

THE CROSS AND THE LYNCHING TREE

A Contemplation of the Cross as Injustice

James H. Cone—“Few, if any, of the early Church Fathers grounded their christological arguments in the concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, little is said about the significance of his ministry to the poor as a definition of his person. The Nicene Fathers showed little interest in the christological significance of Jesus' deeds for the humiliated, because most of the discussion took place in the social context of the Church's position as the favored religion of the Roman State., God of the Oppressed (p. 107)

James H. Cone—“The cross helped me to deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me to understand the tragic meaning of the cross.” (The Cross and the Lynching Tree, Introduction)

James H. Cone—“What is most ironic is that the white lynchers of blacks in America were not regarded as criminals; like Jesus, blacks were the criminals and insurrectionists. The lynchers were the “good citizens” who often did not even bother to hide their identities. They claimed to be acting as citizens and Christians as they crucified blacks in the same manner as the Romans lynched Jesus . . . White theologians in the past century have written thousands of books about Jesus' cross without remarking on the analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and the lynching of black people.” (A Black Theology of Liberation, p. 158-159).

Isaiah 53:8—Unjustly condemned, he was led away. (New Living Translation)

Mark 14.43—Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. [“Temple Police,” cf. Luke 22.52]

Mark 14.1-2—Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

Mark 14.13-15—So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

Mark 12.12—Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Mark 11.27-28—The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”

Mark 11.18—The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

Mark 11.15-16—On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

Mark 11.11—Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

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James H. Cone—“Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, this symbol of salvation has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and oppression of human beings—those whom Ignacio Ellacuría, the Salvadoran martyr, called “the crucified peoples of history.” The cross has been transformed into a harmless, non-offensive ornament that Christians wear around their necks. Rather than reminding us of the ‘cost of discipleship,’ it has become a form of ‘cheap grace,’ an easy way to salvation that doesn’t force us to confront the power of Christ’s message and mission. Until we can see the cross and the lynching tree together, until we can identify Christ with a ‘recrucified’ black body hanging from a lynching tree, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy.” (The Cross and the Lynching Tree)

Karen Baker-Fletcher—“If Jesus is on the side of the least of these, as Matthew 25 suggests and womanist liberation theologians emphasize, then this includes the earth. It too is hungry for nourishment. It too is increasingly impoverished.” (My Sister, My Brother; Womanist and Xodus God Talk)

Plato—“And now let us frame an ideal of the just and unjust. Imagine the unjust man to be master of his craft, seldom making mistakes and easily correcting them; having gifts of money, speech, strength – the greatest villain bearing the highest character: and at his side let us place the just in his nobleness and simplicity – being, not seeming – without name or reward – clothed in his justice only – the best of men who is thought to be the worst, and let him die as he has lived. I might add (but I would rather put the rest into the mouth of the panegyrist of injustice – they will tell you) that the just man will be scourged, racked, bound, will have his eyes put out, and will at last be crucified (literally impaled)— and all this because he ought to have preferred seeming to being. ” (Republic)

Ched Myers—“The threat to punish by death is the bottom line of the power of the state; fear of this threat keeps the dominant order intact. By resisting this fear and pursuing kingdom practice even at the cost of death, the disciple contributes to shattering the powers' reign of death in history. To concede the state's sovereignty in death is to refuse its authority in life.” (Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus)

Ched Myers—“Crucifixion was and remains a political and military punishment . . . Among the Romans it was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e., slaves, violent criminals, and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least Judea . . . These were primarily people who on the whole had no rights, in other words, groups whose development had to be suppressed by all possible means to safeguard law and order in the state.” (Binding the Strong Man: a political reading of Mark's story of Jesus)

James H. Cone—“The cross places God in the midst of crucified people, in the midst of people who are hung, shot, burned, and tortured.” (The Cross and the Lynching Tree, p. 26)

James H. Cone—“I believe that the cross placed alongside the lynching tree can help us to see Jesus in America in a new light, and thereby empower people who claim to follow him to take a stand against white supremacy and **every kind of injustice.**” (The Cross and the Lynching Tree, Introduction)

Mark 8.34—“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Mark 15.38—The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

