

Realistic Living

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The First Face of Revelation -- The About What?

Let us imagine ourselves looking into that absolutely black hole of Mystery, so black that no sight into it is possible, and so silent that no sound is coming from it. This sightless, soundless, stillness, blackness, of Totally Mysterious No-thing-ness is the *First Face* of any sound grasp of the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim revelation.

The Second Face of Revelation -- The Viewpoint

The *Second Face of Revelation* in the above three religions of Arabic origin is a human viewpoint on the human encounter with this Absolute Mysteriousness that we meet in the everywhere and every-moment course of human living. Most of us who are reading this essay are somewhat familiar with these viewpoints: The Exodus story, the Cross-Resurrection story, and the Mohammedan or Koran story. Each of these stories are witnesses to a revelatory event—a historical

The Meaning of Revelation

Theologizing by Gene Marshall

What do we mean by the word “revelation”? What does “revelation” reveal about what? How does revelation reveal? What happens to those persons who *take in* the revelation?

From H. Richard Niebuhr I have learned to speak of three faces of the event of revelation. The following spins are my words, not his.



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event that includes a story about every event, a faith **viewpoint** on the Absolute Mystery we encounter in every event. Such a viewpoint when taken on as a lived faith becomes a historically revolutionary movement of people who respond to living in the “light” of their revelation.

Each of these three monotheistic viewpoints puts a humanly created face on the Abyss of Mystery—a face that is *for us*—a viewpoint that reveals a trustworthiness of this Abyss of Mystery to we humans. The words “God,” “Allah,” “Yahweh,” “Father,” “Mother,” “Friend,” “Shepherd” “Foundation,” “Rock,” and other such devotional words are ways of symbolizing a friendly face on this enduring Abyss. Such faces communicate to us: “the Abyss of Mystery is trustworthy.” “The Abyss Loves us.” “The Abyss is the only encounter worthy of our total obedience.”

In different ways each of these three sets of monotheistic world religions speak of the trustworthiness of the Mysterious Abyss. Each of these primal revelatory events is a “showing” to its faithful adherents about what is being experienced by them in every event that is happening to them. The Exodus from the slavery in Egypt reveals a friendly Face on the Abyss out of which every event of human life is generated. I will explore that revelation shortly, but before I do I want to mention the third Face of every revelation.

The Third Face of Revelation -- The Authenticity

The *Third Face of Revelation* is the quality of consciousness that bubbles up in those human beings who trust their respective revelation of Abyss trustworthiness. This quality is called by many names, including: authenticity, profound humanness, Spirit, Holy Spirit, Freedom, Love, Tranquility, Rest, Peace, Joy, and more. These deep interior states are variously described, but the underlying truth being expressed has to do with an interpersonal bond with the Abyss and among humans. That bond includes a social ethics that promotes justice for all humankind as well as for other kinds of life and even for the Whole Earth. With this three-faced definition of revelation in

mind, I will explore further the Exodus Viewpoint, the Cross & Resurrection Viewpoint, and the Qur’an Viewpoint. Obviously, these insights are my own takes on these deeply controversial topics which are on the move for me and everyone.

The Exodus Viewpoint on the Abyss

So what happened to those slaves that Moses led out of Egypt? This more than 3000-year-old event is now covered with centuries of story, myth, and interpretations to the extent that any scientifically historical accuracy about what actually happened is obscured. Let us assume the following bare-bones approximation of the outward historical facts:

An unusually aware, sensitive, and perhaps educated member of the Hebraic slave community was moved to lead a significant number of his Hebraic companions out of a severely hierarchical Egyptian society into the wilderness where a new vision of law-writing was established, based on the vision that Mysterious Reality allowed such free action to change the course of history. Though based on some cultural memory, this was a shift in life interpretation for these Egyptian enculturated slaves. So huge was this shift that it took Moses and others 40 years, so the story goes, to wash Egypt out of this people and prepare them to fight for a more promising place on Earth for their revelation and their emerging peoplehood.

A more existentially rooted story-time rendering of this transformative event begins with how a man named Moses got so angry over a member of his people being mistreated by an Egyptian soldier that he killed that soldier and had to flee to the out-back to hide from the authorities. Then one day, so the story goes, Moses came upon a bush that was blazing with a strange type of fire. Temporal bushes burn up, but this bush was not being consumed. It remained the same old bush in spite of this strange conflagration. This was surely Moses’ poetry for a very real inner happening to Moses himself. His own “who-he-thought-he-was” was being burned up, yet he was not consumed. The poetry continued: he said that the whole scene became holy and that the bush spoke to him about rescuing his

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people from their slavery. This was the last thing in the world he wanted to do. He raised the fact that his speech-making talent was far inferior to his brother's. "Take him then," said the bush, "but be clear that I am speaking to you, not him. You will have to do the speaking to your brother. You are the one I am calling to this task. Your brother is not here for this awakening in your being." After a bit more excuse making, Moses set out to carry out this horrific calling.

So when a series of cracks in the seams of Egyptian society offered an opportunity to slip out, Moses had already prepared the people to do so. We do not have to believe the exaggerated storytelling that elaborated these events. I don't believe that Moses ever had an audience with the Pharaoh. I don't doubt that in his dream life Moses may have said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." Also, I don't doubt that plagues happened to Egypt. Such things happen to every society. The extent of this plagued society and the relation of that to this slave escape was surely exaggerated as the Exodus storytelling developed.

Anyhow, on one highly opportune day, a fairly large group of slaves got underway before the Egyptian CIA noticed them, alerted the authorities, and got a detachment of fast-moving military chariots in pursuit. I believe that the real historical miracle was something like the chariots getting bogged down in the mud of the Reed Sea rather than walls of water as pictured in an Exodus movie or in a biblical story. But however that was, the big happening was that this group, like many others, actually escaped. It is likely that most of those other escaping groups did not find a way to survive in the challenging wilderness. They did not have a Moses who could explain to them how Reality was *for them*. Moses told them to remember the Exodus and how to remember it. I can imagine Moses saying, "Let us view our freedom from slavery as an ongoing realism that applies to the situation at hand. Here are five ways to not forget the Exodus and five more ways on how we need to treat one another if we are to be true to what we have learned about being freedom-loving people who can dare the impossible and win."

Herein was a *revelation* about how Mysterious Reality *IS* and how humans who *are true* to this *truth* will find their "higher angels" in their own inner depths and then from those profound states find ways to "bend" history. Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others accessed for themselves the Moses-initiated vision about the Friendliness of the Abyss and applied that viewpoint to their contemporary situations. This expanded the relevance of the Exodus experience for all humankind.

The Cross & Resurrection Viewpoint on the Abyss

John, the Baptist, and Jesus also applied the Exodus experience to their situation and Jesus carried out his loyalty to the Mosaic revelation to such an extent that his followers called the result "a New Exodus." John, the Baptist, washed people of their evil era in the Jordan River. I believe he picked that place for his washings from the Joshua stories of old. Jesus emphasized an "Exodus" from the entire Kingdom of Satan toward the Kingdom of God on Earth. This New Exodus for humanity was described in the first century using the symbols of "Cross and Resurrection." The Cross was a new washing from the world of estrangement, and the



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Resurrection was a happening in the lives of the disciples—a promised land of new humanity. In truth, Cross and Resurrection are two aspects of the same happening.

This New Exodus viewpoint was not entirely inconsistent with the Old Exodus viewpoint. Both were viewpoints on the same Abyss of Mystery. Furthermore, the prophets of old, Moses, and his law-writing were all revered as valid insofar as these revelations were viewed through this fresh Cross/Resurrection viewpoint. The Jewish-born and Greek-educated preacher named Paul, viewed the faith-of-Abraham as Christian faith, a faith that preceded law-writing, a faith that Paul saw as support for his vision that our core trust in the ever-present Abyss of Mystery precedes our law writing.

The Cross/Resurrection viewpoint on the Abyss of Mystery has been buried in many layers of literalization, superstition, and downright foolishness. Digging these symbols out of the muck for our time requires some intense thought. How can we understand why these symbols have had such a profound hold on so many people? In order to approach the deep power of this revelation, we need to tell the story of Jesus and his followers in an inward, existentially profound way. And we need to tell the story from the perspective of the disciples. We don't actually have the perspective of Jesus, except what we can glean from his teachings remembered and interpreted by these disciples.

First of all, what we know scientifically about Jesus is minimal. We only know what Jesus said and did through those who tell us about what he said and did. And that first layer of telling is way down beneath several other layers of telling. Mark's Gospel is the earliest New Testament book we have about the life of Jesus, and Mark has Cross and Resurrection in mind from his opening verses. Mark is focused on opening up a revelatory witness that includes resurrection. The earliest Christians, then Paul, and then Mark spell out this revelation seen through the Cross and Resurrection mode of visioning. Mark was not crafting a biography of Jesus. A biography of Jesus we do not have, will never have, and do not need to have to understand the Cross/Resurrection revelation.

Again, we need to see the Cross/Resurrection revelation from the perspective of the disciples, rather than from the perspective of Jesus—whose perspective we do not have.

These disciples, according to these stories, left everything to follow this remarkable truth-telling man who was exciting the masses and offending the religious authorities. They slowly learned a great deal about truth telling, and had some experiences with truth telling themselves. Their expectations for this leader grew to cosmic proportions. But then something very surprising happened—the grim torture to death of their mentor. Their expectations about what following Jesus meant and would mean for them was dashed in this untimely and downright demeaning death of this good man. At first they could not see how this could possibly be a positive experience of revelation of anything more illuminating than how cruel human beings can be. The Cross was a death experience for the disciples, a deep river crossing.

The resurrection was also an experience of the disciples, not an experience of Jesus. We actually have no words of Jesus about what it was like to come back from the dead. It was the disciples who came back from the dead—from the death experience of having lost all hope for authentic living. Resurrection for the disciples was an experience that turned the Cross into a deliverance from estrangement. The resurrection happening turned the cross into a “Jordan River crossing” to a “promised land.” The resurrection realization turned despair into a “doorway” through which one might walk to an experience of true authenticity.

If we see the resurrection as an objective corpse walking about, eating fish, disappearing and other weird things, we are missing the whole point of what was happening to these living humans—these living women and men who were experiencing this resurrection—who were becoming in themselves the resurrection of Jesus. This was not a happening to the corpse of Jesus. The corpse-of-Jesus stories are poetry about what was happening to these still living disciples.

The disciples saw the LIFE OF JESUS in one another—in the living, walking, eating, talking,

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humans who were now carrying on the LIFE OF JESUS in the ACTS of the Apostles and their followers and in all their walking, taking, eating, bonding, child-raising, preaching, organizing, and other ACTIONS.

What had died in the Cross/Resurrection revelatory happening was what these followers of Jesus thought they were following, who they thought they themselves were, what they thought Reality was, as well as what they thought was going on or could go on. In other words, they died to their estrangements from the Abyss of Reality.

Is this really true to the New Testament witness? “Yes,” is my answer. The way the Gospel of Mark ended and the way Luke put together the 24th chapter of his narrative make clear to me that the resurrection was being viewed as a happening to the followers of Jesus. This is a bit of my poetry on this.

Resurrection is about me!
I always sort of knew that.
Why else would I care about it?

And resurrection is not about life after my death.
Resurrection happens now.
Was that not so for Mary, Peter, and Paul?

So what was it that had died in them or me—
that made a resurrection possible?
What died was who I thought I was,
what I thought reality was,
what I thought thought was,
what I thought WAS was and IS is.

This grand GIFT
is given at the tomb.
No wonder those women in Mark’s narrative
fled from the tomb in terror
saying nothing to anyone.

The resurrection was the dawning that the death experience of the cross was a doorway—that the loss of everything they thought and expected for Jesus and themselves was a transformation. This oblivion had paradoxically led them into the very LIFE OF JESUS—that is, into authentic life, the life for which we are all made, and from which all of us are well skilled in fleeing. This is also the LIFE that these

disciples had been fascinated with in the figure of Jesus. They were now themselves the LIFE that they had left everything to follow. What had happened in the Cross/Resurrection revelation was that ordinary weak and estranged women and men became the LIFE OF JESUS. Did not Paul and others talk of being “in Christ”—of being “the Body of Christ”? As the wildly creative gospel writer John had Jesus say to his disciples before leaving them: “*You will do greater things than I.*” When John wrote this gospel these disciples had already done great things—transformed the lives of tens of thousands of people, broken out of the Palestinian container, and written books that are still read today.

The probability is strong that Jesus was an actual historical person whose characteristics are reflected in the New Testament stories. But, it is also true that in all four Gospels, Jesus is a fictitious character in a master narrative about Cross and Resurrection. Mark, Matthew, and Luke keep a bit of historical realism in their story telling, but John is writing a whole-scale fictionalized piece of radical-edge theologizing. It is important to realize that all four of these story tellers were Cross/Resurrection visionaries witnessing through their stories to a revelatory viewpoint on the Final Abyss of Mystery that all of us meet every day of our lives. Their Jesus characterizations were attempts to exemplify in a rather outlandish form of fiction what a profoundly authentic human looks like when walking, talking, and impacting other human beings. The disciples in these stories are also fictional characters who exemplify the journey toward the Cross/Resurrection revelation.

In Mark’s story the Cross/Resurrection happening clearly occurred in the life of Jesus when John, the Baptizer, dunked Jesus in the River Jordan, washed away the evil era, and lifted him up from this sea of death into a new mission of life that was going to be as costly for Jesus as it was for John. This was and still is another offense to our lazy sinfulness—that following Jesus means taking up our own unique cross experiences that we will have in this still estranged world of humans among whom we will have to live and to whom we will be called to love with the expenditure of our lives.

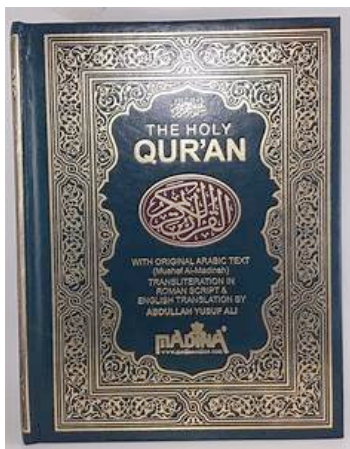
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So now when we read the New Testament stories about Jesus we are reading about a resurrected type of human leading dumbbell disciples like you and me through the deep river crossing of the cross to the life of resurrection. This is the good news. This is the gospel feast. This is the revelation of the New Testament about the Abyss of Mystery and how that Mystery Loves us—loves us by leading us through the deep river of dying to a campground of LIFE on the other side of this death.

Christians are called not only to take in this revelation for their own lives, but to witness to this revelation—to preach it, to proclaim it to the last person on Earth. What do they proclaim? They call it “The Word of God”—a communication from the Abyss of Mystery.

The Qur’an Viewpoint on the Abyss

Six centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus, Mohammed communicated a fresh viewpoint on this same Abyss of Mysterious Reality. The Islamic viewpoint into this Abyss of Reality is a revelation that is less well understood than the other two, at least in the United States.



Mohammed, however, saw both Judaism and Christianity as allies in his primary fight with polytheistic forms of religion. He had less trouble allying with Jews than with Christians. Mohammed could not see how the Constantinian Christianity he encountered was genuine monotheism, rather than a worship of three Gods. Mohammed was clear that neither he, nor Jesus, nor Moses were in any sense God.

I doubt that Mohammed was ever exposed to anyone who suggested to him anything close to

what I am developing in this essay—namely that each of these monotheistic religions have three Faces to their revelation. Here is how even Islam is triune—(1) the Abyss Face, (2) the Mohammedan/Qur’an Face, and (3) the profound humanness Face that flows from that viewpoint into the Abyss.

I will not develop this thesis further, I only want to indicate something crucial for Christians—namely, that Islam, deeply perceived, is an ally, rather than an enemy, to Christian monotheism. Jews, Christians and Muslims can work together against the true enemies of shallowness, oppression, and hatred in the estranged world that we all face.

Estrangements among these three religious heritages can be healed if we go deep enough into how all of us can be “friends” of the same Abyss of Mystery as that Mystery is encountering all of us in the historical events of the 21st century.

Beyond the King on High A Report on the God Seminar

by Alan J. Richard

In the fall of 2016, I was invited to become part of the Westar Institute’s Seminar on God and the Human Future. As of this writing, I have attended two meetings, have contributed a chapter in a Seminar book, and have registered for a third meeting that will probably be occurring at about the time you receive this journal.

Like Realistic Living, the Westar Institute is a research and educational organization and like Realistic Living, it is centered on the meaning of the Christian tradition for our current 21st century cultural, political, and religious context. Westar’s emphasis, however, differs from Realistic Living’s. While Realistic Living is primarily concerned with developing and promoting new forms of Christian practice that acknowledge and respect the theological and historical breakthroughs of the 20th century, Westar is primarily concerned with reaching scholarly consensus on aspects of the history and evolution of the Christian tradition that are important both to scholars and to the general

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public, and turning the results into useful tools that non-specialists can use to evaluate competing claims about Christianity and religion.



Because of these different emphases, Realistic Living and Westar complement each other even when some of their activities overlap. Realistic Living has hosted research symposia and training schools for people dedicated to imagining and inventing a “next Christianity,” but we have not held meetings bringing together academic historians and Biblical scholars in order to focus their expertise on a topic that scholars and non-scholars find compelling. Realistic Living’s summer symposia, like Westar’s seminar meetings, have produced consensus statements but the former tend to be action- and commitment- oriented while the latter tend to be more descriptive. I can’t imagine a Westar seminar consenting that “we will create a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) strategy for Circles, both for mission and for Circle life,” but a symposium hosted by Realistic Living did. Similarly, I can’t imagine a Realistic Living symposium arriving at a consensus that “Matthew 5:3 is highly likely to go back to the earliest layer of the Jesus tradition,” though a number of symposium members are informed about Westar’s work and even most who aren’t would both agree with the statement and have enough of a grasp of historical critical methods to explain why. This was one of the statements on which the Jesus Seminar, Westar’s earliest and most famous seminar, reached consensus.

Despite these differences in emphasis, the organizations’ *interests* as well as their activities intersect. This overlap or intersection of interests is present in a number of Westar’s seminars, but its breadth is greatest in the Seminar on God and the Human Future, known more colloquially as the “God Seminar.” This is the Westar seminar on which I was invited to serve.

The God Seminar

First formulated in 2013, the God Seminar is Westar’s youngest member. Like the Jesus Seminar and its successors, the God Seminar draws on credentialed scholars. They aren’t, however, the same kinds of scholars. God Seminar fellows represent disciplines like the philosophy of religion, critical theory, and radical theology rather than disciplines like history or biblical criticism, which dominate Westar’s earlier seminars. Nevertheless, one of the God Seminar’s earliest consensus statements committed it to building on the historical critical work of the earlier seminars. Its first major project is driven by Westar’s dual mission to conduct collaborative academic research and to promote religious literacy by publishing the results in highly accessible forms. This project, currently called “varieties of post-theism,” is directly inspired by John Caputo’s extension of Paul Tillich’s effort to think God non-theistically, which Tillich expressed when he wrote that “it is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it,” and that God is “not a being,” not even the highest being (Systematic Theology, Vol I, 237). The seven God Seminar meetings held so far and an eighth that will be held in Denver, Colorado on November 16th are devoted to this project. In order to understand the importance of that collaborative work that Realistic Living’s representation in the God Seminar entails, it is helpful to look at the key meetings that turned the God Seminar in a direction that is aligned with Realistic Living’s mission. The God Seminar is also beckoning Realistic Living into new theological edges.



Varieties of Post-Theism: Key Meetings

At the God Seminar's first meeting, John Caputo, author of *The Weakness of God*, *The Insistence of God*, and *The Folly of God*, explained what he means by "weak theology" wherein the word God harbors a call that is weak in the sense of lacking in itself any coercive force but is at the same time insistent in the sense that it cannot be wished away, and grounded that theology in a reading of 1 Corinthians 4. During this meeting, the seminar unanimously rejected the claim that "the subject matter of theology is God conceived as a supreme being or highest entity." At the second meeting Russell Re Manning, editor of *Retrieving the Radical Tillich*, identified three radical edges in Paul Tillich's theology of culture. The first edge is emphasized in *The Socialist Decision*, the book that got Tillich censored by the Nazis. In that book, theology is recognized as both fully embedded in culture *and* as challenging culture to go beyond its present condition. The second edge is the understanding of faith as dwelling in doubt, emphasized in his popular *The Courage to Be*. Re Manning calls this dwelling in doubt Tillich's "strategic atheism." The third edge, manifesting late in Tillich's life, is an awareness of the challenge of global inter-religious engagement. These three edges are woven together

by a dynamic relationship between the "unconditional" and "conditional" historical and temporal forms. (Long-time Realistic Living journal subscribers may be familiar with the language for this dynamic relationship that Gene inherited from the Ecumenical Institute: "The spirit cries out for form, but the form cannot contain it.") The God Seminar fellows unanimously affirmed that "atheism is not the opposite of faith; atheism is an element of faith."

The third meeting featured Irish philosopher Richard Kearney's argument that the experience of disorientation, "when we are no longer sure exactly who we are or where we are going," also opens us up to a newness of life and reorientation, lending life its liveliness. Jeffrey Robbins praised Kearney's work for drawing attention to an understanding of the sacred that comes *after* the death of the "Alpha God of triumphant might and metaphysical certitude." The God Seminar fellows affirmed the theological challenge to "creatively reimagine God after the death of the God of sovereign power."

J. Kameron Carter, noted Duke Divinity School professor and author of *Race: A Theological Account*, kicked off the fourth meeting by asking "What does it mean to say 'God is Not King?'" To tease this out, Carter began to "peel the onion" around Anselm of Canterbury's theology of God's kingship to uncover how its assumptions are grounded in medieval Christendom's concepts of property and lordship that naturalize slavery. Without the whole system of ownership rights built on this foundation of naturalized slavery and culminating in the figure of the "feudal" lord and king (the lord of the lords), the concept of God as divine Lord or King becomes hollow. It is no longer a living metaphor, or rather it lives only insofar as the concept of the ownership of human beings is still a factor in our existence. As Carter put it, "the medieval is still with us." Its survival is an indictment of our continuing attachment to the slave system. The meeting generated one consensus statement that was unanimously affirmed: "Given its problematic associations with property, possessor closure, and mastery, the concept of sovereignty should no

longer be used in reference to contemporary conceptions of God.”

So by the end of its fourth meeting, the God Seminar had already rejected the proposition that the word “God” names a being and was affirming atheism as an element of faith. Its speakers were making arguments that resonated strongly with the branch of the Spirit movement Realistic Living serves. Subsequent meetings have focused on pantheism and panentheism (Spring 2017), religious naturalism and Christian nationalism (Fall 2017), and coloniality in theology (Spring 2018). Some of these have echoed the theological orientation of Realistic Living and some have challenged it, but every meeting has persuaded me of the importance of the Seminar’s work for Realistic Living and the importance of Realistic Living’s for the Seminar.

Bridging the Gap - In Both Directions

Realistic Living’s presence in the God Seminar is part of Westar’s larger effort at “bridging the gap” between the academic study of religion and the experience of the spiritual and the religious in contemporary culture also manifest, for example, in its Praxis Forum (formerly the Young Leaders in Religion Forum) composed of young religious leaders in both religious and secular contexts. Realistic Living’s ability to provide a representative for the seminar who also had academic credentials probably facilitated this presence, as did God Seminar chair Jeffrey Robbins’ interest in Realistic Living’s work. The context of these factors however, is this larger effort at bridging the gap.

Both Realistic Living and the God Seminar are interested in religious theory and practice after theism, after the concept of “God as a being” is no longer credible. Both essentially begin by rejecting the God of what in RL jargon (borrowed from Bultmann) we call “the two story universe.” Both are interested in some of the same elements of Paul Tillich’s thought, including Russell Re Manning’s three radical edges and the inseparable polarity of the conditional-unconditional. Both have faced the

inescapable entanglement of 21st century theological thinking with the threat of climate change and its implications for religious thinking about science and its nature. Both have wrestled with the concept of sovereignty in relationship to the word “God.” Both organizations have done so with explicit reference to how the language and logic of sovereignty are embedded in civilizational hierarchy.

Realistic Living’s most sustained and effective effort to address civilizational hierarchy to date, Joyce Marshall and Pat Webb’s Beyond Patriarchy workshop, dramatically illustrates the important ways that Realistic Living is doing what the God Seminar is not designed to do. The workshop is focused far less on explaining the workings of patriarchy or critiquing patriarchal theological/political concepts than on intervening in them through practices that can be deployed as antidotes to the internalization of the emotionally and bodily embedded images underlying these concepts. It isn’t that Joyce and Pat are unaware of feminist criticism, or for that matter of anti-colonial or anti-racist critiques of sovereignty. On the contrary, Joyce alone has read and reread the canon of second-wave feminist criticism from the 1960s through the 1980s multiple times and has continued to read new work by feminist religious practitioners, theorists, and activists. It’s that they are interested in devising and facilitating *practices* that build on these theoretical tools to *enact* change or becoming on the level of affect, connection, quality of awareness and, yes, conceptual associations. The tools of feminist scholars and theorists serve this interest and these tools inform the practices Joyce and Pat use as well as the categories they use to guide participants through the workshop, but their work is not identical to that of these feminist scholars and theorists. Joyce and Pat have devised a theoretically-informed intervention on the religious level of culture, where symbols of ultimacy are born, live, and die. These symbols, with which we identify and/or to which we submit, touch us affectively and corporeally, not just cognitively. Had feminist scholars not done their work (and much of their early work was also done collaboratively), Joyce and

Pat might not be doing theirs but the work Joyce and Pat are doing, which feminist scholars qua scholars don't do, is deploying this scholarship for the purposes of contemplative activism.

Something similar could be said of Realistic Living's efforts to cultivate Next Christianity Circles. These efforts are born of deep encounters with academically trained biblical scholars and theologians as well as religious practitioners, including religious theorists and practitioners from traditions other than Christianity. But they are bodily and creative enactments of theory, responsive to, embedded in, and shaping a reality that includes theory but also much that is not theory, ready to combine and reinvent theoretical tools in response to context and situation, in a process that can be closer to art or performance than to scholarly or theoretical insight and debate (even though RL meetings and even Circle meetings can involve intense theoretical debate). Without such efforts, theoretical work remains an elite preoccupation aloof from not so much practice in the abstract as from concrete religious practices and from what they do in specific contexts. Religious breakthroughs are never just theological breakthroughs, and theory is not finally about reflecting on the world but about changing it. Westar needs a Realistic Living and many other such groups.

But even that does not go far enough. It isn't just that practice completes theory or embodies it, as if theory were descending from the lofty heights to incarnate itself in sublunary and perishable matter. Theory is itself generated by living bodies that are affected by other bodies and nervous systems. These bodies, their senses and their pattern-forming and associative tendencies, convert affects into action-potentials that prepare those bodies to affect the world. Language and symbolic expression, including the ordered recognition and use of grammatical and syntactical conventions, are human capacities that depend on this more general capacity to *be shaped* and *to shape*, already present in the living body and its nervous system. They are evolutionarily preserved inasmuch as they serve that capacity.

This hints at a second contribution that practice-focused organizations like Realistic Living make. They are engaged in cultic, ritual, artistic, and contemplative experimentation, and this engagement can help theory-focused organizations like Westar. Practice is where the affective and bodily road rises up to hit the theoretical rubber. The bodily and affective signals informing theology are largely shaped by practice. The push and pull, the unpredictable interactions, the pliability and resistance of social and personality structures involved in all experiments with new religious practices generate intuitions, images, and associations that become raw material for fresh theoretical construction and insight. It isn't just that the Word makes flesh but also that flesh makes the Word.

Realistic Living and the movement it serves also need Westar. The God Seminar has intentionally sought to expose itself to the realities of theology's entanglement with slavery and colonialism and to let this deeply pressure its theologizing. The Christian wing of the larger Spirit movement that Realistic Living serves will benefit from the results of this risk-taking work of discovery and from the mass education that Westar has undertaken with the God Seminar. Westar's commitment to publishing and promoting books and curricula drawn from the results of their seminars provides the potential for new ways to communicate those basic elements for theologizing a next Christianity that ground both the God Seminar and Realistic Living, as well as materials that might pressure our theologizing and our practice to notice newly discernible aspects of reality calling for our attention.

A Dual Exposure

The future of Christianity, if it has one, lies in a practice of community that can credibly (not perfectly) hold the image of Jesus as the Christ after the death of the Supreme Being, God the Patriarch, God the King. Such a community will have a culture and this culture will be a subculture within a larger cultural context composed of many such subcultures. Theologizing is an element in this

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practice of community and is embedded in its subculture and the larger cultural context. But as Tillich reminds us, theology calls culture beyond its present condition. In order to do this, theologizing will need to risk itself in two directions. It will need to expose itself to the sensory and affective signals given off in response to subtractions from or innovations in ritual or cultic practice and how these signals affect power relations, or how they affect the quality and complexity of possible interconnection. Theology needs insights gleaned from the work of organizers and facilitators of circles of profound humanness. Theology also needs to face the challenges of thinking emerging outside and up against the dominant strains of European thought that justify exploitation. This is why theology needs the insights of scholars and activists doing that difficult thinking.

The intersection between Westar's God Seminar and Realistic Living is one space where this kind of dual exposure can occur because this intersection rests on the foundation-less foundation held by the hope of a humbled, more open, but also more vital Christianity beyond the one that gave us the King on High.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

FICTION

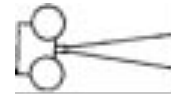
Woodstock
Sir Walter Scott



You likely have not heard of this work by Scott. I would never have discovered it had my daughter not held him as one of her favorite authors and insisted that we read this particular book which Gene and I read aloud. I now hold it as one of my favorite novels and the character Alice Lee one of the greatest fictional heroines. Written in 1826, the setting is 1651 after Charles I has been beheaded, Oliver Cromwell is in power, and Charles II is in hiding. In my opinion, the writing is superb. Its constant surprises are as good as the best spy novel and the many one-on-one scenes demonstrate an

amazing understanding of psychology for the 19th century. Scott's portrayal of Alice and the servant Phoebe show him to be a feminist a century before the term was known. Some of the language is not easy to discern but we found it well worth the effort.

MOVIE REVIEWS



**A number of documentaries
stood out for me recently:**

RBG. This fine documentary on the Notorious Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, is an appropriate acknowledgement of her work and her character. I didn't know of her legal legacy of gender discrimination suits before she became a judge. We are all better off because of her winning five significant cases before the Supreme Court in the 1970s. Another thing that warmed my heart is that her husband, Marty, a top (if not the top) tax attorney in New York City, retired and gave full time support to her career when Bill Clinton appointed her to the Supreme Court. I plan to order a RBG T-shirt.

The Eagle Huntress is a 2016 Kazakh-language British-Mongolian-American documentary film following the story of a 13-year-old girl as she attempts to become the first female eagle hunter. It is an amazing and moving story. With the assistance of her eagle-hunter father and the blessing of her eagle-hunter grandfather, she captures a baby eagle, trains it and wins the all-male eagle hunting contest.

The Dark Horse. There are more than one film with this title. This is the one about a Welsh village that adopts a race horse. This comes about because a middle-aged woman who works as a barmaid and a supermarket cleaning woman convinces other folks in the village to pitch in the money while she finds a mare and a stud, raises a colt and finds a trainer. Amazingly, in this aristocratic sport, the village's horse does very well. They are in the winner's circle and become like a family and the horse their child. This is yet another winning documentary.

Muscle Shoals. Something magical about the small town of Muscle Shoals, Alabama made it a mecca for musicians. Among those who recorded there: Aretha Franklin, Paul Simon, Gregg Allman, and Keith Richards. One unusual aspect of the happening is the blend of the white hillbilly house band with black singers such as Arthur Alexander, Percy Sledge and Wilson Pickett. I found the filming of this documentary to be prime. Very well made!!

Won't You Be My Neighbor? I don't think I ever saw the PBS show "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" when it was on TV. I guess because my daughters were already in their teens at that time I knew of it only by its parodies. So this film surprised me in many ways. I didn't know that Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister who chose to counter the shallowness and violence of children's television with programming that dealt with issues like divorce and assassination and racism. And he did not do so in a preachy manner. For example, when white business owners poured chemicals into swimming pools to drive out black patrons, Rogers invited the black police officer on the show to share a kiddie pool together as they soaked their feet as a relief from the heat. And he shared his towel to dry their feet. This is a fine documentary that reveals what a brave compassionate revolutionary man Mister Rogers was.

And here are a few outstanding dramas:

Maudie is a 2016 biographical drama film about the life of folk artist Maud Lewis, who painted in Nova Scotia. Maud (played by Sally Hawkins) struggles with arthritis, memory of a lost child, and a family that doubts her ability. She convinces a surly fish peddler (a totally unrecognizable Ethan Hawke) to hire her as his housekeeper. Eventually they marry and her art gains in popularity. A fine film.

Our Little Sister. This Japanese film is lovely. Three adult sisters who live together attend the funeral of their father. There they meet their teenage step-sister. It is clear to them that she is unhappy living with a selfish immature mother. They invite her to

live with them and she accepts. The beauty of this film is the focus on simple moments of joy and sadness: four women enjoying each other's company, seeking romance, eating good food, mourning the loss of friends and loved ones.

Stage Beauty. Prior to the restoration of the House of Stuart, the Puritans enacted a law forbidding women to perform in the legitimate theater. In this film Maria (Claire Danes) is an assistant to a male actor, Ned Kynaston (Billy Crudup), who is famous for his portrayal of female characters and currently playing Desdemona in *Othello*. She moonlights at a tavern under a pseudonym and plays Desdemona there, using all the tricks she learns watching Kynaston imitating what he imagines women to be. Then the mistress of King Charles II seduces him into banning men from playing female roles. So, we have Maria playing Desdemona and Kynaston, *Othello*. Although some of the film was not totally satisfying to me (it seems to hint that homosexuality is learned) the climax is the scene on stage when *Othello* murders his wife, Desdemona. Danes and Crudup are in top form as Maria and Kynaston, instead of using mechanical acting techniques, let loose and play it real. It is as stunning a scene as I've ever experienced.

And here is one amazing animated film:

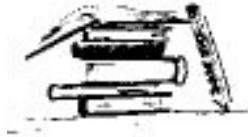
The Breadwinner is set in Kabul, Afghanistan, under the control of the Taliban. Parvana is a 11-year old girl who becomes the family breadwinner for her mother, older sister and younger brother. There had been another older son, but he had been killed. Her father, Nurullah, had been a teacher but a war injury left him hawking on the street to support the family. A young member of the Taliban, who thinks he's been insulted arrests Nurullah. The females in the family cannot go out without an adult male so they are desperate. Parvana decides to cross-dress as a boy. She sets up on the street to read and write letters to earn money and eventually manages to rescue her father from prison. The animation is a work of art and the story inspiring.

RECOMMENDED READING

RECOMMENDED READING

Reviews by Joyce Marshall

Becoming Animal
An Earthly Cosmology
by David Abrams
Pantheon Books, 2010



This book is brilliant, magical and artful. I can hardly say enough good things about it. David is actually a magician who traveled about Asia and the Americas doing his sleight-of-hand magic and seeking out indigenous medicine people. His story, at times, reminds me of Carlos Casteneda's in his relationship to don Juan. He connects deeply to the land and the animals with a high sensitivity to the interactions of the natural world and what we can learn by a deeper awareness. Sometimes he waxes poetic and takes my breath away in writing about weather. Other times his scholarship about language blows my mind. One topic he is passionate about is the need to recover oral culture. He says you don't have to throw away your computers, TVs, cell phones, etc., or even your printed pages. But do tell with your tongue certain stories. And retell them, letting them change as they will, using your gesturing body. Improvise stories for your kids about how the local river feels or about the wild wind blustering through the streets. Well, mostly I want to say, READ THIS BOOK!

Wonder Beyond Belief: On Christianity
by Navid Kermani
Polity Press, 2018 (English publication)

Kermani is a Muslim, a German scholar and writer who has a fascination for Christianity, and, in particular, Christian art. This book is a beautiful collection of fine photos of some of the great Christian paintings from around the continent of Europe.

His comments on the paintings reveal the Christian religion in a way perhaps only someone from another faith could. Discussing Caravaggio's *The Crowning with Thorns* which hangs in a museum in Vienna, he wonders why the high priests and

elders were not content to see Jesus die but wanted him publicly tortured. He calls it resentment resting on inferiority. He says, "The modesty, the submission, the unshakable endurance that the Gospels attribute to the adult Jesus also encompasses a haughtiness, intentional or not because his ostentatious selflessness declares as negligible and ridiculous what ordinary humans find indispensable: their own welfare." In a couple of instances, Kermani steps aside from art and deals with Christian saints. Paolo Dall'Oglio is not officially a saint, but clearly one by my definition. Italian by birth, he became a Jesuit at age 20 with a calling toward Islam. He set up a monastery in Syria where Syrian Muslims shared the community practices. The group fasted during Ramadan and formed a shared life and prayer between the religions. He opposed church hierarchies, declared solidarity with the oppressed in Syria, openly opposing Assad. He was kidnapped in 2013 when he met with ISIS to negotiate. (Paolo had learned to speak perfect Arabic.) He has not been seen since. Kermani notes: "If there is one thing I admire about Christianity . . . it is the specifically Christian love . . . that I perceive most often in those who have dedicated their lives to Jesus, the monks and nuns: a love which makes no distinctions." His art piece for Saint Francis is the photo of a parchment manuscript in Francis' own hand. The Franciscan Institute has meticulously documented that Francis was almost alone in resisting the murderous crusades, insisting on the universal nature of Christian love. He made friends of the Saracens and his religious practice was most like a Sufi.

This is a small taste of a gem of a book.

Women's Growth in Connection
Writings from the Stone Center
by Judith V. Jordan, Alexandra G. Kaplan,
Jean Baker Miller, Irene P. Stiver, & Janet L. Surrey
Guilford Press, 1991

This is a collection of seventeen articles by women who worked at the Stone Center at Wellesley College with Jean Baker Miller, author of the ground-breaking 1976 book, *Toward a New*

RECOMMENDED READING

Psychology of Women. Their approach to therapy is in awareness of the patriarchal social system and an antidote to it. The emphasis is on connection and relationship, mutual empowerment, and empathy. Human growth involves flexible boundaries – an ability to imaginably “walk in the other’s shoes.” Topics include dependency, anger, depression, work, power, and sexuality.



If Women Rose Rooted
The Journey to Authenticity and Belonging
by Sharon Blackie
September Publishing, 2016

Scotch-Irish Blackie was born in England and has lived mostly in Scotland and Ireland. She offers the Celtic traditional stories of “first things,” which “honor Women as the creators of life, the bearers of the Cup of knowledge and wisdom, personifying the moral and spiritual authority of this fertile green and blue Earth” – and great stories they are. She mixes her personal story and poetry with the old stories. Here is how she states her understanding: “The sense of belonging to the world that those of us in these Western lands once had, that sense of deep rooting in the Earth, is all but dead. The patriarchy crippled it; Modernity dealt it the final blow. As a woman, I want to make it live again. We belong to each other, this land and I. The Eco-Heroine’s Journey is a journey back to a solid rooting in the land where we live and the traditions of our native places.” Her advice to older women: Pass your wisdom on. Tell your own story. Your truth shatters

hypocrisy. When necessary, become fierce. Be wrathful.

Ending the Search
From Spiritual Ambition to the Heart of Awareness
by Dorothy Hunt
Sounds True, 2018

This book is an invitation to learn from silence and stillness. To stop trying, stop pretending, stop believing your stories of who you are. To simply rest as what we are. Hunt worked with Mother Teresa, Adyashanti, and Ramesh Balsekar and was inspired by Ramana Maharshi. The book is both a guidebook and a sharing of her experiences of her own spirit journey. Her exercises help you deconstruct your sense of self and experience “awareness moving as love.” She explores the difference in hearing and listening, the transmission of truth beyond words, and the ridge pole of your egoic separate self – fascinating subjects in my book. I suggest hanging out with Hunt’s book for awhile early each morning. You won’t be sorry.

The Way of Rest
Finding the Courage to Hold Everything in Love
by Jeff Foster
Sounds True, 2016

I have appreciated other books by Foster. The particular gift of this one is that each of the 177 pieces is like a poem, some only half a page long. So it works well for reading one a day and writing about it in your journal. Some of my favorites are about letting go of the blame game, being responsible for your own happiness, and not being responsible for the happiness of others.

ON DEATH AND DYING

Walking Each Other Home
Conversations on Loving and Dying
by Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush
Sounds True, 2018

Ram Dass had a stroke 20 years ago. Even though he can’t walk, can use only one arm, and is slower in putting words together, his memory and thinking

RECOMMENDED READING



are still sharp and the humbling physical experience has increased his wisdom. In their younger days he and Mirabai both spent two years in India with their guru, Neem Karoli Baba. After his death and their return to the U.S. they remained friends, getting together from time to time to work on projects and compare notes on their individual spirit journeys. In 2015, Ram Dass asked Mirabai to work with him on a book about dying. So Mirabai made visits to Ram Dass at his home in Hawaii and they had many conversations which she recorded. Sometimes she would read pieces from his former talks and writings and sometimes read from her journal entries and they would reflect on them. Mirabai noted that Ram Dass always tried to note what he was thinking in the moment, not the many answers he had given in the past.

At times it was an interreligious dialogue. Mirabai notes that Ram Dass is a theist. He believes in God. Whereas she is more of an agnostic these days. That didn't appear to get in the way of their discussions. The topic of grief is one they cover. She says, "I think that much of American society is in grief over the apparent loss of compassion, care, wisdom, and even humor in our leadership." One of Ram Dass' short simple statements: "Whatever you do, who you are is what will make the difference." For Ram Dass, this question of identity comes from his association with his beloved guru. Those young Americans who were drawn to him experienced an unconditional love that had no favorites. It is a love that you finally do not do, but you become. Some of the subsections of the section on love: Love is More Powerful Than Death, Lose

Yourself in Love, Love Heals, and Interconnected By Love. There is also a section on Being With the Dying.

This 8 1/2 X 8 1/2 book is beautifully designed with hand lettering and artful illustrations. The last section of the book is Practices for Conscious Living and A Loving Heart. I can see no better way to deal with living in the situation we face today, and with facing our own and others' inevitable deaths than to put these practices to use.

Living and Dying With Confidence
A Day-By-Day Guide

by Anyen Rinpoche and Allison Choying Znamgo
Wisdom Publications, 2016

This is a book of 365 reflections on dying. You read the short piece for the day and then do the exercise suggested - sometimes it is writing, sometimes an activity, but always to increase your understanding of your own relationship to your life and death.

I am on day 36.



What To Do When I'm Gone

A Mother's Wisdom to her Daughter

by Suzy Hopkins and Hallie Bateman
Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018

Hallie Bateman, an illustrator in her twenties, asked her mother, Suzy Hopkins, to write this book because Hallie was concerned at how she would get by without her mom. Suzy agreed to do so and Hallie did the illustrations. The result is a funny, practical, colorful, wise, inspiring book going from day 1 to day 20,000 (but not each day in between).

VIDEOS, BLOG SITE, AND NEW BOOKS

The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning
How to Free Yourself and Your Family
From a Lifetime of Clutter
by Margareta Magnusson
Scribner, 2018

Margareta Magnusson, like me, is somewhere between 80 and 100 and we are both in mind of our upcoming death. I've read other books on decluttering, used their processes, and have discovered the relief and clarity of sorting and cutting down on my "things." Magnusson's approach relates to not only your own joy in being more minimalist, but also saving your family the onerous task of going through your years of stuff. I am experiencing the need to go through another thorough process and she reminds me that it should be done sooner, rather than later. For instance, while I can still climb the attic stairs. She has a great sense of humor as well as practical guidelines that help with the idea of letting go.

I'm Dead, Now What?
Important Information about My Belongings,
Business Affairs, and Wishes
Designed by Margaret Rubiano
Peter Pauper Press, 2015

This is one of those fill in the blanks books. For this topic it is great. I'm not through filling it in yet, but it has all the needed categories and details you might forget. There are side tabs for these sections: Personal Information; Medical Information; Key Contact Information; At the Time of My Passing; My Dependents; Important Documents; Financial Information; Commercial/Business Information; What Beneficiaries Can Expect; Personal Property; Insurance; Pets, What to Pay, Close, and Cancel; E-mail and Social Media; Miscellaneous Information; My Personal Wishes; Last Words. It is probably impossible to leave things perfectly tidy, but this book should help.

Videos, Blog Site, and New Books

announcements by Gene Marshall

In the four-day summer program held in Bonham, Texas, June 9-13, 2018, Gene gave eight hour-long spirit talks followed by 15 minutes of discussion with a group of 26 other persons.

Available Videos

The videos of these talk/discussions are now available on our Realistic Living Blog site. (<https://realisticliving.org/blog/co-pastor-videos/>) For \$10 you can view all 8 of these videos on your computer and own them to project for group discussions. If you prefer to have DVDs, send \$20 to Realistic Living; 3578 N. State Highway 78; Bonham, TX 75418, and we will mail you four discs with two talk/discussions on each disc.

These talks are about core life choices and communal practices for committed persons. They pull together 34 years of experimenting, reading, and writing on Christian theologizing and group practices. Here are the titles:

- Talk 1: What is Truth?
- Talk 2: What is Religion?
- Talk 3: The Essence of Radical Monotheism
- Talk 4: Cross, Resurrection, & the Word of God
- Talk 5: Witnessing Love
- Talk 6: Justing Love
- Talk 7: Building a Movement for a Next Christianity
- Talk 8: Key Methods for Next Steps in Ministry

Professional videos were made of these talks in hope that they will be played for groups of people and discussions held following the viewings. Reflections on these eight topics are needed for most people to even consider practicing a 21st century version of Christianity. Check them out. See if they will help you in your geography of care.

Realistic Living Blog Site

In addition to these "Co-Paster Videos," our blog site now contains two other new links. On the link "**Mark Commentary**," we have published a whole book entitled *The Creator of Christianity: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*. See review below. On the link "**Study Outlines**" we have shared the

NEW EMPHASES FROM REALISTIC LIVING

first three study guides—one on the Mark commentary, one of Jon Bernie's book *The Unbelievable Happiness of What Is: Beyond Belief to Love, Fulfillment, & Spiritual Awakening*, and one on David Orr's book *Dangerous Years: Climate Change, the Long Emergency, and the Way Forward*. Go to <https://realisticliving.org/blog/> to see these links. While you are there take a look at the collection of monthly published essays listed under the title **Realistic Living Pointers**. These sermonic essays are also good study papers for small groups.

Newly Published Books

Wood Lake Publishers has just released Gene's book entitled *Radical Gifts: Living the Full Christian Life in Troubled Times*. This book is written for church school classes and religious study circles. It is a rewrite of Gene's 1984 book *A Primer on Radical Christianity*. The new book includes an appendix on social ethics for 2018 and an appendix on 21st Century communal life and practices. You can order it from www.woodlakebooks.com. A print copy is \$15.96 plus shipping*; e-book or kindle \$9.96. The following is a review written by Marie Sharp:

"Gene Marshall beckons the reader toward contextually reconciling authentic images of Christianity with a not yet invented future of unresolved challenges. The author connects Christianity with actual life experience. The narrative freights a commitment to seeing holiness in what is, in the reality of life. Gene Marshall offers concrete practices that embody commitment, integrity and a framework of functioning in community. I experience the author standing in the times in which we live with eyes toward Christian relevance and shaping the awakening human dialogue in a resurgence of spirit."

*Shipping costs to the United States for 1-6 books is \$17. For 7 or more books, shipping is free. To Canada shipping costs for 1-6 books is \$12. For 7 or more books shipping is free. Contact Gene Marshall for other options.

Here is a **second new book** useful for solitary practice and group study: Gene's *The Creator of Christianity: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*. It is the first complete book published on the Realistic Living Blog site. Ten dollars allows you to download the entire book to your computer and make copies for your group. After an introduction on biblical interpretation, each verse of the Mark text is quoted and commented upon followed by discussion questions. This turning point text is translated from its ancient metaphors into metaphors for our times. Gene has been working and reworking this text for many decades.

As a study book, it almost teaches itself if aided by a teacher who encourages a group to share their inner lives. If you are passionate about Christian renewal, this book is a must for your tool kit and your personal nurture.

A **third publication** is a chapter that Alan Richard carefully researched and wrote about the Marshalls in a book of essays: *The Palgrave Handbook of Radical Theology* edited by Christopher D. Rodkey & Jordan E. Miller. Alan's chapter stands out. First, in the "Figures" section, containing luminaries like Paul Tillich and Mary Daly, it is the only chapter that focuses on a team rather than an individual. Second, Joyce and Gene are the only figures in the book whose work primarily involves the intentional development of radical religious practice rather than that of radical religious theory.

New Emphases from Realistic Living

Beyond Patriarchy: In the coming year Joyce Marshall and Pat Webb will continue to present their Beyond Patriarchy workshop. They did a one-day version of this course in Oklahoma City on April 28, 2018 by request of those who attended the weekend course in 2017. The idea was to emphasize practice of the processes, but Joyce and Pat discovered that the full course could be done in one day. On September 29th this one-day version was repeated for the Trinity Church of Austin, TX—a

NEW EMPHASES FROM REALISTIC LIVING

Reconciling Congregation—and on October 20 for the College Heights Church in San Mateo, CA—a community of service and social justice.



Mary Latham, Pat Webb, & Joyce Marshall

The Beyond Patriarch Workshop contains brief probing spins on five traits of the architecture of patriarchy, followed by innovative exercises that serve as antidotes to the external and internally habituated oppressions of the patriarchal system. It also includes conversations about how we have personally experienced the different aspects of patriarchy and how we have seen them acted out in the world. Participants found the course to be playful, yet providing deep insights, and encouraging of their creativity and connection to one another. Contact Joyce for more information.



College Heights Church, San Mateo, California

Local programing that reaches out to widening circles of new people is a second focus. Rather than the annual gathering in Bonham, Texas, we are proposing to put the energy of this movement into various places across the continent. Realistic Living faculty are available to help you organize and plan these events. These events will need to be followed up by you to build momentum for your concerns for your geography of care.

Week-long or Weekend Sojourns in Bonham for tailored leadership enrichments will be a third focus. Contact Gene for more information on what this could mean for you, you and your spouse or someone you know who is serious about developing leadership capacities. We will consult with you about your personal journey and skill needs and create a full but relaxed time design for your stay. We will integrate you in the community of activities going on in Bonham, Texas at that time.

CoPastor Circle Organizing is a fourth focus dealing with both grassroots experimentation and methodological developments for our efforts toward inspiring a next Christian practice. Realistic Living has 34 years of developed materials and experience on this topic.

Archiving Realistic Living Materials: The Realistic Living faculty plans to continue writing and publishing journals, essays, and books that foster daily, weekly, yearly, practices for a vibrant manifestation of the New Testament revelation. “Archiving” means separating the useful from the 34 years of deposits, and making the useful more easily available.

And we will continue doing what may be **the most important things** we do: a weekly Christian Circle, a weekly spirit group, a quarterly Bioregional meeting, a twice a year Journal, e-mail ministries, and other media approaches.

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.

Realistic Living Finances

With your financial gifts to Realistic Living, you get a big “bang-for-your-buck.” The faculty takes no salaries at this time. We spend all your money on the cost of our work—which includes: housing for Alan Richard; work expenses for all three faculty; office expenses; outreach trips; business travel; research books & movies; and the costs of our publications—like ink, paper, printing, and postage. It is very easy for us to spend our budget of **\$32,000 a year** in useful work.

We encourage you to join the increasing number of people who are contributed on a **monthly basis**. This might mean going to your bank and working out a way for them to send these contributions for you. If you are a customer of *Amazon.com*, you can set up through *smile.amazon.com* for a small portion of your purchase costs to be contributed to *RealisticLiving.org*.

In the first ten months of 2018, we have spent an average of \$2651 per month. As usual our income (an average of \$2100 per month) has not yet matched our spending. We count on year-end giving to meet our budget. For November and December we will need an average of \$6238 per month.

Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

**Check out our newly revised web site: RealisticLiving.org
Also, check out our Facebook page: facebook.com/realisticliving**



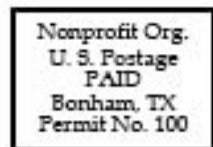
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