

**SMALL
GROUP
GUIDES**
from HarperOne

AMERICAN PROPHETS



The Religious Roots of
Progressive Politics
and the
Ongoing Fight for
the Soul of the Country

JACK JENKINS

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CHAPTER 1: FAITH IN PUBLIC LIFE

1. Where do you see religion in the public sphere today? How are Republicans and Democrats both using religious arguments to support their political agendas?
2. Jack Jenkins describes the role that “progressive faith groups” played in the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) during Barack Obama’s presidency (pp. 9–10). What is one new thing that you learned from this sketch about the nature and influence of these groups?
3. What tactics did progressive faith groups use to influence the ACA’s passage?

CHAPTER 2: THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL— AND SPIRITUAL

1. “Most Democrats still profess a belief in a higher power, but religious progressives . . . often find themselves ignored by the media, undervalued by other liberals, or both” (p. 35). Why do you think religious progressives are treated this way?
2. “Liberals have practiced secular politics since the 1960s, but with the ascent of Barack Obama, the Left discovered it can actually keep the faith” (p. 50). What was unique about Barack Obama? How was he able to help “the Left” do this?

CHAPTER 3: WHEN GOD CHOOSES A LEADER

1. Jenkins mentions Paula White's comments about Donald Trump being "raised up by God" to the presidency (p. 56). What role do you think God plays in politics? Where did you get your perspective?
2. Trump's rise to the White House "shifted the tectonic plates of political evangelicalism, exposing fissures in a right-wing religious coalition that had sat undisturbed for decades" (p. 63). What plates and fissures are Jenkins referring to here?

CHAPTER 4: REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

1. Who is Rev. Dr. William Barber II? What does he represent? What changes among progressive faith groups is he spearheading?
2. "America is North Carolina now," Barber has said (p. 88). What does he mean by this?
3. What is "moral fusion" organizing (p. 74)?

CHAPTER 5: KEEPERS OF THE STORY

1. Jenkins notes "the complex interaction between religion, race, and activism in recent years, particularly within liberal circles and the Religious Left" (pp. 98–

99). Where have you seen examples of this interaction? How would you describe the groups affiliated with this interaction?

2. Who are the “keepers of the story”? Why are they significant?

CHAPTER 6: WELCOMING THE STRANGER

1. What stood out to you from reading the history behind the “New Sanctuary Movement” (p. 120)? What did you learn about the values and tactics of the Religious Left from that history?
2. What role does protest play in your faith community? Are you satisfied with that role?

CHAPTER 7: CREATION CARE

1. Native Hawaiian activist Joshua Lanakila Mangauil has said, “There is no separation from our spirituality and our environment—they are one and the same” (p. 143). How do you make sense of the relationship between spirituality and the environment? How does the Religious Left do so, according to Jenkins?
2. How has Pope Francis—with his encyclical *Laudato Si’* and in other ways—helped widely share religious environmentalism (p. 154)?

CHAPTER 8: PROPHETS OVER PROFITS

1. Jenkins writes that America has a “robust history of religious economic critique” throughout the twentieth century (p. 172). What examples of this history come to mind for you? How has your faith community been shaped by that history?
2. The Poor People’s Campaign is one approach to engaging economic injustice from the Religious Left (p. 174). What is it doing well? What are its critiques?

CHAPTER 9: THE HARD WORK OF TRANSFORMATION

1. “Within a decade of [Gene] Robinson first raising his bishop’s crook [in 2003], Christian LGBTQ advocacy wasn’t a fringe movement to be dismissed. It was a force” (p. 197). Do you agree with this assessment? Where do you see examples of Christian LGBTQ advocacy today?
2. How present are members of the LGBTQ community in your faith community? How are they viewed? What role do they play there?

CHAPTER 10: TROUBLED WATERS

1. Jenkins claims that “interfaith alliances are now not only one of the Religious Left’s greatest strengths,

but also rapidly becoming a rich resource for secular progressives as well” (p. 216). Why are these interfaith alliances valuable? What difference do they make?

2. According to Linda Sarsour, “There’s a lot more empathetic, theological, ideological, deeper conversations that the Religious Left can have that you can’t have in the larger left, particularly in the secular left” (p. 231). What does Sarsour mean by this? Do you agree with her assessment?

CHAPTER 11: THE NEW GOD GAP

1. What is the new “God gap” that Jenkins describes in this chapter? What has been the result of this gap?
2. How does Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign highlight the impact of the “God gap”? What did her failed campaign reveal?

CHAPTER 12: THE FUTURE OF FAITH

1. “To understand what the Religious Left wants, you have to understand how—and why—they worship” (p. 256). Why does the Religious Left worship? Why do you?
2. What does Jenkins think is the future of the “ever-widening umbrella of progressive faith” (p. 274)? What do you think?

FINAL QUESTIONS

1. What part of the recent history and impact of progressive faith groups did you not know before reading this book? How has your understanding of these groups changed?
2. Where do you fit in Jenkins' story of progressive faith groups? Why is that?
3. Jenkins says his book is not a complete assessment of the Religious Left, and that there are other stories to tell. What progressive faith stories do you think remain to be told?