

Title: God in the Ghetto
Subtitle: A Prophetic Word Revisited

Alliance University
ATS/NY

Professors: Charles Galbreath & Gilford Monroe
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Thesis statement

“God in the Ghetto” is a clarion call to Christians white and black to dismantle the unholy matrimony of Christianity with racism. It summons the Black church specially to reconstruct a pathway out with the faith community; and piloting the way for freedom and Black equity.

Overview

Dr. William A. Jones, has been described as outspoken, often controversial and sometimes provocative individual; especially in his fight for human rights and justice. Internationally recognized as a prophetic voice and civil-rights activist; the author did occupy many pulpits around the world. Dyson described Jones in the foreword as one of the nation’s greatest advocates of black radical evangelical belief; a servant that was “Sublimely self-confident with a vocal register that suggested that his voice was a divine instrument to make people listen.”¹

Jones was quoted as saying that he lived his life “With the feeling that divine providence had upheld, sustained, and directed his destiny.” I believe that God had a special mark and anointing on this Black Brother that enabled him to wear the belt of truth and handle the sword of the Spirit without fear or favor. Jones practiced what he preached. He engaged in, and confronted situations that could not be deemed business as usual, civil disobedience if you will; in order to facilitate for the disenfranchised to access resources. He applied the Word as a means of resistance to “White Racism by Design.” He has left a legacy of critical insights, radical obedience to the call on his life, and an enduring prophetic message. His sterling leadership has planted footprints in the sand of history impacting the current generations and those to come.

¹ Jones, William A., Jennifer Jones Austin, and Michael Eric Dyson. *God in the Ghetto: A Prophetic Word Revisited*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press Publishers, 2021.

Analysis

The main audience of *God in the Ghetto* is the church in general, and the Black church specifically. The writing style and content are absolutely appropriate. Jones uses many literary devices and prophetic wisdom to inform the reader. He hastens to define “The System” as the American trinity of capitalism, racism and militarism.”² A ‘system’ rigged by a “Sick sociology based on a faulty anthropology, which emanates from a false theology.”³ Reading *God in the Ghetto* has unveiled American triumvirates. The first trinity is named above; followed by the “Sinful minority that is neither young, colored, nor poor, the highly privileged few; that controlled and manipulated the majority of Americans. They own the nation’s wealth, rape the world’s resources, make political decisions, plan the nation’s military ventures, hurt our humanity, and defaced our dignity.”⁴

Jones reminds us that “Racism operated and still operates on the assumption that psychocultural traits and capacities . . . biological . . . races differ decisively from one another. This coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority . . . its right to dominate over others.”⁵ Based on these statements, I am assuming that whites believed that God’s images with a different pigmentation were Black and blank, dark and dunce, ugly and undeserving of honor and respect.⁶

Thankfully, the author dispelled that notion that Blacks are void of understanding when he affirmed that despite the slaves “Limited learning, they saw clearly the evils of the slavery system; and the dichotomy between faith and practice, between Christian ethics and social

² *Ibid.*, 2

³ *Ibid.*, 3

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19,53

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8

policy, and began to modify and personalize . . . Scripture. They read the Exodus story . . . prophetic response . . . an existential and an eschatological dimension.”⁷ Yes! They started to sing because their Creator’s resumé came into view and they envisioned their own deliverance/exodus. Perspicacious would you say?

At this point, I can’t help but question why is there two different and opposing gospels? The “gospel of racial exceptionalism” and the “gospel of human equality of being.” What was the underpinning, the religious rhetoric that caused “the oppressor’s pathology to be so deep, and spirit to be so twisted and perverted?”⁸ The same Bible white supremacists used to practice and justify genocide, uneven distribution of power and resources, systematic exclusion, polarization, ghettoization, and terror on God’s image bearers, is the same Bible that categorically states, that to sin against any segment of the human family is to sin against God”⁹ ‘Love the Lord your God . . . the second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31) must have been obliterated from the white supremacists version.

The author concluded that the “abandonment of absolutes, the blatant disregard for the sanctity of human life, implies the absence of genuine theism,” but the presence of “Graceless Moralism.” Jones summon the Black church to revisit “racism” and identifying this white nationalist religion . . . and examine it through a spiritual lens for its insidious nature.” He labels “Racism as demonism - a spiritual perversion,” The kind that ruined many nations before, and now, threatens to destroy America.” He said “When racism is stripped down to its bareness, the racist ascribes to God a posture of partiality predicated on skin color . . . permanent places under the sun based on that posit.” Racists have rejected the divine sovereignty of God, and establish

⁷ Ibid., 33,34

⁸ Ibid., 28

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their preferred hierarchy. Is it any wonder that “Slavery was basically a Christian enterprise and a Christian sponsored genocide?”¹⁰

Strengths

“Power is an awesome and awful allurements.” According to Lord Acton, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely . . . the ultimate absurdity of power is that those who possess it have the tendency to try to play God.”¹¹ History has proven to mankind that power is an awesome acquisition; but time and events have demonstrated that yielding to the seductive nature of power almost always lead to ruin. The Word of God declares; God judges the way of the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. I believe El Shaddai, Deus Omnipotens, God Almighty is angry with America.

Back Door Divinity: “He didn’t have to do it, but He did.”¹² The God of heaven chose **redemption** for His fallen children; “In the fullness of time He sent His Son” to demonstrate His love towards falling mankind. A divine sacrifice was required; therefore, the spotless ‘Lamb’ of God entered the ghetto, robed in humanity and humility. He grew up in the ‘hood’ had a menial job; was homeless; hang out with the least of these; he also touched lives no one else was willing to touch. He was despised and rejected by the powerful and privilege. Christ, the Revolutionary engaged and confronted the systems of His day. Jesus came our way by way of the back door. “His sojourn and tabernacling, his flesh-and-blood involvement has made us beneficiaries of a love not deserved and favor not earned.” Most importantly, the author proclaims, “He came the way of the back door because most of His children are back door dwellers.”¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 31,32,33

¹¹ Ibid., 37,88

¹² Ibid., 86,87

¹³ Ibid., 89

“White churches, for the sake of their own redemption, *must* repent and make reparation, and demand the same from the nation as a whole.”¹⁴ The white church must acknowledge the wicked and nefarious nature of racism and how it denies others access to “the tree of life.”¹⁵ Deliberate corrective measure to eradicate the superordination structure is paramount to enable the closing of the gap between the needy and the greedy. I sincerely hope Luke 19:1-10 is found in their version of the Bible, so they can understand that saying sorry is definitely not enough. They need to be acquainted with both the principle of reparation and true repentance. The King of glory gave His life to redeem the human race; yet the American “System” is built on taking life and liberty that it didn’t provide.

Usefulness

God in the Ghetto informs the reader that ‘White American’ churches had, and still have a worldview without God Almighty at the center. It speaks to the intentionality and completeness of racism, stratification, ghettoization; and the devastating effects on the weak, abused and the disenfranchised. This narrative echo how essential theological formation is to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ; because, “The vertical dimension of Christian faith should not be emphasized while the horizontal is neglected”¹⁶ (1Jn 4:7-12; 20). This powerful literature challenges the Black church to learn the game of this racially divided society, and the “System” in order to change the game. Be intentional, because racism is deliberately ruthless.

Take-a-way

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37

“The Black church, when properly performing its prophetic functions will seek reconciliation between the oppressor and the oppressed, but only on terms of equity and justice.”¹⁷ The Black church is called to prophetic utterances not to soothe the conscience of the white church, but to point them to “The supreme symbol of the Christian faith, the cross. The cross, rough-hewn and blood-soaked, beneath . . . midst . . . cursing criminals.”¹⁸ The white church needs an urgent awakening to the truth of the cross of Christ. The place of agony, death, and new life; where God’s love intersects the human condition. Through the cross there is life, liberation, and redemption.” The Black church has a charge to keep; delivering the gospel that is antithetical to the Faith is the core of our witness; therefore, ***we are reconciled to be reconcilers.***

“We have a definite duty to pray for those in authority, but we also have a duty to preach to them. Though we reside here and are subject to the laws of the state, our citizenship is in Heaven and we’re under orders from on high.”¹⁹ Therefore the church cannot forge any unholy union with politics or racism because, when Christians defend the integrity of the perpetrators of injustice, it is betrayal to justice.

“Timid souls can’t preach to a wicked world. The times are too terrible for God’s people to sit at ease in Zion.”²⁰ God in the Ghetto is saying to the church in general, and the Black church specifically, there is a war raging and warriors are needed on the front line. There’s need for David to face Goliath; Esther to enter the king’s presence uninvited, Joshua to command heaven, and John the Baptist disturbing the status quo. A flute is inadequate at this juncture in

¹⁷ Ibid., 83,217

¹⁸ Ibid., 39

¹⁹ Ibid., 140

²⁰ Ibid., 113

America's and the world's history.²¹176 The trumpet needs to be blown (Joel 2:1-2; Is. 58:1), we need to cry and spare not. We need to tell the story of redemption so that those who are oblivious, comfortable in exceptionalism, in denial, complicity, unrepentant political parlance, and false theology will know that the wages of sin is death; but "true freedom" can only be found in the God of the Ghetto without the blue eyes, flowing brown hair and white skin.

Significance for Ministry

Christianity calls on its adherents to submit to the authority of our Lord. The author calls upon the Black church in the midst of their painful predicament to extend the gospel of Christ to the victimizers and seek the healing of the victims, torn and scarred by "The System." The Black church is fully aware of the cultural and spiritual divide between themselves and their oppressors in a Bible land and God-fearing country.

Those who live in the dark ghetto where death, desolation and economic genocide is their stark reality are been called to mission. Only when the church is properly aligned to the Christ mandate loving vertically and horizontally, looking upward to Jesus for divine guidance; looking inside of ourselves as Rom. 3:23 describes us and be willing to activate (Matt. 6:9-15).

Interestingly, within this prayer exist a conditional clause where our Father says we will not be forgiven **if** we refuse to forgive those who trespass against us. The question is how do we forgive what is neither acknowledge or confess?

Samuel Yette concludes that the "White church has no desire to right the wrong against Blacks; repentance is rare, and reparation is non-existent."²² This is proof that America has always been long on promise but woefully short on performance. They offer Blacks "freedom

²¹ *Ibid.*, 176

²² *Ibid.*, 82

without finance, position without power, symbol without substance, access without assets, and existence without equity.” “After they have outlived their usefulness, they are no longer an economic asset but rather a drag.”²³ “The white church as an instrument of “The System” then and now sanctifying its sins and inspiring its iniquitous deeds.”²⁴

Finally, “In this period of history when mercy and compassion are in short supply, and when beneficiaries of an evil past . . . roughshod . . . weak and helpless . . . symbols of human power . . . not indestructible nor determinative.”²⁵ “My heart is indeed heavy, because, we are living in a society that is flirting with destruction; my mind is perplexed over the restless and reckless currents of our time.”²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*, 27,83

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 36

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 128

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139

Bibliography

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