

## Reading Group Guide

### Separation of Church and Hate

John Fugelsang

#### Introduction

Separation of Church and Hate is a probing, insightful, and witty look at the ways that Christian nationalists misconstrue the Biblical teachings of Jesus. Written by John Fugelsang, the son of a nun and a Franciscan priest, this book is a guide to taking down hypocrites and to fighting for the love, mercy, and service that are supposed to be at the heart of the Christian faith. Fugelsang writes with heart and humor as he pulls from both his background in comedy and his deep personal knowledge of Biblical teaching.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Early in the book, the author emphasizes the power of Jesus's storytelling through parables, his style of communicating in a highly accessible way for the masses. How is this similar to or different from styles of sermonizing and communicating today?
2. Are you surprised by how brief Jesus's teaching career was? If more people knew that Jesus only taught for three years, do you think that would change how his messages are perceived?
3. What was the Sermon on the Mount? Does the author shine light on any details of this famous speech that you find surprising?
4. The author references Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite several times. At one instance, he quotes her, saying, "Jesus's teachings were codified under oppressive Roman rule . . . The ministry of Jesus is clearly a rejection of the state as religiously sanctified" (26). How is this an example of irony?
5. On pages 48 and 49, the author lists differences between Jesus and the famous New Testament figure of Paul. At the end, the author states that "like most Christians, Paul was a flawed human and not, in fact, Jesus. Paul put his hang-ups into the work, and Jesus's movement inherited them" (49). Why do you think some Christian nationalists have embraced the teachings of Paul over the teachings of Jesus?
6. Do you agree with the author that the opposite of faith is certainty? The author names figures who exemplify this throughout the book. Can you think of anyone else who embodies this statement in their faith and their politics?
7. In the chapter "Master-Race Christians of the Twenty-First Century, and How to Debate Them," the author challenges the popular belief that the United States was created to be a strictly Christian nation. After reading this, how would you argue with a Christian nationalist relative? What specifically would you cite to try to convince them to question their stance?
8. When debating a Christian nationalist, the author suggests that one "engage gently. Debate if need be. Stay relaxed, don't be intimidated, and try to frame your points around asking questions" (61). Does this mirror Jesus's style of debating and refuting the Pharisees? How might someone respond to an argument framed around questions as opposed to an argument framed around absolutes?
9. "Jesus's longest recorded private conversation with anyone in the Bible" (91) is that in which he speaks with the Samaritan woman (a countercultural act in itself, as Jews and Samaritans were not supposed to interact). After this conversation, many people in the woman's community came to follow Jesus. What does this say about the power of a simple conversation, of taking the time to speak and to listen? In such a polarized society, how might you gradually move toward peaceful conversations with those who have different backgrounds?

10. John Fugelsang is a comedian engaging, in this book, with an urgent and divisive topic. Other than causing you to laugh aloud while reading, what joys and even advantages does a comedic stance bring to the conversation about Christian nationalism? Do you think you would have been impacted in the same way if this book were not written by a comedian?

11. Jewish law and Christian doctrine vary significantly, including on the topic of abortion and fetal viability. Do you see any parallels between the development and enforcing of Christian doctrine (Pope Pius IX and fetal viability, page 150, for example) and the development and enforcing of laws and right-leaning political ideals today?

12. Much of this book is, ultimately, about the character of Jesus—who he was, what he stood for, and how his teachings are misconstrued. After reading, do you think Jesus is a character many Americans, religious or not, should hold as a role model? Do you think communicating the actual teachings of Jesus would help America heal, or should we move away from spiritual/religious figures entirely?