

REALISTIC LIVING

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in which an entire civilization is publicly claimed with steepled buildings in every neighborhood, nor does it look like a monastic order in which an ascetic or detached style of life is taken on in order to provide renewal for some ailing or missing quality in the human experience. Nor does this next Christianity look like a new denomination of doctrinal, moral, or stylistic emphasis. These old forms will continue to serve, but are not the next Christianity, which we imagine may look somewhat like the organization of a biological system – many nodes of activity, each complexly connected to every other node within an effective network that serves the larger body of humanity. More detailed descriptions have been attempted many times, but the truth is that we are watching and waiting for a new body of Christ to emerge in this historical era with a culture, polity, and economy appropriate for this radical task of love.

A 30-Year Anniversary for Realistic Living

Thirty years ago this November, Realistic Living became a 501-C3 nonprofit corporation in the state of Texas. We were located in Dallas for seven years and then moved to Bonham where we have remained for the last twenty-three years.

Realistic Living is a secular term for Holy Spirit. We see “Holy Spirit” as Christian language for an entirely secular reality, the profound humanness that every human being can access as their own true nature. That is, when the ordinary eventfulness of human living is pushed through to its primal depth, we find ourselves part of a community of trust in the Mysterious Final Reality that is near and active in every event. “Realistic Living” means that we trust that inescapable Reality, that we are part of a community of limitless compassion for ourselves and every other living being, and that we are born into a boundless freedom to create out-of-nothing by our own initiative and with Reality’s blessing.

As a human institution, **Realistic Living** is an office of research, publishing, and training within a larger movement toward a “Next Christianity.” This Christianity does not look like Christendom,



Relating to the Mystery of Life

an interreligious spin by Joyce Marshall

The past is past, I vow to let it go.

The future is coming, I vow to open to it.

The present is glorious, I vow to embrace it.

My life is accepted, I vow to accept it.

Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to renounce them.

The deluded are numberless, I vow to liberate them.

Injustices are rampant, I vow to correct them.

Earth restoration is critical, I vow to accomplish it.

Spirit teachings are boundless, I vow to master them.

The Silent Void is devastating, I vow to trust it.

Boundless Fullness is overwhelming, I vow to love it.

Realistic living is impossible, I vow to vow it.

Some years back, we created these realistic living vows based on a Buddhist ritual. They remind me of the absurdity of our showing up in life with its challenges and limits. I like the way Andrew

Bernstein put it (in his book, *The End of Stress*, reviewed in this issue): "We are tiny specks of presumption suspended in a vast universe of uncertainty." The vows are also a reminder that our indomitable human spirit moves toward realistically responding to the situation in which we find ourselves. Throughout the ages human beings have created religions to assist us in this task.

I read some years ago and reviewed in this journal a book, *States of Grace*, in which a friend of ours, Charlene Spretnak, makes the case that the modern world sorely needs the wisdom from all the great traditions of the Earth community.

She addresses (1) the Goddess tradition with its strength of honoring the personal body and the Earthbody, (2) Native American spirituality and its intimate relationship with nature, (3) the Hindu/Buddhist wisdom on the nature of the mind, and (4) Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - the Semitics - with their emphasis on social justice and community.

Charlene notes that each of these traditions needs recovery of its core values. This is even more obvious today when we see how Islam and Christianity have been twisted by so-called fundamentalist movements. But I am encouraged when I note that there are those in each of these traditions who are moving toward wholesome recovery of their own traditions while holding an attitude of openness and appreciation for the other traditions.

Grounded in our particular heritage going back to the 1950s, Realistic Living has moved to make an appropriate recovery of Christianity that can speak to this age. Our close association with the Bioregional Movement since 1984 has deepened our connection to Earth and our respect for Native American traditions. A decade of meditation retreats and interaction with Buddhist teachers has been an immeasurable gift. As you have discerned if you read my book reviews, I have recently been exploring the Hindu Advaita or non-duality teachings. And currently we are studying the life of Muhammad and the origins of Islam in our weekly circle meetings. Our readings and personal interactions have also included the Goddess and Jewish traditions. We have found that this interaction with other traditions has in no way damaged our own practice, but has in fact deepened our Christian understanding and expression.

So I am deeply committed to two values: Recovering the essence of the Christian gift to humanity in a way appropriate to this era, and exploring and taking in the gifts of the other

religious traditions which are being recovered by their progressive practitioners. I can't see a more crucial calling today than this recovery and this dialogue, impossible though it is. I vow to vow it.



A Next Christianity in an Interreligious Era

a view of the future by Gene Marshall

We live in an interreligious world, and there will be no escape from it. Any renovation, renewal, or resurgence of any religion will require adaptation to living among many other viable and meaningful religious practices. Whatever the social process called "religion" contributes to the urgent challenges of our social development, it will be an interreligious contribution. There will no longer be a Christian ethics, only a secular, interreligious ethics worked out with hopefully strong Christian participation.

So what does a next Christian practice look like, and what can a vital Christianity contribute to the interreligious dialogue and thereby to the entire planetary drama?

First of all, let us look more carefully at what interreligious dialogue might mean. It is time to move beyond merely sharing unfamiliar things with each other and learning to appreciate them. And we can move *way beyond* any watering down of our vast diversity to a set of lowest common denominator beliefs and moralities. Let us, the awakening devotees of the many religions, focus on talking about what it means to be human, what profound humanness actually is when viewed from these many different looks toward this one "elephant" of being human.

What Buddhist Meditation is Telling Us about Religion

Contemporary Buddhists have made a strong recovery of the meaningfulness of effective meditation. They have taught us skills for concentrating our consciousness upon consciousness itself – of seeing ourselves as conscious watchers of our feelings and of our mind's ever-

busy workings. But most of all, Buddhists have taught us to notice our inner beings as watchers of our inner watcher watching our own watching. We have also been led to see our own inner doer – our own intentional choosing of our own choosing. These are not new awarenesses, but Buddhist teachers are making them vivid.

These awarenesses assist us to see the whole of our experience more clearly. Most importantly, we see that our self images are tentative and approximate, indeed that we do not actually know who we are at all. All our ideas about ourselves are *not* who we are. Our most profound inner inquiry leads us to the vision that we have “no self” in terms of anything we ever meant by “self.” Instead, we see that we are a vast mysterious inner spaciousness in which our lives are happening. It is within such realizations as these that the word “enlightenment” finds its Buddhist meaning.

A student of Buddhism was reported to have asked his teacher if meditation causes enlightenment. The teacher answered, “No, enlightenment is an accident, but meditation makes you more accident prone.” That saying gives us an insight into the nature of all religions. Not just meditation, but all of our religious practices do no more for us than make us accident prone to the enlightenment accident – that raw happening that opens us to our profound humanness. Christians have spoken of “grace” as such a happening – a gift, an accident that happens to us as we surrender to this gift for our living.

And these new Buddhists are reminding us of another key insight about religion-in-general. Religion is fundamentally *practice*, rather than beliefs or moralities. Religion is something that we do: we pray, sing, chant, listen, read, speak, serve, create, put our bodies on the line for justice, for truth, for an affirmation of our chance to live and die a human life. Religion includes thinking, but our religious thinking is only one part of our practice. Our theorizing, theologizing, and strategizing are certainly part, but only part, of the *doing* of our religious life. Overall, religion is a practice: religion is a persistent *doing* that makes us accident prone to the accident of discovering our profound humanness.

What do we learn about Religion-in-General from the Jewish-Christian-Islamic Rediscovery of “God”?

I will talk about this in terms of my own vision of a next and vital Christian practice, but parallels exist in Jewish and Muslim circles as well. “God”

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has become for me a word that points to an experience, not just an idea in our heads. Here is an example: when physicists or biologists push their discipline of learning out to its further reaches, those scientists, as living persons, can experience the sheer unknown – a mysteriousness that never ceases to amaze. “Good grief,” one scientist is reported to have said, “the more we know about nature the more we know we don’t know.” Such a realization is an experience of what I mean by “God.” Here is another example: when politicians take actions on the basis of their beloved ideological beliefs and then find those beliefs laughed to scorn by the actual events of history, they are experiencing what I mean by the word, “God.” Many of those politicians do not listen to such obvious evidence – perhaps you remember those who predicted that the military attack on Iraq would be over quickly and that the U.S. would be welcomed as liberators. Some of these politicians were so accustomed to lying to make their points, that they didn’t seem to notice the laughing or care about it. Instead, they just moved on to further lies. But lies do not actually defeat the truth, and when truth finally hits pay-dirt in our own unavoidable experience, we are having an experience of God. So used, the word “God” points to that Final Reality that we are unavoidably up-against, and which Final Reality grabs us in specific moments of humbling (and perhaps humiliating) encounter.

“God” is also a devotional word, a word that means dedication or loyalty to that experienced Final Reality. In other words, using “God” as a word for Reality means that we dedicate ourselves to realistic living. This awakening to the wonder and liveliness of this Final Encounter gives us another window into the nature of all religion. It is, of course, true that bad religion fosters our attempts to escape Reality, rather than face it, much less love it. Nevertheless, when *Final Reality Faces us*, we are in the vicinity of an experience in which the word “religion” can make sense to us. We have entered the “religious situation” wherein our good religious practices can make us ever-more accident prone to experiencing the accident of accessing our profound humanness.

How the Core Proclamation of a vital Next Christianity can be Relevant to a Planet-wide Recovery of Religious Practice

“All that IS is good” is a core proclamation of the Christian heritage, a proclamation present in Augustine, Julian of Norwich, Martin Luther, H. Richard Niebuhr, Rudolf Bultmann and many

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others. This cryptic phrase is still vitally important to me. Of course, it has to be understood that "All that IS is good" does not mean that the state of world society is in fine shape or that the corruption of the human species has been corrected. That phrase means that faith or trust in the Ultimate means that we begin our thinking and living with what IS. We do not insist that our concrete place in space/time should be different than it IS. This IS is IT for our authentic life. We can have a fresh start in realism right here, and nowhere else. And this does not mean a passivity or conservatism, for what IS also includes overwhelming possibilities as well as limiting actualities. Openness toward the future is part of affirming that "All this IS is good."

As both Julian of Norwich and Martin Luther put it, "faith" means trusting that "God does all things well." That is, Final Reality, in an absolutely trustworthy fashion, has done all things well, is doing all things well, and will do all things well. In other words, all the happenings that actually happen to us are the IS of our good life. All the limitations and possibilities of this IS are being "done well" by this trustworthy "Upagaintness" that is the devotion of Christian "faith."

When we accept and live this message, we experience a new birth beyond ego, beyond fatalism, and beyond moral certainty. We identify instead with a Spirit that joins us with Christian saints throughout the ages, and also brings us alongside enlightened Buddhists who have, thereby, lost their identity with a self-created ego.

In still other words, "Realistic living is the best-case scenario for your and my life." According to the religious theorist, Søren Kierkegaard, every other option leads to despair. Despair is simply the interaction with Reality that we experience when we are fleeing from the Reality that cannot be escaped or fighting with the Reality that cannot be defeated. My capital "R" for Reality means that I do not mean the "reality" that we think is real, but the Reality that continually tears to shreds much of whatever "sense of reality" I or you currently hold.

In addition to these elemental clarifications, the practitioners of a vital and viable next Christianity need a much more thoroughgoing interreligious context for our Christian practice. What we call the "Christ event" has to be clearly understood as an event that happens among Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, etc. as well as Christians. The Christ event has been summarized as seeing our estrangement, seeing our acceptance for a forgiven fresh start, and accepting this acceptance – this welcome home to Reality with a capital "R." All people can have such experiences.

The Christian language is not sacred, necessary, or even best. Nevertheless, if the existential meaning of Christian language is properly understood, it works just as well to communicate the Ultimate Word about Life as any other language. The resurgence of a valid and vital Next Christianity is just as important as the resurgence of any other religion, and religion itself is an essential social process of every society. Religion is currently in much decay all across the world, and good religion is vitally needed for social health. Good religious practice is just as essential as good sewage disposal, perhaps more so.



Ending Religious Warfare

a social critique by Gene Marshall

This essay is about the ideological defeat of the entire notion of a Christian State or a Jewish State or a Buddhist State or an Islamic State or any other political arrangement derived from one religious heritage. The long-term retrain of ISIL (and movements like it) entails the inward renunciation of the very notion of an Islamic State. How can we ask that, if we cling to a Christian or Jewish State?

In order to picture a viable future for humanity on planet Earth, we must see that every political scope of Earth geography is already composed of an interreligious multiplicity of religious practices, including many varieties of all the classical religions plus many new religions and religion-like practices of profound humanness inspiration. We who wish to see a psychologically healthy, spiritually mature, and peaceful destiny for humanity will surely count as one of our serious enemies this notion that a scope of geography can be or should be dominated by one religious practice of doctrinal, moral, organizational, racial, or cultural input.

This need not mean the adoption of a secularism that hates religion, or dismisses religion as a vital and necessary part of human society. Rather, religion can be valued as much as or more than at any other time in human history. We need to see that religious practices that do their job of relating us to Ultimate Reality and to our profound humanness are an essential social process that is as necessary as education, economics, or any other social process. Furthermore, every religion is a down-to-Earth and human-made social process.

This understanding of religion requires that each

religion face being transformed into a viable companion with other religious practices within our common social spaces. A key discussion within each religious community will be about the task of replacing the ancient, but now obsolete, belief that “my” religion can be or ought to be the ruling cultural force. It has now become clear that pursuing such a vision means being a tyrannizing force with respect to every other religious practice and influence. Rather than supporting a perpetual religious warfare for Earth ground, each community of religious practice will be called to adjust to the role of making its contribution as part of a vast interreligious dialogue and interreligious consensus building about the moral and stylistic fabrics of our common geography of cultural life, political order, and economic care for one another.

This direction of religious transformation entails giving up the idea of Zionism as well as the equally wrongheaded idea of an Islamic State. And let us not overlook that many conservative Roman Catholic and Protestant religious practitioners still cling to notions of Medieval Christendom. Even though these Christians have lived in secular nations all their lives and have no hope of ruling their society with their sectarian views, they still believe that they ought to do so. They fight to impose on everyone their moral views about homosexuality, abortion, and even contraception, not to mention economic theory. It is possible to permit a wide range of religious freedom to each religious group, allowing that group to practice whatever morality and do whatever witnessing they find befitting. This religious freedom can be accomplished without reinstating Christendom-like tyrannies (as well as Zionist-type, Islamic-type or any other type of religious tyranny.)

It is possible for an interreligious community of discussion to agree on the immorality of murder, theft, false witness, and many other moral topics without religious groups with a social space tyrannizing one another with moral tenets that are, for the time being, far from the consensus. Also, let the practice of current and would-be political candidates whipping up the biases of specific religious groups for purposes of their own political ambitions become anathema to most voters. Let the hypocrisy of these politicians and the gullibility of these voters be glaringly illuminated.

And we, the progressive religious practitioners, can come to realize that we don’t need politicians to defend our religious insights and influences. If our witness to the truth of things is not powerful enough to influence society without the aid of political endorsement, we are confessing doubt about the veracity of our religion.

But let us underline that an emphasis on personal confidence and initiative does not mean that religion is merely a private matter with no overall social influence. Religion is an essential social process in every society, and effective religious practices influence every other social process of the society. These important influences, however, can be made grass-roots-out, rather than attempted as topdown impositions. Indeed, true religious awareness is a heartfelt truth, not an outside imposition.

A broad consensus about basic truth and moral topics can be worked through. And as significant social consensus is reached on such matters, laws will surely be passed and enforced on topics affecting the common good. But religious warfare is not needed to make these progressive changes. Reality is its own teacher, and humanity can learn to listen to Reality, as Reality speaks to us through one another, through the events that are happening to us all, and through some vigorous interreligious discussion that illuminates our common experiences.

Here is another piece to this overall picture. Capitalism and communism have become authoritarian religions of a secular sort. These orthodoxies are also participants in the ongoing religious warfare. Some so-called terrorist groups are actually desperate protest efforts against one of these economic religions that have spread harm and disrespect on a worldwide basis. Nationalism also has become a contributing secular doctrine and bigotry in the ongoing religious wars.

Even forms of humanism and scientism have sometimes become rigid tyrannical forces that deny or disparage any experience of truth that does not fit into their narrow boxes. We need not and must not dismiss the truth gained through the scientific approach to truth, as some religious practitioners, as well as fossil-fuel profiteers, are prone to do. The renovation going on in every religious tradition is required by realism to sort out the truth of science from the contemplative or existential wisdom witnessed to in their religious heritage. Then, such religiously wise persons will be able assist those who are afflicted with crass scientism to see and overcome their hidden bigotry, or “superstition” as Wendell Berry dared to call it in his book, *Life is a Mystery*.

The interreligious dialogue also has much to contribute to the economic field of discussion. For example, an effective religious vision is open to learn from both market economics and socialism about the proper balance between these two libraries of useful economic experience. The task of healing humanity of its bigotry applies to economic

bigotries as well. Seeing all these scraps of truth reveals, in part, why religion is so important to the whole of society. Good religion helps us to see that the full truth is never contained in our current boxes of thinking. Good religion includes opening to the truth in the realities we confront, rather than closing-in to familiar, feel-good bigotries of religious, secular, or any other sort.

Religion— Getting the Job Done

a call to action by
Alan Richard



During the first day of Realistic Living's recent strategy session in Houston, an older colleague who had taught college courses in business strategy for decades remarked on a distinction between planning for our organization and planning for a standard business. "Businesses are concerned about being profitable or about keeping themselves afloat," he said. "For us, it isn't about that. It's about getting the job done. If this organization can't do that, let it die and let us find or create an organization that can. And if this organization can get the job done, let's roll up our sleeves and do it." The distinction my colleague made opens the door to a crucial question: what is "the job" we – Realistic Living – are doing?

Of course, it is clear that our job has to do with religion. But given all the challenges we face as a species and all the urgent tasks before us, why mess with religion? I think this question gets back to why religion happens at all. If religion isn't doing anything essential, if it's a holdover from the past that once served a function now better served by something else, or if it's a phenomenon that just belongs to a stage of human development we've surpassed, then it really isn't worth our time. Some people, including most of the so-called "new atheists," have suggested as much. They aren't alone either. Even people who are deeply interested in authentic living or who see themselves as "spiritual but not religious" have spoken of religion as something we can appreciate but can safely leave behind. So why does religion happen then? Why has it been happening for so long, and why does it still happen?

Religion happens because human beings are scraps of matter that are alive and aware. Like other living beings, we show up in the midst of an environment and we are equipped with senses and

circuits that managed to get our genetic material through a certain span of time in a certain evolutionary niche. If we manage to avoid collisions with trucks and viruses and the like, we can hang around longer than some animals but not as long as others before we just wear out and die. But eventually, the senses no longer feel anything and information no longer travels along those circuits and we become chunks of decomposing matter. We will only ever know a very little about the environment that surrounds us: evolution doesn't care about knowing for knowing's sake. We'll never know why we showed up or what this cosmos is all about or indeed whether it's about anything at all. As far as our existence is concerned, it might as well not be about anything, it might as well be pointless.

Except: sometime during that brief flicker in the darkness that is our life, we become aware of this predicament, and we become aware that we are aware of this predicament, and we become aware that we can't make that awareness go away. This has happened to each of us perhaps in ways that are different, but it happens to everyone sometime. And if we look at the earliest signs of religion available to us, they're connected to this awareness. The earliest signs of religion are all bound up with death and birth, the grave and the womb. Religion happens because, fair or not, this little scrap of matter caught inside vast mystery for a flickering moment is aware of itself as a little scrap of matter caught inside vast mystery.

And that's not all. Our awareness of this predicament is a tricky thing. It gives our lives intensity. It pushes us to ask questions, explore ourselves and our world, love with passionate abandon, laugh and grieve with our whole being, and open ourselves to each moment. It underlies the restless creative impulse in every human culture and motivates intimate acts of caring and gratitude that preserve and pass those cultures on from generation to generation. At the same time, it separates us from our culture, our relationships, and even our questions because all of these seem to vanish into insignificance before this predicament and our awareness of it, which is part of that predicament itself. Human social groups cannot operate without this awareness of our fragility before and in mystery, but this same awareness poses a threat to every given social structure. In the face of this awareness, all given meanings, including the meanings we attach to our very lives, are revealed as small and brief blips that could just as well be other than they are. So the same awareness that can make my life passionately engaged can drive me to suicide. The same awareness that creates and preserves cultural forms

can destroy them. And so human cultures develop symbols, poetry, and practices that focus our attention on our predicament and our awareness of it. We call these symbols, poetry, and practices "religion." And yet these same symbolic ways very easily and sometimes very subtly domesticate that awareness and hide or distort that predicament. They can do so more powerfully than other kinds of practices because they are closer to that awareness, and they carry its awe-inducing charge.

Because of this, religion has always stood there on the line between dreadful awareness and desperate, futile flight from reality. This makes religion a human phenomenon with two sides, one of which faces mystery and one of which recoils and faces away from it. These two sides of religion have been at war for as far back as we can trace religion, and they have been and are at war within every religious tradition. This is not a war fought with weapons that kill for the sake of conquest, but a war fought with weapons of awareness for the sake of liberation from living death. It is a war fought as much within each human being, where false consolation perpetually seeks to crucify realistic living, as it is in a social world dominated by games of power and security. The Neolithic shaman who pulled the disease out of the sick person by confronting the entire tribe with the reality they had been avoiding was at war. Gotama Buddha, when he declared the entire religious structure of his Indian homeland to be irrelevant, was at war. Amos, when he declared the carefully prescribed ceremonies dedicated to Yahwah as anathema and irrelevant to Yahweh, Who Amos declared to require justice, mercy, and humility instead, was at war. Jesus was at war and when he took the battle to the centers of religious, economic, and political power, he died in that war. Muhammad, challenging his own Quraysh tribe's claim to be the brokers of Reality and the only means of access to it, was at war – indeed, he named the inner journey jihad, or struggle.

When the times get chaotic and the taken-for-granted social certainties that give a sense of stability to peoples' lives are shaken up, this war intensifies. A bit more recently, when Dietrich Bonhoeffer formed an underground seminary at Finkenwalde to train a small group of would-be pastors willing to stand up against the German national church that had acquiesced to the Nazi regime, he was at war. In the 1950s, when Joe Mathews, Edward Hobbs, and colleagues hurled the theological breakthroughs of Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Bultmann, and Niebuhr into a placid, bland environment of sleepy mainline denominationalism that floated in the sea of depthless American

secularism, they were at war. All of them were at war against religion, and all of them were in this war not because they hated religion but because they loved it – and not because they loved war, but because they lived in the midst of it.

So Where Are We Today?

Today, we don't face a placid, bland environment of sleepy mainline denominationalism in a sea of depthless secularism. Today, we face intense, resurgent religion on all sides, but for the most part, this is religion engaged in a desperate, futile flight from reality. It is religion as false consolation, and false consolation can never be tranquil or tolerant because you can't run from awareness of your actual predicament; it follows you like the hound of heaven. This resurgent religion of fear and violence is happening in every tradition. If you go to Burma, it's happening in Buddhism, in India, it's happening in Hinduism. Here in the West, we see it in Greco-Semitic forms in the Islam of ISIL, the Judaism of violent West Bank settlers, and yes, in the Christianity of so much of the United States, with a violence that bubbles just below the surface and, when it influences foreign policy, often spills over into large-scale, technologically mediated violent crusades. In times like these, those of us who have tasted the freedom and love and tranquility that comes with facing rather than running away from what is, however briefly and infrequently we may have tasted it, have a job to do because religion is not just about futile flight from reality. It stands on that line between dreadful awareness and futile flight. Because it stands on that line, it bears symbols and practices in its bosom that can help us maintain fidelity to those experiences of whole-being awareness of the awesome mystery of our brief lives. Making a Buddhism, a Hinduism, a Judaism, a Christianity, an Islam that does that is a job worth doing, especially here and especially now.

Realistic Living, as I see it, has been dedicated to being a vehicle for doing that job. If it can keep doing that job and can do it in the midst of what is happening right here and right now, then it's important to keep it going so that people in this Christian environment who glimpse our predicament and choose not to turn away can use this vehicle for getting that job done. If we talk about succession planning, that's why. If we talk about strategy, that's why. It's all about that job.

Since Realistic Living was formed, it has focused on the development of new forms of Christian practice. Joyce and Gene Marshall have been experimenting with and reporting on the

“house church” or “Christian Resurgence Circle” form since the early 1980s, and when Realistic Living began hosting biannual and annual Symposia, the development and maintenance of local Circles in multiple locations became one of the topics of research. During the past decade, Realistic Living has been promoting the vision of a network of these Circles. Indeed, in a broad sense, it could be said that Realistic Living exists to support such Circles, such cells of awareness, whether these be groups meeting within existing congregations or outside them. It has supported these Circles by doing research, creating products resulting from this research (solitary manuals, books, journals), and providing teaching and spiritual formation (mentoring) opportunities. On some level, it has always been a kind of school: like the cathedral schools of the early middle ages, or the monastic schools, or the early medieval university --- a new kind of school, to be sure, but a school. It is about religious research, education, and mentoring, with an emphasis on the Christian tradition that remains the dominant promise and threat in our part of the world, in support of the struggle for open awareness and against futile flight from awareness.

I’ll come clean at this point. In my own vision of Realistic Living 30 years from now, when I’m either dead or I’m in the same decade of life that Joyce and Gene are in now, I see Realistic Living as a multi-site, technologically savvy educational center dedicated to research, teaching, and mentoring in the area of intentional inner life, in the practices of awareness that we call “religion,” with a conscious fidelity to the gifts of the Christian tradition. Those who receive training in this center will be at work in cities and towns organizing cells of awareness and struggle against delusion. The shape these cells assume will not be dictated by the center, but will arise from the awareness and curiosity of these cell leaders, sharpened by their training, and by the methods and wisdom that training has given them, as these intersect with each singular situation in each city or town. Those who teach and mentor in this center will be doing research, both scholarly and experiential. They will communicate what they have learned in publications, videos, workshops, and lectures as well as in their interactions with students. I think this vision aligns with much that I heard at the Consult in September. If we can agree that forging ahead with such a center as a goal is appropriate, then we can craft a strategy because we know the job we have to do, we know why we are doing it, and we know the role we can play in getting that job done.

Religion is happening with or without us. There is a war going on, and religion is where it is going on. Fighting religion for religion is our job. Whatever else happens here, one way or the other, I’m going to spend the rest of my life doing it. I can’t think of a group I’d rather do it with than this one, or a legacy I’d rather have in my back pocket, than the legacy of Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Bultmann, and Niebuhr, the legacy of Joe Mathews and the Order: Ecumenical, the legacy of Joyce and Gene Marshall and Realistic Living. I hope we can do it together. Let’s get to work.



Here Already and Still to Come

a sermontette
by Gene Marshall

The New Testament speaks of the Jesus Christ happening as already here and still to come. When we stop to think about it, this quality is true of a wide range of our everyday experiences. When we first meet someone, that person becomes here for us, but there is more to come. Every human being is a mystery of such vastness that no first meeting can reveal everything about that person. As we live with someone for a long time, we may become amazed as to how much unexpected “more” is still being revealed. Our tendency to wrap up another human being in our own mental package is never successful for long. Every person retains the ability to rip loose from our packaging and surprise us once again.

Large-scale conditions of the entire planet are also “here already and still to come.” This is true of global warming. It is already here in terms of increasing weird and dangerous weather patterns. And there is more to come. Much more.

The large-scale social conditions of every society also are “here already and still to come.” Democracy is here already, strongly developed in some places and deeply longed for in many more places. Yet democracy may still be in its adolescence with much more to come.

Truth about almost everything has this quality. We know a great deal about the human brain, but a vast mysteriousness persists. Researchers know that there is much more knowledge to come. Human consciousness is an everyday experience for each awake person, yet human consciousness is a deep mystery with much more consciousness of consciousness to come.

The early church spoke of Jesus’ “Kingdom of

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God" as a happening that was "already here and still to come." This meant that the Kingdom of Satan (the Reign of Sin) was already ending with its full end still to come. The terminology of the two kingdoms remains cryptic for people today. Nevertheless, within this way of talking are insights that are extremely important for Christian theology, and, yes, with still more insight to come. Here are three clarifications already present in contemporary theologizing:

(1) This two-kingdom drama indicates the communal nature of the Christian revelation. The Kingdom of God happens to persons, but to persons in community with other persons. "Kingdom" is a sociological, not a psychological category. In the context of this thinking, the psychological is viewed as one aspect of the sociological. Most Christians today have become victimized by an "individualistic overemphasis." It will take some awakening to let the sociological aspect of Christian origins sink in. It takes effort just to notice that becoming a member of the Kingdom that the Jesus Christ revelation reveals means "joining a communion of people." Secondly, it means becoming a more authentic person, but even this vision of authentic person includes being a communal being. Many modern writers know that human authenticity includes being-with-others, but Christian theology is still struggling with this topic. The term "Kingdom" may bother us, for social royalty has been opposed by democratic thinking. Kings, queens, and kingdoms can come across today as old fashioned talk. And it is. We can translate "Kingdom of God" as the "Reign of Reality" or the "Community of Authenticity." Similarly, we can translate "Satan's Kingdom" as the "Reign of Illusion" or the "Liar's Establishment" etc.

(2) For the Kingdom of God to be "already here" means the reappearance of the humanity that we essentially are, have always been, and will always be. The coming of the Kingdom is a breaking through of the real me and real you and real us as a victory over the anti-kingdom of estrangement, despair, bondage, and malice. The Kingdom of Satan is a real experience, but it is fragile. It can be undone by the Real. The anti-kingdom or reign of sin is actually nothing but a perversion of the real humanity that has never gone away, but has been merely suppressed by bad choices made by our ancestors and by us. This dreadful "fall" is real enough in our everyday experience, but it is a fall from something that has not gone away, is currently returning, and will come in its fullness, for it is the Real. In other words, the Real has already won, is winning, and

will win over the unreal. To have hope for a coming Kingdom of Realism among humans is a sociologically and psychologically realistic hope, because this hoped-for Kingdom already is, has always been, and always will be who we humans truly are. In the end, Reality always wins over unreality. In fact, even now all our unreality is dependent upon Reality for the fragile existence that unreality has.

(3) Thirdly, we who have received the "grace" to dip into the coming Kingdom of Reality, have the responsibility to build new Kingdom-forms of Life here on Earth in our space-time coordinate, and do so both psychologically and sociologically. Grace can happen now, for this Kingdom is already here and its breakthrough into our living present takes no time at all to take place. Sin, though strong, is fragile. Sin is "nothing" compared to the power of the already here and coming Kingdom. But the flesh and blood manifestation of that "already here and still coming Kingdom" takes time to emerge and become manifest in flesh and blood realization in our psychological and sociological living here on Earth. This is a deep paradox of two seemingly contradictory truths: (a) the Kingdom is created by God, not humans; and (b) the Kingdom is built on Earth by human beings for whom the Kingdom has already come in embryo. The Kingdom's existence is not "up to us." Nevertheless, the manifestation of the Kingdom here on Earth is "up to us." This "up to us" does not mean a greedy passion to impose our own beloved ideals; it means a *surrender by us to realism* (i.e. to Reality, to God in the sense outlined in these essays).

We surrender to the Kingdom by witnessing to what has happened to us and what can happen instantaneously to anyone else who is aware enough and willing enough to allow this surrender to happen to them. And we surrender to the Kingdom by thinking through the implications of this surrendered life for envisioning the well-being of entire human societies, and assuming responsibility for designing those fresh designs and creating the strategies for moving toward those fresh designs from wherever we are in current social existing. This justice building is an ongoing, never finished, permanent revolution of social life. This permanent quest for justice is a manifestation of the Kingdom here on Earth within our space-time coordinate of influence. We also surrender to the Kingdom by designing fresh designs for the well being of our own being and that of our companions in realistic living. This includes moving strategically, step-by-step, toward daily, weekly, yearly manifestation of effective nurture designs for our own person and for that of our

companions. Such community building is also a permanent revolution.

Both psychological and sociological manifestation take time. We have to be patient with the slowness of our own psyche and our own society to change toward greater realism. At the same time, our participation in the coming Kingdom takes no time at all. Becoming a member of the “already here and still coming Kingdom of God” is instantaneous and remains instantaneous for our whole life. The coming of the Kingdom requires nothing at all but our surrender to its coming. It is entirely the gift of God, we contribute nothing to its coming except our own instantaneous surrender to its instantaneous coming. Our contribution in life is not to the Kingdom’s coming, but to the Kingdom’s manifestation in flesh and blood living within the time-bound slow-changing patterns of our own psyche and society.

The theological image of “already here and still to come” teaches us *patience*. I would be amiss to expect my psyche to be corrected of its ineffective functioning in one weekend course. The Texas political situation is not going to be positively transformed in one election cycle. In all things manifest in temporal history, patience is required.

At the same time, the theological image of “already here and still to come” teaches us impatience or *urgency*. I and everyone I know or will ever know can enter the Kingdom now, instantaneously. No waiting is needed. Now is the time, the only time, to enter the Kingdom. Waiting for some imagined “readiness” is rejecting the Kingdom. Postponement is rejecting the Kingdom. Postponing is just continuing in the kingdom of despair, bondage, and malice. If you have a broken bone, a dysfunctional personality, or live in a tragic society, you will need to be patient within a significant time period for healing those temporal conditions. But in the case of the Kingdom’s coming, this takes place now, instantaneously. It takes no time to surrender to the process of the Reality in which you already live.

All your past, present, and future fallenness is forgiven. Reality accepts you home to realism right now. And the realistic righteousness that constitutes the Kingdom of God is already complete, already here, and is being given to you instantaneously, not parceled out over time. All that is required of you and of me to enjoy this righteousness is an unconditional surrender to the Reality that accepts us now for complete realism.

What stops me? I do! What stops you? You do! What stops you is the “you” that you think you are – a you that you mistakenly want to continue being. Nothing else stops you from

unconditionally surrendering to who you really are. A surrender to realism is a courageous step. It takes you through your experience of despairing over who you thought you were, turning that fabricated self loose, and allowing the true self to flow. The righteousness being given to you right now is freedom from that old self, freedom for freedom itself, freedom to choose fresh options. The freedom possibility is now being given to you to pick up one foot and place it down on the path of realism, then to pick up the other foot and place it down following the first foot, and so on. Now is the time of “Yes” to Reality, and “No” to unreality. Reality supports you in this. Supports you now – instantaneously. Pick up. Live.

Tomorrow will provide new challenges for the realistically living of this life, but the dynamic will be the same: pick up your old bed of sloth, postponement, and meanness, and drop those fabrications in some trash-can along the way of your “Yes” to Reality. The Kingdom of Reality has already come and is still coming. You and I can go with it, now, instantaneously, no wait is necessary.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

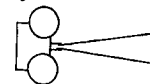
NOVEL

Dombey and Son
by Charles Dickens



Gene and I have just finished reading this book aloud together and I cannot say enough good things about it. Here Dickens deals with classism, racism, sexism, intellectualism, and environmentalism. He deals with grace, forgiveness, and redemption. He is clearly a man ahead of his time. And all is so artfully done, so emotionally satisfying. We were in tears reading one chapter and collapsing in gales of laughter in the next. His character studies are no less than amazing. A fine, fine book. I fear most people will see a 950-page book and say, “No way,” but try a chapter a day. It wears well. You’ll be sorry when it ends.

MOVIES



The Spectacular Now. This is an unusually good movie about high school students. Shailene Woodley plays the quiet girl who is mostly invisible to others at school, and Miles Teller plays the popular, smooth, but emotionally messed up boy (who reminds me so much of the young John Cusack in *Say Anything* that it is eerie). The gift of the film is that it is simple and real. So much so that at the end there is no assurance of how it is going to

work out. A special treat is Kyle Chandler (coach on **Friday Night Lights**) playing a very different and quite believable role.

Lone Star. This 1996 John Sayles film was so far ahead of its time that it is perfectly relevant. It begins in the desert near a Texas town near the Mexican border where the bones of a much-hated sheriff from the 1950s are found. The current sheriff suspects the man may have been murdered by the sheriff's own father, who is now also dead. It gets even more complicated as the lives of the blacks, Chicanos, Seminoles, and whites sort out their relationships with border crossings by river and truck playing a big role as well as crossings of racial borders in sexual relations. Good script, good direction, good acting, a thoughtful film.

Normal. This 2003 HBO film features superb performances by Jessica Lange and Tom Wilkinson as a seemingly "normal" mid-American couple, Roy and Irma Applewood, celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. Roy collapses during the party, and since nothing is found wrong at the hospital, they show up in their pastor's office seeking counsel. With a little pushing on the part of the pastor, Roy finally "comes out." He is a woman, trapped in a man's body who can no longer live this false life. The film deals beautifully with how Irma, their two children, Roy's boss and work mates, and their church struggle with their offense at this revelation and with Roy's determination to hold with the truth of his own identity and of his abiding love of his wife. Their story illuminates how our beliefs about how people "should be" not only separate us from what is real and from one another but also cause us to suffer. I highly recommend this film.

Absolute Wilson. This documentary introduced me to Robert Wilson, now a creative genius in his 60s, whose confidence and success belie his beginning as a stuttering young gay man growing up in 1950s Waco, Texas. The film swings back and forth between the story of Wilson's life and his experimental art work, a perfect method, as his theatrical works and designs were often representations of the sometimes traumatic events in his personal life. His story is fascinating, and his work is uniquely amazing.

Another amazing artist is screenwriter, director, actor Paul Mazursky who died this year. We have been re-visiting his films on the occasion of his death, discovering just what a genius he was in revealing with his low budget films just who we were in the 1970s - 90s. **Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice**, made in 1969, is today a reminder of how earnest we were in those days about being honest.

It makes fun of the Esalen-type group therapies that were the rage. Though on the surface it appears to be about loosening sexual morals, the film brings awareness of the deeper mysteries of relationships.

An Unmarried Woman. In this 1978 film about a woman whose husband leaves her for a younger woman, Mazursky demonstrates his sensitivity to the issue of women needing to find their own life's direction quite apart from what any man might want from them.

Harry and Tonto. This 1974 Mazursky film holds up very well with Art Carney as Harry, a feisty seventy-two-year-old who refuses to leave his New York apartment as the wrecker's ball is bringing down the building. He and his cat, Tonto, are carried out and thereafter hit the road, spending time with his son's family on Long Island, his daughter in Chicago, and his son in Hollywood. Since Tonto's needs are top priority for Harry, he foregoes flying and rides the bus. He buys an inexpensive car, then gives it to a grandson and his girl friend for their own trek to a commune, and he and Tonto hitchhike. Part of the delight of the film is the taste of the varied cultures in New York City, Chicago, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles, as well as that of the Native American with whom Harry shares a jail cell in Vegas. (Harry was jailed for peeing in a potted plant.) But the main delight is Carney's Harry, a warm guy who firmly sets his limits yet is open to new experiences (including one with a hooker with whom he catches a ride.)

Ida. This fine black and white film is set in 1962 Poland, the era of Communist rule and modernization, but the story looks back to the Nazi occupation. Anna is an 18-year-old orphan who was raised in a convent. She is preparing to take her vows when her Mother Superior insists that she first meet her one known relative, an aunt, Wanda, who is a former prosecutor with the Communist Party. Anna's first discovery is that she is not Anna, but Ida, and she is Jewish. Her aunt accompanies her to the village where she was born to learn how her parents died and where they are buried. The journey of the two women reveals stark aspects of their family story and raises questions for both about their future.

Mansfield Park. This review is of the 1999 British film of the Jane Austen novel. Many Austen purists find the film unsatisfying because it is not a faithful telling of the novel. I thoroughly enjoyed it and found it true to Austen if not exact. Fanny is sorrowful in being sent away from her poor family to be employed by Lord Bertram, but she enjoys the advantage of a better life and plenty of paper on which to write. Though poor, she is spirited and

refuses her expected role as a marriage commodity. Director Patricia Rozema plays the story beautifully and with a sophisticated sense of fun.

The Last Waltz. I saw this film in a theater in the 80s and then again on DVD last week. The dazzling array of talent is as good as ever. Director Martin Scorsese brings a fine rendition of the last concert of the rock band known as The Band, a fine group, and the "friends" who join them are the best: The Staples, Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Muddy Waters, Ringo Starr, Emmylou Harris, and Neil Diamond. The movie is more than the concert. Scorsese intersperses the songs with interviews with the band members: Rick Danko, Robbie Robertson, Garth Hudson, Richard Manuel, and Levon Helm. They talk informally about the early hungry days (literally) and what it's like to be on the road for half your life.

The Dhamma Brothers. This documentary and the movie in the review following (Greenfingers) are particularly encouraging because they are about small successful experiments in prison reform. Dhamma Brothers films the 2002 ten-day Vipassana meditation retreat carried on in Alabama at one of the most violent prisons in America. Any of you who have participated in S.N. Goenka's retreat realize that its rigid structure of absolute silence and ten hours a day of sitting meditation is challenging, to put it mildly. It was my first retreat, and I have held it as "meditation boot camp." One of the 36 prisoners in the group commented that it was tougher than his eight years on death row. Initial skepticism about offering the retreat is replaced by amazement at the positive results. Months afterward, tough lifers were still practicing meditation and striving to live by its precepts, and prison violence had de-escalated. Unfortunately, this uniquely successful therapy was abruptly terminated because of pressure applied by "Christians." But the film offers a constructive alternative to the hopelessness of human warehousing.

Greenfingers is loosely based on a true story about the award-winning prisoners of a minimum-security prison in the [Cotswolds, England](#). Most reviewers panned it as sentimental, but even though I share a dislike of cloying sentimentality, I loved this story of reforming the system. I could overlook some of the far-fetched plot twists for its gifts. The story centers around Colin Briggs, who is played by Clive Owens, and Helen Mirren is also featured; so who can complain? The prison has no fences or lock-down and offers many opportunities to work at various jobs. Colin discovers he has a

knack for gardening, which changes his whole sense of himself. He and three other prisoners become a team and even win a national competition.

Mozart: Requiem. If you like Mozart, and if you enjoy fine choral and orchestral performance, if you love Leonard Bernstein, and if a gorgeous Bavarian Baroque church interests you, don't miss this 1988 performance of Mozart's Requiem near the end of Bernstein's career and his life. The orchestra, the choir, the soloists, the church, Lenny, the filming, even the extremely disciplined packed-in audience could not be better. An awe-filled performance!



RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

SPIRIT BOOKS BY ADYASHANTI

Adyashanti is a young man who was unusually aware from childhood. He practiced Zen for years, became a teacher and transmits a teaching that combines Zen with Christianity and Advaita Vedanta. The first book below was reviewed in an earlier RL journal.



Emptiness Dancing
Sounds True, 2004

This is one of those books in which I underline something on every page. Essentially, his teaching is about awakening to what you truly are. Examples:

"... that which our human heart truly desires - to always be with our knees on the floor, always be in that sort of devotion to Truth."

"Actually our greatest fear is to find out that you love all sorts of things and people that your mind would rather not love. Possibly the only fear greater than death, is love, real love."

"There is only one thing going on. Whether you call that one thing God, the divine, consciousness, Buddha nature, emptiness, fullness, leftist, rightist, it doesn't matter. ... There is only emptiness and its infinite display of itself."

If you wish to nourish your natural devotion to Truth and your nature as love, Adya offers insight on openness, letting go, allowing the experience of not-knowing, and other such in this book.

RECOMMENDED READING

Resurrecting Jesus
Embodying the Spirit of a Revolutionary Mystic
Sounds True, 2014

Adyashanti tells his fascinating personal story of relating to God, Christianity, the Christian mystics, and the Jesus story. Then he interprets the myth of the Jesus story. While acknowledging that there are many ways to interpret the story, he sees it as the journey of awakening. Taking each step of Jesus' journey, he notes what this foundational story of Western culture says to us about our own journey. He also explores the archetypal meaning of five other major characters in the story: Peter, John, Judas, Pilate and Mary Magdalene. It is easy to see yourself and your friends in these archetypes. No matter how you interpret this story, Adyashanti's insights will expand and deepen your relationship to this pivotal person.

Falling Into Grace
insights on the end of suffering
Sounds True, 2011

This book is a brilliant explanation of how your mind/ego relates to your being/awareness and how it is possible to loosen our identity with mind/ego, thereby recognizing ourselves as being/awareness. It is like pulling back the curtain on what happens to our interior when doing meditation practice, or in doing the Byron Katie work. I really "got it" how insane it is to believe your thoughts. In the first place, our ability to recall is amazingly terrible, demonstrated by a research study. Further, he makes it clear how believing your thoughts creates suffering. This is a very helpful book.

The End of Your World:
uncensored straight talk on the
nature of enlightenment
Sounds True, 2010

I couldn't put this one down until I finished it. The author's intent was to write about what it is like to "awaken," and he does say a good bit about that – enough to make one pause a bit in assuming it is a good idea. Certainly it is for the brave. The bonus is that for those of us who are still saying, "I don't get it," he has a lot to say. Adyashanti has a gift for describing his experience in detail. Perhaps I should say "a willingness to do so." The book is encouraging to me. Some non-dualists insist that recognizing your true essence is a kind of black and white thing, that there is no "journeying," no practices that get you there. Adyashanti notes various things he has done that do seem to move toward awakening – for example, realizing that any time you are upset that it is you, specifically
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your thinking, that causes it. Also, it is useful to be truly honest, not in blasting people with your judgments, but in a confessional way.

My Secret is Silence
poetry and sayings
Open Gate Publishing, 2003

These are not nice, sweet poems and sayings, but tough, right-to-the-point truths. As Adyashanti says, "I am not trying to give you a spiritual experience. I just want to cut off your head." My favorite of his poems is "Enlightenment is a Gamble," in which the main image is you climbing up on the gaming table yourself.

Way of Liberation
A Practical Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment
Open Gate Sangha, 2012

This is a short book which lays out basic principles for spirit exploration and deepening, namely: The Five Foundations, Three Orienting Ideas, and The Core Practices. Adyashanti underlines that *being* – your *being* – is the central issue of life. I appreciate that in discussing being he defines clearly how he uses the word *Infinite* or *God*. His core practices are meditation, inquiry, and contemplation. In his approach to meditation he is inclined to less and less technique and toward "pure wordless surrender, pure silent prayer. What he means by inquiry includes what I have learned from Byron Katie's "The Work," which involves questioning your beliefs. His contemplation method involves holding a word or phrase in silence and stillness to allow deeper meanings to arise; not thinking about it, but opening to its wisdom, much as the Christian monastics have practiced with scripture. The gift of the book is clearing the mind on what we often complicate with its focus on simple basics and practices.

Impact of Awakening
Open Gate Sangha, 2000

The material for this book came from two consecutive evenings of discussions with a small group of students in 2000, early in Adyashanti's teaching practice. A major theme of the book is the untrustworthiness of the mind. He emphasizes the courage to question everything. He points out the difference from what he calls "realization" and "knowledge." "Knowledge won't get you anywhere. Realization is spontaneous and intuitive. Leave all knowledge behind. Let yourself not know anything, and fall awake." And, "Don't look to the mind. Don't think; just be. Be still and know your Self. Before the movement of mind lies emptiness. Emptiness is the gateway of heart wisdom: the

spontaneous, intuitive intelligence that originates from the Self."

True Meditation
Sounds True, 2006

This short book and CD is an expansion of a section in his *Way of Liberation* book. Here Adyashanti explains how to engage the mind to go beyond the mind and our problematic attachment to it. What he calls True Meditation he sees as the ultimate act of faith: "Because to sit down and let everything be as it already is – to let go of control, to let go of manipulation – is itself a very deep act of faith. It's also a deep act of investigation." He moves on to discussing self-inquiry and the need to ask yourself questions, like: What is the most important thing? What is the question that is in your deepest heart?" "Who am I?" "What am I?" One of the best gifts of this book is an interview with Adyashanti about his own teacher, an unassuming woman in her small living room that few people ever heard of, who shocked him with her depth of integrity and about his own experience of teaching. As he says, "It's very hard for our minds to get that enlightenment can look like your grandmother or your grocer. It doesn't need to look in any way extraordinary."

I value this man's contribution to spirit awareness and highly recommend all of his books.

OTHER VOICES ON SPIRIT

This is Always Enough
Non-Duality Press, 2007
Too Intimate for Words
Integrative Arts, 2005
both by John Astin

John Astin is a student of Adyashanti, a Ph.D researcher in mind-body medicine, a well-known singer/songwriter, and a poet. In these two books we have the gift of his poetry, which is informed by his spirit depth – reminiscent of Rumi. I don't know if John Astin read Kazantzakis, but in his introduction to *Too Intimate for Words* he says that each of us is "a flash of lightening appearing in emptiness and then disappearing again," reminding me of Kaz's similar imagery in *Saviors of God*. Here is the opening sentence of his poem (from *This is Always Enough*) called *No Map, No Territory*:



"Would you be willing to abandon, even for one instant, all teachers and teachings, all injunctions and practices to simply meet what appears in each moment with no guidance or reference points to tell you what is true, or how you must live?"

Fire in the Earth and
Everything is Waiting for You
Many Rivers Press, 1992, 2003
Midlife and the Great Unknown
Audio CD, Sounds True, 2003
all by David Whyte

In the June RL journal I reviewed two prose books by Welsh poet, David Whyte. Here are two of his four books of poetry and one of his many audio CDs. In the CD, *Midlife and the Great Unknown*, Whyte recites and does an exposition on the title poem in *Fire in the Earth*, which is about Moses being told to "take off your shoes." Personally, I can't imagine being without Whyte's books of poetry, AND you simply must hear him as well. You can find him on YouTube (seeing him is good, too). But keeping this two-disc CD in the car is a special treat. As we drive here and there, we listen to it over and over and have yet to tire of his reflections on aging. His voice, his sensibilities, his wisdom, all are pricelessly moving and resonate in your body/heart. The poems in *Everything is Waiting for You* that moved me most related to the experiences surrounding the death of his mother. They touch the depth of both being mothered and being a mother in an uncanny way. If you have not "met" David Whyte, give yourself the gift.

A Thousand Names for Joy
Living in Harmony with the Way Things Are
by Byron Katie (with Stephen Mitchell)
Three Rivers Press, 2007

My gratitude for Byron Katie (whose incredibly skillful tool for investigation called "The Work" has been one of the great gifts of my life) increased when reading this book. Her husband, renowned translator of spirit classics, read to her, a line at a time, his version of the Tao Te Ching, and typed her spontaneous responses to create this book. Mitchell was surprised by her insights, since she had never heard of the Tao but had come to similar wisdom from her own experience, which she expresses in her simple, straightforward way.

In response to the phrase on keeping your mind always at one with the Tao, she discusses the goodness of God. "I have a word for God: *reality*. I call reality 'God' because it rules. It is what it is . . . it's completely dependable. You don't get a vote in what it does. You can trust it completely. You can know that reality is good just as it is, because when

RECOMMENDED READING

you argue with it, you experience anxiety and frustration. . . 'Things should be different than they are', 'He should,' 'She shouldn't.' All such variations on this theme cause stress - suffering. The sane alternative is to ask, 'What can I do from here?' When you are at one with reality, what you have is what you want."

In response to "The world is sacred, it can't be improved," Katie advises activists: "Give the facts, tell your experience honestly, and love without condition." She notes that righteous anger will only meet with denial and resistance. Her response to "The gentlest thing in the world overcomes the hardest thing in the world" is that an open mind cannot be overpowered by a closed mind.

If you are familiar with Katie and have read her other books, you probably know her story of awakening at age 43, after years of suicidal depression. In this book she details her experience and how she came to inquire into all her thinking and question all her beliefs.

One Tao section is: "When they think that they know the answers, people are difficult to guide. When they know that they don't know, people can find their own way."

Katie's work helps people to see that their belief's opposites could be at least as true and that small changes of perception make major life changes. She notes that a closed mind is a closed heart, but by listening and waiting for an opening, even the slightest crack can allow the person's mind to see that maybe it wasn't so sure. And then there is no going back.

The End of Stress
by Andrew Bernstein
Piatkus, 2010

Bernstein did "The Work" process of Byron Kate for several years and worked as creative director of her company. Then, with her blessing, he began his own business using an expanded seven-step form of her process which he created and has successfully used with individuals, corporations and other organizations. In this book he explains how stress is created by thoughts and introduces his format for dealing with stressful thoughts. Then he takes several common types of thoughts and does a chapter on each, allowing the reader to do the process along with the examples given. The topics are: traffic, anger, conflict, loss, success, financial happiness, uncertainty, heartbreak, having too much to do, regret, discrimination, and death of a loved one. Even if you have done the Katie work, this expanded method can be extremely helpful. It amazingly released an old

regret which was still deeply affecting me and my relationships. You can download his ActivInsight worksheet at endofstress.com and also see videos about his work. I highly recommend this book.

Reflections of the One Life
by Scott Kiloby
2009

I reviewed Kiloby's *Love's Quiet Revolution* in the June RL Journal. The gift of this later book is that it has one-page gems for each day of the year. This is a kind of daily devotional but quite different from the Upper Room which I read years ago. Kiloby notes that the word "enlightenment" points to the recognition of the timeless presence that you already are. Within his piece for September 18th he says, "If you are worrying about money, arguing with others, seeking praise from others, or constantly wanting to be right, those are the things most important to you. . . . Once you see what your life is telling you about what is really important to you, the possibility of seeing self-deception arises. Enlightenment is a demolition project." I read a page of Kiloby a day. 'Nuff said.

The Wonder of Being
by Jeff Foster
Non-Duality Press, 2010

I also reviewed a couple of books by Cambridge-educated Britisher Jeff Foster in the previous journal. This book is a combination of two separate books, *Life Without a Centre* and *Beyond Awakening*, which the author revised and edited for this book. The essays are short and more like poetry than prose, and there is a Q & A section. One of my favorites in this collection is his reflection on death, including this quote: "Immortality is the ultimate dream of the ego, the ultimate hope, and ultimate madness, but . . . you *will* die in spite of your efforts to live. You may die tomorrow. The clear seeing of this destroys all fear. So why are you spending today suffering, believing in your non-existent problems? Go on, live! Live totally! Live joyously! Live without fear! Live as though you have nothing to defend! Drop your rigid belief systems, drop your ideologies, drop your prejudices, drop every form of suffering and live! Do it now, you may as well; it will be done for you anyway the moment the body stops functioning. But why wait until then? The time is now, there is no other time! . . . To look death in the face, and to fall on the floor laughing, that is enlightenment."

*Leap Before You Look:
72 shortcuts for getting out of
your mind and into the moment*
by Arjuna Ardagh
Sounds True, 2008

Ardagh is another Cambridge-educated Britisher who went on to study with teachers in India and settled in the U.S., forming a community in California. This book is a practicum of processes toward living life as an art form and toward bringing a feminine balance to our experience. It includes practices in these categories: Meditation, Insight, Daily Routine, Body, Feeling, Intimate Relationship, Sex, Family, Nature, Devotional, Compassion, and Community. One of my favorite family practices is this one: whenever there is a disagreement in the family, switch to gibberish, just talk in nonsense for about five minutes. I also like the compassion practice of noticing when you are having a judgmental thought about someone and add the phrase "just like me." For instance, "He is so lazy, just like me." Ardagh explains the leap he is recommending in the title as a leap "out of the mind into a life of unbridled generosity of spirit – out of habit into the spontaneous flow of real love."

Die To Love
by Unmani Liza Hyde
O-Books, 2011

Here is yet another Britisher who now travels the world leading retreats in "Not-Knowing." My favorite lines from this book are: "Love is not a doing. It is an undoing. You are un-done in Love. Unravelling. Love is Presence which is totally unguarded. . . . You are Love. Unconditional Love is a recognition, not a practice." But Unmani warns that this recognition will destroy you, will "rob you of your deepest held ideas, beliefs, hopes, and dreams. It will turn your view of yourself and your life upside down." She warns the reader in the introduction that before continuing to read "ask yourself if you are willing to die to know the truth?"

Don't Take Your Life Personally
by Ajahn Sumedho
Buddhist Publishing Group, 2010

Ajahn Sumedho grew up a Protestant American and served in Borneo with the Peace Corps in the 60s. While there, he traveled to Thailand and practiced meditation, which led him to becoming a monk, which led him to being ordained by Ajahn Chah in the Thai Forest tradition. Later he was sent to England to establish a monastery where he

spent over 30 years. At age 80, he now dwells as a "free agent" back in Thailand.

This book is a collection of talks he gave to the annual week-long Summer Schools the Buddhist Publishing Group held at the University of Leicester from 1989-2006. Included in this volume are five talks for each of the six years 2001-2006. The titles of the talks I most appreciated will give you a taste of the book: Don't be Afraid of Trusting Yourself; Knowing Not Knowing; Intuitive Awareness; Don't Make a Problem About Yourself; Receiving Praise and Blame; Three Fetters; To Be Right is Not Liberation; Being Awareness Itself; Test It Out!.

Ajahn Sumedho is a good example of taking in the deep gift of non-duality from the Hindu tradition to deepen the meditative experience of Buddhism. He notes that the culture of the West is very dualistic. "I was brought up to believe that right and wrong, good and bad, heaven and hell were opposed to each other and that you had to do what was right and get rid of what was wrong. So, the dualistic thinking process was very much part of my cultural, educational, and religious conditioning." He noticed that his Thai teacher "was much more tuned into time and place and what was suitable and appropriate, rather than to what was 'right' and what was 'wrong.'"

Ajahn's particular teaching gift is his humility in sharing his own struggles to clarify the journey for his students. The book is very personal even as he shares the way to giving up ego-personality.

Zen and the Spiritual Exercises
by Ruben L.F. Habito
Orbis Books, 2013

Since I have in recent years experimented both with Buddhist meditation and with the spiritual exercises of Ignatius (and even with rewriting the exercises), I came to this book with great interest. Some years ago I read and reviewed in this journal one of Habito's earlier books, *Healing Breath - Zen Spirituality for a Wounded Earth*, which he gave us when we met him in Dallas. I recently reread that book and found I appreciated it even more. Habito is a Filipino Jesuit who was sent to Japan to study Buddhism. Later he disrobed, married, and now lives in Dallas, where he established a Zen center and is Professor of World Religions and Spirituality at Perkins School of Theology. Much like the Benedictine, Bede Griffiths, who created an ashram in India, Habito has brilliantly combined the wisdom of East and West. *Zen and the Spiritual Exercises* is a masterpiece of integration of Buddhism and Christianity.

PARENTING

*Brave Parenting:
A Buddhist-Inspired Guide
to Raising Emotionally
Resilient Children*
by Krissy Pozatek
Wisdom Publications, 2014



Pozatek, licensed therapist and parent coach, combines the wisdom from her experience with Wilderness therapy and Buddhist philosophy. Her path of brave parenting uses the metaphor of helping your offspring create moccasins rather than trying to lay down leather wherever they walk. She notes that the type of parenting of professional middle-class parents (at least in the U.S.) has become more focused on the child's happiness (as opposed to emotional health), and includes more concern for success and that the rules tend to be negotiable. It is also characterized by parental hovering (often referred to as "helicopter" parents). Given recent technology, it becomes a kind of surveillance which has been called "the electronic tether." She has many suggestions for ways to be supportive and yet allow your offspring to work through their own struggles – that is, how to be present without interfering, how not to intrude and yet not abandon. I found it very helpful, even with my adult children, to overcome my tendency to believe I need to get on my horse and ride to the rescue or at least offer unsought advice.

SOCIAL/RELIGION

*Waking the Buddha:
how the most dynamic and empowering
buddhist movement in history
is changing our concept of religion*
by Clark Strand
Middleway Press, 2014

This book is the fascinating story of the Soka Gakkai movement whose roots go back to the 1940s. What is particularly interesting is its amazing growth and its values, which have been ahead of their time and indicate the direction for religion today. Soka Gakkai exerts its influence for human rights and human dignity, equal treatment of gays, women and minorities, for religious freedom for all people, not just for Buddhists. They address global issues like climate change, nuclear proliferation, overpopulation, poverty, hunger, economic expansionism, and nationalism. They promote value-creating education with its principles rooted in the land, valuing good food and good water for all. One aspect of their religious practice is monthly discussion meetings,
November 2014

not sermons or lectures. This democratic, egalitarian, life-affirming format allows every voice to be heard. The underlying principle of Soka Gakkai is the wellbeing of humanity as a whole. Their wish is to transform an "Age of Global Decline into an Age of Global Sustainability—an Age of Life in which one person's happiness would not be won at the expense of another's, and human progress would not be mortgaged against the degradation of the earth." Inspiring, I'd say.

Men Explain Things to Me
by Rebecca Solnit
Haymarket Books, 2014

One quote from this book summarizes the point of the title: "I love it when people explain things to me they know and I'm interested in but don't yet know; it's when they explain things to me I know and they don't that the conversation goes wrong." Solnit's opening essay in this collection is the perfect example of this kind of thing that women experience frequently in their conversations with men. She and a friend are talking with a stranger at a large party. He is telling them about an important new book. He had read a review of the book in the New York Times. He went on and on explaining the book even as Solnit's friend kept saying, "That's her book." The man never quite took it in that she had written the book.

Her second essay is on a more severe topic but it follows from a similar attitude. It is not dealt with enough even though we have recently had much evidence of the problem. She calls it "The Longest War," and begins by noting that one in five women will be raped in their lifetime. Also a woman is beaten every nine seconds in this country. Add to that the fact that over a thousand women are murdered here every year by partners and former partners. Solnit says, "If we talked about it, we'd be talking about masculinity, or male roles, or maybe patriarchy, and we don't talk much about that." She notes that violence is authoritarian and begins with the premise that 'I have the right to control you.'

Women will appreciate this book and men should read it. We get all hot and bothered by violent terrorism and get out our big guns to protect ourselves. But add up the numbers. Where is the real danger? What about this terrorism right here at home?

*Foundations of Violence
Violence to Eternity*
by Grace M. Jantzen
Routledge, 2004 and 2009

I am not going to try to do a full review of these two

RECOMMENDED READING

of Jantzen's three volumes about the source of violence in Western culture, as they require much more careful study to discuss them adequately. I just completed reading these books and want to mention them in conjunction with the review of the Solnit book above. The late Jantzen was Professor of Religion, Culture and Gender at Manchester University and a widely respected feminist philosopher and theologian. These books give her powerful analysis of patriarchy and violence. They are densely detailed but quite readable. In the first volume she explores the ancient world of Homer, Sophocles, Plato and Aristotle noting the beginning of violence in western thought in Greece and Rome. In the second volume she shows how man's fear of the female is implicated in religious violence as she examines the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. She does see in this history hopeful signs of the possibility of an alternative world focused on beauty and creativity.

review by
Alan Richard

*No god but God:
the Origins, Evolution,
and Future of Islam*
By Reza Aslan
Random House, 2011



When I was in graduate school in the 1990s, only a handful of Religion departments in the United States offered courses in Islam. Today, more and more Religion departments have specialists in Islam, and the number of academic books and articles in academic journals of religion on Islam has multiplied. But until recently, this scholarship hadn't produced a popular interpretation of Islam comparable to Walpola Rahula's 1959 classic *What the Buddha Taught* or Mircea Eliade's 1958 *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Now there are a handful of them. Reza Aslan's *No god but God* is the best I've encountered so far.

No god but God starts by painting a picture of the Arabian Peninsula in the 6th century C.E., the strange landscape in which Muhammad was born. The first third reconstructs the life of Muhammad. In this section, Aslan respects archaeological and historical data, but disdains literalism and attends to the poetic value of the myths that frame all accounts of the lives of people who perform a prophetic role in history. This part of the book also focuses on contemporary controversies, such as the veil and anti-Semitism, which have grown out of traditions surrounding Muhammad. The second third provides a bird's-eye view of "classical" Islam as it developed in the centuries following Muhammad's death and settled into a pluralistic

but all-encompassing cultural canopy that lasted for a millennium. The final third directly engages "reformation" Islam, starting with the response to colonialism in the late 19th century. It culminates in a detailed but clear discussion of the intra-Muslim conflicts over modernity that have separated today's Islam irrevocably from its classical sources of authority and have generated widely divergent interpretations including the varieties of "Islamic fundamentalist terrorism" that, while primarily unleashing unprecedented violence on other Muslims, has spilled over into confrontations with Israel, Europe, and the United States.

Although attentive to scholarship, *No god but God* is not a scholarly book. It is written for ordinary readers, and it is written with as much attention to the art of writing as to the data. Nor is it a dispassionate and neutral account. But Aslan lays his cards on the table in the book's prologue. He is writing during a time when Islam is undergoing a period of "reformation" following two centuries of Western colonial domination, and the carnage unleashed by this reformation is reinforcing long-held prejudices about Islam that European and American Christians and Christian alumni carry with them often without reflection. His aim is twofold: (1) to defend Islam against prejudice by interpreting it in relationship to the spiritual and political landscape in which its myths arose, and (2) to intervene in the process of Islamic "reformation" by arguing for radical reform as the type of reform most true to the spirit of Islam, which declares that "no one speaks for God – not even the prophets." This twofold aim, and Aslan's skill at achieving it, makes *No god but God* a comprehensive and engaging introduction to Islam for non-specialist readers.

review by Gene Marshall

*This Changes Everything
Capitalism vs. The Climate*
by Naomi Klein
Simon and Schuster: 2014

I almost never review a book I have not finished reading, and I am not going to truly review this one. I am going to review it in the July RL Journal after I finish reading it. But don't wait for my review. Go ahead and buy this classic book on climate crisis. Klein tells us why climate crisis is the top item in the progressive agenda, why it pulls with it every other progressive issue, why moderate action is inadequate, and why the reactionary ideologues are right to deny the very existence of a human-originated climate crisis, for *this changes everything*.

Realistic Living is Entering a New Day

Dear Friends,

For the past 30 years, we have been researching and reporting on new practices, tools, and wisdom for creating a Next Christianity that will be nurturing for living in this tumultuous time. As you may know, we have donated full-time service to this effort, with your contributions going to partial reimbursement for the expenses of the work. We are dedicating the next five years to “passing the baton” – handing off this body of experience, written pull-togethers, and community relations to younger people with communications talents and spirit commitment. In order to do this we need more funding.

While there are plenty of gifted younger people who are willing to live frugally in order to work toward a Next Christianity and keep Realistic Living moving forward, few are in a position to donate all of their time without compensation. Alan has now been with us for five years on a part-time basis. We need at least another \$1000 a month to bring him to full-time status. Over the next five years we would like to add one or two more capable faculty to the Bonham center.

We are developing a comprehensive training and mentoring program for preparing a larger faculty to create local cells of spiritual awareness grounded in the wisdom we’ve explored together in this journal and in our workshops. This training program will make good use of our years of experience and skills while Alan takes on more of the tasks of traveling, contact work, fund-raising, office, and property care.

Of course we will continue the publication of this journal and our newsletters. Please help us in expanding our constituency of support by sending names and addresses of those who would enjoy a sample copy of this journal, or requesting a packet of journals to give out at appropriate meetings.

We deeply appreciate and depend upon the annual or monthly donations many of you send. We ask you to consider an increase of these donations if that is possible for you.

For those who are not now contributing to this work, please consider its importance. Setting up a monthly donation with your bank is an easy option and gives us a stabilizing budget.

Thank you for whatever you can direct to this work. We welcome the messages we receive from you, both to encourage us and to make suggestions

Sincerely,

Joyce and Gene



Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

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OR

Make an arrangement with your bank to become a **Supporting Member** with \$10 or more per month. More than ever Realistic Living needs a steady income to expand our work, our faculty, and continue long-term.

The *Utne Reader* outlined these **principles for the art of philanthropy**:

- Support really good people who have a total commitment to doing good in the world and who are willing to put their asses on the line to do it.
- Seek out originality and imagination.
- Support unpopular truths.
- Fund players with a long view.
- Support people no one else is supporting.
- Support people whose work is their passion in life, not a day job.
- Fund those attacking root causes and trying to change the system.
- Trust what inspires you.

In terms of such principles, we are willing for you to evaluate our work for its appropriate place in your benevolent budget.

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