



UNITED RELIGIONS
INITIATIVE

Manifesting Love and Justice by Dismantling White Supremacy

Reflections by URI's Executive Director the Rev. Victor H. Kazanjian, Jr.

In response to the killing of George Floyd, the latest victim of racist violence against persons of color in the United States, Melanie DeMore, vocal activist and friend of URI, wrote on Facebook, "I feel the pain of loss deep in my bones. Another innocent lost...blatant brutality." And then she sang the words of an African-American Gullah lullaby, "Somebody's baby just killed someone else's baby, leaving somebody's baby, cryin'. When will it all end?"

There are many reasons to weep right now. There is the grief related to sickness, death and disruption caused by the current coronavirus pandemic. There is the ongoing devastation and dislocation caused by wars and conflicts that are raging in so many parts of the world. There is growing fear of nuclear annihilation. There is the ongoing assault on Indigenous people and their lands. There is the interpersonal and structural violence of patriarchy that negatively impacts the lives of women and girls every hour of every day. There are the cries of our Mother Earth as humanity continues to rape and pillage the planet. And there is the rise of anti-democratic leaders in the United States and so many parts of the world fanning the flames of division in order to amass power and control suffering populations.

As I watch the video of George Floyd, a fellow human being begging for help as he is being murdered by a police officer breaking his vow to protect and serve, and as I consider all the injustices that poison our beautiful world, I feel sick. I feel angry. And I feel a deep, deep sadness. My heart breaks and my soul aches for the ways in which human beings so often choose to inflict suffering and pain on one another and our planet rather than offering love and compassion. This is a choice made by every person, in every moment. Will I choose to act from fear and see the other as a threat, or will I act from love and see the other as sister and brother? That is our choice, always. URI's Charter is clear on this choice. We choose love. We choose compassion. We choose non-violence. We choose equality. And we choose to dedicate our lives to creating cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Yes, there are many reasons to weep, but as I was reminded recently by author and longtime URI sister P.K. McCary, weeping is not enough: this is the time to act.

Today, American citizens of all cultures and beliefs are protesting against the violence of racism, bigotry, prejudice, white supremacy, and in particular the violent acts of some police officers against members of the communities that they are sworn to protect and serve. Their mostly peaceful protests are being met in many cities with violent military-style force, encouraged by politicians who count white supremacists among their supporters. In other cities, courageous leaders are stepping up to the challenge and engaging the pain of their communities and decrying racism, while some other police officers are speaking out about the immoral and racist acts of their colleagues.

Throughout its history, American society has struggled to deal with the scourge and sickness that is white supremacy and one of its most insidious manifestations, racism. The ongoing killings of African American sisters and brothers in the United States, and the increasing hate crimes against persons of color as well as Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, LGBTQI and other minority communities, are expressions of the systems and structures of supremacies that were created to perpetuate and protect the privilege and power of one group of people. White supremacy, like all extremist, exclusivist beliefs that lift one group of people over another in terms of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, economic status, age, culture or nationality, is a violation of the core principles of human rights, equality and justice that are essential for peaceful and just democratic societies.

White supremacy also violates the central tenants of all of the world's wisdom traditions. White supremacy is a rejection of the Divine.

White supremacy, like all supremacies, expresses itself through the dehumanization of others. To dehumanize another person or group of people is to rob them of their humanity and turn them into a diminished object of one's insecurity, ignorance, fear, greed, lust, or desire for power or profit. In the religious, spiritual and Indigenous traditions of the world, this dehumanization is understood as evil. This evil has been the cause of some of the most horrific acts in human history including the genocides of Indigenous peoples, the genocides of colonialism, the genocide of slavery, and the genocide of the Holocaust.

In a religious sense, evil is that which is contrary to the character and nature of the Divine. White supremacy is evil because to objectify and diminish another created in the image of the Divine is to act in direct opposition to the character and nature of God, Yahweh, Allah, the Great Spirit, the Source of Life. To dehumanize another is to desecrate the Sacred.

In the moments in which George Floyd's life was taken from him while he was gasping for breath, pinned to the ground by police officers sworn to protect and serve him, the Sacred was desecrated.

URI members are speaking out against white supremacy and racism in America, and the brutality and violence that disproportionately impacts communities of color. Adeola Fearon, URI North America's Leadership Council Chair, wrote of this moment, *"It is with diligence that we must stand for what is humane regardless of the "isms" that haunt our collective consciousness. Let our prayers be fueled by our daily interactions and not our*

actions be excused by our prayers.” In speaking out and taking action, URI members are evoking a lesser known part of URI’s Charter, the Guidelines for Action. The Guidelines for Action relevant to this issue call URI members to the following:

“URI seeks to serve as a moral voice and a source of action grounded in contemplation in each of the following areas:

- **Nurturing Cultures of Healing and Peace:** Actions to develop cultures in which all people can live without fear of violence.
- **Rights and Responsibilities:** Actions to uphold human rights.
- **Ecological Imperatives:** Actions to uphold the welfare and healing of the entire Earth community.
- **Sustainable Just Economics:** Actions to bring a spiritual perspective to the tremendous gap between rich and poor.”

URI Cooperation Circle members are working to dismantle the structures of supremacy in the United States and throughout the world, transforming social, economic, political, religious and judicial systems to serve the interests of all people and our planet. In doing so they are following the statement in the Preamble of URI’s Charter which says, *“We unite in responsible cooperative action to bring the wisdom and values of our religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions to bear on the economic, environmental, political and social challenges facing our Earth community.”*

Into this present situation of chaos and confusion, separateness and struggle, URI Cooperation Circles offer a chorus of voices speaking and living the words of the Charter, articulating a new vision of community life and common life-sustaining principles for all humanity.

URI envisions a world at peace, sustained by engaged and interconnected communities committed to respect for diversity, nonviolent resolution of conflict and social, political, economic and environmental justice. This vision rejects all supremacies, and calls for an interdependent world in which our lives are inextricably linked to the lives of others.

In the days ahead, may we continue to live out this vision as we confront the legacies of injustice (in particular, white supremacy and racism) that continue to haunt our communities destroying so many lives. May we come together and act upon the words of the URI Charter, *“We unite to use our combined resources only for nonviolent, compassionate action, to awaken to our deepest truths, and to manifest love and justice among all life in our Earth community.”*

Peace,

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URI Executive Director