

Critical Theology

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Introduction

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This issue of *Critical Theology* contains three articles focused on different parts of the world. The first, by Shadia Qubti, focuses on the struggles and moral dilemmas of Palestinians in Gaza and reflects on portions of Scripture in light of these. The second, by Jan Rehmann, analyzes how the Trump administration is undermining democracy in the United States. The third, by me, is the fourth in a series of articles reflecting on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Sermon on the Mount, and the quest for right relations between Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada. Though these articles focus on different parts of the world, their topics are interrelated by the global impact of actions by the Trump administration, by the common theme of struggles for life and human rights in each area, and by the belief that biblical teachings can illuminate and support these struggles. The articles are followed by a review of a book containing theology being done in Gaza.

Note: Previously, *Critical Theology* has had two websites. These have been consolidated into one. This Spring 2026 issue will be posted on it in a new format that will make it possible to download individual articles and book reviews. We thank our publisher, Novalis, for their support in making this possible.

Contents

Introduction	
By Don Schweitzer	1
Joshua in the Shadows of Genocide: A Hagaric Decolonial Reading	
By Shadia Qubti	2
Forays into the Project of Fascization in the United States	
By Jan Rehmann	11
The Canadian Government's Response to American Tariffs, Indigenous Rights, and the Sermon on the Mount	
By Don Schweitzer	18
Book Review	25

Joshua in the Shadows of Genocide: A Hagaric Decolonial Reading

By Shadia Qubti

The unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations

Introduction: Tasting Sweetness While Wrestling with Violence

For two years, many have been watching genocide unfold on screens. By September 2025, when this reading group convened for its three-month study, the death toll in Gaza had reached catastrophic proportions. Children pulled from rubble. Hospitals bombed. Families obliterated. Ancient olive trees uprooted. The logic of *herem*, total destruction of people, animals, and land—made manifest in real time. And through it all, sacred texts continued to be instrumentalized to justify the violence.

This weaponization of Joshua conquest narratives is not new. As Michael Prior demonstrates in *The Bible and Colonialism*, “the biblical claim of the divine promise of land is integrally linked with a divine mandate to exterminate the indigenous people,” a narrative that “has supported virtually all Western colonizing enterprises (e.g. in Latin America, South Africa, Palestine).”¹ Spanish conquistadors justified genocide in the Americas by citing Joshua’s divinely commanded extermination of Canaanites. European colonizers and American settlers explicitly used Joshua to frame Indigenous peoples in North America as “new Canaanites” whose dispossession was divinely mandated.² As Randy Woodley (Keetoowah Cherokee) observes, “Christian Zionism’s theological framework mirrors the colonial logic that devastated Indigenous communities, divine promises used to justify dispossession and violence.”³ Joshua’s conquest theology casts long shadows, from the Americas to Palestine.

During the 1948 Nakba, Zionist forces implemented Plan Dalet, systematic Palestinian expulsion documented extensively by Israeli historians, while religious justifications drew explicitly on Joshua’s campaign against Jericho.⁴ A decade later, in 1958, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion institutionalized this theological framework by convening academics and politicians to study Joshua explicitly “through the prism of Joshua.”⁵

This biblical weaponization extends beyond Israeli society to American evangelical Christians, who provide significant theological and political support for Israeli military operations. Polling data from 2024 reveals that 64% of white evangelical Protestants believe Israel’s military actions in Gaza are justified, with 82% maintaining that Israel was given to the Jewish people by God according to scripture.⁶

Sixty-seven years later, as Gaza burns, a small reading group gathered on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations from September through November 2025 to engage in what they described as an intentional undoing, an upside-down version of Ben-Gurion’s colonial Bible study.⁷ The group represented two primary faith traditions, Christianity and Judaism, with participants acknowledging potential pitfalls in Christian-Jewish interactions and ways interfaith communities can cause harm, whether intentionally or unintentionally. But this was not an attempt to redeem violent texts or find hidden liberation within conquest narratives. Instead, it was a bold willingness to sit with the discomfort of scriptures being instrumentalized, to centre Gaza itself in hermeneutical practice and make meaning together when traditional individual interpretation has catastrophically failed.

This article examines how Hagaric decolonial hermeneutics creates space for theological accountability to ongoing genocide by centring Gaza’s ongoing destruction in interpretive practice. Rather than seeking answers or transformation of violent texts, this approach generates questions that emerge from the shared experience of watching genocide justified through sacred scripture. The methodology changed not the biblical violence but the reading communities who refused to seek textual redemption at Gaza’s expense.

Hagaric Methodology: When Abraham’s Story Is Not Enough

This approach employs what might be understood as a theological application of Participatory Action

Research (PAR), positioning community members with lived experiences as co-researchers rather than study subjects. PAR explicitly challenges colonialist-infused research processes by democratizing sites of knowledge production and decolonizing conventional Western-based research approaches. As the document notes, PAR “begins from a social, ethical and moral commitment not to treat people as objects of research but, rather, to recognize and value the differing and diverse experiences and knowledge of all those involved.”⁸ This theological PAR approach created space for Palestinian Christian, anti-Zionist Jewish, and white queer Christian perspectives to function as interpretive authorities generating new knowledge through collective wrestling with violent texts.

The group deliberately chose Hagaric rather than Abrahamic to frame their work, centring the experience of Hagar, Abraham’s second wife within the patriarchal household structure, mother of Ishmael, and matriarch banished by Sarah while pregnant. As one leader explained, “Being a matriarch, it is kind of an interesting lens to throw on our [Abrahamic] religions. To centre it on the experience of women, the experience of childbearing,”⁹ recognizing the patriarchal violence embedded in traditional Abrahamic theological framings.

The methodological framework employed PaRDeS+, an expansion of the classical four-level hermeneutical approach found in both Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions. The fourfold interpretive method appears in medieval Jewish mysticism as PaRDeS (*Peshat, Remez, Drash, Sod*) and in Christian patristic and medieval exegesis as the *Quadrigena* (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical), with both traditions recognizing Scripture’s capacity for multiple simultaneous meanings.¹⁰ This study group added a fifth interpretive lens, “+Justice,” centring how conquest texts connect to contemporary liberation struggles, specifically Gaza’s destruction, thereby refusing the comfortable distance that allows scriptural violence to remain abstract rather than confronting its contemporary deployment in ethnic cleansing.

Three Voices Wrestling Under Gaza’s Shadow

1. Palestinian Christian Reading: Rahab as Indigenous Collaboration

The Palestinian Christian perspective read Rahab through the lens of Indigenous women forced into impossible survival choices under imperial occupation. Drawing on Musa Dube’s postcolonial analysis, this reading sees Rahab as a native woman who aids and

abets the colonizers of her land, not from treachery but from the cruel calculus of survival under occupation.¹¹

Contemporary parallels emerged immediately: Bethel, mentioned in Joshua as near the conquest site, is now an illegal Israeli settlement, *Beit El*, near Ramallah, where Palestinian families face ongoing displacement.¹²

This reading refused the comfortable distance of historical interpretation. Rahab’s choice—collaborate with invaders or face annihilation with her people—mirrors choices Palestinians face daily under occupation. The text presents her salvation as divine providence, but from an Indigenous perspective, her story represents the tragic necessity of seeming betrayal for survival. The Palestinian reading centred not Palestinian identity but Gaza’s current destruction, asking: What impossible choices are Gazan families making right now? What stories of collaboration and resistance are being written in rubble?

The Palestinian Christian perspective, presented by study co-leader Shadia Qubti, read Rahab through the lens of Indigenous women. This reading refused comfortable historical distance by creating contemporary Palestinian readings. Drawing inspiration from PaRDeS+ traditions, one such reading reimagined Rahab in contemporary Gaza, centring both gender and survival under impossible conditions.

A Contemporary Retelling: Rahab in Gaza

Rahab had learned to live in the spaces others couldn’t see. The corner apartment on the third floor, damaged in 2021 but still standing, gave her what she needed: distance from neighbors who might ask too many questions about why Ahmad from the corner shop had quietly become Rahab, growing her hair long and wearing her sister’s old clothes when her sister died in the bombing.

At twenty-eight, she survived by knowing things others didn’t—which routes the drones avoided, which commanders took bribes, which families were desperate enough to pay for passage documents that might or might not work. Living as herself had made her invisible to some, dangerous to others, but also useful to those who needed someone operating outside normal social networks.

The siege made everything possible and impossible at once. No hormones, no surgery, no official recognition—just the quiet determination to be who she was with scarves, makeup when she could find it, and the voice she’d taught herself in the privacy of bombed-out buildings.

Some neighbors whispered, others looked away, most were too busy surviving to care.

When the knock came at 2 AM, she assumed it was another desperate family seeking her services. Instead, two men stood in the shadows, speaking Arabic with accents she recognized—not local, not Egyptian. “We need shelter for three days,” the older one said quietly. “We’re... documenting conditions here for international observers.”

She saw through the lie immediately but also understood the game. Intelligence gathering. They needed someone who wouldn’t be missed, whose apartment wouldn’t be searched, whose death wouldn’t be investigated if things went wrong.

“Five hundred dollars American,” she said. “Half now.”

For three days, she hid them in the bombed-out section of her apartment—behind collapsed walls that looked impassable but weren’t. She brought them water, bread when she had it, and information about patrol schedules they claimed was for their “documentation.”

On the third night, as drones whirled overhead and buildings shook around them, the younger one asked why she was helping them. “Because staying alive means making choices that keep you alive,” she said simply. “Tomorrow you leave. I give you the signal cloth for your people to recognize, and my building gets ‘accidentally’ spared in the next bombing. My elderly aunt downstairs gets to live a little longer.”

The red headscarf she tied to her balcony railing the next morning felt like both salvation and damnation. In the apocalypse, there are no pure choices—only degrees of survival.

Three weeks later, when the bombing stopped and she realized her building still stood while others around it had fallen, her aunt came upstairs for the first time in months. “How did you know to mark the building?” the old woman asked. Rahab looked out at the wasteland that used to be her neighborhood. Her aunt waited for an answer, but Rahab only adjusted the red cloth on her balcony. Some questions carry their answers in the asking, and some silences hold more truth than words.¹³

Rahab’s Genealogy: From Conquest Collaborator to Christ’s Ancestor

Rahab appears in Jesus’s lineage (Matthew 1:5), connecting the Canaanite woman who aided Joshua’s conquest to the one whose Hebrew name Yeshua,

Jesus, derived from the same root as Yehoshua, Joshua, means “God saves.”¹⁴ Both names proclaim salvation, yet their theologies diverge radically. Joshua saved through conquest and elimination of Canaanites; Jesus saves through inclusion of their descendants, born into Rahab’s lineage. Where Joshua commanded destruction of Jericho’s inhabitants, Jesus emerges from that very people, his genealogy deliberately including four women whose stories involve sexual complexity, foreign origins, and survival through impossible circumstances: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

The irony demands theological attention: the Prince of Peace descends from Indigenous collaboration with conquerors. What does it reveal about divine presence in occupied territories that messianic lineage includes a woman who aided occupation forces to save her family? The Palestinian reading asks: If God’s salvation plan required Rahab’s survival through collaboration, what does this say about how contemporary Gazans navigate impossible choices? The genealogy refuses simple moral judgments, instead centring survival’s complex calculations under occupation.

2. Queer Christian Reading: Rahab and Scapegoating Systems

Beth Carlson-Malena¹⁵ applied René Girard’s scapegoating theory to examine how Rahab’s salvation functions within systems of sacrificial violence.¹⁶ Her extensive analysis revealed the disturbing logic of selective salvation: Rahab and her family survive precisely because everyone else must die. The text requires mass extermination to make individual salvation meaningful.

This reading employed rigorous textual criticism, examining Hebrew terms, editorial choices, and narrative structure. She focused particularly on the story of Achan in Joshua 7, the Israelite who took forbidden items from Jericho’s destruction, leading to military defeat and his eventual execution. She noted the “spoiler alert” beginning of Joshua 7, where the editor reveals Achan’s guilt immediately, creating dramatic irony that implicates readers in the scapegoating process. Her analysis of the lottery system, drawing straws to find the guilty party, revealed how divine choice through chance absolves leaders like Joshua of personal vendetta while maintaining the illusion of justice.

The Valley of Achor, which literally means the “valley of trouble,” became central to her interpretation. Achan’s execution created a geographical memorial to collective punishment, an entire valley named after one person’s supposed sin (Joshua 7:24-26). Carlson-Malena examined the wordplay between Achan’s name, possibly meaning “serpent,” and Achor (*akor*),

noting how the text creates linguistic connections between individual transgression and communal disaster. This scapegoating mechanism requires one person's death to restore group unity and divine favour.

Qubti provided linguistic analysis connecting the Hebrew *Achor* (*akor*) to the Arabic *akar*, which means water becoming unclear, diluted from its transparency. This connects to the text's description of hearts 'melting like water' in fear (Joshua 7:5), suggesting contamination and unclear vision under the pressure of conquest.

Carlson-Malena connected this ancient scapegoating to contemporary Gaza, where collective punishment is justified through individual "bad actors." The logic remains the same: identify the contaminating element, eliminate it publicly, and restore group cohesion through shared violence. Her "reverse stoning" practice, dismantling the pile of stones and carrying individual rocks as tools of remembrance, offered embodied resistance to this valley-of-trouble mentality.

Drawing on her evangelical background, Carlson-Malena exposed how conquest narratives function in contemporary Christian nationalism. She cited the "supermarket theology" phenomenon—treating scripture like grocery shopping, selecting comfortable passages while ignoring violence. Her session included extensive archaeological evidence from Dr. Kate Common's *Undoing Conquest*, noting the absence of historical evidence for Joshua's military campaigns and contextualizing the text as sixth-century BCE propaganda written during Assyrian threats to create national unity.¹⁷

The queer dimension of her reading emerged through analysis of belonging systems and boundary policing. She examined how violence against external enemies always results in internal surveillance and paranoia, connecting this to her own experience of evangelical gatekeeping around sexuality. "I know that from being queer and the insidious way that community discipline and policing works ... you're guilty by association,"¹⁸ she reflected, connecting personal experience to textual analysis.

Under Gaza's shadow, the questions became: How does collective punishment create "valleys of trouble" in Gaza? How does identifying contaminating elements justify group violence today? Who becomes the scapegoat when things go wrong?

3. Anti-Zionist Jewish Reading: Talmudic Wrestling with Conquest

Orev Reena Katz brought Talmudic wrestling tradition to bear on Joshua's violence.¹⁹ Citing Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb's work on Jewish revolutionary nonviolence,

this reading distinguished between a "Torah of conquest" and a "Torah of compassion," arguing that Jewish communities can choose interpretation that serves justice rather than domination.²⁰

They introduced participants to actual Talmudic methodology, showing images of Talmudic pages with their characteristic layout, central text surrounded by centuries of rabbinic commentary and argument. "The spaces that are the frames that have no letters in them are just as important," they explained, "because they're framing time and they're framing conversation."²¹ This visual representation demonstrated how Jewish interpretation has always been communal, argumentative, and ongoing rather than settled.

The Talmudic approach revealed rabbinic discomfort with Joshua's violence, including traditions questioning whether Achan's confession was coerced and whether the conquest required such brutality. They shared specific Talmudic discussions about the walls of Jericho, noting how rabbis created alternative images—the walls being "swallowed up" by the earth rather than simply falling down, suggesting divine intervention that minimized human violence.

Central to their interpretation was the concept of "living Torah"—understanding contemporary experiences as part of ongoing revelation. "The lives we live today are part of the Torah that we read that is thousands of years old,"²² Katz explained. This means Gaza's destruction must be included in any honest Jewish theological reflection, not as external political issue but as essential theological content.

They presented devastating contemporary data revealing that 47 percent of Jewish Israelis agreed that "when conquering an enemy city, the IDF should act as the Israelites did in Jericho, under Joshua's command, killing all its inhabitants."²³ This statistic exposed what Katz called the "genocidal imperative of Israeli Jewish society," demonstrating how "the settler colonial context has both enabled and reinterpreted Jewish religious texts as operative guidelines for genocidal violence."²⁴

The anti-Zionist Jewish reading rejected both Christian supersessionism, the Church replacing Israel, and Jewish supremacy, claiming exclusive textual authority. Instead, it reclaimed "Israel" as "God-wrestler" rather than nation-state supporter, positioning anti-Zionist Jewish theology as faithful response to traditional halakhic interpretive obligations. As Katz explained, "We're God wrestlers. We're not supporters of the state called Israel."²⁵

This perspective challenged the assumption that faithfulness to Jewish tradition requires support for the Israeli state. Instead, they argued, faithfulness requires

wrestling with God when God's name is used to justify genocide.

Under Gaza's shadow, the questions became: What does Jewish faithfulness require when Jewish power crushes Gaza? How do we wrestle with God when God's name justifies genocide? What does it mean to practise living Torah when Torah is being instrumentalized for ethnic cleansing?

Shared Focus on Herem

All three interpreters grappled with the Hebrew concept of *herem*, items or people "devoted to destruction" or "prescribed for God."²⁶ This term appears throughout Joshua's conquest narratives, describing both objects that must be destroyed and the fate of Canaanite populations. The word carries connotations of sacred contamination, things so dedicated to divine purposes that human contact renders them dangerous.

Qubti noted the Arabic cognate *haram*, meaning forbidden, connecting ancient prescription to contemporary religious language about forbidden actions. The linguistic resonance suggested how conquest theology embeds itself in everyday religious vocabulary, making violence seem divinely mandated rather than politically motivated.

Carlson-Malena examined how *herem* functions in the Achan narrative: his theft of "prescribed" items contaminates the entire community until he and his family are eliminated. The concept justifies collective punishment by suggesting that contamination spreads from individuals to communities, requiring violent purification to restore divine favour.

Katz brought Talmudic perspectives on *herem*, noting rabbinic discomfort with the concept's implications. Some rabbis questioned whether such total destruction was actually commanded or represented human misinterpretation of divine will. The tradition of Jewish wrestling with scripture included wrestling with its most violent implications.

Under Gaza's shadow, *herem* became uncomfortably contemporary. The logic of sacred contamination, identifying populations or individuals as so dangerous they must be eliminated for divine/national security, operates throughout Israeli military doctrine.

Shared Themes Emerging from Community Wrestling

Across all three perspectives, consistent themes emerged through the questions participants generated rather than the answers they provided.

Questions of survival and complicity dominated the discussions, as recurring concerns examined impossi-

ble choices under occupation. How do we understand collaboration versus resistance when survival is at stake? What responsibility do colonized peoples bear for their own survival strategies? These survival questions led naturally into broader concerns about divine sanction of violence. Multiple questions challenged theological foundations, asking what kind of God orders extermination, how we read texts where divine command includes genocide, and when faithfulness requires rejecting sacred text.

Contemporary parallels persistently surfaced as participants connected ancient and current patterns. How do Joshua's conquest tactics appear in Gaza today? What rhetorics of divine mandate justify contemporary ethnic cleansing? The community also grappled with how historical liberation movements, including the Civil Rights era, problematically identified with biblical Israelites, as exemplified in Mahalia Jackson's performance of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.²⁷ Participants noted the troubling irony that liberation songs celebrated conquest while omitting the massacre that followed, raising questions about selective appropriation of biblical narratives.

Issues of hermeneutical accountability generated consistent concerns about interpretive responsibility. Who gets to interpret these texts? What obligation do religious communities bear when their scriptures justify violence? How do we account for weaponized interpretation? Related to this were persistent questions about absent voices, as participants repeatedly asked about missing perspectives. Whose voices are erased from conquest narratives? What would this story sound like from other Canaanite women who didn't "choose correctly"? How do we centre those being conquered rather than the conquerors?

These themes revealed a community grappling with how sacred texts justify contemporary violence rather than seeking interpretive resolution. Gaza's ongoing destruction interrupted every traditional reading and demanded new forms of accountability.

Praxis: Gaza-Centred Meaning-Making

The study group's methodology deliberately centred embodied practices that resisted interpretive closure. Rather than resolving textual difficulties, physical practices created space to sit with discomfort and generate questions emerging from collective witness to genocide.

The community's wrestling generated questions that extended far beyond the Book of Joshua to fundamental issues of biblical interpretation under conditions of ongoing violence. Participants asked, "What exists in those frameworks for us?" when confronting other

biblical violence, such as the flood narrative and its trauma for Noah's family. Questions emerged about reading the New Testament's violence, the stoning of Ananias and Sapphira, Jesus defending the woman caught in adultery, asking whether divine sanction makes violence more palatable or reveals the horror of all sacred justification for harm.

The archived questions revealed patterns applicable to any contested biblical text. Who decides which voices matter in interpretation? How do we read texts that have been weaponized for violence? When does faithfulness require rejecting rather than explaining problematic scripture? These questions suggest a broader methodology for engaging biblical violence that moves beyond individual text analysis toward community accountability structures for all sacred interpretation.

Each session included embodied disruption through physical practices that interrupted traditional Bible study format. The first session shared dates from Palestinian farms in Jericho, literally tasting the land being conquered while reading a prayer that connected ancient roots to contemporary *sumud*, meaning steadfastness. The choice of dates carried deep significance beyond mere symbolism. Palm trees develop extensive underground root networks extending horizontally up to about 15 metres and reaching depths of 6 metres or more. These "nurse root systems" allow older established palms to support younger trees through interconnected networks, sharing water and nutrients across groves.²⁸ Each date represented not just individual Palestinian *sumud* but invisible networks of mutual support that sustain communities through occupation and theological violence. Like Palestinian farmers' hidden systems of knowledge and care, the palm's underground networks remain invisible to those who see only individual trees above ground, a perfect metaphor for *sumud* that conquest narratives cannot see or eliminate. The second session concluded with "reverse stoning," dismantling monuments to violence and carrying stones as tools of remembrance. The third session concluded with Katz blowing an anti-Zionist shofar, made by a gender-fluid queer artisan in Colorado using a ram's horn from a free-range farm, representing "the horns that we read about in this story"²⁹ but sourced from animals that lived free rather than being sacrificed for conquest.

The shared experience of collective witnessing provided the interpretive foundation, as watching Gaza's destruction for two years became the hermeneutical centre. Gaza's presence interrupted every interpretive move, demanding accountability to ongoing suffering rather than textual sophistication. The praxis revealed how Gaza-centred hermeneutics generates meaning differently than traditional historical-critical biblical

interpretation. Rather than extracting timeless truths from ancient texts, the community created meaning by bringing Gaza's destruction into interpretive space and allowing current genocide to interrupt traditional readings. The transformation was not of violent texts but of interpretive communities willing to centre Gaza rather than their own theological comfort.

Theological Implications: Toward a Hagaric Hermeneutics

This Gaza-centred interpretive work generates crucial theological insights for liberation theology and contributes to emerging academic frameworks for postcolonial biblical interpretation. While "Hagaric tradition" is not yet established academic terminology, this approach resonates with several scholarly developments in postcolonial and feminist biblical studies. Key developments include Musa W. Dube's "Rahab's reading prism," Kwok Pui-lan's creation of interpretive "space" for women in colonized contexts, and Judith E. McKinlay's postcolonial feminist hermeneutics. These approaches share concerns about how biblical interpretation can perpetuate colonial ideologies and seek to "unmask the myriad ways in which biblical scholars, feminists among them, have been complicit with or oblivious to colonialism and neocolonialism."³⁰

The Hagaric approach aligns with Mitri Raheb's recent articulation of Theology After Gaza, which argues that Gaza's destruction represents a hermeneutical watershed requiring new theological methodologies.³¹ Raheb's framework emphasizes that traditional systematic theological categories become inadequate when confronted with livestreamed genocide, demanding hermeneutical approaches that centre rather than marginalize Palestinian suffering. He argues that "Gaza is an urgent wake-up call to decolonize theology," functioning as a hermeneutical interruption that exposes the inadequacy of traditional theological frameworks when confronted with livestreamed genocide.³² This resonates with the study group's refusal to seek textual redemption, instead practising sustained discomfort as theological methodology.

This work builds on foundational critiques by Robert Allan Warrior (Osage Nation), whose seminal essay "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians" exposed how liberation theology's identification with biblical Israelites inadvertently justifies Indigenous displacement. Warrior's insight that "the Canaanites were the Indians of the Israelites" reveals the colonial logic embedded in Exodus-based liberation theology.³³ The Hagaric framework responds to this critique by centring Hagar's experience of displacement rather than Israel's experience of liberation, creating interpretive space for those positioned as "Canaanites" in colonial narratives. As Warrior asks: "Is there a god, a spirit,

who will hear us and stand with us in the Amazon, Osage Country, and Wounded Knee? Is there a god, a spirit, able to move among the pain and anger of Nablus, Gaza, and Soweto?”³⁴

Similarly, this approach draws on Naim Stifan Ateek’s pioneering Palestinian liberation theology, particularly his development of contextual biblical interpretation that centres Palestinian experience rather than treating it as peripheral to “universal” theological concerns.³⁵ Ateek’s work at Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center established methodological foundations for reading biblical texts through Palestinian Christian experience, challenging both Western theological assumptions and Zionist biblical interpretation.

In contexts where answers have become violent, sustained questioning becomes the primary theological methodology. The archived questions from this study represent genuine academic contribution, community wrestling with how sacred texts justify violence that generates new research questions for biblical studies, systematic theology, and ethics. The work examined here embodies what interfaith practitioners call “learning to ask the question ‘What does it feel like to be the other?’” Yet, it goes further: rather than seeking empathy that maintains separation, the Gaza-centred approach demands recognizing that the other’s suffering implicates one’s own theological tradition. Jewish participants confront how Torah justifies contemporary genocide. Christian participants grapple with supersessionism’s legacy. Palestinian Christians refuse to let their experience be theologized away.

The Hagaric framework enables interfaith academic work that neither erases religious differences nor claims false scholarly neutrality. Palestinian Christian, white queer Christian, and anti-Zionist Jewish perspectives remain methodologically distinct while sharing Gaza-centred analytical commitment. This challenges both Christian supersessionism and Jewish supremacy in biblical studies while creating genuine scholarly collaboration across traditions.

The theological implications extend beyond biblical interpretation to fundamental questions about religious community formation under conditions of ongoing violence. How do faith communities practice accountability to genocide while maintaining connection to sacred traditions? How does collective theological wrestling create different possibilities than individual interpretation? What does it mean to read scripture when scripture justifies contemporary ethnic cleansing?

Conclusion: Companions in Sacred Uncertainty

Two years of watching Gaza’s destruction has revealed the deadly consequences of weaponized scripture. The stakes of biblical interpretation become matters of life and death when religious texts justify contemporary genocide.

The Hagaric decolonial reading practice examined here offers one model for theological response to scriptures being used to justify violence. By centring Gaza rather than traditional hermeneutical concerns, this approach creates space for communities to wrestle with the discomfort of violence-justifying scripture without rushing toward premature resolution or false redemption of problematic texts.

The work accomplished not textual transformation but community transformation, centring Gaza’s destruction within hermeneutical practice. Questions archived through collective wrestling become theological practice adequate to contexts where answers have become violent. Embodied practices create accountability structures that intellectual interpretation alone cannot provide.

Perhaps most significantly, this work demonstrates that faithful engagement with sacred texts may require reading against dominant exegetical traditions when those traditions justify genocide. The choice between “Torah of conquest” and “Torah of compassion” challenges Jewish communities to choose between scriptural authority and accountability to ongoing suffering.

The questions generated through this Gaza-centred interpretive practice remain open. How do we read sacred texts when those texts justify contemporary genocide? What does theological accountability require when traditional interpretation has catastrophically failed? How do we practise faithful wrestling with scripture while Gaza burns? These questions do not require immediate answers. They require sustained community commitment to sitting with discomfort, generating meaning through collective struggle, and maintaining theological accountability to those suffering under violence justified through their sacred traditions. In a world where biblical interpretation continues to kill, such questioning communities become essential spaces for faithful response to the shadows genocide casts over all our sacred texts.

In her wilderness of displacement and survival, Hagar models what we practise: companionship in sacred uncertainty rather than warfare for religious certainty. We become companions tasting the sweetness of dates while wrestling with the violence that sacred texts have been used to justify, trusting that divine

encounter happens not in conquest but in the spaces where we tend each other's stories.

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1 Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 287.

2 Steven Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008), 89–104.

3 Randy Woodley, "When Faith Funds Genocide," *Decolonizing Faith and Society* (Substack newsletter), August 5, 2025, <https://rwoodley7.substack.com/p/when-faith-funds-genocide>.

4 Rachel Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 110.

5 Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation*, 17.

6 Al Jazeera, "Conservative Christians, Israel and the US vote in 2024 election," November 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/11/1/conservative-christians-israel-and-the-us-vote>; Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "American Evangelicals' Support for Israel," September 30, 2024, <https://globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/american-evangelicals-unique-support-israel>.

7 Beth Carlson-Malena, Joshua Study Session 2, October 2025, Trinity Grace United Church, Vancouver. While a fragile ceasefire came into effect on October 10, 2025, violence against Palestinians continued throughout the period of this study. According to Al Jazeera's tracking of ceasefire violations, "Since the ceasefire took effect one month ago, Israeli attacks have killed at least 242 Palestinians and injured 622" as of November 10, 2025. Al Jazeera analysis showed Israel attacked Gaza on 25 out of 31 days during the ceasefire period, meaning there were only six days with no reported violence. Despite these ongoing violations, the United States maintained that the "ceasefire" was still holding. Al Jazeera, "How many times has Israel violated the Gaza ceasefire? Here are the numbers," November 11, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/11/how-many-times-has-israel-violated-the-gaza-ceasefire-here-are-the-numbers>.

8 Nat Nesvaderani, "Participatory Action Research: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction," in *Popularizing Scholarly Research: Working with Nonacademic Stakeholders, Teams, and Communities*, ed. Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

9 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

10 John-Joseph Martin, "The Four Senses of Scripture," Teaching document, 2023. The Catholic Quadriga tradition is rooted in patristic interpreters including Origen, Augustine, and John Cassian, becoming systematized in medieval scholasticism. The Jewish PaRDeS method has ancient rabbinic roots, with its mystical dimension (*sod*) explored extensively in Kabbalistic texts like the 13th-century *Zohar*. Both traditions maintain that the literal sense provides foundation for allegorical, moral (tropological), and mystical (anagogical/*sod*) readings. Eastern Orthodox hermeneutics similarly employs layered interpretation with *historia* (literal), *theoria* (allegorical), *tropologia* (moral), and *anagoge* (mystical).

11 Musa W. Dube developed the concept of "Rahab's reading prism" to address the complex position of colonized women who, like Rahab, must negotiate survival by "submit[ting] to the imperial power

of biblical Israel." Dube argues that Rahab "is a politically problematic female character with whom postcolonial feminists should not identify," yet significant because "her story illustrates the multiple positioning of colonized women" who encounter colonizing powers and must negotiate "their own and their family's survival." Dube's reading prism provides "a postcolonial feminist eye of many angles" that resists "imperial and patriarchal oppressive structures" while recognizing the survival strategies of colonized women. See R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 624–25.

12 The Ramallah governorate, which includes Beit El settlement and surrounding Palestinian villages, experienced 634 documented settler attacks between January 2024 and August 2025, the highest number of any West Bank region. In April 2024, settlers launched deadly attacks on villages including Beitin and Deir Dibwan near Beit El, with Israeli forces present but failing to intervene. In June 2025, around 70 armed settlers attacked the nearby village of Kfar Malik, throwing Molotov cocktails at homes and cars; Israeli soldiers responding to the attack killed three Palestinians. Across the occupied West Bank, 1,860 settler attacks were documented between October 2023 and December 2024, an average of four attacks per day. See Amnesty International, "State-backed deadly rampage by Israeli settlers underscores urgent need to dismantle apartheid," April 22, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/state-backed-deadly-rampage-by-israeli-settlers-underscores-urgent-need-to-dismantle-apartheid>; Al Jazeera, "Mapping the rise in Israeli settler attacks across the occupied West Bank," October 14, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/14/mapping-the-rise-in-israeli-settler-attacks-across-the-occupied-west-bank>.

13 Shadia Qubti, "When the Margins Meet the Centre: A Palestinian Rahab in Gaza," August 31, 2025, <https://www.shadiaqubti.com/blog/when-the-margins-meet-the-centre-a-palestinian-rahab-in-gaza>. This contemporary retelling was created for the Joshua study sessions and subsequently published as part of ongoing Palestinian theological reflection.

14 "G2424 – *lēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) – Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2424/kjv/tr/0-1>.

15 Beth Carlson-Malena (she/her) is a co-pastor at Open Way Community Church and a member of the Lead Team of Christians for a Free Palestine Vancouver. She grew up as a pastor's kid in the Canadian Baptist denomination and studied at Regent College.

16 René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

17 Kate Common, *Undoing Conquest: Archaeological Evidence and the Joshua Narrative* (New York: Academic Press, 2023), 78–92.

18 Beth Carlson-Malena, Joshua Study Session 2, October 2025.

19 Orev Reena Katz (they/them) is an anti-Zionist prayer leader, Hebrew Priestess, and psychotherapist. They are a member of Independent Jewish Voices-Vancouver, and a co-founder of Women for Palestine in Treaty 13-Tkaronto/Toronto. As resistance to the genocide in Gaza, apartheid across Palestine, and the profound Jewish exceptionalism of this time, Orev is excited about and committed to understanding texts central to Jewish practice and history from a decolonizing lens.

20 Lynn Gottlieb, *Shomeret Shalom: Replanting Seeds of Jewish Revolutionary Nonviolence After October 7* (Self-published, 2024), 23.

21 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

22 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

23 Tamir Sorek, "Religious Zionism and Genocidal Thinking," University of Pennsylvania study, Spring 2024; Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

24 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

25 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

26 These phrases reflect translations from Joshua 6:17–18 across Jewish (JPS) and Christian (NRSV) sources. The concept of *herem* appears throughout conquest texts, referring to items and peoples that must be completely destroyed as an offering to God. See Joshua 6:17: "The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD."

27 During her *PaRDeS* interpretation session, Katz played footage of Mahalia Jackson's performance of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to highlight the tension between Joshua's use in liberation theology and the hermeneutical blind spot of that era: the impact on Canaanites was not part of biblical interpretation at the time. This demonstrated how even liberation-focused readings failed to consider Indigenous displacement within conquest narratives.

28 Jacqueline Vayntrub, "Tamar and Her Botanical Image," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 2 (June 15, 2020): 301–18, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1392.2020.4>.

29 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

30 Sugirtharajah, *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 624–27; Kwok Pui-lan, "Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretations," in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 77.

31 Mitri Raheb, "Theology After Gaza: Political Context and Theological Challenge," in *Theology After Gaza: A Global Anthology*, ed. Mitri Raheb and Graham McGeoch (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2025), 84.

32 Raheb, "Theology After Gaza," 84.

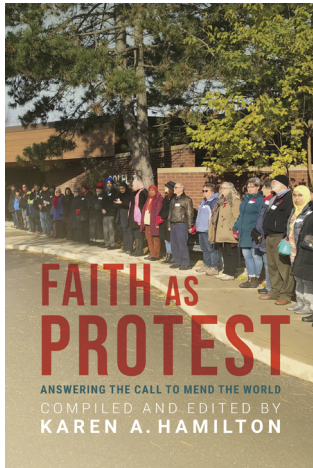
33 Robert Allan Warrior (Osage Nation), "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology in the Americas," *Christianity and Crisis* 49, no. 12 (1989): 261–65.

34 Warrior (Osage Nation), "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 265.

35 Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

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Compiled and edited by Karen A. Hamilton

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Forays into the Project of Fascization in the United States

By Jan Rehmann

New York and Berlin

Anyone grappling with the question of whether the concept of fascism can be meaningfully applied today faces a problem. On the one hand, it is wrong to use the term “fascism” to label reactionary opponents in general. An inflationary usage trivializes the fascist threat. This was already true during the Weimar Republic, when communists labelled the Brüning government (1930–32) as fascist, thereby blurring the distinction between parliamentary and dictatorial forms of bourgeois rule—and, even worse, when they branded the Social Democrats, with whom they should have formed an anti-fascist alliance, as “social fascists.” The Social Democrats did something similar when they denounced the communists as “red-painted Nazis.”

On the other hand, it is problematic to limit the concept to historical fascism. The argument that Trumpism has nothing to do with fascism because society has not yet been brought into line and elections are still being held applies an inappropriate “totalitarian” standard. It is methodically problematic to compare today’s right-wing offensive with the most extreme form of German Nazism in power, which pursued a particularly annihilating “final solution”: to the “Jewish question,” the “social question,” the question of democracy, and the “colonial question.”¹ The perspective changes as soon as we look at the example of Italy: between the “March on Rome” in 1922 and the murder of the socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924, Italian fascism had not yet abolished the parliamentary system. Only after that did Mussolini proclaim himself to be the “Duce,” and from then on he had the opposition parties officially banned (the communist leader, Antonio Gramsci, was arrested on November 8, 1926, despite his parliamentary immunity). Ignoring the similarities to historical fascism from the outset would prevent us from recognizing the danger of neo-fascism in the 21st century. This also applies if the design today is no longer characterized by a catch-up Fordism of imperialist latecomers but by the high-tech capitalism of a superpower. Enzo Traverso suggests that we use fascism as a “transhistorical concept” that transcends the era that produced it.²

In the following, I will use the concept of *fascization*, which draws attention to a project and a process whose outcome is still open. Some aspects of fascization in the US became evident in the deportations beginning late January 2025. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has considerably expanded its scope of operation, with arrests and deportations carried out in an ambush-style way and without court orders. This continued with the deployments in Los Angeles (June 2025), Washington (August), and Portland and Chicago (October) and culminated (so far) in the assault on Minnesota and the murders of Renée Good and Alex Pretti in January 2026. The constant and asymmetrical struggle between both the judiciary and the executive branch and between the federal government and the blue state governments amount to a constitutional crisis. Trump intends to spread terror in order to invoke the *Insurrection Act* of 1807 (originally intended to suppress “rebellions against the federal government”), by which he can declare a state of emergency and seize command of the National Guard, which until now has been under the control of the states.

The Analysis of Fascism by the Project Ideology Theory

Whether one speaks of fascization obviously depends on the respective definition of fascism. To gain a yardstick for both similarities and differences, I refer to the approach of the Projekt Ideologietheorie (Ideology Theory Project: PIT), which provided a nuanced Marxist analysis in the 1980s. Hitler’s disparaging and contemptuous comments about the bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture often led to the erroneous conclusion that he was “anti-bourgeois.” However, a careful analysis of his relevant speeches and statements shows that from the outset, he took the position of the bourgeois bloc, albeit one that needed to be comprehensively reorganized in order to eliminate socialism as a whole—and, with it, bourgeois-democratic equality in politics, law, and culture.³ Based on a new rock-solid belief, a new power bloc of “unified attachment” was to be created, capable of moving from class defense to class offense.⁴ The core of the

Nazi project was to extend the hierarchical leadership principle, as it prevails in the capitalist economy and the army, to the whole of society.⁵ This meant dissolving the connection between the bourgeois world and democracy, that is, eliminating the legacy of the French Revolution. Some aspects of this are mentioned in the well-known definition of the General Secretary of the Communist International Georgi Dimitrov from 1935, according to which fascism represents the “open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, and most imperialist elements of finance capital.” However, this conceptualization has also been criticized by other Marxists, on the one hand because it neglected the relative autonomy of politics, and on the other because it largely sidelined the components of fascist mass movements, their social composition, populist dynamics, and the social-psychological appeal of their ideologies.⁶

Fascism spoke in the name of the ideological par excellence, of the subordination to the highest values—e.g., the nation, race, and soldierly honour to the point of heroic death, and in fact succeeded quite early on in winning over the ideological representatives of bourgeois society—earlier than the political parties.⁷ Consider, for example, the enthusiastic approval of philosophers, lawyers, doctors, and not least the leaders of the Protestant and Catholic churches in 1933. It is primarily against the backdrop of the anti-socialist and populist reorganization of the bourgeois bloc that we can understand the efficacious functionalization of anti-Semitism: by articulating the danger of a socialist revolution as a “Jewish world conquest,” the Nazis succeeded in carrying through an ideological shift from class to race. “Nazism is anti-Bolshevism expressed as resistance of the German people threatened by the Jewish people.”⁸ This functional definition does not mean that the Nazis stood outside anti-Semitic ideology to the effect of consciously manipulating it: the relative autonomy of the ideological produces an ideological circle that also encompasses and permeates the anti-Semitic ideologues, who are themselves also discursively constituted.⁹ Jews became the placeholders for the “counter-people” (Gegen-Volk) needed for the ideological construction of the German “Volk,” but the place in this cluster of enemy-images was open to other target groups: socialists, the sick, Sinti and Roma, Eastern European “subhumans,” gays. “Whoever opposes the Nazis falls into this position and ultimately into the sphere of power of the SS.”¹⁰

But within this framework of violence, the Nazis were able to integrate a wide variety of appealing ideological elements. In 1933, Ernst Bloch described this fascist capacity of absorption and co-optation as “thefts from the commune”:¹¹ the fascists stole the “workers,” the “workers’ party,” the unity between workers and intellectuals, the colour red, the sea of flags, the maypole,

and occupied numerous “non-contemporaneous” contradictions (e.g. cities vs. countryside).¹² The Nazi “is not content with torturing and killing workers. He not only wants to smash the red front but also strips the jewellery off the supposed corpse.”¹³ This ability to absorb a wide variety of ideological elements and incorporate them into the fascist project is overlooked by Marxist theories that understand ideology solely as an “instrument” of class rule or as “false consciousness.” At stake is a profound fascization of the subjects. The challenge is to understand how fascism succeeds in “organizing self-alienation as enthusiastic self-activity.”¹⁴

This is a simplified explanation of the findings of the Projekt Ideologietheorie. In the following sections, I try to identify the essential similarities and differences between historical fascism and the current attempts at fascization in the US.

Fossil Fascism Against China

To start with the obvious, the opposition to historical Bolshevism is no longer an issue after the collapse of the Soviet socialist model. Nor is there any serious domestic threat of socialism. The assumption of Marxist theories of “Bonapartism” that there is a “balance” of force between the classes, which forces the ruling class to hand over political power to a fascist government, was already questionable for historical fascism¹⁵ and certainly does not apply to the US, where the labour union movement has experienced a dramatic decline since the early 1980s. Today, the bourgeois bloc is undergoing a realignment in order to unite forces against rival China, whose mixed system of state planning and “guided market economy”¹⁶ is proving more effective in regard to economic growth and technological development. In many respects, the project of ecological modernization has changed sides and moved to China’s model of development—albeit with highly contradictory social and ecological consequences.¹⁷ The Trump administration has decided to no longer wage the battle in the realm of ecological transformation but to focus nearly exclusively on the expansion of fossil fuels and nuclear energy. According to Andreas Malm, we are facing a “fossil fascism”: since fossil capital would lose profits and investments even with a limited ecological modernization, it tends to side with right-wing extremist and neo-fascist parties.¹⁸ Of course, fossil capital is not the only class component of Trumpism.

An Oligarchic Class Project Undergirded by Popular Discontent

Borrowing from Dimitrov’s definition, one could argue that Trumpism strives for an open dictatorship of particularly aggressive factions of big capital. After

all, there are 13 billionaires in the government itself. Bernie Sanders raises the alarm about an oligarchic takeover of power. Of particular significance is the predominant clout of high-tech capital striving for digital dominance. Whereas in 2016, most high-tech corporations were still hesitant regarding the support of the Trump government, this changed dramatically with Trump's second term. The Trump campaign promised a decisively pro-industry agenda that deregulates the development of technology; in fact, the government is facilitating significantly larger investments in AI infrastructure and data centres, and Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill" provides huge tax breaks for Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook, etc., whereas millions of Americans experience a doubling of their health care premiums and significant cuts in Medicaid. The Trump administration is actively promoting policies aimed at maintaining and expanding the United States' international predominance in artificial intelligence, such as through export controls that restrict the export of key AI technologies to rivals.

One example is Elon Musk's project for a new generation of low-flying satellites, known as low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites, which tries to establish a high-tech hegemony from space.¹⁹ Starlink and other high-tech companies can only become profitable if they cooperate with the military. The satellite program and other high-tech and AI projects depend on an enormous energy consumption. Therefore, we see, on the one hand, a close link with the military-industrial complex and thus with the imperial project of Trumpism (for example, Musk's AI tool Grok is going to be integrated into Pentagon networks) and, on the other hand, with fossil fuel capital and the nuclear power industry. Other capitalist class factions are integrated in a subordinate position.²⁰ With and without Musk, we are dealing with a long-term class project to restore US hegemony, and this may well go hand in hand with a relative independence from immediate profit interests.

The international impact can be observed with the example of the corporate plan for Gaza, the Gaza Reconstitution, Economic Acceleration, and Transformation (GREAT) Trust, developed originally by a group of Israeli business representatives and then taken up by the Trump administration. It plans in the north of Gaza an "Elon Musk Manufacturing Zone," in the South an "American Data Safe Haven" for the development of AI, along the coast the "Gaza Trump Riviera," and in the North about six to eight "free cities." We are therefore not only confronted with the genocidal colonial politics of an extreme right-wing Israeli government but with an imperialistic project dominated by major sections of the high-tech industry.

The establishment of this oligarchic class project was not possible without the successful mobilization

of popular anxieties and anger caused by neoliberal deregulation and "Walmartization" of the economy, generalization of contingent labour, and a long-term stagnation of real wages. Bernie Sanders was right when he argued that "it should come as no great surprise that a Democratic Party which has abandoned working class people would find that the working class has abandoned them"—an assessment that also applies to a larger part of Latino and Black workers. Not dissimilar to the Nazi's "thefts from the commune" diagnosed by Ernst Bloch, Trump was able, in both electoral campaigns, to scoop up widespread popular concerns ranging from rebuilding a national industrial infrastructure with stable jobs to ending the "forever wars" of the US empire. Some criticisms, such as of liberal individualism and atomization, sounded like a leftist critique of bourgeois culture. However, right-wing populism redirects the popular anger from the corporate elites to the ideological construct of "liberal elites" (Volvo driving, latte sipping, etc.) and simultaneously to the most precarious rungs of the subaltern classes, to People of Colour, "illegal immigrants," foreigners, and LGBT communities.

Shock Troops Against the "Normative State"

In 1940–41, Ernst Fraenkel developed the thesis that the Nazi state was a "dual state" consisting of two parallel systems of rule: the "normative state," operating according to formal rules and laws that regulate routine affairs and economic administration, and the "prerogative state," acting in an extrajudicial manner unchecked by any legal limitations.²¹ According to Nicos Poulantzas, fascism organized a "parallelism of power systems," an "institutional duplication" that led to rapid shifts in the exercise of power from one apparatus to another and enabled an effective war of movement against the masses.²² We can observe a similar parallelism in the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which was launched under the leadership of Elon Musk and, following his falling out with Trump, was then managed by Trump and his Cabinet secretaries. DOGE is a kind of shock troop, elected by no one, that combs through the state apparatus to either dissolve it or bring it into line. The attacks are directed, on the one hand, against the already weak social welfare institutions, such as Social Security and health insurance for the poor (Medicaid); on the other hand, against the so-called DEI programs (i.e., diversity, equity, and inclusion), which were intended to facilitate access to education and employment for women and ethnic and sexual minorities; and, last but not least, against environmental agencies, including the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which was defamed in Project 2025 as one of the main drivers of the "climate change

alarm industry.” Throughout, the aim is to eliminate the institutionalized compromise formations that allowed subaltern classes and social movements to occupy certain positions in the state apparatus. At the same time, the purges target all theories and research projects that address the injustices of US society, from critical race theories and feminist gender studies to studies on ecological destruction and, just around the corner, critical theories in the broad sense, all of which are considered as variants of “Marxism.”

Last but not least, DOGE collected a vast amount of data from various devices and consolidated them in a central master database. This amounts to a digital takeover of the technical and operational levels of the US administrative apparatus.²³ The evaluation of the data and their preparation for security agencies, intelligence services, deportation authorities, the military, etc. is, for example, to be carried out by Peter Thiel’s software company Palantir, which is also linked to Israel’s AI-driven genocide in Gaza.

Fascization of Subjects in New Forms

Similar to historical fascism, Trumpism aims to impose the hierarchical leadership principles of the capitalist economy and the repressive state apparatuses throughout society, thereby eliminating social welfare and constitutional mediations and compensations. There are indeed elements of a veritable cult of personality surrounding Trump, who is still able to hold the quarrelling MAGA factions together, not least because everyone in his orbit recognizes him as the source of their own power. But the belief system underlying this is no longer the same as in Italy or Germany after World War I. Hedonistic consumerism and the culture of the internet with its shitstorms, disruptions, and distractions are giving rise to different ideological forms. In contrast to the predominantly ascetic interpellations of Nazism, the focus is now more directly on self-enrichment as a life goal and the masculinist recklessness that goes along with it. At the same time, the attempts of the new “Secretary of War,” Pete Hegseth, to establish a “warrior ethos” in the military and beyond gain more impact as Trumpism escalates its militarism (see the planned increase of military spending to about \$1.5 trillion by 2027, more than 50% over current levels) and its direct imperialist interventionism (epitomized, for example, by the brutal capture of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores in Caracas, the hunger blockade of Cuba, and the war against Iran).

So far, the Trump administration has not succeeded in winning over what Marx described as “ideological estates”: universities, for example, are wavering between conformity, ducking out, and protest, but there is no sign yet of the enthusiastic approval seen in Italy in 1922 or Germany in 1933. The same ap-

plies to major parts of the legacy media, Hollywood, publishers, etc., which are brought under control by a combination of legal warfare, cuts in federal support, and corporate pressure. This does not mean there are no intellectuals supporting Trumpism,²⁴ in particular when we use the category in a wider Gramscian sense, extending it beyond “academia” and conventional intellectual professions and include, for example, the tech engineers, data scientists, product managers, designers (filling, for example, the ranks of the DOGE employees), or the widespread culture of online bloggers and influencers. A particular case in point is the corporate culture of Silicon Valley, which generated a type of ideologues that fuses libertarian, authoritarian, and technoutopian ideas. They produce, for example, concepts of a CEO monarchy based on government corporations (gov-corps), advocated by people such as Curtis Yarvin and Nick Land, and “transhumanist” projects of overcoming humanity’s boundaries with the help of biogenetics and AI—a superintelligence inspired in part by Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*—that is closely connected to eugenics.²⁵ We are confronted with the dystopia of a class divide translated into genetics: a new apartheid between those who can afford to select the favourable characteristics of their offspring, enhance their intelligence, their capacities, their “personalities,” and those who cannot. Naomi Klein observes a transhumanist accelerationism in power that has essentially abandoned the idea of a livable world here on earth, a kind of “apocalyptic fever” that is both evangelical and secular.²⁶

But if the fascization of subjects is operating through different avenues, the social Darwinist struggle of the strong against the weak is once again at the centre and is asserted against all democratic and egalitarian aspirations. What does it mean, for example, when the new Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon, who is tasked with dismantling the Department of Education, is the owner of the billion-dollar World Wrestling Entertainment company, whose wrestling matches are also “kayfabe,” that is, events that are predominantly staged and faked?²⁷ According to Judith Butler, Trump supporters are usually well aware that Trump lies and manipulates, and they admire the power that enables him to do as he pleases: we must understand the “sense of exhilaration” with which this power to lie and hate is experienced as liberation.²⁸ This, too, is a variation of the fascist dynamic observed by the Projekt Ideologietheorie: to “organize self-alienation as enthusiastic self-activity.”²⁹

Gender Panic and Shifts in Racism

The social Darwinist mobilization against the poor and the “unsuccessful” is of course nothing new but is part of the deep structure of capitalist socialization,

temporarily mollified by the postulates of justice during the “social democratic era” and intensified again in real existing neoliberalism. As Stuart Hall shows, this took place primarily through the creation of a “moral panic” in relation to street crime, in which the various ideological apparatuses of society participated.³⁰ Trumpism radicalizes the components of machismo and racism, which were only superficially concealed by liberal discourses of diversity. Gender and sexuality function as central topoi for achieving “hegemony through gender panic”;³¹ the demonization of feminism, of queerness, and of the “feminization” of culture creates a moral panic that is to be “cured” by mobilizing desires for fixed identities and the promise of restoring hierarchical gender duality.

Today, anti-Semitism is no longer the primary component of racism. It is well documented that there has been a shift toward “Islamism” and Muslim immigrants as the main enemy throughout the West. As Mario Candeias observes, “an entire arsenal of monsters is being deployed to generate approval.”³² In Trump’s case, the hostile “counter-people” is represented in various guises: by pro-Palestinian activists, Islamic “terrorists,” and illegal immigrants, especially from South America. But even though the Jewish enemy image has receded behind that of Islamic “terrorism,” it still remains operative: “liberal Jews” are repeatedly the target of fierce attacks. Steve Bannon, for example, believes that Israel’s worst enemies are “among us,” namely, American Jews who oppose Trump and Netanyahu and thus “hate” Israel and their own religion. While the fight against alleged “anti-Semitism” is used as a weapon to criminalize the protest movement against the genocide in Gaza, anti-Semitism is kept alive. Benjamin Balthaser looked at the campaign against Zohran Mamdani and observed a fusion between Islamophobic racism and antisemitic conspiracy theory: whereas Mamdani’s image was literally “darkened” by the Cuomo campaign so that it fits with an anxiety-producing Muslim enemy image, he was also accused by Fox News of receiving funding from George Soros, the billionaire investor who is in turn represented as a combination of “Judeo-Bolshevik” and the “Jewish financier.”³³

Spectacles of Cruelty

One hallmark of fascism is the brutalization of racist discourses and practices of dehumanization. During his election campaign, Trump accused immigrants from Haiti of eating the dogs and cats of the local population. He denounced the deported Venezuelans as gang members who had been deliberately smuggled into the country by the Maduro government to poison the American people with drugs. The enemy within, intimately connected with “crime” and drugs,

was thereby linked to a foreign power, which provided the ideological justification for the intervention in Venezuela and kidnapping of its president. The deportations to the high-security prison in El Salvador are staged as a spectacle of cruelty. The prisoners are led away by masked men who look like executioners, dragged across the floor, and forced to kneel in a hall so their hair can be forcibly shaved.

Such abuse and torture have, of course, been commonplace, not only in Guantanamo. The US empire has always had a fascist underbelly along the racial structure of society characterized, for example, by systematic violence against African Americans, the bombing of the Black Panthers, and the systematic murder of Black leaders and activists. In the midst of the official constitutional democracy of the US, there was always a “prerogative state” that coexisted with the liberal “normative state”; here, too, it is important to recognize the complex connection between bourgeois normality and fascization.³⁴ In 1971, Angela Davis spoke of a US fascism that is today “primarily restricted to the use of the law-enforcement-judicial-penal apparatus” against the resistance of nationally oppressed people but that tomorrow “may attack the working class *en masse* and eventually even moderate democrats.”³⁵ In the meantime, the Trump administration is intensely experimenting how to expand its repression to broader sections of the population: for example, by “denaturalizing” naturalized citizens or persecuting left-wing organizations under the pretext of belonging to an ominous “Antifa” network. Another qualitative difference is the return of the spectacle: the excesses of violence and torture are no longer hidden but proudly displayed.

The Deadweight of the Religious Right

Christian nationalism and the religious right have been carrying much weight on the hegemonic constellation of the US for a very long time. As Kristin Kobes du Mez shows, the evangelical support for right-wing politics is not motivated by biblical literalism or specific evangelical doctrines (for example, upholding the Bible as the highest authority, and the centrality of Christ’s atonement) but rather by an “operational theology”³⁶ that is driven by the ideologies of white supremacy and an aggressive, militant masculinity incarnated “in all its swaggering glory” by John Wayne.³⁷ We are dealing with a “cultural evangelicalism” that is deeply anchored in civil society. Disseminated by powerful distribution channels of a Christian consumer culture, it reaches far beyond evangelical churches and pervades mainline Christianity:³⁸ “Denominational boundaries are easily breached by the flow of religious merchandising.”³⁹ When some evangelical leaders raised moral concerns against a presidential candidate who bragged about

the size of his penis and proclaimed his right to grab the women “by their pussy,” they were overwhelmed by an evangelical culture looking for a strong leader that brings Christianity back to power. Already in 2016, “the ‘Moral Majority’ had reasserted itself, electing the least moral candidate in memory to the highest office of the land.”⁴⁰

Christian nationalists and conservative evangelicals were not only Trumpism’s most reliable and durable voting blocs but also consolidated their power positions in the state apparatus (e.g., in the Supreme Court, the White House Faith Office led by Paula White-Cain, the Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias, the Religious Liberty Commission). Just about all the relevant competing MAGA factions feel compelled to couch their issues in theological language. Peter Thiel translates his techno-capitalist accelerationism and Nietzschean transhumanism into a theological discourse that denounces each and every hindrance to an AI-propelled “progress” as the “Antichrist,” defined by the principle of “peace and security” (a misleading reference to 1 Thessalonians 5:3), whose exemplary embodiment is to be found in Greta Thunberg.⁴¹ Steve Bannon, who condemns Thiel’s posthumanism in the name of Christian values, proclaims at the same time the apocalyptic vision of a final battle with China and the world of Islam, at the end of which the liberal global order is replaced by a reborn nationalist JudeoChristian West. There are some indications that the religious right is already strategizing for a post-Trump era of Trumpism and is reassembling around figures like JD Vance and Russell Vaught, a major architect of Project 2025 who advocates an executive-centred authoritarian state as an instrument to restore a Christian moral order.

A few examples may illustrate to what extent Trumpism draws its violent energies from the ideological reservoir of the religious right: as testified by over 200 complaints, military commanders justify the war against Iran frequently as an eschatological Armageddon battle, which will bring about the second coming of Jesus. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth proudly parades his tattoo >Deus vult< (“God wills it”), which served as a rallying cry with which the Crusaders set out for Jerusalem. He quotes Psalm 144 (“Praise be to the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for battle and my fingers for war”) and urges the US military not to take the Iranian enemy prisoner, but to kill them (“no quarter, no mercy”), which, even as a mere announcement, constitutes a war crime. After the left-wing Presbyterian seminarian James Talarico won the Democratic primary for the Senate in Texas, Hegseth’s pastor, Brooks Pottenger, citing biblical “Imprecatory Psalms,” publicly called for his death: “cut [him] to the heart,” “make [him] as dung on the ground,” “we want him crucified with Christ.”

Precarious Alliance Between the Techno-elite and Populist Base

An important criterion for the use of the term “fascism” is, of course, the question of Trumpism’s mass base. Ingar Solty questions the notion of a fascism in the US and argues that there are still stable two-thirds majorities in favour of universal health care and a \$15 minimum wage and that the left-wing candidates of the “Squad” were re-elected.⁴² There is still “the potential for economic left-wing populism, which is coming to a head in terms of class politics.”⁴³ This is certainly true, as demonstrated by the huge crowds at the “No Kings” demonstrations, the popular support for Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, as well as the resounding victory of Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani in New York City. But this should not mislead us to underestimate Trumpism’s capabilities of garnering mass support, all the more as the Democratic Party is unable to formulate a convincing alternative. So far, the Trump government is still succeeding in connecting a populist right-wing base with a techno-libertarian elite and its milieus. What is decisive is not so much the paramilitary militias such as the Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, or Proud Boys but rather their intimate collaboration with the repressive state apparatuses: the massive funding of the ICE squads is also designed to absorb the fascist militia, subjugate them directly to the state and coordinate their violence accordingly. “We should be alert ... to the way in which state apparatuses can partly substitute for the street movement.”⁴⁴ If the approval ratings continue to fall, there might still be ample possibilities to manipulate the outcome by scapegoating domestic and foreign “enemies,” provoking a state of emergency, rigging the mid-term elections, and similar manoeuvres.

Whether the fascization project succeeds is still an open question. It depends, on the one hand, on whether Trumpism manages to balance the conflicting interests of the major capital factions and, on the other hand, on whether the subaltern classes turn away from it again when they feel the social consequences of inflation and the destruction of the welfare state. The obvious breach of numerous election promises (such as the lowering of food prices, the publication of the Epstein files, and the ending of US wars) could result in breaking up the alliance between the techno-elite and the populist base. And this, in turn, depends on whether the resistance to Trumpism can develop both a socio-political momentum and a wide popular front that translates people’s discontent into effective anti-fascist politics.

Confronted with today’s process of fascization, the churches and religious communities need to declare a *status confessionis*, a critical moment (*kairos*) that demands abandoning lukewarm “reconciliation” or “both/

and” approaches. Based on the biblical principle of a preferential option for the poor, they are called to fight for the economic human rights of the subaltern and middle classes; following the categorical imperative of universal love and care for the most vulnerable, they must condemn the racist and xenophobic campaigns, open their places of worship to serve as sanctuaries, and actively engage in the resistance against ICE raids; since, “in the image of God,” we are called to responsible stewardship and solidarity, in which the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inseparable (see Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*), it is our obligation to stand up against the death drive unleashed by high-tech-driven fossil fascism and imperialist wars.

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The Canadian Government's Response to American Tariffs, Indigenous Rights, and the Sermon on the Mount

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In March 2025, Canada was confronted with a national economic crisis. The Trump administration's imposition of steep tariffs on many Canadian imports to the United States disrupted deeply entrenched patterns of manufacturing and trade in major sectors of Canada's economy. Automobile, steel, aluminum, and lumber exports were all affected. Subsequent Chinese tariffs on Canadian canola and seafood products also affected the Prairie farm and Maritimes' economies.

The imposition of American tariffs was accompanied by President Trump's suggestion that Canada should become the United States' 51st state. All this created a sense of threat to Canada's economy and sovereignty that helped get Prime Minister Mark Carney's Liberal party elected in the Canadian federal election on April 28, 2025. Upon assuming office, the Liberal government's agenda focused on responding to the crisis created by American tariffs.

What follows will examine how the Canadian federal government's response to this economic crisis disregarded Indigenous Peoples' inherent right to self-determination. This was a major setback to seeking right relations between Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada and a moral failing on the federal government's part regarding its commitment to uphold Indigenous rights. We will then show how the Sermon on the Mount warns against this kind of moral failing and works to create a will to a different future. In this case, this would be a future in which the rights of Indigenous Peoples are respected and upheld.

The Federal Government's Response to the Economic Crisis

The sense that Canada faced a national economic crisis in the spring of 2025 as a result of American tariffs was shared by settlers and Indigenous Peoples alike. Much of Canada's economy has been deeply entwined with that of the United States and is heavily dependent upon trade with Americans. The realization that Canada could no longer rely on trade relationships with the United States, its largest trading partner, shocked many Canadians. The federal Liberal govern-

ment responded quickly, tabling the *One Canadian Economy Act*, Bill C-5, on June 6, 2025. This bill has two parts. Part 1 is the *Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act*. It was designed to strengthen Canada's economy internally by enabling goods, services, and workers to move more freely across provincial and territorial boundaries by removing federal barriers to trade and labour mobility within Canada. Part 2 is the *Building Canada Act*. This was designed to expedite the construction of nationally important economic and infrastructure projects by streamlining the regulatory approval processes for these. It was projected that under Bill C-5, such projects could be approved in two years rather than the usual five.

The Throne Speech delivered by King Charles III on May 27, 2025, stated that the federal government would uphold its commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. As the government embarked on nation-building projects, it would be guided by the principle of seeking Indigenous Peoples' free, prior, and informed consent regarding these initiatives.¹ This commitment was reiterated in the preamble to the *Building Canada Act*.² Unfortunately, it was downgraded in the Act to a commitment to consult with Indigenous Peoples who might be adversely affected before approving a project. The Act places the power to approve projects solely with the Major Projects Office of the federal government, which will decide whether these projects are in the national and Indigenous Peoples' interests. The free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples whose lands, waters, or resources may be affected by a project will not be required for projects to go ahead. Indigenous leaders and commentators judged this relinquishment of the obligation to seek their consent for such projects to be a betrayal of the federal government's commitment to seek right relations with Indigenous Peoples. They were right.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

Seeking Indigenous Peoples' free, prior, and informed consent regarding legislation or projects that may affect them is central to seeking right relations with

them. On June 21, 2021, the Canadian government passed Bill C-15, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. This committed the federal government to align Canada's laws and practices with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) and to develop and implement an action plan for this work. Indigenous leaders across Canada lauded this as a major step toward right relations between Indigenous Peoples and settlers.

The notion that Indigenous Peoples must give their consent to undertakings that may affect their lands, waters, or well-being is fundamental to the Declaration. It fleshes out Indigenous Peoples' right of self-determination and the Declaration includes this right in articles 10, 11, 19, 28, 29, and 32. Articles 19 and 32 explicitly mandate states to seek the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples before adopting legislation or administrative procedures that may affect them or before approving projects that may affect their lands or resources. This kind of consent is meant to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and their governments are accorded nation-to-nation status in dealing with Canadian governments and that their rights and interests are acknowledged. It is not intended to be a veto but to stimulate collaboration, working by consensus, and new ways of working with settler governments and businesses.³ Upholding Indigenous Peoples' right to consent is essential to repudiating the ethics of the Doctrine of Discovery, ending Canada's colonial relationship to Indigenous Peoples and entering into right relations with them.

In consultations that the federal government held with Indigenous Peoples in preparing its Action Plan to implement the Declaration, many Indigenous groups stressed the importance of the government upholding its duty to seek their free, prior, and informed consent in the Action Plan and in all aspects of the Declaration's implementation, and to work with Indigenous Peoples to develop a definition of consent. The Action Plan was released on June 21, 2023. Many commitments made in it and much of its rhetoric suggested that the federal government intended to take seriously this recommendation and the inherent right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination.⁴

In a news release dated June 8, 2025, the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations argued that the proposed *Building One Canada Act* directly violated Bill C-15 and Canada's obligations to Indigenous Peoples under Section 35 of Canada's Constitution. During a National Virtual Forum on Bill C-5 held by the Assembly of First Nations on June 17, 2025, a number of participants noted that the bill conflicted with the federal government's commitment to obtaining Indigenous Peoples' prior consent to projects

that might adversely affect them and that this was a significant step backward in Crown–First Nations relationships. Indigenous leaders emphasized that Indigenous Peoples were not opposed to development or national projects, but they expected to be treated as full partners in decisions and legislation that affected them and their lands. Throughout the public debate on Bill C-5, Indigenous commentators also expressed concern over the way this legislation concentrates decision-making power regarding projects of national interest in a single government office. Senator Paul Prosper proposed an amendment to the *Building Canada Act* that would have embedded Indigenous consent in it, but this was defeated in the Senate, and Bill C-5 passed on June 26, 2025.

The outcry from Indigenous leaders and commentators may not have gone completely unheard. In September 2025, Prime Minister Carney announced that an Indigenous Advisory Council would be created. This will be part of the Major Projects Office, which will provide government oversight for projects deemed of national interest under Bill C-5. The Council has 11 members from across Canada, with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representation. It is intended to ensure that Indigenous partnerships and economic participation are part of approved major projects and to advise on how to integrate the Declaration's principles in the Major Projects Office's workings. How the Advisory Council will function and what influence it will have in the Major Projects Office remains to be seen. While the Council may bring Indigenous perspectives to bear in helpful ways on the decisions of this office and the ways in which it works, an advisory council does not automatically guarantee free, prior, and informed consent.

The Doctrine of Discovery Model of Reconciliation

Canada has a history of contradictory behaviour in regard to Indigenous rights. On the one hand, Canada has enacted domestic legislation and entered into a number of self-government agreements with specific Indigenous Peoples that have brought it into partial compliance with the Declaration.⁵ Indigenous leaders and commentators have acknowledged that in the past three decades, progress has been made toward right relations. The work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, plus the work of Indigenous activists and leaders and Indigenous and other scholars, has not been in vain. Canada has been willing to grant Indigenous Peoples soft rights to the preservation and enhancement of their cultures, languages, education, and religions. Yet, Canadian federal and provincial governments have repeatedly

balked at relinquishing control over lands and natural resources.

Sheryl Lightfoot has dubbed this “the Doctrine of Discovery model of reconciliation.”⁶ The Doctrine of Discovery granted European nations sovereignty over lands that they claimed to discover, without regard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples living there. This doctrine presumes European superiority to Indigenous Peoples and underlies Canada’s history of colonialism. In the Doctrine of Discovery model of reconciliation, Canadian governments seek reconciliation between Indigenous and settler peoples by recognizing the value and worth of Indigenous languages and cultures and by aiming to close the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous Peoples and settlers. Yet, these governments have typically sought to maintain control of Indigenous lands and waters and frequently refuse to recognize Indigenous Peoples’ “hard rights” to sovereignty over their territories, self-determination, and consent.⁷ While Canadian governments at times sincerely claim to want to aid Indigenous communities’ economic development, their efforts and vision in this regard have typically operated within the Doctrine of Discovery model of reconciliation.⁸

Canada theoretically repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery when it passed Bill C-15 in 2021. When Pope Francis rejected the Doctrine of Discovery in 2023, Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services, and Daniel Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs, issued a statement acknowledging that this doctrine had been used to justify Canadian colonialism and atrocities against Indigenous Peoples and that Bill C-15 repudiated and condemned the prejudices that the Doctrine of Discovery represents and the colonial practices that it underlies.⁹ Yet Bill C-5’s refusal to acknowledge Indigenous Peoples’ right to free, prior, and informed consent regarding legislation and projects that will affect them continues the Doctrine of Discovery model of reconciliation.

Much of the rhetoric in and around Bill C-5 speaks of how the bill aims to preserve and enhance economic prosperity for Canada and notes that Indigenous Peoples will be included in this. While economic prosperity is important for Indigenous Peoples’ well-being, right relations with settlers will also require Indigenous Peoples’ liberation from colonial rule and prejudices. The Declaration recognizes that for Indigenous Peoples to survive and thrive, their inherent right to self-determination and to consent needs to be recognized and respected in states’ relationships with them.

The economic and social disparities between Canadian settler populations and Indigenous Peoples are related to the structural violence of colonial economic domi-

nation. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and subsequent scholarly research have demonstrated that positive transformation of the economic conditions of Indigenous Peoples results from breaking with Canada’s history of colonial practices by respecting the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-government and consent in decisions relating to them.¹⁰ As noted above, Canadian federal governments have recognized these rights in legislation and public statements. Yet, to date, they have typically resisted respecting them in practice and have sought to maintain liberal versions of colonial sovereignty.¹¹ Bill C-5 is an example of this. By continuing to operate within the Doctrine of Discovery model of reconciliation, the government is continuing colonial practices that it has condemned and repudiated and that harm Indigenous Peoples.

The contradictory behaviour of Canadian governments in relation to Indigenous Peoples’ rights to self-determination and consent reflects residual colonial attitudes in Canada’s settler population and Canadian governments. It also reflects the corrosive effect that capitalism can have on the moral values of democracies. In capitalist democracies, the social good of economic prosperity tends to assume a predominance that can undermine other moral values, like the rights of minorities and social solidarity.¹² Indigenous activists and leaders have recognized that this tendency can be double-edged. For example, in the 1980s, Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia gained leverage to pressure governments sworn to economic growth to recognize their inherent rights by creating economic uncertainty through their land claims.¹³ However, since the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, capitalist imperatives have been undermining the moral values and institutions that foster solidarity and respect for others in Western democracies.¹⁴ In the economic crisis of March 2025, concern for Canada’s economic well-being swept aside the rights of Indigenous Peoples that had been ratified in Canada’s Parliament by Bill C-15.

This bore out Murray Sinclair’s observation, made a year or so earlier, that when it comes to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, Canada’s federal governments have other priorities.¹⁵ At a time when Canadians were being exhorted to pull together, ignoring Indigenous Peoples’ right to consent exacerbated internal tensions within Canada. While many settler Canadians condemned the colonial arrogance expressed in President Trump’s talk of Canada becoming the United States’ 51st state, Bill C-5 continued Canada’s “existing colonial property regimes”¹⁶ in relation to Indigenous Peoples. The disregard for Indigenous Peoples’ right to consent in Bill C-5 reveals that for all the good intentions professed by Canada’s federal government about strengthening Canada’s economy and benefiting Indigenous Peoples, there is

a lack of respect and concern for Indigenous Peoples in it and in the hearts of settler Canadians.

For this economic colonialism to end, a will to a different future needs to be created among settler Canadians and their governments. We turn now to examine how the Sermon on the Mount can contribute to this.

A Warning Speech

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is a warning speech.¹⁷ It announces that the future can be different and summons people to act on the basis of Jesus' proclamation of salvation. A greater justice, a deeper peace, a more diverse and harmonious community can be realized in history. It also warns how commitments to justice and right relations can be undermined and perverted and makes a number of calls to self-examination to guard against this.

The Sermon begins with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–16), Jesus' proclamation of salvation, and describes the calling of those who heed this proclamation. Then follows ethical teaching to guide people in following this calling. First comes a section on Torah interpretation (Matthew 5:17–48), then a section on prayer and spiritual practices (Matthew 6:1–18). Then comes a section, verses 6:19–7:12, dealing with how disciples should comport themselves in relation to social issues.¹⁸ This section begins with verses 6:19–24, which discuss how people should relate to material possessions, money, and financial matters. These verses focus on a person's or community's fundamental orientation in life. The Sermon does not advocate the renunciation of possessions or valorize poverty. It presumes that some who follow its teachings can give alms and have access to private rooms where they can pray (Matthew 6:2–4, 6). Its concern in these verses is with the "heart," the light that is within a person, the primary loyalty that directs a person's course in life.

Matthew 6:19–20 warns against prioritizing financial and material gain over following divine teaching. The next verse, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (v. 21), sharpens this warning by describing what such prioritizing indicates and the perverting effect this can have on a person's moral outlook. It directs its audience to reflect upon what goal they seek in their dealings with possessions and wealth.¹⁹ In life situations, choices must be made between serving God or seeking wealth.²⁰ These choices are determined by where one's heart is. They reveal where one's loyalty lies. Over time, prioritizing financial gain can create a love and a habitus that undermines one's commitment to God and makes one captive to seeking profit. A concern with the pull that material possessions and wealth can exercise on people's hearts

runs throughout Matthew's gospel.²¹ The Sermon calls settler Canadians to self-examination on this point, regarding how concern for national economic prosperity has overruled Canada's commitment to uphold Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Verses 22–23 continue the preceding warning. They teach that a person's and community's humanity and moral character are at stake in their dealings with money.²² These verses use the metaphor of the eye as the lamp of the body, following ancient physiology, to speak of the ethical quality of a person's heart.²³ Who one serves, where one's heart lies, becomes visible in how one relates to financial matters. Does concern with wealth shape one's outlook and actions, or is this concern subordinate to care for justice and the rights of others?

The dichotomy Matthew 6:19–24 sets forth between love of wealth and possessions and love of God culminates in a stark warning: "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). The Greek word *mamnas* (mammon), translated here in the NRSV Bible as "wealth," recognizes the captivating allure that money and material possessions can exercise: how desire for wealth can become a demonic force, an enslavement that crowds out or undermines all other concerns and values.²⁴ The Golden Rule—"Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12)—is the basic principle underlying the Sermon's ethical teachings, and verse 24 warns that love of money can lead people to violate this principle.

A Moral Failing

The Sermon's warning in this regard can be extended to Canadian society as a whole when the right of Indigenous Peoples to consent was downgraded in Bill C-5. It also applies to the deeper moral values underlying Canadian democracy. Modern liberal democracies derive their moral legitimacy from their adherence to fundamental principles of human rights.²⁵ These principles also underlie the Declaration. Approximately 60 member states of the United Nations, Canada included, participated in the negotiations leading to the development of the Declaration. These states contributed to these discussions the basic principles of "non-discrimination, self-determination, and cultural integrity."²⁶ Indigenous Peoples from around the globe made the claim that they were human and wanted respect for their "inherent dignity and self-determination, as enjoyed by other peoples."²⁷ The Declaration fused these two contributions, extending the principles that member states brought so as to articulate the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples pertaining to their cultures, territories, traditions, and communal identities. The extension of these principles in the

Declaration was intended to promote cooperation and respect between states and Indigenous Peoples.²⁸

The Sermon's warning, "You cannot serve God and wealth," illuminates what is at stake in the conflict between Canada's acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples' rights as articulated in the Declaration and the current federal government's prioritization of economic prosperity over these rights. The federal government's response to American tariffs has failed to uphold Canada's commitments to Indigenous Peoples and is undermining the respect for the rights of others that is fundamental to Canadian democracy. By refusing to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples regarding major projects that will affect their lands, waters, or well-being, the federal government is sowing seeds of conflict between it and Indigenous Peoples that could create problems for Canada's economy in the future.

A number of Indigenous commentators and leaders argued that upholding Indigenous Peoples' right to consent should not be seen as an obstacle to facilitating new major economic projects. What Indigenous leaders requested was that they and their rights become part of the new streamlined approval process in an appropriate way.

The evil threatening Canada at present is not only American imperialism. It is also Canada's own servitude to economic growth and an entrenched colonial vision of how to pursue this. By allowing these to overrule its legislated commitments to the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Canada is jeopardizing its economic future, its moral basis as a democracy, and the work toward reconciliation done by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

A Will to a Different Future

The Sermon on the Mount condemns and warns against this kind of behaviour. It also teaches that the future can be different and works to create a will to seek this different future. Through its opening invitation in the Beatitudes, its repeated exhortations, its exaggerated imagery, and its concluding warning parables, the Sermon calls for conversion to the salvation promised by God and demands that people live accordingly.²⁹ The principle that is to guide people in living this way is the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). Underlying all this is the message that a better future is possible. The Sermon is meant to be creatively and contextually put into practice.³⁰ It teaches that Canada can rise above its past and present colonialism.

Canadian churches need to call Canada's failure to uphold Indigenous Peoples' rights into question in light of the Sermon's teachings and the legislative commitments that Canada has made to Indigenous Peoples. The gospel's message of the crucified and risen Christ is the transcendent principle of expectation underlying the Sermon's call to seek a different future.³¹ The religious basis of this transcendent hope creates problems for communicating the Sermon's message in a pluralistic and secular society. However, this transcendent hope can prevent the Church from relinquishing the Sermon's unexhausted ethical insights and can strengthen the resolve of Christian settlers to uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Jürgen Habermas has warned of a "defeatism" lurking in Western secular rationality.³² In the clash between what seems economically expedient and necessary on the one hand and egalitarian notions of morality and justice on the other, the latter often lose their motivating power and fail to sustain an awareness of the violations of solidarity in secular society and the moral imperative to address these.³³ This is the failure of the Canadian government's response to the Trump tariffs in the spring of 2025 in regard to the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Sermon, with its grounding in the crucified and risen Christ, can help Christians retain the awareness that this failure is a violation of solidarity – a moral outrage and a sin. In contrast to a sense of urgency that elevates seeking economic prosperity above the rights of others, the Sermon teaches that there is no peace without justice and that people cannot serve God and mammon simultaneously.³⁴

The Sermon does have a way of communicating its moral insights and concerns to those outside the Church. The Golden Rule's widespread dissemination in various forms throughout history indicates that it has a rationality that can be appreciated from different religious and cultural perspectives.³⁵ Its meaningfulness is not limited to adherents of the Christian faith. It can communicate the Sermon's ethical insights to non-Christians and express its ethical imperatives in a pluralistic culture and secular society. By doing this, it can help form the basis of a will to a different future in Canada.

The Golden Rule implicitly recognizes the often violent character of human interactions. The potential aggressor it is primarily concerned with is ourselves.³⁶ Settlers in Canada need to take this to heart. Its admonition, "do to others as you would have them do to you," invites reflection about basic human goods,³⁷ such as self-determination and dignity. These are the kinds of goods that the Declaration affirms as inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples. This kind of reflection

could lead to the realization that while economic prosperity is good, it is not the only good. Pursuit of it must be balanced by respect for the rights of others and by concern for the moral integrity of one's community and oneself as a human being.

The relationship of the Canadian state to Indigenous Peoples is a test case for the moral character of Canadian democracy. The Declaration was adopted as an attempt to restore Canada's moral legitimacy in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission bringing to light the cultural genocide Canadian governments and churches had practised against Indigenous Peoples. The adoption of the Declaration made moral and legal commitments to uphold Indigenous Peoples' collective rights that are in keeping with the Golden Rule. But simply making these commitments has not solved Canada's crisis of legitimacy. The Sermon demands that the Golden Rule be put into practice. This is where Canadian governments continue to falter.

The Declaration's affirmation of Indigenous Peoples' inherent rights to self-determination and free, prior, and informed consent requires Canadian governments to relinquish their hierarchical colonial relationships with Indigenous Peoples and enter into nation-to-nation relationships with them.³⁸ Fulfilling Canada's commitment to these affirmations will require rethinking and moving beyond Westphalian notions of political sovereignty in which a state typically exercises exclusive control over a given territory. New "plural, overlapping and multiple types of sovereignties"³⁹ will need to be developed in which Canadian governments and Indigenous Peoples share control over territories in ways that accommodate Indigenous rights to self-determination. Sharing sovereignty does not mean giving it up. It means exercising it with respect for and through cooperation with other peoples.

Philosopher Seyla Benhabib argues that states are being pushed by international developments to rethink sovereignty in certain matters in terms of forms of interdependence. Economic globalization and the creation of the World Wide Web have led to large sectors of the economy and electronic media being beyond the control of individual states.⁴⁰ Also, the threat of climate change cannot be adequately responded to by individual states acting alone. The self-determination of individual countries can only be maintained in the face of these developments by the creation of new forms of interdependent and cooperative sovereignties through which individual states act together to address these transnational realities.⁴¹ Such international relationships are also necessary to uphold the human rights of vulnerable migrants and refugees. In addition, Benhabib notes that Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia have moved to intercultural and plurinational models of sovereignty within their borders that incor-

porate respect for the self-determination and other rights of Indigenous populations there.⁴² She describes these versions of cooperative governance as forms of cosmopolitan sovereignty.

If settler Christians in Canada are to live out the Sermon's injunction to "do to others as you would have them do to you," some versions of shared sovereignty between settler governments and Indigenous Peoples will be necessary. The Declaration and the Sermon agree on this. These forms of shared sovereignty could create the kind of ethical space⁴³ needed to facilitate cross-cultural partnerships and cooperation that respect the different identities, worldviews, and histories of Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada. As Benhabib's observations and arguments indicate, this kind of shared sovereignty is not an outlandish idea.

Conclusion

Since the passage of Bill C-5, Prime Minister Carney has continued to meet with Indigenous leaders and to insist that the federal government is committed to seeking right relations with Indigenous Peoples. He has maintained that under Bill C-5, there must be consultation consistent with free, prior, and informed consent before a major project initiative can be designated as being in Canada's national interest.⁴⁴ However, he has yet to affirm that if the consent of Indigenous Peoples who will be affected by a project is not forthcoming, it will not be approved.

Building new international economic relationships has been the main focus of the federal government since March 2025. This is an important government priority at this time, but it should not push aside recognizing and respecting the extent of Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination and consent. Economic prosperity depends upon peace, and peace is built on justice. If Canada's economy is to weather future storms, its democracy needs to be built on solid moral foundations (Matthew 7:24-27). Fully implementing the Declaration's insistence on respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights will be essential to this.⁴⁵

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2 Bill C-5, 7.

3 Marie Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage* (new ed.) (unceded territory of the Musqueam people: UBC Press, 2024), 249.

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5 Sheryl Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 172-73.

- 6 Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics*, 173.
- 7 Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics*, 173, 192.
- 8 Daniel Salée and Carole Lévesque, "Canada's Aboriginal Policy and the Politics of Ambivalence: A Policy Tools Perspective," in *Sharing the Land, Sharing the Future*, ed. Katherine Graham and David Newhouse (Winnipeg/Treaty 1 Territory: University of Manitoba Press, 2021), 441–42.
- 9 "Statement by the Ministers of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Indigenous Services, and Northern Affairs on the Catholic Church's rejection of the Doctrine of Discovery," Ottawa, April 1, 2023.
- 10 Salée and Lévesque, "Canada's Aboriginal Policy and the Politics of Ambivalence," 425; Jennifer Dockstator et al., "Insights into Community Development in First Nations," in *Sharing the Land, Sharing the Future*, ed. Katherine Graham and David Newhouse (Winnipeg/Treaty 1 Territory: University of Manitoba Press, 2021), 181, 200.
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- 12 Jürgen Habermas, *Also a History of Philosophy, Volume III* (Hoboken, NJ: Polity Press, 2025), 430.
- 13 Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2017), 123.
- 14 Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Novalis, 2006), 223–26, 235–36.
- 15 Murray Sinclair, *Who We Are* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2024), 243. Sinclair was Chief Commissioner of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- 16 Salée and Lévesque, "Canada's Aboriginal Policy and the Politics of Ambivalence," 441–42.
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- 19 Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 435.
- 20 Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 454.
- 21 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 336.
- 22 Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 334.
- 23 Alan Culpepper, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 214–15.
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- 25 Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 178.
- 26 Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 61.
- 27 Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 61.
- 28 Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage*, 64.
- 29 Schnackenburg, *All Things are Possible to Believers*, 32.
- 30 Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 391–92.
- 31 Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 391.
- 32 Jürgen Habermas, "An Awareness of What Is Missing," in *An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age*, ed. Jürgen Habermas et al. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 18.
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- 41 Benhabib, *At the Margins of the Modern State*, 91.
- 42 Benhabib, *At the Margins of the Modern State*, 142.
- 43 Willie Ermine, "The Ethical Space of Engagement," *Indigenous Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (2007): 202.
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- 45 I thank David Seljak for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Book Review

Gaza: Liberation Theology in the Face of Genocide

By Hugh Williams

John Munayer and Samuel Munayer, eds, *The Cross and the Olive Tree: Cultivating Palestinian Theology amid Gaza* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2025), 156 pages.

Writing a book today about liberation theology is enough of a challenge. Writing this book from a Palestinian perspective in the face of the Gaza genocide is another thing altogether—some might say it is impossible. And yet, this small text proposes to talk things over among eight young Palestinian theologians.

In certain respects, this is an amazing accomplishment of consequence. Gustavo Gutiérrez points out boldly in his classic *A Theology of Liberation* from 1973 that liberation theology is about the very meaning of Christianity and of the mission of the Church. For the editors and authors to speak of a work being guided by the “hermeneutic of Christ” will inescapably invoke an ongoing tension within Christianity of the continuity and discontinuity between Jesus’ historical life and teachings and the Church’s later varied preaching of the Christ.

Though this tension is nowhere thematized, it is implicit in the text’s well-articulated commitment to non-violence amid the Gaza genocide, a genocide that is never in question in the discussion. What *is* in question is how resistance, liberation, and reconciliation are to be understood and practised in the light of a theology trying to come to grips with Gaza.

There are deep divisions within Christianity between supporters of Christian Zionism and those who have taken up the Palestinian cause of liberation. However, it is the internal empowerment and connectedness among Palestinians and their supporters that is the text’s primary focus. And as difficult as it may be, there must be communication. There must be this effort to talk things through, because Palestinian liberation theology is desirous of an alternative future rooted in non-violence, plurality, and collaboration. This is where the conversation around liberation and reconciliation must be conducted, and done in the face of Gaza, where the death toll as of the book’s publication was estimated at 186,000 (it is much higher as I write this review).

But then the question must be asked directly: What of this commitment to non-violence in the face of Gaza? The answers given by the authors remain at best tentative and open. Again, Gutiérrez showed us how a liberation theology in Latin America had to come to terms with how the exploitation and misery of oppressed peoples results from an institutionalized violence that is responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent victims. This also means there must be reflection on the complex problem of the oppressed people’s counter-violence. Liberation theology challenges the tendency in Christianity’s history to ignore or even accept the violence establishing and maintaining an oppressive order while condemning the violence used by the oppressed to change this order. In liberation theology, there is a refusal to equate the unjust violence of the oppressor with the just violence of the oppressed.

With this deep background, which again is not thematized in the text, there is an acknowledgement that many if not most Palestinians now see reconciliation as irrelevant until liberation has been achieved. There is a deep and justifiable suspicion that reconciliation is used as a tool of colonialization. And there is the deep conviction that Zionism and Palestinian liberation are in mortal contradiction.

And yet, all the authors assert that liberation and reconciliation need each other, for one without the other only leads to further oppression. However, reconciliation requires careful and strict guidelines where the process must be Palestinian led and indigenizing so that the Zionist narrative will be deconstructed. The text acknowledges that not all Palestinians have to engage with Israeli Jews, certainly not Gazans. The text’s Christian-centric viewpoint on reconciliation is also forthrightly acknowledged so that it simply may not be applicable to others from other traditions and backgrounds.

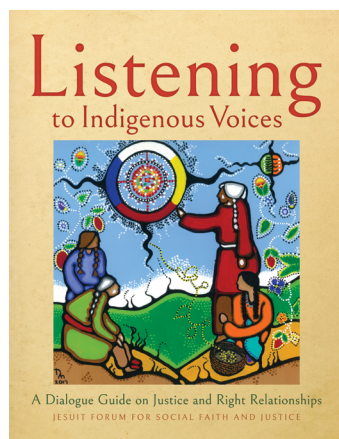
The text does provide a powerful theological perspective on the settler colonial project of Zionism and its

parallels with the similar project undertaken in North American history. Where it is perhaps limited and incomplete is in the recognition of colonialism's deep interconnection with capitalism and capitalist global development. This is often a limitation in accounts of settler colonial treatment of Indigenous populations in both Palestine and North America.¹ This is the case here, in what is otherwise an excellent text that lays some groundwork for an important ongoing struggle for both liberation and reconciliation.

1 The Palestinian analyst Abdaljawad Omar gives a succinct account of these connections in his recent interview for *Monthly Review* (October 2025). The Eastern Mediterranean is viewed by many as the cradle of anti-imperial dreaming, and yet it remains violently fractured and administered. Settler colonial Zionism in this context is not a historical anomaly but a necessary instrument essential to a geo-political trinity that has governed the region since the colonial partitioning: the circulation of oil, the logic of capital accumulation, and the strategic dismemberment of Arab political possibility. It is in this sense that Zionist Israel is not just protected, it is viewed as structurally indispensable.

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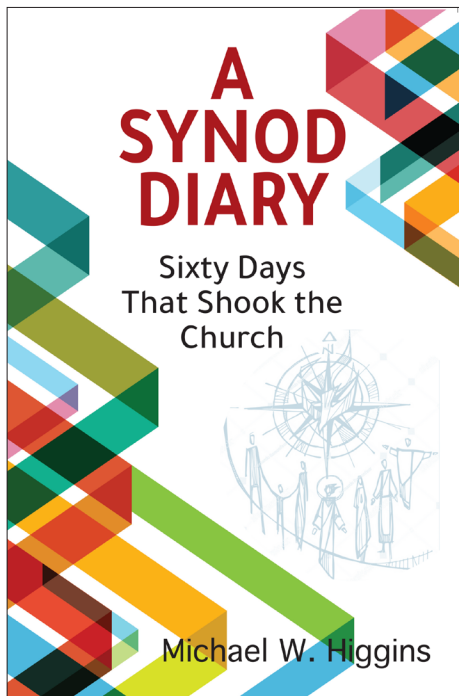


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—from the author's *Prelude*

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