

A Christianity that Kills: White Domestic Terrorism and the Church

*“... For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;”
Romans 3: 22B-23*

In a country and American Church yet unrepentant in our founding from the theft of land and labor, there are daily harmful acts of white supremacy and violence against Black peoples, indigenous communities, and people of color. For many in the Body of Christ, these daily acts of dehumanization are painfully familiar and fearfully normal. And yet, on Wednesday January 6, 2021, an extraordinary vision of white supremacist and misogynistic violence, purportedly under the Cross of Christ, was seen by many: a coup attempt by followers of President Trump staged an armed attack on the Capitol to overturn the results of a democratically held election.

This insurrection was not theologically void, but soaked in Christian imagery, with the name of our one Savior Jesus Christ held high, along with weapons of war.

These people who would self-identify as Christian, who likely are baptized into the body of Christ as we are, erected both a large cross and a noose on the Capitol lawn.

These historic instruments of pornographic death are only displayed together to terrorize Black people, not to testify to the hope of resurrection in Jesus. As [Black churches are desecrated across Washington DC](#), and a [Black church was burned in late December 2020 in Springfield MA](#), the signs are as clear as the star over Bethlehem.

As staff of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, we understand there are wide-ranging political differences in the Body of Christ. Thus, we aim to admonish the Christian collaboration with acts of violence, and take responsibility, as we must always, for our own collaboration with oppression and betrayal of gospel values. The wages of sin are death. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Therefore:

- We denounce a contorted theology that purports some people are superior to others, because of race, nation of origin, immigration status, gender, sexual orientation or citizenship. The racist, xenophobic, antisemitic, misogynistic and white supremacist rhetoric is inimical to the will of God. There is no distinction in Christ. All are adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5).
- We denounce the evocation of historic lynchings and contemporary violence against Black bodies. The insurrectionists raised up together a large wooden cross and a noose by which to hang people. The cross is a primary symbol of our faith. The noose is an instrument of death, designed to terrorize and conjure threats of lynching. Together, they are not a witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. For far too long, Black Christians in this country have been terrorized by this converged bastardization of the cross and the lynching tree.

- We denounce the disproportionately violent law enforcement response enacted on civil rights protesters witnessing to the dignity of Black lives, while the majority white armed insurrectionists at the Capitol were not met with the same violence.
- We denounce an increasing rhetoric of violence, especially from the Commander-in-Chief, but spoken by many with a bully pulpit and blessed by the silence of many Church leaders. Multiple people are dead following this insurrection. Multiple elected leaders, including Mr. Trump himself, spoke to crowds with words encouraging violence. Anger and resentment have a spokesperson in power in Mr. Trump. Closer to home, [Martin Luther King Jr. Presbyterian Church in Springfield, MA was the victim of arson on December 28, 2020](#), as was [Macedonia Church of God in Christ in Springfield](#) following President Obama's election. The burning of Black Churches aims to take the central institution of Black community life. [Across the Nation and in Massachusetts, we've seen an increase in hate crimes.](#)

When Jesus casts out the demons that possess, he names publicly and loudly the demon before he can heal the person. We must name the evil before we can be healed. We must have honest conversation among Christians about where we have fallen short of the glory of God. Some have sinned in particular ways complicit with white supremacy in supporting this Administration, some of us in other ways. But if we do not name the particular evils that binds us, we cannot be set free in Christ, and the truth is not in us.

We recommit ourselves to continued work on our own institutional process of self-examination, confession, and repentance. We are incomplete without the whole of the body of Christ. Part of the history of the Massachusetts Council of Churches is indeed as a majority white, pan-Protestant institution that did not seek the wisdom or collaboration of Christians beyond a small circle. We betray our own mandate to Christian unity even as we proclaim it. Hoarding resources does not honor the Creator. Claiming Christ for ourselves alone does not make us Christ-like. Stealing power for only the well-being of some scorns the Spirit. As we said in 2016, ["Our country isn't suddenly racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, antisemitic, Islamophobic and xenophobic, but this election season and increased hate crimes have exposed the depth of the divide. Many of you knew that all along."](#)

We believe in the Church and the power of Christians from a wide range of backgrounds working together for the flourishing of all. But there has been a long bastardization of Christianity in this country for the political and economic gain of a few. And on January 6, 2021 this contorted Christianity killed people, as it has killed so many enslaved peoples before.

There have been many calls to prayer. While it is always important to come to the Lord in prayer, there is dire need for action, too. We know what to do: Denounce, mobilize, shift money and power to leaders who have been marginalized, and for white leaders, listen and heed those who have been saying for far too long that this heresy is active in our lands and churches. Will the Church act differently this time?