

PREFACE

Since its emergence in the 1960s Black Theology in the United States has achieved a level of sophistication and complexity that is to be both expected and welcomed. However, black theologians must be on their guard against complacency. It is possible to fall asleep at the treasurehouse door if we no longer value its contents. We may awake and find that the gifts that have been entrusted to us no longer are ours to share. The strength and power of faith have been the bulwark of African Americans against the principalities and powers of oppression. “We have been believers” as Margaret Walker reminds us. The faith of African Americans has been tempered in the fire of oppression and galvanized by the quest for freedom. On the threshold of a new century the African American community is threatened by a crisis of belief. This crisis is not simply a matter of intellectual acquiescence, but signals a deeper human loss. At this moment, looking out on the teeming avenues of a city in the throes of scarcity, I am reminded that material poverty is not always synonymous with the poverty of faith. While love is the bond of human community and hope fuels its engines, faith charts its direction. The question that has given rise to the chapters that follow is “what is the relation between faith and freedom?”

I want to thank my colleagues on the faculty of the Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary and St. Bernard’s Institute for their commiseration and support. A special measure of gratitude goes to Ellen Wondra and Thomas Scott, who read parts of the manuscript, and to Linda Wickett who assisted in its production. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of the students in my Black Theology courses. Their probing questions nurtured many of the ideas in the pages that follow.

Finally, I must express an inexpressible appreciation to my children, James III, Jamila Halima, and Jumaane Haji, for the quiet moments and the occasional insistence that I leave this project for rest and renewal.

The reader should understand that citations from other writers are usually presented in their original form. Therefore, in these instances, “humanity” is not substituted for “man,” and “black” or “African American” is not substituted for “Negro.”

Lima, Peru
August 1991