In the book called, “God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited” by William Augustus Jones Junior, the reader can more clearly perceive racism within the church as well as outside of it. The objective of the author is for him to open the eyes of the reader to view racism as not simply a socioeconomical conundrum but a spiritual dilemma as well, in accordance to James A. Forbes who is the senior pastor of the Riverside Church at New York.

It is strongly implied that the target audience for this book is for members of the Black Church. William Augustus Jones Junior had stated that “the Black church became the new Africa. It was the extended family restored under the leadership of Jesus Christ, the great High Priest, and under the earthly direction of the Black preacher who was a prophet, priest, and village chief.”[1] Nevertheless, this is not to say that the author only supports African American believers to help out with the social justice and spiritual cause to reduce racism. It can be assumed that members of other races can help with the cause as well. One historical example was Yuri Kochiyama who was civil rights activist who had worked with Malcom X.

Nevertheless, there is a clear reason why the author is primarily targeting African American believers as his primary audience. This is because, due to “its origin, affliction, worship, witness, and mission, the Black church has had to be more social than any other religious institution on American soil. A deep social consciousness was forced upon it by cultural conditions and circumstances.”[2] In other words, they would understand more clearly where the author is coming from in terms of the graveness of racism having experienced it in their own lives more than the white or even Asian reader.

Moreover, the writing style and content is appropriate for the target audience as he makes the relevance of the case of African Americans to Jesus Christ strong despite the time gap

[1] William Augustus Jones Jr., *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited* (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2021), 76.
[2] Ibid., 74.

between biblical antiquity and the modern twenty first century. One example of the writing style and language the author uses is in the following quote. “Existence without equity is the plight of Blacks throughout America. It is the major hurdle to be overcome. Passive submission to the status quo is the big barrier that stands in the way.”[3] His writing style is direct and to the point. It does not involve long winding personal narratives to tell a single point. As a reader, I can very much appreciate this.

Overall, the book is useful for the reader as the author encourages others to step up and be active in their opposition to racial discrimination and racism in general. What was surprising was when the author had stated a number of African American pastors are hindering this social justice and spiritual cause by not taking the issue seriously.[4] “Some are inactive in the struggle because of their failure to see the social implications of the gospel.”[5] Moreover, William Augustus Jones Junior stated that “The ghetto has been previously described as an island of poverty in the midst of a sea of affluence. This ghetto is marked by economic starvation and stagnation.”[6] An example of the writer’s encouragement for the believers of Christ is the following quote. “And redemption always begins with repentance. “When repentance does not occur, divine activity on behalf of the victims is in no wise halted, for the biblical record reveals that God is always on the side of the disinherited. Our Lord is the God of the ghetto![7]

In terms of practicality, he states that the African Americans should tap into their full potential as civil rights activists in order to implement “a strategy of creative coercion. Such a strategy entails, in simple terms, the proper use of existing power to coerce or force the oppressor into a just relationship with the captive community.”[8] In more direct terms this “strategy of

[3] Ibid., 62.
[4] Ibid., 77.
[5] Ibid., 77.
[6] Ibid., 65.
[7] Ibid., 41.
[8] Ibid., 63.

creative coercion" is not advocating anarchy but is more like the civil disobedience in peaceful terms such as when Martin Luther King Junior had led these protests against racism.

Furthermore, one of the strengths of the author is using the commentaries of other individuals who express their thoughts about the author's accomplishments and theology as it really gives more weight to his words if the reader goes back to read the chapters of the book again. Having several people include their own words into the book also deliver a sense of practicality to the reader as well. This means that William Augustus Jones Junior did not simply speak about the subject of racism but actually did something to impact the lives of the other commentators positively.

The second strength of the writer is the specificality of his visionary goal. As mentioned previously, he had believed that a strategy of creative coercion was necessary to even the playing field for the African Americans living in a nation where whiteness was and still is an unfair advantage. In order to implement this strategy of creative coercion, he mentions three steps to this process. "First, there is an urgent need for a transformation of the Black leadership class. Black leadership suffers from serious fragmentation…. Group interests and individual ambitions take precedence over the total wellbeing of Blacks in the nation."[9] Therefore, this signifies that a number of African Americans should take care of each other rather than taking care of only themselves economically, politically, and socially. "Second, Black economic power must be collectivized. Many had concluded that the technological revolution has already rendered Blacks expendable. This conclusion is utterly false."[10] William Augustus Jones Junior asserts that African Americans have more economic power than they think. This is not only "because the collective annual earning power of Blacks is upward of seventy billion dollars, but also because

[9] Ibid., 64.
[10] Ibid., 65.

of the narrow profit margin which many American businesses and industries operate."[11] In more direct terms, a multitude of businesses small, medium, and in some cases even large are at the whim of the power of a sizeable percentage of their consumers which are African Americans.[12] "Beyond this, if the larger business community returned to the Black community a share proportionate to what Blacks contribute in sales and profits, the status of Blacks would be appreciably enhanced." [13] Here, the author seems to advocate for a form of government aid for African Americans because of how much influence they hold in terms of the overall economy of the United States.

In relevance to the third strength of the author, he utilizes biblical examples to relate the political and socioeconomical situation of the ghetto and racism to the modern times. One example was when William Augustus Jones Junior had contended the point Pharoah was racist and incited a mass infanticide of Hebrew boys which is a similar version of how African Americans were treated during the colonial times.[14] Jesus Christ is also described as a relatable character to some of the African Americans living in the ghetto. "His hometown was the slum section of Galilee. He grew up in a ghetto. He sat and supped with sinners. He and his disciples went without wallets and lived mainly on handouts."[15] In pertinence to the weakness of the book, I feel as though the provided sermons, as good as they are, can be removed to make more available space for the author's direct communication or words with the reader. I would prefer this rather than an indirect form of communication to the reader through a sermon because the writing and language feels too scripted and philosophical than practical there.

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[11] Ibid., 65.
[12] Ibid., 65.
[13] Ibid., 66.
[14] Ibid., 122.
[15] Ibid., 47.

In terms of the concepts I had learned, one was them was that white believers need to first take responsibility for their possible transgressions against African Americans as well as the undeniable transgressions of their ancestors. As the author asserts, “the elimination of racism from the white psyche requires repentance at the vertical dimension and reparation at the horizonal level.”[16] Thus, a spirit of humility is much needed for the Anglo-Saxon church of Christ as well as a spirit of grace and forgiveness on the part of the recipients. For the reparations, financial aid should be given to rebuild the ghetto into a more acceptable living area for its impoverished and financially struggling occupants.

The second concept which stood out to me was the theological perspective of “holding idealism and microscopic realism in a state of dialectical tension. This view recognizes and acknowledges the nation’s virtues and its vices…To do this is to be faithful to the prophetic function, to see the human order both as it should be and as it actually is.”[17] This is essentially the Christ and Culture in paradox worldview by Richard H. Niebuhr. This perspective views secular culture positively and negatively, accepting and rejecting some things as to acknowledge the moral and spiritual tension between Christian culture and secular culture. It is the balanced theological perspective in regards to worldly culture. The reason why there are homeless individuals living on the street is because of how imperfect the world truly is, however, on the other hand the world is not evil either. That is why the Christ and culture in paradox perspective can help the church with assisting the needy to become financially independent particularly in urban areas. In other words, instead of always providing for the poor, it is wise for the church to teach them how to earn a living no matter how modest it is such as a janitor or a dishwasher. The other two perspectives such as telescopic idealism or microscopic realism would either dismiss

[16] Ibid., 38.
[17] Ibid., 53.

or give up on helping such people. The former worldview would say that the homeless are fine and are just homeless because they are lazy and did not aspire to gain the American dream.[18] The latter view would claim that society would make them homeless again due to how satanically corrupt it is. Thus, from its perspective, helping the poor become financially independent would be fruitless.[19]

The third concept I learned was how Christian believers should be loyal first and foremost to "God and not to the government. The Bible is replete with testimony to the rightness of this posture. Here and there in its narratives one reads the shining accounts of men and women who had to say yes to God by saying no to the government. Jeremiah is a lustrous example."[20] Instead of paying Uncle Sam our taxes, that money should really be invested into helping the needy in order to exemplify Christ's love for his people, regardless of their financial status. However, since evading taxes cannot be helped, the next best thing believers in Christ can do is to be faithful in tithing ten percent of their disposable income to the church so that it has more financial power to take care of the needy by educating them and providing them with jobs. Christians need to show their loyalty to the Christian faith by consistent tithing rather than simply showing loyalty to their country by paying taxes. Why are some Christians paying taxes regularly but are skipping tithing? By these actions, they are demonstrating their patriotic loyalty rather than a loyalty to the one and true Lord.

Additionally, this book has impacted my current ministry and future ministry as well. I will first preach my sermons by connecting them to racial minorities to bring more awareness to the issues of racism in both the biblical times as well as even in the modern times. I will then implement my visionary goal of raising funds for a renovation of ghettos in urban areas in New

[18] Ibid., 52.
[19] Ibid., 53.
[20] Ibid., 111.

York City which is my second specific goal. Lastly, I will propel a Christ and culture in paradox worldview to establish the need to not only help the needy but teach and train them to be financially independent. For an example, some of the congregates can actually go and help uneducated people to attain a living such as a barber, painter, janitor, cook, waiter, plumber, etc. This will inevitably reduce the number of occupants living in the ghetto regions.

In finality, this book has helped me to understand the negative social, economic, political, and spiritual impact racism has on the world with more clarity and objectivity. The significance of the Black Church also has been elevated in my opinion as well because of the various obstacles such as racism and discrimination which they had overcome with faith and perseverance throughout the centuries. Moreover, I have learned many useful things about the ghetto and how it interconnects with the way Jesus and his disciples were living on a daily basis.[21] This encourages me to help the needy more on an individual basis as well as a corporate one with my home church.

[21] Ibid., 47.

Bibliography

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