

# CWR<sup>m</sup> magazine

August 2023  
Volume 14, Number 4

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



# 60 years

## He Had a Dream

Greg Albrecht



Also in this issue

BIPOC Faith 60 Years On | Brad Jersak 5

Envisioning a New World | Richard Rohr 7



## “I HAVE A DREAM”

Selected quotes from Martin Luther King Jr. are italicized and printed in *burgundy*. They ring as true now as they did when he first spoke them.

**I***have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Christ-centered man of faith who stood for non-violent resistance to the evils of war and racism. He believed in responding to hatred and racism with love.

*by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.*

Martin Luther King Jr. fought racism with every ounce of his being. But 60 years after “*I Have a Dream*,” it seems *his dream* has been tossed aside, as the blood-swollen god of racism continues to devour all in its path. We must turn our backs on revenge, retribution and retaliation lest we find ourselves in another Civil War.

*I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.*

*We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.*

*Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding*



## He Had a Dream

Greg Albrecht

Dr. King rejected answering violence with more violence and never believed that the answer to racism was more racism. He argued and pleaded for the way of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.

August 28, 1963, Dr. King delivered one of the greatest speeches, if not the greatest speech, ever given on American soil. MLK Jr. spoke of *his dream* from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. During this month of August 2023—the 60th anniversary of “*I Have a Dream*”—let each of us personally reflect on his words and the state of racism in America, and realize that growing bitterness and divisiveness denies *the dream*, and that “ending” racism with even more racism leads to an ever-increasing nightmare of hatred and bloodshed.

*I must say to my people... in the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom*

*deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*

## “ALL IN THE SAME BOAT NOW”

*We may have come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.*

In the United States, many perceive racism exclusively as a black-versus-white issue, while ignoring the fact there are and have been many oppressed races in our nation today, not to mention the world.

The suffering of people groups across the blood-stained pages of history is an ugly and reprehensible sin of humanity against those who are different. No race, creed or color, no religion, no empire and no nation can claim to be innocent of the charges of taking advantage of minorities or the marginalized. *We are ALL in the same boat!*

Our experiences (and those of our ancestors) arriving here in these United States were vastly different. In most cases, our ancestors shared the common *dream* of looking for a better life. But of all arrivals, those who arrived in chains endured the most reprehensible nightmare and trauma.

*The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows.*

*Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.*

There is no question that our nation must do a better job of lionizing people like Nelson Mandela,

Just as the suffering of African Americans should never be minimized, many other racial and cultural narratives of suffering exist who likewise deserve our time, consideration and compassion. Many people groups over the history of the United States, Canada and across the history of our world have suffered injustices, abuse, slavery and genocide. Most notable 20th century examples include the Jewish Holocaust and Armenian Genocide—hatred unleashed against a racial, genetic and religious people group.

ANY movement that seeks to engineer a forced justice through coercion inevitably creates more



## “Beyond Vietnam”

On April 4, 1967, one year to the day before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a sermon titled “Beyond Vietnam” at the Riverside Church in New York City. Among other things, he said,

*“We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow down before the altar of retaliation...”*

*“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”*

Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Thurgood Marshall, Bishop Tutu, Harriet Tubman, Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks and John Lewis, to name but a few people of similar skin color. Let us also remember and honor other prophetic, righteous moral voices—brown and white—many who marched to the beat of MLK’s drum.

Racism is not an exclusive black-white issue—many over history have suffered. ***We must, as Christ-followers, admit past injustices of all people, races and cultures, and help lead the way for Christ-centered solutions.*** Christ-centered social justice is not one-sided nor is it reserved for only one geo-political historical era. Christ-centered justice redresses all injustice and all abuse—attends to all victims and all those who have been marginalized, belittled, dehumanized, hated and treated as if they were invisible.

dysfunction and multiplies injustice. Legislating agendas that impose exclusionary politics and policies, and then energizing them with hatred of the despised “other,” serves only to engender and escalate new and toxic cycles of racism, hatred and injustice... the fruit is not Christlike justice.

By contrast, the agenda of Christ-centered social justice, as proclaimed by Dr. King, is based on love, mercy and forgiveness—while it rejects retaliation and revenge as a means to “balance” the past.

In Christ, there is no difference—black, white or brown—we are God’s children in his sight. There is no Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu blood—only human blood. Perhaps Paul said it best, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:28).

Hatred is hatred, injustice is injustice, oppression



is oppression, abuse is abuse and racism is racism, no matter who the perpetrators and victims might be.

*Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.*

## **FOLLOW JESUS—PURSUE FORGIVENESS, LOVE & RECONCILIATION**

*Dr. King dreamed of a time when his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character. And yet 60 years later toxic voices of racist hatred, many—even in the name of “social justice”—infect our entire culture with hatred, threatening to destroy anyone and anything in its path.*

Many today seek to end racism and resolve past injustices by inflicting revenge racism. Such an agenda will not solve anything, but further polarize and divide, and add fuel to the fires of racial hatred.

There’s an old story about six people who froze to death around a campfire on a bitterly cold night. Each had wood they could have contributed to generate and share warmth with the entire group but each one had a reason why they refused to help the others.

*“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”*

A white person would not throw their wood into the fire because there was an African American in the circle. The African American withheld their piece of fuel as a way of getting even for all that white people had done to their race. A homeless man would not give to help everyone because there was a rich man in the circle. The rich man had plenty of fuel to help the others, but he refused because he felt some of those in the circle were lazy and unemployed by choice. A Muslim would not contribute because a Jew was present, and the Jew reciprocated by withholding his contribution.

They died, not from the cold without; they died from the cold within.

Now is the time, my friends, to heed the clarion call of *“I Have a Dream”* and be grounded in the peace of God, and consequently pursue forgiveness,

mercy, love and reconciliation. *The Dream* is not over. Let us seek reconciliation and peace. Let us ask Jesus to live in us, so that we focus on him, leaving hatred, discrimination and racism behind as we follow Jesus. May we not make room for hatred, nor give into the virus of racism, but rather overcome racism by the love of God which, by his grace, will flow from our hearts.

*Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself.*

*Greg Albrecht is the President of Plain Truth Ministries and Editor-in-Chief of CWR Magazine.*

### *Empathy and Compassion in “To Kill a Mockingbird”*



In *“To Kill a Mockingbird”* Atticus Finch is an Alabama lawyer, a white man who represents African American Tom Robinson, who is charged with rape. Within this highly charged emotional setting in this Pulitzer Prize winning novel, published in 1960, Atticus sits down with Scout, his young daughter. Atticus tells Scout, *“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”*

Atticus is teaching Scout about empathy and compassion—about striving to perceive how others feel with the ultimate goal of extending love, mercy and tolerance. Progress in loving one’s neighbor will never take place as long as “others” are judged by the color of their skin rather than the content of their character. Progress will not only evade those who hate in return for hate, but revenge, deepening hatred, divisiveness and eventually bloodshed will result.

# BIPOC\* Faith 60 Years On

Adapted from Brad Jersak's "Out of the Embers"

\*BIPOC: black, Indigenous, people of color

*"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word."*

—Martin Luther King Jr.

*"Be love."*

—Bernice King

## OVERCOMING INJUSTICE WITH LOVE

Reading or listening to Martin Luther King Jr. (or his daughter Bernice, who speaks in the same spirit), I recognize that the relentless struggle for the love he preached never passively accepted injustice to maintain pseudo-peace with people who look and live like me. Nor did he buy into those voices who espoused the necessity of using hateful or violent means to bring about true justice for all.

Rather, following Paul's exhortation, "*Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil with good*" (Romans 12:21, GWT), Dr. King taught us that *love seeks to actively overcome injustice through nonviolent resistance* against:

(1) *external oppression*, inequity, exclusion and oppression, and

(2) *internal enslavement* to fear, deception, and hatred (so said King's mentor, Howard Thurman, in *Jesus and the Disenfranchised*).

King and Thurman's interpretation of Jesus is best verified by their proximity to the Cross and its expansion of the Passover Exodus in their own history (as per James Cone's book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*).

## HONORING KING VERSUS "VIRTUE-SIGNALING"

As a white-skinned brother in Christ who rejects the assumptions of white supremacy, I realize that whatever I say to honor MLK's memory will no doubt appear *performative*—also known as *virtue-signaling*—as if the popular label "*ally*" is some heroic identity badge I could ever claim for myself.

But let us at least avoid turning our engagement with civil rights into hypocrisy. Let's not co-opt King's own words to oppose his call to the work of justice. His vision of cross-shaped love included public opposition to all forms of death-dealing, whether via racism, war, or state-sponsored executions.

Better, perhaps, for folks like me to practice quiet repentance rather than massaging my guilt with platitudes. But far better still that I would hear and heed God's voice through Jesus' black

prophet of unbending love—and not merely on one token day per year.

I welcome readers to once again consider King's gospel, forged in the furnaces of Egypt, Babylon, Rome, and America over millennia. While our cynical despisers cheer the end of Christian faith in the West, I would ask, since when did the faith of the black community not count? And why would they hope for and serve in its erasure? How "*progressive*" is that?

Rather, Rev. Thurman and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "*religion of Jesus*"—the gospel of nonviolent justice and other-welcoming love—feels to me like



"A Great Man Once Said..." by Lavo

a beacon of *the Jesus Way* amid the church's broader meltdown.

## STOP SHAMING BIPOC FAITH

But beyond the church, I am witnessing a sharp increase in boldness among antagonistic secularists who shame BIPOC people (black, Indigenous, people of color) for their faith in Jesus Christ. I've been watching their public rebukes online and in social media, scolding black and Indigenous people of faith with condescending slogans like "*Learn your history*," accusing them of betraying their own race and heritage by naively adopting the faith of European slavers, settlers, and residential school abusers. With dripping scorn, they patronize Jesus-following people of color, presuming to correct them for being so ignorant, so unenlightened, so poorly informed of their own history that they've somehow stumbled into the colonized religion of their oppressors.

Such contempt and arrogance imagines it will cleanse our brothers and sister of religious brainwashing by, what?

By *colonizing them all over again!* And to what? White European progressivism? Godless rationalism? Anti-faith materialism? Real history tells us it was these same bourgeois elite who actually *expanded* the slave trade across three continents while condemning *all* spiritual traditions (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Black and Indigenous alike) as a "primitive" blight to be erased wherever it is found.

Yes, someone does need to

learn their history. And it is not Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., nor any of our contemporary BIPOC Jesus-followers of good faith.

## A MORE CHRISTLIKE NARRATIVE

Here's another narrative, truer to history and more respectful of our neighbors. The magnificent heritage of vivacious black preaching, spirituality, gospel music and worship were NOT derivative of their white masters—their faith in Jesus is NOT a colonial disease to be derided and expunged. History reminds us that some of Christianity's leading teachers and theologians were born and raised in North Africa!

Despite the corrupt pseudo-faith of European Christendom, BIPOC people of faith resonated deeply with a more ancient tradition: the story of Hebrew slaves who overcame their oppression and made their exodus out of Egypt; Judean refugees who returned home after a long exile in Babylon, and the faith of Jesus Christ in Rome-occupied Galilee. They worship a Savior who endured state-sanctioned execution and rose on the third day to embody liberation for all, even from death.

BIPOC Christianity, in fact, bypassed European Imperialism to directly identify with the olive-skinned Jewish Jesus of occupied Palestine. His message rings true to marginalized people everywhere who suffer under a tyranny like what Jesus suffered, and they hear him announce a

Way—a strategy of liberation—that frees them from the inside out. Certainly, for the black church, the Lamb crucified and risen shaped their Blues-Gospel liberation culture. They didn't learn it from some colonizer ruling over his plantation.

To now say, "Let that go! Be done with Jesus! Be like us enlightened white modernist skeptics," is a tragic kind of hubris that does further violence to the BIPOC soul.

For the spiritually illiterate, King's historic speech was, first of all, a sermon. The man was a prophet and preacher, not an ideologue. His words echoed the voices of Isaiah, Micah and Amos. And his message of doing justice was ultimately deeply rooted in *the Jesus Way* of love and reconciliation.



*This article was adapted and edited for CWRm from Bradley Jersak's most recent book, Out of the Embers: Faith After the Great Deconstruction. □*





Richard Rohr

# Envisioning a New World

One of the most prominent prophets in recent American history is Martin Luther King Jr. Like the prophets of Israel, he saw not just what was wrong with his nation, but how it might be restored to the promise upon which it was founded. The Reverend Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas writes about King's prophetic vision for racial justice, suggesting that it was made possible by the "moral imagination" he learned through the Black church and faith. She writes,

*A moral imagination is grounded in the absolute belief that the world can be better. A moral imagination envisions Isaiah's "new heaven and new earth," where the "wolf and the lamb shall feed together," and trusts that it will be made real (Isaiah 65). What is certain, a moral imagination disrupts the notion that the world as it is reflects God's intentions. . . [It] is nothing other than the hope of black faith. Such hope trusts that the arc of God's universe does in fact bend toward justice.<sup>1</sup>*

In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, King's prophetic, moral imagination is on full display:

*Even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . .*

*I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

*I have a dream today!*

*I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!*

*I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together. . .*

*With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.*

*With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.<sup>2</sup> □*

## References

1. Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Orbis Books: 2015), 225, 226.
2. Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (HarperCollins: 1991), 219.

**Image credit:** Dorothea Lange, "Tractored Out" (detail), 1938, photograph, public domain.

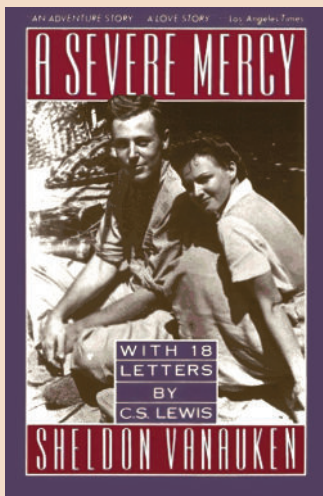
**Original Post:** <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/envisioning-a-new-world-2021-03-25>

## A More Christlike Justice

“...I was one of those caught up in the mood and action of the 1960s, especially the Peace Movement. Christ, I thought, would surely have me oppose what appeared an unjust war [Vietnam]. But *the Movement, whatever its ideals, did a good job of hating*. And Christ, gradually, was pushed to the rear. Movement goals, not God, became first—in fact, not only for me but for other Christians involved...I now think that making God secondary (which in the end is making him nothing), is, quite simply, the mortal danger in social justice, especially in view of the marked intimations of virtue—even arrogant virtue—that often accompany it... I was not obeying the first and greatest commandment—to love God first—nor is it clear I was obeying the second—to love my neighbor. *Hating the oppressors of my neighbor isn't perhaps what Christ had in mind*.

—Sheldon Vanauken, *A Severe Mercy*, pages 234-235

Sheldon Vanauken (1914-1996) was an American author, professor of history and literature, and student-friend of C.S. Lewis. *A Severe Mercy* is a love story of his married life with Davy, the love of his life, who died prematurely at the age of 40 in 1955. After Davy's death, Vanauken became a political activist, only to have severe misgivings in the 1970s about his involvement, as per the quote above.



## MISSION STATEMENT

**Plain Truth Ministries proclaims Christianity without the religion. Our Christ-centered ministry is based on faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone.**

### TO SUBSCRIBE OR UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

**Electronic subscription:** [www.ptm.org/sub](http://www.ptm.org/sub). We serve readers around the world digitally.

**Print subscriptions** to *CWRm* are a benefit for those in North America who generously support *CWR/PTM*. To contribute, visit [www.ptm.org/give](http://www.ptm.org/give).

Please notify us immediately of any change in your address by phone at 1-800-309-4466, online at [www.ptm.org/contact](http://www.ptm.org/contact) or by mail at *Christianity Without the Religion*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

### TO MAKE A DONATION

*Plain Truth Ministries* gratefully accepts donations (tax deductible in the U.S.) to further the ongoing work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We accept donations in U.S. funds by check, money order or credit card. Please visit our secure website [www.ptm.org/give](http://www.ptm.org/give), call us at 1-800-309-4466, or write us at *Plain Truth Ministries*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

### TO SEND A LETTER OR E-MAIL

Write to *CWR magazine* at Pasadena, CA 91129, email us at [managing.editor@ptm.org](mailto:managing.editor@ptm.org). The editors reserve the right whether or not to publish comments, in whole or in part, to print your name and edit for clarity and space.

We protect the confidentiality of correspondence we deem to be of a personal nature.

### COPYRIGHT

*CWRm* (*Christianity Without the Religion magazine*) is published six times a year by Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129. Copyright © 2023 Plain Truth Ministries. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Vol. 14, No. 4: August 2023.

Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the Holy Bible, NIV. © International Bible Society. UBP of Zondervan. *Christianity Without the Religion* is a U.S. trademark.

### SUBMISSIONS

*CWRm* does not publish unsolicited manuscripts. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited artwork, photographs or manuscripts.

### PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

*CWRm* is published by *Plain Truth Ministries (PTM)*. To learn more about *PTM*, visit our website at [www.ptm.org](http://www.ptm.org) (and email us) or write us at *Plain Truth Ministries*, Pasadena, CA 91129.

### EDITORIAL STAFF

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF:** Greg Albrecht

**EDITOR / ART DIRECTOR:** Brad Jersak

**MANAGING EDITOR:** Laura Urista

**PUBLISHING / CIRCULATION:** Dennis Warkentin

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Ed Dunn

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR:** Monte Wolverton

facebook

CWR-Christianity Without the Religion Public Group  
[www.facebook.com/groups/280993567558](http://www.facebook.com/groups/280993567558)



## Reflections Along the Jesus Way

with Greg Albrecht

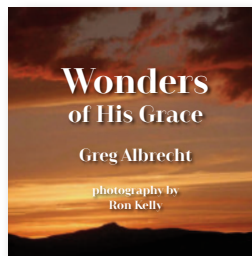
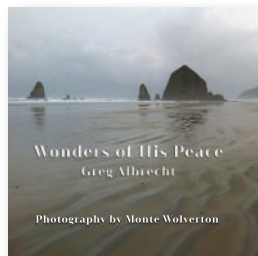
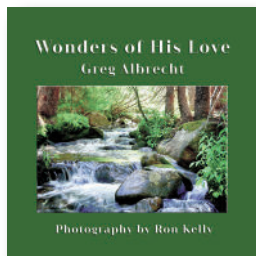
### CWR Quote for the Day

[www.ptm.org/cwr-blog](http://www.ptm.org/cwr-blog)

## Greg Albrecht's

## WONDERS series

### Three Titles Available



Order your copy at [www.ptm.org/books](http://www.ptm.org/books)  
or by calling 1-800-309-4466