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## Introduction

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# Introduction

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**Castellano Turner, Ph.D.**

This issue of the *Trotter Review* continues a tradition of focusing on a topic to which diverse perspectives can be brought together. The central role of the church in Black communities throughout the United States is widely acknowledged. That role goes well beyond providing a venue for worship and individual spiritual development. The role of the Black church in the Civil Rights Movement was a clear demonstration of its commitment to a broader mission. Although movements may fade away, the Black church has consistently redefined itself to attend to the real and current problems facing its membership and the broader community it serves. In this sense, the Black church is a good example of civil society.

The lead article, "Democracy through an undemocratic institution: The church as part of civil society," by Anne Gathuo, provides definitions relevant to the concept *civil society*. This clarification of terms provides the reader with an analytic framework for understanding the importance of the remaining papers, which focus on a wide variety of issues. The paper's most important contribution, however, is its challenging the reader with a fundamental paradox in the church's role in bringing about social justice through democratization. Religious institutions have been, over time, both in the forefront of positive social change and among the agents of repression and maintaining the status quo. The essential point is that the clear potential to enhance social justice in other institutions is hampered by the

structure of the church itself.

Ambassador Charles Stith provides us not with a paradox but a dilemma in his paper, "Moral values and market values: The impact on Africa in an era of global capitalism." Humankind's perpetual struggle between altruism and selfishness takes place in individuals, but it also exists at every level of human systems, including the global stage. Religions can frequently provide the rationale (moral values) that lead to individual and state pro-social behavior, but very often the message encouraging individual achievement and the accumulation of wealth (market values) stand as high, even in the estimation of religious leaders. The answer to the conflict is to be found in values such as justice and trust, which resolve the dilemma: overall improvement in the well being of all flows from a foundation of moral values.

Churches and other religious organizations frequently have made their impact on society in the form of education programs—instructing children in dogma and right behavior along with the state-required curriculum. Georgia Persons, in her article, "Toward understanding the emergence of African-American church schools: Early hypotheses and research agenda," invites attention to the growing number of Black church schools throughout the country. Beginning with no assumptions, she wonders what explains this phenomenon. The sample from suburban Atlanta cannot be considered representative of Black communities across the country, but neither is it so particular that we should hesitate to form some useful inferences and hypotheses. Generating hypotheses and research questions is an important contribution of this paper, and I hope that Persons and others will follow up with the next research project.

It was a genuine pleasure to interview Minister Don Muhammad on the topic, "The Nation of Islam in civil society." The reader will be struck, as I was, by the detail and historical reach in his analysis of the Nation of Islam's consistency and evolution as a movement among Black Americans. Those who remember the Black activist rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s will hear echoes of those volatile times. Many of the most

radical groups of those times have faded into history; but like the Black church, the value and commitment of the Nation of Islam remains. As an example of civil society, the Nation of Islam has gone beyond religious dogma to tackle some of the most intractable problems of Black communities—crime, drugs, unstable and dysfunctional families, and academic underachievement. A complete biography of Minister Muhammad is included at the end of the interview.

President George W. Bush's faith-based initiative provides increased access to faith-based organizations seeking federal money to fund social programs. Traditionally, funders of social programs have been reluctant to use religious groups due to fear that the money might be used for proselytizing, the belief that such groups are inherently inefficient, or that they are solely focused on spiritual outcomes. With the renewed partnership between government and faith-based organizations, a framework for evaluating faith-based social programs using federal money is essential if such money is to be used effectively. Kevin Peterson, a practitioner with experience in overseeing implementation of programs funded through the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, presents an example of such a framework in his article "Delivering social services through Faith-Based Organizations: Case of United Way of Massachusetts Bay."

The two book reviews that complete this issue are specifically relevant to the issue of religion and civil society. Kenneth Johnson's review, "The enduring Black Church and its critics," takes a critical stance toward Omar McRoberts's book, *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*. While acknowledging the significance of the work undertaken, Johnson finds both methodological and conceptual problems with the book. Still, the question raised about the contribution of the Black churches to the neighborhoods where they are located is an important and legitimate one. The debate that has now arisen on this issue is likely to stimulate further research and give the Black church long overdue attention from scholars of civil society. Finally, Devonya Havis has reviewed a very different type of book in

Peter Gomes's *Strength for the Journey: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*. She finds in it, however, a similar challenge: Is religious virtue complete without the love that drives believers to work for the well being of others?

It is with sadness that I must report to our readers the loss of Dr. Bette Woody, who died in the fall of 2003. Dr. Woody, a member of the Sociology Department in the College of Liberal Arts here at the University of Massachusetts Boston, was a longstanding Faculty Associate of the Trotter Institute. Over the years she contributed greatly to the research and service missions of the Institute and was admired for her high standards and integrity.