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free from their Babylonian exile is another speechment of God. Jesus, too, talks this way. This is the biblical claim: THE FULLNESS OF REALITY speaks in specific historical actions for those who have ears to hear.

So "THUS SAYS THE LORD" might be translated "Here is what is happening," or "This is the way it IS," or "Here is what confronts us." But now we have an even deeper enigma to fathom. Who is it that can say with certainty what is happening? Who is it that can speak for Reality on Reality's behalf? We only see Amos, a rural tree trimmer, standing on a rock. Who is he to say what Reality is saying? How does he know? Why would we believe him? Or we only see Jeremiah, and we don't like his grim predictions. Or we only see John the Baptist, an ascetic rabble rouser. Or we only see Jesus, just an ordinary man in an out-of-the-way place, and he hobnobs with the riffraff and eats heartily and drinks wine. Who can speak for God, and why do we believe him or her?

To get somewhere on this topic we will have to look deep within ourselves and notice if we have ever experienced some sort of certainty about something. We know all too well that every human perspective is approximate, relative, changeable, unprovable, and very often dead wrong. But these are all human perspectives, perspectives of some finite human mind. We know that human minds are never absolutely certain about anything. So what do we mean by any of us being certain that we are speaking or hearing the Speech of Reality, the Word of God?

Another way to ask this question is, "How do I know the Truth?" Truth with a capital "T" is the final mystery of things; it is something we do not know and will never know. But we can have certainty in our specific steps toward the Truth. I have found it possible to define three approaches to Truth: the scientific approach, the contemplative approach, and a type of approach to truth that derives from group decisions about the things that work for us in our communal and social arrangements. All three of these approaches to truth help us understand consciousness, wonder, religion, culture, ethics and more.

For example, when we genuinely use the scientific approach to Truth, we can have a sense of what is factual and what is not. Also, when we use

The Most Misunderstood Phrase in the Bible

a mini-sermon
by Gene Marshall



There are so many obscure sayings and topics in the Bible that I might be exaggerating when I say that the following phrase is the most misunderstood: THUS SAYS THE LORD, or simply THUS SAYS GOD. Even if we guess that this phrase means "Thus says Reality," does Reality really speak to human beings? If so, where do we go to hear Reality speak?

Obviously, "speak" is a metaphor. We do not believe in voices sounding from some cloud or magical writing appearing on some wall. If we speak of "the handwriting on the wall" we don't mean a particular wall, and we don't mean Hebrew, Greek, or English letters.

But however metaphorical this phrase is, what does it mean for Reality to speak to us? The Bible has some clarity about this: in the first chapter of Genesis, God speaks the cosmos into being. Reality's speech is an action that creates something noticeable. The Hebrew prophets also mean something noticeable when they announce what God is saying. God speaks in the developments of history. The Assyrians coming to conquer Israel is a speechment of God. The Persian Cyrus initiating a world conquest that can set the Judean captives

the contemplative approach to Truth, we can look within our own lives and ascertain what is so and what is not so. Such knowing is a bit mysterious. We may not be able to contain it in a book. We can know that our speech is partial and that others have to see the Truth for themselves. Nevertheless, we still have times of “no doubt” about some Truth that we have approached or that has approached us. We change our minds to accommodate these arrivals of new Truth. We let go of old beliefs we have had for decades because we become convinced that something else is so. How is this so? How is it so that Reality does speak to us in awarenesses that we cannot dismiss without lying to ourselves and others?

When we let this mystery of Truth sink into our core consciousness, we can become aware of something we can call “certainty” even though our minds cannot fully contain it or exhaust it or possess it. Such Truth possesses us. We can obey it and live it, or we can flee it and fight it. But such Truth is simply THERE for us to deal with. Such Truth is a happening to us that we cannot “unhappen.” Such Truth is a demand upon us that we cannot avoid without hypocrisy or suppression. Can I with reason convince you that this truth about Truth is so? No, it is an experience that each of us must have for ourselves – can have, will have, and probably have had more times than we can remember.

One of my neighbors drove all the way to El Paso, Texas to help people suffering from a flood. The average annual rainfall for El Paso is very low, so a flood in that place seems about as likely as snowballs in a Texas July.

So my neighbor has his interpretation for that unusual event: God is punishing us for our lazy social-security comfort and for women having left the home to go to work. The bare fact that there is no logical connection between this flood and those violations of his conservative Christian conscience did not seem to bother him.

Yes, everyone interprets everything, but some interpretations are better than others. I did not share with my neighbor that my interpretation of such weird weather events was that we were burning fossil fuels to an extent that Reality (yes, God if you like) is indeed punishing us and that far greater punishments are on the way.

Most Texans do know that it is not wise to mess with Mother Nature. A few of us know that Mother Nature is just one of the masks for that God of history that is encountering us in every event. If we are going to use the Christian vocabulary to interpret the signs of our times, we need to avoid imagining God as an interfering

avenger who operates in defense of our current moralisms. But we can find the phrase “wrath of God” meaningful in the sense that Reality is truly uncompromising in its opposition to unreality.

For example, the truth of global warming is not a matter of opinion or ideological viewpoint. It is not politics; it is physics. The planetary dynamics do not care what political position you prefer, whether oil companies finance your ambitions, whether getting elected by dumbed-down voters depends on your lying to them about global warming. The Earth will do what the Earth will do. The global warming prophet is not spouting an opinion that he or she simply prefers. No, Reality speaks to Her global warming prophets and they obey. They say what Reality is saying, because Reality has spoken to them.

Not only are we convinced by our sciences about Reality’s speech, our inward explorations into human existence also convince us of Truth that we must obey and share honestly with our companions. I have attended talks, courses, retreats, contemplative inquiry workshops, etc. and learned new things about myself. Perhaps you have too. Contemplative truth comes to us in just that way.

Our objective mind might picture “the wrath of God” as a divine being having a temper tantrum. But from a contemplative perspective “the wrath of Reality” is not a quality of Reality, but an inward experience – the result of our fight with Reality or our flight from Reality. From the perspective of a devotion to realism, Reality does all things well, as the mystic Julian says. When we are dedicated to realistic living, Reality is nothing but “love” for us. Our flight/fight with Reality can disappear entirely without changing one gram the weight of the cosmos.

Thus says the Lord! Just listen and see.



The Old and the New

a theological clarification

by Gene Marshall

No one puts new wine into old wineskins. The new wine would burst the old skins, spilling the wine and ruining the old skins. No, new wine must be put into new wineskins. Luke 5:37-38

Like all the parables of Jesus, these words about new wine and new wineskins are about the Kingdom of God, about the Reign of Reality, about the ontological, psychological, and sociological

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manifestation of human profoundness in the temporal flow of history.

Specifically for Jesus, the old wineskins were the Jewish culture and religious practices of his times. The new wine is a symbol for that Kingdom of God, that Reign of Reality breaking into history through Jesus' ministries. Jesus understood this Reign of Reality as a fresh coming-to-be, initiated by Reality. Jesus saw himself only as the herald, the pointer, the awakener, a mere tool of Reality's Action. So for Jesus, this Reign of Reality was a Mighty Action in history – a coming-to-be beyond the control of any human being, including Jesus and his confrontational movement. This arriving Reign of Reality was overcoming a horrific Reign of lies, illusions, moralism, stupidity, meanness, and slavery to despair, anxiety, addiction, and sicknesses of soul/body too deep for words.

How does this wineskin parable apply to us today? How is it a revelation of the way Reality has always worked and is still working in our own lives? I will reflect on two illustrations: the old wineskins of Christendom and the old wineskins of hierarchical civilization.

The Old Wineskins of Christendom

In spite of any sparks of life still to be seen within Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Eastern Orthodoxies, this entire embodiment of the Christian breakthrough is now an ossification, a coagulation, an obsolescence – these old wineskins will not hold the current reappearance of the true wine of the Reign of Reality. Right now in our history, Reality (if we trust Reality, we can also say "God") is acting in a disruptive, dismantling way toward the entirety of Christendom. I am using the term "Christendom" in a very broad sense. Some Protestants tend to apply the term "Christendom" to Medieval Catholicism and not see that the fragmenting Protestant denominations have been "fingers of Christendom" spreading from Medieval times into our times, along with the many changing forms of Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Some of us reading these words have been effective Christian renewal agents for many decades, yet Christendom has not been renewed. Individual people have drunk that new wine of Jesus, but the overall patterns of Christendom have closed in on every attempt to repair the old structures of the Christian religion. Christendom has reached the end of its journey. It is not going to be further reformed. It is going to be replaced. And this is not just an opinion of a few radicals like myself. This is the action of Reality with which we all need to come to terms.

To say that we are experiencing the end of Christendom, does not mean that the two thousand years of Christian practice do not contain great treasures that can be restored. It means that the overall container, the wineskin of Christendom, is incapable of holding the new wine of the true Christian truth-for-living that is being restored to our awareness. Here are some core examples:

We can no longer speak of **"the Father in Heaven."** However useful that metaphor was for the last two thousand years, it is no longer useful. All the liturgies, all the prayer books have to be rewritten. Why? Because we now realize fully that calling Reality "Father" is an accommodation with a patriarchal world that is passing away in spite of anything that "conservative" movements can do about it. God is acting. Reality is speaking, "No more patriarchy!"

"Heaven" is also passing away. We can no longer find useful this metaphor about a parallel cosmos. If "heaven" was once used to mean the absolute Otherness of Final Reality to human consciousness, it means that no more. "Heaven" now means an escape from nature, from this cosmos, from ourselves, from history and its meaning, from Reality – yes, an escape from God. So there is no more "heaven" in the Next Christianity. No more going there. No more Christianity that talks that way.

Also passing away are the **"fathers" in the structures of Christian communities.** No more Popes, Bishops, priests, clergy, doctors, and other aristocrats in the Christian "Life Together." All the next Christians who live within an appropriate next wineskin of "Life Together" will be peons, laity, ordinary servants of the same overwhelming calling. No pulpits, no raised platforms! We will sit in a circle equidistant from the Truth. We will all be priests, which means that none of us are priests. We will all be leaders, which means that none of us is The Leader. Thereby we can consider afresh being led by the Holy Spirit of Truth, Love, and Freedom, stirred within us by the Awesome actions of Reality upon our lives. Such new wine does not fit within the old wineskins of Christendom. When we try to fit it in, it tears Christendom to pieces. When we succeed in some small way to restore within Christendom the Truth that this great heritage has carried through history, Christendom, as an overall structure of operating, will crush us. Our new wine is spilled containerless on the ground, for the container of Christendom cannot contain it. A new container is needed. And we have to invent it, build it, and maintain it from perversion. We are living in a similar time to that of the original disciples of Jesus. Within that

ancient grandeur of classical Judaism, they were called to build new wineskins for the new wine released in their consciousness by the tumultuous events of the life, death, resurrection journey they had followed through to its bitter and also glorious conclusion.

Though the future of Christian practice remains largely unknown and unrealized, we can imagine what some aspects of the next wineskins of Christian religious practice might be. Medieval Christendom gloriously succeeded by putting a physical building in every village and staffing that building with priests, monks, and nuns. In order to do that, the Christian revolutionaries of that remarkable time raised among the laos of that religion an enormous amount of wealth. Being a Christian in those days meant sharing a large portion of your wealth with the poor and with building and maintaining churches. We can learn enthusiasm and love from this remarkable story. But we can also learn that this old model for being a Christian can no longer dominate our future. We can learn that building a building for every fragment of Christendom in every neighborhood is an enormous waste of resources. We have to abandon what some humorously call "the edifice complex." Millions of sincere Christians can feel this economic anchor around their revolutionary necks. Most of the meetings that need to go on in the next wineskins of Christian "Life Together" can go on in living rooms and rented spaces. And all that now wasted expenditure can be spent in more effective ways for a valid Christian mission of witness-to-Truth and justice-building in this real world. Such extensive changes may seem unthinkable. And even when we do think them valid, they seem overwhelming to a degree that we are severely tempted to simply abandon the Christian religion altogether.

The Old Wineskins of Hierarchical Civilization

Perhaps even more challenging than the notion of replacing Christendom is the notion of replacing hierarchical civilization. Yet this is the core social vision that flows from applying the resurgent Christian understanding to social affairs: **dismantle civilization and replace it with a social mode that works for this planet and this 7-billion member humanity and its current challenges.** Specifically, what does this mean? Hierarchical civilization has over the last 6000 years become the social vehicle that carries most of humanity. "Hierarchical" is a redundant adjective for civilization, for civilization has always been, still is, and always will be hierarchical. That is, civilization

is composed of rich and poor, an aristocracy of wealth and power ruling over commoners and peons and often slaves. This is still true in so-called "democratic civilizations." The United States today has perhaps the greatest gap of inequality ever experienced between the most wealthy and powerful and the least wealthy and powerful. Money rules. Our current form of democracy moderates this rule very slightly. In virtually every nation at least one political party is entirely dedicated to the power and wealth of the aristocracy and fights for that group with shocking disregard for the needs of the rest of society. This political position is commonly rationalized as good, as a trickle-down of wealth that raises all boats, but the real concern of these ideologues and the real results of their policies is the rise of all yachts and a general sinking of many boats.

For example, the actual result of the standard policies of U.S. conservatism is a flow of wealth from poor and commoner to rich aristocrats. Across the world, we see political parties and movements that are obedient servants of the aristocracy. With regard to conserving the fabrics of hierarchical civilization, true democracy is a subversive vision growing within the old vehicle of civilization.

In many developed societies like the United States, democracy as an idea has reached such general acceptance that aristocratic policies are on the defensive. These aristocratic policies seem weird, even insane, in the depth of their hypocrisy to claim a democratic vision while so completely serving the continuation of the aristocracy and all its abuses. The current crazed conservative fight against the somewhat helpful Affordable Care Act is a fight on behalf of the wealth and power of the current health insurance aristocracy. The fight against a commonsense shift from fossil fuels to a carbon-free energy system is a fight on behalf of the wealth and power of the energy aristocracy.

The very term "conservative" or "true conservative" has come to mean conserving the power and wealth of the aristocracy. That means "saving" hierarchical civilization. The opposite of such "conservatism" is held by the term "progressive." "Liberal" means modifying or repairing civilization. The weakness of traditional liberal views is that they, like conservatism, are limited to "saving" civilization. But civilization cannot be saved. Civilization can be repaired in many of its worst features, and we can affirm such repairs as far as they go, but mere repairs is not a solution of our challenges.

There are many preservable gifts that have been developed over the long period we have lived

within the wineskin or vehicle of civilization. **But civilization, as an overall vehicle, cannot be saved.** Reality (God) has assigned civilization to the grave. And there is nothing that can be done to stop this. This is the progressive vision: we are confronting this choice: (1) we allow humanity to travel in the civilization vehicle to its impending grave or (2) we build another social vehicle within which humanity can flourish with a plausible degree of justice and well being for all.

This truth in its abstract statement may be shocking enough to be somewhat clarifying, but the gut feeling of this truth only becomes obvious when we get serious about actually doing the transition from civilization to that workable next social vehicle.

As an example, let us notice that taking ecological responsibility for the planet is even more subversive of the civilization mode of society than democracy. Civilizations take much from Earth, but seldom see the need to give back to Earth. Nature is viewed by the civilized mind as the bottom rung of the overall hierarchy. Slaves are more valued. Though this demeaning attitude toward nature is often denied or justified, the aristocratic view remains the operating belief that the planet exists simply for civilization, and especially for civilization's aristocracy. In order to hold that view, it is further needful to hold the illusion that nature is virtually an unlimited resource for which we humans have no overall responsibility. Tribal society at least cooperated with nature. And any post-civilizational social vehicle for humanity will need to make caring for the atmosphere, the average planet temperature, the freshwater sources, ocean-life systems, fertile land, species stability, etc. etc. etc. first orders of responsibility. In order to have a bright future for humanity and many more life forms, it is necessary to give up any of our current practices rather than mess with the viability of the planet.

The already occurring catastrophe of warming the average temperature of the planet is a core place to begin our lucidity about the deep ecological confrontation that we civilized people are facing. Every grade-school child needs to understand the dynamics of CO₂ warming. Every U.S. Senator who denies global warming, or the human causes of it, needs to be replaced. Global warming and its human causes are no longer an issue for further debate, it is a factual challenge. We face an unavoidable confrontation with Reality's response to our practices. More intense hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, heat waves, droughts, and horrific forest fires are already happening. And this will get worse. Already it

might be true that the cost of these disasters to our economies is greater than the cost of phasing out the burning of fossil fuels. If that is not yet true, it soon will be. If the fossil-fuel companies had to pay for all these disasters, the price of fossil fuel would move out of reach of most citizens. In addition, fossil fuels remain reasonably cheap because tax loopholes, financial perks, and subsidies to the fossil fuel companies are outlandish and vigorously protected by the aristocracy politicians. Cheap fossil fuel has become a taken-for-granted good in the minds of most people.

And here is where our strategies for transition to a post-fossil-fuel economy hit the fan: the transition to a post-fossil-fuel economy can only be made by raising the price of fossil fuels to all fossil-fuel customers. Customers really don't care what sources of energy they buy. They will buy the cheapest that are available. Investors will invest in whatever energy sources are the going thing. So our very best strategy for a complete transition to a post-fossil-fuel energy system is to tax fossil-fuel burning at an ever-increasing rate until it becomes untenable. That is the only way to leave some of those climate-heating products in the ground.

But, and this is the but of all buts, it is politically unfeasible to ask the poverty stricken and those sinking into poverty to pay for the necessary rising prices of fossil fuels. The rich, not the poor and middle classes, have to pay for the energy transition. The ecologist Paul Hanson has provided the best solution to this problem I have heard. Here is my appropriation of his core idea: the taxes collected on fossil-fuel burning are put into a separate government account not to be used for any other project of government. All these collected taxes are returned through the income tax system to the poorest 90 percent (or so) of the population. What this accomplishes is that the cost of the energy transition is not placed on the backs of the 90 percent. In fact, if they can change their energy source away from fossil-fuel burning, they can increase their standard of living. But the 10 percent have to pay for the rising costs of their fossil fuel burning, and they get no reimbursement for doing so. They can, however, minimize their losses by shifting their energy purchases from fossil fuel to the now fast-growing other sources. This is more than fair, since the 10 percent are those who have been receiving most of the profits from the fossil-fuel system.

Such a set of policies is politically feasible if the 90 percent control the government rather than the 10 percent. That is a big IF, but it takes us back to the main problem we progressives have to solve for a hundred other reasons, namely dismantling civilization and its aristocratic control. We now



Getting Started

A Kind of Parable

by Alan Richard

have a vivid picture of the core revolution that can result in common sense solutions to our energy crisis and all our other pressing challenges. Here it is: Labor unions, progressive NGOs, women, devalued immigrants, under-cared-for minorities, youth, and a growing minority of saner white men will need to join forces against the assault being made upon all of us by a desperate aristocracy that is going to become more and more desperate as civilization's dismantlement continues. These rich and powerful people are not going to endure this transition quietly, even though it would be to their true advantage to do so. They, or many of them, are going to fight to the death with every dollar and every ounce of energy they can muster. This is a civil war, hopefully one that can be won without resorting to violence.

In its essence, democracy is a nonviolent process, but it is not a process free from adversarial tension. We 90 percenters have to get tough in our political activism. We need to assume the worst from our enemies and nevertheless beat them fair and square on the playing field of democracy. This is our challenge. This is what it means to respond to our actual confrontation with Reality, with God. This is what it means to see our ethical imperative as dismantling civilization and building a new social vehicle. This is what it means for our new wine of democracy and ecology to find the sociological wineskins that can contain it.

Dedication to these New Wineskins is a Spirit Topic

Judaism and Christianity are deeply inward religions, but not in a merely psychological manner. The sociology of meeting Final Reality in history and responding to our actual historical confrontations is the very heart of these religious treasures. Justice, real love for real people, is the calling that makes these religious practices what they are in their essence. When the awesome overwhelming actual challenges of history rip us loose from our familiar lethargy and pull us into obedience toward what is Real, then we are having the core Spirit experience of the Exodus and of the Death and Resurrection understanding that initiated the Christian movement. Without this depth dialogue with the ongoing activities of history our spirit life remains sentimental. This new wine that is crying out for new wineskins to hold it is a deep Spirit experience precisely because it is a call to action, to intentionality, to responsibility for ourselves, our place, our role, our continent, and our planet.

It's some kind of miracle that I ever get started on anything. The passage from any desire for change that has been haunting my imagination to a movement of my body that changes something requires both taking hold and letting go, exercising my "I" and relinquishing it. It astonishes me every time it happens.

When I moved to rural north Texas to join the staff of Realistic Living, one of my desires was to gain more hands-on experience with environmentally sustainable homesteading. This wasn't about taking up a hobby. The horror of environmental degradation, the promise of a renewal of connection to the earth and to place, and a growing sense of responsibility to the gap between them were motivating that desire. But I could not have been less prepared. Even though I was born and raised in a tiny town in Iowa farm country, and even though my dad has kept a garden every year since I was born, I'd gone my entire adult life living in apartments without so much as a house plant. Having read and thought quite a bit about climate change, topsoil loss, and other serious environmental challenges, however, I'd become interested in the challenge of designing a living and working space that moved closer to environmental sustainability. I read books on this subject, completed 10-day courses in it, and watched maybe 30 videos. For a couple of years, I worked two days a week at a local homestead doing hands-on supervised work such as organic gardening, orchards, animal husbandry, and even a little carpentry. I took in all this information.

While other people who took these courses went home and apparently transformed their living spaces into awe-inspiring masterpieces of permaculture, I did almost nothing with the piece of land where my house sits. I walked around the property where I lived, observing it from every angle. It overwhelmed me. There were many, many serious challenges in that space, but connecting what I'd learned to these challenges seemed hopelessly beyond me. I want to tell you about one of them because I did eventually do something about it, and it can serve as example of the miracle that getting started is for me and, I suspect, for some of you.

In front of my house was a small hill of lifeless clay, hard as a rock when dry, which had been

moved there when the house was moved here back in 2010. Nothing was growing on it, and every time it rained you could see streaks and little gullies where the hill was eroding. At first, I waited for Gene, who I believed knew more than me, to decide what to do about this and then helped him with my labor. We added soil and seeded it, but the grass that did grow on it looked like the sparse, overly lengthy hairs still growing on the head of a man who is almost completely bald but can't face it yet. The slope of the hill was still fairly steep in places, and I had a hunch that this might be part of the problem. I could see the erosion, and I could also see seeds we had planted bunching up at the bottom of the hill, and I assumed they'd been washed down there. I even had ideas about how to fix this. But I still didn't feel like I knew enough to turn those ideas into a real material something that would really encourage grass to grow.

The permaculture course I took had covered making on-contour swales to capture and sink rainwater and prevent erosion. A friend of mine even helped me create a small A-frame for identifying contour lines. But I wasn't convinced that I was really ready to use it or that I could do it well. I wasn't sure that a swale was the right solution for such a small hill, since I'd mostly seen them constructed on large hills and even in mountainous areas. Finally, the almost-trivial and isolated nature of the problem seemed quite remote from the grandiose notion of reshaping of the landscape that I'd been dreaming about. Even if I were able to get it done, I'd be looking at a conventional lawn: boring grass. So the almost-bare hill remained almost bare.

Then, one day a few months back, I was outside in the afternoon and this ugly, largely bare hill of clay, which I'd seen every day since I moved here three years ago, became suddenly intolerable. I still thought I didn't know enough to fix it "right," and didn't have the proper materials to do it. At the same time, I felt that I was done waiting for my expert to come along and give me free supervision. I remembered learning that brush dams can slow water and prevent erosion, even if they are less efficient than swales at sinking water and thus feeding water-hungry plants. Brush dams are also easy compared to swales: you just dig down a little bit, fill up that area with smaller twigs and rocks and the like, and build bigger on top of it to hold it down until the dam sticks up above the surface enough to trap the water and slow its flow. I remembered that we had lots of available wood lying on the floor of the forest around us. So I decided that I would build a brush

dam and see what happened.

In order to get to the decision to build a brush dam, I had to move from a delightful array of potential projects to one (dealing with the bald hill), and from a number of potential solutions to one (the brush dam). Like every other human being, I participate in what Paul Tillich calls "dreaming innocence" inasmuch as I can imagine any number of mutually incompatible possibilities. If I were just a creature of dreaming innocence, I could have it all. But like every other human being, I live in time and space, and the time I have is short. Every decision to do something is also a decision not to do something else that seems just as important, just as pressing. So dreaming innocently about the things that could be done on the landscape is not an option. Dreaming innocence has to be interrupted by a decision to do some one thing, even if it's a decision to do nothing. As Tillich says, I have to bring about "the end of dreaming innocence."

Part of my procrastination, here as elsewhere in my life, has to do with this predicament. Deciding on one thing is not completely arbitrary, but it's also not automatic. It makes use of the ego, the "I" that exercises a freedom of which I cannot fail to be aware. It puts me in charge: me and no one else. Deciding is a risky, anxious thing. It's not just risky, in fact. It's inevitably tragic. Why? All my decisions are ambiguous. I am aware that I could have decided otherwise. But I want to make the "right" choice. So either I make ambiguous decisions and then regret not having decided otherwise, mourning the possibility that is now lost to me, or I make ambiguous decisions and behave as if they *were* the "right" decisions and that there is no lost possibility. I end up with a chronic dissatisfaction or smug over-confidence. It seems like a no-win situation, and according to my friend Tillich, it is.

Still, Tillich insists that it can be overcome. I can act decisively from within my predicament, though I cannot escape that predicament. Once I have chosen a path, I have to surrender it, giving it up to a new uncertainty. I have to let go of the perfect dam in my mind and let the movement of my body do what it does. This is a different kind of uncertainty because it involves moving from my solitary intention to build a brush dam into a physical dialogue with my arms and legs, and with twigs, branches, and clay. In order to let this perfect brush dam go, in order to make an actual brush dam, I have to let my ego go as well and do a dance with the landscape that depends on a wisdom in my body and in that landscape that I don't consciously control. The decision is my responsibility, but the outcome belongs to Reality.

If I trust Reality, I can say that the outcome belongs to God.

So finally, really getting started feels more like relinquishing control than like taking control. On that day, I was able to do it, to surrender to uncertainty. I can't always do that, but on this day, I could. I remember the feel of the shovel in my hands, the resistance of the clay as I dug, the intense focus of my eyes on the size and shape of objects on the forest floor, the intuitive movement of my hands toward the objects that seemed the right size and shape, the way each step of building and testing the structure flowed out of the previous one. I remember the feeling of being in the flow of the work, lost in it. I worked until some actual thing with a highly imperfect resemblance to my image of a brush dam lay on the mound before me, a thing that expressed my potential but equally the potential of the clay, the twigs, and the branches. That thing was the embodiment of my life and labor poured out into twigs, branches, and clay, and it was the transformation of that life and labor by those twigs, branches and clay.

That dam wasn't accurately on contour, and I had to work on it later to plug leaks. But it did slow the flow of water, and it did the work I hypothesized that it might. In a month or so, it was covered with grass. Since then, I've built similar structures on the other sides of this hill and it has been transformed into a grassy knoll. I got more adept at making the structures themselves aesthetically pleasing. I used other fallen trees and branches on the property to build boxes for raised beds just in front of the house, and filled them with topsoil from the forest mixed with compost from the compost bin out back that has been there since I've moved in but has never been harvested. Slowly, this landscape is changing in relationship to my interaction with it. It hasn't happened effortlessly. I've made mistakes, including trying to grow things in front of the house without raised beds and lots of soil enhancement, an effort that resulted in lettuce plants the size of my iPhone and chard plants that grew all summer and never got bigger than my thumb. I remain unprepared, I remain overwhelmed, but I've begun.



**A New Birth
of Intimacy**
part of chapter 17 from
**The Love of History &
the Future of Christianity**
*Toward a Manifesto for
a Next Christianity*
by Gene Marshall

Archeological evidence seems to support the fact that pre-civilization peoples lived in tight-knit
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groups of about 150 adult members. Extrapolating from the size of the neocortex of various primates including humans, the British anthropologist Robin Dunbar concluded that the "mean group size" for humans was 150 members, with an "intimate circle size" of 12. However valid such research may be, it is remarkably suggestive of something being discovered by current religious experimenters. In our general society we are missing effective social forms of those two "intimate" sizes. We have circles of friends and various volunteer organization in those size ranges, but the seriousness of purpose typical of groups of these sizes do not compare with the seriousness being attached to nations and states. Great pressure is being applied upon singular individuals to succeed within the fabrics of these huge social structures. We seldom sense a comparable urgency for our more intimate associations to succeed. Many people spend very little time within intimate groups. They are basically alone within huge social collectives. Modern society in general can be said to suffer from both immense collectivism and lonely individualism. And when wealthy individuals game the collective society in their individual favor, human life becomes especially mean.

I am suggesting that the Next Christianity needs to "pioneer" strong social forms in the size ranges of 12 and 150, and do so on behalf of humanity at large. I am giving these new social forms of Christian practice these names: The *Christian Resurgence Circle* and the *Regional Assembly*. The Christian Resurgence Circle, as I envision it, is a committed and disciplined group of about 12 that meets for meaningful ritual, serious study, and intimate care for one another. The Regional Assembly is (ideally) about 12 of those Circles meeting together quarterly for a whole day or weekend. When 12 Circles of 12 people meet together, that is 144 people. That is my optimal picture of the next sociological design of the "local church" in my vision of a Next Christianity.

So let us explore in our imaginations this quite practical dream of 12 or more Circles of 3 to 12 adults meeting weekly in twelve places within driving distance, and meeting quarterly all together for Spirit refreshment, theological clarity and discussion, a eucharist meal, plus planning and common work toward the expansion of a CRC Network and its mission to its region of Earth and humanity. This model for the next local church requires no church buildings, no janitors, no secretaries, and no pastors. Living rooms and rented space suffice. And every member is pastor, janitor, and secretary in whatever proportion

results from the skills and choices by the persons involved.

The Magic of Circles

There have been various house church experiments going on in both conservative and liberal venues. Most of them strike me as theologically, methodologically, and missionally inadequate. They tend to carry forward the same dogmatic attitudes, moralism, and sentimentality that characterize so many congregations. More interesting to me have been the base communities launched within Latin American Catholicism by Liberation Theology priests and lay persons. These small groups of mostly working people push for new social justice for the poor, a theology of liberation, and an alternative to the overreaching hierarchical church structuring. Also instructive are the sanghas of renewed Buddhism. Here also are disciplined small groups who are serious about accessing our common profound humanness. Whatever be their gifts or weaknesses, these groups are witnessing to a felt need for intense small group religious practice.

In the Next Christianity that I am envisioning, I see a type of small-group Circle in which the methods and theology described in this manifesto are operating. The word "Circle" is used because it emphasizes seating equidistant from a center, symbolizing a full manifestation of the "priesthood of all believers." This circle pattern has been pioneered by radical feminist movements, and it does provide fresh air for women. Such circling does not mean watering down the members to a common mediocrity, but rather the upgrading of all members to a fully competent leadership status. These envisioned circles are leader-full, rather than leaderless. There will be differences in leadership capacities, but even the most skilled and dedicated do not sit on raised platforms or take on special seating.

The specific experiment in small group practice in which I have been participating for over two decades has used the longer name "Christian Resurgence Circle," or CRC for short. Every new invention of religious practice needs to describe its practice and make clear what that practice is and what it is not. Here is a summation of what my group's 20-year exploration has envisioned a CRC to be and not to be:

A CRC Is Not:

A Church School Class
A Study Group
An Open-Discussion Group
A Circle of Friends
A Meditation Circle

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A Spirit Group with Spirit leader
An Interreligious Dialogue
A Men's or Women's Support Group
A Peer-Counseling Circle
A Social Action Task Force

All these activities are good and may be led or participated in by CRC members, but they do not describe a CRC.

A CRC Is:

A CRC is a disciplined group who practice together (mind, Spirit, & body) with being a base community for a Next Christianity. This religious practice is designed for 3-12 persons meeting weekly for at least two hours. While the particular meeting times and disciplines are designed by each Circle, we have found that meeting face-to-face weekly for two hours is a baseline necessity. It is a viable continuation of the Sabbath heritage.

A CRC is rooted in Christian practice. By "Christian" we mean a basic loyalty to the history-changing and continuously transformative event of dying to our illusions and rising to authentic life – an event indicated by Jesus-as-Messiah, retold by word of mouth, and restated in Christian Scriptures and traditions. Such an understanding is outlined in this manifesto.

A CRC is rooted in the radical Christian theological awakening dating back to at least the innovations of Søren Kierkegaard. This theology affirms radical social responsibility and continues to take in further respect for women's experience, equity topics of all types, ecological responsibility, interreligious respect & dialogue, and other edge topics of intense relevance to a Christian practice.

The CRC group practice uses a nurture design constructed upon the frame of Confession, Celebration, and Dedication.

A CRC is an ongoing experiment in religious innovation of a whole network of CRCs acting together. As a whole group of CRCs, we strive to evolve for ourselves and our descendants a structure of living practice that can become or influence significantly the base communities of a widespread Next Christianity. This networking is a key part of the whole pattern, for it can hold the balance between a commonality of religious practice and ongoing local experimentation. Each CRC needs to remain open to its own best intuitions without being so alone that it easily disintegrates into its own narrow egoisms. Being a vital Next Christianity requires both a planetary commonality and a local autonomy. How to balance those seemingly conflicting values is part of the sociological challenge we face.

The above article is an excerpt from the recently completed *The Love of History and the Future of Christianity*. We urge you to download this brief book:

www.RealisticLiving.org/PDF/History/

Religious Studies-One

for June 5-8, 2114

more news by Alan Richard

RS-1 is a four-session weekend course that launched a movement of religious renewal, the many branches of which continue to do transformative work throughout the globe. It attacked sentimental, otherworldly, moralistic, and rationalistic interpretations of the key Christian symbols of God, Christ, Holy Spirit, and Church and re-grounded these symbols in the inescapable elements of profound human experience. Although I was not a part of this movement prior to my first Realistic Living Training School, simply being in the presence of people whose lives had been touched by RS-1 during that Training School convinced me of its power.

Realistic Living's 2013 Training School was a minimally adapted version of the classic RS-1. Those who attended the course testified that it remains a transformative experience. At the Symposium meeting following the Training School, we decided that 2014's Training School would be a more thoroughgoing revision of RS-1 that would push the envelope to foreground the voices of women.

Since then, Realistic Living staff and colleagues have been reflecting on what such a revision would mean. We have begun with the art forms. Art forms are an important part of the RS-1 experience. The classic works used in RS-1 (D.H. Lawrence poems, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, and Picasso's *Guernica*) were works by and about males. We want to use works by and about women that are just as effective in confronting sentimentality, otherworldliness, moralism, and rationalism.

To this end, the staff has been weekly viewing films made by and/or about women and discussing both their overall quality and their usefulness for opening people to the depths of the Christian symbols that drive the RS-1 curriculum. We've seen some amazing films. We aren't quite convinced that we've found *the* film yet, but we are convinced that women directors and writers are making remarkable motion pictures that communicate profound humanness. I am sure that the 2014 Training School will include a film experience that no one who attends will soon forget.

Our next steps include adding female colleagues to the RS-1 teaching team and identifying the poems and a painting or sculpture that we will use. In the meantime we are working on revising the primary teaching sessions. We are having a lot of fun, and we are getting more and more excited about the experiment. If you've never attended an RS-1 before, this Training School will be a great way to enter the RS-1 dynamic. If you're an RS-1 veteran, I can promise you that this one will both refresh and challenge you. See you in June!

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

NOVELS



The Crimson Petal and the White
The Apple – New Crimson Petal Stories
The Courage Consort
all by Michel Faber

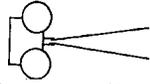
I read *The Crimson Petal and the White* about a decade ago. When I recently saw the 2011 BBC four-and-a-half-hour TV version of the film, it sent me back to read and enjoy the book again – yes, all 954 pages. Faber is a modern Dickens, sharing the social consciousness of the Victorian era, but he adds the 21st century sensibility which allows him to go into the thoughts of the men, the women (wives, prostitutes, widows), the children, the servants. He enters the bedrooms and doesn't leave out the chamber pots, the piss, and the blood. One wonder of reading this novel is recognizing many aspects of the period that still rule our consciousness and allowing ourselves to move beyond those strictures.

The Apple is a collection of short stories in which some of the characters from *The Crimson Petal and the White* appear. The best part of this book is the Foreword, in which the author tells of his correspondence with readers who demanded a sequel to the novel. What a lovely, artful, human piece!

The Courage Consort is a collection of three novellas, each totally different, yet sharing an eerily unsettling fairy-tale quality that defies your ability to predict and leaves you with issues in your own life exposed.

I think I read novels mostly in order to hang out with someone who has keen insights into life and an artful capacity to express those insights in such a way that I am profoundly changed. By these standards, Faber is one of the best companions I have found.

MOVIES



Quartet. Dustin Hoffman's directorial debut is adapted from a play by Ronald Harwood about a retirement home for aging musicians. Many supporting roles are played by musicians who do perform. My major disappointment is that Hoffman didn't cast top flight aging opera singers in the "quartet." But then, most singers probably aren't willing to perform past their retirement, and the quality of Verdi's glorious Rigoletto quartet, which is the movie's finale, would suffer. Since I love musicians and fine music, I reveled in the film. The acting was quality (Maggie Smith, Michael Gambon, Pauline Collins and Billy Connolly), and the story of personal and professional reunions pleasant.

A Late Quartet. Another musical quartet, this time a string quartet, faces a crisis in their 25th year together when their cellist is diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Although their long-time association has given them incredible intimacy, this bombshell exposes issues that have been latent. As with the film, **Quartet**, I would have loved to see "real" musicians in the roles, as there are rehearsal as well as performance scenes (of Beethoven's funereal String Quartet #14); but the intensity of the drama requires acting chops which are well met by Philip Seymour Hoffman, Christopher Walken, Catherine Keener and Mark Ivanir.

Walk to Beautiful. This one-hour NOVA documentary of five Ethiopian women who suffer from fistula will break your heart. I was still weeping when I woke the morning after. Two to three million women worldwide experience this traumatic aftermath of birthing. You probably don't know what fistula is. I had heard of it but was unclear about the details. Because girls in impoverished countries are engaged in intensive hard work from a very early age, their growth is stunted. Add to this marriage at an early age (13 and younger), and what results is an inability to deliver a baby. Labor may last as long as 10 days with usually a stillborn baby somehow wrenched from the girl. This often leaves a hole between the vagina and bladder and in some cases the rectum. The victims are incontinent, leaking urine and sometimes feces. Adding insult to injury, they are abandoned and rejected by their husbands and families, banished to live alone in shacks, waiting to die.

The good news: there is a Fistula Foundation. The film shows their hospital in Addis Ababa where women who can make their way there are

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treated surgically and given kindness and education about their situation. The courage of the women to get there and the devotion and fine work of the doctors are heart-warming, but the film leaves you wanting some way to address the underlying and ongoing causes of this outrage.

Holy Smoke. Ruth (the amazing Kate Winslet), an Australian, is in India vacationing with her friend and becomes mesmerized by a guru there. Her friend returns home and convinces Ruth's parents that Ruth must be deprogrammed from the religious cult. Enter P.J. Waters (the equally wondrous Harvey Keitel), a hot shot exit counselor from America, and we are in for quite a ride with these two. Australian director, Jane Campion, best known and recognized for her film, **The Piano**, is in top form here, though this film has been mostly criticized by reviewers and ignored by the general public. The first delight is the nostalgic trip through the 70s-80s religious/psychological explorations many of us experienced. The core of the film takes place in an isolated cabin in the outback, where it becomes unclear who is deprogramming whom. What begins as a somewhat light story with Ruth's comic family, slowly morphs into a life-or-death encounter between two strong egos, neither of which survives. A powerful film. It reveals your own vulnerability and places demands on your own patience and courage.

Glory tells the Civil War story of the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, made up of black soldiers - some Northern freemen, some escaped slaves - and led by whites, including Robert Gould Shaw, the son of Boston abolitionists. I saw the film when it came out in 1989 and was impressed. I recently saw it again with my daughter, who is fascinated with the Civil War and had not seen the film. It holds up as well over the years as any film I have seen. The music, the cinematography, everything is outstanding. I was in tearful awe throughout the second half.

Drawing on the letters of Commander Shaw, the story is told through his eyes. A young man, he is growing into maturity as a person. As a soldier he is training the black men in his command to be disciplined troops when most people don't believe they are capable of such. Matthew Broderick is believable as Shaw, and Denzel Washington (who won an Academy Award for his role) and Morgan Freeman are perfectly cast as the leaders in the black company who educate Shaw about race and human nature.

Everything in the film leads up to the final bloody battle scene, a suicidal march up a hill that

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accomplishes little in concrete military terms but is of incalculable symbolic importance, giving depth to the word “glory” and making it the appropriate title for this film.

Only When I Dance. This documentary follows two young people from the slums of Rio De Janeiro who have a gift for dance, Western elite dance. They become ballet dancers extraordinaire. The film is the story of Brazilian dance teacher Mariza and her two most promising students, Irlan and Isabela. Both of their families are proud to support their dream, but it requires going into debt with a slim hope of success, particularly for Isabela, whose skin color and body don't match the traditional ballerina. The dancing of these two is the highlight of the film. Irlan's sense of weightlessness in his leaps is reminiscent of Baryshnikov.

Stories We Tell. You may be less familiar with actress Sarah Polley as a director, but this 34-year-old Canadian has been writing and directing films since she was 20. **Stories We Tell** is a documentary about her family history. It has an impromptu and informal style as she interviews her siblings and instructs her father in reading the narration which tells the family story, beginning with how he and her now-deceased mother met. Eventually she turns the camera on herself and others with whom her mother was related, as she probes what she calls a “basic confusion” in the family. It is an amazing film, in part because of what Polley discovers in the process of making it. A five-year project, the result is a stunning experience of this awesome family and an awareness that your family, all our families, are also mysterious likely and hold more secrets than we might imagine.

Le Havre was my introduction to Finnish director/screenwriter Aki Kaurismäki. After seeing the film I immediately sat down at the computer and put the rest of his films (the ones available on Netflix) in my queue. Called the “miserabilist's miserabilist,” his long sequences with no dialogue and deadpan faces are a delight to me. His capacity to create the bleakest comedies reflects not only himself, but his mother country. In an interview he said in answer to what defines the Finnish character: “Melancholy.” And as to why Finland has such a high suicide rate? “Lack of light. Light in every way. The sunshine. It is always dark, and when it is dark, it is also dark in the mind.” (Being a person affected by SAD - Seasonal Affective Disorder - I totally understand this.) The amazing thing about **Le Havre** is that it is not only bleak; it is funny and sweet. As

Kaurismäki says (and I love this quote), “When all the hope is gone, there is no reason for pessimism.” The film has a quirky quality to it that brings a smile, even though it deals with life and death issues – a wife who might be dying, a young illegal immigrant from African Gabon avoiding arrest. One of the delights is the surprise of characters who go beyond expectations. A reminder that people have more possibilities than we often imagine. Another delight is the astonishing affirmation of the power of a love that simply takes care of the details, one by one.



RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

The End of Your Life Book Club

by Will Schwalbe

Alfred A. Knopf, 2012

Will Schwalbe's mother, Mary Ann Schwalbe, was diagnosed with Stage IV pancreatic cancer in 2007. The Schwalbe family was a family of readers. Will often accompanied his mother for her chemotherapy treatments, and it was quite normal for them to select books to read and discuss over the two years as her life wound down. This book is an opportunity to learn about some 125 authors and books you may have missed (mostly, but not all, fiction); to meet an unusual woman who was involved in dangerous on-the-ground activities and in fundraising for war torn areas, including Afghanistan; and to experience the close mother/son relationship as they deal with her death. They discovered that, in his words, “books can be how we get closer to each other, and stay close.”

Tiny Beautiful Things

Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar

Cheryl Strayed

Vintage, 2012

I fell for Strayed when I read *Wild*, her memoir about walking the Pacific Crest Trail, and became her fan after I read her novel, *Torch*. This book is selections from an online advice column Strayed wrote anonymously for a time. I now stand in awe of this woman. She turns advice columns on their head. Rather than telling people what to do from a prim, “I never make mistakes myself” position, Strayed shares her own personal struggles with a similar situation, goes with breathtaking skill to the core of the problem, and gives advice that pulls no punches and yet is extremely tender and respectful. Each letter is an inspiring work of art. Don't miss the opportunity to read this book.

RECOMMENDED READING

Julian of Norwich
Mystic and Theologian
by Grace Jantzen
SPCK, 2011

If you have any familiarity with Julian of Norwich it is most likely with her oft-quoted, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well," which she claims was said to her by God and reflects her theology in a nutshell. Jantzen, an internationally-renowned feminist philosopher of religion who unfortunately died from cancer in 2006 at the age of 57, has left a fine study of Julian's writings and her times. Little is known of Julian herself. Even her name. She lived about 1342 to 1416, and her anchoress' cell was built onto the wall of the church of St. Julian in Norwich; so that is what she has been called. Her writings identify her as one of the most important Christian mystics. She lived through the Plague and was herself deathly ill, during which time she had a series of intense visions of Jesus Christ. Her writings explore the theological meaning of the visions.

Julian respected the scholastic, impersonal and universal tradition of the church but was herself more grounded in the monastic tradition, which is rooted in immediate personal experience. She became convinced that the essence of human beings, all human beings, is good, a fact of nature. She saw the root of all the mess and muddle in our lives as broken-heartedness, not as punishment, but simply a result of turning from our deepest self. Struggling with why humanity went away from that essence, she spent twenty years pondering the problem of evil in the world. She saw no wrath in "God," discerning that human beings make a deliberate choice of "hell." Like modern theologian Paul Tillich, she did not define "sin" as sins, but as a fracturing (Tillich would say estrangement) from our relationship to "God." (Tillich would say Ground of Being). Her primary concern was not to call down judgment on humanity, believing that we are already too aware of our guilt. Instead she emphasized becoming aware of the compassionate understanding of God. She saw feelings of guilt and worthlessness as more serious than what is usually called sins, because these feelings keep us from living in the joy and freedom of the presence of God. In Julian's words: "God is closer to us than our own soul . . . for our soul sits in God in true rest, and our soul stands in God in sure strength, and our soul is naturally rooted in God in endless love." Jantzen points out the psychological realism of Julian, "which recognizes that a great many of our hurtful attitudes and actions are attempts to compensate

for feelings of worthlessness and insecurity and anxiety."

In Julian's visions, God (whom she saw as both mother and father) assured her: "I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see for yourself that every kind of thing will be well." She questioned over and over how that could be, exploring the necessity of human freedom and finally the likelihood that some things will not be understood in this life but in "heaven" (a term which doesn't work for me).

In spite of the need to translate Julian's two-story language, I found her basic understandings and articulations of the gospel from a feminine perspective right on and deeply moving. I am grateful to Grace Jantzen for clarifying Julian's gift.

Perseverance
by Margaret J. Wheatley
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010

This is a book like one I used to read in the 1950s - *Daily Strength for Daily Needs*. You read a page a day and are inspired to go into the day. What I like most about Wheatley is her awareness that we cannot depend upon results or outcomes to keep us going when our vision is far beyond what is happening in the world today. Our job is to keep moving in the right direction. She also sees the gift in invisibility (not needing "applause") and the need for discipline. She creatively sees busyness as a form of laziness. I could go on and on, but read the book yourself. Here's one of my favorite quotes (from the Buddhist Dhammapada): "Whoever moves from carelessness to vigilance, lights up the world like the moon that emerges from a cloud."

Far From the Tree
by Andrew Solomon
Scribner, 2012

Solomon points out that it is a natural, almost ingrown, expectation on the part of parents that their child will surpass the parents' level of accomplishment. I recall when my first child was born, consciously having the thought: She will do everything I did and more. This book is about the experience of parents whose child does not conform to this image and how they cope. Solomon spent over a decade on this extremely well-written book - a hefty 700 pages plus a 75-page bibliography, 75 pages of notes and a 50-page index. It is based on extensive research plus numerous interviews with 300 families with whom he became friends. He explores the deaf, dwarfs, prodigies (particularly musicians), those with Down Syndrome, those on the autism spectrum, schizophrenia, multiple

disabilities, transgender, children of rape, and those whose lives are characterized by criminal activity. He skillfully balances the information about each difference with detailed stories of the families and how their experience played out over the years.

I didn't read the book straight through but began with the autism chapter, which is relevant to our family and probably why my younger daughter drew my attention to the book. Then I read the first chapter, which carries the principle message of the book: If we tolerate prejudice toward any group, we tolerate it toward all groups. Solomon uses his own differences, being gay and dyslexic, to introduce the topic of when to try to "fix" and when difference is an identity. (We have two lesbian daughters in our family and were educated through the years by them about what does not need fixing.) Another message is that we are all differently abled. We need to consider wiping out the idea of "normal." This opening chapter is a fine essay that stands on its own but reading details on each of the groups is an education we need because few of us are conscious of our prejudices about many of the groups.

So here is a bit of info on each group. **Dwarfs:** "The only permissible prejudice in America is against dwarfs," who are seen as comical and treated with unusual callousness. **Deaf:** The deaf were abused for years by the Oralist movement which attempted to force deaf people to talk, keeping them from one another. Now there is a strong deaf movement of people and a recognition of the language of Sign and its gifts of nuanced ability to communicate, even across language barriers.

Down Syndrome is the most common form of intellectual disability. Those with DS tend to be sweet natured, unobtrusive, and sometimes stubborn. They have a heightened risk for abuse. The advantage for parents is that you know what you are dealing with, unlike with autism or schizophrenia. **Autism** is a misunderstood and often mis-treated condition. Each case is different, but it is probably caused by a kind of brain rash from a combination of genetic and environmental influences. The parts of the brain related to social interaction are low-functioning. Some severely affected children strain parents to the limits, without the ability to offer the comfort of connection and responsiveness, some unable to speak. Information about some of the outstanding creative people in history indicates that they were on the Autism Spectrum - probably having Asperger's, a highly verbal form - another reminder of the need for tolerance of difference.

Schizophrenia manifests in late adolescence and becomes increasingly debilitating, seeming to eliminate the person. Though not direct from parents to child, it does run in families. It is a tragic condition, leaving many homeless (150,000 in U.S.) or in jails (300,000 with mental illness in U.S.).

Parents of those with **MSD** (Multiple Severe Disabilities) struggle (as do those from some of the other groups) with the issue of placement and with the concern of what will become of the child when the parents die. In this group, as in the other groups, many parents are aware of the humanity in the child and of how strong their parental love is.

Prodigies: You might think prodigies don't fit in this book, but being gifted is also isolating and mystifying for parents and children. Prodigies definitely fall far from the tree. As Solomon puts it, cleverness may be inherited but dazzling brilliance is an aberration. People tend to fear anyone who is radically different, and those with enormous gifts are often resented. Also, prodigies share with schizophrenia and transgenders a high risk of suicide.

Rape: Children of rape share with autistics and transgenders the risk of being murdered - the children of rape and autistic children by their own families. The children of rape who are murdered are mostly in war situations, where male torture victims are heroes and female ones are considered prostitutes and their children killed. In the U.S. there are about 30,000 rape-related pregnancies each year; half are terminated and at least 8,000 keep the child, bringing a complicated situation to the mother, who is likely suffering PTSD and usually has mixed feelings toward the child.

Crime: Children of law-abiding parents who become criminals are a different situation: "to be or produce a schizophrenic...is generally deemed a misfortune," the author writes. "To...produce a criminal is often deemed a failure." One of the most striking interviews is with the parents of Dylan Klebold, one of the teenage killers in the Columbine massacre. The author says that of all the families he interviewed, it's probably the one of which he'd have most liked to be a part. The Klebolds showed him that any of us could have a child who is broken in some way and wantonly destructive. One aspect of the case was the culture of bullying at Columbine. The author notes that three of four incarcerated youth have mental health diagnoses, 50-80% have learning disabilities, and 75% of delinquent girls have been sexually abused.

Transgender: I was surprised to learn that sometimes before the age of two, these children clearly know that their body does not agree with their sense of their identity. "I'm not a boy, I'm a

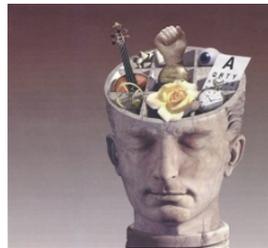
RECOMMENDED READING

girl!" They will be extremely anxious if made to conform and greatly relieved if allowed to act and dress as they feel themselves to be inside. Solomon demonstrates with many stories that transgender is not a preference but a lifelong conviction. Who would prefer an identity that society hates so? One transgender person is murdered world-wide every three days. The author explains that Western culture likes binaries, feels safer with good and evil, mind and body, masculine men and feminine women. Threats to gender are threats to the social order.

It is said to be impossible to hate anyone whose story you know. So read these stories. Let your heart be broken, and let it be inspired by those who parent and those who experience radical difference. Finally, let yourself be released to be whatever "difference" you are.

ASPERGER SYNDROME

I want to share more reviews of books on this aspect of the Autism Spectrum because of my personal experience and because I think there is a general lack of public awareness about it. I have been reading on the subject since my older daughter began suspecting a couple of years ago that she had Asperger's. (She was officially diagnosed as Asperger's in January of this year.) It would have been good to have had this information when she was a child and problems began to manifest, but in the 1950s few people had knowledge of such a condition (or even of Attention Deficit Disorder which usually accompanies Asperger's). Asperger's is often referred to as high-functioning Autism. It is likely that many people are on the Autism Spectrum and are unaware of it.



The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome
by Tony Attwood, Ph.D.
Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007

Tony Attwood is an English psychologist living in Australia who has made Asperger's Syndrome his major study and clinical practice. This is one of six books he has written on the subject. Liane Holliday Willey, who has now written books about Asperger's herself, says of Attwood, "Dr. Attwood, or Saint Tony as I call him, gave me the strength to come out to the world and admit I was only pretending to be normal. That strength saved my life, of that I am certain."

In this book he defines Asperger's and explains

how it is diagnosed; then follows a number of chapters on the characteristics of those with Asperger's Syndrome: their limitations in social understanding and making friends; how and why they are often the subject of teasing and bullying; their inability to understand others' facial expressions and their feelings; their tendency to be high in some cognitive abilities and low in others, causing unrealistic expectations to be placed on them; their confusion and immaturity with regard to feelings; and their sensitivity to sounds, textures, tastes, and light. The book is quite readable and certainly recommended if you are on the syndrome or personally related to someone who is. Or if you suspect you might be.

In explaining challenges that this syndrome presents, Attwood says, "Sometimes people with Asperger's Syndrome assume that a friendly act, smile or gesture has greater implications than was intended, and this may lead to the development of an intense interest or infatuation with a person who appears kind and friendly." Also, "They are often perfectionists with high self-imposed standards of achievement, and . . . are notorious for their inability to cope with frustration." Their sensory sensitivity is such that sounds that others hardly notice can be almost unbearable, hugs are often experienced as unpleasant, and aromas of perfumes or cleaning products can cause nausea. Though Attwood emphasizes the areas where those on the AS need to work, he clearly delights in his clients and the creativity they bring to life with their differences.

*Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
for Adult Asperger Syndrome*
by Valerie L. Gaus, Ph.D.
Guilford Press, 2007

This book is more academic than Attwood's in style and is written for therapists; nevertheless, there is some good information here for family members for whom there is little available that focuses on adults with AS. Gaus, who practices in Long Island, NY, gives an overview of the complex mental health needs of this often-misunderstood population, who face a social world in which rules and expectations appear to be crystal clear to everyone but themselves. She explains how the therapist can use CBT to address their challenges of frequent anxiety and depression. Most helpful to me are the transcriptions of her sessions, noting how she skillfully and respectfully interacts with her clients.

Gaus notes what I have noticed in my daughter (and my daughter recognizes in herself): "The one cognitive distortion that is found in every patient with AS I have met is all-or-nothing thinking.

RECOMMENDED READING

There are no 'shades of gray.' People are evaluated as either good or bad, nice or mean, and smart or stupid. There is a low tolerance for uncertainty."

Gaus says, "Adult patients with AS who have chosen to enter psychotherapy are survivors. The older they are, the longer they have lived with myriad problems in an overwhelming world and without any good explanation as to why the simplest things in life are such a struggle for them. When I hear their stories, I am often surprised by the persistence of some to keep trying to improve their lives, despite an immeasurable amount of pain. I often felt the urge to ask, 'How the hell did you manage to come this far?' – but I didn't say that out loud." She goes on to say, "The long history of struggles and traumatic experiences that is so common to these patients is exacerbated by the fact that they have rarely had anyone to talk to about it. The validation that people typically get from natural supports such as friends and family is not as available to many with AS."

Like Attwood, Gaus loves working with those with AS. Her closing words to fellow therapists: "I have been continually fascinated with the peculiar workings of the AS mind ever since 1995, and I wish for you to equally enjoy working with these unusual but delightful patients."

Aspergirls

Empowering Females With Asperger Syndrome

by Rudy Simone

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010

Most studies on Asperger Syndrome have been based on men and boys. Researchers are now learning that Asperger's presents differently among girls and women. This book is written by an Aspergirl for Aspergirls, young and old, and includes reflections of over 35 women diagnosed as on the spectrum, as well as reflections from their partners and parents. The book can help female Aspies (a term those with Asperger's Syndrome sometimes use to identify themselves) to become clearer about their gifts and limitations and help friends and families to understand and more easily tolerate the person's quirks and appreciate their assets.

There is an extremely useful chart at the end of the book listing the traits of female Asperger Syndrome under these categories:

1. Appearance/Personal Habits
2. Intellectual/Giftedness/Education/Vocation
3. Emotional/Physical
4. Social/Relationships

Aspies can hand this chart to friends and families, highlighting what relates to them personally.

If you are a female and think you might be on the spectrum, this book can give you insight. If you are the loved one of an Aspergirl or a professional who works with Aspergirls, it will broaden your understanding.

The Autism Revolution

by Martha Herbert, MD, Ph.D.

Harvard University, 2012

Dr. Herbert, Harvard Medical School researcher and clinician, challenges the assumption that autism is a fixed state of brain impairment. After years of treating patients and analyzing scientific data, she concludes that rather than being hardwired genetically, autism is a genetic vulnerability which poor food, toxins, bugs, and stress have played upon. This book reviews stories of individuals on the autism spectrum that either improved or got off the spectrum entirely through methods that are not usually included in the standard family physician's to-do list. Her treatment methods are low-risk and low-cost with potential high benefits. Mostly she emphasizes diet, specific supplements, and healthy lifestyle. She also explains why diet affects the child's brain and why the autistic brain might be more vulnerable, clarifying why (for instance) having a pizza might trigger a terrible tantrum in certain sensitive children.

Her stories of improvement beyond bleak prognoses are encouraging because to anyone with a child on the spectrum small changes are major.

Autism Beyond Despair—CEASE Therapy

by Tinus Smits MD

Emryss Publishers, 2010

Like Dr. Herbert, European Homeopath Dr. Tinus Smits also challenged the assumption that autism is incurable. In fact, CEASE stands for Complete Elimination of Autistic Spectrum Expression. Smits saw environmental factors as a primary cause of autism. His particular concern was vaccines before the age of two as well as antibiotics, anesthesia, and drugs administered in the early years or to the birth mother during pregnancy. Before his death in 2010 he treated more than 300 autistic children, with results anywhere from significant improvement to being symptom free. His method: detox the body with homeopathic preparations, use nutrition and specific supplements to nourish the brain (also used by Dr. Herbert, above), and then classical homeopathy. The book includes his own detailed cases as well as those written by the parents of the patients. My daughter worked for a few months with a CEASE therapist and got good results, although I think it probably is more beneficial at an earlier age.

RECOMMENDED READING

Homeopathy – Beyond Flat-Earth Medicine

by Timothy R. Dooley, N.D., M.D.

Timing Publications, 1995

Continuing on the subject of homeopathy, this book is a short straightforward introduction. Dooley uses flat-earth as a metaphor for the current medical model of treating the disease rather than the whole person. Also missing from conventional medicine is the appreciation of the ability of the body to heal itself. In this concise book, in addition to explaining how homeopathy works, Dooley tells his own story as naturopath, homeopath, and medical doctor and the history of homeopathy in the U.S. Probably you didn't know that the first national medical association in the U.S. was the AIH - the American Institute of Homeopathy in 1844. One of the main purposes for the formation of the allopathic AMA in 1846 was to oppose the spread and practice of homeopathy. AMA members also opposed the spread of osteopathy. There were once homeopathic hospitals, medical schools, medical journals, manufacturers, and pharmacies in the U.S. Probably you know that the personal physician of the Queen of England is a homeopath. The twentieth century brought a combination of changes that made homeopathy nearly forgotten but not actually ineffective in comparison to allopathic therapies. Dooley does not discount allopathic medicine but suggests that one's primary physician be a homeopath, in order to give your system a chance to heal naturally, then resorting to drugs only when truly necessary.

Homeopathic Cell Salt Remedies

Healing with Nature's 12 Mineral Compounds

by Nigey Lennon and Lionel Rolfe

SquareOne Publishers, 2004

Dr. Wilhelm Scheussler (1821-1898), a homeopathic physician, revolutionized homeopathic medicine by simplifying the remedies. He worked in his laboratory to isolate the mineral components, resulting in 12 individual remedies, which became known as the Scheussler cell salts. These remedies can be used by anyone without consultation with a professional for day-to-day issues. My homeopath suggested I get this book and the 12 bottles of cell salts. I have recently used it to deal successfully with stomach pain which felt like my old peptic ulcer problem was returning. The book has a chapter on each of the 12 remedies and its potential use as well as a 10-page chart of common symptoms and possible salt remedies.



book reviews by Gene Marshall

The Gardens of Democracy

A New American Story of Citizenship,

The Economy, and the Role of Government

by Eric Liu and Nick Hanauer

Sasquatch Books: 2011

This small, attractive, 165-page, 4 3/4 by 7 inch, hard-cover book addresses the core problem of our North American social lives today: **effective citizenship**. The book begins by distinguishing between our typical "Machinebrain" social thinking and a "Gardenbrain" in which society is viewed by all its citizens as something to be tended, seeded, watered, and weeded on an ongoing basis. In the gardenbrain view, we see each behavior of our lives as a social-improving or a social-degrading action. The authors claim for us a "true capitalism" in which it is understood that "we're all better off when we are **all** better off." That is, the appalling inequality we now endure is not "free" enterprise but oligarchy, slavery, and ruin.

On the role of government, this book offers the clearest and most convincing paragraphs I have seen. The authors see the role of large-scale democratic government as setting the big "whats" for our economy and culture, and then leaving the "hows" involved in carrying out these broad agendas to the creativity of local citizens and economic innovators. Liu and Hanauer give an effective, futuristic populist alternative to the Tea Party's small-government anarchy. It is a vision of a truly participatory society rather than a game played by the rich and powerful. This basic direction makes the moderation of global warming doable, grueling poverty unnecessary, and political participation an enriching and satisfying part of our lives.

In addition to being a delightful read, this is the best **ten-session study book** on social vision I have found. So get this book, read it, use it in your book clubs, and give it to your friends and some of your enemies. Be a citizen.

The Theology of Surprise

Exploring Life's Mysteries

by John L. Epps

Resurgence Publishing: 2013

John Epps is one of the few writers of whom I can say that I agree with everything he says. I may

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want to say more about some things or say some things a bit differently, but basically we are standing in the same places looking in the same directions and reporting what we see. This is not surprising, for John and I have had many of the same experiences, read many of the same books, loved many of the same mentors, and we have known one another for over four decades.

John is a brilliant, adventuresome spirit who has vigorously explored many geographical places and topics of thought.

The book begins with a chapter of personal stories structured to expose the wonder in each phrase of the Apostles' Creed. His intent is to help that heirloom of Christianity to speak relevantly to 2013 citizens of a vastly different world from the one that first listened to these now classical words. He then groups together a series of spins on Cosmology and Culture in which he demolishes Creationism and gives us a vision of loving the natural world and developing a society that can do so. Thirdly, he explores "Dimensions of Authenticity," including reconciliation among a widely diverse humanity and with the Final Reality. He also summarizes the 21st century appropriation of Jesus. Next he pictures for us the spirit of the 80s, 90s, 00s and 10s. This was a highlight for me, deserving even more reflection as the 10s unfold. And finally he winds up answering the question, "What is this Reality that in faith we love?" He dialogues with eight practical, yet universal, aspects of what is fundamentally Real.

I could wax on about most of these topics, but I think you should read this book and have your own dialogue with John Epps' provocations and surprises.

Realistic Living Theology

The theology that undergirds our work is rooted in the mid-twentieth Century resurgence of a vital Christian understanding, especially as the voluminous writings of Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and H. Richard Niebuhr were boiled down by Joe Mathews into a weekend course modestly named "Religious Studies-One." Here is a summary of the four content sessions of that course:

Session One

"Spirit" is a happening in our lives that occurs when an external event occasions an internal crisis that raises an existential question (such as "Who am I?" "How be I? and "What do I?") from which question and its implications I want only to escape.

"Reality" means that Final Mysterious Power

that puts within us every care, longing, and concern of our lives and at the same time limits and frustrates every care, longing, and concern of our lives.

"God" means nothing more nor less than "Reality" when and if realistic living has become the core meaning of our lives.

Session Two

Our initial experience of Reality is as an intrusion into our current sense of reality that calls into question every thought, every feeling, every doing that characterizes our current living. To the extent that we cling to our current sense of reality (which we are always inclined to do), our initial experience of Reality is an experience of despair. "Despair" means refusing the Reality from which there is no escape.

Our second experience of Reality may be the realization that what heals despair is the vision that Reality welcomes us home to Reality without penalty. This may be called "forgiveness."

Thirdly, our contribution to enjoying this option for realism is incredibly singular and simple: simply accepting the forgiveness – simply receiving the welcome home to Reality – an effortless letting be of the forgiven life with all its unavoidable actualities and possibilities.

This three-stage event of healing is both the core message of Jesus and what the Christ-way Jew, Paul, called "grace." Jesus is the Christ or Messiah precisely because he does not do what we expect our messiahs to do – rescue us from Reality.

Session Three

Realistic Living turns out to be Freedom with a capital "F," the sort of Freedom that releases us from what we have become into an ongoing process of becoming. This means a discovery of our even deeper being – the dynamic of Freedom itself. Freedom is also a discovery of our power to make a difference in the history of the world – to experience the future as open to our agency. This Freedom must be freely chosen by us, but it is not invented by us: it is simply the restored gift of our essential humanity.

Freedom also means a life beyond good and evil. Every choice we face in the real world is ambiguous. No standard of good and evil, possessed by our finite minds, can be considered always applicable to every situation. What parents and society have taught us and ingrained into us may provoke useful considerations; nevertheless, real choices place us on our own with our own Freedom.

The free deed now becomes the good deed, not

because it conforms to some standard, but because it is free – because it is true as the realistic living of our lives. So we do the deed, surrender it to history, and do the next deed.

Session Four

Realistic Living turns out to be Love with a capital “L” – compassion for every detail of our own actual lives on our journey to be real, and a similar compassion for every other human being on Earth. (1) Such Love includes being the presence of Love through all the thick and thin challenges of living our particular lives. (2) Love includes witnessing to others concerning the path toward realism we have discovered. (3) Such Love also includes taking responsibility for the social structures that care for human beings and afford all of us opportunities for pursuing our happiness.

Those who Love, those who Care, are thereby called to be the vanguard of humanity leading humanity into ever more realistic patterns of living. We are always becoming anew “Those who Care.” We are called in each moment to choose again to be “Those who Care.”

This vanguard of “Those who Care” is properly called the true Church of Jesus Christ, even though many members of this vanguard have never heard of Jesus Christ or, even if they have, attend no activities of a Christian Church. This vanguard of Those who Care is a cosmic reality, an always-present force in the dynamics of history.

Good theology does not stand still; it is a “theologizing” that further understands a basic self-understanding as some community of people continue through history. So it has been with the journey of the Realistic Living organization and its constituency. The five full-length books we have produced in the 21st century show this journey.

The Call of the Awe

Rediscovering Christian Profundity in an Interreligious Era

In 2003 Gene pulled together an expression of the RS-1 heritage in relation to the developing interreligious dialogue with Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and religious antiquity, including the Great Goddess. This book emphasizes the secular nature of entering the spirit journey, whatever your religious practice.

Jacob’s Dream

A Christian Inquiry into Spirit Realization

In 2008 Gene pulled together the intensified

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realization within the RL constituency, especially its Research Symposium group, that entering the spirit journey was followed by a very intense ongoing struggle. Christian heritage has called this sanctification in contrast with justification, understood as the new birth into a spirit life.

The Road from Empire to Eco-Democracy

In 2011 five members of the Research Symposium, Gene Marshall, Ben Ball, Marsha Buck, Ken Kruetzger, and Alan Richard pulled together four years of work on the social mission of the spirit people of planet Earth, especially those living within the United States. This was not a Christian book, but a secular book that maintained the radical vision spawned by the theological heritage of RL. This book attempted to clarify what our heritage has called “The New Social Vehicle.”

The Enigma of Consciousness

A Philosophy of Profound Humanness and Religion

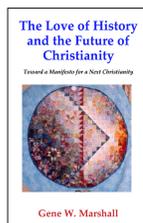
This still unpublished 2012 book attempts to clarify what our heritage has called “The New Religious Mode.” “Religion” means something more than Christian religion. Every society has tended to develop something that enables its citizenry to access their profound humanness. That social process might be called “religion.” Like any social process, such a social process can be good or bad, enriching a whole society or corrupting it. This book defines good religion in relation to an examination of the essence of human consciousness.

The Love of History and the Future of Christianity

A Manifesto for a Post-Christendom Christianity

This still unpublished 2013 book deals with Christianity as a social process in need of radical change in a sociological manner. Taking the history and future of Christianity seriously includes taking history itself seriously. In fact Judaism and Christianity are religions that have explored meeting the Final Reality of life in the historical passage of events. This book includes a return to basic Christian theologizing, but with an emphasis on the sociological living of that carefully reflected faith.

Please correspond with us about any of these topics or about accessing copies of any of these books: jgmarshall@cableone.net



Check out our newly revised web site: RealisticLiving.org.
Also, check out our blog: RealisticLiving.org/blog/

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- * new experiments in Christian community life
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- * local and continental bioregional organizing
- * 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.

Jacob's Dream
A Christian Inquiry into Spirit Realization.

The Road from
Empire to Eco-Democracy

To order each book send \$21
to Gene Marshall.

See RealisticLiving.org
for more information.

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

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