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Black Churches and Their Attitudes to the Social Protest in the Civil Rights Era: Obedience, Civil Disobedience and Black Liberation Theology[1]

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The article focuses on the diversity of attitudes that Black churches presented toward the social protest of the civil rights era. Although their activity has been often perceived only through the prism of Martin Luther King's involvement, in fact they presented many different attitudes to the civil rights campaigns. They were never unanimous about social and political engagement and their to various responses to the Civil Rights Movement were partly connected to theological divisions among them and the diversity of Black Christianity (a topic not well-researched in Poland). For years African American churches served as centers of the Black community and fulfilled many functions of ethnic churches (as well as of other ethnic institutions), but the scope of these functions varied greatly – also during the time of the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, the main aim of this article is to analyze the whole spectrum of Black churches' attitudes to the civil rights protests, paying special attention to the approaches and strategies that are generally less known.

Keywords: the Black Church, African American churches, ethnic churches, Civil Rights Movement, Civil Disobedience, social protests, non-confrontational attitude, Black Liberation Theology.

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Introduction

In the mid-20th century in the USA, many Black[3] churches (that is, Protestant churches that minister to predominantly Black congregations)[4] became involved in the Civil Rights Movement.[5] They had long been the most important ethnic institutions in Black communities and now they took part in the social protest[6] against racial segregation (in the South), discrimination and racism. The involvement of these congregations that entered the protest against the existing social order, was in many respects motivated by Christian religion. The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) was even interpreted as a religious movement at its core because of the prominence of Martin Luther King Jr. and other ministers (Harvey 2016). It is important to remember, however, that not all Black churches joined the movement. In fact, some of them presented many theological arguments against such engagement. What is more, the churches that were ready to join the protest did not always agree on the form it should take. This article will focus on the diversity of attitudes that Black churches presented toward the social protest of the civil rights era, and it will thoroughly examine those that are less known.

The most famous, and most commonly known approach to the struggle for African American rights in the US was civil disobedience. This mode of protest, strongly supported by Martin Luther King Jr. and a number of Black churches, is most often defined as a public, nonviolent and conscientious breach of law undertaken with the aim of bringing about a change in laws or government policies.[7] It took the form of large-scale, nonviolent refusals to obey government, including sit-ins and peaceful demonstrations. Although Martin Luther King Jr. was not the initiator of the early African American civil disobedience actions, his argumentation in favor of them

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[3] There is a debate among scholars whether to capitalize the term *Black*. In this text I follow the decision of the authors of *Black Church Studies. An Introduction* who capitalize *Black* as "a means of moving beyond skin color towards a notion of shared history, cultural heritage, and group identity" (Floyd-Thomas et al. 2007: xxvi)

[4] The definitions of the 'Black Church' and Black churches will be thoroughly analyzed below.

[5] The American Civil Rights Movement is usually considered to last between 1954 and 1968, however also other opening and closing dates have been proposed. In 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and, as most popular representations of the movement are centered on his leadership, 1968 is often considered a closing date. However, scholars, including Doug McAdam, John Dittmer, Charles Payne and Barbara Ransby, note that the movement was too diverse to be credited to one person, organization, or strategy. Agreeing with them that the movement was a coalition of thousands of local efforts nationwide, spanning several decades and including many strategies, I will use a broad definition of the movement. In this paper I will analyze different forms of protests lasting at least until the early 1970s.

[6] Understood here as a form of political expression that seeks to bring about social or political change by influencing the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of the public or the policies of an organization or institution.

[7] According to this most widely accepted account of civil disobedience, defended by John Rawls (1971), people who engage in civil disobedience are willing to accept the legal consequences of their actions, as this shows their fidelity to the rule of law.

received wide recognition. As a Baptist minister, King derived many of his arguments from the Bible. However, he also extensively drew on the ideas of 'Mahatma' Gandhi and various philosophers. Ministers who joined the protests and accepted the idea of civil disobedience, most often followed King's interpretation of the Bible, especially his stress on the social dimension of the Gospel. Because their churches provided important resources to the movement, many scholars started to see the CRM as both a socio-political movement of protest and a religious movement, sustained by the religious power of Black churches (Harvey 2016).

This "prominent role of religion" within the movement (Savage 2008: 272) created a perception that all of the African American churches were involved in the social protest of the era, while in reality a number of Black churches avoided any engagement in the civil rights struggle. Barbara Savage notices that the images of the Black religious leaders engaged in the CRM were extremely powerful and "conveyed the surprising political potency of African American religion in the South" (Savage 2008: 2). She uses the term "surprising" because "although churches were continually called upon to be savior institutions, historically they were most often criticized for failing in that mission" (Savage 2008: 2). During the civil rights era, the interpretation of the Black churches' mission and forms of social engagement also varied significantly among ministers, and quite often was not viewed through the perspective of social protest.

In fact, the ideas of the Black nonviolent civil disobedience had important secular roots (Harvey 2016). They were first advocated by African American intellectuals and social activists (sometimes politically radical and distrusting toward Black Christian institutions, considered as too complicit with power structures). These ideas, according to Harvey, had to make their way from the confines of radical and pacifist thought into African American religious culture (2016). Martin Luther King Jr. helped in this process,[8] but many conservative Black churches were often more skeptical than supportive.

The situation was even more complicated, however. Apart from the Black churches that remained uninvolved and obedient to the system, and those that joined the nonviolent civil disobedience movement, there were also churches which adopted another attitude to the struggle against racial inequality. This new approach was influenced by the arguments of Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) who first used the term 'Black Power' as a social and racial slogan. Separating from Martin Luther King's peaceful activism, Carmichael and his followers created the new Black Power movement, influenced by Malcolm X's criticism of peaceful protest methods as ineffective. And despite the fact that most Christian Black churches[9] denounced 'Black Power' as being grounded in dangerous ideology and inflammatory rhetoric, there was a number of Black clergy that tried to interpret it in light of Christian gospel. In 1967 they even established a group called the National Committee of Negro Churchmen

[8] An important role in this process should be also credited to Howard Thurman, a philosopher, theologian, author and educator.

[9] Non-Christian Black religious groups, like the Nation of Islam, will not be the subject of this analysis.

(NCNC). While the group itself did not gain much publicity or acclaim, in 1969 James H. Cone presented a more successful synthesis of Black Power and Black theology – later coined as Black Liberation Theology.[10] He stated that "to be oppressed is to be Black, and to be an oppressor is to be white" (qtd. in: Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 309). By promoting a more radical (even aggressive) interpretation of the Gospel of Christ, not only did he initiate a revolutionary approach to Christian theology, but also created a new dimension of the social protest and the civil rights struggle.

Due to this complexity and diversity of approaches, the Black churches' involvement in the civil rights struggle deserves to be reexamined. Therefore, the main aim of this article is to analyze the whole spectrum of Black churches' attitudes to social protest of the era, paying special attention to the approaches and strategies that are generally less known. Instead of focusing only on the famous Martin Luther King's stand, this text presents the diversity of Black churches' responses to the CRM, which in fact, was strictly connected to the diversity of Black Christianity (a topic not well-researched in Poland). Another important purpose of this paper is to discuss Black Liberation Theology, a subject usually omitted by Polish scholars[11]. Although this controversial approach was developed at the very end of the symbolic civil rights era and never reached the popularity of King's approach, remaining secluded mainly to the academic corridors, it is worth discussing – as it presented an alternative interpretation of Black Christianity and its role in social protest. Since the historical context is crucial to understanding the roots of various approaches deriving from the complexity of Black Christianity, I will also briefly acquaint readers with the socio-political history of the Black Church and with the roles it assumed as an ethnic institution in various historical circumstances. By drawing their attention to theological differences and to various forms of social and political engagement that Black churches assumed over the years, I would like to invite them to reexamine their assumptions and expectations about the role of minority religions (including ethnic churches) and the possibilities that they can exercise in a pluralistic society.

The state of the art and methodology

An examination of the existing literature proves that although the activity of the Black churches that took part in civil rights struggle has been carefully analyzed, not too many studies focused on the churches that did not get engaged in the social protest

[10] Although Black Liberation Theology has had more prominent representatives, such as Albert Cleage, Jr., James Deotis Roberts, Gayraud S. Wilmore or Cornel West (and they did not agree on everything with Cone), in this essay, in terms of theological arguments, I will concentrate only on James Cone's reasoning.

[11] Among the exceptions, there is a publication by Anna Peck: *W poszukiwaniu tożsamości: rasizm w amerykańskich koncepcjach religijnych* (2007) where she mentions James Cone and Black Liberation Theology.

of the time.[12] This is also true for Polish literature. What is more, apart from analyses of Martin Luther King's CRM engagement and religious rhetoric, not many issues concerning Black Christianity in general have been studied in Poland.[13] The topic of multiple forms of the Black churches' political and social activity is almost non-existent in Polish scholarship.

At the same time research on the active role of the Black Church in the CRM is very rich, especially in American literature. Scholars who have studied this subject represent various disciplines, including history, political science, sociology and theology. Some of the most important analyses of this topic were presented by social movement theorists. Importantly, their interest also resulted in including a religious factor in resource mobilization theories and other social movement theories[14]. The most famous studies discussing the importance of the Black Church as a part of the social movement were presented by Aldon Morris (1984) and Dough McAdam (1982). Both authors pointed to the role of local structures, including those created by Black churches.[15] The political

[12] Among few exceptions there are: Gary Marx's studies from 1967 and 1969 and Ronald L. Johnstone's research from 1969. It should be mentioned however, that the non-engagement of Black churches before the 1950s had been often a subject of the earlier studies. In fact, research on Black churches can be divided into at least two phases: before the civil rights era and after. In the first period the non-engagement or even passivity of Black churches was actually a dominating theme. The examples of such pre-civil rights analyses include: Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (1933); Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944); Franklin E. Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (1964). Also W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), who pointed out the centrality of the Black Church in the African American community, criticized Black preachers for not using their strong position in a more active way. More about it: (Savage 2008), (Lincolnd and Mamiya 1990), (Kurosaki 2012). After the 1960s the perspective changed drastically. Researchers focused mostly on the churches that were active during the CRM, paying much less attention to those that remained inactive. Scholars who concentrated on the active role of the Black churches include: Hart M. Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen (1975), Vincent Harding (1981), Aldon Morris (1985), Dough McAdam (1982), Lincoln and Mamiya (1990). Additionally, some historians at that time started reexamining social activism of the early Black churches (also in the Antebellum South) – most famous examples of such studies are Albert J. Rabouteau's works. Black Liberation theologians also re-analyzed the history of the Black Church, searching for its radicalism (James Cone, Gayraud S. Wilmore). Although e.g. Wilmore observed that the Black Church had been simultaneously "the most reactionary" and "the most radical" institution (1973), until recently the majority of scholarship concentrated on the active role of the Black Church. One of the best examples is David Chappell's *A stone of hope: prophetic religion and the death of Jim Crow*, published in 2004. There were few exceptions, though, such as: Stephen D. Johnson (1986) and Adolph Reed (1996). It was not until the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, that some authors reminded of the divided nature of the Black Church, including: Fred Harris (1999) or Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer (2002). In 2008 Barbara Savage even stated that the Black Church involvement in CRM was rather an unexpected exception than a rule (2). Another author who pointed to the divisions within the Black Church was Paul Harvey (2005, 2011, 2016). In 2010 a vivid but brief debate about the misconceptions concerning the Black Church was initiated by Eddie S. Glaude Jr.'s text *The Black Church Is Dead*.

[13] While some aspects of Black religious culture (e.g. spirituals) have been present in analyses of African American culture, music and literature, its various political dimensions have been almost entirely absent from Polish academic research.

[14] More about this topic: (Kirmani 2008).

[15] Instead of concentrating only on the role of national leaders (stressed by earlier research).

process model constructed by McAdam specifically stressed the significance of the southern urban Black churches' networks in preparing the ground for the "Black insurgency."[16] Yet, neither of these authors paid attention to the internal conflicts concerning the militancy issue within Black churches during this time.[17] Morris, for example, was criticized for not even noting "the large number -perhaps a majority-of southern black clergymen who did not become active in the civil rights movement or allow their churches to be used for civil rights meetings" (Carson 1986: 620–621). These omissions are understandable due to the fact that these authors, as well as many others, focused on the significance of CRM as an example of a successful social movement, on its specificity, and on the role of the Black churches in it. They looked from the perspective of the social movement, leaving behind the topic of the churches that remained non-engaged. This left room for additional research however. Specifically, there is a need of an analysis that, instead of taking the social movement's perspective, would rather consider the perspective of the churches, including those that did not get involved in the CRM or chose a different form of protest than the one most commonly known. That is why in this essay I will not focus on the specificity of the CRM or on the role of the churches within this social movement, but on the reasons presented by various churches in favor or against joining it. I will also try to explain why some churches chose a non-standard form of engagement, accepting the notion of Black Power,[18] and I will analyze the arguments of the Black Liberation Theology's 'founding father'.

Therefore, I will use mainly qualitative methods, including elements of content analysis (especially in respect to the writings by Martin Luther King and James Cone). Apart from looking at the religious leaders' arguments concerning their various positions, I will also pay attentions to the basic theories relating to the role of religion in social change. I will include historical analysis and the existing literature analysis. Apart from the primary sources (documents, speeches and writings of the Black clergy), I will use multiple secondary sources, including academic articles, books, and newspaper articles.

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[16] He preferred this expression since he thought that there was no singular Civil Rights Movement.

[17] Although McAdam described the reasons of the rural churches' non-involvement in the previous period: of 1876–1930 (90–92).

[18] This topic that has not been widely discussed in the mainstream literature on CRM. The mentions of The National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC) are very scarce. Discussions about the 'Black Power' are usually conducted in the context of the influence that the Nation of Islam and Malcom X's Black nationalism had on secular groups (like Black Panthers), not on churches. Black Liberation Theology, on the other hand, is sometimes discussed, but a great amount of literature dedicated strictly to this phenomenon has been written by scholars who have had some ties to this theology (e.g. Gayraud S. Wilmore, Cornell West, James Deotis Roberts or James Cone himself). Additionally, despite the initial publicity of Black Liberation Theology, the interest in Cone's ideas gradually faded. It regained some publicity after 2008 when ABC News published fragments of Barack Obama's pastor Jeremiah Wright's sermons, including the phrase "God damn America for treating our citizens as less than human (…)" (Ross and el-Buri 2008). Despite this momentary and often biased interest, Black Liberation Theology has not managed to escape narrow corridors of divinity schools, and has seldom been a part of discussions on the Black churches' reactions to the civil rights struggle.

The Black Church and Black churches: definitions and perspectives

First, it is important to precisely define such terms as 'Black Church' and 'Black churches'. The term 'Black Church' evolved from the phrase 'the Negro Church,' which was also the title of the pioneering sociological study of African American Protestant churches by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903). Originally, the phrase was an academic category while most African Americans described themselves according to denominational affiliations such as Methodist, Baptist or Pentecostal. African American Christians were never religiously monolithic and their churches were highly decentralized. Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, the concept of the Black Church, while being a scholarly construct, achieved popular resonance throughout American culture and society. For the sake of simplicity and efficacy, the term 'Black Church' became a euphemistic generalization for the collective identity of African American Christians in both academic and societal contexts (Floyd-Thomas et al. 2007: xxiv).

According to a narrow definition, the term 'Black Church' as "a kind of sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 1) refers only to seven historically Black Protestant denominations: the National Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AME Zion), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the Church of God in Christ.[19] And although Lincoln and Mamiya recognized the existence of predominantly Black local churches in white denominations (like United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church or Roman Catholic Church) they limited their definition only to totally Black controlled denominations.

Other definitions include all the Christian churches that currently or historically have ministered to predominantly Black congregations (some of them belonging to historically Black denominations and some to predominantly white denominations). The authors of *Black Church Studies. An Introduction* included in their definition all "those churches whose worship life and cultural sensibilities have reflected, historically and traditionally, a connection to the larger African American community."[20]

A number of scholars notice serious problems with using the term 'Black Church'. As Barbara Dianne Savage stressed, "despite common usage, there is no such thing

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[19] It was estimated that around 80 percent of Black Christians in the 1990s belonged to these churches (Corbett and Corbett-Mitchell 1999: 301). In 2007, 59 percent of African Americans belonged to the historically Black churches while 78 percent of African Americans declared Protestantism (Pew Forum).

[20] They also listed three primary expressions of the Black Church: 1) independent Black, Methodist, and Holiness-Pentecostal denominations; 2) Black congregations and fellowships in predominantly white denominations such as Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians; 3) as well as non-denominational Christian churches "that have multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic membership but the ministerial leadership and cultural identity is African American in nature" (Floyd-Thomas et al. 2007: xxiii-xxiv).

as the 'Black church' (…). The term is a political, intellectual, and theological construction that symbolizes unity and homogeneity while masking the enormous diversity and independence among African American religious institutions and believers" (Savage 2008: 9). Also Floyd-Thomas et al. recognize that "[g]iven the conceptual ambiguity and methodological problems involved in examining the Black Church as an institution, per se (…), it is more useful to study the Black Church as a tradition," which as they claim, despite some complications allows "to discuss the dynamism and evolutionary character of African American Christianity" (xxiv).

As complex and controversial as the idea of the Black Church might be, the term has been constantly present in academia, signifying a central dimension of African American religious experience. To be precise and to acknowledge this complexity, however, scholars also apply the term 'Black churches'. Anthony Pinn for example uses the term 'Black Church' to denote "the collective reality of black Christianity across denomination lines" (Pinn 2002: ix), and the term 'Black churches' to describe local Protestant churches within a particular denomination (Pinn 2002: ix). I will follow Pinn's categorization and, in order to respect the multiplicity of Black churches and their various responses to the social protest, I will use the second term more often.

According to experts, it is difficult to overemphasize the role that the Black Church played for the African American minority group. As they stress, "[t]he Black Church provided structure and meaning for African people and their descendants in the Americas who struggled to survive the ravages and brutality of slavery and racial oppression" (Floyd-Thomas et al. 2007: xxiii). Therefore, although generally Protestant Christianity was not the religion that Africans brought from their homelands,[21] and despite the fact that they did not belong to a single ethnic group, the Black Church is commonly classified as an ethnic church.

The interpretative scheme developed by Hart Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen, for example, known as the "ethnic community-prophetic" model, emphasizes the significance of the Black Church "as a base for building a sense of ethnic identity and a community of interest among its members" (qtd. in Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 11). George Marsden stresses that the Black Church has served many functions of an ethnic church. He explains that unlike many immigrant groups, whom religion brought from their home countries helped preserve their identities, Africans were not able to keep religious heritages. However, what they preserved were African styles and practices that various local African religions had in common. When they converted to Christianity, many of these were incorporated into their new religion (Marsden 1990: 67). By the time of the Civil War, Christianity (with specific African elements of worship) was overwhelmingly the religion of the Blacks (Marsden 1990: 67)[22]

[21] Most Africans before being brought to the colonies practiced indigenous (tribal) religions, some adhered to Islam, and some to syncretic Catholicism (being baptized by the Portuguese).

[22] Although it did not become the religion of all African Americans in the US, it was accepted by the majority of them.

that helped them cope with the difficult situation of enslavement and became part of their culture. After the Civil War and especially during the Great Migration, when in some respects the experience of the freed slaves was analogical to that of other immigrant groups in the northern cities, Black churches played a similar role to that of other ethnic churches (Marsden 1990: 147–148).

In the situation of migration, ethnic religion[23] usually helps migrants in adapting while keeping their distinctive identity. Their religious institutions serve important functions: they help survive in new circumstances and communicate with the rest of the society (Kubiak 1970: 51)[24]. Ethnic churches usually provide leaders, organize financial support, relieve stress, and help to keep identity in the process of integration. All these functions were taken up by the Black Church. Marsden stresses however, that African American migrants to the North, apart from all usual problem of other migrant groups, had to face one additional factor – racism. In this situation Black churches that were the only institutions over which whites did not have control became principal institutions both for coping with the hard realities of life and for building up a sense of community (Marsden 1990: 147–148). Lincoln and Mamiya present a similar opinion. According to them Black churches "have played more complex roles and assumed more comprehensive burdens in their communities than is true of most white and ethnic churches (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 18). And yet, just like many minority religious institutions which in general can reflect the heartbeat and aspirations of an entire community (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011: 275–276), so did Black churches. Whether they wanted to reach these aspirations through social protest of various forms, however, remained debatable.

Black churches: historical context

Although Africans who were brought to the colonies as slaves carried their own religious traditions with them, most often they were forbidden from practicing them (Raboteau 2001: 3–14). Interestingly, in the beginning, American colonists were ambivalent about converting slaves to Christianity. This unwillingness was caused by the fact that an English common law tradition held that baptism made slaves free (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 301). With time however efforts toward their conversion were passed. "As early as 1667 the Virginia colony passed laws which

[23] Scholars who research relations between ethnicity and religion see religion as an element of a cultural system. They often accept Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as it postulates that religion should be studied as a symbolic system in terms of which believers interpret the world and live their lives (Geertz 2007). Also in Lincoln and Mamiya's famous analysis of the Black Church in the African American experience, the authors understand culture as a form of religion, and religion as a form of culture (7). It is indispensable to stress, however, that there are multiple definitions of religion and that defining this phenomenon is one of the most difficult tasks sociologists ever faced (Kehrer 1997).

[24] More about ethnic churches functions: (Leś 1981: 60–63).

other colonies followed, that permitted the baptism and conversion of slaves without setting them free" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 200). After that, Protestant missionaries[25] took the task of Christianizing Blacks (Raboteau 2001: 15). Although some owners were still suspicious of converting their slaves, they soon realized that Christianity could serve as means of social control, shaping "obedient and docile slaves" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 200–201).[26]

'White religion' was culturally distant and difficult for the slaves to understand[27] but soon they managed to develop their own kind of Christianity, based in a large part on the newly developed Evangelicalism.[28] Revivalism of the First Great Awakening contributed greatly to the popularity of some Christian groups among the enslaved.[29] "The openness and expressiveness of the Baptist and later Methodist evangelical services had some affinities to the African religious style and allowed for the introduction of more demonstrative and ecstatic practices" (Marsden 1990: 67). Additionally, evangelicalism unlike traditional Protestantism did not emphasize hierarchical order and authority, and focused more on the poor who could even be spiritually and morally superior than the rich (Marsden 1990: 67). Therefore, instead of simply accepting the teachings of obedience used by the white masters to control them, enslaved Africans created a kind of Christianity that somewhat reflected their African past and the situation in which they found themselves (Raboteau 2001: 17–18).

Thanks to the awakenings a number of independent Black preachers emerged, both in the North and in the South (Marsden 1990: 68). In the southern plantations, slaves felt some freedom by meeting secretly to develop their own prayers, songs, rituals and choose religious leaders – it was a kind of underground religion at first.[30] Though formally they usually had to attend churches of their white owners, they soon managed to create some separate Black congregations. The first independent Black Baptist congregation was established by a slave named Andrew Bryan in 1780 in Savannah. It was independent in a sense that the enslaved Blacks met separately (not in balconies of their masters' churches) and were able to choose their own ministers

[25] In the beginning, mostly the Anglican Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, created in 1701 (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 200).

[26] As the Old Testament examples of slavery were often used to justify the system.

[27] Especially that they were not allowed to (and not able to) read the Bible.

[28] Evangelicalism – transdenominational movement within Protestant Christianity developed mainly during the Great Awakenings in America (having roots in pietism, Methodism and puritanism). It stresses that the essence of the Gospel consists of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, and that the 'born again' experience in receiving salvation is the central moment of 'conversion' to a personal inner relation with Jesus. The emphasis on the authority of the Bible and on spreading the Christian message are characteristic for the movement. Since the beginning, evangelical meetings were egalitarian and emotional. Spiritual experience was more important than hierarchies of the formal churches. Theologically evangelicalism remained conservative, keeping the literal interpretation of the Bible even after scientific discoveries of the 19th century and the development of the liberal theology. More in: (Marsden 1991), (Noll 2002).

[29] The first substantial numbers of Blacks, especially in the South, were converted to Christianity during the eighteenth-century awakenings, especially in 1750s and 1760s (Marsden 1990: 68).

[30] Coined as 'invisible institution' by Franklin E. Frazier (1963) and Albert J. Raboteau (2004).

and officers (Raboteau 2001: 21–22).[31] Despite the fact that white owners wanted to keep control over the message conveyed in sermons, they sometimes agreed for the Blacks to have their own churches because this solved the problem of separating slaves in the back seats of white churches.[32] If slaves could not organize a separate church, they would continue attending a white church[33] but would also place their own prayer meetings in cabins or 'hush harbors' where they sang spirituals. These 'songs of sorrow' usually presented enslaved Africans as a biblical people, new Israelites, enslaved in Egypt (Marsden 1990: 68). Slaves awaited God's deliverance in a double sense: spiritual and literal (Raboteau 2001: 48–49). However, only occasionally did the hope of Exodus take revolutionary form, leading to rare slave uprisings.[34]

Because slaves were not allowed to develop any other social institution (political, economic, educational), the church soon became the only institution in their communities, a center of Black culture and a source of leadership. Christianity became extremely important "for binding the black community together, introducing a new sense of communal identity" (Marsden 1990: 68) as well as for preventing total dehumanization of the enslaved and providing them with at least some feeling of self-worth (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 304).

Although first separate Black congregations (mainly Baptist) were created in the South, the first independent Black denominations, like AME and AME Zion, were established in northern cities. While in the South the independent church movement was threatened with restrictions due to fears of slave revolts (especially after Nat Turner's rebellion), in the North, thanks to the gradual abolition of slavery after the Revolution, it was possible for Black congregations and clergy to take more authority over their religious affairs. One of the first separate Black congregations was Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. It was founded in 1794 by Richard Allen, a former slave.[35] He left his white congregation together with Absalom Jones due to discrimination against the Black congregants and clergy (Raboteau 2001: 22–23). However, while Jones (who also established another separate Black congregation in St. Thomas African Episcopal Church) decided to remain within the white Episcopal denomination, Allen in 1816 separated from white Methodists formally, forming the first Black denomination: African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 51–52)[36]. The second separate Black denomination, AME Zion, was

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[31] Such a solution was possible mainly due to the congregational organization of Baptist churches.

[32] As well as of hiring white preachers who would preach to the slaves.

[33] More about the situation in biracial churches in the South in: (Boles 1990).

[34] In the few slave rebellions, the religious element was quite strong, including Denmark Vesey's conspiration (1822), Gabriel Prosser's planned uprising (1800) and Nat Turner's rebellion (1831) (Wilmore 1998: chapter 3).

[35] For a detailed analysis of the emergence of churches and other Black institutions in the first generation of freedom in Philadelphia see: (Nash1988).

[36] According to Barbara Savage, "those two decisions are an early indicator of the historical diversity among black churches, their ambivalent relationship to white American Christianity, and their political natures." (Savage 2008: 4).

founded in 1821 in New York after a white Methodist denomination refused to ordain Black preachers.[37] Other separate Black denominations were founded much later (between 1870 and 1961)[38].

Some authors view the creation of separate Black congregations and denominations as a protest itself (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:60), however it is also important to stress that the northern churches soon became directly engaged in the struggle against social injustice, especially slavery. Both Philadelphia churches supported the work of the Free African Society (1787), an organization dedicated to racial solidarity and the abolition of slavery. The Bethel Church became a station of the Underground Railroad (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 52) and AME Zion was known as 'The Freedom Church', having Harriet Tubman as a member (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 58). Churchpersons were also involved in promoting issues ranging from education to economic empowerment to political strategies and the physical health of African Americans.[39] They organized extended structures of social institutions (Raboteau 2001: 24–25) and published independent journals.

After the end of the Civil War, northern Black churches (as well as white ones) sent missionaries to the South and became engaged in organizing financial, educational and institutional help for former slaves. However, Black religiosity developed in the South over the years of slavery and under the influence of rural revivalism, was much different than that in the North. It was energetic, enthusiastic, filled with music, dancing and spirituals. Therefore, while some former slaves joined Black denominations from the North, others established their own independent churches (including a new Methodist denomination, two Baptist denominations, and many new congregations). Most of the Black churches were publicly engaged. As "all comprehending institutions,"[40] they had to deal with psychological, social, economic, and physical issues of their communities for a long time. Now they could do it more formally, adding political activity as well.

[37] Just like in the previous case, initially only a separate Black congregation was founded, which however, later fully separated from the white denomination, creating a new one. The Black clergy from New York did not want to join Allen's AME, therefore they created a second Black Methodist denomination.

[38] The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (later renamed: Christian Methodist Episcopal Church) was established in the post-slavery period (1870) in the South (Jackson, Tennessee). Although individual Black Baptist churches were founded earlier than Methodist ones, their organization into a national denomination did not occur until the late 19th century. The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC) was established in 1880, in Montgomery, Alabama; the National Baptist Convention of America International, Inc. in 1915 after separation from NBC; The Progressive National Baptist Convention, incorporated (PNBC) came into being in 1961 due to a disagreement concerning Martin Luther King's social engagement – after separating from NBC. In 1907, The Church of God in Christ became the first legally chartered Pentecostal body incorporated in the United States. More in: (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

[39] They were often mobilized by the National Negro Convention on issues that went beyond abolitionist agitation. Its advocacy of temperance was grounded in the belief that alcoholic beverages merely exacerbated problems of the oppressed (Baldwin 2003: 20–21).

[40] An expression used by Carter G. Woodson (qtd. in: Baldwin 2003: 15; 23).

In fact, during Reconstruction (1865–1877) many of those who emerged as Black political leaders were ministers. They were empowered by their literacy and by the prominent role in building their churches which served as the first forums for collective political organizing (Savage 2008: 4). Some of the ministers were even elected to public office, e.g. AME bishop Henry McNeil Turner.[41] However, while Black preachers filled multiple social roles, their political activities could occasionally create problems for their congregations. Sometimes their churches were burned down by whites who felt they upset the status quo. Additionally, while Black churches were cornerstones of the Black community, they were by no means homogenous, especially in their reactions to such violence. Some Black ministers preached messages of liberation[42], while others preached messages of compromise and accommodation (Barber 2015: 252). The latter ones often ignored or downplayed inequality and accepted the normative claims and practices of white society, sometimes concentrating mainly on the otherworldly themes.

As it soon turned out, Black participation in electoral politics in the South lasted only from the introduction of the Civil Rights Act in 1867 until the late 1800s.[43] After the federal troops retreated from the South and the Democrats regained power, they started to introduce Jim Crow laws that forced African Americans from mainstream politics. Although some preachers reacted to this by reviving liberation themes,[44] a more common response of the Black ministers was to retreat to their communities[45] and to engage in 'surrogate politics' within their churches (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 206). They elected church leaders, pastors, trustees, deacons, and church boards. They remained the only independent institutions and became the only places in the South where talented African Americans could achieve some degree of success and respect. Sometimes they could even serve as liaisons with the white culture while not entering politics directly (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 303). Generally however, Black churches in the South had to keep a low profile. Many reemphasized this part of evangelical tradition that stressed the inner relation with Christ and concentration on spiritual, otherworldly matters. This direction was additionally encouraged by the white landowners (even financially). Some previously active churches were simply silenced by threats of violence (McAdam 1982, 90–92). In this period of distress, many Black churches became a religious and psychological refuge for African Americans and served a therapeutic function (Baldwin 2003: 28).

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[41] More in: (Baldwin 2003: 26–27). See also: (Angell 1992).

[42] Including Henry M. Turner, who even raised the issue of reparations for the years of slavery.

[43] For some authors a symbolic ending date is 1877, however it is not a drop-dead date for the inception of segregation and loss of voting rights. This gradual process culminated in the 1890s and after 1900.

[44] E.g. Henry M. Turner began to support Black nationalism and emigration of Blacks to Africa.

[45] Especially after the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of 1896, and after the intensification of the Ku Klux Klan's activity.

The Great Migration, which began around 1910s, brought even more challenges.[46] As many Blacks moved out of the rural South into cities of the North, Midwest, and West, Black urban churches grew and often became overwhelmed with poor and undereducated migrants. At the same time, the deserted rural southern churches became impoverished. Although many northern churches were also devoid of the resources to address all new problems adequately, they were still trying to assume roles similar to those of other ethnic churches. They would help acculturate rural migrants to the urban environment, often through educational, economic and recreational programs. Some of them also tried to articulate political needs of the urban Black community. Others, however, due to lack of means to do that, turned their sense of mission inward (Baldwin 2003: 29).

What is more, former slaves migrating to the North brought with them a religious heritage that was quite distinct from that found in many established urban Black communities. Spiritual practices were viewed as "antiquated, primitive, tainted by the sins of slavery, and marked by pagan retentions from Africa" (Savage 2008: 6). Due to these differences and to difficulties with admitting large numbers of migrants to the existing congregations, numerous so-called 'storefront churches' were created. Among them, many adhered to Pentecostalism, a new Christian movement that emerged in the early 1900s.[47] Rivalry among small churches was quite common. Additionally, many of their preachers were poorly educated and therefore convinced that they need to get favor from the whites. Many also retreated to revivalist Christianity and defensive accommodationism (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 121).

Protestant fundamentalism, which developed among white evangelicals and attached great significance to biblical literalism, doctrinal conformity, evangelism, and soul-winning mission,[48] captured the imagination of many Black churches (Baldwin 2003: 29). By declaring that revivalism and getting people saved is the only cure for social ills, and by rejecting social, political, and economic reform, fundamentalism changed the character of the previously perfectionist evangelicalism that apart from reforming souls also aimed at reforming society.[49] Interestingly, it often blended with conservative politics of Booker T. Washington, who called for racial self-uplift and education in technical arts instead of agitating for civil rights, political power or liberal art education.[50]

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[46] It is estimated that between 1910 and 1970 over six million people migrated from the rural South to the northern cities.

[47] One of its founding fathers was a Black preacher William Seymour who was famous for the Azusa Street Revival. More in: (Raboteau 2001: 95–99)

[48] Christian fundamentalism began in the late 19th and early 20th century among British and American Protestants as a reaction to theological liberalism, scientific discoveries, including Darwin's theory, and cultural modernism. More in: (Marsden 2006)

[49] This approach, common among Black churches, was also connected to the postmillennial orientation of the early evangelical movement – as opposed to premillennial beliefs accepted by fundamentalists.

[50] More about the influence and writings of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois in: (Aiello, 2016).

On the other hand, churches' indifference towards social issues helped trigger the rise of 'alternative' and 'unconventional' Black religious movements, such as the Father Divine Peace Mission Movement, Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People,[51] and some Islamic and Jewish sects. By challenging racism and addressing issues as poverty, economic injustice or health care, "they compensated for the lack of a strong social and political witness by many of the churches" (Baldwin 2003: 29).

Nevertheless, there was still a number of Black churches that rejected the fundamentalist version of evangelicalism and remained socially and politically active. Most often they accepted Social Gospel[52] and wanted to apply the biblical principles of love and justice in their efforts to transform the church, the state, the economy and other institutions (Baldwin 2003: 30). The needs of the new Black urban community however, exceeded the capacity of churches to serve them. Seeing the need to create new effective institutions, especially in politics and economy, they welcomed the establishment of secular civil rights organizations, such as NAACP (1909) or Urban League (1911).[53] Many of these new organizations still drew support from Black churches and especially Black clergy (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 123).

Despite their activity, the persistent poverty of the Black community endured. The situation was made worse especially by economic depression, discrimination, segregation, and legal incapacity (Savage 2008: 6). Additionally, during the Great Depression many Black churches faced difficulties due to the increased financial dependency on whites.[54] Lincoln and Mamiya describe this time as the period of "a relative quietism and an apparent vacuum of church leadership which was filled by flamboyant messiahs and cultists like Father Divine and Daddy Grace" (121). According to Gayraud S. Wilmore, the 1920s–1930s were marked by the "deradicalization" of the Black Church (Wilmore 1998: 163). As he claims, many Black churches of that time retained rural orientation and retreated to enclaves of moralistic evangelistic Christianity by which they wanted to heal the pathology of the ghetto (Wilmore 1998: 191).[55]

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[51] Father Divine and "Sweet Daddy" Grace were known for their glamorous lifestyle, but both also provided social services for followers, such as food banks, affordable housing, and daycares (Barber 2015: 253).

[52] The Social Gospel movement is a religious movement within Protestantism that began in the late 19th century and gained prominence especially in the early 20th century. It was a Christian ethical response to social problems such as urban poverty, child labor, low wages, economic inequality, crime, and racial tensions. Initially developed by Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbush, it was inspired by New Testament passages that present Christ as a challenger of the status quo. Importantly, Social Gospel was a response to traditional theological ideas that stressed individual sin rather than socioeconomic justice. More in: (Marsden 1990: 55–56).

[53] As well as of other organizations for African Americans excluded from white institutions, such as colleges, sororities or fraternities

[54] However, there were exceptions from this model, e.g. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. from the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 211).

[55] Lincoln and Mamiya do not think that churches became totally deradicalized, but rather that they limited their activity due to being overwhelmed by the effects of Great Depression. Nevertheless, Lincoln, Mamiya and Wilmore agree about the consequence, that is 'quietism.'

The 'quietist' period for the Black Church lasted practically until the 1950s.[56] And even then, if some Black clergy tried to influence the improvement of the African Americans' living conditions, they would do it behind the scenes and in a very non-confrontational way (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 304).

Black churches and Civil Rights Movement protests

This 'cautious' attitude marked the beginning of the civil rights era. It was going to change with time, although not for all Black churches. The symbolic beginning of the CRM[57] was the Montgomery (Alabama) Bus Boycott of 1955–56. This was not the first attempt at nonviolent direct action for promoting social change,[58] but its consequences were far-reaching. When Rosa Parks was arrested in December 1955, the members of the Montgomery Women's Political Council decided to start the bus boycott.[59] The Baptist Ministerial Alliance in Montgomery supported the action and became a part of Montgomery Improvement Association (Pinn 2002: 13). And although it was not the Black clergy who started the protests, Black activists responsible for the boycott in Montgomery selected a young Baptist minister, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to be their leader and spokesman.[60] In fact, he was elected largely

[56] With some exceptions, e.g. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s activity in Harlem. More in: (Pinn 2002: 12–13).

[57] According to Lincoln and Mamiya, many factors contributed to the emergence of the CRM – apart from the activity of the NAACP, also urbanization and its by-products (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 165). Most importantly, rising expectations, unfilled aspirations, and a sense of falling behind whites in an era of prosperity that Blacks were experiencing in the 1950s and 1960s were the factors that provided a social foundation of the movement for change. Specific issues that contributed to this situation included the incorporation of African Americans in some New Deal programs, the March on Washington Movement in 1941, the participation of African Americans in World War II, the struggle for the desegregation of the Armed Forces, and interestingly, the efforts to desegregate baseball (See: Tygiel 1983). One of the breaking points of that period were protests of the Black students in Virginia that started in 1951 which eventually led to the NAACP involvement in five court cases, known as Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.

[58] E.g. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) staged protest against restaurant segregation in northern cities already in the 1940s. There were also earlier boycotts. It is worth to mention at least the Harlem bus boycott organized in 1941 by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. or the protest that took place already in 1952 in Mississippi. The latter was a successful boycott of gas stations that refused to provide restrooms for Blacks, organized by a local Black doctor, T.R.M. Howard, who also belonged to the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL). More in: (Beito and Royster Beito 2018).

[59] In March 1955 Claudette Colvin was also arrested for not giving up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, but a considered bus boycott did not take place. However, after the Mississippi murder of Emmett Till in August 1955 and after the verdict of all-white jury finding his kidnappers not guilty, social tension was radically exacerbated, which led to a different decision after Rosa Parks' arrest. More in: (Garrow 1985) and (Beito and Royster Beito 2018).

[60] What is interesting, Martin Luther King, Jr. was considered "a relatively run-of-the-mill pastor before Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott" (Cooney). King's church, the Dexter Avenue congregation, considered his predecessor, Vernon Johns, too militant on civil rights. In May 1953, he was forced to resign as pastor in Montgomery. The church hoped that the young new pastor would concentrate on ministerial work. That's why they chose King. More in: The Vernon Johns Society, (http://www.vernonjohns.

due to the fact that powerful senior ministers could not agree on who should take the position.[61] Nevertheless, he turned out to be a talented speaker and passionate supporter of the cause, through whom civil disobedience made its way into African American religious culture (Harvey 2016). The eventual success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott made King a nationally known figure.

His agreement to accept this role connected Black churches to the CRM. Charles M. Payne (1996) stresses however, that although Black churches are typically portrayed as frontrunners in the civil rights struggle, in fact they were late supporters of the movement.[62] The strategy of 'direct action,' including boycotts, sit-ins, Freedom Rides and marches was first supported by many local grassroots organizations, fraternal societies, and Black-owned businesses that mobilized volunteers, and only later by churches. Nevertheless, ever since the churches granted their support, the movement's actions were organized not only by civil rights activists but also by Black ministers and laity and backed financially by church members (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 165). What is more, the Black Church "provided the ideological and theological underpinning for the movement" (Pinn 2002: 13).

In 1957 King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and became the 'face' of the CRM.[63] The SCLC was even called by some scholars "the political arm of the Black Church" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 211). It offered training and leadership assistance for local efforts to fight segregation and gave directions to local churches. And although there were also white Americans (and white churches) that supported the protests, it was the Black churches that eventually became the core of the movement. They provided meeting places, information centers, and activists. Even if they were not directly recruiting volunteers, they provided information that shaped the political actions of congregants (Pinn 2002: 14). Being the best educated within Black communities and having some experience with leadership, Black preachers were qualified to play an active role in the CRM – and a number of them did.

This created a perception that all Black churches and Black clergy supported the movement. However, not all of the Black ministers were eager to leave the non-confrontational attitude. In fact, many remained skeptical and unengaged or stood in a strong opposition to King. As some authors stress, middle-class Black clergy in the South advocated cautious gradualism. Even in the 1950s when there was an upsurge

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org/tcal001/vjmontlt.html). The author of the Vernon Johns Society's papers, Patrick L. Cooney refers to research by Henry W. Powell (1995) *Reminisces of Vernon Johns* and Lamont Yeakey (1979) *The Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott, 1955–56*. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University).

[61] Also, because they were unwilling to challenge white power.

[62] He also adds that while historians have commonly portrayed the movement leadership as male, ministerial, and well-educated, he finds that organizers in Mississippi and elsewhere looked for leadership to working-class rural Blacks, and especially to women. More in: (Payne 1996), (Dittmer 1994), (Garrow 1985).

[63] Apart from Dr. King, there more leaders who formed SCLC, including: Rev. Ralph Abernathy Rev. C. K. Steele, Rev. T. J. Jemison, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, Ella Baker, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison.

of protest sentiments among African Americans, most of their ministers "did not embrace the most rigorous techniques of protest until other leaders took the initiative and gained widespread support" (G. Marx qtd. in Glenn 1964). When King defined the Black freedom struggle as a moral and religious cause at the start of the bus boycott on December 5, 1955, he was opposed by those who saw Christian ethics as a matter of personal morality not social action (Raboteau 2001: 110). In fact, a great part of this criticism came from the Black Church. Many Black evangelical ministers disagreed with King's philosophy of social activism because "they believed that society could only be changed by converting individuals to obey God's commandments, not by mass political agitation" (Raboteau 2001: 114). Even Martin Luther King himself pointed to the difficulties of mobilizing support from Black ministers in Montgomery during the bus boycott. He noted that the clergy's apathy "stemmed from a sincere feeling that ministers were not to get mixed up in such earthy, temporal matters as social and economic improvement" (qtd. in Harris 2001: 144).

One of the strong opponents of King was Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, the President of the National Baptist Convention. He represented these Black ministers who believed that "legal solutions to discrimination already existed and would work if given time, without irresponsible demonstrators stirring up counterproductive anger and violence" (Raboteau 2001: 114). In 1961 Rev. Jackson stressed his attachment to a "patriotic law and order, anticommunist, pro-capitalist school of gradualism" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 31). In fact, the institutional conservatism of the National Baptist Convention which was Martin Luther King Jr.'s own denomination, prevented its leaders from accepting King's attitude to protests. Consequently, it led King and his followers to form a new Baptist denomination – the Progressive National Baptist Convention – which was strongly tied to civil rights. Rev. Jackson on the other hand, remained unconvinced and often expressed a strong vocal opposition to King's strategy of civil disobedience and nonviolent protest. He was famous for saying: "From protest to production!" As a result, he managed to block the participation of his convention as an institution in the CRM (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 31).

Professor Manning Marable additionally stresses that it was mostly in small towns where the Black Church provided the institutional means for carrying out the campaigns, while the majority of Black churches in major cities did not engage in civil disobedience. According to him, in Montgomery only around 10 to 15 Black churches were actively involved in the bus boycott of 1955–56. In Birmingham in 1963, the situation did not look much better: only 25 or 30 out of more than two hundred Black churches in the city became engaged in protests. Moreover, while in most churches their members participated to a great extent, the ministers themselves often tried to stand on the sidelines. He emphasizes that the majority of Black Baptist ministers thought that it was not the role of the church to be involved in social protest (Marable 2008).[64]

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[64] Marable recognizes, however, that without financial support from major Black denominations, civil rights organizations would not have managed to operate on a big scale.

Gayraud S. Wilmore describes most churches as spectators of the protests (Wilmore 1998: 209). Andrew Young confirms that even on the important battlegrounds like Birmingham, activist preachers were a minority. He recounts that of all the Black churches in Birmingham, "there were only fourteen that agreed to host the mass meetings that were our primary means of communicating with blacks in Birmingham." He adds that actually "the Baptist preachers as a group voted to oppose Martin's coming." So, if it had not been for the commitment of that small "new breed of clergy," the movement's efforts in Birmingham would have been thwarted (qtd. in Savage 2008: 266–267).

It is worth mentioning that even Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. from the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem (a pastor, a former activist himself and a Congressman) criticized some of Martin Luther King Jr.'s actions.[65] One of the most vocal critics of King, however, was Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, a pioneering African American evangelist and a host of "The Radio Church of God". He spread the evangelical gospel of individual salvation, saying that only converting people to Christianity would help cure the evils and injustices of the world, not political protests. After the March on Washington (1963), Michaux preached a sermon criticizing the event and questioning King's religious commitments. His sermons implied that King was being motivated not by the Bible, not by religion, but by something else. When he organized a picket against the SCLC meeting in Baltimore in 1965, about 100 members of his congregation were protesting King with signs such as "Communist termites are inside" (Eligon 2018).[66]

Some authors remind, however that apart from theological and political reasons or institutional conservatism, another motivation for the clergy's non-engagement was financial dependency. A Black clergy member from Chicago thinks that it was the reason why King failed to recruit influential ministers in Chicago for his campaign against open housing in 1966. "It is a known fact that a number of our black preachers eat at the mayor's table. You don't eat at the mayor's table and fight the mayor. Quite naturally, had they allowed Dr. King in their pulpit they were not an ally to the mayor" (qtd. in Harris 2001: 153). In addition, civil rights activist Septima Clark once admitted that "so many preachers supported the Movement that we say it was based in the churches, yet many preachers couldn't take sides with it because they thought they had too much to lose" (qtd. in Harris 2001: 145). It was not only economic coercion however, but also threats of violence that repressed many of the Black churches (Harvey 2016) and prevented them from actively participating in the civil rights actions.[67]

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[65] Despite senator's initial support, when King planned to protest at the Democratic National Convention, Powell opposed him and threatened to destroy his media image (*Powell*…).

[66] According to Prof. Lerone A. Martin, Michaux collaborated with F.B.I. (Eligon 2018). A more detailed analysis of the arguments that were used by other conservative clergy against King's activism requires a separate thorough research.

[67] Around 93 churches in the South were burned or bombed between 1962–65, most of them rural (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 97). In Addition, pastors were attacked. Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth for example "suffered multiple physical attacks, and both his church and home were bombed on multiple occasions" (*Fred L. Shuttlesworth*…)

As complicated as the reasons behind the Black clergy's opposition to King's protests were, it is important to remember that Black churches and Black ministers were not unanimous about participating in the CRM. It also came as no surprise that on April 12, 1963 a public statement known as "Alabama Clergymen's Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." was issued. It was the most famous rejection of King's actions proclaimed by religious leaders. Although it was signed mostly by the white clergy, many conservative Black ministers agreed with significant parts of it. In this letter the clergymen criticized demonstrations organized in Alabama by King calling them "unwise and untimely." They stated that "racial matters could properly be pursued in the courts" and in the meantime laws should be "peacefully obeyed." They added that "hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political tradition." Describing King's actions, they explained that in their view "such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems." Therefore, they rejected King's "extreme measures" in Birmingham.[68]

In response to these claims, King wrote his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which became known as providing the rationale for the CRM. There he listed religious arguments in favor of civil disobedience and explained why he advocated breaking some laws and obeying others. He distinguished between a 'just law' (which people had a moral responsibility to obey) and 'unjust law' (which people had a moral responsibility to disobey). To support his argument, he quoted St. Augustine: "An unjust law is no law at all" (qtd. in King 1963). He also referred to St. Thomas Aquinas, stressing that: "an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." He concluded that segregation laws were unjust because segregation "distorts the soul and damages the personality." Therefore, he encouraged people to oppose them, especially since minorities, deprived of their voting rights, had nothing to say about passing them. In reply to seeing his nonviolent efforts as extremist, he first pointed out that there are more extreme approaches than his (e.g. the Nation of Islam's), and then he rhetorically asked whether Jesus was not "an extremist in love" and "was not Paul an extremist for the Gospel of Christ" (King 1963).[69]

The letter is one of the best examples of King's interpretation of Christian justifications for the struggle against injustice. His thinking was influenced not only by the ideas of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, but also by such Christian theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and Walter Rauschenbusch.[70] Through Howard Thurman's

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[68] All quotations are from: "Alabama Clergymen's Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr", 1963 [online]

[69] All quotations are from: Letter From Birmingham City Jail – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963 [online].

[70] Through his advisor Bayard Rustin, he also came across Quaker ideas of pacifism. Both in the letter, and in his other writings, he also referred not only to theologians but also to philosophers, including Socrates, Martin Buber, and Henry David Thoreau.

theology of radical nonviolence, he found an important link to Gandhi's philosophy.[71] Most importantly, he connected all these ideas with his strong attachment to Social Gospel. The approach to the social message of Jesus had started to divide Protestants already at the end of the 19th century. Since the creation of the Protestant fundamentalist movement, Social Gospel was being downplayed by conservative Protestants (especially Evangelicals). King, however, following liberal theology, concentrated on the passages of the Gospel that presented Jesus as the defender of the poor and the excluded.[72] This led him to view racial and economic oppression as social evils that Christians had a moral duty to resist. He saw the church as equally instrumental to both individual and social salvation (Barber 2015: 253).

According to Paul Harvey, thanks to such an approach King helped to revivify the part of the history of Black southern Christianity that was connected to social engagement, which allowed people to see themselves as part of a long-running tradition of protest (Harvey 2016). Wilmore presents a similar opinion. Not only does he think King reversed the trend of deradicalization of Black religion, but also that he stopped, what he calls, a 'dechristianization of Black radicalism' (Wilmore 1998: 204).[73] Nevertheless, due to the mistrust of most churches, he "never mastered the whole power of the church" (Wilmore 1998: 204). Most black ministers never became involved in movement activities, and some even actively opposed the movement. And yet, "since clerics were a visible part of the leadership cadre of movement activists and because of the movement's emphasis on Christian values, the movement projected an image throughout American life that black churches were the vanguard of social change in black communities" (Harris 2001: 144–145).[74]

Although King was not able to convince all the Black churches to social activism, he never gave up on the nonviolent protest and on his strategy to confront the conscience of white Americans through the 'ethic of love.' At the same time, he had to face another challenge – from those who thought that his methods were not enough. While he stressed that he wanted a reconciliation that would give African Americans the same rights as the whites had, he sometimes accepted partial solutions. This attitude was criticized by younger activists in groups such as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

[71] Thurman's book *Jesus of the Disinherited* (1949) influenced King's greatly. In the case on Gandhi, he stressed, he saw his wisdom as a proof of "working Spirit of God." More about King's attitude to Gandhi's philosophy in: https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/gandhi-mohandas-k

[72] More about the so called Black Social Gospel, a Black Church variant of the Social Gospel, in: (Dorrien 2015) and (Dorrien 2018)

[73] He explains that radicalism was present in Black folk religion, but since the interwar period it moved from Christianity to such movements as the Nation of Islam (especially, after Malcolm X joined it) and to secular Black organizations (including Marxist ones).

[74] Barbara Savage points out that although the courageous ministers and congregations that stepped forward remained a minority, it was a sufficient one (266). Lincoln and Mamiya also admit that not all pastors and churches participated in the movement "but enough to point to the period with pride" (97).

(especially those who were participating in sit-ins and Freedom Rides). The Black Church faced a major challenge to its religiously motivated activism when members of the SNCC became disillusioned with King's strategy (Pinn 2002: 14). The leader of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael – who was inspired by Malcolm X's arguments on Black nationalism and Black power and who viewed the lack of militancy as a weakness – eventually developed the Black Power movement and became engaged in the Black Panther Party.[75] The Black Power as ideology embraced more radical approaches to social transformation. It promoted a "turn from illusionary cooperation with whites, whose liberalism could only promote limited systemic change" (Pinn 2002: 15). What is more, Carmichael, like many leaders within the Black Power movement, expressed a suspicion towards Christianity – as a culturally legitimized religious system used against Black self-determination.[76] The churches were viewed as having supported passivity among the Black Christians in the past while Black Power rejected both, passivity and nonviolence.

Most Black churches dismissed the Black Power ideology as dangerous and contrary to the previous calls for tolerance and brotherhood. For Martin Luther King, Black Power was a misdirection, a useless appeal to violence that could only breed more violence, and that would make African Americans scoop down to the level of the oppressor (Pinn 2002:15).[77] Nevertheless, although it is seldom discussed, there were some Black ministers who were willing to try to reconcile the Christian principles of King's movement with Malcolm X-inspired demands for Black Power (Pinn 2002: 15). They wanted to prove that Christianity does not require churches to be passive and that they are not against self-determination. In order to work on it, they created the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC). It was formally organized in Dallas, Texas in November of 1967, but the group had issued statements on various subjects as far back as July of 1966.

The statement that appeared on July 31, 1966 in the New York Times was signed by 47 ministers.[78] Today it is considered as a document that was meant to help reshape the conversation on race in America during the 1960s and an early example of Black Liberation Theology (NPR 2008). It consisted of four parts: I. To the Leaders of America: Power and Freedom; II. To White Churchmen: Power and Love; III. To Negro

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[75] More about his ideas in: Kwame Ture, Charles V. Hamilton (1992), *Black Power and the Politics of Liberation in America.*

[76] However, despite his opposition to King's strategy, Carmichael praised him "for successfully cobbling together 'a moral philosophy to justify resistance and the techniques to execute that struggle,'" (Savage 2008: 266).

[77] King thought Black Power was a 'cry of disappointment' but did not want to go this direction. He describes his relations and discussions with the leaders of the Black Power movement in the second chapter his book: *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* first published in 1968. He recounts that he suggested to use the slogan 'black consciousness' or 'black equality' instead of Black Power because 'power' sounded like domination, not equality (31–33).

[78] "Position Statement In Support Of Black Power" [online]

Citizens: Power and Justice; IV. To the Mass Media: Power and Truth. One of the most important passages stated: "We regard as sheer hypocrisy or as a blind and dangerous illusion the view that opposes love to power. Love should be a controlling element in power, but what love opposes is precisely the misuse and abuse of power, not power itself."[79] In an interview in 2008, Rev. W. Sterling Cary, one of the signatories of the statement, said that they felt it was "important to say that the will of God was that people be engaged in this struggle against the powers and principalities that were oppressing them, and that engagement in that struggle required the exertion of power" (NPR 2008). The most active years of NCBC were from 1966 to 1972. It concentrated mainly on economic development and education.[80] The cooperation between the Black Power movement and the clergy was difficult, however, because Black Power leaders generally saw Christianity as a 'white man's' religion. Participation in NCBC declined in the early 1970s, as social radicalism declined in general.[81]

The Black Power concept however, did not disappear from the Christian thought. The most famous attempts to incorporate it into the Christian theology were made by James H. Cone, a young theologian holding his Ph.D. from Northwestern University who wanted to prove that it was not necessary to reject Christianity in order to embrace Black Power. Disappointed with these Black churches that stayed politically inactive, as well as with those that were active but strongly rejected 'Black Power' as contradictory to Christian theology, Cone suggested that Christianity was always about liberation. In his view, white interpretation distorted this message but Black people used to see a true meaning in it and should not be afraid to see it now. Later he said, he wanted to construct "a theology that would be black like Malcolm and Christian like Martin" (Cone 2018: 60).

He reached to the tradition of the Black Church and, similarly to the proponents of the Social Gospel, stressed that Jesus was always on the side of the oppressed. However, he went much further. He announced that "to be oppressed is to be Black, and to be an oppressor is to be white," and therefore God is Black (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 309).[82] One of his important aims was to prove that, contrary to the arguments of the Black Power leaders, Christianity was not a white man's religion. Not only did he refer to the dark skin of Jesus (Palestinian Jew) but also to the history of Ethiopians – as one of the first groups of converts to Christianity. He often stressed that real Christianity – the gospel of Jesus – was not opposed to Blackness. In his biography he explains that when he said "Christ is black!" he meant that Jesus identified with the black struggle for justice and dignity" (Cone 2018: 16). For him "Exodus, prophets, and Jesus (…) defined the meaning of liberation" (67).

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[79] "Position Statement In Support Of Black Power," [online]

[80] But it also worked on building relations with Africa.

[81] It has been inactive since 1984. More on NCBC in: (Wilmore 1998: 226).

[82] In fact, he was not the first one to announce that God is Black. Henry M. Turner also wrote "God is a Negro," becoming a precursor of Black Liberation Theology (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 205).

Thus, for him it was obvious that the Black churches should become God's tool for liberation (Pinn, 2002: 23) and that that the cooperation with the Black Power movement was possible.

According to Cone's own words, after the Detroit riots of 1967 and King's assassination in 1968, he felt the need to react. He wondered what role he can play in the CRM as a theologian. In his biography, he said: "rereading Malcolm X for a deeper understanding of Black Power, as the response to black self-hate"(8) played a great role in transforming him "from a Negro theologian to a black theologian, angry and ready to do battle with white theologians" (8) for the sake of civil rights. In fact, he had a negative opinion of both white Christianity and of Black churches and preachers. In his writings he argued that the post-Civil War church lost its zeal for freedom and equality and a Black minister became "a most devoted Uncle Tom", and the transmitter of white wishes (Cone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 346).[83] He was more understanding toward the churches in the South due to the threat of lynching and the need to protect lives by cooperating with whites. He criticized those Black ministers, however, who accepted personal favors from white society, especially in the North, where in his opinion, the Black Church failed to maintain freedom from white controls.

According to him, Martin Luther King was an exception, embodying a return to the "spirit of pre-Civil War Black preachers with emphasis on freedom and quality" (Cone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 348). As much as Cone appreciated King's involvement, however, he felt that "the only thing missing in the Negro freedom struggle was the accent on blackness and the right of black people to assert dignity without compromise" (Cone 2018: 15). He also agreed with the Black Power advocates that there was no concrete benefit to King's strategy. He thought that King's appeal to oppressors through love and moral arguments only meant Black bodies beaten by white officials and mobs. So, despite paying great respect to King, Cone found him myopic in that he failed to recognize the relationship between violence and the development of the United States. This country, Cone argued, secured its independence through armed struggle, and violence was already a reality in America. Therefore, he made a call for Black Power as a mode of Christian conduct that ran contrary to King's perspective (Pinn 2002: 22–23). Unlike King, Cone and his followers also expressed an openness to the possibility of violence – claiming that Christians' choice is not only between violence and nonviolence or good or evil, but rather between greater and lesser evil (Pinn, 2002: 21–22).

Cone rejected the idea that Black Christians should "turn the other cheek," especially when confronted with violence designed to maintain the status quo. As he put it: "simply to say that Jesus did not use violence is no evidence relevant to the

[83] He even thought that secular organizations like NAACP were created "because of the failure of the Black Church to plead the cause of black people in white society" (Cone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 346)

condition of black people as they decide on what to do about white oppression" (qtd. in Pinn 2003: 23). Therefore, African Americans must determine their own means of resistance, and violence remains an option. What is more, in his view, the terms 'violence' and 'nonviolence' were misunderstood: it was an irony for him that white critics discussed Black violence (especially in relation to CRM actions) but were usually "silent about white violence against blacks" (Cone 2018: 49) that dominated throughout history. However, he stressed that "[v]iolence is not black people's primary response to white supremacy, but self-defense is important to black dignity" (Cone 2018: 47). At the same time, he did not believe that oppressors would willingly surrender power once the error of their ways was pointed out to them through nonviolent action (Pinn 2002: 22).

The book *Black Theology and Black Power* that Cone published in 1969 is now considered the founding text of Black Liberation Theology. In the Preface to its 1989 and 1997 edition, he wrote: "I wanted to speak on behalf of the voiceless *black masses* in the name of Jesus, whose Gospel I believed had been greatly distorted by the preaching theology of white churches" (Cone 1997: 1).[84] He said that in his later books, including "A Black Theology of Liberation" (1970), "The Spirituals and the Blues" (1972) or "God of the Oppressed" (1975), he wanted to dismantle a dominant white theology. As he put it, any theology which is not engaged in liberating Black people from white supremacy "is not a Christian theology but a theology of the Antichrist" (Cone 2018: 18). White supremacy, in his view, expresses a Christological heresy, a basic denial of what the Church must say about the person and nature of Christ. When asked about reconciliation, Cone stressed that it should happen in the social context of Black liberation. He meant that liberation had to come first and white people had to deny their 'whiteness' (understood as a privileged position) in order to be ready to reconcile.[85]

Although Cone explained that he was not merely against white people, but against white supremacy clothed in theological disguise, he faced a lot of criticism. Among his critics there were both white and Black theologians who stressed that as a theological construct Black Liberation Theology had many shortcomings. They pointed out to such issues as 'divine racism', 'this-worldliness' of the theology as well as its Marxist influences.[86] Although Cone saw his work as efforts to use theology as

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[84] He was writing until his death in 2018. One of his most famous books was *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011).

[85] He wrote more about it in 1999 in: *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998*.

[86] Black Liberation Theology emerged with the wave of liberation movements in Latin America although Cone stressed that at the time of writing his first book, he was unaware of that. It shares much in common with Liberation Theology in general although it has its own uniqueness. As a theology of liberation, however, it is concerned with the political and economic aspects of salvation rather than salvation in spiritual terms. Cone made comments on the relation of his theology to Marxism in: *The Black Church and Marxism: what do they have to say to each other* (1980).

a tool in the struggle for a better world without oppression, some scholars thought that Black Liberation Theology actually encouraged a victim mentality.[87] Other scholars, e.g. Charles H. Long dismissed Cone's idea of a separate Black theology while some said it was 'Black' only in name as he used many concepts of European theologians.[88]

Nowadays researchers stress that Black Liberation Theology appeared to be a reactionary effort against a 'white' theology and it emerged as an expression of Black consciousness. Being concerned with racism as well as with the historical identity of African Americans, it seemed to have offered a unique perspective of empowerment to Black Christians. Yet, due to its militant attitude and because, unlike King, Cone decided to dismantle a dominant white theology, only a small number of Black clergy accepted it without reservations. Additionally, a highly academic character of Cone's arguments made it interesting mostly for academics, and it became quite influential almost only among well-educated Black theologians.[89] As a result, with time Black Liberation Theology became mainly a form of an intellectual protest. However, it is also true that the small number of congregations that accepted its views, e.g. Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, have been among those most socially and politically active.[90]

When discussing this diversity of attitudes presented by Black churches toward the social protest in the civil rights era, it is indispensable to recall Ronald L. Johnstone's typology, created in 1969. It is one of the few studies which instead of concentrating on the most famous examples of churches and ministers active in civil disobedience, analyzed various attitudes of the Black clergy (in Detroit). Johnstone decided to do his research because, as he said, "the increasing number as well as success of such militant preachers has been a new thing" (Johnstone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 276). He presented his conclusions in an article: "Negro Preachers Take Sides," where he created a typology that divided the Black clergy into: militants (organizers and activists who took part in the CRM demonstrations), traditionalists (who wanted the church to focus on the gospel and stay out of politics), and moderates (who were between the two other groups). According to Johnstone, militant preachers were younger, more educated, of higher status, theologically liberal, serving within mainline Protestant

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[87] E.g. John McWhorter.

[88] He used for example Paul Tillich's idea of contextual theology, stressing that theology is not universal, but tied to specific historical contexts. In the beginning of his career, he was especially influenced by Karl Barth and the neo-orthodox tradition. In his later works he searched for Black sources, including slave spirituals, the blues, and the writings of African-American thinkers such as David Walker, Henry McNeal Turner, and W. E. B. Du Bois. It was manifested especially in: *The Spirituals and the Blues* and *God of the Oppressed*.

[89] Lack of knowledge and interest in Black Liberation Theology among rural pastors was confirmed by Lincoln and Mamiya's study (1990).

[90] Jeremiah Wright used to be the head of this church. Interestingly, being active in the community service is the most important activity of such churches. Although rhetoric might be infused with political issues, there is no direct call for violence. On the other hand, they are among the small number of churches that have been fully supportining the Black Lives Matter movement since its beginnings in 2013.

denominations, and from bigger congregations. As he concluded they were not very numerous, and their influence was disproportionate to their numbers (Johnstone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 282). Traditionalists were either relatively unaware of problems, had given up hope of changing prevailing conditions, or (most often) "satisfied with the situation" since they were able to do what they wanted to do – make living and preach the Gospel" (Johnstone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 277). A typical moderate preacher, on the other hand, was "a peacemaker," gradualist, aware of conditions but conciliatory and accommodating, supporting improvement, but "without alienating white brothers" (Johnstone in Nelsen et al. 1971: 277).

What's interesting is that, although nowadays Martin Luther King is usually seen as a moderate (especially due to the common comparisons to Malcolm X or the leaders of Black Power), at the time of Johnstone's research, he and his followers were mostly classified as militants. The classification did not take into consideration the followers of Black Liberation Theology (as it had not been fully formed yet). It might be inferred however, that they might have found themselves in the same category as the followers of King – as militants. Another possibility is that there would have to be another category created for even more radical clergy. On the other hand, since Black Liberation Theology became mainly an intellectual protest, maybe it would need to be classified as only verbally militant? Regardless of what category would need to be added, the important thing is that Johnstone's typology has pointed out to the variety of attitudes among Black clergy during the civil right era – the variety which nowadays is often forgotten.

Conclusion

The analysis presented above shows that throughout history, Black churches were never unanimous concerning their attitude to social protest as well as to social or political activity. While they did serve as centers of the Black community and fulfilled many functions of ethnic churches (as well as of other ethnic institutions), the scope of these functions varied greatly – also during the time of the CRM. And although their activity in the civil rights era has been often perceived only through the prism of Martin Luther King's involvement and through his symbolic "I Have a Dream" speech (Neal 2010), in fact Black churches presented many different attitudes the CRM.

It also pointed out to theological divisions among Black churches, which some scholars consider to be best explanations for the different levels of social and political (un-)involvement. To some extent they overlap with two conflicting views presented by Black Church scholars concerning the role of Black religion: one labeled as the 'opiate view' and another as the 'inspiration view' (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 313) – which in turn resonate with two sociological perspectives: presented Karl Marx and Max Weber. 'Opiate view' indicates that the otherworldly focus of religion defers

happiness and rewards to the afterlife and teaches the resigned acceptance of existing conditions of this life – that religion is Marxian 'opium'. Some scholars hold that the Black Church has always majored in this otherworldly outlook and compensatory model. Others downplay the otherworldly model, stressing instead that the Black Church has always embraced reformist-activist ethic aimed at the transformation of earthly society (Baldwin 2003: 15). The 'inspiration view' concentrates on a this-worldly focus of religion that can lead to political and social action to improve this world. It was based on Max Weber's assumption that religion might be a radical force in society – a force for change – especially if it is a 'salvation religion' like Christianity.[91] Interestingly, this perspective is sometimes called the 'social gospel orientation' view' (Corbett and Mitchell-Corbett 1999: 314). There are also scholars who point to the dual function of the Black Church. In their opinion, throughout history, the Church combined an emphasis on the rewards of heaven with an active participation in temporal affairs. According to Baldwin this interrelationship between worldly and otherworldly concerns provides the best hint to understand the nature and levels of Black Church's social involvement (2003: 15). He also stresses that the tradition of public engagement that has always been present in the Black Church was rooted in Social Gospel.

This is a crucial observation, which highlights the major theological division within the Black Church. It became especially conspicuous at the beginning of 20th century when the conservative evangelical branch adopted a more otherworldly outlook connected to fundamentalist premillennialism, and the mainline Black Protestant churches chose elements of liberal theology, with a strong emphasis on Social Gospel. If we treat the Black Church as whole, then certainly both of these tendencies are present there. Some scholars, however, concentrate on the fact that individual Black churches choose either the first or the second orientation, which in result influences the congregation/denomination's attitude to social activity. Johnstone's research for example clearly indicated that militant preachers mostly represented mainline, theologically liberal denominations.

The analysis presented in this paper also demonstrated that Martin Luther King Jr. and the clergy that supported the CRM were not only tied to a tradition of Social Gospel but also had to create a separate (theologically more liberal) new Baptist denomination. What is more, also James Cone, another representative of a militant approach, focused on these parts of the Gospel that concerned 'this-worldly' themes rather than only personal conversion.[92] At the same time, many arguments of the CRM protests opponents touched upon evangelical otherworldly convictions.

[91] It is important to remember, however, that he also agreed that some religions may inhibit social change – as such he considered especially the so called 'otherworldly' oriented religions of the East. Yet, Christianity was seen by Weber quite differently. He thought that as a 'salvation religion,' "Christianity involves a constant struggle against sin, and hence can stimulate revolt against the existing order of things" (Giddens 2006: 540).

[92] Despite the fact that in his early career he was close to the neo-orthodoxy.

Gary Marx's survey of 1964 also seemed to have proved that the otherworldly orientation of Black churches was incompatible with social protest (Marx in Nelsen et al. 1971: 150). Generally, his findings showed that African Americans who had higher religiosity were less militant in terms of civil rights (regardless of age, education or region).[93] However, there were cases of highly religious Black citizens who were militant. Therefore, Marx analyzed the type of their religious orientations. This examination led him to the conclusion that an otherworldly religious orientation inhibited civil rights activism, while a 'this-worldly' attitude increased it (Marx in Nelsen et al. 1971: 158).

Nevertheless, as this paper also indicates, theological beliefs were not the only reasons that kept Black clergy from the involvement in social protests. Scholars who prefer the 'inspiration view' emphasize this fact very strongly. Lincoln and Mamiya, for example, while recognizing that there is a dialectic tension[94] between this-worldly and otherworldly orientation within the Black Church, do not accept Gary Marx's explanation which states that it was exactly the otherworldliness that prevented some churches and their members in participation in the CRM. In their view, this lack of involvement was caused largely by practical reasons such as previous disappointments, distrust of a system, experience of being betrayed, and by fear (1990: 212–213).

These authors also strongly stress exceptions to the otherworldliness thesis. They give the example of the Mason Temple that served as a meeting place during the strike in Memphis and a location of Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous last speech: "I've Been to the Mountaintop", on April 3, 1968 – despite being Pentecostal of evangelical and otherworldly orientation (1990: 223). What is more, for them otherworldliness does not have to be an opiate – it can also be an inspiration. As they emphasize, otherworldly religions contributed to the survival of slaves, without their dehumanization. They allowed people retain a sense of self-respect and personal dignity under dramatic circumstances. This according to them, was already a political protest itself (1990: 201–202).[95]

Therefore, it might be concluded that different theological orientations accepted by various Black churches promoted different forms of protest. The Social Gospel orientation certainly contributed to the direct social protest of the civil rights era. However, although not all of the churches supported this form of protest, decades following the CRM "have dimmed the memories of the conflict and turmoil of the period, the complex picture of successes and failures, violence and non-violence, of

[93] Therefore, he is known as an 'opiate view' proponent.

[94] They are known for creating a 'dialectical model' of the Black Church.

[95] What is also interesting is that, it turned out that in the future the otherworldly-orientation of evangelical Black churches would not stop them from getting more politically engaged. Since the so-called 'evangelical political awakening' in the 1980s, they became more active. Their engagement, however, is much different than that of liberal churches. While the latter ones concentrate on social problems such as poverty or inequality, evangelical ones protest against issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, or pornography.

courage and cowardice. The dust has settled and Martin Luther King Jr. has become the symbolic, mythic figure of that era" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 97). In reality, neither his theological tradition, nor his form of protest were the only ones in the CRM era. It is indispensable to remember that the Black Church has always been divided or, as some authors claim, there has never been a single Black Church.

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