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Spiritual Migration: "Toward a Loving God of Liberation"

Colossians 1:15, 19-20

2 Peter 1:5-7

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We have heard it said, "Christianity must change or die." There's truth in that for sure. Yet, I'm also worried about the killing Christianity is doing. What has happened in the past, now, and what will possibly be in the future, because we have not been a school of love. Rather, Christianity has been a caldron of fear, hostility, prejudice, judgment, and worse.

If the Christian faith is to experience the great spiritual migration it needs, our cover-ups and denial must be replaced with humility and a deep change of heart, because the less aware Christians are of how dangerous Christianity has been, the more dangerous Christianity will be.

Christianity has been driving around with a loaded gun in its glove compartment, and that loaded gun is its violent image of God. It is driving around with a license to kill, and that license is its Bible, read uncritically. Along with its loaded gun and license to kill, it's driving around with a sense of entitlement driven from a set of beliefs with a long, ugly, and largely unacknowledged history.

If we haven't dealt with passages like Deuteronomy 7 and 1 Samuel 15 and Psalm 137:9 we still have some important work to do. We have to find a way to disarm our faith as a potential instrument of hate and convert it into an instrument of love. We need to convert Christianity from a warrior religion to a reconciling religion. Do we think we have the right to kill people of other religions in the name of Jesus, because we can

justify it with a chapter and verse in the Bible! What then is the relationship between Christianity, love, and violence?

We must face where we have been, if we are to move forward differently. We must acknowledge that anti-Semitism began within decades of Christ and the apostles, and grew like cancer to the Holocaust exposed its as the atrocity it was. Then, there has been the rejection of women as equal in church life and leadership, a legacy that began early and continues in many places today. And then there has been the evil that has stretched from Constantine to Pope Nicholas to Columbus to contemporary American and European politics: the tradition of white and Christian privilege and supremacy. All those who were not Christian are seen as enemies of Christ which were then captured, vanquished or subdued, and then there was the reducing of persons to perpetual slavery. And it is not true that black people in America live under a threat of racial violence, never quite feeling that they are fully equal citizens in the nation that their enslaved ancestors built. (Yolanda Pierce "Religion and Politics", 2015)

In some ways, many within Christianity are still reading the Bible exactly as our misguided ancestors did. This has allowed the forms of Christianity that speak of God and gold, Christianity and white supremacy and privilege, Christianity and colonialism and exceptionalism, and Christianity and violence.

Is the Bible, not being used by some to justify a doctrine of domination, by justifying human supremacy, and the exploitation of the earth and all its creatures? And what about Christian eschatology: the belief in the second coming of Christ which according to some: righteous souls go to heaven, and then God will destroy the earth and all upon it who do not

believe. Thus, who cares about the earth? What's a little domination in comparison to divine damnation? "The toxicity of what we are doing to our planet and the toxicity of racism have the same roots." (Sister Simone Campbell). To salvage at least some sectors of the Christian faith from violence against people and our planet, we must go to those roots. We must dare to embark on a great theological migration, challenging many of our deepest assumptions based on the church's teachings about God.

Our next steps will need to be facing the words we use in our Christian theology, words like: almighty, sovereignty, kingdom, dominion, supreme, elect, chosen, clean, remnant, sacrifice, lord, and even God; have dangerous viruses within them, malware that must be identified and purged from our software if we want our future to be different from our past. It is not just that our ancestors merely misinterpreted a few Scriptures in their day; rather, they consistently practiced a dangerous form of interpretation that deserves to be rejected, and replaced by a morally wiser form of interpretation today.

This when done, will not constitute infidelity to Christ, but fidelity, because we are now seeing in the life and teaching of Christ, and especially in the cross and resurrection of Christ, his radical rejection of dominating supremacy in all its forms.

Rather, than seizing power, Jesus was constantly empowering others. King Jesus did not seize, hoard or exercise domineering ways, which was typical of kings, conquistadors and religious leaders. Rather, Jesus empowered others.

He descended the ladder and pyramids of influence instead of climbing them, released power instead of grasping it, served instead of dominated.

In Christ, we see an image of a God who is not armed with lightning bolts but with basin and towel, who speaks not threats but good news for all, who rode not a warhorse but a donkey, and wept in compassion for a people who do not know the way of peace.

In Christ, God is supreme, but not in the same way as the old view. Rather, God is the supreme healer, the supreme friend, the supreme life-giver who self-empties in gracious love for all. The king of kings and lord of lords is the servant of all and the friend of sinners. The so-called weakness and foolishness of God are greater than the so-called power and wisdom of human regimes.

2,000 years ago, Jesus inserted into the human imagination a radical new vision of God – non-dominating, nonviolent, supreme in service, and self-giving. That vision was so radically new and different that we have predictably spent our first 2,000 years trying to reconcile it with the old visions of God that it challenged. Are we finally ready to worship and follow the God that Jesus was trying to show us?

Christ overturned all conventional understandings of supremacy, lordship, sovereignty, and power by purging them of violence. In this way, according to our reading from Philippians chapter 2, Jesus manifested the true nature or image of God. And for this reason, God elevated Jesus's name above all other names, so that every knee should bow to Jesus as Lord. In other words, one day, all of humanity will become convinced that the way of violence and domination, enslavement and exploitation, supremacy and privilege are ugly, wrong, suicidal, and ungodly. They will realize that the violent "winners" were wrong, and the nonviolent "losers" –

those who walked the path of Jesus – were right. Jesus' way of self-giving was right. His humble path of gentleness was right. His form of servant leadership was the one we should have honored all along. Jesus way of nonviolence, self-giving love, will earn the trust of all humanity. We will ultimately migrate toward the way of Jesus. Between now and then, let us honor and love God by doing all we can - in the way of Jesus. Amen and Amen.