

One of the shocking messages of Christmas is the number of words describing change. And it's radical change. It's deep and not shallow. That's why justice and peace takes so much work and time. Each generation has to learn the same message of the baby Jesus – that he wants the world restored.

Just take Mary's Magnificat:

God has scattered the **proud** in the thoughts of their hearts.

God has brought down the **powerful** from their thrones and lifted the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the **rich away empty**.

These are not comforting words for those mentioned. And they are all over the texts we use for Advent and Christmas. So it's an ongoing battle when we don't have justice and peace and fairness and equal opportunity and so and on. So please read this and compare what is said to Canada. And unfortunately too often, the church is who the Christmas scriptures describe. What year will we really have a racism free Christmas?

## The Shocking Necessity of Racist Violence

It takes cruelty and brute force for human subjugation to work.

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| OCTOBER 9, 2020

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

*Stony the road we trod*

*Bitter the chastening rod*

*Felt in the days when hope unborn had died...*

*God of our weary years*

*God of our silent tears...*

*(excerpts from "Lift Every Voice and Sing")*

Humans were created by love, for love, to love. As such, we hold a number of love-directed freedoms that persist despite sin and distortion of our loves. Sin, while grievous and comprehensive, does not recreate our humanity nor destroy our first-ordained purposes. When our love- and freedom-empowered design is restricted or oppressed by sin, we are compelled to resist. We cry out. We push back or seek shelter. We strategize and plan. We protest and legislate. We prophesy and lament. We are human. Consequently, unrelenting violence and all of its forms—physical, psychological, and theological—is necessary to maintaining human subjugation. Racism requires violence. Throughout the history of what is now the United States of America, violence, the generational scars of it, and the threat of more to come, has been an inexorable part of the race story.

The "race riots" of Oklahoma, Chicago, St. Petersburg, and Atlanta, and the history before them, seeded the Great Migration that forced families like mine to journey from Mississippi to Maryland. Some followed the call of our escaped enslaved ancestors even past the borders of the United States.

An acclaimed psychologist, the late Olivia Hooker, [tells](#) of being a small girl during the massacre on Tulsa's Black Wall Street district in the early 1920s. The slaughter destroyed over 30 city blocks, leveled more than 1,200 homes, and killed 300 people. The Oklahoma governor declared martial law and mobilized the National Guard to imprison every black person not yet in jail.

A group of white men stormed the home of Hooker as her mother and siblings stood in fear. In a fit of anger and covetousness, the intruders smashed the family's beloved piano. That senseless act tightly followed a peculiar expression of civil religion. Before smashing the piano, the intruders gently removed the closed Bible that was positioned atop the piano. This perverse version of Christianity, bound to white supremacy, effectively shoved aside the faith held by blacks before destroying property and personhood to maintain temporal and carnal power. The so-called shared faith of white Christians and black Christians does not guard against violence toward the Emmett Tills, Tamir Rices, or George Floyds of society.

White supremacy's sinful dance, swaying back and forth between Klansmen's sheets and clergy robes, pains and plagues Christian of color and lies to white Christians. Violence is not neutered or challenged. White Christianity's very design exists to maintain false piety and sear the consciences of white people against the oppression and exploitation of blacks.

Isabel Wilkerson, in her new book, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, writes how America's racism works within the broader and older idea of a caste system. Caste systems rely on dominance and inferiority and must be enforced and reinforced by violence: gun-toting militias, vigilante neighbors, under-policing, and corrupt over-policing to protect select neighborhoods from crime. This violence is even wielded, or conveniently ignored, by those who claim to follow the Prince of Peace.

This necessary violence of racism is not only physical, but deeply psychological and spiritual. Spiritual violence abusively castes people within our systems but also in our imaginations and social media feeds with name-calling such as "heretic" or "unbeliever." Social power further amplifies and legitimizes these accusations. How we think about our neighbor and enemy, resources and rights, duties and governance is both theological and political. Moreover, our theologies are political because how we live in light of who God is is necessarily public, civic, and embodied.

Spiritual violence against black Americans in the political sphere means disparaging and minimizing the faith of black Christians. Appealing to the notion of a singular Christian worldview, Southern Baptist Seminary president Al Mohler stated in a room filled with white men that [a vote for Trump in 2020](#) would be most in line with "Christian worldview." Mohler's [statement](#) went beyond the partisan and political. His statement was theological with significant implications for the unity of the church in America. As president of the flagship seminary for the largest Christian denomination in the United States, his religious endorsement of a highly controversial president known for racist and sexist rhetoric and actions mattered significantly.

Christians debate the appropriateness of religious leaders speaking so openly about their personal support of candidates and the necessity of other Christians to fall in line. My concern, while subtle, knocks at the door of spiritual violence. By saying one's "Christian worldview" leads to reelecting Donald Trump in 2020, Mohler asserts that faithful Christian theology applied to politics must draw the same political conclusions as most white conservative Christian men in this country. This is the group that has voted and will likely vote for Trump in large numbers again.

This same assertion, proclaimed from pulpits, tweets, and faux confessional statements, put on trial the Christian integrity and witness of black Christians who have overwhelmingly voted against Donald Trump. Black women report some of the highest levels of Bible study, charitable giving, authoritative views on Scripture, amount of time praying, and church attendance. But because of their political and theological misalignment with Trump and Republican agendas, they are deemed by default biblically

ignorant, and at worse, heretics, cultural Marxists, and whatever new term works to caricature and discredit those holding a differing view. Welcome to politically motivated spiritual violence.

Despite claiming loyalty to the same Jesus, divergent “Christian worldviews” historically produce people like George Whitefield, Johnathan Edwards, John Gresham Machens, and even Al Mohlers on the one hand, and the Harriet Tubmans, Ida B Wells, Vashti McKenzies, and Stacey Abrams on the other.

Most people, I imagine, watched in horror the recent footage of the unarmed black men killed in 2020 and wept through the details of Breonna Taylor’s death. Even those who deny systemic racism likely oppose the in-your-face violence of public lynchings. However, the horrors of 2020, coupled with the trauma-cementing psychological and spiritual violence of news networks popular to white “conservative Christians,” discredit each victim. Prominent white church leaders and their political candidate pile on by publicly minimizing or justifying their deaths.

The year 2020 has been a perfect storm of violence for black Christians—physical, psychological, and spiritual. A global pandemic prejudiced against black, brown, and indigenous people; further unemployment and underemployment; a politically polarizing president during an election year; and the deaths of several public and beloved African American figures—John Lewis, Chadwick Boseman, Lou Brock, C.T. Vivian, and Barbara Harris—is exhausting, grueling, and traumatizing. Yet the very existence of black Christians in America past and present testifies to the calling and keeping power of God alone.

The humanity and its intrinsic resistance to oppression is so evident in the black believer in America, pushing, pressing, praying, and protesting against the violence of racism. Through humor, scholarship, and art, they mock the foolishness of the caste system that places the beloved of God on the bottom. The necessary violence of racism is combated by the nonviolent and steadfast resistance of black Christians, which reminds all of us who we are designed to be. White Christians, will your shared humanity and Christianity move you from violence and violence-denying to the nonviolence of empathy, solidarity, and repair?

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