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RENEWED HEART MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 1211, Lewisburg, WV 24901
Phone: 304.520.0030
Email: info@renewedheartministries.com

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@HerbMontgomery



Herb Montgomery

Year-End Giving

2020 has been a challenging year for many of us, including non-profits.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides resources and current social analysis that assists people in finding the intersection between their faith and societal justice in its many varied expressions.

Rev. Dr. Emily Townes says, "When you start with an understanding that God loves everyone, Justice isn't very far behind."

(Journey to Liberation: The Legacy of Womanist Theology)

Intersections between faith and justice are needed right now more than ever. We are passionate about engaging the relationship of faith,

love, compassion and justice, as well as offering resources that renew hope and inspire action as we work together toward shaping our world into a compassionate, just and safe home for all.

No one could have predicted how this pandemic would affect each of us. Renewed Heart ministries relies on your consistent and generous donations to exist and continue being a voice for renewal and change. 100% of your donation to Renewed Heart Ministries is tax-deductible with annual receipts being distributed each January.

If you have gained a blessing from RHM's work this year, help us continue our work by making a year-end, tax-deductible gift as 2020 comes to a close.

Thank you for believing in the mission and work of Renewed Heart Ministries.

Your support is deeply appreciated.



Giving Tuesday Thank You!

Thank you, each of you, for supporting the work of RHM on this year's #GivingTuesday!

RHM relies on support like yours to continue being a voice for change in our world. This year especially, we just can't thank each of you enough.

No one could have predicted how this pandemic would have affected each of us. 2020 has been a challenging year for many, including non-profits. On this year's Giving Tuesday, you raised over \$12,000 to support RHM's work. And each of those dollars, as pledged, will be matched.

Days like yesterday remind us that no matter what the future holds, our hope is not in hoarded resources, but in each other and the care we take for one another.

Your support yesterday on Giving Tuesday is so deeply appreciated. Thank you. Intersections between our faith and societal justice are needed right now more than ever. And together we are shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone.

Thank you for believing in the mission and work of Renewed Heart Ministries.

Sincerely,

Herb Montgomery
Director | Renewed Heart Ministries



Photo by Ben White on Unsplash.com



“This is how the birth of Jesus the anointed came about.”

(Matthew 1:18)

The Concrete Liberation Narratives of Advent (Part 1 of 3)

by Herb Montgomery

Advent season has begun!

Over the next few weeks, we'll look at the birth narratives of Jesus from 1st Century perspectives. In their cultural context, both Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives are about concrete liberation for oppressed Jewish people in the here and now. Matthew's and Luke differ greatly on the details of the birth of Jesus but both speak of concrete liberation. We will read each story in the religious and political contexts they were written in. They intensely subvert the political theologies of their day.

Today, we have access to information that helps us rediscover the stories' meaning to the first century followers of Jesus and also to us today as well.

A Preliminary Word about Both Narratives

Something to note before we begin: these narratives are primarily concerned with this world, not with heaven. They are focused on liberation in this life, much like the Exodus liberation narratives of the Torah are. Too often, the birth narratives

of Jesus are read through the lens of a salvation defined as entrance into a post-mortem heaven. But that is not how the original Jewish Jesus community would have heard these stories.

That community was concerned with the whole of life, not merely with an afterlife. A spiritual, afterlife application of these narratives became the dominant interpretation through the cultural influence of the Christianizing and expanding Roman Empire. Reading the gospel narratives with an otherworldly focus has born intensely destructive fruit ever since then. Before imperial Christianity, people understood these narratives to be about the liberation and transformation of our communities and this world. They were not solely religious stories; they were also political, economic and social, with distributively just imaginings of an end of violence, injustice, and oppression.

The Importance of Context

If we are going to wrest these two narratives from centuries of purely religious and otherworldly interpretations, we must discover their historical context. Once we see that context, we cannot unsee it. Once we know it, we cannot unknow it. Learning this context for myself, has forever changed how I read the birth-narratives of Jesus, so I want to share that journey with you.

This week, we'll begin with Matthew's narrative. We will consider why Herod is the focus and why the Magi are included.

Next time, we will explore Luke's birth narrative. My hope is the information in this series will enable you to read the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke anew. And I hope that these narratives, seen in their own contexts, will renew your heart and hope, and inspire you as a Jesus follower to more deeply embody their focus on transforming this world.

Though the early Jesus birth narratives were originally intended for 1st Century listeners, I believe they're also significant for us today. In our era, these narratives are being eclipsed for Christians by a consumerism that uses the gift of Jesus to affirm our holiday economic machine.

Richard Horsley describes this in the introduction to *The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context*. He writes:

“Indirectly at least, the giving, hence the buying, of gifts is rooted in the paradigms of God's gift of the Christ-child and the costly gifts of the Magi. The Christmas story has clearly come to have a material significance: it helps to legitimate the festival of retailing and consumption of goods. The Christmas story has thus also become subservient to the contemporary economic ends as well as subjected to modern cultural presuppositions.” (p. ix)

Today the subversive political and economic themes of the Christmas story are lost even to Christians who are most familiar with them. Systemic racism continues to thrive, xenophobia toward immigrants and Muslim Americans

continued on page 6

December's Recommended Reading from RHM

The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in Social Context

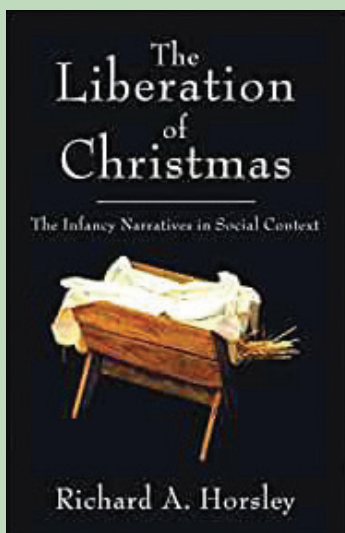
by Richard Horsley

Current biblical scholarship tends to treat the nativity narratives as having little historical basis and to see in them illustrations of the particular theologies of Matthew and Luke.

Non-biblical scholarship sees in these narratives only an adaptation of traditional folklore themes relating to the birth of the hero. This leaves the ordinary Christian in a vacuum that the mass media and other commercial interests are only too anxious to fill. 'Liberating Christmas' shows that, regardless of whether the nativity narratives are rooted in actual historical situations, they do portray a

particular network of social-political relationships. Thus Caesar ruled and taxed peoples, such as the Jews, through client-kings, such as Herod, who ruled with sharply repressive violence. But the narratives also celebrate the birth of a messiah who will finally liberate his people even though he and his family are driven into exile.

The Christmas stories as reappraised by this book have, therefore, important political implications,



implications not only about first-century Palestine but about contemporary history as well. These latter implications are brought out by an extensive analysis of the political-economic domination exercised in much of Latin America by the United States, domination maintained by "client dictators who use death squads (paralleling Herod's slaughter of innocents) to terrorize and control the exploited peasants while driving members of basic Christian communities into exile. 'Liberating Christmas' has as much to say about the 'Pax Americana' as the original nativity narratives had to say about the 'Pax Romana' The story of Jesus is as important to ordinary readers today as it was when it was first told centuries ago.

Remember, you don't have to order this book through amazon.com, but if you do, please consider using Amazon Smile (smile.amazon.com) and selecting Renewed Heart Ministries as your designated charity for a portion of your purchase to be donated to RHM at no additional cost to you.



Weekly Zoom HeartGroup on Wednesday Nights

Each Wednesday evening, Glendale City Church will be hosting a Zoom-HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in Renewed Heart Ministries weekly eSight articles and the *Jesus For Everyone* podcast published each Friday. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/10:00 p.m. Eastern.

Email us at info@renewedheartministries.com to receive the link for the Zoom meeting.



Photo by Anastasiya Yilmaz on Unsplash.com

A Special Message to Our HeartGroups

We at RHM are continuing to ask all HeartGroups not to meet together physically at this time. Please stay virtually connected and to practice physical distancing. You can still be there for each other to help ease anxiety and fears. When you do go out, please keep a six-foot distance between you and others to stop the spread of the virus.

This is also a time where we can practice the resource-sharing and mutual aid found in the gospels. Make sure the others in your group have what they need. We are more interconnected than we realize, as this has proven. And we need each other during this time.

This is a time to work together and prioritize protecting those most vulnerable among us. We'll get through this.



SOCIAL JESUS

A Blog Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Societal Justice



Recent Posts from RHM's "Social Jesus" Blog on Patheos

patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/



Transforming Communities Built on Exclusion (Part 1-3)

"One possible interpretation of these stories is to understand them as drawing attention to those whom the community has chosen to expel: the scapegoats, the sacrificed, the expelled, but who themselves are innocent."

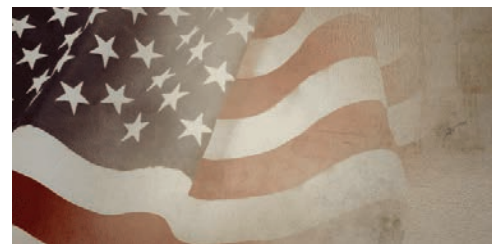
Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/11/transforming-communities-built-exclusion/



No More Sacrifice (Part 1 of 3)

"The unity that comes through sacrificing a common enemy is temporary and must be continually rekindled. The Jesus story shows us a different way."

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/11/no-more-sacrifice-part1/



Taking Sides: Reclaiming our Humanity (Part 1 of 3)

"Oppression dehumanizes everyone involved. By dehumanizing another, we lose our own humanity, and when we stand up for the humanity of others, we're also reclaiming our own humanity as well as the humanity of those being harmed."

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/11/reclaiming-our-humanity-part1/



A Community of the Rejected (Part 1 of 3)

"Rejection was a familiar theme for the early followers of Jesus. How can we reclaim these stories in ways that today are life-giving?"

Begin reading this series at patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2020/11/community-rejected-part1/

Find more articles at
patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/

flourishes, LGBTQ exclusion is still practiced by a large number of Christian congregations, and, much like the Rome of these birth narratives, the U.S. still seeks, to achieve peace through military violence—all while we adorn our American lawns with nativities of the babe from Bethlehem.

If we are to rediscover the original subversive power of the birth-narratives of Jesus and rightly apply those stories to our lives today, we must read them in the context of the lives and hopes of people in 1st Century Galilee and Judea who daily faced dehumanizing and economically crushing oppression.

Matthew's 'King of the Jews' uses a title reserved for Herod the Great. And Luke's "Son of God", Savior of the world, the One who brings peace on earth also uses titles and accomplishments normally applied to Caesar alone. We'll explore what difference the reassigning of these titles to Jesus made for the oppressed communities of early Jesus followers throughout this series.

For now, the Gospel of Rome promised peace through terror and violence. The Gospels envisioned peace on the other hand through and establishing of distributive justice for *all*.

The historian Josephus wrote about the ceremonial celebration at which the Roman Senate made Herod the client king of the Jewish region. He said:

"The meeting was dissolved and Antony and Caesar (Augustus) left the senate-house with Herod between them, preceded by the consuls and the other officials, as they went to offer sacrifice and to lay up the decree in the Capitol. On this, the first day of his reign, Herod was given a banquet by Antony." (*War* 1.285)

Herod would later economically crush the Jewish common people, piling on the already oppressive Roman tax burden of the inhabitants of the area under his control and threatening violent redress by a large and heavily armed militia. Not only was the Jerusalem Temple-state responsible for collecting the temple tax and the tribute due to Rome, Herod would also extract heavy tributes for an extensive building project aimed at paying homage to Caesar and thus securing his position within the Roman empire. Herod was intensely efficient at crushing uprisings and rebellions against his oppressive policies, and his slaughter of the people in villages and towns was extensive at certain times. This was a time when life in this region under Herod looked most hopeless. It was a time characterized by exploitation and tyranny for the Jewish peasantry: Herod was economically bleeding his people and country dry.

Josephus again writes that, at one point, Herod's economic tributes became so heavy that, Herod had to remit "to the people of his kingdom a third part of their taxes, under the pretext of letting them recover from a period of lack crops" (*Antiquities* 15.365). Because Herod himself was involved in projects whose expenses were greater than his means, "he was compelled to be harsh toward his subjects, for the great number of things on which he spent money as gifts to some, caused him to be the source of harm to those from whom he took his revenues." (*Antiquities* 16.154)

The situation for many under Herod's reign that the peasantry cried out day and night for relief from Herod's tyranny. Herod had reduced the entire people to helpless and hopeless poverty. Herod had become a conduit for the transfer of the economic lifeblood of Jewish people to other peoples and thus deeply harmed

the towns in his own realm as people, once of means, daily passed into poverty.

This is the concrete political, economic and real life situation Matthew's birth narrative centers as it tells the story of a threat to Herod's reign. This Christmas story, far from being about how Jesus would make a way to the afterlife and leave the oppressive systems and structures of this world passively untouched, speaks to its audience of a liberation from soul-crushing realities affecting its listeners in the here and now.

We'll take a deeper look at Matthew's version of the story of the birth of Jesus next time.

What economically life crushing realities do you need to be acknowledged this week?

How has the COVID pandemic impacted your life? How has the government down playing it, some leaders' apparent choice to choose the do-nothing, mass-murder-policy of natural herd immunity, the U.S. Senate's choice to recess early before the Thanksgiving holiday instead of passing on much needed relief—how have these and more failed approaches to the pandemic impacted you?

This year, as many of us are facing our own harsh realities, there may have never been a more appropriate time to consider the concrete liberation in the birth narratives of the Advent season: they were written for people who were facing harsh and crushing realities themselves and found hope in the person and teachings of Jesus.

Advent has now begun.

What do its stories have to share with us today?

Continue this series at renewedheartministries.com. ■

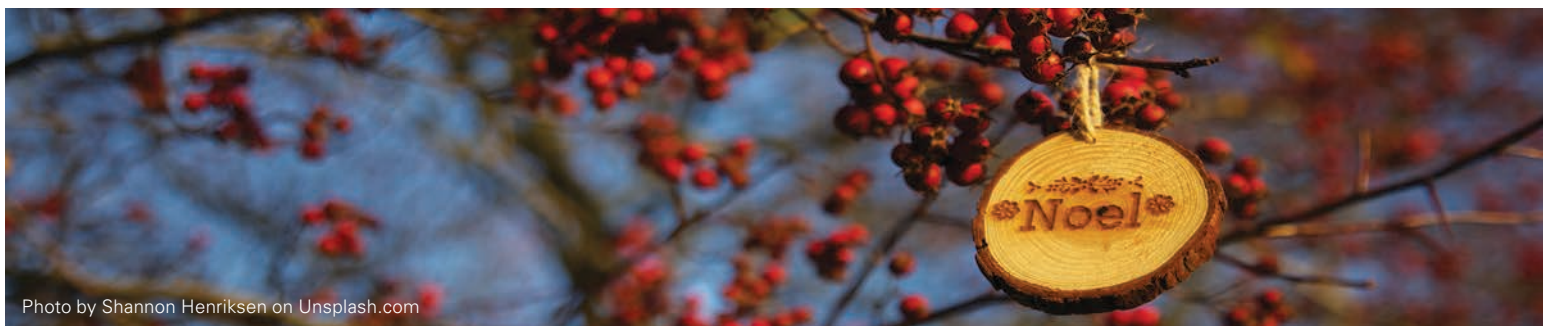


Photo by Shannon Henriksen on Unsplash.com

**2020 Projected Budget
Goal: \$185,000.00**

**2020's Projected Monthly
Budget Goal: \$15,417.00**

**2020's Projected Budget
January-October:
\$154,170.00**

**2020's Contributions
Received Through October:
\$62,450.97**

**October's Contributions
Received:
\$5,998.86**

Renewed Heart Ministries is a nonprofit organization working for a world of love and justice. We need your support to impact lives and provide the kind of resources and analysis RHM offers.

Intersections between faith, love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever.

***Help Christians be
better humans.***

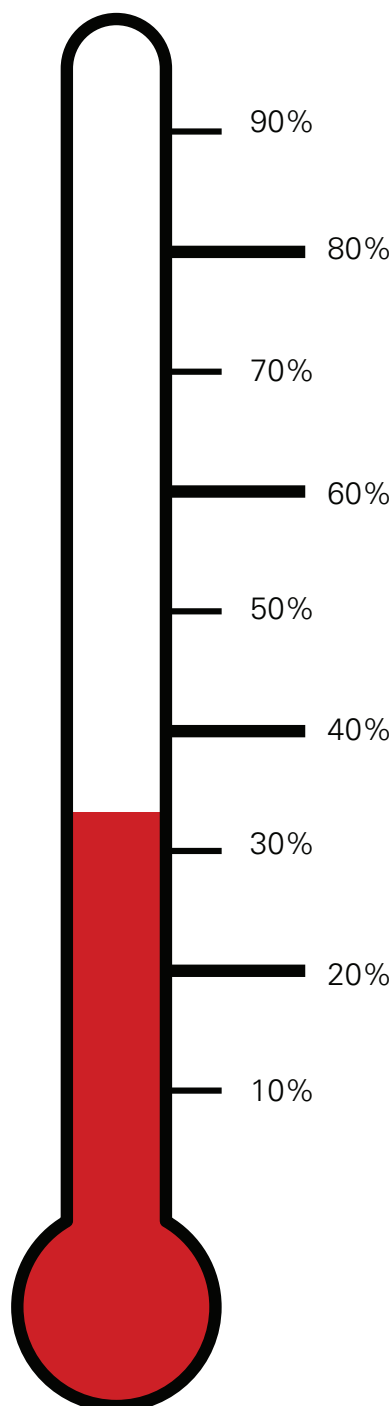
**Please consider making a
tax-deductible donation to
Renewed Heart Ministries today.**

To do so online go to renewedheartministries.com and click "Donate." Or if you prefer to make a donation by mail, our address is:

Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

**And to those of you out there
who are already supporting
this ministry, I want to say
thank you.** We could not continue being a voice for change without your support.

**Whether you give
\$5 or \$5,000,
every amount helps us
continue our work.**



**Are you getting
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your inbox?**

***Sign up today so you
don't miss a thing!***

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**The "Jesus
For Everyone"
podcast**

New episodes every Friday!

A weekly podcast where we talk about the intersection of faith and societal justice and what a first-century, Jewish prophet of the poor from Galilee offers us today in our work of compassion, love and justice.

**[renewedheartministries.com/
Podcasts](http://renewedheartministries.com/Podcasts)**

Renewed Heart Ministries is a not-for-profit group that is passionate about rediscovering, following and helping others rediscover the teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We believe these teachings have an intrinsic value in informing the work of nonviolently confronting, liberating and transforming our world into a safe, more just, more compassionate home for us all.

Everything we do here at Renewed Heart Ministries is for free. Even the many educational events that we hold in various venues. You can support our work either with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors by going to RenewedHeartMinistries.com and clicking the **donate** tab at the top right.

Or you can mail contributions to:
Renewed Heart Ministries
P.O. Box 1211
Lewisburg, WV 24901

Also, please sign up for our free resources and remember, every little bit helps.

Anything we receive over and above our annual budget we happily give away to other not-for-profits who are making both personal, systemic and structural differences in the lives of people who are less privileged.

And to those already supporting the work of Renewed Heart Ministries, your generous support makes it possible for us to exist and to continue being a presence for positive change in our world. So with all of our hearts, "Thank You."

Together we are making a difference, till the only world that remains is a world where only Love reigns.

RENEWED
HEART
MINISTRIES



Front cover artwork by Ali Montgomery.



"IN WHOSE NAME
ALL OPPRESSION
SHALL CEASE."

O HOLY NIGHT

RENEWEDHEARTMINISTRIES.COM



Howard

@nakedpastor.com