

# REALISTIC LIVING

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If "The Death of God" means anything at all, it means the death of every literalized human-like construction presumed to exist in some universe next door. No human has experienced a universe next door. This is a myth, a human construction used to assist humans to talk about experiences they have had and still have of the ONE. But the myth itself cannot be taken with scientific literalism. We have not and cannot experience a literal universe next door with gods and goddesses, angels and devils, wings and tails, voices and hands, and all the other poetry that is so familiar within the religious heritages of the planet. This mode of religious reflection has indeed died, even for those who still cling to it. This horrific death of "God" is not just a wild belief held by subversives; it is a cultural happening, a fact of history that is denied by millions.

Nevertheless, the Death of God symbolism is not helpful in grasping the meaning of the First Face of the Christian Trinity. More helpful than all this Death-of-God talk is an appropriate existential interpretation of the Muslim cry, "There are no gods, (long pause) save the ONE."

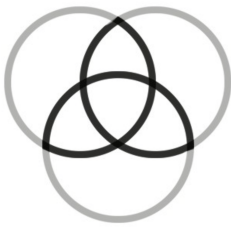
Christians and Jews who know their heritage could also bow five times a day to the above interpretation of the core of Muslim practice. That Muslims, Christians, and Jews have all perverted the encounter with the Awesome ONE into warring sets of human-made doctrines and moralities need not blind us to the truthful witness made within all three of these vast heritages.

Familiar biblical phrases pass us by because we are blind to the core experience being referenced:

How deep I find thy thoughts, O God, how inexhaustible their themes! Can I count them? They outnumber the grains of sand, to finish the count my years must equal thine. Psalm 139:17,18

Before the mountains were brought forth, or earth and world were born in travail, from age to age everlasting, thou art God. Psalm 90:2

For all that can be known of God by human beings lies plain before their eyes: indeed God Herself has disclosed it to them. His invisible attributes, that is to say, Her everlasting power and governance have been visible, ever since the world began, to the eye of reason, in the things He has made. Romans 1:19,20



## The Death of the Death of God

a Christian sermonette  
by Gene Marshall

The Death of God is not an adequate Christian symbol for that Mysterious Power referenced in the best of contemporary Christian theology. The All-Powerful Reality (source of Earth and sky) cannot be said to die. This object of Christian worship is THE one verity that does NOT DIE. The stars all die. The Earth will one day be entirely consumed by an expanding red-giant sun in its process of also dying. Only the ONE does not die. And this ONE is too huge, too deep to be encompassed by the human mind. It is not a thing alongside other things. It is a NO-THING, an Absolute Mysteriousness to the human mind. Indeed, every experience of Mystery is an experience of this ONE. Even the word "one" as a word, as a concept, as an entity of the mind, crumbles before the ONE of experience we are referencing with this silly little word "one."

We are not lacking in experience of the ONE, we are only lacking in an ultimate devotion to this ONE as our God. The word "God," like "sweetheart," is a devotional word for "ultimate concern," "final trust," "core meaning of my life." The Mysterious Enigmatic ONE is being experienced in every event of our lives. This experience is the one experience that endures when all else passes.

We can see more clearly the truth in these verses, when we disentangle our minds from the He or She symbolism and from all other anthropological imagery. Such personal language, used to express the God-relation, is a means of personal devotion, not a description of the ONE. The ONE is not describable. This is made plain in almost every verse of biblical text. Those who insist on describing the ONE as male or female must simply be reminded that the ONE cannot be described.

In spite of this shocking death to our literalized gods and misused god-language, "The Death of God" remains an inadequate Christian symbol. The Christian God is a Living God. This biblically referenced verity is ALIVE in every event of our lives. Standing immediately behind each neighbor that is neighboring us is the INFINITE NEIGHBOR. Shining through each event that happens to us is the INFINITE CHALLENGE of the ONE. There is no escape from the ONE.

Where shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I climb beyond the stars thou art there;  
If I make my bed in the Earth among the dead,  
again I find thee.  
If I take my flight to the frontiers of the morning  
or dwell at the limit of the western sea,  
even there thy hand will meet me,  
and thy right hand will hold me fast. Psalm 139:7-10

Can we actually believe that the authors of such poetry had no reference in experience from which they were penning such passionate words?

Loyalty to this dreadfully mysterious ONE may seem an outlandish way to live – too demanding, too intense for we superficial, distracted, addicted, anti-thoughtful, inappropriately reasonable, super-gifted primates. Nevertheless, the Loving-What-Is WAY is a viable option – a possibility offered to us in our biblical heritage, in the good preaching of the New Testament breakthrough, and in the victorious living of millions of witnesses. This living presence in history we cannot doubt.

### Walking on Water

a healing event  
by Alan Richardl



Seminole County is landlocked. It's in the middle of Oklahoma. But there, however briefly, I walked on the stormy sea and almost drowned. And there, an outstretched hand rescued me by restoring me to a community of trust and courage.

Seminole County lies in the path of the Keystone XL Pipeline, slated to carry toxic goop from the Alberta Tar Sands to refineries near Houston. James Hansen, whose work on human-made climate change inspired Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, says that full exploitation of this deposit will release twice as much carbon into the atmosphere as all the oil burned in human history. "If this project is allowed to be completed as planned," says Hansen, "it is game over for the climate." The Keystone XL's builder is seizing Indian tribal lands and private lands in an unprecedented expansion of eminent domain, and Seminole County, the home of Seminole Indians relocated to this area during the Trail of Tears, is no exception. For their descendants, the Keystone XL is the latest in a series of blows to dignity and autonomy.

Late last year I attended a weekend training event sponsored by the Tar Sands Blockade. A scheduling conflict meant that I decided not to participate in the blockade following the training. So in late June, when someone called from the Great Plains Tar Sands Resistance and asked me whether I was interested in participating in a blockade of the Keystone XL, I said yes. The caller told me to prepare for a weekend camping in primitive conditions, followed by direct action in an unknown location. I drove 200 miles to a rural training camp and met more than a dozen people who were prepared to put their bodies on the line for the sake of a sustainable future. I didn't know any of these people. The close quarters, heat, and primitive conditions quickly revealed to each of us the human limitations of the others. But we knew that we were venturing together out of the apparent safety of our boat onto stormy waters, our eyes fixed on a word of reality that temporarily calmed our petty irritations and fears. A sense of calm settled over me. This calm fueled the march onto TransCanada's easement in the early morning darkness and the movements of our hands as two of us chained ourselves to each other atop a cargo container while others chained themselves to other buildings and to an excavator on the other side of the huge trench where the pipeline lay. This calm also supported us in our initial encounters with a friendly but firm member of the local sheriff's department. We remained calm as our colleagues chained to the other trailer were cuffed and led to a police van. But then things changed.

Perched atop the container, we saw the sheriff and local volunteer firemen approach the excavator with a machine of some kind. We heard a loud buzz and a voice screaming "What the f\*\*\*!! You're hurting me! Are you crazy?" The buzz didn't stop. Nor did the screaming. One of our colleagues

emerged from under the excavator, clutching his hand. Time passed. An ambulance arrived. Two figures made their way toward the excavator and began working on that colleague. While the firemen used the same machine that had injured the first colleague to extract the others, the sheriff approached us. "You see what we did over there," he said. "If you don't unlock yourselves now, I will use the 'jaws of life' on you and I will hurt you. I will leave a mark that won't go away." "We can't unlock," we said. "We don't have a key." This was true. We had left the key with support people offsite so that it could only be retrieved after a direct request from us to our designated police liaison. The sheriff walked away. All three of the colleagues chained to the excavator were extracted. Then the sheriff returned with his deputies and the firemen. He said that our actions were violent protest because we were forcing him to use violence against us. "If you don't come down in ten minutes," he said, "I will use the 'jaws of life.' Your friend's hand is cut pretty bad, and I'm going to use the same thing on your neck." As they walked away, we discussed the sheriff's prior behavior and the credibility of his threat. We decided to unlock. We called the sheriff back and asked for our police liaison. At that moment, a sense of shame descended on me, a sense that I had failed, that I was not adequate to this task, that I was a coward. A half hour later, we were unlocked, cuffed, and stuffed into the sheriff's department van along with the 7 other protesters and the police liaison, who had also been arrested.

Throughout the booking process at the county jail, my fear mounted. The sheriff stood at the booking desk and cursed us. He said he wished that our families were murdered. Ankle-cuffed with my colleagues to a bench near the desk, my mind wallowed in memories of a previous terrifying jail experience. My heart pounded and my hands shook. I was booked, given a shower, clothed in an orange jumpsuit, handed a 3-inch-thick styrofoam mattress, and led back to "pod 12." I entered and saw a room filled with 8 cots, some tables, and 12 men with tattoos and staring eyes. The rank smells of sweat and mildew overcame me. I tossed my mattress on the floor, curled up, and closed my eyes. I was exhausted but I couldn't sleep. The concrete walls of the pod both increased the volume and decreased the clarity of every sound. I imagined the inmates laughing at me and planning to hurt me. I deserve this for my stupidity, I told myself, echoing the sheriff's sentiment. What did I think I was accomplishing? Wasn't it just a futile ego trip? And so it went for the next four hours. I was sinking fast.

Then, a familiar face appeared. José Martinez<sup>1</sup>, a round elder with long grey hair and a long grey beard, appeared at the entrance to the pod, smiling. José had been one of the first to be arrested at the site. During the training camp, he'd asked about my work. I'd told him about Realistic Living and our theological understanding. José instantly began introducing himself to the other men in the pod, shaking hands and joking. He walked toward me. I arose from my mattress and sat at one of the tables so we could talk. We decided to call the attorney and find out how the bonding process was going. We discovered that the sheriff had warned the bail bonding companies in the county to refuse our bond, so we were in for the night. I returned to my mattress, closed my eyes, and resumed my futile attempts to numb myself. Some time later, I felt José's hand on my shoulder. "Get up," he said. I did. His arm around my shoulder, he whispered, "I remember what you said about those Christian circles, and about the priesthood of all believers. You have work to do here."

He led me to a group of inmates seated on the cot closest to the tables and on the table next to that cot. They were passing a King James version of the Bible around. They greeted me as though I were a prison chaplain. They took turns reading fragments of the Psalms or Proverbs and saying what these meant to them. Their idiosyncratic interpretations seemed informed by Pentecostal and country Baptist approaches to the Bible. Nevertheless, they also spoke about their own lives, about social and economic pressures I could hardly imagine. Hearing them, I recognized where I was for the first time. I was among Seminole Indians with long memories stretching back generations. I was with people who knew what we were fighting and why we were fighting it, whose livelihoods depended on an exploitation of natural resources that tore up their cultural heritage, polluted their waters, and put food on their tables. The anonymous tattooed thugs I'd seen when I entered that pod were figments of my imagination. José's eyes met mine. It was my turn. I read Romans 8: 31-39 ("nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God"), passed the Bible to José, and said "Paul wrote this in prison." Then José spoke. Slowly, deliberately, citing Scripture when appropriate, he reminded us of our power to be ministers of the gospel right here in this pod. I saw him for the first time as well. This old Latino man was a religious scholar and more. In his application of Scripture to the present situation we were all experiencing together, he was an intuitive manifestation of Wisdom Herself.

<sup>1</sup> Not his real name.

I learned about the way the Seminole hid escaped slaves, about the Trail of Tears, the Seminole Stomp Dance, and energy politics in Oklahoma. But more than this, I experienced the presence of the one who walks on water lifting me up and saving me from drowning in a distorted relationship to reality that had blinded me to my solidarity with and connection to the Spirit beings around me. Nothing in my situation had changed. The men in this pod were not the innocent peaceful nature-lovers of white romanticized portraits of Native Americans. Their honest accounts of addictions, violence, escapism, and religious bigotry made that clear. But they were ministers of the Word of Reality addressing me in my own alienation from the Awesome Mystery, offering me my own freedom to walk amidst that squalor and chaos. They were a living testament to the truth of the words of Matthew's Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the middle of them."

The Peter who walks on the water is the "two or three" who gather in that healing Word. Shut tight in my fear and shame, engaged in a futile struggle to escape the situation I was certain I couldn't handle, I was lost. When José restored me to that "two or three," the sea calmed and the air was thrust back into my lungs. Together with the flawed, motley crowd of fools daring to let go of their self-possession and open themselves to the unknown All-That-Is in trust, we are all Peter and, as Peter, Jesus Christ to each other.

## The Activism of Loving What Is

a theological clarification  
By Gene Marshall



Loving God in the Christian sense, means loving what we are truly encountering in our actual everyday lives. It can seem at first that "Loving What Is" results in a passive or ultraconservative sort of ethics, but that would be to ignore the truth that Reality always includes possibility. There is no actual that does not include the possible, and there is no possible that is not rooted in some actual. If loving the actual excludes loving the possible, then we need to rip the word "actual" out of the English language. And if loving the possible excludes loving the actual, then we need to rip the word "possible" out of the English language. Actual and possible are two wings on the same bird. However paradoxical that may sound, it is simply the truth: Reality includes both actual and possible.

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Here is an illustration of what the above insight means in practice:

### Thinking Outside the Fossil Fuel Box

As long as we insist on thinking inside the Fossil Fuel Box (the actual), there is no way to envision a genuine alternative to fossil fuel use, and there is no way to chart a path from our hopeless *here* of the impending climate catastrophe to the *there* of a viable alternative energy system (the possible).

I was rocked into the importance of seeing beyond the norm of current thinking about energy by an article by Gail Tverberg entitled "Renewables; Good for Some Things; Not so Good for Others." I found this article to be an example of thinking inside the Fossil Fuel Box. She begins with this assertion: "Renewables that we have available today won't replace all of today's fossil fuels in any reasonable time line." "Reasonable time line" is a phrase that excludes a full grasp of the possible that is present in our actual situation. To LOVE WHAT IS we must think of an *unreasonable time line* in order to avoid the worst case scenario of the climate-crisis catastrophe – "unreasonable," in terms of the thinking that goes on inside the Fossil Fuel Box.

The Tveberg article is a good analysis of how difficult the transition from fossil fuels to a wind-and-solar-based system will be. And clearly there will have to be a period of transition, for this is an enormous leap, and we will need the energy of fossil fuels to make this leap. But overall the Tverberg article amounts to a victim image about making the needed energy transition under any circumstances. And the article leaves out of consideration some very important facts, without which the technological possibilities are invisible. So let me sketch some of those facts:

(1) It is now technologically possible to fuel jet planes with liquified hydrogen cheaper and safer than with jet fuel. This also has implications for trains, trucks and other transport means and major equipment.

(2) Hydrogen can be produced from any energy source – fossil, solar, wind, etc. Hydrogen is not an energy source, it is an energy currency like electricity. Electricity and hydrogen, operating together, can connect any energy use to any energy source. The economics and efficiency of energy conversion to hydrogen is rapidly improving. For storing energy, hydrogen can replace batteries in many important applications. Storing energy is a key innovation for replacing the easily-stored fossil fuels.

(3) Unlimited growth in the overall use of energy is not a necessary prediction. We are

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currently so wasteful with energy that we may be able to cut the overall use of energy in half without lessening what we actually need energy to do.

(4) The building of an infrastructure to distribute energy through electricity and hydrogen may be far cheaper over the long haul than maintaining the current energy infrastructure, especially if we figure in the damage done by harsher and more frequent hurricanes, tornadoes, desertification, flooding, and the social chaos that will attend a continuation of the current energy system.

So what are the blocks for using the power of fossil fuels to arrive at a post-fossil fuel energy system? The main block is populations and their politicians living inside the Fossil Fuel Box of understanding. Plus it is energy companies that have already located fossil fuel sources and built long-range business plans based on selling those "goods." Such companies will have to be severely regulated, perhaps nationalized, perhaps outlawed if we are going to leave some of that fossil fuel product in the ground. This requires a political shift from big money control of our governments to popular control by an enlightened population. That may seem to be an impossible challenge. But it is **the** challenge. It is **the** possibility within our actual situation. There exists no impossibility within the technology of making a transition to a post-fossil-fuel system. The technological challenges are a real limit on the speed with which the transition can be made, but not the main limit. It is the political limits that control the speed of the transition.

We have not yet begun the energy transition in earnest. With a full political dedication to the transition, it might shock us how quickly this enormous shift could be conducted. Just suppose all subsidies to fossil fuel companies were removed. Just suppose that 90% of the profits of fossil fuel companies were used to subsidize the transition. Suppose that a hefty tax was placed on fossil fuel burning, and those funds returned equality to all citizens. History shows that change can happen rapidly when the mental, political, and economic factors line up together. Consider the stories of the automobile or the computer chip. Technology, when widely purchased, is an almost irresistible force for change. And investors don't care what they invest in: they will go with whatever is going.

In conclusion there are reasonable grounds for being unreasonable with respect to the "reasonable" thinking that goes on within the Fossil Fuel Box. Reality is always unreasonable with respect to the inherited form of reasoning. Reality is always alive with possibilities that shock to the roots the reasonableness of inherited reasoning.

For a reference on the possibilities of hydrogen,

see **David Sanborn Scott**, Ph.D., Vice-President (for Americas) International Hydrogen Association, Founding Director, Institute for Integrated Energy Systems, University of Victoria, Canada, author of *Smelling Land: The Hydrogen Defense Against Climate Catastrophe*

Also see a fuller analysis of the energy crisis in chapter three of the book *From Empire to Eco-Democracy* authored by Gene Marshall, Ben Ball, Marsha Buck, Ken Kreutziger, and Alan Richard.

Let us move back to the theological topic of loving the REAL as both actual and possible. It may seem impossible at first for gay and lesbian individuals and those of us who respect and love the gay and lesbian individuals in our lives to love the actual world in which gay and lesbian individuals are misunderstood, viewed as abnormal, despised, and oppressed. But this actual world is the only world we have. To live in this world wholeheartedly, we must love both the possibilities of correcting this world and the actual world in which these possibilities exist. Not to do so would be a split love – seeing life as two great powers – one evil, one good. This is the Manichian heresy with respect to the Christian relation to the Real as the good.

At the other extreme, it would be a lack of love for Reality to exclude the possibility of correcting the illusory living within this actual world. Gay and lesbian oppression is based on a set of illusions. And all illusions are vulnerable to the judgment of Reality. In other words, Reality is on the side of respect for gay and lesbian individuals. Reality is defending them from oppression, opposing their enemies, holding before us the possibility of revealing the illusory nature of all grandiose thinking about the glory of being heterosexual.

The possibility of ending these gender illusions, as well as the malice they engender, will be healed by those of us who stand for the truth. Standing for the truth of possibility in an actual world of illusory living results in sacrifice on the part of the first defenders of that specific truth. This is called in Christian theology, "the cruciform principle."

So now we face yet another "crisis of faith" with regard to affirming Reality as good. How can Reality be good if the cruciform principle is part of Reality? Christian theology has grappled with that issue in this way: Reality is loving (forgiving) the sinners (the illusion dwellers) by sacrificing Reality's truest sons and daughters for these sinners' healing. For Reality lovers this means becoming servants of the spiritual sick rather than their self-righteous rulers and despisers. We enact Reality's forgiveness for the illusion dwellers with

our own bodies and blood. And we do not forget that it was the bodies and blood of other servants of the Real that brought healing judgement and forgiveness for our own illusion dwelling.

Yes, loving Reality is a humbling life. It humbles our own prideful illusion dwelling. It humbles our reluctance to live in the actual world of illusion-dwelling people. It humbles our lethargy and fear of embracing the possibility of being a healing force within this sick, illusion-dwelling, actual world. Nevertheless, loving Reality is the blessed life – the kingdom of God on Earth.



## Kierkegaard & the End of Authority

excerpts from a new book  
by Gene W. Marshall

### An Attack on Christendom

Kierkegaard's Christianity moved beyond Protestantism and Catholicism in a thoroughgoing manner. Though he was clearly a follower of Luther's understanding of faith, he saw the whole establishment of 19th Century Christianity as a betrayal of the Jesus Christ "revelation." He especially opposed any sort of authoritarianism that moved the discovery of truth beyond what can be verified in personal experience. Though it remains true that there was a type of existential orientation in the authority thinking of Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther, and many others, Kierkegaard helps us to abandon entirely the notion that Christianity has an authoritarian reference point. Neither the Bible nor the Church fathers (and mothers) have any authority over the depth existential experience of the individual Christian.

If we cannot find resonance in our own individual lives with a Christian doctrine, creed, writing, poem, story, etc., then that witness has to be either abandoned or it has to be interpreted in a way that is existentially persuasive. It may, of course, be the case that many sayings and teachings of this long-standing tradition are true to our personal existence, but we have yet to "grow up" in our consciousness in order to appropriate them. Indeed, most of Kierkegaard's theological writings are aimed at assisting us in that growing-up process. I will illustrate his theological gift with a quick survey of some core insights in his book, *The Sickness Unto Death*.

### The Sickness of Despair and how Despair is a Fresh Definition of Sin

Faith, according to Kierkegaard, is not the opposite of vice or disbelief: faith is the opposite of despair. This is a key contribution to Christian theology. Sin is not immorality. Sin is a sickness of the "soul" – a sickness in the most primary quality that makes us human, our consciousness of our consciousness. This sickness may lead to immoralities and also to sick moralities, but sin itself is not immorality. Sin means that our basic attentionality and intentionality are corrupted in a fundamental and horrifying way.

Kierkegaard tells us what that sickness is. He gives us a vivid description of the sickness he calls "despair." All of us create despair in our lives when we flee from or fight with Reality. Why? Because Reality cannot be fled, and Reality cannot be defeated. We do not always experience the despair that we are in. We only experience our despair when we are courageous enough to experience it. Why is courage needed? Because if we experience our despair fully, it is the most horrible experience that a human being can have. Rather than endure their despair, human beings often commit suicide. Very few people commit suicide for any other reason than to escape their despair. When a returning war veteran kills himself, it is almost always because he is despairing over being a person who participated in an overwhelming amount of violence, or who in some other way is finding it difficult to handle his traumatic memories. When a mass murderer kills a bunch of adults, college students, or children and then kills himself, he is, in all likelihood, acting out some despair over himself or over how he is being perceived by others. We often see quite functional persons take their lives in the wake of being jilted by a lover or some other interruption of their self-created world. The event that sets suicide in motion may seem trivial to an outside observer, but to the despairing person some sort of upending of his or her world or vital self-image has in all likelihood occurred.

Kierkegaard describes how these suicidal or potentially suicidal persons are bearing a pain of despair so intense that most of us cannot even imagine it. Most of us are not in touch with our despair. Most of us view any whiff of despair that comes up for us as if this were just a smoking fireplace in our house. We leave the house until the smoke clears away, and then we go back into our familiar living room and sit down again.

But there are also those who carry the harsh pain of despair as a deep secret while outwardly

being a circumspect, ordinary, quite careful person. Such respectable appearing persons are the ones who may surprise us with their suicide.

But few despairers stay at this point of complete closed-in secretiveness. Rather, they plunge into debauchery or into noble work, whatever seems to dull the pain of their despair. This desperate plunge leaves a clear trace that their condition is despair.

And finally, Kierkegaard describes the defiant despairer who may be defiantly active in creating a false self to substitute for the real despairing self. This actively defiant despairer is a curious phenomena, for this self-created self can with a single choice be returned to the nothingness that it is. A second type of defiant despairer uses his or her own despairing self as an excuse to protest against Reality. With his typical humor, Kierkegaard suggests that for passive defiance it is as if an author were to make a mistake on a printed page and then that this mistake becomes conscious of its self and uses itself to prove that this author was a very poor writer.

The defiant ones are the most conscious of all despairers, but consciousness alone does not heal the despair. The turn to "faith" means trusting that the realistic living of what is truly here and truly possible is the best case scenario for living. From the perspective of such faith, despair is a doorway to health, for it reveals where realism is being avoided. Despair seems to be a horrific thing, but since it is only the result of lying to ourselves, it can disappear when our lying ceases. Trusting Reality is the health that is built into Reality itself. Trust of Reality is the Garden of Eden from which we have been expelled through eating off the "lie" tree. This psychological analysis of sin and faith is one of the key contributions of Kierkegaard to the theology of a vital Next Christianity. This vision of sin and faith illuminates the long history of Christian witnessing and shapes the witnessing of a meaningful Next Christian practice.

### The Authority of Authenticity

As previously noted, both Roman Catholic and Protestant expressions of Christianity have given strong emphasis to authority as a primary test for "Christian" truth. The authority of Scripture, the authority of tradition, the authority of ecclesiastical personages have been assumed to be an ultimate test of Christian truth. Personal experience has always played a role as well – at times it competed strongly with the authority principle. But today as we seek to dwell, think, and work toward a vital Next Christianity, authenticity, not authority, becomes the sole test of Christian truth. This is a

primary characteristic of what I am calling "a post-Kierkegaardian era of vital Christian formation."

Authority of a secondary sort will still play a role (*We will still treasure the Bible and the great souls of our heritage.*), but the role of authority is now quite secondary to the role of authenticity. We might say that the authority of authenticity is now more primary than the authority of authority. From now on the Christian truth about life can only be validated by authenticity, not authority. This is a radical change. It places us on a narrow path with huge ditches on both sides. On the right side of the road is the ditch of authoritarian dogmatism. On the left side of the road is the ditch of absolute relativism that denies any certainty whatsoever, including authenticity. The absolute relativist tends to view authenticity as one more form of authoritarian dogmatism; hence the absolute relativist rejects authenticity as a reliable test of truth.

### Existential Truth

In order to be truthful, we must give relativist thinking its due. Any truth that a human being has created is uncertain. My latest and best theology, my philosophy, my view of being a husband or a parent, my healthcare plan, my worldview, my social ideology – all these things have at best only approximate certainty. All these human creations have room for improvement. All these human creations may be wrong in major ways. I don't know how wrong they are. I don't know how right they are.

Anything that human beings have created is uncertain. Einstein's theory of gravity, Darwin's theory of evolution, the Pope's latest proclamation, my favorite commentator's latest rant – none of these creations by human beings are certain. All these views are without certainty. They are no more than approximate, and they are all open to improvement. Science, which in an earlier century spoke of discovering the laws of nature, has now become more modest. A law of nature is now seen as the most recent, best-case bit of order, created by humans to approximately match the empirical data so far gathered by the experts on the topic to which this "law" applies. In other words, a law of nature is merely a guess that has not yet been refuted. We have no absolute certainty arriving to us from the work of scientists. This does not mean that all guesses about nature are equally worthy, for the facts have refuted many guesses, and the guesses left standing are those in terms of which we can most successfully conduct our living. And even more humbling is the realization that the mystery of life is not being reduced by our scientific

advances. Rather, the mystery grows stronger in the light of our new discoveries. The more we know about nature the more we know we don't know.

Absolute certainty is not a characteristic of anything created by the human species. Furthermore, absolute certainty does not drop into the human mind from heaven or from some other realm. Anything that the human mind can possess is uncertain. We hear it said that nothing is certain except death and taxes. Even that is an exaggeration. Death is certain, but taxes are not. Death is not created by a human being, but taxes are.

Your and my ideas about death are not certain, but death is certain. What does it mean to say that death is certain? In answering this question we discover a fundamental clue to the nature of existential truth, the sort of truth that Kierkegaard promoted. Doing theology in the wake of the Kierkegaardian breakthrough means embracing the existential type of truth we have to experience in order to understand fully any verse of Christian scripture or any valid witness to the Christian revelation.

Death, whatever else it may be, is not a human creation. We humans did not create death. It would have been the last thing our hypermagical minds and egos would ever have been concerned to create. We have created our ideas about death, but not death itself. In this sense death is certain, a certain truth. What else is certain? Life is certain. As the poet Rumi noticed, "Life and death are two wings on the same bird." Every experience as experience is certain – as certain as death. Our descriptions of an experience are approximate and capable of improvement. Thus our descriptions of experience are not certain. Nevertheless, the experience itself is certain.

Let's say that a truck runs over my toe. I am going to experience something, something more than the sight of the blood oozing from my shoe, something more than the pain in my foot, something more than all the ideas flowing through my mind. What sort truck was it? Who was driving it? All these considerations have uncertainty built into them. Do I need to go to the hospital? Which one? How do I get there? All these sort of considerations have uncertainty built into them. But one thing is certain. I have had an encounter with Reality in the vicinity of my toe. This is certain with the same certainty that death is certain. This is *truth* of an existential sort.

Therefore, let us be clear that the increasingly popular human view that there is no certainty is not certain. In fact, that view is not true. There is

certainty. When people say that the only certainty is uncertainty, that is not true. Any experience that comes to me from Reality is certain. I will inevitably have my thoughts and opinions about that experience, and all those thoughts and opinions are uncertain. *But, let us notice that the experience that all my thoughts and opinions are uncertain is certain! Why? Because that experience of uncertainty is an experience.*

If we say that we cannot sort out the certainty of experience from our thinking about experience, we are not telling the truth. We can. It is true that thinking is constantly going on and that thinking is producing "screens" through which we are viewing our experiences. This *truth of experience* may seem to imply that we never have an experience that is certain, because experience is always being limited by those relative screens of thought through which we are looking at our experiences. But we can experience those screens and notice that they are not the experience we are seeing through them. From time to time we can notice ourselves testing different screens through which to view the same experience. We can also notice ourselves allowing our experience to tell us which of several screens is best for describing our experience. So who is doing this noticing and this choosing of screens? It is "I" – the contemplative inquirer into my own "I"-experiences. It is "I" who can see the difference between thinking and experience.

If we say that what we are experiencing is not certain, we are talking about our self-created ideas about our experience, not about our experiences themselves. By experience we mean whatever is certain within that maze of thinking and responding that is being humanly created in response to that experience. Such certainty is what we are pointed to with the word "authenticity." Such certainty is what we are pointing to with the term "existential truth." Such certainty is what Kierkegaard uses to criticize Hegel and the rest of Western philosophy. Such certainty is what Kierkegaard expects Christian theologians to use to test, understand, or proclaim anything that has to do with Christian faith – trust of Reality, love, freedom, hope, peace, or any other word used to point to something real, authentic, convicting, challenging, healing, redemptive, etc.

Everyone has denied, is still denying, or can deny these existential certainties. This capacity for denial is also a certainty. The widespread dynamic of denial is as certain as death and more certain than taxes. The widespread dynamic of denial is a part of our experience. But let us not view this widespread denial of certainty as necessary. There



is no excuse for it. It is not necessary. This, too, can be our experience. We can experience the experience of experiencing our experience as an absolute certainty, and we can experience that the denial of that experience as unnecessary.

The writings of Søren Kierkegaard transport us to this kind of certainty, to this authority of authenticity. His philosophical description of human experience puts us in position to better understand the Christian heritage. For example, if you are experiencing in this moment your experience of the Awesome and the Awe, let me welcome you to the Kingdom of God, to the Reign of Reality, to the Eternal Tao, to the Enlightenment of profound humanness, to the Truth, the Life, and the Way of Jesus. The witnesses who created so much of our religious vocabulary join together in welcoming you and me home to the absolute certainty of our Real experience. Also, you and I are being welcomed to the historical wake of Søren Kierkegaard and thereby called to a fresh future of Christian witnessing and theologizing. This awakening means a new era in the history of Christianity. Luther conducted a reform of Christendom. Kierkegaard has led us beyond Christendom, beyond all authority to an Awe-sustained authenticity.

The above article is excerpts from Chapter 11  
 "Kierkegaard and the End of Authority"  
 from my just-completed book

## **The Love of History & the Future of Christianity**

*Toward a Manifesto for a Next Christianity*

A core thrust of the Realistic Living organization is stated in this book. Here is the downloading code:

**[www.RealisticLiving.org/PDF/History/](http://www.RealisticLiving.org/PDF/History/)**

And here is:

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## **Religious Studies One for June 5-8, 2014**

a forecasting by Joyce Marshall

For the June 6-9, 2013 Training School we decided to experiment with doing the classic RS-1 and evaluating its relevance for us today. Even though we replaced the worship sections with Qi Gong and meditation and added body movement play, and made some small adaptations, we stuck to the essential core of the weekend course with the lectures and papers focused on looking at God, Christ, Holy Spirit, and Church as dynamics in our life experience. We used the Picasso painting, Guernica, the movie: Requiem For A Heavyweight, and poetry by D.H. Lawrence.

We discovered that the course was refreshing for those who had experienced it many times before and, best we can tell, a helpful experience for those new to the course, in some cases quite profoundly so.

At the Symposium meeting following the Training School, we decided to do the course again June 5-8, 2014. This time the experiment will be to see if the course can be made more relevant to women. We want to push the envelope in both the blatant and subtle ways women's sensibilities may have been ignored, in both the material and its execution. We plan to change the language, the style, to use a film with female protagonists, women poets, and a painting by a woman, to include several women teachers, and have men take the major enablement roles. We plan to keep the essential message of what has been to Realistic Living a profound grounding for which we remain deeply grateful.

The Symposium members have encouraged the staff to approach this project in a spirit of serious fun. That is, to seriously keep the undergirding understandings of the course and to search for every way to value all human beings without blaming men or women. Women will be encouraged to claim their powerful gifts without imitating men. Men will be encouraged to become aware of any unconscious sense of privilege. And we hope to laugh together about any awkwardness or sense of absurdity that may arise.

We hope to see you there!

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## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

## NOVELS

*Torch*

by Cheryl Strayed

I reviewed Strayed's memoir, *Wild*, in the November 2012 journal. *Torch* is based on Strayed's life leading up to her 1100-mile solo hike detailed in *Wild*. In *Torch*, the protagonist's 38-year-old mother, Teresa, is dying of cancer, throwing the family into a tailspin. Claire is 20, her brother Josh, 18, and their stepdad, Bruce, is like a father to them. Strayed pulls no punches in the relationship of each to Teresa and to one another as they struggle with the passing of the linchpin of the family. The honesty and artistry of this novel are remarkable for such a young writer. I was deeply moved time after time.



## MOVIES

**The Lone Ranger.** I was captured from the first moment. Great cinematography, great music, a nice twist on the myth (which I rushed home from school daily to hear on the radio over 70 years ago), enough humor to poke a bit of fun at being a myth, serious enough to make your heart pound. Ignore the critics and do not miss this film. I cheered loudly at its conclusion in rural Texas where you don't make noise in movie theaters. I joyfully expressed appreciation for those too shy to do so.

Eighty years ago the Lone Ranger myth was created: a man committed to justice under the law discovers that those in control of the law are using it for their personal gain and therefore decides to become an "outlaw." Perhaps my preference for this myth over that of other action heroes/heroines has to do with my age and having been reared on a farm and riding horses in the Texas Panhandle. But I think there is a decided gift in the down-to-earth quality of this particular myth. I also like that it features a couple, not a single person, and that the partner is a native of the land, one grounded in earth tradition and representing those severely oppressed by encroaching forces who are not grounded in the earth. So check out the Lone Ranger creed. Here's the core of it:

- That all men are created equal and that everyone has within himself the power to make this a better world
- That 'this government of the people, by the people, and for the people' shall live always.
- That men should live by the rule of what is best for the greatest number.

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That creed needs to be edited for exclusive language, and of course it would be good to have a female ranger, but otherwise it holds up pretty well. Put on your mask.

**The Intouchables.** This award-winning French film is based on the true story of a wealthy quadriplegic, Phillipe, who chooses among the applicants for his replacement caretaker a man who really doesn't want the job. Driss is a thief who has applied only to be eligible for the French equivalent of unemployment insurance. Phillipe's intuitions, however, prove to be right on. The two form an unlikely bond which brings laughter, tears, and lessons in relationships. An excellent film!

**Pina.** This documentary features the work of much-loved German choreographer, Pina Bausch. Unfortunately she died a few days before filming began, leaving her troupe to perform her works as they mourned her loss. She selected the dancers by an arduous process. They are all ages, all races. Each member has a closeup on camera as their voice-over talks about their experience with Pina. Each exhibits a commanding yet simple presence. She was like a guru, and the troupe like nuns or monks. Some of the pieces are performed outside, some in public spaces. One is on a stage covered with earth and sand. I love dance, but I have never been so viscerally moved as I am by Pina's creations. This is a film to see over and over.

**Fidelio.** James Levine conducts the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this 2000 presentation of Beethoven's only opera. Spanish noble and convicted political prisoner Florestan faces certain death. His wife Leonore tries to save him by impersonating a prison guard named Fidelio. A woman hero, sublime music, impeccable performance, a creative modern setting. I stood, applauded, and shouted "Bravo" in my living room. I wonder if the Met isn't the best institution our country has created.

**Where Do We Go Now?** is written, directed and starred in by a brilliant Lebanese woman, Nadine Labaki, who takes on the absurdity of religious wars, in particular those between men who grew up friends in the same village. With a non-professional cast she brings off a balance of tragic-comedy with amazing finesse. Heartsick over the loss of sons and husbands, the Catholic and Muslim women of the village strategize a series of ruses to de-escalate the hostility among the volatile men, including hiring a troupe of Ukrainian belly dancers. The film is a delight from start to finish.

**The Great Gatsby.** I have not read the book. It wasn't required reading in my small Texas

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Panhandle high school. The reviews were bad, so I went not expecting much of the Baz Luhrmann production. At two hours and twenty-some minutes it looked to be too long by half. Also, neither Leonardo DiCaprio nor Tobey Maguire is a favorite of mine. So I was pleasantly surprised to be totally intrigued, entertained, and even touched by the film and its story of two deeply flawed characters and their tragic tale. I found DiCaprio (Gatsby) and Maguire (Gatsby's friend Nick) to be quite satisfying in their roles, as was Joel Edgerton (Daisy's husband Tom), who was new to me. I was already sold on Carey Mulligan (Daisy) from her role in **Drive**. The lavish party scenes at Gatsby's reminded me of Luhrmann's **Moulin Rouge** but didn't distract from the overall flow of the film. The dramatic scene in the hotel room with Daisy, Gatsby, Tom, Nick, and Jordan was the high point of the film, and Nick as narrator worked splendidly. Definitely worth seeing.

**Samsara.** Ron Fricke's wordless documentary is stunning. Beginning with wondrous footage of the natural world and native peoples, it flows to beauties created by human beings – architecture, dance, sculpture, and paintings. Then the film shifts mood as it moves to segments picturing our mechanized processing of animals for food and the suffering thereby caused to animals and people, the objectification of women, and modern traffic. Accompanied by music perfectly suited to each segment, picture is indeed worth a thousand words.

**How to Survive a Plague.** This documentary by David France is about the ACT UP response to the AIDS crisis. Beginning in the earliest days of the crisis, it uses video footage taken from the early meetings and activities of ACT UP and other groups. The film documents how difficult it is to make a social movement work. I was impressed with the brilliance of the group in educating doctors and scientists with their own research; with their perseverance through the years as many of them were dying; and with their in-your-face refusal to be ignored until this plague was appropriately dealt with. A fine film.

**Skyfall.** I haven't seen a James Bond film in years (decades?). I'm glad I decided to check in again. The long opening chase scene followed by the creative credits and Adele's great title song left me satisfied that I already had my money's worth. The acting was top notch. Daniel Craig has the rough and tough body needed for Bond, a sense of decency about him, and he "cleans up nice." Judy Dench is spectacular and plays a major role this time. Javier Bardem creates a totally different villain who is a perfect foil for Bond. Albert Finney

is, as usual, great in a small but significant role. Kudos for the script and directing. Overall, what delighted me most was how the folks in the spy "business" make their split second life-and-death decisions, quickly weighing up the values and the circumstances and, without apology or self-recrimination, simply go on to the next challenge. Invigorating!

**Silver Linings Playbook.** Although not totally realistic about living with our own and others' psychological vulnerabilities, this film captures the heartbreak and frustration of those involved with a sense of humor that helps to heal the wounds any of us have from our personal experience. I loved it.

**The Sessions.** Based on the true story of Mark O'Brien, this film is about how, totally crippled by polio, he is able to "become a man" sexually through the assistance of a therapist who is a sexual surrogate. That's right, they literally have sex. This sensitive and nuanced telling of his story demonstrates that sex is (or can be) much more than a physical experience. Fed by his Catholic faith, Mark's straightforward honesty, his sense of humor, and his poetic sensibility affect all his relationships – with his caregivers (both male and female), his priest, and the surrogate. Who can't help but love him? A fine, fine film.

**Fear and Trembling.** Based on the memoirs of Amelie Nothomb, a Belgian woman who spent her childhood growing up in Japan, this film is the tale of her return to that nation as an adult who finds that being born in Japan and speaking the language perfectly does not make one Japanese. Amelie lands a one-year contract as a Japanese/French interpreter for a major Tokyo conglomerate, and the film tells the story of that year. As she commits social errors, violates taboos, and is given busywork – from delivering coffee to cleaning the bathrooms – actress Sylvie Testud captures just the right tone as Amelie, moving from the comic to the tragic. A delightful film.

**Flight.** The climax of this film (the court hearing) should live as a classic. I have never experienced a moment in which the best and the worst in a person are placed in sharper contrast. And the moment of decision for this person's "soul" is felt in its full weight. Denzel Washington outdoes himself as a heroic pilot who brings about an unbelievable crash landing in a virtually hopeless situation – then has to deal with his even tougher down-to-earth addiction. This isn't an easy film to watch but totally worth it.

**Lincoln.** Lincoln knew that winning the Civil War was not enough to stop slavery. The 13th Amendment was needed to "seal the deal." This

film demonstrates his down-home folksy wisdom in playing the necessary sophisticated political game to make this happen. There are great intimate scenes with Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln, him and his cohorts, him and his adversaries. There are scenes where a group listens as Lincoln tells a story that at first makes no sense, but later swings round like a Zen koan with a bite. Occasionally there are familiar shots of Lincoln in silhouette, dramatizing his historical significance; whereas after the assassination, his dead body appears to be a simple, gentle, humorous man taking a nap. What a gift Spielberg, Daniel Day-Lewis, et al have given us by revealing the lovely ordinariness of this extraordinary man who graced our history and continues to inspire our nation!

**The Hobbit.** I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this film. Nobody can do this kind of mythic drama like Peter Jackson and his phenomenal (and huge) crew. I thought I would miss the characters from the previous trilogy, but I fell in love with the dwarves from their first entrance one by one into Bilbo's gorgeous home. What a fascinating and varied group! Some of their adventures fighting goblins and Orcs went on a bit long in my view, but every scene was a visual treat. I'm not a big 3-D fan, but I found it worked in this instance without seeming like a gimmick. I look forward to prolonging the Tolkien journey two more years.

**Chinaman (Kinamand).** What a wonderful film! Keld's wife leaves him in the first scene. He is lost. He sells all his furniture. He closes his plumbing shop. He takes up with Feng and his Chinese family at their grill where Keld eats daily. He agrees to marry Feng's sister so she can stay in Denmark. For this they pay him enough for his divorce settlement. Then things begin to change for Keld as the divorce and the wedding and the payment of the arrangement all begin to take place. We are treated to a warm, intimate, lightly humorous tale, with a touch of irony.

**Hobart Shakespearians.** This inspiring documentary features the fifth-grade classroom of teacher Rafe Esquith, who clearly makes a difference in his students' lives. Most of them are Asian or Latino, and the school is in a rough neighborhood in Los Angeles. Part of Rafe's core curriculum is Shakespeare, and each year his fifth-grade class performs one of Shakespeare's plays. Visitors to the class are such luminaries as Ian McKellen and Michael York, who share scenes and discuss the plays with the students. The students weep as they read Huckleberry Finn. They all learn to play guitar. They are treated with respect and no-

nonsense firmness when needed. The film isn't long (less than an hour) and every minute is inspiring. Don't miss it.

**The Dust Bowl.** Even though Gene and I were born in Oklahoma in the midst of this phenomenon, we didn't know the full story as it is so powerfully told in this documentary by Ken Burns. We do have physical repositories from it. I had pneumonia at 3 months, leaving spots on my lungs, and Gene is susceptible to bronchial infections. Burns has the advantage of many photographs plus interviews with living witnesses. It breaks your heart to see all those plows lined up, destroying the beautiful natural prairie, and to hear the mournful tales of family catastrophe. But we don't seem to have learned the deeper lesson, even though this weather crisis was undeniably human-created.

**Game Change** is the back-room story of the attempts to train and restrain VP candidate Sarah Palin during John McCain's presidential campaign. Julianne Moore in no way parodies Palin as has Tina Fey. In fact, I found myself for the first time having some sympathy for her. The incompetence of McCain's staff plus her inflated ego put her where she was in over her head and fighting for her life. And she managed to survive, though probably without becoming much wiser.

**Killing Them Softly.** I went because I loved Pitt and director Dominick's Assassination of Jesse James. Their take on that bit of tradition stripped bare the heroic images to reveal immature young men walking the edges of sanity. Killing Them Softly also reveals immature though not-so-young men walking the edges of insanity. In addition, it seems to be comparing Brad Pitt's hit man, who prefers to kill them softly (not close-up and personal), with government CEOs and banker "hit men" who wipe out the poor (including the poor ignorant bastards trying to make money off their heist in this film). But the metaphor doesn't quite come off, and the violence is overdone. On the up side, Brad Pitt is impressively cool, and the acting all top-notch.

review by Alan Richard

**Man of Steel** is a strange kind of Superman movie. It is about a world where nothing is left to chance and about the courage to take a chance. On the planet Krypton, every detail of life is genetically engineered in order to preserve the whole without change. This is a world without a future. As that world splits into warring factions and tears itself apart, a single infant, illegally conceived by means of illicit sex, is launched toward a distant world, our Earth. This infant is a roll of the dice, an act of



## RECOMMENDED READING

faith, the hope of new life. In order for that new life to take hold, however, this roll of the dice must learn to let go of the quest for finding himself in his origins. He must also relinquish the dream of being completely at home in his adopted world, which he must nevertheless learn to love. This Superman isn't the paragon of American moralism familiar from the Superman comic books of your childhood or the Christopher Reeve movies of the 1980s. This version expresses the Superman character's real force, reconnecting it to the experience of his creators, two young Jews whose parents left Tzarist Russia's iron-fisted stagnation and anti-Semitic pogroms to take a chance on life in a new world, only to discover that this world, too, didn't quite trust them. Watching this new Superman take a leap of faith beyond the need for control or certainty was a delight for me. Despite a final 30-minute summer-blockbuster battle that was as boring as they all are, *Man of Steel* is the best Superman movie I've seen to date.

## RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

### BENEDICT

I have been creating solitary exercise manuals based on the practices of the Benedictines. The following books were my resources and were personally inspiring.

*The Rule of Benedict*

*Insights for the Ages*

by Joan Chittister, O.S.B.

Crossroad, 1992

This is Chittister's commentary on the 73 chapters of the Rule of Benedict. Around the year 500, Benedict became so upset by the immorality of society in Rome that he gave up his studies there to be an ascetic monk in the pursuit of personal holiness, living as a hermit in a cave near the rugged region of Subiaco where he began to attract disciples. Near the end of his life he wrote the rule. During its 1500 years, this rule has been the leading guide in Western Christianity for monastics living in community.

The spirit of St. Benedict's Rule is summed up in the motto "pray and work," providing a moderate path between the individual and institutionalism. Benedict's concerns were to establish a workable order, to foster an understanding of the relational nature of human beings, and to provide leadership to support and strengthen the spiritual growth of the individuals.

Chittister notes that Benedict advises the abbot and prioress to have more concern with the

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spiritual needs of the monastery than its physical ones. She realistically lists the kinds of issues that "tax the soul of a leader: anger with those who resist, frustration with things that can't be changed, disappointment with things that showed promise but never came to fruit, hurt because of rejection by the people you tried to love, grief over the failure of projects that you counted on to succeed." She says, "Benedict's leaders are to birth souls of steel and light; they are to lead the group but not drive it; they are to live the life they lead; they are to love indiscriminately; they are to favor the good, not to favor the favorites; they are to call the community to the height and depth and breadth of the spiritual life; they are to remember and rejoice in their own weaknesses in order to deal tenderly with the weaknesses of others . . . and to save their own souls in the process."

To balance this admonition to leaders, Benedict discerns the difference between compliance and obedience, reminding disciples that wholehearted participation is required, not weighing the group down with complaints or demeaning of the leaders or teachings.

Here are brief comments on crucial subjects:

**Humility:** not being perfect but honest about what you are.

**Prayer:** hard and demanding work; the natural response of people who know their place in the universe; the submission of every act of our lives to the heat and purifying process of the smelter's fire.

**The Psalms:** to Benedict the Psalms formed the core of spiritual practice.

**Daily Practice:** the importance of stopping "at regular times, in regular ways to remember what life is really about, where it came from, why we have it, what we are to do with it, and for whom we are to live it, no matter how tired we are or how busy we are or how impossible we think it is to do it."

**Listening:** "We must learn to listen to what God is saying in our simple, sometimes insane, and always uncertain daily lives."

Finally: Benedictine balance "makes the hum-drum holy and the daily the stuff of high happiness."

*The Monastery of the Heart*

*An Invitation to a Meaningful Life*

by Joan Chittister

BlueBridge, 2011

Like the book reviewed above, this book is also inspired by the Benedictine Rule (she is, after all, a Benedictine nun), but it is written as poetry rather than narrative. It is difficult to review Chittister's books without quoting page after page of her concise and inspiring poetry.

## RECOMMENDED READING

To create a monastery of the heart we must first read the scriptures intensely, day in and day out, so as to see in them the love and patience of the Infinite for us so that no amount of weakness on our part can discourage us from continuing on "the Way."

Benedictine prayer is "steeped in the Psalms" which restore the soul dried by "years of trying to create a world that never completely comes."

She points up the importance of manual labor to the Benedictines. Manual labor keeps us aware of the struggles in life, of the burdens carried by those about us, and keeps us in touch with one another.

She notes the inadequacy of the male-centered view of creation and the importance of leaving whatever part of the earth we inhabit in better condition than before we came.

**On Humility:** "We must simply recognize that God is God – and we are not. We are not in control." Humility enables us to understand that there are blessings in difficulties and hope to be gained from struggles. In humility we are not shocked by the failings of others because we know we would have done the same or worse in the same circumstances.

*Saint Benedict on the Freeway*  
*A Rule of Life for the 21st Century*  
by Corinne Ware  
Abingdon Press, 2001

Dr. Ware is a professor of spiritual formation at the Episcopal Seminary in Austin, Texas. One of the gifts of the monastic tradition is that of regular moments of remembrance throughout the day in a pattern called the canonical hours. In this book, Ware explains the significance of each of the hours. Here is a summary. I have added suggested specific times.

**Vigils.** 12-3 am. If you have a night work shift or wake in the night with stressful thoughts, this time can be used to turn over to the Infinite those things you cannot control, asking the Benevolent Ultimate to stand vigil. Or maybe "just being in the dark and wondering what the still hours have to say."

**Lauds.** 3-6 am. Welcoming the light of day with gratitude that you woke. This is the usual time for daily devotions, beginning your day centered with reading, prayer, meditation.

**Prime.** 6-9 am. A time to check your calendar, set your intentions for the day.

**Terce.** 9-noon. A midmorning break to calm yourself. The pause that refreshes.

**Sext.** noon-3 pm. As we pause for nourishment, this is also a time to consider the events of the world and pray for peace.

**None.** 3-6 pm. Time for taking stock, to forgive and ask for forgiveness, face our limitations.

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**Vespers.** 6-9 pm. Vespers, with Lauds, forms the contemplative bookends of the day. Time for reading, prayer, meditation.

**Compline.** 9-12 pm (or bedtime). A time to rest in trust that all is well and we will be cared for.

Ware suggests using the hours as a way of stopping from time to time to see that all is holy and to keep us from getting lost in the frenetic pace of today's habits. Similarly, she notes that our lives are crippled when our only shared experience is TV sitcoms and movie plots without the enrichment of the stories and teachings of the Biblical tradition. This book has many practical simple ways to use the Benedictine tradition to deepen your life.

*St. Benedict's Toolbox*  
*The Nuts and Bolts of Everyday Benedictine Living*  
by Jane Tomaine  
Morehouse Publishing, 2005

For Episcopal priest Tomaine, the Benedictine guidelines are relevant today as a way to make life less chaotic and fragmented, less superficial and more caring, basically a framework for living life more fully. Her book includes "tools" to reflect on your own life in light of these guidelines. She points out the importance of the Psalms in this tradition. Benedict insists that the full 150 psalms be said each week. Actually, earlier monastics said the fully psalmody each day. The point is that the psalms become an integral part of one's being, moving toward being prayer.

Tomaine wisely suggests starting small with your Benedictine experiment, such as pausing at various times throughout the day to say thanks, to notice what you are up to, to redirect., and then maybe adding a psalm or a line from a psalm for reflection. Some of her other chapters address staying power, listening, openness, hospitality, and work. A very practical book.

### SAINTS

*The Saints' Guide to Happiness*  
*Practical Lessons in*  
*the Life of the Spirit*  
Doubleday, 2003  
and

*Blessed Among All Women*  
*Women Saints, Prophets, and*  
*Witnesses for our Time*  
Crossroad, 2005  
both by Robert Ellsberg



Ellsberg approaches happiness not as a feeling but a way of being rooted in habits of the soul and therefore not subject to the vagaries of fortune. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used "happy" or "blessed" to describe those who mourn, suffer, and

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experience loss. So in his Saint's Guide to Happiness, Ellsberg sees saints as people who are everywhere among us: those whose "love, courage, and inner balance seem to set them apart . . . as a standard what humanity can be." Working with Dorothy Day at the Catholic Worker he became attracted to Catholicism, not because of any doctrine or authority but because of the examples of the saints, including Dorothy herself. Ellsberg says, "The saints do not teach us how to avoid suffering; they teach us how to suffer. They do not provide the 'meaning' of suffering. But they lived by the assurance that there is a meaning or truth at the heart of life that suffering is powerless to destroy. They did not believe that suffering is 'good' but that God is good and that 'neither death nor life . . . nor height, nor depth' can deprive us of access to that good if we truly desire it. They found that there is no place that is literally 'godforsaken,' but that in every situation, even the most grim and painful, there is a door that leads to love, to fullness of life . . . to happiness. This is the deepest mystery of the gospel. Our task, if we would learn from the saints, is to find that door and enter in." In this book, he explores other lessons we can learn from the saints, such as, learning to let go, to work, to sit still, to die. Good lessons, all.

Ellsberg once wrote a book about 365 saints, from those canonized by the church to those who had nothing to do with any church. A community of Maryknoll sisters noted the imbalance of men to women in the book (four to one) and suggested lots of female candidates for a future volume which became *Blessed Among All Women*, this book about 136 women. Each challenged through brilliance, perseverance, and willingness to suffer in order to serve the cause she was called to. Most of the women had to face the powerful resistance of a patriarchal culture and demonstrate the necessity of remaining firm. Ellsberg has the capacity to tell each woman's story in two or three pages and capture the essence of her inspiration. We used this book in our weekly circle meeting and were inspired and challenged.

#### NON-DUALITY

Some see the teachings of non-duality as the essence of Zen, Dzochen, Tao, Vedanta, Sufism, and of Christians such as Meister Eckhart. Some authors of these books don't call themselves non-dualists, but their approach generally fits that category. I find them stimulating, pushy, and inspiring.



#### *The Silent Question*

*Meditating in the Stillness of Not-Knowing*

by Toni Packer

Shambhala, 2007

Toni Packer grew up in Nazi Germany, the daughter of two scientists. Her mother was Jewish, and the family barely escaped the Holocaust. That experience gave her an early awareness of how crowds can be persuaded to carry out terrible horrors when stirred by a charismatic leader. After the war she met and married an American exchange student in Switzerland and moved with him to the United States. They discovered the Zen Center in Rochester, NY, where Toni eventually became a teacher. In 1981 the entire teaching responsibility at the Center was transferred to her. She became increasingly uncomfortable with the traditional and dogmatic aspects of formal Zen practice, which seemed to get in the way of open listening. She left the center and founded what is now Springwater Center for Meditative Inquiry and Retreats. Due to her health, she has recently retired from teaching.

Her talks/writing encourage us to be our own authority – to look, to listen, to question, to see what is actually there. She says, "Listening quietly to the cacophony of the inner and outer world, can we come upon a hidden silence that enfolds all the noise and confusion . . . This stillness has room for everything happening on this earth – the good and the evil, the wounding, the helping and the healing, the dying and living, the hating, the killing, and the inexhaustible love that transcends it all in a way too marvelous to comprehend."

Packer is a wise woman worth hanging out with.

#### *Painting the Sidewalk with Water*

and

#### *Nothing to Grasp*

both by Joan Tollifson

Non-Duality Press, 2010 & 2012

The gift of one-armed, Lesbian, ex-addict Joan Tollifson is her capacity to speak simply and directly about how it is. Influenced by Toni Packer and non-dualist teachers/writers, she gives no allegiance to any tradition. *Painting the Sidewalk* is an edited transcription of talks and dialogues at meetings held mostly in Chicago between 2004 and 2006. The book's title comes from her memory of her mother's giving her a bucket of water with which to paint the sidewalk when she was a child. Joan loved such painting, not worrying about creating anything lasting or comparing with other work – just enjoying the movement and shapes of the moment. She notes that our habitual living involves something different, which she calls "the

movie of waking life." Sometimes, when we awake from deep sleep, there is for a moment a not-knowing who we are. Then we quickly recreate our "movie"—the story of "me." She encourages pausing longer in the not-knowing mode.

**Quotes:** "Sometimes life hurts. Stormy weather is part of the show. There's no way to avoid it. But when trying to avoid it, or needing to avoid it, or taking it personally as 'my' problem falls away, then it's clear that whatever is happening is simply weather, like a thunderstorm or a cloudy day. Pain still hurts, sadness is still sad, but the suffering disappears."

Comparing her sidewalk water paintings with the sand paintings of Tibetan monks, she says: "They spend hours and days and weeks meticulously creating an elaborate mandala in the sand. When it's done, they enjoy it for a moment, and then they wreck it! Like children at the beach building sand-castles and then smashing them. Or like the painting of a whole lifetime at the moment of death – poof!"

Tollifson's book, *Nothing to Grasp*, is a collection of brief essays on topics like Not Taking Your Life Personally; The Art of Going Nowhere; What Should I Do?; What If We Really Are Perfect, Just As We Are?. In this last one she suggests that instead of praying, "May it be as I'd like it to be," our prayer become, "May it be as it is." She mentions that Thich Nhat Hanh points out that roses and garbage are inseparable, and she closes the chapter with these words: "Perfection is the whole enchilada. It includes everything, even God nailed to a cross."

*Hidden Treasure*

*Uncovering the Truth in Your Life Story*

by Gangaji

Tarcher/Penguin, 2011

Gangaji here uses her own life story and a teaching story of her Indian teacher along with inquiry questions, to allow you to explore your own story – your experiences of loss, of hell, of questing, and of discovery. She shares her struggles as a girl in Mississippi who seeks a man to make her life right; her awakening in India by a deeply insightful teacher; her becoming herself a well-known teacher; and her betrayal and forgiveness of her mate/partner in teaching. I particularly appreciated how she dealt with cynicism. She tells how she personally stopped her emotional growth at cynicism by seeing herself as a sophisticated, angst-ridden, doomed-to-suffer special one. She notes that cynicism makes a religion of refusal. She adds that refusal is a power, but the wise learn to use it well; that searching for what could be wrong is intelligent, but the practice for searching for what is

wrong is self-defeating. Gangaji says: "You can end your starring role in the story you have named *Me, the Victim* as well as the story *Me, the Hero*. You can realize that whatever story is being told is always just a story, and you always have the choice to inquire deeper."

*Dismantling the Fantasy*

*An Invitation to the Fullness of Life*

and

*Essence Revisited*

*Slipping Past the Shadows of Illusion*

both by Darryl Bailey

Non-Duality Press, 2010 & 2011

Bailey understands himself in the tradition of Albert Einstein, Simone Weil, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Emerson, Thoreau, Goethe, Hafiz, Schopenhauer, Martin Luther, Teresa of Avila, Juliana of Norwich, Saint Augustine, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Alan Watts, Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, David Bohm, the Zen masters, Sufi masters, Advaita sages, and the enlightened teachers of the Upanishads. He says that "every religion ultimately points to an indefinable presence that is the ground of all existence; that all of existence is a vital presence that can't, in any true way, be described and that includes you; and that true humility is realizing this event or presence."

He goes on: "Life isn't merely a gentle, soothing, experience. Mother Nature is bountiful in her expression, but she also eats her young," noting that the emphasis on love and peace doesn't prepare us for life as it actually is. "Ideas only go so far. At some point, the heart may open to the totally indefinable, unpredictable, and often unwanted movement that life is. Love is that openness of heart, a truly sensitive vulnerability to what is."

*On Having No Head*

*Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious*

by Douglas E. Harding

Inner Directions, 2002-2010

Countering our tendency to live in our heads, Harding presents Eight Stages of the Headless Way (waking to the no-self of non-duality or seeing into nothingness). In stage five the person experiences: an enlivening of the senses – including a sustained "whole-body" alertness in place of the "heady" intermittent sort; a reduction of stress, particularly in the eyes and mouth and neck; a lowering of one's center of gravity (as if finding one's heart, and guts, and feet, now rooted in the Earth); a downward shift of one's breathing; a general come-down (as if all the good things one had vainly strained after in the heights were awaiting one in the depths); an upsurge of creativity with childlike

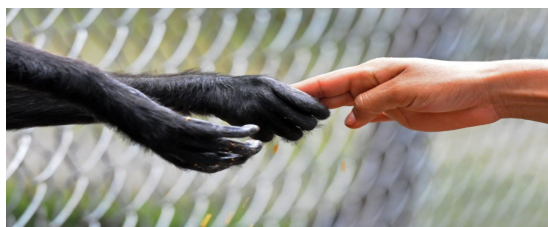


## RECOMMENDED READING

spontaneity and playfulness and lightness; and a calming of fears with reduction of greed and anger and greater capacity for joy. He adds that these benefits are experienced as modest, patchy and variable, slow to ripen and even then more apparent to others than to oneself. The next three stages are Working It Out, The Barrier, and the Breakthrough.

Then he quotes Jean-Pierre de Caussade – “that great Christian authority on surrender–” who writes: “If you abandon all restraint, carry your wishes to their furthest limits, open your heart boundlessly, there is not a single moment when you will not find all you could possibly desire. The present moment holds infinite riches beyond your wildest dreams.”

### LIVING IN TODAY'S WORLD



*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts  
Close Encounters with Addiction*  
by Gabor Maté, MD  
North Atlantic Books, 2010

Born in Hungary, Maté is a survivor of the Nazi genocide who emigrated to Canada in 1957. He is currently the staff physician at the Portland Hotel, a residence and resource center in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Many of his patients suffer from mental illness, drug addiction and HIV, or all three. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* opens with stories about some of these patients.

Reading about the tragic lives of the patients he treats is very difficult to get through. Nevertheless, to Maté these stories offer “the fresh air of truth, even if it's the stripped, frayed truth of desperation” and “they hold up a mirror in which we all, as individual human beings and collectively as a society, may recognize ourselves.” The reader soon becomes clear that most hard-core substance abusers come from abusive homes and the assaults suffered by these folks in childhood are heartbreaking. Key to Maté's work, and its biggest challenge, is to simply demonstrate care and acceptance for these folks, just as they are.

On the nature of addiction, Maté notes that essential to optimal human brain development are nutrition, physical security, and consistent emotional nurturing, all of which are too often missing.

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Maté tells the story of his own addictive habit, not to drugs, fortunately, but to purchasing classical music CDs. It sounds minor, but his habit has involved secrecy from his wife, buying binges (\$2000 in 6 weeks for CDs he doesn't even have time to hear), hours spent compulsively reading music review, and making lists of discs he wants to buy. The gift of his addiction is, he says, that it takes one to know one. He understands the compulsions of his patients.

Finally, Maté addresses the need for social change. He proposes new approaches to treating addiction based on understanding its biological and socio-economic roots. He argues that the “war on drugs” actually punishes people for having been abused and entrenches addiction more deeply. He says a system that marginalizes, ostracizes and institutionalizes people in facilities with no care and easy access to drugs only worsens the problem. He argues the need for better support for families overall, as most children in North America are now away from their parents from an early age due to economic conditions. Maté is a fearless social revolutionary whose prodigious heart and mind deserve to be listened to and supported.

*Fearless at Work*

*Timeless Teachings for Awakening Confidence, Resilience,  
and Creativity in the Face of Life's Demands*  
by Michael Carroll  
Shambhala, 2012

Carroll, a student of Chogyam Trungpa – well-known Tibetan Buddhist teacher in the U.S. in the 70s and 80s – has successfully taken the Shambhala Warrior practices into the world at large, mostly through working with businesses. In the Buddhist style of lists, he offers 38 slogans to inspire fearlessness in everyday life. The 38 are put in five categories: Primary Slogans, Exploring Cowardice, Taming the Mind, Fearless Presence, and Living a Skillful Life.

The first slogan is: Face the Fierce Facts of Life. I love this one. So basic. Its subparts: it hurts to be human, anything can and does happen, we are born and die alone, we are going to die - soon - and when we do, most of the world won't notice and those who do will forget . . . often. This makes me smile . . . broadly, and reminds me of what I love about Buddhism – the no-nonsense realism.

Slogan 27 is to Hold Sadness and Joy. Very wise. Here Carroll talks about noble tenderness and tells a story about rescuing an injured sparrow as a boy, becoming attached to the bird, then seeing it fly off, never to return. There is a built-in poignancy to life that requires a fearless vulnerability to be fully experienced.

This book also has some excellent appendices. I

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## RECOMMENDED READING

particularly appreciated the ones on mindfulness meditation and how mindfulness cultivates social intelligence. One result is the capacity to give total attention and listen fully to another, understanding the other rather than just making our own point. Another result is learning how to **be** rather than learning what to **do**, thereby being at ease with who we are, under all circumstances.

### *Improv Wisdom*

*Don't Prepare, Just Show Up*

by Patricia Ryan Madson

Bell Tower, 2005

Madson discovered early on that improvisation was key not only to her teaching as a Stanford professor of acting, but key to living well. So this book is not just for actors or directors of acting but for anyone ready to loosen up and play with life. Her simple exercises will teach you how to make mistakes and take a circus bow when you do; to pay attention and get outside your own head; to say yes and open up possibilities; and to see the gifts and connect to others. Not only will you have more fun; your life will be changed.

### *Finding Your Way in a Wild New World*

*Reclaim Your True Nature to Create the Life You Want*

by Martha Beck

Free Press, 2012

First, I must confess my temptation to dismiss Beck's book because of her emphasis on magic, including many stories in which "strange" things happen – like bending spoons, or mystical connections with wild animals. AND there are many gifts in the book that I want to acknowledge.

For living in these challenging times, Beck suggests four technologies of magic: Wordlessness, Oneness, Imagination, and Forming. She uses many examples from her experience with trackers in the African bush.

Some of Beck's insights:

1. Knowledge is no longer power, because knowledge is no longer scarce. Human attention is what is needed now. The qualities that capture positive attention these days are not slickness, blandness and mass consensus, but authenticity, inventiveness, humor, beauty, uniqueness, playfulness, empathy, and meaning.
2. The most valuable resource today comes from being absolutely yourself – operating from your true nature, which begins with healing yourself.
3. Wordlessness involves learning to think with the body, not just the head. Typical human behavior is to become lost in thoughts and unavailable to anything real. (Beck has some interesting simple exercises for experiencing wordlessness.)
4. Any unpleasant emotion takes ninety seconds to

process unless held on to by telling ourselves a story about it.

5. We might very well be better off if we eliminated the word "work" and substituted "play" instead. Try the four D's of traditional societies: drumming, dancing, dreaming and drinking.

6. Research on creativity consistently shows that people are much better at coming up with creative solutions when they are unconcerned about the outcome, when they're basically playing.

7. Creative thinkers are metaphorical thinkers. Jesus was a "metaphor machine."

8. Reading Beck's accounts of tracking and encountering lions, leopards, rhinoceroses, and giraffes up close and personal **are** awesome. She applies that tracking to the skill of tracking your own way in forming your vocation in the wild world of today. Her charts to fill out – of "things you have practiced for ten thousand hours" and "ways you went to hell" – I found quite helpful.

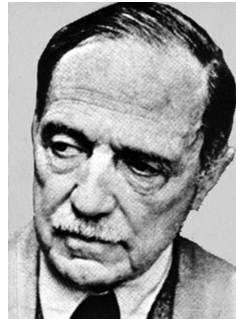
9. Rule for success today: Use the most innovative technologies to deliver the most primal products and services.

review by Gene Marshall

### *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*

by Konrad Hammann

Polebridge Press 2013



This may be one of the top two or three books I have ever read. It helped, I am sure, that I had read much of Bultmann's writing and was a fan of his theology. But I had never met the man in his domestic life, his personal work with students, his friendships with other scholars, his relations with opponents, his dealings with world wars and Nazi Germany, his Jewish

friends and support for them, his many sermons and lectures, his teaching trips, his dealing with politics in university and church as well as state, his personality qualities and warmth and care for people.

Hammann does a marvelous job of pulling all this together, as well as illuminating how Bultmann was a premier scholar, linguist, connoisseur of literature and art, and perhaps the Christian theologian of his century who will be remembered the longest. I read this book a few pages at a time over several months, and I enjoyed every moment of the time I spent. If you have a keen interest in these topics, I recommend that you add this book to your solitary reading.

# *From Empire to Eco-Democracy*

The Crisis and Future as viewed by five United States Citizens in 2011

**Gene Marshall, Ben Ball, Marsha Buck,  
Ken Kreutziger, and Alan Richard**

We tend to lack a comprehensive overview of the deathtrap into which humanity has cornered itself, as well as how to construct a social vehicle within which humanity can survive and thrive. This book is an attempt to provide that.

## **A thoughtful analysis of the choices America faces.**

The authors offer a clear and comprehensive description and analysis of the issues the American people must face. It is an intelligent and courageous work, defining the road ahead, a road that is filled with many challenges and difficult choices. The authors' vision is well worth wide attention. —**George C. Lodge**, an American professor and former politician, son of Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.

## **Participatory Democracy at its Finest**

The co-authors have worked to revolutionize broken societal structures since the 1960s. This is a refreshing manifesto for a new world order that challenges the status quo with big ideas and realistic action plans. I recommend it highly.

—**David Marshall**, Vice President, Editorial and Digital: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Wise, insightful, forthright, systemic, and clearly written, with moments of special brilliance. The framing of “The Forces of Transformation” and “The Role and Limitations of Electoral Politics” are particularly distinctive and useful contributions. —**David Korten**, author of *Agenda for a New Economy*, *The Great Turning From Empire to Earth Community*, and *When Corporations Rule the World*

I hope *The Road* is read and discussed by groups of friends and neighbors across the country. Sidestepping the political stalemates of the day, the authors name the basic problems facing our society, explain why “taking the long view” is crucial (but largely missing), and propose the processes by which we might create an eco-democracy. —**Charlene Spretnak**, author of *Relational Reality*, *The Resurgence of the Real*, and *States of Grace*

I'm often depressed by the ... un-integrated, non-systemic band-aid solutions which have become public policy staples. *The Road* neither trivializes the challenges nor tumbles into the trap of simplistic solutions. —**David Sanborn Scott**, Ph.D., Vice-President (for Americas) International Hydrogen Association, Founding Director, Institute for Integrated Energy Systems, University of Victoria, Canada, author of *Smelling Land: The Hydrogen Defense Against Climate Catastrophe*

*The Road from Empire to Eco-Democracy* may be ordered  
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Contact Gene Marshall at [jgmarshall@cableone.net](mailto:jgmarshall@cableone.net) for further information, study guides, quantity discounts, dialogue on these topics, action possibilities, and contacts that may be helpful. You may also correspond by postal mail to: 3578 N. State Highway 78; Bonham, Texas 75418. Send \$21 for a postage free copy.

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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.

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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