

After the Right, What's Left? A Socialist Critique of Trump and the Christian Right

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Donald Trump lost the 2016 United States Presidential election by over 2.8 million votes, but in the US electoral system, that does not matter. Trump gained enough votes in key states like Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan to win the Electoral College and to raise, for liberals, the uncomfortable question about how and why he appealed to traditional working-class America in traditional working-class states. Why was his appeal equally engaging of the old Left as it was of the Alt Right? The question is significant not only for imagining the political future of America and the West but also when considering the future of Christianity as a socially relevant religion. Trump's overwhelming support on the Christian Right raises the question of the Christian future.

The Lost Left

The lost Left of America are those older labor unionists who once held good jobs and good benefits in a strong American workforce. Those older industrial jobs, though, progressively transferred out of the state and out of the country when the globalization of capitalism worked to advantage corporations over people. In 2016, Trump resonated with that lost population on the Left who once formed the backbone of strong labor unions. Once upon a time, the worker was solidly behind

the Democrats,¹ but free trade devalued the American laborer, who then became disillusioned with the international expansion of American capitalism. Labor unions stand for, and struggle for, secure jobs and thriving small towns, but the new global economy left those older values out in the cold. In his vibrant yet disturbing campaign of 2016, Trump sounded like he stood against globalization and stood for the forgotten worker and the return of good union jobs.

Recall how, several decades ago, progressive minds were highly critical of the 1988 Free Trade Agreement first struck between Canada and the United States, then subsequently expanded as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1994. Ross Perot, the independent Presidential candidate in 1992, expressed, in less dramatic words, worries about NAFTA similar to Trump. Perot claimed that NAFTA would mean the weakening of the American labor movement and the loss of union jobs due to cheaper labor costs and few environmental standards south of the border.² (Trump just said things like NAFTA was the worst deal ever without explaining why.) Perot was right, but the Democratic Party failed to hear these concerns when President Bill Clinton signed NAFTA and embraced globalization. Arguably Clinton's signature proved to be a turning point after which a painful rift began to appear between an older and newer America, with older America eventually giving the advantage to Trump. In a buffoon-like manner, Trump stirred the voting power of the American worker with the promised return of lost industrial prosperity. The strategy paid off, since, by 2016, the American worker had forgotten that prosperity and good jobs are actually housed on the Left inside strong labor unions.

In America and in Western nations, the rise of labor unions through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries both prevented social revolutionary causes from gaining ground and advanced real socialist values (such as investments in poverty, higher minimum wages, and medical care). Capitalism continued as the default social order, but labor unions assured that laborers could enjoy job security and benefits. Labor union spin-off effects also advanced values for middle-class professionals like weekends, earned vacation time, and safe working conditions. Ununionized workers, on the other hand, had no such luck. When Donald Trump adopted the slogan "Make America Great Again" (modifying Ronald Reagan's 1980 slogan, "Let's Make America Great Again"), he inadvertently appealed to the memory of powerful labor unions and the time when what made American great was good union jobs. He stoked the nostalgia of the postwar era when a socially conscious

America witnessed the rise of unions that protected workers and contributed immensely to local economies. "Small town America" is the waning memory of that era.

Globalization arrived with free trade to make labor an international commodity and convinced corporate America to move production offshore. This created unheralded increases on returns for shareholders, who are the isolated one percent, but the new era also meant closed local factories, vacated small towns, and depleted purchasing powers for the average American worker. Even though, in terms of policy, his administration is no friend of labor unions, Trump attracted the American worker, who is wistfully addicted to the heyday of powerful unions. Trump employed political rhetoric that sided his speech, though not his heart, with labor against free trade and the exodus of American factory jobs to international free trade zones. With his Left hand, Trump upheld the spirit of socialism, which sets its priorities on people, but with his Right hand he ensured that the people in question are the wealthiest of Americans along with himself. In 2016, without a Bernie Sanders to oppose him, Trump was able to hoodwink the common American worker.³

Though not exclusively, since Trump also appealed to a racist America, much of Trump's popular appeal was based on his emotional stirring of socialist values, while Hilary Clinton, who is ideologically friendlier to actual socialism, seemingly defended the rational *status quo*. Despite this strange reversal where the Right sounded Left and the Left sounded Right, Clinton still won the election but lost the College.⁴ A whole list of sins subsequently followed Trump and have defined his presidency since, including narcissism, racism, sexism, ignorance of indigenous rights, ignorance of American history, ignorance of climate change, various deceptions and lies, possible illegal acts, et cetera. Each shortcoming is also accompanied by a lack of vision to the disadvantage of workers and the advantage of elite capitalism, but during the Presidential campaign none of these troubles mattered. What mattered was the injury the American worker had suffered for too long.

Fake Socialism and Real Resentment

Despite occasionally sounding socialist,⁵ there is not a word from the Oval Office about labor unions, worker rights, guaranteed living wages, safe working conditions, and countless other issues that concern unionized labor (overtime payment, employment re-training, inflation protection, maternal and parental benefits, critique

of privatized social security, critique of privatized education, advancing the shift to a green economy, etc.). Instead, the Trump administration demonizes the idea of socialism and enacts tax policies that promote the increasingly dramatic monetary gap between capitalist elites and common workers. In Marxist thought this means courting social disaster. The larger the divide between wealthy capitalists and a subjugated workforce, the more likely a social revolution. However, whether the result of President Obama's policies or Trump's, a super-heated capitalist economy holds its own form of opium for the masses: high employment rates, even with an exploitive minimum wage, make everyone feel like things have never been better. Yet, for Marx and Marxist thinkers, social exploitation is the force of social resentment housed among privileged classes—a force of fear against the “other.” The inherent contradiction between the resentments of the privileged and the solidarity of the exploited results in the rising consciousness of revolution.⁶ In Trump's America, resentment surfaces both in the White House and the White middle class that perceives or else confuses social equality with a loss of entitlement, and such misplaced resentment expresses itself perpetually in toxic forms of bitterness. A president ought to address, not fuel, such a lethal mixture in the social fabric.

Instead of leading the call for a constructive and cohesive dialogue, Trump takes advantage of prevailing resentment with acts and statements that promote fearmongering among the advantaged who feel threatened with a loss of power. He promotes division between the historic middle class and the historically desperate “others” (immigrants, indigenous peoples, and Blacks) who seek equal opportunities for advancement. The old middle class becomes protective of its status, feeling it is losing its economic power, but it does not see that this sense of loss is due to capitalist exploitation at the hands of the one percent. The sense of loss has nothing do to with others; it has everything to do with the globalization of elite capitalism. Trump provides an outlet for middle-class resentment with his name-calling of supposed enemies, his taunts of the desperate, and his slander of opponents. Trump does not really have any solutions for the plight of the threatened middle class, but he does provide an outlet for their anger in vilifying the most desperate and the most despairing among us.

From a socialist viewpoint, the thinking of the Republican Party and its Trump supporters is set in reverse, tearing apart rather than building up society. Such anti-community encouragements, given in Trump's derogatory rhetoric, deeply insult the spirit of America and the beckoning words cast on the Statue of Liberty.⁷ Socialist

principles define America as much as capitalism because society, any society, rests on the pillars of shared opportunities and the dignity of work. Investments in poverty reduction, education, and health care are social goods that advance the whole, even when the “whole” is a capitalist economy. How the Republican Party manages to make these sincerely important and cohesive social policies “a waste of taxpayer’s money” is one of the mysteries that people on the Left find baffling. Nevertheless, the ability to demonize taxes seems to be one of the tickets to political power in America. Socialism also critiques the over-emphasized individualism that defines pure capitalism and forms much of the American myth. To idealize a rugged individual, which is the common trope of the American gun lobby if not Hollywood, abstracts (separates) the individual from the ground of reality. Real people exist in real-life situations, that is, in a society with others. Real life is always embedded in experiences created with other people. Real life is a socio-economic reality that shapes events, causes suffering, accounts for joys, and makes reflections about meaning possible. Nothing can happen in human life without an already present society in operation. Human beings are born into a community, whether the community in question is unfortunate or advantageous. Politics is about governing a society to the advantage of the citizens. Another way to say this is that politics is about trying to ensure every member of a nation is born into the most advantageous situation possible. The common concern about society makes politics, even right-winged forms of it, “socialist” in nature.

People who value some level of socialist thinking understand that a real person is a construct of, and a life within, material social conditions. This is the insight of Karl Marx: everything emerges from material social conditions. There is accordingly a natural dialectic between the individual and the community; the two evolve together in a struggle that includes labor and capital. The struggle is not restricted to these two elements, but these two do drive the engine of an economy. The positive value that emerges from this dialectic is equal opportunity, which is built on the basic sense of human dignity in production. The old Soviet Union, which is not often a good example for things, was strong on this point. Early Soviet iconography depicted the worker as a muscular, independent woman who was no longer restricted to the capitalist household (and kitchen) as its possession.⁸ Unions in America hold similar values, though no sympathy for a soviet-styled dictatorship, with their historic struggles to gain dignity for the worker.⁹

The Trump administration has taken advantage of the middle class's resentment over its perceived loss of economic thriving, and instead of offering the nation a vision of a new economy, Trump has been able to divert attention, through that resentment, from genuine social questions to false narratives about invading immigrants and scheming Democrats.

The Right Gets Christianity Wrong

Despite its many problems – participation in colonialism, crusades, sexism, and anti-Semitism – Christianity manages to hold in its identity the glimmering light of a justice imperative. The light rests on sayings in the beatitudes (Matt 5:1–12) like, “blessed are the poor,” “blessed are the peacemakers,” and “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” The book of Isaiah inspired Luke to write that the ministry of Jesus was “to preach good news to the poor” and “to liberate the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Matthew also picked up the spirit of the Q Sayings Gospel, where the beatitudes originally lay, in the summary comment, “whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did also for me” (Matt 25:40). Against the background of such Christian Bible verses and in consonance with Christian social teaching, Gustavo Gutierrez formed the tenets of Liberation Theology and spread the news about God's “preferential option for the poor.”¹⁰ Although Christianity may not hold a distinguished history when it comes to social justice, the justice imperative still defines the faith, even to its center at the cross, where self-sacrificial love resides, and at the table, where the bounty of a harvest is shared.

The trouble with theology in America, though, is that the justice imperative largely resides in mainline Protestant churches where rationalism holds sway over emotions and where colonial attitudes (the attitude that Western reason is normative) often prevails. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s that staid, mainline rationalism failed to attract new and younger generations who preferred postmodern experiences (that is, pluralism, difference, and diverse sexual and intellectual expressions) to imperial forms of rationalism. The appeal of the Christian Right was to emotions, to the experience of being “saved,” and to the rhetorical drama of unique sin and salvation stories. Reason lost its authority, and on the Right emotion-based, reactionary discipline (“Christian values”) rose in place of reason-based, ethical decision-making. The Christian Right was in the minority for most of the twentieth century, but a dramatic change came about in the 1980s with the election of Ronald Reagan and the focus on abortion. Jerry Falwell's threefold mantra

became a type of clarion call: get saved, get baptized, and get registered to vote. From that point forward, the Christian Right moved in with the Republican Party to make women's bodies and human sexuality a voting issue. Then, with the Christian Right's emphasis on an individual (libertarian and anti-social) salvation model towing along, the Republican Party's anti-tax agenda seemed a perfect fit. On the Right one needs to make it on one's own whether in society or with God. The narrowing of society to a set of saved individuals who don't pay taxes (or don't want to) has now placed a permanent juxtaposition between "conservatives" and "liberals" and, as such, between Christianity understood as politics and Christianity understood as social justice. On the Right, Republican policies now define what it means to be a Christian, and Christian faith now means to vote Republican. Today, there is virtually no distinction between the two. The fate of the Christian Right lies in the hands of the Republican Party. The two are tied together. They have each sold their souls to one another. And presently their souls are in the hands of Donald Trump.

What is tragic about the Christian Right is its focus on control, whether that is wishing to control the social agenda or wishing to control women's bodies. The Christian Right in America is an example of what happens when obsession overtakes common sense. In Jungian psychology, obsession relates to irrational repetitions (attempts to silence, suppress, confine, control) that seek to satisfy a troubled psyche. The trouble, in this case, as I have tried to indicate, emerges from resentment. Even if one feels Jungian analysis is inaccurate, the point about control remains a good one that has biblical precedence. "Whoever clutches and grabs after life will lose it" is my preferred translation of Luke 17:33; it is a paradoxical way of saying that an honest life is lived out of equanimity (Greek, *ataraxia*), but attempts to control makes honesty impossible.

The Christian Right betrays faith (trust) because it set its form of Christianity on the path of control, which is the opposite of faith. Faith (*pistis*) in the Bible means trust, and as Paul uses it (subjective genitive), it means trustworthy. To describe Christ as faithful (the faithfulness of Christ, Rom 3:22) refers to Jesus being trustworthy. It is not a reference to believing unbelievable things like miracles or the raising of the dead. The deeds of Jesus point to his trustworthiness—that's the Christian idea. In earliest expressions of Christianity, Jesus is trusted as the guide to life, practices, and community relationships. Jesus can be the center of these things because of his integrity.

The Christian Right does not hold a gospel that promotes trustworthiness as a core value. Arising from a long and complex history, with nineteenth-century fundamentalism in the background, “faith,” on the Right, means “belief” instead of trust. Without its moorings in trust, faith promotes both control over others (the “other”) and fear of the other (whatever person or culture that happens to be). When faith loses its social sense of trust, Christianity collapses into libertarian salvation, with the emphasis on individual belief experiences, and turns away from an objective sense of trust. Non-believers, from the side of libertarian individualism, are out there only for the purpose of being saved. Compassion for others, which requires trust of the other, moves on the Right to anthropophobia, the fear of other people who threaten the insider beliefs of fundamentalist Christianity. The Trump administration has managed to grab this bull by the horns. Trump gladly exaggerates the threat of the other and feels absolutely justified in promoting a wall against them. The Christian Right is neither able to see how this act is faithless nor understand how such faithlessness has changed America. Today, the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty seem like a kind of joke.

Several aphorisms related to the Jesus tradition are about letting go. These forms of aphoristic wisdom emphasize what James Robinson¹¹ called a trust ethic. “The least are the greatest,” “don’t worry about what you wear,” “take no staff, no purse, no food,” and “when you enter a home say, ‘peace be upon this house’” are all wisdom sayings drawn from the Q Gospel. These short sayings do not originate verbatim from the lips of Jesus, but they do reflect the earliest traces of Christianity rising in the context of ancient Rome. The trust ethic expresses what Dominic Crossan called open commensality: the emphasis on shared goods, on solidarity, and on fair exchanges among the poorest of Rome’s peasants.¹² The banqueting roots of the Christian eucharist remember and reenact the central value of justice through solidarity.¹³

How did America allow a fundamentalist Christian interpretation of the Bible to become the platform of its Republican Party? How did private religious interpretations, isolated from reason, define the backbone of public policy? How can it be that instead of being a democracy, America shows signs of being a theocracy? When did God become an American politician?

The Republican Christian Right: Not a Lost Left but a Lost Christianity

The answer to the questions above might be 1968. It was then that Presidential candidate Richard Nixon employed the so-called “southern strategy.” To be fair to Nixon, he was not a racist; his administration did put the “Philadelphia Plan” (Affirmative Action) in effect, and he declared on numerous occasions that a nation divided by race could not stand. While the southern strategy shamelessly relied on racism, its target was the Southern voters. The strategy aimed to overcome the historic ties between the South and the Democrats that rested on the Southern dislike of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican North. The new appeal of the Republican Party to the South consisted of limiting federal involvement in State affairs, declaring opposition to school busing, and reforming, if not dismantling, social welfare. The strategy, inherited from Barry Goldwater, did not oppose, in Nixon’s hands, the 1964 Civil Right Act, but it did court the Southern vote with a soft but clear anti-integration voice. The strategy worked. The Republican Party became not the party defined by responsible taxation, but the party defined against social responsibility. The White Southern vote was also, in the majority, the Christian fundamentalist vote. So, the stars aligned. Being anti-socialist and overtly racist, both indirectly and directly, became the Christian Right identity. This first step lead to several others as, progressively, to be Christian on the Right came to mean believing that personal prejudices hold greater authority than the social good. In America, the history of Christian social teaching entered the beginning of the end when the southern strategy also became the backbone of Christian faith.

The stark contrast of the Christian Right to the teaching of Jesus and the birth of Christianity is more than just ironic. It is both tragic and dangerous. When individual “gut reactions” and emotions hold the highest level of authority in society, the only possible consequence is civil chaos. At the “gut level,” because it is the level of instinctive survival, every issue, foreign or domestic, holds the same urgency. The ability to discern the difference between really important issues and not so significant issues is lost. In the Trump administration, everything from a positive, working health care reform (the Affordable Care Act) to a positive, working international treaty (Iran nuclear deal) are subject to the same whims of emotions, suspicions, and misinformation. Basically, a good deal is a bad deal if President Trump had nothing to do with it. That thinking fits into the now normative rhetoric of the Christian Right. If an idea does not resonate with one’s feelings, even if it’s an academically sound and somewhat indisputable idea, then it is suspect, likely threatening, and maybe evil.

When the Jesus Seminar proposed that the voice print of the historical Jesus was found mostly in the aphorisms of the Q Saying Gospel, the response on the Right was the defense of orthodoxy, the denouncement of the seminar (often as evil), and the rejection of the Q Gospel in total.¹⁴ Though every theory is subject to critique, emotional rejections to evidence-based reasoning is a psychosis, not an argument. The Christian Right's rejection of biblical scholarship due to a perceived level of threat and the Trump administration's rejection of good social policies, never mind informed epidemiological advice, due to a perceived socialist tone are almost identical. Both cases lack a sense of the common good; what seems to matter is the ability to defeat common sense with the force of self-serving opinion.

The threat of the Trump administration to the integrity of Christianity then is twofold. The first consists of substituting the historic social teaching of Christianity with libertarianism, which, unfortunately, appeals to the lost Left who feel justified resentment against globalization. The second is further enforcing the divorce between Christianity and the academic world. The divorce is expressed in the administration's mimicking of the Christian fundamentalist priority set on emotion. In both cases, the Christian Right supports the Trump administration. With Trump, it gladly demeans "socialism" and the trust ethic it rests upon, and it gladly accepts emotional taunts designed to belittle evidenced-based reasoning. The Christian Right can see in political libertarianism its own emphasis on personal salvation; and it can see in the blatant disregard of facts its own joy over dismissing science and ignoring scholarship. Yet, on the Right, the future does not look bright. The Christian Right's own children are returning to the social gospel, and this movement suggests that despite all, Christian social teaching is not lost in America.

The Return of the Social: Faint Hope on the Right

In the early twentieth century, Ernst Troeltsch published *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*.¹⁵ In two volumes, he covered an immense amount of historical and denominational ground, but he made one curious comment when considering the value of the church. The historic value of the church consists of its ability to ignore subjective holiness for the sake of an objective treasure he called redemption.¹⁶ For Troeltsch, the Christian sense of redemption was social; it involved the universal condition of the human family as the ultimate concern of the Christian faith.

In the early twentieth century, social analysis also defined the sense of the Christian gospel in America. Theologians such as Shailer Mathews, Walter Rauschenbusch, and the young Reinhold Niebuhr defined how the “the kingdom of God”¹⁷ is primarily a prophetic image rather than an ecclesial image. The kingdom of God, as Rauschenbusch particularly explained, was the proclamation of the Jesus movement. It could not be restricted to a celestial realm, and it could not be tied to church doctrine; the “kingdom” was about the world transformed. It was the prophetic voice of justice, and it was, as such, the work of the church in society outside the walls of churches. For Rauschenbusch and others, neither the church nor any Christian doctrine could contain or control the working out of the kingdom of God in the world. Social reality was the reality of the kingdom.

The point of highlighting the social gospel and acknowledging Christian social thought is not to condemn religious fundamentalism or mourn a lost Christianity, but to name the challenge of Christianity in the West. At a time when the definition of Christianity is largely in the hands of the Christian Right, who in turn gave it to the Republican Party, it is interesting to note that the children of the Christian Right appear to focus on a different set of issues. The traditional “faith values” of homophobia and anti-government, insofar as statistics can be trusted, are not priorities. Youth on the Christian Right, even when emphasizing the born-again gospel, do not see this experience as the end game of Christian life. Young people, statistics suggest, who remain in evangelical Christianity, do not care so much about the sexual orientation of their friends, tend to support same-sex marriage, and hold much greater concern for government social policies and climate action.¹⁸ There is a significant, though, of course, not universal, concern for elements of the social gospel in their theologies. The next generation of evangelicals seems more focused than their parents on climate change and a positive role for government. For many, to be a Christian is to be green.

The social gospel began in the late nineteenth century out of the concern for education and health care among the poorest members of society.¹⁹ It seemed impossible to those caught up in this spirit that such basic compassion should be foreign to the Christian identity. Social gospelers also knew that compassion alone was useless if it was not accompanied by structural changes to society. So, they supported labor unions, worked to abolish child labor, sought to establish reasonable working hours, and inspired the New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt. These were not hollow victories. Today, whether religious or not, whether Right or

Left, these social principles remain assumptions of justice in American life. Remarkably, too, the social gospel resonated deeply in evangelical churches, the Baptist Church in particular. Mathews, Rauschenbusch, and Martin Luther King, Jr., all emerged from the Baptist tradition.

Christianity's social gospel past cannot predict its future, but there is a hint that when the gospel is taken seriously, it inevitably leads back to the world, to the welfare of others, and to the social conditions of life. In the past, when society was divided and when poverty was acute, when there needed to be a sincere change in policy, the social gospel came forward. If the path Trump is on remains all about isolating the most desperate, denying the need for climate action, financially subsidizing the wealthiest among us, and doing so while mocking socialism and stirring racism, there is every reason to believe that the social gospel will appear again. This time, it may wear evangelical colors, and perhaps a new Right set on poverty and climate issues will inspire a new Left to set its sights on societal structural changes. In as much as human societies always divide between libertarian and socialist forces, perhaps the emerging Christian Right will contribute to reawakening the socialist side of the argument.

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Notes

- ¹ Though I make this claim based on general reading, Robert Reich of *The Guardian* underlined this point immediately following the 2016 election; Reich noted the fall in union membership (22% to 12%) from the time of Bill Clinton's administration to Barack Obama's administration. See "Democrats once represented the working class. Not any more." *The Guardian*, November 10, 2016. (web address as of this writing: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/10/democrats-working-class-americans-us-election).
- ² See the transcript for "The 1992 Campaign," *New York Times*, October 16, 1992. The transcript is available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/16/us/the-1992-campaign-transcript-of-2d-tv-debate-between-bush-clinton-and-perot.html>
- ³ David Galston, "Taking Advantage" *Doing Theology in the Age of Trump* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), pp.127-136.
- ⁴ We might note here, in another twist of fate, that Bernie Sanders won the Democratic nomination but lost the Democratic super-delegates who basically act like the American Electoral College.
- ⁵ Many media outlets have made this point, but I found that Neil Macdonald of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has made this point in the most playful of ways: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/opinion/donald-trump-left-1.4989948>
- ⁶ I use the word contradiction carefully given that it is a key Marxist word often critiqued in post-Marxism due to its Hegelian/ontological sense. Yet, I do think it remains a useful word not to uphold a hidden teleology but to understand the experience of the nonsensical on the ground in a situation of exploitation.
- ⁷ As a reminder, those words are "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore." The words are from "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus, 1883.
- ⁸ A poster from 1945, showing a strong woman with shovel in hands, entitled "We Will Rebuild," is an example of how in the USSR women were often depicted as vital contributors to the economy. Western commentators call these posters USSR propaganda, but propaganda or not, they showed women as strong and independent economic agents in ways Western countries did not.
- ⁹ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003) is a book, both vilified and respected, that chronicles, among other things, the rise of unions in the United States and reviews several incidences of workers united to promote and protect the dignity of their work. The Ludlow, Colorado, miner's strike of 1914, which ended in a massacre, is one such tragic story that Zinn recounts.
- ¹⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973).
- ¹¹ *The Gospel of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).
- ¹² *The Historical Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
- ¹³ But of course, Christianity is no stranger to changing this admirable ritual into a rite that expresses privilege and that divides, according to creed, one set of people from another.
- ¹⁴ A good review of the diverse reactions to the Jesus Seminar is Robert Miller, *The Jesus Seminar and its Critics* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Originally published as *Die Sociallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (1913), it appeared in English in 1931 (New York: The Macmillan Company).

¹⁶ *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Volume II, p. 933.

¹⁷ I am using “kingdom” as the social gospellers used the term. The Greek word is *basileia*, which can be translated otherwise with a less gendered but equally strong term. The Jesus Seminar in *The Five Gospels* translated the phrase as God’s Imperial Rule. Because the context is the Roman empire, the “empire of God,” which rests on an ironic and insubordinate relationship with Rome, is also a good translation.

¹⁸ These statistics are not always clear, which means the future of evangelical Christianity is an interesting question. However, the Pew Research Center indicates that the trend among younger evangelicals (23 to 38 years old) is to a more socially progressive stance. Sometimes by a wide margin (as much as 20 per cent or more), young evangelicals are more likely than older evangelicals (39 and older) to accept homosexuality, support same-sex marriage, call for stricter environmental laws, and vote Democrat. However, when compared to their non-evangelical peers, they remain more conservative on most social issues. (See statistics from the Pew Research Center at www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/04/though-still-conservative-young-evangelicals-are-more-liberal-than-their-elders-on-some-issues). Meanwhile, among young evangelicals, climate action has emerged as an act of faith (see Young Evangelicals for Climate Action: www.yecaction.org).

¹⁹ Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*. New York: Double Day, Page, and Co., 1912.