THE INTERACTION OF RACE & THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION
IN CONGREGATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE PROVISION

by

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ABSTRACT

This project continues the tradition of scholarly attention to the social service

activities of African-American religious organizations. Analysis of data from the 1998

National Congregations Study reveals that African-American congregations are not more

or less likely to support social services in general. They are, however, more likely to

support certain types of programs. Specifically, these are programs in the areas of

substance abuse, mentoring/tutoring, and non-religious education. Further analysis of

NCS indicates that, among African-American congregations, theological conservatism is

associated with a greater likelihood of supporting social service programs. This runs

counter to existing assumptions about theological conservatism, which has previously

been associated with a focus on "other-worldly" concerns, such as getting into heaven.

As such, theological conservatism has never been thought to encourage concern over

"this-worldly" issues such as poverty, homelessness, and other social problems that are

part of the social service realm. While these assumptions about theological conservatism

hold true for non-African-American congregations, the same cannot be said for African-

American congregations. This project attempts to figure out why this is the case. Does

theological conservatism mean something different in African-American congregations

than what it does in other congregations? If so, what are these different meanings?

To answer these questions, the project includes nineteen interviews with key

informants, such as ministers, priests, or other staff people/leaders, from local religious

congregations in a mid-sized city in the southwestern U.S. Nine of the informants are affiliated with African-American congregations, and the other ten are affiliated with non-African-American congregations. The interviews establish the racial/ethnic composition, theological & political orientations (liberal, conservative, or in the middle) of each informant's congregation, as well as whether the congregation supports any social service programs. The interview data show the ways in which many of the stereotypes about theological conservatism do not apply to African-American, theologically conservative congregations. Many of the interviewees from African-American, theologically conservative congregations emphasize the importance of relationships and community in ways that the non-African-American theological conservatives do not. This explains why these African-American congregations are more likely to support social service programs, unlike other theologically conservative congregations.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Much scholarly attention has been paid to the social and political engagement of African-American religious organizations. The prominent role of black churches in the Civil Rights Movement, for instance, has received extensive discussion (Frazier [1964] 1974; McAdam 1982; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Some (Frazier [1964] 1974; Mukenge 1983; Nelsen 1988) have argued that churches, having been superceded by secular organizations, currently play a less significant role in the lives of most African-American communities. Others (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), however, hold that the church continues to serve important community functions. Lincoln and Mamiya, however are critical of African-American congregations' community efforts, asserting that they fail to address the "real" problems facing African-American youth, such as high unemployment (1990:332).

Analyzing data from the 1988 Gallup / Independent Sector national survey of religious congregations, Chaves and Higgins (1992) compare the level of community involvement of African-American congregations with that of other congregations. The researchers' operationalization of community involvement includes social service activity, such as meal service and housing/shelter for the homeless, as well as cultural programs and other types of activities not included under the umbrella of "social service." Chaves and Higgins conclude that African-American congregations are <u>not</u> more

involved in their communities overall. The congregations are, however, more involved in certain types of activities. Specifically, Chaves and Higgins find that African-American congregations engage in significantly more civil rights activity and "activity directed at serving disprivileged segments of the immediately surrounding community" (1992:425) than do other congregations. The researchers acknowledge the limitations of the data they use (1992:429, footnote 4), however, suggesting that it would be fruitful to test their findings on a more representative sample that is not so biased toward larger congregations.

Working with data from a nationally representative sample of Roman Catholic congregations, Cavendish (2000), like Chaves and Higgins (1992), finds that African-American congregations are more likely to support social service programs that are designed to help "disprivileged segments of the surrounding community" (Cavendish 2000:378). After controlling for the existence of congregational leadership training programs for lay members, however, the effect of race upon support for social service programs became insignificant. Nevertheless, the work of Cavendish and of Chaves and Higgins (1992) demonstrates the value of considering community involvement as a set of discrete types of activity, with each type to be considered separately.

In addition to race, theological orientation also affects the social engagement of religious congregations and individuals. Since the mid-20th century, a large body of literature has confirmed the lower levels of social engagement associated with theologically conservative religious organizations (Guest and Lee 1987; Hoge and Faue 1973; Kanagy 1992; Will & Cochran 1995). The roots of the liberal/conservative split in

American religion extend to the late-19th century evangelical movement. By the early 20th century, fundamentalism had emerged in opposition to so-called "modernism," which was identified largely with evolution and other challenges to Biblical authority. The Scopes trial in 1925 caused fundamentalists to be viewed derisively by many in America and throughout the world. Fundamentalism, however, continued as a movement, albeit outside the Protestant mainstream (Marsden 1991). A new evangelical movement that "emerged as heir to the original fundamentalist coalition of the 1920s" (Marsden 1991:62) was centered around figures like Billy Graham. However, by the late 1960s, "it was impossible to regard American evangelicalism as a single coalition with a more or less unified and recognized leadership" (Marsden 1991:74).

In *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988), Robert Wuthnow argues that the Christian religious landscape in America changed significantly in the mid-20th century. Inter-denominational differences, which had once been so pronounced, were eclipsed by intra-denominational conflicts between liberals and conservatives. Notable issues on which these two groups disagree include the willingness to take the Bible as the literal word of God and the appropriateness of religious engagement with the social and political environment. Regarding the latter issue, Wuthnow describes how theological conservatives earned their reputation for non-engagement in the 1950's and 1960's. As social conflict raged over the civil rights movement and against the Vietnam War, conservatives disapproved of taking direct action in support of or against either one (1988: 147-48). The other-worldly inclination of theological conservatives seems to temper any inclination to engage this world and its problems.

More recently, a body of findings supports this position that theologically liberal churches affiliated with more "mainline" Protestant denominations are more involved in their communities (Chaves et al. 2002; Wuthnow 1999). Some researchers, on the other hand, argue that it is a mistake to discount the civic engagement of theologically conservative individuals (Smith 1998). Researchers have uncovered support among theological conservatives for programs to help the poor (Regnerus et al 1998; Pyle 1993; Iannaccone 1993). Along these same lines, Regnerus and Smith (1998) report that conservative Protestants in the late 20th century began to demonstrate a greater willingness to address social and political issues, while Park and Smith (2000) find that evangelical Protestants are significantly more likely to volunteer than members of other denominations. Similarly, Hart (1992) disputes the assumption that the outlook of evangelical Protestants is exclusively other-worldly. These findings concerning theological conservatives, however, are all at the individual level of analysis. At the congregational level of analysis, the evidence supports the position that theologically liberal congregations are indeed more socially engaged.

Such generalizations about theological liberalism and conservatism do not, however, apply to African-American congregations with absolute accuracy. Woodberry and Smith (1998) point out ways in which conservative African-American congregations are unique in comparison with other conservative congregations. As evidence of this, Omar McRoberts (2003, 1999) reports on a brand of social activism linked with theologically conservative black Pentecostal churches in Boston. McRoberts claims that, "in the last three decades black Pentecostal churches, a most theologically conservative

set of institutions, have become more involved in political and social activism" (1999: 47) by becoming more involved in community development programs. This suggests that the differences between theological liberals and conservatives are not static, or at least that the differences vary across racial and ethnic groups. If the relationship between theological orientation and social engagement varies by race, then this raises various puzzles. Why would theological orientation operate differently along racial lines? Exactly how does it operate differently?

The issues discussed above raise the following research questions to be answered with the appropriate data:

1. Are African-American congregations more likely to support social services than congregations of other races?

2. Are African-American congregations more likely to support different types of social service programs than congregations of other races?

3. Does theological conservatism have a different relationship with social engagement among African-American congregations in comparison to other congregations?

4. If the answer to question #3 is "yes," then why? Does theological conservatism mean the same thing to African-American religious congregations as it does to other congregations?

Data & Methods

In order to answer these questions, this project uses a double-pronged research strategy using quantitative and qualitative methods. For questions 1 through 3, I will use

data from the National Congregations Study (NCS), a survey of a nationally

representative sample of congregations. The 1998 General Social Survey - a

representative sample of English-speaking adults in the United States - included a set of

questions asking respondents who say that they attend religious services to reports the

name and location of their religious congregation. Inspired by the insight that

organizations attached to a random sample of individuals comprise a random sample of

organizations, this procedure produced the most representative sample of congregations

in existence. Data about each of these congregations were collected through a one-hour

interview with one key informant, such as a minister, priest, rabbi, or other staff person or

leader. Overall, data were collected for 1,236 congregations, a response rate of 80%.[1]

One NCS item asked, "Has your congregation participated in or supported social

service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects of any sort within

the past 12 months?" Respondents were instructed to exclude from consideration any

"projects that use or rent space in your building but have no other connection to your

congregation." Those respondents whose congregations did participate in or support such

programs were then asked to list these programs. The responses to these questions were

coded into various types of programs.

Other NCS items asked respondents whether, within the past 12 months, there

have been any groups of people from the congregation meeting for "religious, social,

recreational, or other purposes." Informants were given the opportunity to list up to ten

such groups. In the process of coding these responses, it became clear that some of these

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[1] For more detail about NCS data and methods, see Chaves et al. (1999).

groups, such as those meeting to help substance abusers, fulfilled the criteria to be counted as social service programs. So, these groups were included in all analyses relating to congregations' social service activities. .

Congregations' total number of social service programs is an indicator of their total level of social service activity. There are, of course, other ways of operationalizing the total level of activity. Chaves and Tsitsos (2001) used NCS data to analyze congregations' total level of activity. The authors operationalized social service activity in three different ways: total number of social service programs, total amount of money spent on social services in the past 12 months, and total number of volunteers working on social services. The results for all three were similar, suggesting that they could be used interchangeably. The control variables in their analyses were almost identical to those in this paper, so I feel comfortable using total number of programs as an indicator of overall level of activity.

Further analysis shifts the focus to congregational support of nine types of social service programs: food, housing, clothing, homeless, educational (excluding religious education), domestic abuse, tutoring/mentoring, substance abuse, and job-related programs. Analysis of congregational participation in educational, mentoring, and job-related programs permits an exploration of the criticisms directed by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:332) at African-American churches for not addressing the "real" problems facing African-American youth, such as high unemployment. Analyzing congregational support for specific types of programs also makes it possible to determine if African-

American congregations specialize in social services directed at the "disprivileged," as concluded by Chaves and Higgins (1992), as well as Cavendish (2000).

This raises the question of how to define a service that is directed at "the disprivileged." This question can begin to be resolved by comparing food programs with, say, educational programs. Whereas programs that involve the distribution of food to hungry people are clearly directed at the disprivileged, educational programs are not quite the same. The people served by an educational program might be disprivileged, but they might also just be kids who need help in school, which is a more abstract type of disprivilege. The decision to make this distinction is tacitly supported in the work of Chaves and Higgins, who found no significant difference in participation between African-American and other congregations in non-religious educational programs but still feel comfortable concluding that African-American congregations are more likely to support programs for the disprivileged. From the work of Chaves and Higgins (1992) and of Cavendish (2000), therefore, I expect African-American congregations to be more likely than other congregations to support services like food programs, which are directed at clients who are clearly underprivileged.

The main independent variables in this study are the race of a congregation, the theological orientation (liberal vs. conservative) of a congregation, and an interaction term for race and theological orientation. Regarding race, the NCS included a question asking informants what percent of regular adult participants are "black or African American." In previous examinations of the social service activities of African-American congregations, researchers have used different criteria to designate what exactly makes a

congregation "African-American." Cavendish (2000) defines "black congregations" as "those whose respondents reported African as the 'most frequently represented nationality' in the congregation" (375). For Chaves and Higgins (1992), at least 80% of the members of a congregation must be black in order for the congregation to be considered African-American. This study employs the same 80% criterion in designating African-American congregations. In the NCS sample, there are 156 such congregations.

The analysis also includes dummy variables to for the theological orientation (liberal vs. conservative) of congregations. Chaves and Higgins (1992) found that increasing scores on a conservatism scale had a significantly negative effect on all congregations' participation in local community and civil rights activities. One NCS item asked respondents, "*Theologically speaking,* would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle?" As the wording of the question suggests, respondents could choose from three possible replies. These answers were transformed into two dummy variables, with "more on the liberal side" as the omitted category. Congregations whose respondents answered "more on the conservative side" were coded "1" on the theologically conservative variable, while congregations whose respondents answered "right in the middle" were coded "1" on the theologically moderate variable.

The analysis also includes interaction terms between race and theological orientation. One such term is for African-American congregations that are theologically liberal, and the other is for African-American congregations that are theologically conservative. My own preliminary analysis using NCS data, described above, indicates

that theologically conservative African-American congregations are significantly more likely to support social service programs.

Besides the main independent variables of interest, the analysis includes numerous control variables. Congregations in the NCS sample were categorized into four denominational categories: mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, conservative/evangelical Protestant, and other/no denomination. The fourth, "other/no" category is a residual category containing all congregations, such as non-Christian congregations, that do not fit into the other three main categories. As a result, it is substantively meaningless, and coefficients for it are not reported in any of the regression results in this paper.

A congregation's access to human and material resources clearly influences its ability to support social service programs. Simpson (1993) and Nelsen & Nelsen (1975) predict that theologically conservative African-American Pentecostal congregations will be more active once they have more middle-class members. Therefore, numerous control variables are introduced into the models in order to take into account the availability of resources. For instance, all models reported here control for congregational size (defined as the logged number of regular participants aged 18 and over), as well as congregational income (defined as the logged total money received from all sources). In addition, the NCS asked respondents what percentage of regularly participating adults have four-year (or more) college degrees and what percentage live in households with income greater than $100,000 per year and less than $25,000 per year. These three percentages are logged and included in all models.

The types of environments in which congregations are located also influence congregations' access to resources as well as clients' access to alternative service providers. So, all models include six dummy variables for various regions of the country, plus a dummy variable indicating whether a congregation is located in an urban environment. Another control variable designed to highlight access to resources is a dummy variable indicating whether a congregation is located in a census tract with a poverty rate of at least 30%.

Also included in all analyses is a control variable for the year in which the congregation was founded. This is a continuous variable. The justification for the inclusion of this variable is found in the work of Billingsley (1992:425), who notes that older African-American churches are more likely to engage in community outreach. Billingsley (1992:376) also contends that the level of education of the senior minister of African-American congregations positively influences community outreach efforts.

The quantitative analysis outlined above cannot suggest an answer to research question #4, which asks whether theological conservatism means the same thing to African-American religious congregations as it does to other congregations. If the answer to research question #3 is, "Yes, there is a significant interaction between race and theological orientation in the support of social service programs", then research question #4 asks, "Why is this the case?" The work of scholars like McRoberts (1999) suggests that theological conservatism does not have the same implications for social engagement among African-American congregations as it does among other congregations. McRoberts does not suggest a mechanism to explain this, and doing so

requires looking into the different cultural meanings attached to ideas and terms like "theological liberalism" and "theological conservatism."

In order to move toward understanding these symbolic differences, I conducted a series of exploratory interviews with clergy (and one deacon) from nine African-American and ten non-African-American religious congregations during the summer and fall of 2005. I found these respondents through a systematic convenience sample. The interview questions are listed in Appendix A. The intention of the questions was to establish whether each respondent's congregation would be considered theologically liberal or conservative (or in the middle) according to established sociological indicators, such as a belief on Biblical inerrancy. Then, I determined whether the respondent considered his/her congregation to be politically and theologically liberal or conservative (or in the middle). As part of this questioning, I asked respondents why they classified their congregations in the theological and political categories that they chose. Responses to these questions amounted to definitions of theological conservatism and liberalism. Comparisons of these definitions between the African-American and non-African-American respondents yielded insights into the different meanings of "theological liberalism" and "theological conservatism" across races.

Chapter 2 answers the first 2 research questions listed above. The analysis shows whether or not African-American congregations are more likely than other congregations to support any social service programs at all. I also examine the congregations that do support social services in order to uncover if African-American congregations participate in a larger number of programs. In addition to shedding light on the broader picture of

race and social service activity, the analysis in chapter 2 looks at individual types of social service programs in order to see if African-American congregations focus their efforts on certain types of social engagement. This addresses the concerns raised by scholars like Lincoln and Mamiya regarding the types of community involvement undertaken by African-American churches.

In chapter 3, the focus shifts to research question #3, as the analysis looks at the interaction between race and theological orientation as it affects social service support by congregations. The discovery of a significant interaction effect suggests that theological conservatism does have a different meaning across racial lines. This motivates the qualitative research detailed in chapter 4. Sociologists of religion have established various criteria to determine if individuals/congregations should be classified as theologically conservative, such as the belief in the Bible as the inerrant word of God. Our understanding of the interaction between race and theological orientation in American religion could be improved, however, if we move beyond superimposing pre-existing definitions of "liberalism" and "conservatism" onto congregations. Instead, let's find out just what these terms mean to people on the ground, because that's where social engagement takes place.

Studying the relationship between race and social service provision is especially important now, since President Bush's Faith Based Initiative has given religious organizations easier access to government funding for social service programs. Existing work (Chaves 1999) shows that African-American congregations are significantly more likely than others to be willing to seek out government funds for social service activity.

A study of what types of programs these congregations already support stands to shed light on the direction(s) in which a portion of federal funds could potentially be sent in the near future.

However, this study has a greater significance than just raising our understanding of public policy. As sociologists of religion, many of us continue to believe (and to teach others) that theological conservatives are socially disengaged. If conventional sociological wisdom about liberals and conservatives does not apply to African-American congregations, then we must face up to the possibility that it is inapplicable to whites as well. It is crucially important to pursue this insight so that the sociology of religion can remain relevant to the contemporary landscape.

CHAPTER 2: RACE DIFFERENCES IN CONGREGATIONAL SOCIAL

SERVICE ACTIVITY

The data from the National Congregations Study allow for the study of

congregational social service activity in a number of ways. At the most basic level, the

survey asked whether congregations supported any social service programs at all. This

permits the comparison of congregations who do support at least one program with those

that do not. Survey respondents representing congregations that do support social

services were asked to list all these programs. The total number of social service

programs supported by a congregation is one indicator of the congregation's total level of

social service activity. There are, of course, other ways of operationalizing the total level

of activity. Chaves and Tsitsos (2001) used NCS data to analyze congregations total

level of activity. The authors operationalized social service activity in three different

ways: total number of social service programs, total amount of money spent on social

services in the past 12 months, and total number of volunteers working on social services.

The results for all three were similar, suggesting that they could be used interchangeably.

The control variables in their analyses were almost identical to those in this paper,

suggesting that total number of programs is a reliable indicator of overall level of

activity.

From the lists of programs provided by NCS respondents, it is possible to determine whether African-American congregations focus their social service activity in different directions in comparison with congregations of other races. For the second part of this chapter, the focus shifts to congregational support of nine types of social service programs: food, housing, clothing, homeless, educational (excluding religious education), domestic abuse, tutoring/mentoring, substance abuse, and job-related programs.

In the regression analyses reported in this chapter, the main independent variable is the race of the congregation. The NCS included a question asking informants what percent of regular adult participants are "black or African American." In previous examinations of the social service activities of African-American congregations, researchers have used different criteria to designate what exactly makes a congregation "African-American." Cavendish (2000) defines "black congregations" as "those whose respondents reported African as the 'most frequently represented nationality' in the congregation" (375). For Chaves and Higgins (1992), at least 80% of the members of a congregation must be black in order for the congregation to be considered African-American. This study employs the same 80% criterion in designating African-American congregations. In the NCS sample, there are 156 such congregations.

Modeling

The initial analysis determines what percentage of congregations supports at least one social service program, followed by what percentage of congregational attendees are part of these congregations. The regression analyses begin with a logistic regression

analysis performed on the entire NCS sample in order to determine if African-American

congregations are more (or less) likely to support any social service programs at all.

Following this logistic regression is an OLS regression on the subset of congregations

that do participate in at least one program in order to discover whether there is a

relationship between race and the total number of programs supported. The second part

of the paper consists of logistic regression analyses on the nine dependent variables. Like

the OLS model, these regression models are limited to the subsample of NCS

congregations that support at least one program. All the regression models in this paper

use only cases with non-missing values for the dependent variable. When there are

missing data for independent variables, mean values (for continuous variables) and zeros

(for dummy variables) are substituted. Missing value indicators are then included in each

model to confirm that this strategy does not affect the substantive results.

All regressions use unweighted data, and diagnostic tests recommended by

Winship and Radbill (1994) were performed in order to look for specification error that

can stem from the fact that the probability of a congregation's appearing in the NCS

sample is related to its size. The tests revealed that no models had their fit statistics

significantly improved by the addition of interaction terms involving size.

Results

Table 2.1 shows what percentage of congregations supports at least one social

service program. The last row of the table shows the percentage of congregational

attendees who attend the congregations that support social services. The larger numbers

in this row (relative to those in the row above it) are a result of the fact that larger

congregations are more likely to support social services. A comparison of the figures

across races indicates that African-American congregations are not more likely to support

social services in general. If anything, they are slightly less likely to do so, when

compared with congregations of other racial compositions. This finding lends support to

the conclusion of Chaves& Higgins (1992) cited above.

Table 2.1. Frequencies of Support for Congregational Social Services

	All Congregations	African-American Congregations	Non-African-American Congregations
% of Congregations	57.1	55.4	57.4
% of Attendees of Congregations	75.5	69.5	76.3

Source: National Congregations Study (1998)

        Do the results in table 2.1 hold up after controlling for other factors? The next

two logistic regression analyses attempt to answer this question. The first logistic

regression analysis reveals that congregational race is not a significant predictor of

support for at least one social service program. The insignificance of the race variable

indicates that African-American congregations are not more (or less) likely than other

congregations to engage in any social service activity at all. Table 2.2 shows the

complete results of this regression analysis. The significant predictors of congregational

Table 2.2. Logistic regression on congregations' support of at least 1 program

Independent Variables	b	
Religious Traditions[a]		
Mainline Protestant	0.909	***
Roman Catholic	0.115	
Theological Orientation[b]		
Conservative	-0.401	
Moderate	-0.463	
Congregational Features		
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	0.233	
Urban census tract	-0.088	
Founding Date	0.001	
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	0.849	***
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.272	
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.428	*
Demographic Variables		
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year (logged)	0.005	
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year (logged)	-0.287	
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree (logged)	0.444	*
Race		
80+% African-American	0.178	
Constant	-4.012	
-2 Log Likelihood	1163.4	
Number of congregations	1232	

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

support for at least one social service program include affiliation with a mainline

Protestant denomination. This reinforces findings reported elsewhere (Chaves et al.

2001) regarding the prominent public presence of mainline Protestant denominations in

comparison with conservative/evangelical Protestant denominations. The remaining

significant predictors include variables reflecting congregational resources, such as size.

Table 2.2 also reveals that congregations led by clergy with graduate degrees and

congregations with more college-educated laity are more likely to support at least one

social service program.

Shifting focus to congregations' overall level of service activity, as

operationalized by the total number of programs that they support, the race variable is not

significant. Table 2.3 presents the results of this OLS regression.2 As in the first

analysis, the significant predictors include variables reflecting denominational affiliation

(for mainline Protestant congregations), as well as congregational resource- and

education-levels. Larger congregations and urban congregations tend to support more

programs, as do congregations led by college-educated clergy or composed of college-

educated lay members. So, among congregations that do support social service

programs, African-American congregations are not more (or less) likely to support more

social service programs.

Table 2.4 compares the percentage of non-African-American congregations

supporting nine types of programs with the percentage of African-American

congregations supporting these same types of programs. Table 2.4 is divided into two

panels, panel A for programs that favor African-American congregations, and panel B for

programs that favor non-African-American congregations. It is notable that the programs

in panel A all require more intensive, personal interaction between people on the giving

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2 To see the complete results of an OLS analysis with the same dependent variable (total number of programs supported) and a similar group of independent variables, see Chaves & Tsitsos (2001).

Table 2.3. OLS regression on congregations' total # of social service programs supported

Independent Variables	b	S.E.
Religious Traditions[a]		
Mainline Protestant	1.000 ***	0.256
Roman Catholic	-0.580	0.278
Theological Orientation[b]		
Conservative	-0.407	0.3
Moderate	-0.356	0.296
Congregational Features		
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	0.452	0.297
Urban census tract	-0.383 *	0.208
Founding Date	0.000	0.002
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	1.770 ***	0.245
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.280	0.214
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.581 **	0.226
Demographic Variables		
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year (logged)	-0.434	0.232
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year (logged)	-0.082	0.231
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree (logged)	0.728 *	0.277
Race		
80+% African-American	0.242	0.324
Constant	-1.66	
R-squared	0.191	
Number of congregations	927	

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

and receiving ends of services than the programs in panel B. Possible exceptions to this

are domestic abuse programs, which are in panel B, but the contrast between panel A and

B is still sharp. The programs in panel A cannot exist without intensive, personal

interaction between servers and clients.

Table 2.4. Racial differences in social service participation

PANEL A: Programs for which differences favor African-American congregations

Program	% of non-African-American congregations supporting program	% of African-American congregations supporting program
Education (non-religious)	11	12
Job-related	2	5
Substance abuse	3	5
Mentoring	2	5

PANEL B: Programs for which differences favor non-African-American congregations

Food	58	43
Housing	34	29
Clothing	22	12
Homelessness	15	13
Domestic abuse	8	1

Note: No significance levels are given for these crosstabulation results, because these calculations employ data weighted inversely to congregational size. Standard chi-square calculations are not valid for weighted data.
Source: National Congregations Study (1998)

Another point to note about the race differences reported in table 2.4 relates to the findings of recent studies of congregational race and social service activity (Chaves and Higgins 1992, Cavendish 2000). Recall that these studies found African-American congregations to be more likely to support programs that direct aid to the underprivileged in the surrounding community. Of the nine types of programs in table 2.4, some of these

programs, such as food, clothing, housing, substance abuse, and homelessness programs, are clearly directed at aiding underprivileged people. Other programs analyzed here, however, are less clearly focused on helping the disprivileged. These include mentoring, job, and education programs. Although the clients for a mentoring program, for instance, might be disprivileged, they are not necessarily suffering in the same way as someone who would starve to death without the help of a food program. With the exception of programs for substance abuse, programs that are clearly directed at aiding underprivileged people, such as food, clothing, housing, and homelessness programs, are found in panel B of table 2.4, for programs with differences favoring non-African-American congregations. The programs with differences favoring African-American congregations, meanwhile, are mostly programs which help people who are not so clearly disprivileged, such as non-religious education and mentoring programs.

A third point to notice in examining table 2.4 is that the three programs in panel A include all three education-related programs. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) criticize African-American congregations for not supporting enough programs that address the "major issues" facing African-American youth, such as high rates of unemployment and teenage pregnancy (1990:332). Out of the nine types of programs considered in this paper, the types that would seem relevant to such issues are (non-religious) education, mentoring, and job programs. Table 2.4 reveals that African-American congregations participate in these programs at <u>higher</u> rates than other congregations. It is true that not all education programs are aimed at young recipients, but the target clients of programs

are not clearly indicated by all survey respondents. As a result, it is not possible to

determine exactly what percentage of such programs is aimed at which constituencies.

Table 2.5 presents coefficients from four logistic regression analyses in which the

dependent variables are congregational participation in four types of programs. I limit

my analysis of specific types of social service programs to those congregations that

support at least one program. This is because the inclusion of hundreds of congregations

that do not support any programs can skew the results of an analysis of support for any

one type of program. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that influence

specific congregational social service activities, I limit my analysis to those

congregations that are actually active.

   Although I performed regression analyses on all nine of the program types in

table 2.4, the racial differences for the programs not included in table 2.5 disappear with

the addition of control variables. For the sake of brevity, these non-significant results are

not reported. Table 2.5 shows that the only program which African-American

congregations are significantly less likely to support, controlling for other factors, is

clothing programs. In classifying the various programs in terms of whether they are

directed at disprivileged clients, I consider this to be a program clearly intended for the

disprivileged, like a food or housing/shelter program. Considered this way, then, this

result runs counter to the conclusions of Chaves and Higgins (1992) and of Cavendish

(2000).

   The remaining programs for which there are significant race effects even after

taking into account controls are programs in which African-American congregations are

Table 2.5. Logistic regressions on individual program types

Independent Variables	Clothing	Substance Abuse	Tutoring/ Mentoring	Education
Religious Traditions[a]				
Mainline Protestant	-0.361	0.271	0.380	0.365
Roman Catholic	-0.258	0.329	-0.908	-0.355
Theological Orientation[b]				
Conservative	0.522	-0.116	-0.562	-0.589
Moderate	0.443	-0.423	-0.089	-0.552
Congregational Features				
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	-0.359	0.165	0.710	-0.216
Urban census tract	0.021	0.600	-0.226	0.535
Total # of programs (logged)	3.334***	2.888***	2.8***	3.583***
Founding Date	-0.003	0.000	-0.006	-0.002
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	-0.363	-0.640	-0.076	0.259
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.304	.981*	0.842	-0.115
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.119	-0.455	0.618	-0.097
% Lay Leaders (logged)	-1.419	1.611	3.616	1.723
Demographic Variables (all logged)				
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year	-0.068	0.050	0.082	-0.152
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year	-0.129	.-087	0.059	0.102
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree	-0.341	0.167	0.203	0.666
Race				
80+% African-American	-0.816*	1.006*	1.254*	.941*
Constant	1.613	-9.588	1.402	-0.819
-2 Log Likelihood	952.29	383.33	259.13	638.19
Number of congregations	928	928	928	928

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

more likely to participate: tutoring/mentoring, substance abuse, and non-religious education programs. The results of the logistic regression analyses of support of these programs are reported in table 2.5. Unlike clothing programs, these are programs that require intensive personal interaction with clients. Moreover, with the exception of substance abuse programs, the programs which African-American congregations are more likely to support are not clearly directed at the disprivileged.

Discussion & Conclusions

The primary focus of this paper has been on race as a factor in congregational support of social service programs. The first main finding of this study has been the absence of overall race effects on whether congregations support social service programs, as well as on the total number of programs supported. This finding echoes the conclusion of Chaves and Higgins (1992) that African-American congregations are not more involved in their communities overall than other congregations. Rather, the community involvement of African-American congregations is concentrated in certain types of activities. In contrast to the findings of Chaves and Higgins (1992) and Cavendish (2000), however, the analyses here reveal that African-American congregations are actually not more likely than other congregations to support most of the programs that are clearly directed at the disprivileged. In fact, clothing and substance abuse programs are the only such programs for which any significant race effect endures even after controlling for other variables, and the race effect for African-American congregations'

support of clothing programs is actually negative, the opposite direction from what one would expect based on previous research.

The findings reported in this paper, particularly the significantly positive race effect on mentoring and education programs, counters the assertion by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) that African-American congregations are not doing enough in areas that are critical to African-American youth. If they are not doing enough, at least they are doing more than other congregations. Why is this so? Perhaps African-American congregations have responded to the argument put forth by Lincoln and Mamiya that educational programs are what African-Americans really need for future success. Even if some of these mentoring and educational programs are not directed at young people, the pattern of results suggests that there is something about African-American congregations that makes them more likely to support social service programs that involve more direct, in-depth interaction with clients of all ages. This mysterious "something" could be as simple as the fact that the African-American church has been a central element in the lives of the African-American communities throughout the U.S. for so many years. Perhaps this more central role makes the African-American church more willing/able to engage clients in social service programs that require increased commitments of time and energy.

Indeed, in Ammerman's (1997) case-studies of American congregations, congregations with more African-American members seem to support more time-intensive social service programs than other congregations. Price (2000:69) discusses the dilemmas faced by predominately white congregations attempting to support tutoring

programs in a largely African-American housing project in Chicago.   Problems arise

from the distance (along racial, geographic, and/or socioeconomic dimensions) between

service providers and recipients. African-American congregations providing social

services may not be so distant from their clients along one or more of these dimensions,

thereby making them more able/willing to support more time-intensive programs like

tutoring/mentoring. To test this would, however, require more detailed data on the clients

served by social service programs. Such data would also help address the question of

whether programs are directed at young versus adult clients.

Previous studies of congregational race and social service activity (Chaves and

Higgins 1992, Cavendish 2000) found African-American congregations to be more likely

to support programs that direct aid to the underprivileged in the surrounding community.

The fact that Cavendish (2000) found a positive relationship between race and support of

these social services, while this paper has found relationships that are sometimes positive,

sometimes negative, and sometimes insignificant, is probably because Cavendish

analyzed all social service programs as one group, while this paper has analyzed different

program types separately.

The pattern of results reported here suggests that, when congregations decide to

participate in social services, including the more popular ones like food and clothing

programs, there is something going on besides simply asking, "What does the community

need, and how can we supply it?" If such questions did determine the social services

supported by congregations, then it would be reasonable to expect that a congregation's

being located in a poor census tract and/or having a higher percentage of poor attendees

would have a significant positive effect on supporting programs that are clearly for the disprivileged. The logistic regression results in table 2.2 on support for clothing programs, as well as unreported analyses of support for food, housing, and homelessness programs, reveal that this is not the case. What could explain this? Perhaps there are certain isomorphic tendencies among congregations as organizations, such that congregations support popular programs such as Meals on Wheels and Habitat for Humanity because they are familiar charities that are immediately identifiable as "natural" activities. This suggests an avenue for further research into congregational social services.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) summarize various research projects that find "strong relationships between city characteristics and organizational attributes" (1991:66) in the early existence of various industries. As industries age, however, adoption of new attributes by organizations "is not predicted by city characteristics, but is related to institutional definitions of the legitimate structural form" (1991:66). A similar process of institutionalization seems to be at work in the provision of social services by congregations. Perhaps patterns of congregations' social service provision mapped more clearly onto the needs of their environments when such services were initially provided. At this time, though, NCS data appear to reveal a mismatch between the needs of communities and the services provided by congregations. This mismatch has the potential to grow even more pronounced since the passage of welfare reform, as politicians call attention to congregations as providers of services that these congregations may not necessarily be willing/able to provide.

For a long time, African-American congregations have had a reputation for high levels of social involvement and service, but this has been based more upon anecdotes than upon comparative evidence. The comparative work that has emerged has been limited by non-representative samples (Chaves and Higgins 1992) or limited to congregations within a single denomination (Cavendish 2000). The analyses reported here reveal that African-American religious congregations are not more (or less) likely to support social service activity in general. Instead, they are less likely than other congregations to participate in some types of social services and more likely to support others. It is encouraging, however, that the service programs which African-American religious congregations are more likely to support are the ones that aim to address some of the pressing needs and obstacles facing so many members of the African-American community, including young people.

CHAPTER 3: THE INTERACTION OF RACE & THEOLOGICAL

ORIENTATION

The analyses in the previous chapter looked at variation among different types of

social service programs, showing that African-American congregations are more likely to

support certain varieties of social services. In this chapter, I examine variation among

African-American congregations in an attempt to determine if certain types of these

congregations are more or less likely to participate in social services. Specifically, I am

interested in using NCS data to answer the following question: Does theological

conservatism have a similar effect on civic engagement among African-American

congregations as it does among congregations of other racial/ethnic compositions? Since

"civic engagement" is a fairly broad term encompassing many different types of activity,

in this chapter I analyze two different types of engagement. In the first part of the

chapter, as in the previous chapter, I examine congregational social service activity as an

indicator of civic engagement. In the second part of the chapter, I look at various forms

of political activism on the part of congregations as another type of civic engagement.

Data

Data from the National Congregations Study is useful in answering the question

raised above. One NCS item asked respondents, "*Theologically speaking,* would your

congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle?" As the wording of the question suggests, respondents could choose from three possible replies. These answers were transformed into two dummy variables, with "more on the liberal side" as the omitted category. Congregations whose respondents answered "more on the conservative side" were coded "1" on the theologically conservative variable, while congregations whose respondents answered "right in the middle" were coded "1" on the theologically moderate variable. Responses to this question allow for the creation of an interaction term for African-American congregations that are theologically conservative. Findings for these congregations can then be compared with African-American congregations that are theologically liberal.

Modeling

As in the previous chapter, the analyses begin with a logistic regression analysis performed on the entire NCS sample in order to determine if theologically conservative African-American congregations are more (or less) likely to support any social service programs at all. Following this logistic regression is an OLS regression on the subset of congregations that do participate in at least one program in order to discover whether there is a relationship between race and the total number of programs supported. The second part of the paper consists of nine logistic regression analyses. The dependent variables for these nine regressions are the nine individual program types discussed in the previous chapter. Like the OLS model, these regression models are limited to the subsample of NCS congregations that support at least one program. All the regression

models in this paper use only cases with non-missing values for the dependent variable.

When there are missing data for independent variables, mean values (for continuous

variables) and zeros (for dummy variables) are substituted. Missing value indicators are

then included in each model to confirm that this strategy does not affect the substantive

results.

All regressions use unweighted data, and diagnostic tests recommended by

Winship and Radbill (1994) were performed in order to look for misspecification error

that can stem from the fact that the probability of a congregation's appearing in the NCS

sample is related to its size. The tests revealed that no models had their fit statistics

significantly improved by the addition of interaction terms involving size.

Results

Table 3.1 shows the results of the first logistic regression analysis. Adding the

interaction term for race and theological conservatism reveals that theologically

conservative, non-African-American congregations are significantly less likely than

theologically liberal, non-African-American congregations to support social services.

This result lends support to the numerous researchers, discussed above, who have argued

that theological conservatism leads to less civic engagement. This pattern, however, does

not hold true for African-American congregations. In fact, the opposite is true for these

congregations. Among African-American congregations, theological conservatism

encourages social service participation.

Table 3.1. Logistic regression on congregational support for at least 1 program

Independent Variables	B	S.E.
Religious Traditions[a]		
Mainline Protestant	0.831 ***	0.235
Roman Catholic	0.034	0.236
Theological Orientation[b]		
Conservative	-0.723 *	0.327
Moderate	-0.519	0.317
Congregational Features		
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	0.242	0.258
Urban census tract	-0.142	0.169
Founding Date	0.001	0.002
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	0.871 ***	0.195
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.311 *	0.150
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.391 *	0.174
Demographic Variables		
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year (logged)	-0.001	0.193
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year (logged)	-0.260	0.194
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree (logged)	0.477 *	0.197
Race		
80+% African-American	-0.467	0.3
Interaction		
African-American * Theologically conservative	1.518 ***	0.441
Constant	-3.97	3.447
-2 Log Likelihood	1151.6	
Number of congregations	1232	

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Figure 3.1 graphically illustrates the interaction effect between theological orientation and racial/ethnic composition. The graph shows that, among theologically liberal congregations, non-African-American congregations are more likely than African-
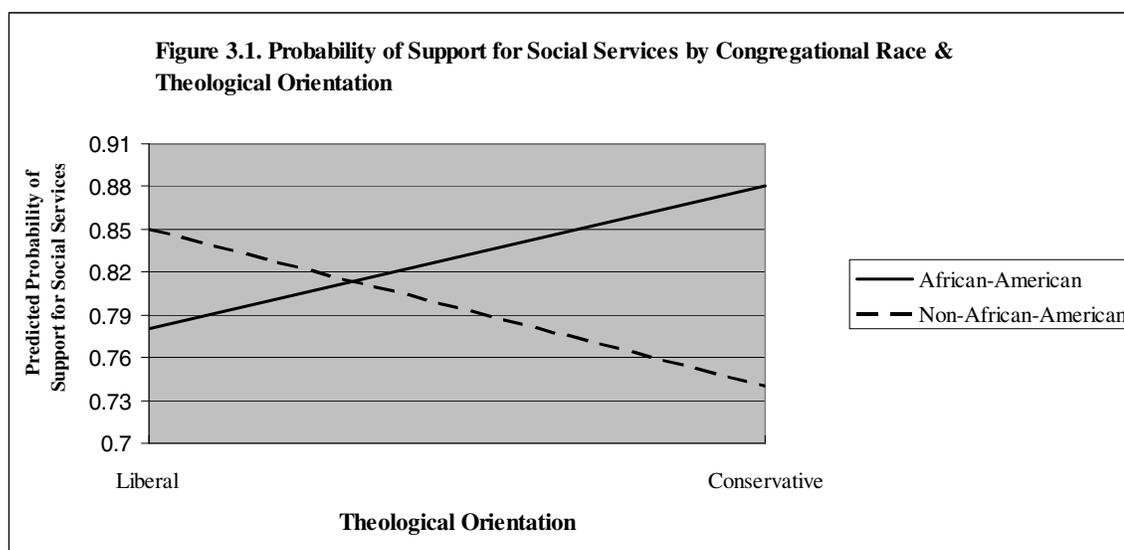
American congregations to support at least one social service program. Among

theologically conservative congregations, this pattern is reversed, as African-American

congregations are more likely than non-African-American congregations to participate in

social services. In fact, as the figure reveals, theologically conservative African-

American congregations are significantly more likely than <u>all</u> other congregations,

regardless of their theological orientation or racial/ethnic composition, to support at least

one social service program. While the line in figure 3.1 for African-American

congregations has a positive slope, it is not clear from the graph if that slope is

significant. Looking to the regression results in table 3.1 do not make this any more

apparent, because interpreting the results of equations with interaction terms can be

tricky. Further analysis reveals, however, that theological conservatism does not have a

significantly positive effect on the social service activity of African-American

congregations. Rather, it does not have a dampening effect on this activity in the same

way that it does for non-African-American congregations.3

Shifting focus to an OLS analysis of the total number of programs supported by

congregations, the inclusion of the interaction term does not alter the pattern of results

reported in the previous chapter. As with the logistic regression analysis reported in table

3.1, the OLS analysis includes only congregation that support at least one program. Table

3.2 shows the results of this OLS analysis. Among congregations that support at least

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3 By computing a dummy variable coded "1" for non-African-American congregations
and re-running the regression analysis with an interaction term for theologically
conservative non-African-American congregations, the coefficient for theological
conservatism indicates the effect of theological conservatism upon African-American
congregations. This coefficient is positive but not significant.

one program, mainline Protestant congregations and larger congregations participate in more programs. Also, congregations led by higher-educated clergy and congregations composed of more college-educated members support more social services. African-American congregations, regardless of their theological orientation, are neither more nor less likely to support a greater number of programs than non-African-American congregations.

Figure 3.1. Probability of Support for Social Services by Congregational Race & Theological Orientation

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998
Note: The downward slope of the line for non-African-American congregations is significantly different from zero, but the upward slope of the line for African-American congregations is not significantly different from zero.

So, if theologically conservative African-American congregations are more likely than other congregations to support at least one social service program, but they are not more likely to support a larger number of programs, are there any individual program types which theologically conservative African-American congregations are more likely to support? Answering this question involves performing nine different logistic

Table 3.2. OLS regression on congregations' total # of social service programs supported

Independent Variables	b	S.E.
Religious Traditions[a]		
Mainline Protestant	0.972 ***	0.257
Roman Catholic	-0.601 *	0.279
Theological Orientation[b]		
Conservative	-0.505	0.31
Moderate	-0.359	0.296
Congregational Features		
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	0.448	0.296
Urban census tract	-0.407	0.209
Founding Date	0.000	0.002
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	1.765 ***	0.245
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.303	0.215
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.579 **	0.226
Demographic Variables		
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year (logged)	-0.435	0.232
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year (logged)	-0.076	0.231
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree (logged)	0.730 **	0.277
Race		
80+% African-American	-0.109	0.423
Interaction		
African-American * Theologically conservative	0.715	0.554
Constant	-1.763	
R-squared	0.193	
Number of congregations	927	

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

regression analyses for the nine social service program types discussed in the previous

chapter. Adding the interaction term for the interaction between race and theological

conservatism does not alter the conclusions of the last chapter for seven of the nine program types. So, I will not report those results here. However, the interaction term significantly alters the understanding of racial differences in congregational support for social services addressing housing needs and the needs of the homeless.

Table 3.3 shows the results for the two logistic regression analyses with housing and homelessness programs, respectively, as the dependent variables. The coefficients in the housing program analysis reveal that African-American congregations are not more (or less) likely to support housing programs when compared with congregations of other races. This result is no different than the one reported in the previous chapter. However, this analysis shows that theologically conservative African-American congregations <u>are</u> significantly more likely to support these programs. This result would appear to run counter to the view of theologically conservative congregations as socially disengaged.

The analysis of support for homelessness programs leads to a similar conclusion about theological conservatism, but it also sheds new light on African-American congregations' social service programs more generally. Whereas the analysis in the last chapter indicated that African-American congregations are not more or less likely to participate in programs to address homelessness than other congregations, controlling for theologically conservative African-American congregations reveals that African-American congregations are actually significantly <u>less</u> likely than non-African-American congregations to support such programs. Among African-American congregations, meanwhile, theologically conservative congregations are significantly <u>more</u> likely than liberal congregations to participate in programs addressing homelessness.

Table 3.3. Logistic regressions on individual program types

Independent Variables	Program	
	Housing	Homeless
Religious Traditions[a]		
Mainline Protestant	0.346	-0.281
Roman Catholic	-0.493 *	-0.464
Theological Orientation[b]		
Conservative	-0.621 *	-0.436
Moderate	-0.037	0.035
Congregational Features		
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	-0.059	0.081
Urban census tract	-0.047	0.864 ***
Total # of programs	3.461 ***	2.841 ***
Founding Date	-0.002	0.000
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	0.183	0.077
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.121	0.011
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.324	0.279
Demographic Variables (all logged)		
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year	0.181	0.076
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year	-0.434 *	-0.307
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree	0.149	0.094
Race		
80+% African-American	-0.293	-1.234 *
Interaction		
African-American * Theologically conservative	1.059 *	1.832 **
Constant	0.490	-4.198
-2 Log Likelihood	1046.17	846.04
Number of congregations	928	928

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

In the NCS data, there is some overlap between housing programs and programs to address homelessness. Not all homelessness programs are also classified as housing

programs, and not all housing programs are classified as homelessness programs, but

some are classified as both. However, if the overlap was so severe that measuring

housing programs was the equivalent of measuring homelessness programs, then the

pattern of coefficients in the two regression analyses in table 3.3 would not differ in any

meaningful ways. The different coefficients for the African-American dummy variable

between the two analyses are clear evidence that, whatever the degree of overlap in

classifying housing and homelessness social service programs in the NCS dataset, the

two program types are not equivalent.

Theological Conservatism, Race, & Political Engagement

In their analysis of NCS data, Beyerlein & Chaves (2003) examine the political

activities of religious congregations in the U.S. According to Beyerlein and Chaves,

African-American congregations are "particularly more likely to engage in two political

practices: bringing political candidates to congregations to speak and having a group to

get people registered to vote" (2003:240). Additionally, they find that African-American

congregations are significantly more likely than congregations of other racial

compositions to offer opportunities for political involvement to their members, as well as

to have groups which meet to discuss politics (2003:238-239).

Any assertion that African-Americans are more likely to support political activism

by religious organizations runs counter to Gary T. Marx's 1967 analysis of survey

responses of a nationwide sample of African-Americans. Marx concluded that higher

levels of religious involvement hinder militancy. In response to this, Nelsen & Nelsen

(1975)), as well as Hunt & Hunt (1977), argue that Marx's conclusions are misleading because of his failure to control for factors such as sectarianism. They define sectarianism as "an extreme religious conservatism or an otherworldly orientation" (1975:7), and they report that such conservatism "acts as an opiate for militancy" (1975:123) among black people. In their own analyses of Marx's data, Nelsen & Nelsen and Hunt & Hunt find an inverse relationship between sectarianism and militancy. Nelsen & Nelsen also report that "[r]ising educational levels are coupled with a decrease in sectarianism" (1975:123). The work of Nelsen & Nelsen suggests that, among African-Americans, it is theologically conservatism, and not race, which lowers support for political activism.

Harris (1999), analyzing data from a 1966 survey of over 1000 African-American adults, reports that being "deeply religious" (which he defines in different places as being otherworldly and sectarian) has a significantly negative effect on campaign and protest activism among African-Americans. At the same time, he finds that being deeply religious has no effect on participation in voter activities (Harris 1999:60-65). Nevertheless, Harris's findings lend support to the argument that theological conservatism stifles civic engagement, at least on the political level. Along the same lines, Chaves and Higgins (1992) found that increasing scores on a conservatism scale had a significantly negative effect on all congregations' participation in local community and civil rights activities.

My analysis above indicates that theological conservatism does not stifle the civic engagement of African-American congregations, at least in the realm of social service

activity. In fact, theological conservatism has a significantly *positive* effect on African-American congregations' likelihood of supporting at least one social service program. Perhaps theological conservatism has a similarly positive (or at least a non-negative) effect on African-American congregations' political activity, as well. Such a finding would run counter to the conclusions of Marx (1967), Nelsen & Nelsen (1975), and Harris (1999), as described above, but those researchers based their conclusions upon relatively old data. It is plausible that the relationship between theological orientation and political activism has changed for African-American religious congregations in the decades since the Civil Rights Movement.

Modeling

Beyerlein and Chaves (2003) report that African-American congregations are more likely than congregations of other racial/ethnic compositions to support the four different types of political activity reported above. They also find no significant race difference in support for two types of political activity: groups to demonstrate/march and groups to lobby elected officials. The control variables used in their regression analyses are not identical to those that I employ, but they are similar. I begin with a logistic regression analysis on the likelihood of a congregation supporting any of the seven types of political activity analyzed by Beyerlein and Chaves. I perform this analysis twice, once with the interaction term for theologically conservative African-American congregations and once without it. Then, I perform logistic regression analyses on support for each of the seven types of political activities analyzed by Beyerlein and

Chaves, using my series of control variables and adding the interaction term for theologically conservative African-American congregations.

Results

As Chaves and Beyerlein report, 41% of congregations in the NCS sample supported at least one political activity (2003:235). Table 3.4 shows the results of two logistic regression analyses on the likelihood of a congregation supporting at least one of the seven types of political activity analyzed by Beyerlein and Chaves. The first analysis does not include the interaction term for theologically conservative African-American congregations, which is added for the second analysis. Theologically liberal congregations are more likely than both moderate and conservative congregations to support political activities. This finding is in line with previous research on the public engagement of liberal congregations (Chaves et al 2002), although it is notable that the coefficient for mainline Protestant congregations is insignificant. Also, congregations possessing more resources, in terms of size and money, are also more likely to be politically engaged.

The strong, positive race effect for African-American congregations reinforces Beyerlein and Chaves' conclusion that "explicitly partisan involvement in electoral politics is more common and more accepted among African-American congregations than among white congregations" (2003:240). The addition of the interaction term for theologically conservative African-American congregations does not change the pattern of results. The interaction term is not significant, and the coefficient for African-

Table 3.4. Logistic regression on congregations' support of at least 1 political activity

Independent Variables	b	b
Religious Traditions[a]		
Mainline Protestant	-0.133	-0.127
Roman Catholic	0.210	0.214
Theological Orientation[b]		
Conservative	-0.526 *	-0.509 *
Moderate	-0.562 *	-0.562 *
Congregational Features		
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	-0.022	-0.023
Urban census tract	-0.083	0.086
Founding Date	0.000	0.000
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	0.573 ***	0.574 ***
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.500 ***	0.498 ***
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.188	0.190
Demographic Variables		
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year (logged)	-0.256	-0.256
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year (logged)	0.116	0.115
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree (logged)	0.011	0.009
Race		
80+% African-American	0.902 ***	0.956 ***
Interaction		
African-American * Theologically conservative		-0.121
Constant	-3.852	-3.846
-2 Log Likelihood	1535.6	1535.5
Number of congregations	1235	1235

Source : National Congregations Study, 1998

Note : The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

American congregations remains highly significant in the positive direction. From this I

conclude that theological conservatism has a significantly negative effect on the political

activities of religious congregations regardless of their racial composition. So, while

theological conservatism has a positive effect on social service engagement for Africa-American congregations, it has a negative effect on their overall political engagement.

Table 3.5a shifts the focus from overall political activity to specific types of activities. As with the earlier analysis of congregational support for social service programs, I limit my analysis of specific types of political activities to those congregations that participate in at least one activity. This is because, as with social service activities, the inclusion of hundreds of congregations that do not support any programs or activities can skew the results of an analysis on support for any one type of program. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that influence specific congregational social and political activities, I limit my analysis to those congregations that are actually active.

The four types of activities in table 3.5a are the types for which Beyerlein and Chaves found significant race differences: relaying of political opportunities during worship, groups to discuss politics, visits by political candidates, and voter registration. In the analyses of relaying of political opportunities during worship and having groups to discuss politics, controlling for theologically conservative African-American congregations wipes out the significantly greater likelihood of support by African-American congregations. The addition of the interaction term does not wipe out the significant race effect on visits by political candidates, and voter registration. In fact, theologically conservative African-American congregations are even more likely to be visited by political candidates than are theologically liberal or moderate African-American congregations. This is the only type of political activity for which the

Table 3.5a. Logistic regressions on individual types of political activity

Independent Variables	Political Opportunities	Discuss Politics	Candidate Visit	Voter Registration
		Political Activity		
Religious Traditions[a]				
Mainline Protestant	0.506	1.051	0.416	-0.156
Roman Catholic	.945***	-0.162	-1.387*	0.413
Theological Orientation[b]				
Conservative	0.125	-1.093***	-0.348	0.335
Moderate	0.041	-0.504	0.149	0.061
Congregational Features				
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	-0.309	0.453	-0.214	0.113
Urban census tract	0.055	.650*	0.175	.726**
Founding Date	-0.001	-0.002	-0.004	0.001
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	-0.293	.778**	0.497	.579*
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	0.152	0.212	0.340	0.266
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.021	0.029	-0.195	-0.443
Demographic Variables (all logged)				
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year	-0.114	0.212	0.692	0.107
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year	0.254	0.443	0.724	.754*
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree	0.282	0.502	-0.250	-0.054
Race				
80+% African-American	0.091	0.005	1.254**	1.638***
Interaction				
African-American * Theologically conservative	0.091	0.283	1.423*	0.210
Constant	0.756	-1.889	0.149	-3.814
-2 Log Likelihood	884.99	620.90	360.28	612.34
Number of congregations	700	704	692	705

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

Table 3.5b. Logistic regressions on individual types of political activity

| | Political Activity | | |
| | March/ | | Voter |
Independent Variables	Demonstrate	Lobby	Guides
Religious Traditions[a]			
Mainline Protestant	-0.576	0.162	-.861***
Roman Catholic	1.054***	.923**	-1.238***
Theological Orientation[b]			
Conservative	.757*	-0.176	0.215
Moderate	0.483	0.289	-0.155
Congregational Features			
Census tract with 30+% poverty rate	.743*	.620*	0.039
Urban census tract	0.349	0.457	0.119
Founding Date	0.001	-0.004	0.003
Size (logged # of regular participants aged 18+)	0.430	0.369	0.399
Income (logged total $ received from all sources)	-0.230	0.352	0.031
Clergy with graduate degree[c]	0.441	0.010	0.136
Demographic Variables (all logged)			
% attenders with household income > $100,000/year	0.204	0.045	0.060
% attenders with household income < $25,000/year	0.287	0.068	0.163
% attenders with at least 4-year college degree	.642*	0.269	-0.270
Race			
80+% African-American	0.364	0.162	-0.224
Interaction			
African-American * Theologically conservative	-0.612	-0.047	0.630
Constant	-5.329	1.688	-5.767
-2 Log Likelihood	783.55	615.15	888.71
Number of congregations	705	705	703

Source: National Congregations Study, 1998

Note: The models include additional dummy variables indicating missing data on theological orientation, % with BA degree, % rich, % poor, % college educated, % lay leaders, clergy education, income, and founding date.

[a] The reference category is conservative Protestant. This set of dummy variables for religious tradition also includes a variable indicating a residual category exclusive of the other categories. It is only included in the models so that the religious tradition reference category is meaningful, and its coefficients are not reported.

[b] The reference category is theologically liberal.

[c] The reference category is clergy with less education. A dummy variable for no clergy is included, but not reported.

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

interaction term is significant. Another notable finding reported in table 3.5a is that theologically liberal congregations of all racial compositions are significantly more likely to discuss politics than are theologically conservative congregations.

Table 3.5b shows similar regression results for the remaining three types of political activities for which Beyerlein and Chaves found no race effects. A general difference between the results in tables 3.5a and 3.5b is that there are more denominational differences in support for the activities in table 3.5b then for those in table 3.5a. Theologically conservative congregations are more likely than mainline Protestants to march and/or demonstrate and to distribute voter guides. This makes sense in light of the rise of the Christian Right, although it is important to recall that theologically liberal congregations of all racial compositions are significantly more likely to discuss politics than are theologically conservative congregations, as reported in table 3.5a. Conservative Protestant congregations are also more likely than mainline Protestant and Catholic ones to distribute voter guides, but they are less likely than Catholic congregations to march/demonstrate or lobby elected officials, according to the NCS data

Discussion & Conclusions

Supporting social service programs is just one way in which religious congregations can be civically engaged. However, as the federal government steers more federal welfare funds towards faith-based organizations, it becomes all the more important to understand this form of congregational civic engagement. If African-American congregations are more likely to apply for such federal funds (Chaves 1999),

then understanding congregational social service provision involves asking what types of African-American congregations are more likely to participate in social services. The analysis in this chapter indicates that theologically conservative African-American congregations are significantly more likely than other congregations to support at least one program. This result runs counter to the expectation that theologically conservatism leads to less social engagement.

When it comes to the political engagement of religious congregations in the U.S., theological conservatism and theological moderation have an overall negative influence for congregations of all racial compositions. Looking at individual types of activities, moreover, reveals that theological conservatism has a significant dampening effect on the likelihood of congregations' having political discussion groups. However, theological conservatism actually has a positive effect on the likelihood of congregational participation in marches/demonstrations. As for theologically conservative African-American congregations, their patterns of political activity are similar to those other African-American congregations, except insofar as they are significantly more likely than congregations of other racial compositions and theological orientations to be visited by political candidates. Perhaps this is because theologically conservative African-American congregations are the contemporary carriers of the Civil Rights torch, working to help their communities and neighborhoods through social services and other projects. As such, they are more likely to be visited by candidates each year around the time of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

Nelsen & Nelsen (1975) posit that theological conservatism is an element of the broader concept of sectarianism. The analyses in this chapter indicate that theological conservatism operates differently among African-American congregations than among other congregations, at least in the area of social service provision. This suggests that the church/sect dualism does not apply to African-American congregations in the way that it (arguably) does to other congregations. To this point, Mukenge (1983) argues that the church/sect model is inapplicable to the black church, in part because "it obscures the coexistence of church-like, sect-like, and social movement characteristics in the black church" (7). Others (Eister 1967) criticize the church/sect dichotomy for being too subjective.

In this chapter, I have focused on theological conservatism and attempted to avoid broader pronouncements about church-like and sectarian religion in an attempt to avoid debates over the value of the church/sect model. Attempting to avoid one subjective area, however, has merely opened the door to another one. Specifically, the results in this chapter suggest that the meaning of "theological conservatism" is not constant across races. Theological conservatism is linked with higher levels of social engagement among African-American congregations and lower levels among other congregations. Determining why this is the case is not possible by analyzing the NCS data. Rather, it is necessary to go out and ask people what theological conservatism means to them.

CHAPTER 4: THE MEANING(S) OF THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

In order to understand if theological conservatism means something different across racial lines, I interviewed representatives (18 clergymen and 1 deacon) from 19 religious congregations in a mid-sized city in the southwestern US. The interview questions are attached to the end of this chapter as Appendix A. Question #2 asks, "Thinking of the regular adult participants in your congregation, what percentage are black or African-American?" I used responses to this question to classify congregations as African-American (at least 80%) and non-African-American (below 80%). Using this criterion, my interview sample included 9 African-American congregations. I used the responses to question #3 ("Does your congregation consider the Bible to be the inerrant word of God?") as an indicator of a congregation's theological orientation. This is based upon work by Hunter (1983), whose first identifying characteristic of contemporary Evangelicals is "the belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God" (1983:7). The answers to this question alone do not give a complete sense of a congregation's theological stance, however, because (as I discuss below), almost all my respondents answered "yes" to question #3. Responses to item #9 ("Theologically speaking, would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle? Can you tell me why you say this?") allowed me to gain a deeper sense of what theological conservatism means to my interviewees.

The interview data reveal that many of the characteristics traditionally identified with theological conservatism do not apply as strongly to African-Americans who identify themselves as theologically conservative. Two African-American respondents seemed to have reversed the definitions of theological liberalism and conservatism, indicating that the meanings of these terms are not as set in stone for African-Americans. Furthermore, the African-Americans in my sample who identify as theologically conservative did not cite the belief in Biblical inerrancy in their definitions of theological conservatism as much as the non-African-Americans interviewed. Also, while theological and political conservatism are strongly related for the non-African-Americans interviewed, this relationship was not so strong for the African-Americans.

How does this all relate to congregational support for social services? The African-American theological conservatives in my interview sample emphasize the importance of relationships and community in ways that the non-African-American theological conservatives did not. These emphases are not surprising, and they make sense in light of the history of African-American religion. Consideration of this history alongside the interview data suggests why theological conservatism does not hinder social engagement among African-American congregations.

Conservatism & Liberalism: Confused Meanings?

One interviewee, from a congregation identified as 99% African-American, described his congregation as more on the conservative side theologically. When asked to explain why he said this, the respondent described the members of his congregation as

"open to whatever subject comes before them, they're open to a discussion on it…they're a little more open-minded." Sensing that this definition of theological conservatism would usually be applied to theological liberalism, I asked the respondent to define theological liberalism, and he stated that it would be "exactly the opposite" of his description of conservatism. Along similar lines, another respondent from a 95% African-American congregation described his congregation as theologically liberal. When asked to explain this, the interviewee said that he believed the congregation to be liberal because its views came "from the old traditions," and it "hasn't really changed."4

These two interviewees from African-American congregations have reversed the traditional definitions of theological liberalism and conservatism. On one level, it seems possible to see this as a "fully/only" problem. In other words, an observer could dismiss this finding by pointing out that only two of the nine respondents from African-American congregations performed this reversal of definition. Another observer, however, could state that fully two of these nine respondents reversed the definitions in this way. I choose to side with those who believe that it is notable that fully two respondents did this.

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4 In tabulating the various frequency statistics in this chapter, I classified these two congregations' theological orientations as their respective representatives had classified them. If I had chosen to classify them differently, then one change would be in the "Participate in Social Service Programs" row of Table 4.1. Since the congregation whose representative identified it as conservative yet seemed to be describing liberalism was the only African-American congregation that did not support social services, the number in the African-American cell of this row would rise from 4 to 5. Also, re-classifying the two African-American congregations' theological orientations would result in changes to the African-American section of Table 4.2. Specifically, the number in the politically liberal cell would decrease to zero, and the number in the politically conservative cell would rise to 2. None of these changes, however, would affect the overall arguments and conclusions of the chapter. It should also be noted that none of the quotations in this

None of the interviewees from non-African-American congregations made the same reversal.

While these interview data do not indicate that theological conservatism means something different across racial lines, they do suggest that the definition of theological conservatism is not as consistent in African-American congregations as it is in other, non-African-American congregations. In his analysis of the history of African-American evangelicalism, Sernett (1991) discusses conflicts within the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA), which was founded in 1963. In the 1970s, NBEA leaders were unable to agree on whether to endorse "biblically-based 'expositional' theology or culturally-based black 'experiential' theology" (Sernett 1991:144). While these past conflicts do not explain why some African-American Christians would reverse traditionally accepted meanings of theological conservatism and liberalism, they could help explain the inconsistency expressed by my African-American interviewees in their definitions of theological conservatism. With the lack of consensus within larger church organizations, African-American Christians have more freedom to define what conservatism means to them.

Biblical Literalism & Theological Conservatism

Of the ten representatives from non-African-American congregations interviewed, six identified their congregations as theologically conservative. For these six respondents, theological conservatism is strongly linked to Biblical literalism. All six

chapter, except for the ones describing their seeming reversal of theological conservatism

individuals claimed that their congregations believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of

God. When asked to explain why they described their congregations as theologically

conservative, five of these respondents cited Biblical inerrancy and/or strictness of

interpretation of the Bible. One interviewee from a congregation with no African-

American members stated:

"That means, pretty simply, 'What part of "Thou Shalt Not" don't you
understand?' God said something. We believe He meant it. We don't think it's
open to man's interpretation. It's basically just a literal interpretation of what the
Scriptures say."

Explaining the difference between theological liberals and conservatives, another

interviewee from a theologically conservative congregation with no African-American

members asserted:

"As I understand those terms, a liberal theologically would take the Bible and its
wording, often would take it to be other than strictly literal. A conservative
theologically would take the Bible to be literally saying what happened, that the
miracles really happened, for example."

Another interviewee's definition of theological conservatism is a good example of

the emphasis placed upon strictness of biblical interpretation. This respondent also

represents a congregation with no African-American members:

"An understanding of what the Scriptures say in terms of what God's attitude is
toward mankind and the fact that He is strict. What He says goes, kind of that
way."

Of the nine respondents from African-American congregations, five identified

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and liberalism, come from the interviewees from these two congregations.

their congregations as theologically conservative, two as in the middle, and one as liberal.

Keep in mind, however, that the liberal respondent was the one discussed above, whose

explanation of liberalism actually sounded more conservative. The ninth respondent

would not identify his congregation as one of the three options given, but instead stated

that "whatever the Bible would depict was going on is what we would go with." Despite

this apparent endorsement of Biblical literalism, I chose not to classify this congregation

as theologically conservative in the analysis in this chapter. Because I am interested in

studying what theological conservatism means to its adherents, I did not want to read too

much into my interviewees' responses and (re-)classify them.

Table 4.1. Biblical inerrancy and theological conservatism

	African-American Congregations (N=5)	Non-African-American Congregations (N=6)
Belief in Biblical Inerrancy	4	6
Defining Theological Conservatism as Belief in Biblical Inerrancy and/or Strictness	2	5
Participate in Social Service Programs	4	5

Of the five respondents from African-American congregations classified as

theologically conservative, four claimed that their congregations believe the Bible to be

the inerrant word of God. When asked to explain why they described their congregations

as theologically conservative, however, only two of these respondents cited Biblical

inerrancy. As a point of comparison, recall that five out of six respondents from

theologically conservative non-African-American congregations cited inerrancy and/or strictness of Biblical interpretation in defining theological conservatism. Table 4.1 summarizes the results described above concerning belief in Biblical inerrancy and the importance of this belief to theological conservative identity across racial groups.

So, the theologically conservative congregations in my sample overwhelmingly accept Biblical inerrancy regardless of their racial compositions. In fact, most of the theologically liberal and moderate congregations in my sample accept Biblical inerrancy, as well, which calls into question its usefulness as an indicator of such conservatism.5 For that reason, I have to chosen to focus on whether or not my respondents' chose to focus on inerrancy in defining theological conservatism. As discussed above, belief in inerrancy is not a major, definitional component of the theological conservatism of many of the African-American congregations sampled. This is unlike the non-African-American congregations studied here, whose representatives more frequently cited inerrancy as an important component of theological conservatism.

Sernett (1991), discussing the history of American evangelicalism, presents one explanation for this pattern. After the Civil War, evangelical Christians split along racial lines, and "[b]lack churches, though theologically conservative, did not become significantly involved in the twentieth-century controversy of fundamentalism versus modernists" (Sernett 1991:142). While "the white fundamentalist preoccupation with

5 My sample included 4 non-theologically conservative, African-American congregations (3 of which accepted Biblical inerrancy) and 4 non-theologically conservative, non-African-American congregations (2 of which accepted Biblical inerrancy).

inerrancy made the Bible a cultural icon" (142), African-American evangelicals did not focus on Biblical inerrancy as a central component of their religious identity.

Conservative Theology, Liberal Politics

If, as mentioned above, only two respondents from the six theologically conservative, African-American congregations cited the belief in Biblical inerrancy as an indicator of theological conservatism, then how did the others define it? Examining their definitions of theological conservatism reveals that some respondents distinguish between the theological beliefs of their congregations and the practice of those beliefs. For instance, one respondent from a 90% African-American congregation described his congregation as:

"more conservative as far as what we believe about the Bible, and then as far as the application of the Bible, we'd probably be more liberal…we're not like the fundamentalists who are very conservative, but they're not very liberal when it comes to the application of the Bible. They believe more in the letter of the law than the spirit of the law."

Another respondent from a 90% African-American congregation identified his congregation as theologically conservative, saying that, "If you believe in inerrancy of the Bible, then you're considered conservative." He went on, however, to state that he himself (the pastor) is:

"more in the middle when it comes to the relationship aspect of that…I try not to compromise, but I believe the Bible is teaching us about relationships with humanity."

The result of this "relational" theology is that the pastor tries to, in his words, "meet people where they're at." Another interviewee expressed a similar, relationally-based theological view in identifying his congregation as theologically conservative but also stating that "we don't fit into that box of conservative/liberal." According to this respondent, "We strive and attempt to take the Word of God, to understand what that means, to help us live with each other in a way that espouses who God is."

The interviewee quoted above identified his congregation as politically liberal and theologically conservative, and he described political liberalism as being "more sensitive to people" by giving help and understanding to people facing problems. He also emphasized the importance of relationships:

"As African-Americans, we might be liberal, but we're conservative in our understanding of who God is, and we strive to live that out in our relationships with each other."

Statements about not fitting "into that box of conservative/liberal" suggest a greater level of flexibility among African-American congregations when it comes to the relationship between belief and practice. To the respondents quoted above, the belief in Biblical inerrancy implies a level of intolerance that they reject in reaching out to others. A similar pattern of African-American congregations' "not fitting into boxes" emerges upon comparison of the political and theological orientation of congregations sampled. Of the six theologically conservative non-African-American congregations, five identified their congregations as politically conservative and one as in the middle. In contrast, of the five theologically conservative African-American congregations, only one identified as politically conservative, and this was because, according to the respondent

(who was also the pastor), congregations take on the views of their pastors, and this

pastor was conservative. As he himself pointed out, however, there was "maybe one"

Republican in the congregation. Of the remaining four theologically conservative

African-American congregations, two identified politically as in the middle, and two as

liberal. Table 4.2 presents the frequencies of the political orientations of the

theologically conservative congregations in my sample.

Table 4.2. Political orientations of theologically conservative congregations

| | Non-African-American Congregations | | |
| | Political Orientation | | |
	Conservative	Middle	Liberal
Theologically Conservative	**5**	**1**	**0**
	African-American Congregations		
	Political Orientation		
	Conservative	Middle	Liberal
Theologically Conservative	**1**	**3**	**1**

Table 4.3 presents the same frequency data for the congregations in the National

Congregations Study. The NCS data also reveal that, among theologically conservative

African-American congregations, theological and political conservatism do not go hand-

in-hand in the same way they do among other congregations.

To the extent that governmental social services have historically been supported

by political liberals, the greater frequency of liberal political orientation suggests a

greater willingness among these African-American congregations to participate in social

services. The rhetoric of "reaching out" to others found in the quotations above from

interviewees representing African-American congregations would also suggest this, but I

did not discover such a pattern among my respondents.6 Four out of five theologically

conservative African-American congregations in my sample participated in social service

provision, as did five out of six theologically conservative non-African-American

congregations.

Table 4.3. Political orientations of theologically conservative congregations in the National Congregations Study

	Non-African-American Congregations Political Orientation (%)		
	Conservative	Middle	Liberal
Theologically Conservative (N=573)	**89**	**9**	**2**
	African-American Congregations Political Orientation (%)		
	Conservative	Middle	Liberal
Theologically Conservative (N=68)	**60**	**34**	**6**

Source: National Congregations Study (1998)

Relationships & Community

      If almost all of the theologically conservative congregations in my interview

sample are supporting social service programs, regardless of their racial composition,

then how is it possible to argue that theological conservatism means something different

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6 The seeming lack of any relationship between political orientation and support for social services among my interview respondents is also reinforced by quantitative analysis of NCS data, which shows that politically liberal congregations are not significantly more or less likely to support at least one social service program. Also, an OLS analysis on the total number of programs supported by congregations reveals that politically liberal congregations actually support significantly fewer programs (p.<.05), but this relationship disappears with the addition of an interaction term for African-American, politically liberal congregations. This interaction term is also not significant.

across racial lines in a way that influences social service provision? My interview data

do indicate that the meaning of theological conservatism does differ across racial lines.

Specifically, although almost all the respondents from theologically conservative

congregations identified their churches as believing in Biblical inerrancy, the non-

African-American theological conservatives in my sample cite Biblical inerrancy in

defining theological conservatism more often than African-American conservatives. For

the representatives of African-American congregations in my interview sample,

definitions of theological conservatism more often emphasize the importance of

relationships with others, as opposed to a focus on inflexible, strict Biblical truths.

How does this relate to social service activity? The interview data indicate that,

while acceptance of Biblical inerrancy is virtually unanimous among theologically

conservative congregations, congregations of different races draw from the Bible in

distinct ways in applying their beliefs. In discussing their congregations' support for

social service provision, interviewees from non-African-American congregations tend to

emphasize other-worldly concerns of the afterlife. For example, one representative from

a theologically conservative, non-African-American congregation explained the support

for services by pointing out that:

"If a person is in poverty and feels that nobody cares he may be inclined to reject
God. A person who knows God will have a compassion for [that] man and will
come with both his physical needs, but his spiritual needs also in view, but with a
priority on his spiritual needs and his eternal destiny."

The respondent from the only theologically conservative, non-African-American

congregation in my sample that was not "actively involved" in any social service

programs (but did "support" and encourage such programs) stated, "We still have a part in this world, but we are not of this world." Although this interviewee's congregation did not support any social service programs per se, he did believe that his church itself "is a social service…we are doing a service to the community by giving them a place to come to get acquainted with the Lord."

Another interviewee from a conservative congregation with no African-American members claimed that it would be hard to get any needy people to care about spiritual needs "if we don't show any concern for the non-spiritual."

In all of the quotations cited above, concern for worldly problems is couched in a concern for the other-worldly future of the afterlife. As this interviewee from a theologically conservative, non-African-American congregation explained:

"You can't make a big difference, in my opinion, by doing marches and holding political signs, and that kind of thing. It's more get acquainted with people and let them know that there is a sincere concern about what's going to happen not only in the future with Heaven and Hell…but also the future of a person's well-being in this life."

Only two interviewees from theologically conservative, non-African-American congregations explained their congregations' social service activity in terms of a Biblical mandate to care for others, without mentioning other-worldly concerns. One did not think that his congregation's theological conservatism actually influenced its social services, but rather that congregational social services are an attempt to stop the "drift away from that which we're commanded to do." Another, from a congregation with an estimated 65-70% African-American membership, pointed out that Jesus said, "Go into the world."

In contrast, none of the interviewees from the theologically conservative, African-American congregations in my sample that supported social services mentioned other-worldly concerns in discussing their social service activities. Instead, these respondents cited a mixture of Biblical mandates to care for the needy and notions of their congregations' existing as part of a larger community of need. For example, one representative from a theologically conservative, African-American congregation explained that "Jesus teaches us that we're supposed to help the poor." Similarly, another interviewee cited Scripture in stating that "we're called to be each other's keeper." This same interviewee also referenced the community orientation mentioned above: "As a community, we see our bounds going outside of our walls…our calling as a church of God is to be concerned about people."

When asked if his congregation's theological conservatism influences its social service activism, another respondent said that it "most definitely" did, and he elaborated, "The church is not in this building…you go out and share it and get your hands dirty." According to this man, the church is the only institution in the African-American community keeping social chaos at bay. Another interviewee expressed similar ideas about community and survival, even though he specifically did not feel that his congregation's theological conservatism influenced its social service activity. For him, social service activity is driven more by the need to preserve some semblance of black community, which has been threatened as neighborhoods have been divided less by race and more by class. He emphasized the importance of preserving the African-American church's historic role as a central community institution.

Billingsley (1999) notes the community orientation of the African-American church in his discussion of its tradition of social engagement. He writes of a "source of influence on the community outreach role of the black church, and that is the community itself, which provides the social context for the action or behavior of the church" (1999:11). According to Billingsley, during times of crisis, "the church typically responds by moving beyond its purely spiritual or religious or privatistic mission to embrace its communal mission" (1999:11). This could explain the language employed by some of my interviewees from African-American congregations. African-American congregations have a history of being virtually synonymous with the communities of people that they serve, and this is reflected in comments about the church extending beyond the building walls.

When considering the African-American church's historic role and its relation to social services, it is important to note the social agenda that existed in American evangelical religion of all races through the 19th century. As Miller points out, "this movement, and especially it African-American counterpart, called for moral and social reform in the areas of personal piety, slavery, and discrimination" (2000:717). Carson (1997) discusses the late 19th-century growth of social gospel Christianity "that extended beyond purely spiritual matters" (1997:345). According to Carson, by 1893 in Atlanta, "social gospel activism was becoming increasingly common among both black and white urban clergymen" (1997:345).

This movement towards church engagement beyond just the religious sphere did, however, cause a backlash among some, more conservative evangelicals. Marsden

(1992) comments on the split within American evangelicalism in the late 19th century.
As the Progressive movement gained momentum, "[l]iberal Protestants readily identified themselves with progress and hence rapidly adapted their program (which became known as *the* Social Gospel) to the moral reforms of Progressivism. More orthodox evangelicals, on the other hand froze in their views" (1992:11). According to Marsden, this "freezing" on the part of conservative evangelicals was as much a reaction to the popularity of Darwinian ideas, which were also considered a progression by many, as to the ideas of Progressivism. Others argue that this movement away from social activism did not take place until after World War II. Dayton (1976) writes that "what had begun as a Christian egalitarianism was transformed into a type of Christian elitism. Revivalistic currents that once had been bent to the liberation of the slave now allied themselves with wealth and power against the Civil Rights movement" (134). Regardless of precisely when it happened, the point is that the emphasis on social reform which had been a part of American evangelicalism practically disappeared among some non-African-American conservative evangelicals. African-American evangelicals, however, retained this notion of the value of reaching out to help people in ways not limited to spiritual needs. The comments from many of the African-Americans I interviewed reflect this.

The interview data analyzed in this chapter reveal that many of the indicators traditionally identified with theological conservatism do not apply as strongly to African-Americans who identify themselves as theologically conservative. My initial review of the data showed that two African-American respondents seemed to have reversed the

definitions of theological liberalism and conservatism, indicating that the meanings of these terms are not quite so set in stone for African-Americans. Furthermore, the African-Americans in my sample who identify as theologically conservative did not cite the belief in Biblical inerrancy when they defined theological conservatism as much as the non-African-Americans interviewed. Finally, while theological and political conservatism are strongly related for the non-African-Americans interviewed, this relationship was not so strong for the African-Americans.

How does this all relate to congregational support for social services? The African-American theological conservatives in my interview sample emphasize the importance of relationships and community in ways that the non-African-American theological conservatives did not. These emphases are not surprising, and they make sense in light of the history of the African-American church discussed above. This history, meanwhile, suggests why theological conservatism does not hinder social engagement among African-American congregations. All of this raises the following question: if traditional indicators of theological conservatism (such as belief in Biblical inerrancy) are not as central to the African-American definition of theological conservatism, and traditional stereotypes about theological conservatives (such as social disengagement) do not apply to African-American theological conservatives, then how useful is the established idea of theological conservatism? I address this in the final, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

At this point, it is worthwhile to revisit the original research questions that motivated this project:

1. Are African-American congregations more likely to support social services than congregations of other races?

2. Are African-American congregations more likely to support different types of social service programs than congregations of other races?

3. Does theological conservatism have a different relationship with social engagement among African-American congregations in comparison to other congregations?

4. If the answer to question #3 is "yes," then why? Does theological conservatism mean the same thing to African-American religious congregations as it does to other congregations?

The NCS data suggest that the answers to the first three questions are all "yes." Regarding question #4, the interview data discussed in the last chapter suggest that theologically conservative congregations accept Biblical inerrancy (a traditional indicator of theological conservatism) regardless of their racial composition. However, when defining theological conservatism, interviewees from theologically conservative African-American congregations expressed a belief in the importance of relationships and

community in a way that other theological conservatives do not. It is this belief that influences their willingness to reach out to others through social service activity.

Since the focus of this project is upon the interaction between race and theological orientation (specifically theological conservatism), the findings reported here speak to the existing bodies of knowledge on both African-American religion and theological conservatism. Some of the most notable contributions to the study of African-American religion (Dollard 1937; Johnson 1941; Myrdal 1944) date to the late 1930s and early 1940s. Johnson discusses the disillusionment with the church felt by many African-American youth in the southern U.S., but he concludes on a hopeful note, predicting that "the church will increasingly influence youth as its programs take their needs into account on a new and improved cultural level" (Johnson 1941:169). When reading this quotation, I am reminded of the emphasis placed by one of my interviewees from an African-American congregation on meeting people "where they're at." While later scholars, such as Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) lament the African-American church's seeming reluctance to meet the needs of youth, my analysis of congregational support for youth programs such as mentoring and non-religious education shows that the church is, in fact, stepping up to this challenge more than other congregations, as Johnson predicted. It is important to note, however, that even if African-American congregations are more likely than other congregations to support these types of programs, the percentage of African-American congregations that do support such programs (about 5%) is still quite small. This indicates that there is validity to Lincoln & Mamiya's criticism.

These findings also speak to the work of John Dollard (1937), who concludes that the African-American church is inherently other-worldly in orientation. The fact that African-American congregations are more likely than other congregations to support programs focused on helping people improve their lot in this world (such as mentoring and non-religious education programs) suggests that this is no longer the case, if it ever was so. For that matter, the fact that none of the interviewees from the four theologically conservative, African-American congregations in my sample that supported social services mentioned other-worldly concerns in discussing their social service activities also indicates that Dollard's argument is not entirely valid today. Clearly, African-American congregations are not pre-occupied with other-worldly concerns to the exclusion of other issues.

Myrdal (1944) expresses what is perhaps the most pessimistic view concerning the future of African-American religion. He argues that, as a result of the declining status of clergy in the African-American community and its other-worldly outlook, the church is at risk of becoming obsolete, especially as African-Americans find it possible to achieve more worldly success. Observing the tumult in many African-American communities in the 1960's, other scholars (Frazier [1964] 1974; Clark 1965) echo Myrdal's pessimism. Both Frazier and Clark predict that the African-American church will be left behind as the rest of African-American society is integrated into the larger American environment.

The scope of this project is too limited to pass judgment on such predictions. With that in mind, however, the research for this project has taken me to many African-

American churches that I would consider full of life, and I am not alone in this. Nelson

(2004) reports on an ethnographic study of "Eastside," an African-American

congregation in South Carolina. In his discussion of the congregation's attempts to deal

with various social problems, Nelson writes that:

"The complexity of interlocking social and spiritual explanations for racial
oppression and the continuing problems he pointed to— drug addiction, sexual
infidelity, alcoholism, family abandonment, and other social ills— has led most
Eastsiders to advocate both spiritual and social solutions to these problems. In
keeping with the Evangelical emphasis on individual salvation, Eastsiders tried to
bring drug addicts, alcoholics, and dealers to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ
because they felt they needed the 'heavy fire,' in Reverend Wright's words, of
God's conviction and the Holy Ghost's work in their life before they could
straighten up. Purely human interventions were bound to be inadequate, they
believed. At the same time, Reverend Wright had quite elaborate ideas about the
kinds of social programs that were needed to address the many social problems
that plagued the local community." (2004:182)

The Eastside congregation, which Nelson identifies as conservative (2004:34-35)

enthusiastically supports various social service programs, much like many of the

theologically conservative African-American congregations that I studied for this project.

This indicates that so many of the previous scholars who predicted the coming

irrelevance of the African-American church were not correct. There are those who

lament that the African-American church is "unsuitable for confronting class

subordination" (Mukenge 1983:203). The African-American church may not be pushing

for large-scale social change on a scale that would satisfy scholars like Mukenge and

Wilmore (1998). To say, however, that it is not socially engaged in the community is not

accurate.

As mentioned above, this research also speaks to the existing body of knowledge on theological orientation, especially on theological conservatism. Much like Mukenge's claim, cited in chapter 3, that the church/sect dualism does not apply to the African–American church (1983:7), this project indicates that the traditional ideas about the lack of social engagement on the part of theologically conservative congregations are also not applicable in the case of African-American congregations. Acceptance of this point, however, calls into question the usefulness of traditional ideas regarding theological conservatism, regardless of race. If theological conservatism does not serve to hinder social engagement among African-American congregations, then why should we continue to assume that it does so for any congregations?

Even Wuthnow (1988), writing about the reconfiguration of American religion along liberal/conservative lines, acknowledges the increasing engagement of theological conservatives in the political realm. It would have been difficult for him to deny this, as the Moral Majority exerted a major influence on U.S. politics precisely as Wuthnow was writing. Since 2000, the support of theological conservatives for President Bush's faith based initiative programs indicate their greater willingness to expand beyond just political engagement into broader social action. As such, I call not just for an acknowledgment of "African-American exceptionalism" in regards to theological conservatism and social engagement, but rather for a re-evaluation of the way in which we understand theological conservatism. The other-worldliness that has for so long characterized theological conservatism is real for some theologically conservative congregations, as my interview data for non-African-American congregations indicate.

However, this other-worldliness no longer seems to exclude the possibility of working to change this world. Recent controversies within the Christian Right over whether to acknowledge problems such as global warming only reinforce the argument that theological conservatism is changing, and scholars must work to stay in tune with these developments.

I am reminded of an interview I conducted with the minister of an all-white, non-denominational Protestant congregation. He identified the congregation as theologically "right in the middle," because it has "a good mix" of younger members, who are more liberal, and older, more conservative members. The pastor himself, however, struck me as a conservative. At one point during our interview, he stated that, "Unfortunately, we have to live on earth for a while." Later, he made the case that social change "is not as important as a relationship with God." I also observed a Sunday service at this congregation, and the most memorable part of that service (and perhaps of any service I've attended) came when the pastor discussed the problem of rising gas prices. After acknowledging the difficulties facing many members of the congregation who have to drive 50 miles each way to work, the pastor urged them to take comfort in the fact that no one has to worry about gas prices in heaven. Clearly, this minister possessed an other-worldly orientation. However, he also fully supported his congregation's social service activities, which include a food bank and furniture distribution program, citing the Biblical emphasis on reaching out to those less fortunate in order to give them hope for this life. The existing ideas about theological conservatism must be revised in order to understand this co-existence of this- and other-worldliness.

There are, however, a number of qualifications to be made regarding the conclusions of this study. For example, regarding the qualitative research, the clergy interviewed were not part of any representative sample, so it would be wrong to generalize the views expressed by the interviewees to African-American (and/or non-African-American) congregations. Researchers such as Stump (1987) have noted the significant regional variation which exists in African-American Christianity. The goal of the interviews in this project was to explore possible explanations for the results of the quantitative analysis of NCS data. The fact that interviews with nineteen clergy reveal clear differences patterned along racial lines indicates that this goal was achieved. These results also suggest that a larger study of a more systematically-derived sample of clergy could yield even further insight into the difference meanings of theological liberalism and conservatism.

Regarding the quantitative analysis, some might object to the quality of the data on theological orientation. The National Congregations Study included just one question directly about theological orientation. This NCS item asked respondents, "*Theologically speaking,* would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle?" The survey included no option for respondents to explain their answers to this question. It is conceivable that the NCS respondents had much different ideas of the meanings of the 3 possible answers when they selected one of them. While I considered this possibility when reviewing the results of the logistic regression analysis with the significant interaction effect (see table 3.1), I felt that the interaction effect was so highly significant (with a p-value less than .001) that the result

was worth delving into more deeply. It was actually the NCS questionnaire, which did not give respondents the chance to explain what they meant by theological orientation, that necessitated the qualitative research. In the final analysis, I believe that the NCS data are vindicated by the qualitative analysis. The interview data indicate that theological conservatism means something different in African-American congregations from what it means in other congregations.

In the course of discussing this research with various other sociologists, some have raised questions about the dependent variables used in the logistic regression analyses on congregational support for at least social service program in the previous 12 months. Often, these questioners are more comfortable with OLS analysis of the total number of social service programs supported in those same 12 months. Implicit in their objections seems to be a belief that almost all congregations support at least one program, so using that as a dependent variable in a regression analysis is a waste of effort. It is important to recall, however, that less than 60% of all congregations, according to NCS data, actually supported at least one program in the previous year. Social service provision by religious congregations is by no means universal in the United States, and we can learn valuable (and unique) lessons by examining both whether a congregation supports any social service programs at all and how many programs they support.

Thinking about directions for future research, I believe that it is extremely important to update the sociological understanding of theological conservatism, for the reasons stated above. How do some theological conservatives reconcile an other-worldly orientation with this-worldly action? Swidler's (1986) notion of culture as a "tool-kit"

provides one way to begin looking for an answer to this question. If Biblical literalism can be valued by some congregations that are socially engaged and other that are not, then perhaps the Bible itself serves as a tool-kit from which individuals and congregations draw to justify and support their actions.

All of this raises an issue of greater significance for the sociology of religion as a field of study. The sociology of religion has long been closely affiliated with the sociology of culture, but sociologists of religion still talk about values influencing action, whereas many in the sociology of culture have attempted to move beyond this conception. Swidler herself frames the tool-kit idea as an attempt to move beyond the "culture as values" (1986:274) model of action. If we accept that theological conservatism is a value, then the results of this project indicate that sociologists of religion should consider moving towards severing the direct causal link between values and behavior which is often assumed to exist in studies of religious action. A review of the tables of contents of recent issues of prominent sociology of religion journals reveals that many sociologists of religion still accept this link as valid. Some sociologists studying religion have begun to question the validity of this connection. In *The Truth about Conservative Christians* (2006), Greeley and Hout look at the voting behavior of Americans. They discover that the group most likely to vote Democratic is theologically conservative African-Americans, while the group most likely to vote Republican is theologically conservative whites (2006:85). The authors conclude, "Conservative Christianity can promote a political agenda. American political history teaches us, though, that the direction it leads men and women cannot be determined in advance"

(2006:88). The findings of this project lead me to a similar conclusion. For African-American congregations, theological conservatism drives social engagement, while for other congregations, it does not. Values do not carry any inherent demands for behavior, and the sooner sociologists of religion accept this, then the field can move forward.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. With what denomination, if any, are you and your congregation affiliated?

2. Thinking of the regular adult participants in your congregation, what percentage are black or African-American?

3. Does your congregation consider the Bible to be the inerrant word of God?

4. Does your congregation have any special rules or norms concerning homosexual behavior?

5. Does your congregation have any special rules or norms regarding cohabitation of unmarried adults?

6. Has your congregation participated in or supported social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects of any sort within the past 12 months? Please don't include projects that use or rent space in your building but have no other connection to your congregation.

7. (Ask if response to #6 is "yes") Can you name the programs that your congregation has supported?

8. Politically speaking, would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle? Can you tell me why you say this?

9. Theologically speaking, would your congregation be considered more on the conservative side, more on the liberal side, or right in the middle? Can you tell me why you say this?

10. (Ask if conservative but engaged) Some people expect conservative churches to be less active in the community. Why do you think that is, and do you think the conservatism of your congregation influences its activism?

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