

James Cone, the Urban Church in South Africa, and Theological (Re)Education: A Personal Reflection

Stephan de Beer

ABSTRACT

This essay uses as backdrop the work of James Cone, and is foregrounded by a personal reflection of epistemological and theological rupture. Through the lenses of Cone's black theology of liberation, I lament the irrelevance of both black and white churches, as well as theological education, in relation to contemporary urban struggles in South Africa.

Introduction

Taking Cone's assertions as starting point, I reflect on the urban church and theological education in South Africa today, arguing for a theological re-education of ourselves, our faith communities and our dominant theological curricula, if we are to be a contemporary church of the oppressed.

The first part of the article offers an auto-ethnographic reflection that describes ruptures that mediated existential and theological shifts in myself. In the second part I read the South African urban church and theological education through the lenses of James Cone. In the third part I re-imagine theological education through on-going disruptive conversions and the interlocution of the (black) oppressed. Only such ruptures, I suggest, could mediate radical, prophetic theologies that take sides, and get expressed in a church of solidarity, standing with the (urban) oppressed.

Part 1: A Small Auto-Ethnography

Growing up in a white inner city neighbourhood in Pretoria, South Africa

I grew up in Sunnyside, Pretoria. It is adjacent to the Burgers Park neighbourhood of the inner city. For the past 46 years these two neighbourhoods were home. When

Stephan de Beer, Centre for Contextual Ministry & Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria <stephan.debeer@up.ac.za>