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AMERICAN DENOMINATIONS AND CHRISTIAN SERVICE: THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND SERVICE

by

Jonathan Barkley Murphy

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Although a primary tenet of Christianity is service to others, the level to which denominations extend such assistance greatly varies. Recent research attributes this variance to differences in church theology. Evangelical theology stresses anti-structuralism and de-emphasizes the ethical teachings of Christianity while the opposite is true of non-evangelical theology. These differences are thought to limit assistance to others in evangelical churches and to promote such assistance in non-evangelical churches. Using data from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, I test these ideas by examining the relationship between type of denomination (evangelical vs. non-evangelical) and whether or not churches have programs such as housing for those in need, prison or jail ministry, substance abuse recovery, etc. Surprisingly, the findings offer virtually no support for the predicted outcomes. I will explain the evidence found in this study, and discuss the ramifications regarding religious research.

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American Denominations and Christian Service: The Relationship Between Theology and Service

Introduction

Writing in a 1912 issue of *The American Journal of Sociology*, Samuel H. Bishop notes, “From the beginning of the Christian era up to the beginning of the last half of the nineteenth century the Christian church was the sole charitable agency in the western world” (p. 370). If this claim is true, it suggests that many Christian churches take seriously the doctrine that adherents have an obligation to help others. In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus appeals to His followers to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, for “whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40 Today’s New International Version of the Bible). Not all Christian churches, however, are equally concerned with social responsibilities. Indeed, denominations differ greatly in the degree to which they provide community assistance. Very few studies, however, have tried to understand why these differences exist.

The purpose of this study is to determine if a church’s theological position influences its social involvement. Previous research has demonstrated that the theological orientation of white evangelical churches differs significantly from those of mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches (Ammerman, 2005; Steensland et al., 2000). As will be discussed below, this difference may be important in explaining differences in the extent to which churches are involved in providing services to their members and their communities. I analyze data from a

random sample of U.S. churches to reveal a possible pattern of assistance based on church theology.

For the purpose of this study, a church's social involvement refers to its efforts to provide services for its members or for people in the community. Service encompasses a variety of possible opportunities to provide communal assistance. Some churches, for example, have programs designed to provide meals to the homeless and shut-in (i.e., Meals on Wheels), some have prison or jail ministries, and some have substance abuse/recovery programs.

Theory Development

Stark and Glock (1968) were among the first sociologists to demonstrate empirically that members of different Christian denominations differ greatly in terms of the doctrine they endorse. For purposes of the current study, their most relevant finding is that members of some churches tend to stress this-worldly or ethical aspects of Christianity (e.g., loving your neighbor and doing good unto others), while members of other churches tend to stress supernatural beliefs (e.g., the divinity of Jesus, miracles, and salvation through Christ) and traditional religious practices (e.g., praying, attending church, and Bible reading). Catholics and members of Protestant churches that are generally considered to be "mainline" (e.g., the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church) tend to stress ethical aspects of Christianity and members of churches that are often referred to as "evangelical" (e.g., the Southern Baptist Church and the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church) tend to stress supernatural beliefs and traditional practices.

Stark and Glock (1968) suggest that the doctrine of “ethicalism” was embellished during the “Social Gospel” movement, which encouraged adherents of mainline and liberal churches to serve God through service to mankind. The movement itself, which began in the late 19th century and early 20th century, stood in opposition to the individualism that had previously defined Christianity and called for renewed social awareness that would redirect efforts to benefit an unfortunate community. Evangelical churches, conversely, are seemingly at odds with the larger society and generally avoid or condemn it. They are more likely to endorse the philosophy of “being in the world, but not of the world.”

After reviewing the history of different faith traditions in the United States, Steensland et al. (2000) draw conclusions similar to those of Stark and Glock (1968). The theological traditions of mainline Protestants stress social and economic justice, the accommodation of modernity, and tolerance of differing individual beliefs. The evangelical tradition, on the other hand, reflects the conservative tradition of separation from secular society, evangelizing and conversion, and adherence to strict religious doctrine.

Steensland et al.’s. (2000) review also led them to conclude that it is important to differentiate between black and white Protestant traditions. Black churches are similar to white evangelical churches in emphasizing evangelizing and supernatural aspects of Christianity. However, like mainline Protestant churches, their theological orientation also emphasizes freedom and social and economic justice. Indeed, black churches place even more emphasis on applying the ethical principles of Christianity than do white mainline Protestant churches. Although Steensland et al. do not discuss Catholic

theology, others have noted that Catholicism has a strong tradition of social teachings that stress the importance of helping the poor and overcoming inequality (e.g., see Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006).

The works of Stark and Glock (1968) and Steensland et al. (2000) have important implications for whether or not churches develop programs designed to provide assistance to others. Assuming that churches develop programs that are consistent with or supportive of their theological orientation, one would expect mainline Protestant churches, black Protestant churches, and Catholic churches to be more likely to have programs that assist their members and communities than would evangelical churches.

Studies conducted by Hunt (2002) and Emerson and Smith (2000) provide additional reasons to expect that assistance-oriented programs vary by type of denomination. Hunt is concerned with religion's influence on beliefs about poverty, and Emerson and Smith are concerned with the relationship between religion and race relations. The theoretical reasoning employed in both studies is easily extrapolated and applied to the issue of service to the community.

Hunt (2002) argues that whether or not church members get involved in efforts to overcome poverty depends on whether the church's ideology/theology about poverty is individualistic or structuralist. Individualism situates the causes of poverty within the person. It is caused by the person's lack of ability, effort, or will. Structuralism, the other dominant view of poverty, situates the causes of poverty in the social and economic system in which poor persons live. Structuralism acknowledges a lack of jobs, low-wage positions, and discrimination as causes for poverty. For the individualist, resentment of

the impoverished individual is a barrier to providing assistance. Thus individualists will provide limited assistance compared to structuralists (Hunt, 2002).¹

Hunt (2002) found that the individualism view is more popular among white Protestants while black Protestants are more likely to take a structuralist view. An important limitation of Hunt's study, however, is that it fails to differentiate among Protestant denominations. Indeed, he suggests that, "future research should examine possible implications of denominational variation among Protestants" (p. 828).

Emerson and Smith (2000) do differentiate among Protestant denominations. They argue that white evangelical churches believe in accountable freewill individualism and anti-structuralism. Since God gave people freewill, they can make choices that affect them positively or negatively. If people don't get ahead or are in prison, for example, their circumstances are attributable to their failure to make wise decisions. They have chosen to be lazy or to disobey the law. Thus, conservative churches are more likely to emphasize personal accountability for actions and to reject the notion that structural deficiencies influence negative decisions. Mainline churches, on the other hand, view humans as essentially good, "provided they are released from social arrangements that prevent people from living happily, productively, and equally" (p. 76). Adverse personal circumstances are attributable to structural barriers rather than poor decision-making.

The authors further suggest that evangelical churches are characterized by internal solidarity or network closure. That is, their members confine most of their interactions to each other. Network closure limits opportunities to provide assistance to those outside

¹ Hunt also identifies a "fatalistic" view of poverty, which assumes that a person is destitute as the result of bad luck, chance, sickness, or physical handicaps. It is not the fault of the individual or the social structure, but rather it is beyond the control of either. However, he does not use this view of poverty in his analyses.

the immediate congregation. Consistent with this view, several studies have found that friendship ties are more extensive in conservative congregations than in more liberal ones (Demerath, 1965; Iannaccone, 1988, 1994; Schwadel, 2005; Smith, 1998; Stark & Glock, 1968).

One can conclude from Hunt's (2002) work and the work of Emerson and Smith (2000) that the perceived source of one's problems is very important. For the theological positions of evangelical Protestant churches, one is deserving of the consequence following one's actions, and therefore they are less likely to be benevolent. For the mainline Protestant churches, the responsibility shifts from the individual alone to structural considerations. Applying these ideas to the question of whether or not churches develop programs to assist those in need, one would expect evangelical churches to be less likely than other types of churches to do so.

Previous Research

I was able to locate only three studies that examine empirically the relationship between type of denomination and community service. Two of these studies (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Wilson & Janoski, 1995) are conducted at the individual level of analysis. That is, they examine whether or not individuals affiliated with evangelical churches are less involved than other Christians in community service. Wilson and Janoski (1995) found that mainline Protestants and Catholics are more involved in "working with others to solve community problems" than are conservative Protestants. They did not differentiate between white mainline Protestant churches and black Protestant churches. Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) found that mainline and black Protestants are more involved in charitable organizations than are evangelical Protestants and Catholics.

Although these studies made contributions to the literature, they have limited relevance for the current study, which is concerned with whether or not evangelical churches, not evangelical individuals, provide services to their members and communities. The third study (Ammerman, 2005) is more relevant in that it examines church involvement, rather than individual involvement, in service activities.

Ammerman's study, which is based on data from 549 congregations, indicates that they differ in the extent to which they have or support programs that facilitate service. She found that African American congregations, mainline Protestant congregations, and Catholic congregations are substantially more concerned with and involved in service than are conservative congregations (see her tables 9 and 11). Conservative churches are more inclined to support evangelistic outreach than community service.

Although Ammerman's (2005) findings concur with the theoretical ideas discussed above, her conclusions are based on analyses that do not take into account any control variables. As Ammerman herself notes, with more financial resources, a congregation is usually better able to afford and therefore offer services such as housing for seniors, food and clothes for the needy, etc. It is well documented that when controlling for congregation size theologically conservative churches tend to have more financial resources than do mainline and Catholic churches (Davidson & Pyle, 1994; Iannaccone, Olson, D.V.A., & Stark, 1995; Stoll & Petersen, 2008). However, mainline Protestant churches and Catholic churches tend to have larger congregations and therefore more people to make financial contributions. Consequently, these churches generally have more financial resources that could be used for community outreach

activities. In addition, religious organizations with more members have more individuals who could volunteer to assist in community outreach activities. Therefore, it could be size of the congregation and/or the church's financial status rather than church theology alone that explain Ammerman's findings regarding the level of community service for different religious groups. In the current study, I control for size of congregation and the church's budget.

In addition, it is likely that the membership of evangelical churches tends to be politically conservative while the membership of more theologically liberal mainline churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches tends to be more politically liberal. Indeed, it is often assumed that most people associated with the politically conservative Christian Right are evangelicals. The politically liberal are more likely to endorse structuralist ideas supporting government programs to address the needs of the people, while the politically conservative tend to stress individual responsibility. Therefore, it is important to rule out the possibility that a congregation's political stance rather than its theological stance explains differences in congregational involvement in service-oriented activity. To do so, I will control for political orientation: whether the church's congregation tends to be politically liberal, middle of the road, or conservative.

Finally, it is important to control for the proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic. Hispanics are often in need of a variety of services, especially if they have recently immigrated to the United States. Housing, food, training in English, transportation, etc. are likely to be high priorities for many Hispanics. Most Hispanics are Catholics and the membership of some Catholic churches in the United States is predominately Hispanic. If churches develop service programs in part on the basis of the

needs of their congregations, it is possible that Catholic churches have more services than do churches in which Hispanics are less common.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical ideas discussed earlier, I hypothesize that church-based programs that provide assistance to community and church members varies by type of denomination. White evangelical churches will be the least likely to have assistance programs due to a theological orientation that deemphasizes the ethical implications of Christianity and stresses individualistic and anti-structural beliefs. Mainline, Catholic, and black Protestant churches will be more likely to have such programs because their theology emphasizes the application of ethical principles of Christianity and structural explanations for individual circumstances. This emphasis is generally lacking in the conservative churches whose theology focuses more on an individual's relationship to God, and not man.

The data set used in the current study will allow me to examine the relationship between type of denomination and whether or not churches have programs designed to provide assistance to substance abusers, prisoners, the unemployed, and people needing housing. Since white evangelical churches are more likely to assume that the individual is a free moral agent, acting apart from structural control, the individual is solely responsible for his or her own actions. If one is a substance abuser, in prison, unemployed, or homeless one has made ill-fated decisions and does not necessarily warrant assistance. Mainline, Catholic, and black Protestant churches, on the other hand, would view these circumstances on the part of the individual as resulting from such structural realities as a lack of jobs, unequal educational opportunities, and being raised

in an environment that supports drug use. Moreover, providing assistance to individuals experiencing unfortunate personal circumstances would be consistent with the ethical principles of Christianity. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested.

H1- Mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to have substance abuse or 12-step recovery programs.

H2- Mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to have programs that assist the unemployed (preparation for job seeking, skills training).

H3- Mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide housing for people in need (crisis, youth shelters, homeless, students).

H4- Mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide prison or jail ministry.

The data set also allows me to examine the relationship between type of denomination and church involvement in political or social justice issues and the relationship between type of denomination and church support for immigrants. Since mainline churches stress structural insufficiency and the ethical implications of Christianity, they would be more likely to initiate political or social justice activities and provide support for immigrants. Recognizing injustice as a social problem, they would be inclined to act on behalf of the subjugated in an attempt to ensure civil and human rights. Moreover, immigrant support by churches recognizes that the current

system is structurally inadequate to help immigrants assimilate into American society. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested.

H5- Mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to engage in political or social justice activities (civil rights, human rights).

H6- Mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide immigrant support activities (English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service).

Methods

Sample

Every other year, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago draws a probability sample of people 18 years of age or older living in the continental U.S (the General Social Surveys--GSS). Individuals that participated in the 2000 GSS that reported having attended worship at least once in the prior year were asked to name the place of worship. Researchers invited each place of worship to participate in the project. Of the 1,214 congregations nominated, 434 returned completed questionnaires from all individuals who attended worship services on April 29, 2001 (The Association of Religion Data Archives).

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey is the largest survey of worshipers in America conducted to date. There were 122,404 worshipers in the 434 congregations that participated in the survey. Each participating congregation returned an Attendee Profile survey completed by individual worshipers and a Congregational Profile survey

completed by a religious functionary (e.g. pastor, priest, rabbi, etc.). The latter survey contained organizational level data on such things as the congregation's facilities, staff, programs, and worship services. Most of the variables used in this study are contained in the Congregational Profile survey. However, one of the control variables (proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic) had to be calculated by aggregating individual level responses to a question about race contained in the Attendee Profile data.

Measurement

Independent Variable. A modified version of Steensland et al.'s (2000) categorization of denominations as evangelical, mainline, Catholic, black Protestant, Jewish, and other is used as the independent variable. Jewish and "other" places of worship were excluded from the analyses because the dependent variables were constants in these places of worship. Surprisingly, none of the Jewish or "other" congregations had any service programs. Dummy variables were created for all the remaining categories (mainline, Catholic, and black Protestant) except evangelical, which served as the reference category. A congregation was considered black Protestant when more than 50 percent of its attendees were African American.

Dependent Variables. There are six dependent variables in the study, each of which refers to a different type of service oriented program or activity. The item used to measure each type read, "In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your congregation's members or for people in the community?" This question was followed by (1) Substance abuse or 12-step recovery programs, (2) Activities for unemployed people (preparation for job seeking, skills training), (3) Housing for other groups (crisis, youth shelters, homeless, students), (4) Prison or jail

ministry, (5) Political or social justice activities (civil rights, human rights), and (6) Immigrant support activities (English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service). For each type of activity, if the church had been involved in the activity, it was coded 1. If the church had not been involved in the activity, it was coded 0.

Control Variables. As mentioned earlier, all the hypotheses are tested while controlling for the congregation's political stance, church's financial status, congregation size, and the proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic. The congregation's political status was measured with a question, which asked, "Politically would your congregation be considered (1) more on the conservative side; (2) right in the middle; (3) more on the liberal side". Two of the three categories ("right in the middle" and "more on the liberal side" were treated as dummy variables, with "more on the conservative side" serving as the reference category.

The congregation's financial status was measured with an item, which read, "What is the total amount of money your congregation received in income from all sources during your most recent fiscal year?" Respondents reported actual dollar amounts. Congregation size was measured with an item that read, "So far this year (2001), what is your best estimate of average weekly attendance at worship services for this congregation? If you have more than one worship service, record the average attendance for all services combined." Respondents gave their own estimated average of weekly attendance. Finally, proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic was obtained by aggregating responses from the Attendees Profile survey, which included an item that asked respondents their race.

Because the dependent variables are binomial, I will use logistic regression to test the hypotheses. Six models will be estimated, which differ only in terms of the dependent variable.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the study are shown in Table 1. With reference to type of church, mainline Protestants churches are the largest, making up 43.7% of all religious groups, followed by evangelicals (26.3%), Catholics (25.4%), and black Protestants (4.6%). Politically, about half (51.4%) of all churches are conservative, 41% are moderate, and only 7.6% are liberal. On average, Hispanics comprise only about 5.1% of a church's congregation. The mean income for churches is \$604,760.69, and the average weekly attendance at worship is 638 people.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for all Variables

Variables	Means/Proportions	Std. Deviation
Church Type		
Black	.046	.210
Mainline	.437	.496
Catholic	.254	.436
Evangelical	.263	.440
Congregation's Political Stance		
Conservative	.513	.500
Moderate	.410	.492
Liberal	.077	.266
Church Budget	\$604,760.69	974153.520
Weekly Attendance	638.37	962.529
Proportion Hispanic	.051	.157

Hypothesis 1

The results of the analyses where substance abuse programs, unemployment programs, and housing services are the dependent variables are presented in Table 2. For each dependent variable, the effects of the religion dummy variables without controlling for other variables are reported in model 1. The effects of the religion dummy variables while controlling for political stance, church budget, church size, and proportion Hispanic are reported in model 2.

Table 2
Logistic Regression Models for the Log Odds of Having Substance Abuse Programs, Unemployment Services, and Housing for Those in Need

Independent and Control Variables	Substance Abuse Programs		Unemployment Services		Housing for those in Need	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Church Type						
Black	1.1350	1.122	.800	-.706	.145	-.608
Mainline	1.173***	1.214*	.432	-.135	.560	.349
Catholic	1.350***	.433	1.080	-.089	.601	.112
Congregation's Political Stance						
Moderate		.041		1.051		.069
Liberal		.550		2.094*		1.285**
Church Budget		.000		.000*		.000
Church Size		.000		.000		.000
Proportion Hispanic		1.663*		-.233		-2.173
Constant	-1.910	-2.297	-3.102	-4.053	-1.649	-1.793
Chi-square	16.417	35.112	3.500	27.225	3.533	18.652
-2 Log likelihood	361.934	343.240	161.916	138.191	337.691	322.573
Cox & Snell R Square	.050	.104	.011	.082	.011	.057
Nagelerke R Square	.072	.150	.027	.202	.017	.086

Note. * $p \leq 0.05$. ** $p \leq 0.01$. *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Hypothesis 1 states that mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide substance abuse or 12-step recovery programs. Model 1 shows that prior to taking into account the control variables, the Catholic and mainline Protestant dummy variables have significant ($p \leq .001$) effects on the likelihood that churches have these programs. The effects are positive, indicating that Catholic and mainline Protestant churches are more likely to provide such programs than are evangelical churches. Black Protestant churches are also more likely to provide such programs, but the Black church dummy variable does not quite reach significance at .05 ($p = .053$). However, after introducing the control variables (model 2), the only church dummy variable that remains significant is mainline Protestant and its effect continues to be positive. Since mainline Protestant churches are the only ones that are more likely than evangelical churches to provide substance abuse programs, the data provide only partial support for Hypothesis 1.

Of the remaining variables, only proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic has a significant effect. Its effect is positive, indicating that as this proportion increases, a church's probability of having substance abuse and 12-Step programs also increases.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 states that mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide programs for unemployed people. Even without controlling for additional variables, the data do not support this hypothesis. None of the church type dummy variables in model 1 is statistically significant. After controlling for the additional variables

(model 2), there is still no evidence that any of the different types of churches differ significantly from evangelical churches.

With reference to the control variables, the findings indicate that a church's political composition and its budget are significant predictors of the dependent variable. Churches whose members tend to be politically moderate do not differ significantly from those whose members tend to be politically conservative. Politically liberal churches, however, do differ from the politically conservative. The former churches are more likely to provide unemployment services to their members or those in the community. Church budget has a significant positive effect, indicating that churches with larger budgets are more likely to provide these services.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3--which states that mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide housing for people in need--is not supported. With or without taking into account the control variables, none of the church type dummy variables is significant.

The response to whether a church offers housing for those in need is best explained by its political composition. The politically moderate and conservative churches do not differ from each other, but those that are politically liberal are significantly more likely to offer housing than are politically conservative churches.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 states that mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to provide prison or jail ministry. From Table 3, we see that the data provide no support for this

hypothesis. In models 1 and 2, black Protestant churches, mainline Protestant churches, and Catholic churches do not differ from evangelical churches in the likelihood that they offer a prison or jail ministry. None of the additional variables (see model 2) have significant effects on the dependent variable.

Table 3
Logistic Regression Models for the Log Odds of Having Prison/Jail Ministry, Political and/or Social Justice Activities, and Immigrant Support

Independent and Control Variables	Prison/Jail Ministry		Political/Social Justice Activities		Immigrant Support	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Church Type						
Black	1.076	1.024	1.528	.334	.372	-.043
Mainline	.124	.113	.665	.092	.220	.274
Catholic	.278	-.104	2.326***	1.607**	1.821***	1.027
Congregation's Political Stance						
Moderate		.137		.417		.103
Liberal		.072		2.465***		.115
Church Budget		.000		.000		.000*
Church Size		.000		.000		.000
Proportion Hispanic		.787		-.816		1.934*
Constant	-.894	-1.127	-2.508	-2.914	-2.674	-3.273
Chi-square	3.053	10.804	40.689	73.043	22.987	46.141
-2 Log likelihood	400.519	392.768	279.568	247.214	222.010	198.855
Cox & Snell R Square	.009	.033	.119	.204	.069	.134
Nagelkerke R Square	.013	.046	.189	.323	.130	.251

Note. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Hypothesis 5

The findings partially support hypothesis 5, which states that mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white evangelical churches to have political or social justice programs. Before the inclusion of the control variables (model 1), Catholic churches differ significantly from evangelical churches and the difference between black churches and evangelical churches almost reaches significance ($p = .051$). However, after controlling for other variables (model 2), the difference between black Protestant churches and evangelical Protestant churches does not even approach significance ($p = .728$). The difference between Catholic churches and evangelical churches, however, remains significant. Catholic churches are more likely to engage in political and social justice activities than the evangelical churches.

The most significant predictor of a church's political and social involvement is its political orientation. Although politically moderate churches do not differ from politically conservative churches, the difference between politically liberal and politically conservative churches is highly significant. The former churches are more likely to offer programs that promote or support political matters and social justice awareness.

The findings suggest that a church's budget, size, and proportion Hispanic are unimportant in explaining the level of church involvement in political and social justice programs.

Hypothesis 6

The findings fail to support hypothesis 6, which states that mainline Protestant churches, Catholic churches, and black Protestant churches are more likely than white

evangelical churches to provide immigrant support activities (e.g., English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service). Prior to the inclusion of the control variables (model 1), Catholic churches are the only churches that differ significantly from evangelical churches in offering immigrant support programs. After the control variables are taken into account, however, (model 2), the Catholic effect fails to reach significance at the .05 level.

Two of the control variables, church budget and proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic, have significant positive effects on the dependent variable. Having more funds allows for more flexibility and options for providing assistance. The presence of an immediate need is another good predictor. In an environment that is more densely populated with Hispanic individuals, the relevance of immigrant support and training in English as a second language is more immediate than in an environment where the Hispanic population is sparse. Furthermore, with limited funds available, support becomes selective. Therefore, the discussion of immigration service becomes less of a theological issue, and more about church income and ethnic composition.

Summary and Discussion

A major concern of this study has been to examine the role American Christian churches play in the “betterment” of society by offering programs to help people in need. Based on previous research (Ammerman, 2005; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Hunt 2002; Stark & Glock, 1968; Steensland et al., 2000) one could predict the social outreach of churches based on their theological orientation and social, as opposed to individual, ideology. Mainline Protestant, black Protestant, and Catholic churches have a long history of stressing the ethical aspects of Christianity and structuralist ideology. That is,

they endorse the idea of serving God by serving mankind and the view that social ills (e.g., poverty, crime, and drug use) are attributable to structural arrangements rather than to deficiencies on the part of individuals. On the other hand, white evangelical Protestant churches have focused less on ethicalism, and instead have emphasized adherence to doctrinal aspects of Christian responsibility, salvation, and accountable freewill individualism.

Therefore, one would expect evangelical churches to be less likely than the others to have programs (such as prison ministry and substance abuse programs) designed to provide assistance to their members or to those in the community. To test these ideas, I developed six hypotheses which state that evangelical churches are less likely than the other churches to have substance abuse programs, programs to assist immigrants, prison ministries, programs to make housing available to those in need, programs that promote political and social justice, and services for the unemployed.

Surprisingly, I found almost no support for the hypotheses. Even before control variables were taken into account, mainline Protestant churches and Catholic churches were the only ones more likely than evangelical churches to provide certain assistance programs. Both of the former types of churches were more likely than evangelical churches to provide substance abuse programs. In addition, Catholic churches were more likely than evangelical churches to provide immigration services and support political and/or social justice programs. In no instance, were black Protestant churches more likely than evangelical churches to have assistance programs.

When the control variables were included in the analyses, there was even less support for the hypotheses. Mainline Protestant churches were still more likely than

evangelical churches to provide substance abuse programs, and Catholic churches were still more likely to support political and/or social justice activities. Otherwise, evangelical churches simply did not differ from other types of churches. Stated differently, not a single hypothesis was fully supported by the data and most hypotheses received no support at all.

These findings suggest that the theoretical ideas that provide the underpinnings for this study exaggerate the importance of theological orientation in determining whether or not churches develop programs that help them carry out the implications of their theology. Non-evangelical churches espouse ethical/structuralist theology but put no more effort than do evangelical churches into developing their own assistance programs based on that theology. Evangelical churches place less emphasis on ethical/structuralist theology, yet are as likely as non-evangelical churches to develop assistance programs. Thus, I conclude that the theoretical ideas presented herein should be questioned, at least insofar as they relate to the development of church-based assistance programs.

My findings, however, should not be interpreted to mean that there is no connection between evangelicalism and service to others. As discussed earlier, although there has not been much prior research conducted on the relationship between evangelicalism and service, that research has consistently found the relationship to be negative. A possible explanation for the apparent inconsistency between previous research and the current study is the level of analysis. With the exception of a study by Ammerman (2005), religion/community assistance research has been conducted at the level of individuals. That research has found that *individuals* affiliated with non-

evangelical churches are more involved in community service than *individuals* affiliated with evangelical churches. The present study, on the other hand, examined church-level data. It found, almost without exception, that non-evangelical *churches* do not differ from evangelical *churches* in the likelihood of having service programs.

Individuals who are committed to an ethical/structural religious approach may indeed be motivated to provide assistance to members of their communities and congregations. Following through on this motivation, though, does not necessarily require them to volunteer for assistance programs provided by their own churches. Indeed, many churches, regardless of their ethical/structuralist orientation, may simply be unable to develop and sustain assistance programs. It takes a great deal of time and resources to develop and maintain even one self-contained program that would provide relief to, say, the homeless, the chemically dependent, or immigrants who need to be taught English. Thus, churches may attempt to fulfill their ethicalism mission or to overcome structural barriers, not by developing their own programs to address these issues, but by instilling in members ethicalism values and by encouraging members to volunteer for service-oriented secular organizations. The Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, the Community Assistant Program, Volunteers for Peace, the Child's Advocacy Center and numerous other community-based and nationally based for-profit and non-profit organizations are designed to help those in need. Moreover, they rely to varying degrees on volunteers to help carry out their goals.

In addition, alliances, or partnerships, between churches and service-oriented organizations are quite common. The support for such organizations is manifested through various forms; volunteer work, monetary resources, and providing space for

organizations to mobilize resources. Some of these partnerships are with local organizations while others operate on the national and global level. For instance, churches that seek to provide housing for impoverished families, both locally and abroad, might support a nonprofit ecumenical organization such as Habitat for Humanity International. World Vision is an organization that seeks to assist victims around the world suffering in the wake of a disaster. Organizations such as March for Jesus or Right to Life are political interest groups that also receive support by some churches. National civil rights organizations such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) are supported by a number of black congregations. Moreover, most major cities in the U.S. have a local religious non-profit organization that provides services to the homeless community. For example, Nashville, Tennessee has the Room in the Inn (www.roomintheinn.org); Memphis, Tennessee has the Union Mission (www.memphisunionmission.org); and Seattle, Washington has the Northwest Harvest (www.northwestharvest.org). These are merely a few of the countless organizations supported by churches as a means of serving the community.

The partnership of churches and service-oriented organizations is a possible explanation for the inconsistency between my findings and the findings of Ammerman (2005). Her research is of particular interest because, like the current study, she relies on church level data; however, she concludes that non-evangelical churches are more service oriented than evangelical churches. It is possible that the different findings between our studies can be attributed to Ammerman's failure to distinguish between self-contained church-based programs and church partnerships with organized charitable and other types of agencies. She classified a church as having congregational outreach if it had a self-

contained program and/or a partnership with an outside agency. The present research, however, focuses on congregation-based programs and does not recognize church partnerships and alliances. This is especially significant considering that of the congregations Ammerman studied, only three percent did not have partnerships.

Because the current study is directed toward congregation-based programs, it does not allow one to rule out the possibility that non-evangelical churches are more involved in, or have a broader range of, service-oriented partnerships than do evangelical churches. If non-evangelical churches are more involved in these partnerships, the theoretical ideas discussed herein may indeed be helpful in understanding why some churches have more civic involvement than others. They are not helpful, however, in understanding why some churches are more likely than others to have their own service-oriented programs.

It is also possible that the findings are inconsistent with Ammerman's findings because of differing methods of sampling. Her study was based on a non-random selection of seven regions. Five of the regions are major cities, and the other two are rural counties; within those cities and counties Ammerman drew a random sample of congregations. Her sample is intended to be a reflection of religious culture in the United States. However, five non-randomly selected cities and two rural counties can hardly be considered representative, even if random samples are drawn within these areas. At a minimum, her sample has an urban bias.

With reference to control variables, the results suggest that a church's political composition is a better predictor of whether or not churches develop assistance programs than is theological orientation. Churches composed of individuals who were mainly politically liberal were more likely to provide unemployment services, housing for those

in need, and political/social justice activities than were churches whose membership was mainly politically conservative. This could be because liberal politics bear the undertone of structuralist ideology whereas conservative politics is more individualistic. A structuralist approach, as previously noted, seeks to correct the design of structures that neglect the socially marginalized. Conversely, an individualist does not readily acknowledge a flawed system, but instead assigns responsibility to the individual. Consequently, it is conceivable that a church with a majority of politically liberal members is more likely to provide services to the disadvantaged and to support political/social justice. Since political composition's effect held even when controlling for type of denomination, it is possible that to some extent churches develop programs that promote the political agendas of their membership.

Of the remaining control variables, church size showed no significant effects, and church budget was only significant in two program areas: unemployment assistance and assistance for immigrants. Therefore, both church budget and size are largely irrelevant in determining whether or not a church has community service programs. These findings are surprising because developing, maintaining, and "manning" church-based programs requires money and volunteers. It seems as though larger, wealthier churches would have more of both.

Before concluding, two limitations of the study should be discussed. First, the phrasing of the service questions is not as precise as I would have liked. My original intention was to measure a church's involvement in the community. However, the question in the Congregational Profile asked, "In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for

people in the community?” It would have been desirable to have measures that allow one to know if the service provided was for the congregation, for the community, or for both. Previous researchers have argued that evangelical churches, as compared to non-evangelical churches, have a lot of internal social activities (Blanchard, 2007; Iannaccone, 1994). Perhaps evangelical churches provide various kinds of assistance to their own members, while non-evangelical churches reach out more to the community and beyond.

In addition, future researchers should develop direct measures of a church’s theological orientation rather than rely on previous methods of categorizing denominations. Mega-churches are becoming increasingly popular in the United States as more Christian sects are leaving traditional doctrine in exchange for a more unified faith (Johnstone, 2009). As a result, churches are not as identifiable by the denominational title that they bear. Moreover, not all churches within the same denomination stress ethicalism or freewill individualism to the same degree. Southern Baptist churches, for example, are classified as evangelical in the current study. Some Southern Baptist churches, however, place a great deal of emphasis on the ethical aspects of Christianity (Stark & Finke, 2000). Future researchers should develop a battery of questions that could be asked of religious functionaries to better identify their church’s theological/structuralist orientation.

Despite these limitations, this study has demonstrated that, with few exceptions, type of denomination does not predict whether or not churches offer their own self-contained service programs. Thus, the theoretical ideas that provided the underpinnings for this study should be questioned. Prior research suggests that these ideas are helpful in

predicting the service behavior of individuals and alliances between churches and community-based or nationally-based service organizations. However, they do not appear to be helpful in predicting whether or not churches develop their own service programs. Future research should not only try to improve measurement, it should devote more attention to the alliances between churches and partner organizations, and note how (or if) these alliances differ among churches that differ theologically. However, such research should also control for the political composition of the congregation. Although Ammerman's findings are consistent with the theoretical ideas discussed herein, she did not control for the political composition of the congregations she examined. Had she done so, perhaps her finding in support of the theory would not have been as strong.

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Appendix

Survey Items

Independent Variable

Type of Denomination

Measured using a modified version of Steensland et al.'s (2000) RELTRAD classification scheme.

Dependent Variables

Housing for Those in Need

In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for people in the community? - Housing for other groups (crisis, youth shelters, homeless, students)

- 0) Not checked
- 1) Checked

Prison or Jail Ministry

In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for people in the community? - Prison or jail ministry

- 0) Not checked
- 1) Checked

Substance Abuse or 12-step Recovery

In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for people in the community? - Substance abuse or 12-step recovery programs

- 0) Not checked
- 1) Checked

Immigrant Support

In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for people in the community? - Immigrant support activities (English as a second language, refugee support, interpreting service)

- 0) Not checked
- 1) Checked

Unemployment Services

In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for people in the community? - Activities for unemployed people (preparation for job seeking, skills training)

- 0) Not checked
- 1) Checked

Political or Social Justice

In the past 12 months, did your congregation provide the following service for your own congregation's members or for people in the community? - Political or social justice activities (civil rights, human rights)

- 0) Not checked
- 1) Checked

Control Variables

Congregation's Political Stance

Politically, would your congregation be considered?

- 1) Conservative
- 2) Right in the middle
- 3) Liberal

Dummy variables were created for categories 2 and 3. Category 1 served as the reference category.

Congregational Income

What is the total amount of money your congregation received in income from all sources during your most recent fiscal year? Respondents reported actual dollars.

Average Weekly Attendance

So far this year (2001), what is your best estimate of average weekly attendance at worship services for this congregation? If you have more than one worship service, record the average attendance for all services combined. Respondents reported their actual estimates.

Proportion Hispanic

Proportion of the congregation that is Hispanic was obtained by aggregating responses from the Attendees Profile survey, which included an item that asked respondents their race.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Institutional Review Board

To: Jonathan B. Murphy
Sociology

From: Chair, Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Subjects
Administration 315

Subject: Christian Denominations and Community Involvement (E09-244)

Approval Date: April 3, 2009

This is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has designated the above referenced protocol as exempt from the full federal regulations. This project was reviewed in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations as well as ethical principles.

When the project is finished or terminated, please complete the attached Notice of Completion and send to the Board in Administration 315.

Approval for this protocol does not expire. However, any change to the protocol must be reviewed and approved by the board prior to implementing the change.

Chair, Institutional Review Board
The University of Memphis

Dr. L. Peterson