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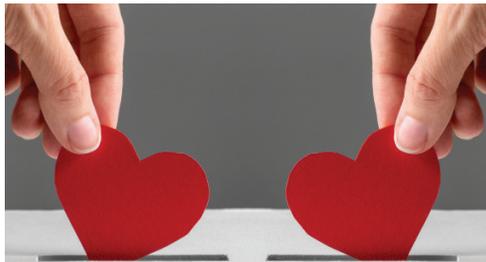
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## **Big News! Your Gift Will Go Twice as Far!**

From now through December 31st, every dollar you donate to Renewed Heart Ministries will be matched dollar for dollar!

That means your support will have **double the impact** in helping us continue to educate, inspire, and work toward a more just world grounded in love and compassion as we follow Jesus together.

Whether it's \$5 or \$5,000, **your generosity will be doubled** thanks to a matching gift opportunity from generous supporters.

### **Give today and make twice the difference!**

Go to [renewedheartministries.com](https://renewedheartministries.com) and click on "Donate."

Or you can mail your support to:  
Renewed Heart Ministries  
PO Box 1211  
Lewisburg, WV 24901

**Thank you for being part of this work. Let's finish the year strong—together.**



## **Renewed Heart Ministries Shared Table Event is Back!**

Become a monthly sustaining partner for 2026 and receive a special thank-you gift: *a Renewed Heart Ministries Shared Table Pottery Bowl* handmade by Crystal and Herb. You can become a monthly sustaining partner by clicking "**Check this box to make it a monthly recurring donation**" option when you donate online.

Becoming a monthly sustaining partner helps RHM plan and budget for our ministry projects throughout the year. To sign up, simply visit [renewedheartministries.com/donate](https://renewedheartministries.com/donate) and choose an **automated recurring monthly donation** of any amount. If you prefer using PayPal, you can also select the "**Make this a monthly donation**" option.

As a token of our appreciation, we'll be sending you one of these beautiful pottery bowls at the start of the new year. Our hope is that these bowls, whether displayed or used, will serve as a reminder of Jesus' shared table fellowship and his message of love and care for our neighbors. They also make wonderful gifts or conversation starters!



If you're already a sustaining partner for 2026, we deeply appreciate your ongoing support, too, and you also will receive one of our Shared Table Pottery Bowls as a thank-you gift.

Regardless of how you choose to support Renewed Heart Ministries at the end of this year, we are profoundly grateful for your partnership in furthering Jesus' vision of a world rooted in compassion, love, and inclusion. In the coming new year, we will continue to follow Jesus' gospel together in being a source of life, healing, and love as we work to shape our world into a safer, more compassionate, and just home for all.



## Christmas Reminds Us Not To Become Complicit with Societal Injustice

by Herb Montgomery

Our reading this week is from the gospel of Matthew:

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25)

The birth narratives of Jesus found in Matthew and Luke emerge within a world saturated with Roman imperial propaganda, and they can be read as intentional counter-stories to rival the prevailing narratives surrounding the birth of Caesar Augustus. In the early Roman Empire, Augustus’ rise was framed as a divinely orchestrated event. Imperial poets and historians portrayed him as born under auspicious signs, heralded by prophecies, and destined to bring a golden age of peace. His birth was said to fulfill cosmic expectations, and inscriptions such as the Priene Calendar Decree called him a “savior” whose arrival marked the beginning of “good news” (or gospel) for the world. These themes formed a powerful ideological backdrop shaping public imagination.

Against this context, early Christians crafted their own birth narratives. These stories do not simply tell of Jesus’ origins but deliberately challenge Rome’s theological claims. Luke’s narrative in particular mirrors and subverts imperial motifs. While Augustus issues a decree that sets the story in motion, the real focus is on a child born not in a palace but among the poor. Angels proclaim “good news” of “peace on earth,” echoing Roman language but redirecting it toward a different kind of ruler. Instead of imperial conquest, this peace is grounded in human compassion and justice. Matthew’s story likewise positions Jesus within a prophetic lineage superior to Rome, presenting him as the true king threatened by unjust power.

By adopting forms familiar from imperial birth legends but filling them with radically

*continued on page 4*



## Thank You!

We want to take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you who supports the work of Renewed Heart Ministries. Your generosity makes it possible for us to continue our mission of love, justice, and compassion—even in a time when ministries like ours are being called to do more with less.

Your support means the world to us. Whether we’re speaking into the broader society or engaging within our faith communities, we remain committed to advocating for a world that is inclusive, just, and safe for all. Your partnership helps keep that vision alive.

From all of us at Renewed Heart Ministries, **thank you.**

We are so deeply grateful for you—**and we couldn’t do this work without you.**

If you’d like to join them in supporting our work, please go to: **renewedheartministries.com** and **click “Donate.”**

Or you can **mail your support to:**

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PO Box 1211  
Lewisburg, WV 24901



## Weekly HeartGroup on Zoom Every Wednesday Night!

Each Wednesday evening, Renewed Heart Ministries hosts a Zoom-HeartGroup led by Herb Montgomery. Our discussion each week will focus on the content in RHM's weekly eSight articles and the *Social Jesus* podcast. The time of each Zoom session will be on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific/10:00 p.m. Eastern.

To receive the link for the Zoom meeting, email us at: [info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com)

**“Theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed.”**

James H. Cone  
A Black Theology of Liberation



renewedheartministries.com

### Christmas Reminds Us... continued from page 3

different content, the gospel writers offer a theological critique of empire. Jesus is portrayed as the genuine bringer of salvation to society, not through domination and imperial violence but through love of neighbor and solidarity with the marginalized. The birth narratives that we celebrate this time of year functioned originally as political statements. They offer an alternative vision of power, challenge Rome's claims to divine favor, and invite readers to imagine a world ordered not by imperial might, but by the values of justice, compassion, and liberation.

Supernatural as these narratives are, I would like us to try and step back from the supernatural claims of the birth narratives for Jesus. These claims were made for Caesar as well. And that is the point. What are these supernatural narratives saying politically, and can they inform our justice work today as well, see to follow that first century, Jewish, prophet of the poor from Galilee.

The central passage the Matthew chooses to adobe in his birth narrative about Jesus finds its roots in a completely different story among the ancient Jewish stores. It's found in Isaiah 7. And if we are to understand this story in Isaiah in a life-giving way, we need to start with the history surrounding the original claim that “a virgin would conceive” in Hebrew prophetic justice book of Isaiah. Bear with me as we briefly summarize that history. It will be worth it in the end.

Isaiah 7 is set during the Syro-Ephraimite War between 735–732 BCE. This was a major geopolitical crisis where the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) and Aram (Syria) formed an anti-Assyrian alliance. They then threatened to invade the southern kingdom of Judah. Their goal was to depose King Ahaz of Judah and force his kingdom to join their anti-Assyrian alliance. Ahaz (king of Judah) and his people were terrified by this impending war.

King Rezin of Aram (Syria) and King Pekah of Israel (Ephraim) marched to besiege Jerusalem. Their plan was to overthrow the Davidic monarchy (Ahaz) and install a puppet ruler, the son of Tabeal. The heart of Ahaz and his people “trembled with fear, like the trees of the forest shake with the wind.” (Isaiah 7:2) Rather than seeking help from their God, Ahaz began making secret overtures to Tiglath-Pileser III, the powerful king of Assyria, to become his vassal and gain military protection.

In the book of Isaiah (Isaiah 7), the prophet Isaiah was sent by God to meet Ahaz and urge him to stay calm and trust in the Lord instead of a foreign alliance. Isaiah assured the king that the invasion would fail, referring to the two enemy kings (Rezin and Pekah) as “two smoldering stubs of firewood” who would soon be extinguished.

Within a few years, Assyria conquered both Aram and Israel, the two nations threatening Judah. The prophecy indicated that before the child Immanuel was old enough to know right from wrong, the threat from Rezin and Pekah would be over.

Because Ahaz chose to rely on Assyria rather than God, Judah became an Assyrian vassal state, leading to heavy tribute and the introduction of pagan practices, setting the stage for future conflict and eventual exile.

This is the connection between Matthew's birth narrative for Jesus and Isaiah. In our naturalistic world view, what catches our attention is the scientific impossibility of a virgin birth. And this has distracted much our attention away from the political point the author of Matthew's gospel is making.

Let me explain. Just like the Ahaz with the powerful king of Assyria, the Temple State elites of Jesus' society had submitted to being a vassal of Imperial Rome. Their complicity in Rome's exploitation of that region had brought them both power and wealth. But this was privilege for the few at the expense of the masses.

In the world of Jesus, the Jerusalem Temple was not only a religious center but also the administrative heart of a Temple-State, a political institution deeply entangled with Roman imperial power. After Rome appointed Herod the Great as client king and later installed Roman prefects to govern Judea, the Temple leadership—particularly the high-priestly aristocracy—found itself operating within a system designed to maintain stability for Rome and to secure its own privileged status. The high priest was no longer chosen by internal Jewish processes but appointed and removed at the will of Roman authorities. This

*continued on page 6*

# Social Jesus

## Recent Social Jesus Blog Posts on Patheos:



### ***Life and Living Versus Death and Dying*** (Part 1 of A Gospel About the Living Rather than the Dead)

The contrast between focusing on the living rather than on death and dying could have many possible applications today.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/life-living-versus-death-dying/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/life-living-versus-death-dying/)



### ***Salt, Light and Justice*** (Part 2 of A Gospel About the Living Rather than the Dead)

Being salt and light here and now means being a conduit of the gospels core ethic—love of neighbor—through our actions.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/salt-light-justice/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/salt-light-justice/)



### ***Afterlife Obsession and Justice Work Today*** (Part 3 of A Gospel About the Living Rather than the Dead)

A belief in an afterlife shouldn't overshadow the work of shaping our world into a safe, compassionate, just home for everyone today.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/afterlife-obsession-justice-work-today/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/afterlife-obsession-justice-work-today/)



### ***The Unsustainability of Injustice*** (Part 1 of A World that is Just, Safe, and Compassionate for All)

The unsustainability of their economic system had reached a breaking point where the masses could not be squeezed any further.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/unsustainability-injustice/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/unsustainability-injustice/)



### ***The Widening Gap: Can Equity Outpace Inequality?*** (Part 2 of A World that is Just, Safe, and Compassionate for All)

The widening gap in our one-sided system grows wealth exponentially for a few, divorced from real economic welfare for the wider population.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/widening-gap-can-equity-outpace-inequality/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/widening-gap-can-equity-outpace-inequality/)



### ***One Stone Not Left Upon Another of our Growing Disparity*** (Part 3 of A World that is Just, Safe, and Compassionate for All)

Similar to the 1st Century, change requires a profound shift away from a system of growing disparity toward collective flourishing.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/one-stone-not-left-upon-another-growing-disparity/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/one-stone-not-left-upon-another-growing-disparity/)



### ***Calvary as Political Execution*** (Part 1 of A Political Execution: Beyond Atoning Sacrifice)

Political execution pivots us from a transaction in cosmic accounting far away to our own confrontation with systemic injustice here and now.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/calvary-political-execution/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/calvary-political-execution/)



### ***Crucifixion: A Historical Alternative to Substitution*** (Part 2 of A Political Execution: Beyond Atoning Sacrifice)

Crucifixion was reserved enemies of the state or those who threatened imperial order, not ordinary lawbreakers.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/crucifixion-historical-alternative-punitive-substitution/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/crucifixion-historical-alternative-punitive-substitution/)



### ***Resurrection and Justice Work Today*** (Part 3 of A Political Execution: Beyond Atoning Sacrifice)

Death, even just one more death, doesn't overcome death. Resurrection nonviolently triumphs over violence and injustice.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/resurrection-justice-work-today/](https://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/resurrection-justice-work-today/)

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**Advent and Reclaiming Our Humanity**  
(Part 1 of *The Liberation at the Heart of Advent*)

This Advent passage concerns transitioning away from a world imagined as a predatory beast to one where our humanity has been reclaimed.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/advent-reclaiming-humanity/](http://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/advent-reclaiming-humanity/)



**Advent as Ritual Reminder**  
(Part 2 of *The Liberation at the Heart of Advent*)

Advent reminds us that if we don't share the social location of the marginalized, we're called to live in year-round solidarity with them.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/advent-ritual-reminder/](http://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/advent-ritual-reminder/)



**The Liberation at the Heart of Advent**  
(Part 3 of *The Liberation at the Heart of Advent*)

Advent calls us to participate in the beginning of a whole new world where injustice gives way to loving one's neighbor.

[patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/liberation-heart-advent/](http://patheos.com/blogs/socialjesus/2025/11/liberation-heart-advent/)

## Upcoming Events

**DECEMBER 20, 2025**

**Good News Fellowship**

Toronto, Ontario Canada

**For info or Zoom link, email:**

[info@renewedheartministries.com](mailto:info@renewedheartministries.com)

## December's Recommended Reading

### *The Cost of Discipleship*

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

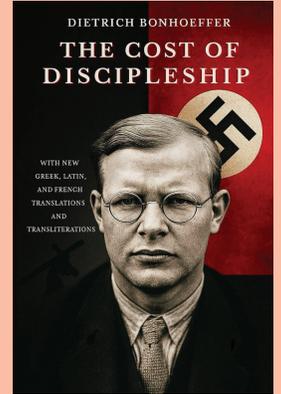
Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, now with new translations, transliterations, and Afterword. An insightful look at grace and the path to eternal life, featuring:

"A rigorously patient exposition of the Sermon on the Mount which compels the reader to face himself, and God, in any situation. A very moving book, lived as well as written"—*Times* (London) *Literary Supplement*

"Among the Flossenberg martyrs was a remarkable young Lutheran pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had joined the underground convinced that it was his duty as a Christian to work for Hitler's defeat. Bonhoeffer was only 39 when he died, but he had already made a monumental contribution to Christian thought, which today has profound and growing significance for both theologian and layman. Bonhoeffer's books are gaining an astonishing popularity in the secular world...He is admired by people who have read his best-known books, *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, as the example of what a modern Christian must be."— *Life*

Millions of readers worldwide have benefited from the profound insights presented in *The Cost of Discipleship*. In this remarkable work, 20th-century Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserts that "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die". Drawing from the Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer offers a critical examination of the distinction between "cheap grace" and "costly grace." He describes "cheap grace" as self-bestowed, characterized by the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, and communion without confession. According to Bonhoeffer, "cheap grace is grace without discipleship."

Conversely, he defines "costly grace" as the gift that must be earnestly sought, symbolized by the door at which one must knock. It is costly because it demands a person's life, yet it is grace because it is given by God and provides a path to true life. *The Cost of Discipleship*, first published in 1936, is an excellent addition to any Christian library.



### *Christmas Reminds Us...* continued from page 4

arrangement created a class of leaders whose power, wealth, and security depended on cooperation with the empire.

The Temple system collected tithes, offerings, and taxes from the populace, functioning alongside Rome's own heavy taxation. Many scholars note that this dual burden intensified economic strain on ordinary people, especially peasants already living close to subsistence. Temple elites, benefiting from control of offerings, land, and commerce, were seen by many as aligning themselves with Roman economic extraction rather than resisting it. Their collaboration helped stabilize Rome's rule while reinforcing their own authority.

This complicity is a central backdrop to Jesus' confrontations in the Gospels. His symbolic action of overturning tables in the Temple challenged not Jewish worship itself, but a system he saw as exploiting the poor and legitimizing imperial violence. By critiquing both economic injustice and elite collaboration with Rome, Jesus exposed how the Temple-State had drifted far from its vocation as a place of liberation, becoming instead a partner in imperial domination.

And this leads us to certain parallels in our time today. In the United States today, certain sectors of Christianity have become closely aligned with nationalism (empire), blending religious identity with political power and national loyalty. This alignment often frames the nation as uniquely chosen or divinely favored, transforming faith into a marker of cultural belonging rather than a call to ethical discipleship that follows the values and teachings

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The work of helping people find life-giving ways to live out their faith through love, compassion, and justice are needed now more than ever. At Renewed Heart Ministries, we provide resources of faith and healing with the aim of renewing hope and inspiring action as we allow the Jesus story to inform each of us as we work together to shape our world into a compassionate, just and safe home for everyone.



Renewed Heart Ministries is a 501(c)3, grassroots ministry on the margins that prioritizes the needs of marginalized communities, especially those who have been the recipients of misinformed, faith-based harm. Your support enables us to be a life-giving, healing light in our faith communities and continue to be a voice for desperately needed change.

*You get to decide what shape our faith communities take and what voices get to be heard.*

You can support Renewed Heart Ministries with a one-time gift or by becoming one of our monthly contributors. Your donation can be made online at: [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com) or by mail at:

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

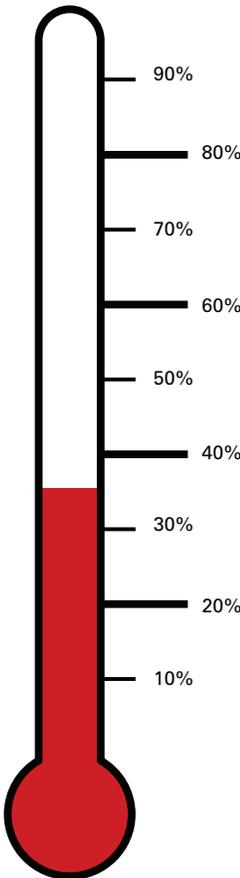
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And **THANK YOU** for reading, listening to, sharing and supporting RHM's work. Thank you for the decisions you make every day to make our world a safer, compassionate, just home for everyone. Thank you for your dedication to engaging our world and the care you demonstrate, and for being such an important part of our community.

**2025 Projected Budget Goal:**  
**\$150,000.00**

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**YTD Donations Received:**  
**\$55,147.07**



*Thank You!*

actually found in the Jesus story (such as nonviolence, inclusion of the marginalized, welcoming the migrant, and taking care of the poor.) Christian symbols and language are sometimes used to legitimize policies that prioritize dominance, exclusion, or fear of the "other," especially immigrants, religious minorities, and dissenters. In this framework, loyalty to the nation can eclipse the core Christian commitments to peace, justice, and love of neighbor. National success is interpreted as divine blessing, while critique of the state is portrayed as unfaithful or unpatriotic. This fusion risks turning Christianity into a tool for preserving power rather than a prophetic voice that challenges injustice. When faith is subordinated to nationalist goals, it loses its capacity to speak truth to power and to stand in solidarity with the vulnerable.

From Isaiah's critique of a union with Assyria, and the Gospels critique of union with Rome, today Jesus followers are called to put their faith in the way of peace and justice. This holiday season, the birth narratives of Jesus give cause to pause and assess whether our own faith practices are still in harmony with the stories we hold so dear. ■

**You can find Renewed Heart Ministries on Blusky, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Meta's Threads.**

If you haven't done so already, please follow us on your chosen social media platforms for our daily posts.

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- [Renewed Heart Ministries](https://www.facebook.com/RenewedHeartMinistries)
- [renewedheartministries/](https://www.instagram.com/renewedheartministries/)
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- [renewedheartministries.com](http://renewedheartministries.com)

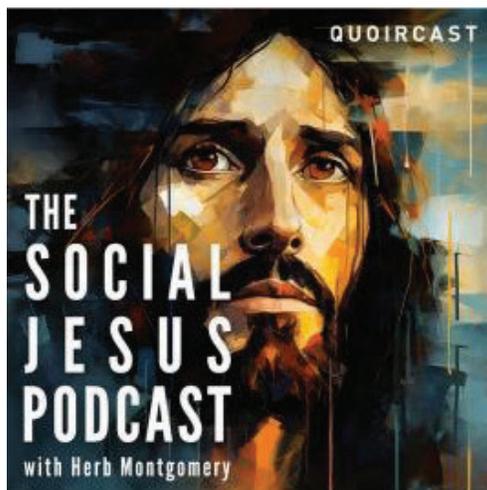


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You can find RHM on Blusky, Facebook, Instagram and Threads for daily posts. Our JFE podcast can be subscribed to through the podcast platform you use. You can also receive inspiration in your inbox from RHM delivered to you email inbox daily or weekly.

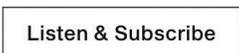
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*Sign up today so you don't miss a thing!*



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

**Find The Social Jesus Podcast at:**  
<https://the-social-jesus-podcast.simplecast.com/>



***Finding Jesus: A Fundamentalist Preacher Discovers the Socio-Political & Economic Teachings of the Gospels***

by Herb Montgomery

***Available on Amazon!***

In *Finding Jesus*, author Herb Montgomery delves into the profound and often overlooked political dimensions of the gospels. Through meticulous analysis of biblical texts, historical context, and social discourse, this thought-provoking book unveils the gospels' socio-political, economic teachings as rooted in a profound concern for justice, compassion, and the well-being of the marginalized.

The book navigates the intersections between faith and societal justice, presenting a compelling argument for a more socially engaged and transformative Christianity.

*Finding Jesus* is not just a scholarly exploration; it is a call to action. It challenges readers to reevaluate their understanding of Christianity's role in public life and to consider how the radical teachings of the gospels can inspire a renewed commitment to justice, equality, and compassion. This book is a must-read for those seeking a deeper understanding of the social implications of Christian faith and a blueprint for building a more just and inclusive society.

