

# Priestly and Prophetic Influences on Black Church Social Services

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*This study examines the relationship between priestly and prophetic functions and social services sponsored by the Black Church. Faith Factor 2000 Project data for seven African American denominations are used to study the role of the contemporary Black Church in addressing economic and social problems that affect the African American community. Results from bivariate and negative binomial analyses show varied denominational support of social services. The majority of sponsored programs are economic in nature or youth-oriented, rather than political or civic. Furthermore, financially stable churches with better educated, paid clergy positively influence social service sponsorship. And while variables associated with a prophetic function have a greater influence on social services, variables that reflect a more priestly function, specifically whether churches sponsor religious programs, are also important in motivating churches to provide such services. These findings add to the literature on the nuanced nature of the dialectical model used to describe the Black Church.*

In their seminal work on the Black Church<sup>1</sup> and the African American experience, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya (1990) suggest a dialectical model that places the Black Church between its priestly and prophetic functions.<sup>2</sup> Priestly functions focus on the spiritual or “other worldly” dimensions of religious life; its polar opposite positions the Black Church as a change agent. Prophetic black churches are involved in events that lead to economic and political empowerment and the maintenance of cultural and racial/ethnic identity (Morris 1984; Nelsen, Yokley, and Nelsen 1971). Priestly congregations emphasize the importance of godly living, worship, and events to meet the spiritual/religious needs of members (Cavendish, Welch, and Legee 1998; Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962; DuBois 1903; Frazier 1964). And while both functions can exist, to some degree, in most churches, fundamentally different appropriations of religion may occur based on the dominant function. Differences in emphasis have also been noted based on denomination (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Regardless of ideological or denominational bent, the historic Black Church has been found to be an important economic, political, social, and psycho-emotional buffer for African Americans that

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1. Throughout the document, the term “the Black Church” is used to represent the institution as a collective and “black church” when specific congregations are referenced. The “African American community” is used to reference the collective. The descriptive to identify race/ethnicity, “African American,” is used rather than “black.”

2. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) present six primary pairs of dialectically related polar opposites such as other-worldly and this-worldly orientation, universalism and particularism, and charismatic and bureaucratic. And while this work focuses on priestly and prophetic functions, the reader is reminded of the relationship between this dialectic and other-worldly vs. this-worldly orientation, where a priestly function is more likely to coincide with an other-worldly orientation and a this-worldly orientation tends to be related to prophetic functions. However, the authors discourage simplistic assessments, but rather encourage persons to understand the complexities of the Black Church for which various dimensions of the dialectical model are possible at different historic periods.

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often provides community outreach via social services (Billingsley 1999; Boyd 1998; Ellison 1993; Lincoln 1984; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). However, given the myriad of challenges that currently face segments of the African American community, two pressing questions remain: 1) does the Black Church continue to meet the needs of the diverse African American populace (Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990); and 2) does it play a more priestly or prophetic role (Billingsley 1999; DuBois 1899, 1903; Lincoln 1984; Wilmore 1994, 1995).

This study seeks to determine whether the contemporary Black Church continues to provide important social services and the degree to which prophetic and priestly functions motivate such involvement. Based on a sample of 1,863 black churches across seven denominations, I examine social service programs and the variables that help explain their adoption. This work adds to the literature by: 1) empirically studying social services for a nationally selected sample; 2) identifying the most common types of social services; and 3) determining whether involvement can be attributed to prophetic functions, priestly ones, or other factors such as denomination, clergy profile, and church composition. Social problems such as poverty, incarceration, drug use, and political disempowerment affect a disproportionate number of African Americans. Using bivariate and multivariate techniques, I examine whether and how the Black Church provides certain social services in response to these problems and possible motivating factors linked to one of Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) proposed dialectics.

### **The Dialectical Model of the Black Church and Social Services**

E. Franklin Frazier (1964) refers to the Black Church as a nation within a nation: it is an agent of civic, political, and social involvement and economic cooperation, as well as a refuge in a hostile white world. Today's Black Church continues to face many of the challenges presented by Frazier (1964) and others (DuBois 1903, 1907; Nelsen and Nelsen 1975; Nelsen et al. 1971), as well as new ones, as its members and the communities in which it serves contend with increased economic problems linked to poverty and single parent homes (Anderson 1997; Billingsley 1992; Wilson 1986, 1997) and hypersegregation (Massey and Denton 1993). The Church must also address diverse sub-groups whose religious needs are not met using traditional methods (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), and competition due to expanded religious and social options (Ellison and Sherkat 1995; Frazier 1964; Nelson 1988). These challenges explain possible tensions associated with the Church's priestly and prophetic roles. Just as scholars note specificity in community and political involvement (Cavendish 2000; Chaves and Higgins 1992), there is need to investigate how changing social conditions continue to nuance the Black Church's stance and participation. More diverse manifestations of Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) dialectics would move research on the subject toward the authors' challenge:

The dialectic holds polar opposites in tension, constantly shifting between the polarities in historical time . . . The dialectical model allows for a more objective analysis of black churches as social institutions because it takes a broader, more comprehensive perspective. It moves beyond the simplistic positive or negative assessments of personal observations and places black churches along a dynamic continuum allowing for change in response to changing social conditions. (Pp. 13, 16)

#### ***The Priestly Function***

Scholarship supports the inception of the early Black Church or "invisible institution" during slavery, its fusion of African religions and Christianity (Costen 1993; Felder 1991), and later organization by freedpersons to establish an autonomous worship experience without the constraints of segregation and cultural hegemony experienced in white churches (DuBois 1903; Felder 1991; Frazier 1964; Wilmore 1994, 1995). According to Lincoln and Mamiya

(1990), “priestly functions involve only those activities concerned with worship and maintaining the spiritual life of members” (p. 12). In its priestly role, the Church provides religious symbols, worship, and events to enable members to strengthen their relationship with the Deity. The priestly function enables congregants to survive in a society that is often unwelcoming and motivates them to look forward to a more promising afterlife. The priestly function also tends to focus on use of scripture, songs, and church gatherings to strengthen the religious character of congregants to live lives that are set apart from secular society rather than challenging social problems in society. Persons are often encouraged to garner and improve *personal* religious traits as suggested in scripture. And although the priestly dimension has been recently shown to encourage collective social action (Cavendish 2001), it tends to be associated with individual introspection and growth. As such, the importance of spiritual growth, promoting biblical study as well as personal meditation and reflection, sponsoring programs that encourage religious learning, and living one’s life parallel to the model of Christ as a sign of commitment to the Deity, is emphasized (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Wilmore 1994).<sup>3</sup> Manning Marable’s (1995) work also informs the topic:

Throughout Black Christianity was a dual consciousness, one located within the quest for spirituality, and the other within the attempt to transfer morals to material reality . . . The conservative side of Black faith conforms to traditional western philosophy by locating the concept of liberation with the *Geist*, or Spirit, rather than within the material world . . . The conservative tendencies within the Black faith reach for a Spirit that liberates the soul, but not the body. (Pp. 324, 327)

Religion/Christianity has been said to placate persons who should otherwise revolt against societal inequities (Marx 1848 [1977]; Wilmore 1994) and, to the contrary, inspire civil rights militancy (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Morris 1984; Sherkat and Ellison 1991). However, it is clear to most that the Black Church’s primary *raison d’être* is to create religious expression considered more authentic and germane to the African American experience. And although the desire to address the religious as well as temporal needs of congregation and community members are often intertwined, a priestly function tends to focus on the former needs as opposed to the latter. However, several scholars illustrate a relationship between priestly dimensions and community involvement.

Benjamin Mays and Joseph Nicholson’s (1933) study of over 600 urban black churches illustrate the link between religious instruction and social services. All of the surveyed congregations sponsor religious services and activities such as preaching, Sunday school, union services, and missions, in addition to community outreach programs. Other studies illustrate the centrality of the Black Church as a means of religious, ethnic, and class identity and status where “church-centered” African Americans are highly committed to the church and community in direct contrast to their “non-church-centered” counterparts (Drake and Cayton [1945] 1962), and the Church stands as the bedrock religious institution in poor urban centers (Hannerz 1969; Williams 1981). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) contend that greater emphasis is often given to the Church’s prophetic elements, while the potentially liberating features of priestly activity are ignored:

A deep religious faith can be the bedrock for sustaining a person in courageous political acts of liberation. Religious piety does not have to be an opiate; it can be an inspiration to civil rights militancy. Other-worldly religious transcendence can be related dialectically to the motivation, discipline, and courage needed for this-worldly political action. (P. 234)

3. A priestly function would tend to focus on the model of Christ as the “Suffering Savior” who showed the world unconditional love, illustrated His knowledge of “scripture” by distinguishing Himself as a master teacher, and lived in a manner that was clearly distinguishable from secular society. This image differs dramatically from the more prophetic Christ who represented a religious and political figure that came to challenge the status quo and change the very nature by which society evaluated itself (Bennet 1995; Cone 1995; Marable 1995; Wilmore 1994).

According to Mary Pattillo-McCoy (1998), during periods of community unrest or need, boundaries between sacred and secular space are often blurred and religious symbols spur community activism. She asserts that, through songs, hymns, and call and response, religious symbols can be socially and politically transformative and encourage community involvement and engagement for persons who may ordinarily be considered disempowered. James Cavendish (2001) also illustrates how events that have traditionally been considered primarily “priestly” in nature (i.e., homilies during mass) have been used to frame social issues so that they resonate with parishioners and stimulate grassroots community activism.

### *The Prophetic Function*

In diametric opposition to the priestly function, the prophetic Black Church is most concerned with Christianity as a mechanism for liberation of oppressed and disenfranchised people. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) suggest, “prophetic functions refer to involvement in political concerns and activities in the wider community . . . priestly churches are bastions of survival and prophetic churches are networks of liberation” (p. 12). As such, religion is appropriated in the world to improve political,<sup>4</sup> economic, and social conditions. While priestly churches can reflect routinization of charisma (Gerth and Mills 1970), their prophetic counterparts challenge the status quo and often use more temporal standards to measure religious conviction. Congregations believed to follow a more prophetic stance are often keenly aware of social problems such as poverty and unemployment, and make a concerted effort to address these types of problems in practical, tangible ways. Pastors and leaders inform members of social problems through sermons, church events, and, in some instances, political and social speakers from the community (refer to Chapters 7–9 in Lincoln and Mamiya [1990]). A prophetic function suggests that, just as a religious conversion should alter one’s personal life, such a change may be questioned if not accompanied by the desire and willingness to mobilize collectively to affect societal improvements (Cavendish 2001; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Wilmore 1994) or serve as an agent of resistance and protest (Day 2001).<sup>5</sup> Mary R. Sawyer (2001) informs our understanding of the relationship between a prophetic orientation and social engagement:

The resultant redaction is a black religious tradition that holds as its ultimate values communalism, the welfare of the collectivity, and integral relation of the spiritual and the material, and the moral obligation to pursue social-political concretization of the theological principles of equality, justice, and inclusiveness. (P. 67)

Other scholars such as Cornel West (1982) point to the Christian obligation toward social and political activism engendered via the Black Church.

The basic contribution of prophetic Christianity . . . is that every individual . . . should have the opportunity to fulfill his or her potentialities. This first and fundamental norm is the core of the prophetic Christian gospel . . . The fuller prophetic Christian tradition must thus insist upon both

4. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) present a much broader definition of politics for black churches that moves beyond the traditional definition and also includes community building and sponsoring and taking part in empowering activities. Per the authors, community building is essential for developing the necessary human relationships that, in turn, can be used to foster political protest and electoral politics.

5. Although some work in social movements suggests that involvement in social service programs may politically mobilize black churches towards prophetic ends, literature in Sociology of Religion and cultural studies supports the causal ordering I suggest here. For example, Cavendish’s (2001) empirical work on clergy mobilization strategies did not find that parishioners who engaged in antidrug activism were predisposed to join the specific prophetically-oriented Catholic church under study, but rather that their activism was spurred by religious messages promoting social involvement *after* they joined the congregation. And although the two dynamics would be expected to reinforce each other, a religious orientation emphasizing social outreach has been shown to be the impetus for sustained social and political involvement by black churches rather than the reverse (Billingsley 1992, 1999; Day 2001; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Morris 1984; Sawyer 2001; West 1982; Wilmore 1994).

this-worldly liberation and otherworldly salvation as the proper loci of Christianity. For prophetic Christianity, the two inseparable notions of freedom are existential freedom and social freedom . . . Existential freedom (i.e., salvation per this author) empowers people to fight for social freedom. (Pp. 16, 18)

Finally, Marable's (1995) notion of *Blackwater* can be correlated with a prophetic function:

The radical consciousness within Black faith was concerned with the immediate conditions of Black people. This other half of Black faith, which I shall refer to as "Blackwater," provides a spiritual equilibrium with its conservative counterpart . . . Blackwater was the dialectical quest for the pedagogy of liberation, the realization that human beings have the capacity through struggle to remake their worldly conditions . . . Blackwater was the impetus toward political activism and the use of religious rhetoric to promote the destruction of the white status quo. (Pp. 327-8)

Although W. E. B. DuBois (1903) is critical of the Black Church's emphasis on secular over sacred issues, Gary Marx's (1971) research uncovers black churches that embrace a "social gospel" that encourages political and social activism. However, he finds that this ideology varies by denomination, that religion is not typically associated with civil rights, and that other-worldly-oriented congregations are less apt to encourage such activism. Research by James Harris (1987) on over 330 African American congregations suggests an emphasis on sermons that link the spiritual to the political and on allowing scripture to inform civil rights involvement. These churches also organized for political change and rallied members to establish and work toward political goals. Such foci often translate into involvement to insure fair hiring and housing practices, local demonstrations, and support of national political and civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and SCLC (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). In addition, Clarence Taylor (1994) finds urban black churches in the Brooklyn area employ strategies to use the church as a vehicle to promote political and moral leadership. Studies support the centrality of the Black Church in the following types of political arenas: voter registration, introducing Black Liberation theology, and informing members of political issues and candidates via the pulpit, especially during the civil rights movement (Cone 1995; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Morris 1984).

### *The Black Church and Support of Social Services*

Regardless of demographic composition, over 90 percent of churches sponsor some type of community or social service program (Chaves 1999; Chaves et al. 1999; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993) and religion plays a central role in motivating persons to volunteer in their local communities (Park and Smith 2000). Black churches have a particularly long tradition of community service (Boyd 1998; DuBois 1903; Frazier 1964; Lincoln 1974; Morris 1984; Pattillo-McCoy 1998). Mark Chaves and Lynn Higgins (1992) note similar levels of community involvement for black and white congregations, but significantly more involvement by black churches in civil rights activities and events that benefit the under-privileged. James Cavendish (2000) shows that black churches, both Protestant and Catholic, engage in social services and social action more than their white counterparts.

Some research also posits denominational differences in community outreach efforts. In general, less hierarchical denominations tend to encourage greater social and civic involvement (Harris 1995; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1993). Among African American congregations, Methodists and Baptists are more supportive of social and political activism than Church of God in Christ (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990) and churches affiliated with the Progressive National Baptist Convention more than other Baptists (Billingsley 1999). The somewhat greater community involvement by Baptists can be explained theoretically, given the strong abolitionist polity of the early 19th century Baptist church, and the independent nature of such churches that lends itself to more activist-oriented expressions of

scripture. Although research recognizes Methodist sponsorship of social services, the congregational polity in the Baptist tradition and less rigid infrastructure translates to more autonomy in decisions that affect the black community (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). These latter authors note:

Because Baptist ministers are essentially free of accountability to a denominational hierarchy, they have often been less vulnerable to civil and economic suppression, a factor of significance in their traditional involvement in political activity and community advocacy. For example, no event of recent times highlighted this circumstance more than the civil rights movement. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. was himself in disfavor with the head of the convention to which he belonged, for example, the mass movement he led was populated disproportionately by pastors and members of local Baptist churches. (Pp. 43–4)

In addition, Baptist churches often have a more disenfranchised membership as compared to some Methodist groups, which may spur a self-help tradition and social involvement made most evident during the civil rights movement. In contrast, one recent study suggests increased social and political activism on the part of traditionally priestly-focused Pentecostal churches (McRoberts 1999) and minimal denominational influence on involvement in social and political activities (Calhoun-Brown 1998; Park and Smith 2000). Thus, I examine possible denominational differences here.

The immediacy of economic problems, especially among the poor and near poor, necessitated the Black Church's response to meet temporal needs. The legacy of slavery and racial discrimination has hampered economic mobility for many African Americans. Limited or lack of wealth among African Americans and the fact that many black churches are located in impoverished urban communities also means that organizational resources are often focused on economic outreach programs. These conditions have only been exacerbated by recent changes in economic climate due to government cutbacks. A self-help tradition was also codified in Christianity during slavery, modeled after the servant Christ who fed the masses before He taught them, and supported by a plethora of scripture that encourages Christians to help the less fortunate. Traditionally, this "economic ethic" motivated the Black Church to help the African American masses stay alive such that they could ultimately fight for freedom and equality (Billingsley 1999; DuBois 1907; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

In an early analysis, Mays and Nicholson (1933) found that 97 percent of the churches they surveyed provided economic relief for the poor, 2.1 percent fed the unemployed, and about 1 percent provided free clinics and benevolent societies. More recently, Andrew Billingsley (1999) shows that 66 percent of the congregations studied sponsor family support programs such as counseling and intervention and 40 percent of programs are instrumental in nature and include: food and clothing distribution, emergency financial aid, referral services, homeless shelters, home-care programs, and to a lesser degree, income maintenance. Other studies illustrate a similar pattern (Taylor 1994) and activities involving the wider community, including: employment counseling, senior citizens services, hospice care (Milbrath 1991), and youth programs (Cook 2000). However, it has been noted that outreach in the 1950's and 1960's directly focused on social action and protest, while contemporary outreach tends to take the form of food and clothing programs, family-support, child care, and community development (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). I explore the types of social services that are currently most common.

Pastors in the black religious tradition have generally had great influence on the theological tenure and organizational structure of their churches. Better educated pastors tend to have the increased human capital higher education affords, increased networks among other clergy and community leaders, and training to develop and implement social programs by mobilizing congregants and the community. In addition, clergy trained in a more Afro-centric tradition tend to correlate theology with activism (Billingsley 1999; Calhoun-Brown 1999;

Sawyer 2001; Wilmore 1994). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) conclude, “churches that sponsor the most creative and innovative programs in the community and in the church usually have well-educated, well-trained pastors” (p. 130). Similarly, larger churches have more members to draw upon to implement social programs as well as more persons possibly in need of assistance. Many larger churches tend to have the monetary resources to support social services and to keep church debt to a minimum. Larger membership often translates to more economic stability due to sheer volume of donations as well as the tendency for such churches to attract middle- and upper-class African Americans who are more able to financially support such programs (Billingsley 1992; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Larger churches and those with more liberal stances (Chaves 1999; Chaves and Higgins 1992; Reese and Shields 2000) as well as churches that are more economically stable and with better educated, paid pastors (Billingsley 1992, 1999) tend to provide more social services. Although activism can be spurred by clergy influence (Cavendish 2001; McRoberts 1999), some better educated pastors have been found to be less prophetically oriented (Day 2001). However, per Billingsley (1999), clergy with prophetic roles are more likely to head churches with substantial community outreach programs. My third hypothesis examines the importance of such influencers.

The priestly-prophetic dialectic reflects a theoretical framework to better understand motivators for Black Church community involvement and suggests that the overall theological orientation of black churches, whether they are largely priestly or prophetic in nature, will inform how scripture is appropriated, whether and how church resources are mobilized for community involvement, and the types of services that are sponsored. Furthermore, the pastor’s tendency towards a priestly or more prophetic posture greatly affects the overall church’s emphasis. As noted earlier, churches with stances that correlate religious/biblical symbols and events to community involvement and activism tend to take part in social services more than their counterparts with less of an emphasis on this relationship. A priestly function tends to emphasize religious piety and programs that encourage it; social outreach is not a necessary condition stemming from a salvation experience. In contrast, a more prophetic function emphasizes social involvement and community outreach as a manifestation or marker of Christian membership. Thus, one would expect the mechanisms that foster the latter dimension also to work to encourage greater involvement in social services.

The aforementioned theoretical arguments and literature suggest that the Black Church has and continues to provide various forms of support to congregants and community members. And while the type and prevalence of social services have been studied, fewer studies examine factors that encourage such involvement. This issue is central to my study. The preponderance of theory on the subject and corresponding empirical findings correlate a prophetic more than priestly orientation to community outreach. The goal here is not to suggest a dichotomy for prophetic and priestly functions, but rather to empirically examine their *relative influence* on social service provisions as well as possible effects of other indicators such as denomination and church profile. I test the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Social services will vary by denomination. Specifically, Baptists will provide more social services than their counterparts.
- H2:** Regardless of denomination, churches will sponsor more social services related to economic outreach such as food and cash support than services linked to political issues such as social advocacy and voter registration.
- H3:** Regardless of denomination, larger, financially stable churches led by clergy that are better educated and paid will sponsor more social services than churches that are smaller, less financially stable or led by less educated, non-paid clergy.
- H4:** Variables associated with a prophetic function will be stronger determinants of whether churches provide social services than variables associated with a priestly function.

In summary, Hypothesis 1 tests the prevailing findings on denominational differences in community outreach.<sup>6</sup> Hypothesis 2 speaks to current national findings that churches tend to provide economic support over other forms of outreach (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). The third hypothesis assesses whether church leadership and church profile continue to be important determinants of social services, while Hypothesis 4 directly tests the possible influence of prophetic and priestly church functions on social service sponsorship.

## Data and Methodology

The study is based on a national secondary database of black congregations from the Faith Factor 2000 Project, a joint venture between the Lilly Foundation and the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia instituted to provide a profile of such churches in the United States. The data collection process was spearheaded by the ITC with assistance from Gallup, Inc. A total of 1,863 black churches from the following five African American denominations were included: Baptist (502 churches), Church of God in Christ (COGIC) (503), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) (295), African Methodist Episcopal (AME) (257), and African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) (110). Predominately black churches from the historically white United Methodist and Presbyterian denominations—United Methodist (UM) (95) and Black Presbyterian (101)—were also included for a total of seven denominations.<sup>7</sup>

Identifying the sampling frame and selecting the sample occurred in several phases. First, lists of all the congregations in the AME, AMEZ, CME, COGIC, UM, and Presbyterian denominations were provided by denominational heads or deans from the various schools at the ITC. The decentralized nature of the Baptist tradition precluded such a list. In order to develop the sampling frame for Baptists, ITC solicited information from Tri-Media, an organization that retains lists of all churches nationwide that purchase Sunday school material and supplies. Tri-Media data were used to identify the population of Baptist congregations affiliated with the three largest historically African American Baptist denominations.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the six other denominations, the sampling frame for Baptist churches is an approximation with

6. Bivariate results enable the reader to compare social services across denominations. Given the literature that emphasizes community involvement by Baptists and in order to evaluate the specific influence of each denomination, I chose to use the Baptist category as the control group in the multivariate analyses.

7. The intent was to mimic Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) work by focusing on historically African American denominations. The ITC research team included black churches that have historically been affiliated with predominately white denominations and that are typically included in research on the Black Church (i.e., UM and Presbyterians). African Americans have historically been involved in the United Methodist and Presbyterian traditions, but many congregations and conferences were racially segregated as late as the mid-1900s. The power and participation of African Americans in the two denominations have differed as compared to that of African Americans in predominately African American denominations, but their long time involvement in these two traditions warranted inclusion of such churches in the sample. The Black Presbyterian churches were selected from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) which, since 1983, includes the following two largest American Presbyterian denominations—United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and Presbyterian Church in the United States. (Survey screening questions were used to identify predominately black churches from the lists of UM and Presbyterian churches.) Focus on these seven denominations excludes black churches affiliated with other white denominations and black, non-denominationally affiliated churches. The sampling process is representative for non-Baptist denominations and provides a conservative, systematic attempt to approximate black Baptists in light of the challenges associated with this task. The use of these seven African American denominations is common in research on the subject and provides a comparative benchmark for other studies.

8. They are the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., National Baptist Convention of America, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Tri-Media data were also used to augment the lists from the six other denominations; churches found on either source were included on the composite list for that perspective denomination and duplicate churches were identified and only included once.



several clear limitations,<sup>9</sup> but it represents a systematic attempt to identify such churches given a lack of national hierarchy. After the seven lists were compiled, Gallup selected a random sample from each denomination to meet the desired sub-sample sizes.<sup>10</sup>

Telephone surveys of clergy and senior lay leaders were conducted by Gallup from February 22, 2000 through May 11, 2000. Each interview averaged approximately 16 minutes in length and 37 questions were posed. The church leaders were charged with providing aggregate demographic data on their churches as well as answering a variety of attitudinal and behavioral questions on topics such as worship and identity, missions, church demographics and financial health, spirituality, leadership and organizational dynamics, church climate, and community involvement.<sup>11</sup> Initial screening was used to gain cooperation from the pastor and to confirm denomination. If the pastor was unavailable, a senior lay leader or assistant pastor was interviewed. Of the 1,863 interviews, 77 percent (1,482) were conducted with pastors and 23 percent (381) were conducted with an assistant pastor or senior lay leader. Senior staff was used because they would be expected to be the most knowledgeable about their respective communities of faith.<sup>12</sup>

### *Dependent and Independent Variables*

Research shows that the historic Black Church provided economic and instrumental services to congregants and community members (Billingsley 1999; DuBois 1903; Frazier 1964; Wilmore 1994). In order to determine whether this is the case for the contemporary Black

9. For example, Baptist churches that purchase Sunday school items at venues not listed with Tri-Media or those that do but that are not affiliated with any of the three conferences would not be included in the sampling frame. Thus the Baptist list can be considered a lower bound of the number of black Baptist churches nationwide.

10. The desired sample was: 500 Baptist, 500 COGIC, 250 AME and CME, 125 AMEZ, and 100 Black UM and Black Presbyterians, respectively. In order to take advantage of the available data for subsequent studies, the two latter groups were over-sampled relative to their presence in the overall population. During the modeling phase, the data were weighted to reflect the current estimates on denominational representation to correct for the disproportionate sub-sample sizes (Billingsley 1992; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). The sample margin of error was  $\pm 2.3$ .

11. Chaves and associates (1999) discuss the validity and reliability of relying on a single key informant to report church characteristics. Such persons are likely to over-estimate the extent to which their views correspond to their congregation's views. They note, "an informant's judgment about an organization's goals or mission is likely to represent the informant's interpretation of a complex reality rather than a more or less publicly available cultural fact about the congregation" (p. 464). In light of this dynamic, these data can be considered a best case scenario relative to social services. However, the vast majority of respondents are senior pastors, and because research shows that African American pastors tend to have a greater degree of authority and influence over their congregants than their white counterparts, they are expected to have greater influence over the focus and activities of their churches (Billingsley 1999; McRoberts 1999; Wilmore 1994).

12. The response and cooperation rates by denomination are as follows: Baptist (.22, .49), COGIC (.19, .51), AME (.25, .52), CME (.40, .66), AMEZ (.24, .55), UM (.46, .69), and Black Presbyterian (.37, .65). The overall sample rates were .24, and .54, respectively. Although the most current available lists were used, low response rates were due to situations such as disconnected telephones or relocation which counts against the response rate (referrals were used to locate many such churches). In such situations, the cooperation rate can be used as a reasonable proxy. The figures represent the CASRO Standard calculation for the response rate and the cooperation rate reflects the percent of churches that participated once contact was made. In order to examine possible differences due to the cooperation rates, I compare the sample profile to that from the National Sample of Black Churches (NSBC) compiled by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990). NSBC data reflect a regional research strategy based on lists provided by local clergy associations in towns and cities in each region, while Faith Factor data reflect the use of both national denominational lists as well as Tri-Media lists. Thus, a two-tiered approach to identify and confirm possible churches was used during the latter project. The NSBC total sample count and cooperation rate are 1,894 clergy and .33. In addition, 19.2 percent of the NSBC sample includes rural churches taken entirely from the South. When compared to the Faith Factor data, NSBC data include substantially more Baptists (1,028), a similar number of Methodists (724), fewer COGICs (316), and little representation among Black UM and Presbyterians (68 churches identified as "Other"). Although it is difficult to interpret these sample differences, cautious commentary can infer the probable financial status of the Faith Factor 2000 churches (able to purchase Sunday school material), the increased presence of COGICs and Black UM and Presbyterians, lower representation by Baptists, and probable lower presence of rural churches that are less likely to sponsor some of the social services studied here. As noted earlier, models presented here are weighted to reflect denominational representation.

Church, I explore a set of similarly studied outreach options (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990) by examining responses to the following question: "In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide or cooperate in providing for any of these social services or community outreach programs?" The sixteen program options are: food pantry, cash assistance, thrift store, elder housing or affordable housing, counseling/hot lines, substance abuse, youth programs, tutoring/literary programs for youth and teens, voter registration or voter education, social issue advocacy, employment counseling/placement or training, health programs/clinics or health education, senior citizens programs other than housing, prison, or jail ministry, credit unions, and computer training.

For each option, values of "0" correspond to "no" and "1" corresponds to "yes." Bivariate correlations (provided upon request) suggest that the variables hang together and the unidimensionality of the construct is supported.<sup>13</sup> High scores on this scale, *Social Services*, (range from 0 to 16) suggest that congregations take part in more of the aforementioned social services. It should be noted that the dependent variable may not capture the quality of the services provided. For example, a church that sponsors a full service homeless shelter and no other programs may, in fact, be supporting its community far more than a church that marginally supports five programs. And while data constraints prevent my assessing this degree of program quality, the current indicator does provide insight into outreach level for each church.

Three groups of independent variables are tested. I examine: Billingsley's (1992, 1999) assertion that community outreach is directly related to church size and financial health, the existence of paid clergy, and pastor's education; denominational differences posited by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990); priestly factors such as church emphasis on spirituality, worship, church religious life, and an other-worldly focus (Harris 1987; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Marx 1971); and prophetic factors such as emphasis on racial issues, social justice, liberation theology, political/civic and community concerns, and activism (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Morris 1984; Taylor 1994; Wilmore 1994). The groups are as follows: 1) church demographics, 2) priestly functions, and 3) prophetic functions.<sup>14</sup> A total of 21 variables measure dimensions of religious life and church demographics as understood by the respondent. Each variable's operationalization and corresponding survey questions is provided in the appendix.

### *Methodology*

In the first phase of the analysis, bivariate crosstabulations of mean responses or percentages and  $\chi^2$  or t-tests are used to compare the independent variables across the seven denominations.<sup>15</sup> Next, percentages by denomination are provided for the sixteen social service programs to show how outreach efforts are prioritized within the listing and across denominations (Table 1). Because the dependent variable, *Social Services*, reflects non-negative count outcomes, I use negative binomial regression modeling (Long 1997; Long and Freese

13. Inclusion of these 16 social services in the Faith Foundation 2000 data follows theoretically from several earlier quantitative and qualitative studies on the Black Church (Billingsley 1992, 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Mays and Nicholson 1933; Milbrath 1991). A rotated Principle Components Factor analysis suggests unidimensionality (eigenvalue = 3.92) and Cronbach's alpha (0.80) supports construct reliability (N = 1,750).

14. I explored developing separate, single factors to capture priestly and prophetic functions (example, combining the five variables associated with a priestly function into a single factor). Each set of variables is theoretically related and statistically correlated at the bivariate level. However, multivariate tests and substantive reasons do not support their use as factors. Principle components factor analysis, provided upon request, do not support unique constructs. In addition, I wished to examine the potential effects of *each variable* separately to determine its influence on explaining social services. For example, do sermons help explain social services more than religious programs? This latter objective would not be possible using scales.

15. Bivariate correlations provided upon request. Overall, multicollinearity was not an issue as the study variables did not reflect any unusually high correlations (i.e.,  $r \geq .40$ ).

2001).<sup>16</sup> In each step, the dependent variable is regressed on church demographic variables (Model 1), in models controlling for priestly functions (Model 2), prophetic functions (Model 3), and all variables simultaneously (Model 4). Model results are provided in Table 2. The multi-method approach provides a variety of “lenses” with which the Black Church can be evaluated more comprehensively.

## Findings

### *Church Views and Demographic Profile*

A demographic profile of the sample by denomination is presented in Table 1 (Panel 1). The majority of churches are financially stable with the highest representation for Baptist (71.9 percent) followed by AMEZ (68.8 percent). When paid clergy are considered, AMEZ, UM, and Presbyterian churches are most likely to have paid pastors, and COGIC churches are least likely to do so. Lower percentages of churches have pastors with Doctor of Ministry degrees. The majority of Presbyterian and UM churches have highly educated pastors, while the figure is less than 15 percent for COGIC churches. Churches average at least 100 in attendance each Sunday, and Baptist, followed by AME, congregations have the greatest average representation. Statistically significant denominational differences are apparent for these four indicators.

When variables associated with priestly functions are considered, regardless of denomination, the majority of churches have environments that can be characterized as spiritually alive and encouraging members to have deepened relationships with God. Save Presbyterians, over 80 percent of the remaining six denominations have frequent sermons that focus on God’s love and care. Sermons on spiritual growth are common as well (at least 50 percent for each group). When I examine sponsorship of specific religious programs, results show no significant difference across denominations and a mean of about 3 programs. Trends for the indicators associated with a prophetic function suggest that less than 50 percent of congregations have environments that encourage social justice and less than one-third frequently hear sermons on the subject. While slightly more than 20 percent of CME and AMEZ churches are frequently exposed to sermons on racial issues, rates are substantially lower for the remaining five denominations. While less than 20 percent of churches are frequently exposed to Liberation/Womanist theology via sermons, representation is greatest in the CME tradition (19.8 percent) and least in the Presbyterian (8.0 percent) and Baptist (9.9 percent) traditions. However, regardless of denomination, the vast majority of respondents suggest that their churches approve of clergy involvement in protest marches and church expression of views on political and social issues. These data show considerably greater support for variables associated with a priestly function rather than a prophetic one.

### *Social Services*

Of central concern here is whether churches provide social services, how services are prioritized, and whether differences exist across denominations (Table 1, Panel 2). Churches sponsor, on average, about 9.2 of the 16 social services under study. AMEZ (9.9), AME (9.8), followed by Baptist (9.6), and UM (9.6) sponsor slightly more programs than the remaining

16. Use of standard linear regression techniques can result in estimates that are inconsistent, inefficient, and biased. In some instances, linear modeling can produce acceptable results, but scholars suggest it best to use models specifically designed for count outcomes. Negative Binomial models are used here because they adjust for possible unobserved heterogeneity among cases by adding a parameter  $\alpha$  to explain this possible unobserved heterogeneity (Long 1997; Long and Freese 2001).

**Table 1 • Social Services and Dependent Variables by Denomination (N = 1,863)**

	Total	B	COGIC	AME	CME	AMEZ	UM	Presb.	$\chi^2/t$
Panel 1: Independent Variables									
Church demographics									
Financial health (% good)	63.8	71.9	58.0	60.4	63.5	68.8	62.0	58.3	24.3***
% Paid pastors	78.5	80.5	50.4	97.5	88.3	92.8	97.0	96.9	348.8***
% Pastors w/post dr.	31.7	33.4	14.4	46.2	24.3	42.6	54.6	61.1	412.6***
Sunday attendance (mean)	221	373	135	231	148	154	219	135	t***
Priestly functions									
Spiritually alive (% very well)	64.8	68.5	79.2	62.5	54.1	58.7	46.0	38.0	141.5***
Deepen rel. w/God (% v. well)	63.3	66.3	75.6	60.5	52.2	59.5	50.0	45.0	105.3***
God's love & care (% always)	83.1	84.1	84.5	81.3	84.7	87.3	80.0	69.0	28.3
Spiritual growth (% always)	72.9	73.1	76.1	74.6	72.9	75.4	65.0	56.0	31.0**
Religious programs (mean)	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.1	3.1	
Prophetic functions									
Social: env. (% very well)	42.6	41.5	46.5	49.4	37.6	43.7	32.3	35.0	39.2*
Social: sermons (% always)	26.1	23.3	27.9	25.9	32.8	23.0	27.0	14.0	67.0***
Racial issues (% always)	17.8	16.0	17.2	18.5	23.9	21.4	14.0	8.1	86.2***
Lib. theologies (% always)	13.1	9.9	11.7	15.0	19.8	16.9	12.0	8.0	84.4***
Clergy: marches (% approve)	89.9	89.2	78.5	96.1	92.7	98.4	94.9	94.9	195.4***
Church views (% approve)	94.0	93.9	89.47	97.44	97.2	94.4	95.0	98.0	75.8***
Panel 2: Social Services (% yes)									
1. Food pantry	74.9	76.0	70.9	80.8	67.9	<u>82.5</u>	<b>83.0</b>	78.0	24.5***
2. Cash assistance	86.2	<u>90.4</u>	81.4	85.6	85.3	<b>92.8</b>	86.0	85.7	21.5***
3. Thrift store	51.9	51.3	51.4	53.4	46.2	<b>62.8</b>	<u>58.6</u>	51.0	11.4
4. Elderly/housing	36.1	38.0	29.1	<u>41.0</u>	36.5	<b>44.8</b>	38.0	35.7	18.0**
5. Counseling	63.2	<b>71.2</b>	<u>64.9</u>	63.8	50.7	62.7	58.0	56.6	36.5***
6. Substance abuse	50.8	<u>53.0</u>	51.6	51.5	44.5	<b>61.6</b>	52.0	38.8	17.3**
7. Youth services	91.9	94.0	90.2	<b>94.6</b>	89.8	<u>94.4</u>	89.0	89.0	12.0
8. Tutoring	65.1	68.1	59.4	<u>68.5</u>	61.8	64.8	68.0	<b>79.6</b>	21.2**
9. Voter registration	76.1	79.3	65.1	<b>88.3</b>	78.8	<u>84.1</u>	70.0	74.8	63.3***
10. Social advocacy	47.2	48.6	33.1	59.2	45.3	56.8	<b>63.6</b>	<u>60.0</u>	74.7***
11. Employment counseling	44.6	<u>47.7</u>	46.9	46.8	35.7	<b>49.6</b>	41.0	36.4	17.2**
12. Health programs	61.9	64.6	51.6	69.9	56.7	<u>72.0</u>	<b>74.8</b>	70.7	49.4***
13. Senior citizens	56.8	62.5	42.0	63.6	58.4	<b>65.9</b>	<u>65.7</u>	63.3	64.7***
14. Prison ministry	59.8	<b>66.0</b>	<u>65.5</u>	56.8	55.3	63.4	45.0	33.0	57.4***
15. Credit unions	6.5	5.2	6.6	<b>9.7</b>	<u>7.2</u>	5.6	5.0	6.0	6.1
16. Computer training	41.8	47.4	32.9	<u>48.5</u>	38.4	40.5	48.0	<b>49.0</b>	32.1***
Average number of services	9.2	9.6	8.4	9.8	8.6	9.9	9.6	9.3	

Note: Significance tests are  $\chi^2$  or t-tests. Bold and underlined values reflect 1st and 2nd highest rates for each social service, respectively; t\*\*\* means at least 4 combinations are significantly different at  $p < .001$ .

B = Baptist, COGIC = Church of God in Christ, UM = United Methodist, CME = Christian Methodist Episcopal, AME = African Methodist Episcopal, AMEZ = African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Presb = Black Presbyterian.

\*  $p < 0.05$     \*\*  $p < 0.01$     \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

groups, but there is not a significant difference between most levels of sponsorship. When rankings of services are considered irrespective of denomination, churches provide youth services (over 90 percent), cash assistance (over 80 percent), food pantries (70 percent or more), voter registration (over 65 percent), and counseling (at least 50 percent) most often. Less than 10 percent of churches provide credit unions and computer training programs are provided about 40 percent of the time. When specific political or civic services are considered, about three-fourths the total sample provide voter registration, while less than 50 percent of churches have social advocacy programs. AME followed by AMEZ churches have the highest rates for voter registration services; COGIC churches are least represented. Social advocacy programs are most likely to be sponsored by UM, Black Presbyterian, and AME congregations, respectively, while COGIC churches (33 percent) are the least of the seven groups to support such efforts.

Although differences exist, irrespective of denomination, youth programs, cash assistance, and food banks are among the top four most commonly sponsored services. Voter registration is also among the top four services for four of the seven groups (Baptist, AME, CME, and AMEZ). COGIC churches tend to sponsor more prison programs than their counterparts, while health programs and tutoring are more common for UM and Presbyterians, respectively, but not so for their counterparts. Panel 2 of Table 1 also provides a visual representation of the prevalent patterns across and within denominations. Churches from the AMEZ denomination have the highest rates for six of the 16 social services and the second highest rates for four of the remaining 12. CME and COGIC churches are least represented overall.

The findings partially support Hypothesis 1 in that social services vary by denomination. However, AMEZ congregations (followed by AME, Baptists, and UM) tend to sponsor more social services than their counterparts. These findings also show that the most commonly sponsored social services focus on youth programs, followed by programs that are more instrumental and practical (i.e., cash assistance, food banks). However, although social advocacy is not sponsored as frequently, political involvement is evident as over 65 percent of congregations provide voter registration. These results partially support Hypothesis 2 and correspond to studies on the continued focus on economic aid and youth programs. However, a decline in all forms of political and civic programs is not evident (Billingsley 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). It should also be noted that, although social advocacy is ranked lower than other programs, at least one-third of congregations do sponsor such services. And in response to drug abuse, crime, and chronic unemployment in many African American communities, the majority of congregations provide substance abuse, prison ministries, and, to a slightly lesser degree, employment counseling services to address such problems (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; West 1993; Wilson 1986, 1997). However, such programs to counter more systemic, long-term challenges are less frequently offered as compared to short-term economic assistance services (Billingsley 1992, 1999).

### *Modeling Social Services*

A series of negative binomial regression models examine possible simultaneous effects of the variables on explaining social services (Table 2). When church demographic indicators are considered alone in Model 1, CME churches (odds = 0.94,  $p < .05$ ) are less likely to provide social services than their Baptist counterparts. Denominational affiliation has no other significant effect on social service sponsorship. However, a church's financial health, having a paid, formally educated pastor, and church size are all positive predictors of social services.

When variables related to priestly functions are included in Model 2, significant, positive differences emerge between AME and Baptist (odds = 1.05,  $p < .05$ ) and AMEZ and Baptist (odds = 1.06,  $p < .10$ ) congregations suggesting that both Methodist groups are more apt to sponsor such programs. The aforementioned four demographic variables continue to directly affect whether social services are sponsored. Additionally, more frequent exposure to sermons

**Table 2 • Negative Binomial Regression Analysis for Social Services (N = 1,863)**

Independent Variables	Model 1 Church Demographics	Model 2 Priestly Functions	Model 3 Prophetic Functions	Model 4 All Variables
<b>Church demographics</b>				
COGIC (1 = yes)	.02 (1.02)	.00 (1.00)	.02 (1.02)	.01 (1.01)
AME (1 = yes)	.01 (1.01)	.05 (1.05)*	-.04 (0.96)	.01 (1.01)
CME (1 = yes)	-.06 (0.94)*	-.03 (0.97)	-.09 (0.91)***	-.07 (0.93)**
AMEZ (1 = yes)	.04 (1.05)	.06 (1.06) <sup>+</sup>	.02 (1.02)	.03 (1.03)
UM (1 = yes)	-.01 (0.99)	.05 (1.05)	-.04 (0.96)	.02 (1.02)
Presbyterian (1 = yes)	-.04 (0.96)	.03 (1.03)	-.08 (0.92)*	-.03 (0.97)
Financial health (1 = good)	.09 (1.09)**	.07 (1.08)***	.06 (1.06)***	.06 (1.06)**
Paid pastor (1 = yes)	.12 (1.12)***	.08 (1.08)*	.13 (1.13)***	.08 (1.09)**
Pastor's education (1 = none, 6 = Post Dr.)	.06 (1.06)***	.06 (1.06)***	.05 (1.05)***	.04 (1.04)***
Sunday attendance (1-6000)	.00 (1.00)***	.00 (1.00)***	.00 (1.00)***	.00 (1.00)***
<b>Priestly functions</b>				
Church environment				
Spiritually alive (1 = not at all, 5 = very well)	.01 (1.01)			.00 (1.00)
Deepens rel. w/God (1 = not at all, 5 = very well)	.03 (1.03)			.01 (1.01)
Sermon focus				
God's love and care (1 = never, 5 = always)	.06 (1.06)*			.03 (1.03)
Spiritual growth (1 = never, 5 = always)	-.00 (1.00)			-.01 (0.99)
Number of religious programs (0-4)	.17 (1.19)***			.16 (1.17)***
<b>Prophetic functions</b>				
Church environment				
Social justice (1 = not at all, 5 = very well)			.06 (1.06)***	.05 (1.05)***
Sermon focus				
Social justice (1 = never, 5 = always)			.01 (1.01)	-.00 (1.00)
Racial issues (1 = never, 5 = always)			.03 (1.03)***	.03 (1.03)**
Liberation/womanist theology (1 = never, 5 = always)			.03 (1.03)***	.02 (1.02)**
Clergy in protest marches (1 = strongly disapprove, 4 = strongly approve)			.02 (1.02)	.03 (1.03) <sup>+</sup>
Church soc./pol. views (1 = strongly disapprove, 4 = strongly approve)			.06 (1.07)***	.06 (1.06)***
$\chi^2$	202.76	448.66	351.26	571.96
N	1,603	1,591	1,538	1,528

Note: Log odds presented first; odds in parentheses.  
 \* p < .05    \*\* p < .01    \*\*\* p < .001    <sup>+</sup>p < .10

that focus on God's love and care encourages social service sponsorship. In addition to this variable that influences congregant beliefs, a behavioral indicator is important. The data show a direct relationship between the number of religious programs (odds = 1.19,  $p < .001$ ) and support of social services. Interestingly, the two indicators that specifically focus on issues of spirituality are not predictive. Also, the model's explanatory power improves considerably ( $\chi^2 = 448.66$ ) over the baseline regression.

In Model 3, I consider the effects of variables associated with a prophetic function. Denominational importance changes relative to the two earlier models and four of the six new variables are predictive. Two denominational differences are apparent and CME and Black Presbyterian churches both have lower odds of providing these types of social services than do Baptists. While frequent sermons on social justice do not significantly influence social services, churches with an overall environment that encourages social justice (odds = 1.06,  $p < .001$ ) are more likely to sponsor social services than those without such an emphasis. However, frequent sermons on racial issues and Liberation/Womanist theology have an important, positive influence on social service sponsorship. And the variable related to clergy/church promoting political awareness is positively related to the dependent variable—supporting research on the direct relationship between prophetic factors and community outreach (Harris 1987; Marx 1971).

All variables are tested simultaneously in Model 4 ( $\chi^2 = 571.96$ ). As was the case in prior models, church economics, size, and pastor's profile help predict social services; CME churches continue to be less likely to provide social services than Baptists. And the effects of several dialectical variables change. None of the priestly variables associated with ideology continue to be predictive. Only religious programs directly influence whether social services are provided. However, five of the six variables associated with a prophetic function are significant and positively related to social service sponsorship. These modeling results can be used to assess Hypotheses 3 and 4.

Hypothesis 3 is largely supported in that larger, economically stable churches led by pastors who are better educated tend to sponsor these social services more than their counterparts. In addition, denominational affiliation has a varied effect, with CME churches tending to be somewhat less apt to provide support for these services. Several important findings emerge relative to Hypothesis 4. First, contrary to prevailing literature, variables associated with a more priestly function do positively influence social services sponsorship, just as do prophetic indicators. In addition, when each set of variables is considered alone, the explanatory ability of the former variables is actually greater than that of the latter ones. However, when variables associated with both priestly and prophetic functions are considered together, the stronger influence of prophetic variables becomes apparent. In this instance, only the variable that gauges specific religious programs (rather than priestly ideology) predicts social services and it has the greatest odds of positively influencing social service provisions. But the majority of the variables related to a prophetic function remain important.

## Conclusion

This research focuses on the Black Church as a provider of social services. These findings can be broadly generalized (refer to Endnotes 7 and 9 for data constraints), but do not propose to represent all factors that influence the Black Church's ability to engage in community outreach. However, they do provide insight into current efforts and some of the motivators that encourage congregations to seek to serve others. Results suggest that the Black Church continues to provide a variety of social services to the African American community. My findings illustrate a relationship between churches that: 1) are more financially stable and larger in size, 2) have paid, formally educated clergy, 3) sponsor varied religious programs, and 4) have a more prophetic environment, and the tendency to sponsor more social services. These

findings show that, as urged by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), the influence of Black Liberation theology and other activist-oriented tenets has moved beyond the intellectual elite to directly influencing support of social services.

Churches affiliated with the AMEZ denomination tend to offer a wider array of social outreach programs. However, regardless of denomination, the most frequently offered services tend to be instrumental in nature (i.e., food, clothing) rather than expressive (counseling, drug abuse support). Akin to earlier models of Black Church programs, sponsorship of political and civic services such as voter registration has not waned dramatically, and support for traditional forms of clergy activism is decidedly more liberal (Cone 1995; Harris 1987; Morris 1984). The overall results parallel historic and more recent studies of social services via the Black Church and the emphasis on economic aid and extensive youth programs (Billingsley 1999; Cook 2000; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Mays and Nicholson 1933).

Several general observations are in order. Preliminary models based on priestly functions do not support the prevailing sentiment that a spiritual/religious emphasis depresses political and social activism, or, as is argued, "other-worldly orientations did not preclude this-worldly concerns" (Calhoun-Brown 1998:433; see also Cavendish 2001). My findings show that some churches with a more priestly focus (or other-worldly orientation) are just as poised to affect social and political change as their more prophetic counterparts. When I consider possible effects of priestly and prophetic functions simultaneously, most of the priestly indicators neither promote *nor* detract from social service sponsorship and one factor—providing religious programs—continues to enhance sponsorship. This finding also calls into question literature that suggests that other-worldliness depresses this-worldly activities. However, in addition to needed motivation via a prophetic or priestly emphasis, churches that sponsor social services must also have clergy support and the financial wherewithal to sustain such community outreach. From an applied perspective, these findings show strong evidence that, given the scope of challenges the African American community currently faces, priestly-oriented congregations are responding more readily than has been found in past research. The results can also be broadly applied to inform churches that wish to galvanize efforts for community outreach that a prophetic model appears to be best suited to develop and sustain such endeavors. Results also suggest the importance of well-educated, paid clergy who are committed long-term to developing a church environment that promotes social justice, can rally members, and institute broad-based religious programs (Billingsley 1992; West 1993). Because the ability to pay clergy and attract better educated clergy are linked, to a large degree, to church economics, studies would benefit by examining creative and non-traditional ways churches with limited budgets are able to attract faithful volunteers, institute religious programs, and encourage community involvement in spite of certain resource constraints.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) suggest that the Black Church constantly shifts between various dialectics throughout history. I posit that these dialectical shifts can also occur within a given time period and based on specific inter- and intra-church issues. For example, studies are needed to examine how the Black Church in general as well as specific black congregations may reflect a "this-worldly" orientation in regard to social, political, and civic issues, but an "other-worldly" orientation when sexual politics are concerned, and universalism in terms of race issues (as in the contemporary Fundamentalist Gospel movement embraced by increasing numbers of African Americans [Wilmore 1994]). Given that many churches may actually blend strains of prophetic and priestly orientations to frame their missions, additional research is needed to examine ways in which specific strategies that incorporate both functions are used for proselytizing and activism (Cavendish 2001). My findings also suggest that, given the changing social and economic climate in the United States (increased African American poverty, charitable choice initiatives, increased Afro-centric thrusts in some black churches, reduced government-sponsored social programs), both priestly and prophetic orientations via non-traditional self-help initiatives may now be appropriated in ways yet to be revealed in research. For example, given their locale, it may be the case that some priestly-



oriented churches are now engaging in more outreach due to community need rather than theological orientation. Furthermore, it may be the case that more black churches are redacting scripture in a segmented fashion such that certain passages engender priestly action, while others encourage more prophetic ends. Qualitative, exploratory studies of African American clergy and laypersons are needed to ascertain possibly new conceptualizations and nuances of the two functions and to compare and contrast their views with Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) framing as well as with recent scholarly findings.

In response to concerns that the Black Church would lose its place of importance in the African American community (Frazier 1964; Mays and Nicholson 1933; Myrdal 1971), my results illustrate that it continues to respond to congregational and community needs. However, despite the prevalence of drug abuse and unemployment in some African American communities, most churches do not offer programs to address these social ills as frequently. Black churches are challenged to institute creative, proactive methods to address new and chronic challenges in their communities. However, the social services they offer, no matter how comprehensive, only represent impotent attempts at addressing macro-level challenges unless they are coupled with national initiatives and church-based programs to address systemic problems and encourage individual initiative (Chaves 1999; Reese and Shields 2000).

## Appendix: Survey Questions and Variable Operationalizations

### *Church Demographics (10 variables)*

1. *Denomination* (coded into seven 0–1 dummy variables, Baptist is the reference category)  
**Q:** What is your church denomination? Baptist, Church of God in Christ (COGIC), United Methodist (UM), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Black Presbyterian.
2. *Financial Health* (coded such that 1 = good, 0 = tight/difficulty)  
**Q:** How would you describe your congregation's financial health? Good, tight, or serious difficulty.
3. *Paid Pastor* (coded 0 = volunteer, 1 = paid)  
**Q:** Are you/is your pastor paid or a volunteer?
4. *Pastor's Education* (1 = none, 6 = post Dr. Ministry/Ph.D.)  
**Q:** What is the highest level of (your/your pastor's) ministerial education? None, apprenticeship with senior pastor, certificate or correspondence program, Bible college or some seminary, seminary degree, post-minister of Divinity Work or degree.
5. *Sunday Attendance*<sup>17</sup> (continuous, 0–6,000)  
**Q:** What is the total attendance for all services on a typical Sunday?

### *Variables that Describe a Priestly Function (5 variables)*

#### *Church Environment*

**Q:** How well does each of the following statements describe your congregation? Use a scale from 1 to 5 where "5" describes your congregation very well and "1" means not at all well.

6. *Spiritually vital and "alive"*
7. *Helps members deepen their relationship with God*

17. I choose to use average Sunday attendance rather than number on the church roll as a measure of church population. Because inactive members are often maintained on roll and can unduly inflate the membership roster, I believe the former variable better captures consistent involvement and represents a more conservative estimate of membership.

*Sermon Focus*

**Q:** How well does each of the following statements describe the sermon focus? Use a scale from 1 to 5 where “5” means always and “1” means never.

8. *God's love and care*
9. *Personal spiritual growth*

*Religious Programs*

**Q:** During the past 12 months, did your congregation participate in any of the following programs or activities in addition to your regular Sunday School?

10. *Bible study other than Sunday school, theological or doctrinal study, prayer or mediation groups, or spiritual retreats (sums total number of programs, values 0–4)*

**Variables that Describe a Prophetic Function (6 variables)***Church Environment*

**Q:** How well does each of the following statements describe your congregation? Use a scale from 1 to 5 where “5” describes your congregation very well and “1” means not at all well.

11. *Working for social justice*

*Sermon Focus*

**Q:** How well does each of the following statements describe the sermon focus? Use a scale from 1 to 5 where “5” means always and “1” means never.

12. *Social justice or social action*
13. *References to the racial situation in society*
14. *References to Black Liberation Theology or Womanist Theology*

*Clergy/Church Activism*

For each one, please say whether you strongly disapprove, somewhat disapprove, somewhat approve, or strongly approve (coded such that “1” means strongly disapprove and “4” means strongly approve).

15. *Clergy in your own church taking part in protest marches on civil rights issues*
16. *Churches expressing their views on day-to-day social and political issues*

Source: ITC Faith Factor 2000 Project.

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