

# Dry Bones and Holy Wars

A Call for Social and  
Spiritual Renewal



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# Preface

When I entered seminary in 2015, it was clear that there were seismic shifts happening in our world, shifts that would inevitably require clergy of all traditions to lean deeper into our calling to be both prophets and healers throughout the coming decades. Polarization was on the rise and existential threats like climate change were becoming more dire. From where I sat as a young, wide-eyed optimist with quite a bit of privilege, I felt like we were making progress as a nation and as a species. But by the time I graduated in 2017, my perspective shifted dramatically.

The US presidential campaigns of 2016–17 began to unearth a startling reality for many citizens—that despite the superficial progress we seemed to have made, much of the deep-seated prejudice, hatred, and apathy toward injustice that we often spoke of as a bygone era had been flourishing just beneath the surface of our nation’s collective consciousness. White supremacy, antisemitism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, nationalism—all of this reared its ugly head not just in the speeches of Donald Trump but in the millions of people who supported him, including a stunning number of Christian religious leaders.

As I contemplated what it meant for me to step into the role of a Christian pastor in this era, I admit that I was quite timid. I knew that wherever I ended up, I would need to draw on my faith tradition to speak hard truths about our collective sins and

our need for repentance and transformation. I knew that throughout the Trump presidency, I would be challenged to encourage Christian resistance to the often-backward ethics and xenophobic policies of the Trump administration, which would likely result in a lot of pushback from those who wanted to keep their faith and politics separate. In short, as I accepted my first call, I knew that the first few years of my ministry would be challenging to say the least.

I had no clue just how challenging they would turn out to be. Nearly every month from 2017 to 2020, there was some major tragedy or moment of reckoning. From the murder of George Floyd to a global pandemic to the January 6 insurrection, my role as a pastor began to look more like that of a community organizer. I would spend large portions of my days working with local coalitions to mobilize my congregation to participate in tangible action to demand justice and bring healing to the world. Our Sunday worship services began to seem like organizing meetings, with my sermon being a moment where I would remind the congregation of our moral responsibility as disciples of Jesus and then point to individual and collective actions we could all take to transform the brokenness around us through subversive acts of truth telling and love. My counseling sessions were often focused on helping people process their bewilderment and fear about the state of the world. And I found myself spending a lot of time wrestling with my own perspective and beliefs through writing.

What you are holding is a series of reflections I have written to help myself and fellow Christians process the moment we are living in and how we should respond to it. Each reflection is rooted in the ancient biblical tradition and tied to a pressing modern concern, inviting us to individual and communal introspection about how we have arrived here and how we can move forward as a people. While the events that provoked these reflections are now past, we are still living in the ongoing impact of these realities, and, thus, continued faithful reflection and response is merited.

These words are offered not as answers to our society's many ills but as provocations to new ways of seeing and being in the world. It is my hope that these words will serve to inspire innovative ways of thinking about how modern disciples of Jesus might embody our faith in the world and ultimately bring you some encouragement and hope that a more just world is not only possible but is well within our reach.