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Review of *Divine Callings: Understanding the Call to Ministry in Black Pentecostalism* by Richard N. Pitt

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Beginning with W.E.B. DuBois' seminal essay "Of the Faith of the Fathers," published in his text *The Souls of Black Folk*, sociologists have noted the important role of religion and spirituality in the lives of African Americans and the influential role of the black church as the premiere social and cultural institution within African American communities. According to Richard N. Pitt however, the actual call to serve as clergy in the black church has never been studied sociologically. Thus his text *Divine Callings: Understanding the Call to Ministry in Black Pentecostalism* fills a need.

Pitt provides a riveting account of over one hundred women and men within the African American pentecostal denomination of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) who—despite receiving no formal clerical training or education, having few paid opportunities to serve as clergy or pastors, and despite the inability for women to be ordained—understand their call to minister and serve within this denomination. Although this text provides a thought-provoking account of what it means to be a minister and receive a calling, at its core this text is about how people claim and defend a professional

identity even when they may lack the individual markers of this identity. This is a truly fascinating concept.

Pitt's sample population provided a great analysis of the calling these ministers experienced. As he contends, COGIC is one of the 50 percent of American Christian denominations that do not allow women to lead congregations. Pitt provided that statistic to show how similar COGIC's teachings and mandates are to half of the other Christian denominations in the United States. Pitt explains that women are allowed to serve as ministers; however, they cannot be ordained as pastors and lead parishioners, except for extreme circumstances, such as a minister who is the widow of a pastor. The women facing no opportunities to lead a church within this denomination, as well as the limited training and few paid career opportunities most ministers in this denomination experience, demonstrate the level of dedication these respondents have to both their denominations and their callings.

The methodology presented in this text is quite appropriate and thorough for this project. The over one hundred respondents included aspiring ministers, deaconesses, missionaries, pastors, chaplains, and bishops from the northeastern and southeastern parts of the United States. More than 150 hours of in-depth interviews were conducted with this sample. Importantly, Pitt mentions that he was raised within COGIC, thus providing the reader with an insider account and deeper understanding of not only the denomination, but also the belief systems of the respondents. He contends that his insider status allowed for more thorough interviews, as respondents seemed to trust him and feel comfortable divulging their utmost personal and spiritual experiences to him.

In fact, the level of detail and analysis Pitt provides is truly enlightening. In many instances throughout the book, he explains the Bible passages and religious experiences described by the respondents, providing the reader with both a sociological analysis and the necessary Biblical background information that someone who knows little of the black church or of even Christian and Biblical beliefs can appreciate. Additionally, Pitt does a wonderful job explaining the Biblical interpretations and justifications that subjects used to describe their experiences within COGIC—the *why* and *how* they justify and explain their calling and the sacrifices they make to serve as ministers.

This text is detailed and well organized: it begins with an introduction to the black church and COGIC, then provides a discussion of the calling and how this calling was experienced, how those who are called are "created," or constructed into ministers by congregants, the value of a degree (a particularly interesting chapter), the relationship that those who are "called" have with their day jobs, a discussion of women in the clergy, and a concluding chapter which encourages a new understanding of the role of the church and religion in examining identity. Throughout each chapter, Pitt uses sociological theories and concepts to explain his observations and the experiences of his subjects. The crux of his analysis, however, appears to be Goffman's dramaturgy, as he uses this analysis to explain the importance of the social roles these ministers play, both within the congregation and in the minds of the respondents.

Pitt's discussion and description of the calling was particularly fascinating. He spends considerable time explaining the "vertical call" to serve that aspiring ministers receive from God. Respondents are described as having primarily experienced two different types of calls: conventional calls, where respondents were often groomed into the ministry since their youth, such as the children of clergy, or

they simply drifted into the ministry; and blitzkrieg calls, such as hearing voices or experiencing dreams or visions. Upon receiving these calls, Pitt explains how respondents then interpret these calls and how they act upon them.

Divine Callings is not only well researched and certainly enjoyable to read, but it can also serve as a wonderful resource for a variety of scholars including those interested in religious, gender, racial/ethnic, and importantly, labor studies. Although it would appear from the outset that this book is about religiosity among African Americans, it also provides a fascinating sociological account of how a person sees themselves as a professional in a particular institution regardless of their actual standing within this institution. Thus, as Pitt explains, sociologists should take into account the varying ways in which cultural markers such as the calling to ministerial duties, can be experienced and used to inform one's identity beyond the more traditional societal markers of education, position, and paid-employment, used by sociologists to examine profession and identity.