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JAMES BALDWIN AND JAMES CONE:
GOD, MAN, AND THE REDEEMING RELATIONSHIP

Sister Rea McDonnell, S.S.N.D.
(1972)

Abstract - Pope Francis calls us to live among the wounded and marginalized, letting them heal us and free us. How very current that makes this article, written as a Master's thesis in 1972. Apart from anachronisms such as writing about God as "man" (instead of men/women), about redeeming (when I meant saving), what is so apropos is the good news proclaimed by both James Cone and James Baldwin. James Cone wrote groundbreaking books on liberation theology. James Baldwin, as an author, expresses Black theology through his characters. Both men illustrate black faith, sometimes set over/against black religion.

PREFACE

Although James Cone¹ is the theologian by whom we hope to systematize somewhat the spiritual journey of author James Baldwin and his articulation of the faith of his black community, it is to Joseph Washington² and his distinction between black faith and black religion that we first turn. Much of Baldwin's refer-

ence to the black community's relationship with God can be classified as "religion" by Washington's standards. Religion for Washington means the external expressions of a faith calling for a uniquely organized church government, a particular type of liturgy, and a morality specific to certain black sects.³

The theology of Dr. James Cone, who studied at Northwestern University and has taught at both Adrian College in Michigan and Union Theological Seminary in New York, deals more directly with black faith, which Washington defines as "response to God."⁴ And while Cone articulates that faith in quite European terms, James Baldwin weaves faith through the lives of his characters in a style thoroughly American and Black.

James Baldwin, having spent ten years in self-exile in France, nonetheless is steeped in black American culture. Born in Harlem in 1924, he worked with and through his culture to become lauded as an author with his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, in 1953.⁵ Through all his writings, his upbringing in a household dominated by sectarian religion⁶ haunts him, destines him to oppose religion (as defined by Washington) and yet embrace faith. This paper then, after a preliminary survey of Baldwin's preoccupation with religion, will be limited to uncovering faith in Baldwin's corpus.

Even with Cone's help, can the author theologize? Andrew Greeley, sociologist and chairman of the National Opinion Research Center, indicts Baldwin for his attempt. He accuses, "In theology...he has been only half-educated and thinks nevertheless he knows all the answers."⁷ James Cone, however, would let the author theologize, for Baldwin meets Cone's criteria for an authentic black theology; mak-

ing sense of the black experience, recognizing the religious character of the black community, relating the biblical experience to the black experience, revealing God in black culture, and portraying God as actively involved in black liberation.⁸

For Cone, faith is “existential recognition of a situation of oppression and a participation in God’s liberation.”⁹ Focusing then on faith as an active response and participation, as a life in the midst of death, I will explore Baldwin’s concepts of God, of man, and of the personal relationship between them. I do not subscribe to each of Dr. Cone’s ideas, to much of his rhetoric, or to his inconsistency in interpreting Scripture, but to his basic premises: that God prefers the poor, the weak, and the oppressed;¹⁰ that salvation is synonymous with becoming black but “To be black means that your mind and heart and soul and body are where the dispossessed are;¹¹ and that those who are truly Black participate in the work of God who is Liberator.¹²

INTRODUCTION

Reviews, such as John Thompson’s *Commentary* review of *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*, often laud author James Baldwin as eminently able to show what moves his race.¹³ When a black man presumes to speak for his community, he must at least acknowledge the role faith plays in the life of American Blacks. James Baldwin, formed in the spirit-filled tradition of his father’s religion, more than acknowledges his Christian faith. Throughout his writings he wrestles with it, flees from it, substitutes for it, improves

on it, but never ignores the faith which threads through his existence as a black man.

Baldwin voices the faith which is in him as would a lover, in the passionate tones of poetry. Dr. James Cone voices the same faith, in the logical tones of theology. In his two books, the first in the field of black theology, Dr. Cone systematically treats the major doctrines of Christian redemption. Baldwin, in his corpus, ranges through the *mystery* of redemption, vivifying doctrine through his use of images.

While Dr. Cone reviews Scripture in the light of the black experience, Baldwin recreates the images of God at work in the black experience. Just as Scripture offers images, not conceptual doctrines, just as Jesus does not say he is of one substance with the Father but that he in the Father's bosom,¹⁴ so James Baldwin concretizes and symbolizes the mystery of God's relationship with the black man.¹⁵

According to Harvard professor of Theology of Literature, Dr. Arthur McGill,¹⁶ James Joyce once wrote that the novelist collects epiphanies. He does not set out to convey a truth in concrete form, but the novelist first writes and then senses the truth, presences the truth. Baldwin writes of life, black life, through which God constantly manifests Himself. Because of his faith, he can understand life in terms of death-resurrection. But for Baldwin, as for Cone and Jesus himself, authentic life is work against suffering. Suffering can be the source of atheism, as Leo in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* poignantly underscores; but Leo's very hatred of God "accomplished his reality and undid my unbelief."¹⁷

Suffering can also be the source of true religion,

true response to the Life-and-Death-Giver. Time and again throughout Scripture, God chooses prophets and even his own son¹⁸ to decry man's injustice to man. Man suffers in his freedom as he makes decisions, chooses values, balances emotions, becomes whole, responds in dying-rising surrender to his Lord. But when a man in his freedom causes another free man to suffer, God steps forward in His chosen leaders and spokesmen such as Moses,¹⁹ Gideon,²⁰ Judith,²¹ Isaiah,²² Jesus²³ to protect the suffering caused by injustice and to announce and effect the deliverance of his people. So the religious person says "No!" to suffering, just as God says "No!" to suffering.

James Cone devotes his whole work to emphasizing God's stand against suffering and oppression.²⁴ And James Baldwin stresses that man must expand his concept of God, knowing God as the liberator He is.²⁵

RELIGION, FAITH, AND RELATIONSHIP

James Baldwin insists that man broaden his concept of God, he himself extends the traditional definition of religion: that virtue by which man renders to God that which is His due, to include any response of man to life and/or death, to the Life-and-Death-Giver. In his "Letters from a Journey," Baldwin poses the question which haunts all his writing: "And what, precisely, is a religion?"²⁶

Cone, speaking doctrinally, writes that religion is meant to apply the freeing power of Scripture to those who are oppressed. It is not, he quotes Jurgen Moltmann,

an opium of the people which intoxicates and incapacitates, but the ferment of a new freedom...the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a being who labors and is heavily laden.²⁷

When the Spirit grapples with and grasps a man, Cone asserts, He turns his outward to combat the evils of oppression, even to the point of death.²⁸ Always, for Cone, religion should be man's battle against oppression.

Religion, as the liberating God intended it, is meant to relieve the heavily burdened. In *Another Country*, Baldwin had Ida wake one morning with a "church song" on her mind. Her lover, Vivaldo, teases her to sing it. The author has her reply, "I used to have religion, did you know that? A long time ago when I was a little girl." After she sings it for him, she explains that she just woke up with it, and Baldwin continues, describing religion through Ida's explanation: "It made me feel, I don't know - different than I've felt in months. It was just as though a burden had been taken off me." The author comments, with Vivaldo, "You still *do* have religion."²⁹

But Baldwin himself began his long search for God in the very anti-religious situation of oppression, that which his very "religious" father imposed upon him. In his earliest novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* written in 1953, the hero, teen-age John, speaks out from Baldwin's own past. Both young men could not reach God without first kneeling before their minister fathers.³⁰ John watches his father gloat to see his elderly sister suffer in her struggle to reach God, not so she would be receptive but so she would be humiliated before the congregation.³¹ And so the sense of oppression, alienation and actual hostility, the search for understanding and

eventual acceptance of his father are noted in almost every Baldwin book. Perhaps that is why critic Gary Wills suggests that Baldwin's rage against religion is a private rather than a public wrestling with the gods.³²

Fictionalized in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,³³ the real-life crisis between fourteen year old Jimmy and his father is spelled out in *The Fire Next Time*. When he began his preaching career in a friend's church, Jimmy admits that he was using his religion as a weapon against his father.³⁴ In moments of exaltation, he feels like a conqueror deserving of Hosannas, like the Lord's anointed; he wants to be powerful and cruel.³⁵ By Cone's standards, then, young Baldwin has joined the satanic forces of oppression and has, by Cone's definition, become white, saying "No!" to his blackness and denying his own existence.³⁶

Even at fourteen, young Baldwin is ambiguous in his relationships. He soon must have sensed the evil in retaliating with oppression against his father's domination, must have sensed evil in slavery of any sort. From that point, Baldwin seeks obsessively to reject the superstitious religion which bound him as a youth. But meshed into his emotional life, the Spirit compels him throughout adulthood to search for light as he curses the darkness. So his experience of religion grows from the subservience he hypocritically offered his father to an experience of the freedom by a liberating God. "HE WAS FREE - WHOM THE SON SETS FREE IS FREE INDEED."³⁷

Religion for the author can be the liturgical response of the tambourines, the rock of a church, the mystic experience of being possessed by the Spirit while preaching, the feeling of communion with the worshippers.³⁸ It can be the

sentimental response of asking to hear Mass on Christmas Day in a Paris jail.³⁹ It can be the angry response of Elisha who dances before the Lord, and the dance is the expression of his rage.⁴⁰ It can be the musical response which lifts a man's spirit to the Spirit, which Sonny, Baldwin's short story character, explains in comparing a hymn to the effects of heroine: "It makes you feel sort of warm and cool at the same time. And distant. And - and sure...it makes you feel - in control."⁴¹ It can be the organized response of a prayerful, angry people marching to City Hall.⁴² It can even be the response of respect.⁴³

But at some point, religion meshes with faith. Even in the midst of His oppressing ministers, true religion can be a binding of oneself to the freeing love of God.⁴⁴ It is a dying and a rising. As Caleb of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* describes his dying, his dying at peace, forgiven, he experiences the rising within him - "I wasn't afraid. I understood for the first time the power and the beauty of the love of God."⁴⁵ True religion is the dying-rising reply, the surrendering response to the God who calls man to be with Him: "To be with God is really to be involved with some enormous, overwhelming desire, and joy, and power which you cannot control, which controls you."⁴⁶

CONCEPT OF GOD

To be with God is to be with a Father, Christ himself explained. But to expand his concept of God, the father-dominated Baldwin has to seek new images of God. In his

fictionalized autobiography, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Roy asks his brother John if the Lord is as hard as their father. John, confused, ignores the question.⁴⁷ But Baldwin cannot ignore the question.

In his search for the God who will free him, he interviewed Black Muslim leader, Elijah Muhammad. From Allah's prophet in Chicago the author learned that "God is black...the white God has not delivered them; perhaps the Black God will."⁴⁸ But Baldwin wants a God who can make men more loving, more free, and instead he finds the Muslims and their black Allah imitating Christians and miming at the "sanctification of power."⁴⁹

Cone affirms Baldwin's rejection of a God whose power oppresses, a God whose power is supposedly meted out through domineering church-people. God, for Cone, is the one who revolts against all that is against man and his dignity. He is for us. Quoting Moltmann, he describes God as "the God who leads his people out of the house of bondage. Thus he is a God of freedom, the God ahead of us."⁵⁰ Baldwin responds to that experience of God in a Scripture quote with which he opens *Go Tell It on the Mountain*: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."⁵¹ Or again, Baldwin links God and freedom with Auden at the beginning of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*: "Teach the free man how to praise."⁵² The author knows that in days of slavery, before religion became a means for power and profit,⁵³ his people trustfully responded to the God of the "Exodus."⁵⁴ The emancipation of America's slaves Baldwin describes in scriptural terms: "He done brought us

out of Egypt, just like He promised, and we's free at last!"⁵⁵

Baldwin has to cut through much emotion, laden with the hateful distortions of a God who, as father, images the oppression of his own father. In *Another Country*, when Rufus' father views his son's corpse and is urged by his wife to pray, the man rages: "If I ever get anywhere near that white devil you call God, I'll tear my son and my father out of his white hide."⁵⁶ Juanita, sweetheart of the murdered hero in *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, also rejects God as father in "His icy, snow-white heaven;" she'd like to spit in His face.⁵⁷ And so the author continues his painful search for a father. In his most recent novel, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, he seems to have reached a truce in his quest for his father's love, for Leo's father, divorced from religion, is a fatherly character of his own creation to whom Baldwin can at least relate.⁵⁸

CONCEPT OF MAN

In explaining his concept of God, Baldwin knows that man mirrors his creator. The white man images one god, a false god;⁵⁹ the black man reveals the true God, the liberator. In relationship to the God who frees, God constitutes the black man both black and man. When his brother Caleb, who has always struggled with his blackness and his manhood, discovers the sources of life, Leo of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* notices: "He seemed not to despise himself anymore."⁶⁰

For James Cone, the man *par excellence* is Jesus. After tracing the activity of the liberating God through the Old Testament, especially in the Exodus event, Cone focuses on

the concept of God revealed through Jesus. The gospel itself arose from an oppressed society;⁶¹ indeed, the gospel, Cone asserts, is all about the black experience: the blind seeing, the lame walking, the poor and the outcasts being preferred.⁶² God reveals Himself in the Incarnation of Jesus who was a slave in an occupied country, an oppressed member of a minority race.⁶³

Cone's view of man, specifically the black man, is then always in reference to the "blackness" of Jesus.⁶⁴ Baldwin does not look to Jesus as the measure of a man, but rather rages about the white Jesus foisted upon the black man by white missionaries⁶⁵ or even by black church tradition.⁶⁶ Cone paints the black man in proud, self-confident colors; Baldwin's picture of the black man is very often murky and ambiguous, struggling and unsure. Man, for the author, is a wanderer,⁶⁷ a traveler through constant danger.⁶⁸ And truly, Baldwin wanders and stumbles his characters through the maze of being a man. However, late in his writing career, Baldwin melds his 1963 here, Lee of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* and moves him toward the pride and power of Cone's kind of black man. If middle-aged Leo is somewhat baffled by this concept of man, he looks with approval on his young friend Christopher's new idealism, violent though it may be.⁶⁹

Jesus comes to bring the sword, not peace.⁷⁰ Dr. McGill of Harvard⁷¹ opines that Jesus challenges man to take up the sword and cut away false securities, false loyalties, false loves. Cone echoes that idea, placing the sword in the context of the black-white crisis. "Look man, the revolution is on. What side are you on?"⁷² He writes:

The willingness of black people to die is not despair, it is hope, not in whites but in their own dignity grounded in God himself. This willingness to die for human dignity is not novel. Indeed, it stands at the heart of Christianity.⁷³

One of Baldwin's characters, Meridian Henry of the 1964 play, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, exemplifies man's growth from cowering to courage. Preacher Henry is first accused of being a public man, playing to the public, black and white. He is not a "private man at all,"⁷⁴ in touch with a real God through real brothers. But through his son's murder he is forced into action which reveals to himself his own dignity. Preacher Henry soliloquizes that perhaps had he not been born black he'd not be a Christian, but Christianity gives him dignity. "I could be a man in the eyes of God."⁷⁵

"To speak of man is to speak about his being-in-the-world-of-oppression."⁷⁶ Cone defines man as what he is in the eyes of God. He axes the white man's definitions of the black man and trumpets that the black man's power lies in his ability and responsibility to define himself on his own terms. Cone subscribes to one core principle, calling for an unqualified commitment to the black community as that community seeks to define its existence in the light of God's liberating work in the world.⁷⁷

This is also Baldwin's position on man. In Nat Hentoff's words, Baldwin's stance parallels Cone's: "This is the point Baldwin made years ago – not having the white man's definition of themselves and their history."⁷⁸ At least in his fiction, Baldwin is not so polemically concerned as Cone with the life-death tension between blacks and whites.⁷⁹ What Cone seems to stress is that there is not freedom within the black community until

that community wrests the power to be free from white oppressors. Yet Baldwin, once weaned from the dominating church influence of his younger years, says “Yes!” consistently and concretely to his own blackness, with or without the approval of whites. This yes-saying, by Cone’s standards,⁸⁰ is Baldwin’s hacking away at the last of white structures which bind him.

THE REDEEMING RELATIONSHIP

Baldwin’s saying “Yes!” to his blackness breaks down, for him, the structures of the folk religion in which he was reared. Cone warns that a black articulator of the faith must be sure not to put the new wine of God as liberating author of Black Power into old wine skins.⁸¹

And so, as the black theologian must hew new words to express the new ideas of God, man, and their redeeming relationship, the author must create new modes of conveying the deep, passionate dynamic between God and the black man. White men do not realize what God could be for black men.⁸² And Cone warns that even black men often “still talk of salvation in white terms, love with a Western perspective.”⁸³ *Another Country*’s Rufus certainly breaks through the genteel categories of a safe theology in expressing his relation to God and the genuine hope he has in God’s mercy. Baldwin has Rufus call on his Creator as he stands on the bridge of his suicide: “You bastard, you motherfucking bastard. Ain’t I your baby, too?” Standing on that bridge, mentally breaking the ties with his loved ones, asking forgiveness of the woman he has wronged, he

realizes that the pain of his existence would never end on this earth. So trusting himself to the water below, he entrusts himself to God, and Baldwin moves him to cry: "All right, you motherfucking Godalmighty bastard, I'm coming to you."⁸⁴ Rufus, the suicide, and his brothers in religion who comment at Rufus' funeral, have no doubts about the goal of their dying and certainty of their rising:⁸⁵ "I'm coming to you."

The redeeming relationship, fragile and fierce, reveals both God and the black man as who they are. "When men encounter God's self-disclosure, they not only know who God is but also who they are."⁸⁶ This seems to be affirmed particularly in Baldwin's description of the boy John's conversion. He first knows himself to be among the oppressed. He becomes conscious that "his drifting soul was anchored in the love of God."⁸⁷ As he notices the exultant faces beaming at his as he writhes on the floor, struggling to surrender, he is aware of the moral power of these, his black people, who mirror the heroes of God through the centuries. And he knows himself, one with them, to be new. Baldwin explains through Elisha, who comments on his young friend's salvation: "The Lord done laid him out, and turned him around and wrote his new name down in glory."⁸⁸

To know oneself is really to be known by God. "For God to love the black man means that God has made him somebody."⁸⁹ The black man transformed by grace accepts and loves the gift of his blackness as does Peter Henry in *Blues for Mr. Charlie*: At least in the eyes of God he is a man.⁹⁰

Man is not man until he accepts the gift of his black-

ness as does Peter Henry in *Blues for Mr. Charlie*: At least in the eyes of God he is a man.

Man is not man until he accepts the gift of his blackness and can begin to move from oppression to the freedom of the sons of God. Man, in the redeeming relation, is man becoming. And, Cone adds, salvation always means becoming black.⁹¹ On the witness stand at the trial of his son's murderer, Meridian Henry is asked if he is a minister. Becoming more aware and more appreciative not only of his black body but also of his black mind and heart, the Pastor responds: "I think I may be beginning to become one."⁹²

Meridian Henry of *Blues for Mr. Charlie* is one of Baldwin's most becoming characters. Created in the decade of SCLC's non-violent but powerful revolution, Henry typifies the new spiritual leader, who like Moses, leads his people out of the plague, the plague which Baldwin, in introducing his play, names "our concept of Christianity: and this raging plague has the power to destroy every human relationship."⁹³ When one white Christian had destroyed Henry's son with a bullet, the pastor who knows himself to be a man in the eyes of God, questions if God's eyes are blind to a black suffering.⁹⁴ Moving out of the plague categories of Christianity, Henry formulates a new faith in a liberating God and leads his congregation to share with that God the work of setting oppressed men free.

Setting oppressed men free. This is the term of the redeeming relationship. For Cone, redemption is all about transformation, not in symbolic, mystic realizations, but in the concrete transformation of the oppressed into free persons.⁹⁵ God Himself will brook no subservience, no lack of freedom from His sons who boldly approach Him.

“God did not hear the prayers of the fearful, for the hearts of the fearful hold no belief.” That belief is not to be only in God, but in oneself and in the community. Freedom, Cone insists, situates itself in the community.⁹⁶

To be free is to participate in a community of those who are victims of oppression. Man is free when he belongs to a free community seeking to emancipate itself from oppression... [Freedom] always involves making decisions within the context of people who share similar goals and are seeking the same liberation.⁹⁷

Perhaps freedom and redemption lie in power, and only the strong will bear it away. Baldwin highlights the sense of power which springs from rage. Elisha dances before the Lord and his dance expresses his rage.⁹⁸ Baldwin’s own father, the author reveals, yielded to racial bitterness which added power to his gospel message.⁹⁹ Harlem preachers, Baldwin reports, sugar-coat revolutionary topics with scriptural themes, conning the honky while letting their black brothers know that God’s justice and vengeance on the oppressor are right-now realities.¹⁰⁰ Even the usually gentle Pastor Henry in *Blues for Mr. Charlie* notes that white folks must be blind to miss all the rage and hatred concealed in the gospel songs.¹⁰¹

[What black men] held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their own image, to impose this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world and of themselves held by other people.¹⁰²

Cone echoes this last quotation of Baldwin’s throughout both his works. He defines Black Power as the right and responsibility of black men to take the position of dominance

in the black-white relationship.¹⁰³ But neither he nor Baldwin, for all their rhetoric, ever fall into the biblical sin of urging man to assume the controlling role in the God-man relationship. If redemption lies in power, both men acknowledge that it lies in God's power. As man strives to liberate himself and his community from oppression, he is only sharing in God's liberating power. God is Lord and Master of redemption and freedom.

Both black writers see conversion at the core of redeeming relationship, a conversion which means both revolution and reconciliation. Of course, conversion includes the personal revolution of the Lord turning a man around, as He did young John in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.¹⁰⁴ But a man in revolution not only experiences a radical change at the core of his person, but carries that revolution to his community. To preach a gentle, forgiving Jesus in the face of his church's hypocrisy, its ministers' financial security, its absence of love, enrages the young preacher Baldwin who castigates his community: "It was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair. The transforming power of the Holy Ghost ended when the service ended and salvation stopped at the church door."¹⁰⁵ Revolution to Baldwin has to mean more than the "turning around" at a church service or even the violent rhetoric of the community's leaders. There is unity in revolt, Baldwin writes,¹⁰⁶ and it is that revolutionary solidarity that batters the forces of white oppression.

While Cone writes, "To the extent that we are creatures who rebel against ungodly treatment, God has made himself known,"¹⁰⁷ Baldwin fleshes out characters who rebel and who are characterized as religious. *Blues for Mr. Charlie's* Meridian Henry's personal conversion, through his son's murder, is dramatically symbolized by Baldwin's

positioning the witness stand in the third act's courtroom scene in the exact spot where the pulpit had stood in the first two acts.¹⁰⁸ If in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, John's preacher father is tempted to pray for a quick revolution,¹⁰⁹ Pastor Henry is ready to lead it. Henry's prayer is laced with both hope and militancy: "Let not our suffering endure forever. Teach us to trust the great gift of life and learn to love one another and dare to walk the earth like men. Amen."¹¹⁰

As Meridian, on the witness stand, is questioned by the white establishment, his rage crescendos. He muses later, "You know, for us, it all began with the Bible and the gun. Maybe it will end with the Bible and the gun."¹¹¹ To conclude the play, Henry leads the black townspeople in a march to the steps of City Hall where they will dare both to walk and to pray like men, free men.¹¹²

Although Henry subscribes to a basically non-violent revolution, Cone calls for men to "refuse to tolerate present inequities."¹¹³ Cone asserts that revolutionary action is a Christian struggle. He points out that Jesus' injunction to turn the other cheek does not mean a continuation of passive suffering by blacks; this is a scriptural literalism expounded in white interpretations of Scripture.¹¹⁴ Blacks must turn white words around and speak of revolution and reconciliation in their own terms and on their own terms.

Christ is black because he is oppressed, and oppressed because he is black. And if the Church is to join Christ by following his opening it too must go where suffering is and become black also.

This is what the New Testament means by the service of reconciliation...It is freeing the racist of racism by making him confront blacks as men. Reconciliation has nothing to do with the "let's talk about it" attitude, or "it takes time" attitude. It merely says, "Look man, the revolution is on. Whose side are you on?"¹¹⁵

Reconciliation must be on the black man's terms. And he must know himself a man. Reconciliation cannot be the empty longing of a Baldwin who wishes he had talked more with his father.¹¹⁶ It is more the strength of Deborah in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,¹¹⁷ the wife who forgives John's father for his extra-marital activities. With bitterness on her dying face, she confronts him with his wrong; while she never mouths the words of forgiveness, her concern for him is evident as she admonishes him to ask God for a sign that he is truly forgiven. Knowing what any reader does about Baldwin's long and painful struggle to accept and be accepted by his own father, one sees in the conversion of the autobiographical John of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* how manly is the reconciliation which he offers the father who has oppressed him with the very name of God.

John struggled to speak the authoritative word that would conquer the great division between his father and himself. But it did not come, the living word; in the silence something died in John, and something came alive.¹¹⁸

What died was any subservience to his father's religion-inspired domination; and what came alive was his boldness, without any hint of acceptance from the oppressor, to unite himself to his father by using his father's own words of testimony. God, he cries out, will keep him strong "against everything and everybody...that wants to cut down my soul."¹¹⁹

God will keep him strong, for “it demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck.”¹²⁰ Young John could hate white people, too, if God were not changing his heart.¹²¹ But God will keep him strong, for conversion, revolution and reconciliation are God’s work. “The kingdom is what God does,” writes Cone, and conversion “...arises solely in response to his liberation.”¹²² Although the hero of *Giovanni’s Room* is referring to the nakedness of his body which he knows he must “hold sacred,” he waits to be set free from his personal, sexual distress. “I must believe, that the heavy grace of God, which has brought me to this place, is all that can carry me out of it.”¹²³

Cone is quick to refer personal redemption back to the liberation of the black community. For him, blackness is synonymous with salvation. Neither blackness nor salvation is something man can accomplish; it is a gift. “The gift is so unlike what humans expect that when it is offered and accepted, we become completely new creatures.”¹²⁴ But always, for both authors, redemption is God’s work.

What is redemption? The purging of man through suffering. The gifts of faith, hope, and love. The presencing of God through the body of man and the body of the community, which is the Church. His presence through the word of man and Scripture. His leading man to communion and to surrender, to the dying of surrender and to the rising of new life; free, black life.

Realizing that God never aligns Himself with injustice, Cone views suffering, not as the passive acceptance of unjust conditions, but that which derives from man’s decision to be in the face of non-being, a suffering for the sake of freedom.¹²⁵ Man is not purged, in Baldwin’s books, merely by

participation in revival meetings,¹²⁶ or in mystical struggles under the Almighty's pruning shears.¹²⁷

Although he could never have read Cone who wrote in 1969 and 1970, already in 1965 critic Joseph Featherstone, commenting on the suffering of Baldwin's characters, mirrors the theologian's liberation theme. Featherstone claims that all the author's fictional heroes in their secular confrontations with injustice perform priestly functions through their suffering. It is by suffering that they are set free and have the power to set others free.¹²⁸

To be in redeeming relationship is to accept the gift of faith. Faith permeates the life of the black man who is not fearful but free.¹²⁹ When a black man is a black man, he does not believe; for "To believe is to receive the gift (both of salvation and blackness) and utterly to reorient one's existence on the basis of the gift."¹³⁰ But again, for Cone faith is not merely passive acceptance of God's gift; but it is the "existential recognition of oppression and a participation in God's liberation."¹³¹

When a black man has faith and thus receives the gift of blackness from his Creator, he is also able to hope, and that hope is first of all in his own dignity and in the humanity of his black brothers.¹³² Hope is not in the glory-land hereafter as promised by slave preachers or oppressors, but in the person of the dying-rising black Jesus. Hope is not future-oriented, but it is a certain trust "grounded in the past and present reality of God."¹³³ Just as the Israelites remembered the saving deeds of the God who marched ahead of them into the land of freedom, and in this God they hoped, so with Blacks today. Those who know the God of the past and of the present, "Those who hope in Christ," (Cone quotes Jurgen Moltmann) "can no longer put up with reality as it is."¹³⁴

The tension tugging toward the not-yet only sharpens the sensitivity of man and urges him to combat, with God, an all present injustice.

And so, for Cone, hope is not future-oriented. Any desire for reward he rates as unfaithful. Man cannot merit any reward; instead, it is God who puts man right, who sets him free, and the present freedom is reward enough. He is free to be immersed in the world of oppression and yet to declare his own being on his own terms, and to revolt against the oppressive bonds which still fasten his neighbor.¹³⁵

Just as Baldwin's leading black characters voice and live the kind of hope described above, so they are vitally involved with questing after the gift of God's love. Although he faithfully records in his essays the fury and hatred of his black fellows, in his fiction, Baldwin seems more interested in love. *Giovanni's Room*,¹³⁶ *Another Country*,¹³⁷ and *The Amen Corner*,¹³⁸ do not witness so much to black rage as to everyone's search for love, redemptive love. The characters in *Giovanni's Room* despair of salvation in human love, but the men and women in *Another Country* discover, at least fleetingly, the "redeeming majesty of the orgasm."¹³⁹

In the quest for love, John LaFarge notes that Baldwin and St. Paul have much in common. Like Baldwin's, Paul's "stormy career was dedicated to a transracial and transnational concept of love."¹⁴⁰ Paul's controlling image of the Body also themes Baldwin's treatment of love. Love, which is the very Spirit of God, is made tangible through the body, both the body of the Church and the body of man.

David of *Giovanni's Room* looks at his body trapped in the mirror, but a body which "hurries toward revelation."

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

I long to make this prophecy come true. I long to crack that-mirror and be free. I look at my sex, my troubling sex, and wonder how it can be redeemed, how I can save it from the knife... the key to my salvation, which cannot save my body, is hidden in my flesh.¹⁴¹

Although critics raise eyebrows at Baldwin's constant preoccupation with sex, the knowledge he confesses: that salvation is somehow hidden in his flesh, is key to his theologizing in his most graphic sexual scenes. When David makes love to Hella in *Giovanni's Room*, the psalmist best expresses the union, mystical as well as physical. David feels his woman "rushing to open the gates of her strong, walled city and let the king of glory come in."¹⁴² Sex with one who is loved is a means for liberation, of communion with the purity of the earth, of surrender and dying and rising.¹⁴³ Throughout their sexual-sacred encounters, Baldwin's chief characters maintain the priority of love. The overwhelming realization of his love for Ida forces Vivaldo of *Another Country* to pray: "Oh God, make her love me, oh God, let me love."¹⁴⁴

Personal, body-love in *The Amen Corner*¹⁴⁵ is the means to love of the body which is the Church. Sister Margaret, the pastor of Amen Corner, is undone in her proud self-righteousness by her wayward husband Luke, who returns to remind her of their young love which he believed could have saved his soul.¹⁴⁶ At the end of the play, Sister Margaret explains love and the salvation it brings:

Children, I'm just now finding out what it means to love the Lord. It ain't all in the singing and the shouting. It ain't all in the reading of the Bible. (She unclenches her fist a little). It ain't even – it ain't even – in the running all over everybody trying to get to heaven. To love the Lord is to love all His children – all of them, everyone! – and suffer with them and rejoice with them and never count the cost.¹⁴⁷

Salvation for Baldwin often flows from the communal experience of love. A loving solidarity with the black community makes the presence of the Lord real, and He is presented by their song. John of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* overflows one Sunday morning with terror and wonder at the “saints” for “Their singing caused him to believe in the presence of the Lord...they made that presence real.”¹⁴⁸ In *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, Caleb's face radiates the presence of God. When Caleb, converted, returns from the war, he warns his younger brother Leo of the unhappiness consequent on fighting the love of God. As he speaks, Leo notes, “A stern and mighty beauty entered his face. I had no weapons against him.”¹⁴⁹

God touches the black community through the body and through the word. As God takes on the black body of the oppressed in His son Jesus, He takes up the word of the black man and reveals Himself through that word.

His revelation comes to us in and through the cultural situation of the oppressed. His Word is our word; his existence our existence. This is the meaning of black culture and its relation to divine revelation.¹⁵⁰

Both in his essays¹⁵¹ and in his fiction, Baldwin specifically refers to the power of the Word as a weapon. When there is trouble, the bitter Lorenzo suggests that the black

community in *Blues for Mr. Charlie* use the Bible for a breastplate.¹⁵² But in every “cultural situation of the oppressed” which Baldwin describes, he finds the words and images to convey “the meaning of black culture and its relation to divine revelation.”¹⁵³

Whether manifested through the body or the word, God is present. Whether the black man is conscious or unconscious of his relationship with his redeemer, God is present. Before his murder, Richard of *Blues for Mr. Charlie* expresses his disbelief, and Mother Henry explains to him that it is impossible not to believe in God. It isn’t up to Richard, she continues, because the life within him knows where it came from and that life within him does believe in God. She asks the young man to hold his breath and die. He, of course, cannot, implying that the Life in him transcends his intellectual disbelief; his life clings to the Source of Life.¹⁵⁴

Man’s life is in communion with God’s life, Mother Henry asserts. And for Baldwin, that life is black. He sees white America in communion with a “Puritan God who had never heard of them and of whom they had never heard.”¹⁵⁵ For blacks, life is passionate, not Puritan, and the communion is therefore passionate. In *Another Country*, Ida sings “Precious Lord” in a kind of public affirmation of her dead brother, Rufus.

Her eyes were closed and the dark head on the long dark neck was thrown back. Something appeared on her face which had not been there before, a kind of passionate, triumphant rage and agony. Now, her fine sensual, free-moving body was utterly still, as though being held in readiness for a communion more total than flesh could bear. ¹⁵⁶

Caleb speaks passionately to his disbelieving brother in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* about surrender and the communion it brings: "To surrender your will and find yourself in the great will, the universal will, the will of God."¹⁵⁷

Cone's logic tempers too much passion in the surrender and communion; he warns about cheap grace and reminds about the costly obedience of faith.¹⁵⁸ Surrender is painful. Florence, John's aunt in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, has difficulty reaching or being reached in the communing relationship. She has always scorned the moaning and the mounting whisper of the name of Jesus during the church services, has always preferred to pray in silence. But the silence is dark and she feels alone. Perhaps it is too late to be redeemed, but "she muttered against the knuckles that bruised her lips." Baldwin leads her to pray, "Lord, help my unbelief."¹⁵⁹

Whether longing for this communion or actually experiencing the breakthrough of the Lord, man is led to surrender, led to the dying of surrender and to the rising of new life: free, black life. As John's mother and his friend Elisha express it, the major theme of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is John's struggle to surrender, his dying and rising to be set free.¹⁶⁰ Only when a person is "together" can he surrender, "lay his sins on the altar, lay his *life* on the altar and rise up, praising God."¹⁶¹ Through music two other Baldwin characters reach the self-possession necessary for conscious dying and rising. When the author describes the quality of *Another Country's* Ida's singing, he notes that

This quality involves a sense of the self so profound and so powerful that it does not so much leap barriers as reduce them to atoms...it transforms and lays waste and gives life, and kills.¹⁶²

The short story "Sonny's Blues" in *Going to Meet the Man* ends with the transfiguration of the suffering musician, expressed in religious terms: "And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever."¹⁶³

Transformation, through death to new life, is possible, Cone states because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In freedom he lay down his life, his existence as the Oppressed One, and through His son's resurrection God confirmed His fatherly power to liberate. God is eminently present in the dying-rising dynamic of oppressed people, and in that dynamic He reveals Himself as the God who frees and transfigures, as He did and does for His own son, Jesus.

His death is the revelation of the freedom of God, taking upon himself the totality of human oppression; his resurrection is the disclosure that God is not defeated by oppression but transforms it into the possibility of freedom.¹⁶⁴

And lest anyone discover a note of self-righteousness in some once-for-all surrender to the redeeming God, Baldwin points out that just as dying is a day by day event, so rising or rebirth must be effected by God's power every hour every day.¹⁶⁵ Conversion, communion, surrender must be continual. In this constant dependence of man upon his liberating Lord, one is not trapped in self-righteousness, as are so many of Baldwin's "religious" characters. This kind of dependence

for Baldwin spells freedom. Love dependent on the Lord, love that requires surrender and effects communion, resurrects Caleb of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* and sets him free, "free at last!"¹⁶⁶

Like Baldwin, Cone notes the snare of a false independence, of self-righteousness. Throughout his works, he accuses the white church of America of being enslaved in their domination of Blacks and, like Baldwin, he calls on the oppressed to save the opponent. When the Blacks are set free, they are then missioned to offer freedom to their white brothers. The black man participates in the liberating work of God, and as God's prophet, invites the white man to accept the costly grace of dying to self, selfishness, and domination.

When the Spirit takes hold of a man, He turns him outward (to his white brothers in the faith) to combat the evils of oppression (by his white brothers in the faith) even to the point of death (from his white brothers in the faith). But the black man is called to continue God's work of redemption: conversion, revolution, and reconciliation. First man must be black, must have accepted the gift of blackness and salvation. Then, as James Baldwin bears "witness to the reality and power of the light,"¹⁶⁷ the black man must witness to the black God who calls Blacks and whites to redeeming relationship.

"Black confrontation with white racism is Christ himself meeting white people, providing them with the possibility of reconciliation."¹⁶⁸ As the Church continues Christ in the world today, so the Church is entrusted with the mission of passing on the faith. Faith of its nature is handed on, and in this case, from a renewed and reconciled black

community to a racist white church community. But how can a church have fellowship and service and obedience to Jesus if it is racist? Its only salvation is to become black, to continue the Incarnation of Jesus, the Oppressed One.¹⁶⁹

So far, Cone accuses, the Church has identified itself with the oppressors.¹⁷⁰ Just as when a black man, such as John in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*,¹⁷¹ is converted he must change communities, moving from, in John's case, a religious community dominated by a tyrannical false god to the community of the free sons of God, so the Church must move from the community of the oppressors to become the community of the oppressed. It must become black so that its mind and heart and soul and body are with the weak, the lowly, the dispossessed of this country. But is it possible to change communities? To change communities involves a radical change of being...Christianity calls this experience conversion.¹⁷² If the Church wants to be converted, surrendered and thus really free, it must, paradoxically, "participate in a community of those who are victims of oppression."¹⁷³

Joseph Washington affirms that it is the Blacks' "participation in the Christian faith [which] may well bring a renewed Church."¹⁷⁴ But faith is the "radical identification with the neighbor,"¹⁷⁵ even Blacks with whites. For Baldwin, the truest love and respect and identification is offered by a black man or woman who accepts and cherishes the gift of blackness. This is not the sentimental do-gooding of a still "white" Meridian Henry at the opening of *Blues for Mr. Charlie*. He stays in his bigoted town because he wants the whites to "turn from evil."¹⁷⁶ Rather, it is the strength of a black Ida and a black Leo offering a redemp-

tive love to their white lovers. Baldwin realizes that not only the Church, but individual men can grace each other with God's redeeming presence. David knew Giovanni, and cared. So "the burden of his salvation seemed to be on me..."¹⁷⁷ And above all, Blacks can offer whites freedom, the kind of freedom defined by James Cone.

That Cone puts his hope in the renewed Blacks and the reconciled black Church as the agent for renewal of all of Christianity threads through both his works. He prophetically calls both black and white Christians to the renewal which sets them free from "the good life," the values of this world, and which chooses "costly obedience," a prophetic stance, pregnant with pain and even death.¹⁷⁸

To be converted the Church must suffer. "The Church is God's suffering people...the call of God constitutes the Church, and it is a call to suffering."¹⁷⁹ As John of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* wrestled with God to the point of his conversion,¹⁸⁰ as Meridian Henry of *Blues For Mr. Charlie* changed radically and "died" when his son was murdered,¹⁸¹ as Caleb of *Tell Me How Long This Train's Been Gone* almost died on the battlefield before he finally surrendered to the God who saves, not just from physical death but from hell of an oppressing world¹⁸² - so the racist church must writhe in death agony to which its Lord leads it.

But death, for Christians, always leads to resurrection. As God constituted Jesus Lord because of¹⁸³ his dying and rising, so God confirms the dying-rising Christian in relationship with Himself.

CONCLUSION

If the black community, through the categories of James Cone and through the characters and images of James Baldwin, has anything to proclaim to the white community it must be that God prefers the weak and the poor and the oppressed of this earth. That He chooses them to carry on today His mighty work of liberation.¹⁸⁴ That those who try to save themselves, who brandish their power and their influence and their good deeds before the Lord are cast aside.¹⁸⁵ In the redeeming relationship it is God who is the liberating Lord of man's life.

Many to whom I have spoken of this paper before and as I was writing it have raised a quizzical or critical eyebrow at the thought of my tracing the faith relationship through James Baldwin's books. My black confreres often shamefacedly deny Baldwin's descriptions of church services as a true portrayal of the black religious experience; my white friends condescendingly smile at the quaint customs of black religion. Both groups are outraged by the blasphemy of Baldwin's characters, such as Rufus in *Another Country*¹⁸⁶ or Leo in *Tell Me How Long This Train's Been Gone*.¹⁸⁷

To me, Baldwin's characters animate for him new definitions of God, man, and the redeeming relationship.¹⁸⁸ They are not the scholastic definitions molded by Greek categories. Not even modern European philosophy, reshaped by the black theology of Dr. Cone, can contain all the deeply-lived truths felt by Baldwin's sons and daughters of slavery, still trekking the desert-wastelands of oppression. Yet Baldwin's truly religious characters are Blacks who embrace their

blackness as men and women in relation with a Black God whose mind and spirit and even His body in the person of Jesus and His church are with the poor, the weak, and the oppressed.¹⁸⁹

The black religious experience is unique, far from the stereotypes of black and white questioners. I hope that in this paper I have brought some of their prejudices into a new or different focus. The faith of Blacks, confirmed in the redeeming relationship, is unique, and James Baldwin has captured its unique protest against suffering, its unique thrust toward the hoped-for promised land on earth, its unique familiarity with God who is as much a lover as a Lord of dying and rising, of freedom and future.

And so James Baldwin not only makes sense of the black experience, relates the biblical experience to the black experience, highlights God's revelation in and through black culture, and portrays God as actively involved in black liberation.¹⁹⁰

Personally, Baldwin also teaches me, fascinates me, inspires me as his characters grapple with themselves, with each other, and with God. The author has not only found his God who makes men larger, freer and more loving;¹⁹¹ he has shared and is sharing his God with others. James Baldwin truly, as he asserts in 1964's *Blues For Mr. Charlie*, bears witness to the light.¹⁹²

Notes:

¹ Cf. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969); *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott company, 1970).

² Joseph Washington, *Black Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Washington, serving as chaplain at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, has written a well-documented book, quoting extensively from the authoritative and still timely study by Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (1933), from Dr. Martin Luther King, Howard Thurman, C. Eric Lincoln, R. Franklin Frazier, and other authorities.

³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, see also xiii-xiv.

⁵ Publisher, "About the Author," *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1968), 371. Nb. This book was also published by The Dial Press in the same year.

⁶ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1963), 46.

⁷ Andrew Greeley, Review of *The Fire Next Time*, by James Baldwin, *The Critic*, 21 (April 1963): 72.

⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 53-81

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 95.

¹³ John Thompson, Review of *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, *Commentary*, 45 (June, 1968): 67.

¹⁴ John 14:11 [Ed. note: version not specified for all biblical references. Paper written in 1972.]

¹⁵ James Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1963), 296.

¹⁶ Lecture by Dr. Arthur McGill, St. John's University, Collegetown, MN, July, 1970. .

¹⁷ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 76, 45, 173, 312, passim.

¹⁸ Luke 16:19-31.

¹⁹ Exodus 3:16-17.

²⁰ Judges 7:15-23.

²¹ Judith 16:1-4.

²² Isaiah 30:30-33.

²³ Luke 4: 18-20.

²⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 169.

²⁵ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 61.

²⁶ James Baldwin, "Letters from a Journey," in *Soon, One Morning*, ed. by Herbert Hill (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1968), 40.

²⁷ Jurgen Moltmann as quoted in *Black Theology and Black Power*, 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁹ James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1960), 126.

³⁰ James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1953), 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

³² Gary Wills, "What Color Is God?" *National Review* 14 (May 21, 1963), 403.

³³ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 207.

³⁴ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 46.

³⁵ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 33 and 39.

- ³⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 25 and 33.
- ³⁷ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 216.
- ³⁸ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 43.
- ³⁹ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: The Dial Press, 1955), 141.
- ⁴⁰ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 15.
- ⁴¹ "James Baldwin" in *Dark Symphony*, eds. James A. Emanuel and Theodore L. Gross (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 340.
- ⁴² James Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1964), 152.
- ⁴³ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 108.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ⁴⁵ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 308.
- ⁴⁶ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1961), 113.
- ⁴⁷ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 125.
- ⁴⁸ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 71.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.
- ⁵⁰ Moltmann as quoted in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 169.
- ⁵¹ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, frontispiece.
- ⁵² W. H. Auden as quoted in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, frontispiece.
- ⁵³ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 106-07.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. Exodus, trans. Ronald Knox, in *The Holy Bible* (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1944).
- ⁵⁵ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 70-1.
- ⁵⁶ Baldwin, *Another Country*, 350.

- ⁵⁷ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 135.
- ⁵⁸ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 370.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 395.
- ⁶¹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 23.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 35, 60-73.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 151. "To be black means that your mind and heart and soul and body are where the dispossessed are."
- ⁶⁵ Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 163.
- ⁶⁶ Baldwin, *Another Country*, 356.
- ⁶⁷ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 299.
- ⁶⁸ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 299.
- ⁶⁹ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 369-70.
- ⁷⁰ Mt 10:34.
- ⁷¹ Lecture by Dr. Arthur McGill, St. John's University, Colleagueville, MN, July, 1970.
- ⁷² Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 69.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ⁷⁴ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 53.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁷⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 159.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁷⁸ Nat Hentoff, interviewed by William Buckley; "William Buckley's Firing Line: The Black Revolution," (Pleasantville, New York: Warren Schoat Productions, Inc., nd.).

⁷⁹ Reviewer Granville Hicks notes that Baldwin is not a propagandist, though his purpose is to make his audience change; Hicks defends: “The present crisis makes change imperative.” Review of *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, *Saturday Review* 47 (May 3, 1964): 27.

⁸⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸² James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1966), 204.

⁸³ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 49.

⁸⁴ Baldwin, *Another Country*, 78.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

⁸⁶ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 105.

⁸⁷ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 204.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 201, 203-04, and 221.

⁸⁹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 52.

⁹⁰ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 56.

⁹¹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 125.

⁹² Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 139.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56-7.

⁹⁵ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 29.

⁹⁶ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 66.

⁹⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 171.

⁹⁸ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 15.

⁹⁹ Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 82 and 147.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

- ¹⁰¹ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 57.
- ¹⁰² Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 35.
- ¹⁰³ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1.
- ¹⁰⁴ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 15.
- ¹⁰⁵ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 53-4.
- ¹⁰⁶ Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 100.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 98-9.
- ¹⁰⁸ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 1.
- ¹⁰⁹ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 134.
- ¹¹⁰ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 78.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 157.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹¹³ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 21.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.
- ¹¹⁵ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 69.
- ¹¹⁶ Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 89.
- ¹¹⁷ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 148-49.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁰ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 113.
- ¹²¹ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 37.
- ¹²² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 98-9.
- ¹²³ James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: The Dial Press, 1956), 249.

¹²⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 125.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹²⁶ “Baldwin,” *Dark Symphony*, 339.

¹²⁷ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 193-210.

¹²⁸ Joseph Featherstone, “Blues for Mr. Baldwin,” *New Republic* 153 (November 27, 1963): 34.

¹²⁹ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 66.

¹³⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 125.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹³² Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 28-30.

¹³³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 125.

¹³⁴ Moltmann as quoted in *Black Theology and Black Power*, 102.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹³⁶ Cf. Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*.

¹³⁷ Cf. Baldwin, *Another Country*.

¹³⁸ Cf. Jame Baldwin, *The Amen Corner* (New York: The Dial Press, 1968).

¹³⁹ Featherstone, “Blues,” 35.

¹⁴⁰ John LaFarge, Review of “The Fire Next Time” by James Baldwin, *Saturday Review* 46 (February 2, 1963): 29.

¹⁴¹ Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 248.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 168. Baldwin weaves references to psalms into his writings; he does not specify his source, but Scripture has definitely influenced his images. In *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*, Leo mentions his Ethiopian hands: “To what God indeed, out of this despairing place, was I to stretch our these hands?” 75.

¹⁴³ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*, 278.

- ¹⁴⁵ Cf. Baldwin, *The Amen Corner*.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ¹⁴⁸ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 13.
- ¹⁴⁹ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 293.
- ¹⁵⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 62.
- ¹⁵¹ Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 42.
- ¹⁵² Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 51.
- ¹⁵³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 62.
- ¹⁵⁴ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 33-4.
- ¹⁵⁵ Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 109.
- ¹⁵⁶ Baldwin, *Another Country*, 217.
- ¹⁵⁷ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 293.
- ¹⁵⁸ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 52.
- ¹⁵⁹ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 66-7.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 93 and 217.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 217.
- ¹⁶² Baldwin, *Another Country*, 215.
- ¹⁶³ Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*, 122.
- ¹⁶⁴ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 210-11.
- ¹⁶⁵ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 113.
- ¹⁶⁶ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 293 and 309.
- ¹⁶⁷ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 3.

- ¹⁶⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 193.
- ¹⁶⁹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 69-73.
- ¹⁷⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 25.
- ¹⁷¹ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 193-221.
- ¹⁷² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 175.
- ¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ¹⁷⁴ Washington, *Black Religion*, 161.
- ¹⁷⁵ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 175.
- ¹⁷⁶ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 61.
- ¹⁷⁷ Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, 168.
- ¹⁷⁸ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 113-155.
- ¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ¹⁸⁰ Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 193-210.
- ¹⁸¹ Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 104-05.
- ¹⁸² Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 308.
- ¹⁸³ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151; Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 187-8.
- ¹⁸⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 95; Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 207.
- ¹⁸⁵ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 52; Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 64.
- ¹⁸⁶ Baldwin, *Another Country*, 75.
- ¹⁸⁷ Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, 76.
- ¹⁸⁸ Dr. Arthur McGill. The "characters animate." Baldwin is deliberately described as passive. Dr. McGill stresses that real

characters lead an author. Only *after* he has written can the novelist discover the truth his characters have just embodied.

¹⁸⁹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 151.

¹⁹⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 53-81.

¹⁹¹ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 61.

¹⁹² Baldwin, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 8.