

# Realistic Living

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Contents of this Issue

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Issue 69

## GOD QUESTIONS

a theological query by Gene Marshall

## THE SUPERHERO RENAISSANCE

superhero stories as confession by Alan Richard

## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

## RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce, Jeanette Stanfield, & Gene

## REALISTIC LIVING NEWS

social structures, but especially to the perpetual revolution in religious forms. The word "God" and words like it, have been in perpetual revolution all the way back to Moses and all the way forward to any radical new edition of Christianity.

One of Mathews' favorite spins was about how Spirit cries out, "Give me form," and how the form that we give to Spirit can never contain the Spirit that cried out for form. For example, the first sermon I ever gave was on the topic of Christian love. I chose as my text, "Let love be genuine."

## God Questions

A theological query by Gene Marshall

Realistic Living faculty member Alan Richard has been attending meetings of the God Seminar, a group of scholars who are probing the topic of "God" that occurs on the other side of that revolution in religious thought that is sometimes called "the death of God."

The following essay is my weighing in on this topic, a topic I have been living with, thinking about, and acting upon since at least 1953.

### Perpetual Revolution in our use of the word "God"

My mentor for 20 years, Joe Mathews, was a graduate student and long-term friend of H. Richard Niebuhr. "Perpetual revolution" is a phrase and an emphasis that Mathews took from Niebuhr and passed on to me. This phrase was applied to all



That talk held some spirit truth, but I have over the years come to see that Christian love exceeds in its mystery that small insight. The most recent talk I attempted on this topic emphasized love as "care" and how such love is like Atlas lifting the planet, a very heavy "mountain of care."

The word "God" also indicates a topic that is still in process of clarifying for me. During the last two decades I have done a great deal of thinking and living in relation to this topic. Here is a list of questions that are still open questions that I and

many others continue asking and answering again and again.

### Four Sets of "God" Questions

#### 1. "God" as a concept within two-realm God-talk (i.e. traditional theism):

How is two-realm God-talk dead?  
 When was two-realm God-talk alive?  
 How and why did two-realm God-talk die?  
 Why is this "death" crucial for future realism?

#### 2. "God" as a discussion about Reality:

What is Profound Reality?  
 How do we know Profound Reality?  
 How does Profound Reality differ from our rational pictures of reality?  
 How is Profound Reality "Eternal," in the sense of being true for every human?  
 How is this Profound Reality (or experience of the Eternal) related to religious practice?

#### 3. "God" as a devotional word that adds no content to Profound Reality:

What does devotional language add to our experience of Profound Reality?  
 What use of the word "God" is needed in a revitalized practice of Judaism, Christianity or Islam?  
 In this devotional sense, is there a post-two-realm theism?  
 Is such theism restricted to devotional communities?  
 Does secular philosophy have any valid use for the word "God"?

#### 4. "God" as a discussion of all devotional words for Profound Reality:

Is the Great Goddess of deep antiquity a devotional word for Reality?  
 Are "Yahweh" "Our Father Almighty" and "Allah" devotional words?  
 What words for a "God-devotion to Profound Reality" do we find in: Hinduism? Buddhism? Taoism? Native American? African? & more?

I am not going to deal with all those questions in this essay. I have dealt with them in books that I have listed as end notes in this journal. In this essay

I will focus only on those questions in the third set of questions—that is, on "God" as a devotional word that adds no content to Profound Reality.

### What does devotional language add to our experience of Profound Reality?

Devotional language like "God," "Christ," "Holy Spirit," "Grace," and even "Sin," add nothing to our understanding of Profound Reality. These words only add devotion to that Mysterious Profoundness that we never fully understand. Devotion is *contentless*, rationally speaking. This contentless devotion is *relationship* with whatever content real life offers us.

As Søren Kierkegaard so carefully pointed out in *The Sickness Unto Death*, "Sin" is a word of devotion with which to affirm the reality of the *despair* that results from rejecting and attempting to flee Reality. And "God" is a word of devotion to that same Reality that we so often reject and attempt to flee. Kierkegaard views "faith in God" as an obedience, or commitment, or devotion to the trustworthiness of Reality. When we understand the core Christian vocabulary as devotional words, we can see that these words add no sensory, mental, or emotional content to Reality. They only add an expression of commitment in our consciousness to every bit of content that Reality brings us.

### What use of the word "God" is needed in a revitalized practice of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam?

I view these three long practiced religions as three viewpoints on the Mysterious Abyss of Reality. Each of these groups of religions is rooted in an event that reveals the "Trustworthiness" of Reality for human trust. In each the word "God" holds that trust. Therefore, a viable future for any of these religions, requires the metaphorical translation of the word "God" (Yahweh, Allah, Lord, Almighty, whatever) from a character in the second-realm type of story-telling, to a one realm set of metaphors that mean devotion to the Absolute Abyss of Profound Mystery. Human knowing never encompasses

Mysterious Reality with a capital “R,” which capitalization indicates profundity. “Sweetheart” is also a devotional word, but unlike the devotional word “God,”



“sweetheart” does not usually carry the meaning of “ultimate concern.” Paul Tillich points out that “God” is a devotional word that means an *ultimate concern* for *Ultimate Reality*.

If we are oriented in an ultimate concern for a temporal reality, that is properly understood in these religions as “idolatry.” If White Nationalism is functioning as our “God,” that means an ultimate concern for a temporal power. The same can be said for choosing money or status as our God-devotion. And here is a second type of violation of being ultimately devoted to Ultimate Reality—having a limited concern for that Ultimate Mysterious Reality that requires an ultimate concern.

**In this devotional sense,  
is there a post-two-realm theism?**

“Yes,” is my short answer. Such a theism becomes a study of Reality in the context of a devoted-to-Reality mode of consciousness. Such a theism describes a permanent revolution of openness or willingness to change our mind. Such openness is the quality of any true research scientist or any true prophetic poet who is addressing a culture’s ethical delusions. Similarly, radical Christian theology is a permanent revolution of openness to the Absolute Mysteriousness pointed to by the word “Reality.”

**Is such theism restricted to  
devotional communities?**

“Yes again,” is my short answer. “God.” “Allah,” “Yahweh,” etc. are words that only have meaning in a religious group of practitioners—a sub-culture that uses that language for devotional purposes. Only within such a community does

theism or God-talk have a serious impact. Without such a community of faith, the word “God” become an empty concept with no meaning power for our actual living.

**Does secular philosophy have any  
valid use for the word “God”?**

“No,” is my short answer. This answer has to do with my definition of philosophy as a temporal discipline of learning. I am insisting that the discipline of philosophy cannot claim to be a “metaphysics”—an overview of thought that has some sort of absoluteness or permanence. If a philosophy claims absoluteness, that makes it a religion or a quasi-religion, rather than merely being one of the many disciplines of learning. All the human disciplines of learning, including philosophy, can create useful overviews that benefit our human cultures with our human need for meaning, order, and practicality, but these overviews can no longer be associated with a term like “metaphysics” or any other claim to absoluteness. Some new word like “metabilt” or “metaview” will have to do.

For example, physics is itself a type of metaview supported by sensory experience. And there is no *meta* (no meaning world that is *before*) physics, or biology, or psychology, or anthropology, or history, or the arts. All the disciplines of learning are finite, approximate, temporary, impermanent, progressive, changing overviews of human meaning. We have no permanent meaning of life that the rational minds of humanity can encompass. Permanent meaning has to be an aspect of a faith-relation to Permanent and thereby Mysterious Reality.

As Paul Tillich indicated, we live in an era characterized by “the anxiety of meaninglessness.” This is our wholesome fate—never to have the final answers to anything. Even our questions are finite and passing. This need not mean a contempt for our curiosity or our mental work to push the edges of our understanding. Rather, accepting Total Mysteriousness as our “God” (our “Final Good”) encourages our mental life. It is *rigidity of mind*

about *supposed final answers* that promotes the widespread anti-intellectualism of our times.

To have a core lasting meaning for our lives, the only help we have are events of awakening that provide our consciousness with opportunities to trust Reality. And such trust is a leap into the Dark Night of Total Mysteriousness. We have no proof of mind for this trust. Such trust precedes even our thinking about the meaning of the word “trust.” Our thinking about trust, (as well as love, freedom, and other primal states of consciousness) distinguishes religious theoretics (including our Christian theologizing) from our philosophizing or any other discipline of human learning.

Such a demotion of the human disciplines of learning is best understood as *flexibility* or as a *healing* of our dogmatic, arrogant, rationalistic, authoritarian bigotries. When God-talk is about a “Yes” to Reality, we enter a curious journey with Absolute Mystery by our side as our only finally dependable companion. Even the word “dependable” now has a mysterious meaning. We live “by faith alone” as dear Luther put it.

*For more on these “God Questions”  
see the end notes on page 17.*

## The Superhero Renaissance

Superhero Stories as Confession  
by Alan J. Richard

The Lone Ranger: What are we going to do, Tonto?  
Tonto: What do you mean *we*, Paleface?  
- very old superhero joke

Superheroes are back, but what are they after now? Are they here simply to provide us with escapist entertainment? That doesn’t seem to be the formula. The most commercially successful superhero movie franchises of the last two decades —Fox’s X-Men, Warner Brothers’ Dark Knight Batman trilogy, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe —ask us uncomfortable questions about what we fear, how we defend ourselves against it, and how we call that good.

This is a far cry from what superheroes were doing in the comic books, radio programs, and movie serials of the 1940s, the superhero television

series aimed at children or slyly making fun of a children’s genre in the 1950s and 1960s, or even previous excellent screen adaptations like Richard Donner’s 1978 *Superman*. Then, superheroes transported us to a world where “our” consensus about what is right, backed by authorities we had put in place at the highest level, was given the power necessary to overwhelm the wrong. This was their appeal during the second wave of the Depression when they appeared and during World



War II when they were everywhere, and this is why people began to lose interest in them as soon as the tide began to turn in that war.

Today’s superheroes still spend a lot more time duking it out with enemies than they spend questioning their own values. But the stories of the superhero renaissance submit the superheroic “good” for *our* examination, dramatize its ambiguity, and in doing so challenge beliefs deeply rooted in our fears and desires. This has been the appeal of superhero movies since 2000’s X-Men made mutants

with superpowers into a metaphor for stigmatized minorities in general and set their actions against a debate about the use of revolutionary violence. It is also the appeal of 2018's *Infinity War*, which has broken multiple box office records with a story in which superheroes are deprived of both victory and any clear justification for their actions.

It could be said that the Golden Age of superheroes invented the superhero to do battle on behalf of an imagined oppressed majority backed by a higher authority against a perceived mid-level elite minority. This is why superheroes can nab the villain and then turn that villain over to the authorities even if that villain is himself a cop or a political officeholder. Ultimately, someone trustworthy is always in charge. The superhero stories of today have been reinvented to do battle on behalf of imagined oppressed minorities against an oppressive majority consensus. This is more than a simple reversal because, as students of racist, patriarchal, colonial, heteronormative, and economic oppression have all noticed, majority consensus tends to be manufactured by those who hold power but also internalized by those who don't. The trust in "legitimate" authorities at the highest level collapses when the enemy is able to manipulate public consensus—indeed even consensus within an oppressed minority. The question of what authorizes heroic action on "our" behalf is thrown back in "our" lap.

The superhero renaissance is not an attack on the superhero icon but a collective practice in which we use that icon to draw honest-as-possible picture-stories of the fears and desires stirring in our imagination and then pay attention to what those picture-stories tell us about those fears and desires. It is a practice of confession, if we regard confession as saying as honestly as possible how it is with us without pretense or judgment and *then* asking ourselves, "what's going on here?"

### The Outsider Perspective in Comics

Superheroes were created *when* they were created because we were frightened. The assimilated undocumented alien Superman received a warm welcome in 1938 America because he took decisive

action against all too familiar Depression-era evils like unrestrained corporate power, machine politics, and lynchings. More importantly, he beckoned readers to imagine themselves *as* Superman, overcoming their fear to take decisive action. This imagining is about getting the superhero off the page and into our own lives. Every child who has ever tied a blanket around their neck for a cape, raised their arms to the sky, and shouted "up up and away!" knows this. The Tahrir Square activists who faced tanks and weapons pointed at them wearing Superman t-shirts knew it too. It's the reason Captain America punched Hitler in the jaw a year and a half *before* American troops were deployed. Superheroes help us imagine what we might do if we really *acted*, and in doing so move us to act.

I belong to the last generation of children who were able to go to the local pharmacy, drugstore, or newsstand magazine rack and find comic books there. But comic books were already a minority taste for children of my generation. Indeed, television had been steadily encroaching on the child comic book market for eight years before I was born. Most children, even my peers in first and second grade, disparaged comics and superheroes as "for kids." The leading comic book publisher DC Comics, still failing to see the writing on the wall, was primarily making comics for children while gingerly putting out feelers for a possible adolescent readership. Since the 1950s afternoon reruns of the *Adventures of Superman* and the campy *Batman* show were full of paternalistic pronouncements about being nice, those of us who read superhero comic books were suspected of being goody-two shoes or, if we were male, mama's boys. Getting caught reading comic books came at a cost to your reputation. If you had a reputation to put at risk, you probably didn't read comic books. Thankfully, I didn't have much of a reputation. Being a comic book reader in the 1960s also meant that you were in on a secret—neither comic books nor superheroes were what your peers thought they were. You saw yourself and other kids who were in on this secret as a kind of marginalized elite, sharing coded messages that your peers were incapable of understanding.

The transformation of stigma into pride was made possible largely because of the Marvel Comics

## THE SUPERHERO RENAISSANCE

guys whom I still call Stan and Jack, in spite of having never met them. The characters they began creating the year after I was born now populate a movie franchise with total revenue that dwarfs every other in movie history. The stories each of those movies tell, and the larger story into which all of them are folded, were written by fans—not just readers but fans—of Stan and Jack’s work. These fans belong to that last generation of magazine rack comic book buyers. Superman’s publisher, DC Comics, started the fan phenomenon when it pioneered a regular letters page in its comic books in 1958. But Stan Lee, who (mostly) with Jack Kirby created Iron Man, Thor, Black Panther, X-Men, the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Spiderman, and dozens of other Marvel Comics characters between 1961 and 1967, upped the ante. He encouraged readers to approach Marvel creators as friends, so that letters would begin with “Dear Stan and Jack” rather than just “Dear Editor.”

Marvel heroes, like their presumed readers, were outsiders. Daredevil was blind. The X-Men were mutants hated and feared by their fellow humans. Thor was the god of defunct and discarded religion. The Hulk was a monster that both resulted from and was barely restrained by his alter ego Bruce Banner’s empathy. The Black Panther was a racist’s nightmare: the king of a hidden African people with vast energy resources, scientific prowess, and advanced technology that was nevertheless thoroughly African. Even Captain America was a man out of time, created to fight World War II but unwillingly awakened in the midst of the 1960s.

Thanks largely to Marvel’s productivity in the 1960s and the response it generated among adolescents and college students, the comic book industry as a whole began to recognize that the children’s market was gone and that it had to mature with its existing fans if it was to survive. As we prideful castoffs became more aware of the larger world around us, beyond the bullies and the oppressive authorities encountered in school, we did so with a traumatized child’s mistrust of powerful forces. The still-shrinking industry responded with stories that pushed the envelope further. Instead of just giving us “heroes with

problems” who live in the world “outside your window,” as Stan liked to say, comic book publishers began to shine a critical light on the superheroic missions of some long-standing characters.

Writer Dennis O’Neil’s take on Green Lantern, a 1940s hero rebooted in the 1950s, began with the hero’s recognition that the mission he’d been given along with his powers only seemed to do good when it simply supported the existing power structure. Toward the end of O’Neil’s first issue, Green Lantern is confronted by an older black man who says “I’ve been reading about you. How you



work for the blue skins. And how on a planet someplace you helped out the orange skins. And you done considerable for the purple skins. Only there’s skins you never bothered with: the black skins. I want to know how come.” In the next panel, we see Green Lantern struggling and failing to defend himself. The writer doesn’t tell us what he’s thinking. He just has us look at the Green Lantern hanging his head and lets that shake our defenses. This is the moment Green Lantern decides to defy the galactic high council that gives him his powers and authorizes his action. The rest of O’Neil’s run

has the Lantern, along with buddy Green Arrow and a high council member, on a road trip in a beat up car across America, where they encounter incident after incident of oppression authorized by law and order. Here, the outsider superhero, represented by Green Arrow, is accompanied by the superhero as viewed from an outsider perspective as redeemable but wanting. O'Neil's work was eagerly discussed by a particularly intense group of hardcore fans who would shape the comic book market when it shifted from magazine racks to specialty shops in the 1980s. Its influence on superhero stories was as profound as its influence on me. This was the writer-hero combination that hooked me on superhero stories for life.

### Canaries in a Coal Mine

The last generation of childhood superhero comic book readers, marginalized and discarded kids who found a community with an outsider perspective iconically evoked in their superhero stories, were canaries in a coal mine. From their marginal place in the culture, these stories didn't look like metaphors for things that would happen in the new millennium but for things that were already happening. The reduction of the comic book market to hardcore fans was completed in the 1980s, and the outsider perspective became the dominant one in superhero comics. Meanwhile, the CIA's illegal and intrusive domestic activity was exposed. The center did not hold despite Reagan's declaration of morning in America. The Cold Warrior and drug cartel operative Oliver North became a hero for a good third of Americans. There were no trustworthy authorities to whom superheroes could turn over their villains. The unified country each president in turn has tried to evoke was gone. The now-adult superhero fan community still wanted fantastic superhero icons to depict their implicit values and sink them deeper into their lives, and this need became acute after 9-11. But they also wanted to hear and tell existentially honest tales about the real-world fears and desires that gave life to these fantastic icons. Even those within the fan-based creative community who recoiled from what they saw as the excessively dark turn in superhero stories

after 1986 now created their optimistic superhero stories in a way that held superhero stories up for focused attention and examination of superhero icons. This new enjoyment of superheroes requires reader discomfort in order to work, but it has been the norm for over 30 years in comic books.

Blockbuster movies aren't made for cash-strapped outsiders but for the broadest possible audience. Since the beginning of America's long War on Terror, this audience has shared with hard-core comic book fans a taste for a new kind of superhero story. Audiences flock to movies that hold our wish-fulfillment fantasies up to us, not as the empowered innocence we like to insist they are, but closer to how our actions have shown them to be. Rather than simply indulging our wish-fulfillment fantasies, these movies lay them out for scrutiny. But that new quality in superhero stories comes from the comic book fans who in the late 1960s and early 1970s were unwilling to look away from the cultural prejudices embedded in the superhero "formula." As events brought these cultural prejudices to the surface, clear fault lines in American identity became more visible. The conflicts remained unresolved. Those with reputations at stake were busily painting over these fault lines in a desperate attempt to pretend Captain America could be reassembled. But the community of outsiders that Stan and Jack had helped create could not forget what the "world outside your window" taught them about such whitewashing.

The comic book fans of the final decades of the 20th century reached into the depths of what was happening in and around them. Rather than abandoning or disavowing the superhero while silently nursing the fears and wish-fulfillment defenses that have animated our politics since the 1960s, the superhero comic book community let the superhero embody those fears and desires without the illusion of innocence. Now that the predicament they saw reflected in the superhero icon has ripened into the catastrophe we are experiencing today, the lucidity of their stories is fueling a superhero renaissance. Superheroes were always about inspiring action. Now they are also about confession.

## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

## NOVELS

*Casual Vacancy*

by J.K. Rowling

review by Joyce Marshall



Gene and I read this book by J.K. Rowling aloud. After many of our reading sessions, all I could say was, “Wow!” At book’s end, I could hardly even articulate that. As many reviewers have said, this is no Harry Potter. As you likely know, Rowling wrote the now famous Potter series and thereby went from living on “the dole” to being a multimillion dollar philanthropist. *Casual Vacancy* illustrates a depth of skill and life wisdom beyond that demonstrated in the Potter books. It is a complicated read. The first half we kept telling each other that we needed to draw up a chart of the characters so we could keep them straight. But we did figure them all out and then in the second half watched as they interacted with one another in astonishing ways, often tragic and sometimes heroic. The story develops around a vacancy on the Parish Council of Pagford, a small town in England, brought about by the early death of Barry Fairbrother, who was born poor and became beloved of many in the town. But not beloved of Howard Mollison, who opposed Barry’s position on the council for Pagford to maintain responsibility for the poor section where Barry was born. So part of the story is a liberal versus conservative fight. The Pakistani doctor, the social worker, and the school counselor join Barry to represent the less fortunate. The story makes clear how very tragic the life of those in poverty can be. Terri, the drug-addicted mother is looked down on by most everyone, but we learn her heart-wrenching story. Wow. Everyone in town knows everyone else and Rowling takes us inside the thinking of many of the characters. The book is gritty and raw. It demonstrates a sentence I read in one of my inspiring books this morning: “If we invest our happiness in an intermittent object, substance, activity, relationship or state, we are, by definition, securing unhappiness for ourselves.” In this story character after character has their dream of what would be a perfect life destroyed. I love this book.

*The Forty Rules of Love*

by Elif Shafak

review by Joyce Marshall

Gene and I also read this book aloud together and we loved it as well. Elif Shafak is a French-born Turkish writer and feminist. The book begins with an unhappily married Jewish housewife and mother named Ella who lives in 2008 Northampton, Massachusetts. She works for a literary agency. She is assigned a book named “Sweet Blasphemy” by Aziz Zahara which is about the wondering dervish, Shams, who comes to be the close companion of Rumi the famous Persian poet. Shafak’s novel goes back and forth between the two narratives of Shams and Ella. Shams dispenses his forty rules of love one by one as he journeys through his 13th century world from Baghdad to Konya and Ella communicates with Aziz to expand her own journey. A delightful book!

*The Brothers Karamazov*

by Fyodor Dostoevsky

review by Gene Marshall

In my view, *The Brothers Karamazov* is the best novel of the famed novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, though *Crime and Punishment* runs a very close second. I certainly count *The Brothers Karamazov* as one of the best novels I have read. I have recently read it a second time, and I would read it a third time if there were a group of people to read it with me and discuss it.

The novel can be said to be an exploration of whether it is possible for a lucid and thoughtful person to also be a Christian. One of the three Karamazov brothers, Alyosha, is a sensitive, responsible, disciplined, and serious religious seeker who is on a journey toward a more lucid view of being a true Christian. His brother, Ivan, is a rather cynical intellectual who is convinced that religion, especially Christianity, is worse than bosh—it is a tyrannical power that even Jesus would reject. The third brother, Mitya (Dmitri), is a committed sensualist pushing the edges of what might be called “debauchery.” All three brothers are believable characters. I think Dostoevsky must have identified with all three of them—found in each of



them something important about his own life and about being human.

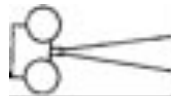
Perhaps the novel is an exploration of the psyche of 19th Century Russian culture, especially that of its males. The novel has a number of women in it—women who are sensitively drawn; but it is not a feminist novel in the sense of being basically about women. Nevertheless, the three male brothers, plus their father and Alyosha’s mentor Zossima depict universal life paths that apply to men and women. The brothers’ father, Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov can be viewed as the antithesis of what Alyosha wants to become. And the old monk, Father Zossima, can be viewed as a portrait of the depth humanness that Alyosha seeks to find in himself.

These three brothers, in their interactions with one another, flesh out not only three very different life paths, but three aspects (body, mind, and spirit) of our common humanity. The above is my skeleton view of the novel. Perhaps it is the details that matter— such as the life history told by Father Zossima, and the work with young boys that is done by Alyosha. Also instructive are the wild ups and downs of Dmitri and the lucid, yet despairing thoughtfulness of Ivan.

Dostoevsky’s religious concepts were taken from 19th Century Russian orthodox Christianity, but he sees through these now questioned symbols to the deep experiences to which these symbols once pointed. He, along with Søren Kierkegaard, was a radical theologian before there was even a name for such a person.

## MOVIE REVIEWS

by Joyce Marshall



**Film Stars Don’t Die in Liverpool.** I somehow missed Gloria Grahame’s films when I was a girl, although I was familiar with her name. This film is about the last two years of her life as she was dying of cancer and her career waning. She has a love affair with a Britisher decades younger (not unusual for her, it turns out). The movie is based on a book written by him. Like most of her personal life, the bare details of the story sound seamy, but this film was to me emotionally moving from opening to closing with Annette Bening and Jamie Bell (who

won my heart in *Billy Elliot* 18 years ago) playing the leading roles. I would have given this one the Academy Award for best picture.

**Darkest Hour.** This film reveals the greatness of Winston Churchill at a time when someone of his determination and courage was needed. The movie managed to have a humorous touch and at the same time be constantly emotionally powerful. It was so impressive that I didn’t even notice that it was in black and white. This story of the early days of Hitler’s European invasions is told from the Prime Minister’s perspective, letting you in on his weaknesses and strengths when faced by a great deal of opposition and criticism from those in the British government who wanted to negotiate with Hitler. It is a moving message of someone who was willing to take the responsibility to decide forcefully in an ambiguous situation. Clearly, without him, it would have turned out very differently. Gary Oldman is phenomenal as Churchill.

**LBJ.** This film is similar to **Darkest Hour** in presenting the gift that Lyndon Johnson was to the country at a seminal moment in getting the civil rights legislation passed. Like Churchill, he faced much opposition and criticism, and was also a plain spoken man who knew how to “work the system.” Whatever happened later with Viet Nam, this film helps us to remember and give tribute to Johnson’s heroic qualities. Woody Harrelson is an amazing LBJ.

**Victoria & Abdul** is the story of the relationship of an aging Queen Victoria to a young Indian man she made her servant, and later her private secretary. They had a personal relationship which mostly resembled a mother/son for a decade, until she died. This played out in the midst of great resistance on the part of her family and the Royal household and including the Prime Minister. When Victoria died they destroyed all evidence of the relationship which was recovered by a journalist in 2003. Judi Dench plays Victoria, as she did in the movie *Mrs. Brown*, about the queen’s relationship with a Scottish servant, Mr. Brown, a few years after Prince Albert died. Their relationship lasted a few years, until he died. In his case there was also

turmoil among the royals. In both excellent films, we get a sense of a queen who is very lonely for true human company, spots its possibility, and does not let others keep her from having it.

**Blue**, made in 1993, is the first part of Krzysztof Kieslowski's trilogy on France's national motto: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Juliette Binoche, one of my favorite actresses, plays Julie, who loses her husband, an acclaimed composer, and her young daughter in a car accident. The film's theme of liberty is manifest in Julie's attempt to start life anew, free of personal commitments, belongings, grief or love. She withdraws from the world, living anonymously in Paris. Eventually people from her former life and her present one intrude upon her. Binoche is wonderful, as usual.

**A Face in the Crowd**. This classic 1957 Elia Kazan film has prescience for the political situation today. Andy Griffith steps out of his laid back sheriff role to play Lonesome Rhodes, a drunken drifter with folksy charm who, with the help of a radio talent scout (Patricia Neal) becomes a national TV star. People love his willingness to blurt out whatever comes to him and his unwillingness to stick to anyone's script. He begins to have power with political figures, coaching a candidate for senator with his own sense of how to please crowds. He loves adulation, to the point of creating his own applause machine which his assistant plays for him when he needs a lift. Quickly his new power goes to his head and his behavior becomes ever more disgusting with no loyalty to anyone but himself. You will no doubt find it encouraging that as night follows day, the worm begins to turn and his downfall isn't pretty.

**Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai**. Ghost Dog (Forest Whitaker) sees himself as a retainer of Louie (John Tormey), a local mobster, because Louie saved Ghost Dog's life when he was a young boy. He adheres to the code of the samurai in serving Louie as an extremely successful hit man. This is another fine Jim Jarmusch film which moves slowly as you watch the details of Ghost Dog heisting a car which takes him to the house where he quietly gains entry, and easily targets the one he is to "take out." There

are fine moments like Ghost Dog's interaction with a stray dog who looks like a samurai himself, and his interaction with a young girl in the park with whom he shares favorite books. It is also an interesting touch that Ghost Dog communicates by carrier pigeon, living with them on the roof of a building. Best of all is that his best friend is a French-speaking Haitian who has an ice cream truck. They understand one another perfectly though not speaking the same language. The mob turns on Louie and to save Louie and himself Ghost Dog must kill the entire group. It is a real samurai treat to see him carry that out.

**Wonder**. "Auggie" has a rare medical facial deformity which has meant numerous surgeries and being home-schooled by his mother. He is now approaching middle school age and his parents decide to enroll him in a private school where he deals with bullying from a group of boys. His older sister Via is protective of Auggie but also resentful that much of her parent's attention has been on him since his birth. Each person in the family deals with their issues arising from Auggie's special needs as Auggie makes his way in school, learning to make friends. This movie walks the line of sentimentality, but I found it genuinely moving.

**The Big Sick** is a 2017 American romantic comedy film written by married couple Emily V. Gordon and Kumail Nanjiani and based on their interracial and intercultural romance. They deal with issues from both families. Holly Hunter and Ray Romano are great as Emily's parents and the entire film is a delight.

**The Post** is relevant in making clear the importance of freedom of the press and the need of the press to call out any funny business in the government. Therefore, the press shouldn't get too cosy with those in positions of power. Also, it is a lesson for the guys in suits to pay attention to women and for women to stand up for themselves. I cheered when Katherine Graham finally told her board members that neither her father nor her husband was now the owner of the Washington Post – she was – and if they weren't clear about that they probably should resign. I also cheered when the other major papers

## RECOMMENDED READING

joined the Post in solidarity, printing the Pentagon papers, too, signaling the court that if they wanted to stand against the press, it would have to stand against them all. A good film.

**The Greatest Showman** is a very entertaining film. The music/dance numbers are show stoppers and best seen in a theater with big screen and sound. (Probably too late for that now unless you can catch it at the dollar theater.) Even though I understand the film isn't totally accurate, it is interesting history about the Barnum and Bailey Circus.

**Step.** This inspiring documentary is about the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women which was chartered in 2009. The school has 120 students from 6th to 12th grade. Any girl in the Baltimore school district ready for 6th grade can apply. Selections are made by lottery. Applicants need to be clear that this is a college prep school and they work very hard to see that every graduate gets to college, rigorously dealing with all aspects of that eventuality. This clearly is not just a job for the faculty and staff. It is a mission to guarantee that this generation of young African-American women is bestowed with all the chances they deserve to rise to their full potential. One program of the school is the Step team. Step is a form of percussive **dance** in which the participant's entire body is used as an instrument to produce complex rhythms and sounds through a mixture of footsteps, spoken word, and hand claps. The film follows the team and, in particular, several of its members as they go through their senior year. Of course, the highlight is the performance of the group as they practice and finally give a phenomenal performance at the Step contest.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Reviews by Joyce Marshall,  
plus a review by Jeanette Stanfield,  
and a review by Gene Marshall*

### SPiRiT

*Seeds for the Soul*  
by Chuck Hillig  
Sentient Publications, 2007



July 2018

Hillig, a psychotherapist and writer on Eastern philosophy, has created here an easy-to-read book of sayings printed like poems or adages. Some of my favorites are on relationships, i.e., "Ask 100% of the people for 100% of what you want 100% of the time. Otherwise, you are requiring others to magically read your mind." Also, "Check everything out first before assuming *anything* about anyone else." Here is his reason to practice being nonjudgmental: "Don't we all laugh, cry, sneeze, scream, burp, smile, cough, and fart in the same language?" His epilogue is an essay on the great wisdom held in the 18 common simple words of a campfire song we all know. This one I won't give away, but leave you to discover.

*The Art of Living*  
by Thich Nhat Hanh  
HarperOne, 2017

World famous Buddhist monk and peace activist (he coined the phrase "engaged Buddhism") Thich



Nhat Hanh, now 91, entered a monastery in Viet Nam at age 16. During the Vietnam War he came to the United States where he taught comparative religion at Princeton and was a Buddhism lecturer at Columbia. He is fluent in French, Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali, Japanese, and English in addition to his native Vietnamese. He returned to Vietnam in 1963 where he aided his fellow monks in nonviolent peace efforts and established a university. He traveled to the United States to promote peace between North and South Vietnam and was denied reentry into his country which began a long exile. He has since established his home monastery in France and others in the U.S., Australia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Vietnam, and Germany.

He has authored more than 100 books. This one, edited by his monastic students, sums up the essence of the last lectures he gave before his stroke in 2014, and these lectures sum up the essence of his teachings. He offers deep insight on what it means to be alive and what it means to die. True to his

Realistic Living • 11

## RECOMMENDED READING

Buddhist roots with numbered lists, he offers liberation from the three “wrong views” and three major practices plus four additional practices. This small 200-page book is jam-packed with solid wisdom. You can sense this teacher’s embodiment of his teachings which gives them added power. Whether speaking, walking, doing calligraphy, engaged in social action, or dealing with a stroke, Thich Nhat Hanh walks the walk.

*The Pocket Thomas Merton*  
edited by Robert Inchausti  
Shambhala, 2017

I own and have joyfully read many of Thomas Merton’s books. (I just counted them. Twenty. Well, twenty-one with this new one.) This little book has the advantage of including writings from other sources as well as selected highlights from all his books and organized in categories. The four major sections of the book are: Real and False Selves, the World We Live In, Antidotes to Illusion, and Love in Action. I find Merton to be a person who was truly ahead of his time. Although he was a Catholic monk who died, sorrowfully too soon, in 1968, his words still speak to us today. Maybe we are more ready to hear them now. Pope Francis called Merton, Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day the four great, prophetic figures in American History. Merton was just beginning to explore more deeply and enter into more dialogue with the religions of the East when his accidental death occurred at a meeting in Thailand. Another of his gifts was his insight into the technological age in which, he says, “We fly in all directions to sell ourselves.” His “theology of love,” he says, “must seek to deal realistically with the evil and injustice in the world, and not merely to compromise with them.” And, “He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others.” This book fits nicely in your purse or pocket. I recommend having it handy.



*The Unbelievable Happiness of What Is*  
by Jon Bernie  
Non-Duality Press, 2017

This is one of my favorite books for early morning inspiration. It has very short chapters (two or three pages), and the language is clear, simple, personal. The essence of his message: he is sharing his own experience and you have to find your own way; you are encouraged to take your beliefs less seriously and note more closely the experience of the moment with emphasis on the sensations of the body; he also talks about the heart, noting that his own experience has been that living in the moment connects him to love of what is and to happiness. This is not unalloyed happiness, but a happiness that does not resist the natural flows of life’s joys, sorrows, pains and pleasures. As I read the book I found that it artfully carried me deeper and deeper into these experiences. My favorite quote from the book: “There is no end to how much you can love.” I highly recommend this book.

*Wonders of Spiritual Unfoldment*  
by John Butler  
Shepherd-Walwyn Publishers, 2008

I first experienced John Butler on a YouTube interview, *Discovering Stillness*. I was moved by his presence and bought this book to learn more about him. Some of the book tells his story and other parts are journal writings as he travels in Russia, Africa and the United States. A Britisher with an English father and Russian mother, Butler became a farmer,

## RECOMMENDED READING

then went to South America in his twenties to “make the world a better place.” He discovered that he needed more work on himself before he could be of help to others. He returned to England and attended the School of Meditation with a teacher from Northern India. He combined his experience there with his Christian faith to discover his own path. He lists his teachers as: Nature; Love; Freedom; Practicing Meditation/Prayer; The Church; and Human Teachers. Whether in his book or on YouTube, I find John Butler a good companion to hang out with.

### *Love Everyone*

by Parvati Markus  
HarperOne, 2015

When the man we have come to know as Ram Dass left India the first time, his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, told him not to talk about him in the West. Nevertheless, he is all Ram Dass did talk about, resulting in many young seekers from the U.S. going to India and becoming devotees of “Maharaji.” Parvati Markus is one of those who went and received a new name. I read Ram Dass’s books, *Be Here Now*, *The Only Dance There Is*, and *How Can I Help* some years back, but this collection of stories from over sixty of those bright youngsters (now aging adults) who went to India from 1968 to 1973 (the year Maharaji died) impressed me in a way my previous reading did not. It is difficult to discount the miraculous things this person knew and did. But like Jesus, he treated lightly that aspect of his life. The important thing to all of these followers is the profound experience of love they had just being in his presence. There is a short bio of each contributor to this book and I am also impressed at what an influential group they are. They have obviously taken to heart Maharaji’s mantra: “Love Everyone, Serve Everyone, Remember God.”

### BEYOND PATRIARCHY

The other books I want to review can fit under the category Beyond Patriarchy, a topic I continue to be passionate about.

To summarize: We live in a political institution which is undergirded by a socially conditioned belief system. Patriarchy is the appropriate name because the underlying beliefs regard males as inherently superior and the “norm” for humanity. The oppressions, though primarily aimed at females, actually hurt all beings: women and men; people of all colors; those who are different in gender, mentally, and physically; the young and the old; the earth itself.



Patriarchy has a powerful psychological control over us because of its universality and its longevity—about 6,000 years. So it seems to be “the way it is.” The patriarchal mode of thought is so built into our mental processes that we cannot exclude it unless we first make ourselves consciously aware of it, which always means a special effort. The first step in breaking the chains of its oppressions is to overcome our blind acceptance of this system as normal. To awaken to its manifestations in the world about us—some of which are obvious, others more subtle. And to discover how our minds have been poisoned.

What we have going for us is the truth of who human beings are. We all have experienced glimpses of our true beauty in moments of recognizing our own uniqueness and strengths, our compassion for and delight in all beings in their diverse wonders and the joy of working and playing together with those who are different.

The following books are the ones I have been reading recently on this topic and finding helpful.

## RECOMMENDED READING

### *Sexual Politics*

by Kate Millet

Columbia University Press, 1969-2016

When Kate Millet died recently I realized I had missed reading her 1970 classic that pinpoints the beginning of patriarchy with the discovery of paternity and demonstrates how the sexualization of power is the basis of oppression of all kinds. Her work is scholarly but quite readable and is wonderful in its capacity to change your perceptions about yourself and all of society. She notes that men and women are not inherently nearly as biologically different as we suppose because of behaviors and breeding. I'm still reading this book.

### *Intercourse*

by Andrea Dworkin

Basic Books, 1987 with 1995 Preface

I reread Dworkin's book recently and find it even more radical than Millet. She's been called the Malcolm X of feminism. She sees the act of intercourse itself as oppressive. As Ariel Levy says in the Foreword, "She may not be saying all sex is rape, but clearly she was suggesting that most sex is something damn close when you live in a patriarchy." Here's how Dworkin says it: "The only condition under which women could experience sexual freedom in intercourse—real choice, real freedom, real happiness, real pleasure— was in having real and absolute control in each and every act of intercourse, which would be, each and every time, chosen by the woman." Since it is physically impossible for a woman to rape a man (forcibly penetrate him) giving her the power over intercourse gives her the power to be equal. She notes how the religious and governmental laws and practices keep women under control physically and mentally. Her discussion of misogyny is, I am sorry to say, appropriate today.

### *Toward a New Psychology of Women*

by Jean Baker Miller, M.D.

Beacon Press, 1976

I recently pulled this book off my shelf and discovered it was totally unmarked, which meant I

hadn't read it!! I corrected that quickly and found it a fine critique of Freudian psychology and a beginning of her work on feminist therapy. In 1995 she founded a Training Institute at Wellesley College.

### *The Healing Connection*

also by Jean Baker Miller and by

Irene Pierce Stiver, Ph.D.

Beacon Press, 1997

Based on weekly discussions of a group of women therapists this book further expands their theory. The key, they discovered, is that relationships are the integral source of psychological health. The therapist, rather than being an objective observer, takes an empathetic approach which they find to be mutually empowering to client and therapist.

Miller died in 2006 and Laura Brown explains the new developments of the theory in her 2009 book, *Feminist Therapy*, (published by the American Psychological Association) placing it in context with other therapies. Some of the key insights: 1) Feminist therapy is not for women only. There is an effort to make it available to all people whatever sex, gender, color, or class. 2) It is not designed to help you fit in to the social world as it is, but to see the nature of patriarchy and develop egalitarian and empowering strategies. 3) There is an avoidance of diagnosis of disorders unless necessary for insurance and then reached collaboratively with the client. 4) Many tools are used, including psychodynamics, cognitive therapies, mindfulness-based paradigms, expressive and movement therapies, and others.

### *The Mother of All Questions*

by Rebecca Solnit

Haymarket Books, 2017

Solnit is the author of *Men Explain Things to Me* (which I reviewed previously). She gives her own experience as well as facts and figures in the world today that illustrate the horrors of the system as it is.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Women and Power:  
A Manifesto*  
by Mary Beard  
Liveright, 2017



This short book by British professor of classics at Cambridge University explains “just how deeply embedded in Western culture are the mechanisms that silence women, that refuse to take them seriously, and that sever them from the centres of power.” Going back to Homer’s *Odysseus* she notes Telemachus’ put-down of his mother, Penelope, and traces these behaviors up to the present day, including the recent experiences of Hillary Clinton and Angela Merkel.

*What Happened*  
By Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Simon and Schuster, 2017

Gene and I read this book aloud together and were surprised at how well written and how totally satisfying it was. It is her story from her perspective and well told.

*Dear Madam President*  
by Jennifer Palmieri  
Grand Central Publishing, 2018

Gene and I also read this short book aloud together and found it also very well written and a pleasure to read. Palmieri was communications director for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign. She was also President Barack Obama’s communications director. The book is an open letter to the women who will run the world, and specifically to the first woman president. It is written from her various experiences, but mostly from the Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign. One major thing she learned: if she were to do it again, she would encourage the candidate to do it a woman’s way, not try to be a female facsimile of the qualities of a male president. Her book encourages the first female president and all women in whatever positions to speak up, realize

you will draw fire, embrace your battle scars, and most of all—even when you lose, don’t be defeated.

*Sucking Up:  
A Brief Consideration of Sycophancy*  
by Deborah Parker and Mark Parker  
University of Virginia Press, 2017

We are presently seeing the process of sycophancy right out in the open at the highest levels of power. This short book explains the science of this process and gives examples from literature - in Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen, and Tolkien – and from modern movies as well as in our world today.

*Savages*  
by Joe Kane  
Vintage Book, 1995  
and *The Time of the Black Jaguar*  
by Arkan Lushwala  
Hernan Quinones, 2012

These books show both the gifts of indigenous peoples that we sorely need these days and the damage our system is doing to the precious resources of these peoples and the earth itself. *Savages* is an eyewitness account by a journalist (Kane) of how the Amazonian Huaorani people’s home is destroyed by oil companies. The question raised by the title is, who are the real savages? In *Black Jaguar*, Lushwala returns to the Andean culture of Peru to discover the gifts of his heritage and its wisdom about masculine and feminine and caring for the earth.

*Neurotribes*  
*The Legacy of Autism & the Future of Neurodiversity*  
by Steve Silberman  
Avery, 2015

Journalist Steve Silberman meticulously traces the history of autism and the lives of the neurologists, psychologists and doctors who chased its elusive identity. He gives most attention to psychologists Leo Kanner in the United States and Hans Asperger in Nazi-controlled Vienna. Asperger, for whom one aspect of the autism spectrum is named, identified the syndrome and pioneered its study through

## RECOMMENDED READING

observations on hundreds of cases. He emphasized those on the savant end of the spectrum in his reporting in an attempt to save the so-called “mentally feeble” individuals from the Nazi’s euthanasia program. One stunning revelation to me is that Hitler used the papers from eugenic conferences and activities in the U.S. in the early 1900’s to inform his programs. It wasn’t until early in the 1990s that autism was finally classified as a widespread and bonafide syndrome with a textured and wide-ranging spread of symptoms and issues. As the title puts it, Silberman’s plea is for a world that appreciates neurodiversity—recognizing that people regarded as psychologically different have very important and valuable perspectives to offer.



*Uniquely Human*  
by Barry M. Prizant, PhD  
Simon & Schuster, 2015

Prizant draws on his 40 years of professional experience and his empathic wisdom to give practical suggestions for relating to those “on the spectrum.” He not only offers keen insight on autism, he demonstrates what it means to be human. For instance, all of us have difficulties communicating at times. A basic human skill is to strive to listen and understand what another is trying to say, even without words. All of us “act out” at times. A basic human skill is learning to ask ourselves, “What must this person be feeling?” rather than blaming them. And we can all celebrate with one another what we appreciate, what’s going right without excessive attention on what’s wrong.

This book, beginning with its title, is a reminder that every person is uniquely human.

## ECONOMICS

*Doughnut Economics*  
*7 Ways to Think Like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economist*  
by Kate Raworth  
Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017  
*Review by Jeanette Stanfield*

At first, Raworth rejected the profession of economics for its irrelevance to real life, but after decades of rethinking how economics could become relevant, she presents an exciting and challenging exploration of real life economics. Through many practical and collaborative investigative approaches and many questions, Raworth proposes seven ways to think like a 21<sup>st</sup> century Economist. She is now testing these seven ways in organizations and communities around the world. As a person not trained in economic theory, I appreciate Kate’s earthy examples and vivid pictures.

Her “Doughnut Economics” is about reinventing economics from being a system based almost exclusively on growth to one based on the thriving of humans and the earth. She uses the Doughnut as a new compass for guiding humanity. The inner ring of the doughnut is the social foundation or the twelve basics all humans need. All are included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The outer ring is the Ecological Ceiling, which includes nine critical processes an international group of Earth-system scientists identified in 2009. The challenge is for humans to thrive in the safe and just space between these two boundaries.

She is critical of growth as the exclusive goal of an economy, of an economy as a self-contained system, and of humans as exclusively self-interested and dominant over nature. She asks economists to **Get Savvy with System**—to see themselves as gardeners who are stewards, rather than believing that things will self-regulate. She calls for an economic system that is **Distributive by Design**—one whose dynamics tend to disperse and circulate value as it is created rather than concentrating it in ever fewer hands, and **Regenerative by Design** giving a way for people to become full participants



## RECOMMENDED READING

in regenerating Earth's life-giving cycles so that humans thrive within planetary boundaries. Kate's *Doughnut Economics* is helping me re-imagine a viable economic future for human society.

### THEOLOGY

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Introduction to his Thought*  
Sabine Dramm  
Hendrichson Publishers: 2007  
*Review by Gene Marshall*

Books about Bonhoeffer are quite numerous. Most of them see him either as a conserver of orthodox Christianity or as some sort of "come of age" abandonment of every form of "religious" understanding. Sabine Dramm recognizes that he is a transition figure, but finds some consistent middle ground in his evolving thought, seeing no inner contradiction between his rootage in the New Testament revelation and his love of secular thought and living.

In his early works in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, she sees him walking the thin line between excellent philosophy and neo-orthodox theologizing. He is a deep debtor to both Karl Barth and Søren Kierkegaard. She follows him moving into "a lived faith" in his popular books *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*. And she sees his *Ethics* and *Letters from Prison* as consistent with his deep religious perspective in spite of their more secular focus.

This is not an easy book to summarize, for Dramm has studied with care, in Bonhoeffer's own German, his writing and his life story in which his thought is grounded. She also discusses many of the sources he read. Nevertheless, this is a readable and rewarding book. It is challenging because it is a deep book, an ethical book, a practical book about being the church in a communal and profound manner. Both Bonhoeffer and Dramm can be trusted to be sincere and carefully thoughtful about issues that endure and that matter.

For example, Dramm makes clear that Bonhoeffer both reaches for a church of the future and yet begins with the institutions that he had, including a worldwide ecumenical movement that transcends every national form of Christianity.

July 2018

I recommend this fairly short 232-page text as the best I have found on the enduringly remarkable Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

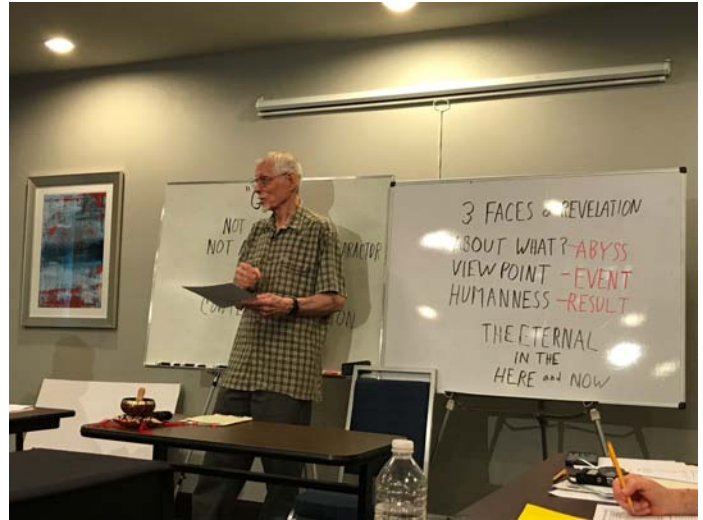
### *End Notes on the "God Questions"*

In the following books I (Gene) deal the God questions not covered in the opening essay of this journal:

1. *The Call of the Awe: Recovering Christian Profundity in an Interreligious Era*. In Part One of this 2003 book, I probe the first three sets of God Questions (especially in chapters 1, 2, 6, and 7). In Part Two of this book I give attention to the last set of questions on interreligious dialogue.
2. *The Enigma of Consciousness: A Philosophy of Profound Humanness and Religion*. This 2015 book does not deal directly with Christianity nor with the "God as devotion" set of God Questions. Part Three of this book is important, however, for the first set of God Questions. Part Four of this Book may be my best thinking on the second set of God Questions. And Part Five contains an examination of some basic metaphors that are an important enrichment for the fourth set of God Questions.
3. *The Love of History and the Future of Christianity* quite exhaustively deals with the third set of God Questions as those questions apply to Christianity and Judaism. Chapters 1, 2, and 11 are especially relevant to the devotion-type questions.
4. In 1984 I wrote a book entitled *A Primer on Radical Christianity* in which chapter 4 speaks to this topic in ways that I still find helpful in 2018. In September of 2018, Wood Lake Publishers will make available a reworking of that 1984 book under this new title—*Radical Gifts: Living the Full Christian Life in Troubled Times*. The old chapter 4 entitled **What Reality in Human Experience Do We Point to with the word "God"** still appears in the new book with very little alteration. And in Appendix E of the new book, I do some updating of that discussion.
5. Finally, these topics are further explored in a book to be published in 2019, *The Creator of Christianity: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*. Mark explores Cross and Resurrection as a revelatory viewpoint on the Abyss of Mystery.

## Report on the June 8-12, 2018 Summer Gathering

Twenty-six men and women gathered for four intense days for a pull together of 34 years of Realistic Living research toward shaping a next Christian practice appropriate for century 21. Gene Marshall gave eight spirit talks followed by discussion. Each talk/discussion was followed by a workshop facilitated by Alan Richard, Elvagene Philbrook, or Roy Philbrook. Joyce Marshall started each day with a guided solitary, facilitated evenings activities, and handled needed administrative details.



### Themes of each day:

Day One dealt with the times in which we live as pertains to the topics “What is Truth?” and “What is Religion?” Day Two dealt with the basic message of Christianity as pertains to a revised use of the word “God” and the meaning of revelation held in the symbols of Cross and Resurrection. Day Three dealt with the mission of Love as Witness to our deep beings and as Justice for our societies. Day Four pulled together the leadership principle for a next Christianity as manifest in what we are calling “the Co-Pastor Circle”—5-12 men and women who pastor each other and pastor their geographical parish of responsibility.

Video tapes were made of the 8 contextual spirit talks, and these videos will be available for widespread use later this summer after some editing and preparation work by Maryellen May. Our hope is that many local groups will play these videos and follow them with appropriate discussions useful for the leadership training of the co-pastors of a next Christianity and other servant leader roles.



## Realistic Living Mission Statement

While Realistic Living has been deeply engaged in the secular world, our core focus has been and remains Christian Resurgence. With rare exceptions, the institutions of Christianity have not internalized the wonders and enduring relevance of the twentieth century theological revolution. The core difficulty is: these old wineskins are not suited for carrying, protecting, and advancing the new wine of a vital Christian resurgence. New communal and institutional forms have to be built. New methods of group life have to be learned. New qualities of leadership have to be developed. New programs for ongoing Christian maturity have to be created. We are one small body of experimentation with these challenging issues.

**The core mission of Realistic Living is to clarify the essential Christian message and to promote and inspire Christian practice through small, intimate group life and action.**

We carry out research into the core challenges of our times. We write essays, books, journals, newsletters, and manuals. We maintain a website, blog, and electronic ministries. We organize training events and circles that meet weekly. We are involved in inter-religious dialogue, solitary religious practice, innovative leadership methods, bioregional organizing, and progressive social change. We offer these works as a homeopathic drop in the ocean of need.

## Our Finances

Realistic Living is a research and action movement in which you can participate, not only with your financial support, but also with your use of our resources in your place of responsibility. Your financial contributions are carefully spent on the important mission of this movement. A gift of \$20 a year covers the costs of keeping you in touch with our publications, announcements, and reports.

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 monthly income in addition to our strong year-end financial support.

Sending us your e-mail address enables you to receive on the 15th of each month our Realistic Living Pointers—a brief edge essay on religious and ethical matters. Previous Pointers are included in the RL Blog: [www.RealisticLiving.org/blog/](http://www.RealisticLiving.org/blog/) We also have a Realistic Living Facebook page, containing visits with a wide range of inspiring persons: [www.facebook.com/realisticliving](http://www.facebook.com/realisticliving)

*Please help us direct others to all these resources  
If you send us names and addresses,  
we will send them a complementary copy of this journal.*

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