

# THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER

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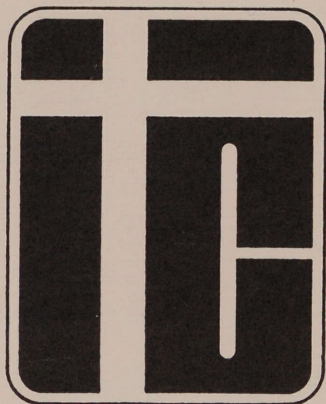
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THE BLACK CHRISTIAN WORSHIP  
EXPERIENCE: A CONSULTATION

To Wilson Hemister, a brother  
in the struggle  
Jim Costen

*Edited by*

MELVA WILSON COSTEN  
DARIUS LEANDER SWANN

Volume XIV

Fall 1986      Spring 1987

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**THE JOURNAL OF THE  
INTERDENOMINATIONAL  
THEOLOGICAL CENTER**

THE BLACK CHRISTIAN WORSHIP  
EXPERIENCE: A CONSULTATION

MELVA WILSON JORDAN  
DAVID BRANTLEY STARK

THE JOURNAL OF THE

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THEOLOGY

THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

## INTRODUCTION

Christian worship in Black congregations is the corporate response of a particular people to what God in Jesus Christ has done in the past, is doing now, and has promised to do. Although the *leitourgia*, the visible acting out of this response, will vary from congregation to congregation, there is a common historical rootage which evokes a common theological interpretation of the acts of God. The themes which permeate all scholarly research in Black American traditions are the Biblical undergirding, the Americanized version of Christianity, the African heritage, and the influence of the unique conditions of slavery, all of which inform the worship of Black folk.

As an interdenominational, international, and interracial institution, the Interdenominational Theological Center is submerged in a variety of forms of communal worship. At the heart of the worship life is an awareness of the uniqueness of the Black witnessing community as it strives to demonstrate and implement the Christian faith. The heritage, the contemporary shapes (and reshapings), and the hope, need continual exploration, utilizing research tools and techniques which enhance the "oral tradition" through which worship has been nurtured and continues to survive. Thus, ITC continually seeks ways to heighten and deepen this kind of research as a part of its contribution to the Christian community.

The articles in this issue of *The Journal* represent the first in a series of scholarly research in Black worship sponsored by ITC. Papers delivered at the first Consultation on the Worship Experience among Black Americans, November 21-23, 1985, as well as solicited articles, are included.

### *THE CONSULTATIONS ON BLACK WORSHIP*

The first in a series of consultations on the worship experience among Black American Christians was held at Camp Calvin, a camp and conference center, in Hampton, Georgia, near Atlanta, November 21-23, 1985. The projection of this series was made possible by a generous gift to the ITC by Helmar Nielsen, a businessman from Boston, Mass. After conversation about the current music and worship programs at ITC and the possibilities, Mr. Nielsen presented the gift to help facilitate the process, as a result of his own conviction that there is a deep sense of reality in Black worship not evident in the majority churches.

In planning for the consultation, the committee agreed that the consultation should explore, identify, compile, study, and refine those elements that distinguish the worship of Black communities; to encourage the creation of liturgical forms with enduring beauty and spirit; and to offer these creations and encourage their use in worship in other churches. At the outset, the model for such consultations was determined to be "the context of worship itself" with conversation, papers, flowing out of this context rather than the traditional "scholarly paper-discussion-then worship" model.

This first historic gathering included persons representing ten Christian denominational traditions. Six of these ten are constituent seminaries of the ITC (*Gammon*, United Methodist; *Morehouse*, Baptist; *Turner*, African Methodist Episcopal; *Phillips*, Christian Methodist Episcopal; *Johnson C. Smith*, Presbyterian; and *Mason*, Church of God in Christ). Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, African Methodist Episcopal Zion and other Pentacostal denominational representatives constitute the remaining four traditions. In terms of individuals, the Consultation included clergy (pastors and teachers), lay persons, musicians, dancers, seminarians, bishops, priests, administrators and academicians.

Plans for subsequent consultations are still in process. The project director is Carolyn McFarlin. Proceedings of the first consultation are available on video tape and in written form.

Melva Wilson Costen and Darius Leander Swann  
Consultation Chairpersons  
Atlanta 1986

**THE BLACK CHRISTIAN WORSHIP  
EXPERIENCE: A CONSULTATION**

**MELVA WILSON COSTEN  
DARIUS LEANDER SWANN**  
*Editors*

THE BLACK CHRISTIAN WORSHIP  
EXPERIENCE: A COMPLETION

MELVA WILSON GIBLIN  
DARLENE LEANDER SWANN  
Editors



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