

## FOREWORD

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### "By Their Institutions Shall You Know Them"

For the better part of my life I have been a preacher and pastor; therefore, I am intrigued, gratified, and most delighted by the subject, substance, and excellence of Dr. Angela Dillard's *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit*. It is a refreshing and resourceful presentation of how private faith can serve effectively to create public institutions that act valiantly, impartially, and noncoercively to bring about positive and universal social change. Such religious activism as is described by Doctor Dillard as being responsible for the birth and rearing of organized labor unions, civil rights groups, and human rights institutions does not portray religion as loving and serving religion but religion that is willing to pour out its life and energy into institutions and associations that serve the common good. In most instances of human progress in art, science, politics, and economics, there is the presence of the hidden, unselfish, altruistic, affirmative, loving, lifting, life-giving, freedom-directed hand of faith at work in the world to redeem and advance the interests of all humankind.

James Luther Adams, late Harvard professor of Christian social ethics, used to say of churches, "By their institutions you shall know them." Professor Adams was paraphrasing a favorite Bible reference that was constantly quoted in every one of his sermons by the salient protagonist of this book, the late Rev. Dr. Charles Andrew Hill Sr.: "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are rav-

enous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15–20).

If labor unions have served and still serve the public good, if such associations stem inordinate corporate greed and foster the reasonable and fair redistribution of wealth, if democracy is still being advanced, if the inclusive masses of people are benefited and sustained in a society that provides opportunity for all, requires responsibility from all, and builds a just community of all, Angela Dillard’s book demonstrates and documents the “good fruit” that has been harvested from the social institutions that were spawned in, by, and through the churches in Detroit that encouraged, backed, and supported the birth of labor unions “way back in the day” when it was not popular, safe, or easy to do so.

Sixty-five or seventy years ago, three black pastors turned their backs on the rich automobile-manufacturing companies that opposed the organization of labor unions and threw the weight of their faith and influence behind the movement to organize factory workers to protect their material interests by using the power and tools of collective bargaining. Corporate power resisted and violently opposed such a movement. There were rich corporate rewards for the pastors and churches that would discourage their laboring members from organizing. The majority of the pastors in Detroit, white and black, backed the owners and managers of the corporations and discouraged unionization. Charles A. Hill of Hartford Baptist Church, Malcolm Dade of St. Cyprian’s Episcopal, Horace White of Plymouth Congregational (now Plymouth United Church of Christ), Henry Hitt Crane of Central United Methodist, and several others took an oppositional stance against corporate power and in favor of the laborers who, without unionization, had no power to protect themselves, advance themselves, or sustain their communities. Citing the evidence presented in this book, it can be brilliantly and successfully argued that without the life and work of religious faith common people could not have organized themselves into effective institutions.

How sweet it is that this book has arrived at such a critical time for religious institutions, particularly those that are located in the inner city. I look at my own city, and it is very evident that the downsizing of the automotive industry, the automation of manufacturing processes, the globalization of production and sales, the undermining of the labor

movement, and the flight of jobs and the middle class from the city, coupled with the intensification of urban social problems, have created an economic crisis. Detroit is begging for economic development and an enlarged tax base to pay for public services and police protection. Our newest hotels are in trouble, as the occupancy rate is 50 percent or less. Cobo Hall, our newly expanded convention center, has been sparsely occupied. If massive numbers of new jobs are not created here, our future will soon be bleak. But Detroit does not stand alone; we see deterioration, decay, hopelessness, and despair all across the face of the United States. And I would venture to say that urban life worldwide is in crisis. Paris, London, and Rome are not the cities they used to be. And the church is being called upon to act as an instrument of transformation and hope.

Two of the most precious hours of a sabbatical Merrill Fellowship that I had at Harvard Divinity School were spent in the company of my old and then very feeble, retired professor, James Luther Adams, no relation to me, who wrote the book on being human religiously. I asked him, "Dr. Adams, will you please tell me what in your opinion is the hope of the world today?" And that sagacious, white-skinned, white-haired octogenarian looked me straight in the eye and said, "The hope of the world today is the African American preacher." Now, I want to change that to "African American church" because I think that is what he meant to say. But can you imagine a white Harvard scholar who spent all his life, more than ninety years, in celebrated white institutions, in a white academic world of power and privilege, a man who has never wanted for any honor or distinction, saying to me that the hope of the world is not white wealth, not white culture, not white America, not white academic institutions, not the white Republican Party, not white corporate America, not General Motors, not IBM, not Harvard University with its multi-billion-dollar endowment? According to him, the hope of the world is none of these things that we respect and adore. He said that the hope of the world is the black church. It is a shocking statement both because of its source and because of its substance.

As to its source, I would not have been surprised if these words came from a black demagogue, charlatan, or perennial presidential candidate. Wouldn't you expect people like me to make such a cavalier and offhand assertion? Black preachers like me are often given to hyperbole, overkill, and media hype. All demagogues, politicians, and propagandists claim that they and their ethnic groups are the hope of the world, the source of a new world order. But this man is not a demagogue; he is too feeble. He is a seasoned, sober, reasonable Harvard scholar. And he said with no

uncertain tone and no unexamined sense that the American African church is the hope of the world today. Now, I know that means all colors because the color black includes all color and excludes none. But it's still a startling statement.

Second, I am startled by the substance of the statement. How can we who have received the least be expected, even required, to give the most? Are we who are crucified by the world now to become saviors? Are we who have been left out of the structures of power and privilege now to be the key that unlocks the door to freedom and power and liberty and justice for all? It seems absurd, doesn't it? Yet perhaps the victims of society's injustice and indifference are the inevitable redeemers of the society that has rejected them. For when God was ready to build a new people to be the instruments of divine salvation, God chose not a yuppie or a buppie, but God chose those who were underprivileged, a hundred-year-old Abraham and a ninety-year-old, shriveled up Sarah. God made *them* the mother and father of a holy nation. Then, when God was ready to draw Israel out of bondage in Egypt, God chose an eighty-year-old, tongue-tied fugitive from justice named Moses and made him the first international leader and liberator in human history. As Gardner C. Taylor says, "Moses left Egypt as a fugitive from justice, and Moses returned to Egypt as the prosecuting attorney." When God was ready to break the back of the British Empire, God chose not the armies and generals of Europe but a thin, gaunt, brown, praying man of peace named Mahatma Gandhi, who crushed the largest, most far-flung, most impressive empire in the world not by military might but by prayer and fasting.

When God was ready to desegregate America, God chose as the leader not a privileged, preferred, pampered, and honored person but a hated, rejected, despised, exploited, excluded, segregated, dishonored man named Martin Luther King Jr. and made him the greatest moral and spiritual leader of the twentieth century. Does it take an exiled Moses to humanize and save a whole society? Does it take a blind Milton to see an invisible Paradise? Does it take a deafened Beethoven to hear a humanly inaudible symphony of brotherhood and peace and write it down on paper? Does it take a once-excluded Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young to re-create the urban vitality of Atlanta? Does it take a Shirley Franklin to claim for Atlanta the written documentation of Martin King's legacy? Does it take a once rejected Coleman Young to raise Detroit from pronounced social and economic death? Does it take an excoriated and vilified Harold Washington to transform Chicago politics? Does it take a crucified savior, a wounded healer, to redeem the world? And will it take ebony and ivory people of intelligence and spiri-

tuality and integrity to lift all of humanity to the light and life and love that should belong to all people?

Since African Americans are in the intensive care ward of the U.S. economy, there is a tremendous opportunity for churches in general, and the African American church in particular, to initiate and demonstrate a better use of human and financial capital. White churches, like the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan and its McGee fund for Urban Development, are stepping up to the plate and seeking to raise and invest much more in the inner cities as both a moral obligation and an economic opportunity.

Likewise, black churches must continue to merge across denominational lines, to work in tandem with theological schools, universities, and business schools, to conceive, implement, and complete an economic development plan not only for African Americans but for all of urban America. The Clinton economic stimulus plan went the way of all flesh. Republicans are in power but seem to be distracted by wars and rumors of wars. Corporate America is running away from the problem, but African Americans, working in tandem with other faith communities, could make a difference. African Americans grossed eight hundred billion dollars last year. That is more than the gross national product of Canada and fifteen other nations. A united church community could seek to garner 5 percent of that gross, not as gifts from individuals but as investments made by individuals through an envisioned African American church community development fund. Expertly managed, such a fund could build factories, finance institutions, employ the indigent, solve social problems, educate youth, multiply and strengthen community-based banks, liberate and dignify the human race, and save and deliver children from drugs, crime, guns, gangs, violence, teenage pregnancy, and high school attrition to the end that the entire urban environment would be transformed. The church could take the lead because the church already has the human capital, the moral credibility, and the organizational skills to get things done. Is it not true that the African American church has given African Americans everything they have?

An African American lawyer once told me, "I don't go to church because I think it has kept African Americans down." I said, "How ignorant can an intelligent man be? You need to read Carter G. Woodson's *History of the Negro Church*, E. Franklin Frazier's *Negro Church in America*, Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, Eric Lincoln's *African American Churches*, Albert Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, Cornell West's *Prophesy Deliverance*, or Aldon Morris's *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. They all agree that everything we possess was mothered and

nurtured by African American churches. Let me cite a few lines from *Black Theology and Documentary History*, edited by Gayraud Wilmore and James H. Cone.

The black church of the 19th Century, despite its client relationship to white churches, was clearer about its identity than many of us are today. It knew itself to be God's judgment upon the inhumanity of racism. Its blackness was therefore an expression of its sense of cultural vocation. . . . By every measure, it was an amazing institution, led, for the most part, by illiterate preachers, many of whom were slaves or recently freed men. Poverty stricken and repressed by custom and law, this church converted thousands, stabilized family life, established insurance and burial societies, founded schools and colleges, commissioned missionaries to the far corners of the world and at the same time, agitated for the abolition of slavery, supported illegal actions on behalf of refugees, organized the underground railroad, fulminated slave uprisings, promoted the Civil War, developed community, political, education and action on behalf of civil rights and provided the social, economic, political and cultural base for the entire black community in the United States.

Everyone should know that the African Methodist Episcopal Church created and supported the first African American university, Wilberforce, in 1858, predating emancipation. Everyone should know that black Presbyterians, along with the white philanthropic response to their initiatives, created Johnson C. Smith University, which once had its own medical school, and also Knoxville College. Everyone should know the black United Methodists created Gammon Theological Seminary, Houston Tillotson College, and many others. For their part, African American Baptists, working in tandem with the American Baptist Home Mission Society and Black Baptist State Conventions, established a black college or university in every southern state. In Alabama, it was Selma University; in Florida, it was Florida Memorial College; in North Carolina, it was Shaw University; in South Carolina, it was Benedict and Morris; in Virginia, it was Virginia Union; in West Virginia, it was Storer College; in Arkansas, it was Arkansas Baptist College; in Mississippi, it was what has now become Jackson State College; in Kentucky, it was Simmons University; in Tennessee, it was Roger Williams College now LeMoyne-Owen College; in Texas, it was Bishop College; in Louisiana, it was Leland College; and in Georgia it was Morehouse and Spelman.

Can't the churches do for economic development today what they

did for educational opportunity 150 years ago? The African American church is all that African Americans have. It sits in the midst of our urban, ghettoized situation. Everyone in the ghetto does not belong to the church, but the church belongs to everybody in the ghetto.

It is a preserver of our culture. It is a producer of our genius. It is the power base for political ascendancy. It is the parent of our music and art. It is the sponsor of our creativity, versatility, and ingenuity. It is the incubator of our leadership. It is the storehouse for the disinherited. It is the power base for the disfranchised, and it is a hospital for wounded souls. It is a love tabernacle for the hated and exploited. It is an open door to the least, the last, the lost, the little, the lowest, the unlucky, and the left out. It is the biggest enemy of the status quo. It is a central agency for antisegregation and antidefamation. It is a rock in a weary land of oppression. It is a shelter from the storm blast of bigotry; it faces a frowning world and shouts and shows that we shall overcome. Let's join it, engage it, and use it to encourage African Americans and others to be partners, movers, and shakers in the vast underdeveloped vistas of economic possibility and social responsibility. Above all, churches must continually create new public services, voluntary associations, and advocacy institutions in order to fight to preserve affirmative action, labor unions, civil rights, and civil liberties. The Rev. Charles A. Hill admonished his church and the surrounding community to work tirelessly to build a better world and a just society. The institutions spawned by churches can serve the public good better and promote the general welfare best when they remain open to all, practically and religiously impartial.

As Hill's prodigy and Dillard's pastor, I'm intrigued, gratified, and delighted by this book. It is a scholarly, well-documented, and thoroughly substantiated historical account of how the preaching and practice of faith in God served to create active, voluntary, inclusive, secular associations of people who were motivated by their religious experiences, spiritual feelings, and doctrinal convictions to work hard in order to generate nonviolent, affirmative, socially inclusive changes in the city of Detroit and its suburbs. This book demonstrates and validates the power of the pulpit in public affairs. For many decades, the pulpits in Detroit have sounded forth the trumpet that has never known retreat, retrenchment, or retraction. White and black, Jew and gentile, Protestant and Catholic pastors of conservative or liberal inclinations have made all the difference in the formation of Detroit's unique character, diverse culture, and undying hope. Saint Anselm used to say, *Fides quaerens intellectum*, "faith seeks intelligence." But intelligence is not all that faith seeks. Faith also seeks radical change, collective righteousness,

social equality, the unfettered opportunity to rise higher (both collectively and individually), and the courage to transform old systems of exclusion into open doors of opportunity.

Faith perpetuates hope.

Faith generates love.

Faith actuates justice.

Faith elucidates freedom as it lights the way for humankind to become a Beloved Community of all races, nations, and religions.

It was a Harvard philosophy professor, Josiah Royce, who coined the phrase, “Beloved Community” and inspired the intellectual consciousness of Martin Luther King Jr., who found in Royce’s writings a powerful social commentary conceived from those Bible scriptures that articulate the demand of God for justice as a religious priority. The God of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament made justice, not personal piety, the ultimate priority. That God is love does not denigrate justice but necessitates it. Justice is the inevitable fruit, offspring, issue, and consequence of love. M. Scott Peck, of blessed memory, used to say that love is the active and determined and diligent search for, and dedication to, the total fulfillment and ultimate satisfaction of the beloved. To love is to be profoundly and indefatigably committed to the best interests of the beloved’s life, liberty, justice, empowerment, and fulfillment. It is only puppy love, hound dog love, or purely undisciplined love that would deny justice for the sake of “love.” Such love that obstructs and violates and denies justice is not authentic love but an imposter posing as something that is called love but falls far short of true love.

It is because Angela Dillard unearthed the words and works of several Detroit activist pastors who truly understood the real nature of love as the basis of justice that her book presents compelling documentation that can fill out our historical comprehension and appreciation of dynamic faith in the life of the city. The author, her brilliant late brother, Father Paul Anthony Dillard, dean of the Cathedral, Imani Temple, African American Catholic Congregation, and I were blessed beyond measure to have been born and reared on the near west side of Detroit, whose earliest and most distinctive, dynamic, religious, cultural, and political center was Hartford Church, the birthplace of Ford’s United Auto Workers Local 600. It was Charles Andrew Hill Sr. who delivered the baby union into the life of the world. Charles Andrew Hill was born in Detroit on April 28, 1893. He was educated at Cleary Business College in Michigan and Lincoln University and Seminary in Pennsylvania. Having finished his social gospel studies and standard seminary work at Lincoln, Hill was elected by the congregation of Hartford

Avenue Baptist Church to serve as its pastor. The congregation was composed of thirty-five intrepid souls. Pastor Hill assumed the pulpit in November 1920, and the church grew rapidly into one of the city's largest.

Pastor Hill retired on his seventy-fifth birthday, on April 28, 1968, with a huge celebratory banquet that lauded our beloved pastor for his unequalled contribution to the advancement of his race, the uplift of humankind, and the enhancement of his native city. Talk about a profile of courage and imagination, Hill was Detroit's greatest. Angela Dillard raises Reverend Hill from dusty death and immortalizes his personality and power. Like the Apostle Paul, Hill did not preach about himself; he preached Christ, community, courage, and change. Before the present publication, we knew very few of the biographical details of Hill's birth, parentage, and rearing. We were unable to catalog his childhood experiences, choice of church, and call to ministry or understand how he happened to be so radical, progressive, universal, relentless, and fearless in his pursuit of justice. He never cringed in the face of threats or the massive opposition of and intimidation by the local, state, and federal governments. He loved his God, his church, his community, and his country. He loved America too much to leave it as he found it in 1893. I never met a human being so persistent and yet so cheerful, so Christ-like and nonviolent in his fearless fight for peace, equality, and universal inclusivity.

In 1953, I saw what the government of the United States did to my pastor and mentor, the Rev. Charles A. Hill, how they hauled him in to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, how he was condemned by the clergy, smeared in the media, and abandoned by many members of the church who feared the loss of jobs and fortunes. I sat in church that Sunday morning after seeing the televised hearings, which were meant to discredit and destroy this powerful, wonderful man, this organic intellectual and community leader. We wondered what Reverend Hill would say now.

Would he continue the debate?

Would he denounce the media?

Would he castigate the government?

Would he condemn his enemies by using the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God?

No. His text that day was Matthew 5:43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise

on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Obviously, Reverend Hill was inherently strong but totally nonhostile and nonviolent, slow to anger, and incapable of hate. He demonstrated a peaceful calm and confidence. He showed to the whole world the power of the love of God to change the world. The focus and joy of our religion is not brute power but unconquerable love! <sup>1</sup> John 4:20 says, “If a man say I love God and hateth his brother or sister, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother or sister whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” The world needs the religious roots and social fruits of the spirit of Charles A. Hill Sr.

There is an old black spiritual that asks the question, “Is You Got Good Religion?” Not just “Is you got religion?” but is it good religion? There’s a whole lot of dangerous, bad, sick religion in the world; bad religion can make you hard, cold, mean, and insensitive. Bad religion is worse than no religion. I once heard the New Testament scholar Krister Stendahl say, “There’s not an evil cause in the world that has not been sponsored by somebody’s sick, perverted, bad, hateful religion.” Bad religion spawned the medieval military crusades. Bad religion grabbed the enforcement of the state to destroy freedom of conscience. Bad religion set up the inquisitions to enforce religious conformity. Bad religion murdered the anabaptists, burned Joan of Arc at the stake, executed John Huss and Hans Denck, and persecuted and banished Roger Williams. Bad religion killed William Tyndale for translating the Bible into the vernacular of the people. Bad religion took apartheid to South Africa; brought slavery to America; fostered segregation, bigotry, and exploitation; organized the Ku Klux Klan; generated the Nazi Party; created the immoral majority; and produced Jim Jones, Jimmy Baker, Jimmy Swaggert, Jerry Falwell, and David Koresh.

Bad religion assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, murdered Anwar Sadat, slew Indira Gandhi, cut up Lebanon, destroyed Iran, devastated Iraq, oppressed the poor, made September 11, 2001, a day of infamy, crucified Jesus, killed Martin Luther King Jr., and devastated Yugoslavia.

That’s why grandma wanted to know, “Is you got good religion?”

Bad religion takes life.

Good religion gives life.

Bad religion castigates folks.

Good religion liberates folks.

Bad religion talks about national defense.

Good religion talks about national purpose.

Bad religion divides folks.

Good religion unites folks.

Bad religion makes you hate folks.

Good religion makes you love everybody.

Bad religion segregates.

Good religion integrates.

Bad religion stays in the church.

Good religion breaks loose in the world.

Bad religion hangs around the altar.

Good religion walks down the Jericho Road with healing in its hands.

Bad religion is shaped like a spurious pole, trying to reach up to God without reaching out to anybody.

Good religion is shaped like a cross, the vertical beam reaching up to God for power, and the horizontal beam reaching out to people and sharing love, power, peace, joy, hope, life, freedom, jobs, education, and opportunity all around. Is you got good religion? When we get good religion, true religion, strong religion, inclusive religion we will not be discouraged by anyone, defeated by anything, destroyed by any evil. I believe that Angela Dillard's book promotes good religion and authentic faith, and for that I am both grateful and very proud.

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