

# REALISTIC LIVING

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## REALISTIC LIVING

priorities for 2017 and support for them

Don Jones was a student of a movement in which I was a teacher. I feel a second-hand responsibility for Hillary's religious formation. And both she and I have maintained that emphasis into the present day. Here is more from Daniel Burke's research on Hillary's religious faith:

"I think it's fair to say," Clinton said in 2009 while delivering a eulogy at Jones' funeral, "that next to my parents . . . no adult (than Jones) had more influence on my life."

His challenges were more than intellectual. Jones took his Christian charges into inner-city Chicago churches, where they mingled with black and Latino teens, creating connections with people they might not otherwise have met. Jones encouraged his youth group to babysit for the children of Latino migrant workers and to visit the elderly in nursing homes.

Christians aren't supposed to sit quietly in church, hoping to get into heaven, Jones taught; they're supposed to build the kingdom of God on earth.

In 1962, Jones took Clinton and her youth group to hear the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. speak in Chicago, where the civil rights leader delivered his famous sermon "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." King's challenge struck Clinton like St. Paul on his horse. She left the room that night a changed person, she would later recall.

"His words, the power of his example, affected me deeply and added to the lessons of my minister to face the world as it is, not as we might want it to be," Clinton told a group of Baptists in September, "but to commit ourselves to turning it into what it should be."

Bill Clinton credits King's speech with changing the trajectory of his wife's moral and political life.

I identify with Hillary's admiration of King. I attended King's "I have a dream" speech in Washington D. C., and I have been deeply moved by many of his other speeches. I believe that the social activism illustrated by King has a deeply religious root. This combination of religious depth and social activism is illustrated by the life of Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, my own life, and many, many others. I believe that social activism is a primary contribution of Christianity to the

## Faith and Politics

on the gift of grace and social activism by Gene Marshall



On October 31, 2016, Daniel Burke, CNN religion editor, posted a long article entitled "**The public and private faith of Hillary Clinton.**" I will cite excerpts from this post:

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/30/politics/clinton-faith-private/index.html>:

In 1961, when Clinton was a teenager, a youth pastor came blazing into Park Ridge behind the wheel of a red Chevy convertible. The Rev. Don Jones would inspire Clinton to see the world as her parish.

Fresh from seminary after a stint in the Navy, Jones gathered the sheltered Methodist youth of Park Ridge and gave them crash courses in the "University of Life." He read them poems by e.e. cummings, introduced them to Christian intellectuals such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich, and asked them to interpret modernist paintings such as Picasso's "Guernica."

interreligious dialogue and to the cooperation among religious people in social activism. Indeed, a spirited social activism is a primary contribution of Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam.

### U. S. Politics

I was prepared to accept Hillary Clinton as my president, and work with Bernie Sanders to hold her feet to the fire of the most progressive platform in the history of a U.S. political party. That this is now not to be has filled me with a deep sadness that I do not yet know how to express. I have been aware of this intense cultural war between a backward-clinging, nativist-leaning, patriarchal, rural culture and the more forward leaning, more diverse, more planet sane, urban culture willing to break the glass ceiling with a fully prepared first woman president. But I was unprepared for the intensity of this rural backlash—even to the extent of following a crass con-man who is starkly unprepared for the office of the presidency. We citizens of this nation have our work cut out for us. It is more than a political and economic work, it is a cultural, religious, and Spirit work. It is an intensity of social activism that even our most liberal churches of Christian faith still need to explore further.

I believe that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share many of the same issues concerning the importance of social activism, but I will be focusing on Christianity, especially the Pauline, Augustinian, Lutheran, Wesleyan thread of Christian heritage. All four of these luminaries emphasized the gift of God's grace rather than winning our "righteousness" through human works. This emphasis on grace has been used to minimize the importance of political activism.

Here is my much-pondered thought on the paradox of God's grace and human action. The gift of grace must be actively received and lived. John Wesley described this paradox in this colorful fashion: "Faith is 100% God's gift, and 100% my action." Paul Tillich described faith as the deed of acceptance of our acceptance. Rudolf Bultmann called faith the "true deed" of "freedom from the past and openness for the future." It is this response of faith to the gift of God that is the source of the emphasis on social activism in this thread of Christian heritage. The righteousness of faith is an action of the human in time, in history—a response to the gift of redemption that also meets us in the flow of history.

In the Arabian-rooted religions, history and the experience of communal membership in the flow of history is a prominent awareness. Authentic human beings are seen as history benders. The

future is always a surprise that results from many causal factors, but humans are one of those causal factors. In other words, social activism matters.

One of my favorite sayings of Jesus is: "If you have even a small seed of faith, you can say to that mountain move, and it will move." Obviously, this is a metaphor meant to challenge all of our victim beliefs. Another such saying of Jesus is: "All things are possible for God." And here is one of my favorite not-from-Jesus "contradictions" to our sell-out to the familiar: "The difficult we do right away, the impossible takes a little longer." Establishing the kingdom of God on this earth is one of those "takes a little longer" callings.

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In this journal I am going to respond more fully to these topics. I recommend that we who are dedicated to create a transformation of Christian practice that is appropriate for the 21st century discuss further this topic of "*Christian Theologizing and Politics*."

Before I deal directly with political issues, I am going to share two spins on Christian theologizing: *Creation Stories New and Old* and *The Primacy of Trust*.



## Creation Stories New and Old

some basic theologizing  
by Gene Marshall

In recent decades a "creation" story has come into being that tells a fresh narrative in a colorful way about the facts of modern astronomy and other physical sciences. "The Big Bang" has become the popular name for this story. Here is how we know we are telling a story: this Big Bang occurred over 13 billion years ago before there existed such a thing as a "bang," big or little. At the time that the Big Bang happened, there were no ears to hear the sound if there had been a sound to hear. At that time there was no air through which sound could have been mediated to human ears. Sound itself had not yet emerged.

The Big Bang might as well have been called "the sound of one hand clapping." The Big Bang was indeed a Big Silence out of which came space and time and unimaginably intense energies congealing into elementary bits of mass that later become whole galaxies of whirling stars and planets and

other masses and energies too dark to be visible on our telescopes.

Strange as it may seem, our huge telescopes are time travelers—receiving light and other vibrations from billions and billions and billions of years ago. The Big Bang story is in accord with the facts of such obscure scientific observations. And more facts keep coming in, more attempts to order those facts for human comprehension are being constructed, thereby enriching the quality and wonder of this story of creation. The Big Bang creation story is an ongoing recreation. Indeed, we have created a whole scientific/artistic discipline to tell this story. We call this discipline “cosmology.”

### Older Creation Stories

Sometime in the vicinity of 500 years before the common era (BCE), a much older and different science spawned a different story. This story was told by Hebrew people who had recently been exiled in Babylon (Iraq). In Babylon they had learned the natural science that we find in the first chapter of our Jewish and Christian Bibles. Their story was not about Babylonian science, but about their faith in the goodness of the temporal world, but they used the scientific thinking of that time and place to tell their story of creation.

So, what was that science like? The dry land was seen as a sort of pancake floating on an ocean of water. The waves of that primal ocean were lapping on the shores of the pancake, trying to take back the dry land where we humans and many other life forms lived in a much more ordered manner. This prevailing water could also be found by digging down far enough in the dry land. Also this water existed beyond the great bowl of sky above and rained down upon us from time to time, filling lakes and rivers for our benefit and the benefit of all the other living beings. It was understandable that this water around, below, and above symbolized for these people a sort of free flowing *chaos* that attempted to take over the *dry-land orderly living space*. In the Hebraic story telling that went with this science, it was sensible to say that the Creator of this whole drama was protecting us from the watery chaos and was providing us a useful and beautiful home of ordered dependability of plant and animal food, safe sleeping spots, and more. Such was this creation story in brief outline.

There were many more details in this old story. Many of these details were useful for the conduct of their practical lives. And this whole drama of things seemed wondrous beyond measure to those members of the Hebrew people who were sensitive to such wonders. The story they told makes this

unscientific, but important point: all of the created order of things is good—the order and the chaos, the security and the insecurity, the living and the dying, the eating and the defecating, the birthing and the rotting, the pleasure and the pain, the health and the suffering, the human and the non-human. In their story, a character named “Yahweh” looked upon all that “He” had created and said, “This is very good.”

Humans are still prone to argue with this main point of the Genesis One story. We do not want to affirm the goodness of the entire temporal order of things. We think we know what is good and what is evil, and because we think we know, we think that some things are good for us and others are evil for us. We think we know what the words “good” and “evil” mean. We think we know good and evil because we begin our thinking with our own whims, longings, clingings, raw desires, and very limited objective and subjective knowledge. We have all eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is the core of the creation story told in Genesis 2 and 3.

This second story of creation is more primitive than the story in Genesis One. Its earliest versions were written in the vicinity of 950 BCE—written by Hebrew people before the exile to Babylon around the time these people were first becoming a small nation on Palestinian fertile lands.

In this second Genesis story of creation, the cosmos begins as a garden with plants and animals unnamed, and with no one there to name them. Then the Creator, pictured as a magical Giant, walks into the garden, scoops up some dirt and shapes it into a human figure, A-dam, A man. Life is breathed into A-dam. Adam is lonely, so a rib is taken from him and a companion is made for him—wo-man (womb human), for she is to be the mother of all future humans. The story goes on to say that these humans are asked to give names to all the animals and plants, and whatever names these humans give them, that is their names. This is a very interesting allocation of freedom to the human species.

Of course this old story is filled with patriarchal biases—all the patriarchal patterns of thought and action that saturated that time and place in which this story was written. In Babylon, Palestine, and Egypt, everyone, every man and woman, was patriarchal in their imaginations, and had been so for at least a thousand years.

Nevertheless, these patriarchal limitations did not prevent this story from being profound. It still stands as a story about the origin of evil and about what “evil” essentially means for these religious people. The garden of the cosmos is created with

food for the living—a tree of life from which man and woman are free to eat. But there also is in this garden a tree from which man and woman are not to eat. The name of this tree is “the knowledge of good and evil.” It is being assumed by the writers of this story that “God” (Final Reality) knows what is good and evil, but that it is forbidden by Final Reality for humans to know what is good and evil. Evil, according to this story, is born on the day that humans begin knowing (or we should say, “think they know”) what is good and what is evil.

This “false” knowing is viewed in this story as the primal tragedy that has “be-fallen” the human species. No longer are we humans simply tending a wondrous garden, we are now scratching the hard ground and sweating for our survival. No longer are women simply birthing babies with extreme discomfort, they are now being cursed with pain. Everything is judged differently when humans think they know what is good and what is evil.

This very old story shares with us a profound ethical choice between letting everything the Creator is providing be good, or choosing to believe that about half of what is provided is evil. According to this story, choosing this second option is the birth of what is truly “evil” from the point of view of these story-tellers. Eating from this tree is the birth of egoism, narcissism, bullying, and murder (Cain kills a brother because he thinks his view of things is *better* than Abel’s view of things, in spite of the fact that Abel and his view seems to be prospering.) All the evil that humans do in the world derives, according to this story, from eating the illusory knowledge of good and evil—murder, theft, false witness, coveting others good fortune, bigotry, oppression, contempt for the past, fear of the future, hatred of the present, and even downright despair over the entire fabric of things. This despair sometimes leads to suicide, genocide, and ecocide. All these quite obvious human perversions are, according to the Genesis 2 and 3 story, derived from thinking that we humans know what is good and what is evil!

After Adam and Eve eat of that tragic fruit, God comes walking into the garden in the cool of the day calling to these humans, “Where are you?” They are hiding in the trees. They have clothed themselves in fig leaves. “Who told you you were naked or that naked was something bad? Have you eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from which you were forbidden to eat?” “Eve,” whined Adam, “said it was good to eat and I ate.” “The snake,” whined Eve, “said it was good to eat and that it would make us wise like God.” “OUT OF THE GARDEN OF INNOCENCE!”

commanded the Creator. And we human are still OUT, still lost in our own imaginations about what is Real and what is Good.

Our created goodness is still intact, but we do not see it as good. We sometimes hate our own bodies—their ugliness, their limitations, their aging, their approaching death. Everything we do not like is being seen by us as “bad.” Furthermore, we often despair over this imagined “bad” to the extent of committing suicide or killing our spouse, or children, or planet. Yes, instead of maintaining that all that IS is good, we have lost our connection with the “good” in an ocean of self-inflicted “evil.”

The still existing *good* stands in judgment upon we humans who, through our own god-given freedom, have suppressed the *good* and opted for a substitute for the *good*. Such human choices create *evil* in the way Genesis 2 & 3 use of the word “evil.”

### And God, the Creator?

These biblical creation stories also tell us something about the meaning of the word “God” in the literature we call “the Bible.” The natural cosmos is, of course, an experienced verity, but the terms “Creator” and “creation” are elements in a story. In order to see clearly the story-telling nature of these writings, let us picture the story of Genesis One as a stage play with two stages. These two stages are stacked one on top of the other. The lower stage is dark. On the upper stage we see a Kingly figure on a throne with winged attendants (the enactors of this “King’s” commands) gather around his throne. The King cries out, “Let there be Light” and light appears on the lower stage. As yet, in this story, there is no sun, no moon, no stars, nothing except light. On the lower stage we now see both day and night, light and dark, coming and going. In this very old science, there was no awareness that the light is being generated by the sun, moon, and stars. Night and day just happen. Later in this story, the sun is created to mark the day, and the moon is created to mark the night. This Almighty King (symbolizing the Source of all things) then calls into being each layer of reality as understood in the 500 BCE Babylonian science. This is all meaningful fiction. The Creator is a character in a story. Creator and creation are both nothing but story-telling. But this story can mean something about our ongoing lives.

There is in this story the really experienced natural world. All the things around us must have had some sort of origin. Some Mysterious NO-THING-NESS has established every-thing in this vast connectedness of EVERY-THING-NESS. Each of these temporal things emerges from that NO-THING-NESS to join the EVERY-THING-NESS,



and after a short or long span of being present, every temporal thing returns to the NO-THING-NESS. This much we can intuit from our ongoing experience. And let us notice that without the “story-telling,” our raw experience of nature is basically without meaning.

Genesis one, two, and three are providing a meaning for all the experiences within which we are involved. Here is that meaning: all things being provided to us are good. “Evil” is created by humans when we separate the value of things into some good and some evil. To live in the *goodness* of all things, does not mean passivity, for active freedom or intentional choosing is part of our god-given creation. Affirming the goodness of all things means starting where we are and making appropriate decisions in relation to what it means to honor all things with our unique lives in our space and time. Such extreme realism is very demanding, and we will often miss the mark of being fully realistic. But Reality welcomes us home any time we are willing to repent of our unrealism and accept our forgiveness for our departures into unrealism.

This Final Reality, with which we are in inescapable dialogue, is not a Big Person in another realm. The two-realm stuff is a story, not science, not experience, not true in a literal sense. But this good-creating Creator can be true in a literary sense. Many of us see truth told by J. K. Rowling in her fiction about Harry Potter and company. We can also see truth in the fiction of Genesis 1-2-3 and following chapters.

The next essay was first published in the October 16 issue of our monthly e-mailed **Realistic Living Pointers**. This spin is so appropriate for this issue of the Realistic Living Journal that we are also publishing it for this larger list of readers. And if you would like to be on our e-mail list for a brief article every month, simply send your e-mail request to [jgmarshall@cablone.net](mailto:jgmarshall@cablone.net)

## The Primacy of Trust

more theological  
story-telling  
by Gene Marshall



My cat has no idea what I do for his health. I throw out his old uneaten food, I wash out his cat bowls, I provide good products for him to eat. I put a vitamin pill in his wet food. He trusts me. He has some sensibilities about what is good for him, but he also simply trusts me, and he has only a vague sense of what I do for him.

His situation is similar to my relationship with God. I have only a vague sense of what God does for me. I am limited to trust. I do not have to know what God is doing for me in order to trust. The opposite is true, I have to trust God in order know anything whatsoever about how I am being cared for.

I do need to know what I mean by the word “God” and what I mean by the word “trust.” I need to know what I mean by these words in order to trust God. Trusting God is not happening unless I know what I am talking about when I say that “I trust God.” So let me spell this out once again, for without clarity about this, all my theologizing is a waste of breath, ink, and internet bits.

In my theologizing, “God” means the Upagainstness that I am up against—such as the unstoppable movement of time, such as the fact of my birth as a biological being and the experience of my awakenment as a being that is conscious of being an awake being. “God” also means that Final Upagainstness of my approaching death, as well as the approaching death of my cat, my car, my house, my money, my wife, my children, my nation, my planet, my everything. I am up-against the fact that every moment of my life is dying and is being replaced by the “new deal” of a next moment. I may not favor the death of a specific moment. And I may oppose some specific next moment that is being given to me. But I am absolutely powerless to prevent the death of this moment or my experiencing the “new deal” of a next moment. And if I do not submit to trusting both this death and this new deal, I am hurt by pursuing an unwinnable fight or an inescapable flight.

In addition, I am powerless to prevent this **either-or** situation faced by my consciousness: to trust **OR** to mistrust the death of the last moment, and to trust **OR** to mistrust the “new deal” of a next moment. I have all sorts of knowing with which to interpret this unending flow of time, but none of my knowing gives me certainty about this core decision: to trust **OR** to not trust. Trust is a leap into the darkness of unknowing. And so is mistrust. Moment by moment, life is about which of these two overarching contexts I am going to embody—trust **OR** mistrust? Can I willingly turn loose of the past and open to the future? Or am I going to cling to the what is dead and gone and miss what is alive and coming?

The revelation about Final Reality that is revealed in the Jesus Christ event, provides a sort of confidence on the side of trust. It enables me to say to myself that the passing of each moment is simply **forgiveness** for all my committed flaws and limited goodness. And the coming of the next moment is

simply a *fresh start* in *being forgiven* for all my next flaws and limited goodness that may characterize the next moment. This forgiveness is simply part of my trust. For all I *know intellectually*, life is a matter of being tested in accord with some law that I do not understand, being found guilty, and then punished severely. But the Jesus Christ revelation assures me that there is nothing but forgiveness. Reality opposes my unrealities, but Reality is merciful. It is helpful for me to say frequently, "Lord, have mercy." And Reality's "Yes" to my request is given along with the gift of the cosmos. That is what the Jesus Christ revelation tells me about Reality. Reality is like a wholly loving parent who welcomes his prodigal children back home to Reality, puts new garb on them, and prepares a feast.

Also, the Jesus-Christ story, remembered and elaborated by those who trusted this revelation, tells me that the life of trust can be victoriously lived through feast and famine, through ups and downs, through praise and rejection, even through misunderstanding, abandonment, and betrayal by my best friends, and yes, (Oh my God) trust can live victoriously even through being unjustly convicted by my society and tortured to death.

Trust wins every time, no matter what. This is a revelation that cries out to be trusted. When Mark's Jesus, quoting the 22nd Psalm, says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", this was not a lack of trust. In saying "my God" both Mark's Jesus and the Psalmist were operating from trust. Mark's view of Jesus was that Jesus did not know *WHY* what was happening to him was happening. Mark's Jesus was only admitting to being a mere human being—residing in finitude, living in mental ignorance of what was going on. As all mental certainty and all physical confidence is being taken away from him, Mark's Jesus still trusts God. Another Gospel writer pictures Jesus saying in his last cry: "Into Thy hands I commend my consciousness."

All human beings, you and me included, simply do not know *WHY* what is happening is happening. But not knowing *WHY* is part of the life of trust. That is part of what the Jesus Christ revelation tells us about being profoundly human in relation to that Final Reality that we confront in every event of our lives.

For a more thorough and sophisticated elaboration of these topics, see my book:

*The Love of History and the Future of Christianity  
toward a manifesto for a next Christianity*

Here is a link to the Realistic Living web site that tells you more about this book:

<http://www.realisticliving.org/books.htm>

While you are looking around there, also consider my more recent book on a philosophy of religion generally:

*The Enigma of Consciousness  
a philosophy of profound  
humanness and religion*



## Christian Theologizing and Politics

living realistically  
this transition  
by Gene Marshall

In the two previous essays I have defined somewhat what I mean by "Christian theologizing" for the 21st century. So I will now jump into what I mean by "politics" and what sort of politics is suggested by the above 21st Century Christian theologizing. Perhaps this topic is appropriate for this journal, coming as it does only days after completing an attention-getting election for president of the United States.

First of all, affirming the goodness of nature has implications for a thoroughgoing ecological forthrightness relative to the care by humanity for planet Earth. Some have said that we have entered the Anthropocene era in Earth history. The most helpful understanding of what that word "Anthropocene" means is that we have entered the *human era*, the era in which for the first time the future of the planet rests in human hands. Up until recently, humanity was cared for by the Earth, with very little need for humanity to care for the Earth. Earth was doing fine caring for itself. But with the impact of seven billion plus humans with vast technological powers, Earth history is now being changed significantly by the choices of existing humanity.

If humanity does not love this planet as the planet needs to be loved, horrific consequences ensue. And our best contemporary Christian theologizing is clearly saying that God is not being loved if this planet is not being loved, loved as each person loves herself or himself. In fact, if each of us does not love the planet, we do not actually love ourselves as we need to be loved. If ExxonMobil or Wells Fargo Bank loves itself more than the planet, it is judged by the best Christian theologizing as grossly estranged from Reality. The same judgment applies to every nation, every state, every province, every eco-region, every town, every city, every man, every woman, every child.

Yes, in the Anthropocene era, to be *human* means

to be responsible for the whole planet and every process, human and otherwise, that characterizes this planet. Of course no one human or group of humans or organization of humans can do everything that needs to be done, but each and all of us are responsible to see to it that everything needful is done. To not do so means to be *inhuman* in this Anthropocene era.

This judgment of good Christian theologizing upon human affairs means nothing more nor less than being realistic in our living before the Final Reality we trust to love us. Our obedience to Reality is our simple duty in being one who walks in the footsteps of realism, our practical love of God.

## The Ecological Challenges

There are 10 or 12 critical ecological challenges. As an example of the seriousness of this topic, let us look at what is arguably the most challenging ecological issue: the moderation of the climate crisis before untenable changes in weather patterns and social chaos ensue. The anti-science climate deniers who argue that the climate crisis is a hoax are in direct rebellion from the facts, and thereby in rebellion from the Final Reality of God in the understanding of good contemporary Christian theologizing.

It is true that scientific knowledge is always limited and perpetually improving, but to the extent that science is fact-based, it is the Word of God we are facing in this moment of history. So we are required by our love of Reality to obey when 99% of the valid climate scientists conclude that the average temperature of the Earth is increasing, that this purports an untenable future, that burning carbon fuels by humans is the core cause of this increase of greenhouse gases.

Let us not ignore the paradigm-shifting book, Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*. She shows us in a conclusive fashion that minor repairs on the existing political, economic and cultural systems will not deal with the climate crisis. Thousands of nuclear power plants will only create another serious problem. More biofuels is only a very small part of the answer. Solving this crisis will require a total change in our energy provision infrastructure, a whole new politics that supports the rapid phasing out of fossil fuels and the rapid replacement of those fuels with solar and wind alternatives, plus a cultural revolution that supports such politics and life-style changes.

Based on current knowledge, such a vast shift in human affairs can seem impossible. But since our current knowledge is limited, the possible may be

bigger. In good Christian theologizing, we may hear Final Reality calling, "Find a way—find the knowledge that is needed to make this transition possible."

Let us examine the politics of this challenge.

## What is Politics?

Electoral politics is an important part of a democratic society that uses the electoral method of selecting leadership, but electoral politics is only part of the politics of a whole society. Political processes include all the ways that group decisions are being made that affect the course of the whole society. That includes a lot more than voting every few years.

A democratic social body needs to have a way to inform and inspire citizens to participate in building a consensus about basic directions, how to organize the public expression and empowerment of that consensus, and how to administer its implementation.

So with that minimalist definition of "politics" in mind, what is the role of politics in the lives of those who obey Final Reality as their God and resolve to live their lives realistically in a manner revealed through the Jesus Christ event?

This is not an easy question, because this devotion includes a kind of detachment from this world of temporal ongoingness and well as an engagement in this temporal world of ongoingness. A devotion to the Eternal cuts the nerve commonly felt in devotions to the temporal processes. Yet from that perspective of detachment, a new sort of engagement in the temporal processes is present through the fact that we meet the Eternal as call from the future to be open to the future with our whole mind, heart, consciousness, and strength. This placement of our lives in the temporal flow of history makes us deeply *in-this-world* as well as *not-of-this-world* in our overarching devotion.

So what does this vision of history have to say about ecological politics in the USA in November of 2016?

- Being free from the past and open to the future allows us to face the full horror of the impending climate catastrophe and thus see the urgency of placing climate crisis at the top of the political list of issues.

- Being open to the future allows us to consider fully progressive possibilities rather than being trapped in the need to preserve current structures of familiarity like wealth-pampering, trickle-down economics, perpetual economic growth, rigid nationalism, capitalism, or socialism. It is true that

solving the climate crisis will require *Changing Everything* as Klein so adequately points out.

- *Being free from the past means being free to travel into the unknown future.* In this openness to the future, we do not ask *whether* it is possible to build a replacement energy infrastructure based mainly on solar and wind sources and delivering those abundant sources to every need through electricity and liquified hydrogen. We only ask *how* this alternative infrastructure can be built promptly.

- Such openness to the future means being open to reading a book like *Smelling Land: The Hydrogen Defense Against Climate Catastrophe* by David Sanborne Scott.<sup>1</sup> This book *smells* a solution to the energy storage problem that comes up when we replace fossil fuels with solar and wind. Solar and wind energy sources can be directly transformed into electricity, but electricity must be used or stored for future use. Fossil fuels are easily stored and transported, while storing electricity in batteries is an expensive and unwieldy process. Scott spells out how solar and wind sources can be stored in liquified hydrogen containers that can be easily transported. This solution to the storage problem permits, according to Scott, flying jet planes more cheaply and safely on hydrogen than on jet fuel. This is an important prospect, for it resolves big doubts that many people have about the technological viability of a post-fossil-fuel-energy infrastructure. There exists a vast abundance of solar energy hitting the planet. And there exists a vast abundance of hydrogen contained in water. Solar energy can break down water into oxygen and hydrogen fuel that is then burned back into water. That is a safe and climate friendly solution to our energy use issues. And it is an economically viable alternative that can be developed to outperform fossil fuels. The fossil-fuel establishment does not want to even hear about such alternatives, and can be expected to fight the realization of such ideas with billions and billions of dollars.

- This brings us to the core political issue on the energy topic. The only forces that can force or persuade the fossil-fuel-allied industries to phase out fossil fuels are the national, state, county, city, and town GOVERNMENTS. So we have to give up the notion that government should stay out of the way and let the energy players solve everything in a free-market manner. The fragment of truth in

this dominant political philosophy is that it is not necessary or needful for governments to micromanage individual companies. But this principle does not hold for the recreation of the overall energy infrastructure. Most of us do not complain about government financing highways or doing pure-food-and-drug supervision. The same holds for the energy infrastructure.

- What can governments do? Governments can stop supporting and licensing extreme extraction methods—like deep ocean wells, drilling in Arctic lands, blasting off mountain tops, fracking for oil and natural gas, mining and transporting tar sands oil, etc. These means would only be needed if we needed more and still more fossil fuels—fuels that we dare not burn without dire consequences. Governments can outlaw such irresponsible procedures. Governments can inspire and finance the building of a nationwide (and planet-wide) remodeled solar-wind and electricity-hydrogen infrastructure to replace the infrastructure we have. Governments will need to put in place the new rules of play for using this new pattern of living. Too many free-market enthusiasts fail to notice that there would be no free-market without government establishment and enforcement of the rules of play that define a “free” market. Also, a market controlled by the largest existing industries is not a “free” market. It is government that defines what we mean by the “freedom” of a free market. Any football or basketball enthusiast knows that the rules are not made by the players of the game.

- So we citizens of a democracy, who wish to operate our democracy in a fully realistic manner, need to take charge of our governments and get this alternative energy infrastructure built with all deliberate speed. To do this we will need laws that criminalize uncooperative fossil-fuel companies.

- Meanwhile, there is a huge and creative role for alternative energy companies and their investors and customers. These institutions have an opening to provide energy at a price that is competitive with fossil fuels. When solar energy is available to customers at two-thirds of the price of fossil fuel, rural peasants in India as well as suburbanites in Texas, will buy solar rather than fossil—provided, of course, that the solar industries and the solar infrastructures make such purchases convenient. When those conditions are created, fossil fuels will be phased out rapidly.

- And this thoroughgoing solar transition will produce millions and millions of new jobs for which the old fossil-fuel employees can be retrained. This vast transition will not be politically

<sup>1</sup>Scott, David Sanborne, *Smelling Land: The Hydrogen Defense Against Climate Catastrophe, Enhanced Edition* (Queen’s Printer of British Columbia: 2008)



viable if these workers are not cared for fully and carefully. This aspect of the transition will also be the job of government, for the old energy structure will not do it, and the new energy structure will need government help with this transition. This is a core political principle. Like unto it is the principle that fossil fuels cannot be phased out unless the new energy system is simultaneously phased in. Also, a period of extreme austerity for ordinary people is not politically viable. The pessimistic assertion that we cannot avoid extreme austerity is bogus. A way must be found to maintain a modest level of prosperity for everyone, and the propaganda that this is impossible must be fought to the death, or rather fought to the *life* of succeeding with the transition.

- Something must also be said about the politics of the cultural transformation that will and must accompany the above described economic and political transformations. The needed cultural transformation is already being fostered in essays like this one and in hundreds of good books on this topic. Also, educators like Al Gore, Bill McKibbin, Naomi Klein, Van Jones, Jim Hightower, and others have been at work for decades. Nonprofit organizations, media outlets and political parties, can also participate in leading the needed cultural transformation. Protests by Native American tribes, Bill McKibbin's 350.org, Earth First, and other nonviolent interrupters have large educational impacts.

- The communal practices of our religious renewal efforts also contribute importantly to the cultural transformation. Effective religion provides nurture that sustains us through these long-range, uphill social transformations. Effective nurture assists us to be free from the past and open to the future, the very gift most needed for leading and sharing in these difficult social transitions.

I have used the **climate crisis** as my illustration for laying out the nature of politics done on the basis of 21st century Christian theologizing, but many other ecological topics are also important. Furthermore, there are other huge challenges that cry out for an adequate politics:

- \* Overcoming the **patriarchal oppression** of women is closely related to overcoming our oppression of nature and the human body.

- \* Fully affirming **racial and cultural diversity** is critical for living in this planetary era.

- \* Ending **grueling poverty** and the vast inequality that characterizes almost all of our societies.

- \* Resolving our deep **conflicts peacefully** and with the least cost to human life.

- \* Transforming the **banking & money systems**.

- \* Correcting the untenable further explosion of the human **population** on this limited ball.

These are only some of the pressing political issues. Solving each of them assists in the solution of the other transitions.

Christian theologizing is useless unless it provides guidelines for these perpetual revolutions in human affairs. Loving God and neighbor becomes a meaningless hypocrisy if these vast social transformations are ignored. This is the Anthropocene; to be *human* is to be responsible for everything on this planet. And that includes being political.



## Radical Theology & Realistic Living:

A Tribute to Joyce  
and Gene Marshall

by Alan Richard

H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich were both dead before I was in Kindergarten, and I was in high school when Joe Mathews died. By the time I was in college, the neo-orthodox movement had all but disappeared from seminaries and churches. My teachers, mentors, and theological influences belonged to the second generation in a lineage known as radical theology. This theology had been driven from seminaries and churches during its "death of God" phase in the 1960s. Over time, it had made a kind of uneasy home in university religion departments, but the community that developed around it was as ephemeral as the passage of each cadre of students through their degree program.

There were strengths and weaknesses in this theological exodus from the church. As Jeffrey Robbins puts it in *Radical Theology*, radical theology's sensibility is "genuinely revolutionary." It "seeks not to conserve, but to transform." Whereas liberal theology and neo-orthodoxy were still serving the religious practices, dogmas, and communities that grew up around Christendom, radical theology serves the growing awareness that those practices and communities no longer give adequate expression to the sense of ultimacy, mystery, and horror that human existence cannot escape. This awareness is itself a kind of religious event. It is an occasion for shock and awe. But as

Robbins goes on to say, too often “radical theology’s revolutionary sensibility has been more stylistic than substantive and has thus failed to develop either a politics or an ecclesiology of its own.” A theoretical expression of a revolution with no practices, communities, or political engagement is all dressed up with no place to go.

So when Don Sinclair introduced me to the Realistic Living Symposium in 2006, it was like coming home. Here was a community of secular people who had given up the eternal all-knowing Father and His church—people for whom religion was about our brief lives lived here and now in relationship to an inescapable real we can neither know nor control. And they weren’t just talking about it. They were engaged in *practices* of transformation drawn from diverse religious and non-religious sources. They were noticing gifts in non-Christian traditions that were not emphasized in Christianity. They were activists with experience in the civil rights movement, feminist and LGBT/queer movements, union organizing, environmentalism, and economic justice. Joy filled me that weekend because I seemed to be witnessing the ecclesial and political *activation* that radical theology needed but had never developed. I wanted to dedicate the rest of my life to what seemed to be happening here. For the past five years, I have been doing that.

This spring, Chris Rodkey and Jordan Miller asked me to contribute an article on Joyce and Gene for Palgrave-Macmillan’s upcoming textbook *The Handbook on Radical Theology*. As I interviewed each of them at length for this article, I became convinced that what I saw at that first Training School and Symposium was real. The work Joyce and Gene are doing is the first instance on this planet that gives ecclesial and political form to the awareness that radical theology expresses theoretically. Gene and Joyce have taken the legacy of Joe Mathews and the Order: Ecumenical in a direction that honors that legacy even as it births something new that the Order: Ecumenical did not and could not anticipate. Before I did these interviews, I already knew that Gene’s theological writing and Joyce’s explorations into radical feminism and ecotheater, along with their joint participation in organizing and promoting bioregionalism, their inter-religious work, and their experimentation with local Christian circles had taken Realistic Living far beyond the already substantial innovations of the Order. What I learned from these interviews, however, was how the decisions that drove this work arose out of recognitions similar to those that motivated radical theology.

The different backgrounds of Joyce and Gene have helped make Realistic Living what it is. Joyce was raised in a small town in the Texas panhandle where “plain folks” evangelicalism was assumed, whether or not you thought of yourself as religious or went to church. As an adolescent, her experience of church was mostly alienating. She knew she’d never had the “being saved” experience that other Baptists claimed they had, and she often doubted if they had really had it either. Later, its rejection of evolution and its assumption that black people were intellectually inferior turned her off even more. But her marriage to a church choir director, also an unbeliever, and the sense of awe and connection that the music and performing arts she could access through the church kept her involved. Long before she discovered RS-1 or the Order, she devoured books by Tillich, Harvey Cox, John A.T. Robinson, and Thomas J.J. Altizer at the Roswell, New Mexico public library. By the time she encountered the Order: Ecumenical, she was a closet atheist for whom nothing that happened in church made sense. The first gift she received from the Order was a way to breathe in an institution and a tradition she found stifling and could not love. Gene, on the other hand, was raised in a college town in Oklahoma by unchurched academic parents who dropped him off every Sunday at the local Methodist church they did not attend. This liberal church, which was full of college professors and their kids who scoffed at the literalism of “plain folks” evangelicalism, afforded Gene the opportunity to have deep, warm, and intimate relationships he could not get at home. In college, he was a math and science prodigy *and* president of the Methodist Student Movement of Oklahoma. For Gene, Joe Mathews and his movement represented the hope that an institution and a tradition that he loved could be renewed.

As its name suggests, the Order: Ecumenical was a religious order. It saw itself as serving the institutional church by calling it back to itself, by revitalizing it through example and teaching. But by the time Gene and Joyce met each other, Gene and other long-time members of the Order no longer thought this was possible. The Order’s 1970 summer research assembly had developed an ambitious multi-year strategic plan for local church revitalization, with select local churches functioning as demonstration projects. By the end of the first year, it was clear that the project wasn’t working. It wasn’t being blocked by forces that were merely local or denominationally specific or lodged in outmoded doctrine, but by the entire economic and political structure that made churches recognizable as churches. “We could see

then that what it meant to become a Christian movement in the local parish that did something for people there in a revolutionary way was going to take more than what you could do inside one of those old cocoons," Gene told me in his interview. "That's what we learned. So that was the first time that all we'd been doing sort of came apart for some of us." The Order's response to what they had learned was the "turn to the world," which would do an "end run" around the local church to serve the world. Turning toward the world was precisely the turn taken by radical theology in its departure from radical orthodoxy. But Gene soon saw something missing in this approach as well. The issue wasn't the embrace of the secular and it wasn't the decision to serve the world directly rather than under the authority of the church. "The problem with the turn toward the world was it neglected the nurture of the order," he told me. "And because we did not solve the nurture issues, the Order passed away."

Addressing this problem became the focus of Joyce and Gene's work after leaving the Order. The question of nurture was the question of how to sustain a movement as a genuinely *spirit* movement but *without* Christendom and *without* the institutional structure or authority of its churches. The word "spirit" gets thrown around a lot, often in suspiciously spooky ways. But for the Order and for Joyce and Gene, "spirit" is just the ongoing process of being the impossible relation between freedom and necessity that we are. Being this dynamism rather than being some comfortable but dead collapse of the tension between freedom and necessity is what, for them, enables people to fully and joyfully serve the world. For their first few years as a couple, the question of spirit nurture was posed primarily in relationship to psychology, focusing on how their own personalities functioned and on their relationship with each other and with their children. But when they relocated to Dallas, Texas in 1982, they started a weekly nurture group that eventually evolved into the "house church" or "Circle" form frequently discussed in this journal. This group did not originally have a Christian or even a religious focus. It was already, however, a group for nurturing "spirit." A crucial element of the Circle that developed early on was the notion of "co-pastoring," or shared leadership among members of the Circle, a break with the notion of "authority from above." The same year, Gene wrote his first book, *The Future of Religion*, which starts with a political vision of a world in the midst of a transition that is being resisted largely because the necessary spirit revolution is not being adequately confronted. Soon after this and for the

next 30 years, Joyce and Gene began throwing themselves passionately into bioregionalism, ecotheater, Buddhist and Sufi practices, and much more. They put out the Realistic Living journal twice a year, published scores of books and "booklets," and created manuals for solitary and collective practice. In 1999, they instituted a research symposium designed as a short version of the Order's summer research assembly and a training school as a short version of its Academy. Gene told me that he sees the Circle, the Symposium, the Training School, and the new Realistic Living extended faculty as crucial pieces of an ecclesial form fitted to a post-Christendom era. I see them, along with Joyce's experimentation with performing art forms that shatter the "third wall" between performer and audience, her work developing individual and group practices that assist people to let go of their investment in patriarchy, the religious-secular dichotomy, and dualistic thinking, as a practical expression of the spirit revolution that radical theology theorizes.

When I was interviewing Joyce and Gene, we talked about the degree to which they identify with the lineage of radical theology. I do identify with that lineage, and I strongly believe that radical theology needs more people like Gene and Joyce. Or to put it another way, the cultural event to which radical theology bears witness, the event that led Gabriel Vahanian, William Hamilton, Thomas J.J. Altizer, Mary Daly, and others to put aside the God that solves intellectual and existential problems, needs more people like Joyce and Gene if it is to be given any form other than an academic one. Since the 1970s, evangelicals have experimented with alternative "forms of worship" while remaining theologically committed to a rigid set of beliefs and a sense of Christian superiority. Liberal churches harbor free-thinkers and atheists even as they cling to institutional and liturgical forms that do the believing that they can't do for them, protecting them from the experience of life without that escape. Radical theology draws passionate and intelligent young people to itself while remaining largely confined to the university and its own institutional forms of false consolation. Recently, some ex-evangelicals who get lumped in with the "emerging church," particularly Pete Rollins and Kester Brewin, have brought a theoretical affirmation of our lives as they are together with a commitment to new practices for keeping us from grasping at "answers" that promise an escape from those lives. But Joyce and Gene have been dedicated to this as a team for over 30 years. This is why working with Gene and Joyce still feels like home to me. It feels like home because

they have long since made their home in a wilderness of endless wandering that is nevertheless firmly planted on the one and only earth with no nostalgia for any imaginary escape from our lives as they are. And it feels like home because they aren't just thinking about it. They are doing it. And they aren't just doing it. They are thinking it and doing it in a way that beckons, in a way that says "see, we can do it together." While I was writing this piece, Joyce and Gene both told me that they do regard their theologizing as radical, and they are certainly activating radical theology. They are showing what living this event looks like on the material earth, as a body, in a place, which is the only way any of us will ever live. Because of this, I am not ashamed to say that they still fill me with joy.



## Beyond Patriarchy

a workshop description

by Joyce Marshall

Pat Webb and I began our *Beyond Patriarchy* course on the road in September, presenting it to a group in Santa Rosa, California. Some came from Alaska and North Carolina to join the locals for the weekend experience. Our approach is to look at five aspects of the patriarchal system in the context of thousands of years of history. We explore how we personally experience the oppression of these aspects as well as noting where we have been a part of the oppressive forces or colluded with them. The emphasis, however, is on antidotes to the system – individually, in pairs or threes, or as a group – doing processes that bypass its harm, heal our hurts, and recover our inherent power.

Some of the words attendees used to describe their experience of the weekend: Terrific! Wonderful! Great! Stimulating. Inspirational. Awesome. Amazing. Supportive. Introspective. Time well spent.

### Other comments:

*I became more aware of the censorship that limits me and that I can use antidotes. Much to my surprise I found that I am able to write poems and how much fun that is. I was able to communicate freely with every other participant in the group and found much common ground.*

*The group go-rounds enhanced my awareness of and insight regarding the many different ways to approach each characteristic of patriarchy.*

*It was good to study and relax together to make our lives and our world more balanced.*

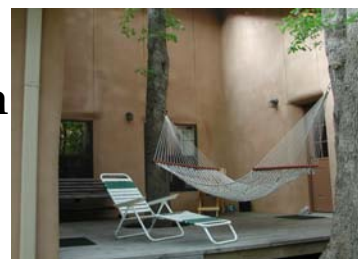
*The poetry read evoked a realization of our oneness within the human family. The sharing of those realizations through responses and the creative process of writing our own poetry was a powerful and most helpful learning tool. I gained not only insights but practices that enrich my life.*

*As a man, I went a bit cautious at first, fearing revenge from women who have been abused for so long by men. But I got none of that. I enjoyed the short lectures always laced with personal stories that evoked our own past events. Rather than a "new truth" about patriarchy, it is more like a Road Map with good Markers to watch for, to reflect and mediate and act on. What I bring back the most from this experience is an enhanced alertness of how the patriarchy works when it appears to me during my everyday life.*

We are continuing to offer this program. It is being scheduled in Oklahoma City in the Spring of 2017.

## Sojourning in Bonham, Texas

highlights & poetry  
by Pat Webb



If you read this journal, you might be considering a sojourn with Realistic Living. (See page 18 for a description of the sojourn program.) I can't recommend it enough. Here are some highlights of my sojourn this October.

*First, let me share two processes I brought home to use with my community:*

- A "Spirit Group" meeting for Qi Gong, meditation and sharing. This gentle format is very powerful and helpful. I love Realistic Living's commitment to really clear methods of nurture and forward motion.
- A delightful sharing process called DT3s (moving and talking three times). This amazing process helped me pull together many insights about my family situation, my personal goals, blessings and next steps.

*Next, as wonderful as these two methods are, I think the personal coaching I received during my sojourn was even more helpful:*

- Private time with Joyce allowed me to look deeper at my life journey right now—especially at how grief over my mother's recent passing and my busy schedule have impacted my health.



- Eating healthy every meal! Gene and Joyce have spent many decades reading on alternative health and they've put their education to powerful use in the way they take care of themselves. I can't think of two people in their 80's who more fully embody vibrant health!

- I lost ten pounds eating healthier than I have in years. I have more understanding of causes of poor health and I have a new health plan I can continue at home.

- Joyce arranged for me to have a foot massage with a local massage therapist. I felt very cared for and learned a lot about my body—an important key to my healing journey.

- Gene and Joyce asked me to share some of my journaling methods. It was a joy to have my work received! We also did some singing and dancing together. Community time was so nourishing!

- Gene, Joyce and Alan model “allowing.” All three are great listeners who supported me in learning what I wanted to learn. I was empowered to ask the questions I wanted to ask and they were available to explore those questions with me in a very relaxed way.

- Joyce sent me home with a DVD to look at, the film “Dangerous Beauty” which was very powerful and supportive of our work on the feminine.

*In summary, I want to highlight the things I'm most grateful for as I reflect on my sojourn:*

- I connected again with nature, a dear and long neglected friend. It was profound just to BE in the woods to enjoy times of solitary reflection.

- I re-energized my intent to live my life as a contemplative, journal-keeper and writer.

- Back home I had five days of pure productivity, achieving more than I had in the previous three months. I give a lot of the credit to the power of the sojourn time to sharpen my mind and refresh my body.

- I didn't accomplish everything on my initial sojourn list. But I actually accomplished much more in the big picture—achieving things I didn't put on the list initially. I think this is one of the real treasures of “sojourning”—an adventure that results in discoveries you cannot anticipate.

*Thank you Joyce, Gene and Alan for a very rich experience!*

Following is a poem that Pat wrote on her sojourn:

November 2016

## Walking the Deck

The boards are wet from early morning rain.  
Every grain stands out in 3-D beneath my feet.  
Here on the deck between house and woods  
I breathe and walk, blessed with time  
To simply notice.

This October morning noticing feels like a miracle.  
The moment I switch on my desire to really notice  
The natural world rushes to meet me.  
Everything is “punched up” into bold color and  
wild design—  
More than eyes alone can take in ...  
but I do my best.

Below me, leaves of brown and yellow and the knot  
holes on the deck  
Above, countless leaves swaying in pebbled  
sunlight  
The sky, a dozen shades of blue and white –  
moving, moving.  
And for ears there is another feast ...  
The crowing of a far-off rooster; the sound of acorns  
dropping,  
The creaking hinges of dry stiff branches,  
The seductive whisper of leaves stirred by autumn  
wind.

I am seduced by it all ... and by one peculiar flurry  
of air  
That comes and goes without my bidding,  
A breeze that stays to dance with me a moment  
Before swirling out past the garden toward the  
road.  
My skin misses it, hopes it will return, and is  
helpless to control that.

While I wait, I breathe and pace very slowly,  
Aware of this small walk, this symbol of my  
convalescence,  
This tribute to nature, the great healer,  
This tribute to my sturdy but tired body  
So in need of time in quiet attention—  
Quiet so I can attend to myself and  
Let myself be tended to.

As my walk draws to a close, I inhale deeply  
And exhale my tiny thanksgiving address:

I'm so glad for these woods,  
For those who thought to build a house here  
And to make a deck for walking.  
On this October day, may all their sweetest  
dreams

Be realized in my simple, complete happiness.  
We are all so wonderfully connected.

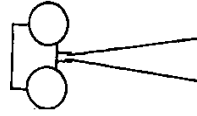
Pat Webb, October 2016

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## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

## FILM



**Far From Men** is a French production set in the 1950s during the Algerian War of Independence and based on a short story by Albert Camus. Viggo Mortensen plays Daru, a teacher of children in the Atlas mountains. It is unclear where the children live as all we see is his combination school room/home on the otherwise barren landscape. Early on he is handed a prisoner, Mohammed, who is to be escorted a day-long walk to a trial and, ultimately, execution. The film is largely the journey of the two men, made life-threatening by groupings of other men along the way. We learn more about each man as they share details of their lives on their trek. Each faces situations of ethical ambiguity, and each makes their decisions thoughtfully. What I loved most about the film was the quality of these two men. Both were amazingly courageous and yet wondrously tender; firm and solid as rocks, yet vulnerable and sweet. My kind of man, and this is my kind of film.

**Dangerous Beauty.** This exquisite film is based on the historical book, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, by Margaret F. Rosenthal. Arranged marriages based on money and class prohibited Veronica's marriage to the man she loved, and her father's loss of his fortune left her with a choice between being a powerless, repressed wife in a loveless arrangement or a free and educated prostitute. She is far too independent and intelligent to settle for being a wife. I can't imagine why this film about her life was basically ignored when it came out in 1998. Fortunately, I came upon it on Netflix. Jacqueline Bisset is superb as Veronica's mother who taught her daughter the powerful arts of her sex and set her upon a path that led her into the arms of senators, kings and priests, upon whom she had a profound influence. Catherine McCormick even resembles Bisset and is perfect as Veronica. Rufus Sewell, who often plays villains, is excellent as the love of her life. The surprises in the film are among its delights, so I won't speak of the plot, but will say that I found it to be both inspiring and stunning.

**Wadjda** is a 10-year-old Saudi Arabian girl confronting the limitations placed on women in her culture with the heart of a rebel. Her dream is to own a bicycle, race with her male friend and beat

him. This is the first feature ever directed by a Saudi woman and it manages to clearly depict the difficulties Wadjda faces without being grim. Heartwarming.

**A Walk in the Woods.** Robert Redford and Nick Nolte prove their well-earned acting chops in this film of a couple of aging guys walking the Appalachian Trail. Assisted by a fine funny script the film doesn't go for cheap laughs, but explores life issues along the way leaving you surprisingly touched by the end of the film. Redford and Nolte carry most of the movie but smaller roles are well-played by Emma Thompson, Mary Steenburgen, Kristen Schaal and others.

**Still Mine.** James Cromwell and Geneviève Bujold play a couple in their late 80s dealing with the inevitable decline of life. Based on a true story set in Canada the couple's immediate challenge is her broken hip. A descendant from a long line of shipbuilders, he decides to build them a small accessible house on their large acreage. He runs into a picky government inspector who insists on the letter of the law in spite of the fact that the building is solid and beautiful. We meet some of the couple's seven children, their helpful lawyer, and a sympathetic judge as well as close neighbors. The movie is a reminder that all solutions are temporary in this life and is a fine example of aging with grace and perseverance.

**Incendies.** Jeanne and Simon, adult children of Nawal, are instructed by her will to seek the father they never knew and the brother they didn't know they had. With flashbacks and their present journey from their home in Canada back to the Middle East, they and we learn that the mother who they felt was something of a confusing irritant was an amazing and courageous revolutionary with a remarkable history in the war between Christians and Muslims. Their discovery involves a shocking surprise and reveals their mother's depth of spirit as well as calling upon their depth response.

**Lunch Box.** This film from India is about an unusual relationship that develops from a rare mix-up in the famous complicated system that delivers lunches from restaurants and homes to people at work. Ila seeks to put romance back into her marriage by sending delicious food to her husband. Widower Saajan, an accountant soon to retire, mistakenly receives her gourmet meals. A series of messages back and forth reveals the mistake and a friendship begins. A nice story on the nature of intimacy.

RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall



*Love Poems from God*  
*Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West*  
 Translated by Daniel Ladinsky

Ladinsky does a short biography of each of twelve “saints” from different traditions, and then gives his translation of a number of poems of each. Included are: Rabia (a Sufi from the 8th Century), St. Francis of Assisi, Rumi, Meister Eckhart, St. Thomas of Aquinas, Hafiz (14th Century Persian), St. Catherine of Siena, Kabir (from 15th Century India), Mirabai (16th Century India), St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and Tukaram (17th Century India). I love this book. Ladinsky’s translations are down to earth, funny, and touch the heart. This quarter we are reading one each week in our circle meeting.

*A None’s Story:*  
*Searching for Meaning*  
*Inside Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam*  
 by Corinna Nicolaou  
 Columbia University Press, 2016

This was a book I found hard to put down. I was drawn by the quality of the writing and the spirit of the writer. Motivated by personal traumas, the last of which was 9/11 when she was working near the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., Nicolaou decided to explore what religious traditions might offer. It turned into a four-year project. A second generation “None”—meaning that when filling out a form asking for religious identity she and her parents would check the None box—the author brought a fresh approach to her search. Not only was I impressed by her openness to receive whatever gifts any tradition offered, I found her amazingly courageous in her willingness to visit gatherings of all stripes of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists as a stranger and to throw herself into whatever practices each asked of its members. (She even did the Ramadan fast.) Her summations of the essence of each tradition are excellent, coming from her insightful capacity to notice and to trust her experience. I heartily agreed with her in being turned off mostly by those who imagine they have absolute answers, and mostly attracted to those who are welcoming and kind and admit to their vulnerability.

November 2016

*Just Mercy*  
*A Story of Justice and Redemption*  
 by Bryan Stevenson  
 Spiegel & Grau, 2015

Bryan Stevenson is not only a brilliant attorney doing inspiring and sometimes heartbreaking work defending the poor and the wrongly condemned in our criminal justice system, he is a fine, fine writer. Some of the book is difficult to read because the stories are so tragic, but ultimately it is heartwarming. Gene and I read it aloud and both of us were often moved to tears. In his principal story he tells of Walter McMillian, on death row for a crime he clearly did not commit. In alternate chapters, we hear about a number of other cases Stevenson defends, including those of children put away for life with no parole, of mistreated mentally ill, and of women. The unfairness of our system is stunning, particularly toward African Americans. Stevenson’s Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama offers free legal services to the poor and disenfranchised. He and his staff not only offer the best in legal services, they offer respect, solace and compassion to their clients and their families. In some cases they make clear the corruption of the local officials and have suffered bomb threats for their work. President Obama is the first sitting president to visit a federal prison. I understand that the criminal justice system will be one of his post-presidential projects. Every citizen of this country needs to read this book and then send a donation to Equal Justice Initiative.

*Making Marriage Simple*  
*10 Relationship-Saving Truths*  
 by Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt  
 Harmony Books, 2013

Gene and I read the earlier version of this book (*Getting the Love You Want*) when it came out in 1988 and did some of the processes. This year we pulled that book out again and, using it along with this newer version, instigated a weekly meeting of helpful practices. Their approach is excellent. Particularly useful are the mirroring process and the daily appreciations, either of which can be used with anyone. I highly recommend their books. Their exercises are magic, IF you use them as prescribed. The couple mention in this second book that their own marriage got rocky when they quit using their suggestions in their own relationship.

*Don’t Be A Jerk*  
*And Other practical Advice from Dogen,*  
*Japan’s Greatest Zen Master*  
 by Brad Warner  
 New World Library, 2016

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## RECOMMENDED READING

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Warner is not your usual image of a Zen priest. He played in a hardcore rock band, made Japanese monster movies, and calls his teachings Hardcore Zen. This is my favorite of his books I have read. He translates Dogen in regular, easy-to-understand talk. For example, in demonstrating that Dogen was a feminist, he translates Dogen's comments about the nun Myoshin thus: "Everyone agreed that even though Myoshin was a woman she had the balls to do the job. . . . But some of these dopes refuse to be taught by female teachers who are clearly their superiors. What a bunch of dim-witted weenies!" I like Warner's simple explanation of the Zen understanding of knowing and not-knowing: "If you can completely accept and be perfectly comfortable with the fact that you don't know anything, then you know everything." Later he goes on to say: "It's difficult to fully trust in our nonknowing. To do so is to act from intuition rather than concrete understanding. We're trained not to do that. But Buddhist practice emphasizes this kind of nonunderstanding. Our knowledge is always incomplete, and our brains always misinterpret so much, that the only thing we can truly trust is intuition." I hope this taste encourages you to read this book.



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### Three books by Jean Klein

Musicologist and physician Jean Klein was born in Berlin in 1912. He secretly worked with the French Resistance in the Second World War. Later he spent three years studying Yoga and Advaita Vedanta in India. He returned to the West to become a spiritual teacher. He died in 1998 in Santa Barbara, California.

*Beyond Knowledge*  
Non-Duality Press, 1994

This book is an exploration of the topic of nonknowing discussed in Warner's book, reviewed above. It is based on dialogues of the late Jean Klein in Greece and England in 1992 and 1993. In the preface he notes, true to the topic, that "It is not important to understand these words, but it is essential to live with the feeling they evoke." And he closes the book saying, "When you take home the ideas you lose the perfume of these moments.

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But it is the perfume which holds the essence of the moment. Forget the ideas and keep the perfume." I assume it would have been more beneficial to have sat in the room with Klein, but I nevertheless get a whiff of the man through his books and recommend this one.

*Who Am I?*  
Element Books, 1988

I love Klein's advice in this book. Here's some examples. "Don't try to influence." He claims that the world is affected by all we do. If we live in peace, we radiate it. It isn't useful to become a "professional do-gooder." He also suggests that the natural state of the brain is attention, alertness – like a panther. He recommends being like wild animals, in relaxed alertness. When asked how to come near to enlightenment, he says, "Be aware only of your unwillingness to give up wanting to produce." Receptivity is key.

*The Book of Listening*  
Non-Duality Press, 2008

This book is a compilation of volumes 1-10 of Klein's journal *Listening*. It is a collection of varied treats. One of my favorites is The Sayings of Old Man Tcheng. Here's a quote as Tcheng speaks to his monks: "You are incapable of seeing for yourselves but only feel what you think should be felt, and think according to the opinion of those you have placed on a pedestal. Nincompoops, you are nothing but fakes and tricksters. Your case is hopeless." Another treat is Klein's sensory awareness exercises. And there is, of course, great poetry on not-knowing with lines like: waiting without waiting for anything, directionless awareness, live in absolute absence of yourself, complete openness, free from all ideas, free from all hope, taken by Truth, by Grace.



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I found the following three recent books by Tibetan Buddhists to be particularly inspiring. Each seems to me to use English in unusually creative and clear ways, even though English is their second language.

November 2016



## RECOMMENDED READING

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*The Intelligent Heart*  
*A Guide to the Compassionate Life*  
by Dzigar Kongtrul  
Shambhala, 2016

Pema Chodron's teacher was the well-known Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. After his death, she says (in this book's Foreword) that she hadn't met anyone else who could sense where she was stuck until in the 1990's when she met Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, whose ability to "hook" her caused her to ask him to be her teacher. I found this book to be an extremely well-organized step-by-step method for dealing with the major cause of suffering. What many call "ego" or "the small self," this teacher names "self importance." I find this a very helpful name for it. I can easily identify self importance in myself when I take "an attitude." I experience a kind of interior eyes-to-the-ceiling "humph." A sort of, "Do I really have to put up with this?" It is useful to recognize that attitude as a doorway to my suffering.

Personally, I have always been turned off by the Buddhist practice of Tonglen. But this teacher's explanation of that practice is quite winsome to me. The myth assumes many lifetimes and that every sentient being has at some time been your mother. Then he does an inspiring bit on mother—how, in caring for vulnerable me, she was unable to do her own spiritual growth. And because of her care I now have the possibility of becoming a Bodhisattva. So when I see anyone suffering from their self importance, I can imagine myself breathing in their suffering and breathing out any happiness I have in loving repayment to him/her—my mother. And, here is an added bonus. If I am low on peace and happiness and love, I can think of myself as having power of attorney to access the immense bank account of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and saints of the past, present, and future. If you think this is masochistic, just understand that what causes suffering is self importance and practicing Tonglen is the opposite of self importance.

Buddhism is great for making lists. This book has a fine list of 59 instructions. For example, Do not feel the world owes you. Or: Do not wait in ambush. Or: Do not pounce upon vulnerability. Here's a challenging one: Do not speak about the downfalls of others.



*Embracing Each Moment*  
*A Guide to the Awakened Life*  
by Anam Thubten  
Shambhala, 2016

Another Tibetan Buddhist teaching in the U.S., Anam Thubten represents the Nyingma tradition. Some of the simple, yet profound insights I appreciate from this book relate to his statement that essentially life is about learning how to love. Part of this learning involves learning to make friends with the fact that life is "fragile, whimsical, and transient." We want it to be secure and certain and tend to hate that our life and life about us can fall apart at any moment. He reminds us that it helps in this process to take our minds and our beliefs less seriously. He also suggests that we let go of our hopes and fears and simply surrender and let our hearts dance.

*Our Pristine Mind*  
*A Practical Guide to Unconditional Happiness*  
by Orgyen Chowang  
Shambhala, 2016

Orgyen Chowang is also of the Nyingma tradition and his primary teacher was one of the great Dzogchen masters. This author/teacher notes that human beings are mental hoarders. He says, "We have this beautiful Pristine Mind with five amazing senses that are like beautiful windows to the world. When our mind is pristine, everything we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell is viewed from the pristine perspective." But we store clutter and garbage in our mind, saving negative thoughts, bad habits and unhealthy belief systems. Orgyen Chowang offers methods which allow us to step outside our lifelong perceptual tendencies and to simply abide in our awareness which cultivates a good heart that is courageous, strong, and patient.



## REALISTIC LIVING

Where we've been, where we are, how you might help



Realistic Living is a contemporary reclaiming of the gifts of Christianity, offered as one of the wisdom traditions much needed in today's world. Since the early 1980s we have published this journal and have met with a local circle of practitioners of this tradition. We have taught many courses across the U.S. We have learned from and supported ecology movements and peer counseling movements as well as learning from and dialoging with the other major religious traditions.



We carry out this vision in many ways. Gene's current focus is courses on Christian history and practice, and these courses are now being offered by local teachers in Portland, Oregon and Edinburg, Texas. Alan is our ambassador to the world. He attends religious and academic conferences, presenting papers and leading courses. He is currently working on a history of the work of Realistic Living (including bios of Gene and Joyce) to be included in a college text book on radical theology. Joyce's recent focus is on *Beyond Patriarchy* and interreligious dialogue. In all that we do, we hope to build a dedicated constituency for this ongoing movement and to nurture leadership that will sustain it.



The three of us are available to design with you a **Sojourn** appropriate to your needs here in the woods of North Texas (see photos and Pat Webb's descriptive article herein). So far nine people have had that experience. Some of the options are: visiting our weekly Christian Resurgence Circle and our Spirit Group, singing, music, dance, drama, writing, inquiry, interplay, enneagram, leadership skills, ecology and social change activity, discussion of chosen books, religious methods, and more. A weekend or longer of such experiences may be right for you this coming year.

If you receive and read this journal, you are already part of this movement and its vision. Please help us expand its reach by sending us names and addresses of those who would appreciate our work. Also consider setting up or teaching Gene's *Six-Course Curriculum* or the *Beyond Patriarchy* course in your area. Or you might want to attend the *Beyond Patriarchy* course in Oklahoma City in the Spring of 2017 or the *Six-Course Curriculum* in Portland, Oregon or Edinburg, Texas.



## Financial Support

Over 1500 people have bought a book, read an essay, or attended one of our programs. We now have over 500 people on our active mailing list for this journal. We add names to and subtract names from this list every year. One hundred of you supply most of our financial support. Another hundred subscribe or give intermittently. The number who participate in this organization can drift backwards in this fast-changing society if we do not keep adding new people to our list of supporters. We need your help in adding new persons to our constituency. We also encourage you to continue being as generous as you can. This is crucial, for a small group of supporters cannot meet the whole need indefinitely.

The river of experience that we are tapping into is not a minor stream. Joseph W. Mathews synthesized six or seven key Christian luminaries and set in motion a river of realism relative to Christian practice that this organization has sustained and expanded upon since 1984. In the next few years, we would like to train others who will carry this baton forward to an ever deeper contribution to the religious history of the world. We see ourselves as a sprout from a small acorn that may with some water grow into a massive tree. We aren't the only thing going in the Christian resurgence field of work, but we are a vital piece of that puzzle. In the hope that you experience the value of this work, we ask for your help in whatever ways you can give it.

We want you to know that \$5 a year is deeply appreciated, and we will keep you on our lists for as long as you express such interest. And we want you to know that two persons contribute about \$5000 a year and others \$250 a month. In last year's campaign, ten of you gave a total of \$10,000, in excess of your usual giving. These gifts enabled the three of us to do the work necessary to build this movement. Something like that additional amount is needed every year to continue expanding this work. The same amount could be reached if all 200 of our current givers gave an annual average of \$50 more than they gave last year. Another way to meet this need is for more to contribute \$10 or more per month. Your bank can arrange for you to send us that monthly check.

If you cannot contribute more financially, please help us add one more person to the mailing list for our journal. This too is tremendous help in supporting this work.

Many of you who have been our most faithful members are now senior citizens. If you are making benevolent donations in your will, consider including us; we will see to it that your contribution is well used.

We appreciate deeply all that you do for this movement, not the least of which is your encouraging notes. Thank you.



# Realistic Living

*is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."*

Check out our newly revised web site: [RealisticLiving.org](http://RealisticLiving.org).

Also, check out our  
Facebook page:



[facebook.com/realisticliving](https://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

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