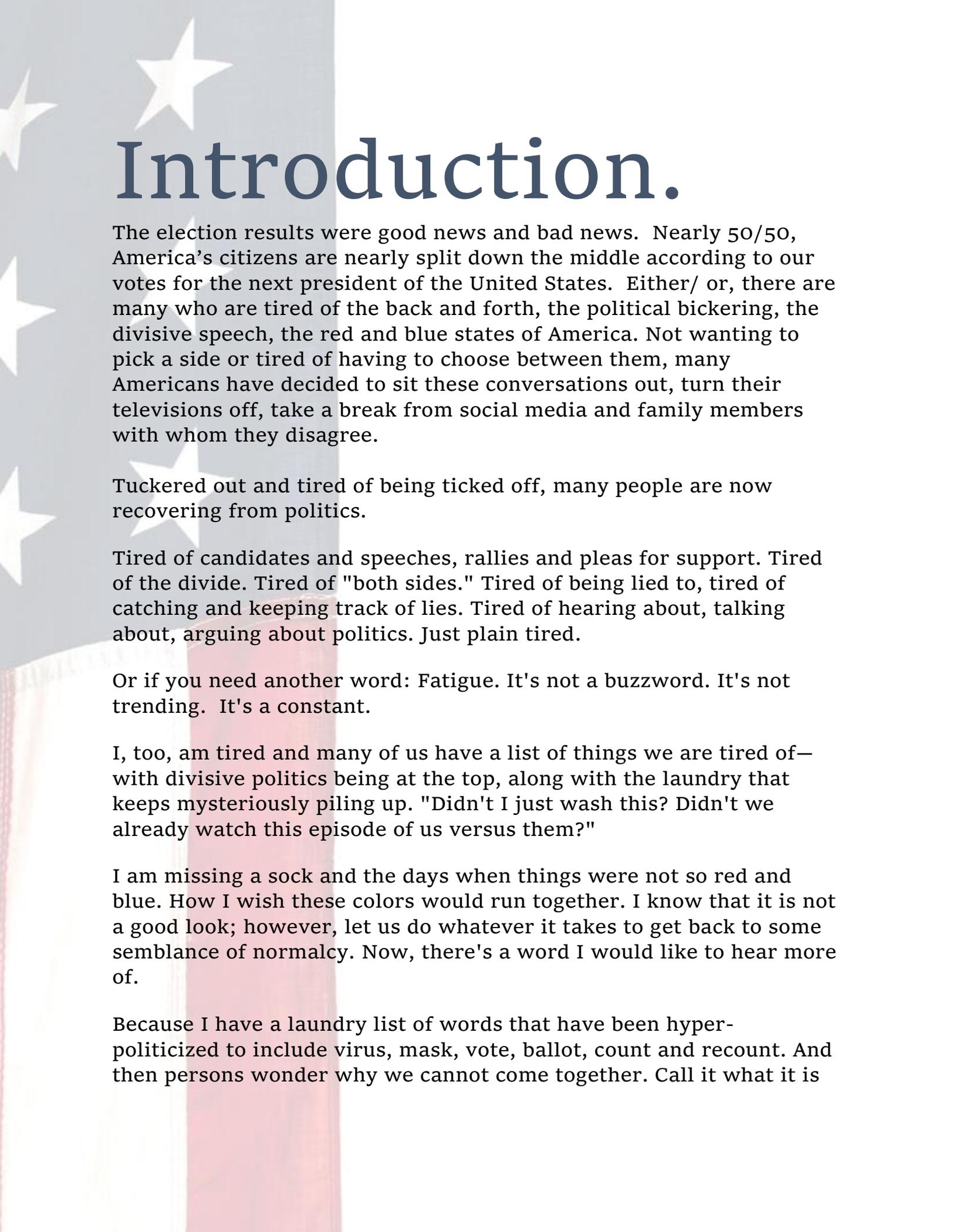




Recovering from

Separating Church from State (Again)

Politics

The background of the page is a stylized American flag, featuring a vertical red stripe on the left side and a field of white stars on a blue background to the right. The stars are arranged in a grid pattern.

Introduction.

The election results were good news and bad news. Nearly 50/50, America's citizens are nearly split down the middle according to our votes for the next president of the United States. Either/ or, there are many who are tired of the back and forth, the political bickering, the divisive speech, the red and blue states of America. Not wanting to pick a side or tired of having to choose between them, many Americans have decided to sit these conversations out, turn their televisions off, take a break from social media and family members with whom they disagree.

Tuckered out and tired of being ticked off, many people are now recovering from politics.

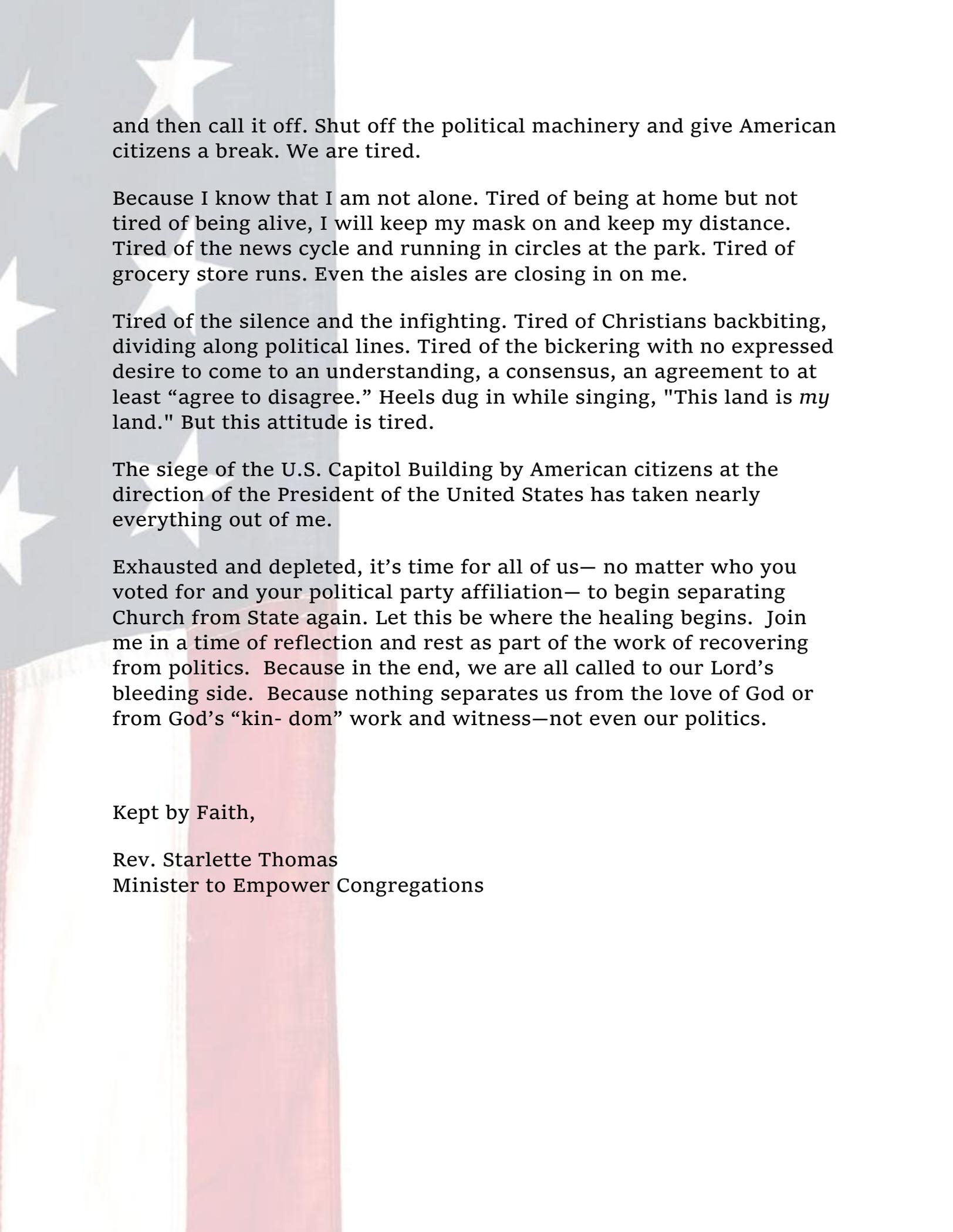
Tired of candidates and speeches, rallies and pleas for support. Tired of the divide. Tired of "both sides." Tired of being lied to, tired of catching and keeping track of lies. Tired of hearing about, talking about, arguing about politics. Just plain tired.

Or if you need another word: Fatigue. It's not a buzzword. It's not trending. It's a constant.

I, too, am tired and many of us have a list of things we are tired of—with divisive politics being at the top, along with the laundry that keeps mysteriously piling up. "Didn't I just wash this? Didn't we already watch this episode of us versus them?"

I am missing a sock and the days when things were not so red and blue. How I wish these colors would run together. I know that it is not a good look; however, let us do whatever it takes to get back to some semblance of normalcy. Now, there's a word I would like to hear more of.

Because I have a laundry list of words that have been hyper-politicized to include virus, mask, vote, ballot, count and recount. And then persons wonder why we cannot come together. Call it what it is

The background of the page is a vertical strip of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The stars are white on a blue field, and the stripes are red and white.

and then call it off. Shut off the political machinery and give American citizens a break. We are tired.

Because I know that I am not alone. Tired of being at home but not tired of being alive, I will keep my mask on and keep my distance. Tired of the news cycle and running in circles at the park. Tired of grocery store runs. Even the aisles are closing in on me.

Tired of the silence and the infighting. Tired of Christians backbiting, dividing along political lines. Tired of the bickering with no expressed desire to come to an understanding, a consensus, an agreement to at least “agree to disagree.” Heels dug in while singing, “This land is *my* land.” But this attitude is tired.

The siege of the U.S. Capitol Building by American citizens at the direction of the President of the United States has taken nearly everything out of me.

Exhausted and depleted, it’s time for all of us— no matter who you voted for and your political party affiliation— to begin separating Church from State again. Let this be where the healing begins. Join me in a time of reflection and rest as part of the work of recovering from politics. Because in the end, we are all called to our Lord’s bleeding side. Because nothing separates us from the love of God or from God’s “kin- dom” work and witness—not even our politics.

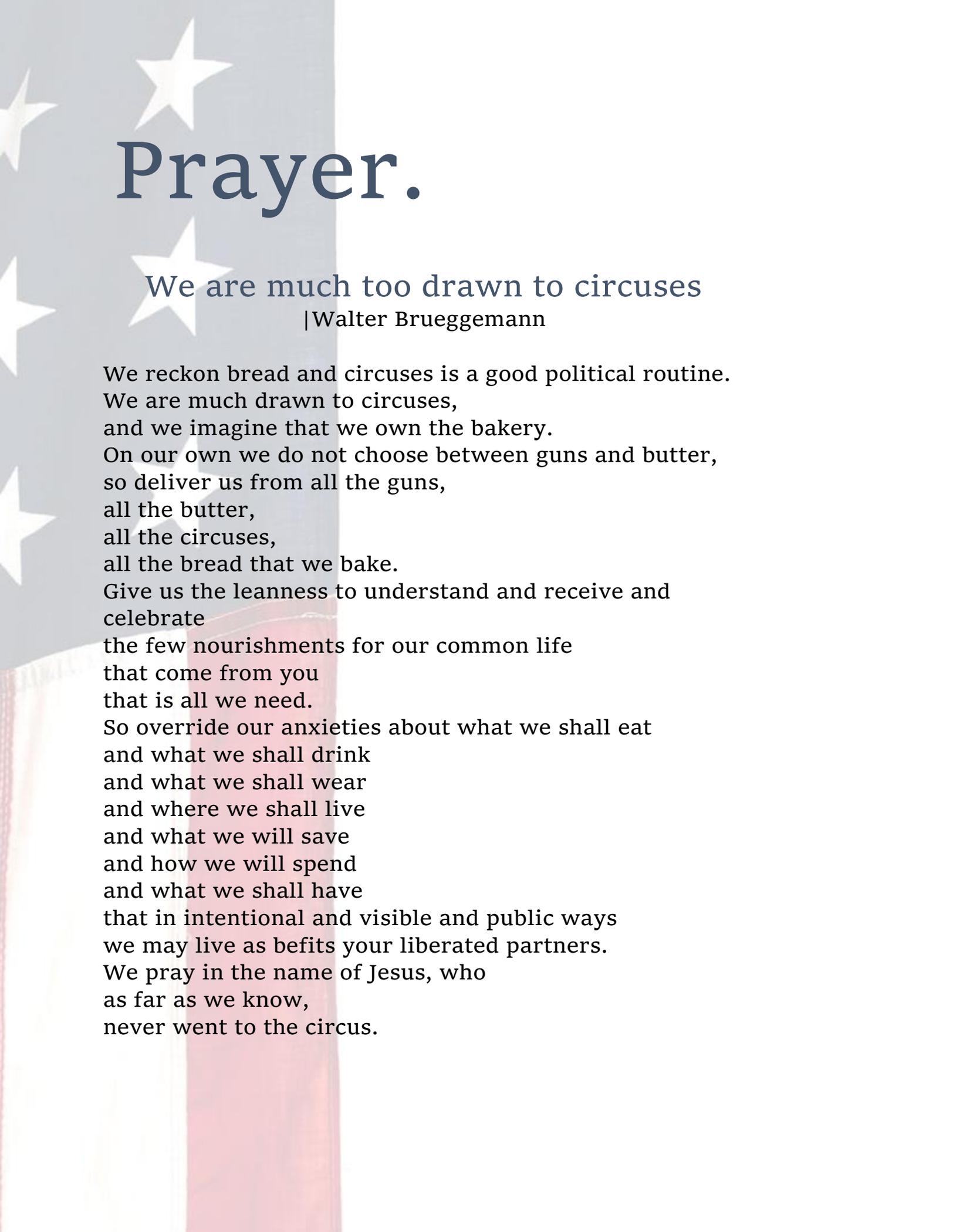
Kept by Faith,

Rev. Starlette Thomas
Minister to Empower Congregations



“To a man
with a
hammer,
everything
looks like a
nail.”

| Mark Twain

The background of the page is a stylized American flag, with white stars on a blue field in the upper left and red and white stripes below. The text is overlaid on this background.

Prayer.

We are much too drawn to circuses

|Walter Brueggemann

We reckon bread and circuses is a good political routine.

We are much drawn to circuses,
and we imagine that we own the bakery.

On our own we do not choose between guns and butter,
so deliver us from all the guns,
all the butter,
all the circuses,
all the bread that we bake.

Give us the leanness to understand and receive and
celebrate

the few nourishments for our common life
that come from you
that is all we need.

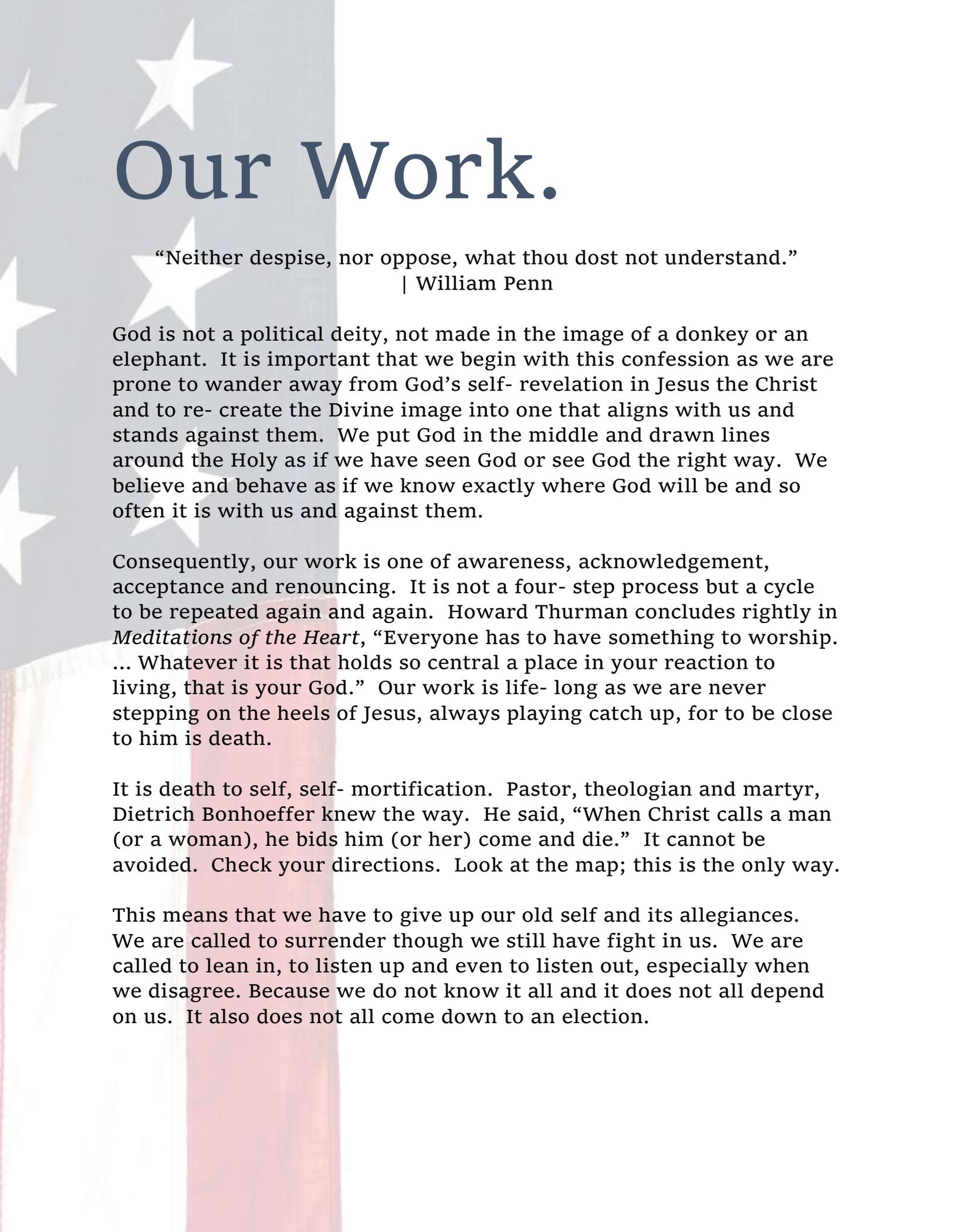
So override our anxieties about what we shall eat
and what we shall drink
and what we shall wear
and where we shall live
and what we will save
and how we will spend
and what we shall have
that in intentional and visible and public ways
we may live as befits your liberated partners.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who
as far as we know,
never went to the circus.

A close-up photograph of the American flag, showing the blue field with white stars and the red and white stripes. The flag is positioned on the left side of the image, with the stars field at the top and the stripes at the bottom.

“To be human
is to feel pulled
in different
directions, and
to marvel—
sometimes in
horror— at your
inability to
control your
own actions.”

| Jonathan Haidt

The background of the page is a stylized American flag, with the stars and stripes visible. The stars are white on a blue field, and the stripes are red and white. The text is overlaid on this background.

Our Work.

“Neither despise, nor oppose, what thou dost not understand.”
| William Penn

God is not a political deity, not made in the image of a donkey or an elephant. It is important that we begin with this confession as we are prone to wander away from God’s self- revelation in Jesus the Christ and to re- create the Divine image into one that aligns with us and stands against them. We put God in the middle and drawn lines around the Holy as if we have seen God or see God the right way. We believe and behave as if we know exactly where God will be and so often it is with us and against them.

Consequently, our work is one of awareness, acknowledgement, acceptance and renouncing. It is not a four- step process but a cycle to be repeated again and again. Howard Thurman concludes rightly in *Meditations of the Heart*, “Everyone has to have something to worship. ... Whatever it is that holds so central a place in your reaction to living, that is your God.” Our work is life- long as we are never stepping on the heels of Jesus, always playing catch up, for to be close to him is death.

It is death to self, self- mortification. Pastor, theologian and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew the way. He said, “When Christ calls a man (or a woman), he bids him (or her) come and die.” It cannot be avoided. Check your directions. Look at the map; this is the only way.

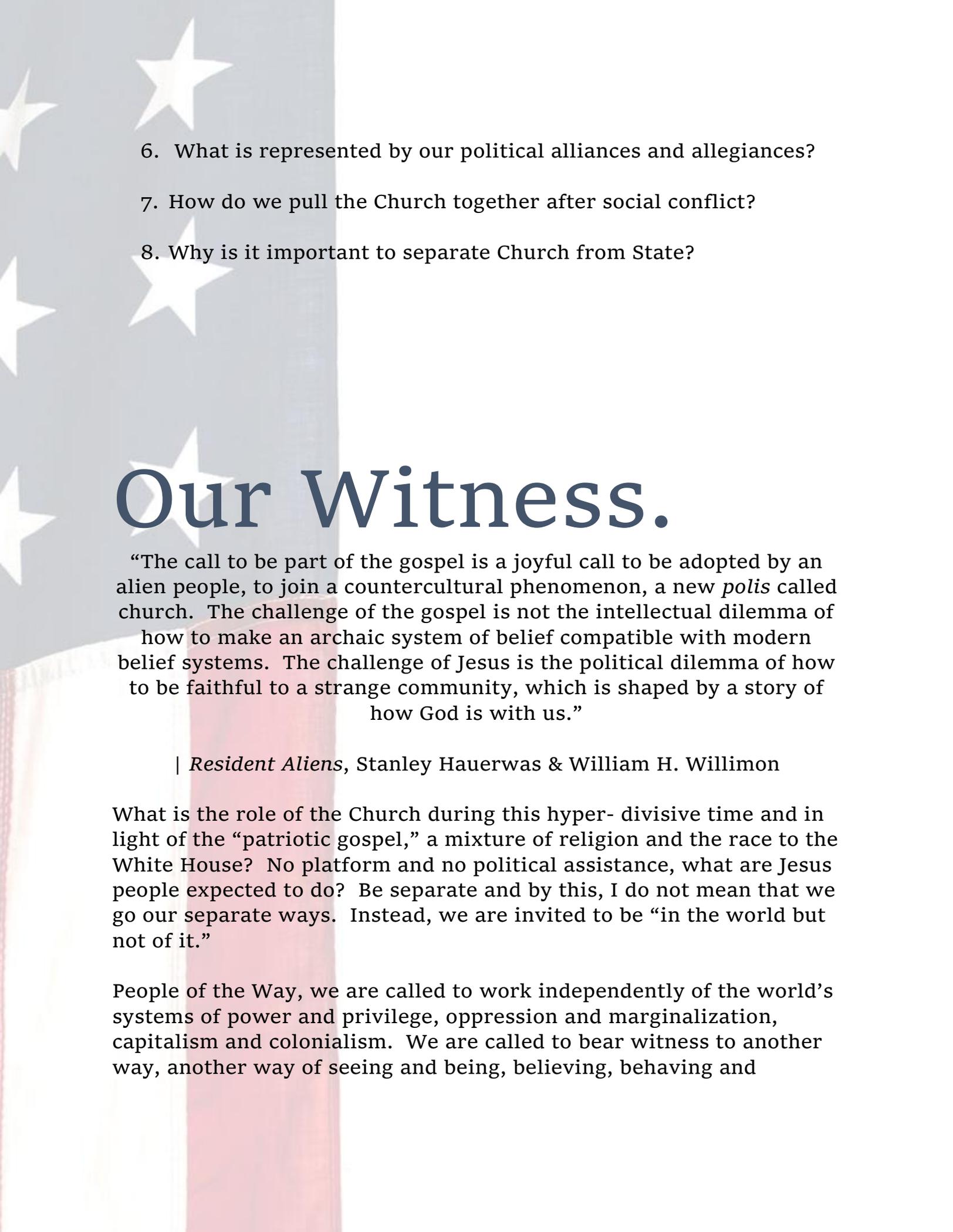
This means that we have to give up our old self and its allegiances. We are called to surrender though we still have fight in us. We are called to lean in, to listen up and even to listen out, especially when we disagree. Because we do not know it all and it does not all depend on us. It also does not all come down to an election.

The background of the slide is a faded American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The stars are white on a blue field, and the stripes are red and white.

Our Questions.

Jesus is the way; we are following behind him. Jesus is the truth; we know it not apart from him. Jesus is the light; we are in darkness without his life and its witness. And to ensure that these truths remain separate, that we don't blur the lines and forget our place, it is important that we walk circumspectly, that we question our directions so that we don't lose our way.

1. Last year is one for the record books. 2020 was not visionary and likely captured nothing on our vision boards. What separations did you notice from expectations versus reality?
2. With more than three hundred and fifty thousand persons dead due to COVID- 19, economic repercussions that Americans will feel for generations and a historic political contest that has left the nation deeply divided, it is no wonder that we are weary and worn down. Still, there are also personal struggles and familial pressures that weigh heavily. So much to choose from, what are you recovering from?
3. How do we address our differences theologically?
4. Why is it important to separate them from our public policies?
5. What does the Church in North America need to separate itself from?

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- The background of the page is a faded American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The stars are white on a blue field, and the stripes are red and white.
6. What is represented by our political alliances and allegiances?
 7. How do we pull the Church together after social conflict?
 8. Why is it important to separate Church from State?

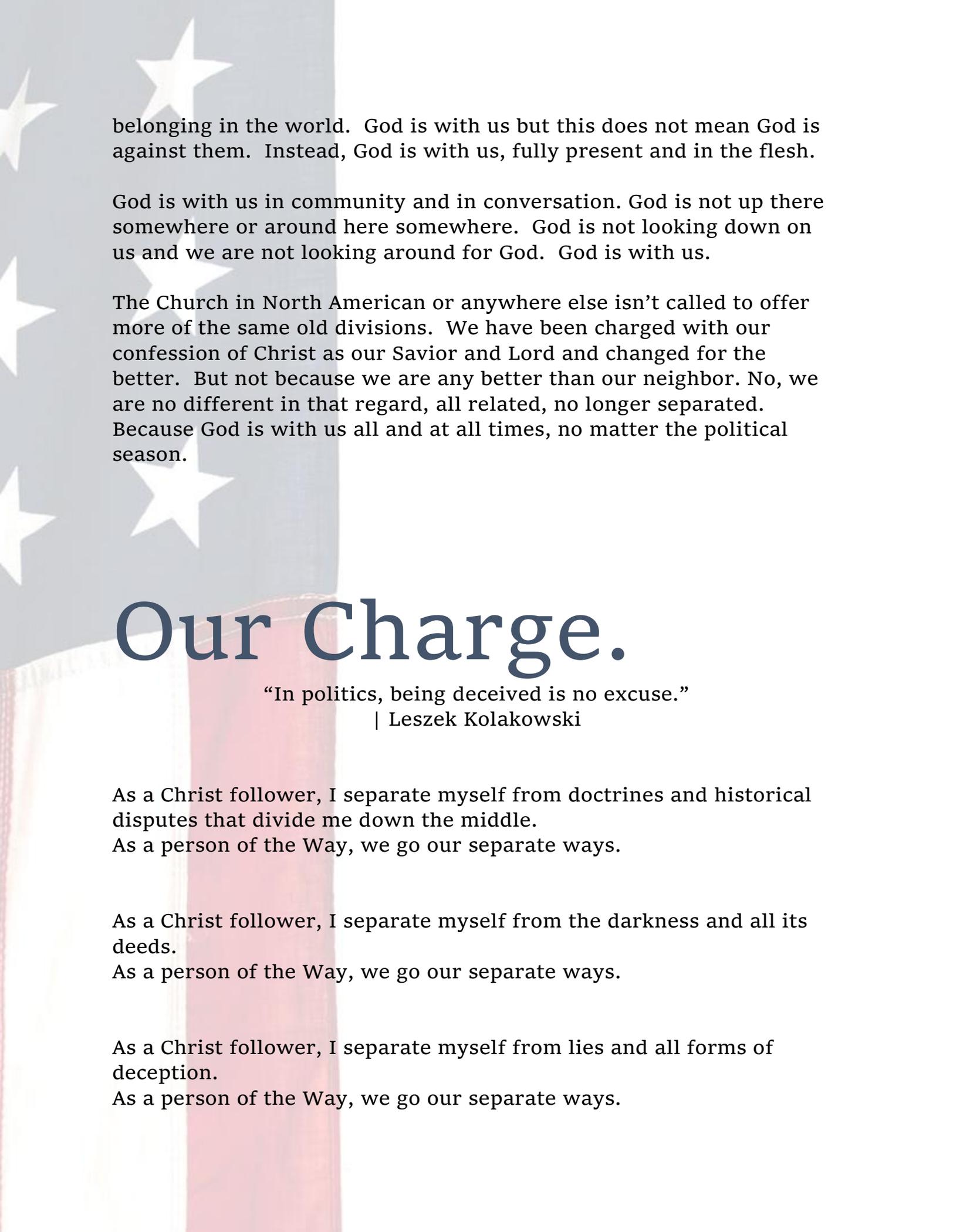
Our Witness.

“The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a countercultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called church. The challenge of the gospel is not the intellectual dilemma of how to make an archaic system of belief compatible with modern belief systems. The challenge of Jesus is the political dilemma of how to be faithful to a strange community, which is shaped by a story of how God is with us.”

| *Resident Aliens*, Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon

What is the role of the Church during this hyper- divisive time and in light of the “patriotic gospel,” a mixture of religion and the race to the White House? No platform and no political assistance, what are Jesus people expected to do? Be separate and by this, I do not mean that we go our separate ways. Instead, we are invited to be “in the world but not of it.”

People of the Way, we are called to work independently of the world’s systems of power and privilege, oppression and marginalization, capitalism and colonialism. We are called to bear witness to another way, another way of seeing and being, believing, behaving and

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belonging in the world. God is with us but this does not mean God is against them. Instead, God is with us, fully present and in the flesh.

God is with us in community and in conversation. God is not up there somewhere or around here somewhere. God is not looking down on us and we are not looking around for God. God is with us.

The Church in North American or anywhere else isn't called to offer more of the same old divisions. We have been charged with our confession of Christ as our Savior and Lord and changed for the better. But not because we are any better than our neighbor. No, we are no different in that regard, all related, no longer separated. Because God is with us all and at all times, no matter the political season.

Our Charge.

“In politics, being deceived is no excuse.”
| Leszek Kolakowski

As a Christ follower, I separate myself from doctrines and historical disputes that divide me down the middle.

As a person of the Way, we go our separate ways.

As a Christ follower, I separate myself from the darkness and all its deeds.

As a person of the Way, we go our separate ways.

As a Christ follower, I separate myself from lies and all forms of deception.

As a person of the Way, we go our separate ways.

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As a Christ follower, I separate myself from favorite hatreds, go- to prejudices, hand me down stereotypes and all forms of division.
As a person of the Way, we go our separate ways.

As a Christ follower, I separate myself from distortions of reality and depictions that devalue the existence of other human beings.
As a person of the Way, we go our separate ways.

As a Christ follower, I separate myself from social supremacies, all tricks and tactics that seek to dehumanize other human beings.
As a person of the Way, we go our separate ways.

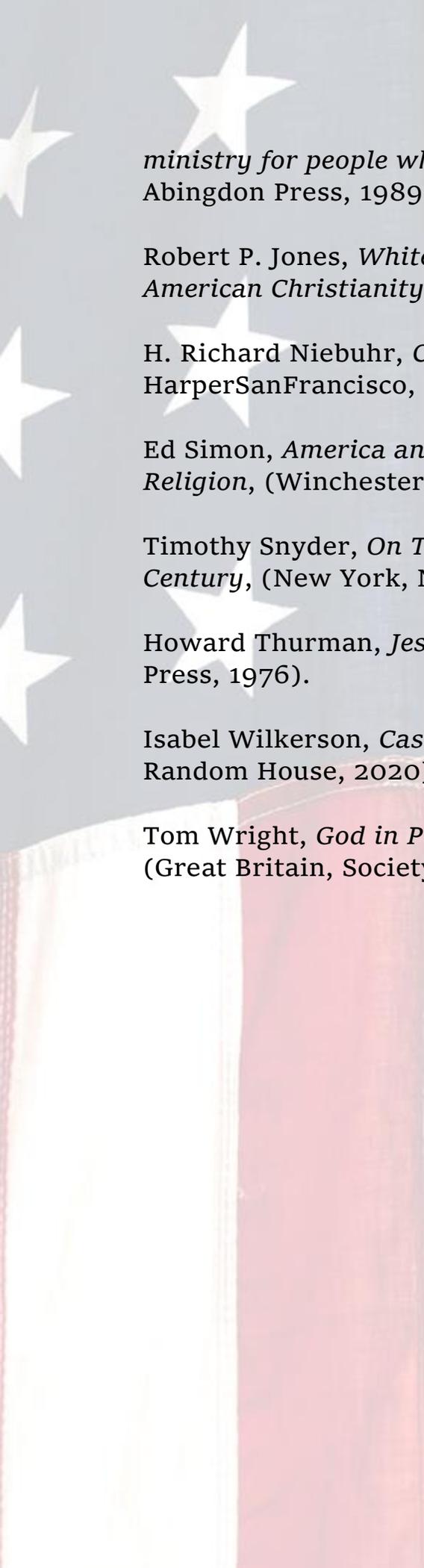
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