

Introduction: James Hal Cone a *Domestic* Gift to Black Christians and Theologians in the Struggle for Life and Liberation

Vuyani Vellem and Tinyiko Maluleke

Emmanuel Martey beautifully describes James Cone as a *domestic person*, a Greek word meaning a “gifted person” as in an evangelist, teacher, prophet or pastor bequeathed us by Christ the Liberator. In the quest to understand the exigencies of black faith lived out within the struggle for life, James Cone is undisputedly a pioneer and pace setter. Cone has established a theological project and originated a theological methodology that has left Christianity as a whole, perhaps even religion in general never the same as it was before. After Cone brutalities once theologically justified in the name of Christianity, can no longer neither be espoused innocently nor with impunity.¹ As an “epistemological breaker” *a la* Martey, James Cone pioneered a grammar of theology, pertinent even to this day, that rejects the myth of superiority of one race in the festival of knowledge construction in the world. According to Emmanuel Martey, following the irruption of the work of Cone, it is no longer possible to ignore black experience in Christian reflection.

J.N.K Mugambi’s article offers insightful commentary on Cone’s corpus not only simpere by the latter’s written works but also face to face interactions indispensable for mentorship, nurture and growth. Mugambi offers a readable thread of Cone’s works with foci such as chromatic metaphors, culture and worship.

In his essay, Gift Baloyi appropriates Cone’s theology in South Africa post 1994. At issue is the on-going discord of black impoverishment in spite of the lofty promises made in the name of democracy. Baloyi is especially concerned with what he describes as a *problematiek* of pseudo-dignity, meaning the harsh conditions that defy all definitions of dignity – abstract or concrete. Under these conditions, the dreams of political liberation have been turned into a nightmare for the vast majority of black people. Baloyi sees Black Theology as a necessary prophetic instrument, organically embedded in the struggles for life even in democratic South Africa.

Reflecting on the footprints of the white and black churches in the inner city’s sanctums, Stephan de Beer agitates for theological re-education imagined through

1 See Emmanuel Martey’s article in this edition, the explanations he offers and the title of his article for further clarity.