



Church Meets World

VOLUME 4 in the **Church's Teachings for a Changing World** series

Study Guide for Individuals and Groups

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Mutual Invitation

Series co-editor Eric Law developed a process called Mutual Invitation that ensures everyone in the group will have a voice. Try this process with a group of five to twelve people, especially if you're reading the book as part of a group.

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, proceed in the following way:

- The leader or a designated person will share first.
- After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. You need not automatically invite the person next to you.
- After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.
- If you are not ready to share yet, say, "I pass for now," and we will invite you to share later on.
- If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and invite another person to share.

Continue in this manner until everyone has been invited.

Introduction

1. Imagine two ends of a spectrum, one representing a more personal faith that transforms individual lives and the other end representing a more socially oriented faith that transforms society. To which end do you most naturally gravitate, if any?
2. Name some of the major social movements that have affected your life and the life of your wider community.
3. If you're part of a church, how has your church participated in social movements in that community? What has your church engaged, and what has it not engaged? What did you think of these stands?
4. Paul wrote in Ephesians that "our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness." Does this sound true? How do you respond to his statement?

CHAPTER 1

Biblical Foundations

1. Do you read the Bible in your personal practice? What role does it play as you make decisions about your life: how you spend money, how you choose your friends, how you understand your sexuality, etc.?
2. What biblical mandates for the social order can you identify? Which ones apply to your life, and which do you think might apply to another community or time?
3. Christians often disagree on what the Bible says about social issues. How do you think we should deal with those differences?

CHAPTER 2

Church of the Oppressed or the Empire

1. Recall the story of the Emperor Constantine and Christianity's shift from religion of the margins to religion of the insiders. What difference do you imagine this made in the experience of Christians who were alive for both eras?
2. The Episcopal Church did not oppose or split over slavery. What does this demonstrate for you about The Episcopal Church?
3. F. D. Maurice and Vida Scudder were very public Christian Socialists. What does this phrase mean for you, if anything, today?

INTERLUDE

What Is “Power”?

1. Racism is defined as discrimination plus power; in other words, your personal bias, plus the capacity to impact another person’s life negatively because of that bias. Can you think of examples of how this formula works, for racism and other kinds of oppression?
2. In what categories do you have power or privilege? How does that feel? How did you become aware of it?
3. Identify things you can do with your power to challenge injustice.

CHAPTER 3

Contemporary Voices for Justice

1. Many say the Holocaust was unique in Western history. Is this true? How would such an event challenge one’s faith in God today?
2. M. M. Thomas writes that “humanization” for the most downtrodden among us was the work of the Incarnation. Is this true? How does God coming among us change your understanding of the human and of the divine?
3. Liberation movements assume God is especially active among the powerless. What do you think? Have you felt God active in your own life, when you were in great need?

CHAPTER 4

For the Love of the Earth

1. What signs of climate change have you noticed in your community? What do you understand the causes to be?
2. How do you engage the created order? In what ways do you sense God in creation?
3. What does “stewardship of the earth” mean to you? Do you see your faith community tending to the earth in concrete ways? What more could you do?

INTERLUDE

What Is “Social Location”?

1. What is your social location: gender, race, class, age? What else would you include?
2. What does it feel like to state your social location?
3. In what way does this exercise make you feel empowered? In what way is it challenging? Why might that be?

CHAPTER 5

Racism Matters

1. The Episcopal Church, like many of the mainline denominations, is sometimes called a “White Church.” What does that mean to you? Is it true? If so, how can or should we change?
2. Movements for racial justice have occurred throughout history. What do you think the church’s role should be in relation to these movements?
3. How are you engaging the work of racial reconciliation? What do you want to learn? Who do you want to work alongside?

CHAPTER 6

Christian Love

1. Have you noticed changing attitudes toward homosexuality in your circle of family and friends? What is changing? Why?
2. Have you noticed changing attitudes toward marriage in your circle of family and friends? What is changing? Why?
3. In 1985, Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning said, “This church of ours is open to all—there will be no outcasts.” Is this a goal worth pursuing? How would you measure our progress?

Gender Fluidity

1. Have you ever been asked to claim your preferred gender pronoun? How would you answer? How does this question make you feel?
2. Scholars like Phyllis Tribble suggest that in Genesis, the original human being was both male and female. What do you think of this theory?
3. What issues of gender justice are you aware of in your church or community?

What Is “Intersectionality”?

1. Perform a quick self-check: how does the idea of intersectionality make you feel: understood, confused, frustrated?
2. In the General Motors case, the ruling stated that the black women who had brought the case could not benefit doubly from antidiscrimination ordinances and had to choose one, black or woman. Have you ever had to choose an identity?
3. Intersectionality asks each of us to name our intersecting identities. Can you think of a situation in which your multiple identities inform or enrich your experience in unexpected ways?

Jesus and the 99 Percent

1. Are you surprised at the evidence of The Episcopal Church’s overall wealth and education? How does this match your own understanding of the church?
2. Many Christians participate in the stock market. What makes an investment ethical for a Christian?
3. Much of the historic infrastructure to address poverty in the United States no longer exists. How, if at all, do you believe the church should respond?

War and Peace

1. Christians have struggled with the seeming inevitability of war for millennia. Why might a Christian defend war? Why might a Christian oppose it?
2. Reinhold Niebuhr argues that the world is fallen, and that Christians have to deal in the reality of our time. Are there unchangeable realities in your life that force you to make decisions you might feel are less than true to Christian faith?

Liturgy and Social Witness

1. How does liturgy influence your understanding of yourself and the world?
2. Bishop Paul Moore makes a case for why the Eucharist is so central for Christian life, especially for social action. Would you agree? Why would the Eucharist be so important?
3. Singing the Magnificat during Evening Prayer, Jonathan Daniels felt a call to join the Civil Rights Movement. Can you recall a time that participating in liturgy changed your experience of the world or stirred you to any sort of action?