

REALISTIC LIVING

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[thanks to Jan Cunningham for the bald eagles photo](#)

The solutions Orr develops begin with a shift in the human will or heart, then move on to a shift in the human mind, and end with real-world, down-and-dirty, power-politics, as well as the year-in-and-year-out local tasks of reconstruction. Here is a quote about the educational care of our social minds:

We would be embarrassed to graduate students who could neither read nor count. We should be mortified, then, to graduate students who are ecologically illiterate—clueless about the basics of ecology, energetics, systems dynamics—the bedrock conditions for civilization and human life. page 110



Orr prepares our awakening "hearts," "wills," and "minds" for our real-world politics with sentences like these:

And there will be no *Deus ex machina*, or cavalry, or invisible hand, or miracle technological breakthrough that will rescue us in the nick of time. It will be up to us to change the odds and the outcomes on our own. page 144

The next passage I will be reading aloud in my speeches. It is a gem that notices the spirit depth of our call to action:

If humanity is to have a better future it will be a more "empathic civilization," one better balanced between our most competitive, hard-driving selves and our most harmonious, altruistic traits; one that embraces the yin-yang poles of behavior. It must be a change sufficiently global to bridge the chasms of ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, and

Dangerous Years

a conversation with
David Orr
by Gene Marshall

I started to write a brief review of David W. Orr's 2016 book *Dangerous Years: Climate Change, the Long Emergence, and the Way Forward*. I found, however, that a longer "essay" was what I felt called to write. Orr's book is the best thing I have read on the overall social-change challenges of this century. I am ranking this book, along with the Bible, as something to read over and over for the rest of my life. I recommend that you buy a hard copy, and wear it out over the next decade. The social content of this book is broad, deep, and on target, and Orr's prose reads like poetry. His choice of words is beautiful, gripping, and often funny. I am going to quote some examples for you to taste.

First of all, he demolishes the lies of climate crisis denial, as well as the lies of minimalist response to this emergency:

Nearly everything on Earth behaves or works differently at higher temperatures. Ecologies collapse, forests burn, metals expand, concrete runways buckle, rivers dry up, cooling towers fail, and people curse, kill, and terrorize more easily. Climate deniers . . . are doomed to roughly the same status as, say, members of the Flat Earth Society. page 25

politics and deep enough to shift perceptions, behaviors, and values. The change must enable people to grow from a “having” orientation to a “being” orientation to the world. It must deepen our appreciation, affiliation, and competence with the natural world, albeit a natural world undergoing accelerating changes.

I do not think, however, that we can simply will ourselves to that empathic new world. The transition will result from social movements, activism, education, and political changes. But there is always an X-factor, an inexplicable process of metanoia, a word meaning “penitence; a reorientation of one’s way of life; spiritual conversion.” It is a change of inner sight. “I once was blind, but now I see” as the former slave trader John Newton wrote in the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Metanoia is liberation from bondage—physical, mental, emotional—a total change of perspective. pages 147-8

I view the core of the revolution for a next Christianity to be the creation of *metanoia* circles, small groupings of people in which our deepest humanness can be nurtured on a regular basis and our compassion and persistence prepared for our wide-world responsibilities.

Orr pictures the role of politics as a “long revolution.” We now need more than small teams and edge movements: we need large structures of action that year-in-and-year-out for decades do all the little and big things that need to be done for this huge transition.

Orr works through our core challenges with thorough analysis and inspiring description of practical options. He also continues to indicate the spirit courage and persistence it is going to take. He deals with sustainable democracy, ecological design, hotter cities, systemic thinking, a new agriculture, and much more.

Orr concludes his book with a description of the Oberlin Project—a multi-committee, local project of community-renewal organized by Orr and others, in Orr’s Oberlin, Ohio home town. He pictures the kind of things that the co-pastors of future Christian Resurgence Circles might envision for their quality action in their local parishes of responsibility. Here is a quote taken from that final chapter:

We need people who make charity and civility the norm. We need more parks, farmers’ markets, bike trails, baseball teams, book groups, poetry readings, good coffee, conviviality, practical competence, and communities where the word “neighbor” is a verb, not a noun. We need people who know and love this place and see it whole and see it for what it can be. page 227

Orr is also clear that we need people who lead the global level responses to the climate crisis, economic equity, democratization, campaign financing, racism, sexism, and more.



Religion and Politics

a fresh 2017 look

by Gene Marshall

This topic has been discussed without a clear definition of “religion” or “politics.” Sometimes the entire discussion is reduced to a very narrow scope such as: “When does human life begin?” or “Does government have any authority over anything growing inside a woman’s body?”

Also, our so-called “politics” is often reduced to applying ideological principles—true conservative ones or true liberal ones or some other so-called “true” principles. The result of this is that each set of “principled” persons works to see their cherished principles forced upon reality, rather than finding truly relevant principles that grow out of reality. Missing in so many of our tragic political dramas is the humbling truth that all ideological principles are relative constructs of thought, created by mere human beings—beings who are essentially ignorant of the fullness of reality.

Theologizing

Rudolph Bultmann says that a true Christian faith means “freedom from the past and openness for the future.” No politics drops down from some imagined Eternity. Even Thomas Aquinas, rooted as he was in Medieval forms of thought, was clear that what he called “Eternal Law” was something beyond the reach of human minds—something known only to the “mind of God”—that Absolute Mysteriousness that no human mind can fathom. Thomas’ insight about Eternal Law is also present in a quite modern awareness that “Life is a Mystery,” as Wendell Berry’s book by that title so brilliantly illuminates against what Berry calls “a modern superstition” to the contrary.

Aquinas cleverly defines “natural law” as that part of “Eternal Law” that the human mind can encompass. That is, natural law is an approximation of Eternal Law. Within our modern science, we are more clear than Aquinas was about how deeply approximate natural law always is.

Indeed, our more humble physicists today are willing to witness to this contemplative awareness: "The more we know about nature, the more we know we don't know." Rather than science lessening the Mystery, scientific work expands the Mystery.

Aquinas goes on to define "human law" as a human creation that is promulgated for the common citizenry. In order for a human law to be valid law, he says, such a human law must obey natural law. I find that a very interesting way to spin the relation of theology to politics.

Here is an example: The Mysterious Eternal Law of things provides us enough wisdom of natural law to recognize the validity of global warming. So, our human laws are not valid laws unless they are built in recognition of this climate crisis. And as Naomi Klein has pointed out, "*This Changes Everything!*" Our politics is bogus and criminal unless it is a program to get busy phasing out fossil fuels and building an energy infrastructure based on solar, wind, and other non-greenhouse-gas-producing energy sources. Also, minimalist adaptations to this vast energy shift are also bogus and criminal, for the scientific natural law of things tells us that this is an emergency not to be fooled around with, compromised with, or postponed.

In good Christian, Jewish, and Islamic theologizing, the word "God" means a devotional relationship with that Final Reality confronting us in the course of historical events. So, this view of "God" calls for an obedient realism in our politics. We can argue among us about what is true realism, but we cannot use a made-up set of religious principles to justify statements like: "Global warming is hoax made up by the Chinese," or "Evolution is not a true picture of life on Earth." Reality-obedient theologizing requires us to give up oil company false facts, literalistic views of the Bible, and exaggerated views of human standing in the cosmos. Today, we manifest being sons and daughters of the Christian God by being humble before the actual reality of an evolving biology on a small planet of a minor star in one of a hundred billion or more galaxies. From a valid Christian point of view, current "natural law" matters to our political realism.

What is Politics?

My mentor of many years, Joe Mathews, spawned a season of intensive historical and sociological study in which a band of us sought to define the essential social processes that can be found in all human societies—past, present, or future. We saw that the essential political social

processes are one third of a larger set, the other two thirds of which can be called "economic social processes" and "cultural social processes." ("Essential," in this discussion, means the *natural-law-for-now* discussed above.)

Using Mathews' method of triangular breakdown, I have intuited the following three subsets of essential political processes: (1) geographical-districting social processes, (2) social-order social processes, and (3) group-decision-making social processes.

(1) **Geographical-districting social processes** include the awareness that human political life requires defining the geographical scope of any whole society of political governing. Ancient hunter-gathers defined their hunting-grounds. Today, we define the boundaries of nations, states, counties, city limits, and other districts. We are developing a planetary scope of governance in which all other scopes of governing are nested. Many of our current national boundaries are arbitrary, but a clear definition of place will be required for any whole-society governing. Further, our programs of political change will have to begin with the currently operating scopes of governing.

(2) **Social-order processes** include: (a) enforced laws for which there are penalties for violations, (b) domestic tranquility that includes policing, and (c) common defense, which includes military means as well as negotiations among the relevant seats of social power.

(3) **Group-decision-making social processes** include: (a) legislative lawmaking, (b) executive leadership functions, and (c) judicial review functions. In a democracy, these forms are combined with a free press & media, popular suffrage, and other sorts of consensus building that amplifies popular influence and the popular selection of representative decision makers. Group-decision-making can take on many forms. Most of them in the last 6000 years have not been democratic, but the influence of the "demos" can be shown to have always been a present dynamic, along with various forms of centralization and various forms of task-assigned structuring. Social decision-making is an essential feature built into the species, but its forms are constructed in terms of workable or practical challenges by each specific body politic, living in dialogue with what that society is facing in the overall history of its time and place.

A **political ideology** is an overall context for making decisions within each aspect of these essential political processes, as these ongoing processes are being manifest in our moments of history. A political ideology can be viewed as a

part of “ethics,” and ethics can be viewed as part of the discipline of learning called “philosophy.” The actual practice of doing politics assumes some sort of political thinking about the why? what? and how? of doing the practices of politics in an existing society at a specific time in history.

Our most responsible philosophy (or ongoing philosophizing) is constructed in obedience to the sciences of nature, the contemplation of our inner life, and the workability of making responses by our culture to its historical challenges. So a responsible ethics and its accompanying political ideology is an ongoing journey into realism. And an obedience to Reality is a core quality of the deepest theological thinking of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such statements indicate how religion is connected or can be connected to our politics.

Following this line of thought, we can see how a humanly created **social law** can be responsibly produced through the interaction of a realistic political ideology with the ongoing political processes of a specific society. Such law is invented by humans, but it is responsible or irresponsible in terms of the kind of thinking just outlined.

“**Natural law**” is also a freely invented human construction, but it is constructed with the intent of possessing strong participation in the Mysterious Overall Reality that both science and contemplation explore. Such exploration is never complete, so “natural law” is progressive and open to further progress. That does not mean, however, that natural law is ungrounded in the Real. The Real is what makes natural law natural. As the Real negates an existing natural law, that natural law becomes open to being replaced with a more inclusive natural law. Sometimes truths held by older *natural-laws-for-now* forms turn out to be forgotten, and sometimes new *natural-laws-for-now* forms turn out to be misleading; nevertheless, realistic progressive movement characterizes the overall character of natural law.

The *essential* social processes (cultural, political, and economic) are human-built models that can always be improved as more Reality comes into play. So these “essential” processes are “natural law” in a way that is similar to the laws of physics. Both the essential social processes and the laws of physics are *essential-for-now* verities of the natural cosmos. However, the humanly created historical manifestations of these essential social processes are not “natural law” but “human law” in Thomas Aquinas’ vocabulary.

This state of perpetual revolution in all our knowing is not a cause for despair over knowing; it is a discovery of what knowing is like. When I

personally have to give up a specific state of knowing that I am clinging to, I may feel despair, but my despair is my lack of faith. I am refusing to be a person who is open to more truth. Such closedness is unfaith in the Mysterious Reality that we all face and that Christians revere with the word “God.”

So What is Godly Politics?

The word “God” can be washed of all its metaphysical wrappers and be viewed as a devotion to that “Final Whatever” that we encounter in history as the Destroyer of the past moment and the Presenter of the next moment, thereby rendering “realism” to mean being “free from the past and open for the future.” This state of obedient realism is, according to Rudolf Bultmann, the meaning of “faith in God.”

It may seem to our consciousness that we live in some sort of Eternal Now through which time moves and we just watch, but the biblical picture of this experience is that we are living in the Now of decision for the future, which future is somewhat determined by our God-empowered freedom to choose. The consequences of our choices will be carried out in history by a Power beyond our control (the “actions” of Mysterious Reality). These consequences of our own actions will then face us with our next set of choices. We are history-benders without being in control of the final bendings. We humans are causal members of the time process. The nature of time is not a set course, but a dialogue, symbolically speaking, between humans and the Eternal Reality that we humans meet in history. As Christians our lives are a “conversation in action” with Final Reality—honored as our God, our final devotion, our ultimate loyalty.

What is Democracy?

The vision of “democracy” penned in Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence* has some overlaps with the God-devotion to that Final Reality indicated above as a characteristic of the deep versions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Humans are not biologically equal, nor are they equal in sociological usefulness for the rest of us. Human equality judged by any humanly created aesthetic, functional, or ethical standard is nonexistent. Human equality has its roots in a strange and quite religious value devotion—namely, that any human who is born to a life on Earth is a gift to all of us from that Final Reality that we obey if we trust this Inescapable Reality we meet in the flow of time—that is, in the challenge of historical events.

So, in spite of the fact that Jefferson's Bible had been severely abridged, Jefferson's religion still supported this basic valuation of each and every living human. The Constitution of the United States, however, watered down this radical vision considerably. Giving slaves their freedom and women their vote have been steps toward the Jeffersonian vision of equality. And thoroughgoing democracy remains a revolutionary vision. A fully democratic social order requires having "representatives" who carry out the specific functions of society on behalf of all the people; therefore, these representatives are required to be truly *of the people*, sustained *by the people*, and work *for the people* if anything worthy of the name "democracy" is going to be in play. This means an ongoing tension between the social power given to such "representatives" and the social power of the people who are being represented. "Democracy" means an ongoing check against any and all trends toward a topdown governance by a wealth-empowered elite, or any other elite that disrespects the churning popular will.

Examples of Democracy as a Political Issue

Currently, we in the US face the political ideology and political style of the Donald Trump mode of Republicanism. This is an antidemocratic politics: in its campaign financing policies, its voting rights policies, its role-of-government policies, its trickle-down economic policies, its criminal justice policies, its ecological policies, and more. Such political rule is profoundly out of sync with the *Declaration of Independence*. It is closer to the policies of King George III, against whom the US Revolution was waged. Current Republican policies are a form of oligarchy worked out within a haze of democratic pretensions.

Indeed, this US Republican anti-democracy is somewhat more restrained than the Stalin-like ruthlessness of Vladimir Putin's cabal of billionaire oligarchs. Nevertheless, Donald Trump manifests a strong preference for strongman rule, and finds positive identification with Putin and with other dictators throughout the world. This authoritarian style is admired by most of Trump's avid supporters. In spite of this support, critics of Trump can make the case that this style of leadership is indeed antidemocratic.

In general, the current US Democratic Party is more committed to democracy than the current Republican Party, yet there are also deep tensions within the Democratic Party between moderation and full-speed ahead on democratic topics. We

might also call this a tension between slow incremental progress and political revolution. In other words, relative to the topic of democracy, the 2017 US political preferences might be said to fall into these three groups: (1) *full-speed forward*, (2) *incremental repair*, and (3) *full-speed backward*. In this historical movement of deeply needed cultural, political, economic, and ecological change, a significant portion of the population views *incremental repair* in last place among these three preferences.

If true, this last sentence means that more than a few people, rightly or wrongly, saw the Obama/Clinton forces as lukewarm water they wished not to drink. Some Bernie Sanders supporters wanted to shake things up so badly that they were willing to vote for Donald Trump rather than Hillary Clinton, or not vote at all. This truth is hard to measure or prove, but I believe it was so. I also believe that these preferences have not changed, but have even deepened. So, it is likely true that a workable unification of the Democratic Party had best lean hard toward the Bernie Sanders/Elizabeth Warren full-speed ahead political style. If Democrats want to win close races in difficult places, incremental repair is not exciting enough. And any snuggling up to conservative money will be especially bad policy for Democrats. There is little enthusiasm for a middle-of-the-road set of policies. Full-speed ahead for democracy (which includes all that a fuller democracy will make possible) has the enthusiasm advantage in this moment. If such big changes are the call of historical realism, then they are the call of God, according to what I consider to be the best of contemporary God-talk in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

I hold that the above is at least a clue as to how politics and religion are related in the 17th year of century 21.



Rural Organizing as a Spiritual Practice

some social-action theologizing

by Alan Richard

Since the 2016 election, the label "white working class" has stuck to the non-degreed hourly wage workers who voted overwhelmingly for Donald

Trump. Over half the “white working class” live in rural areas. Journalists and political analysts are divided about the motivations that drove these rural white voters to Trump, with some insisting that they were angry about economic distress and neglect and others arguing that rural xenophobia, racism, and sexism were decisive. But there is another way of getting at what is happening to the politics of rural America, and that is to look at the images that rural people have of themselves and of others. In *The Politics of Resentment*, Katherine Cramer uses interviews with urban, suburban, and rural voters in Wisconsin to show how rural identity hinges on a sense of the rural dweller as a hard worker “who is systematically ignored and left out of the exercise of power” (p. 66). Thomas Frank’s now-classic *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* offers a glimpse of the rural dweller’s image of urban dwellers. According to Frank, rural people see powerful and oppressive elites aligned against them. These elites are not wealthy people and corporations motivated by profit or money. They are city people motivated by liberalism. For people who adopt a rural identity, liberalism is an autonomous social force operating independently of economics. The city wins even when rich people side with rural people because of the autonomous dark force of liberalism. “To be a populist conservative is to be a fatalist,” Frank writes, “to believe in a world where your side will never win; indeed, where your side almost by definition *cannot* win.”

To the degree that rural people have internalized these images of self and other, they have blinded themselves to two important features of their own experience. They have blinded themselves to the role of economic forces in the rural-urban differences they perceive. They have also blinded themselves to their own personal and collective agency. Here in rural north Texas, I have seen this rural fatalism play itself out in a myriad of ways. The destruction of Bois d’Arc creek to feed the Dallas metro area’s demand for water is said to be a “done deal,” long before contracts have been signed or environmental reviews completed. The county can’t spend money on infrastructure to make Bonham a more attractive place to live because “we’re a poor county, and that’s just the way it is.” Even our local progressives speak of rural people as ineffective. A few weeks ago, I heard a north Texas native progressive with a deep love for the area call local participatory planning meetings “pooled ignorance.” Rural political helplessness is accompanied by a background belief that, somewhere out there, someone with the right mix of purity and power must exist to save

rural America. Rural people here are looking for a certain kind of hero, someone who is “successful” in a way rural people aren’t but who hasn’t become one of the citified “elites.” North Texas loves the reality TV shows *Duck Dynasty* and *Fast n Loud*. Both feature “real” hard-working people who have become “successful” doing things like making hunting decoys or restoring old cars. The first Republican since Richard Nixon to win in our rural county was the folksy, inarticulate, and rich George W. Bush. The inarticulate, rich, and crude Donald Trump garnered 79% of the votes of Fannin County (where I live) and 70% of rural votes throughout the United States.

Joseph Mathews called our imaginary saviors “the Everyman-Christ.” Born of the “experience of the limitations of existence,” the Everyman-Christ relieves everyman “of the necessity of living their given life in the present situation.” According to Mathews, the Christ-event is always an assault on the Everyman-Christ, just as the crucifixion of Jesus was an assault on the Messianic expectations of his followers. Proclaiming the Christ-event is a matter of slicing through the paralyzing false security of Everyman-Christ, leaving the hearer of the proclamation with nothing but the good news of an open future and a call to decision. These dynamics of healing have happened recently right here in Fannin County Texas.



Citizen Organizing in Fannin County

In September 2016, dozens of people in northwest Fannin County met at the home of a local resident to discuss sand-mining activity in their community. The Guardian has described sand mining as “the global environmental crisis you’ve probably never heard of.” The global urbanization boom and the use of hydraulic fracturing have so increased the demand for sand that this has already depleted water levels along some of the world’s largest rivers, disrupting fishing, agriculture, and wildlife habitat. Since our local environmental education nonprofit Communities Organizing for

Resources and Environment (CORE) had previously led a successful fight against a coal-fired power plant, these rural residents asked CORE to lead the effort to force sand and gravel mining firms to mine responsibly. No one, including us activists on the CORE board, had more than a vague idea of what that outcome might mean. But the CORE board saw that these rural people were directly experiencing something that was triggering a willingness to struggle collectively. For the moment, these rural dwellers were neither wallowing in resentment nor seeking saviors. And we saw this as an opportunity to organize.

The aim of organizing is to develop the kind of political power that doesn't come from deep pockets but from the commitment of large numbers of people. Experienced organizers insist that this can only be built from within a community that has become aware of its situation and its agency. Organizing is *not* about being a leader. It's about identifying organic leaders within the community that is directly facing a form of oppression, awakening them to their agency, training them, and equipping them. It is also about refraining from doing anything more than this. As the famous "Iron Rule" of the IAF puts it, "never do for others what they can do for themselves." Though the craft of organizing includes facilitation methods, one on one dialogue tactics, pedagogical skills, and the like, the art of organizing is the art of *not* doing. Admittedly, it is a kind of not doing that involves long hours and multiple types of labor and either substandard or no pay, but it's still a not doing.

Although organizing is a secular craft, it is also a spiritual practice. Organizing involves proclaiming the Christ-event. Organizers shatter the often-implicit false hopes, the Everyman-Christ, that keep people attached to daily routines and forms of compliance, private individualized transgressions, or busy work. It rubs people's faces in the horror of a situation they already inescapably experience, and helps them relate to this situation as a call to responsibility rather than to imaginary escape. But organizing isn't about the organizer bringing the truth to the hoi polloi. The only truth that an organizer brings is a truth that people already experience and want to escape but cannot escape. If that truth is proclaimed to organic leaders and those leaders respond, organizers turn decision-making over to these organic leaders. Organizing calls for a difficult refusal to lead, and this refusal is the contemplative practice of being with the neighbor in distress not as one who needs to be rescued but as Christ, and this form of "being with" means that the organizer exposes herself to a Christ event, to being addressed by these organic

leaders.

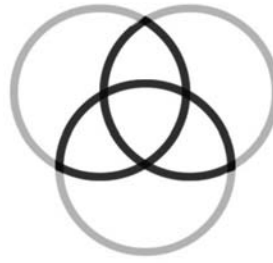
At the next sand mining task force meeting, CORE talked about citizen power. Board members told attendees that, although the board was there to support their actions with the resources at its disposal, CORE was not the cavalry coming over the hill and that there would be no cavalry coming over the hill. "Take a good look at yourselves because right now at this moment you *are* CORE." We said that "the sand-mining companies have more money than we'll ever have, more trained experts than we'll ever have, more lawyers than we'll ever have, and more lobbyists than we'll ever have. What we have is people angry enough about what is being done to them that they are ready to share in running their own community. And that is citizen power." And CORE board members watched people at meetings and between meetings, noticing who brought others to meetings, who seemed to know everyone, who received respect and deference from other residents. We focused on awakening these people to the possibility of acting collectively against unregulated sand mining, not only in Fannin County but in Texas. We shared the little we knew about sand mining operations with them, and we answered their questions as best we could. We shared encouraging stories about grassroots resistance with them. But when there was a concrete task to be done related to leadership in the effort, we largely (though not perfectly) resisted the temptation to volunteer. We didn't know it at the time, but the sand-mining challenge was almost tailor-made as an assault on rural consciousness's image of the outside savior. Few other communities in Texas have successfully fought sand mining, and state and national advocacy organizations are not focused on it. Against this threat, local people really are on their own.

Within a month, people who were at these first meetings began talking about sand mining at county commissioner's court. The rural families who were now CORE's sand-mining task force helped pack a town hall meeting where the county commissioners presented state senator Bob Hall with a proclamation recommending that the legislature mandate that sand-mining operations reclaim the land they mine, and dozens of local citizens voiced their support for reclamation legislation. In the next few months, the sand-mining task force members completed a three month action plan with facilitation help from ICA board member Randy Williams; hosted a forum wherein the owner of N-Tex, a local sand-mining operation, answered questions from residents who live near his active mines; launched a blog featuring

stories about and interviews with local residents about sand-mining activity; gave interviews on public radio; filed complaints that led to TCEQ citations against local sand mines; toured local sand-mining operations; and successfully opposed the widening of a county road that would have solely benefitted the large Fort Worth sand mining company purchasing land along that road. As of last month, residents of the area along the Red River who are directly experiencing the devastation wrought by the sand mining have come to occupy all CORE board officer positions. And most importantly, this group of citizens in a solid red county in a red state are taking on a Herculean effort and have identified large corporations as the enemy.

For these rural residents of Fannin County Texas, the appearance of sand-mining operations in their community was a Christ event. The rural residents who have participated in the sand mining task force have seen the images of self, other, and imaginary savior animating rural consciousness shaken. They have experienced the death of their hopes for some ultra-competent and powerful ally, the creative power of their own collective acts, and the true shape and contour of the oppressor's power. CORE activists like me have seen our own images shaken. We have been humbled by the relative uselessness of our own environmentalist connections to the problem at hand. We have been surprised by the vigor with which these Republican-voting rural folks have rallied to fight against corporate power and to push for regulations. We are a little less inclined to play the rescuer and a little more inclined to step back and give rural people space to exercise their wisdom and power.

The difficult work of organizing builds solidarity based not on some received story that reinforces given identities and friend-enemy distinctions but on shared action that, in taking on oppressive power, forces that power to reveal itself beyond the identities and stories that mask it. An organizing approach to addressing the political rural-urban divide in the United States isn't as comfortable as reframing mass media messages for a rural constituency or parsing electoral maps to amass majorities without having to mess with rural America at all. It can't be done from the safety of coastal urban enclaves, but involves sustained face to face interaction with the rural people and places that frighten us. It is a radical and risky option that won't work without transforming organizers who leave the coastal urban enclaves as well as the rural people they encounter. It is a transformation of politics by way of spiritual practice.



Uses of the Word "God"

A Definition of Theology

by Gene Marshall

"God" is a relationship word—a word of devotion similar to sweetheart, lover, friend, rock, foundation, shepherd, mother, father, and other such words of devotion. When we call the Final Mystery "God," we are making a religious confession. If we are not making a religious confession, we do not need the word "God." We can get along without the word "God" or any word like it, unless we are a self-conscious Jew, Christian, Muslim, or a member of some other religious community that uses "God" as a devotion word—as a relationship word for the Final Mystery.

Honestly living within today's culture, we find no heavenly realm of rational meanings that humans can access to make sense of the absurdity of a Big Bang Beginning, or of an evolution from the single-celled organisms that mysteriously arose on this minor planet of a marginal star in one of the hundred billion or so galaxies. The sheer Mystery of this vast expanse and of the infinitesimal minuteness of this physical cosmos is not made less Mysterious by presuming a First Cause or an Ongoing Creator of all this wonderment. As a solution to scientific meaning or contemplative awareness, the word "God" is not needed for any rational solution.

If we call this Final Mysteriousness "God," we are making an act of will, an act of devotion, an act of commitment, a leap of trust. Trust of this Final Mysteriousness does not alter the fact that we still know absolutely nothing about this Mystery—nothing with our scientific research and nothing with our contemplative inquiry. We know things, but all that we know is approximate and changing.

The famous Sufi Muslim poet, Rumi, captured the shock of calling the Final Mystery "God" with this provocative verse: "Life and death are two wings on the same bird." For Rumi, the name of that "bird" is "the actions of God." Rumi uses the word "God" devotionally. And the object of his God-devotion is *Whatever this IS that is ISING what is ISED.*

Some theologians are trying to say that God is changing. It is true that our human uses of the word "God" can be said to change or evolve. But

"changing" is not something that can be said about this Final Mystery—this Mystery about which nothing can be said. Similarly, "unchanging" cannot be said about the Absolute Mystery, unless "unchanging" means that the extent of the Absolute Mystery is no less Mysterious today than it ever was or ever will be.

The human mind cannot speak about the Absolute Mystery itself, but only about *our relationship with this Absolute Mystery*. Therefore, there can be no models of God, no images of God, no attributes of God. Why? Because Absolute Mystery cannot be thought by a human mind. The much rehearsed God-talk found in our Bibles, Torah, Koran, and other theologizing is now seen to be story-talk about our human relationship with this Mystery. The entire 3000 years of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim "God-talk" is story-talk about our human relationships with the Unspeakable Mystery, not about the Unspeakable Mystery that remains unspeakable in any human language.

We can indeed describe our experiences of our conscious relationships with this Indescribable Mystery. We actually know a lot about our experiences of this Mystery. We often call these experiences "Wonder" or "Awe"—where "Awe" means a shaking of our rational foundations resulting in a deep dread and fascination—experiences for which we need courage to sustain them as our conscious state. Such courage is part of our faith, our trust-devotion that reveres this shattering Awe as good for us. Strange as it can seem to our knowledge-hungry egos, we can revere our total ignorance before the Absolute Mystery as good for us.

Following Søren Kierkegaard's insights, we only have two basic options for our relationship with this Absolute Mystery, (1) "Yes, this is my life, and it is good" or (2) "No, I will insist on having some other 'reality' or resign myself to consciously fleeing, fighting, and inwardly hating what IS." The word "God" fits into this awareness as a *devotional* name for the Absolute Mystery when "Yes" is being said. In other words, the name "God" is a name that is expressing a positive relationship with the Absolute Mystery. "God" is not about some rational understanding of this Mystery. Similarly, Father, Mother, Friend, Rock, etc. are all words of story-time talk that describe a relationship of trust with the Mystery for which we have no description.

Relationship

What does it mean to have a relationship with any object or process? Relationship includes an

encounter of my consciousness with some *otherness* plus a response by my consciousness to that *otherness*. We have all sorts of relationships with temporal entities and processes: parents, stars, planets, children, enemies, gravity, etc. Some of these *others* can consciously respond back, some cannot. We also have relationships with internal *others*, such as our own bodies, minds, feelings, and consciousness. And we have an unavoidable relationship with that Absolute Mystery that is ISING every temporal isness and all our relationships with these temporal *othernesses*.

The argument that there is no *otherness*, that we humans are simply an inseparable aspect of an inescapable *Oneness* is only half the truth. This Mystery is indeed an *Everythingness* in which we and all things exist. But this Mystery is also a *Nothingness*, an *otherness* from which we and all things have come and to which we and all things return. This paradox of *Everythingness/Nothingness* is simply an expression of the realization that we know nothing and will forever know nothing about this Absolute Mysteriousness.

Oneness

The Oneness of the Absolute Mysteriousness is part of our faith, our leap into the darkness of Mystery. We who cherish a truly monotheistic faith do not believe that we face two powers—one that is for us and another that is against us. Rather birth and death are two wings on our experience of the same Oneness. The same "Love for us" is trusted in our death as in our birth. In other words, our faith in Oneness is not about a description of the Unknown Mystery. Rather, Oneness is about our relations with the Absolute Mystery. Again, the Absolute Mystery is that about which nothing is known, including Oneness.

When monotheistic faith seems to be in rejection of the many warring, quarreling, battling mysterious powers, this only means a rejection of scatteredness in our human devotion, not a rejection of the many Awesome aspects of life. To worship Venus as help for our love life and Mars as help for our conflict life is a scatteredness in our devotionality. Of course both love and conflict are real powers in our human existing. But worship is not about whether something exists, but about the quality of our devotion to what does exist. Monotheistic faith is about an affirmation of the goodness of every Awe-filling aspect of the Overall Awesome Mysteriousness. This quality of Oneness in our monotheistic God-talk is a confession of faith—a relational quality of trust in THAT WHOLENESS about which we know nothing with

USES OF THE WORD "GOD"

our mental faculties or with our emotional sensibilities.

Every Psalm in the Bible is a poem about a relationship of trust with the One Eternal Mystery. Here is one of my favorite Psalms, plus a bit of substitute wording and some notations for reading it aloud, as I believe all Psalms are meant to be read.

Psalm 139

Eternal Mystery, my God, . . .

You see through me. . . .

You know everything, . . . when I sit down or rise up; . . .

You watch my thoughts. . . .

You have traced my journeys and my resting places. . . .

You are familiar with all my paths.

There is not a word on my tongue that has missed your observation. . . .

You have kept a close watch in front of me, behind me, and over the top of me. . .

Your knowledge of me is beyond my understanding. . .

I cannot comprehend it.

Here there is a shift in tone of voice: it is louder now, more openly full of dread, a tone of satirical humor is added.

Where can I escape from Your presence? . .

Where can I flee from Your sight? . . .

If I travel out beyond the last galaxy, . . You are there. . . .

If I bury myself in the grave, . . You are there.

If I flee to the east where morning begins,
or go west till the ocean ends,
even there You will find me . .

Your awesome actions will grasp me. . . .

If I say, "Surely darkness will cover me,
black night will hide me." . .

No darkness is dark for You.

The night is as luminous as the day. . .

Dark and light are alike to You.

Now the voice tone shifts to sheer amazement.

It was You who fashioned my inward parts. . .

You stitched me together in my mother's womb.

I marvel at Your presence,

for You fill me with AWE.

You overwhelm me with WONDER,

And each specific entity You bring forth is full of WONDER. . . .

You see me through and through. . .

My private body is no mystery to you.

You saw as I was secretly shaped,

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patterned in the depths of earthiness. . .

You saw me unformed in the womb.

You marked down in Your records each of my limbs,

as day by day they were formed.

Not one limb was late in growing! . . .

O trusted One, how deep is Your sense of things!

How inexhaustible the subjects of Your wisdom.

Can I count them? . .

They outnumber the grains of sand . .

To finish the count, my years would have to be as numerous as Yours.

Now the voice tone is loud and angry.

O trusted One, if only You would slay all those who oppose You.

If only those killers of Your truth would but leave me in peace--

those who challenge You with their deliberate falseness,

those who viciously rebel against You. . .

How I hate them, O Eternal One, those that hate You.

I am cut to the quick when they oppose You.

I hate them with undying hatred.

I hold them all as my enemies.

Now the tone is more quiet, but with the intensity of humble confession and sober trust.

Examine me, O trusted One, . . . know my thoughts. . . .

Test me, . . see my ignorance. . . .

Watch me, . . lest I follow any road that departs from You. . .

Guide me, . . in Your primordial path.



Theologizing

Theologizing is a confessional witness meant for a community of faith and for the building of that community. Theologizing is a planet-wide address only in the sense that it is about the profound humanness that is possible for all human beings.

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But as rational content, Christian theologizing is only one of many viewpoints on this quest for realism. And Christian theologizing is a group process, rather than a merely individual opinion process. If that group is a vital community of Christian faith, we theologizers in this group work together on a common theological project for our era. We Christian theologizers serve each other, and we do so in obedience to a specific *revelation* of Final Reality, a *revelation* called "Christ/Jesus."

When the best of Christian theology speaks of *revelation*, it speaks of an encounter that illuminates all encounters for those who join this *revelation*. When the best of Christian theology speaks of *faith*, it speaks of a current human response to a current human encounter with specific events in the life of a living human being. In *faith*, specific current events are viewed through the Christian *revelation* of the meaning of all events. Christian theologizing is reflection on such *revelations* of the Christ Jesus *revelation*.

A similar theologizing is taking place among many members of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In what I view as the best of Jewish theologizing, we find an inquiry into a *revelation* about Final Reality given to us in the event of the Exodus and its accompanying new mode of law writing.

In what I view as the best of Christian theologizing, we find an inquiry into a *revelation* about Final Reality given to us in the "New Exodus" event of dying/resurrecting into the ongoing body of Christ Jesus.

In what I view as the best of Muslim theologizing, we find an inquiry into a *revelation* about Final Reality pulled into focus by events surrounding the life and teachings of Muhammad, who is also a devotee of the God of Abraham.

At least some of the theologizing within each of these vast religious communities can be seen to grapple with the implications for living the total round of life in the light of a unique *revelation* about the meaning for humans for living every event.

We can discern a great deal of overlap among the deepest theologies of these three monotheistic religions. There is also considerable uniquenesses in each of these three religious points of view concerning how Final Reality is to be viewed and trusted. In spite of these differences, all three of these Arabian-originated religions emphasize "eventfulness" and history and living that history in the light of a specific *revelatory* vision.

Buddhists, in their theoretics about Final Reality, make little or no use of the word "God" or "eventfulness," so their theoretics need not be called "theologizing." But Buddhists also revere a type of revelatory event found in the life and teachings of

the one called "Buddha." Christians talk of participating in dying with Christ Jesus in order to be *resurrected* with him to newness of life. Similarly, Buddhists talk of participating in the *enlightenment* of this historical Buddha. As actual experiences of the depths of human living, *resurrection* and *enlightenment* have overlapping meanings. Clearly each of these four religions have enrichments to share with each of the others. All *revelation* is a unique viewpoint on the Absolute Mystery of Final Reality—unknown to everyone.

The above summary is a bare-bones picture of what a confessional theology or a confessional religious theoretics looks like. "Theologizing" is reflective thoughtfulness about an event of *revelation* concerning what we are *encountering* in every event. Each event of *revelation* includes the *response* of a primal choice of trust toward living that *revelation*—a response often called "*faith*." In other words, *revelation* only becomes *revelation* when it is *revelation* to someone making the choice of *faith* to allow their lives to be so *revealed*.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

NOVEL

The Blind Assassin
by Margaret Atwood

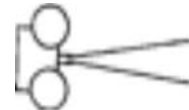
Atwood is a tough-minded woman and this book is about a tough-minded woman, Iris Chase Griffin.

The sections alternate between Iris' writing as an old woman, which is about both her present life and her memories; dated newspaper articles about her and other people in her life; and a sci-fi novel called *The Blind Assassin*. It is like reading a detective novel with clues coming from each of the writings that help you sort out what happened with Iris, her younger sister, Laura, their socialist friend, Alex, and Iris's rich ambitious husband, Richard.

The setting is Toronto and Port Ticonderoga, Canada of the 30s and 40s. Iris is a delight to be with in her cranky dotage, and the book leaves one breathless with awe.

MOVIES

Lark Rise to Candleford. I like this 40-episode, 2008-2011 BBC series so much that I purchased it and plan to see it over again, perhaps many times, as well as share it with my friends. It is based on Flora Thompson's semi-autobiographical novels set in Oxfordshire at the end of the 19th Century. In her teens, Laura Timmins leaves the hamlet of Lark



Rise for a job in the market town of Candleford, where her mother's cousin, Dorcas Lane, is postmistress. Life centers around the post office. We get to know well about a dozen characters and meet others who come and go. The series deals with personal and family issues as well as conflicts between various factions that arise. The scripts are as fine as I have ever seen, the acting superb, the setting and costuming top-notch.

The Paradise is yet another BBC series—this one about the first department store and set in the 1870's. Based on Emile Zola's novel, the lavish store is transported from Paris to England. The manager, the owners, the clerks and their personal lives are the subject. I chose to see it because it was written by Bill Gallagher, who wrote **Lark Rise to Candleford**. As expected, its 16 episodes (it was cancelled too soon) are excellent.

The Pallisers and **The Barchester Chronicles** are BBC productions of Anthony Trollope novels, both blessed with fine scripts and packed with the best of British character actors. The 26-episode **Pallisers** was filmed in 1974 and features the issues arising in various couplings, mostly arranged by class and money in the context of Parliament. Most of the men in the story are members of Parliament and the women find their significance by indirectly using their influence, which is palpable. **Barchester** has only seven episodes, and involves the clergy—two Bishops, a chaplain, the warden of a hospital, a Dean, an archdeacon—and the daughters, wives and others in the community of Barchester. Both series start rather slowly and they grew on me with their fantastic scenes between well-drawn characters which deepened my own life by simply living with them over a period of time.

Hidden Figures. I began crying at the opening of this film, a flashback of a young black woman being recognized for her brilliance in mathematics and offered free advanced training—in the 1920s!! Move to 1960 and we meet her two friends as the three drive to work at NASA. One is also a mathematician, the other an engineer. Unbelievable is the word that comes to me. First, that these three black women were actually able to make their phenomenal contributions to the space program. Second, that I had never heard of them. They are Dorothy Vaughn, Katherine Johnson, and Mary Jackson. One of the buildings at NASA is now named in honor of Katherine Johnson! I identified with their struggles as women but came to a deeper understanding of what being black added to that. Johnson had to walk a mile to get to

the bathroom and back (no colored bathrooms any closer) and then suffer complaints at taking too long on breaks. Also, a separate clunky coffee pot was set up in the large working room for coloreds (meaning her). Another “unbelievable” was their ability to plan ahead and to patiently and skillfully overcome sizable barriers (including tremendous lack of respect when they were by far the most capable in the room). By the way, I did a fact check, and John Glenn actually did insist that Katherine check the numbers before he agreed on launch.

Wonder Woman. It was very satisfying to watch the fierce, yet kind Amazonian women train for battle. I think the key to the “wonder” of the entire film was that these women and the young one they trained, the goddess Diana, combined their amazing toughness with wisdom. The actress, Gal Gadot, carried off that quality beautifully as her Diana moved from the hidden island of the Amazons to the Europe of World War I. She was matter-of-fact about her powers, yet never arrogantly overbearing, and always compassionate toward the suffering of others. This is a film I want to see again.

Toni Erdmann is a German film about a jokester father and his serious adult daughter. Nearly three hours long, I could have sat longer. It is funny, serious, and always surprising. I usually don't care for pranksters, but Winifred, Ines' father, had me laughing from the first scene. He visits Ines in Bucharest where she has a trim suit, high-heeled job with an international capitalistic company that puts bottom line over workers. Toni Erdmann is one of the pseudonyms Winifred assumes with a sloppy disguise when he shows up at her important meetings.

Paterson is a story of two artists who live in Paterson, New Jersey. Paterson is a bus driver who is also a poet (Paterson from Paterson). Laura, his wife, creates in black and white—walls and curtains in the house, everything she wears, cupcakes she sells at the farmers market. Their dog, Marvin, is also a main character. We follow Paterson through a week of his daily routine: waking beside his wife, breakfast, walking to work creating a poem, sitting in his bus writing the day's poem, starting the bus, driving the route, observing those about him, walking home, walking the dog and stopping by the neighborhood bar. I kept fearing some violent event was going to occur—like in most movies. The major happenings relate to Marvin the dog, and a chance meeting with another poet on a park bench. My kind of film!

RECOMMENDED READING

Confirmation is about a father and son spending a weekend together. The mother has remarried after divorcing the father and it is his time with the son. Not a great film, though it did grow on me, and demonstrated the importance of being friends with your offspring. The father was struggling with several issues in his life and he and the son went through intense experiences together, supporting one another.

Hell or High Water is also about relationships between males. It is a fine Texas movie filmed in the area where I grew up. It explores the relationship between two adult brothers who decide to rob the banks that robbed their mother in order to save the family farm; the relationship between two Texas Rangers who are trying to capture the brothers; the relationship between one of the brothers and his teen son; and the relationship between one of the Rangers and one of the brothers. Like **Confirmation**, there are no heroes in this film—just ordinary guys trying to do their best. Both films reveal that life is not black and white, right and wrong, but involves a great deal of ambiguity. Both films are also sprinkled with humor.

Hail Caesar. After the first hour of this film we considered not even seeing the rest. Then it got strangely interesting and by the end even awesome. I hesitate to try to say what the film means to me. The Coen brothers' creations have a wildness to them that is inexplicable. For me the film both spoofs the movie industry as it makes clear its wondrous gifts, and it also spoofs religion (specifically Christianity) while at the same time bringing about the experience of its depths. One of the awesome aspects of the film is the music of the Red Army Choir, made doubly moving because of the loss en masse of this irreplaceable group to an unexplained air crash the week before I saw the film.

Lion. Based on a true story, **Lion** follows Saroo, a five-year-old in India who becomes lost from his older brother in a train station and ends up many miles away in Calcutta. Unable to speak the language and find his way home to his beloved mother, Saroo escapes several dangerous situations, is picked up by social services, and adopted by a couple in Australia. In his 20s he begins the search to find his way back to his home. Very touching film!

Manchester by the Sea. Though this is a gloomy film, I appreciated the way Lee was able to work through the guilt and trauma of his messy past by dealing with the responsibility placed on him for

the care of his nephew, a handful for anyone.

The Lady. I was somewhat familiar with Burmese heroine, Aung San Suu Kyi, and I was delighted with this biographical drama showing what it meant for her, her English husband, and their two sons to give up their happy life in England in order for her to take on her father's role for political freedom in Burma. Her husband became a hero to me for taking on the kind of role women often do for men in supporting her and her work.

Loving. Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter were the plaintiffs in the 1967 Supreme Court case which invalidated state laws prohibiting interracial marriage. This film tells their story beginning with their marriage in 1958. Most surprising to me was how quiet and steady the two were—even when hauled out of bed and jailed, and even when they had to leave their roots, families, and friends in rural Virginia and relocate to urban Washington D.C. Richard learned what it was like to be black, although not quite. He could have been left alone if he had dissolved the marriage. But, as he told his attorney before the Supreme Court hearing, "Tell the judge that I love my wife." I found myself saying, "Thank God for the ACLU."

The Edge of Seventeen. I didn't expect to like this teen film. Indeed Nadine, her mother and brother were overdrawn. Nevertheless, I was intrigued throughout and found Woody Harrelson's portrayal of Nadine's history teacher to be delightful and a model to emulate. The movie opens with his deadpan response to Nadine's long dramatic announcement of her intention to kill herself, and throughout he manages to take the tone of a Zen master with her desperation.

RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

SPIRIT/RELIGION

Out of Your Mind

by Alan Watts

Sounds True, 2017



Perhaps the West's foremost interpreter of Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism, and Taoism, Watts left a number of books when he died in 1973. Fortunately, his son, Mark, has pulled together as many since his death, from Alan's writings and talks. This most recent collection is a written version of a collection of audio talks produced by Sounds True a decade ago. I have read and appreciated a number of Watts' books, and this one

RECOMMENDED READING

is the best yet. It is at once accessible, brilliant and funny, expressing his combination of ecological awareness and mystical experience.

The Unfindable Inquiry
by Scott Kiloby
Non-Duality Press, 2016

Kiloby asserts that each of us has a story of a core deficient self, a false story of “what is wrong with me.” He identifies various forms this takes with chapters of his dialogues with individuals. He also explains how you can use two methods on your own to discover your false deficient self and to come to realize that it doesn’t actually exist. Key to Kiloby’s exploration is to vulnerably face our doubt, fear, or insecurity. My favorite quote in the book: “Your true power lies in openhearted vulnerability.”

Religious Diversity
by Rita M. Gross
Cascade Books, 2014

I have appreciated Rita Gross’ books on feminism and religion and on Buddhism. I was sorry to learn of her death in 2015 at age 72. This is her last book. In the Preface she tells how she was raised Lutheran and at age 21 was excommunicated for not swearing loyalty to the doctrines of the church. It reminded me of my experience as a teenager of being removed as choir director of the local Southern Baptist Church when it was discovered (evidently by window peepers) that I participated in dances at the local club house – probably the most innocent activity local teens could do. The dances were sponsored by adults (including my parents) who played 78 records of Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman. Gross went on to become a college professor of religious studies and, after ten years practicing Judaism, became a Buddhist.

Her thesis in this book is that it is destructive and dysfunctional to claim that one religion is true and all others false. She claims that not only is it not necessary for deep spirituality to claim your religion to be the only valid one, such belief may be harmful to the quality of one’s religious life. She also notes that hardly any other facet of religion has caused as much suffering as male dominance. Gross discusses the problem of many Christian missionary efforts and proselytizing even though this sort of evangelizing is not essential to Christianity. She notes that Americans combine strong opinions about religion with basic religious ignorance. She encourages learning about unfamiliar religions from an empathetic perspective. After all, all religions place the highest value on compassion.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Winter is Coming
Why Vladimir Putin and The Enemies
of the Free World Must Be Stopped
by Garry Kasparov
Public Affairs, 2015

For 20 years Garry Kasparov was the world’s number-one-ranked chess player. In 2005 he retired from professional chess to help lead the pro-democracy opposition against Vladimir Putin. His close colleague, Boris Nemtsov was murdered in that effort and Kasparov is now living in self-imposed exile in New York. Written before the 2016 US election campaign, this book couldn’t be more relevant. Kasparov thinks Reagan was better (firmer) at dealing with Russia than any US administration since. He says Putin and his junta have turned Russia into a petro-state and Putin’s only goal is to stay in power. This book tells the history of how this came about. Here is a quote: “For at least a decade now, those who defend Putin either have something to gain from it or they are dangerously ignorant.” He says to understand Putin, read Mario Puzo’s *Godfather* trilogy: “the web of betrayals, the secrecy, and the blurred lines between what is business, what is government, and what is criminal.” Recently Kasparov has said that Trump’s courting of Putin is ‘sinister’ and may spell doom for America.

Private Empire
ExxonMobil and American Power
by Steve Coll
Penguin, 2012

Pulitzer Prize winner Coll tells the story of ExxonMobil beginning with the 1989 Valdez spill and leading to the Gulf of Mexico spill in 2010. We get up close and personal with CEO Lee Raymond and then Rex Tillerson (now US Secretary of State). The somewhat shadowy connection of US government to oil production was news to me. Coll takes us inside detailed deliberations between the oil corps and the presidents. It is also useful to know more about Tillerson’s background. His father was a Boy Scout executive, and Tillerson’s values are based on scouting and his favorite book, Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*. He was born, raised and educated in Texas, and his present wife was a cowgirl barrel-racer. (Not important, I suppose, but an interesting bit of gossip.)

On Equilibrium
Six Qualities of the New Humanism
by John Ralston Saul
Four Walls Eight Windows, 2004

RECOMMENDED READING

Saul proposes these six qualities—Common Sense, Ethics, Imagination, Intuition, Memory, and Reason—to develop and balance in our living. He sees the need for Common Sense these days because technology interferes with it. Perhaps the best example of Ethics is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission where victims were heard and spoke to those who had inflicted the harm—not to extract revenge but to have the truth acknowledged. Saul says that we Imagine the other when we transcend the self. Intuition is needed to balance Reason. Memory is important in that we not forget the violence we have done, i.e., the Holocaust, the Witch Hunts, Slavery, and Native American genocide. Saul notes that the utilitarian, interest-based corporatist viewpoint has chased reason from our public imagination and replaced it with mechanistic dogma. He sees the need to use reason for memory and ethical judgment. So the idea of equilibrium is the balance of these six qualities in concert with one another to make a true human being.

Good People

The Only Leadership Decision That Really Matters

by Anthony Tjan

Penguin Random House, 2017

The key to this book is the belief that we have a duty to help others become the fullest, truest versions of themselves, and to move beyond settling for “hero-oriented leaders” of competency to “servant-oriented leaders” of character who are committed to building cultural systems based on values. Tjan has discovered in his work as a CEO that hiring people who are self-aware, who listen to others, who are authentic, and who are respectful to others means that the company is more successful. He shares his Goodness Pyramid of qualities he seeks in workers. He also describes how to care for these workers so that they love to go to work. It is encouraging to see signs of a new mood in work places.

Arguing For Our Lives

A User’s Guide to Constructive Dialog

by Robert Jensen

City Lights Books, 2013

Jensen offers clear frameworks for engaging in constructive dialog about the issues that matter—rather than shouting matches, or “That’s just my opinion,” or “America, love it or leave it.” In a clear accessible manner, he explains how to note and defend your assumptions, clearly define what you mean by your terms, and offer evidence and reasoning to support your opinions. He discusses approaching questions ecologically, societally and

personally and attempting to understand our world philosophically, historically and sociologically. He includes chapters about thinking critically about politics, religion and news media. He introduces Abe Osheroff, a political organizer going back to the 1930’s who died in 2008. Osheroff made the point that though we all have greed as part of our core, it is in our self-interest to pursue a path of generosity, love, and affection.

Plain Radical

*Living, Loving, and Learning
to Leave the Planet Gracefully*

by Robert Jensen

Soft Skull Press, 2015

Jim Koplin was Robert Jensen’s teacher, mentor and dear friend. No one affected his life more. This biography/memoir is beautifully honest and vulnerable, explores political and ecological ethics, lays out clear thinking on patriarchy, and tells the story of a good death. This book is a delight to read, and includes an excellent recipe which I have added to my collection.



BEYOND PATRIARCHY

My friend and colleague Pat Webb has joined me in creating and leading an interactive workshop under this title. So far we have presented it to groups in Bonham, Texas, Santa Rosa, California and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. We will be leading it in Houston, Texas this December and Tulsa, Oklahoma next spring. The following books are among the extensive material that has fed our thinking in developing this program. Our approach is to challenge the system of patriarchy, not men themselves, who have found the workshop as helpful as women do. We explore five aspects of the patriarchal system in which we swim, sometimes unconsciously, and how we participate in each aspect, sometimes as oppressors and sometimes as oppressed. Then we offer processes as antidotes which move us beyond the system. Each participant learns the processes and takes home a manual explaining them so they can be practiced and taught to others. If you are interested in such a workshop in your area contact me at jamarshall@cableone.net.

RECOMMENDED READING

The True Life

by Alain Badiou
Polity Press, 2017

This small, three-chapter book by 79-year-old French philosopher Badiou is directed to today's youth. His definition of a false life is one struggling for power and money. A true life involves creating something new that is NOT pursuing money and power. He notes that in his youth there was still initiation—military for boys and marriage for girls. The lack of initiation today means an endless adolescence with a focus on buying—big toys like cars, TVs, smartphones, vacations, etc.—and a sense of being adrift. Also, there is less value placed on age. Badiou proposes an alliance of the aged and the youth—the over 60s with the under 30s. He sees this as a time of crisis when old traditions are shaken up—castes, nobilities, hereditary monarchies, religious obligation, initiation of the young, subjugation of women, separation of the powerful few and masses of workers. These traditions have been abandoned by capitalism, leaving ruthless, arbitrary, violent free play of the economy and nothing but money as a universal referent. He imagines the wise elders guiding youth in creating a new egalitarian symbolization opposed to the destructive symbols of capitalism or the option of reactive fascism—to a true life, not just a job or a career.

That summarizes his first chapter. The second chapter focuses on the contemporary fate of boys and the third chapter on the contemporary fate of girls. Once again, in summary: boys are at risk of never becoming an adult and girls are premature women. Young males are eternal consumerists and competitive adolescents and young females are pre-mature becoming-women driven by the cynicism of social becoming—both of these driven by the capitalist monster. Badiou says: "What might the world become under these conditions? A herd of stupid adolescent boys led by smart career women." His vision for the future is that both young males and females will choose to be servants of the human race through "a new symbolization of birth and all its consequences." This is a fascinating book worth careful reading.

The Descent of Man

by Grayson Perry
Penguin Book, 2017

British artist Perry deals with the subject of masculinity in a style that is friendly to men, humorous, and pulls no punches. He names the four components of traditional masculinity (or the male sex role) as No Sissy Stuff, The Big Wheel (the quest for success and status and to be looked up

to), The Sturdy Oak (toughness, confidence and self-reliance), and Give 'Em Hell (the acceptance of violence, aggression and daring in men's behavior). He addresses the areas of power, performance, violence, and emotion.

He says, "Having been unaware of the myriad ways they are privileged, men feel feminism is an attack on their core identity rather than a call for equality." Even a taste of equality causes men to feel they are being "hauled in front of the headmistress and given a right good dressing-down and it's not fair." Men are highly fearful of being ridiculed because the male role is much more heavily policed. As an example Perry notes that a father would rather walk down the street with his daughter in dungarees waving a plastic sword than with his young son in a tutu waving a plastic fairy wand. It comes down to this stark fact: Globally, three-quarters of suicides are by men. Perry relates this dire consequence to an attempt to live up to an outdated image of masculinity.

He suggests needed change in the way we bring up boys that increases the tolerance of a spectrum of masculinities. He closes with a list of men's rights: To be vulnerable, to be weak, to be wrong, to be intuitive. The right not to know, to be uncertain, to be flexible. And finally, the right not to be ashamed of any of these.

The End of Patriarchy

Radical Feminism for Men
by Robert Jensen
Spinifex Press, 2017

University professor and writer Robert Jensen joins Grayson Perry in seeing his role relative to feminism as speaking to men. He understands that feminist women have done amazing work. He is particularly appreciative of Andrea Dworkin. Having become a feminist by learning from her and other women he wants to interpret those understandings to other men. He says that patriarchy begins in men's claims to own women's bodies, especially reproduction and sexuality, and that the two oldest oppressions, patriarchy and human domination of the world, share the pathological belief that we can own things. He sees no human future in capitalism, as it is premised on the market and the ownership of all. Jensen notes that patriarchy is a relatively recent development. In the 200,000 years of our species only about the last 6,000 years have been hierarchical or male-dominated. He sees it connected to the agricultural revolution. In his chapter on the culture of rape and violence Jensen emphasizes the need to appropriately socialize young men. He sees pornography as part of the patriarchal culture and

RECOMMENDED READING

as destructive of men's humanity. In discussing sexual exploitation he raises and answers an important question: What is sex for? I recommend this book for both men and women.

Caliban and the Witch

Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation

by Silvia Federici

Autonomedia, 2004, revised 2014

Federici's work on feminism goes back to the 1970's when she felt neither the Radical Feminists nor the Social Feminists provided a satisfactory explanation of the roots of the exploitation of women. In this book she explores the transition from feudalism to capitalism and its affect on women. The title draws on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with Caliban representing the anti-colonial rebel and the Witch representing female heretics, healers, disobedient wives, women who dared to live alone, and those who inspired slaves to revolt. Compare that model of strong women to the new model of femininity which emerged at the end of the 17th Century (after centuries of state terrorism): ideal wife, passive, obedient, thrifty, chaste. Federici investigates the 300 years of witch hunts of the Middle Ages, the role of which she sees to create out of the female body workers for the burgeoning capitalist economy. She tells the horrific story of the many ways that the power of women was destroyed culminating in the massacre and cruel torture of hundreds of thousands of women. The witch hunt was a turning point in women's lives. No doubt the psyche of every woman is affected still by so many of the strongest of us being so treated. Yet the witch hunt is one of the most understudied phenomena in European history.



The Gift of Fear

*And Other Survival Signals
That Protect us From Violence*

by Gavin de Becker

Delta, 1997

This book begins by noting that 75 women are raped every hour and 2 women are killed by a male partner every 2 hours. The numbers change a bit year by year (you can google it for an update) but the point is that at present the patriarchal world is dangerous. De Becker notes that at core, men are afraid women will laugh at them, while at core, women are afraid men will kill them. His expertise

on violent behavior began as a child raised in a violent home. His clients now include Hollywood stars and government agencies. His advice, and the core of the book is to trust your intuition. If you feel fear in a situation, don't override it. He says that human violence is not random or senseless, at least not to the perpetrator and that there are pre-incident indicators. He has taught them to the FBI and in this book will teach them to you. His stories are fascinating to read as well as instructive. The chapter, "I Was Trying to Let Him Down Easy," was amazing. He notes (and demonstrates) that men who cannot let go choose women who cannot say no. As for guns, statistically speaking, the man and wife who own and have licenses to carry concealed weapons to protect themselves are far more likely to shoot each other than some criminal. This book is quite readable and useful.

EcoTopia

by Ernest Callenbach

Heyday, originally 1975, anniversary edition, 2014

This book, called prescient in 2008, is more stunningly so today. Ecotopia translates "home place" and was born out of an attempt to deal with a practical issue—sewage. Written in 1975, it is set in the future of 1999. In 1980 the states of Washington and Oregon had joined northern California in seceding from the union. Most Americans have been barred from traveling to Ecotopia and the book is made up of the newspaper articles and the diary entries of Will Weston, the first American mainstream reporter to visit. The book is one of the manuals of the bioregional movement we have been a part of since 1984, as the country of Ecotopia was formed out of a vision of relating to the earth sustainably, emphasizing biology more than physics. The vision involves being rooted to place. Community relationships are central. Everyone is an artist of some kind and everyone sings and dances. Attitudes toward sex are looser and politically it is egalitarian (Ecotopia has a woman president). Ecological values rule.

In 2012, Callenbach, aware of his upcoming death, left an epistle to us Ecotopians. It is included in the 40th anniversary edition and can also be found online. It is his "thoughts and attitudes that may prove useful in the dark times we are facing." He discusses hope, mutual support, practical skills, organizing, learning to live with contradictions, and the Big Picture. In one paragraph he describes with amazing specificity (in 2012, mind you) our present president. He closes with an encouragement to appreciate the Japanese wisdom of the beauty of wabi-sabi. "Let us embrace decay, for it is the source of all new life and growth."

RECOMMENDED READING



Review by Gene Marshall

Sapiens

A Brief History of Humankind

by Yuval Noah Harari

Being a history buff, I found this book worthy of an extended review. If you are a serious student of patriarchal oppression and women's issues, you may find this study minimalist on your topics. I had a similar feeling about the deep and subtle matters of racism, nativism, and cultural bigotries. And most of all, I found this book lacking in depth with regard to the essence of religion and religious history.

If, however, we want a well-illustrated overview of basic social, ecological, economic, and life style matters from the pre-civilization hunter-gatherer period to the 21st century, this is a book to own and treasure. Often Harari's colorful turn of perspective was fresh for me. The pictures and diagrams alone are artful, interesting, and useful. His use of the title "*Sapiens*" means that he reserves the word "humans" to cover a wider range of species—Neanderthals and other big-brained, upright-walking primates. It took me a while to absorb this 416-page text, yet it is indeed brief in terms of the scope of time and space that Harari ventured to cover—namely, the whole sapiens story from 70,000 years ago until the present.

I treasure Harari's thoroughgoing appreciation of the scientific approach to truth. He not only pursues a scientific approach to history, he also portrays science as a huge ingredient in the history of modern times. Harari understands how an openness to ignorance is a characteristic of the scientific mode of truth. We are truly scientific when we have an openness to new views of nature, exploring new lands about which nothing is known, and embracing new technologies and styles of living that depart drastically from the familiar.

True to our limited facts about the pre-civilization period, Harari's portrayal of this period is startling. He sees our ancient ancestors as an intensely communal species, undergoing a revolution in awareness about being conscious beings with new powers to work together to feed and protect themselves. The development of stone tools made our species a powerful presence and the

builders of huge stone structures, long before the dawn of civilization. We owe a lot to the trial and error solutions of this early period.

And, surprisingly early, sapiens became the most destructive species in the natural world. With nothing but stone tools and cooperation, most of the largest animals were hunted to extinction in every new land to which we sapiens migrated. For example, before sapiens made the near miraculous ocean trip to Australia (beginning about 45,000 years ago), that continent was populated with 450-pound six-foot kangaroos, marsupial lions as massive as a modern tiger, flightless birds twice the size of ostriches, two-and-a-half-ton wombats, and other large animals. All these large creatures and some smaller ones were harvested and/or driven to extinction long before Europeans arrived. A similar story took place when sapiens migrated from Siberia into the New World continents. There was no predator that could keep us in check, and there was no prey animal that we could not kill.

Harari documents how the invention of agriculture had both benefits and severe downsides. We put up with agriculture only because once sapiens engaged in it, there was no turning back. We need the details of this story to help us shape our future reconstruction of agriculture for our now imperiled future.

I was also impressed with Harari's early story about the rise of capitalism, how a general openness to the future in the Western world enabled investors to trust the future enough to risk extending vast amounts of credit, betting on future returns. We can view the 1492 Columbus trip in this light. The resources allocated by the Spanish crown for ship-building and staffing of the Columbus adventure was like a promising investment, a bet on future wealth for the Spanish crown. Such freeing up of risked capital or credit has been the core gift that has made the entire industrial era possible. We now face the planetary limitations of that trend, but it has been a huge ride, expanding the human population from five hundred million to seven billion in 500 years.

In his closing chapters, Harari deals with the recent rise of the vast power of machines and robots to take over tasks once done by humans and animals. Will these ever-more-capable machines make humans their slaves? If these robotic machines ever become capable of replicating themselves, however lacking they are in that inner reality called "consciousness," they may become the Frankenstein monsters that our literature has feared. Herein is another grim challenge we sapiens now face, along with climate catastrophe and nuclear annihilation.

Who Are We?

Realistic Living is a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to religion and ethics. We see our core task as promoting and equipping a movement for a next practice of Christian living, theologizing, and mission directed toward the actual problems we face in our contemporary history.

Our focus is on the Christian heritage, but we foster an interreligious, non-bigoted attitude toward religious practices. We view a next Christianity that contributes its gifts to the general interreligious dialogue and to a thoroughgoing reconstruction of secular society.

For this next Christianity, we see an emphasis on small-group intimacy in a weekly pattern of nurture and training toward a thoroughgoing love for a local parish of responsibility and for the whole planet. We see a vast transition of church life toward “fresh wineskins” that can contain the “new wine” of the recovered “good news.”

Each June we conduct a Leadership Training School and a Research Symposium that build movement in local places across the continent and world.

We invite you to consider a week-long sojourn with us in Bonham, Texas, tailored for your specific journey in spirit matters and in Christian mission to your local parish of responsibility. For more information on any of these topics, email us at:

jgmarshall@cableone.net

We invite you to visit our website, *RealisticLiving.org*, which contains many resources for you to use: videos, essays, courses, books, methods, suggestions.

Our Finances?

We ask you to think of Realistic Living as the promoter of a movement in which you can participate, not only with your financial support, but also in your use of our materials and organizing in your place of responsibility.

Your contributions are carefully spent on a crucially important mission. You get a “big bang for your buck.”

We encourage you to consider monthly contributions that are sent automatically by your bank. We have already made considerable progress in this direction, giving us a steady income in addition to a strong year-end financial support.

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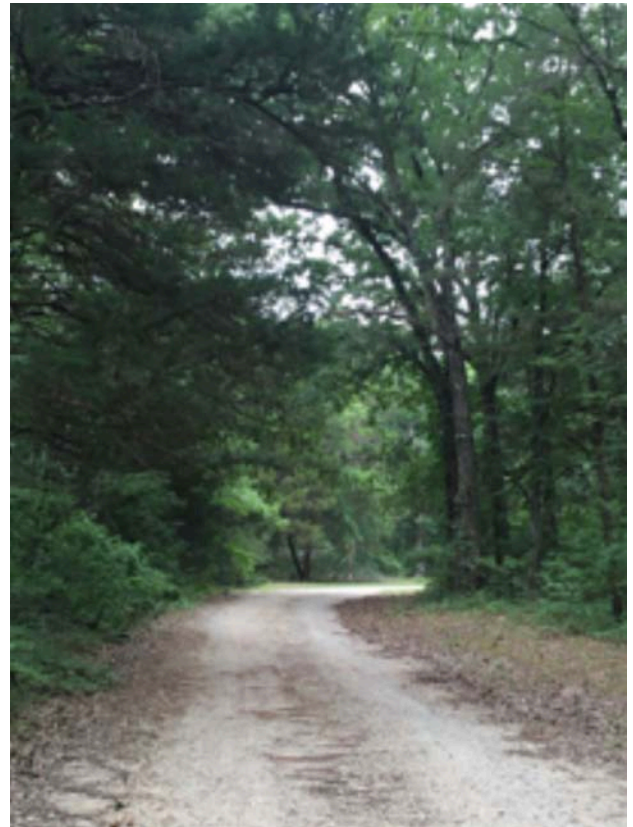
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is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

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