



Tear Online é licenciada sob uma Licença Creative Commons.

## PRAYING WITH BLACK PEOPLE FOR DARKER FAITH<sup>1</sup>

---

*Orando com pessoas Negras por uma fé negra*

**Claudio Carvalhaes**<sup>2</sup>

Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better.  
Martin Luther King Jr.

*It always seems impossible until it's done.* Nelson Mandela

Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.  
George Orwell

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.  
I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*  
Jesus in John 10:10

### Introduction<sup>3</sup>

For more than 500 years, indigenous people have had their lands stolen, their culture appropriated, their people marginalized, exploited, put to jail, killed.

For almost 400 years, black people have had their origins uprooted, their culture appropriated, their people kidnapped, pushed to the margins of society, exploited, put in jail, killed.

For more than 180 years, Mexican people have had their lands stolen, and with Latinx people, they have had their culture appropriated, their people abused, pushed to the margins of society, exploited, put in jail, killed.

For all of its history, the stranger, the non-white, have been demoted, thrown away, defaced, abused, ripped apart, made a source for the building of a nation.

For all these years, there has been a whitening of the continent. The project of whitening the continent has been made possible by the de-negrating,<sup>4</sup> blackened, turning negro, of everybody

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was published at *What's Worship Got to Do with It? Interpreting Life Liturgically*, Cláudio Carvalhaes (Oregon: Cascade, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor of Worship, Union Theological Seminary in New York City ccarvalhaes@uts.columbia.edu.

<sup>3</sup> This article deals with the hidden racism in the Christian churches in the United States. It hopes to give liturgical language for prayers to be open and clear about dismantling racism from the Christian faith.

<sup>4</sup> *Denigrate*: "If you "denigrate" someone, you attempt to blacken their reputation. It makes sense, therefore, that "denigrate" can be traced back to the Latin verb *denigrare*, meaning "to blacken." When "denigrate" was first used in

who was not white. The blackening of people was a way to clarify and organize no-whites into a lower cast of a human kind by defacing their bodily features, sources of religion, culture and forms of being human. Notions of white normalcy, control, order and so on, shaped through light and darkness were at the heart of this process.<sup>5</sup> The creation of race was thus necessary for the creation of whiteness as an uncontested form of superiority and power control. Over against blackness, Mbembe talks about the necessary appearance of whiteness. He says:

*The strength of race derives precisely from the fact that, within the racist consciousness, the appearance of things looks to be the true reality of thing. In other words, the appearance is not unlike the 'reality'.<sup>6</sup>*

Thus, the reality of things and also the appearance of reality forged racist ideas that grounded the very foundation of this nation and built a society with legislative and democratic views that wouldn't be able to distinguish whiteness from moral virtues and blackness from any sort of deviation, malfunction and misplaced origins. In other words, this historical racial process has been organized by white reasoning, that is, the whitening of sources, forms of thinking, living, praying, worshiping, believing and how to be human.

This whitening of the Americas has surely been accompanied by the stealing of the richness of this land. Europe and the US empire still live off of the riches stolen from the Americas and blackened people.<sup>7</sup> Since the beginning of colonization, and for all these years, powers have been in the same hands of white families while blackened/colored people have had to face all forces of death and struggle to survive. It has been the inner work of resistance and resilience, strategies and wisdom, strength and faith of all the blackened people that have brought these people and all of their wisdom and sources alive this far.

During all these years, Christianity has also been a part of the creation of racial ideas and a fundamental part the whitening conquering of the American continent. The sources, contours and content of the Christian faith have been built on white sources. This means that theology has mainly been a white project, worship has been a white project over the bodies of people as to teach people to pray in white performative and content wise ways. Historically, white churches have learned to discern the faith and life in white terms. In other words, to sense with the fullness of the body perceptions, the whole world and God through white religious glasses.

During all these years, only a few people have fought against the defacement of the indigenous, black peoples, Latinxs people, as well as Asian people and all who fit the category of the stranger people, were thrown into the same exclusionary bus. Very few people prayed for people of colors, with colored people, concerning colored people and their histories!

---

*English in the 16th century, it meant to cast aspersions on someone's character or reputation. Eventually, it developed a second sense of "to make black" ("factory smoke denigrated the sky"), but this sense is somewhat rare in modern usage. Nowadays, of course, "denigrate" can also refer to belittling the worth or importance of someone or something."*  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/denigrate>

<sup>5</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, and *Volume 2: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (London: Verso, 2012); Geraldine Heng, "The Invention of Race in the Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass*, 8/5 (2011), 315-331.

<sup>6</sup> Achille Mbembe, *A Crítica da Razão Negra*, (Portugal: Antígona, 2014), 194.

<sup>7</sup> Galeano, Eduardo, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

For more than 500 years, this mighty project in the Americas also convinced us colored people that white people have always been the best thing that happened to this land. And to us! Civilization, progress, culture, manners, organization, order, sexual standards, and so on where all forms of proper humanity wrapped up in religious language. The civil religion was mixed with the religious beliefs, conflating obedience to slave masters as obedience to God. Good and evil was established by the colors of religious ownership. The demonizing of forms of black(ened) bodies was fundamental to the conquest. In a play of values around what was to be considered human, what was worthy honoring and what was to be condemned, there was a need for demonic<sup>8</sup> actions of white slave owners that created racial-social-theological constructions to turn black people (blackened bodies) into natural creations, social expressions and cultural manifestations of the demonic. From there, the whole reasoning of the racial demonizing was set. Disobedience/unsubmission by blackened bodies was a sign of being taken by the devil and obedience/submission, proper (white) manners, no resistance, acceptance to God's will, and so on, were signs of those closest to the God and obedient to the Bible. The formation of a white civilization came by the denial of those not white (blackened people). Its forms of colonization used liturgical sources such as prayer, hymns, orders of worship, liturgical moral/gestural codes, all wrapped up in white religious reasoning. However, even if Africans and blacked people would embrace Christianity, the Christian faith didn't serve to give them its worth or full humanity. Gayrand S. Wilmore says

*The British rationalized the enslavement of both Africans and Indians because they were different in appearance to themselves and because they were heathens. When it became evident that blacks were becoming believers despite widespread neglect by official church bodies, Virginia was the first of the colonies to make short shrift of the matter by declaring in 1667 that 'the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage of freedom.'*<sup>9</sup>

These forms of colonization, its inward and outward brutality, its ugly and kind forms of appearance, its angry faces and smiles, its passive aggressive moral conducts, brought forth racist ideas that have shaped our societies, designed our common richness for only a few white people, and told us how and where we should live, how we should think, have molded our own feelings and established what is normal in our society. The 500 years of heavy education from pretended, unmarked, apolitical color-free and non-ideological thinking have served well to make us all people of all colors to realize that racist ideas today are not so clear they actually exist. This ongoing reminder is always fast to point out that minorities nowadays have good living, good jobs and some are even rich, even to the point that minorities in America have their place: US had a black president, Brazil had a president who came from the lower class, and Bolivia an indigenous president. All of this shows that what is at stake is not the color of the skin anymore but rather, the individual commitment and desire of someone to work and achieve greatness. The devil in our societies is not there any longer. He has gone fishing!

---

<sup>8</sup> Throughout the chapter the use of the word demonic has to do with breaking and ripping apart, with destruction and death. The intent here is not the demonize any person but to name the powers and forces of destructions as evil structures of death.

<sup>9</sup> Gayrand S. Wilmore, "Historical Perspective," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, Editors, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21.

The declaration of independence, the US sense of exceptionalism<sup>10</sup> and Manifest Destiny, created a necessary mass of critical symbolic and concrete materiality that was both potent to establish a forceful white ideology of conquering and expansion as to secure its racist underpinnings. Grounded in an undeniable but also an idolatrous faith, turning into God was what not God, that is, sanctifying civic actions into God's promises, this country was chosen to be great from its very beginning and apart from everybody else. The theological and civic privilege, or better said, a duty, to expand and conquer was given by God and protected by God. The moral superiority that is so prevalent today, has always fed the formation of an Empire of demonic forces of destruction of blackened people. At the heart of these events, there were white people thinking, believing, acting, leading and using power. This white dominion was guarded in demonic power that had indigenous, blacks and Latinxs to be either killed or put into slavery so the conquering could be established. This power had to create laws that under the sacred cow of "democracy," allowed conquest to move on to the "wasted lands," and use denigrated/blackened bodies in whatever way it was necessary to build the empire. In this way, the demonic, that which breaks and rips apart and steals, conducted the owning and privatizing of common sources of natural resources and the given free labor created of black people were at the beginning of a savage system called capitalism that now rules this country.<sup>11</sup>

The demonic power is still at works today. The use of power structuring life and the very forms of thinking and being continue today with the ongoing killing and disenfranchising of blacks, indigenous, Latinxs, immigrants, with the control of the economic market by the white private sector, and the necessary US engagement with endless wars across the globe in order to maintain the structure of the US economy and to protect/expand/fulfill the call to continue to be the American Empire.

### **Same Power Structure, New Forms of Defacement**

From the beginning of colonization to now, if we are to claim the gospel to witness to this process we can call on the words of Jesus in the gospel of John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."<sup>12</sup>

The thieves that came more than 500 years ago continue to lie, steal, destroy, and kill. Our politicians lie, our economic structure destroy the poor, and the whole white reasoning of this country continue to kill our people daily.

The symptoms of this ongoing demonic structure have surfaced with the killings of black people by the police across US. The recent awareness of the death of black people (Trayvon Martin, John Crawford III, Amadou Diallo, Manuel Loggins Jr., Ronald Madison, Kendra James, Sean Bell, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Alton Sterling and so many others), only exposed the pattern of the police that exists since America's slavery.<sup>13</sup> In United States, "young black men were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by police officers in 2015."<sup>14</sup> These killings are fully associated with a demonic structure of living that was planned, organized and enforced through a system that

---

<sup>10</sup> Brown, Kelly Douglas, *Stand Your Ground; Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Leiman, Melvin, *The Political Economy of Racism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> John 10:10, Bible, NRSV.

<sup>13</sup> In Brazil, a black person is killed every 23 minutes. <http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-36461295>

<sup>14</sup> Jon Swaine, Oliver Laughland, Jamiles Lartey and Ciara McCarthy, "Young black men killed by US police at highest rate in year of 1,134 deaths" <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men>

persists whitening the country by ways of defacing all that is not white. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”

The only reason we know about these killings is because of the power of phone cameras and social media used by common people on the streets that made these videos go viral. The historical lack of information about police reports have now surfaced and police depts., often led by white people, had to start publicizing reports.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the cleanliness, denial or approval of violence against black people in the media, often owned by white people, the heavy support of states to invest in jails rather than schools, the ongoing cut of social support for blackened communities, often supported by white political representatives, the policies that replaced Jim Crow are the same or worse due to its appearance of equality,<sup>16</sup> are all but a part of the same supporting structure of a white system of control of power and richness. Public policies are thieves, killing systems majorly sanctioned by demonic laws that continue this control locally and nationally and not many people know about it.<sup>17</sup> The thieves are in the highest places stealing from some and giving to others. Let me give one example: from 1934 to 1962 the US government backed 120 billion dollars of home loans that were given only to white people. The results of what is called *red lining* created a ripple effect of white people with rising assets while black people had to continue in poverty with no help, living in “the ghetto” without state investments and consequently lacking good schools, jobs opportunities and social expansion.

The thieves are everywhere! Along with public policies, the whole bashing of black people for being lazy, not wanting to work, use federal sources without offering any counterpart are all lies deeply seated in the people’s consciousness, spread out as truth and affecting the feelings and worldviews of both white and black people in very different ways. The psychological effect of 500 years of colonization and the daily manifestations of racist ideas, gestures, relations, power dynamics and so on have immense reverberations in the ways black people live their lives.

The thieves are deeply invested in the institutions of this country. Politically, neither political parties have ever fully served the minorities of this country. The best they did was to mend parts of the system in order to keep the whole structure of exclusion running. All of that are just some symptoms of the larger disease of racism that plagues this country and has kept black people as second citizens for its entire history, again, away from the wealth of the country and its social sources of sustenance.

### **Same Power Structure And The White Christian Churches**

The thieves have stolen Christianity. They have stolen the revolutionary kernel of the Christian faith, have destroyed its promises of equality and justice, and killed the central idea of God’s option for the poor. In a game of appearances and platitudes, the thieves and all its demons, made a failed Christianity look like it was alive by performing perfunctory religious rituals that served to show that it was alive.

---

<sup>15</sup> Lowery, Wesley, *They Can't Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America's Racial Justice Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Alexander, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Barber II, William J. and Zelter, Barbara, *Forward Together: A Moral Message for the Nation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2014).

This entire system has created white Christian churches who hide under a gospel of unconditioned love so this unmarked sense of love could hide the markers of racism and the exclusion of minorities. If we look at the structures of the white Christian churches, its theological and liturgical resources, it is often done by white people for white people of a certain class.<sup>18</sup> This has immediate consequences on our prayers and how we pray. If prayer is the grammar of our faith, and the white church has never created a deep religious language to engage with the black people, or the indigenous people or the Latinx or other immigrant community, that means that the content of the Christian faith has never had a grammar where prayers could be spoken as means to enter into solidarity with non-white communities. The results are that faith continues to have a full white vocabulary that gives the scripts/scriptures of life in a specific format. When dealing with non-white people, the response is often muted for there is no vocabulary to help address some situations. I have seen white people, especially in circles where tension and disorder is a place where one gets totally lost, who are willing to engage in solidarity with black people but they lack a vocabulary to do so which prevents them from acting and making mistakes, saying something wrong. They can't deal with the tension of the struggle to find peace and manifest this inadequacy often through passive-aggressive modes of behavior.

The larger result in the public arena is that white churches end up supporting white Christians or white people in most political places. In the last election for President, 8 in 10 white Evangelical Protestants voted for Trump, and the majority of white Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants also supported a candidate who has publicly shown his racist views against black people and other minorities. This numbers show not only the inadequacy to engage non-white people but a visceral rejection of “blackened” people, a rejection mixed with fear, anger and resentment. In this vein, Donald Trump becomes the white man who gets it, the one who will correct the wrongs of the government who have put blackened people ahead of the white people with social help, against the white people who are suffering and did not receive the help of the government. Trump will get rid of the blackened people and bring the country back to an mythical and imaginary place where this country was once great.

This is only possible because white churches have always had pastors and theologians who have never engaged blackened people, their ways of living, their sufferings and their resources. There has never been grammar for the prayer to move us all towards blackened people. Surely there hasn't been prayer in worship books against blackened people. However, there hasn't been any in favor of them or done with them, or raising their concerns.

Thus the rest of this chapter intends to help Christians to pray with black people for the dismantling of the racist structures in place in this country. Perhaps a wishful thinking, but I do believe prayers can offer seeds of change. Prayers can shift our feelings, move our ideas, transform our behaviors, invent new ecclesiologies and concrete forms of mission, create new practices and bring about forms of concrete love for people we never knew we could love or even had to love in a real way. Prayers enthuse us to engage in forms of life that really matters for the sake of the restituting humanness to minorities. Providing a new vocabulary for our faith, prayers can shift a whole form of thinking, it can open or a new kind of anthropology, one that is beyond the concepts we presently

---

<sup>18</sup> See my critique to the creation of liturgical sources in the Presbyterian Church here: Cláudio Carvalhaes, “White Reasoning and What is Common in our Common Worship? A Methodological Critique to the Process of Renewal of the Book of Common Worship – Presbyterian Church U.S.A.” in *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts*. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY. Vol. (May 2016).

have that whites are above other colored people, so they should receive things first, and even more, that humans are above animals and creatures, and that we have the earth to exploit for our own desires.

### Praying the Letter from a Birmingham Jail

Thinking about that, I propose prayers for people, regardless of their color, to pray along with some parts of Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*,<sup>19</sup> written in 1963. I am highlighting some parts and also following the highlights chosen by artists who added pictures to those lines as to not let media wash away the depth of MLK Jr.'s letter. My hope is that the reader will read the whole letter several times and see the images in the website quoted.<sup>20</sup> Here is just a frail guide for our beginning to engage the world, the church and our neighbors liturgically.

#### Letter:

*Let us consider the need for a tough mind, characterized by incisive thinking, realistic appraisal, and decisive judgment. The tough mind is sharp and penetrating, breaking through the crust of legends and myths and sifting the true from the false. . . . This prevalent tendency toward soft mindedness is found in man's unbelievable gullibility. . . . This undue gullibility is also seen in the tendency of many readers to accept the printed word of the press as final truth. Few people realize that even our authentic channels of information – the press, the platform, and in many instances the pulpit – do not give us objective and unbiased truth. Few people have the toughness of mind to judge critically and to discern the true from the false, the fact from the fiction. Our minds are constantly being invaded by legions of half-truths, prejudices, and false facts. One of the great needs of mankind is to be lifted above the morass of false propaganda. . . . Soft-minded persons have revised the Beatitudes to read, "Blessed are the pure in ignorance: for they shall see God." . . . There is little hope for us until we become tough minded enough to break loose from the shackles of prejudice, half-truths, and downright ignorance. . .*

#### Prayer

God of our thinking

Give us a tough mind

Incisive thinking

Realistic appraisal

Decisive judgment

For our weary times are filled with half truths

We know people are paid to misrepresented truths

So we can't find a way to oppose and resist

We continue to be confused

So we pray for wisdom!

To know the sources of news

The better forms of knowledge

For we know where there is wisdom there is happiness

---

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Checked 12/01/2016. <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/strength-love>

<sup>20</sup> "Artist creates 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' memes to stop people from whitewashing MLK Checked 12/01/2016. <https://mic.com/articles/165598/artist-creates-letters-from-birmingham-jail-memes-to-stop-people-from-whitewashing-mlk#.bzIDoXy1V>

Help us see the difference between truths and half truths  
And deliver us from ignorance and sadness  
God of wisdom,  
More than anything we need wisdom  
And the desire to learn  
To read  
To engage  
To listen to those suffering  
So we can have our minds changed  
So we can be transformed  
In Christ the truth, we pray. Amen!

Letter:

*But we must not stop with the cultivation of a tough mind. The gospel also demands a tender heart. Tough mindedness without tenderheartedness is cold and detached, leaving one's life in a perpetual winter devoid of the warmth of spring and the gentle heat of summer. What is more tragic than to see a person who has risen to the disciplined heights of tough mindedness but has at the same time sunk to the passionless depths of hardheartedness? . . .*

Prayer

God who sees us all  
We pray for these two gifts: a tough mind and tender heart  
May we gain a tough mind  
So we can go about the world without being surprised all the time  
May we gain a tender heart  
So we can trust that goodness and love will remain  
Teach us to be disciplined in this search and discernment  
So we can develop these gifts.  
Help us know how to live with these two gifts together  
Like a bird that needs two eagles to fly.  
In your mercy

Letter:

*. . . I am thankful that we worship a God who is both tough minded and tenderhearted. If God were only tough minded, he would be a cold, passionless despot sitting in some far-off Heaven "contemplating all," as Tennyson puts it in "The Palace of Art." He would be Aristotle's "unmoved mover," self-knowing but not other-loving. But if God were only tenderhearted, he would be too soft and sentimental to function when things go wrong and incapable of controlling what he has made.*

.. —

Prayer

We praise you all God  
Because from your tough minded and tender heart  
You have looked upon us equally  
But we have made your love look more favorably to some white people  
We who have everything  
Have not looked at those who don't have



We even think that the have-nots are where they are because it is their fault!  
We love to contemplate you and you alone  
Without contemplating those who have been wrong by history  
We pray that in our worship together  
You help us see how some have benefited from a certain sense of your love  
while others have not.  
Discipline us to see racial structures of love and hate everywhere  
To see that our society is only made for some to live  
While others are sentenced to jail or death  
But we praise you for also being tender hearted towards us  
Taking away our fears to approach blackened brothers and sisters  
May your tough mind and soft heart help us engage the color lines but also go beyond it  
Help us find courage to hear what we need to hear and engage with one another without being  
shackled into politics of difference.  
We praise and worship you!  
In your blackened name we pray!

Letter:

*You deplore the demonstrations taking place... but your statement fails to express a similar concern for the condition that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with the effects and does not grapple with the underlying causes.*

Prayer

We confess  
That are afraid of street demonstrations and protestors  
We confess that we are angry they don't follow proper order and laws that we follow to make changes  
We confess  
It has to either be our way or no way because we understand the more democratic ways to do things properly.  
We confess  
That we feel we built this country and they came later  
We confess  
That to see the perspective of the marginalized and are content to believe major news reporting  
We confess  
That we tried to settle the case of black people as quick as possible, blaming them for violence without looking at the violence of our racialized systems of oppression  
We confess  
That we blamed black people for their own violence against themselves without understanding that it is the lack of basic conditions of life that creates violence and dysfunction.  
We confess  
That we cannot understand this situation because we have no clue how it is to be a black person in this country.  
In your mercy

Letter:

*You may well ask, “why direct action?” Why sit in, marches and so forth? Isn’t negotiating a better path? Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.*

Prayer

God of our abysses

We do indeed ask why do we need direct action, sit in, marches and so forth

We cannot understand why they can’t talk, calmly, in the order that makes us comfortable

Why can they kindly ask for change?

We think we have always wanted to negotiate

But now they invade public and private places and demand things

Why oh my soul do I think that way?

What is it in me that I cannot grasp the fact

that their need is bigger than my fear?

that their time is not my time

that my fulfilled needs allow me to wait through longer transformation

that my entitlement cannot process the immediacy of their complains

Help me God to rid my soul from the thinking that only my life is important

With your help, I will understand that we have refused to wrestle with the difficult issues related to black people.

With your help, I will be able to see that blacks or indigenous or Latinxs or immigrants are no less than our children.

*In your mercy*

Letter:

*We have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined... nonviolent pressure. It is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntary. We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntary given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.*

Prayer

God who can change us

Help us go through conversion.

May your Spirit creates in us a true change, conversion, *metanoia*

For we cannot see we have privileges

We have instead seen what we have as blessings

That you bestowed upon us!

The place we have now was given to us by our fathers and fathers’ fathers

Who worked hard for it!

And we now work hard to keep it

Why now we have to give anything?

God of change

We cannot really see this

We cannot change

But we pray

Help us change

And see that power is not voluntary shared.

Help us see that!  
In your mercy

Letter:

*Justice long delayed is justice denied.*

Prayer

Oh God

Why do we see this sense of justice only when it has to do with us and our needs?

Why do I believe in long democratic processes for justice of others when it is for others and we I am impatient when I myself am hurting?

Why don't I go out to the streets and demand justice for black people right now?

Help us o God to join the fight! May we learn the justices and injustices of our country!

May we go to the streets with Black Lives Matter! And listen to them, and see what is needed to support them in love, care and sustenance.

Help us go to the streets where minority communities, now my people, are fighting for justice!

Help us O God!

Letter:

*When you have seen hate filled policeman curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; When you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" Then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.*

Prayer

Merciful God

When a child asks, we often listen

But when our children ask about race or black people, we deny that racism exist in us and in our country.

Yes we have mistreated black people, yes we have enslaved them, yes we have put them in terrible places.

Help us o God to be honest with our kids

Even when they don't ask.

Help us be honest

With you

With our children

And with the blackened people.

So we can be attuned to your own voice!

In your mercy!

Letter: *One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no at all.' Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.*

Prayer

God of truthful laws

We are learning with our brothers and sisters that law is not sacred, that laws are human creation and not sanctified by you. Give us strength to fight the laws that privileges some people and

dismisses others. Give us strength to fight the state when they create laws that supports the lives of a few people and put many others in jail. Help us go after the local policies of our communities and see how racism is so fully present here. Help us dismantle the unjust system of laws, so we can create legislative equality for all.

In your mercy!

Letter:

*I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. The Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not... the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than justice; who prefers a negative peace (the absence of tension) to a positive peace (The presence of justice; who constantly says, "I agree with you in the goals you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom. Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.*

Prayer

We confess

That all we've attempted to be is moderate

To uphold the order

To find a common ground

To foster positive peace

So we wouldn't need to change anything, much less ourselves.

Help us move away from that place, where order and decency is a façade for the protection of white people.

Give us courage for we are weak and slow in making up our minds

May we finally see that we are not free unless our brothers and sisters are free.

Our churches have not necessarily associated themselves with the KKK, but we have been silent, we have not spoken up

So we pray you give us voices and words to speak, to you, to each other, to our congregations, and to those in power. Help us sit with and listen to those who are suffering.

Help us change O God, help us change!

In your mercy!

Letter:

*One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.*

Prayer

God of love

In your name we will go to the streets. We will disobey the human laws that traps the poor so we can obey you! From you, we have learned that when we are fighting for those suffering, we discover where Jesus actually is. Help us always commit to stand alongside the poor. Help us see that your love is given to all, but preferentially to the poor and those who are at the margins of history, of our communities.

In your mercy

Letter:

*We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. Injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience at the air of national opinion before it can be cured.*

Prayer

God of solidarity

We will join our colored brothers and sisters

We will go where they are

We will ask for a common meal

We will ask what it is to live the lives they live

We will listen and try to find a common ground

Our communities have people who are sick

Help us visit each other

Our communities have families who have beloved ones in jail

Help us visit each other

And fight against the incarceration of blackened people

Help us find places, organizations and people so we can fight together!

May our community cry out loud: Black Lives Matter!

May our local church be chapters of justice, making a grassroots revolution.

In your mercy!

Letter:

*I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and fewer still have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action.*

Prayer

May we be those who can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race. May we see, hear, and sense the anxiety, fears and all the challenges of growing up as a black and colored people in this country!

May we engage into deep listening! Now and for the days to come!

In your mercy!

Letter: *We have to repent in this generation, not merely for the hateful words and actions of bad people but for the appalling silence of good people. Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally in the forces of social stagnation.*

Prayer

We repent o God

For we have run this race without paying attention to those who run with much more weight on their bodies. May we have our minds and our hearts transformed. Help us see that we have also created and supported systems of injustices. Help us create innovative structures of peace, redistribution of money, sharing of resources, health care for all, free college tuitions, and an

egalitarian education system. Remind us that we are each other's keepers. May we fight all of the forces of social stagnation, including the ones inside of us! Now and forever! We pray that by your grace and mercy, our world will grow darker by the blessed presence of colored people! May we see the gift of darkness against the illusion of a self-made light that only shines our own! In your mercy! Amen

## Concluding

As professor Stephen Ray reminded me once, of how the blackening was meant as evil, as with all things, God brought good out of it. So many of us found freedom in the Christian faith! Christ has become our liberator! Now, we can have a church that is taking over its historical failures and moving towards justice and the true love of God by dismantling the work of the thieves. If Jesus says the first part of John 10:10 “

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy,” The second part Jesus says: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Together, whites and all blackened people, by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, will turn lies into truth, retribute what was stolen from oppressed people, bring life where there was death and rebuild what was destroyed! Together, we will show this abundant life we live in Jesus by building and defending together the beloved community, which has people of all colors! “The Beloved Community” is a term developed and popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Howard Thurman. King wanted to use this metaphor as a spring board, a symbol and also a concrete arrival of our society, a place where love, peace and justice could live together. Dr. King's hopes for this beloved community were grounded in non-violence, but a place with generative conflicts, where justice should be a constant struggle with the belief that through our common agape love we could make it happen.

We can also build, defend and expand the beloved community through its liturgical structures, orders and rituals of transformation. For liturgy is always a call to conversion! The “liturgy's danger,” says liturgical theologian Nathan D. Mitchell, “is to resist or ignore its call to conversion.”<sup>21</sup>

To pray with a blackened faith in a darker context begs us to consider the relationship between the *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi and Lex Agendi*, that is: the intertwining of the *rule of prayer*, the *rule of belief*, the *rule of life* and the *rule of action*. This is because when we pray, all vulnerable life is at stake, especially black lives! When we pray, our very breathing, our hunger, our limitations, our desires, our social systems, everything enters into a movement of circulation of feelings, energies and thinking. When we pray, our own breathing reminds us that we are made of the air, the sun, the soil, the birds and all God's creation. When we utter words in prayer we are disclosing not only our hearts to God but also our biased heart is exposed, our racist upbringing becomes clear. When we give our offerings in prayer we are also showing the systems we are connected, where we live, what kind of health insurance we have, what culture we are part of, and what and with whom we have our deepest commitments. Thus, prayer is always prayed in some deep context, which includes the race and ecological systems we are immersed and many times help to sustain.

Thus, to pray is to weave together the liturgy of the church, the liturgy of the world and the liturgy of the neighbor against forms of racism and exclusion. To pray is to make an option for the poor! To pray is to turn our hearts into a darker faith, because we are now unequivocally inhabited by all people of color. With faith, also hope is turned black! And love is turned black! For to pray is to enter

---

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, Nathan D., *Meeting Mystery. Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 42.

the darker side of all those disfranchised, of all colored people which surely included “darkened” whites, where the number of disposable people across the globe grow every day. Darker ethics and darker creeds, Darker social actions and darker prayers, all shaping desires, giving contours to hurts, establishing ways of living, creating economic mechanisms of control, forming joys, elaborating concerns, relating us to the earth, defining pain, making us sing some songs, and throwing us into living in certain ways with our local communities and our plural world. All of these things together compose every prayer we pray.

With this chapter I tried to follow what Willie James Jennings said in his book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*: “I yearn for a vision of Christian intellectual identity that is compelling and attractive, embodying not simply the cunning of reason but the power of love that gestures toward joining, toward the desire to hear, to know, and to embrace.”<sup>22</sup>

I also tried to follow what Emilie Townes and her call for justice and peace and via Howard Thurman, head and head, prayer and belief, *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. Townes says: “Our world needs a new (or perhaps ancient) vision molded by justice and peace rather than winning and losing if we are to unhinge the cultural production of evil. Doing so is to respond to the call by the Black mystic and theologian Howard Thurman who joined others in encouraging us to blend head and heart.”<sup>23</sup>

Our Christian intellectual identity calls us into new and constant metanoias, change of ways of thinking, shifting our views the world, embodying individual and communal prayers of justice so we can create praxis of solidarity and transformation with the poor and the earth. And we can only do that if we engage our prayers into the breaking of the potencies of racism! In order to do that we must embody Christ as our full prayer.

---

## References

- ACHILLE, Mbembe. *A Crítica da Razão Negra*. Portugal: Antígona, 2014.
- ALEXANDER, Michelle, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2012.
- “Artist creates ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail’ memes to stop people from whitewashing MLK Checked 12/01/2016. <https://mic.com/articles/165598/artist-creates-letters-from-birmingham-jail-memes-to-stop-people-from-whitewashing-mlk#.bzIDoXy1V>
- BARBER II, William J. and Zelter, Barbara, *Forward Together: A Moral Message for the Nation*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2014.
- BROWN, Kelly Douglas, *Stand Your Ground; Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. New York: Orbis Books, 2015.
- CARVALHAES, Cláudio. “White Reasoning and What is Common in our Common Worship? A Methodological Critique to the Process of Renewal of the Book of Common Worship – Presbyterian Church U.S.A.” in *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts*. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, KY. Vol. (May 2016)
- GALEANO, Eduardo, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997.

---

<sup>22</sup> Jennings, Willie James, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>23</sup> Townes, Emilie M., *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2006), 164.

- GAYRAND S. Wilmore, "Historical Perspective," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, Editors. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- JENNINGS, Willie James, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- JON Swaine, Oliver Laughland, Jamiles Lartey and Ciara McCarthy, "Young black men killed by US police at highest rate in year of 1,134 deaths <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men>.
- KING JR'S, Martin Luther. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Checked 12/01/2016. <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/strength-love>.
- LEIMAN, Melvin, *The Political Economy of Racism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010.
- LOWERY, Wesley, *They Can't Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America's Racial Justice Movement* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2016.
- MITCHELL, Nathan D., *Meeting Mystery. Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments*. New York: Orbis Books, 1984.
- THEODORE W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, and *Volume 2: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*. London: Verso, 2012;
- Geraldine Heng, "The Invention of Race in the Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass*, 8/5, 2011.
- TOWNES, Emilie M., *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; 2006.