

Foreword

From early essays regarding the shortcomings of black theological discourse and work on the constructive task of presenting black women's thought and life as academic resource, womanist scholarship has grown over the years. The initial struggle to have the liberative nature of religious faith and the academic merit of black women's contributions to this transformative process has expanded and is now recognized for its tremendous importance through conferences, curricula, books, articles, and a growing number of womanists working across academic disciplines. We recognize that African American women are generating some of the most creative and vital study of African American religious thought and life; and we are delighted that this series contributes to the presentation of some of these scholars.

Monica A. Coleman is one of the new voices in womanist theology. Trained in process studies, but with a commitment to the intellectual significance of African American experience, Coleman has given attention to the development of a womanist postmodern theology that speaks to faith and social responsibility in complex and creative ways. *Making a Way Out of No Way* is her most substantive presentation of this theology. It weaves together a variety of theoretical and methodological tools, including those underutilized in black religious studies such as process thought. This book is both academic and personal, speaking to collective realities and interior concerns but in a way that is mindful of the nuances of individual encounters and perspectives. There is in *Making a Way Out of No Way* an impressive blending of general, insightful concerns with Coleman's personal narrative as well as serious stories and wise living of other women. In this regard this text articulates lessons culled from the work of a variety of womanists who push for a sensitive balance between the individual and the collective as a way of maintaining the integrity of personal identity as related to but not consumed by communal associations. Embedded in this book is an important question: How does one do womanist theology, and what does it mean to do this theology within the context of difference that marks the community and experiences of black women? This is not the first time Coleman has responded to this question, but this book certainly represents her most intellectually mature response. It

fits well into the canon of womanist discourse, serving to further advance its creativity, challenge, and methodological/theoretical systems.

Coleman seeks to understand the dynamics of the postmodern world and the ways in which that world frames our sense of proper *thinking* and transformative *doing*. Taking seriously the call for wholeness drawn from the work of Alice Walker and the works that currently saturate the scholarship of womanist thinkers, Coleman's book promotes reading the religious significance of black women's lives in ways that do not flatten it out, narrow its scope, and limit its reach. Rather, she seeks to maintain the thick and at times tense nature of religious engagement within the African American community. In a word, Coleman troubles the assumption that womanist theology can be articulated only using a Christian vocabulary and grammar, arguing instead that sensitivity to religious pluralism marks the spiritual commitments in African American communities. As Coleman remarks, "In a postmodern womanist theology, I can find a language that has a rich past, resonates with spirit and memory, and evokes images particular to the experiences of black women." The book you have started to read is not only cognizant of the experiences of black women, but it is also shaped by and influenced deeply by those experiences—seeking to provide a reasonable and faith-based response to the turmoil of life.

We are pleased to have this volume in our series, and we are convinced that it marks a significant contribution to black religious studies in general and womanist scholarship in particular.

Katie Geneva Cannon

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