

REALISTIC LIVING

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Then relatively recently, about 5-6000 years ago, around 3000-4000 BCE, came a change that literally turned cultural evolution around. Small bands of nomadic herders from colder territories grew in number and began making invasions into Old Europe. These Kurgans, also called Indo-Europeans or Aryans brought their male gods of war and sky and gradually imposed their ideologies and ways of life.

The blade is used to symbolize their worship and way of life because they were fascinated with its lethal power and in some cases they literally worshipped it. Earlier peoples had used metals for ornament and practical tasks, but these peoples used the blade to take life and to dominate, and that power replaced the power of the Goddess to give and nurture life.



So I want to talk about **Patriarchy** – a social system in which domination has been idealized.

I want to insert here that even though men have fought most of the wars and the Blade has been a male symbol, I'm not talking about men being inherently violent and warlike. The earlier period of 25,000 years indicates otherwise. In the Patriarchal system men and women have been taught roles in which women are secondary, sometimes ignored or violated, and considered dangerous if unrestrained. And even though this system gives men entitlement, it has not been kind to them either – encouraging them to risk their health and well being or even their lives to win in every aspect of their lives. And Patriarchy is destructive of Earth itself. Today the patriarchal model of domination has pushed Earth to its limits.

Then I want to look at **how patriarchy affected Christianity** – a religion based on a man who challenged the patriarchal system.



Patriarchy, Radical Feminism, & the Future of Christianity

a talk by Joyce Marshall

This is a transcription of a talk given in August 2011 at the Symposium meeting near Dallas, Texas. It is my pulltogether of my reviews of feminist books in Journal 55.

I want to talk about four things: The Goddess, Patriarchy, Problems with Christianity, and Living Now. First, I want to explore the tens of thousands of years our ancestors worshipped a **Mother-Goddess**. Human imagination was captivated by the animals, birds, fish, trees, grasses, clouds, sunsets, mountains, and stars, and particularly by the creation of life in woman's body. For over 30,000 years, God was a woman, a woman manifest in every aspect of the natural world.

Riane Eisler has used the chalice as a symbol of this period, representing the power to give life, to nurture, to live in partnership. Deeply within us, and underlying all societies that followed, is tens of thousands of years of human living in connection to the natural world, and in a generally peaceful, egalitarian collaboration with one another.



← THE GREAT GODDESS → PATRIARCHY

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Finally, I want to consider how we **live Now** as women and as men – how we spin out of patriarchy and live now the future we imagine. In this section I want to encourage us to become outlaws of the patriarchal system and to begin now to create a non-hierarchical, non-oppressive society and a religion to support it.

Only in the past few decades have human beings become aware of this system – how it began, how it works – and given it a name. It is so embedded in our lives that we generally accept its premises as natural and inevitable.

It is important that we become clear that human groupings were not always patriarchal, in fact, mostly they were otherwise. So societies don't need to be patriarchal now or in the future. And it helps to take a look at what life was like when it wasn't patriarchal, so we can get a sense of living outside the patriarchal system.

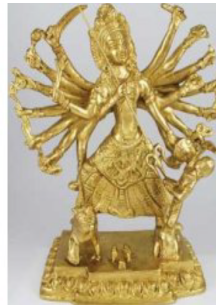
I. The Goddess

We are talking here about ancient Goddess culture, not the classical Greek mythology, which is a patriarchal version of goddesses. The old religion was radically body-honoring and nature-oriented. Earth, air, fire, and water, the stars, planets, sun and moon were considered aspects of deity.

The moon was particularly important and one part of the Goddess tradition uses the moon as symbol of a Triple-Goddess: Maid-Mother-Crone. The new Waxing Moon represents the Maid or Daughter who is related to new beginnings, youth, possibility and Springtime. Sometimes called the Virgin, the word does not mean chaste, but belonging to herself alone. Free and untamed. The animal associated with the Daughter is the deer. The Full Moon represents the Mother, creative Mother of all, mature woman, nurturing and protective. She is related to harvest time, fertility, stability and power. The animal associated with the Mother is the cat. The Waning Moon represents the Crone, the old woman of wisdom, inspiration, and secrets who is facing death and helps others prepare for inevitable endings in life. She is sometimes called the Dark Mother who relates to winter, accountability, and retribution. Her animal is the owl.

The Goddess has had many faces, many aspects, many names. Pictured here are two examples: The seated

goddess represents Kwan Yin, from Buddhist tradition, who is the goddess of compassion.



The many-armed standing figure represents Kali from the Hindu tradition. Kali slays lies and the lying ego and brings us face to face with the inevitability of death.

Crete has given us the best information about what Goddess culture was like. Around 6000 BCE a group of immigrants, probably from Anatolia (what is now Turkey) arrived on that island and brought the Goddess with them. Their civilization lasted nearly 5000 years. In the rest of the civilized world the Goddess was being displaced by the invaders. Crete is the last civilization in recorded history in which the Goddess culture prevailed. This culture was highly evolved with an unusually equitable sharing of wealth and extensive public works: viaducts, paved roads, reservoirs, large-scale irrigation. There was flourishing trade and superb arts and crafts. The worship of nature pervaded everything. There were harmonious bonds among humans, animals, and nature. Women had a prominent position in society. A notable aspect of Crete was the style of dress. Women wore bare-breasted clothing and men's dress emphasized the genitals. There appeared to be a frank appreciation of sexual differences and a sense of the pleasure bond and mutuality between men and women. This is quite different from religious dogma which views sex as more sinful than violence.

Today Goddess spirituality carries on traditions of celebrating solstices and equinoxes with bonfires, feasting, singing, and dancing. These traditions include rituals of passage and transformation that use drama and playfulness to open intuitive abilities, expand consciousness, and raise power to act in the world.

Recovering the gifts of Goddess religion can give us a sense of continuity with our past. It can teach us to honor and respect the natural world and female power; to affirm the body; to celebrate all the stages of life; to acknowledge the need for nurturance; to value play, dance, song, and ritual.

II. Patriarchy

So, back to our time line. About 4,500-3,000 BCE came the invasions. Probably one reason the takeover was possible was that there were also earthquakes, tidal waves, and volcanic eruptions that weakened the area of the Goddess culture. Over a period of about 2500 years, what we have



come to call “patriarchy” became firmly established in Old Europe, the Near East, and the Mediterranean. In some places the transition was brutal, in others less so. Generally life became less free, less creative, and less joyful. Women became a resource acquired by men, either bought in marriage, or conquered in slavery. Their sexual services were part of their labor and their children were the property of their masters. The Hebrew Levites were so concerned about the paternity of children, that the violent rape of a virgin was considered a declaration of ownership and brought about a forced marriage. Contrast this to Ancient Sumer where a man was put to death for raping a woman.

In India the spread of the Indo-Aryan culture brought with it the origins of the Hindu religion with the concept of light-colored skin perceived as better than darker skins. So it appears that the patriarchal invaders who saw women as inferior fostered racist attitudes as well.

When Christianity first began to spread, it coexisted with the Goddess faith. In fact, country priests as late as the 12th and 13th Centuries would dress in skins and lead the dance at the pagan festivals. But by the 14th and 15th centuries the church began persecuting witches, Jews, and “heretical” thinkers. Pope Innocent VIII (an oxymoron) intensified a campaign that killed about 9 million people, 80% women. Most were not witches or even members of covens. They were widows whose property was coveted, young children with “witch blood,” midwives who were competition to a newly male-dominated medical profession, and free thinkers who asked the wrong questions. In some villages in Europe there were no women left alive.

With patriarchy we lost the conception of the Great Spirit as manifest in nature, in life, in woman. Although there is evidence of this long tradition in the “dirt” (archeological digs), most of this tradition was before written records and what records existed were erased or written from the viewpoint of the victor whose interest was to vilify the vanquished deities. The Judeo-Christian tradition has long sought to eradicate all traces of Goddess religion. You can read stories in the Old Testament of the slaughter of Canaanite culture.

Here’s how Mary Daly defined modern Patriarchy: “society manufactured and controlled by males in which every legitimated institution is in the hands of males and a few selected henchwomen; society characterized by oppression, repression, depression, narcissism; cruelty, racism, classism, ageism, specieism; objectification,

sadomasochism, necrophilia. Ruled by Godfather, son, and company, fixated on proliferation, propaganda, procreation, and bent on the destruction of life.” She calls patriarchy the prevailing religion of the planet whose essential message is necrophilia (obsession with death or “getting off” on death).

To those who would say that the word Patriarchy is passé, Daly asks, “Whose interest is served to erase the word patriarchy that so aptly names the enemy of women and all the oppressed, including our planet?” Turning a blind eye to patriarchy is to spread the message that things have always been like this so you can never stop it. This kind of arrogant ignorance of everything before and beyond patriarchy is used to silence women and all the oppressed.

How does this affect men and women still today?

Though there have been changes in the past decades, women are still conditioned to be outwardly oriented. We judge our success as persons by how happy we make others, how fully we meet their needs, how much they love and respect us. Early in life woman ceases to ask what she wants until she loses the ability to know what she wants. Groomed from birth to marry, we view ourselves as half of some future twosome that will be called by his name, and expected to breed his children who will also be called by his name. Though I was valedictorian of my class, I understood that the only reason for my going to college was insurance in case something happened to whatever man I married. No one ever talked with me about what I wanted to do with my life.

Like other dominated people, women have learned to manipulate and seduce. I recall a therapist noting what he called my coy behavior, saying I acted like Shirley Temple. I was 45 at the time and likely learned to be coy from my mother who learned it from Shirley Temple movies. Men have sometimes characterized this behavior as power, but it is more like the child’s or courtesan’s power to wheedle and the dependent’s power to disguise her feelings in order to obtain favors or literally to survive.

As for men, however much they may call for women’s liberation, it is still their order, confirming them in privilege. Men live out of a mostly unconscious sense of entitlement. It does need to be made clear, though, that patriarchy has failed men, punishes them severely. To be a proper Man, the system demands that they submit to authority, and that they strive to win in all endeavors no matter the cost to their emotional or

physical life, or to their relationships.

Adrienne Rich describes how men want women for emotional sustenance yet at the same time fear emasculation by them. The fear is so strong that he is ready to "kill the dragon" to protect himself. Rich says this fear is the real dragon to be destroyed. We have only slowly become aware of this deep fear that men have of women and that it can easily erupt into malice. The name for this hatred of women is "misogyny."

I see examples of misogyny daily in the news:

(1) Recently Congressional House Representative Debra Wasserman Schultz referred to Allen West on the floor of the House thus: "The gentleman from Florida who represents thousands of Medicare beneficiaries, as do I, is supportive of this plan that would increase costs for Medicare beneficiaries. Unbelievable from a member from South Florida."

She apparently made her remarks after West left the House floor. This prompted West to send the following e-mail in response, copying to House Majority and Minority Leaders: (I have omitted part of it.)

"Subject: Unprofessional and Inappropriate Sophomoric Behavior from Wasserman-Schultz

Look, Debbie, I understand that after I departed the House floor you directed your floor speech comments directly towards me. Let me make myself perfectly clear, you want a personal fight, I am happy to oblige. You are the most vile, unprofessional and despicable member of the US House of Representatives. If you have something to say to me, stop being a coward and say it to my face, otherwise, shut the heck up. Focus on your own congressional district!

You have proven repeatedly that you are not a Lady, therefore, shall not be afforded due respect from me!

Steadfast and loyal, Congressman Allen B. West"

(2) Another example of misogyny is Prostitution and Pornography: Newsweek published an article recently about a study undertaken on men who buy sex. Those doing the study had "big, big trouble finding nonusers" for their 100-person control group. Overall, "the attitudes and habits of sex buyers reveal them as men who dehumanize and commodify women, view them with anger and contempt, lack empathy for their suffering, and relish their own ability to inflict pain and degradation." This is a growing multibillion dollar business in this country. The images of pornography are increasingly violent and degrading to women. This is what more and more

men in our culture "get off on." In fact, multiple studies confirm that about 65% of young boys are exposed to internet porn beginning at the average age of eleven. Pornography is documented in Robert Jensen's book, *Getting Off*. The prostitution story is even more upsetting – what is done to little girls. There is forced marriage that goes on even in the United States. Some families disown or even kill their daughters when they refuse to go along with a forced marriage. It is uncomfortable to look at the details of misogyny. It is much worse **not** to look at it – to ignore that this is going on.

III. Problems with Christianity

So how is Christianity affected by patriarchy?

First, there is the Judeo-Christian Bible which by page 3 establishes a penitent, submissive position for females. For Goddess sake, to have the first male give birth to the female is pretty absurd. And "Thou shalt not rape" is conspicuously missing from the 10 commandments. We are familiar with the New Testament admonitions for women to learn in silence, not to teach or to usurp authority over the man, to be under obedience, to be submissive to husbands. To locate these passages I flipped through my Phillip's New Testament to see where I noted "good grief!" in the margins. Feminine scholars have noted that the New Testament writers attempted to make their message acceptable to the patriarchal culture of their time, thereby omitting stories which gave women the greater role they actually had.

The orthodox Christian notion of female sexuality has been that of dangerous temptress. In the 12th C. St. Bernard warned his monks that "to live with a woman without incurring danger is more difficult than to resuscitate the dead." His rules did not permit a woman, for any reason whatsoever, to cross the bounds of a monastery. If a woman appeared at the gate she was to be refused alms. And one of their vows was to feed the hungry.

Then, of course, the masculine language of Christianity has for centuries communicated to women that they are a subspecies of men, inferior both culturally and religiously. The maleness of God and Christ provide images of the "rightness" of male rule, and reinforce and legitimate the power of males in society.

Also, the church has allied itself with the state against those that Jesus stood for: the pariahs of his time (in our time, it would be gays and lesbians), women, the poor, the outcasts. As Mary Daly saw it: The idea of women seeking ordination in the

church is like a black person seeking office in the ku klux klan.

The presence of patriarchy in church life is deeper than a custom of language. Christianity in our time hasn't understood the feminine dimension. Here is an example: Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr claimed to offer a universal definition of sin as pride, and grace as sacrificial love. To tell a woman that sin is pride is likely to reinforce her tendency to self-forgetfulness, which might be considered her real sin. I recall telling my mother once that I had joined an adult woman's basketball league and had not lost my high school touch as point guard. Her response was: "Getting a little braggish, aren't you?" I was stepping out of the modest role she had taught me. And women are more likely to interpret sacrificial love as self-negation, as they have been expected to put aside all self-interest for husband, children, parents. All our theology needs to be examined in the light of women's experience.

Realistic Living follows an approach to the Christian tradition that has made many steps toward a wholesome recovery of that tradition for the times we live in. Still, there are problems. I will note a few that occur to me:

1. We still have **male language and symbols**, and more subtle, a male style.
2. We are heavy on rationality, and fall into **rationalism** at times. For example, I love Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Responsibility essay and decision making method, but in using that method we sometimes overemphasize the mind as separate from intuition and a sense of guidance.
3. In challenging sentimentality or sentimentalism, we have sometimes **lost heart and connection**. The emphasis on God as the crunch between being driven and limited sometimes loses touch with God as the "still small voice," or God as comforter. And the emphasis on the fact that you alone make your decisions and die alone sometimes loses the connection with the Eternal and with your companions. It can become a form of stoicism.
4. The church as mission has **not been clear about the patriarchy** in which we swim. We speak of justice when there is no justice in a system which omits half of humanity. We speak of structural love without noting the patriarchal aspects of those structures.

Mary Daly said: "The women's revolution will become the greatest single potential challenge to Christianity to rid itself of its oppressive tendencies or go out of business." Then she gave up on Christianity entirely. I haven't given up on it and I

assume you haven't either, but that means that we have a lot of work to do. We need to exorcise internalized images of male superiority from our consciousness and from whatever structures we create. Rather than expending our energy attacking patriarchal religion "out there," we need to clear it out of our own heads and create something new.

But creating new symbols is not something we can arbitrarily decide. Symbols grow out of a changing communal situation and experience. On the other hand, we don't have to be passive about creating better theology and communal practices.

We need to be attentive to what our new experience of becoming human is. Obviously exclusive masculine symbols won't do. The hidden history of and the gifts of women in religion need to be uncovered and recovered.

We need to affirm that Christian faith and theology are not inherently patriarchal and sexist, and at the same time acknowledge the sexist traditions and myths that do exist and change them or eradicate them.

We need to recover the deep meanings from the ancient practices and incorporate those meanings with a self-consciousness the ancients did not possess. This means orienting ourselves to the earth, to life, to nature, with no dichotomy between spirit and flesh. It means encouraging playfulness, developing our intuitive abilities. It means affirming mutuality in gender, class, culture, and race in all our work.

IV. Living Now



What does this mean now for women and men specifically? How do we spin out of patriarchy and live now the future we imagine?

In the first place, **women** must be clear that it is self-destructive to go for **vengeance**. It is very easy to get caught in anger. It is important to find ways to deal

with the Rage that is naturally there without hating men or life generally.

At the same time, women must not **settle** either personally or socially or religiously for some premature reconciliation that does not cut to the depth of sexist society. Women must use the energy of their Rage for making change.

Women must cease to play the role of "complement" and find strength in the self as free

responsible human beings, not expecting men to take care of them. They must not be complicit in their own oppression. For example, women must not sit still for health care that pays for viagra and not contraception. Women must not sit still for being portrayed as sex objects, as many outstanding women athletes have been.

Women also need to look carefully at the qualities that Christianity has idealized, especially for women, such as sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc. These “virtues” need to be replaced with courage, willingness to act boldly, faith in her own power of generosity.

Mary Daly talks about the cow that jumped over the moon – in the nursery rhyme – as her heroine. (You know the nursery rhyme? Hey, diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon. The little dog laughed to see such sport, and the dish ran away with the spoon.) Daly says: “The cow didn’t know where she was going, but she knew she had to do it. So what if the little dog laughed. What did he know? I’m sure the cow was fed up with domestication. Being seen by some foolish farmer as an udder and a breeder. She could have jumped over the fence but they would have caught her and brought her back. A cow after my own heart – she chose to jump over the moon. **Following her essential cause.**”

This is how women might become full human beings.

Then **men** – It is no small request to ask men to incorporate a radical feminist critique into their lives. For most men it means a major change which requires introspection that is often painful and can, in the short term, leave one feeling uncertain, confused, and powerless. This is because the nature of being in the role of oppressor is unconsciousness. Jaime can see my racism of which I am unaware. Alan can spot my unaware homophobia, and I can spot Alan’s or Jaime’s unaware sexism. But if men do allow women to challenge the sexism they are unconscious of, and do set forth on this perilous journey of losing their undeserved privilege and prestige, and if they do not shrink from the good news of actually finding themselves, they might very well succeed in becoming **human**.

Becoming human, rather than a **Man (a real Man)** or masculine. The images around being a man or being masculine are entangled with the old system – being ambitious, patriotic, brave, goal driven, tough, stoical, aggressive, winning at all costs.

And then each man can look at his past history

and acknowledge the ways he has participated in violating women – in using them as objects to fulfill his needs. He can objectively **acknowledge** the **guilt** – just as the U.S. acknowledged what was done to the Japanese in this country during W.W.II and as we need to acknowledge what was done to the Natives of this land, and to the African Americans, and to gays and lesbians. Like recovering alcoholics, men need to make amends. It is a healing step to acknowledge what has happened.

A few other suggestions for men:

1. Forego **violence** against a partner or child and don’t support men who use violence, whether it is physical violence, laughing at misogynistic jokes, or using porn or prostituted women.
2. Do your **share** of the domestic arts and child care.
3. **Listen** to women and remember what they say.
4. Tell women how you **feel** and ask them what they **think**. Give them credit when you use their ideas.

All of this can seem overwhelming. It is easier to deny that there is a problem, or that it matters.

But it is important to take even one step out of this system, to do one act of courage, no matter how small it may appear. Even though as women we may be called man haters or “ball busters,” or as men we may be called wimps or “pussy-whipped,” we can choose to “rock the boat.” We can choose to throw our small weight on the side of the oppressed – those destroyed and damaged by the racism, classism, ageism specieism, sexism of this sick system.

Every act outside of the system is momentous and contagious. We become more courageous as we perform courageous acts. Those about us become more courageous. This is our task. It is enormous, and it is worth our best efforts.

A Call to Experiment in Creating a Next Christianity

a communal vision
by Gene Marshall



That there is such a thing as a viable and vital “Next Christianity” has long been an axiom of this publication and of Realistic Living as a organization. This conviction has been held in spite of the shame piled upon the very word “Christian” by biblical literalism, sentimental moralism, patriarchal oppression, thoughtless

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superficiality, oppressive dogmatism, politicized nonsense, hatred of nature, individualistic overemphasis, otherworldly escapism, and other scandals.

But asserting personally and theologically that there is a viable and vital Next Christianity is only a first step toward realizing such an emergence in actual history. Some of us have to experiment in practicing that Next Christianity. Some of us have been exploring such a practice for many decades, and we are now ready to create a thoroughgoing experiment in being that Next Christianity weekly and locally, as well as continentally in an organized way.

“Realistic Living” has from the beginning been another word for Holy Spirit and for manifesting that Holy Spirit in communal nurture and in ongoing service to the whole of humanity and planet Earth. Holy Spirit is not a special reality invading normal reality from some other realm. Holy Spirit is the bubbling up of true reality within what we have wrongly assumed to be real. Holy Spirit is not an achievement of human beings, but a dreadful and glorious gift to humans of what it means to be human before we substituted something else for human.

So defined, “Holy Spirit” is not unique to Christianity; it is a factor in our human constitution that accounts for the emergence of religion in every long-lasting and vital human society. Religion, like economics, can be good or bad in relation to serving the cause of realism in human living. Much religion is driven by unholy substitutes for Spirit. At the same time, true Holy Spirit is alive and well today in Buddhist forms, Hindu forms, Islamic forms, Jewish forms, Pagan forms, as well as Christian forms and religious forms that may not have such long-standing roots. Holy Spirit is not something that separates Christians from other religious practices, but something that unites a Holy-Spirit-inspired Christianity with Holy-Spirit-inspired religions of every variety. Religions that are so inspired learn from each other how to better practice their own religion.

Unless Holy Spirit is our guide, there is no vital and valid Next Christianity; there is only another form of the old coagulation of Christian distortions. A Next Christianity is a creation by humans of a temporal and earthly religious practice that fosters our access of Holy Spirit and assists us to embody Holy Spirit in the entire operation of our living.

So let's do it – some of us, that is. Let's practice a Next Christianity. After decades of exploring items of a Next Christian practice, it is my intuition that we need to lay down some guidelines for a

stable communal togetherness that fosters an ongoing communal experiment in an expanding historical manifestation of that Next Christianity.

Guideline number one is meeting weekly in a religious practice with 3-12 other Holy-Spirit-intrigued humans who have opted to try “Christian” for their religious practice. The small-group Circle is the new base community of the Next Christianity. Most of us have grown up understanding an independent or denominational congregation as the base community of our Christianity. No longer can this be so. As a vehicle that carried us out of an oppressive last stages of the Middle Ages, the denominational congregation was a successful and useful construction. But now its days are numbered. The task of the denominational congregation is not yet finished, but it is time to begin construction of its replacement. I envision an experiment in Next Christianity in which Circles of 3-12 people meet weekly is a new practice of base community. Perhaps those “Circles” of people “congregate” quarterly from across a local region, but the Circles are the base community; the congregating is a congregating of Circles. Three is the minimum number, because two is not enough for a Christian Resurgence Circle. Two is an intimate couple with all the dynamics of coupling. Three persons is enough to have that more complex nest of relationships that an operative Circle needs. Five is better, but three is enough. So all you need to do to be in a new base-community of the Next Christianity is to find two other people who are willing to practice with you a viable and vital Christian practice on a weekly basis. Three people can establish a foundation in vital Christian practice that person number four through person number twelve can join. Why is about “12” a maximum number? When there is more than 12, a Circle begins to struggle with having the quality of intimate participation that is needed. The solution to this is simple: you divide into two Circles. How you do this and when you do this requires paying attention to the guidance of the same Holy Spirit that is calling this new Circle practice into being.

Guideline number two is about the avid study of a Holy-Spirit-grounded theology that makes ever more clear what we are pointing to with the term “Holy Spirit.” Some post- or semi-Christian innovators have recommended doing away with theology, but that is because they view the “Theo” in “theology” in the obsolete two-story fashion. If “Theo” does not mean a somebody or a something in some other realm who has some effect on this realm, then we can see “theology” differently. We can be open to the core of the 20th Century

existential theological revolution in which “Theo” became another word for “Yes” to Reality with a capital “R.” We might say that the old-time “theology” became “real-ology” – that is, the knowledge of Reality when knowing and serving Reality has become the best case scenario for living our lives. Making this simple distinction does not end the discussion, because Reality is an open-ended topic. What is Reality? We don’t know. Reality is a Mystery that perpetually undermines our sense of what Reality is. This means that we are not using the word “Reality” to mean anything that human beings have invented – like a sense of reality or a worldview or an ideology or a theology. Reality is that which perpetually undermines every sense of reality that human beings invent to deal with the Reality that humans perpetually do not fully understand. But this does not mean that Reality is something wholly apart from the realities that humans do somewhat understand and clearly live among. Indeed, every event that is actually happening is, however poorly understood by humans, an expression of the Reality that manifests through all actual events. It is this Reality that we who are inventing this Next Christianity serve as our core devotion (that is, my god is Reality with a capital “R.”) This devotion was being expressed in the very name of the grandfather of prophets, Elijah (my god is JAHHHH). And this is why Realistic Living is Holy Spirit and why any event that kills our illusions and raises us up to our actual lives is an event that is honored by the term “Jesus Christ.” Jesus’ life and death, seen as the Christ, was such an event.

Guideline number three has to do with the liturgical use of the Bible. The Old Testament writings were probably read aloud to Jewish practitioners as far back as written scrolls existed in this community. The New Testament writings were also written to be read aloud and were read liturgically as their first publication. Today in our most liturgical congregations we still hear the Gospels and the Epistles read aloud liturgically. Protestantism was born by and borne down through history on the back of biblical reading and biblical preaching. Although the Next Christianity can be viewed as beyond Protestant, beyond Catholic, and beyond Orthodox, it cannot be viewed as beyond being a religion of the book. This claim, however, raises immense problems, for we now know that the Christian Scriptures (however we determine what they are) were all written by human beings, not dictated by a Divine Mouth. And these texts were all written in cultures that were immersed in patriarchal language and moral patterns. The Biblical writers

also used a two-story mythic vocabulary that we now view as obsolete. So every verse of Christian Scripture has to be translated from its two-story metaphorical language into contemporary, existential metaphors. And every verse of Christian Scripture also has to be rescued from its cultural limitations, especially its patriarchal or gender biases, its toleration of slavery, its old science, its obsolete moralities, and so on. Though various great souls among the biblical writers moderated some of these cultural limitations, they still lived in and accommodated to these old cultures. If we are to follow the core teaching of the Bible in being fully realistic, we have to be realistic about all these troubling aspects of Christian Scriptures. And if we are to use these texts liturgically, we have to do more than simply read them aloud. We have to study them and discuss them in a historical and existential fashion. This mode of Scripture interpretation has to be taught to one another in our Circles and in training schools that support our Circles. Each Christian in this Next Christianity needs to become proficient in gleaning the juice from these founding texts of our “religion of the book.”

Guideline number four has to do with the balance of nurture and mission. It seems that we must say over and over to ourselves that nurture without mission is self-absorbed, and mission without nurture is shallow, ineffective, and short lived. In almost any circle of religious practice, there will be those who overemphasize nurture to the exclusion of mission. A. H. Almaas calls this a lollypop religious work; we come to the work to experience lollypops of Awe or Joy or Freedom or Compassion, but we do not choose to live from those experiences in the entire course of our lives. At the other extreme are those who emphasize mission over nurture, bending the Circle toward being a mere planning group for some needed action in the general society. A balance needs to be held. It is true that at different times a person or a group may need to lean toward nurture or toward mission, but the balance is still an underlying need. One way to encourage this balance is through a pattern of study choices – two quarters on nurture, two quarters on mission. We might break that down further: a quarter on basic theology, a quarter on devotional content or Spirit methods, a quarter on the mission of creating and expanding the Next Christianity, and a quarter on the vision, strategy, and implementation of social change in our place and for our planet. Such a model for study is a pattern to be departed from as needed, but it provides a norm from which to depart. Also, all study is part of nurture rather than mission. So

whatever we study, we still need to put our nurtured life on the road of living every day of the week.

Guideline number five has to do with loving the body. Spirit maturity is a kind of strength that includes strength for controlling the body – controlling our body-emotions, our bodily-desires, our body-minds, and the actions of our bodies. This can result in an over-control, bordering on a suppression of the natural body. Christianity is an incarnational practice, a practice that emphasizes the embodiment of Spirit. Recognizing this incarnational motif, we view our body as a means of Spirit expression. We allow our body to be itself as part of our Spirit presence. These insights can result in a fresh view of our lives as Spirit-bodies in intimate relations with other Spirit-bodies. For our liturgical practice this awareness can mean adding to our circle activities like: singing, silence, dancing, standing, as well as sitting. These additions are not simply entertaining things to do: they are Spirit enhancing. For example, we can beckon Spirit through improvisational dance within the context of letting the body move as it will to some rich, rhythmic music. Such practices encourage us to listen to and obey our Spirit-bodies, rather than force movement or restrain movement with our minds. It is important for religious practice to get beyond our controlling minds so we can have our minds back as tools or servants of Spirit living.

Much more could be said about all five of these guidelines, and a full understanding of them can only be realized by actually practicing them with at least two other people. I am attempting to issue this call: let some of us experiment with creating and living the Next Christianity. And let us begin our ongoing experimentation by following these guidelines, guidelines that have evolved through several decades of experiential learning that is now ready for our use.

For further exploration of this topic you can download from our web site a packet of materials entitled:

“Describing a Christian Resurgence Circle.”
(<http://www.realisticliving.org/articles.htm>)

You can also download from our web site eleven essays of a course entitled: **“The Next Christianity.”**
(<http://www.realisticliving.org/training.htm>)

Announcement

On **Saturday March 31, 2012** we will host a one-day training with Janine Sanford, a Byron Katie certified facilitator. Janine will lead the group through simple self-inquiry exercises that can be

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life changing. The Work of Katie brings awareness to how tightly we hold our judgments and beliefs, allowing us to loosen that grip and let in a fuller experience of our essential freedom and love of reality. The cost of this workshop is \$100 per person, \$150 per couple. This includes the noon meal. On **Sunday April 1, 2012**, the RL Staff will conduct a workshop on other Spirit methods. We will demonstrate solitary and group methods and train participants in them. The workshop will include the art form method, scripture conversations, the go round, meditation, prayer, embodiment methods, and consensus methods. We will not only review the form of each method but share an understanding of the Spirit depth each implies and the kind of presence required to lead these methods well. For the Sunday workshop there will be a \$25 fee for materials and lunch. E-mail us at jgmarshall@cableone.net to indicate your interest and for more information.

Radical Monotheism

a theological spin
by Gene Marshall



Radical monotheism, as elaborated by H. Richard Niebuhr, has to do with value and ethics. The core question is: What is good? What is best for the loyalty, devotion, and cause of my life, and of our lives as an organization, a region, a state, a nation, or a species of life.

Radical monotheism is one of three prominent answers to that question. The other two can be named “polytheism” and “henotheism.” As an answer to the question of value and ethics, polytheism means having many centers of value that comprise the pantheon for my life or for our lives as a group. Those centers of value might include: family, work, sex, pleasure, money, self esteem, companionship, approval, power, status, variations on all of these, and many more centers of value.

As an answer to the question of value, henotheism is often found in some form of nationalism – my country right or wrong – mine is the greatest nation on Earth – being a patriot is my core value. Nationalism usually means projecting my view of being a patriot upon all the other members of my nation, whom I may view as subversive if they disagree with me about my nationalism. Henotheism can also be making my center of value a specific religious group or cultural group or race. Humanism is a form of henotheism in which my center of value is the

whole human species – whatever is good for humankind is good and whatever disadvantages humankind is bad. Or my henotheism can be expanded to include all living forms. This center of value is still henotheistic, not radical monotheism, because it does not include the inanimate aspects of reality.

Radical monotheism includes everything, inanimate and living, in its scope of values. Everything that exists is good because it exists. The radical monotheistic center of value is a loyalty and a devotion to that Absolute Source from which all emergents emerge and into which all that has emerged returns. Birthing and dying are of equal value as parts of the whole process of Reality. Coming and going, big and little, pleasant and painful, growing and rotting are all valuable because each process is a manifestation of the Master Process of Reality.

The “mono” in “monotheism” means that there is but One overriding loyalty. Good and evil no longer mean two aspects of what is Real. The real is the good and the good is the real. “Evil” within the radical monotheistic value-system means any denial of the Real, any hatred of the Real, any illusion that masks the Real, any escape that flees the Real, any fight that desperately seeks to win against that really Real that cannot be defeated.

Theism

The “theism” in polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism does not mean belief in gods or goddesses, or in a supreme being alongside other beings. The gods and goddesses of ancient polytheism were stories about processes within the human psyche or within the human interactions with the environments of human living. Polytheism does not mean taking these stories literally. The gods and goddesses do not exist as literal beings observable by scientific examination or contemplative inquiry. For example, Venus and Mars are just stories about the dynamics of love and war. A vital polytheism can include loyalty and commitment to both love and war and many other centers of value.

Similarly radical monotheism is not a belief in One God that rules over all the other gods and goddesses, angels and devils, gremlins and fairies, and other visualizations and fictions about aspects of our lives. Radical monotheism has nothing to do with beliefs in beings or in a being. Radical monotheism is a devotion, a loyalty, a trust in the totality or Wholeness of what is Real. This devotion relativizes our devotion to all the many aspects of reality that have been and still can be centers of value in our living. In radical

monotheism we have One center of value that makes the many centers of value relative to this One center of value – Reality as a Whole.

Now this Oneness in radical monotheism must be distinguished from seeing our nation as our oneness, as our one overriding center of value. Though we are part of our nation and our nation is part of us, we are more than our nation and the truth of our being, the reality of our lives is more than the actuality and destiny of our nation. Similarly, the Oneness in radical monotheism is more than the oneness of humanity, or the oneness of living beings, or the oneness of my planet. The one center of value that constitutes radical monotheism is Reality as a Whole, the Quintessence of what is Real.

This Quintessence can be experienced. It can be visited. It can become the station of our living in which we dwell. It can become the trust and devotion and loyalty of our lives. It can become the cause for which we live and die. And people who so live are all around us every moment. The possibility of joining those who so live is present in every moment, provided that we see in that moment that all the other centers of value are finite, temporal, untrustworthy, passing, limiting, and often obsessive and compulsive loyalties that carry us to the pits of despair. Any other-than-radical center of value is an idol that will destroy our lives until we see that it is just part of our lives, a life that is much larger, a life that encompasses all the potential idols as relative centers of value within a more inclusive mode of living.

Radical Monotheism and Science



Natural science is a method or approach to what is True. In that sense, natural science is a servant of radical monotheism. The discoveries of science are discoveries of what is real and thus enrichments of our radical monotheism. But the formulations of scientific knowledge are always partial, incomplete, open to further advances in the process of science. So any current scientific formulation is not the Quintessence of Reality; it is only a humanly invented level of understanding of some part of reality. The process of science is an approach to truth and, therefore, compatible with radical monotheism. The specific results of science can be idols that radical monotheism opposes because they are not the fullness of reality.

A good scientist can also be a radical monotheist. This is observable in the consciousness of those scientists who have come to see that “the more we know about nature, the more we

know we don't know." Our scientific advances do not bring us to some promised land of absolute knowledge; rather, they open up even more unknowns to be explored. But scientific advances are still advances, each advance more real than the formulations over which it is an advance. The process and progress of science is a journey into what we actually experience. This is not clearly understood by all philosophers of science. The keystone of science is the actual experience of our senses. Obviously, what we sense is conditioned, or at least shaped by, what we believe before we sense it. But our sensations, when we fully open to them, can also challenge what we believe, can challenge what our whole society has believed for a very long time. This willingness to let sensations challenge beliefs is the key to scientific research and the reason that science as a method is compatible with the loyalty of the radical monotheist.

Many philosophers of science notice that modern scientific experiments are very complex and very distant from the everyday experience of our senses. Many of us cannot, even in our imaginations, reduplicate the complex interpretations of the light gathered by immense telescopes from galaxies billions of miles away. Nor do we understand the explorations using huge atom-smashing cyclotrons into the microcosm of nature's smallest constituencies. We seem stuck with simply trusting scientists in what they say rather than actually knowing how scientists arrived at their current formations of truth. As true as this is, it is also true that these scientists are trustworthy only to the extent that their science is referencing actual experiences of the senses. And if we became competent scientists in their field, we could also observe with our own senses whether these advances are indeed advances into truth or not. Any philosophy of science is bogus that does not keep in touch with the fact that a scientific advance is trustworthy only when a community of scientists can witness that this new formulation of truth is compatible with what can be seen, heard, smelled, felt, tasted, or otherwise sensed with our human senses.

Radical Monotheism and Contemplative Inquiry

The human senses are not, however, the only source of truth. The human senses cannot sense consciousness. The human senses can only sense the behaviors and the reports of conscious beings. Consciousness is assumed by scientists, but it cannot be explored by them as scientists. Consciousness, often called subjectivity, is a secret known to scientists, but rigorously excluded from

the objectivity of scientific research. I am not talking about the processes that a scientist goes through in her or his mind to come up with a better theory to be tested in the world of sensory experience. That inner process of imagination is not a test that separates false from true in scientific work. Science is objective in its tests for truth. Subjectivity is purposefully and faithfully avoided. This is both the grandeur of science and its limitation. It cannot explore the nature of consciousness or of conscious processes.

All exploration of consciousness itself is explored by a conscious human noticing consciousness within her or his own being. These inward noticings can be shared with other noticers of their own consciousness. We thereby construct a community of discussion about consciousness. All good art is a sharing of these inward noticings. Much psychology and philosophy is also a sharing of these inward noticings. Religion is good religion only if its assertions are rooted in this inward noticing. Psychology, philosophy, and religion may combine their inward noticings with the scientific type of knowing, but competent thinking must remain clear about what is scientific knowing and what is contemplative inquiry.

Radical monotheism is compatible with contemplative inquiry. Anyone who is looking honestly at her or his own consciousness and reporting accurately is a trustworthy source of truth about reality, that One Reality that is the devotion and loyalty and cause of the radical monotheist.

Radical Monotheism and Social Ethics

Radical Monotheism is first and foremost a context of value that leads to action – to the vocation of living one's whole life in the context of value that opposes every limited center of value and fights for this inclusive center of value: the real is the good and the good is the real. This means that everything that scientific work discovers to be real is good and that everything that contemplative inquiry discovers to be real is good. And further, radical monotheism as a center of value challenges us to integrate our scientific truth and our contemplative truth into a workable program of action for our whole lives in service of the whole Earth and the whole destiny of humans on this Earth. Judaism and Christianity have been traditions that support ethics, justice, and social action because of the radical monotheism that these traditions carry. As finite religions in real world history, these traditions also carry perversions of radical monotheism – most often as the henotheism of group morality and group

dogma. This decay of radical monotheism into an in-group self worship is a temptation faced by every serious religion. Such decay robs social ethics of its flexibility and revolutionary power. The ethical sphere is broken open for perpetual creativity by radical monotheism as a center of value.

Radical Monotheism and Religion

Religion is finite construction by human beings. At its best religion points beyond itself to that which is not finite but which is everlastingly True and Real. Good religion points beyond its ethical moralities and its dogmatic teachings to a depth of human experience that cannot be contained in any finite ideas, social shapes, or humanly practiced processes. Radical monotheism has to do with openness to and dedication to that which is not finite; therefore radical monotheism cannot be contained within any religious forms – dogmas, moralities, or communal forms.

Radical Monotheism and Christianity

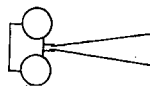
Christianity as a historical community of religions has entered an era of history in which all its old dogmas, moralities, and communal forms have become obsolete in relation to the scientific truth, the contemplative truth, and the ethical challenges of our times. All hope for a continuation of what has been central and best about the Christian religious tradition rests on a recovery of radical monotheism. Relevant leaders of a valid Christian resurgence will see clearly that Moses and the prophets were radical monotheists, that Jesus was a radical monotheist, and that Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John were radical monotheists. That the expressions of these signal figures were limited by their times does not change the fact that radical monotheism is the thread that unites them and is the thread that unites them with the many women and men who have and are dedicating their lives to the radical monotheistic cause.

For further clarity on the essence of radical monotheism, every sentence of the following book is still relevant: *Radical Monotheism in Western Culture* by H. Richard Niebuhr.

ART ON THE HUMANNESSE SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

MOVIES



Drive. Ryan Gosling first caught my attention when he played the loner with a blowup-doll girlfriend in **Lars and the Real Girl**. He recently showed his dramatic skills in **Blue Valentine** and his ability to do comedy in **Crazy, Stupid Love**.

Whatever film he is in, you can't take your eyes off him. He does more with less than any other actor I have ever seen. **Drive** is the perfect vehicle for his minimalism. His entire script for the film is probably no more than a page or two. He doesn't even have a name. He is The Driver – a Hollywood stunt driver by day who moonlights driving getaway cars. His style is best described as smart and unbelievably cool. So we are surprised when The Driver reveals that he is capable of a wide range of roles, depending on what is called for, from lover and benefactor to brute and killer. The true existential hero, he leaves you wondering, "Who is this guy?" Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn makes his Hollywood debut with this highly stylized, often beautiful and graphically violent film. Refn describes it as something of a Grimm's Fairy Tale. The rich gallery of supporting performances are flawless as well. I nominate this film and Ryan Gosling for every award available.

Mao's Last Dancer is a wondrous adaptation of Chinese ballet dancer's Li Cunxin's memoirs. At 11, Li is chosen by Communist officials to be part of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. He is sent to Madame Mao's ballet school in Beijing and from there to the U.S., where he dances with the Houston Ballet. The dance sequences are enthralling, and the story of Li's defection, heart-stopping. This is one of my all-time favorite movies.

Of Gods and Men is based on an event in Algeria in 1996, when eight French Trappist monks were taken hostage by terrorists. Most of the film is set in the monastery and in the Muslim village which the monks serve with a health clinic and clothing without attempting to convert anyone. The eight men also tend crops, keep bees, sell honey, hold meetings around a table with a candle, and sing gorgeous chants in their simple chapel. The film centers around the ambiguous decision the monks must make: to remain when the political situation becomes dangerous, or abandon their work and the community and the monastery. A beautiful film.

Secretariat. No doubt you know that Secretariat was the crowning glory of horse racing, winning the Triple Crown in 1973. What you likely do not know is the role his owner, Penny Chenery, a southern steel magnolia, played in allowing this horse to "run his race." Chenery stood up to the old boys' club, an arrogant trainer, her brother, and her husband, then grasped the reins of the team of groom, newly hired trainer, and jockey to manage the career of this amazing horse. She literally "bet the farm" and didn't flinch when she could have

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lost it and her marriage as well. What a horse! What a woman! What a film!

Lincoln Lawyer. Matthew McConaughey plays Mick, an attorney who works out of the back seat of an old Lincoln Town Car with a chauffeur who (because Mick got a DUI) ferries him around to his Los Angeles clientele of dealers, hookers, bagmen and low-lives. Mick's specialty is getting people off, sometimes in a perfectly legal way. The incomparable Marisa Tomei plays his ex-wife, courtroom opponent and (still) friend. The movie becomes a really satisfying legal thriller after Mick takes on a rich young client from Beverly Hills who, accused of beating up a woman, claims to be innocent.

Inside Job. When producer Charles Ferguson accepted the Academy Award for this documentary, he reminded us that three years after our worst financial meltdown, "not a single financial executive has gone to jail." And this is after the deliberate attempt of the industry to defraud ordinary American investors. It is depressing to see how this massive swindle was pulled off through the collusion of economic advisors, politicians, professors of economics with unethical conflicts-of-interest, investment banks, and ratings agencies. A fascinating aspect of the film is the chatty insights of a Wall Street madam who reveals that abundant sex and cocaine were supplied for valued clients and the traders themselves as an accepted part of the corporate culture. Kept on retainer were \$1000-an-hour hookers who wondered how some traders could even function after most nights. Let's hope the present protest movement results in major change of this system.

Cheers. We somehow missed the TV series Cheers when it had its 1982-1993 run. In checking it out on Netflix, we were surprised how well it has held up. It is sophisticated in its comedy and in the issues it pokes fun at. We are watching Season 4 now and look forward to seven more seasons in this Boston bar where everybody knows your name (great theme song, too).

POETRY

The Sweetest and the Meanest
Poems by Tom Kimmel
Point Clear Press, 2006

I attend house concerts at the rural home of friends who live 5 miles from us just south of the Red River. Recently, the singer/songwriter performing was Tom Kimmel. And Kimmel interspersed his songs with his poems. It is hard to say which I enjoyed more – the songs or the orated poems, each
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of which is a condensed slice of life in the South. (Kimmel grew up in Alabama and lives in Nashville.) Read them all and you feel like you know personally his family (including Bubba and Aunt Nee Nee), the women he has loved, and his life struggles. In the title poem a girlfriend's description of him spins him into the realization that she has described all his people who are "so sweet, so naturally, innocently sweet, that we can't bear it, so it's our meanness that becomes necessary, becomes our lifeboat, our means of survival." Likely you have heard Kimmel's songs; they have been featured in film, and on television, and albums by well-known artists.

FICTION

The Fifth Sacred Thing
by Starhawk



In her first novel, Starhawk, known for her works in women's spirituality and ecofeminism, conjures a visionary tale that considers two possible futures for America. The city of Los Angeles has gone all the way into patriarchal, mechanistic, racist, fundamentalist corporatocracy. To read the book is to experience the dead end of the strong trends going on this moment. The city of San Francisco, on the other hand, has become an egalitarian, nature-based, consensus-building, interracial, interfaith community – a healthy possibility for us. The life and death struggles between the two are a reminder that triumph of the good is possible only through tremendous effort, creativity and sacrifice. Starhawk has begun making a movie of this book.

Nightwoods
by Charles Frazier

Frazier does more with one sentence than many writers do with paragraphs. Reading him is a delight and this novel compares favorably to his *Cold Mountain*. Set in the early 1960s in North Carolina, it is the story of Luce, a young woman who inherits her murdered sister's traumatized young twins. The characters are fascinating and the plot crisp with constant surprises and the tension of a thriller. A work of art.



RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

Question Your Thinking, Change the World
Quotations from Byron Katie (2007)

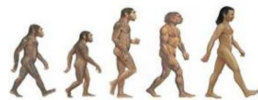
Tiger-Tiger, Is It True? (2009)
by Byron Katie and Hans Wilhelm
both published by Hay House

In an earlier RL Journal (June 2002) I reviewed Katie's book, *Loving What Is*, in which she
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introduces her method of self-inquiry, which has since changed thousands of lives (mine included). The quotations book is a selection of short quotes from her work, placed in five chapters: 1. On Love, Sex, and Relationships, 2. On Health, Sickness, and Death, 3. On Parents and Children, 4. On Work and Money, 5. On Self-Realization. If you have read *Loving What Is*, you know that Katie doesn't pull any punches. As she says, don't fight with reality; you lose 100% of the time. In this book she clarifies what is your business and demonstrates how to stay out of other's business (thinking you know what they should do with their lives) and "God's" business (worrying about natural disasters or anything out of your control). By asking hard questions that challenge the stories we tell ourselves, Katie shows how to loosen the stronghold of ego and release the freedom that is our essence. If one of the five topics is hot for you, read the full chapter. Or, each short quote is food for reflection.

Tiger-Tiger, Is It True? is Katie's basic four-question process told in a children's book with great illustrations by Hans Wilhelm. When Tiger-Tiger gets up on the "wrong" side of bed, he laments, "It's going to be one of those days"...and he's right. His parents argue at breakfast, he is picked last for games, and his friend Zebra decides to play with someone else. Consumed with anger and sadness, he sits by the water crying until Turtle surfaces and asks him "What's up?" Gently and persistently, Turtle prods Tiger-Tiger to reexamine his assumptions using the four questions, leading Tiger-Tiger through The Work of Byron Katie. The book is written for ages 4-10 but I think it works well for ages 4-100.

Thank God for Evolution
How the Marriage of Science and Religion
Will Transform Your Life and Our World
 by Michael Dowd
 Plume, 2007



Since 2002, ordained United Church of Christ minister Dowd and his wife, science writer Connie Barlow, have traveled the country to give artful presentations of the epic story of evolution. Dowd's writing style, folksy and fun, draws on his early experience as an evangelist to tell the story of celebrating the ecotheology of cosmologist, Thomas Berry. I recall Berry saying that human beings are the "champagne of the universe." Dowd puts it this way: "A human being looking through a telescope is literally the Universe looking at itself and saying, 'Wow!'" His sermonic summary is that the Universe is trustworthy. "When I act as if all

things work together for the good of those who love Reality and are called to serve a higher purpose, I love my life! What more could I want?"

I like Dowd's distinction between what he calls *flat-earth faith* and *evolutionary faith*. "What I mean by flat-earth faith is not people believing the world is flat. Rather, it refers to any perspective in which the metaphors and theology still in use came into being at a time when peoples really did believe the world was flat." A big problem with this faith, as Dowd sees it, is that such traditions fail to teach the basic principles of ecological living and thereby threaten planetary and human well-being. He sees the glory of all religious traditions as compromised by flat-earth cosmologies and needing to move entirely to evolutionary interpretations of their doctrines. To do this, Dowd talks about day language and night language. There is "the realm of what's so: the facts, the objectively real, that which is publicly and measurably true." This he calls our day experience. Then there are metaphor, poetry, and images which are subjectively real and focus on meaning. These he calls night language. Dowd says we must first seek clarity on the measurable facts in order for our stories and meanings to enrich our lives. His criteria for any religious tradition to realize its night-language concepts are:

1. Validate the heart of earlier interpretations
2. Make sense naturally and scientifically
3. Be universally, experientially true
4. Inspire and empower

When Dowd went for his ordination hearing years ago, a beloved retired minister, Emory Wallace, had recently died. One of the ministers at the hearing asked him, "Where is Emory?" This is part of his answer: "To respond to your question, I have to answer in two ways. First, in the day language of common discourse, I will say, Emory's physical body is being consumed by bacteria. Eventually, only his skeleton and teeth will remain. His genes, contributions, and memory will live on through his family and through the countless people that he touched in person and through his writings – and that includes all of us. But, you see, if I stop there – if that's all I say – then I've told only half the story. In order to address the nonmaterial, meaningful dimensions of reality I must continue and say something like: 'Emory is at the right hand of God the Father, worshipping and giving glory with all the saints.' Or I could say, 'Emory is being held and nurtured by God the Mother.' Or I could use a Tibetan symbol system and say, 'Emory has entered the bardo realm.' Any or all of these would also be truthful – true within the accepted logic and understanding of

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mythic night language.” Dowd’s (and Barlow’s) book is provocative, useful, funny, and inspiring.

Radical Theology
by Don Cupitt
Polebridge Press, 2006

Cupitt is a Life Fellow and former Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, England, and the author of more than thirty books. In this collection of essays written from 1972-2003 he discusses the importance of religion and the role of radical theology in creating better religion. He notes that religion helps us to see the harder questions of life and to say yes in the face of them. He says, “The job of religion is to give us the selflessness and the poise to survive in the modern world, and to be creative and productive people. Without religion, I believe we are threatened by pessimism, nihilism – and fundamentalism.” He notes that postmodern religion thinks that we need to train ourselves to look steadily at the abyss, thereby purging us of anxious egoism and liberating us for love and creativity. Fundamentalist religion, on the other hand, glimpses the abyss and clutches at authority, charisma, tradition, and certainty.

Cupitt says that great traditions eventually come to belong to all humankind. With the free worldwide dissemination of information and the globalization of culture, most of us are not confined to a cultural or religious sub-world. You might say that we are all hybrids. He adds that all religious truth must be continually rediscovered and reminted and he puts that job in the hands of all of us. There are no experts with ready-made answers. He sees value for Westerners in redesigning Christianity, since Christianity is our native language. Even those who don’t call themselves Christian are already committed to many things that are distinctly Christian. He describes Christianity as a family of monotheistic faiths which in various ways find in Jesus a key to the relation of human beings with the infinite. So, even though “we are in varying degrees exasperated that the Church insists on handicapping herself by remaining needlessly locked into a world-view that is well over 300 years out of date, is strongly supernaturalist, with hierarchical masculine power – this past is perishing.” Religion matters as a society and individually. It can focus opposition to cruel and despotic government and be a guardian of values in an increasingly barbarous world.

Society and the Sacred
by Langdon Gilkey
Crossroad, 1981

In earlier issues of this journal I have reviewed Protestant theologian Gilkey’s books on Reinhold
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Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and on his experience in a Japanese internment camp in China. His experience as a prisoner of war led to his rethinking of Christianity. *Society and the Sacred* is one expression of that rethinking. Here is my summation of this book.

Society is inherently religious, and without religious criticism and concern society can become demonic. Religious myths answer the deepest questions of our identity: our origins, our destiny and the meaning of our life as individuals and as a society. No social order can be challenged and refashioned without challenging its underlying myths. In this scientific age, faith is inescapable, necessary and fully possible. The Christian faith is eminently adequate and appropriate to meet the needs of a society in this age. The symbolic system in our nation that must be challenged by healthy religion includes “the American way of life,” “America, love it or leave it,” and the myth of progress. Such a religion must let go of any claim to absoluteness in its moral laws, forms, doctrines, or institutions. This puts us in a paradoxical position. No longer can we claim that healing force exists only in our religious response to the true Absolute. We must at one and the same time affirm our own faith and yet recognize that of the other traditions. This sea is uncharted. If we are able to navigate this journey, our encounters with other religions (such as Buddhism) can uncover both creative elements and demonic aspects of our own tradition. Either way, our faith can thereby become deeper.

The Empathic Civilization
The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis
by Jeremy Rifkin
Tarcher/Penguin, 2009

I have been reading Rifkin’s books with great interest since 1985, when I met him in *Declaration of a Heretic*. Reviewers said he committed the ultimate heresy therein by questioning the fundamental assumptions of contemporary Western civilization, namely by saying ‘No’ to the scientific world view and the Age of Progress. Even in that book he was using the word ‘empathy’ to suggest that we replace the adage of knowledge as power with knowledge as empathy and that we could reach security through participation rather than control. In 1989 I read his *Time Wars*, in which he outlines the history of how people have viewed time, noting that our conception of time must change in order for civilization to change. He notes that speed for speed’s sake to save time has actually left little time for living. I read *Biosphere Politics* in 1992

when I was actively engaged in the bioregional movement. Appropriately, that book probes the developing consciousness of the planet as living Earth and of human responsibility for its life.

The Empathic Civilization speaks to our despair when we confront the horrific effects of global warming, financial meltdown, and war. Rifkin says that our customary feeling, thinking, and acting are no longer relevant to the world we have created and that humanity is on the cusp of its greatest experiment: to refashion our consciousness in order to live and flourish in the new globalizing society. The way Rifkin tells our human story (a 600-page telling, backed up by new research), empathy is more basic to our essence than materialistic self-serving and is the quality we most need to survive and flourish in the 21st century. For an entertaining quick summary of this book, see the RSA Animate version at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7AWnfFRc7g>

"Empathy," explains Rifkin, unlike sympathy, "conjugates up active engagement -- the willingness of an observer to become part of another's experience, to share the feeling of that experience." Empathy involves sharing in another's joy as well as suffering. Rifkin looks at new scientific discoveries that show humans are "a fundamentally empathic species" rather than naturally aggressive, acquisitive, and self-involved. Then he charts the development of human empathy, "from the rise of the great theological civilizations to the ideological age that dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the psychological era that characterized much of the twentieth century," and the emerging trends of the 21st century. Finally, Rifkin focuses on "the Third Industrial Revolution: Distributed Capitalism," which he sees taking place in the Age of Empathy -- if, that is, we win the "race against time" and navigate the shift. He explains that every great leap forward in civilization has combined a communications revolution with an energy revolution. We are going through a communications revolution like no other in human history.

Rifkin is a thinker of sweeping-view whose research across many academic disciplines is amazing. Though you may not agree with all his conclusions, your imagination will be deepened and widened.

Beyond Happiness

The Zen Way to True Contentment

By Ezra Bayda

Shambhala, 2010

Bayda notes that the recent increasing search for happiness has actually resulted in more anxiety and

disease. Feeding our discontent is the sense of entitlement that happiness is our birthright and the Western belief in the quick fix. One big problem, as he sees it, is that we don't understand what it means to be happy. We equate happiness with pleasure or money or good health, or accomplishments or good relationships. Basic to Buddhism is the understanding that all these things are impermanent, always changing; so any external cannot be the basis for happiness. Beyond our idea that happiness means having life be a particular way, is the true contentment of being okay with life as it is. In Christian theology, "Life is Good" -- in Byron Katie's language, "Loving What Is." Like Katie, Bayda suggests a practice. The practice is to give up the pursuit of what we want and instead be present to what we have: to "appreciate the sweetness of the moment even when the moment isn't conventionally sweet." This involves working with our fears, our remorse, and guilt, and discovering our generous heart. In this practice, happiness is not the goal; it is a byproduct. An excellent book.

Work as a Spiritual Practice

A Practical Buddhist Approach to

Inner Growth and Satisfaction on the Job

by Lewis Richmond

Broadway Books, 1999

Richmond, a veteran corporate executive and former Zen Buddhist priest, says that people are skeptical about spiritual practice at work. A student of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, he uses four categories (conflict, inspiration, accomplishment, and stagnation) to show how Buddhist principles can mitigate workplace problems. He cites studies that the average American works 150 more hours per year than she or he did 80 years ago; so a creative relationship to this time is surely needed. His Zen background gives the book rigor, and his business acumen keeps it relevant and practical. I particularly like his simple, workable methods for dealing with worry and with anger. And my favorite quote is: "To be present is the most fundamental generosity of all."

reviews by Gene Marshall

Diamond Heart Book Five

Inexhaustible Mystery

A. H. Almaas

Shambhala: 2011



I have read this 374-page book a few pages at a time each morning for most of a year. It has been an excellent devotional reading for me. I recommend it to anyone who is opening into a full

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journey into who you actually are beneath all the images and guesses and rebellions that wrongly perceive your reality.

I have now read all of Almaas' books. Of all the living persons that I count as Spirit guides, he sits on the front row of my meditative council. And this book has been for me one of his best, if not the best of the lot. And you can read it without having read the others. In fact, it is one of the most accessible. It is a series of sermonic talks that he gave to his advanced students, followed by their questions and his answers. Depending on where you are in your journey, some things may seem cryptic, but many things will surely resonate and/or carry you into some new place.

Furthermore, this book may be the most Christian of all his books. He takes explicit Christian symbols and explores them. He begins the book sermonizing on the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit" and "Blessed are the pure in heart." One of my favorite spins is the one he does on "Blessed are the Meek." He suggests that "meek" does not mean knuckling under to authoritarian humans, but being vulnerable – vulnerable to other persons, but also vulnerable to Reality. He points out that the human is physically a vulnerable animal, without horns or claws. Humans are also vulnerable emotionally, and in our deepest sensibilities. This is not a flaw. This is our greatness. If we are fully vulnerable, fully open to Reality, we inherit the planet, we inherit our true calling, we realize our best-case scenario.

Another favorite chapter is "The Guest Arrives only at Night," which reminds me of John of the Cross and his "Dark Night of the Soul." This chapter is a reflection on a poem that Almaas has written. When we are absolutely poor, our mind annihilated in the heart and the heart empty, then we can experience the arrival of the Beloved in the heart, the arrival of the Absolute God as a devotional Presence.

It would take a series of long sermons to fully tell what this book has meant to me. And only then could I begin to tell about my critique of Almaas. Perhaps my rewording of Almaas' insights includes my critique. Anyhow, I will conclude my review with some sermonizing of my own in dialogue with Almaas' last chapter "Divine Quintessence."

The Quintessence of Reality with a capital "R" is both a void and a fullness, both an unmanifest mysteriousness and a manifest every-thing-ness. The Quintessence of Reality is experienced not as a rationally ordered continuum of movement down an objective line of past/present/future. But time itself is a manifestation of this Quintessence. As an

analogy, consider a movie being projected on a screen. Individual frames of creation hit the screen with spaces of void between them. We imagine this to be an approximation of the continuous flow of Reality. But let us imagine that the Quintessence of Reality is more like that movie projection of instantaneous frames. Reality manifests out of an Absolute Void frame by frame. And each frame returns to the Absolute Void. Our typically assumed solid continuum of time is only an impression in our consciousness. The Reality we face is inclusive frames or flashes – manifesting from and disappearing into the Quintessence of Reality.

Our consciousness of our own consciousness can be conscious of this Quintessence of Reality. We can journey beyond all our images of solidity and continuity into a direct experience of that Void out of which every instant of Reality is emerging and returning. We know that our own manifestation is bounded by our birth and our death. We know that each imagined piece or period of our lives has a beginning and an end. So it is only a further depth in our noticing when we see that everything is manifesting instantaneously and ending instantaneously. We can journey beyond all our solid images of enduring reality to that place of unsolidness, that place of timelessness, that place of Now where Absolute Mystery is manifesting mysteriously from the Absolute NO-THING-NESS into the Absolute EVERY-THING-NESS in which we share as a co-creating wonder.

And having journeyed to that place where our consciousness itself disappears into nothingness as well as manifests for us from that same nothingness, we can feel this GRAND VOID of BEING at our back, so to speak. We can turn our back to the Void and allow the gaze of our conscious to notice the whole universal manifesting taking place all around us, and in us, and through us. We can see all this manifesting with a sense of clarity that is unmarred by our mental concepts. We can see our own beings as one with all this manifesting. We can see that our own choices can be aligned with this total manifesting. Or contrarily, we can attempt to fight against such alignment. It is a losing fight, for this manifesting Reality is all powerful, including our own small portion of power. So let us suppose that we employ our own small portion of power in alignment with this total manifesting. Then we can see that we join Reality in manifesting what Reality will manifest next.

There is a verse in John's gospel in which Jesus says, "My Father is working, and I am working." I

take this verse to be a reflection of that Gospel writer's consciousness of the experience that Almaas and I have attempted to describe. Jesus in the New Testament literature is a portrait of what each of us are, in our full awareness of who we are. "The Absolute Father/Mother and I are one" need not mean that my puny ego is the Almighty Reality. Rather, my puny ego is but an illusion of my own invention. The TRUE ME is a manifestation of the Quintessence of Reality that can be aligned with that Reality in co-creation of what Reality, in its manifestation, will be next.

If I chose to separate myself from all this manifesting, to be my own invention in opposition to this Wholeness, I have committed the original fault, dramatized in the story of Adam and Eve. In an earlier chapter, "The Basic Fault and the Resurrection," Almaas describes how we have all, early in our lives, fallen into this Basic Fault, and how we can be delivered from it, and how this deliverance (or Resurrection) is the place where Christianity has made its major contribution to the religious treasury.

Relational Reality
New Discoveries of Interrelatedness
That are Transforming the Modern World
 Charlene Spretnak
 Green Horizon Books: 2011

I have found that reading Spretnak's books is a refreshing and illuminating experience. This latest book is no exception. She continues to combine a deeply existential, ecological, and feminist perspective with a broad, far-reaching scholarship. She tells you about things you never heard of, and joins them to the human challenges that you care about.

If you are concerned about deep philosophical and religious matters, you can get away with reading only the opening and closing chapters of this book: Chapter 1—Relational Revelations and Chapter 6—Stepping Up. But since the healing angels (like the devils) are in the details, you may also want to work your way through: Chapter 2—The Relational Shift in Education and Parenting, Chapter 3—The Relational Shift in Health and Healthcare, Chapter 4—The Relational Shift in Community Design and Architecture, and Chapter 5—The Relational Shift in The Economy.

The core generative idea in all these chapters is the shift (needed and also taking place) from an overly individualistic and mechanical mode of perception toward a mode of seeing things that is intimate, empathetic, interactively human and natural. Like all of her books, this one is deeply ecological, nature loving, and bioregional. It is

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passionate about a sense of place in the natural world and a deep transformation of our human ways of aligning with the Wholeness of which humans are part.

Here are some highlights: She explains why parents of small children need to provide these developing minds with relationships with real human beings and with nature, protecting them from the false colors and impressions of the TV and computer screen pixels. Teenagers and adults also need education that features intimate relations with teachers, and cooperative, rather than competitive, associations with peers. Health and healthcare need to move beyond treating the bodymind as a machine and notice the healing richness of intimate relations, laughter, music, nature, meditation, and treatments tailored to the complexity of each person. The relations of each body to the whole environment with all its gifts and pollutions make diagnosis and treatment more complex. She describes the principles of a new interdisciplinary field of Ecological Medicine. Architecture and urban planning are also moving beyond the ugly rectangular box without relations of beauty to nature and people. And last but not least, her treatment of the relational shift in the economy deals with everything from local community empowerment to global systems that yoke us well with the natural planet and with one another. The fullness of this book cannot be absorbed in one sitting, but it is worth the time to feel the power of all these encouraging stories and details that tell us specifically how to live better.

reviews by Alan Richard

Thinking as a Spiritual Exercise

Capitalism and Religion

The Price of Piety

Philip Goodchild

Routledge, 2002

Theology of Money

Philip Goodchild

Duke University Press, 2006



Philip Goodchild is professor of Religion and Philosophy at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. Professor Goodchild's first intellectual passion was theoretical physics, but after spending time with Britain's "Time for God" program doing voluntary work in the inner city area of Walsall, his attention shifted to questions about the nature of life beyond the purely physical. Early influences included the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity, John Howard Yoder's politics of Jesus, and Jung's depth psychology. During his graduate

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tenure at Lancaster University, he became interested in the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and his early published work made major contributions to the interpretation of Deleuze's thought. As he was awakening to the intersection between our ecological and economic crises, he began developing the theological investigations that issued in the two books reviewed here. Prof. Goodchild's **Capitalism and Religion** and **Theology of Money** are written to shake us out of our familiar thinking and open us to what matters to us ultimately, whatever our story. These theoretically related books provide new and provocative interpretations of economics, religion, and thinking in a dense prose that at times verges on poetry without losing its rigor, invoking the awe and wonder that alone give rise to real thinking.

In **Capitalism and Religion**, Goodchild argues that Western piety directs attention toward abstract concepts that are distinct, familiar, easily remembered, and already widely shared at the expense of context, singularity, and mystery. Goodchild explains how this piety, this way of focusing honor and attention, arose out of the expanded trade in commodities that emerged in the Greek peninsula between the 7th and the 5th centuries BCE, and became the foundation of Greek philosophical reason. Modern reason, its latest form, can focus sharply on specific problems like markets, employment, or monetized economic growth, but ignores or minimizes the complex interdependencies of the real people whom it reduces to free, self-interested actors, the actual conditions under which markets are produced and sustained, and the natural and social contexts in which they are nested. It has given rise to ecological and economic crises and its power to direct attention overrides any concern we might have about them. Goodchild looks to Kierkegaard to show how true rational passion lies in the "venture" beyond conceptual clarity into mystery that matters to us infinitely. Starting here, Goodchild sketches out a way of paying attention to what demands attention despite our attempts at diversion or denial, a thinking process that can open us to an experience of awe and wonder. Suffering is an example of an experience that demands attention in this way despite our attempts at distraction and denial: it points us to the unconditioned in experience. Goodchild concludes the book by offering examples of paradoxical concepts that can evoke experiences of this unconditioned depth of reality we may call "God." Attention to these experiences may have the power to correct the excesses of a piety that has led us to the brink of ecological and economic catastrophe.

In **Theology of Money**, Goodchild builds on the foundation laid in *Capitalism and Religion*. Goodchild argues that the 17th century invention of modern debt money and central banks refocused our time, attention, and devotion on the structure of accounting, which is the essence of modern money. The result is an ethics of self-mastery and prudence that obscures our connection to other people, animals, and plants and forgets the costs that our apparent prudence shifts to others. But his critique is not a mere rejection of money. Rather, he shows how value creation and credit underlie the structure of money. He links value creation to the experience of wonder and awe, and credit to the experience of trust and fidelity. But he does not stop there. He concludes the book by discussing how we might build institutions that support true value and credit alongside current financial institutions, in order to more effectively direct financial resources to what matters.

While I was visiting England in May of this year, Prof. Goodchild kindly granted me an interview in which he offered a hint of the future direction of his work. "I'm not so interested in what people *project* as their God," he told me. "I'm interested in the ways reality and life impinge on human experience." For him, this means being interested in reason, not as a system of logic but as a spiritual exercise. "I'm working on a book at the moment which is on philosophy as a spiritual exercise and it is constructed as a sort of symposium, an experiment where people think together, they present papers to each other on what it is to do philosophy as a spiritual exercise, and instead of agreeing or disagreeing they try to enter into the experience of someone else's thinking, resonate with it, to respond to it, and to catalyze it further, so that as a group, we are mutually catalyzing each other's thoughts." I recommend these two books to anyone interested in a serious philosophical approach to our current economic crisis, and I look forward to encountering Prof. Goodchild's thought again in this new project.

(If you wish to receive a complete transcript of the two-hour interview with Prof. Goodchild, please send your request to alanrichard@cableone.net)



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Years ago we adopted as our philosophy of benevolence these thoughts from an *Utne Reader* which outlined **principles for the art of philanthropy** for people of ordinary means as well as the wealthy. Here are some of those principles:

- Support really good people who have a total commitment to doing good in the world and who are willing to put their asses on the line to do it.
- Seek out originality and imagination.
- Support unpopular truths.
- Fund players with a long view.
- Support people no one else is supporting.
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- Fund those attacking root causes and trying to change the system.
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