

In Memory of James Cone: A Domatic Gift to the Black and African Church and Theological Communities

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ABSTRACT

The article honours Professor James H. Cone as Christ's gift to both church and theological communities, and whose iconic influence had challenged and continues to challenge these communities not only in North America and Africa but also stretches far and wide to Latin America, Asia, Caribbean, Pacific-Oceania and other parts of the world. As a young theologian, Cone discovered the contradictions that racism and white supremacy presented for Christianity mainly in America but also for the whole world. He then began to raise a theological cry to wrestle against injustice, oppression and the cruel realities of life. James Cone saw his writings as the way to resist and subvert white supremacy. For him therefore, the words of his writings became weapons of resistance to white supremacy, and, of affirmation and defense of black humanity. "I wrote," declared Cone, "because words were my weapons to resist, to affirm black humanity and to defend it."

In his last book published before his death, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011), which is a theological response to the extrajudicial killing and criminal lynching of black people in white American society, Cone reprimands American society for not seeing the striking similarity between Jesus' Crucifixion on the Cross and the lynching of black people on the lynching tree. James Cone places the lynching tree at the center of American theological reflection of the Cross of Jesus and the proclamation of His Passion in the Christian churches: "The conspicuous absence of the lynching tree in American theological discourse and preaching is profoundly revealing, especially since the crucifixion was clearly a first century lynching," Cone wrote.

The article then touches on James Cone's contribution to the development of both African and South African Black theologies on the African continent and his influence on some individual theologians in Africa on both sides of the Zambesi.

Introduction

The Reverend Professor James Hal Cone was a *domatic gift*¹ Christ gave to Black

1 Several Greek words have been used in the New Testament which are rendered 'gift' in English. These include the generic *pneumatikos*; others are *dōrea* (which is often used in the singular); *charisma* (plural *charismata*); and *dōma* (plural *domata*) from which the adjective 'domatic' is derived. The word *domata* (singular, *dōma*) is used as "gifted persons" or "officials" that the Risen Christ gave