

# FAITH AND RECKONING AFTER TRUMP

*Miguel A. De La Torre*, editor



ORBIS BOOKS  
Maryknoll, New York

---

## *Preface*

For many progressive religious leaders and scholars, the 2016 election of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States came—to say the least—as a shock. He was the first person in US history who was elected president without any previous governmental or military experience. The country chose a mediocre businessman made rich through inheritance, known for bankruptcies, perpetuating scams, and starring on reality television. At that time the need was felt to speak up, to provide not just a pastoral word to many who were fearful of what that moment would unleash, but just as important, to sound the clarion for praxis, for action. Making room in an already busy and hectic schedule, several of us came together to write *Faith and Resistance in the Age of Trump*. This was probably the first book published from the perspective of faith communities providing a critical assessment of the coming Trump administration and offering guidance on how to remain authentic to our faith while resisting political policies detrimental to the most vulnerable within our society. Some of our trepidation proved to be well founded, as his four years in office unveiled an individual who lacked a moral compass. Governmental policies he championed proved to be diametrically opposed to the message of the Sermon on the Mount.

We took seriously the charge to stand in solidarity with the “least among us.” While many within the community of white Christians aligned themselves with a figure whose actions repudiated the basic message of the gospel, others within diverse faith communities became the conscience of the nation. For the past four years, many

of us raised our voices as the Trump administration, which claimed a mandate to “drain the swamp,” instead saw six former campaign and White House aides criminally convicted.<sup>1</sup> A seventh, Steve Bannon, was indicted for defrauding Trump supporters, who sent him \$25 million to build a wall on the southern border.<sup>2</sup> Trump profited off the presidency to the tune of at least \$12 million as those entities seeking to curry favor with the government made reservations at his properties.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, federal agencies were forced to spend at least \$2.5 million at his properties.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, having paid no income taxes for years, he bragged to his uber-wealthy clientele, “You all just got a lot richer,” hours after signing the 2017 tax bill.<sup>5</sup>

A majority of US citizens voted against Trump in 2016, and when an even larger majority voted against him again in 2020, he refused to honor the will of the people. How easy, then, with the inauguration of Joseph Biden as the forty-sixth president, for religious leaders and scholars to simply shout “Hallelujah” and return to a more tranquil life, marked by less drama, chaos, and lawlessness. But if truth be known, we find ourselves still anxious for the future. We find ourselves on the other side of the Trump administration, residing in a nation—due to corruption—where trust in our democratic bonds has been frayed to the point of breaking. A nation, due to incompetence, is sicker, as the pandemic rages uncontrollably, and poorer, as we endure the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. A nation, due to self-interest, is more divided by racist

---

1. Paul Manafort, Roger Stone, Michael Flynn, George Papadopoulos, Rick Gates, and Michael Cohen.

2. Kevin Johnson, “How Many Trump Advisers Have Been Criminally Charged?” *USA Today*, August 20, 2020.

3. Nicholas Confessore et al., “The Swamp That Trump Built,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2020.

4. David A. Fahrenthold et al., “Ballrooms, Candles and Luxury Cottage: During Trump’s Term, Millions of Government and GOP Dollars Have Flowed to His Properties,” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2020.

5. Russ Buettner, Susanne Craig, and Mike McIntire, “The President’s Taxes,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2020; Kathryn Watson, “‘You All Just Got a Lot Richer,’ Trump Tells Friends, Referencing Tax Overhaul,” *CBS News*, December 24, 2017.

dog whistles. If the transition period between the November election and the January inauguration was any indication of the future that awaits us, then this nation can expect a division not witnessed since the years prior to the Civil War.

During those long days in early November, glued to news programs before the election was called, the contributors to this book were asked to bring their analytical skills to this moment in time, the seventy-eight days between the election and the inauguration. While it was expected Trump would challenge the election results, we could never, in our wildest nightmares, have imagined what was in store. An attempt was made to disenfranchise voters from communities of color on the basis of false allegations of fraud. We witnessed (1) over sixty legal challenges to the election, all but one thrown out as frivolous, even by Trump-appointed justices; (2) a refusal by the Supreme Court, even though packed by Trump appointees, to hear Trump's case, even while the majority of Republican House members joined an *amicus curiae* brief; (3) pressure on Michigan state legislative Republican leaders not to certify the electoral votes of that state; (4) a request by the president of the United States to Georgia's secretary of state, a Republican official, to falsify the vote count; (5) an attempt by Republicans in Congress to challenge the certification of the Electoral College; (6) a call from the president of the United States to his followers to flock to the nation's capital, where he incited them to a riot, the storming of the Capitol where five lives were lost. And even after the insurrection was put down, six senators and 121 representatives opposed certifying the electoral votes from Arizona, while seven senators and 138 representatives—all Republicans—opposed Pennsylvania's certification.

By the time Biden was sworn in as president, a usually joyful event celebrating the peaceful transfer of power, Washington, DC, was fully militarized—an armed camp, facing a segment of the country's population, disproportionately represented by white nationalist Christians, who threatened the peaceful and democratic process. And not just at our nation's capital. Every state capital was also placed on high alert because of creditable threats picked up on chatter among domestic terrorist groups. The seventy-eight days between election and inauguration day were, by far, the longest

days in US history. What a difference from previous transfers of power. When John Adam lost his reelection to his political arch-enemy, Thomas Jefferson, he handed off the keys to the government and returned to Quincy, Massachusetts, thus establishing the precedent of peaceful transitions. The few who lost reelections may have been disappointed, angry, or resentful; but none set out to employ *caudillo* tactics to deny the will of the voters.

For the first time, we have had a president who has refused to concede defeat, poisoning the well with conspiracy theories. Ironically, when Alexander Lukashenko—the autocrat of Belarus—declared victory in August 2020 after losing the election by employing the same tactics attempted by Trump (undermining the integrity of the election process, attacking the press, demonizing political opponents), the United States, along with other Western democracies, denounced the brazen defiance of the voters' will and imposed sanctions.<sup>6</sup> Four years of witnessing turbulent conduct that flirted with fascist sensibilities and authoritarian sentiments had left many of us dealing with a collective form of post-traumatic stress disorder. Or maybe, what was truly unnerving was the recognition that Trumpism was not decidedly repudiated by the 2020 electorate. We were obviously more divided on election night 2020 than we were in 2016. Though he received a winning majority, Biden did not inherit the political mandate to vanquish Trumpism, an ethos that will long survive the man.

Trump lost the election but won in capturing the soul of about half of the population. We who are religious leaders and scholars recognize the moral obligation to speak a word as the storms of racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism refuse to dissipate. With dire apprehension we wonder if some future Trump 2.0–type politician, one more politically savvy, could arise in 2024 or 2028, succeeding where Trump, due to his ineptness and incompetence, fell short. This responsibility to speak truth in solidarity with the powerless has found its expression in the book you hold in your hands. *Faith and Reckoning after Trump* continues that conversa-

---

6. Andrew Higgins, “Trump Borrows Election Tactics from Autocrats,” *New York Times*, November 12, 2020.

tion begun four years ago. Recognizing that unless we continue to faithfully resist, the Biden years could easily be reduced to a temporary reprieve, as opposed to a sea change.

All contributors of this book were contacted within a week of Biden's election and asked to speak to this moment. They were asked not so much to give a commentary on what was occurring in real time but rather to use this moment as a springboard to explore (1) the damage of the past four years to our democracy; (2) what this moment reveals about the state of Christianity; (3) the role faith might play in reconciling a divided nation; and (4) possible signs that might point toward hope (or hopelessness). While our eyes were upon what was occurring in real time, our focus was on the future. How will this moment now shape the political theology of tomorrow? How might the lessons of the past several years be transformed into liberative praxis for a post-Trump United States?

Almost all of those I approached about this project responded positively. The book was completed less than two weeks after Biden's inauguration, some twelve weeks after his election. As you read this book months, if not years, into the Biden administration, you can better judge if the issues we raised and the concerns we voiced were warranted.

A special thanks goes out to all the contributors for their faithfulness to do their ministerial and/or academic work firmly planted in the reality faced by the disenfranchised, the dispossessed, and the disinherited. I am honored by how they rushed to the task at hand, despite their busy schedules. I am also grateful to Robert Ellsberg, the publisher at Orbis Books, who did not hesitate to give a green light to this project when I first proposed it, even *before* the election was called for Biden. But more importantly, I am thankful to the millions of faith leaders and lay people who refused to follow the MAGA bandwagon on the road to destruction but chose instead to tread the narrow, stony road that leads to life. So many of them demonstrated faith and resistance during the age of Trump. Trump may now be gone, but Trumpism remains, stronger than ever, entrenched in our national ethos. The political and spiritual battle is not over. Now is the time for faith and reckoning. We cannot afford to blink.