

# Realistic Living

A Journal on Religion and Ethics

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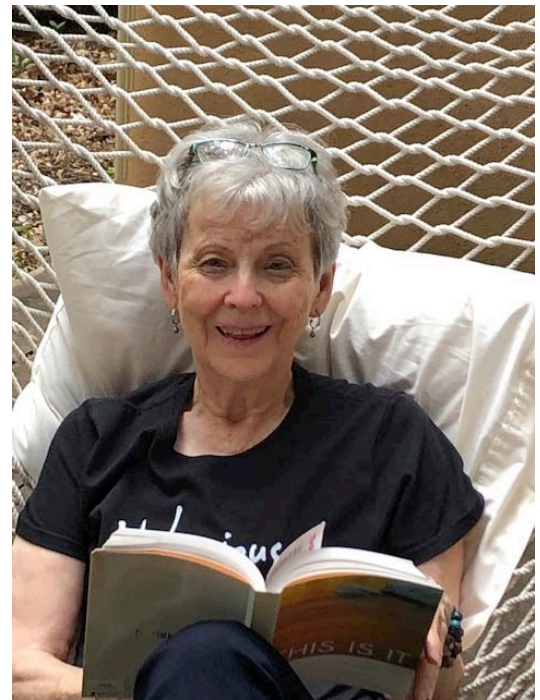
“wrong” person) destroyed the earlier ones. I have been drawn this month to begin reading these journals, which is a slow process. This month has got me to 1989. I don’t read every word because in the early ones I recorded dreams and I was having many dreams – sometimes as many as eight a night. And Gene and I often discussed our dreams and I recorded some of his dreams as well. And being a feeling person (number 4 on the enneagram), a high percentage of the pages are descriptions of my emotional ups and downs. Whereas, in my reading I am interested in what happened (Just the facts, Ma’m).

## Reflections on a Life Journey

from the journals of Joyce Marshall

We have been going through our large attic, sorting, tossing, organizing. Although we are amazingly healthy for anyone in their 80s, a cursory glance at the obituary section of the paper indicates that we have already lived beyond what one might expect. And preparing for the inevitable includes not only having one’s psyche and spirit in order, but one’s “stuff.” So we have been boxing up that “stuff” in categories. I have boxed up a number of categories already, including EcoTheater, Bioregionalism, and Symposium.

Then I came across several boxes of my personal journals from 1973. I kept a journal most of my years beginning in high school, but for various reasons (partly concern they might be read by the



Here is where surprise and perspective come in. I am stunned at what I forgot. So many happenings and people I have no memory of whatsoever. It is wondrous to recover a more fulsome view. I also

notice that I have generalized lots of events and relationships in a totally inaccurate fashion. For example, a great deal of change takes place in all relationships. It is unrealistic to put a label on any of them.

And here is the best part: I find that I am feeling more forgiving – of myself, my family members, my friends, and anyone that I had labeled an enemy at any time. I am even thinking that I might write a memoir, or a novel, or a play using these journals. But for now, I have a long job ahead of me to just read them.

### Rocketman

#### A Movie Review by Alan Richard

The British glam rock biopic is already becoming its own genre. *Bohemian Rhapsody* (about Queen's Freddie Mercury) and *Rocketman* arrived within months of each other and a David Bowie biopic is apparently in the works. This genre follows the well-worn rock biopic plotline, but adds to that recipe a queer sensibility and big, outrageous gender-bending costumes loaded with sequins and feathers. Directed by Dexter Fletcher, who also finished *Bohemian Rhapsody* after its original director



Bryan Singer was removed under a cloud of scandal, *Rocketman* faithfully follows the recipe.

On the surface, *Rocketman* is the story of Elton John (Taron Egerton), the songwriter, pianist, and singer whose 58 top 40 singles and seven consecutive number-one albums helped define rock music in the 1970s. It follows his rise from a troubled childhood to fame and fortune, his descent into drugs and debauchery, and ends with a redemption. But *Rocketman* doesn't just serve up that recipe. It shows us what can be done with it.

Unlike the standard rock and roll biopic, *Rocketman* is a genuine movie musical, a frankly dreamlike fantasy that gets at emotional reality without pretending to be "realistic." Director Fletcher depicts crucial events and transitions in John's life as lushly orchestrated and stunningly choreographed song and dance numbers that recall classic Broadway shows or MGM musicals of the 1950s. Only a few are staged, rock biopic style, as re-enactments of performances, and even these break that frame with the dancing and singing that spill out from the stage onto the street (*Saturday Night's Alright*) or literally lift both performer and audience off the ground (*Crocodile Rock*). This approach is not entirely without precedent. Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* comes to mind. But Fosse was not a rock musician. So this may be a first for a rock and roll biopic.

Second, this may be the first rock and roll biopic with a brief but sexually explicit romantic scene between two people of the same gender. *Rocketman*'s portrayal of John losing his virginity to manager John Reid (Richard Madden) makes *Bohemian Rhapsody*'s handling of its protagonist's sexuality look timid and cowardly. Like other important scenes in the movie, this one is a part of a choreographed musical number (*Take me to the Pilot*), but it still manages to communicate passion and spontaneity.

Finally, the core of *Rocketman* is a love story between two people who do not connect sexually and do not become romantic partners. Those two people are John and lyricist Bernie Taupin (*Billy Elliot*'s Jamie Bell). If the film has a hero, it is Taupin, whose love for John is expressed throughout the

film in his willingness to be vulnerable and honest in ways that are both prescient and courageous.

If all of this doesn't persuade you to see *Rocketman*, let me add a confession. I have never loved musicals or rock and roll biopics. I even loathed *The Sound of Music*, the one musical my father liked. Although I am gay and was a teenager when glam rock hit the scene, I was not a fan. My sister Jan was the one with Elton John and Queen records, while my collection was all Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. I was not excited when Joyce suggested we see *Rocketman*. But the movie dazzled me, filled me with joy, and moved me to tears anyway. I guarantee it will also break down your resistance, if you have any. Whoever you are, this one's for you.

## Essential and Political Freedom

### How Does Essential Freedom Differ from Political Freedom?

by Gene Marshall

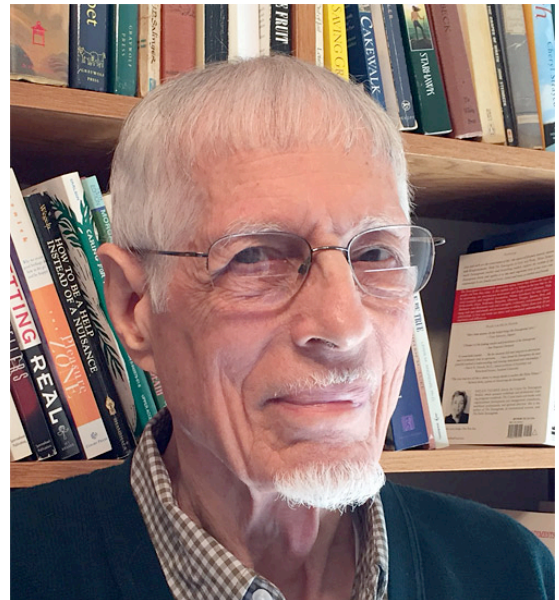
In this year of fighting for democracy and political freedom against a planet-wide backlash of authoritarian governance, the meaning and mystery of freedom itself comes up for review.

Here is what I am going to elaborate: *political freedom is something granted by a human government to its citizens. Essential freedom is something granted by an "Eternal Government" to its human beings. This is a big difference, but the two are related.*

### Political Freedom

Political freedom is created by human beings. It is the gift of human making—governments that we humans create and fight for. Political freedom can include the rights outlined in the U.S. bill of rights. Political freedom can also include the proposals of Franklin D. Roosevelt: the freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear.

Today we are adding the freedom from corporate wealth ruling our entire lives, the freedom to vote and have our vote counted, the freedom to have affordable healthcare, the freedom for women to have control over their own bodies, the freedom of all types of humans to have equality before the law and a fair share of our economy, and even the freedom to have a planet that permits the welfare of our species and other life forms.



### Essential Freedom

Our essential freedom is provided by the Profound Reality that we confront in every event of our lives. We typically flee from this freedom and get stuck to the places to which we have fled. Nevertheless, the miracle of being restored to our essential freedom remains a possibility. We don't have to create this essential freedom. There is no way to achieve it. We don't have to do anything to have it. We only have to surrender to the essential freedom that is being given to us in the events of our lives.

Essential freedom comes to us as a package deal with our essential trust in the Profound Reality that confronts us and with the restoration of that essential care/*agape*/ love that Paul claims is the greatest gift of our most profound consciousness.

Ultimate Trust, Total Affirmation, and Complete Freedom come to us as an enigmatic wind—blowing through our fragile lives. Christians have called this package-deal “Holy Spirit.” Other religions speak of it with other names.

In order to manifest this essential freedom, we have to relinquish our flight from this freedom to our fatalistic excuses; our compulsive addictions; our clinging to self-justifying moralisms, dogmatic beliefs, delusory safety, and raw cowardice.

To understand the reality of our essential freedom we need a deeper view of the word “Reality.” This capitalized word “Reality” or “Profound Reality” points to whatever it is that is “governing” of all events that are happening to us. We experience this governing in the flow of time. Time is a gift that keeps on giving whether we want it or not. We cannot imagine a life without the flow of time. Yet time carries us from birth to death. There is no stopping time. There is no going back in time. Time is part of the governing of an Eternal, Mysterious, Unfathomable “Government” that also provides freedom and love to those who trust this “Eternal Governing.” Of course “governing” is only a symbol for our experience of this flow of Uncontrollable Reality. There is no literal Congress or President above the sky with hands upon the crank of time.

Essential freedom is a gift of that Mysterious Governing that some of us revere as our God. What that means is that we are being given, if we choose to take it, the possibility of participating in the shaping of history. We are being given a limited freedom to make choices that bend the course of history. We are not being given absolute control of the flow of history, but every free choice or unfree choice we make does bend history into channels history would not otherwise have taken. There is no fate already petrified in some cause-and-effect perfection. There is only a tale yet to be told—a destiny yet to be chosen.

Such essential freedom is quite awesome and downright terrifying because it entails making in the living now uncaused choices—raw responses with our own primal “response-ability.” The only justification for our free deeds is freedom itself. To

manifest this essential freedom, we have to embrace forgiveness for all of our ignorance and uncertainties, and for all our flight to moral safety, all our flights to the un-freedom of additive, arrogant, and cowardly cop-outs.

*Let's face this; if we don't want to live our essential freedom, we will not choose our political freedoms. Slavery of one sort or another will be chosen for us.*

Living within this Eternal Governance of having to choose our destiny is, however, an extreme optimism. Profound Reality is constantly providing us with a *perpetual fresh start* on the other side of all our choices—however well or poorly conceived, however well or poorly enacted. We never arrive at a state different than the one indicated by this phrase: “we are sinners saved by grace.” Such humility is the nature of the obedience to being our essential freedom.

### **How is Eternally-Granted Freedom related to Human-Government-Granted Freedoms?**

A human government does not grant essential freedom, and a human government cannot prevent essential freedom no matter how hard it strives to oppose it. So what sort of freedom can a human government grant? It can grant freedom to participate in the processes of governing, freedom of participation in the fruits of social living, and the freedom to speak and live by the truth we find without punishment.

Government can grant us the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Government can grant us the right to own property that is our very own. Government can grant us the right to share in common properties such as air, water, parks, streets, buildings, transportation systems, economic systems, healthy environments, safety, protection from harm, etc. All these granted rights or freedoms are limited for each of us by the calling to provide such political freedoms to everyone. “Justice” is a word that is used to indicate the appropriate distribution of these freedoms to all people.

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Citizens of a democratic government are entrusted to use their Eternally-granted essential freedom to create and maintain the human-government-granted freedoms we need and dearly want. The imperfections in U.S. citizens to access to their essential freedom limits the success of our democratic vision. Those citizens who choose to see themselves as elites who rule over rather than with and on behalf of all the other citizens *limit democracy* or openly *oppose democracy* in favor of a more authoritarian, or even totalitarian forms of society.

So democracy is always a work in progress. Democracy is never complete, even when a democracy has moved from democracy for white male property owners to an inclusion of former slaves, an inclusion of women voters, and some safety-nets for the struggling, the old, and the disabled. More democracy can also be about who is empowered politically and who is and is not given economic opportunities.

The idea that society must be a monopoly-game competition in which there are huge winners and big-time losers is an anti-democratic delusion. In a fully democratic society, citizen freedoms will manifest a balance between competition and cooperation, between personal striving and empathy, and between personal power and personal benevolence.

*Such an understanding of a perpetually improving, freedom-granting democracy is more revolutionary than our typical pessimisms can easily embrace.*

Pampering aristocracies while controlling commoners is not the only possibility for a sociological mode for human societies. The framers of the U.S. Constitution were beginners—escaping from British tyranny to a bare beginning of democracy for a few white, Protestant, male, property owners—a freedom that did not trickle-down, but had to be fought for on behalf of both slaves and women, and it is still being fought for by descendants of both these two groups and many other groups newer to our awareness.

The expansion of democracy is a battle not yet over, and a fuller democracy is strongly opposed by powerful authoritarian forces. No one can openly watch the current news without seeing that that fight needs to be won for Muslims, for Hispanic immigrants, and for a huge number of unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid citizens. How can we revere the earlier victories for democracy and still let the U.S. nation coast into a reactionary-white-nationalist authoritarianism?

Herein is how our Eternally-granted essential freedom is related to our government-granted political freedom. It takes the exercise of our essential freedom to insist upon a political freedom for ourselves and for all others who neighbor us. If this sounds like Biblical scripture, it is because it is. Such democratic activism is part of what was once called “being the people of God.”

So, how can true practitioners of Christianity combine their Christianity with being in a hate group? They cannot. If we do not want for all human beings the political freedom we want for ourselves, we have lost sight of the fact that “God-and-neighbor” is a hyphenated phrase in Christian understanding. If we do not care for the neighbors we see, then we do not trust, obey, or care for the unseen Profound Reality that is confronting us in the provision of these neighbors. Any so-called Christians who claim that their religion is separate from their politics have overlooked the very essence of the Christian faith.

### Washed of our Wicked Era

Biblical theologizing by Gene Marshall

When the historical scholars sought to find in the deep recesses of the first three Gospels some true biographical facts about the life of Jesus, they did not come up with many certainties. But these two facts are among the most likely: Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and Jesus was ritually washed by John, the Baptist, in the River Jordan.

I have been fascinated by John Dominic Crossan’s guess that Jesus joined the religious movement of John, the Baptist, rather than become a

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Zealot or an Essene. Nor was Jesus a member of the Sadducees, Pharisees, or Scribes.



So what did this Baptism mean to Jesus and what did his having been so washed mean for the 1st Century Christ-way Jews, like, for example, the writer of the Gospel of Mark?

John, the Baptist, and Jesus apparently saw these washings as having to do with a confession of participation in a wicked and doomed Era of history. For Jewish culture the Roman Empire was not a friendly place. Whatever Rome's virtues, the famed "Roman Peace" was being bought with rows of hanging rebels being tortured to death in horrific public display. Soldiers walked the streets and byways, and if one of them was tired of carrying his heavy pack, it was permitted by the Centurion for him to ask any available Jew to carry his pack for one mile. And if that man or woman responded with any smart remark, a serious slap across the check could also be expected. Some of the Roman Emperors even messed with the main cultural temple of these people. The whole era was seen by most Jews as fundamentally wicked. And each of them participated in this era to a degree that they were loath to admit.

The political and religious elites among the Jews had sold out completely to the Romans. The more ordinary religious teachers had become safety-first, hypocritical moralists. The peasants were driven mad by the stern tensions of everyday living. This madness is reflected in the story about an uncontrollable wild man who was plagued by a "Legion" of demons. "Legion" was the name given

to a 100 Roman soldiers. This ongoing Roman oppression got into more than one person's head.

People flocked to John, the Baptist, to be washed of this wicked era. A smart, roof-repair man named Jesus was among them.

Many of us today can identify with this need for washing. Authoritarian leaders around the world are rising in power and eroding or abolishing what is left of democracy. State Governments of about 20 U.S. States are hell-bent on taking control of women's bodies. Without regret, the world's wealthiest one percent hold more wealth than the bottom 99 percent, and a handful of billionaires own more than the bottom 3.7 billion people. Many people have to choose between food and pills, or even go without both. Oil and coal companies and their political palsies continue to deny the truth about the ever-heating atmosphere; they don't seem to mind cooking the planet if that makes money. And a president of the U.S wakes at three in the morning in a cloud of self-adoring lies which he then tweets to adoring fans and sycophantic associates.

*In is understandable if we also long to be washed of our wicked era.*

So, I am going to share with you a portion of my commentary on Mark's story about Jesus of Nazareth being washed in the River Jordan.

### **Mark: 1: 9-11 The Heavenly Birth of Jesus**

It was in those days that Jesus arrived from the Galilean village of Nazareth and was baptized by John in the Jordan. All at once, as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open, and the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove. A voice came out of Heaven, saying, "You are my dearly-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!"

Almost every phrase that Mark includes in this story has some sort of secret meaning. "Up out the water" can pass unnoticed if we do not associate this immersion with dying to the evil era. If we see this allusion to dying, then "up out of the water" is seen

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an allusion to resurrection. In this story Jesus is becoming the resurrected one.

*"The heavens split open"* is an even more cryptic piece of poetry to a modern person who does not know what to make of the word "heaven" and certainly finds it very odd to speak of seeing "the heavens split open." Translating that phrase from its transcendence metaphorical imagination to an existential transparency type of poetry takes a bit of thoughtfulness. "Heaven" means the realm of Absolute Mystery, and Mark is picturing that dynamic as right above our heads. There is a sort of big punch bowl with stars on it and if that bowl were to split open we would see right into the Eternal heaven. I believe that Mark is thinking more metaphorically and less literally than that picture may sound. Seeing into the Eternal is the heart of the meaning of this text. As Jesus comes up out of the watery tomb in which John has dunked him, the punch bowl of Awesome Absolute Mystery splits open. What a story!

Next, this profound-eyed person Mark sees another signal of profundity: *"the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove."* Spirit, for Mark, is the Absolute Mystery itself manifesting as a state of our whole life sometimes called "Wonder" or "Awe." But for someone who has the courage for such a dreadful, fascinating state of Awe, this happening is a gentle thing, like a dove settling on head and shoulder.

Finally, Mark gives us one more symbol for how this baptism was an outstanding event: *"A voice came out of Heaven, saying, 'You are my dearly-beloved Son.'"* We need not believe that a tape recorder would have picked up this voice. Mark included this bit of poetic flair to complete his view of the significance of this baptism for this simple roof-repair man's son from the nowhere of Nazareth. And what does "Son" mean here? It means that Jesus is having a new birth, not of a father from Nazareth, but of a Spirit from Eternity. This is Mark's "virgin birth" narrative. Mark is implying a virgin birth for Jesus, a birth sired from heaven that was now taking over Jesus' whole life from his biological birth in Nazareth.

The *Awed One* (Jesus) is filled with *Awe* (Spirit) sourced from the *Awesome* (Eternal Mystery.) This whole secret Trinity of (Awesome, Awed One, & Awe) is happening among us, to us, to humanity in these opening pages of Mark's story. For the rest of Mark's strange narrative, Jesus is the washed one, the resurrected one, the beloved of Reality one. Jesus is virgin born among us to lead us into our own profound, virgin-born humanness. For the rest of Mark's gospel we see in Jesus what this exemplar of resurrected humanity looks like—walking, talking, calling, teaching, healing, feeding, eating, celebrating, living, suffering, dying. Women coming to honor him in his tomb find nothing there, except their very own resurrection into this virgin-born Jesus-hood.

So, what might this passage be saying to us today about the living of our own authentic lives and about the power of these Christian symbols for our own depth living? Perhaps we might give Christian symbols a second look. Perhaps we might view these long-preserved stories as being clues to our own most profound matters of living. Perhaps we might ask of Mark and other resurrected witnesses, what must we do to inherit this life abundant. Perhaps we are drawn to read further in Mark's story to see where our own particular healing is required in order to be washed of our own grim era—washed in order for us to enter here and now into this communion of the saints, this Kingdom of God, this Reign of Reality, this commonwealth of profound realism of which Jesus speaks. Perhaps such an enigmatic interior baptism is our first step, our next step toward beginning a fresh walk with Jesus for the rest of our own life story.

Mark clearly sees Jesus' baptism by John as a new birth in the consciousness of Jesus. If we were using Eastern language we might call it "enlightenment." Using the language that Mark develops toward the end of his story, Jesus was experiencing in John's baptism a death and a resurrection to profound humanness—to his spirit depth, to his authenticity in this ordinary human body.

## Radical Study in Local Places

### Suggestions and Study Guides

by Gene Marshall

The ordinary human ego of Jesus was not destroyed, but that ego ceased to be the identity of this person. Jesus was dead to the evils of his era to the extent that there was nothing left to his identity except his essential authenticity, his profound humanness that was created by Final Reality from the dawn of time. Jesus in this story is a symbol for that profound humanness that the Creator of everything gives to humans before their fall into their estrangements from Reality. Jesus is the “Offspring of God,” the new humanity—a humanity that Jesus’ healings are going to call forth in others. Perhaps in you. Perhaps in me.

To say all these extreme things about Jesus, at the very beginning of his narrative, means that Mark views Jesus as a human being who has already died to estrangement and been raised up to authentic life. As we will see, Jesus is not intimidated by the entire Roman world or by Israel’s hypocritical religious establishments of compromise, flight, or furious hatred toward it all. Jesus is not intimidated by the prospect of living such a profound life or dying such a profound life at the hands of an estranged humanity.

Matthew and Luke expand on this topic of Jesus being an “Offspring of Final Reality” with stories about Jesus’ virgin birth. John’s gospel also talks about a second birth that is available to all of us who embrace Jesus’ message. But at this point in Mark’s gospel the meaning of this divine birthing is only hinted—it is still a secret that something very special has appeared in Jesus. In coming chapters we are going to watch what happens as this person lives out such profound humanity in real-world social engagement. We are going to see someone who lives the authentic life unto death.

According to the scholarship of Rudolf Bultmann, what baptism came to mean in the early church was threefold: (1) washed of the era of “sin,” (2) sealed within the body of Christ, and (3) filled with the Holy Spirit. All three of these meanings are descriptions of an event of rebirth—drowning our estrangements to death, opening us to our profound authenticity, and facing our future in this “Spirit of Wholeness.”

If you, like me, are in prayer for a viable and vital next Christianity, a strategy for doing something effective toward that end can begin with facilitating, leading, or teaching radical study programs in the local places where we live.

Our turning point in the history of Christian practice during the last several and the next several decades requires assisting more people to see the depth and complexities of our radical shift in Christian theologizing, nurture, action, and life together.

People cannot be prepared for this shift with a single talk or a single event. We need to teach or facilitate courses or workshops with about ten one-hour sessions to bring into being the kind of clarifications and commitments that are required.

I have been preparing accessible study materials for this purpose since 1984 when I self published *A Primer on Radical Christianity*. In 2018 Wood Lake Publishers republished that book with updates under the new title *Radical Gifts: Living the Full Christian Life in Troubled Times*. This book was written and rewritten for church school classes and religious study circles. The new book updates the old chapters and has a new appendix on social ethics for 2018 and a new appendix on 21st century Christian communal life and practices.

Our weekly meeting Circle in Bonham, Texas has just finished an ten-week study of *Radical Gifts*. I created a study guide for teaching those 10 sessions using selected portions of that book. I have edited and published that guide on our Realistic Living blog site. It is free. Simply go to:

<https://realisticliving.org/blog/study-outlines/>

Click study outline 4 on *Radical Gifts*. That will download the study outline and you can run off as many copies as you need for your class members.



## RADICAL STUDY

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You can teach all 10 sessions yourself or have some of the members of your group share in the teaching. The instructions for doing the teaching are clear enough that minimal skills in leading a group will suffice.

Your work will be getting the group to commit to reading the ten brief assignments and to attending the ten one-hour meetings. This should not be a come and go deal, but a covenant to come to all the sessions having read the assignments.

You can order from [www.woodlakebooks.com](http://www.woodlakebooks.com) an e-book or kindle for \$9.96. If you want print copies you can get them shipping free for \$19.96 each if you order 7 or more books. If you order a single copy or six copies, this Canadian Company will charge you \$17 shipping. You can order 1-6 copies from me shipping free within the United States for \$20 each. Shipping costs within Canada for 1-6 books is \$12.

### Study Suggestion Number Two

While you are visiting our blog site, look over the study outline for *The Creator of Christianity: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*.

<https://realisticliving.org/blog/study-outlines/>

This is another book that I published in 2018. You can download the entire book from this blog site. The download password is available for a mere \$10 and your email. See the instructions on this site and information about his book.



This book contains an introduction on the difficulties of biblical interpretation and the methods that can work for us today. The full text of Mark is included in this book, and discussion questions follow sections of the commentary.

It is my view that a new approach to the Bible is a big part of creating a viable and vital next Christian practice. Here are three of the best places to begin our recovery the Christian Bible as a nurture resources for our nurture life together to day: Genesis, the Psalms, and the Gospel of Mark. I have been passionate about the Messianic secret of the Gospel of Mark since it was introduced to me by Edward Hobbs, my New Testament teacher in 1954.

Last year our Bonham Circle studied together the first half of this commentary. The revised study outline is now a tested resource. I strongly recommend this book and its study plan for both group discussion and solitary time.

### More Study Suggestions

While you are still visiting our blog site, look over the other study outlines

#### Study Outline 2:

[\*The Unbelievable Happiness of What Is: Beyond Belief to Love, Fulfillment & Spiritual Awakening\*](#)  
by Jon Bernie

This book is excellent, easy to use, and a moving presentation of the best of contemporary Buddhism. Bernie is a clear writer, both accessible and profound. He is a best-case introduction to Eastern religion. The study outline was prepared by Joyce Marshall

#### Study Outline 3:

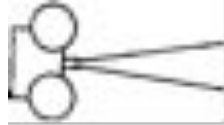
[\*Dangerous Years: Climate Change: the Long Emergency, and the Way Forward\*](#)  
by David Orr

For an overview of the social situation, few books are as good as this one. It is also a spirit book—probing our relations to our horrific challenges. We studied this book in our Bonham Circle, using this study outline prepared by Gene Marshall.

**ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE**

reviews by Joyce Marshall

**MOVIES**



The PBS Masterpiece series **Victoria** is superb! Beautifully written, each episode is a work of art. This highly recommended story of Queen Victoria of Britain shows a queen who, from her youth, manages to hold her own with Prime Ministers, a difficult mother and sister, and a husband who does not always give appropriate support. She ruled well and bore nine children in the process!

**12 Angry Men** - 1957. Sidney Lumet made his debut as a director with this classic jury-room film. It is highly appropriate today as an example of how to talk with those whose minds are closed to their own prejudice. The Henry Fonda character makes it clear to all the principle of reasonable doubt and demonstrates a psychological moxie in dealing with the angry rants of his fellow jurors that puts most of us to shame fifty years later.

**Bohemian Rhapsody.** I enjoyed this film even though I was not familiar with Queen and their music, except I was surprised when they played "We Will, We Will Rock You" to realize they were the source of the NBA Basketball theme which I had heard for years. Freddie Mercury was clearly a genius who initiated many trends as he struggled with forming a band, getting records made, relationships with band members, his female love partners, and his own sexuality. Definitely worth seeing.

**On the Basis of Sex.** In our November journal I reviewed RBG, the documentary about Ruth Bader Ginsberg, which showed us how she did such important work in getting the laws changed on gender discrimination. This movie makes it clear how very challenging her work was and how often she was treated condescendingly and faced

discrimination herself in working to change those laws. I came to tears several times in the film – at how she was treated, at how we all have been treated, and at her courage to keep going to get things changed. A fine film.

**Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot**, is directed by Gus Van Sant with Joaquin Phoenix playing cartoonist John Callahan in the story based on his life. This film could be an advertisement for Alcoholics Anonymous. I have mixed feelings about the AA program, but if this is the way it works, it certainly works for me. A good film, in my book.

**Finding Your Feet.** If you, like me, appreciate Brit actors Timothy Spall and Imelda Staunton and enjoy good British comedy, this film is just the ticket. Nothing heavy, it is a lot of fun for the aging crowd (like me).

**FICTION**



*A Place For Us*  
by Fatima Farheen Mirza

This is an amazing novel, particularly from a 27-year-old. Mirza has captured the tragedy of a family with a child who is "different," with a father who is easily angered, a mother who wants to avoid humiliation in their community, and a competitive sibling. The young Muslim couple moves from India to make a home and a life in California. The book moves back and forth in time, gradually revealing events from the perspective of different family members that affected their relationships with one another. I grew to deeply appreciate some aspects of Islam in this intimate setting, and the family dynamics are no different from those I have experienced. I read this book aloud to Gene. It moved me so deeply at times that I could not read for weeping. The overall theme of this book is mercy and forgiveness.

## RECOMMENDED READING

### *The Overstory*

by Richard Powers

This is an amazing book about nine people whose lives at some point connect to trees and to one another. Powers knows a lot about trees and ecosystems which he combines with psychological moxie to tell a moving story that constantly surprises. We share the experience of protestors sitting for a year in a giant redwood tree, of a scientist discovering the mysterious beings that trees are, of an attorney creating a defense for those who put the lives of trees on an equal with personal property, of a family who photographed monthly their chestnut tree for generations. These people each have challenges that are extremely raw. There are no easy answers for them and nothing gets tied up neatly with a bow. And, it is an opportunity to face, through their experience, what we, in fact, do face in our world today. Powers certainly deserves the Pulitzer Prize he won for this book this year.

### *There There*

by Tommy Orange

Orange, a Native American born and raised in Oakland California, gives us a novel about Native Americans in urban Oakland. Each chapter comes from the perspective of one of a dozen individuals who eventually converge at the Big Oakland Powwow. The Prologue is a stand alone essay that is as moving as anything I have read about Native Americans, telling the story of their migration to cities. The novel is both a work of art and an education on a people.

## RECOMMENDED READING

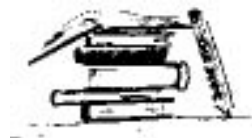
*Reviews by Joyce Marshall*

### *Let the Moon Be Free*

by 'Eric Baret

translated by Jeanric Meller

Science and Nonduality, 2018



Frenchman Baret carries on the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism, although he claims Jean Klein as

his teacher and Klein has been called a master of Advaita Vedanta. Evidently the two traditions are closely related. The approach of both remind me of Charlotte Selver's work which she named Sensory Awareness. This book by Baret is actually transcribed dialogues of his meetings, translated from French to English. There are times that I am confused what is being said, which I assume is related to translation, but overall I found it an inspiring book. I have read and appreciated seven of Klein's books and one highlight of Baret's book is his description of Klein. I have read books by other students of Jean Klein but none described in such detail what he was like in relating to his students.

Whereas those who related personally to Ram Dass's guru, Marharajji, speak of his unconditional love, Baret describes Klein with the words "extraordinary respect," with no desire to change you, marveling at your beauty. The phrase Baret uses most for guidance is "felt sense." Rather than getting on the train of thought, he encourages you to note the felt sense in the body. Live in the felt sense, and not in strategy. He notes that, "When you do not pretend that you have a story about yourself, you totally love the person you are with." And, "It isn't your doing, it's the nature of the world to love." These are just a few of many lines in this book that I underlined to remember.



### *This Is It*

*The Nature of Oneness*

by Jan Keresschot

Watkins Publishing, 2004

Two-thirds of this book is dialogues with eleven teachers of non-duality. However, I particularly appreciated the first third, which is two essays by Keresschot. It is some of the clearest description of non-duality I have read. A Belgian, Keresschot is a medical doctor with a fascination for spirituality and philosophy.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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*Radically Condensed Instructions  
for Being Just as You Are*  
by J Matthews  
self-published, 2010

This 70-page book is wondrously clear. I'll try to make it even shorter:

Many of us, like Lady Macbeth, endlessly scrub our hands all day to clean up our anger, jealousy, regret. Whereas the only way to experience the mystery of life is to simply experience it, this moment, to be free to love whatever is happening, regardless of whether we like it. Then the prevailing feeling is poignancy (one of my favorite words). All of our "reactive" emotions are an attempt to defend us against this primary bittersweet poignancy.

*The Warmth of Other Suns*  
*The Epic Story of American's Great Migration*  
by Isabel Wilkerson  
Vintage 2011

Wilkerson interviewed over 1200 people to create this wondrous work of history which reads like a novel. The migration she chronicles is the move from 1915 to 1970 of Black Americans from the South to the North and West. She features three people in detail: Ida Mae, who leaves Mississippi for Chicago, George, who leaves Florida for New York City, and Robert who leaves Louisiana for Los Angeles. She also tells vignettes of other lives to fill out the reality of this migration – what it meant to those who experienced it and what it meant to this country. You get the horrors that motivated it, the complications of being Black, in North or South, the gifts given to American culture as a result of this migration. This 500+ page book reads easily and expands your wisdom and sensibility.

*Eloquent Rage*  
*A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*  
by Brittney Cooper  
St. Martin's Press, 2018

Cooper is a professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University and has written for The New York Times, The

Washington Post, and other media. She tells the feminist story from her experience as a Black woman growing up poor in the south. In her opening chapter she says, "In this book I am doing what Black women do best. I'm calling America out on her bullshit about racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and a bunch of other stuff."



She also notes (quoting Audre Lorde) that, "Rage is a legitimate political emotion. Focused with precision, it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change." She speaks to many issues with unapologetic honesty. It is generally understood that the oppressed are the ones who know more clearly what is going on in the dynamic of oppression; and in sexism and racism, Black women are the oppressed of the oppressed. Cooper, however, does not see herself as a "feminist killjoy." While noting that the clarity that comes from rage tells us what we want to be rid of and also what kind of world we want, we also need to help people find better tools to work with. I see the Beyond Patriarchy workshop that I lead with Pat Webb emphasizing those better tools. A Christian, Cooper ends her book like all good church services with a Benediction, the last part of which is: "May your rage be a force for good."

*Buddhism for Couples*  
*A Calm Approach to Relationships*  
by Sarah Naphthali  
Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2014

This book emphasizes relationships between men and women, although on the second page of the introduction a wedding speech is quoted,

## RECOMMENDED READING

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including the line, "I also support gay marriage . . . why should heterosexuals be the only ones to suffer?" The book is an attempt to go beyond the cynicism expressed there.

Naphthali shares her own experiences from her marriage and that of others as well as drawing on Buddhist wisdom and psychological insights. Some of the highlights of the book for me:

"Speak from the heart: If you have a preference, voice it. If you have a question, ask it. If you want to cry, bawl. If you need help, raise your hand and jump up and down." (This from Karen Armstrong, ex-wife of cyclist Lance Armstrong.)

"I don't look back on my day and judge it for how much I got done. I look back and ask, 'How present was I?'" (This from a fellow buddhist, oncologist Jonathan Page.)

"Venting anger has been found to increase hostile feelings, aggressive tendencies, and violence. . . . This is not to say, however, that we should ignore, deny, or suppress anger. Anger is useful if it motivates us to confront injustice. . . . In relationships, unaware anger can lead to regrettable behaviors—snapping, sniping, yelling, blaming."

She also deals with sharing household tasks and all the social conditioning that leads to the inequity that women deal with in this area. Her suggestion to women is to "frame things" differently: gratitude for what the man has done and asking in an affectionate tone.

*The Assertiveness Guide for Women*

*How to Communicate Your Needs, Set Healthy Boundaries, & Transform Your Relationships*

by Julie de Azedo Hanks, PhD

New Harbinger, 2016

Hanks defines communication that is assertive as that which is clear, confident, and self-assured. Also, it involves the courage to express difference. Women need training in this communication because we have generally been socialized to be nice, compliant, and relationship oriented, while boys are generally socialized to be independent and strong and encouraged to speak up. Girls are also historically taught that they should take care of

others and be self-sacrificing. Most assuredly, this was my training in the Panhandle of Texas in the 40s and 50s. This book serves as a workbook. At the end of informational sections, she asks questions that invite self-reflection, i.e., What stories are told about you as a young child? How would you describe your relationship with your father? with your mother? She looks at the three styles of attachment and at the three ways of self-expression. A very useful self-help book.

*Yes, And*

*Lessons from Second City*

by Kelly Leonard & Tom Yorton

HarperCollins, 2015

Second City is an improvisational comedy enterprise, best known as the historically first on-going improvisational theater troupe, continually based in Chicago. Some of the best comedians learned their trade there: Tina Fey, Bill Murray, Steve Carell, Amy Poehler, Stephen Colbert, to name a few. This book is about how the authors have used the principles of improvisational theater to assist businesses to improve their emotional intelligence, increase creativity, and learn to pivot out of tight and uncomfortable situations.

One of the things they have learned is that leadership traits are more commonly found in women than men, i.e., they are better listeners, better at building relationships, and more collaborative. When the authors work with corporations, they have them do the same exercises that they teach actors. The core exercise is "Yes, And." The central idea here is that you accept what is offered and add to it (regardless of what you think of it). In fact, say Leonard and Yorton, "Yes, And is the lens through which we view our entire business and our place in the world. We are here to affirm and build upon people's ideas in a way that's smart, thoughtful, useful, interesting . . . and usually, uproariously funny." In the appendix they list each exercise, many of which are useful for your own groups or relationships.

*a review by Gene Marshall*

*Winners Take All*

*The Elite Charade of Changing the World*

Anand Giridharadas

Alfred A. Knoff 2018

By “winners” the author means those persons and corporations who are raking in so much of the wealth being generated by the U.S. economy and similar economies. The term “winners” also implies that there are many losers who are losing through no character faults of their own, but because the overall structure of things does not work for them.

The term “winners take all” reminds me of the well-known monopoly game in which the aim and rules favor one person winning all the money and every other player going bankrupt. Giridharadas does not use the monopoly game metaphor, but I find it apt to what he is indicating. The overall structure and rules of our current economic game favor big winners and many losers.

By “the elite charade of changing the world” Giridharadas is describing the approach to social change that ignores government led changes and promotes corporations and the wealthy doing what they can do without involving any engagement with the overall monopoly game. Giridharadas calls this win/win. That is, the winners can continue to win how they make their money and also win doing social good with that money and standing they have so acquired. Much good can be done in this way, but it also involves the irony that the same people doing this good are, at the same time, doing major harm that exceeds the good they do.

Also, this pattern of social change assumes that these winners, because they are winners, are the smart ones who know what social changes are needed. Often they are quite smart about certain things—being experienced in worldly affairs, but they are smart within the context of the current economic game. They are ignoring and perhaps denying the wisdom of the losers who see more clearly how the game rules are the real problem. So we have another irony: the winners are also taking all the perspectives and honor of making the needed

social change, while the losers are basically expected to take on their limited view of what changes are appropriate, and deny their own experiences of the problems.

Changing the basic rules of the game requires political action, not the action of a current government bought and paid for by the winners, but political movements that are out to change the character of the political establishment and thereby change the rules of the economic game. This means of doing major good is seriously opposed by many of the so-called “winners.” So those of us who are strategizing social change that matters, need to take notice that simply depending on the winners to invent and lead the needed changes is an inadequate view.



I have summarized this very elaborate book with my own broad generalizations. Giridharadas is one of the most well-read, well-informed, articulate humans on the planet. Perhaps you have seen his intense sub-Asian face on TV. He is a frequent presence on the more progressive networks. This is a classic book with an incredible amount of convincing detail.

## **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.

### **Here are some of our current emphases**

**A Six-Day Sojourn** in Bonham, Texas, tailored for your leadership enrichments. Contact us 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.

**Co-Pastor Circle Organizing**—sharing our years of experimentation with weekly-meeting Circles of a proposed next Christian practice. On this topic, Realistic Living has 34 years of experience and developed materials.

**Archiving Realistic Living Materials:** The Realistic Living faculty plans to bring new order into our 34 years of accumulation. “Archiving” means separating the useful from the needless, and making the useful more easily available.

**Local programing** that reaches out to widening circles of new people. 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 organize and plan these events. These events will need to be followed up by you to build momentum for your concerns for your own local geography of care.

And we will continue doing what may be **the most important things** we do: our own 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 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 contributing 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*.

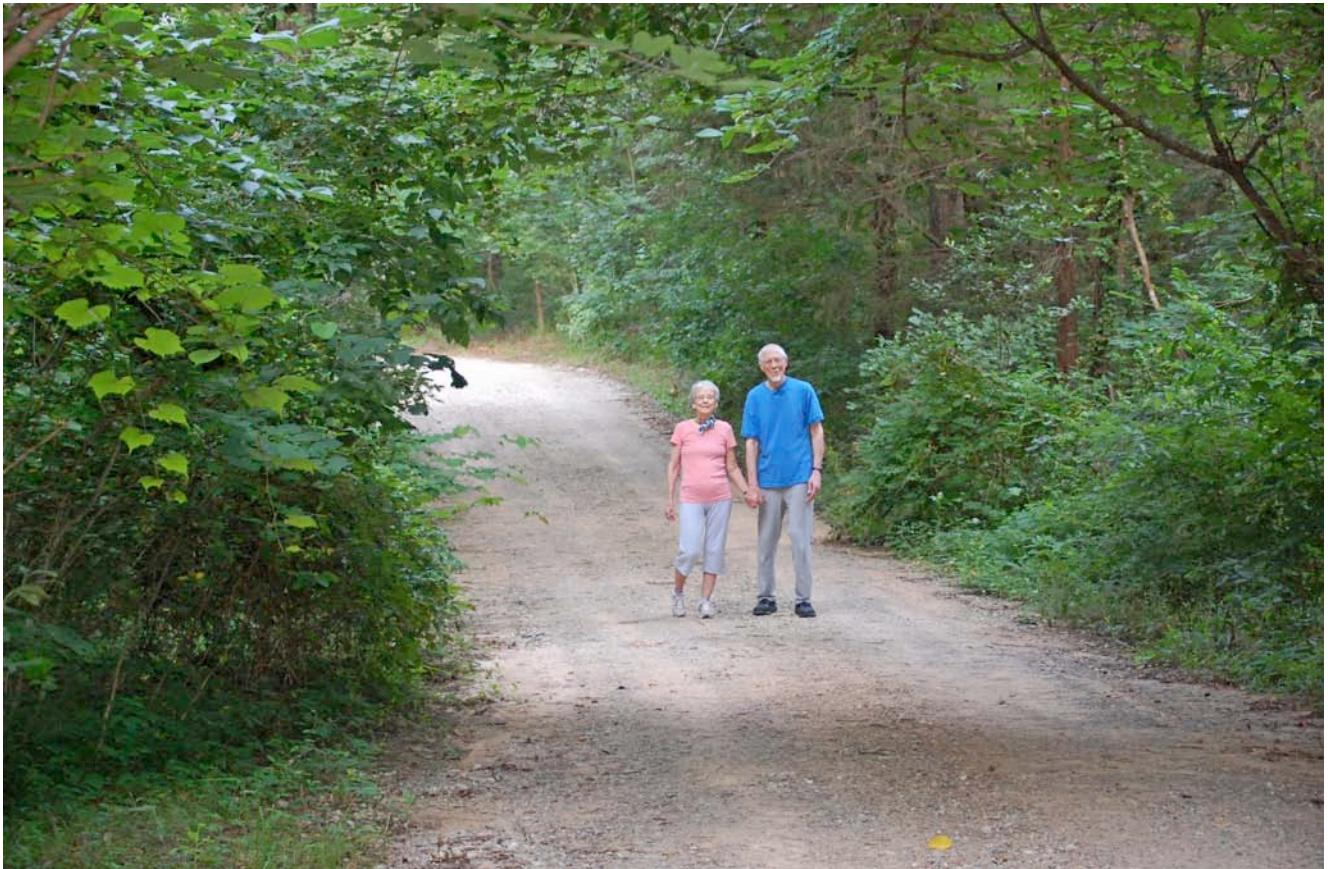
*We thank you for seeing the worth of this long-range project—a viable and vital next Christianity.*

# Realistic Living

*is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."*

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

**Also, check out our Facebook page: [facebook.com/realisticliving](https://facebook.com/realisticliving)**



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## **Realistic Living**

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