

prayer, she is not currently part of a religious congregation. She u

Most had a high level of personal practice (prayer, etc), which was measured in a questionnaire, but most did not attend a congregation, or did so only on holidays. I later interviewed Catholic and Protestant pastors working in poor urban areas

III. Partnering With God

The most prevalent way low-income mothers draw on religion in facing challenges imposed by poverty is in seeing themselves as “working in partnership” with God. Similarly, this is a common way that psychologists find non-poor people draw on religion in facing challenges. Maria explained how she “worked with God”

Other researchers have found similar things.

VII. Conclusions on Findings

Everyday religion is important for many mothers in poverty, including those who do not attend religious liturgies or services. Women are more likely to draw on religion in ways that

Americans and Democrats

more than very short-term assistance. A minority of women I interviewed think increased government partnership with funding of church-based social services is a good idea, because they feel churches are more compassionate and better able to help people.

But for others, concerns about inclusion and accountability overrode the potential for churches to provide more compassionate or effective assistance. A Latina Catholic who attends weekly, fears non church members will be left out. She said, “A lot of people don’t go to the church, so nobody knows about the programs in the church.” Women also bring up concerns about church accountability for funds. Said one African American Baptist that attended church once a month:

My pastor and his wife drive very luxury cars...Can you imagine what they would be driving if the government gave them all this money? They can fudge paperwork like you cannot believe...All their family members would probably be driving around in Rolls Royces.

Obviously, this is a small study done in one geographic location, but my findings suggest that mothers in poverty worry government funding of church-based social services would have trouble with exclusion, financial accountability, and church capacity. While stating that churches are often more compassionate, human, and helpful than government agencies and noting the good that many churches already do, poor women do not necessarily see more government-funding for church-based social services as a solution.

Given the emphasis on domestic poverty reduction as a key focus issue for Obama’s faith-based office, it’s important to take into account the views of the people who receive social services. It is important to figure out ways that religious organizations which provide services can best reach residents of poor neighborhoods. Policy initiatives promoting church-based solutions to the problems of the poor must also acknowledge a gap between the churches and many impoverished urban residents.

I wrote this book to let these mothers’ voices be heard more widely, and to help scholars more deeply understand everyday religion. But I hope that this account will also help religious

