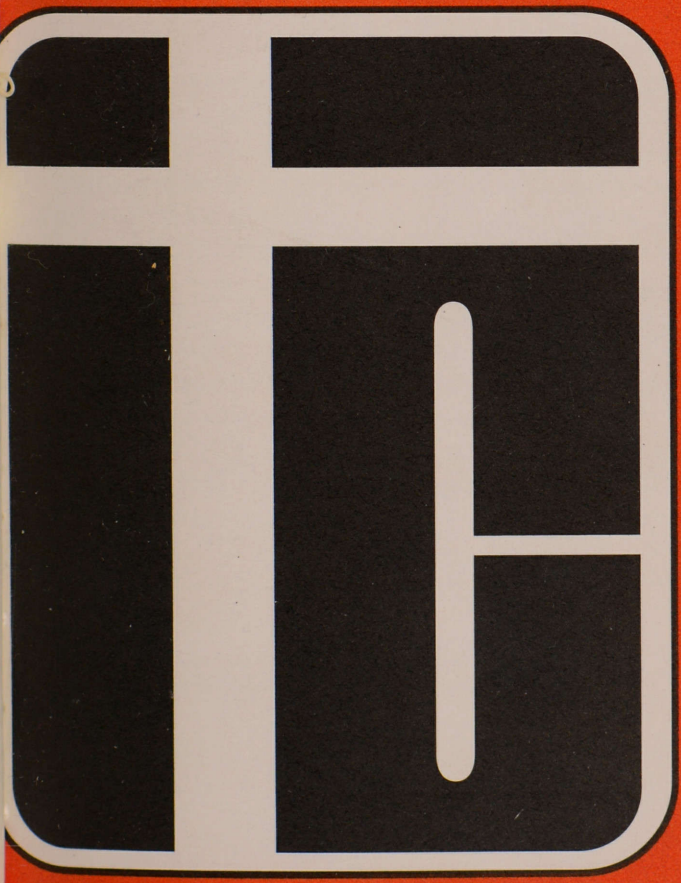
ISSN 0092-6558

THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER

Volume XVIII Fall 1990/Spring 1991 Numbers 1 and 2



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The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center

Volume XVIII

Fall 1990/Spring 1991

The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center is published semi-annually by the Faculty of The Interdenominational Theological Center, 671 Beckwith Street, SW, Atlanta, Georgia 30314. Manuscripts and related correspondence should be sent to the editor at the address above. Matters pertaining to subscriptions and back issues should be directed to Mrs. June S. Johnson at the school address. JITC is indexed in *Religion Index One: Periodicals* and in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*. This publication is available in microform through University Microfilms International. Subscription rates are: Individuals, $8.00 per year; Institutions, $10.00 per year. Single copies and back issues are available. Make checks payable to: The ITC Press. JITC is a member of the American Theological Library Association (ATLA).

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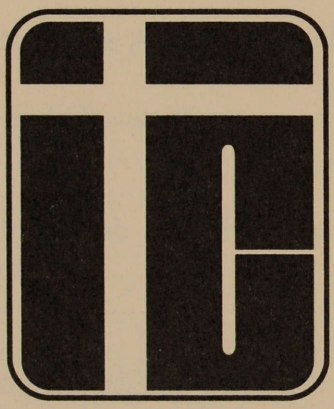

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The Charles B. Copher Annual Faculty Lecture Series

Volume XVIII of the *JITC* is devoted entirely to faculty lectures, hitherto unpublished, in honor of Emeritus Professor of the Old Testament, Charles B. Copher. In March 1979 the annual Faculty Lecture Series was renamed the Charles B. Copher Annual Faculty Lecture Series. It was inaugurated on the occasion of the Twentieth Anniversay Celebration of the founding of the Interdenominational Theological Center in 1959. Since the first lecture, delivered in 1979 by Professor of the Old Testament, John W. Waters, the community has looked forward each March to the presentation of the scholarly work of the members of the ITC faculty and periodically their lectures have been published in the *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*.

Previous lecturers have included Professors Jacquelyn Grant, Justo Gonzalez, and J. Deotis Roberts in 1981, Professor W. Thomas Smith in 1982, Professor Jonathan Jackson in 1983, Professor Riggins R. Earl, Jr. in 1984, Professor David K. Rensberger in 1985, and Professor Jacquelyn Grant in 1986. In 1987, the last year the Copher lectures were published, Professor Gayraud S. Wilmore, UNCF Distinguished Visiting Professor at ITC for 1986-87, and Professor Copher himself, were the lecturers. Volume XIII contained those two lectures in addition to the earlier lectures by Professors Smith, Rensberger, and Grant.

This series is one of the ways in which the ITC community seeks to honor Dr. Copher who retired from regular teaching in 1978 after a long and distinguished service to Gammon Theological Seminary and the ITC.

Charles B. Copher was born in Troy, Missouri in 1913 where he completed his primary and secondary education. He attended Stowe Teachers College in St. Louis and subsequently

received his B.A. degree from Clark College in Atlanta in 1938. In 1937 he was ordained a deacon in the Methodist Church.

Dr. Copher earned his Bachelor of Divinity from Gammon Seminary in 1939, the same degree from Oberlin Graduate School of Theology in 1941, and the Ph.D. degree from Boston University in 1947. He was the fifth African American in the United States to earn the doctorate in Bible and related studies. The first was Pazavia O'Connell who received his degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1898.

Dr. Copher is known and loved by generations of Gammon and ITC students as an energetic lecturer and matchless scholar of the Old Testament. Today he is widely regarded as the "dean" of Black biblical scholars. He taught O.T. at Gammon from 1948 to 1958 when that institution became a part of the Interdenominational Theological Center. From 1953 to 1958 Dr. Copher was Dean at Gammon and from 1958 to 1972, Academic Dean at the ITC. In 1972 the board of trustees of ITC elected him Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean. He is one of the few people in theological education who has demonstrated the rare gift of being both an able administrator and a brilliant teacher.

During the 1960s Dr. Copher's writings ranged over a broad spectrum. Not only did he write for the Methodist Church school curriculum, but produced many essays and articles in the field of social ethics. In 1962 his *Men and the Book* was published by the Graded Press of the denomination in Nashville. In 1964 and 1965 the same press published his *Black Persons Who Knew God*. The civil rights movement and the Black Power movement had their impact upon Dr. Copher as they did upon many Black theological professors of the period. In 1970 his work made a decided swing to biblical studies from an African American perspective, closing a large gap in Euro-American theological education. During the last twenty years he has been much in demand as a lecturer on Black biblical studies in clergy confer-

ences, seminaries, and colleges. He is now working on a compilation of his own articles on the subject over the years and also an anthology of essays by Black biblical exegetes and scholars from as early as 1793. In retirement Dr. Copher continues to work on his long-awaited *opus magnus*, *Black People and Personalities In and From the Bible*, intimations of which may be found in his celebrated article "Three Thousand Years of Biblical Interpretation With Reference to Black Peoples," *JITC*, XIII (Spring 1986), No. 2.

Dr. Copher was a pastor of churches in Ohio and Massachusetts in the early years of his ministry and will long be remembered for his contribution to the preaching and pastoral ministry. For many years he played an exemplary role in many aspects of Methodism, across racial and regional lines. Fifty-three years ago he married Miss Marie White of Portsmouth, Virginia, and they presently are enjoying retirement together in Atlanta, where he, as needed, still accepts occasional teaching assignments at the ITC.

The *Journal of the ITC* is proud to present in this issue five Charles B. Copher lectures delivered over the past several years by members of the faculty. All of them have been greatly abbreviated and revised for publication, with the inevitable loss of some of the intimacy and excitement of the word spoken in the lecture hall on an auspicious occasion. They stand, nevertheless, as eloquent examples of the work being done by professors in the various disciplines of the theological curriculum at the Interdenominational Theological Center.

G.S.W.