The Names of Chicago's Churches:
A Tale of at Least Two Cultures

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This is a study of the generic and specific terms appearing in the English-language names of all the houses of worship/congregations in Cook County, Illinois (Chicago and its immediate suburban periphery) it was feasible to observe during the period 1999-2001. The central question posed was what these linguistic patterns can disclose about the similarities and differences between the religious cultures of the Black and the Non-Black (largely Euro-American) communities. Relying upon two commercial mailing-list compendia and other documentary sources, but mostly on direct fieldwork to locate and document the places in question, I analyze the nomenclature of some 4,466 sites with their 3,407 and 9,481 usages of generic and specific terms, respectively. The major finding is how markedly the Black naming pattern deviates from that of the dominant population, particularly in terms of its two overarching, overlapping themes: uninhibited emotional and verbal exuberance, and an expansive, thrusting drive toward higher and broader realms of spirituality.

Introduction

We know precious little about the names of churches in the United States. The basis for this study—apart from the intrinsic appeal of the topic—is the claim that by extending and deepening such knowledge we can provide useful insights into the nature of religious communities and the larger societies in which they are embedded and even offer a modest contribution toward a general theory of names.

Research into the nomenclature applied to houses of worship would be much less rewarding beyond America's borders. Virtually everywhere else in the world the church, temple, mosque, or whatever seldom calls for any special designation. Since the edifice may be the only such facility in the village, municipality, or neighborhood, it may simply be identified as such, if any identification is called for, e.g., the Parish Church of Place X, or else it may bear only the name of a saint or some other exalted personage.

In the United States, on the other hand, we confront a totally different, indeed unique, situation: an extreme profusion of houses of worship, of denominations and unaffiliated congregations, all far in excess of the number or variety observed in any other land (Zelinsky 2001). In the American case, then, there is a compelling need to announce and advertise the presence of the individual church (a term used henceforth to cover the structures/congregations of all faiths), to set it apart from its multitudinous competitors in a religious market-place that, unlike what we usually see in other lands, is emphatically competitive (Finke 1990; Finke and Stark 1990; 1992; Moore 1994). Thus the normal American practice is to emblazon the church name rather conspicuously on the structure itself or else on a freestanding signboard nearby or on a sign suspended outward above or near the entrance.

As already indicated, the relevant literature for the U.S. is sparse and apparently nonexistent elsewhere. The first, and still the only, general conspectus of the subject is H. L. Mencken's (1948) regrettably brief, but characteristically pungent and informative commentary. The remaining handful of publications address only certain categories of names or just those within a given locality. Thus we have a trio of notes on storefront church names (Stronks 1962; 1963; 1964), two articles on the same topic (Noreen 1965; Dillard 1968), and treatments of the names of Episcopalian (Anonymous 1891), Lutheran (Ferguson 1966), Protestant (Rogers 1963), ethnic Roman Catholic (Stump 1986), Eastern Rite Roman Catholic (Stump 1988), and Baptist churches in New Orleans (Fairclough 1960).

Presented herewith is a case study, a path-breaking effort, I trust: an account and analysis of all the church names that could be observed or documented in Cook County, Illinois during a recent period. Why Cook County, i.e., the city of Chicago and its immediate suburban periphery?[1] There are several reasons, including the author's familiarity with his native metropolis. But the most compelling is the fact that, of all the major urban centers in the nation, Chicago may be the most ideally representative of the entire constellation by virtue of the general "averageness" of its social, economic, and morphological attributes and the fact that it has shared so fully in the nation's recent ethnic, social, and religious alterations. The presumption is that the findings offered here will be valid for other large American metropolises.

Data Sources

In the course of a larger project intended to encompass the religious geography of the county in its totality, I have sought out and visually inspected every house of worship I could possibly locate during the period from March 1999 through November 2001. The names of churches and congregations were among the various items recorded at each site. Tracking down all the places in question in Chicago, or any other large American city for that matter, is not a simple, straightforward task. Unlike most other enterprises, such as schools or restaurants, we have no complete central registries for churches. Any group or individual can create a congregation and place of worship without applying for a license from a secular authority.

Consequently, I have been obliged to resort to a pair of compilations furnished by commercial mailing-list firms for my basic resource. For the most part, these companies derive their information from telephone directories. Unfortunately, because quite a few churches do not enjoy telephone service, and many others came into existence or have ceased functioning before or after such lists were compiled, their utility proved to be less than ideal. Supplementing them were a number of directories kindly offered by various denominational offices and lists of various ethnic congregations lent by other scholars.[2]

As it turned out, this combination of data sources still failed to guarantee complete coverage of names and addresses. In the course of much cruising by auto and on foot along major and minor thoroughfares, I have come across a significant number of churches not noted in any of my documentary items. The reluctant conclusion is that it is not feasible, physically or otherwise, to conduct a truly comprehensive census of religious facilities in any metropolitan area as large, complex, and dynamic as Chicago. Although I have managed to tabulate some 4,926 churches/congregations, perhaps another hundred or so have escaped my scrutiny. The actual count of structures is rather less than 4,926 since we have many instances of two or even three different congregations "time-sharing" the same premises. I must also confess that it is not possible to vouch for the active status of all these entities. I did not record places that were obviously abandoned, but casual inspection does not suffice to determine whether many of the shabbier establishments with locked doors were still in business. The only way to be sure would be to lurk in the vicinity around noon of a Sunday (or on a Friday or Saturday for Islamic, Jewish, or Seventh-Day Adventist sites), hardly a practical procedure for the many scores of places in question.

The vast majority of the names discussed below were recorded verbatim from signs on or near the church buildings. The exceptions include a few Islamic mosques and orthodox Jewish synagogues that seek to avoid hostile attention and quite a number of congregations housed in private dwellings. The latter evidently seem to believe that signage might be unseemly in their respectable residential neighborhoods, if not actively discouraged by local ordinance.

For the purposes of this study I have excluded the 411 church names presented in foreign languages—mostly Spanish but also Arabic, Hebrew, Slavic, Chinese, and Hindu, among others. But the occasional Latin term is included on the assumption that the words in question form part of the lexicon of well-educated Anglophones. Also omitted are 37 churches for which no name was available either on the site or in documents, and a dozen places where racial identity could not be ascertained. The final count, then, of names subjected to analysis is 4,466. For reasons that will become obvious, I distinguish between the 2,183 congregations that are wholly or predominantly Non-Black and the 2,283 that, conversely, are wholly or predominantly Black. Although Euro-Americans, i.e., White Roman Catholics and a wide variety of Protestants, account for the overwhelming majority of Non-Black congregations, the category also includes a number of Jewish, and Eastern Orthodox congregations, and those of African and Asian origin that happen to have English-language names.

It was not always easy to ascertain the racial identity of a given church that did not announce its affiliation with a Black denomination, e.g., A.M.E. or Moorish Science, or one of the ethnic entities. In many instances I could observe worshippers or church personnel entering or leaving the premises. But the great majority of the structures classified as wholly or predominantly Black were so designated simply because of their location in totally Black neighborhoods and lack of any indication of having been founded by White congregations. The most problematic cases were stranded, relict Roman Catholic and Protestant buildings erected before the neighborhood had turned Black. Relying as I did on guesses and hunches, I may well have falsely characterized a score or more of these transitional situations.

I must also note that it may be worthwhile at some future date to analyze how the nomenclature of Latino congregations—whose number has been growing so rapidly—deviates from that of the non-Latino congregations. Another rewarding study would take up the obvious differences in naming practices as between Roman Catholic and other

Christian churches, or the onomastic peculiarities of any of the other major demoninations. But in this pioneering venture, for reasons of space, I must confine myself to the most obvious and consequential of our sociocultural bifurcations.

Generic Terms

A basic principle in onomastics is that names consist of two components: the specific and the generic. It goes without saying that the former is always expressed, while the latter may be either explicit or implicit. In dealing with most categories of names we generally have little difficulty in identifying the generic element, but such is not the case for church names. In a number of instances—almost always the designations for Black congregations—it is not at all clear whether certain terms are adjectival in intent or are meant to serve as generics. A pair of examples will illustrate the problem: *United Faith Temple, Full Gospel Community Love Center,* and *Fellowship Revival Center Full Gospel Holiness Church.* In the first case, just which is the generic (or quasi-generic)—*Faith Temple, Temple, Community Love Center,* or *Center?* In the other example, every term, aside from *Full Gospel,* is a candidate for generic status. Exercising Solomonic judgment in these, as in so many other puzzlers, I have opted for a pair of full generics, i.e., *Temple* and *Center,* in the first example and another pair, *Revival Center* and *Church* for the second. A parallel sort of dilemma confronts one in classifying elements in names such as *Faith Bible Center Church. Church* is clearly a genuine generic, but I choose to define *Center* (or, arguably, *Bible Center*) as a "quasi-generic" and to tabulate it as such.

The outcomes of these and other excruciating decisions appear in table 1. As might have been predicted, the term *Church* far outnumbers all its competitors, accounting as it does for 62.4% of all explicitly stated generic terms. (And, of course, in many hundreds of cases the church name contains no explicit generic.) But what is interesting, and could not have been fully anticipated, is the great number—89 in all—of other generic and quasi-generic usages, the majority of them in Black settings. The only other category of names that may rival such plenitude could be those for eating places. In a study of cemetery names (Zelinsky 1975, 179), I discerned some 31 generic terms. It would be worthwhile to look into the implications of the strong Black predilection for such terms as *Temple, Ministry, Tabernacle, Mission,* and *House of Prayer.* Although not germane to this inquiry, note the apparent relative weakness of the community church movement among the African-American population as indicated by table 1.

Table 1. Generic and Quasi-Generic Terms Found in English Language Names of
Houses of Worship in Cook County, Illinois, 1999-2001.

Generic	Total	Black	Non-Black
Church	2,122	1,235	887
Temple	239	219	20
Ministry(ies)	126	103	23
Center	112	61	51
Community Church	102	39	63
Tabernacle	75	66	9
Fellowship	74	36	38
Bible Church	59	15	44
Mission	48	37	11
Chapel	45	19	26
House of Prayer	38	36	2
Assembly	27	13	14
Cathedral	23	11	12
Congregation	22	3	19
Gospel Chapel	15	7	8
Foundation	14	13	1
Reading Room	14	1	13
Worship Center	13	5	8
Community	12	2	10
Community Center	12	5	7
Parish	12		12
Sanctuary	10	9	1
Association	8		8
Society	8		8
Corps	6		6
Prayer Band	6	6	
Cultural Center	5	2	3
Hall	5	1	4
Synagogue	5		5
Theological School/Seminary	5		5
Upper Room	5	5	
Chabad	4		4
Conference	4	2	2
Meeting	4		4
Mosque	4		4
Seminary	4		4
Strangers Home	4	4	
Basilica	3		3
Gospel Church	3	2	1
Institute	3	2	1
Prayer Center	3	3	
Rescue Mission	3	3	
Revival Center	3	3	
Shrine	3		3

Generic	Total	Black	Non-Black
Traveler's Rest	3	3	
Ashram	2		2
Bible Chapel	2		2
Education Center	2		2
Family Worship	2		2
General Assembly	2	2	
House of Worship	2	1	1
Monastery	2	1	1
Meetinghouse	2		2
Parish Center	2		2
Prayer Tower	2	2	
Alliance	1		1
Arena	1	1	
Church Office	1		1
Coalition	1	1	
Convent	1	1	
Cultural Alliance	1		1
Drop House	1		1
Faith Clinic	1	1	
Family Church	1	1	
Flock	1		1
General Conference	1		1
Gospel Center	1		1
Guild Hall	1		1
League	1		1
Learning Center	1		1
Meditation Group	1		1
Meditation Temple	1		1
Motherhouse	1		1
Oratory	1	1	
Outcast Recycling	1	1	
Pastoral Center	1		1
Praise Center	1	1	
Prayer Circle	1	1	
Praying Circle	1	1	
Priory	1		1
Prison Ministry	1	1	
Provincialate	1		1
Retreat House	1		1
School (of the Prophets)	1	1	
Sunday School	1		1
Supreme Council	1	1	
Synod	1		1
Teaching Center	1	1	
Theological Union	1		1
Total	3,407	2,027	1,380

Classifying the Names

We cannot proceed with the treatment of specific terms before adopting an appropriate system for classifying the names of Cook County's churches/congregations. Unfortunately, there is no serviceable precedent to fall back upon. If we regard the phenomena in question as place names—even though in actuality they are hybrids between names of places and those for social entities—there is one noteworthy adventure in taxonomy meriting serious attention: George R. Stewart's 10-part scheme for typing American place names "by mechanism of origin" (1970, xxviii-xxxii).

The specific categories are descriptive, association, possessive, incident, commemorative, commendatory, coined, transfer and shift, folk etymology, and mistake. Only four of these types (descriptive, possessive, commendatory, and transfer and shift) are in any way applicable to Chicago's religious scene, and, in toto, account for no more than 352, or a mere 3.8%, of the 9,481 specific terms tallied for our 4,466 entries with English-language names (table 2). The incompatibility seems to be a matter of scale. Stewart's *Dictionary* covers places likely to appear on topographic maps or on small-scale depictions of broad areas, media in which churches are rarely labeled, in contrast to my survey of items occupying more intimate niches in the cultural landscape.

The only attempt at categorizing church names of which I am aware is that by Fairclough (1960) in his study of Baptist institutions in New Orleans. Although necessarily rather rudimentary, by virtue of the limited number of cases considered, his tripartite typology—religion; secular; and combined religious and secular—makes a good deal of sense, and foreshadows my own independent scheme. Fairclough also recognized some of the same major subdivisions of the primary groups that I came across in Chicago, e.g., biblical, saints, and deities within the religious type; numerical, locational, personal, and ethnic as subtypes of the secular. Under the heading of hybrid religious/secular names, Fairclough noted the existence of such "secular grace names" as *Liberty, Union,* and *Unity* along with some wildly inventive coinages "marked by efflorescent and untrammeled fancy" (79).

Since the naming of cemeteries is the closest analogue we have to the church-naming process, it may be worthwhile to note in passing two efforts of mine in this genre. In the earlier one (Zelinsky 1975, 186-

Table 2. Specific Terms in English Language Names of Houses of Worship/ Congregations by Frequency and Race. Cook County, Illinois, 1999-2001.

Specific	Total	Black	Non-Black
Religious	6,123	3,395	2,728
Denomination	2,639	1,385	1,254
Theological	1,686	1,116	570
Biblical	667	425	242
Saints	643	197	446
Divinities	488	272	216
Locational	750	185	565
Immediate Locality	698	178	520
Remote Locality	39	3	36
Temporal	393	326	67
Social/Political Concepts	363	119	244
General	188	112	76
Ethnic	164	1	163
Nationalistic	11	6	5
Magnitude	271	247	24
Numerical	263	116	147
Biotic	223	169	54
General	128	96	32
Flora	74	65	9
Anatomical/Physiological	14	3	11
Fauna	7	5	2
Image-enhancing	213	189	24
Environmental	208	172	36
Physiographic	187	159	28
Aquatic	14	8	6
Meteorological	7	5	2
Emotional	160	140	20
Personal	98	45	53
Celestial	45	40	5
Color	7	6	1
Descriptive	2	1	1
Whimsical/Facetious	1	1	
Miscellaneous	461	334	127
Total	9,481	5,485	4,096

188), the taxonomic exercise covered only a limited range of cases, offering a four-part scheme that bypassed the important religious items: vegetational; terrain and hydrology; atmosphere, season, time of day; and miscellaneous other attributes. A later, much more inclusive effort

(Zelinsky 1990, 213), arranged some 84,102 cemetery names from throughout the nation into eleven categories (in order of decreasing incidence): family names, locational names, standard terms (e.g., such stock items as *Fairview, Evergreen, Riverside*), hagiolatrous, nationalistic, biblical, upbeat, denominational, ethnic, fraternal and unclassified. As will become apparent, there is much overlap between this system and the one presented in table 2.

The sixteen primary ad hoc categories in this table and the various subdivisions within five of them are the result of an empirical, inductive sorting out and without conscious borrowing from any antecedent work. The resulting tabulation is, I believe, a document loaded with all manner of cultural and social implications.

The Profusion of Black Churches

Before exploring the messages embedded in table 2, we cannot avoid comment on the glaring disproportion between the sizes of the two major segments of the population—Black and Non-Black—and the number of churches/congregations they have generated. According to the Census enumeration of April 2000, Whites (including most Latinos) accounted for 56.3% of Cook County's population, Blacks 26.1, Asians 4.8, and Others 9.9. Yet I have documented 2,283 wholly or predominantly Black churches, 46.3% of the grand total, as opposed to 2,183 Non-Black churches with English-language names (44.3%) and some 460 churches (9.4%) excluded from table 2. In plain words, then, the sheer number of Black churches in our study area is astonishing. Although this is not the proper occasion for a thorough exploration of this striking phenomenon, it is clear that at least two factors are at play here.

One is the strong likelihood that, on average, the Black church is significantly smaller, in terms of both physical bulk and size of membership (and probably enjoys a shorter life expectancy) than the Non-Black. Unfortunately, we lack usable data on per-church membership of our two major racial categories. At a later date, however, after complete analysis of my field data, we shall have at least a rough quantitative measure of whatever disparity may exist between the sizes of the two classes of church structures since I recorded an eyeball estimate of their bulk at each site. I fully expect, on the basis of general impression, that the Black churches will register as being significantly smaller than the other group. But one should not overgeneralize about the Black church as a physical entity. While many are indeed small,

even tiny, or shabby, there is no shortage of large, architecturally imposing, well-maintained edifices.

The other likely factor contributing to the extraordinary proliferation of Black churches is higher levels of church membership and attendance among African Americans than prevail among most other ethnic/racial communities.[3] Without getting into the immensely complex question of whether the African American version of Protestant Christianity differs in some fundamental fashion from the mainline or other forms of the faith adhered to by Caucasian congregants, the data at hand strongly suggest that, on the whole, the church does play a more central role in the lives and minds of Blacks than is the case for most other Americans (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Turning to the statistical evidence, the material assembled by the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey (Davis and Smith 2001) indicates decided differences between our two major groups with respect to church-going behavior. Thus, from responses given by a sample of 34,688 persons to questions administered over the period 1972-2000, we learn that only 8.7% of Black individuals reported never attending church as against 15.7% for the other respondents. At the other extreme of activity, 9.9% of Blacks claimed church attendance several times a week, as opposed to 7.9 for others.

General Profile of Church Names

The arrangement of the sixteen main categories in table 2 in order of decreasing incidence quite properly highlights the powerful preponderance of items with religious connotations: more than 64% of all items tabulated. Although such words appear fairly often in the names of American cemeteries—the only other category of names where they make much of a showing—their incidence there is at a much lower level. In this initial approach to table 2, I leave aside for the moment the many intriguing interracial differentials.

The second-place ranking of locational terms is not surprising, indeed something to be expected of any collection of place-related names. As might also have been expected, there is a respectable representation of terms within the following categories—but with qualifications: social/political concepts (especially ethnic), biotic, image-enhancing (Stewart's commendatory), environmental, and personal. But closer examination generates several questions and puzzles.

The relative dearth of terms with nationalistic resonance is noteworthy and of more than casual import. A meager total of eleven occurrences consists of four *America(n)s*, two *Lincolns*, and five Black churches with *Mount Vernon* in their title, a choice that perplexes me. Such scarcity stands in dramatic contrast to their popularity in names of Cook County's streets, schools, parks, and a variety of enterprises. Such near-total separation of church and state is also to be observed in the rarity of flag display on the exterior of church structures or on their immediate premises (although evidently obligatory for adjacent parochial schools), a marked departure from the abundance of flags on or near residences, shops, factories, and other objects.[4] Even in the immediate aftermath of the atrocities of September 11, 2001 the number of hastily hoisted flags was remarkably small.

Some 98 adoptions of personal names may seem like a decent quantity, but the number pales in comparison with their incidence in the designations for burial places or shops and other business enterprises. Furthermore, there is a radical difference in the kinds of persons so honored. Without exception, they are either religious figures of national or international stature, such as the two Martin Luthers, or dignitaries associated with the founding or life of the particular church. No military, political, or cultural heroes, no business tycoons, no ordinary folks. As with nationalistic terms, we have here a sharp divergence from practices in the larger society. Looking only at street names for the city of Chicago, commemorations of political and military notables, explorers, and real estate developers are thick upon the ground, along with a sprinkling of names reminding us of cultural heroes, such as *Goethe, Mozart, Byron, Schiller,* and *Schubert,* but fewer than a half dozen street names with religious connotations.

Although allusions to plant life are reasonably frequent, some of which may be biblically inspired, I expected far more references to birds, mammals, and other fauna than actually occur. No obvious explanation presents itself. Similarly, the rarity of any terms describing color was a genuine surprise, but the greatest mystery is the occurrence of only two church names one could characterize as describing the object in question, including the utterly banal *United Methodist, The Little White Church.* In contrast, we see in other venues a multitude of descriptive terms applied to all sorts of landscape features and to many secular structures and enterprises.

Much less startling is the sighting of only a single establishment that might fit under the heading of Whimsical/Facetious, a type of coinage often encountered in drinking places, rock bands, and beauty parlors, inter alia: *Hi Praz Bible Fellowship* in suburban Bellwood. Although tempted to so classify *Baptist Church Without Spot or Wrinkle* and *Fun Family Christian Center,* I finally decided to relegate them to the miscellaneous group.

Discussion of the temporal, magnitude, emotional, and celestial categories of church names, along with a revisiting of some already touched upon, is best deferred until we examine some striking differences between Black and Non-Black practices.

Black/Non-Black Differences

To the casual observer perhaps the most obvious of such differences is a quantitative one: the length of the name. Dividing the number of terms tabulated for Black and Non-Black churches—5,485 and 4,096, respectively, into the number of places under consideration, we find the mean number of terms for the former is 3.29 as against 2.51 for the Non-Black. As it happens, these numbers understate the actual word-count since such items as *the, inc.,* and *of* were not tallied. It is most likely that the gap between 3.29 and 2.51 would be further widened were we able to distinguish those numerous Catholic and Protestant Black churches that were originally Non-Black and retained the original name from those churches whose founders and namers were Black. In any event, garrulity is a common practice among Black congregations. The champions in any such competition may be *United John 12: 22-23 Living Waters John 7: 31-39 Bibleway John 14: 6 Ministery* [sic], and *The House of God, Which Is the Church of the Living God, the Pillar and the Ground of Truth, without Controversy, Inc.*

Another practice exclusive to Black churches and, I believe, rare within the entire universe of onomastics, is the use of entire declarative sentences to serve as the totality or major portion of church names. There are many examples, including *In Thee O Lord Do I Put My Trust, There Is Nothing Too Hard for God, God Never Fails Ministries, Get God in the Mind,* and *God is in Control Healing & Deliverance Church.*

A further examination of interracial differentials in church nomenclature has proved to be most rewarding. As an aid in that exercise, I have assembled table 3, one that displays the more striking discrepancies in usage between the two groups of churches, and, as expected, reveals that the quantity of terms heavily favored by Blacks far outnumbers the Non-Black favorites.

Rather than consider each term individually, it is more productive ultimately to view them in the light of two overarching themes that pervade the Black naming pattern: (1) sheer emotional and verbal exuberance; and (2) an aspiration toward a loftier plane of grace that is tinged with a certain spiritual-cum-material expansionism. And both must be interpreted as being nested within the long and harrowing general Black experience in the New World and also quite conceivably as having some ultimate connection with ancestral African cultural systems. But before probing into the significance of these motifs, there are two other matters to be disposed of: some interracial contrasts within the extremely large religious category, and the peculiar situation within the locational group.

If denominational identification and invocation of deities are practices split rather evenly between our two groups, the lower incidence of names of saints within the Black community was not unexpected given their great popularity among Roman Catholics and some mainline Protestant denominations. But quite a number of Black predilections within the classes of Theological Concepts and Biblical terms give us pause. The more striking examples (where the numbers indicate Black and Non-Black occurrences, respectively) are Faith (134/37), Apostolic (68/13), Zion (61/13), Deliverance (60/1), Pentecostal (48/12), Full Gospel (34/13), Outreach (40/4), Truth (26/3), Spiritual (25/2), Prayer(s) (23/3), Miracle (22/0), Healing (21/0), Divine (21/7), Gospel (20/6), Bibleway (15/0, Praise (14/1), Jerusalem (14/2), Mt. Olive (13/1), Shiloh (12/1), New Testament (9/1). Just what significance might be read into such choices is a task I gladly leave to the theologians.

No such evasive action is advisable when we look at the strange reluctance of Black congregations to include names of streets, neighborhoods, municipalities, regions, or other geographic entities near or far when deciding what to call themselves. Thus there are few Black parallels to such Non-Black cases as *57th Street Meeting, Ravenswood United Church of Christ, Palos Hills Christian Reformed Church,* or *Midwest Presbyterian.* A simple confession of perplexity is in order. Are we to infer from such feeble local toponymic anchorage a standoffish attitude on the part of Black churches, a detachment from the ambient community or the possibility of a high incidence of commuting from distant homes combined with relatively frequent shifts in church location? I know of no other evidence for such a conclusion, and can

Table 3. Terms Heavily Favored in English Language Names of Black and Non-Black Houses of Worship, Cook County, Illinois, 1999-2001.*

	Black	Non-Black		Black	Non-Black
			Black Preferences		
New	243	28	Light(s)	23	6
Temple	219	20	Miracle	22	0
Greater	148	0	Healing	21	0
Faith	134	37	Divine	21	7
Ministry(ies)	103	23	New Life	21	7
Mount	97	12	Gospel	20	6
God('s)	76	16	#2	18	1
Apostolic	68	13	Original	17	0
Tabernacle	66	9	Progressive	17	0
Love	63	0	Bibleway	15	0
True	63	4	Lord('s)	15	2
Zion	61	13	Praise	14	1
Deliverance	60	1	Jerusalem	14	2
Life	59	15	Foundation	13	1
Holiness	57	2	Mt. Olive	13	1
Pentacostal	48	12	Universal	13	1
Hope	46	17	Mt. Pleasant	12	0
Outreach	40	4	Shield (of Faith)	12	0
Mission	37	11	Shiloh	12	1
House of Prayer	36	2	Jesus	12	3
Full Gospel	34	13	Joy	12	2
House	29	7	Star	11	2
United	28	10	Vine (True)	10	0
Truth	26	3	Kingdom	9	1
Way	26	3	New Testament	9	1
All Nations	25	0	One	9	1
Spiritual	25	2	Sanctuary	9	1
Rock	23	2	Hill(s)	9	2
Prayer(s)	23	3	Light House	9	3
			Old	8	2
			Non-Black Preferences		
Bible Church	15	44	Reading Room	1	13
Our Lady	1	37	Parish	0	12
Immanuel	3	21	All Saints	0	11
Congregation	3	19	Redeemer	0	11
Immaculate	6	19	St. Joseph	3	11
Savior	2	18	Community	2	10
St. Mary	5	18	St. George	2	9
Bethany	1	15	St. Matthew	3	9
Good Shepherd	4	14	St. Michael	3	9

*Occurring at least 10 times; excluding locational, ethnic, and denominational terms.

only suggest that this is a puzzle for sociologists to look into and a phenomenon that may have deep implications for the geography of religion.

I am also mightily bewildered by the virtual absence of references to Africa or other foreign localities, especially during our present period of lively Afrocentric sensibility in terms of personal names, dress, art, and scholarly endeavors. A logical inference is a divergence of sentiment between clergy and the intelligentsia within the African American community.

Quite a number of specific terms support the proposition of a relatively uninhibited emotional expressiveness on the part of Black church namers. Thus, within the category of Emotion, a total monopoly of Love (63/0), and we find plentiful adoptions of Hope (46/17) and Joy (12/2), along with the less frequent Good Hope (4/0), Care (3/0), Joyful (2/0) and Brotherly Love (2/0). Then, under the heading of Image-Enhancing, one of the types much favored by Black churches, such terms as Pleasant, (12/0), Sweet (7/0), and Shining (5/0) also seem relevant to this theme. The notion of biblical resonance, previously noted for vegetational items, may also apply to these Emotional and Image-Enhancing terms.

Such general verbal effusiveness in church nomenclature cannot help but remind us of the rousing sermons and enthusiastic audience participation, even frenzy, so characteristic of many African American church services, but much less often enjoyed by Caucasian congregations in general and decidedly rare among mainline denominations. Such emotional expressiveness also has its analogy in the bold outdoor murals conveying religious messages that are not uncommon in Black neighborhoods, though outnumbered, I must add, by their like in Latino settings.

If the first of our two macro themes could have been readily discerned by the casual onlooker, such is hardly the case for the second: a yearning and thrust toward greater and higher things, a veritable syndrome of expansiveness, of otherworldly conquest, embedded in the currency of terms considered here. It surfaces most vividly in the strong showing of items grouped under the heading of Magnitude, i.e., words expressing size and extent. (Incidentally, I am hard put to think of any other category of names for which such a type would be appropriate.) I was amazed to learn of the existence of 148 instances of *Greater,* as

well as four *Greats,* and one *Greatest,* within the ranks of Black church names, but zero cases among the Non-Black. Such lopsided rates of usage persist well down the roster of terms within the category: *All Nations* (25/0), *Universal* (14/1), *World* (7/3), *Monumental* (5/0), *Cosmopolitan* (3/0), and *All People* (2/0).

Such flexing of verbal muscle has its counterpart in the physical world with the frequent invocation of terms denoting height found under the heading of Physiographic, what might be construed as heavenward tropism. Thus *Mount* (97/12), *Rock* (23/2), *Hill(s)* (11/2), *Solid Rock* (8/0) and *Ridge* (4/1). We may draw a similar lesson from the relative popularity of Celestial terms within the Black community: *Star* (11/2), *Morning Star* (7/0), *Sunrise* (4/0), *Rising Sun* (3/0), *Starlight* (3/0), *Evening Star* (2/0), and *Rising Star* (2/0).

Much less obvious, but, I firmly believe, equally relevant to the second grand theme are some diagnostic items listed under the Temporal designation. It calls for only a modest stretch of the imagination to see a parallel between a skyward physical trajectory and an upward course for time's arrow. Just as in the exuberant logic of the world of advertising, Newer=Better=Greater/Loftier. Thus we must reckon with the extravagant popularity in Black churchdom of the term *New* (243/28) as well as the lesser *Everlasting* (4/1) and *Progressive* (17/0), another exclusive Black preserve rather arbitrarily listed in another group, as signifying a gesture toward a loftier realm, one to be realized in the fullness of time. But a backward gaze must also be acknowledged within a community that seems especially attuned to the temporal dimension, as indicated by *Original* (17/0), *Old* (8/2), and *Heritage* (3/0). Staking a claim for authenticity, perhaps?

This exegesis would not be complete without acknowledging some church names and terms therein that defy classification or interpretation. Among church names, examples include *Move of God, Arrows of Deliverance,* and *Purchased Church of God,* while enigmatic or obscure indeed are such words and phrases as *Anvil, Fireball, High Time, Latter Rain, Second Word, Third Heaven,* and *Tried Stone.*

Some Conclusions

The presentation and analysis of church names in contemporary Cook County have provided much evidence that, despite considerable

overlap, there are still strong and striking differences in patterns of nomenclature between the two major ethnic/racial groups, Black and Non-Black. I have also been able to describe in some detail the peculiarities of the Black pattern and to suggest something of what they reveal about the nature of African American religion in general by focusing on two themes—an ecstatic emotionalism and an upward and outward spiritual expansiveness—that seem to embody much of what is special in the belief system of the society in question.

If I have refrained from detailing the Non-Black pattern in similar depth, it is because the reader can perform that exercise on his/her own through a careful scanning of table 2 and, furthermore, because of the belief that little that is new or unexpected would result from such an effort. Left unexplored, as already noted, is the possibility that the ways in which certain ethnic or denominational groups within the Non-Black category, e.g., Koreans, Jews, Latinos, Muslims, may designate their houses of worship could be distinctive. It is a question well worth looking into, even though the numbers of cases, at least locally, are so limited as to render analysis rather tricky.

What this study definitely confirms is something already well known: the coexistence and quasi-autonomy of two cultural worlds within the United States: the African American and the majoritarian White Euro-American. But is African American Christianity a distinctive, independent entity unto itself, or should it be considered as just simply existing on a par with other major denominational subdivisions within the faith? (The same question is often posed with respect to the identity of Mormonism.) The onomastic evidence fails to decide the issue, but certainly does not contradict the former possibility.

Another important question for which no answer is readily at hand is whether the differences in church nomenclature documented herein are decreasing, increasing, or remaining stable over time.[5] A study such as this, based as it is on a single brief period in time, would have to be supplemented with a later replication, perhaps some twenty years or more in the future, if we are to have any reliable sense of direction. But in a parallel channel of onomastic inquiry, the study of personal names, there are indications of a rift between Black and Caucasian practices in this nation that seems to be widening (McGregory 1988; Lieberson and Mikelson (1995).

A final observation has to do with the vexatious problem of classification and typology. In an ideal scholarly world, it would not be necessary to reinvent the wheel, so to speak, each time the investigator begins a trip into the unknown; that is, to devise *de novo,* a classification system for the objects to be observed and studied. But that is the situation I and others have confronted in our onomastic expeditions. Would it not make a great deal of sense to construct a master typology covering the entire vast universe of names, one that could accommodate every species thereof and also allow for all their relevant dimensions? If we were to possess such a multidimensional grid, then one could plot the incidence of the various observations in the most meaningful loci; and, if this were done for two or more varieties of names, the cross-variety analysis of contrasts and/or conformities in pattern could yield some rich and surprising rewards. If such a research aid had been available already, I am confident much more meaning could have been squeezed out of my data set.

Notes

This study has benefited substantially from the data, comments, and suggestions supplied by Nancy Ammerman, Roger Finke, Lowell Livezey, Paul Numrich, Rodney Stark, and R. Stephen Warner.

1. The Greater Chicago Metropolitan Area embraces not only Cook County and Lake, DuPage, and Will, its three adjacent counties, but others even further afield in Illinois and Indiana. But, in view of the effort involved and the diminishing returns to be expected, it was not practical to extend this study beyond the central county.

2. I am especially indebted to Paul D. Numrich of Loyola University, Chicago, for lists of Islamic, African, and South Asian congregations.

3. The most obvious exception is a Korean-American community that has established a surprising number of congregations in Cook County and appears to be assiduous in attendance.

4. But, curiously enough, in contrast to European practice, most sanctuaries and auditoriums *within* American houses of worship display the national flag, a phenomenon that shocks foreign visitors (Finke 2002).

5. Although we have as yet no way to differentiate trends as between Black and Non-Black congregations, R. Stephen Warner (2002) believes "that the newer the church the less likely it is to include a denominational reference in its name." In a similar vein, in their history of religious cults in America, Stark and Bainbridge learned that since 1930 fewer and fewer of the groups in question used a Christian referent in their names (1985, 201-203).

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