

*'As Much Truth As One Can Bear: James Baldwin's Life and Thought'*

J. A. Robinson-Brown

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- I. *Contextualising Baldwin*
- II. *Baldwin's Thought*
- III. *How Baldwin can help us as Christians today*
- IV. *Epilogue*

**1924** James Arthur Jones born in Harlem, New York City.

**1927** Renamed James Arthur Baldwin after mother marries David Baldwin a Baptist preacher.

**1929** Attends Public School where he is encouraged in his studies by School Principal.

**1935** Attends Frederick Douglass Junior High School where he is influenced by his teacher Countee Cullen. Visits local library and reads voraciously. Also attends Pentecostal Churches with family of school friend and undergoes a conversion experience – becomes a young minister at Fireside Pentecostal Assembly and preaches regularly until 1938.

**1938** Attends De Witt Clinton High School, a prestigious school in the Bronx.

**1939 – 1941** Grows in concern about not knowing who his biological father is. Struggles with studies, but excels in history and English. Meets artist Beauford Delaney who introduces Baldwin to the art world in Greenwich Village, and teaches him about music. Baldwin preaches final sermon at the end of High School.

**1942** Awarded High School Diploma. Works as a labourer in army depot, then in a meat packing plant – loses both jobs and ends up as a waiter. Has intimate encounters with men and women.

**1943** Stepfather dies. Baldwin begins to identify himself as 'homosexual'. Begins what would become the novel *Go Tell It On The Mountain* Meets Marlon Brando in a theatre class and also Richard Wright who reads a manuscript and puts it in the way of editors Harper and Brothers.

**1946** Close friend Eugene Worth dies by suicide after jumping from George Washington Bridge which troubles Baldwin greatly and enters his work *Another Country*.

**1948** Moves to Paris. Jailed in Paris for eight days for theft of a bedsheet. (charges later dismissed). Falls in love with Lucien Happersberger a young Swiss man living in Paris.

**1952** Borrows money from Marlon Brando and takes brief trip to New York. Back in France he becomes godfather to Luc Happersberger, son of Lucien and Suzy Happersberger who marry earlier that year.

**1954** Wins Guggenheim Fellowship.

**1956** Attends First Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists held at the Sorbonne connected to the Negritude movement.

**1957** Sees Martin Luther King Jr in Atlanta. Travels through Alabama visiting Birmingham and Montgomery where he meets Coretta Scott King. Meets Lorraine Hansberry. Awarded Ford Foundation Grant in 1959.

**1961** Meets senior Black Muslim Leaders Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad. Visits Israel and Istanbul, Turkey which begins many trips to Istanbul.

**1962** Attends White House dinner for American Nobel laureates. Travels to Africa with his sister Gloria who works as his assistant.

**1963** Undertakes lecture tour. Meets Medgar Evers. Medgar Evers assassinated in Jackson in June. Wins George Polk Memorial Award. Elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters in February 1964.

**1965** Cambridge Union Society Debate against William F. Buckley Jr. Malcolm X assassinated in February. Participates in March from Selma to Montgomery led by Martin Luther King Jr.

**1968** Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated in April. Robert F. Kennedy assassinated in June. Addresses the World Council of Churches in Uppsala in July.

**1974** Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Awarded medal by St John the Divine Cathedral "artist as prophet". Awarded Martin Luther King Memorial Medal for "lifelong dedication to humanitarian ideals" in 1978. Awarded Honorary Doctorate from Hull University in 1976.

**1979** Goes into seclusion after hearing of Beauford Delaney's death.

**1986** Made an Officer of the Legion of Honour in France by President François Mitterand in June. Travels to London for production of *The Amen Corner* which runs for seven months.

**1987** Undergoes treatment and tests for cancer of the oesophagus. Works on The Welcome Table and other projects. Eventually is cared for by his brother David. Insists on a Thanksgiving Dinner although too weak to walk. Dies at home, 1<sup>st</sup> December with his brother and Lucien Happersberger at his side.