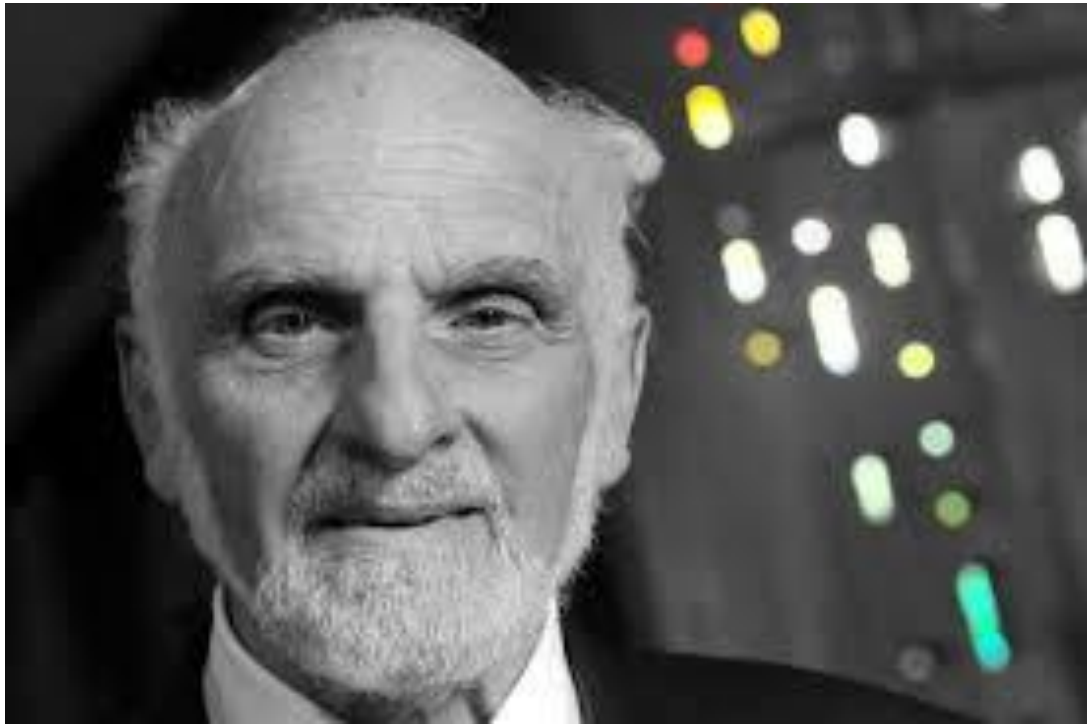
Living Against the Grain, week 4

Thinking Against the Grain Leads to Living Against the Grain

Review: Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

“The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us” even when that dominant culture is largely progressive like the clergy and leadership of the PCUSA.

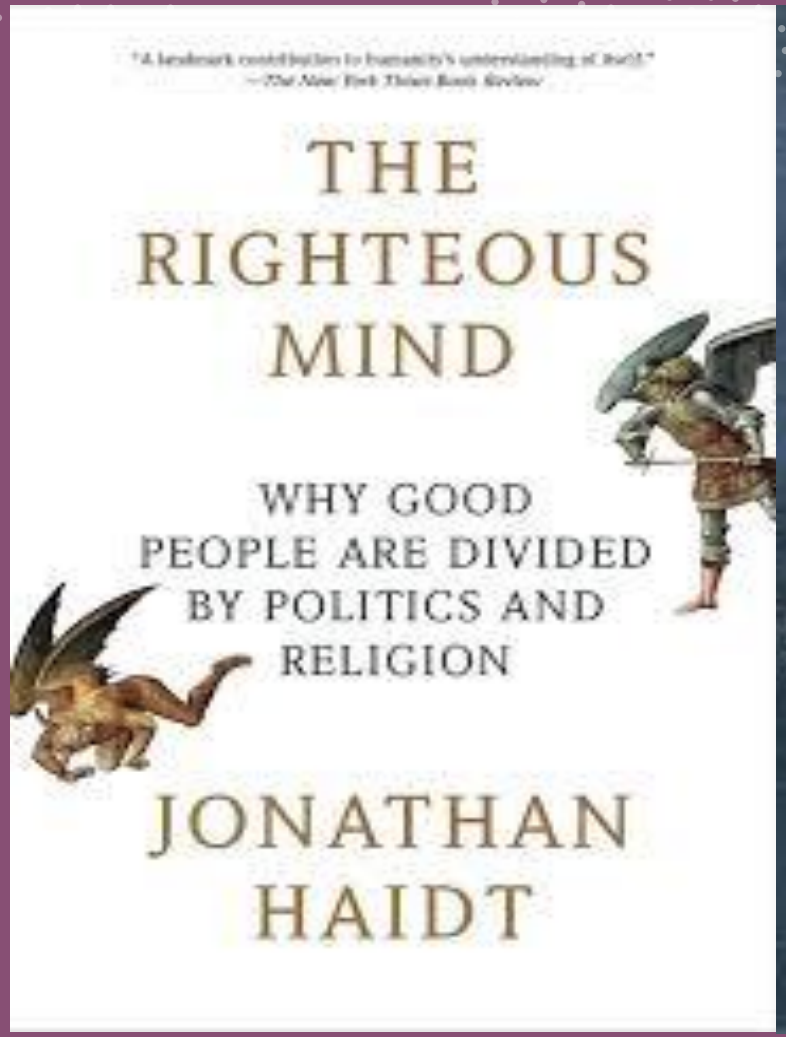


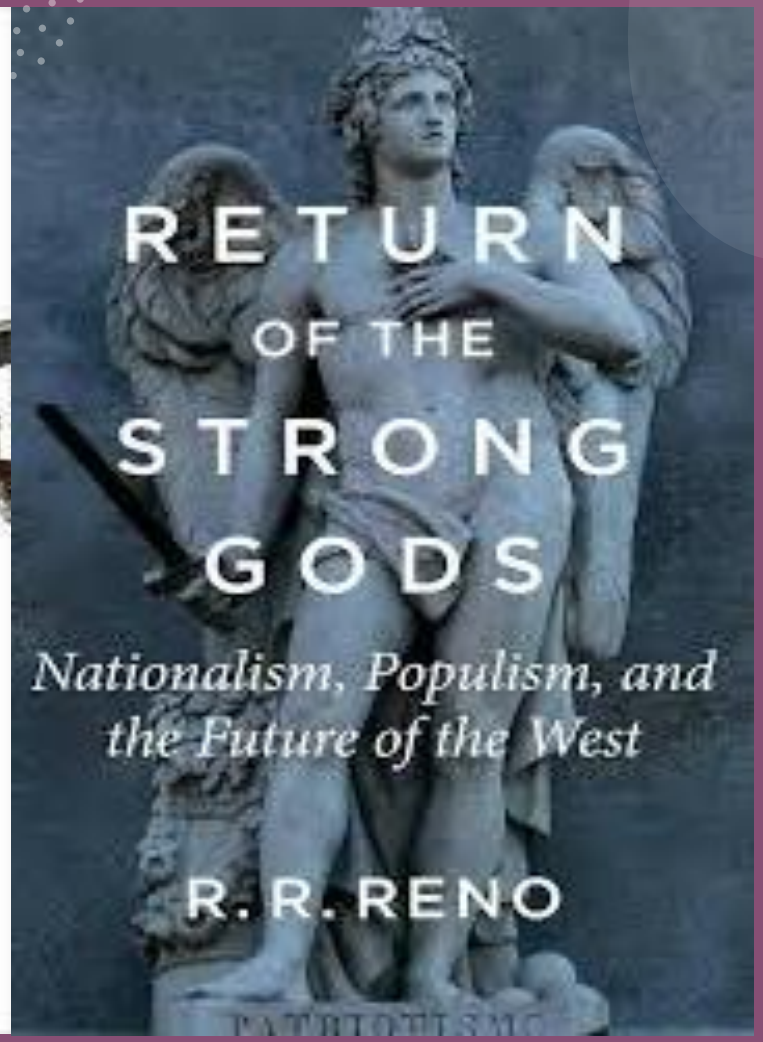
Speaking Truth to All Powers and Authorities

Intentional use of ambiguities and logical fallacies to persuade.

Is Christian Nationalism a Threat or a Bogey Man?

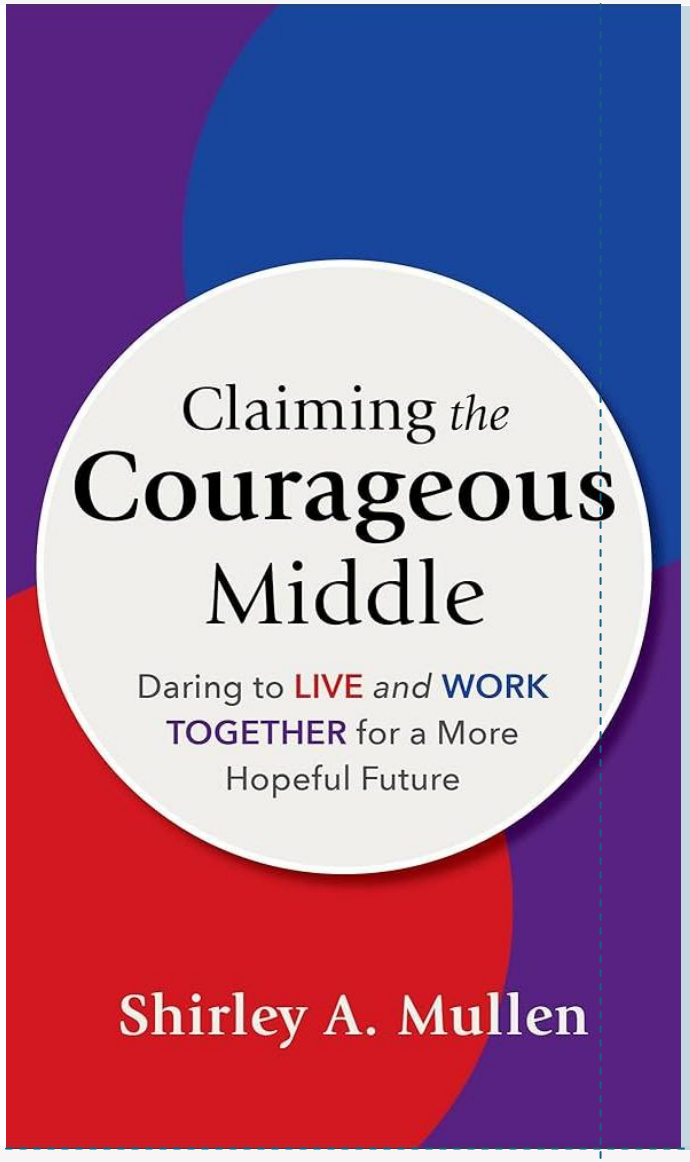
Why we're divided. The PCUSA leadership fears the strong gods that give life to many.





How can Christians contribute to the healing of our cultural and political divide?

Being able to RECOGNIZE and GRASP and then be willing to SPEAK a word about the things that divide us.



A Call for Understanding and a Grace-Filled Future

“Christian faith, where God is the only one who deserves complete loyalty, makes it impossible for Christians to align themselves fully with any side, party, or ideology. As such, it uniquely equips believers to call their communities [in whatever form] away from total partisanship in favor of a more thoughtful and grace-filled future.”

Ways of Thinking Lead to Ways of Living and Vice Versa

“I will be whatever I am—a good citizen, democrat, republican, independent, conservative, liberal, radical, etc.—until I can no longer be a good Christian.”

How will I know and what will I do? Some simple suggestions.

#1 Paying attention

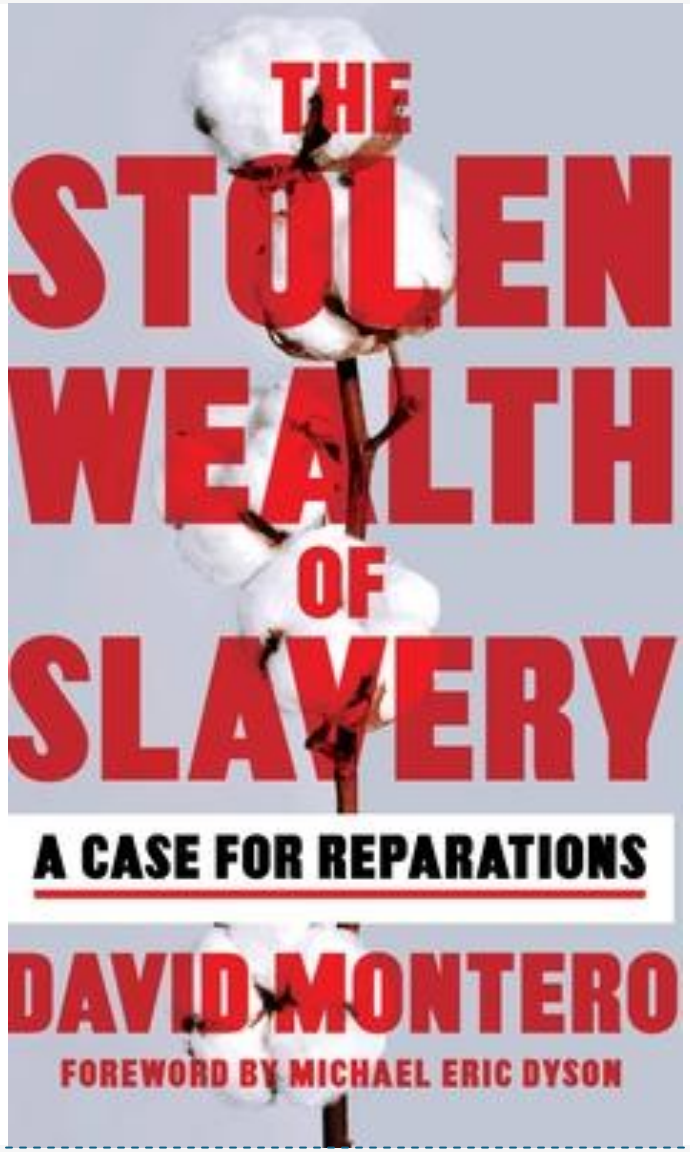
Intellectual formation is a “fundamental demand of human intelligence by which people 'participate in the light of God's mind' and seeks to acquire a wisdom which in turn opens to and is directed towards knowing and adhering to God.”

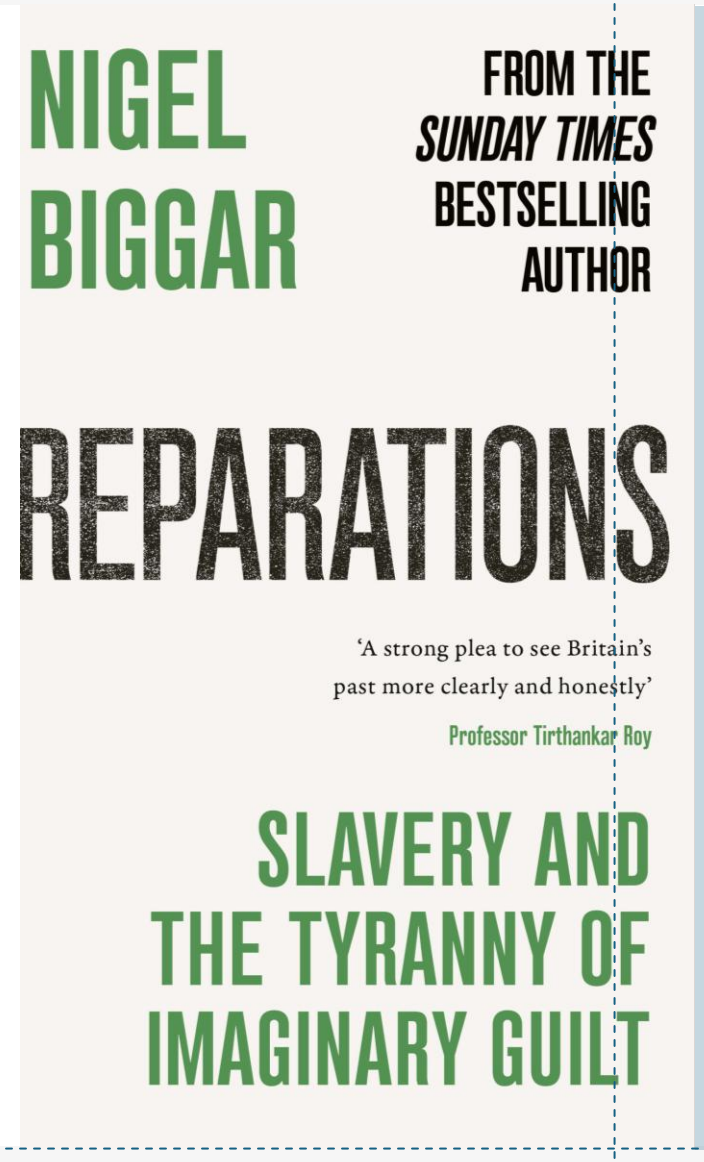
Intellectual formation is a part of spiritual formation. Prayer, Bible Study, History, etc.

PCUSA

Are conservative churches more intentional?

Ways of Thinking and Living #2 Curiosity about views that are not natural to you.





Being able to state a different position to a person's satisfaction, not to win a debate but to understand a different position.

#3: Are we open to God's call to minister to the uninteresting poor and oppressed, marginalized, etc.?

What makes the poor, oppressed, etc. interesting or uninteresting according to Ellul?

The Interesting Poor….

For Ellul, the "interesting" poor are those who have an instrumental value for those in or seeking power, i.e., their plight and attempts to address it, can be used for political purposes.

The uninteresting poor…

Are those who have little or no instrumental value for those in or seeking power, i.e., their plight and attempts to address it, have little use for political purposes. Or, if they received attention they might support the political position of their opponents.

British “grooming/rape gang” scandal: who is the interesting poor?

Caring for the poor for their own sake. Making the unknown poor known, popular, and then moving on to the next group of poor.

Special bias in favor of the household of faith.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints [in Jerusalem]: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia.”

1 Cor. 16:1

Were there no poor in Corinth in Paul's day?

Persecution of Christians in Nigeria?

“There is no genocide in northern Nigeria,’ says African Union Commission chief after Trump remarks. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf says Boko Haram’s first victims are Muslims, warns against oversimplifying conflict in West African country.”

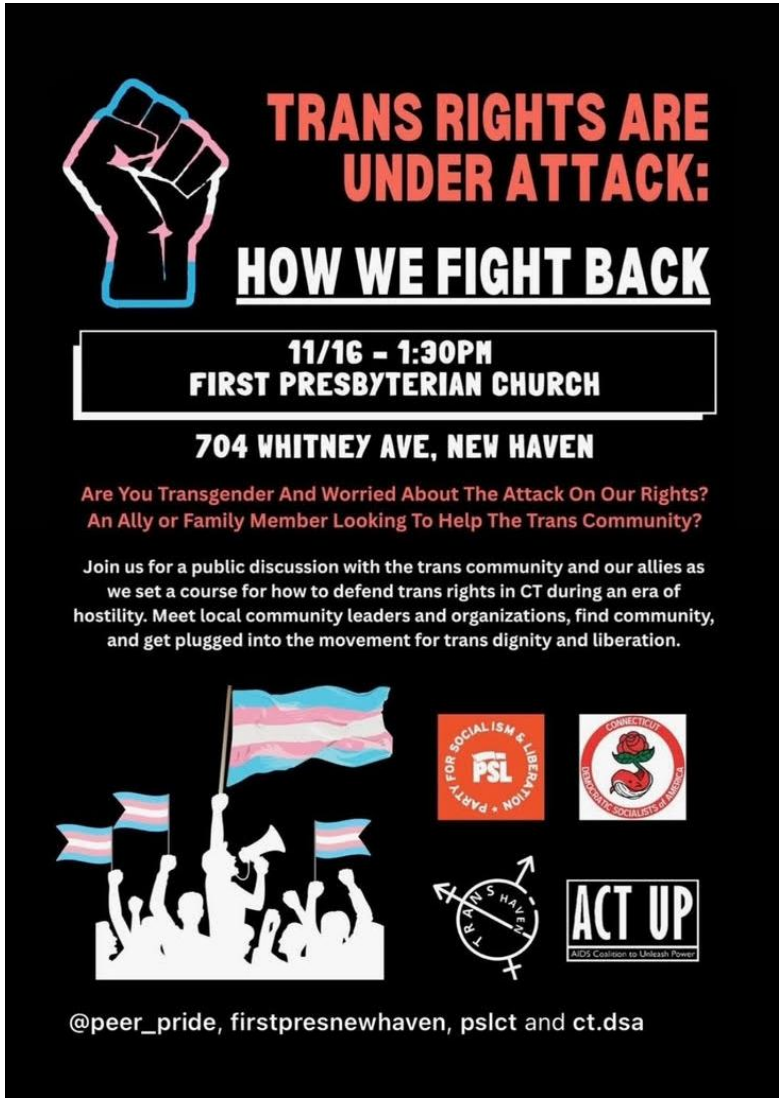
In what senses are the poor in Nigeria interesting and uninteresting? What is at stake?

#4 Going Against the Stream

Pushing then reversing direction.

No major theologian pushed for the defeat of the Nazis more than Karl Barth. Once the end of the Nazis was near and then after the War, no major theologian pushed more for the restoration of the German people.

Changing Sides: Margaret Towner, 1956



Compassion for the "losers."

#5 Lessons from the book of Job 29:16

“I was a father to the needy, and I championed the cause of the stranger.” NRSV

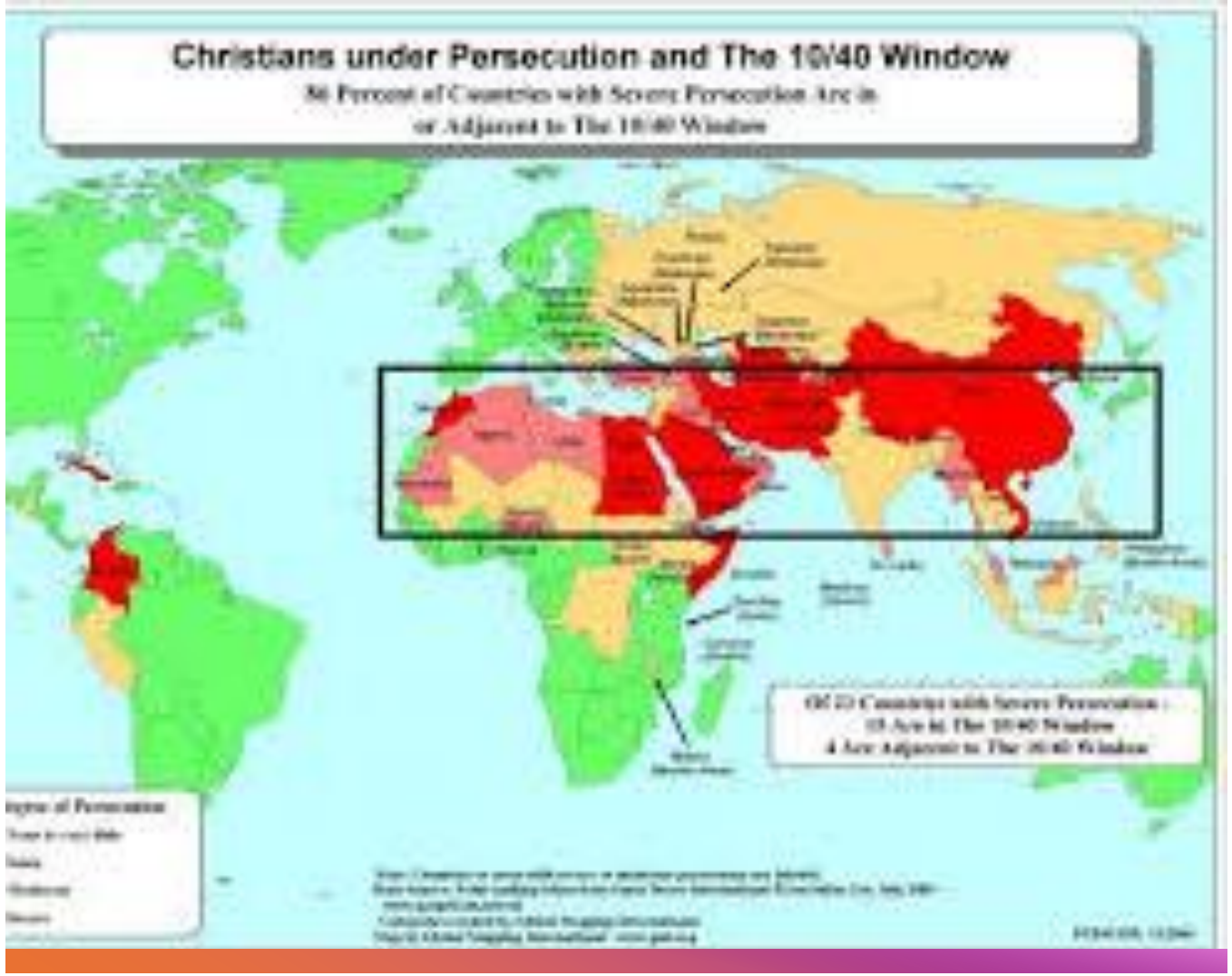
“I was a father to the needy; and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.” ESV

Every church I know has or contributes to:

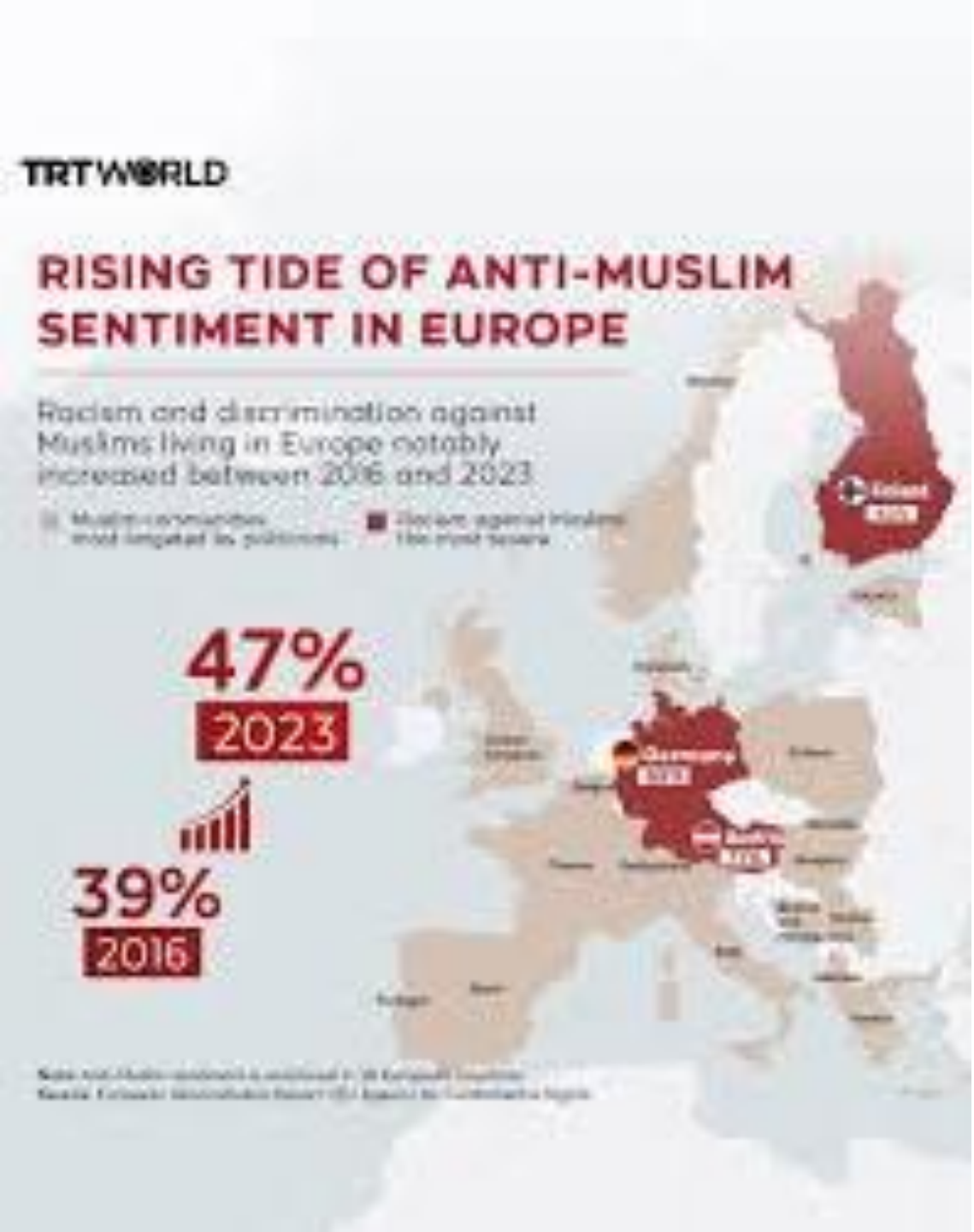
- **Food pantry**
- **Winter Coat drives**
- **Angel Tree for Christmas**
- **Collecting eyglasses**
- **Sponsoring an immigrant family**
- **Disaster relief**
- **Helps deliver meals on wheels**
- **Neighborhood dinners**
- **Mission trips for youth or families**

Who in Pittsburgh and around the world is desperate for attention but ignored by the church and the media?

Sex Offenders

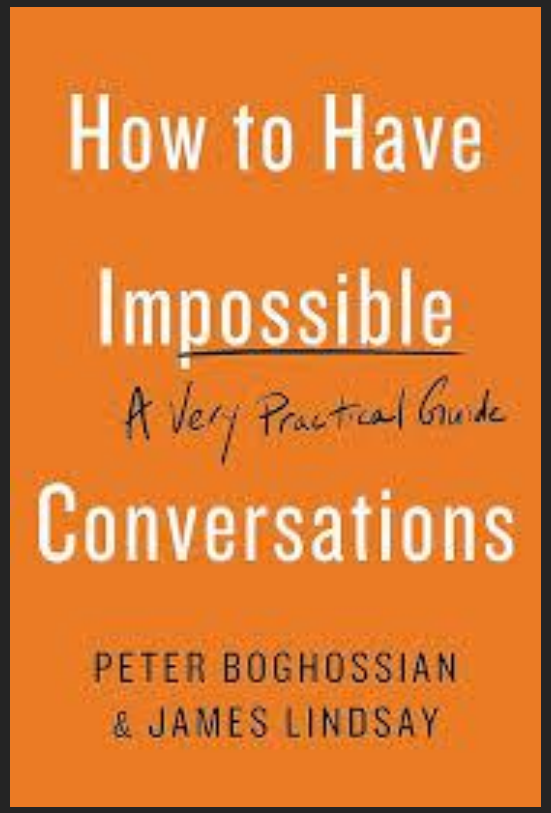


Persecuted Christians in the 2020s. Interesting or uninteresting?



Is Islam a religion of peace/a new strong god?

Anticipating the coming Islamophobia/ “Islamophilia” controversies.



Lesson 6:

Risking demanding conversations.

Intermediary or Buffer Zone

The Hardest Conversation Partner?

Living Against the Grain: Summary

“Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye….You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”