



Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology (New Vectors in the Study of Religion and Theology)

Dwight N. Hopkins

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Hopkins contends that the lives of enslaved African Americans were the foundational source of liberating faith and practice for African Americans today. Down, Up, and Over draws on their religious experience, and the example of their faith and witness, to develop a constructive theology of liberation.

African American belief structures and hope practices blossom from the black folk's religious encounters with God, Hopkins contends. The first half of his ambitious work reconstructs the cultural matrix of African American religion--a total way of life formed by Protestantism, American culture, and the institution of slavery (1619-1865)--in which racial identities developed. Whites from Europe and blacks from Africa arrived with specific, differing views of God, faith, practice, and humanity. Hopkins recreates their worldviews and how white theology sought to remake African Americans into naturally inferior beings divinely ordained into subservience. The counter voice of enslaved blacks begets the Spirit of Liberation.

Tracking that Spirit, Hopkins crafts an explicit black theology of the Spirit of Liberation for us (God, chapter 4), with us (Jesus, chapter 5), and in us (human purpose, chapter 6). Out of the crucible of slavery emerge the lineaments of a constructive religious vision: the constitution of a new self and a divinely purposed liberation toward full spiritual and material humanity.

Hopkins's sweeping vision, impressive scholarship, and astute social analysis make for a fascinating and important volume, one that can help all readers find meaning and purpose in the daunting 350-year pilgrimage of African Americans.

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