

THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY SERVICE

CONCEPTIONS OF POVERTY

Morality

Poverty is inevitable; those who are not poor should personally help those in need

Justice

Poverty is unjust; the poor are responsible for claiming their rights and helping themselves

Utility

Poverty is a societal problem; institutions and society as a whole must make amends

Humanistic

Material aspects of poverty are not central; focus on the human through community relationships

Salvation

Serving the poor is a path to God for the non-poor; aid the poor to aid one's own spiritual journey

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center

(Mosque and Community Center)

Park Street Church

(Conservative Congregational Church)

Saint Katharine Drexel

(African American Roman Catholic)

Temple Israel

(Reform Synagogue)

First Church Cambridge

(United Church of Christ)

Saint Cecilia Parish

(Roman Catholic)

Trinity Church

(Episcopal Church)

RESEARCH QUESTION AND IMPLICATIONS

How do religious leaders conceive of poverty and the poor?

- State-run social programs send messages to recipients about their place in society; these messages affect political participation
- This study analyzes the way in which local religious leaders speak about poverty and the poor
- In some cases leaders spoke in ways familiar to political scientists' analysis of conceptions of poverty
- But leaders also thought about the poor and service in new ways that have not been analyzed until now
- Further studies could look at how these messages affect program recipients' relationships to society