

# REALISTIC LIVING

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Egypt. She became Julius Caesar's lover in hope of ruling the world with him. When he was assassinated, she chose the Roman General Antony as her next hope of world queendom. She and Antony were defeated by Octavian who became Caesar Augustus, whose number of marble statues has never been and will surely never be exceeded. His power, his face, his accomplishments for relative social good, and the acceptance of his forced rule have seldom been equaled. Perhaps photography has allowed the face of Mao Zedong to be a bit more widely seen by a huge population. Both of these men exemplify how the solidarity of a vast civilization can be achieved by an exceedingly competent megalomaniac.

Democracy has limited but not ended megalomania. Richard Nixon, a far more intelligent and innovative leader than the typical 21st century Republican, was, nevertheless, both energized and brought down by his megalomania. Franklin D. Roosevelt was a remarkably competent and progressive presence whose achievements in war and domestic reorganization justify his place of honor among US citizens. Yet as we look closely at his life, his five terms in office, his comfort with power and with wielding power, and his talent for mobilizing a population, we can place him among the other successful megalomaniacs in the history of civilization. Perhaps Roosevelt belongs in the assembly of "good kings" rather than in whatever group of "bad kings" we place Hitler, Stalin, Caligula, and a host of others. Male or female, for good or for ill, all these famous wielders of power illustrate that the social mode called "civilization" encourages megalomania.

The more ordinary members of a civilization tend to honor megalomania, identify with it, and derive a sense of personal worth and power from supporting it. Furthermore, megalomania shows its face in our social customs of valuing competition over cooperation, valuing male rule rather than male/female balance, and valuing social ladder climbing rather than appropriate vocation. And there is surely megalomania in the passion for excessive wealth and in achieving celebrity and notoriety of all kinds. Civilization and megalomania are companion concepts. Wherever there is a topdown organization of social relations, megalomania will appear in the mix.

## Megalomania

a thank-you note to  
John Dominic Crossan  
By Gene Marshall



Alexandros/o Megas was the name given to the Greek conqueror we remember as Alexander, the Great. The New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan points out that the Greek word for "great" is the first Greek root in "megalomania."<sup>1</sup> Alexander was indeed a megalomaniac, a competent and successful one. Without him we might never have heard of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and the New Testament might not have been written in Greek. However indebted to Alexander we may feel, he was and is a portrait of what megalomania looks like.

Similarly addicted to boundless greatness were the competent and famous Roman emperors Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar, after whom our July and August are named. Their accomplishments made Roman Civilization one of the wonders in the history of civilization. And their stories dramatize how the social order we call "civilization" has depended for its success on competent, dedicated megalomaniacs.

Cleopatra, who was one of the most intelligent and competent female rulers of all time, also provides a story of megalomania. She wisely and boldly arranged for her potentially murderous and less competent brother to be killed so she could rule

<sup>1</sup> Crossan, John Dominic and Reed, Jonathan L., *In Search of Paul* (New York, Harper Collins: 2004) page 126.

In the current United States we claim to honor democracy, yet we tolerate the Koch brothers and other billionaires in their arrogant passion to buy our offices of leadership with their excessive wealth. Currently, over half of the voting citizens of the relatively moderate state of Wisconsin supported the reactionary and blatant megalomania of Governor Walker. Indeed, a majority of US citizens have not yet grasped that a full commitment to democracy means putting an end to megalomania, *which includes putting an end to civilization*. Our clear realistic challenge is not to find a new Roosevelt to save us, but to work together to build something better than civilization. We even have the following teaching of Jesus to encourage us toward living our lives in a post-civilizational manner:

You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and the great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you: among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all. (Mark 10: 42-44 New English)

Jesus and his most enlightened followers have exemplified a new kind of power, the power of servanthood, a style of solidarity with others that allows each to creatively serve in accord with his or her consciousness, talents, and opportunities without indulging in megalomania or in seeking leadership from a megalomaniac who is willing to make all the big decisions for us “pitiful peons” in social responsibility. Servant leadership allows everyone to be totally responsible for everything without any need for anyone to possess megalomaniacal power.

And when we say “responsible for everything” we mean every human being in every social arrangement. We mean every ecosystem of living beings in every geographical region of the entire planet Earth. We do not have to be megalomaniacs to fight for the big shift – the passing away of the social mode of civilization that ravages the planet as it also ravages the men, women, and children who do not belong to civilization’s ruling classes.

Roles of social power there will always be, even in a fully democratic and ecologically savvy post-civilization. Let us consider, however, that we could structure those social power positions as task forces of men and women who work together for the needs of all rather than as status positions for indulging individual megalomania. Yes, this is a huge revolution in social practice. To achieve this change will require a hard fight against great wealth and powerful lovers of and indulgers in megalomania. A post-megalomaniacal world will

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mean the transformation of everything we have done within the social mode we have called “civilization.”

Post-civilization requires a post-megalomaniacal attitude in the lives of both those who play roles of much social power and those who operate with only a little social power. It means that *serving* rather than *being served* takes over our imaginations. It means seeing that everyone serving results in everyone being served. It means that competition for the most favored positions of being served results in many people not being served. It means that a lot of people not being served in their basic needs and dignity results in no one being served – that rich and poor, weak and powerful enter into the pits of doom together. Civilization with its inevitable megalomania is no longer a sustainable form of social organization.

Jesus called his experience of a doom-destined social world “Satan’s Kingdom.” He called the alternative social organization of humans “The Kingdom of God.” Yes, that coming Kingdom was coming on Earth, not in some other cosmos. That Kingdom was and is the reign in our inner lives and outward actions of a happy servanthood of the Reality that posits us in being. We do not have to wait on the full coming of this “Commonwealth of Realism.” We can manifest it today in our own lives and in the group life we create among those with whom we share this vision and this calling. So why don’t we simply get with it – without megalomania, work together to dismantle civilization, build its viable replacement, and reconstruct our religious practices for that coming world.



## Great Disappointment & Bodily Resurrection

on loving reality  
by Alan Richard

I am suspicious of two kinds of religious messages. One kind of message tells us that Ultimate Reality is not the author of our suffering but opposes it and in due time will clean up the world and make everything right. Following New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan, I call this kind of message the Great Cleanup. Another kind of message tells us that our lot in life is an expression of Ultimate Reality’s mysterious providence, and is to be endured with patience and acceptance. I call this kind of message Father

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Knows Best. Both of these messages ask us to choose between loving Ultimate Reality and changing the conditions that reproduce excess suffering. Although they are religious, they appear in secular as well as religious forms. In this article, I draw on the theological heritage of Realistic Living and my own experience to suggest a theological understanding that opposes these messages. Against the Great Cleanup, I offer a brief discussion of the Great Disappointment. Against Father Knows Best, I offer a personal witness and a slightly longer discussion of the Bodily Resurrection.

### *I. The Great Disappointment*

Early on October 24, 1844, thousands of believers stood in a field in Kansas where they'd been camping, some of them for months. Having sold all their possessions, they were waiting for Jesus to come in the clouds. They called themselves Millerites. A quarter century earlier, William Miller, an unschooled preacher in New York's burned-over district, had calculated the date of Christ's coming based on folk interpretation of Biblical events and timelines. The date had been progressively narrowed down to this day.

The sun rose. The sun set. No Jesus.

Among the Millerites, this day became known as The Great Disappointment.

Many of us have experienced our own Great Disappointments. Anyone who counts on his or her own version of the future is bound to experience them, and we have all counted on some version of a Great Cleanup that we have dreamed up. As future possibilities are whittled down to present actuality, I end up facing stuff I didn't expect and the absence of stuff I did expect. We have all waited for messiahs only to be left with nothing but fumbling improvisers. Someday, we tell ourselves, the right president will fix everything that has gone wrong and marginalize the political voices of greed and delusion. We end up with all-too-human politicians facing intransigent opposition. We have our mini-messiahs too: someday I will have that house on the lake and get away from it all; someday, I will retire and no longer work endlessly for a boss who doesn't appreciate or reward my labor; someday, I will find the perfect partner and we'll live happily ever after. These wish-dreams turn us into obedient servants who fail to revolt against their masters because they expect their obedience to be richly rewarded in some indefinite future. The Great Disappointment robs us of all of these dreams, and frees us to grapple with our own lives here and now.

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I am grateful for the Great Disappointment. In fact, I see the Great Disappointment as the empty space that makes room for the real messiah. In his essay "The Christ of History," Joe Mathews contrasts the Christ of History with the Christ of Everyman. The Christ of Everyman is the expectation that some force outside me and bigger than me will bring about a better world because I can't stand to imagine the alternative. The Christ of Everyman is the change of heart I imagine my boss will someday have, prompting him or her to acknowledge or promote me, or the day when the working people of the world will unite, get rid of all the bad guys, and clear the way for the good guys, like them and me, to run things. The Christ of History, on the other hand, is the messiah whose message is that "there is no messiah, never has been and never will be, and I am he." According to Mathews, the Christ of Everyman is the messiah that the people around Jesus wanted him to be, and the Christ of History is the messiah he turned out to be. The first is the messiah of the Great Cleanup. The second is a messiah who, though courageously taking up the cause of the poor and oppressed, is executed as a common criminal. The Great Disappointment that happens when the illusion of the first gives way to the reality of the second is an invitation to live out of our own present lives rather than out of expectations that serve as an escape from our lives.

### *II. The Bodily Resurrection*

The Great Disappointment makes room for the Christ of History. Taken by itself, however, it tends to function as a version of the Father Knows Best message. The disciples give up Jesus' foolishness about the poor inheriting the earth and return to a sensible quiet life of fishing. Revolutionaries give up the struggle against inequality and ecological destruction, returning to their cubicles and the glow of their television sets. But this message doesn't correspond to Mathews' account of the Christ of History, the story told by Paul and the gospel writers, or my own experience. The Christian story insists on tying the death of Jesus to Bodily Resurrection. As the story goes, Reality raises the executed rebel and organizer from the dead, makes him appear to his students and friends, fills them with the same Spirit of Awe that animated him, and lives again as a community of Awed liberators. This community preaches his message of impending doom to those who think they're in charge and good news to those who don't. They build parallel social structures that demonstrate at least an attenuation of and at most

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an alternative to the rigid top-down hierarchy of Rome. They practice a religious inclusion that eventually reaches far beyond that practiced by Jesus himself, embracing Gentiles as well as the “prostitutes and tax collectors” and “sinners” Jesus had counted among his friends. They do all of this, not as mere students of Jesus of Nazareth, but as people who have died to their own social roles and habits, their own “selves,” and who now live as Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ, they go further and do more than Jesus of Nazareth ever could.

The question of the “something more” that links the Great Disappointment to a Bodily Resurrection that doesn’t reduce to another version of the Great Cleanup message is especially salient to people whom our society systematically subjects to cruel or unjust treatment. Everyone faces moments of hopeless resignation, but hopeless resignation is a constant temptation for oppressed people because society’s structures seem to “prove” the truth of the disempowering stories told about them. In the 1950s, for instance, the very real depression that women experienced because of their diminished life opportunities, their long hours of financially uncompensated work, and the blame foisted on them in the popular press for emasculating their husbands and sons was treated by a flourishing psychiatric industry that interpreted this depression as proof of women’s biological vulnerability. This interpretation justified their subjection to electroshock therapy and emotionally deadening drugs. The behavior resulting from this treatment became additional evidence proving their unfitness for high-level responsibilities in the workforce. No wonder that many women in this period believed themselves capable of little outside their household duties. Today, similar disempowering stories take the form of advice to “be real” or “be grateful for what you have” and statements like “you can’t fight reality because reality always wins.” These messages tell oppressed people that peace comes from accepting their place in the natural order of things and that suffering results from their futile and misguided rebellion against the existing order. Too often, this advice is buttressed by the language of religion. But even in the absence of divine punishment, karma, or heavenly reward, the oppressed are counseled to be patient and realistic, meaning that all attempts to radically change their circumstances are delusional.

I experienced the oppressive use of such “realism” early in my adult life, and I experienced it giving way to a “something more” that I think can shed a little light on the Bodily Resurrection. After coming out as gay in the late 1970s, I was part of a genuinely loving if flawed community of lesbians

and gay men who were forming new kinds of families, businesses, and cultural institutions to provide the mutual support that the straight world would not provide for them. The vision of self-acceptance that inspired us was revolutionary, but we placed far too much trust in the American dream and our eventual integration into it. Within a few years, this community was subjected to a horror I cannot adequately describe. One after another of the male friends, lovers, and community leaders with whom I had become in some way connected, and with whom I could be myself without hiding, began to sicken and die until everyone I’d known in those early years was dead. Many became quite disfigured before they died. They developed ugly purple blotches on their legs, arms. Bodybuilders shrunk into wrinkled, 95-pound skeletons almost overnight. They developed AIDS dementia, a condition that leads to paranoia, withdrawal, sudden outbursts of violence, confusion, and finally a mute near-vegetative state. By the mid-1980s, such horror became routine. The sight of purple blotches and sunken eyes became an everyday occurrence. Meanwhile, the outside world turned away. Gay men became the objects of renewed fear, disgust, and moral condemnation. “The poor homosexuals,” declared Pat Buchanan, Ronald Reagan’s Chief of Communications, “they have declared war upon nature, and now nature is extracting an awful retribution.” In news stories, which carefully distinguished gay men with AIDS from “innocent victims” of AIDS, we were portrayed as casually murderous, seductive, and doomed narcissists. Articles in medical journals speculated about how gay sex helped the AIDS virus get past the body’s defenses, or helped it move more readily from body to body. When gay people asked the government and medical institutions to prioritize AIDS research or prevention efforts, we appeared to others and often even to ourselves to be fighting reality. In Ronald Reagan’s first public statement about AIDS, seven years and over 10,000 deaths into the epidemic, he said “let’s be honest with ourselves, AIDS information cannot be what some call ‘value neutral.’ After all, when it comes to preventing AIDS, don’t medicine and morality teach the same lessons?” Those of us who struggled to remain faithful to a positive vision of liberated sexuality and community were subdued. Reality itself seemed to have defeated that vision. Realistically, we told ourselves and were told by our gay and straight friends, all we could do was to love each other and grieve. “Father Knows Best.”

But the lives and deaths of so many people who



had touched us deeply and – yes – bodily were changing us. Love, sadness, and disappointment, as genuine as these were, began to seem inadequate words for what was happening to us. As Debra Gould suggests in *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT-UP's Fight Against AIDS*, we felt something more, something that remained with us after love, sadness, and disappointment had all been expressed. A few people found words to express and focus this “something more” much earlier than the rest of us. Larry Kramer was one of them. He had never been interested in political activism until his housemates and friends began to become ill in 1981. Although his first response was to organize Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) to deliver services to people who were sick, the acceleration of fatalities in his own personal circle and the tepid response of either government or existing gay leadership soon incited him to move more forcefully. His 1983 article “1,112 and Counting” was, in the words of Randy Shilts in *The Band Played On*, a grenade tossed into a foxhole of denial. It combined unstinting honesty about our situation with a call to refuse resignation in favor of rage and action. “If this article doesn't scare the shit out of you,” he wrote, “we're in real trouble. If this article doesn't rouse you to anger, fury, rage, and action, gay men may have no future on this earth.” “1,112 and Counting” rubbed our faces in the rapid accumulation of cases and the near 100% fatality rate. It told us that AIDS patients had nothing in common other than “one wrong fuck,” that many and perhaps most sexually active gay men in major cities were already exposed, and that no concerted effort to address AIDS was on the government's or the gay establishment's horizon. It closed with a call for volunteers to participate in “demonstrations of civil disobedience” involving risk of arrest. Many people initially ridiculed and shunned Larry for what he was saying. His words gained credibility, however, as chronic exposure to the suffering and death of so many intimate friends and lovers generated an intense background of feeling that was impossible to ignore or adequately express in the language of grief. By the time I moved to upstate New York in 1988, the sick and the dying had started demanding solidarity rather than sympathy. Many were refusing the victim role and beginning to speak with a bold and even absurd authority. An organization had coalesced around Larry's call and it had already conducted two demonstrations on Wall Street resulting in over 100 arrests, successfully disrupting the New York Stock Exchange. Later that year, it successfully shut down the Food and Drug Administration for a day. The organization was called the AIDS Coalition to

Unleash Power (ACT-UP). Like many other gay men in New York and elsewhere, I joined a burgeoning chapter, became an activist, and was one of hundreds who was arrested in a demonstration of thousands at the National Institutes of Health in Washington D.C.

ACT-UP was not conventionally realistic. Its ability to “unleash power” and to force change in Food and Drug Administration (FDA) policy, National Institutes of Health protocols, and public attitudes toward sexuality and health did not result from favorable social or personal circumstances. Those of us who joined knew we could not rely on the natural course of things or on the expertise of our leaders to save us. But the lives and deaths of our lovers and friends had become entangled in our own lives. They would not let us go. Our choice was becoming clear. We could pretend that our memorial services brought closure and spend the rest of our lives fleeing the images, sensations, and words that kept returning or we could let these images, sensations, and words fuel a struggle against the greed, indifference, and victim images that had conspired to kill our lovers and friends. As we discerned the contours of this decision, we interrupted or refocused careers as advertising executives, stockbrokers, commercial artists, and, in my case, academics, in order to engage in direct action to change the way AIDS was addressed. Many of us walked away from lives of economic security. We found the courage to confront the structures of power, the concrete violence of police batons, pepper spray, and weaponized police horses, and hostility from family members, co-workers, and religious leaders in our own faith traditions. Some members who reached the last stages of AIDS were even determined to place their own corpses at the service of the movement. ACT-UP members demanded that their bodies and their ashes be thrown on the white house lawn or left on the steps of the federal buildings, and when we could comply with their demands, we did. The more that people living with AIDS refused to suffer and die in silence and obscurity, the less those of us not bearing that burden could evade their call to us with comforting symbols of peace and closure. Their determination to live without illusion or resignation continued to move us beyond the grave, and the movement they inspired in us gave a number of gifts to the world. These include effective HIV drug combinations that extend life and, by reducing viral load, discourage new infections. They include needle exchange programs, treatments for infections common among women with HIV, and more funding for addressing the AIDS crisis than anyone thought

was politically possible in 1987. The movement also changed us forever. We are not the same people we were before the lives and deaths of these lovers and warriors transformed us. We are less able to keep turning away from people who suffer systematic oppression, and less attached to our unjust social system. We can't go back to fishing.

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When Jesus was executed, his disciples' false expectations of an immanent Great Cleanup were shattered, just as those of the Millerites were shattered on that morning in 1844 when he failed to come down from the sky, and just as those of the gay and lesbian community were shattered when AIDS lifted a facade of tolerance to show us the greed, indifference, and bad faith at the heart of the American dream. They all experienced the Great Disappointment. Of course, some of Jesus' disciples clung to expectations of the Great Cleanup. After all, illusion is comforting and the Great Cleanup can always be delayed. Perhaps some of them left the movement behind forever. But some of them sensed that something more was happening to them, and they let this something more express itself in an intensification of Jesus' work and in the rituals and poetry that resonated with it. Some people in the lesbian and gay community also followed those first two paths, but some let the lives and untimely deaths of friends and comrades inhabit their own lives and take those lives in unexpected directions. These people – Jesus followers, radical gay and lesbian activists, radical environmentalists, radical feminists, economic revolutionaries, and so on – have rubbed societies' noses in the horror of the circumstances of hierarchy, exclusion, and unnecessary death. We have insisted that Father does not Know Best because we sense in our own bodies an unwillingness to let the status quo be, and a sense that this unwillingness is not just our own idea but is shaped by the lives and deaths of these others. We have discovered that, although the circumstances against which we struggle have taken the lives of many and might take our own, relational Reality that connects us all to one another raises us up here and now in this material world, and transforms our lives and deaths into a force with the power to change oppressive circumstances. We have experienced the Bodily Resurrection, and there is no turning back.



## The Theology of Realistic Living

foundational thought  
by Gene Marshall

"The theology of Realistic Living" has two meanings: (1) the theological foundations of the nonprofit organization called Realistic Living, founded in 1983 by Joyce and Gene Marshall and our first board member Marilyn McCord, and (2) the theological foundations for the realistic living of our lives in this era of social history.

In this essay, I will focus on the first of these meanings, but the second meaning will also be present. "Realistic Living" is a secular name for Holy Spirit, and "Holy Spirit" is the Christian term for the dynamics of realistic living. Realistic living means manifesting the profound humanness of Trust, Love and Freedom.

I will discuss "The Theology of Realistic Living" in three ways: past, present, and future.

### Past: The Theological Roots of Realistic Living

Realistic Living, the organization, is a direct descendent of the work of the Order:Ecumenical founded by Joseph Wesley Mathews and his colleagues. Joe Mathews was a student and friend of H. Richard Niebuhr who was also Joe's doctoral advisor. The theological thought of this younger of the two Niebuhr brothers is crystalized in an essay that he first entitled "The Nature and Existence of God" and later retitled "Faith in Gods and in God." This topic was further elaborated in a brief but classic book *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. In the second essay of the November 2011 RL Journal, I summarized that book. No other book is more important than this one for understanding the theological perspective that has shaped Realistic Living, the organization. The clarification of radical monotheism is also basic for the future of a viable Christianity, as well as a viable Judaism and Islam. It is a perspective that has been mostly misunderstood in much of the theology written in the 21st Century.

Not only was Joe Mathews grounded in Niebuhr's radical monotheism, he was also grounded in Søren Kierkegaard's existentialism. Niebuhr criticized SK for an "individualistic overemphasis." Niebuhr saw the communal nature of Christian practice more clearly than SK, or at least he saw that SK's appropriate passion for the individual person needed to be augmented by

a communal understanding and a thoroughgoing social ethics. Mathews agreed with Niebuhr on this, but like Kierkegaard, Joe was more dramatically evangelical than Niebuhr with regard to the transformation or healing of individual persons.

The theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer provided another key foundation for Mathews' theology. Bonhoeffer agreed with Niebuhr's communal emphasis, and carried it further in interpersonal intensity. Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* was a classic in Mathews' view. Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* was also crucial in Mathews' thinking.

Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich provided a secularity to 20th Century Theology not thoroughly embodied by Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer. Reading Niebuhr and Bonhoeffer requires a great deal of translation into contemporary thought for key terms like Christ, sin, grace, cross, resurrection, and others. Bultmann, a quintessential New Testament scholar, focused almost entirely on developing the tools to translate the biblical language into contemporary speech. Tillich picked up this Bultmannian emphasis and applied it to the entire history of church and society. Tillich brought theological reflection to more topics than most thinkers even want to consider. His voluminous writings remain eye-opening and enduringly relevant on topic after topic that comes up in ongoing theological and ethical discussion.

These five theologians gave Joe Mathews his theological perspective. He integrated their contributions for his own understanding and boiled down their breakthroughs into a weekend course entitled "Religious Studies One: The Twentieth Century Theological Revolution." This course was taught to tens of thousands of people, and many of us still vibrate from its impact. This course provided an easily intelligible way of appropriating the first-century Christian breakthrough in a 20th Century understanding. In the early days of the Realistic Living organization, our main focus was on updating and continuing to teach new versions of this course.

### **Present: How the Theology of Realistic Living has Moved Beyond Joe Mathews**

Mathews' life ended in June of 1977, over 35 years ago. Much water has passed under the bridge since then. Four topics, crucial for Christian theology and ethics, stand out: (1) feminism, (2) ecology, (3) interreligious dialogue, and (4) the impending end of civilization as a viable social organization.

#### **(1) feminism**

Joe Mathews was a feminist but in a somewhat moderate way. He did not appropriate the racial feminist thought of Mary Daly and many others who were better known later. He did not participate in the imperative to depart from the last fragments of patriarchy that have warped society and Christian churches for two thousand years. Mathews supported a lot of fresh air and responsibility for women, but he had yet to see some of the insidious subtleties of the patriarchal, patronal, topdown, hierarchical demeaning of women and women's experience that has come to light in recent decades. The ongoing exploration of this topic by the Realistic Living organization has been spelled out in Joyce's many book reviews on feminism and feminine authors as well as in her essay, "Patriarchy, Radical Feminism, & the Future of Christianity," in the November 2011 RL Journal.

#### **(2) ecology**

Joe Mathews had a down-to-Earth view of the human body and its roots in the natural world, but his ethics focused more on poverty, inequity among humans, economic tyranny, racism, nationalism, and other structural issues. The foolishness of humanity toward the natural planet and the crucial importance of the ecological transformation of every human function had not fully dawned for him. Ecology rose to importance for the Realistic Living organization in 1984 when Joyce and I and other members of our constituency were drawn to the bioregional movement. This entailed an expansion of our concept of community to include the animals, plants, water tables, soils, and geographical regions of Earth in our view of what "home" means. The centrality of human cities for mapping the Earth still has meaning, but we now have a newer sense of how planetary existence can be mapped. We now emphasize the natural regions within which our cities need to adapt and transform themselves. Also making a big impact on our theological thought and ethics have been the works of ecological authors like Arne Naess and Thomas Berry.

#### **(3) interreligious dialogue**

Joe Mathews resonated with Paul Tillich's discussion of the gifts of Buddhism and he favored a thoroughgoing interfaith fellowship in community development projects. The work he did on what he called the Ur-images of the various world cultures was also a big contribution to interreligious thinking. When Joe and his colleagues taught Christian theology in India, Hong Kong, Africa, Bolivia, and so on, Joe insisted

that we create respectful relations with the religious heritages of these non-Western cultures. In the ministries of Realistic Living we have continued to pursue and enrich this line of thinking. Especially strong has been our appropriation of the gifts of Buddhist meditation and Buddhist thought about the basic “non-self” of enlightened realization. We have come to see ever more clearly how a vital Next Christianity will live within an interreligious culture – that all vital religion is a finite human creation for accessing the profound humanness that all humans share in common. In this interreligious era we see proponents from every religion learning from all religions as a means of renewing their own religious practice.

#### **(4) the impending end of civilization as a viable social organization**

Joe Mathews still lived within an era of thought that saw creating a better civilization as the context for ethics. He spoke of a New Social Vehicle in very radical terms. He saw that the goal of full democracy was a big change from the patronal system and the patriarchal patterns that still dominated human society. But the social thought that now governs the ethical and theological perspectives of Realistic Living is even more radical. As we have explored solutions to the ecological crises called “global warming” or “climate change,” we have come to see that these solutions entail giving up the entire pattern of social organization we have called “civilization.” Civilization is inherently a social organization that is destructive of the natural Earth. Civilization is inherently topdown rather than local-out in its political, economic, and cultural organization. Many fields of social thought, from feminism to poverty, are coming together in the realization that a post-civilizational social order is needed for any realistic vision of a viable future for humanity.



#### **Future: Theology's Role within a Vital Next Christianity & within a Viable Post-Civilizational World**

So radical have been the transformations of our era that the meaning of “theology” itself has come into question. Etiologically, the word “theology” means the study of God. But the thoroughgoing critique of the two-story myth of heaven above and Earth beneath as a viable means of religious thought has raised in some minds the conclusion that theology itself is an obsolete pursuit. Certainly,

a clearer definition of theology is in order. If by the word “God” we simply mean Reality in its most inclusive, awesome, totally mysterious quality, then “theology” is simply “the study of Reality” with a capital “R” to distinguish what we are talking about from “realities” of a finite or partial nature. Christian theology is the study of Reality as Reality was revealed to BE through the breakthrough to which Jesus and his first interpreters bore witness. So, to do our “study of Reality” we must include our own personal witness to this Christ Jesus breakthrough in our own life experience. Unless the Christian “revelation” is a revelation of what is Real in our own lives, it cannot be the core happening upon which a meaningful theology can be built.

This context for theology/Real-ology includes the insight that a valid Christian theology is not an abstract philosophical pursuit by a systematic thinker who wishes to complete his or her rational worldview. Christian theology is not about a worldview, it is about witnessing to an event of revelation that happened to a community of people. Further, Christian theology is not an individual pursuit, even though theologians are individuals. The task of each individual Christian theologian is a communal task – the inclusive understanding of what has happened to a community of people who are witnessing to a particular historical event that is a revelation of Reality. And such theology is an ongoing task. It is never finished, because life moves on. Each new learning in each new moment of history must be integrated within this revealed perspective on Reality that governs the life of this specific communal body within which theologizing functions as an aid to total living.

Let us examine in more detail what the above rather formulaic statements mean. Every religion tends to have its revelatory events which call its members into being. This is certainly true of Judaism and its view of the Exodus. Islam sees the teachings of Mohammed as such an event. Buddhism refers to the Bodhi tree moment in the life of Siddhartha as the dawn of the Awake One or Buddha. Buddhists may not see themselves as doing theology, but they practice a form of theoretics or Dharma teaching which accomplishes the function that theology accomplishes in Christian communities.

So let's look at Christian theology within this universal sense of a rational theoretics about a revelatory event in relation to which a community of people are witnessing to what is Real. Jesus, his teachings, his healings, his quality of life, and his death are all interpreted through a “Real-ology”



that uses hot symbols like Messiah, cross, resurrection, and others. If we think of these interpretations not as dogmas or literal history, but as a witnessing to personal experience, we can better understand the power of these original interpretations of Jesus.

For example, the Christ or Messiah symbol was first used in the context of an apocalyptic understanding. The Messiah symbolism was understood as part of the vision of a “coming to be” that ends the age in which “wrong doing” reigns and begins an age in which “right doing” reigns. “Wrong doing” in this context means being out of sync with Reality, and “right doing” means being in sync with Reality (that is, in sync with God). So in calling Jesus “the Christ” these first witnesses meant that Jesus’ whole life, including his death, was the dawning of the age of “right doing” and the overturning of the age of “wrong doing.” Jesus was understood as a strong presence who had defeated “Satan” in his own life and in his relations with others in such a manner that the era of “wrong or sick doing” was overcome and people’s lives were turned loose from their slavery to “sick doing” and opened to a manifestation of the “healed doing” that is the true Realism (or love of God and neighbor).

Jesus himself did not take credit for these transformations. He constantly referred to the “faith” of the person being healed as the “cause” or “source” of the healing. By “faith” he meant something deeper than belief in a set of rational dogmas. “Faith” meant trust in Reality, including faith in Jesus as a definitive manifestation of realistic living. Such faith was manifested in Jesus’ life and inspired others to faith. We might say that Jesus’ living witness was contagious. Nevertheless, the healing of others was accomplished by the faith of the person being healed, not by the magic of the healer. Jesus demonstrated faith and called for it, but each healed person had to do his or her own answering of this call. Jesus was interpreted as the Christ because these healings were happening in his presence. Indeed, his life and his death set loose a whole generation of healings that went on healing others in every generation from then until now.

The continuing presence of these healings is the meaning of another hot symbol – “resurrection.” The healing presence of Jesus is not dead: it is alive in the community of healing that he occasioned. We must never overlook the simple truth that this community referred to itself as “the body of Christ” – that is, they were then and still are a physical/social body within down-to-Earth history that brings healing – defeating the era of inauthenticity and opening the era of authenticity. Jesus as Messiah is still alive. He is resurrected

indeed. And this resurrection is not a ghost or a psychic dream or a numinous vision. It is a body of flesh and blood – flesh and blood that is still being broken and eaten, spilled and drunk to bring healing to the life of humanity.

The symbolism of the cross is also key in this mix of theological interpretation. The symbol of the cross unleashes vast meanings quite beyond a mere report of Jesus’ mode of death. The cross means the emptying-out of the life of authentic humanity on behalf of those who are still trapped in “Satan’s kingdom” – that is, in inauthenticity. The rule of Jesus over our lives is his willingness to empty his life on our behalf and call us to the same self-emptying vocation. All status, all prosperity, all security, all talent, all body, and all blood goes into the breach of this self-emptying vocation on behalf of all. And this self-emptying symbolism points to a quality within Reality as a whole. Reality is poured out for us. Reality posits us in existence, provides for our sustenance, cleanses us from our illusions, and enables us to join the self-emptying process on behalf of all those who are still trapped in the illusions and obsessions that make people out of sync with Reality. In other words, Reality is forgiving. Reality accepts us home to realism without penalty for our many departures into the stupidity of illusion. According to the famous “prodigal son” parable (Luke 15), Reality runs down the road to greet us with welcome and celebration as soon as we give the first sign of our realization that being out of sync with Reality is not working for us. Jesus tells us this story and invites us to join him in living and telling this story to every human being on Earth.

The interpretation of Jesus’ life, teachings, and death though the symbols of Messiah, cross, and resurrection still constitute the cornerstone of a vital Christian theology. Our ongoing theological thought on the wide range of other topics is but an application of this core dawning about the nature of Reality and the essence of realistic living.

As an example, let us examine the contemporary issue of the equality of women and men. The male-dominating patronal patterns of the Roman Empire and within first century Judaism did not support equality for women. But within the original community created by the Jesus-as-Christ breakthrough there is neither rich nor poor, master nor slave, man nor woman. Everyone is viewed as an offspring of the same Reality with the same value before Reality. Such a view opened fresh air for women, who had been grievously oppressed in the patriarchal world. This equality was not entirely absent in following centuries of Christian living, but it was already deeply eclipsed by the



accommodations with Roman culture made by late first and second century Christians. Nevertheless, it remains true that the view of Reality revealed in the Christian breakthrough supports the equality of men and women. It is also true that this basic breakthrough frequently moderated the inherited patriarchy during the Middle Ages. The flaring forth of women's liberation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is consistent with the fresh flaring forth of the original Christian impulse.

Similarly, the challenge of our current ecological crisis is also seen through the lens of the original Christian breakthrough and its ancient Jewish origins. Even though our radical ecological crisis was not experienced in those ancient times, we find in the heart of this heritage the view that nature is holy, part of what Holy Reality posits in being. The soils and plants and animals are all here for their own benefit as well as poured out for our companionship and feeding. Each grain of sand or compost or leaf or hair or entire species is a holy object supported and poured out as an expression of the love of Reality for all aspects of what is Real. From this perspective, humanity is not the center-of-value in terms of which all insects, spiders, worms, mushrooms, fruits, and animals are to be judged. The true source of judgment with regard to these companions of ours is the Reality that posits them in existence. Using the old mythic language: the "judgment of Reality" that nature is "good" means that nature is exactly what is needed, without the least modification in terms of what humanity wants or does not want. Nature is poured out in benefit of humanity, but humanity is also poured out in benefit of all things. For humans to be willing to participate in this pouring out is to be in sync with Reality. The call of Reality is for us (1) to gratefully receive our lives as sustained by the pouring out of all things and (2) to join in the great drama of "pouring out" in the service of all things.

In conclusion, the theology of a Next Christianity will be our reasoned witness in relation to how this Reality-inspired pouring-out-of-life can be appropriately lived in the 21st Century. As the Gospel of John put it, Jesus showed us the essence of "The Truth, the Way, and the Life" We, however, need to creatively think through what that primal essence means for each new generation. This thinking through defines the meaning of the term "Christian theology."

So what is theology's role within a vital Next Christianity and within a viable post-civilizational world? It is to see our pressing challenges through the lens of the basic Christ-Jesus breakthrough and then creatively interpret and live our current

challenges from that point of view. Such theology is a dialogue with every historical event, every other religious community, every insight that crops up from any source. Christian theology is not a fixed set of doctrines. It is an ongoing invention of fresh understanding of this religious community's grand heritage and of the fresh communication of this Christ-Jesus Way within our era and our moments of actual living.

## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

### NOVELS

*Our Mutual Friend*  
by Charles Dickens



I would never have tackled this novel if my daughter hadn't given it to us for Christmas and kept asking if we had read it. So when we needed a good book to read aloud in the spring, Gene and I began *Our Mutual Friend*. What a treat! I am amazed by any novelist's ability to create an array of characters and circumstances and then weave them all together in surprising ways. Dickens not only does this with great skill; he is also a caustic satirist of great humor, an absolute genius of character study, and a spirited social critic to boot. When the wicked finally get their comeuppance, the Dickens characters who apply the verbal medicine do so with an articulate fervor that is deeply satisfying. Not always an easy read, this book is definitely worth the effort.

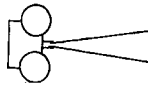
*Ivanhoe*  
by Sir Walter Scott

*Ivanhoe* was yet another book my daughter said we needed to fill out our literary experience. I had seen the Elizabeth Taylor/Robert Taylor film in the 40s (saw it again recently; it was really bad) and of course I knew the Robin Hood legend. I discovered that Scott, like Dickens, creates characters with depth – even his villains are not all evil – and the most heroic is the Jewess, Rebecca. Key to this story is the attempt of John to wrest the throne from his elder brother, King Richard the Lion-Hearted. (They are the offspring of Eleanor and Henry featured in *The Lion in Winter*). Saxon-bred Ivanhoe joins Richard's forces against his father's wishes. His father also messes up Ivanhoe's plans to wed his love, Rowena. There is lots of familial infighting. There are disguises, jousting tournaments, tensions between Saxons and Normans, Jewish prejudice, and the heroine is very nearly burned at the stake. Truth and honor are upheld in inspiring language.

*Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*

by Mark Twain

I am so grateful that this third book was thrust upon us by my insistent daughter. I knew only that the peasant girl, Joan of Arc, led the French troops to oust the English and that she was eventually burned at the stake. Twain has told her story so beautifully that its power is inescapable. In his greatest book (the book the author himself best loved) he creates a character, Joan's page and secretary, who narrates the events which Twain spent twelve years researching. In the midst of the Hundred Years War with England, France was desolated and the French King ready to flee. Seventeen-year-old Joan saw visions from saints who told her to lead France to victory over oppressive England. Never having even seen troops, never having ridden a horse, she followed the direction of her voices and convinced the king to give her command over the French army which she led with amazing skill, turning the war around, and saving the nation of France. Tragically, when she was captured by the Burgundians and sold to the English, the King did nothing to rescue her, and she was executed. Reading this stunning novel which is based heavily on historical records, you can see why Twain puts Joan right up there with Jesus. Do yourself the favor of reading this book.

**MOVIES**

**Argo** is based on the actual dramatic and secret CIA rescue that took place in the midst of the 1979 hostage crisis in Iran. If you recall, Jimmy Carter was president and probably lost the 1980 election to Reagan because the hostages weren't yet released. It wasn't until 1997 that this side drama was declassified. When the US embassy was attacked, six staff members escaped and took refuge in the home of the Canadian Ambassador. A CIA agent and a friend in the movie business cooked up a scheme to rescue them before they were discovered and possibly executed. This film is a nail-biter of the first order. Ben Affleck produced, directed, and played the agent, pulling off all those roles masterfully. The only weakness in the film is that in his telling of the story, every possible block to the rescue that could come up does come up and at the last possible moment. This produces a lot of tension that eventually begins to feel contrived. Nevertheless, it is a very good film.

I saw **two French films** recently which move me to forgive the French for looking down their noses (if they do) at Americans. Or perhaps it isn't that the films are French, but that they were

written/directed by women, that made them so delightful to me. **Look At Me** is about a chubby classical singer, Lolita, who strives for the approval of an egotistical father. He is a famous writer and a snob, absorbed in himself and concerned that his plump daughter might ruin his image. He has a young trophy wife who also smarts under his condescending treatment. But what I loved most was the singing – in Lolita's voice class, her small group ensemble, and her and her teacher's testing out the acoustics in a church – just lovely music throughout the film. Agnes Jaoui wrote the screenplay, directed, acted (Lolita's vocal teacher), and even sang her own parts in the film. If you love good vocal music (solo, duet, small ensemble of Schubert, Mozart, Handel, Monteverdi), you may want to buy the CD of the sound track, which includes the full songs as well as a bonus DVD of the recording of the music. **Avenue Montaigne** is a similar paean, this time to all art. It features the artistry of a concert pianist who wants to leave that elite world, dress in T-shirts and play for "ordinary folks"; the art collection of a widower who is selling what he and his wife collected over the years; and a Feydeau theatrical farce starring a soap-opera star who really wants to play Simone de Beauvoir. These characters from the Parisian art world are tied together by a glowing young waitress who follows the advice of her beloved grandmother to risk herself in the city of lights.

**Bernie** is one of the funniest movies I ever saw. Strangely funny, because it is based on the true story of a rich, bitchy Carthage, Texas widow who is murdered by the nicest guy you'd ever meet, the local funeral director. Among the funniest scenes are interviews with the actual townsfolk, some of whom refuse to believe that Bernie actually did this deed to which he confessed. Jack Black is at his best in the role of Bernie, and Shirley MacLaine nails the widow without going over the top. The theme of the movie is Texas niceness. Having been raised in Texas I know this topic well. No matter all the masculine individualistic hoopla in Texas; there is nothing more important in this culture than niceness, which can cover a multitude of sins, including murder.

**Hope Springs.** Tommy Lee Jones and Meryl Streep are a married couple whose relationship has lost its fervor. They sleep in separate bedrooms and their life has become a boring routine. She finds a marriage counselor who does week-long intensives in Hope Springs, Maine; she pays for the session and air tickets and says she's going whether he joins her or not. Steve Carell is perfect as the therapist. The sessions are very much like

## RECOMMENDED READING

actual counseling sessions (I say from experience) – pushing the couple to be open and honest about hidden thoughts and feelings, along with exercises to overcome the blocks to their intimacy. These sessions make clear how valuable it is to talk honestly about your relationship in the presence of another who does not take sides. Take your partner to the film. It will open up conversations that most couples will find useful.

**The Master** features outstanding acting by Phillip Seymour Hoffman as Lancaster Dodd, the leader of a cult, and Joaquin Phoenix as Freddie Quell, an alcoholic Navy vet who comes under Dodd's influence. It is unclear in the film what Dodd, the master, espouses, although he uses processes not unlike the "auditing" of Scientology. Mostly the film is about the relationship between the master and the follower with the distressed soul and how it plays out as Dodd's clay feet are revealed to Freddie. The film evokes reflection on any relationship to a "master" we may have had.

## RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall



*So Far From Home  
Lost and Found in our Brave New World*  
by Margaret J. Wheatley  
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012

I have not read anything with which I resonate more strongly than this book. Drawing on her work with systems, Wheatley lays out the elements of the world we now live in – robber barons, millions oppressed, ideological dumbing down, manufactured selves, consumerism, distraction, etc. – and how these elements interact, resulting in humanity being Lost. The first step toward being Found is to recognize how profoundly we are Lost. To motivate ourselves by the outcomes we hope to achieve is not appropriate. That kind of hope is the flip side of fear. But there is a different kind of hope – that we will BE hope, be warriors of the spirit. This requires looking directly into the darkness of our times and being brave and decent human beings who face deeply challenging circumstances. As Wendell Berry put it: "No matter how bad things get, a person of good will and some ability can always do something to make it a little better." Maybe our work won't be different from what we are now doing, but the context shifts. Expectations and attitudes shift. One aspect of that spirit is avoiding getting caught up in outrage and righteous anger. The truer feeling is being overwhelmed with grief. Allowing

ourselves to experience our grief will leave us with greater clarity about how to respond.

Wheatley, articulating what I have been sensing for some years now, clarifies a context that I have fuzzily tried to talk about. Her mentors are Chogyam Trungpa and Pema Chodron, and though they are Buddhist, I am happy to follow her call to arms and become a Christian spirit warrior. I would like for all my friends and colleagues who are vocated to serving the world to read this book – yesterday.

*Faith of Cranes*  
by Hank Lentfer  
Mountaineers Books, 2011

Hank Lentfer was formed by early experiences of hunting in Southeast Alaska with his dad, who loved the natural world and used hunting to explore the area where they lived. Feeling confined in school, as soon as Hank graduated he left for South America, where he spent several months working at an orphanage in Bolivia. He was now saddened and angered by both the disparagement of the earth and the unjust poverty he had witnessed. This memoir tells how he worked out his passions by spending years with the Park Service, years involved in intense activism, then creating a homestead and a family with wife and daughter, and finally by letting go of activism and managing a preserve for his beloved sandhill cranes.

Lentfer says, we are "driven to reverse our culture's damage to the earth. But what happens when the pace and scale of damage outstrip our ability to restore and repair? What happens when we get caught up in the mad rush to catch something beyond our reach?" He discovered that to live in hope we don't need to believe that everything will turn out well, but only to be on the right track. In Lentfer's case, his track has become caring for the cranes, his family and his neighborhood, gardening, hunting, woodworking, making music, and learning to "live a life so that joy remains when all else fades."

*Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian*  
by Paul Knitter  
OneWorld Publications, 2009

My exploration of Buddhist meditation has greatly enriched my Christian practice, so I was intrigued by the title of this book. Knitter is Paul Tillich Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary and carries on Tillich's fascination with Buddhism as Tillich himself might have, had he lived longer. A former Catholic priest, Knitter is now married. Coming from the liberation theology

## RECOMMENDED READING

tradition, he has worked for years as a peace activist in Latin American countries. His discussion of the interreligious dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity is quite satisfying, although I found the first half of the book, on the theology of God and heaven, less so. His discussions of Jesus and Buddha, of meditation and prayer, and of social ethics were all illuminating. Knitter quotes Karl Rahner's words: "for Christianity to survive into our contemporary age it will have to reappropriate its mystical depths." Buddhism can teach us this reappropriation with its centuries of meditation practice, by which we can move beyond words and concepts to grasp reality. Knitter explains the varied forms of Buddhism and of meditation in an accessible, simple way, drawing on his long personal experience. Through the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, he discusses the relationship of spiritual growth to social action as completely as I have seen.

*How to Train a Wild Elephant*  
by Jan Chozen Bays  
Shambhala, 2011

The wild elephant is often referred to as a wild monkey in Buddhist parlance. Either is a metaphor for the human mind, which is not easy to train. Bays provides 52 exercises (one for each week of the year) to help tame your wild mind. Each chapter is succinct and simple, with a short description of the exercise and its deeper lessons. It is probably better to emphasize SLOW and actually spend a week on each one, given our propensity these days to go fast and skim the surface.

The exercises involve noticing simple things like your hands, the wind, listening, eating, waiting, your anxiety, and they open awareness to the depth of every moment in life. Whether you are a novice to the discipline of mindfulness or looking for a fresh approach to improve your awareness, this book serves nicely.

*Intuition*  
*Knowing Beyond Logic*  
by Osho  
St. Martin's Press, 2001

This book is a fantastic antidote to the rationalistic cultural milieu we inhabit. Using the image of Zorba the Buddha and calling for meditation as the method, Osho explains: the known, the unknown, and the unknowable; how denying the heart denies woman; the difference between intellect and intelligence; and the difference between reason and intuition (among other things). This book reminds me of the Christian scriptures: Do not worry about what you will say; the spirit will give you utterance.

November 2012

Or, Take no thought for the morrow, what you shall eat or wear. Osho's big questions: Do you have poetry in your life? Is your heart open? Can you make friends with the Unknowable?

*Old Age*  
*Journey Into Simplicity*  
by Helen M. Luke  
Lindisfarne Books, 2010

Naturally this book would appeal to me, since I am old, but I encourage you to note that we all are aging. This wondrous book offers an artful approach to the process. Luke, a renowned Jungian analyst, uses Homer, Shakespeare, and T.S. Eliot to deepen our understanding of aging. For example, from *King Lear* we learn that the proper occupations of the aging are purposeless activities such as prayer, song, telling old tales, and laughter – counters to our busy, accomplishment-oriented society. From Prospero in *The Tempest* we learn how the difficult lesson of forgiveness allows the "ultimate freedom of the spirit." This requires letting go of past achievements and, in our growing weakness, learning to depend on others and recognize our kinship with all things.

This book is so full of gems it requires reading one page or paragraph at a time and allowing time to digest it. Here is one of my favorite nuggets: "We can do something towards tracking down some of the continual evasions of the ego by uncovering our fear of humiliation. From this fear of degradation in our own eyes or in the eyes of others, real or imagined, comes a dead weight of moods and depression. For the truly humble person no humiliation exists." We all need such a wise mentor to guide us.

*Between Heaven and Mirth*  
*Why Joy, Humor, and Laughter are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life*  
HarperOne, 2011  
*My Life With the Saints*  
Loyola Press, 2006  
*The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*  
*A Spirituality for Real Life*  
HarperOne, 2010  
all by James Martin, S.J.

In his book, *Between Heaven and Mirth*, Jesuit Martin makes a convincing case for the appropriateness of laughter and joy in the life of the spirit. Taking oneself too seriously and being ungrateful are high on his list of things to avoid, even "sinful," to use old language. If lightening up is something that might benefit you, Martin's book is full of good suggestions along with some very funny Jesuit jokes.

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In *My Life With the Saints*, an award-winning book, Martin tells of his personal encounters with stellar human beings in past and present church history. Some are “certified” saints of the Catholic Church; others are his personal heroes. I share several of his choices, having read every book of Thomas Merton and been deeply inspired by Joan of Arc and Pope John XXIII. The best thing about this quite readable book is the realization that there are as many ways to be a saintly human being as there are human beings. As Thomas Merton says (in Martin’s dedication quote), “For me to be a saint means to be myself.”

*The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* is a wonderful handbook on all the great gifts the Jesuits have brought us, written in a clear straightforward way. For instance, although Martin states that no form of prayer is better than another, he explains for easy use the traditions of prayer that Ignatius (the founder of the Society of Jesuits) developed. He describes six ways to love chastely and eight barriers to healthy friendship. He explains a core Ignatius concept – how our desires help us to find our vocations and to be who we are. Jesuits are known for the understandings that everything in your life is important and that God can be found in everything. They are also known for the combination of contemplation with action in the world. Martin even makes poverty, chastity, and obedience relevant to any of us.

All three of these books by Martin are written in a personal way, with humor, and yet they are deeply serious and challenging with practical help for the journey.

*Wild*  
by Cheryl Strayed  
Alfred A. Knopf 2012

This memoir of Strayed’s three-month, 1100-mile, solo hike on the Pacific Crest Trail is definitely not a hiker’s guide. Strayed had prepared for the hike, but her level of preparedness was limited by great naiveté. Two major problems for her were carrying a pack more than half her body weight and wearing boots that were too small. How the author was prepared for such an experience was that her life had essentially fallen apart, she felt she had nothing to lose, and she was willing to be honest with herself, to discover who she was and make a fresh start. Somehow her youth, determination, and grit made up for her ignorance. Strayed’s story is valuable because of her courage to openly share her stupidities and weaknesses and her ability to tell the story of a journey from which she emerged having healed old wounds and a good bit wiser.

*Eat Pray Love*  
*One Woman’s Search for Everything*  
*Across Italy, India and Indonesia*  
by Elizabeth Gilbert  
Penguin, 2006

I avoided this book for years because I heard about the movie (but didn’t see it). Finally a friend I trust insisted on the book’s value; so I read it and found it to be an honest and thereby helpful work of introspection and extremely well written. I particularly appreciated Part II at the ashram in India. It reminded me of my experience in long meditation retreats, and she had some fine teachers, including some of her fellow yogis. So after reading the book, I decided to give the movie a go. Big mistake. It was even worse than its reviews. It trivialized Gilbert’s experience and time and again missed the point of her journey. Read the book. Skip the movie.

*The Self-Made Myth*  
*And the Truth About How Government*  
*Helps Individuals and Businesses Succeed*  
by Brian Miller and Mike Lapham  
Berrett-Koehler, 2012

This book takes the myth that individual and business success is attributable only to the work of the individual and tears it apart piece by piece. First the authors tell the origins of this myth, from early colonists breaking from aristocratic lineage to Horatio Alger’s rags to riches stories to Ayn Rand’s novels, whose heroes serve their own greed, to today’s Republicans talking of “job creators” who must be protected from taxes and regulation. Then the book tells how to bust this myth by bringing to light what is really happening, meaning the myriad ways society at large contributes to individuals and to businesses of all sizes. This chapter points out that 50-60% of those who benefit from varying government deductions and tax credits or loans claim to have never used a government social program. In fact, over 40% who have received Social Security, Veterans Benefits, Medicare, etc. claim they have never used a government social program. There is some kind of blind spot here. One chapter of the book is devoted to the stories (with photos) of people who created and run businesses and the reasons for their success. They were questioned about luck, timing, being white, male, tall, educated, receiving government subsidies of various kinds, inherited wealth, preferential tax treatment, etc. This is good information with which to educate yourself and your neighbors.



## reviews by Gene Marshall

*In Search of Paul*

*How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's  
Empire with God's Kingdom*

John Dominic Crossan  
and Jonathan L. Reed

HarperSanFrancisco: 2004



Relative to provoking my thinking, *In Search of Paul* has been the most influential book I have read this year. It is about Paul, the apostle of Jesus, but it is even more about Rome, the glory and the tragedy of this high point in the practice of civilization. Roman history is fascinating because it tells us so much about our history. Also, how Jesus and Paul addressed their Roman world tells us much about how an emerging Next Christianity needs to address civilization today. My *Megalomania* essay in this journal was inspired by my reading of this book.

The many archeological details of this book make it priceless, but it is Crossan's and Reed's vision of the meaning of these details that make it a spirit classic. In the Epilogue we find these words of summary about the great tectonic plates beneath the more surface events of history.

The normalcy or even the cutting edge of human civilization has this chant: *First victory, then peace* or *Peace by victory*. On one side, another plate grinds relentlessly against the great central one. Some call it utopia, eschatology, or apocalypse, but we call it postcivilization and its chant is *First Justice, then peace* or *Peace by justice*. On the other side of civilization's great central plate, a third one also grinds relentlessly against it. Some call it nihilism, totalitarianism, or terrorism, but we call it anticivilization and its chant is *First death, then peace* or *Peace by death*. Those plate tectonics of human history curve around as does our globe, so that those two smaller plates of anticivilization and postcivilization grind not only against civilization, but also grind against each other. In the first century, however, and indeed for most of the next two thousand years, postcivilization's nonviolent alternative seemed to many a sweetly romantic, politically irrelevant, and idealistically unreal dream. Now at the start of the twenty-first century, it seems more like a terrible warning two millennia ahead of its time. "If you live by the sword, you will die by it" no longer applies minimally to Israel or maximally to Rome, but minimally to world and maximally to earth. So, then, there remain these three: anticivilization, civilization, and post-civilization, but the greatest of these is postcivilization.

In our book, *The Road from Empire to Eco-Democracy*, we describe this emerging post-civilization with the term "Eco-Democracy." Like Crossan and Reed, we envision a plausible postcivilization, a positive vision that is possible. We see a "Road" to replacing civilization without reverting to the futility of anticivilization.

*In Search of Paul* also gives us clues for creating a Next Christian practice that is true to the Spirit of Jesus and Paul and adapted to the potential era of postcivilization. On this topic, I want to add one caution for the readers of Crossan and Reed. The Kingdom of God is something deeper than one of the tectonic plates in finite history. A workable postcivilization will be an expression of the Kingdom of God coming on Earth, but the Kingdom of God will still be coming. Postcivilization and the Kingdom of God are not synonymous terms. The "Kingdom of God," as this phrase is understood in the best of New Testament theology, points to a profound humanness of Wonder that can never be fully contained within any human-made social vehicle. Nevertheless, Crossan underlines the companion truth that this Eternal Kingdom does come on Earth. We are not talking about an otherworldly heaven. We are talking about real down-to-Earth embodiments of profound humanness – the coming of an "in Christ" (profound humanness) presence of "Holy Spirit" aliveness that never goes away and can never be stopped.

*Rooftop Revolution*

*How Solar Power Can Save our Economy  
and our Planet from Dirty Energy*

Danny Kennedy

Berrett-Koehler Publishers: 2012

Kennedy, a radical activist turned entrepreneur, has written a brief and illuminating book on how solar power can become our wholesome future in spite of the desperate opposition of the fossil fuel industries. He shows how our pessimism about solar has been fostered by millions of dollars spent to dumb us down on this topic. But this is more than another book telling how most of the energy establishment is willing to destroy the planet rather than limit their opportunity to profit by their current means. Kennedy shows how clever entrepreneurs and customers, even with limited governmental help, can tip the balance toward a solar-powered world. If you live in Kennedy's West Coast area, you can lease from him now the technology you need to increase your participation in the rooftop revolution. Refresh your optimism with this read!

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**Also, check out our blog: [RealisticLiving.org/blog/](http://RealisticLiving.org/blog/)**

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- \* the publication of social-change materials

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.
- Support people whose work is their passion in life, not a day job.
- Fund those attacking root causes and trying to change the system.
- Trust what inspires you.

**Order *Jacob's Dream***  
*A Christian Inquiry into Spirit Realization.*

Also **Order *The Road from  
Empire to Eco-Democracy***

For each book send \$21  
to Gene Marshall.

See [RealisticLiving.org](http://RealisticLiving.org)  
for more information.

In terms of such principles, we are willing for you to evaluate our work for its appropriate place in your benevolent budget. And we invite you to consider yourselves partners in promoting these religious and social directions.

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