level. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Yeah, sinful people that we are. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: But we chose the higher level and that worked with young idealistic boys and girls. Girls wanted to be virgins, and boys wanted to be supposedly celibate. Yeah, that just fell apart. And I’ve struggled with how that’s true, why that’s true, how that affected my life. I’m not saying it was completely wrong. I don’t think I could have done much that I did if I hadn’t not had a wife and not had children. So, look how God brings good out of stupidity. [laughter] That’s the big obvious one. I mean even the words we had in my generation, well, maybe these persisted, “dirty words”? Did you speak of it?

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. And we even had a—oh, he was ancient. I don’t know why they let him teach us, but they just couldn’t pull him out of his role. He would speak of certain body parts as “dirty parts.”

Paul Swanson: Oh, wow. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: 100%. I grew up a Baptist, Richard. They were the best at that.

Richard Rohr: Dirty parts of the body.

Brie Stoner: They made so much shame about the body. Oh, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brie Stoner: It's terrible.

Richard Rohr: A lot of people have told me this in confession over the years when I'd be talking to them after they confess their sexual sins. Men especially would say, "How are you supposed to think of sex as sinful and then one ritual of a wedding ceremony, and that night it's a sacrament?"

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! The psyche can't—

Brie Stoner: Adjust.

Richard Rohr: --make the adjustment, that what was sinful is now holy. So, we just didn't have good catechesis, good understanding of the human person, but this is an outstanding example of where it backfired, and now it's backfiring in a major degree. And do hear me, I'm not denying there is such a thing as the charism of celibacy, but it's much rarer than we Catholics gave our people the impression.

I've met more nuns than priests, more women than men, who really appear to have the charism of celibacy. By that I'm saying, toward the end of their life, they're still healthy human beings, and they're happy human beings. If you don't see both of those, they don't have the charism. If they're sour and picky, and self-centered, you know, only think about themselves, it hasn't worked. In fact, it's not work.

Brie Stoner: It seems to invite us into becoming, and I don't think this is a word, but "sacramentors."

Richard Rohr: It's good. I like that. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Making up words. But people who live from the lens of seeing the Sacred Heart in all reality and live committed to anointing reality to further bring out that sacramental depth of this is all one, this is all one, this is all one.

You've written elsewhere about, well, in *The Universal Christ*, you talked about the one lump of suffering. And as we try to "sacramentalize" reality, kind of to your story, Paul, we have to include suffering and death in that. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how this tenet connects with the one lump and our opportunity to sacramentalize even suffering, and loss, and heartbreak?

Richard Rohr: This one comes as a genuine surprise to a lot of people that all suffering is the suffering

of God. I've answered the only way I know how to answer. There's one lump, there's one suffering, and we all participate in it. Now, the people who talked that way for me were the Catholic mystics. I'm sure other mystics do, too, but they were almost obsessed with it, helping Jesus carry the cross was maybe the language they used. But this recognition that my suffering is not just my suffering, that my suffering is our suffering, and my ability to say yes to my suffering is joining you on the cross.

I know that got sentimental and maudlin even, but it was in every Catholic monastery like our Franciscan houses, we'd invariably have this 17th century painting of Jesus on the cross one hand unnailed, moving from the cross into the body of Francis, perhaps you've seen it, and Francis welcoming it.

Richard Rohr: This transposition of person, of place, of thing, and this transposition of suffering that you don't have to see it in that literal way, but it helps facilitate the process. It really does. I've had too many suffering people tell me this in hospitals, when you're losing it toward the end of your life, that isn't going to be a maudlin, sentimental, you'll forget about your "four-ish" art tastes. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to the Enneagram type "four." There are nine Enneagram types.]

Brie Stoner: Never! [laughter]

Richard Rohr: And say, "I just need that. I don't care that it's not the greatest art, it's the greatest symbol." And that's true of a lot of art. I say that in partial response because you brought up the image of the Sacred Heart, which the same thing applies. It's usually not good art. There's a crown of thorns around it. There's fire and flames.

Brie Stoner: Which I love it. I know you can get so cheesy, but I love it. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: No, we're saying the same thing. It's usually bleeding a few drops of blood.

Brie Stoner: That's right. In anguish.

Richard Rohr: And we had to give it the feminine form. It was called the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It's a big movement in the Philippines. I remember the two hearts and you drive by these little, little nipa huts, or walked by them, all over the Philippines, and right at the doorway, they'd have the two hearts. And I just often wondered what makes these people so attracted to not just the one, but the feminine heart? There are people who suffer a lot. They need to sacralize, to legitimate, to allow, to forgive their suffering by uniting it with the one suffering. So, what we're emphasizing here is the one suffering not just with Christ's suffering. But Christ's suffering is the one suffering, you see? Yeah. He's the sacrament of what is true everywhere.

Brie Stoner: It makes so much more sense out of the ways in which we're like, "Well, if God is all powerful and in control, power over hierarchy—"

Richard Rohr: That's right. Uh huh.

Brie Stoner: --then how do bad things happen in the world?"

Richard Rohr: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Brie Stoner: This changes our view of that question. It dissolves that question because God has chosen the power with paradigm to empower us.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for saying it that way, yes.

Brie Stoner: And then we can say God suffers when we suffer. It's not that God is sitting back and being like, "Sorry, gotcha! I'm just going to unleash this hurricane, unleash these horrible fires in Australia. Too bad for you." It's like, no, God is deeply suffering with us, with creation, and hopefully that animates us into action. It just shifts the whole thing.

Paul Swanson: I think that's why that Sacred Heart image is so striking because it invokes that the Sacred Heart is protected from nothing. Reality is able to touch it.

Brie Stoner: Vulnerable.

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Paul Swanson: It's so vulnerable. And that if you can get past the gaudy art of it, often it can really just pierce you.

Richard, not long ago you went back to Kansas, and you sent some photos around of your house.

Richard Rohr: Oh, did I?

Paul Swanson: And I asked you if you had a picture of your beautiful spot that you've mentioned on the podcast where you would go as a little boy. You sent a photo to me, and there is now a propane tank on your sacred spot.

Richard Rohr: I know. [laughter] Yes.

Paul Swanson: And I just love that you were able to embrace "the sacred and the propane."

Richard Rohr: Oh, thank you.

Paul Swanson: I wonder if you can— [laughter]

Richard Rohr: The ugly, propane tank, sitting there on my beautiful spot. That's true. If you remember, it wasn't really my home. It was my summer farm home with my cousins. But go ahead.

Paul Swanson: I mean, one, I just love the play on the sacred and the propane. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: He's so clever. He's been working on that one for weeks.

Paul Swanson: I was really excited about that. But even just the symbolism of it, of like here, now is something that is not considered typically sacred—

Brie Stoner: Or beautiful even.

Richard Rohr: Even beautiful, yeah.

Paul Swanson: --but your spot is now everything shifts, everything changes and that is the one reality of it all. It just was such a nice metaphor for me.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for bringing me back to it. That day was so special. You all know this, that your childhood experiences become more and more beautiful the farther you get away from them. You realize the foundational fascinations and images were planted already then. And my summers on the western Kansas farm with my dear cousins, it was just, oh my God, nothing could be more boring for most people than western Kansas. It's just flat, but you deal with what you're handed. And when I would wake up and across that huge flat landscape, see the waving wheat and the sun coming over, and the birds in the trees, it was just heavenly.

To go back there and to realize, this isn't, another family owns it now. He was gone for the day so we got to walk around freely, was just tugging, tugging at my heartstrings to how can something be and now not be? The barn was gone. Trigger was the horse. That was Roy Rogers' horse, Trigger, wasn't it? I think so. Trigger was gone. The water container for the cattle was still there. The silo was gone where we jumped naked into the grain.

Brie Stoner: That sounds uncomfortable. [laughter] I'm just going to be honest. That does not sound like fun to me, but I'm sure it was as a kid.

Richard Rohr: Oh, little twelve-year-old boys loved it. [laughter] I really want to go back again. Yeah, but that's not what you asked me. What did you ask me?

Paul Swanson: I was just playing with the sacred and the propane.

Brie Stoner: He really just wanted to say that.

Paul Swanson: It just made me really chuckle but, yet, there is the metaphorical element of—

Brie Stoner: Even that.

Paul Swanson: --even that.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: So, as a way to kind of round out this episode that we've been trying to think, how do we practice these themes? Is there anything that comes to mind for you about how do we practice the sense of "There's only one reality for those who see deeply, and by reason of incarnation there's no truthful distinction between sacred and profane?"

Richard Rohr: How do we practice it? It's a gift of allowing, not creating, allowing this to be true, overcoming your resistance to it by the literal mind which always wants to

Richard Rohr: separate. You've heard me define diabolical, diabolus, "to throw apart," that's literally what the word means; religio, re-ligament. How many times have I talked about that, but I don't know why other people don't talk about it? To me, it's so obvious. The diabolical is when you separate things. The religious is when you connect things.

And the more broadly, the more deeply you can make the connections, the more obvious God is and the more obvious love is. And, it's a benevolent universe. You're at home. You don't need to go to shrines. They're still nice as sacraments, but not an end in themselves. Like if I ever went to the Camino-- I wish I'd done it when I was younger and in better shape, you know? It goes from France into Spain and it takes several weeks. --I think my desire would be not to enter the big Basilica in Compostela at the end, but to say, "No, this journey has been the sacred. I don't need all the Spanish decorations." I'm sure I would go ahead, but I'd like to think I wouldn't need to because that makes me think this was the goal. "The journey is the dream," as one of my Franciscan compatriots said in one of his poems.

So, yeah, any practice whereby you can re-ligament this to that, especially where it's more difficult, especially where the ugly person, the unlikable person, the violent animal. I see a tiger killing a little deer, and I just don't like that tiger. I really turn off the TV sometimes, I do, or at least I just look away. "Why are you doing that? Don't you know she's a mother, and that mother is going to die now?" And yet, I see that the tiger goes home and feeding her little baby tigers. I don't understand. There's an irrationality to the cycle of life because it includes, damn it, the cycle of death. That's what the cross reveals, and proclaims, and says, get this: gaze upon the crucified, and you've got the whole mystery. But it will always be something we resist.

I remember preaching in a big tent in England years ago. I must have been saying something in this direction. And an Englishman—they always sort of resent us glib Americans, probably for good reason—he got up yelling at me, "Here you come again, you dang Christians and Catholics, telling us suffering is good." "No, it's not." "Yes, it is. That's what you were trying to say. We're sick of it," and he walked out of the tent. I know I just didn't say it well enough. But that is the attitude of a lot of Christians. They think we created, we used to call it "what mysticism," the mysticism of suffering, the over-romanticizing of suffering.

Brie Stoner: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It almost glorifies it.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, glorifying suffering.

Brie Stoner: Yeah, yeah. I can't think of it.

Richard Rohr: And we've done that enough that I can see why the poor guy was dang mad. He was missing the point too. At least, I think he was. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Paul Swanson: Awesome. Thanks, Richard.

Unknown Speaker: "I believe in the incarnation and the one reality of a loving God alive and active here and now. At the same time, my country, Australia, is dealing with the immediate catastrophic impact of dangerous climate change, including months of unprecedented forest fires, homes and lives lost, coral bleaching, damaging the Great Barrier Reef, the collapse of ecosystems.

I am an elder and grandfather. I feel this pain. Our politics is divided. Our national

government is part of the problem, blocking and even reversing real action to address the cause of climate change. For my part, I am active in working to shift consciousness and participate in nonviolent action to protect the planet. I'm a man of faith, hope, and love. I have a first-world standard of living. I'm simultaneously part of the problem and part of the solution. I struggle to live in faith, hope, and love, to model action and contemplation during this epoch of mass extinction. How do we live incarnation here and now?"

Richard Rohr: My, the way you say it so calmly but firmly is already very helpful. You feel like a faith-filled man and yet you're holding an unbelievably real tension that can't be resolved fully, only partly. How do we do it? Well, we certainly do it first of all inside ourselves, and I don't mean to individualize it and subjectively limit ourselves, but you sound like you have the social awareness already. You want to do something socially. I'm going to say something that will probably disappoint you and maybe even scandalize you, but I'm not sure, because of the archetype we were given of the life and death of Jesus, that mass extinction isn't in our future. I'm not sure. I'm not saying there will be, but Jesus did die on the cross. He didn't pretend to die. He did die. I don't know any other way this greedy, superficial, capitalistic, materialistic world that we now are stuck with is going to choose to reform itself unless in some ways it hits bottom.

Now, I don't know how to precisely define "hits bottom," but collapse is a very real possibility, and Australia, beautiful Australia, I've been there about four or five times, is really symbolizing it, because of the massiveness of your suffering. Maybe California is going to be the same thing for us, who knows? Let's be open to the possibility that this could be leading to major catastrophe, global catastrophe, left on the course we're on.

If we stay on the course of the status quo, business as usual, this is certain. This is not a conspiracy theory. We are destroying the earth. And the next ten years are going to be very hard. We're a foretaste, your country, our country, and many others. But we won't hear about it in Bangladesh and little Micronesian islands as they're flooded. It has to happen in countries like ours, which control all the media and all the importance.

Richard Rohr: So, let's look at it, let's learn from it. Let's take what urgency from this is good and necessary. And I think if this leads us to an urgent sense of a need for real Christianity, real spirituality then it will be serving its purpose because what we have now is not very real. It's just a formula. We mentally believe, but we've been quite cooperative as you know in the destruction of the planet, and now we're seeing it in highly visible and destructive forms. Thank you for saying it so well.

Brie Stoner: I'm also drawn to because of the mystery of this tenet, Richard, to reflect on how we're invited to have compassion to suffer with each other and our planet. And what I hear in this question, he didn't say his name, did he?

Richard Rohr: He didn't.

Brie Stoner: I wish I knew your name, but to say, Cynthia Bourgeault talks about a lesson she learned from her teacher, Rafe, when he said, "No conscious act is ever wasted." That somehow, somehow, in the mystery of this one reality, we are in this together and you're not alone in your grief and suffering, that somehow in our small conscious acts, we are impacting the

whole. May it be that quantum physics is true and that we are entangled. But this seems to be the thing that the mystics have been pointing to that the incarnation teaches us is that we're somehow all bound together in the Sacred Heart of Christ and that your suffering, it's not being experienced alone and that, therefore, whatever we can do, we are doing it together in service to the whole. But just to acknowledge the suffering that's happening and that our hearts are joined with you in that deep suffering.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Your question really hits home for me, and it's one that my wife, Laura and I, this question sits on the front porch of our hearts all the time. We talk about it. The one solace I get is it's shaping the way that we live, the way that we vote, the way that we try to participate in the life of Christ in community. That is one of those questions that doesn't have an immediate response—

Richard Rohr: It doesn't, no.

Paul Swanson: --and answer, but how can we live into this together? Like you said, Brie, we are all in this together. And Richard, I took so much respite in your response and just acknowledging the reality of it, and that it's something that we've created. How do we be a part of the solution whether that solution is just being on the Hospice team—

Brie Stoner: That's right.

Paul Swanson: --as we go out towards extinction or whether we are able to somehow—

Richard Rohr: Wow. A Hospice team for the planet.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Wow. Well, said. Huh. Thank you. Thank you—

Paul Swanson: Thank you.

Richard Rohr: --both. It's much more courageous for young people to say it than for me to say it, because you're going to live in this world. [music]

Paul Swanson: And that's it for today's episode, 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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