

Book Review

REPUBLICAN JESUS: How the Right Has Rewritten the Gospels. By Tony Keddie. Oakland: University of California Press. 2020.

According to Genesis, God created us in His image; according to Tony Keddie, Republican politicians and preachers have created Jesus in theirs.

Keddie's basic premise in *Republican Jesus: How the Right Has Rewritten the Gospels* is nothing new. Other scholars have shown how different versions of Jesus reflect their cultural milieu: Thomas Jefferson's Enlightenment Jesus, the nineteenth century maternal Jesus, the manly Jesus from the early 20th century, the hippie Jesus of the 1960s (*Godspell!*), and so on. Keddie updates that list with a contemporary Republican Jesus who "loves borders, guns, unborn babies, and economic prosperity and hates homosexuality, taxes, welfare, and universal healthcare," in the words of the publisher's blurb.

The book begins with "A Portrait of Republican Jesus" as shown in Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard's *Killing Jesus* (2013). Keddie describes the book as "a political allegory in which ancient characters and events are used to express the authors' modern political views on class, race, and religion." The result is "a gospel of limited government marked by anti-Semitism, white nationalism, and Christian supremacism" (33).

Describing the origins of today's Republican Jesus, Keddie notes that the Protestant Reformation and classical liberalism provided important antecedents, but he follows Kevin Kruse (in *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, 2015) in emphasizing the role of businessmen who enlisted religious leaders in their opposition to the New Deal. The resentment politics of the Tea Party built on that 1930s foundation and lead directly to Donald Trump and what is effectively a new version of Christianity.

The meat of the book is Part Three, in which Keddie describes the Republican Jesus's views on family values (especially abortion and LGBTQ+ issues), welfare, the separation of church and state, immigration, and the end times. Republicans use what Keddie calls the "GOP method" of biblical interpretation: they *garble* the text by mistranslating or misstating the words of the Bible; they *omit* context and cherry-pick phrases; and they *patch* this "cut-up text together with other cut-up texts into the framework of a carefully designed quilt that's backed by ignorance, stuffed with hatred, and sewn with self-interest" (10).

So, what would Jesus do? Keddie, a respected historian of early Christian history at the University of British Columbia, knows his stuff and can explain what the

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scriptures *really* say about these issues. Republicans, he says, are engaging in “biblical gaslighting” (267).

Some readers will find this book useful as a way to refute conservative friends and family members (although the book comes with no guarantees that anyone will actually listen). Probably more will appreciate it as a way to understand something of our contemporary scene—like the conservative candidate for governor in Georgia who is currently campaigning with a simple slogan: “Jesus, Guns, Babies.” Suddenly, it almost makes sense.

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