

The Rage of a Black Atheist

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Young Black atheist Ankh Ma'at Ra has struck a nerve. He can be seen on a video ranting against the God concept and the seemingly irreparable harm it has done to Black people. He liberally uses the f-word, the n-word, the s-word, and so forth. That is to say, he is very hard core. And many people seem to agree with him. The video has garnered over 800,000 views. It is titled "Tired of Waiting."

Ankh is tired of waiting for Jesus to return. He says that his family has believed that we have been living in the last days for four generations. He says that he is the fourth generation, and the madness stops here.

He says that Black Christian and Muslim leaders should be "ashamed" of themselves for continually teaching Black people that Jesus will return or that Allah will save them. He says that if there is a God, it must be the "spirit" that dwells within each and every one of us.

He obviously has a point. For the past 100 years, since W.W. I, religious leaders have been insisting that we have been living in the last "days." (Actually, Christians have been insisting that we are living in the last days for the past 2,000 years!) But since when have days actually meant years, decades, a century or two millennia? Why do religionists insist upon doubling down on the foolishness even after it is clear that they have been had, bamboozled, led astray and run amok, as Malcolm X would say?

Ankh expresses my rage. I, too, say that religionists ought to be ashamed of continuing this charade. They never have to put up or shut up. They just keep talking nonsense and giving Black people false hope.

In the movie *Panther*, about the Black Panthers, Kadeem Hardison's character's mother says that Black people need to pray. However, he says to his mother, "Our people have been praying for 400 years. Maybe it's time we tried something else."

Indeed, what do we have to show for our vaunted spirituality? Is it only supposed to pay dividends *after* we die? If so, why can so many White theists reap rewards in this life *and* the afterlife? It makes the Black theist look like a second-class child of God.

Ankh is correct to point out that Christianity and Islam have failed to save Black people. Malcolm X said of Christianity, "If your religion hasn't done any more for you than it has, you need to forget it anyway." However, Ankh questions Islam as well.

And there is no reason to stop there. Grenadian atheist Seon Lewis has noted that when enslaved Africans were crying out to the ancestors during the Middle Passage, the ancestors could do nothing for them. There does not seem to be any evidence to back up the extraordinary claim that there is any God, gods or spirits helping Black people, in particular. Indeed, no great Black religious leaders or religious scholars have presented such evidence. Yet most of us continue to believe despite all evidence to the contrary.

In the 1990s, Black scholar Randall Kennedy, an author and law professor at Harvard, edited a journal called *Reconstruction*. He asked me to write an article for the journal. I submitted a piece titled, "Will God Save Black America?" Of course, my answer was a resounding "no" and I gave many good reasons for arriving at that conclusion. But, alas, I received a call from Kennedy saying they would not publish it (with no explanation as to why.) It seems that most Black people do not want to hear what they consider to be such depressing information.

However, as Ankh shows, the problem will not go away. Black people are praying yet they continue to suffer. This situation is crying out for an answer and the usual weak theodicy might not cut it forever. There are many more angry young Blacks like Ankh, and they will continue to press their case. Black religious apologists will run, but they can't hide.

It is clear that strong economies in nations with strong democratic institutions bring forth secularism and a major decrease in religious belief. However, poverty among African Americans in particular continues to be high, as does the costs of health care, and so on. As long as African Americans continue to face serious

economic challenges, they are likely to be easy marks for religious leaders with grandiose promises, despite the rise of people like Ankh.

I hope that more young Black atheists come out of the closet, come together, and put religious apologists on the defensive. Ankh believes that if we had not wasted so much time on religion, we could have made much more progress than we have. He is probably right. It *is* time we tried something else.