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https://christianhegemony.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Preface-1.pdf



Preface

Adapted from Living in the Shadow of the Cross

By Paul Kivel

For over 45 years I have been doing violence prevention and social justice education, activism and writing. Still, it took me years to begin to sort out the role Christian dominance plays in our society.

Like most people, I was vaguely aware of the Crusades, Inquisitions, Witch-Hunts and the colonization of the Americas. Historically, my family was affected by Christian anti-Semitism that produced Russian pogroms, the Nazi holocaust and hate crimes in the US. On a more personal level, I regularly had to explain why I took Jewish holidays off at school and work and put up with missionaries at my front door. The fourth grade public school teacher of our oldest son gave out pocket Bibles to reward her students, whether they were Christian or not. It should not have been so hard to see the bigger picture. Yet it was.

The picture became clearer only when I began to understand that foundational to economic, racial, gender and other forms of oppression was a worldview which makes a fundamental distinction between Christians and a wide assortment of peoples labeled Other. Christianity did not create these distinctions but it gave them a theological place in a cosmic battle depicted as being between good and evil - a battle in which only Christians were deemed capable of being on the good side. All Others were in league with the devil. As an experiment, one day I put Christian dominance in the center of a piece of poster paper and drew lines out to other systems of oppression and begin to tease out the connections, some of which are elaborated in this book.

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However, I didn't really put it all together until I was writing a book about racism for white people.[1] Researching the history of racism led me to understand that before Europeans understood themselves to be white they thought of themselves as Christian. Jews, Pagans and Muslims were the long-standing Others. When encountered, Native Americans and Africans became new heathens in the same good/evil equation. It was only when some Jews and Muslims, and subsequently Native Americans and enslaved Africans, began to convert to Christianity that white Christians felt the need to draw an uncrossable line. Even if members of these groups became Christian, they would still be ineligible for participation in society because they were not white. Being a white Christian (and, it was assumed, male) became the criterion for being fully human.[2]

Once I developed a Christian dominance lens, I began to see more clearly the interrelationship between social concepts, personal beliefs, interpersonal behavior and large-scale institutional and public policy. *In the Shadow of the Cross* is my attempt to describe those relationships and the way the systems of Christian hegemony contribute to the concentration of wealth and power among a few, and the exploitation of the many.

To begin my journey I had to situate myself in relationship to dominant Christianity. I encourage you to do the same.

* What are your current connections with Christianity?

* What was the relationship of your foreparents to Christianity in whatever parts of the world they lived?

* What has been the relationship of whatever identities you claim (female, Black, Native American, queer) to Christian dominance?

[1] Paul Kivel. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 3rd ed. New Society, 2011.

[2] For more details about this process see Ronald Takaki. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Penguin, 1989, p. 47 and Ronald Takaki. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Little Brown, 1993, p. 59.

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Notice the thoughts and feelings that come up as you join me in examining a dominating worldview that often obscures reality, hindering us from collectively addressing our global problems of war, economic inequality and climate change.

As I researched Christian hegemony, I also began to notice stories of resistance. To my own Jewish stories I added stories of Native American, African-American, women's and other peoples' efforts to survive and thrive under oppression. I learned about Christians who worked for social change and communities that developed alternative Christianities, standing against injustice of all kinds. The last part of this book looks at some of these stories.

This book and the Christian Hegemony project (christianhegemony.org) are part of my own resistance effort. My work contains an invitation to you to raise your voice and join the long line of people who challenge dominance and engage in building healthy and sustainable communities of justice and peace.

Paul Kivel, Oakland, CA, 2013

Paul Kivel is an educator, activist and writer with decades of experience working on issues of violence prevention and social justice. His books and curricula include Uprooting Racism, Men's Work, You Call This a Democracy?, Helping Teens Stop Violence, Build Community and Stand for Justice and Living in the Shadow of the Cross. Information about his work, books, and other resources is available at www.paulkivel.com and www.christianhegemony.org.

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