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**ITC/FAITHFACTOR PROJECT 2000:  
AN AFFIRMATION FOR THE JOURNEY  
INWARD AND OUTWARD**

**Introduction**

Spirituality and community outreach are at the heart of Black congregational life. The journey inward and the journey outward are not dichotomous or differentiated realities. They are symbiotic parts of the same whole. Our ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 study found the Black Experience is one that fosters a deeper spirituality and a comprehensive hope concerning God's future. At the same time, the pastors interviewed in our study reported overwhelming support for community activities, social involvement, and political advocacy. These churches and their leadership mirror a spiritual reality that encompasses the whole person and the whole community. This is significant as we advance into our newest millennium. While societal problems and barricades to community building exist in North America, Black congregations refuse to remain uninvolved. In fact, they appear always ready to be engaged. Their spiritual growth and experience seem intertwined with their commitment to share with those who reside beyond their doors. As Martin Luther King has said:

Every [person] lives in two realms, the internal and the

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external. The internal is that realm of spiritual ends expressed in art, literature, morals, and religion. The external is that complex of devices, technique, mechanism, and instrumentalities by means of which we live. Our problem today is that we have allowed the internal to become lost in the external. We have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live. . . . If we are to survive today, our moral and spiritual 'lag' must be eliminated. Enlarged material powers spell enlarged peril if there is not proportionate growth of the soul. When the 'without' of [people's] nature subjugates the 'within,' dark clouds begin to form in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Our study of Black religious life has confirmed that Martin King's warning has been heard and affirmed. The external and internal must be held in proper balance. This essay relates the story of *Project 2000* but more importantly, it gives a fresh awareness and reaffirmation of the Black Church's journey—both inward and outward.

### **Black Religious Life**

African-American experience and religion are important and deserve serious treatment. Ever since their arrival in the New World, Africans have sought to assert the uniqueness and importance of their experience. The early classic voices that sang of Black consciousness in lyric and epic form such as Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon and Albery Allson Whitman articulated that relevance. In time, as African Americans

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King Jr., "The Quest for Peace and Justice" [Nobel Lecture online] (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo, 1964, accessed 15 December 2001); available from <http://www.nobel.se/peace/laureates/1964/king-lecture.html>; Internet.



became aware that their identity was entwined with the American story, they also discovered that they had to tell that story for themselves. Frederick Douglass, Henry Garnett, Martin Delaney, and David Walker were activists who through their writings made the case for a legitimate place for Blacks in this society and passionately called them to moral obligation as part of the American fabric. This perspective and its work are not new phenomena in the African-American experience. Much is owed to pioneers in the field—Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. DuBois, followed by J. Saunders Redding, John Hope Franklin, and Benjamin A. Quarles.

Earlier studies of the African-American experience were “those arising from the social sciences, and an explicitly theological apologetic tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Although a general focus in the studies has been religiosity through the church, commentary and critical observations have been present in disciplines other than theological or religious studies. The Lincoln and Mamiya study,<sup>3</sup> and others—Billingsley,<sup>4</sup> Dyson,<sup>5</sup> Smith,<sup>6</sup> Marable,<sup>7</sup> are examples. Jacquelyn Grant in her ground breaking, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist*

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<sup>2</sup>Charles H. Long, “Perspectives for a Study of African-American Religion in the United States,” in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. by Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 24.

<sup>3</sup>See C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>See Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup>See Michael Eric Dyson, *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup>See Theophus Harold Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup>See Manning Marable, ed. *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* (New York: Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, 1999 - ).

*Response*<sup>8</sup> led the way for a succession of studies on the African-American experience, especially concerned with women, their place, their significant contribution to church life and the ongoing challenges they face. Among the women making scholarly contributions, we note Katie Cannon, Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, Emilie M. Townes, and Delores S. Williams.

There is no disagreement that the church has been the most important social institution in the Black community. There has been a false impression that the church has an "other worldly" focus, but the reality is that the church exists with other aspects of society: economy, politics, and culture. Any analysis of church and religion must take into account the concrete conditions within which they exist. The Black Church and the religious experience of Black people have undergone changes during what may be identified as the three main periods of African-American history: from the invisible institution during slavery to the small rural church, to the urban storefronts, to the megachurches of today. In each of those periods, religious leaders have consistently sought to maintain the nexus between their spirituality and the conditions of their daily human existence with varying levels of involvement.

### Project 2000

The research on African-American congregations is part of a national study of religious life in the United States. That larger study, entitled *Faith Communities Today: A Report on*

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<sup>8</sup>See Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).



*Religion in the United States Today*<sup>9</sup> was a national survey of forty-two religious denominations. Included in that number were Catholics, Muslims, Bahá'í, Jewish, and Protestant congregations. Interdenominational Theological Center was invited to assist in gathering data on seven historically Black denominations—Baptist, Church of God in Christ (COGIC), African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), Black pastors in the United Methodist Church and Black pastors in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

During 2000, The Lilly Endowment, Inc. and the Ford Foundation funded an ITC/FaithFactor Initiative, *Project 2000*. The project conducted a national survey of Black congregations in conjunction with *Faith Communities Today*, which is a research and educational program of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Project, coordinated by The Hartford Institute for Religious Research, Hartford Seminary.

Areas of study included sources of unity and cohesion; growth, change and conflict; congregational life; congregational resources; and leadership. *Project 2000* was initiated to provide a profile of Black congregations in the United States and to enhance the capacity of participating religious denominations to conduct and use congregational studies in their work and program planning.

The project survey instrument used more than 200 questions and covered six broad areas:

- Worship and identity
- Location and facilities

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<sup>9</sup>See Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States Today* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, 2001).

- Internal and mission oriented programs
- Leadership and organizational dynamics
- Participants
- Finances

All faith groups within the African-American tradition were represented in the survey. These included the major historically Black Christian denominations mentioned above. Muslim masjids were surveyed in an ancillary study conducted with ITC sponsorship.

It must be noted that among the slaves transported to the Americas were devotees of Islam. Not all slaves accepted Christianity when a Christianizing process was begun by Charles II to the Council for Foreign Plantations in 1660.<sup>10</sup> The Muslim presence in America gained prominence in the early 1920s and intensified after World War II when tens of thousands of Muslims flocked to American soil from Asia and Africa upon a relaxation of racial barriers to immigration. African Americans had been converting to that faith and living as Muslims even before the war.

### Scholarship Describing the Journey

Many scholars have articulated a balanced understanding of Black religious life, one that affirms the complementary religious journey that draws African-American people both within and without. Gayraud S. Wilmore confirms that spiritual formation and social transformation are both part of the same Black religious experience.

My thesis is that what we call the Black religious tradi-

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<sup>10</sup>Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 212.



tion nurtures and promotes both spirituality and militancy for social change in varying and complex ways; that both in the official actions of the denominations and in the Black church as a mass-based, folk institution, religion and politics are inseparable; and, further, that spirituality and social transformation are not only two sides of the same coin, but are so interpenetrated that the Black religionist cannot rest comfortably without both.<sup>11</sup>

In their landmark study, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Lincoln and Mamiya construct a “dialectical model” of the Black Church that affirms both the private or inward aspects of religiosity as well as the communal or outward ones. Their study of 2,150 churches and 1,894 clergy persons underscores a holistic picture of African-American religious expression. That picture depicts Black men and women consistently active in the sanctuaries, in political enclaves, and in economic and community development enterprises. “The communal orientation refers to the historic tradition of Black churches being involved in all aspects of the lives of their members, including political, economic, educational and social concerns. The privatistic pole of this dialectic means a withdrawal from the concerns of the larger community to focus on meeting the religious needs of its adherents.”<sup>12</sup> According to Lincoln and Mamiya, it is both/and, and not either/or—Black religious life includes the communal and the private sphere.

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<sup>11</sup>Gayraud S. Wilmore, “Spirituality and Social Transformation as the Vocation of the Black Church,” in *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, ed. William K. Tibb (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 240.

<sup>12</sup>Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, 13.

African-American spirituality discussed by Michael I. N. Dash, Jonathan Jackson, and Stephen C. Rasor, in *Hidden Wholeness*, is suggestive of a unique and liberating dynamic. "Spirituality involves individuals and communities in a tripartite and cyclical process: a liberating encounter, a liberating reflection, and a liberating action. Spirituality is more than a personal experience. It is a communal quest and adventure to discover wholeness only to be realized in community. . . . It is a spirituality that demands creative integration, contemplation, and engagement."<sup>13</sup>

These writers argue that the Black Church offers its people and those beyond its settings who open themselves to the possibility, a spirituality that includes whole people and whole communities. In the face of a fragmented and disconnected society, Black religious life offers a model of wholeness that fosters healing and reconciliation. The journey can be inclusive and supportive; everyone can potentially benefit.

Vashti McKenzie's *Not Without a Struggle*, Carlyle Fielding Stewart's *Soul Survivors* and Walter Earl Fluker's *The Stone That the Builders Rejected* posit a Black Church tradition that nurtures holistic religiosity. They declare that leadership among Black women and men grows out of a deep spirituality, including the individual and the community. It is a spirituality that pushes one both into the heart and outward to the neighbor.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Michael I. N. Dash, Jonathan Jackson and Stephen C. Rasor, *Hidden Wholeness: An African American Spirituality for Individuals and Communities* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997), viii.

<sup>14</sup>Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1996). See also Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Soul Survivors: An African American Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), and Walter Earl Fluker, ed., *The Stones That the Builders Rejected: The Development of Ethical Leadership from the Black Church Tradition* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).



Finally, Andrew Billingsley's *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*<sup>15</sup> and *Mighty Like a River* describe the Black Church as an agent of social reform—historically and in contemporary society. In *Mighty Like a River*, his recent study of more than a thousand Black churches, he acknowledges that not all churches in the Black community are the same. Some are more conservative, thus “confining themselves to their basic spiritual and religious work,” hence “ignoring, or seeming to ignore, the social crisis around them. Other churches will reach out and open their doors to the community. There is a third group of churches, which he calls “activist churches headed usually by activist ministers.” These churches “move with vigor into the community to confront the secular crises engulfing the people.” Often, indeed, these churches do not distinguish between sacred and secular issues. They focus instead on their calling to minister to the whole person and the whole community.”<sup>16</sup> There are more activist churches present in our society than one might assume. Billingsley asserts that Black religious life has in the past and at present supports both a personal and a communal spirituality. Both are part of the whole seen in variation among African-American religious bodies.

*Project 2000*, in its study of Black congregational life, took seriously this informed scholarship and its foundational understandings of Black religion. The religious community celebrating God within its walls is the same community involved in political, social, and economic engagement. *Project 2000* verifies this.

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<sup>15</sup>See Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

<sup>16</sup>Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River*, 185.

### Research Process

In the fall of 1998, Carl Dudley of The Hartford Institute for Religious Research visited ITC to assist with an emerging design—Cooperative Congregational Studies Project. The specific task was to gather data on the historically Black denominations. Larry Mamiya of Vassar College accompanied Dudley and assisted us as a lead researcher. Mamiya spent a sabbatical year on the project. His expertise of more than three decades in the field and particularly his work with the renowned C. Eric Lincoln were most useful.

Our initial response in a commitment to the project was to solicit the support of the denominational deans. ITC is a consortium of six denominations whose presence is represented and supported by denominational deans. The deans were excited to participate in such a project that could be mutually beneficial. They assisted in providing limited lists of pastors in their denominations. There is a distinct lack of available records reflecting numbers of churches and pastors in their denominations. We met that challenge by using the lists from the denominational deans and also information generated from congregations throughout the nation. However, the primary source used in the study was provided by Tri-Media, which reflects those churches and pastors who ordered materials for Sunday Church School.

ITC then engaged the Gallup organization to assist in data gathering. Consulting with our colleagues at Gallup, we agreed that telephone interviews would be the most beneficial for maximum response. The Gallup Organization is known for this methodology.

Gallup conducted the telephone surveys between February 22 and May 11, 2000. A total of 1,863 senior pastors or lay



leaders of Black or predominantly Black churches were interviewed with the average telephone interview being sixteen minutes. An initial first question, designed as a screening mechanism, sought cooperation from the pastor. This process also included confirmation of the denomination. If the pastor were not available during the field period, Gallup interviewed the church's assistant pastor or senior lay leader. Of the total of 1,863 interviews, 1,482 (77 percent) were conducted with the pastor while 381 (23 percent) were conducted with the assistant pastor or senior lay leader. It must be noted that the sample of 1,863 represented the largest number of surveys for any one group in the total national sample.<sup>17</sup> Our survey was weighted to reflect the latest available estimates of the number of congregations interviewed within each denomination. This step was intended to correct the disproportional size of the denominations determined by the interviewing quotas.

The following chart indicates the total number of completed interviews by quota group and the margin of error associated with each (at 95 percent confidence level for percentages near 50 percent).

#### Completed Interviews by Quota Group and Margin of Error

	Total number of interviews	Margin of error (+/- percentage points)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,863</b>	<b>2.3</b>
Baptist	502	4.4

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<sup>17</sup>Dudley, *Faith Communities Today*, 4.

	Total number of interviews	Margin of error (+/- percentage points)
COGIC	503	4.4
AME	257	6.1
CME	295	5.7
AMEZ	110	9.3
Black United Methodist	95	10.1
Black Presbyterian(USA)	101	9.8

### General Findings

Much important data were discovered in this national survey of Black churches. The specifics related to rural, urban and megachurches are highlighted in other articles in this issue of the *Journal*.

- The overall view of Black pastors or pastors of predominantly Black congregations at the beginning of the new millennium is that their congregations are spiritually alive, and they are excited about the future.
- Most congregations are strongly involved in a variety of positive social activities and programs. However, many pastors are concerned that new people are not easily assimilated into their congregational life.
- A majority of pastors feel that their sermons "always" focus on God's love and care (83 percent), personal spiritual growth (74 percent) and practical advice for daily living (66 percent). Comparatively few report that their sermons always focus on social justice (26 percent).
- Music is an important element of most services. Some differences emerge on the basis of educational background.



Churches with pastors with a seminary degree or higher are less likely to use spirituals in their services than those with no formal training or some Bible college or some ministry.

- In terms of community activities and other social programs, the pastors interviewed report that their congregations are involved in many such activities. Youth programs (92 percent) and cash assistance to families in need (86 percent) are priorities. About three-quarters are involved in food pantries or soup kitchens (75 percent) and voter registrations (76 percent). Although 45 percent of congregations are involved in social advocacy overall, AMEZ (62 percent) and Blacks within United Methodist congregations (63 percent) are more likely to report this involvement. The same denominational pattern emerges regarding participation in health programs or clinics.
- A majority of clergy strongly approves of “clergy in their church” involved in protests and marches on civil rights issues (55 percent). This is especially true for large congregations (61 percent strongly agree), AME (72 percent), CME (65 percent), AMEZ (72 percent), Blacks within United Methodist churches (73 percent), and Blacks within Presbyterian churches (73 percent).
- A majority (64 percent) of all clergy interviewed strongly approves of churches expressing their views on day-to-day social and political issues.
- Among all faith communities studied during the year 2000, historically Black protestant churches give the highest priority to community outreach ministries and social justice advocacy.
- All clergy persons, among all groups, with a seminary education are no more likely than other clergy to be in

churches that have a strong social justice orientation and are much less likely to be in congregations that deal openly with conflict and disagreements.

- The issue that is most divergent by denomination is approval of a woman as pastor of a church. Overall, 40 percent of clergy strongly approve, while only 27 percent of Baptists and 23 percent of COGIC strongly approve. On the other hand, one in ten clergy members of the remaining denominations strongly approve of women as pastors of their own church.
- Over half (52 percent) of all Black churches are located in the South.
- Most Black churches are located in urban areas.
- Over half (53 percent) of the churches in the total sample of Black churches have less than 100 regularly participating adult members.
- Over half (57 percent) of the churches in the total sample of Black congregations were organized before 1945.
- A majority (64 percent) of the full sample of Black churches surveyed is financially stable. It seems that only a small percentage of Black congregations (3 percent) are in serious difficulty.

Thus, ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000 has confirmed significant facts about the African-American Church. Black congregations at the beginning of the new millennium feel they are spiritually alive and are excited about the future. The Black Church is uniquely powerful in its community outreach tradition. Most congregations are strongly involved in social activities with programs relating to youth and cash assistance as a priority. Local religious groups are the most important source of civic competence for persons of low income.



Clergy persons are actively involved in the communities with civil rights issues, social, and political concerns. Advocating for those who may often be neglected is an important assumed role of most African-American clergy. The churches, while somewhat smaller in membership size, often less than 100 regularly participating adults, offer significant ministry to their people and those beyond their doors. They appear to be able to maintain a fairly stable financial base as they serve others. Their perceived vitality is demonstrated by nurturing members and community outreach. They illustrate the Black Church traditions of an inward growth of membership and an outward community concern. They represent the best of the journey inward and the journey outward.

### Conclusion

This is an exciting time for African-American congregations and clergy who are actively involved in their churches and communities. While the needs of our American society are great, the Black Church models a record of addressing problems with relevance in the midst of contemporary concerns.

ITC/FaithFactor Project 2000, the nation's most current and comprehensive survey of Black religious life helps all of us. *Project 2000* enables local pastors, denominational officials, and others in understanding what congregations are doing with worship, spiritual growth, community outreach, managing, and leading. This project is unique because it combines systematic research and analysis on the character and culture of Black congregational life and religious leadership.

*Project 2000* builds on the strengths and assets of Black institutional entities. Black academia, political, and civic leadership recognize the historical reservoir within the Black

community. The Black Church has been at the center of that reservoir. *Project 2000* confirms that it will continue the journey—both internal and external—into the future.



**(God) has told you, O mortal, what  
is good; and what does the Lord  
require of you but to do justice,  
and to love kindness, and to walk  
humbly with your God?**

**Micah 6:8**



