

In Memoriam: James H. Cone



James H. Cone (1938-2018), was known as the founder of Black liberation theology, he was the Bill and Judith Moyers Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary. He attended Shorter College (1954-1956) and holds a B.A. degree from Philander Smith College (1958). In 1961, he received a Master of Divinity degree from Garrett Theological Seminary and later earned an M.A. (1963) and Ph.D. (1965) from Northwestern University. Dr. Cone has been conferred thirteen (13) honorary degrees, including an honoris causa from the Institut Protestant de Théologie in Paris, France.

Among his numerous awards are the American Black Achievement Award in religion given by Ebony magazine (November 1992), the Fund for Theological Education Award for contributions to theological education and scholarship (November 1999), the Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion (2009), the Eliza Garrett Distinguished Service Award in recognition of seminal theological scholarship from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (2010).

Dr. Cone is an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He is listed in the *Directory of American Scholars*, in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in American Religion*, *Who's Who among African Americans*, and *Who's Who in the World*. He is the author of twelve (12) books and over 150 articles and has lectured at many universities and community organizations throughout the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. He is an active member of numerous professional societies, including the Society for the Study of Black Religion, the American Academy of Religion, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in the Philippines, and is a founding member of the Society of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion.

Dr. Cone is best known for his ground-breaking works, *Black Theology & Black Power* (1969) which represents an initial attempt to identify liberation as the heart of the Christian gospel, and of Blackness as the primary mode of God's presence relating to the struggle for liberation with the gospel message of salvation to lay the foundation for an interpretation of Christianity and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) that combine the visions of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. to reappraise Christianity from the perspective of the oppressed Black community in North America;

he is also the author of *God of the Oppressed* (1975), reflections on God, Jesus, suffering, and liberation that relates the gospel message to the experience of the Black community to argue that social and historical context plays a part in framing the questions addressed to God as well as the mode of the answers provided, and of *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* (1991) which provides an examination of King and Malcolm X that cuts through superficial assessment of the two as polar opposites to reveal instead two men whose visions were complementary and moving toward convergence; all of which works have been translated into nine languages. The 30th Anniversary of the publication of *Black Theology & Black Power* was celebrated at the University of Chicago Divinity School (April 1998), and a similar event was held for *A Black Theology of Liberation* at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (April 2000) and at the Catholic Theological Society of America (June 2001). His research and teaching are in Christian theology, with special attention to Black liberation theology and the liberation theologies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He also taught 19th & 20th century European-American theologies.



Cone (in a 2009 photo to the left) is also author of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, a book that argues that the cross and the lynching tree are the two most emotionally charged symbols in the history of the African American community in the U.S. as he explores these symbols and their interconnection in the history and souls of Black people, the book received the 2012 Nautilus Silver Award in Religion/Spirituality-Western Traditions. And in his final work titled *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* (2018), he describes the obstacles he overcame to find his voice, to respond to the signs of the times, and to offer a voice for those—like the parents who raised him in Bearden, Arkansas in the era of lynching and Jim Crow—who had no voice; recounting lessons learned both from critics and students, and the ongoing challenge of his models King, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin, he describes his efforts to use theology as a tool in the struggle against oppression and for a better world. He is survived by

his sons Michael and Charles, daughters Robynn and Krystal, and two grandchildren, Jolei and Miles.