

Heart and Head, by Dwight N. Hopkins

reviewed by [Lewis V. Baldwin](#) in the [January 11, 2003](#) issue

Black theology has matured and assumed greater clarity and analytical depth since its origins in the 1960s. Dwight N. Hopkins, associate professor of theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, has contributed enormously to this development. With this book, Hopkins establishes himself as a leading intellectual and spiritual force among the second generation of African-American theologians.

Hopkins begins by reflecting on the values of his parents, who taught him the importance of both faith and education. "A faith of service to the less fortunate in the community and a spirituality of justice for the most vulnerable people went hand in hand with a disciplined and determined approach to education."

Hopkins provides rich insights into the origins of black theology, giving special attention to the pioneering scholarship and the social involvements of his mentor, James H. Cone. Much of the ground he covers on this subject is familiar, but the appeal of the discussion rests on Hopkins's suggestion that black theology has a usable past, a rich legacy of intellectual vitality and faith activity, that must inform its present practice and its future direction.

His discussion of womanist theology is interesting but not strikingly original. The ideas of Jacquelyn Grant, Katie G. Cannon, Delores S. Williams and other African-American female theologians are treated briefly, with some attention to theological method. Drawing on the insights of Williams, Hopkins concludes that the methodology of womanist theology--which is multidialogical, didactic, liturgical and practical--allows it to converse "with partners from various religious, political, and social communities." Hopkins is especially sensitive to the impact of womanist theology as an "innovative creation" in "the method of black theology," but one wishes that he had commented more deeply on the possible wedding of womanism and black theology.

Hopkins's impressive treatment of the relationship between spirituality and social transformation is the strongest part of the book. He does not reduce spirituality to the personal or private sphere, making it devoid of sociopolitical content. Rather, he argues persuasively that spirituality is genuine only to the extent that it translates into action on behalf of the poor and oppressed. A keen sense of how black theology might continue to speak relevantly to the issues of race, class, gender and sexuality courses through this part of the book.

Hopkins sees the globalization of black theology as essential to its survival and relevance, and stresses the need for black theology to converse with theologies across the boundaries of religion and nationality. More than most black theologians he asserts the need for black theology to move beyond the African-American experience to address universal concerns as varied as multiculturalism, interfaith dialogue, economic and political systems, human sexuality, information technology, ecology and the nuclear threat.

Head and Heart lifts black theology to another level while revisiting themes and concerns that have defined its parameters since it began. It answers those critics who have dismissed black theology as merely a fad. Written in a clear and simple style, the book has much to say to those in the academy, the church and the public square who view ideas and the prophetic posture as keys to the shaping of a new humanity.