

**ANOTHER  
NAME  
FOR EVERY  
THING**

with

**RICHARD ROHR**

Season 5, Episode 2  
My Story of The Cosmic Egg

- Paul Swanson: Brie, it's been so fun to delve into this cosmic egg of meaning and pretty early in this conversation, as we talked about My Story, well, not My, as in Paul Swanson Story, but just that...
- Brie Stoner: Which would have been just as entertaining though.
- Paul Swanson: Which would have been a really long episode. But as we talked about this yoke of the cosmic egg, as Richard said, and the ways that it shows itself in healthy and unhealthy ways, and the ways that we also need to see this as one healing aspect of the whole cosmic egg, what struck you in particular about this episode?
- Brie Stoner: Oh, man, so much. I think it's really beautiful to hear Richard reflect on, you know, the healthy role of religion in giving context to My Story, the My Story, so that the My Story doesn't become the narcissistic whole thing. And, you know, I think it's fair to say that we live in an era of narcissists, and social media certainly isn't aiding us with that. So, the ways in which Richard talked about the importance of context and in seeing ourselves as reciprocally part of an Our and a larger The Transcendent Story, it was really helpful to me. What about you?
- Paul Swanson: Yeah. Well, I think a lot of the things that you just named, and I think it's near the end where he talks about Merton saying The Story kind of invading My Story and that reciprocal edge of that relationship, and would Jesus as our central reference point... That there's this pattern that we can emulate and model from what we've seen in the life and work of Jesus. I think it just kind of helps me find myself in my own story within the My Story of the cosmic egg.
- Brie Stoner: That's right. And, you know, when 2020 has forced so many of us to reckon with where do I even find meaning when so much of what constituted the My Story has been pulled out from under me or from under us, you know? And I think politically, we also explored some interesting questions about how that human need to be part of something bigger explains some of what's happening with the political echo chambers that are taking place right now.
- Paul Swanson: Yeah. That's so well said. I think about some of the shadow elements of the My Story that had been revealed in this time, and I think it also helped me recognize the work that I still need to do using this map as a frame of the My Story the scaffolding I have put up or the things that have fallen down to recognize how this is all part of my own transformation to allow The Story to infiltrate and animate My Story.
- Brie Stoner: It's such an opportunity here at the close of Another Name for Every Thing, for us to allow this journey to come to an end, because we want to privilege and center other stories, other My Stories and other Our Stories, and what an opportunity that is for us to get out of the way. But really, you know, that was another helpful part of this conversation was to recognize what a relief it is to let go of needing to center the white My Story.
- Paul Swanson: Yeah, and how that's a part of our own becoming is in the letting go, and the closure of this beautiful time together we've all had Another Name for Every Thing, but that we close it out and continue to make room by stepping away.
- Brie Stoner: So, we hope you'll find this conversation helpful as we discuss the My Story portion of the

cosmic Ed. [giggling]

Paul Swanson: The cosmic Ed. I love it.

Brie Stoner: [laughing] That's just what came out of me. That's hard to come back from. He's such a good guy that cosmic Ed. He's the best. All right. So, we hope that you'll enjoy this conversation on the My Story portion of the cosmic egg as we continue this mini season closing out Another Name for Every Thing.

Paul Swanson: Richard, I want to tee up questions that are kind of around the shadow within My Story, not my personal story, but the My Story of the egg. So, when I visualize this, of the My Story, I visualize a bunch of self-obsessed individuals bumping into each other and defining themselves just by their personal narratives alone, divorced from lineage, and it's concocted by themselves alone. And that life beyond the perceived self is an intrusion. It's just all about their own experience. And then if folks have been historically privileged, this adds a layer of protection and perpetuation of selfish motives, whether they're conscious or unconscious to the public sphere. And for me, this cartoonist visualization doesn't seem that far off for how structures of power can be built and can become abusive with that power because it's a perpetuation of the My Story, and that those that are exercising that influence can be blind to it or fail to critique it. How does this strike you as like the shadow side of the My Story and what that can perpetuate in the public sphere and the ripple effects? Does that resonate with you?

Richard Rohr: The way you were describing it I kept saying "Yes. Yes. Yes." I think you're saying that if you just live in My Story, or live in it too long, you do become self-obsessed, which we call narcissism, but it's such healthy sounding narcissism.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Yes.

Richard Rohr: It sounds like educated narcissism. So, we misjudge this person is still self-referential. Everything is referring to my limited experience. The only filter is me. And if you are the only filter or the necessary reference point, you just won't get very far. You'll be incapable of being a receiver station of other people's experience, to love your neighbor, and certainly infinite experience, which we call God. So, too much My Experience, when it becomes the first filter, the person who always jumps into the conversation with, "I think," or "This is what I have gone through." There's a place for that, but not every day, not every conversation. Sometimes you have to be able to talk in the third person about events, about ideas that are disconnected to me, to justifying me, or justifying my intelligence or making me look good. This is very hard to tell to a true narcissist, and we've produced a lot of them in our culture.

The language of narcissism is so common today that it doesn't look like narcissism. It looks like intelligence, and it's as common on the left as it is on the right. And I must say that very strongly. We've always experienced it here at the Center because most people who come to us are from the progressive end. That we've experienced many narcissistic people who once their narcissistic wound is further touched, they can be just as adamant, just as cruel, just as close minded, just as accusatory as anybody else. It's one of the great disillusionments of working with educated people.

Brie Stoner: Hmm. That's so helpful even in thinking of expanding the frame of narcissism as the backdrop or harmonic coincider with whiteness.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Brie Stoner: Because when My Story as a white person is concomitant with the dominant Our Story, then we have to begin to examine whose My Story is getting privileged and whose My Story is being treated as though it's everybody's story, right, in that kind of false projection of not recognizing the assumptions we make in the falsities of our racial white privilege.

And so, I want to bring that up in this conversation here within the context of healing and maybe to say in this moment of necessary de-centering of the white story, what is the role of healthy reclaiming—the freeing liberatory act of reconnecting with the self of a My Story for those who are marginalized or oppressed by the domination paradigm, to use Beatrice Bruteau's frame? There seems to be a growing recognition that we cannot go on as we have—this systemic silencing of the My Story of so many marginalized and oppressed peoples' Black and Brown voices. I guess I'm just wondering how the necessary reclamation of their My Story fits into naming that lifting up of my feelings, my beliefs, as a sacred act of healing for them and necessary for us to center as well?

Richard Rohr: My guess is you probably need to take years. And it's a spiral, again. It isn't a straight line of saying at each of the three levels: It is good. It is good. It is very good. And then they interpenetrate one another, the healing that's involved in my personality, my family wounds, which everybody has. And I say that now out of working with people so many years, there's nobody who isn't from a dysfunctional family on some level, maybe not as high as everybody else, but it has its own issues that has to go through its healing. The critical voice of history, of women's history, white history, Black history, that's the whole middle part of life. And if all you do is over identify with one group, white or Black, let's just pick those two—there are a hundred races in between, I guess—you're blind if you think that the validating of your story is the dominant paradigm that explains everybody else's.

Richard Rohr: Oh, it's so hard. I mean, I don't know why God made it so hard. That's why God must be forgiveness itself because most people don't have the time, the education, the spiritual communities that you and I have had to face each one of these things, to go on the spiritual journey of The Story and to keep layering back a deeper experience of God, who's always bigger than we imagine, more than we imagine, and so forth. But again, I want to say, as you move forward on one, you will find the call to find a bigger God, a bigger history. History might be the biggest one that's exploded in our time, just this critical knowledge of history. And a lot of us used Howard Zinn's book, A People's History of the United States. And it's still very hard for conservatives to read, but to read every American war simply through another set of eyes, which isn't American.

And women's history is the same thing for us men to read it through a woman's perspective. Each time we've got to say, "I am not the center of the world. I am not

the center of the world.” “Unless the single grain of wheat dies, it remains just a single grain.” And most of us up to now were allowed to remain a single grain. And from that viewpoint judging everything else, which left us mostly blind. So, we can thank God for giving us this capacity to, what it comes down to is, to be more compassionate, more forgiving, more accepting, more patient. But I suppose we want to yell at God, too, because “Boy, you made this hard.”

Brie Stoner: Being a human being is so messy. [laughter] This whole human project is a real mess. But what I hear you saying is that you're, by seeing this frame, just by seeing this as a living unfolding framework, it can offer us a deep humility to be aware, especially for those of us who are white. When the My and Our Story, you know, how that needs to be called into question during this time, how we need to sit back and listen. And I just think that's really powerful to put into the context of the cosmic egg in the midst of what's happening, because it provides that kind of fluid reciprocity and compassion that you're talking.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for understanding, because I'm still trying to understand this much less teach it well. I hope I'm not using too abstract words, but I know when you have all three, you have healthy and happy human beings. Really, let's make it that simple: healthy, and happy. If you have honored your story, have gone through and love Our Story that you're a part of and can rest in the largest nest of the universal patterns, you don't have any reason to pick fights anymore. Do you follow me? It's so subtle the ways the ego will again take control. And it always wants to be right. And when the most recent form of political correctness is the new way to be right, human conversation just falls apart. I think this is what's happening in America, at least one way to understand it. Does that make sense?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah, it does make sense, Richard. I think this kind of plays into, for me, but a bit of the shadow of the My Story and the wanting to be right and also the specialness. I want to ask you a question about something you wrote in *The Wisdom Pattern* on this about this desire to be special. So, I'm going to quote you here.

Brie Stoner: I don't know anything about the desire to be special. [laughter]

Richard Rohr: She's a four, everybody, a magnificent four. [Note: Fr. Richard is referring to Enneagram type four. There are nine Enneagram types.]

Paul Swanson: That's the best. You write: “The stage isn't big enough for all of us to be special on this little earth—except under the sacred canopy of the larger domes of meaning. In Jesus' language, ‘the branch cut off from the vine is useless.’” Richard, this is a so counter-cultural particularly in our American culture where specialness is taught that it's almost a birthright. How in the world do you think that this larger message can take flight and spread to see ourselves within the larger domes of meaning and not try to pump up our own specialness?

Richard Rohr: You know, if I had to choose your point of entry between entering with *The Story* where God's gaze makes me special and solves all the problems—even though there are risks of narcissism there and of judgmentalism of people who are not my

religion—and your point of entry being My Story, my temperament, I would risk starting with The Story because there you have a more radical specialness that can't be taken from you. And if you're honest, you have to admit that your specialness was undeserved, unearned, and that that gaze of infinite love is being given to everybody else, too, and you can more easily meld downward into Our Story: "Okay, now I can understand Jewish history and American history in the context of salvation history, infinite love. And now I can address my own personal temperamental issues in the context of infinite love."

I'm sure I'm sounding very old fashioned to many people in saying that, but I'm saying it out of experience. Like I've met—please don't be offended anybody—I've met Southern Baptists, who I confess as a Catholic, I was prejudiced against. I thought, "My, they're all stupid. They're all racist." Forgive me. That's because I never lived around any real Southern Baptists, I guess, but I said how can any religion think slavery was okay, even minimally okay? So, I had written them off and yet, again and again over the years, I have met Southern Baptists who's radical, and sincere, and authentic heartfelt love of Jesus allowed them to relativize their Americanism and to relativize their own pathologies, their own private... Now, I wouldn't say it's necessarily even the majority, but it's enough.

And the same with conservative Catholics. I can't go back there. I was too well-educated by the Franciscans to not have a critical mind, but I have also learned enough that my critical mind can get in the way and make me overly judgmental. So, if you have to choose entrance points, and let's be honest, the three of us sitting right here, we all started as very conservative religionists.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Is religionist a word?

Brie Stoner: I like it.

Paul Swanson: It is now.

Richard Rohr: And then we broadened out, "Oh, oh, oh," without losing our beginning point, but just seeing it in a broader lens.

Brie Stoner: That's so helpful for us to be able to reclaim the healthy role of religion. Even for those of us who now look back and say, "Oh gosh," we can still reclaim the redemptive side of what we grew up with as, "Oh yeah, it did give us a healthy The Story. It did place us in the context of a larger, transcendent, unfolding reality..."

Richard Rohr: There you go. There you go.

Brie Stoner: ...that kind of checks the narcissistic My [Story] a little bit. But, Richard, I want to ask you, this is a great segue into this question because in The Wisdom Pattern book, you say, you know, the small and fragile self needs to be part of something more significant, this larger story, you're talking about, and because it has that need, it creates dramas, tragedies, and victimhood to put itself on a larger stage.

And here you're talking about what happens when we don't have that healthy, you know,

frame of a transcendent perspective. So, it really resonates deeply with me that in the absence of deeper meaning, we're going to fill it with some addictive fluff, right, so like some type of mythmaking for ourselves that we can participate in. And immediately I'm thinking of social media, but even like, you know, video games, or Netflix, or the political cancel culture that you named. So, as 2020 has forced so many to reckon with where do I find My Story now that so much of what used to constitute that drama is gone or shut down. And, you know, politically, I think this also helps us have more compassion for the ways that that human need to belong to something bigger is being co-opted by our respective political echo chambers on social media and otherwise. So, I guess, what's your reflection on this moment and what the pandemic is maybe helping us to have a trap door to humility around the My Story?

Richard Rohr: Wow. Why do you two ask such good questions? It's too early in the morning for me to have good answers. All I know is if we've spent too much time wrapping ourselves in the first two, My and Our, that ego is so defended, it has so much insulation around it, you long for identity in the first half of life. And if you allow this to become your identity, that you are, fill in the blanks, whatever it might be at that smaller level, boy, there's massive resistance to letting go of it. "Don't you lay your religion on me." And we have done that too much, but that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about openness to something that's true for everybody, and that's beyond Christianity. But people have developed a very sophisticated language of protection from anything that will

Richard Rohr: dismantle my story or our story. And, boy, you fight it, and they come out with their guns blazing, even otherwise Christian people. It just astounds me.

Brie Stoner: It's making me think about how, I guess, the analogy there is that in some ways the pandemic has sort of taken away some of the props that we're used to creating, you know, the My Story play. Like, it's sort of pulled the stage lights, and the props, and the costumes away. And, you know, it's interesting to observe this, but I think there was an article in The Times about this, that there's a fascinating correlation between times of pandemics and kind of uprisings in mysticism. And I think it may seem obvious to say this, but when the My Story is exposed as bankrupt, then the deeper hunger for that, for that true belonging in a larger story can take hold. And I think when that is at the same time layered with the kind of diminishment and sort of toppling down of the Our Political Stories that are happening right now, too, I think that there's this opportunity that we're facing collectively as human beings to ask ourselves "So, what then now? How can we belong together? How can we create new systems of belonging that reflect what the pandemic has taught us is that we're all interconnected, and My Story is not separate from Your Story?" And the humility...

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. Your answer was much better than mine. I didn't address the pandemic. And I mean, I'm still reeling from it. I keep writing these letters from outside the camp as we call it, and yet I feel I still haven't gotten on to the immensity of the lessons we are presently learning that there's clearly one Body of Christ and there's one sick Body of Christ right now, physically sick. Isn't that sort of clear like never before?

Brie Stoner: Oh yeah. Yeah. And the ways in which we construct a linear narrative of my story, anticipating the future as if it's something we can count on, which is like, it never was, it never has been, but we delude ourselves into thinking that we can, you know, make these



projections and assumptions. So, many of us find ourselves like, “Yeah, I don’t really know what I’m going to do in three months,” you know, or “I don’t really know what’s around the corner.” So, for all of us who are in that kind of middle of life, like career-driven stage of life, the pandemic is forcing us to reckon with the reality that My Story is not the same thing as what I do for a living. It’s not the same thing as my “accomplishments,” whatever those might be. It’s not the same thing as, you know, the things that I look forward to or anticipate. So, it’s a radical time of unknowing, and it’s really uncomfortable.

Paul Swanson: It seems to be revealing kind of the actual state of My Story. And I think that that kind of unveiling of like, this is actually the My Story that I’ve been trying to perpetuate or build upon. And to your earlier metaphor, like that scaffolding has fallen over, and I’m seeing the vulnerability of my own story in a different way.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. And to drive it maybe a little bit to the personal level, and in confession, I haven’t had confession in so long. Well, have I ever had confession? I don’t think I have. So, Richard, this can be your first confession of me. But it’s like realizing I

Brie Stoner: really attach to this identity of being, you know, a contemplative as if I knew what that meant, or to mysticism, or to the mystics, or even in being a good student to you, Richard, or to any of the other teachers.

And watching that story crack open has been really over the last year the beginning of a deep journey of walking into the wardrobe myself and realizing like, “Oh, I was just as much of a contemplative asshole, like, “Hi, my name is Brie, and I’m a recovering contemplative A-hole.” Precious, very precious. But it’s realizing that many of us even, you know—and, again, I know we’re going to get to this when we talk about Our Story—but many of us have over identified the My Story with contemplation or being, you know, part of the CAC, or part of what we’re learning or discussing together. And that’s like just one more camp outside of the wardrobe.

Richard Rohr: Yep. Yep. Very good. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Brutal, brutal.

Richard Rohr: You know, in the earlier years we used the language, I used language so much [from] Thomas Merton, of true self/false self. I think that overlays a bit here. You can’t have true self without the story invading your consciousness. And that’s why the egg has most cracked is we denied any universal truth the last few hundred years. There’s nothing that’s always true. Once you say there’s nothing that’s always true, it destabilizes the person very sincerely. So that’s, you’ve heard me say this, why I can’t give up on religion. Someone has to say there are some universal patterns of goodness, of forgiveness, of liberation that are always true. We confuse the conversation by saying that part of the universal patterns were patterns of punishment and exclusion. Once we make the universal patterns a threatening God, an unloving presence, no one wants to go back to universal patterns anymore. They have to be good or we do not live in a benevolent universe, as we say in our CAC logo. And we’re trying in this secular age to rebuild a benevolent universe, what Martin Luther King and others called the “Beloved Community.”

Paul Swanson: That’s so well said. Thank you, Richard. And that line about the story invading the My Story,



Richard, as a way to kind of close our time here together, can you further connect the dots of a healthy nature of the relationship of My Story with the Universal Christ? You've kind of tied it up with The Story, invading My Story and the benevolent universe. Can you take us home with that?

Richard Rohr: Well, given that we're a very individualistic culture that isn't going to change in the immediate future, given that you and I have all the tools and vocabulary of self, a large percentage of us are going to start on the other end naming My Story. What enters in is a lot of victimhood and a lot of aggressiveness toward supposed perpetrators. In fact, what we've found at this point is the major paradigm of explanation is perpetrator-victim, that this is what's made me wounded or suffer: "My father did this to me. My mother did this to me. That I'm not pretty did this to me." It's so easy to look for someone to be the cause of

Richard Rohr: my unhappiness so I can rearrange other people instead of rearranging myself. If you can get out of that paper bag. And it's a big if, because once you've framed it-- This is the unhelpful nature of dualistic thinking. Perpetrator-victim is like a...

Brie Stoner: Pinball machine?

Richard Rohr: Pinball machine. Yeah. Like a pinball...

Paul Swanson: Pinball.

Brie Stoner: I was just thinking about the eighties, the pinball machine. [laughter] I had to reach back into my childhood in the eighties.

Richard Rohr: It's like a pinball machine. You just go back to who's the perpetrator? Who's the victim? Who's the perpetrator? I perpetrated more. I was victimized more. I can't believe how many people that I like are still inside of that. And they're just waiting to get the new paradigm of perpetrator-victim. So, see the Gospel, Jesus doesn't allow that because what he did, and you know what I'm going to say, he became the victim and did it as the jokester, finding freedom on the cross. I'm not going to play the victim. I'm not going to over identify with "you hurt me." Yes, you did hurt me, but I'm not going to be trapped there. I'm not going to be trapped there. And I find many educated, sophisticated people after their first sophomore course on social analysis, they learn that paradigm and they're a ping pong ball the rest of their life. Maybe they reach a higher level of sophistication, but it's still the same paradigm instead of let go of it all together. I don't need to find someone to blame. I don't need to feel sorry for myself. It's a dead end, but, boy, is that hard to learn.

So, you asked me to connect the dots. When you start drawing the dots from the self, some dot has to radically not fit that paradigm where I'm the justified victim, and all I have to do is find the right person to blame. That you find the wrong person, and you suffer for it, would that be a way of doing it? Probably. I've seen that happen. You mentioned the good word humility. I have a moment of radical humility where I can see what I'm doing. Let's use your good evangelical language: I can repent of my own sin. I don't see a lot of repentance anymore. I really don't. It's always a higher level of paradigm of explanation, of fault finding, which ensconces me in my position. How does God teach us repentance? The word, as you know, metanoia, literally means to change your mind and to turn around. This is much rarer than you might think, I find.

- Brie Stoner: Yeah, it kind of reminds me of Brené Brown's work around shame and guilt where she says shame is the declaration that you are determined by a mistake or an action, which we can also say cancel culture is very much transcribing that inner shame and projecting it into shaming others, right?
- Richard Rohr: There you go.
- Brie Stoner: She says guilt is fluid. Guilt recognizes that we're still in the process of becoming, and this is why I think ontology is so important even when we talk about the cosmic egg, because we're not talking about a static ontology. We're not talking about a static view of reality in which our determinant being is the entirety of who we are, but rather it's the unfolding of our collective becoming and our individual and group stories as being nested in that larger unfolding reality. That's what lets us have the fluidity to have guilt instead of shame and say, "Oh yeah, I screwed up," or, "Yeah, I really missed the mark with that." Or "Oh gosh, there's my white fragility again." And to have the humility to see those things, correct course but to keep going and not be defined by them, which seems to me, Richard, would be so much of what you've been teaching us with the Universal Christ, which is that this is an unfolding, manifesting story. And at the heart of it, if Christ is, you know, another name for every thing, then, you know, that is the ultimate story and everything else can live in relationship to that place of belonging, and love, and dignity, and worth.
- Richard Rohr: The Universal Christ is our metaphor for the forgiveness of everything for not being perfect. And once you recognize the necessity of the whole Christ alone being perfect, then I give up this search for who's at fault now; who's at fault now; who's at fault now, which is a never-ending journey of desolation, I think, because you really think you're going to find it. And you think you're a genius when you found who to blame.
- Brie Stoner: Or a precious, contemplative asshole.
- Paul Swanson: What a model we have in Jesus of leading the personal to the universal. I mean, I think I always come back to that being such the core tenant of the CAC, that Jesus, as the central reference point, just particularly in the "My story," right, can really help open the flood gates of stepping deeper into the Universal Christ and seeing Christ everywhere.
- Richard Rohr: Excuse me, I'm going to get a paper off my-- Hold on. I think this has been up here ever since I moved into this house twenty-two years ago: "The person who blames others for his or her problems hasn't even begun their education. The person who blames himself has begun his education. The person who blames no one has finished his education," where the need to blame has fallen away or to shame other people. As you were mentioning Brené Brown's work where this passing one of shame is no longer my life task, if that isn't a free person, I don't know what it is. There is no explanation which is going to find the worthy perpetrator when I am the perpetrator in parts, and we're all the suffering Body of Christ. We're all the wounded Body of Christ. We're all the victorious Body of Christ now because we don't need to apply shaming names or glorifying names to anybody.
- Brie Stoner: That's so beautiful, Richard, and a perfect meditation and way for us to close this conversation to consider, hey, especially in our culture right now and in this moment that we're in how vital that message is, how critical, how, you know, it's like, I can feel my own

body relaxing in relief over realizing like I don't have to be perfect. I don't have to get it right. My story is evolving, unfolding, and it's no more or less important than other stories. And we're in a moment of deep listening to each other's My Story. And I think that's a great, great place to begin a new chapter of whatever the Our and The is. So, thank you, Richard, for sharing your wisdom with us today.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you both. Good to be in dialogue with you again. We're going to do this on Our Story in the future?

Brie Stoner: Yes. Yes.

Richard Rohr: Okay. God bless you both.

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

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