

Realistic Living

A Journal on Religion and Ethics

Contents of this Issue

November 2022

Issue 78

THE MAIDEN AND THE GIANT

a fairy tale by Joyce Marshall

DISCOVERING RELIGIOUS INTEGRITY

a personal memoir by Joyce Marshall

FREEDOM AND THE LONG VIEW

A bit of theological politics by Gene Marshall

POLITICS IN A TIME OF TYRANNY

a justice witness by Alan Richard

BIOREGIONAL TRAILBLAZERS

by Joyce Marshall

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

movie & novel reviews by Joyce Marshall

RECOMMENDED READING

book reviews by Joyce Marshall

REALISTIC LIVING

name –was not only big, she was loud, and there was never any doubt what she was thinking or feeling. Mirabel was out there! And the young maiden – Nona – well, she really admired that. She wanted to be big and loud and “out there” with her thoughts and feelings.

So it happened that Nona hung out a lot wherever Mirabel was likely to show up. The Wishing Stone was Mirabel’s favorite spot, so when Nona headed down that way one day, she saw Mirabel kneeling at the stone. Nona crept up silently so as not to disturb the giant, for she seemed to be praying. Nona sat quietly to the side and was surprised at the soft voice she heard coming from Mirabel. Here’s what she heard: “Oh, Stone – hear my wishes, hear my pleas. For I am a weak person, needing your powers and assistance. Everyone hears my loud voice. Everyone sees this big body. Everyone thinks Mirabel is strong



Drawing by Alan Richard & Ruya Afridi-Dennis

The Maiden and the Giant

A Fairy Tale

by Joyce Marshall

Once upon a time there was a young maiden. She lived in the valley of the giant, not jolly nor green, but a regular giant – a big, big woman. This giant of a woman really impressed the maiden. You might say that the giant was the maiden’s mentor – her model of womanhood. This giant – Mirabel was her

and fearless. Only you dear Stone, only you, know the frailty that I am. Only you know the doubts surrounding my heart and soul." Then Mirabel sensed Nona's presence and turned and looked into her face. Mirabel looked at Nona and continued speaking. "You and the maiden Nona. Only you two know my uncertainty."

Mirabel broke off her prayer. She sighed and went over and sat down beside Nona. She said no more. Nona, too, sat in silence for a time. Then she said, "I didn't mean to pry into your private affairs. I just like being with you. I want to be like you."

"Can you," asked Mirabel, "can you conceive of moving from admirer to friend? Are you capable of being my friend?"

"I don't know," said Nona. "I've always put you in a special category – above me. Someone to aspire to."

"Yes," replied Mirabel. "So being my friend means putting yourself in a special category. It means trusting yourself. It means you can admire me, but not idolize me. It means you will sometimes challenge me but not blame me for not being your perfect idol."

"I want to be your friend," said Nona.

"O.K." said Mirabel. "Let's go find Moose."

"Moose?"

"Yeah. When I feel like a bellowing, Moose always matches me bellow for bellow."

So Nona and Mirabel hunted out Moose and began their friendship with a bellowing party – awaking everyone in the valley to the feminist renewal movement.

Discovering Religious Integrity

A Personal Memoir

By Joyce Marshall

(I recently discovered this article which I think was written in 1995 – 27 years ago. There are many updates that could be made, but it has details that tell a story that others might relate to, so I leave it as is.)

I grew up in the Panhandle of Texas. I knew no blacks, no Jews, no atheists, no homosexuals – or if I

did, I didn't know it. My religious upbringing was in the Southern Baptist Church. I joined the church with my family when I was twelve and was baptized. But I never felt "saved." When others discussed their "personal relationship to Jesus" I feared they could see that it hadn't happened to me. At the same time, a part of me didn't quite believe the authenticity of many of the self-proclaimed "saved." Fortunately, my father and grandfather were not pious men and they inserted a healthy dose of skepticism into my religious stew.

I do appreciate some aspects of this background. As a result of it, religion to me is not abstract nor something to be taken lightly. I am glad to feel emotionally and seriously involved in my relationship to the Infinite. I am also grateful for a familiarity with the Bible. I read it twice through before adulthood, memorized many passages and learned – through Bible School "sword drills" – its order and organization. I am glad to have the resource of many great hymns in my being. And the years spent in this heritage have given me a good understanding of fundamentalism, which I now consider to be a perversion of Christianity.

In the Southern Baptist Church there was lots of talk of heaven and hell and behaving so as to get to the one and avoid the other. Examples of dangerous behavior: one minister disapproved of my father's smoking; when I was in high school I was removed from my position as church choir director because I participated in dances (which were amazingly wholesome) at the local women's club house. There were also attempts to arouse emotion – mostly that of fear and contrition. It worked on me, particularly regarding my one defiant act of childhood (smoking) and my relation to boys and sex.

My smoking was so innocent as to seem absurd now. My friends and I would hide out and puff on cigarettes stolen from smoking parents. My sexual exploration was also relatively innocent. There was lots of parking and "making out." My weak sense of myself made it difficult for me to say "No" to boys. I sometimes accepted dates I really didn't want. But my fear of pregnancy was so strong that I imagined disappearing into a black hole if that should happen; so I always said "No" at crucial junctures.

DISCOVERING RELIGIOUS INTEGRITY

Prayer for me at that time involved either bargaining with God (please help me do well on this history test and I will quit smoking) or begging (please let me not be pregnant). Actually, the circumstances didn't make it possible for me to be pregnant, but then I wasn't sure what was possible.

Deaths of my family members were key experiences in my spiritual development. My thirty-year-old aunt died in childbirth when I was fourteen. My brother (my only sibling) was killed in the Korean War when I was nineteen. My father died when I was twenty-one, and my grandfather later that year. Until my aunt died, I naively believed that death was something that came to other families, not ours. My egoistic eggshell cracked at that event. When my father died I knew without doubt that death was coming for me. I also knew that, even though I was devastated by his death (I adored my father), that somehow I had been given a gift in it as well. I had been relieved of a bit of arrogance, of unrealism. I had been given a shot of humility that put my feet more solidly on the earth and connected me more surely to other human beings. Only later was I able to make theological sense of this.

My marriage at age 20 (another case of my weakness in saying "No") resulted in my becoming a Methodist. My mother told herself and her friends that I was still a Baptist at heart (in other words "saved"). I found being a Methodist a bit more relaxing. It required less pretense. A few years after I joined this denomination they published some new adult study material. It included a piece by Paul Tillich which challenged a literal virgin birth. I had never heard of Paul Tillich and I was very excited by his approach. Others in the church class were not so pleased. One woman accused me of trying to destroy her faith. I went to the public library and found Paul Tillich's books and read them along with other authors on the same shelf. Wow!

Eventually, I decided to be an atheist. As an atheist I felt free of pretending to believe things I could not believe and I felt through with allowing my emotions to be manipulated. My husband was a church music director so I was a closet atheist, but people who were in church study classes with me were aware that I asked lots of pushy questions. One of them invited me to a weekend seminar called

Religious Studies One, put on by the Ecumenical Institute. Paul Tillich's writings were a part of this program. I went. What a relief! Ah! I could be religious without pretending. I could be religious without denying my intelligence and without compromising my emotional integrity. I became a theist again, but most people (as e.e. cummings uses the word) might call my style of theism atheistic.



Joyce Ann Miller (now Marshall)

The best thing about the weekend was that someone, a group unknown to me, had put together with beautiful clarity and powerful style, an understanding of Christianity that made sense of history and made sense as a faith for me. I was not alone in this quest. I could hardly believe my good fortune. The more I immersed myself in the power of the metaphors of the gospel, the more I experienced freedom from the shackles of moralism that Paul the Apostle speaks of so passionately. I felt within my belly a sense of power. No longer did I sink into

FREEDOM AND THE LONG VIEW

wallows of despair! Nor did I stay long in the marriage which I had entered so ill-advisedly.

So, what was it in that weekend (and in subsequent experiences of exploring this religious understanding) that undergirds me in life? Now, this is where I approach the unsayable. How to put this into words?

Most important to me is an understanding of God as The Way Life Is. God is not simply that in life which I experience as good. I see now that I was experiencing God in the deaths of my father, my brother, my aunt and grandparents. I see the issue as the quality of my relationship with that One who brings all things to be – that One over whom I have no control. When I trust every happening in life to be Love for me, my life has a central stability that cannot be shaken.

I can even understand my despairs as opportunities for healing. At times I hate this Infinite One; I "kick against the pricks" when I am being pushed to the edge. Nevertheless, such moments can be a doorway to deeper trust.

I got the flu this winter. I was very sick. I thought I was going to end up with pneumonia and that I might very well die, and a very unpleasant death at that. I realized that if I didn't die now that for sure I would some day and it might very well be painful. Initially I did not thank God for this illness. I felt pretty much abandoned by the son of a bitch. (This is a statement of feeling.) As I got better I realized that I had been changed by that bout with the flu. You might call it a wrestling match with God. I saw that the glimpse of death that I received had brought me closer to that Awesome Otherness, had created a deeper space of stillness within.

I already mentioned the importance to me of freedom. Living by anyone's moralistic handbook feels like child's play after tasting the seemingly impossible responsibility of Christian freedom as Bonhoeffer describes it. Once, when I quit a well-paying job as a secretary in Beverly Hills to pursue riskier, more meaningful work, I felt like I was walking on jello – very insecure. As I have learned to live more consistently in the ambiguity of freedom I sometimes experience moments of looking back

upon the overall picture of my life and sensing that I am being strangely led.

I now understand many things I do in the world as the activity of the church. Of course, no one knows for sure how any action is to be finally judged. But I see the church as that dynamic in society that is ever repenting in the appropriate areas on behalf of the whole of society (who is as yet unaware of that particular need for repentance) and creating new responses in the world according to our best prayerful guess of what is needed. My participation in the Bioregional Movement holds many areas of "church" work: a new relationship to the Earth, respecting feminine values, honoring diversity, moving toward full democracy.

Operating out of my deep freedom, I have created practices to grow in spirit awareness. I have learned that my spirit can be crippled by ignoring good physical and psychological practices, so I list them, too.

Physical Practice: Eating awarley. Long fasts and periods on raw foods have been useful. I have learned to be careful about eating sugar in order to feel good, avoid depression and think clearly. Yoga and walking are my principal exercise and occasional Bowen therapy (body work) gives me structural support.

Psychological Practice: Re-Evaluation Counseling, with its excellent democratic methods, proved my ongoing psychological maintenance and healing.

Religious Practice: Daily I meditate, pray, read inspirational material, and write in my journal. The prayer dynamics of confession, gratitude, petition, and intercession flow beyond my morning solitary into my daily life as I note myself owning up, being grateful, reaching out and opening up and looking to the needs of the world. Weekly, I participate in House Church meetings with songs, conversation, devotional readings and study for personal deepening. I have drawn on Native American teachings, Goddess traditions, and recently on Buddhism for their strengths in relating to the Earth, the body, and in meditation methods, areas in which the Christian heritage is weak.

I believe that my inability to go along with the literal, moralistic, sentimental religion presented to me in childhood had to do with my innate awareness that what we are truly up against in life is too awesome and fierce to be dealt with tritely. I now see more clearly that the Ultimate Mystery is totally Love – a love that we seldom in the first instance believe is love. May this God, this Love, this Mysterious Other, open our hearts, and save us from pretentious, shallow religion. May our trust be deepened in the God who kills those lesser things in life to which we are tempted to give our first allegiance Amen.

Freedom and the Long View

A Bit of Political Theology

by Gene Marshall

Let Donald Trump be my poster boy for what it means to not have a long view. As I see it, his view is limited to his own ego and therefore extends only until his own death. It does not matter to him whether industrial society is collapsing or not, whether a climate crisis exists or not, whether the U.S. has a long-term public-health service or not. His concern extends only to the short span of time between now and his death. He is concerned about being rich, about being able to do what he thinks he wants to do, about having a crowd adore him, about having a “high” place in the world’s pecking order. Even if Trump is somewhat concerned for his descendants or his peer group, that is also an ego concern. He is a poster boy for what it looks like to not have a long view—a view for humanity, or for the planet, or even for the U.S. nation.

To the extent that each of us is bound up with our own ego, we will also be without a long view. Even if our ego concerns seem to us better than Trump’s ego concerns, we can still be missing a long view—a view for something larger than our own selves or our own tiny concerns.

So Who Does Have a Long View?

The writers of the Old Testament had a long view. They reflected back hundreds of years and they reflected forward centuries as well—seeing their

peoplehood as a servant body on behalf of all the nations of the world.

Jesus had a long view. In laying down his life for the people of Israel, he was laying down his life for the restoration of this servant people and thereby for the whole of humanity.

Paul had a long view. Augustine had a long view. Martin Luther had a long view, Paul Tillich had a long view. The priest and author, Thomas Berry, had a long view. He not only had a long view for Christianity, Berry promoted a next Christianity that has a long view for the whole of humanity. He viewed humanity as an integral part of the planet. He saw humanity as Earth’s champagne of deep awareness and joyous celebration on behalf of this wondrously unique planet that can sustain life, including human life.



Thomas Berry

Five Patterns of Government in the U.S.

We who comprise the progressive portion of the United States voters and activists need a simple and easy-to-teach narrative about where we are as a society and how the various types of Republicans and Democrats relate to some “big story” of our existing conditions and our possible futures. Here are five

FREEDOM AND THE LONG VIEW

styles of governing that are being pursued in the United States and many other places:

Option 1: This style of governing is illustrated by the Vladimir Putin type of control of both the regime of the state and the regime of capital—both regimes are in the hands of very wealthy oligarchs of which Putin is one as well as head of state. This is the option that Donald Trump and his cronies favored and still favor. They lie about their poorly hidden dictatorial direction for governing. Lying, misinformation, and deception in order to assemble support is a characteristic of this option for governing. When taking this option, democracy becomes a social veneer that has no real power over the course of events. Option one policies seek support from the super wealthy and from the long-enduring forms of the caste system—racism, patriarchy, gender, and so on.

Option 2: This style of governing is illustrated by those U.S. conservatives who are quite critical of various aspects of the reigning caste systems, but who insist that the regime of capital must manage the regime of the democratic state. The policies of this political constituency are crafted to benefit big business leaders and their corporations. They claim that “business friendly” policies benefit everyone with a “trickle down” of prosperity. Many anti-Trump Republicans hold this view. A number of Democratic Party leaders and thinkers also hold this view. The majority of the Democratic Party, however, now hold the view that the “trickle-down” of wealth is microscopic compared with the “siphon-off” going to the upper classes. Persons who engage in Option 2 style governing are also typically uneasy about a “too powerful” democratic government regulating the regime of capital “too severely.” In the view of U.S. Option 2 policy-makers, “small” government, which they favor in the regulations department, does not exclude “large” outlays for the defense industry, or “large” tax give-aways to the fossil fuel industries, and other governmental perks to the existing economic powers.

Option 3: This style of governing is illustrated by those who view the need for a strong regime of democratic governing that sets the rules that structure the economic playing field for the players of the regime of capital, and enforces those rules fairly and strongly. Option 3 policy-makers expect the capital-owning forces to control the micro-economic choices, but they maintain that the macro-economic choices are to be made by a democratic government focused on serving all the people. The still valued regime of capital takes on a secondary role with regard to the basic ecological, economic, political, and cultural directions for the society. The regime of capital is expected to be obedient to these large-direction choices made by the representatives of a democratic government.

Option 4: This style of governing is more aggressive than the Option 3 style with regard to the role of democratic government in regulating the regime of capital. The Option 4 style of governing applies especially to those portions of the society that are fundamental for everyone. Currently, these topics include healthcare, education, energy provision, water quality, soil quality, air quality, basic transportation, internet fairness, and the building of a whole new infrastructure designed to moderate the climate. Option 4 directions on such topics currently include specific policies like: Medicare for all, the Green New Deal projections, and the long-range energy policies that will compel oil companies to submit their business plans for how they are going to phase out their product from its current massive use to a mere trickle in the next three decades. According to Option 4 voices, this huge but necessary, energy transition cannot start someday; it must start now. Under this option, energy companies (such as oil, coal, and nuclear) would start now facing severe penalties if they do not assist rather than oppose these necessary directions of energy transition.

Finally, here’s a minority option in the United States—**Option 5:** This option makes the news, and it is illustrated by those members of almost every society who support some form of the “dictatorship” that claims solidarity with the working population. We

find a version of this style of governing in China and Cuba. Though this Option has a slim following in the United States, we find a significant amount of appreciation for the accomplishments of China and Cuba in their ecological policies and in their ability to sustain a solid social order that is not ruled by the regime of capital. The obvious downside of Option 5 is the absence of an ever-deepening democracy. Dictatorial concern for the working population does not make a dictatorship into a working democracy. Even if we agree that a strong state government may have been required in China or Cuba to put a ruthless regime of capital in its subservient place and keep it there, option 5 still amounts to a revival of a strong economic caste system—a “new class” as some critics have spelled out—a new form of dictatorship that resists serious challenges to democratize.

Ecological Democracy

So I return to Option 4 as the most promising of the five for handling the ecological emergencies. If ecological solutions are to be forged and carried out for the big ecological challenges, a fuller and fuller democracy of the Option 4 intensity will be the key correction that cries out to be made in each society on the planet. Climate moderation is the biggest of the big matters among these ecological challenges. Without a solution to the climate crisis, we face irresolvable difficulties afflicting progress in all our other challenges. We have already delayed solutions to the climate crisis so long that many catastrophes are now unavoidable. But if we are to bet our lives on the emergence of possibilities for the survival of our species, we must now put the climate crisis first on our list of challenges and see every other challenge in that context.

I understand writers and teachers who recommend that we turn our attention to accommodating with the inevitable collapse of our current societies before the impending climate impacts. But instead of any mere accommodation to the collapse of current societies, let us imagine investing trillions of dollars in the search for ways we cannot yet see to replace these collapsing societies with better ways of doing human socializing.

November 2022

Several years ago I began advocating “building Eco-Democracy societies.” In order to be successful in building Eco-Democracies, we must not wait until after the current societies finish collapsing. Rather, we can take charge *now* of our collapsing civilizations—transforming the energies of these societies into opportunities for designing and building societies that are substantially better.

The great transition from hunter/gather societies to civilized societies took thousands of years. The transition from agricultural societies to industrial societies took hundreds of years. We now face the opportunity and the necessity of doing our seemingly impossible transition in a few decades. In the next three decades, we might get half way there if we are finding our way. Two hundred years from now, we may still be finishing up elements of this transition, unless, of course, we have missed the turn with our further delays. This is a “long emergency,” as David Orr calls it in his book *Dangerous Years*. We are being challenged to exercise our freedom in the light of this living now with its present challenges—to form right now a *long view* about which we can continue to be more specific.

Politics in a Time of Tyranny

Paul Tillich and Timothy Snyder

on Living Historically

by Alan Jay Richard

The German elections in 1932 were nail-biters. A collapsing world economy and accelerating wealth inequality undermined trust in liberal democratic norms, leading to unprecedented gains by both the far right and the far left. In the last relatively fair and free election in any part of Germany until 1949 and the last in all of Germany until 1990, the Nazis lost parliamentary seats while the Communist party gained a few. One could be excused, perhaps, for believing that the worst was past, and that Germans who, in the eyes of the far right, weren't German enough had dodged a bullet. It wasn't the case. German elites feared the far left much more than they feared the far right. And so, by the time elections in 1933 rolled around, the Nazi militias were using physical threats and actual violence to intimidate

Realistic Living • 7

POLITICS IN A TIME OF TYRANNY

opposition candidates, election workers, and voters. The “fair and free” pretext was already a joke, even to defenders of the regime.

In 1932, the German religious philosopher Paul Tillich, later known as an American theologian, was preparing his book *Die sozialistische Entscheidung* for publication. Max Horkheimer warned him that this book might cost him his life. It was announced after



Paul Tillich

the November 1932 elections and published in January. By then, Hindenburg’s centrist government, alarmed by the Communist gains in the election, handed Hitler the chancellorship, believing that they could control him. Tillich’s new book, along with books by prominent Jewish and socialist intellectuals, was banned as “un-German.” In May, most copies went up in flames in the first public Nazi book-burning, and Tillich lost his academic position. As 1933 elections neared, he had repeated aggressive encounters with Nazi militia and youth brigades attacking fellow citizens. Over the summer, Hannah Tillich had to intervene when, upon leaving a church service dominated by Christian nationalists, Paul

began screaming curses. By September, Hannah, tickets to America in hand, gave a taxi driver a wad of bills and told him to buy something for his children. “You are saving my husband’s life,” she said. They got in, and left Germany. The remaining copies of Tillich’s book were destroyed when the allies bombed a warehouse. The only copies circulated after this were copies of the manuscript held by close friends. No one in his new home wanted to translate or even touch it. It was dynamite.

The United States isn’t the Weimar Republic, and the mid-term elections of 2022 aren’t the parliamentary elections of Germany in 1932. But in historian Timothy Snyder’s words, 1932 is “instructive.” If you’ve been following the television news discussion of Russia’s invasion of the Ukraine and the Ukrainian resistance to it, you may have seen Snyder in the last few months. He’s an expert on the history of the part of Eastern Europe where both the Stalinist mass murder of the 1930s and the bulk of the Nazi Holocaust took place. His pamphlet *On Tyranny: Ten Lessons from the Twentieth Century* was published after the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Two years later, he published *The Road to Unfreedom*, his history of the last four decades in Russia and Eastern Europe. In both books, he draws on his deep knowledge of the region’s history to ground his framework for understanding our present threats and choosing possible futures that may avert them. This framework uncannily echoes the one Tillich had presented in the book that neither Nazis nor Americans wanted to read.

The Socialist Decision, as the title of Tillich’s explosive book was rendered when Chicago Lutheran professor Franklin Sherman finally translated it in the late 1970s, was largely ignored and fell out of print until Wipf & Stock recently re-issued it in paperback. Tillich starts the book by observing that we ask about the roots of spiritual or social institutions and movements only when steady growth gives way to a bent, twisted wasting away. Speaking in 1932, Tillich tells his readers that it is time to take a close look at those roots. *The Road to Unfreedom*, Snyder’s history of the present moment, starts with a similar observation. Both books ask “how did we get here?”, and both ask “where can we go from here?”, where “here” refers to

POLITICS IN A TIME OF TYRANNY

a time and place characterized by vastly increased inequality, rising authoritarianism, mistrust of democratic institutions, and far right wing street violence. And both locate the pre-political roots of this political situation in two specific orientations toward time. Tillich calls the first one “the myth of origin” and he identifies it with the “reactionary romanticism” of the German far right. Snyder calls it “the politics of eternity.”

The politics of eternity looks back to a mythical time of origin when the country was pure and “great,” and tells us that our problems will vanish if we restore that purity. It has no use for the future, no use for individual or collective responsibility, and no use for any critical appraisal of the past. It is a politics of “us” versus “them,” where “they” are the others whose presence threatens the purity of the people, their sense of who they are. It is not about policy that confronts economic or social dysfunction with rational action, but about self-affirming spectacle, the constant manufacturing of enemies to blame for whatever goes wrong, and the use of fear, violence, and intimidation to monopolize public space. Not being about policy or critical thought, it also has no need for truth-seeking. In place of the latter, it seeks to manufacture awe and abuses the powers of art and performance in this effort.

Tillich’s name for the second time orientation is “hidden harmony” or “the bourgeoisie principle,” and he associates it with social, economic, and technical liberalism. Snyder uses the phrase “the politics of inevitability” to name this orientation toward time. The politics of inevitability promises, in Snyder’s words, that “tomorrow will be like today, but better.” Time is a line that goes in one direction, from a past where life was nasty, brutish, and short to a future where it will be delightful, cultivated, and long. There is no pattern for life to be found in looking back to origins. Rather, there is a “hidden harmony” (Tillich’s phrase) working behind apparent conflicts and competition, whether it be the invisible hand of the market, the rational dialectic of Spirit in history, or the Marxist development of the forces of production. The politics of inevitability explicitly rejects the principle of origin, but it shares important features with the politics of eternity. Like the latter, it has no use for either critical appraisals of

the past or collective decisions about the future. Since hidden harmony ensures that my quotidian individual choices as a consumer and producer, concerned only with my own interests or those of my family, will magically contribute to a better world for everyone, the past has nothing to teach me that I need to learn, and I don’t *need* to do anything about a future that is already written. Yes, the future is real, but only as the present with the unpleasant bits missing. Best of all, there is no “maybe” about this future, and thus no demand facing me in it. It is inevitable, even if it seems to be taking a long time. Or, as one of its best and more sophisticated interpreters put it, “the arc of history is long but it bends toward justice.” Snyder quotes Dr. King’s famous line only to add: “But that isn’t true, because the arc of history doesn’t bend unless we bend it.”



Timothy Snyder

These two astute social observers, Snyder and Tillich, have similar proposals for overcoming these two politically irresponsible orientations toward time. Snyder tends to frame his proposal in terms of lists: twenty acts to defend democracy in *On Tyranny*, six political virtues in *The Road to Unfreedom*, and in a

recent talk, five forms of freedom. He has said, however, that all of these lists are just attempts to get to an antidote that he can sum up in one word: history. In a historical orientation toward time, he argues, the present moment brings with it not only the natural limits and capacities imposed by our evolutionary heritage but the perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and ethical limits and capacities arising from the decisions of human beings in the past and of our own society and culture. Although we can't know these limits and capacities absolutely, it's also false that they are completely opaque to us. We can't know everything that is possible for us, every alternative to what seems to be "normal," but if we study the past so that we know about things that have happened, our sense of possibility expands. We can be wary of *some* possible catastrophes and aware of *some* possible human achievements. The present moment, understood in historical terms, also contains a limited but diverse and conflicting array of possible futures, not just one. Although none of us individually controls which possible futures are realized, we can, when we are historically aware, evaluate them together, consciously examine which seem important and promising to us, ask ourselves why, and make self-aware decisions for some possible futures and against others. In doing so, we exercise a very fragile, very human, but real and actual freedom.

What Snyder calls "history," Tillich calls "the socialist principle" and, after a theological detour, "prophetic expectation." Tillich's analysis may be earlier and may have been written in a period that differed from ours in many ways, but it also adds a theological depth to Snyder's analysis of our own current circumstances, with democracy in shambles and violent, "great again" rhetoric once again ascendant. For Tillich, the two orientations toward time he and Snyder critically analyze are ultimately rooted in human being, in the way humans "be." Thus, they aren't mere lies but distortions of truth which, when understood existentially, show ourselves to us as fundamentally historical beings. We don't choose to show up, show up not choosing where and how we show up, and, even if we can to some degree choose when and how we die, we can't

10 • Realistic Living

choose *that* we die. Our life is surrounded by an abyss and the life of our species and our universe are surrounded by the same abyss. For Tillich, this abyss that we do not choose is the source of our power of being, what keeps us going and, when the time comes, cuts us off. This is our true origin, and inasmuch as our myths of origin (our diverse "actual origins") point to this reality, reminding ourselves of it is personally empowering and, yes, revering it is an indispensable source of political power. On the other hand, Tillich says, human being isn't simply a passive vehicle of nature, society, and culture. The Enlightenment may have been built on a delusory trust in the power of reason to free us, but as long as human beings have asked themselves where they are going and have sought to bend the future however slightly by acting in this way and not that, by leaving the familiar city of Ur in response to a demand and a promise or changing a way of life that has become toxic, human beings have experienced the future as something for which they are responsible. Inasmuch as the bourgeoisie principle, even with its faith in hidden harmony, was also a call to action, it was a call to stop seeing ourselves as the pawns of vast occult powers or the passengers on a one-way flight to utopia on automatic pilot, to break with our fascination with the myth of origin in order to face an unwritten and open future that demands our considered, difficult, and free decision as well as the use of our cognitive, technical and labor power to do as much bending as we can. For Tillich, the orientation toward time that affirms both the power of our true origin and the demand of our unwritten future, understanding the latter as the fulfillment of the former, is prophetic expectation, a time-orientation he associates with mature socialism. In our own time, we might associate it with eco-democracy.

The familiar politicians of progress are wrong. So are the MAGA politicians advocating a return to mythical origins. They are wrong, but their time-orientations are seductive because they promise security, and both of these types of politicians currently hold power almost everywhere. A future that includes human freedom, or for that matter, the human species, is not a given. The origin of a society is a source of power, but it isn't a guarantee of victory.

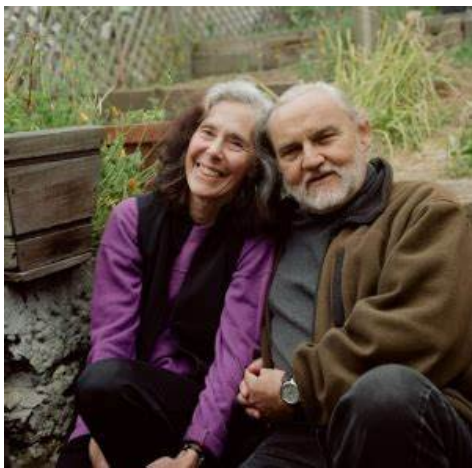
BIOREGIONAL TRAILBLAZERS

Our capacity to break with tradition, to imagine new devices and to build them, to analyze a situation rationally and respond, and to choose our values carefully but courageously, is also indispensable for realizing those possible futures that are better than our present and for avoiding the catastrophic futures that are much more likely. But this isn't a guarantee either. As both Tillich and Snyder remind us, though standing almost a century apart, the two imaginary alternatives to this perilous tightrope we walk between what is given beyond decision and what calls us to decide view time itself as a tyranny, even when they regard that tyranny as benign. Only when time is approached as historical, as the uncertain challenge to fulfill the promise of the origin instead of repeating it and as the responsibility for an unwritten future in which we are never secure, are we free. And only free beings have a chance to make a future.

BIOREGIONAL TRAILBLAZERS

by Joyce Marshall

Planet Drum Foundation will celebrate 50 years of grassroots approach to ecology emphasizing sustainability in 2023. Developing the concept of bioregion to enhance the intimate connection with life-places, their work has involved a harmonious connection of humans with the natural environment.



Gene and I met Peter Berg and Judy Goldhaft in 1984 at the first Continental Bioregional Congress where we also met Thomas Berry. Peter died in 2011

and his life partner, Judy, continues to manage the work of the organization. Check out the website: planetdrum.org and the book, *The Biosphere and the Bioregion: Essential Writings of Peter Berg*. The book includes tributes to Berg from a number of our bioregional friends: David Haenke, Stephanie Mills, Kirkpatrick Sale, David Simpson, Gary Snyder, Starhawk, Seth Zuckerman and many others as well as exploring the many aspects of their work. Our lives were deeply changed by the bioregional movement and Peter and Judy were central to its development.

Native American Seed. Another couple who have made a major contribution to the ecosystem is Bill and Jan Neiman who created Native American Seed to help people restore the earth. We met them in the 1980s when they were located in Argyle, Texas.

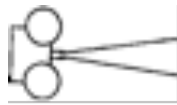


They have since relocated their company to Junction, Texas where we visited them a few years ago. You can meet them on their website at www.seedsource.com. I suggest their recent hard copy catalog which includes: a beautiful map of the bioregions of the southeastern U.S. (we're in the Blackland Prairie), a fine article by Bill of their story, all the native grass and flower seeds they sell (with photos), and great photos of their place and work, the folks who work with them, and the animals in their habitat. It is a delightful education piece. They also offer consulting services. Contact them by phone at 325-446-3600 or 800-728-4043

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

MOVIES



The Ballad of Buster Scruggs —

This 2018 Coen Brothers film is something else. I saw it in 2018, but my recent viewing impressed me more deeply than that one. The Coens do with a movie what Walter Scott does with literature. They allow the awareness of the utter uniqueness of each human manifestation. Each character in these six short vignettes of the "wild, wild west" is amazing to observe. And each one experiences his/her own particular tragi-comedy in the event played out for us, allowing the viewer to know at a deep level that our life carries its own uniqueness, its own particular tragi-comedy.

The Dust Bowl – This 2012 documentary is one of Ken Burns' best – a chronicle of the worst manmade environmental disaster in American history. The great plow-up of the farmland of the Great Plains during the depression of the 1930s combined with drought to create a "dust bowl." This 4-hour film was particularly interesting to me as I was born in 1934 in Norman Oklahoma and we moved to the Texas Panhandle when I was three. I'm told I nearly died of pneumonia at 3 months, and I guess it was one of the cases of dust pneumonia. A fascinating story of human misunderstanding and endurance.

Our Town – This Thornton Wilder play has long been one of my favorites and this 2003 film featuring Paul Newman as the Stage Manager captures its gifts: appreciating loved ones and life itself as our time on Earth is short.

To Sir, with Love – This 1967 film of Sidney Poitier, a Black teacher in a mostly white inner city school in Britain, is excellent.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid – I saw this 1969 film several times when it came out. Once, in a drive-in. It's my favorite of the Newman/Redford films and has a lasting power.

Hair – Also has a lasting power. Amazingly, I saw the 1968 musical in Amarillo, Texas. All I recall is the scene in which the characters all stand up nude. The 1979 musical is a fine celebration of the Hippie movement and Berger a hero who is always playful yet takes himself totally seriously.

Man Named Ove – This 2015 Swedish film won my heart and is worth more than one viewing. In despair after losing his wife and his job, Ove continues to be interrupted in his suicide attempts by neighbors needing his help.

Of Gods and Men – This 2010 French film is based on a 1996 event during the Algerian Civil War. Nine Cistercian monks live at their monastery in Algeria in harmony with the Muslim population. A group of fundamentalists led by Ali Fayattia change their situation. A beautiful film.

Joyeux Noel – This 2005 French film is based on a Christmas truce of December 1914 when the German Crown Prince sent the lead singer of the German Opera Company to the front lines. He sings and the French, Scottish and German soldiers call an extended songs truce and make friends. The director heard stories and saw photos of such incidents and based the film on them.



FICTION

The Heart of Midlothian
by Sir Walter Scott

Gene and I are currently reading aloud this book together (me to him). It features the first woman among Scott's protagonists and the first to come from the lower classes. She is Jeanie Deans, a Scottish woman who walks (mostly barefoot) from Edinburgh to London to ask the king and queen to pardon her sister who has been convicted of murdering her newly born child - born out of wedlock. These topics are out on the edge for Scott. Jeanie is devoted to her religion

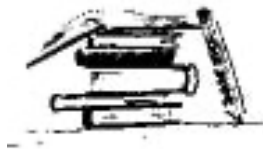
RECOMMENDED READING

- a branch of Presbyterianism known as Cameroonians and known for their moral certitude. Sometimes she seems simply moralistic, but in a discussion with an Anglican minister, she takes on moral ambiguity sounding (so help me) like Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Scott skillfully mixes historical characters with his fictional ones and on another occasion, in interacting with the Duke of Argyle, Jeanie impresses him with her understanding of legal and legislative matters. All of this is done in simple language and inherent common sense. Scott continually surprises and never disappoints as he reveals the humanity of his characters.

RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

Tariki
Embracing Despair,
Discovering Peace
by Hiroyuki Itsuki
Kodansha, 2001



I first read this book when it came out 20 years ago and picked it up again recently to find it even more powerful. Itsuki is a Japanese novelist who lived through difficult times during and after World War II. In this book he explores the gifts of the tradition of Pure Land Buddhism and how it spoke to him personally through the years. It speaks to me as we in this country have gone through the pandemic, Trump, and the threat of religious fundamentalism these past few years.

An Inconvenient Apocalypse
Environmental Collapse, Climate Crisis, and the Fate of Humanity
by Wes Jackson and Robert Jensen
University of Notre Dame, 2022

Two friends have collaborated on the creation of this address of what is probably the major issue of our lifetimes. We met Wes Jackson, the cofounder of The Land Institute in Kansas, at a bioregional meeting some years ago. Recently, in working on the creation of the Beyond Patriarchy course, I carried on an email conversation with Robert Jensen, professor
November 2022

emeritus in the School of Journalism at UT Austin, who has published several books on that topic. Our circle is presently studying this book at our weekly meetings. We are particularly impressed with the authors' down-to-earth, pull-no-punches approach. They share their own participation in the systems that need change and they are clear about the potential hopelessness of the situation. They look deeply, not only at the outward systems but also at our human possibilities. They also explore theological concepts with a secular approach in their search for a wise moral response that replaces arrogance with humility and grace.

Love Unveiled
Discovering the Essence of the Awakened Heart
by A.H. Almaas
Shambhala, 2020

A.H. Almaas is the pen name of Hameed Ali who created the Diamond Approach decades ago. I attended several retreats of this group in the 1990s and I worked directly with one of the teachers trained by Almaas for four years. I've read most of his 20 books.

One of the things I appreciate about the Diamond Approach is Hameed's perspective that each person's journey is unique. There is a great deal of respect for that individual unfoldment. He views love as an expression of our true nature. Inquiry is the principal method of the Diamond Approach, which means asking oneself (or one another in pairs) questions, usually a repeated question and allowing new awarenesses to arise. For example, "What makes you feel you are unlovable?" or "Tell me something you passionately love." In this book he explores self love and also love in committed couple relationships. He notes that sometimes couples experience hate as well as love and that needs to be felt and not denied. If we repress our hatred it gets acted out in subtle ways. Basically, he supports honesty, trusting that our essential nature is love and if we are honest that is what we discover.

Realistic Living Mission Statement

The core mission of Realistic Living is to clarify the essential Christian message and to promote and inspire a new Christian practice through small, intimate circles and their action as members of a local bioregion.

We carry out this mission with many forms of research and workshop attendance, and then share those findings. We write essays, books, journals, newsletters, and manuals. We maintain a website, a blog site, and other electronic ministries. We organize training events, Zoom meetings and Seminars, political and justice participations, bioregional organizing, interfaith dialogues, and more. We create both solitary and group religious practices. And we offer each of these works as a homeopathic drop in the ocean of need.

Over the 38 years of the existence of Realistic Living, we have gathered together a huge collection of writings to study, study plans to consider, simple yet deep courses to teach, as well workshops and solitary exercises to do.

Resources

Go to our website <http://www.realisticliving.org/> and look over the material laid out there. Also see our blog site www.realisticliving.org/blog/ It contains Realistic Living Pointers essays, whole books, study guides, and videos. If you want to receive our annual Newsletter and our monthly Realistic Living Pointers, send your email to gwesleymarshall@gmail.com.

Events on the Zoom Schedule

On the first of every month, Realistic Living is enabling a Zoom meeting for Symposium members. The Symposium is a collection of dedicated enablers of a next Christianity. We used to meet every

summer for four days in Bonham Texas. More recently we have limited our connection to a monthly e-mail. This year we dropped the emailing and are holding a Zoom meeting the first Saturday of each month from 11 to 12 Central Time.

Zoom Seminars

Gene has now conducted 10 Zoom Online Seminars on *The Thinking Christian*, A 10-session Zoom Seminar on Part One of this book was just completed on October 8th. A Part Two Zoom Seminar will begin January 21, 2023 and will continue until March 25th—10 one-hour sessions on successive Saturdays.

Part Two of this book features edges in Christian theologizing. I, Gene, prefer the word "theologizing" to "theology," for I believe we have no final statement of Christian faith, but rather are invited to a practice of thoughtfulness that is practiced by everyone practicing a Christian religion.

We will be striving for a group of 10 or 12 people—half women and half men. Each session is a participant event using innovative methods, and building a spirit companionship.

It is not necessary to be a practicing Christian to participate in this study of Christianity together. We live in an inter-religious era in which Christians need to study Buddhism and Buddhists need to study Christianity, etc. But if you do practice a form of Christianity, this Zoom is a rare opportunity for a fully up-to-date experience for your theologizing.

Part Three is on Christian ethical practices and Christian practices of a communal life of nurture for this ethical mission. It is scheduled in 2023 for April 29 to July 1.

The Part One Seminar is focused on foundational breakthroughs in our understanding of religion in general. This Zoom Seminar is scheduled in 2023 from August 6th through October 8th.

If you do not already own a copy of the Wipf and Stock published book, *The Thinking Christian*, the publisher has just published a second edition correcting most of the typos in the first edition. You can order either an e-book or a paperback from Wipf

and Stock or through Amazon. This book is a 398-page pull together of 40 years of studying and teaching these topics.

For E-mail-Dialogue

We are open to assist you to understand these resources or to discuss any of these matters with you. Our email addresses now are:

Gene: gwesleymarshall@gmail.com

Joyce: joycemarshall623@gmail.com

Alan: alanjayrichard@gmail.com

Realistic Living Finances

Financial gifts to Realistic Living go directly into needed services. We raise and spend a budget of **\$30,000 a year** on programing that is useful to our constituency.

We send complimentary copies of this journal to new people for a temporary period of time. If you want to be sure of continuing to receive this journal, we ask for a minimum donation of \$20 a year.

This work is support for a movement of religious renewal that is primarily Christian, but also relevant to religious renewal in general—as well as to an ethics that is intentionally inter-religious.

We encourage you to join the increasing number of people who contribute on a **monthly basis**. Your bank can work out a way to send these contributions for you.

Have a check sent to Realistic Living; 3578 N. State Highway 78; Bonham, TX 75418

If you are a customer of *Amazon.com*, you can set up through *smile.amazon.com* for a small portion of your Amazon purchases to be contributed to *RealisticLiving.org*.

We do not pay salaries to our three staff members, but only expenses that sustain our programing, electronic outreach, physical travel, and program attendance. We have a 12-member official board who is responsible for our non-profit 501-C3 corporation and who are also an active working

board, that now meet twice a year by Zoom. The staff—Gene, Joyce, and Alan—seek the advice of this board, and our finances are legally reviewed by them.

We thank you for the years of support so many of you have given us for enlivening a movement to assist a next Christianity to find a place in the drama of history. So thanks once again for sharing with us in this task and thank you also for our future associations.



Gene and Joyce
Photo by Pat Webb

Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."



Alan, Joyce, and Gene

Photo by Paula Brennecke

Realistic Living
3578 N. State Highway 78
Bonham, TX 75418
November 2022
Issue No. 78

Printed on
Recycled Paper



Nonprofit Org.
U. S. Postage
PAID
Bonham, TX
Permit No. 100

Current Resident