



**WITNESS
FOR JUSTICE**

A weekly commentary from the
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The Emperor's Clothes

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"But the emperor has no clothes!" cries the child in the crowd. And so cry we all, when our public leaders embrace an obvious scam without a trace of remorse, without a blush of embarrassment. "No kings," we shout against unilateral political power. "No occupation," we shout against military action in our own cities and neighborhoods. "No theocrats," we shout against the imposition of puritanical laws.

Pointing our finger at naked hubris on parade takes childlike audacity.

Contending with our own naked hubris, however, takes maturity.

Those of us who are white American Christians have a very particular and blatant pretense to contend with, a twisted scam that has been run in the name of Jesus for centuries:

The belief that Christianity + whiteness = righteousness.

= authority.

= importance.

The impact of this historic and ongoing con is monstrous. Yet despite clear knowledge of our supremacy problem, white American Christianity as a whole continues to parade its pretense through the streets: uncompromising in our occupation of stolen lands; undeterred from our conviction that



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white American Christian values are best for the world (even as we fight amongst ourselves over which set of values that is); unashamed to view ourselves as exceptions to our own history. There are not enough protest posters in the world to make fig leaves that will adequately cover the extent of such hubris.

White American Christianity still seeks no king but itself, no occupation but its own, no values unless we approve. We are impressively naked, wrapped in the scam we've inherited and perpetuated. When our nakedness is pointed out, the white tears we cry do not veil our self-importance.

"Happy are those whose sin is covered," observes the psalmist. "But when we hide our iniquities from our own awareness and before God, then we waste away." (See Psalm 32:1–4.) Collective repentance, in liturgy and in life, is essential in our state of torment—not as an effort to cover the nakedness of white American Christianity but as a spiritual practice to strip it more completely of its long-running con.

Collective repentance requires our white American Christian theology to mature in its understanding of salvation. If indeed Jesus came to save us all, then Jesus is the Good Samaritan and we are the battered faith dying in a ditch. We are the lazy servant with our faith buried in the dirt of racism and fear. We are the hungry, the sick, and the imprisoned who so greatly resent a self-image of need that we built and still embrace social systems that force others into hunger, illness, and imprisonment. If indeed Jesus came to save us all, then our white American Christian theology cannot position us as salvation-bearers and eager-beaver-Jesus-helpers. We cannot be disciples of a one-by-one savior, whether that's a "personal Lord and Savior" or a "one-man justice act" called Jesus. Collective repentance of our supremacy sin needs a collective savior, and we white American Christians are no more and no less than those who need salvation.

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