



Michael A. Battle*

INTRODUCING THE THEME: THEOLOGY AND
PUBLIC POLICY, ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP
AND PUBLIC POLICY AND BREAKING THE
SILENCE: CHURCH CONVERSATIONS
ABOUT HIV/AIDS

For the past two years, the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) has intentionally engaged some of the foremost intellects and prominent voices in the church and the community to dialogue and address public-policy issues impacting our society. Special focus was given to HIV/AIDS, poverty, and health disparities. Although pervasive in society, these concerns affect the African-American community disproportionately higher than any other ethnic group. While these discussions are presented in mainstream media occasionally and with shallow interest—as minor items in newspapers, as news flashes, or trailers to more sensational stories on nightly news television—a more insightful focus and dependable conversation is required. Consistent in African-American history, it becomes the responsibility of the Black Church to bring attention and voice to these issues, with a goal of broad-based community intensive education and to garner collective participation of members of the faith community in becoming *change makers* for the common good. Our greatest power base for reaching the African-American community is from the pulpit to the pew.

These forums, addressing three major topics, were held on the ITC campus: “Theology and Public Policy,” “Ecumenical Leadership and Public Policy,” and “Breaking the Silence: Church Conversations

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about HIV/AIDS." Collectively, more than 500 persons attended these discussions, gathered information, and were commissioned to begin the education process in their churches and faith organizations.

Within the context of these forums, collaborative bridges have forged among ITC and churches across the nation, other theological institutions, civic, community, healthcare organizations, and faith partners, such as:

1. Theology and Public Policy in partnership with the Joseph E. Lowery Institute for Social Justice
2. Ecumenical Leadership and Public Policy and the eight mainline denominations of the Black Church:
 - African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)
 - African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)
 - Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)
 - National Baptist Convention of America (NBC)
 - Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. (PNBC)
 - National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBCUSA)
 - Church of God in Christ, Inc. (COGIC)
 - The National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (NMBC)
3. "Breaking the Silence: Church Conversations on HIV/AIDS," The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the faculty and students of eight seminaries of the Association of Theological Schools in the US and Canada:
 - Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN
 - Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA
 - Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Detroit, MI
 - Payne Theological Seminary, Wilberforce, OH
 - Capital Bible Seminary, Silver Springs, MD

- Howard University School of Divinity, Washington, DC
- Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, NC
- Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA

Resultant to these collaborations, *The Journal of the ITC* presents these papers from noted theologians and clergy, representing the highest officials among eight denominations in the Black Christian Church, civic and community leaders, academics from sister seminaries, and the ITC faculty.

Fundamental to its mission and ministry, ITC is a safe haven for critical discourse, where there is freedom in diversity to wrestle with issues and ideas and the offering of scholarly opinions and possibilities to serve as catalysts for change. ITC is uniquely positioned to initiate such conversations as the historic incubator of ecumenical cooperation, and through this *Journal* is prepared to offer these critiques and recommendations for the reader's consideration. As with all scholarship, the intent is to engender critical thinking toward a more profound awareness and subsequent behavioral transformation within the context of the Black Church.

As ITC celebrates its Fiftieth Anniversary of ecumenism in theological education, we continue in the tradition that has been established, offering this volume of authentic analysis on these selected themes. We express our genuine appreciation to the Ford Foundation for providing funding to make this volume available.

The first volume of the *Journal of the Society of Christian Writers* is a collection of essays by leading writers of the day, including C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and others. It is a landmark publication in the history of Christian literature.

The second volume continues the tradition of high-quality writing, featuring works by authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien and T. S. Eliot. These essays explore the intersection of faith and culture in a profound way.

The third volume is particularly notable for its focus on the spiritual life, with contributions from writers like Dorothy Sayers and Evelyn Waugh. It offers a deep look into the hearts of these authors and their faith.

The fourth volume brings together a diverse group of voices, including both established and emerging writers. It reflects the rich and varied landscape of Christian thought and expression at the time.

The fifth volume is a testament to the enduring power of the *Journal* as a platform for serious Christian writing. It contains some of the most powerful and moving pieces ever published in its pages.

The sixth volume, the final one in this set, is a fitting conclusion to the series. It contains a collection of essays that look back on the journey of the *Journal* and forward to the future of Christian literature.