



## **Black Liberation Theology** by [John T Polk II](#)

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

**Question: What is "Black Liberation Theology"? Is there any difference between religion for "blacks" and "whites"?**

**Answer:** As for the second question, **no**, not as far as the Bible is concerned. As for the first question...

**In 2008, "Black Liberation Theology" came to public attention through the preaching of Jeremiah Wright, of Chicago, Illinois. Wright was *not* a radical preacher,** but represented its mainstream beliefs:

- Black hatred and suspicion of whites;
- Black racism and arrogance; and
- Belief that America is a white-racist society devoted to keeping down blacks.

"Black Liberation Theology" is Malcolm X's Black Muslim doctrine combined with Stokely Carmichael's "Black Power" doctrine of the 1960's disguised as "Christianity," and has been preached from pulpits for decades instead of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The writings of James H. Cone popularized the doctrine that has formed the faith of numerous blacks. Cone documented:

However, it was not until the summer of 1966, after Malcolm X's assassination (February 21, 1965), that the term "black power" began to replace the term "integration" among many civil rights activists. (page 10, **For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church**, by James H Cone, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, copyright 1984, 13th printing, December, 2003) [Bold formatting in quotations from Cone's books has been added by this writer unless otherwise noted.]

James Cone maliciously divided society, spiritual fellowship, and families along a purely racial line, and has completely broken down the line of communication between many blacks and whites. The National Committee of Negro Churchmen wrote a "Black Power Statement" that was published in the New York Times, July 31, 1966,

The publication of the "Black Power Statement" may be regarded as the beginning of the conscious development of **a black theology in which black ministers separated their understanding of the gospel of Jesus from white Christianity and identified it with the struggles of the black poor for justice.** (*ibid*, pages 10-11)

**... Black leadership believed that the time had come for black Christians to make their own interpretation of the gospel by**

**separating black religion from white religion, and then connecting the former with their African heritage and their contemporary fight for justice. Black church leaders would soon openly denounce white racism as the Antichrist and would become unrelenting in their attack on its demonic presence in white denominations. It was in this context that the term "black theology" emerged.** (*ibid*, page 11)

... Black theology arose as an attempt to stem the tide of the irrelevance of Christianity **by combining both Christianity and blackness, Martin [Luther King, Jr., jtpII] and Malcolm [X, jtpII], black church and black power**, even though neither side thought it was possible. (*ibid*, page 59)

Advocating "the blackness of Jesus," Cone said:

**We wanted to expose the racism of white churches** and also encourage black churches to embrace the biblical Christ who looks much more like oppressed blacks than white oppressors...

... **White biblical scholars have not even bothered to train blacks** to acquire the skills that they regard as necessary for sound biblical exegesis. What right, then, do they have to say that our exegesis is unsound? (*ibid*, page 67)

Unfortunately, **American white theology** has not been involved in the struggle for black liberation. **It has been basically a theology of the white oppressor, giving religious sanction to the genocide of Amerindians [sic, jtpII] and the enslavement of Africans.** From the very beginning to the present day, American white theological thought has been "patriotic," either by defining the theological task independently of black suffering (the liberal northern approach) or by defining Christianity as compatible with white racism (the conservative southern approach). In both cases theology becomes a servant of the state, and that can only mean death to blacks...

... **Blacks recognize that it is incumbent upon them to throw off the chains of white oppression by whatever means they regard as suitable.** This is what God's revelation means to black and white America, and why black theology is an indispensable theology for our time. (page 4-5, **A Black Theology of Liberation**, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, copyright 1970, J. B. Lippincott Company, copyrights 1986, 1990, 18th printing, October, 2007, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545)

### **Bible Reply:**

There is absolutely no way to properly identify Jesus Christ with "black" anything. Neither His skin, nor doctrine, nor practice, nor sympathies, nor politics associated Him with "blackness."

Anyway, how dark must a person's skin be for Cone to trust him? Cone establishes his doctrine by quoting from the writings of some white skinned philosophers, endorsing white Karl Marx, and accepting the writings of lightly-colored W. E. B. DuBois from

the early 1900s. *Hypocritically, Cone decries all theological help from whites in understanding the Bible, but accepts philosophical and sociological assistance from white men to shore up his prejudice against whites!* Cone anticipated this criticism when he said:

There are essentially two responses. First ... When I say that white theology is not Christian theology, I mean the theology that has been written without any reference to the oppressed of the land. This is not true of Karl Barth ... Dietrich Bonhoeffer ... Reinhold Niebuhr ... I do not condemn all persons who happen to look like white Americans; the condemnation comes when they act like them ... Secondly, it is characteristic of the oppressed to be limited to the thought forms of those who call themselves the masters. (*ibid*, Chapter 1, footnote 4, pages 203-204)

In other words, Cone will use white authors when they are on the side of the oppressed blacks, but decry them as "racist" when they teach a Scriptural equality of mankind! He shows the futility of mind like those who have not learned Christ but are:

... Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart (**Ephesians 4:17-18**).

***If people were to read all of Cone's "Black Power/ Theology" books, substituting "white" every time "black" is used, no one could miss the "white racism" in them.*** Even Cone admitted he could be wrong:

I realize that my theological limitations and my close identity with the social conditions of black people could blind me to the truth of the gospel. And maybe our white theologians are right when they insist that I have overlooked the universal significance of Jesus' message. (page 126, **God of the Oppressed**, Seabury Press, Inc., 1975, New Revised Edition 1975, 10th printing, October, 2007, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545)

The attitude of a false teacher is one who:

... Does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... Is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, **from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions**, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth ... From such withdraw yourself. (**1 Timothy 6:3-5**, emphasis mine, jtpII)

Cone prejudicially condemns all white students of God's Word, "evil suspicions," then proceeds to preach his "envy, strife, reviling" based upon what some whites have done to *some* blacks. Cone chafes at white man's interpretation of Scripture, and seems ignorant of:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (**2 Peter 1:20- 21**).

***The Bible was not written by purely white men; it has no white man interpretation (or black, either!); and it does not uphold white enslavement of black people.*** In fact, the Gospel of Christ was accepted completely by a man of Ethiopia (**Acts 8:26-39**) who said nothing whatever about it "enslaving" him to whites! ***When it comes to "theology," Cone should not be trusted by neither whites or blacks.***

### **Cone Twists History for His Purposes**

Cone completely misrepresents history and magnifies one part above all else. Granted, human slavery has been reprehensibly practiced by many, but white men (and Americans particularly!) have not been entirely responsible for the practice. British Historian Tiffany Nairne has said:

Romans enslaved Eastern Europeans— hence the name slavery comes from Slavs, from the Slavic nations (Slovakia obviously, but also its neighbours; this treatment of Slavic nations is still seen in modern times with the ethnic cleansing wreaked upon Romania). The English were so named by a Roman Emperor who saw a "slave" from the British Isles. Commenting that the child had the face of an angel, the Isles were hence called "Angel-land," and the slave people Angels (or Angles, of the Anglo-Saxon stock). Hence the Colonial past of the United States is rooted in a land named after a slave race, inheriting a name given by the slave masters from Rome! The first servants taken to the American colonies were not African but Irish. The Ottoman Empire of the Turks made vast fortunes from the slave trade, and Saudis, Iraqis, Afghanis, etc., still do make money from trading in slaves. (Personal correspondence, 8-15-2008)

The fort, El Mina, built by the Portuguese in Ghana, West Africa in 1482 (incidentally ***before Columbus discovered America***), became the primary point of departure for blacks sold by blacks to the whites. White man's enslavement of blacks lasted about 300 years, but Muslim/ Islam's enslavement of black people has continued for over 1400 years! Why doesn't Cone object even more to the Muslim practice in history than to whites? Could it be that Cone wants everyone to be as blind as he is to the rest of history (**Cf Matthew 15:14**)? **Has he willfully ignored the white people who died to free blacks from slavery during the War Between the States?**

*Making racially prejudiced statements is morally wrong regardless of the skin color of the one making the statements!* The Bible teaches that

[Eve] was the mother of all living (**Genesis 3:20**).

After the world was destroyed by flood, it was from Noah and his three sons that:

The whole earth was populated (**Genesis 9:19**).

After Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, Jews "from every nation under heaven" (**Acts 2:5, 38, 40-41**) and then Gentiles (**Acts 10:1-48; Romans 10:12-13**) heard and obeyed the same message of salvation from sins. The Bible teaches that by Creation and after judgment in the Flood, the human "race" came from the same family; but by the blood of Jesus Christ, God wants His spiritual family to come from every nation (**Matthew 28:18-20**). ***The proper response to white racism is not***

**black racism, but to teach from the Bible that the God who made us, saved us, and gave Himself for us to be one in Him, is neither black nor white** (**John 4:24; Luke 24:39**). Jesus Christ “has broken down the middle wall of separation” (**Ephesians 2:13-16**) between people who hate each other; Cone seeks to build a hateful middle wall of separation that divides the human race. Has Cone not even read these passages of Scripture?

## **Cone Twists Bible for His Purposes**

Cone twists many Bible terms out of their Biblical sense, as condemned in **2 Peter 3:16**, redefining them to refer to Black liberation from white racism:

### **1. Exodus of Israel from Egypt:**

By delivering this people from Egyptian bondage and inaugurating the covenant on the basis of that historical event, **God is revealed as the God of the oppressed**, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage (**A Black Theology of Liberation**, page 2).

**Bible Reply:** God said He freed Israel (from slavery imposed by Africans!) to possess the land He promised to Abraham (**Exodus 3:6-10; Leviticus 25:38; Joshua 21:43-45**) and did this for no other nation (**Deuteronomy 4:33-39**)! Israelites were not to enslave one another, but could buy slaves from other nations (**Exodus 21:1-12, 20-27; Leviticus 25:39-46**). Because of their unfaithfulness, God let them become slaves again for 70 years out of their land, but returned them, as prophesied (**2 Kings 17:5- 20; 2 Chronicles 36:15-23; Ezra 9:9**). *Nowhere is it recorded that God liberated all oppressed people in all countries, or that He is the “God of the [physically] oppressed blacks [only].*

### **2. Resurrection:**

If the history of Israel and the New Testament description of the historical Jesus reveal that God is a God who is identified with Israel because it is an oppressed community, **the resurrection of Jesus means that all oppressed peoples become his people**. Herein lies the universal note implied in the gospel message of Jesus. **The resurrection event means that God’s liberating work is not only for the house of Israel but for all who are enslaved by the principalities and powers** (*ibid*, page 3).

**Bible Reply:** Jesus Christ was raised from the dead to:

- Declare Him to be the Son of God (**Romans 1:3-4**);
- Permit sinners baptized into His death to arise as new creatures (**Romans 6:4-5**); and to
- Prove there will be a general resurrection of all the dead some day (**1 Corinthians 15:12-13; Acts 24:15**).

Jesus’ resurrection did not mean “that all [physically] oppressed peoples become his people,” but only those baptized into His death and raised with Him to life, that is, the obedient (**Hebrews 5:8-9**).

### 3. Kingdom:

The appearance of Jesus as the black Christ also means that **the black revolution is God's kingdom** becoming a reality in America (*ibid*, page 124).

**Bible Reply:** The kingdom of God:

- "Is not of this world" (**John 18:36**);
- Was taken from the Jews and given to another people (**Matthew 21:42-45**);
- Came during the lifetime of those who heard Jesus (**Mark 9:1**);
- Is where disciples observe the Lord's Supper (**Mark 14:22-26**);
- Is for those who are reborn (**John 3:3-5**); and
- Is entered by obeying the Gospel of Christ (**Acts 8:12**); and faithfulness shown in suffering as the church (**2 Thessalonians 1:3-6**).

*Nowhere is it associated with black revolution!*

### 4. Repentance:

For Jesus, repentance is a precondition for entrance into the kingdom. **But it should be pointed out that repentance has nothing to do with morality or religious piety in the white sense ...** The kingdom is what God does and **repentance arises solely as a response to God's liberation.** The event of the kingdom today is the liberation struggle in the black community" (*ibid*, page 124-125).

**Bible Reply:** Bible repentance only relates to a sinner's response to sin. It:

- Is for sinners (**Mark 2:17**; **Luke 5:32**) responding to "the goodness of God" who wants all to repent (**Romans 2:4**; **2 Peter 3:9**);
- Must only be motivated by "godly sorrow" (**2 Corinthians 7:10**);
- Is followed by baptism "for the remission of sins" (**Acts 2:38**);
- Is shown in those who "do works befitting" it (**Acts 26:20**).

*Nowhere is it only for freed black slaves!* Repentance has everything "to do with morality or religious piety" in the Biblical sense!

### 5. Salvation:

**In most societies where political oppression is acute and religion is related to the state, salvation is interpreted always in ways that do not threaten the security of the existing government ...** With the poor counting on salvation in the next life, oppressors can humiliate and exploit without fear of reprisal. That is why Karl Marx called religion the opiate of the people" (*ibid*, page 126- 127 ... **Salvation, then, primarily has to do with earthly reality and the injustice inflicted on those who are helpless and poor. To see the salvation of God is to see this people rise up against its oppressors, demanding that justice become a reality now, not tomorrow** (*ibid*, page 128).

**Bible Reply:** Salvation:

- Is only in the name of Christ (**Acts 4:12**) for both Jew and Gentile (**Romans 1:16**) who obey Jesus (**Hebrews 5:8- 9**);

- Is learned through Scriptures (**2 Timothy 3:15**);
- Requires godly living (**Titus 2:11-12**);
- Will not be offered after death (**Hebrews 9:27-28**); and
- Concerns a soul's eternity (**1 Peter 1:6-9**).

*Nowhere in the New Testament is a soul's salvation associated with overthrowing physical oppression! The Apostle Paul was saved (**1 Timothy 1:15-16**) but denied being any part of "people rising up against its oppressors" (**Acts 25:7-8**).*

## 6. Church:

**The church must be a revolutionary community; breaking laws that destroy persons** ... The task of the church is threefold. First, it proclaims the reality of divine liberation ... **Secondly, the church not only proclaims the good news of freedom, it actively shares in the liberation struggle** ... Thirdly, the church as a fellowship is a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality (*ibid*, page 130-131).

**Bible Reply:** The church of Christ:

- Is composed of all those who obey the Gospel of Christ (**Acts 2:36-38, Acts 2:40-41, 47**);
- Only met and prayed about the Apostle James death and Apostle Peter's imprisonment (**Acts 12:1-5**);
- Scattered when persecuted (**Acts 8:1**);
- Shows God's manifold wisdom to the world (**Ephesians 3:8-12**).

The Apostle Paul denied ever "inciting the crowd" (**Acts 24:10-13; 25:7-8**) and taught civil authority is God-given for an orderly society (**Romans 13:1-5**). *Nowhere was the church of Christ a "revolutionary community, breaking laws that destroy persons!"*

### **Cone Needs to Read the Black Print on the White Page**

The Old Testament indeed shows how God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (**Exodus 1-15**), but *has Cone not read* that John the Baptist identified:

Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (**John 1:29**)?

***Jesus is concerned with "sin" not "skin"!***

*Has Cone not read* Jesus' description of the origin and types of sin (**Matthew 15:19-20**), not one of which is "slavery"?

*Cone must have quit reading the Scriptures* before Paul taught "bondservants" and "masters" to treat each other with goodwill (**Ephesians 6:5-9**)! It is bondage or slavery in sin (**John 8:34-36; Romans 6:1-22**) from which Jesus can free any people (**Galatians 3:23-4:7**).

*Cone completely misrepresents the central message of Scripture*, but Jesus said,

"You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (**Matthew 22:29**).

## What part of Jesus' teaching does Cone endorse?

### 1. Love?

**Cone:** White people should not even expect blacks to love them, and to ask for it merely adds insult to injury (page 21, **Black Theology & Black Power**, James H Cone, 1969, Harper & Row, 18th printing, November 2006).

**Jesus:** "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (**Luke 6:27-28**).

### 2. Non-Violence?

**Cone:** If whites do not get off the backs of blacks, they must expect that blacks will literally throw them off **by whatever means are at their disposal** (*ibid*, page 22).

**Jesus:** "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (**John 18:36**).

### 3. Example to Follow?

**Cone:** He [Jesus, jtpII] certainly never resorted to violence ... **We cannot solve ethical questions of the twentieth century by looking at what Jesus did in the first. Our choices are not the same as his ... His steps are not ours** (*ibid*, page 139).

**Jesus:** "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (**John 14:21**).

He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (**1 John 2:6**).

### 4. Moral Law?

**Cone:** This means that the Christian is placed in a situation in which he alone makes the choice. **The dichotomy between 'good and evil,' 'right and wrong' is a false one** (*ibid*, page 142).

**Jesus:** "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (**Matthew 12:35**).

James H. Cone, and all Black Liberation Theology preachers, should be made aware of the warning Jesus gave in **Matthew 23:13**:

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."



Don't be so narrow-minded that you only try to extricate black people from "white-American enslavement."

For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is bought into bondage. (**2 Peter 2:18-19**)

Rather, preach "the whole counsel of God" (**Acts 20:27**) that all people who obey the Gospel of Christ may be made free indeed (**John 8:32**). Jesus Christ drew no racial lines when:

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (**Mark 16:15-16**)

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