

Doing Theology in the Context of Poverty in South Africa: A Reading of James Cone's Black Theology of Liberation

Tlharhani G. Baloyi

ABSTRACT

Upon the dawn of freedom and democracy in 1994, some South Africans saw this event as a liberating act of God, where human dignity would be an integral part of their lives. Today South Africa still experiences challenges of high levels of poverty, inequality and unemployment, which erodes that human dignity. This article shall reflect on the challenges stated above as faced by black people in South Africa. It intends to use James Cone's liberative theology to argue for an engagement in prophetic activism for the liberation of black people from poverty. The article concludes thus, for as long as the black experiences involve pain and suffering, James Cone's theology remains relevant in the context of South Africa.

Introduction

Without any doubt, James Cone's influence on many black people in their social, academic and church life has been phenomenal. This is evident in the type of theology he lived and professed throughout his life. In the South African context, his theology had tremendous impact on black people and ignited the rise of black liberation theology in South Africa in a form of black theology. According to Kalu:¹

His impact was particularly felt in Southern Africa because, when other regions of the continent were hoisting their new flags, learning new national anthems, and celebrating political independence, repressive regimes bared their fangs in the southern region. In West Africa, for instance, the major theological task was the search for an indigenous theology relevant to African culture.

In this, Cone succeeded in developing a theology that crossed through the broader society and the church. One is able to link such theology in response

1 Ogbu U. Kalu, "James Cone's Legacy in Africa: Confession as Political Praxis in the Kairos Document", *Verbum Et Ecclesia* JEG 27, 2 (2006), 587.