

REALISTIC LIVING

A JOURNAL ON ETHICS AND RELIGION

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Falling Apart Together:

Ekklesia in Christ

on Christian community

By Alan Jay Richard

Relatively few English-speaking people are familiar with the word "*ekklesia*," the Greek word that English language Bibles translate as "church." Even fewer are aware that the word "*ekklesia*" doesn't come from religion but from the politics of Greek democracy. More than any other Greek word, it symbolizes the rule of the people in contrast to the rule of an exceptional group or individual. Stemming from a revolt against the traditional aristocracy, the ancient Athenian *ekklesia* resulted from a decision to question the given order of things, the order that says some are born to command and others to obey. That decision raises the question "who rules?," the question that is the very foundation of intentional politics. And the *ekklesia* that the New Testament calls "of God in Christ" raises that question even more radically because, in place of an exercise of collective

freedom grounded in holding it all together, an *ekklesia* "in Christ" practices falling apart together.

In the Athens of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, the "*ekklesia*" was the civic assembly where the citizen population was invited to propose laws, to debate these proposals openly, and to vote on them. It was at the heart of the set of institutions that defined Athenian democracy. The linchpin of the *ekklesia* was something called "*parrhesia*." In the context of Athenian democracy, *parrhesia* meant more than "free speech." *Parrhesia* was the opportunity of each citizen to speak frankly to fellow citizens about a public matter and having that frank speech evaluated against competing arguments. It meant the opportunity to win one's fellow citizens over to one's perception of the truth, and to have that perception tested through their collective action in the form of resolutions or decrees. *Parrhesia* was an attempt to place truthful and bold speech at the center of political decision-making. The Athenian *ekklesia* was the arena in which this "truth-speaking" took place.

Truth-speaking in the *ekklesia* rested on citizens' willingness to reveal what was on their minds, even if this made other citizens angry. This kind of speaking required courage. A powerful citizen could punish a less well-placed citizen whose views he disliked by interfering with that citizen's means of making a living or even having him beaten in the streets. Since widespread use of such reprisals might shut the truth-speaking process down altogether, truth-speaking also required powerful citizens to restrain themselves, and required citizens in general to forego shouting down speakers with minority views. The *ekklesia* could only work if citizens in general had the courage to speak the truth and the openness to hearing disturbing perspectives without defensiveness. From the beginning, there were people who suspected that this courage and self-restraint were not virtues cultivated or achieved by many people. This is the paradox of *ekklesia* that still influences our own politics: government by the many seems to require qualities that most of us, at least some of the time, don't imagine many people have.

The Pauline Ekkesia

So whenever one of the apostle Paul's letters uses the word "*ekklesia*" to name local gatherings of



Christ-followers, he is evoking the image of this political truth-speaking assembly. Athenian-style *ekklesiae*, operating under the watchful eye of Rome, continued to function in many cities at this time. Even in places where the Romans had abolished the *ekklesia*, the memory of people who belonged to a place debating and deciding on their own collective care for that place lived on in story, teaching, and art. The use of the word *ekklesia* for gatherings of societies of Jesus-followers suggests that they thought of themselves as being up to something political, something that involved the self-government of a community through the practice of bold truth-speaking. They did not imagine that they had the power to enact enforceable decrees for their cities. Paul, whose letters are the earliest occurrences of the term "*ekklesia*" for the Christian assemblies, argues that the very fact that the Roman authorities are in power makes them "God's servants" where coercive power is concerned (Rom. 13: 1-5). Paul and his hearers know that Almighty Reality has not granted them this kind of power. At the same time, however, the people gathered in the name of Christ were engaged in a limited, semi-autonomous form of self-government. Paul urges the Corinthian *ekklesia* to judge between litigants rather than referring cases to the traditional power structures, reasoning that since the new *ekklesiae* would be judging the entire world, they were already competent to judge cases arising among themselves. Paul himself exercises bold truth-speaking to get the slave Onesimus freed even though Onesimus's master Philemon cannot be legally coerced to free him. In other words, although these early followers of Jesus were not advocating revolt against the existing authorities, they fully expected that Reality Itself would soon be sweeping these obsolete authorities away and that *ekklesiae* "in Christ" would be left running things. The *ekklesiae* of those gathered in Christ, then, were like governments in exile, practicing whatever self-government was possible given the persistence of the regime that had crucified Jesus while preparing for the day when the obsolete powers would give way to the new. The *ekklesiae* in Christ were a new practice of freedom emerging in the shadow of obsolete crumbling structures.

Who Could Participate?

One clue to the difference between the old *ekklesiae* and the *ekklesiae* in Christ had to do with who could participate. Participants in the old democratic institutions were free native adult males. That is, they were people who belonged ethnically to the city, who had undergone the

education, training, and service that preceded initiation into full adulthood, who had not allowed themselves to become the tool or property of another, and who were not burdened with a womb, which was regarded as both a destabilizing and foreign presence in the body and a key to the future that must be rigorously guarded. These limits expressed the contradiction at the heart of Athenian democracy: the perception that the qualities making government by the many possible are only possessed by a few. Influential oligarchs like the philosopher Plato argued that the courage and self-restraint essential to "truth speaking" relied on the "nous," a core self that directly experiences truth apart from the senses and formulates intentions based on that directly experienced truth. They thought that the body, along with its senses, feelings, and emotions, were like ordinary people in the *ekklesia*: unruly, multiple, and dangerous guides. Only individuals exceptionally in touch with the courageous and restraining core self could govern successfully. These views, implicit in the Athenian model itself, excluded people whose bodies (women and foreigners) or decisions (slaves) indicated that they were especially lacking in courage and self-restraint, estranged from their core selves, and for that reason unqualified for participation in the *ekklesia*. The new *ekklesiae* that followers of Jesus instituted, on the other hand, included foreigners, slaves, and women. This is a sign that, whatever kind of politics the new *ekklesiae* involved, they were a rejection of the perception that courage and self-restraint are exceptional qualities.

A God in Christ Ekkesia

A second clue helps explain the first. It can be found in the qualifiers "of God" and "in Christ" that Paul occasionally attaches to the noun *ekklesia*, and his statement in 2 Corinthians that the hope resulting in truth-speaking (*parrhesia*), the hope that lifts the veil separating the people from God, comes through Christ and in the Spirit. In the new *ekklesia*, the courage to speak the truth and the ability to hear it were not a matter of detachment from and control over the senses, changeable impulses, or vulnerability. Early in 1 Corinthians, Paul says that the power of Christ originally came to the Corinthians from out of Paul's own state of weakness, fear, and trembling. Paul also reminds the Galatians that they received Christ through Paul's "infirmity of the flesh" when, his condition being repulsive and a trial to the Galatians, they received him as a messenger of Reality, or even "Christ Jesus himself!" In these passages, being "in Christ" sounds less like the submission of the body

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to a steady immaterial core than like releasing control to the truth exposed by and in the reality of the body's weakness. This speech sounds less like a word from a place that holds everything together than like a truth that tells everything precisely *because* it is spoken in the midst of falling apart.

Falling Apart



What Paul is pointing to here can be found in a slightly different form in the gospel of Mark, the earliest gospel we have. The Jesus of this gospel often looks a lot like the “truth-speaking” heroes of Hellenistic gentile and Jewish literature, people like the Cynic hero Diogenes, the Cynic version of the divine man Hercules, or the martyrs of the Maccabean revolt who stood up to powerful people with nothing but their own truth to defend them. But there is a crucial difference between these figures and the Jesus of Mark's gospel that makes all the difference. Whereas each of these figures holds it together in the face of adversity, torture, and death, bravely and calmly facing what is happening with their confident speech unaffected, Jesus falls apart. He prays to have “this cup” taken from him. Yes, he immediately turns back to say “not my will but yours” but it is the wavering and not the turning back that separates him from Diogenes, Hercules, and the Maccabean martyrs. And on the cross, Mark's Jesus makes no calm speeches and utters no reassuring promises or statements of belief. Instead, we get an expression of utter forsakenness and a loud cry. That's it. Then he dies. Directly after this, the curtain in the Temple symbolizing the inability of human beings to face Reality and live, the veil separating the people from God, is torn from top to bottom. A centurian who doesn't know Jesus but who is the very symbol of Roman power says “This man was Reality's child.”

None of the Hellenistic tales of truth-speaking heroes depicts them in such an uncontrolled, unmasculine state. When these heroes give up homes, fine clothing, status, reputation, haircuts, bathing, and security, they are testing their inner strength. Within this culture, the story of Jesus'

final hours is embarrassing. Even the Cynics, who advocated the defiance of conventional values and welcomed the contempt of conventional people, would have regarded a Jesus who pleads for his life, accuses God of abandoning him, and cries out in pain as an utter failure. But somehow the author of Mark, through the mouth of the centurian, declares this Jesus to be Reality's child. And this Jesus, the one whose very weakness tells the truth about instruments of torture and execution, can't be kept in the tomb. It is this Jesus' story, not the story of Diogenes or Hercules, that leaves the hearer of the story with an empty tomb and three women fleeing in terror and amazement. And it is this Jesus who exemplifies the power of the new *ekklesia* to speak truth courageously and to hear it without violence or defensiveness.

The *ekklesia* of God in Christ is the assembly of those who are able to say everything and hear everything precisely because they no longer hold it together but instead fall apart together. It doesn't take a special kind of person to fall apart. Anyone can do it, even if most people don't most of the time. Take the case of Emmett Till's mother Mamie Till Mobley.¹ Emmett Till was fourteen the summer his mother put him on a train from his home city of Chicago to visit cousins in rural Mississippi. That summer, the husband and brother-in-law of a woman who owned a grocery store where Till had been buying candy claimed he had made lecherous advances. They abducted, tortured, mutilated, and shot him. His swollen and disfigured body was recovered from the river after three days. It was packed in a box and prepared for burial. The murderers were not convicted and spoke freely about their deed. Were that the whole story, there would be no story. White adults killing Black children, like Romans crucifying Jews in the first century, was part of the landscape. But because of Mamie Till Mobley, this was not the whole story.

So weak from grief she was in a wheelchair, Mamie rode a train to New Orleans and personally retrieved the box. She screamed all the way back to Chicago. The stench could be detected a block away. The Chicago mortician asked if she was sure she wanted to open the box. She said “Mr. Rayner, I want to see my son.” She doubted she was strong enough to take the sight. But some other part of her, overcome with grief and love, had to see. So she saw the tongue choked out, the right eye lying midway on his cheek, the nose chopped up, and a hole going all the way through his head. “Do you

¹ The story of Emmett Till and Mamie Till Mobley is told movingly in Mamie Till Mobley & Christopher Benson's *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

want me to touch the body up?" the mortician asked." "No, Mr. Rayner," said Mamie. "I want the world to see what I see." And it did. Tens of thousands lined up to view the body. A photograph of it was published in *Jet* magazine. At the funeral, Mamie finished falling apart. "I had no activity to hide behind, no little detail to handle. I was defenseless. Something started coming over me. I couldn't take it. I was overwhelmed. I became hysterical, weak, and had to be carried back to my seat." Photographers captured that moment too.

This event helped ignite the civil rights movement. Mamie Till Mobley continued talking boldly and frankly about her son and about his confessed murderers still at large. She received traumatizing letters and phone calls, including death threats. But she also found people willing to listen who, in listening, told her someone cared. "I was grieving by talking. In the process, I was finding my voice." She got a degree in school psychology and began working with young people, consciously developing leaders who would be mindful of African American history and their responsibility as citizens in promoting justice. Decades later, one of Emmett's murderers said "Emmett Till's been dead 30 years. Why can't he stay dead?"

Mamie insisted that she could not fight her grief, her anger, her intrusive memories of Emmett. Instead, she worked through these signals from her fleshly being to drive her course of action. And the mass meetings where Mamie's voice was heard and where she heard the care of the people who listened to her grief, along with the classrooms where new generations of leaders listened to her and spoke to her and even the Church of God in Christ congregation she served as a founding member of the "Mother's Board," were *ekklesiae* "in Christ."

The *ekklesia* "of God in Christ" is, then, a political assembly where equal speech and frank, bold speech can be practiced because those gathered into it are those who are no longer holding it together. It is not composed of those who are masters of self and others. The truth-speaking in this *ekklesia* comes from the place where Reality exposes the disintegrating obsolete order of mastery for what it is. It comes from the place where the man crying out on the cross, the little boy mutilated beyond recognition in the box, the women struck by terror and amazement, the mother who has no idea how she will make it through, are revealed as Reality's Child. It comes from a place that no longer takes the order of things for granted, the only place where politics really happens.

Godly Hope



A big stretch from Time
to Eternity
by Gene Marshall

The hope of which the New Testament speaks is not an ordinary kind of hope. The word "hope" is most often used as a way of expressing fear. I fear I will have a heart attack; I hope I won't. I fear my money won't hold out; I hope it does. I fear that my children will mess up; I hope they don't.

New Testament hope is not a fear, but a decision—a decision made in spite of all the odds, a persistence of freedom operating in a given direction. In the Genesis stories we have examples of this sort of hope. Abraham and Sarah left the city Ur in what is now Iraq and trekked across the desert toward a hoped-for land where they could become the parents of a multitude of descendants. Though childless in their old age, this hope recurred, scared them almost to death, but nevertheless came to pass in a miraculous birth. Later, as Abraham took this only son Isaac to the top of the hill to be sacrificed, he still maintained this hope in that Final Reality that he trusted and obeyed. Then, in the midst of his willingness to empty himself of all tangible hope and lean on Final Reality alone, Abraham received Isaac back again to continue to be the means of Abraham's still outlandish hope.

These remarkable stories were written centuries later than the migrations of which Abraham and Sarah were mythic members. The Abraham stories were written from the perspective of the Exodus revelation. The Exodus stories hold a second major example of this decision to hope the outlandish hope. Moses leads slaves out of a strictly hierarchical civilization into an unknown wilderness in the hope of not only escaping the chariots of the Egyptian military, but somehow creating a sociological future in that wilderness of big surprises.

In a still later period when Israel and Judea were small nations among the huge Empires of the world, Godly hope (today some call it "eschatological hope") took the form of a "trust" that this peoplehood was pioneering realism on

behalf of all the nations of the world. Statistically speaking, this was a preposterous hope. They did not even know about all the nations of the world. They had no idea of the hugeness of this planet or of all the very different people and their far-flung societies. Nevertheless, this was their Abraham-type, Exodus-type relation to their vision of the future. This sort of outlandish hope reached a zenith in the Jeremiah period. The leadership and the intelligentsia of Judea were carried off into exile in Babylon and the rest of the society scattered. The nation of Judea was ending. But according to Jeremiah this did not end their “eschatological” hope in the Eternal Reality. A new covenant that did not require a nation, “a covenant of the heart” was being made by Eternal Reality with this “people of promise.” Being exiles in a foreign land was not the end of their hope, but simply a new phase of it. With the aid of other eschatological-hope-infatuated prophets, this people persisted, and when a chance was given, some of them picked up their Babylonianized maturity and returned home to Palestine to rebuild their world-changing bit of religious culture.

In the next period of this story, the eschatological hope took on the mythological expression of a coming Messiah, a spiritual descendant of Abraham, Moses, and David who would finish the job of bringing to all the peoples of the world the realism of the Exodus revelation. This hope was no less preposterous than all the earlier expressions of it. This small peoplehood within the immense swim of history, now ruled by one empire after another, understood itself as hope for humankind as a whole. This eschatological hope was too preposterous to be considered arrogant, even though many still make that accusation. This hope was and is another expression of the big stretch from time to Eternity—a trusting by ordinary humans of the Eternal Reality. Clearly understood in that way, it is an expression of the depth of humility, a surrender to a hope that could not disappoint because it was not based on anything temporal or impermanent. This outlandish hope was based on a realism that was rooted in trusting Final Reality—a devotion seen as dependable, for it is a devotion to the winning Power in the entire historical process.

The New-Testament-writing community saw Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom of God as a continuation of and a fulfillment of eschatological hope. Jesus is proclaiming that the end-of-time Kingdom of God is happening now in the midst of those who are truly hearing Jesus’ teachings. Only those who have eyes to see can see the hope of a

total transformation of this devil-driven world. Victory is happening and will complete its happening. Thy Kingdom Come. Thy will be done. Now! on Earth! Nothing could be more preposterous than this message, if we are only looking at the surface of things.

Then this determined, charismatic, disgraced, and crucified maverick peasant teacher, was viewed by his followers as the Messiah, the Christ, the harbinger of the End-of-Time fulfillment. These Christ-way Jews claimed that a full realism for living our lives had come, and that this first-taste coming was still coming to complete the process of a universal healing encompassing the whole of humanity. This scientifically preposterous hope for the future still lives and walks and talks among us. This preposterous hope still stretches the consciousness of its participants all the way from time to Eternity.

Godly Hope Today

So practically speaking what does living such a hope look like on planet earth in 2016? Here is a current ethical example of how this eschatological hope can and is being manifest in our 21st century history. Our global civilizations are now flourishing, to the extent that they are, on the burning of the fossil-fuel deposits. The downside of this energy arrangement is that the atmosphere is being drastically changed, bringing to pass extreme conditions not seen for thousands of years. Already the hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and droughts have become more extreme. Oceans are rising, ecological zones are shifting, social chaos is becoming an increasing threat, and much more. These directions can only be mitigated by ending our fossil-fuel energy system and replacing it with solar and wind sources. Water movement, biofuels, and geothermal sources are not enough. Nuclear fission is much too dangerous even in a well-ordered society, much less in our increasingly chaotic real social world. So a future viability for billions of people is an energy source transition to the boundless solar rays hitting the planet every day, including the sun effects upon the winds and everything else. This will require a whole new energy infrastructure that includes the effective means of storing vast amounts of energy when the sun is not shining and the wind is not blowing. This storage problem is a severe challenge and is causing many to lose hope for the solar transition.

This transition will also require strong activist roles for democratic governments—a development that the freewheeling corporation lovers consider anathema. Whole classes of rich and almost rich

people will have to give up their global empire building. Every commercial, nonprofit, and religious organization will have to undergo big changes. Indeed, *"This Changes Everything,"* as Naomi Klein says with the title of her recent book.

Nevertheless, phasing in a new energy system does not mean the end of the human species, it just means the end of civilization as we have known it. This post-civilization mode of social organization does not have a name yet. I am suggesting Eco-Democracy as a holding nomenclature. We don't know what this new mode of society building will end up looking like, or whether it will ever come to pass; nevertheless, opting for it can be an expression of our eschatological hope in this challenging moment of our human history. We can decide to face this challenge and build strategies and tactics for moving in this direction, whether the realization of such a future is probable or not. We can choose to embrace that direction now and do so with no other certainty than our awareness that without this energy transition our species may become extinct sooner than need be. At the very least, the neglect to act to complete this energy transition will result in only a small minority of current humans returning to a ruthless form of pre-civilization living.

One of the strategies for this massive inclusive energy transformation has been under-reported in the public discussion—the crucial role that hydrogen can play as a means of energy storage in the new energy system. As already mentioned, one of the biggest problems in building a post-fossil-fuel energy system is storing solar energy when the sun is not shining and storing wind-turbine energy when wind is not blowing. Hydrogen can play a big role in storing the energy derived from solar and wind sources, and this stored energy can then be used in a timely fashion as a delivery system to our many energy uses. The burning of hydrogen is ecologically friendly, because its exhaust is water and not carbon dioxide and other pollutants.

Hydrogen is not an energy source. Hydrogen is plentiful on this planet, but it has already been burnt, so to speak. That is, most of the hydrogen is in the form of water and other compounds. But solar energy can be used to break up water into hydrogen and oxygen gasses. The efficiency for doing this is improving, and in the long haul efficiency may not matter, for there is an overabundance of sunshine. Liquid hydrogen tanks can drive even jet planes as well as, or better than, jet fuel. Hydrogen tanks can also replace gasoline tanks in our hybrid cars. Hydrogen tanks can replace diesel tanks in our trucks and trains. Hydrogen and electricity can be the connectors

between our abundant sunshine and all of our energy uses. How to do this and getting it done is an enormous challenge, but this is one of the meanings of eschatological hope: *finding a way where there seems to be no way.*

James Bevel was a civil rights organizer in the 1960s U.S. South, a companion of Martin Luther King Jr. He gave a sermon that impressed me. In the style of many black preachers, it had this repeating refrain, "Love will find a way." Bevel would tell about the harsh conditions and the seemingly impossible hopes for completing the civil rights cause and then after each such spin end with this phrase "Love will find a way." He would have entire audiences, included me, in tears by the end of this talk. And in this instance, *Love did find a way!*

This sort of Love is a decision, not a prediction. It is not an estimate of probabilities; it is commitment to a historical direction. And both religious and secular citizens of the United States and elsewhere still speak about this kind of love. I just finished reading a fresh-off-the-presses book by John Perkins, *The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. At the end of this second scathing critique of the horrific policies of US economists, hit men, and jackals of violence, Perkins writes these words:

When Samantha said . . . , "it turns out that love really is all you need," I realized that she was expressing the basis of a new dream. It is the dream that indigenous people and spirit teachers—from Mother Teresa to the Dalai Lama, from the Buddha to Pope Francis—have always dreamed. It is a dream of love—for ourselves, for each other, for nature, and for the planet. It is a dream that tells us to replace the old dream of a death economy with a new dream of a life economy.²

Such dreams are about a persistent hope for a love that will find a way. Such dreams are reenactments of that eschatological hope of Abraham, Sarah, Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Hildegard, Teresa, Luther, Julian, and Christians today who do indeed trust the Eternal Reality that is confronting us in the urgency of climate crisis and other challenges.



² Perkins, John; *The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, (Berrett-Koehler: 2016) page 290

A Six Course Curriculum

in
**Unreduced
Realism**
insights for a next
Christianity

by Gene Marshall



The core of human evil might be described as making up facts to support a preferred reality. We see pundits and politicians making up facts to support a flawed ideology, some conspiracy story about an opponent, some justification of the greed of a campaign financier. We see religious leaders making up facts that support some flawed doctrine, some too literal interpretation of a sacred text, some popular preference of a sentimental view, moral bias, ethnic prejudice, passive sloth, or some plain lazy-mindedness. **Unreduced Realism** means an openness to every inconvenient truth, ever scientific fact, every inward noticing, every practical answer to a real historical challenge.

One of the key tasks of the Realistic Living mandate, faculty, and constituency has been preparing teaching materials for teachers in local places across the continent and planet. Two years ago, I began collecting a random list of essays held in a folder I called “**Unreduced Realism**.” Most of this work has now been boiled down into six core courses for teaching Christianity and its related ethics in local places of the English-speaking world.

Following are the titles and a paragraph on each of these six courses. For more information on the titles of each essay and the essays themselves, simply go to: RealisticLiving.org/UR1/ or [UR2/](http://RealisticLiving.org/UR2/) [UR3/](http://RealisticLiving.org/UR3/) [UR4/](http://RealisticLiving.org/UR4/) [UR5/](http://RealisticLiving.org/UR5/) [UR6/](http://RealisticLiving.org/UR6/) Every essay is up on our web site except for eight of the essays in Course 5. That course should be completed by the end of the year.

1. Christians: Who are We?

a deep look into misunderstood symbols

This is an accessible and updated rendition of what we used to call “RS-1” or “The Twentieth Century Theological Revolution.” Session one is about God. Session two is about using the word “God.” Sessions 3, 4, and 5 are about the Jesus Christ revelation of that Eternal Reality that meets us in every event or our lives. Session 6 is about unfaith or sin. Sessions 7 & 8 are about Holy Spirit. And session 9 & 10 are about the Church as a dynamic of response in history.

2. Religious Action in Century 21

the secular ethics of a responsible Christian

This is a course about religious ethics—a contextual ethics that applies not only to Christians, but to any realistic religious practitioner and to secular activists as well. Some of these essays mention Christian topics, but they do so in a general way that makes clear that Christian ethics is simply ethics for anyone who wants to be realistic in an unreduced realism manner.

3. Steps Toward a Next Christianity

transfiguring a religious tradition

This course is about solitary and communal nurture. The first three sessions deal with the solitary journey using the beatitudes from Matthew 5. The next four sessions deal with the polarity of solitary and communal in Christian practice and with the stages of Spirit journey of a Christian community. The last three sessions deal with sociological models for a post-Christendom form of Christian life together. Session nine deals with leadership in these freshly conceived sociological dynamics: Guild, Temple, and Circle.

4. The Magic of Three—Infinite Faces

an adventure in triune Christian theologizing

This course is advanced Christian theologizing. It cleans up some subtle misunderstandings and spells out in terms of everyday experience the three faces of the Christian Trinity. Each time Eternity happens to anyone or any historical group, all three Faces of the Trinity are part of that experience. The course winds up with a session on the meaning of revelation and a session on the ethics of radical monotheism and how radical monotheism differs as an ethical foundation from two other common modes of ethics. This course is a deep dive into the sort of Christian theologizing that we began to clarify in courses 1, 2, and 3.

5. The Magic of Three—Finite Processes

ethics and our essential temporal processes

This is a course on ethics—illuminating the many places where ethics takes place: social life, solitary life, and life in the natural cosmos. Step-by-step this course develops a sense of wholeness: the essential processes of human society, the essential processes of solitary personhood, and the essential processes of the natural world. The course ends with a session on a theology of cosmology, and a final session on Eternal Reality as a the land of wonder that undergirds all the temporal processes of our living.

6. The Interreligious Journey *Tools for Dialogue and Cooperation*

The course is about the Interreligious Journey and tools for dialogue and cooperation among all the great religious explorations of human history. Through interreligious dialogue and cooperation each religious community can be inspired by the others to better practice their chosen religion. The RL core curriculum would not be complete without this course. Much of this material is found in my recent book *The Enigma of Consciousness*, but this course provides selections and simplifications of that more philosophical book.

I understand these six courses to be a core curriculum of the Realistic Living organization. RL faculty and many of you teach other courses and books as well, but the content in these six accessible 10-session courses are a summation of many decades of RL research and our vision of the future Realistic Living work.

We make available many other materials, such as: solitary booklets, videos, manuals, workbooks, booklets, perfect-bound books, and more, but these six courses provide perspective for all these materials. And perhaps more important, these easy-to-teach essays provide a way to introduce new people to this deep heritage in a way that is more accessible than the original sources of many of these breakthroughs.

Please contact us for more information, and please read the essays that most interest you. Many of you, we hope, will teach these courses in your local spheres of responsibility.

Expanding the Realistic Living Faculty

It was decided at the recent Symposium meeting to establish a continent-wide group of teachers of this curriculum. This group is now being enlisted and their names and locations will be included on flyers announcing the above courses and on the Realistic Living web site.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

FICTION

A Little Life
by Hanya Yanagihara
Doubleday, 2015



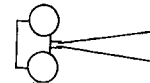
Gene and I read aloud together this 720-page book over a couple of months. I loved reading it
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aloud. It was so real and so intense and so very satisfying emotionally. Sometimes the horrible treatment of one human to another was difficult to bear, and we had to stop and take a break to recover. At other times the utter sweetness of one human to another brought me to tears and I couldn't read. Sometimes I wept at the heart-breaking sadness. I have never been more affected by a book. This author is a genius, in my opinion. The story? Oh yes, the story. The story begins with four friends who meet in college and we follow all four throughout their lives, but the little life is that of Jude, one of the four and we eventually learn about his entire life. These four men are not four ordinary guys. They are unusually talented and each becomes successful in his field: artist, actor, architect, lawyer, and in competitive New York City. But we come to know them in their personal lives in the ups and downs of their struggles and their friendships, not only with one another but a wider collection of people who are sorting out what it is to be a friend when it isn't obvious or easy. A book for the brave-hearted.

Hausfrau
by Jill Alexander Essbaum
Random House, 2015

This story of Anna Benz, the American wife of a Swiss banker living in Zurich with their three children, is an excellent modern version of Madame Bovary or Anna Karenina. The opening line, "Anna was a good wife, mostly" sums up her desire to be a good wife, but so many things make it difficult for her to fulfill that role. The novel brilliantly weaves the story of her unraveling as she seeks solace in extramarital affairs to ease the loneliness of living in a foreign land with an emotionally cold husband and a disapproving mother in law. I couldn't put it down in spite of sensing the outcome. I continued to hope she will avoid it. Maybe she will open up with her analyst, or share her problems with her new friend, Mary. But no, she soldiers on to her doom in an interior isolation stunningly depicted by poet Essbaum in her first novel.

FILM



Where to Invade Next is a misleading title for Michael Moore's latest documentary. By "invade" he means to plant the U.S. flag in European to countries where people are using creative ideas to live more wholesomely and to bring their ideas home. Even though what he discovers is wondrous and almost idyllic, the film is very sad for us Americans. The contrast is stunning. For example:

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in Italy everyone gets 30 days paid vacation each year and two-hour lunches and company owners are pleased to have happy rested workers; in France all school kids are served nutritional gourmet food and astonished by how Americans feed their kids; in Slovenia college is free—even for foreigners—and students go on strike if anyone even thinks about charging tuition; in Finland school hours are short and homework nonexistent (and Finland's schools are ranked among the best in the world); in Norway the worst felons are treated with compassion, have no sentence longer than 21 years and their crime rate and recidivism are both low; in Islamic Tunisia women have free health care; in Portugal using drugs is not a crime, but rehab is offered to those who want it; Iceland has a woman president and all their governing bodies must have at least 40% of each sex (and their country is doing very well); and the Germans do not hide from their shameful past, teaching students and using art and public forums to remind citizens of the Holocaust (compared to U.S. denial of African slaves and treatment of Native Americans).

The irony of the film is that when Moore asks the innovators in these countries where they came up with their ideas, they mostly credit the good old U.S. of A. Which raises the question: Can we recover our own good ideas and learn from those of other countries?

Seymour: An Introduction. This documentary filmed by actor Ethan Hawke features Seymour Bernstein, a pianist in his eighties and a person that you just don't want to miss being with for at least the 80 minutes of this film. When I first saw it, I wanted to see it over right then. I managed to wait until the next day. I plan to see it yet again before too long.

k.d. lang: Live in London with the BBC Concert Orchestra. I only recently discovered this singer. If you haven't heard her, you are in for a treat. And she's even better when you can see her as well. This 2009 concert film is absolute perfection. The setting is a fairly small English church with a small audience, a great band and backup by the orchestra. The whole production is superb. And lang, well, she's incomparable.

Bridge of Spies. Britisher Mark Rylance, who has become one of my favorite actors, won a Academy Award this year for his portrayal of Rudolph Abels, a Russian spy in the 1950s. This film is based on the true story of Abels' capture and his defense by attorney James Donovan (Tom Hanks). Later, Donovan also negotiated Abels' exchange for

American pilot Gary Powers and American student Frederic Pryor. The movie is Steven Spielberg at his best, with a message about what it means to act from human values however ambiguous the situation and with fantastic scenes between Hanks and Rylance.

Academy Award winning movie **Spotlight** brings to mind the excellent film, **All the President's Men**, as it is right up there in demonstrating the best of investigative reporting and has your total attention from start to finish—even to wondering if you missed your calling as such strong identity emerges with the Boston Globe team of four working this story with full passion blazing. The story is the true one of the massive scandal of child molestation and cover-up within the local Catholic Archdiocese which shook the entire Catholic Church to its core. All the actors are top-notch with Mark Ruffalo leading the pack and earning his best supporting actor nomination. I also particularly appreciated Liev Schreiber's subtle rendering of the newly appointed editor and Stanley Tucci as a long-suffering attorney for the victims—both men playing Jews in Catholic territory.

Carol. I sit in wonder of an Academy that nominates films like **The Big Short** and **Revenant** (both of which I, unfortunately, saw) and **Mad Max: Fury Road** (whose trailer I could not even endure) for best picture and not a film like **Carol**. I think the word "exquisite" most accurately defines this film for me—a fine script, expertly directed and acted. I re-experienced the 50s, this time from the perspective of two women who love one another. When we meet them, Carol is older, and knows her sexual propensity, whereas Therese only knows she doesn't really care much for her boy friend, Richard, and is totally fascinated with Carol. Both Richard and Carol's husband, Harge, are flummoxed by "their" women. Carol must strategize carefully to keep a relationship with her young daughter if she follows her body and heart. I particularly appreciate how Carol gives the younger woman space to make her own decision about their relationship. A mesmerizing film.

45 Years features two fine British actors (Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay) playing a childless retired couple approaching the celebration of their 45 years of marriage. Their quiet contentment is disrupted by an unexpected letter. In the few days leading up to the celebration, we not only learn of secrets that have been withheld, but also discover the destructive nature of secrets in an intimate relationship. Like **Olive Kitteridge** (reviewed below), this film is real stuff, extremely well done.

Room is based on a novel that was inspired by similar real-life crimes in which young women are abducted and held for years, repeatedly raped, and in this case, give birth to a child and raise the child in captivity. Not a happy story, and though “Ma” (what the child, Jack, calls his mother) does amazingly well for seven years in an 11 X 11 garden shed, keeping her sanity and raising a reasonably healthy child to age five (when she and he bring about a rescue), as you can imagine, a return to “normal” life is not an easy transition. Not always a pleasant film to watch, it gives insight into resilience, and the kind of steady support others can give to those traumatized— exemplified by the young woman’s mother and step father. Brie Larson deserved her Academy Award.

Brooklyn. Unable to find work in small town Ireland in 1951, Eilis Lacey leaves her mother and sister to move to Brooklyn with the sponsorship of her local parish. She works at a department store and goes to night school studying bookkeeping, staying at a boarding house for other young women. She meets an Italian plumber and falls in love. The main tension in the film arises when Eilis returns to Ireland for her sister’s funeral and faces the pressure of family and friends to remain and marry a local man who is reasonably attractive to her and “a good catch.” Most people can identify a time in life when the option to leave “home” (the comfortable, the familiar) or risk the larger world calls upon a deep decision. A relatively quiet, but real film.

The Danish Girl is based on the lives of Gerda and Einer Wegener, whom we meet as a happily married young couple of painters in early 20th century Denmark. Gerda enjoys having Einer dress in women’s clothing to serve as model when her female model isn’t available. Einer poses for Gerda for a number of paintings which become the rage in Paris. But when Einer begins to call himself Lili Elbe and stays longer in that role, she becomes disturbed. After they try a series of terrible “treatments” to fix Einer, eventually Gerda agrees that Einer is really a woman and Lili becomes one of the first people to undergo sex reassignment surgery. The film suits a story of artists, as its visuals are lovely. It also is a sensitive telling of how two people who love one another deal with one of them becoming another gender. Superb acting by Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander.



Suffragette. I was expecting this film to inspire me. Ultimately it did, but the miserable conditions of the lives of the working woman in Britain in 1912, and the brutality those women met when they began to draw attention to their situation was hard for me to watch. And then there is the situation of women today when things look better generally but with many signs that misogyny is still rampant: high rates of rape and the murder of women by their male partners, women still paid much less than men for equal work, and sexist comments by candidates running for president, for examples. The film gives an inside look at the workings of patriarchal power, the complexities of political resistance, and the economic implications of the right to vote.

British women didn’t win the right to vote until 1918 and U.S. women in 1920—fifty years after African American men. Overall, the movie was an important reminder that women did not get the vote or any level of equality by being nice.

Concussion. Will Smith is amazing in his role as Nigerian Dr. Bennet Omalu. He somehow changed his whole facial structure as well as his accent. Omalu is the real-life doctor who discovered the brain damage caused by the trauma of repeated hits to the head by long time football players. The film plays loosely with some of the facts. For instance, Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, or CTE was noted years earlier in boxers. He didn’t discover it. But it is true that some pro football players have been severely damaged by the head trauma of the game, sometimes resulting in hallucinations, memory loss, mental suffering, and aggressive behavior. As you have probably noticed in the news, the NFL and many fans did not welcome this information with open arms, and are now only gradually adjusting to it by making some changes in equipment and responses to injury. For a long time I have felt that football is the modern version of the gladiator arena of ancient Rome, the gladiators being expendable. As the film notes, it is

difficult to find a balance between the Shakespearean drama of the game and a protection of its players.

Trumbo. In this year of the expose', this film is a dramatization of prominent screenwriter Dalton Trumbo's experience bucking the Hollywood blacklist in the 1940s. After spending time in prison for mocking the House Un-American Activities Committee, he managed to make a living for years by employing false names or sometimes "fronts" who took screen credit for his work. In one case, the film, **Roman Holiday**, won an Oscar for the script. Finally, actor Kirk Douglas and director Otto Preminger openly gave Trumbo credit for his work on **Spartacus** and **Exodus**, respectively. That began to break the blacklist in 1960. We also saw the 2007 documentary, **Trumbo**, which includes video and audio of Trumbo and his family along with various actors reading his letters and talks. The documentary is perhaps even more moving than the drama in its focus on the words of a premiere writer who articulated the human condition with emotional power, whether in an artful script about the down-trodden, oppressed, and wretched of the earth, or in a letter to a school principal about the mistreatment of his daughter because of his being blacklisted, or in a humorous letter to his son about masturbation.

Learning to Drive. Patricia Clarkson plays a woman whose husband divorces her for another woman. Having depended on him to do any necessary driving, she faces the need to drive herself in order to visit her daughter outside New York City limits. Sir Ben Kingsley plays a Sikh who teaches people to drive in the morning and drives a cab at night. He becomes her driving instructor. It would seem natural in a light weight film for them to become a romantic item. And they are interested in one another. Fortunately for this film, they become friends instead, maybe because it was written and directed by women. A good film.

Danny Collins is written and directed by Dan Fogelman, who wrote the fantastic script for the comedy, **Crazy Stupid Love**. I liked this film all the way through. It is based on the true story of a pop singer/songwriter (played by Al Pacino) who received a letter from John Lennon which was written in response to a magazine interview. But the letter got to him decades late, delivered by his best friend/manager (Christopher Plummer). Danny has become burned out with fame and fortune and Lennon's letter inspires him to make changes in his life. He makes contact with his estranged son (Bobby Cannavale), seeks a more

"age-appropriate" relationship (Annette Bening), and begins to write songs again. But it isn't as simple as it sounds, which is where the fine script writing comes in, plus the great cast. Don't miss this one.

The Intern. I like this film very much. Robert De Niro plays Ben Whittaker, a retired, 70-year-old widower in Brooklyn who's still alert and healthy and needs something meaningful to do. So he applies to be a Senior Intern at an e-commerce business which sells clothing and winds up reporting to its founder, Jules, (played by Anne Hathaway) who's been amazingly successful but is sometimes exhausted from balancing work and family. De Niro is surprisingly great at playing the calm, centered, wise older guy in a company full of young, smart, colleagues. He is almost saintly in his ability to be helpful to his co-workers and boss without a trace of condescension. I can't help but think his character was deeply affected by the Tai Chi he is practicing with a group out in the park at the beginning and end of the film. This is a sweet, funny story that I wouldn't quite call a comedy. Maybe it's a dramedy.

Spy. Melissa McCarthy goes undercover in this hilarious James Bond parody playing CIA agent Susan Cooper who finally gets into action after a decade at Langley doing the smart work that makes pretty-boy spy (Jude Law spoofing 007) the success he is. No opportunity for a good laugh is missed as McCarthy brings the villains and her macho male cohorts to their knees in acknowledgment of both her brilliance and her hand-to-hand combat. Laugh-out-loud fun.

Marx Brothers. I have seen bits of the Marx Brothers movies in the past, but I recently watched three in one afternoon (on Turner Classics) and discovered their genius. People have explored the theology of the Charles Schultz Peanuts comics. I find myself musing about the theology of the Jewish Marx brothers. Seems to me that their "work" is very Zen in that they don't take the "self" seriously—their own or anyone else's. Everything is play to them and their style is that of "no-self." They seem to have no ego to defend. One of my favorites is their hour-long **Horse Feathers**, in which Groucho plays the new president of a college which is out to recover a winning football team.

Harvey. I knew about Jimmy Stewart's role as Elwood P. Dowd who had an invisible rabbit (Harvey) as a friend, but I didn't see the film when it came out in 1950. Though Dowd's touch of imbecility is a bit off-putting at the start of the film, by film's end Stewart's genius had me wanting to

emulate the guy—a man who is always ready for a drink, who hands his business card to everyone, invites one and all to dinner, and who, of course, always includes his friend Harvey.

Testament of Youth. This fine BBC drama has the distinction of chronicling the horrors that World War I inflicted on a generation of young English people from a woman's perspective. It is based on the account of Vera Brittain of her own experiences. After attempting to write a novel, the coining of the term "documentary" in 1933 inspired her to write a 661-page memoir which began in her childhood and ended in 1925. This film dramatizes the period leading up to and including the war. Amidst the patriotic fervor and the belief that the conflict will be glorious and short, most young Englishmen don't hesitate to enlist, including Vera's brother, their close friend, and her fiancé. Vera goes through a hard-won battle to enter the university, but gives up her studies to become a nurse, serving on the battlefield in France confronting the maimed and dying. She is called on to minister not only to the suffering British soldiers but to the dying captured German ones as well, whose agonies were a crucial factor in her becoming an antiwar activist.

Race carries the double meaning in this story of Jesse Owens' mark in history at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany. This young black athlete became the first person to win four gold medals in one Olympic games in track, all while acting as a symbol of American rebellion against Hitler's Nazi Germany. Sadly, when Owens returned to the United States he was left out of the congratulations at the FDR White House and in order to attend a reception honoring him at the Waldorf Astoria, he and his wife were forced to take the freight elevator. Further, he could not find work beyond such things as undignified races against horses and automobiles. The movie is nevertheless inspiring because of the dignity of the man himself and of others such as his German opponent in the broad jump who became Owens' life-long friend.

The Hateful Eight. Quentin Tarantino certainly knows how to make good films about bad people. I found this film to be fascinating, though I didn't exactly like it. It is post Civil War. Holed up in a isolated snowbound Wyoming outpost we meet five members (one female) of a rebel gang, two bounty hunters and a (maybe) sheriff-to-be. We have to sort out who is who as the movie plays along. Plays along is a good phrase for Tarantino as there is a playfulness about the way he portrays his violent stories. What I noticed about my

response to the film was that I wanted the woman (who was no less hateful than the others) to win, to manage to "take out" the others and survive. In fact, even to have a triumphal moment over them. I was seeing this film as it became clear that Donald Trump was the assumptive Republican candidate for president. I noticed that I also longed for Hillary to be the Democratic candidate, and for her to select Elizabeth Warren as her running mate and for the two of them to literally trounce Trump into the dust, into utter humiliation, to beat him beyond standing in any way at all. As I reflected on the movie and the political race, I decided that both Tarantino and Trump have the capacity to bring out awareness of the dark side of us all.

Creed. Forty years ago Gene and I saw and enjoyed the film **Rocky** in Chicago. It was one of the first (if not the first) films we saw as we began our life together. I think we saw the second in the long series of Rocky films but lost interest as the sequels went on. The attention of the Academy Awards to **Creed** drew us back to see this film—perhaps the final in the series. The first Rocky film has a memorable moment when the fighter, having won through many difficult times, runs through the streets of Philadelphia ending at the top of the endless steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art with his arms held triumphant in the air. **Creed** ends with Rocky and his former opponent's illegitimate son Donnie at the top of the same steps. Rocky has been mentor and trainer and father figure for this younger Creed as he struggled through some of the same difficulties Rocky had experienced. Now Rocky, suffering from cancer, can barely climb the steps, but he has come through his own challenges to make his contribution to the next generation. This film ranks up there with the first **Rocky** with fine human values, and one an elder like me can certainly identify with.

TELEVISION SERIES

Wolf Hall. This BBC six-episode series based on Hilary Mantel's novels is my style of drama. Mark Rylance, as Thomas Cromwell, is mesmerizing. I couldn't keep my eyes off him. He does more with less than any actor I've seen. (See **Bridge of Spies** review above.) The story begins in Henry VIII's 1529 and gives a new view of Cromwell as Henry's right hand man. Instead of villain to Thomas More's saint, he is more heroic and Thomas More less so. Well, maybe heroic is the wrong word. He is the perfect example of a person in many totally ambiguous situations who never blames anyone or anything, but merely plays his cards with calm finesse, aware of everyone at the table and all that

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is at risk. He is quietly breathtaking, good cop/bad cop at the same moment. If you like explicit sex, horrific violence, and cliff hangers, see **Outlander**. If you love skilled subtle irony and nuance, don't miss **Wolf Hall**.

Olive Kitteridge. This HBO mini-series starring Frances McDormand and Richard Jenkins as a married couple experiencing the events of a 25-year span is really fine TV by my standards. It's not a happy story and the characters aren't pretty physically, nor are they saintly. They are real. Olive herself is a cranky school teacher who can't abide superficiality or sentimentality and does not hesitate to say so. The series deals with attraction to other people outside the marriage; raising a son, going through his marriage and divorce and remarriage; depression; crippling illness; death; buried secrets; resentments—well, all the ordinary things of real life.

RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

NONFICTION BOOKS



I am going to begin my nonfiction reviews with some personal reflection on finding encouragement in my early morning reading. I can easily become discouraged with my state of being and judgmental about my relationship to life and to other people. I imagine that I should be more loving and have more equanimity. I spend time every morning reading brief passages chosen from a stack of books. One morning recently I found great encouragement from three authors.

LIBERATED CONSCIOUSNESS

Ordinary Freedom

by Jon Bernie

Non-Duality Press, 2010

Jon Bernie lists 4 stages of liberated consciousness:

1. We are unconsciously incompetent—we don't know that we don't know.
2. We are consciously incompetent—we become aware that there's something we don't know and set out to learn it.
3. We become consciously competent—we've learned something and are aware of our new knowledge.
4. We become unconsciously competent—the learning is integrated and we no longer need to be aware of it.

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Bernie notes that #4 is where we get discouraged, not realizing that we really are in a different place. He points out that the mind is the last to get it and, in fact, there is a sense in which the mind never gets it.

Now I feel very encouraged about this. I think maybe, just maybe, I have integrated lots of things without my mind knowing it. And at times, it even becomes very clear that that is so. For example, Gene and I have recently taken on a relationship renewal project using Harville Henrix's exercises in his book, *Getting All the Love You Want*. Periodically, we reread the vision statement we created of our relationship and the lists of requests to one another for behaviors. We are surprised at the changes we each have made—at the integration of new ways of being that have happened without our realizing it.

ESSENCE

Getting Free

by Gina Lake

Endless Satsang Foundation, 2007

Another author, Gina Lake, discusses Essence as opposed to ego. Essence, she says, perceives life as a whole and as essentially good. She describes a visual aspect of being aligned with Essence—to look at things without evaluating them—and how objects may begin to take on a glow and subtle fluidity. In this kind of looking your eyes become soft. This change of relationship results in your taking action when action is called for without trying to force or manipulate life to conform to ideas as the ego does. Essence is free of ideas about the way things should be. In her words, "Essence may have intentions for the next moment, but it doesn't try to change the current one. Essence does influence and shape life, but during it, not after the fact. It flows with life and shapes life while life is moving where it is moving. This is very different from the ego, which opposes whatever is showing up and trying to change what already is." Like aikido, I think.

Although I do practice Qi Gong and Tai Chi, I have never done Aikido. But I am inspired by what I understand of the approach of Aikido. Aikido is different from other martial arts. Its philosophy is to extend love and compassion even to those who seek to harm others, so an attack is harmlessly redirected and not only is the receiver unharmed, but so is the attacker. I see Gina's way of relating to life like Aikido. Not fighting with it in opposition, but flowing and making subtle shifts. I see that instead of opposing others, I can note what I hear from them, empathize with their way of seeing things, (flowing along) and then (after a pause to

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really sense who they are) say how it comes to me. Very different from an argumentative 'stance.'

Gina goes on to describe how the eyes reflect ego with a hard dullness and how the energy of Essence is transmitted through the eyes with a gentle, yet fiery quality. This brings up for me the memory of a session with my Buddhist guide. In the midst of a month-long retreat I went to our weekly session for once without complaints and was just there with him, eye to eye. It was wondrous. I realized that he had always been there with the energy of Essence. On this occasion I had enough openness to respond. Just being there looking at one another was a profound experience for me.

Gina has encouraged me to simply look at objects in the world as I move about each day. To relax the mind and just see them. Even now, this moment, I look out the window and see the tree, just in itself, just being there. The hammock blowing in the wind. And I don't need to resist life to respond appropriately. I can trust myself to act in the moment. You can change the direction of flow without fighting it.

Gina goes on to note that Essence is behind everyone's eyes, but is covered over when mental activity is very strong. Though ego-identification is the usual state of consciousness, it is not the natural state. The natural state is love, the glue that holds the universe together. The mind can't understand this and has to take it on faith. But when we trust that this is true, we begin to see love everywhere. We see love pushing a child on a swing; we see love driving safely, shopping for food, listening, touching, smiling, laughing, singing, playing and on and on—the only real constant in the universe. (I am quoting her words here, leaving out some for brevity).

I really love this. It resonates with my Christian upbringing and deepest sense of things which I can forget when I watch the evening news. But I realize that I can watch the evening news and see love there. I mean, truly, Rachel Maddow, to start with, has such a passion to uncover the truth as well as a passion for the underdog. And there is such a sense of fun sometimes between those newscasters (I'm a fan of MSNBC) who delight in their work and love working together. That's just for starters. I haven't pushed myself yet to see the love hiding in those I tend to hate. (I won't mention his name.)



SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Nothing Personal

by Nirmala

Endless Satsang Foundation, 2001

Self-Consciousness is discussed by a third author, Nirmala, who happens to be married to Gina—the author of the above book. Nirmala notes how we often check in on ourselves: How am "I" doing? How is it going for "me"? Even if we are doing well, there is the concern over keeping it that way. He compares that experience to moments of what he calls pure Consciousness when we are in the present. Like athletes "in the zone," or in an emergency, or engrossed in a book, or just in life itself. His antidote is to realize that pure Consciousness is always here, which he calls Grace. We don't need to try to get rid of self-consciousness (what Gina might call the ego), but just to notice the Grace of Consciousness (or Love or Essence in Gina's words) that is always here.

Most certainly I get involved in how I'm doing over and over throughout every day. It encourages me to realize that I can always take that perceptual step back and note that a part of me can see that self-consciousness without judgment and the hold loosens. I am aware of a broader identification.

After reading these three witnesses one morning, I wept for awhile. Lego (our cat) was lying beside me giving his comforting presence). These writings resonate with me. My ears prick up metaphorically. I am at attention. The tears are, I think, both some sorrow at not experiencing Essence (pure Consciousness, Love, Grace) more and also a kind of relief at being here and having my experience clarified and validated and experiencing it now. I experience deep gratitude for these three people and their attempt to put in words their own inexpressible experience.

The Magic of Awareness

Snow Lion, 2012

and

No Self, No Problem

Awakening to Our True Nature

Shambhala, 2013

both by Anam Thubten

Anam Thubten sees the goal of all spiritual practices to awaken to our true nature—and not intellectually, but experientially. This nature he sees as utterly loving and compassionate no matter what the dance of consciousness might be in this moment. From his perspective, we are already Buddha, we are already Christ and in his words,



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“the universe will provide us with much magic and many miracles to help us wake up” to that reality. Tibetan Thubten seems to find the fact that English is not his first language an advantage. His use of English is charming, simple, illuminating, and inspiring. I particularly appreciate his discussion of our full-time employee, the ego, the one who constantly tells us how good or bad everything is. He notes there is no 12-step program in transcendent wisdom. Just the one-step program to not associate with the ego. The result being that we fall in love with the truth. He notes, “You have to be a little bit crazy to love the truth” —or suchness, or what is, or emptiness. This love burns all our concepts, beliefs, our isms, our illusions. And also our misery. I highly recommend Anam Thubten.

After Buddhism

Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age

by Stephen Batchelor

Yale University Press, 2015

Of Batchelor’s earlier books, I particularly appreciated *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. I found many similarities in my approach to Christianity. This book covers much of the same territory. One of the key questions he seeks to answer in this later book is: “How, in the course of Buddhist history, did the concept of emptiness evolve from a way of dwelling on earth unconditioned by reactivity into an ultimate truth to be directly cognized in a nonconceptual state of meditation?” Batchelor’s goal is to return to the root of the Buddhist tradition and rethink and rearticulate it for today’s secular world.

He does so by writing chapters which explore five major people in the Buddha’s life and alternating those with chapters on five major themes of Buddhism.

His secular summation of the essence of the Gotama’s (the Buddha’s) dharma (teaching) is these four:

1. The principle of conditionality (life is endlessly fluid and unpredictable)
2. The practice of a fourfold task (not to arrive at a satisfactory solution to a problem but to achieve a sensibility not determined by the influence of fixed opinions)
3. The perspective of mindful awareness (letting go or reactive patterns of thought, leaving a still mind)
4. The power of self-reliance (commitment to a way of life emerging from such stillness)

Batchelor notes that Gotama’s awakening “was not achieved by gaining privileged knowledge of

an ultimate truth, but by seeing himself and his world in a radically different way” —like a gestalt switch. Also Gotama did not buy in to the duality of “it is” and “it is not,” using the impermanence language that Batchelor says captures better “the ineffable emergence and slippage of life.” The moment-to-moment aware living espoused by Gotama lends itself to a situational, rather than a legalistic ethics, responding in unpredictable ways to whatever moral dilemmas are encountered with empathy, intelligence, and compassion.

But sometime during the centuries after Gotama’s death, Buddhism took a turn to a language of truth: “from pragmatism to ontology, from skepticism to dogmatism.” This resulted in privileging abstract knowledge over felt experience, of doctrinal belief over practical application. Batchelor notes the importance of this difference: “He (Gotama) sought to establish a pragmatic framework to enable men and women to experience for themselves that they are free not to live according to the instinctive dictates of craving and egotism. This freedom is not an end in itself, but a freedom to embark on a way of life in which human beings can flourish”—a new kind of society. And Batchelor notes what that flourishing would look like: “Grounded in the body and the senses, we value an open-mindedness to what is unfamiliar, probe our sensorium with relentless curiosity, listen attentively to what others have to say, are willing to suspend habitual attitudes and opinions, and question what is going on instead of simply taking things for granted.” One would live in the “sacred dwelling” of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, which wishes all others well.

Batchelor encourages Buddhists to articulate “a philosophically coherent and ethically integrated vision of life that is no longer tied to the religious dogmas and institutions of Asian Buddhism” which might encourage the “dawning of a culture of awakening, which may or may not call itself ‘Buddhist.’”

MEMOIRS

Grits, Green Beans and the Holy Ghost:

Memoirs of a Girl Monk

by Carol J. Poole

Rose Hip Press, 2015

Anyone ever connected in any way with the Order Ecumenical (no doubt many of our readers) will find this book of great interest and will no doubt have many memories and feelings arise while reading it. The book is so sensitively and intelligently written and the story so intriguing that

I imagine most anyone will find it a page-turner. Psychotherapist Poole recalls her memories as a child whose parents were a part of the “Order,” as it was called, from the time she was three; and she reflects from her adult perspective on the organization and those adults who were a part of it in the 1960s to 1980s. The mere details of her childhood experience will raise your eyebrows, at the least. The gift of the book is her ability to have empathetic understanding of those “existentialists” who were a part of, in her words, “a leftist new religious movement . . . whose thousands of members embraced a quasi-monastic lifestyle in their quest to save the world.” I highly recommend this book.

*The Reluctant Spy:
My Secret Life in the CIA's War on Terror*
by John Kiriakou
Bantam Books, 2009

John Kiriakou was a CIA agent from 1990 to 2004 and received many awards from the agency for exceptional performance and meritorious service. After retiring from the agency he worked for a time as a consultant for ABC News. In 2007 he did an interview with ABC reporting on his participation in the capture of an aide of Ben Laden, noting that the aide was waterboarded briefly once (not in Kiriakou's presence) and cooperated by giving good information afterward. Two years later the truth came out that the man had been waterboarded at least 83 times with no information gained. Kiriakou decided to blow the whistle on this torture for which he was imprisoned for two years, February 2013 to February 2015, becoming the first US government official to confirm—and condemn—the practice of torture by CIA interrogators and the only US official to serve time following the revelation of the CIA's “enhanced interrogation” practices. *The Reluctant Spy* was published in 2009 and tells the story of his work with the CIA. It reads like a good spy novel, even more interesting because it is true. Kiriakou has also written about his experience in prison and is a supporter of prison reform. He is one of my heroes as well as a friendly approachable man who answers his emails personally. His website: <http://www.johnkiriakou.com/>



SOCIAL THOUGHT

reviews by Gene Marshall

*Saving Capitalism
For the Many Not the Few*
by Robert B. Reich
Alfred A. Knopf: 2015

The capitalism that Reich wants to save is nothing like the economy system proposed by Trump, Cruz, Kasich, Ryan, Bush, and others of that ilk. Reich's “saved capitalism” is more like the democratic socialism of Bernie Sanders or the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt. What Reich wants to save is a democratic, government-created market that works for everyone and not just the upper crust.

In the opening chapter Reich begins, “The prevailing view is so predominant that it is now almost taken for granted.” The split between the left and right “depends on which you trust most (or least): the government or the ‘free market.’”

Instead, Reich asserts that “A market—any market—requires that government make and enforce the rules of the game. In most modern democracies, such rules emanate from legislatures, administrative agencies, and courts. Government doesn't “intrude” on the “free market. It creates the market.”

So the issue becomes *who* makes these rules and *whom* do these rules benefit. Conservatives, as that word is currently used, are those who support power to the wealthiest elements to make the rules that benefit the wealthy at the expense of the rest. Basically, these are the rules we have now, and their consequences have created an intolerable degree of inequity. And this trend is still in full swing.

We need what Reich calls “a contravailing power,” something labor unions used to provide—something New Deals and Fair Deals used to provide. This countervailing power can also be private forces as well as governments. Most of all it must be movements of people who are willing to stand up and “not take it anymore”

RECOMMENDED READING

A political movements that can make significant changes in our inequity trends needs to take on the big banks, the fossil fuel companies, the big health-related companies, and others who are dedicated to the current trends. Governmental power is crucial, but there are still big roles for labor unions and the noncooperation power of local communities, masses of citizens, customers, small businesses, and other such forces.

Reich goes into the details of what such movements of people can fight for in terms of changing governing rules. He writes whole chapters on better ordering the market with regard to property, monopoly, contract, bankruptcy, and enforcement. He also goes into the details of how we can build the contravailing power that gains the political clout to make rules that are right for the many, not just the few.

This is an important book by a great teacher and writer as well as an artful blogger who has helped so many—explaining things that our college educations and graduate schools so often left out.

The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man

by John Perkins

Berrett-Koehler: 2016

Many years ago I read the first *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, and it was a wake up call for me on how gross so many prominent corporation-profit-makers have been in forcing unfair global deals with false promises, threats, assassinations, and military actions. This follow up book, twelve years later, tells how things have changed, but not necessarily for the better. The most important “better” is how many more people know how bad it is.

This freshly released new book reads like a novel, while informing us about so many current public affairs. If you have any doubts about the importance of assembling the popular will to alter the current trends, this book should clarify that. Concerning the content of the book, the following quote from the publisher, Berrett-Koehler, is very informative:

“Featuring fifteen explosive new chapters, this expanded edition of a classic New York Times million-copy bestseller brings the story of the economic hit men and jackal assassins up to date and, chillingly, home to the United States. It also gives us hope and the tools to fight back.”

And here is a quote from Perkins toward the end of his new book that sums up his “spirit” relation to public affairs:

“When Samantha said . . . , ‘It turns out that love really is all you need,’ I realized that she was expressing the basis of the new dream. It is the

dream that indigenous people and spirit teachers—from Mother Teresa to the Dalai Lama, from the Buddha to Pope Francis—have always dreamed. It is a dream of love—for ourselves, for each other, for nature, and for the planet. It is a dream that tells us to replace the old dream of a death economy, with a new dream of a life economy.”

When Money Talks

The High Price of “Free” Speech

and the Selling of Democracy

by Derek Cressman

Berrett-Koehler: 2016

This book is about overcoming the US Supreme Court ruling on Citizens United, a topic much in the news, internet, and presidential campaigns. Cressman has placed a second sub-title on his book cover: “An Instruction Manual to Restore Fair Elections.”

Cressman delves into detail on the philosophy of free speech, how we got into this mess through flawed logic and omitted insights, and how we might overcome this warp in our political campaign financing. This book is far more than a rant on this topic. It is a book aimed to convince the conservative doubters as well as energize the democratic progressives with the tools of insight they may need to finish the job of putting the current patterns of “money-ocracy” on the self of history.

Bernie Sanders, as well as Hillary Clinton, have put the issue of “big money in politics” and the gross inequity of our economy front and center in the public discussion. Cressman adds to these elaborations a spectrum of strategies and tactics for getting from here to there in the specific imaginations and practices of the nation.

Even if Supreme Court replacements manage to shift the decisions of the Court on these crucial matters, Cressman argues that a Constitutional amendment is still needed to make permanent the legality of limiting the extent of big money dominating campaign speech. Without the amendment, after a decade or so of better practices, a new Court could shift matters back.

Cressman also outlines what careful and complete Constitutional amendment could say:

To advance democratic self government and political equality, ensure a fair and balanced debate, and protect the integrity of government and the electoral process, nothing in this Constitution shall prohibit limits on the amount of money spent in, or given to, election campaigns or political advertisements. (page 132)

Dates for your Calendar

September 24-25, 2016; Santa Rosa CA: **Beyond Patriarchy**
October 21-22, 2016; Oklahoma City, OK: **Beyond Patriarchy**
June 9 (7:00pm) - June 11 (12:30 pm), 2017; Bonham Texas: **Leadership Training School**
June 11 (7:00pm) - June 13 (8:30 pm), 2017; Bonham Texas: **Research Symposium Meeting**



“Beyond Patriarchy” contains brief probing spins on five traits of the architecture of patriarchy, followed by innovative exercises that help each person explore in their personal lives these external and internally habituated oppressions. This program was created by Joyce Marshall and Pat Webb over many months of planning meetings, and was enthusiastically acclaimed by its first participants.

What participants say about Beyond Patriarchy

- The organized information about Patriarchy was helpful in understanding the behaviors to be challenged and changed. The techniques used to teach this complex social organization were excellent, even extraordinary. The body exercises, the art activities, the imagery, the music—all outstanding. The entire course was masterful, harmonious, and balanced—an invaluable experience.
- A well-planned and sensitively led course that made me aware of the complicated web of patriarchy as it has manifest in my life. It provided a safe environment for us to open up to how much we feel burdened.
- Experiencing the practices in this course in the context of the “architecture of patriarchy” helped me become more aware of which aspects have been most operative in my socialization as a child and lie behind habits of thought and behavior that still “hook” me.
- This course helped me to discover how I have been oppressed and how I have oppressed others, and I learned antidotes for those oppressions.
- I found the unhurried pace truly restful and the sharing with small groups or partners was intimate without being forced.

For further information on Beyond Patriarchy” e-mail Joyce Marshall: jamarshall@cablone.net
or Pat Webb: webbpat1@cox.net

Establishment of a Scholarship Fund

We want to offer financial assistance to first time attendees of our courses, training schools, symposium meetings, and extended sojourns in Bonham Texas. If you need financial help to enable you to attend one of these events, please let us know. One member of our constituency has promised the first contribution to this fund, and has suggested that we raise as much as \$10,000 for this fund. We invite others who share this concern to also donate money for this new effort.

Realistic Living Finances

Last year so many of our constituency increased their giving that we not only **made our budget**, but started the year in **good shape** for the leaner months. This surge in financing was deeply aided by one member's offer to increasing his giving by \$2000 if eight others would increase their giving by \$1000. Remarkably, this challenge was met. Without those responses we would not now have the foundation we need for our work this year.

Also, we have had an increase in the number of **monthly givers**. This means we now have an average of \$775 coming in each month in addition to the other giving. This has increased the stability of our financing, which has been characterized by year-end giving.

If we are to continue this momentum, we need more of our old timers joining the monthly givers, and we need **more new people** joining our constituency and becoming supporting members of this movement. We are therefore proposing that our key fund-raising strategy for 2016-17 be **building movement momentum**.

"More new people" can be included by conducting courses, retreats, and other means of **reaching out**. These new people can then be linked to our web site, added to the Realistic Living emailing and postal mailing lists, and asked to participate in other possibilities.

Reaching out in this way requires leaders. So we are expanding our Realistic Living faculty across the continent, and proposing more **leadership training**. In addition to our once-a-year summer programing, the Bonham faculty are offering to devote more of their time to weekend and week-long sojourns in Bonham, Texas for persons dedicated to accessing leadership skills, methods, and content for this awesome task of fostering a viable and vital next Christian practice.



Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

Check out our newly revised web site: RealisticLiving.org.

Also, check out our
Facebook page:



facebook.com/realisticliving.

To continue on this mailing list, we request a yearly contribution of \$20 or more (a tax-deductible donation within the United States).

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.

Realistic Living

3578 N. State Highway 78
Bonham, TX 75418

July 2016

Issue No. 65

Printed on
Recycled Paper



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U. S. Postage
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