
Reviewed by Erika Bourguignon
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In this interesting study, Stephen D. Glazier confirms A.F.C. Wallace's dictum that "new ethnographic description, like daily weather reporting, is an endless task" (Wallace 1961:2). Conducting his study of Trinidad's Spiritualist Baptist between 1976 and 1982, Glazier can look back on the work M.J. and F.S. Herskovits conducted 40 years before, as well as that of various other predecessors (Mischel 1958, Simpson 1970) and measure the changes that have taken place in the interim in this religion as well as in the larger Trinidadian society. And, although he does not stress this, both his research strategy and his theoretical vantage point differ from those of earlier scholars. The resulting picture offers striking points of contrast so that the book may be read as providing both an updating on the situation in Trinidad and as revisionist with regard to theory.

To begin with, contemporary Trinidad is seen as a relatively prosperous society, with large oil reserves, other resources and a favorable balance of trade. One consequence of this is that there have been changes in the social structure: the role of whites in the society compared to the 1950's has been reduced, a larger percentage of the upper class are of mixed race and there are even some blacks in the top level of Trinidadian society. On the other hand, the lower class now contains many mixed as well as black persons. Schooling is more widespread, so that, as Glazier notes, a majority of his "Baptist informants are literate...sophisticated, and both willing and able to speak for themselves." And, he goes on to say: 

I have been much aware that my findings will be discussed and criticized by members of the religion
and that anthropologists no longer enjoy a monopoly
on the act of interpretation (p. xix).

The people who are the subjects of this book are members of religious groups known as Spiritual Baptists, and also as Shouters, and on St. Vincent, as Shakers. In identifying their religious institutions, Glazier finds the sociological church, sect, and cult typology to be wanting and inapplicable: "The Baptists are too numerous and complex to be considered a cult, are far too active politically to be considered a sect, and are far too individualistic to be considered a church in the strictest sense of the term" (p. 80). The people themselves speak of individual churches, grouped into "denominations," although a given church may belong to more than one of these tenuous, hierarchical organizations.

Spiritualist Baptists consider themselves to be Christians, because, they say, they believe in the Holy Trinity and in the Bible. Glazier speaks of them as polytheistic because they conceive of the Trinity as composed of three different entities, and they also believe in a variety of other spirits. For many, this includes the African gods of the Shango cult, with which some of the Spiritualist Baptists churches have what might be called a
symbiotic relationship. With regard to Christianity, however, Spiritual Baptists' emphasis is on rituals of baptism and "mourning," during which visions are expected which are (ideally) the basis for advancement in the church hierarchy. On the other hand, they are said to be uncomfortable with the symbol of the crucifix and with communion ritual. By conducting his research over a six year period, in five different field seasons Glazier is able to provide a longitudinal view of the groups he studies, to observe change, and to see various aspects of social processes at work. With regards to theory, Glazier is interested both in individual actions and decisions, and in institutional structures. His differences from previous students of Trinidadian religion are best illustrated by his discussion of belief and ritual.

Thus, where the Herskovitses and Bastide (1978) discussed religious rituals and their history in terms of syncretism, the blending of two or more traditions, Glazier is interested in decision-making, and sees modifications in ritual and belief, whether involving additions to the ritual or innovations, or losses as due to the decision-making activities of individuals. Particularly leaders who have the authority to institute changes. Glazier sees the Herskovits-Bastide approach as "global," essentially, that is, as not involving individuals. From a psychological perspective, it can be seen as looking toward cognitive and perceptual explanation of completed changes in rituals and their associated beliefs (Bourguignon 1982) in contrast to the study of a rational and conscious process of making choices observed as these take place.

Where Herskovits saw in the beliefs and rituals of the Spiritual Baptists reinterpretations and syncretisms of African traits, Glazier sees "juxtapositions," involving spatial and temporal separation of rituals from different historic sources (Christian, African, or Hindu, for the most part). He finds much greater separation now than that described by earlier researchers, and argues that these may be related to social changes during the intervening years, such as increases in immobility, religious freedom and consequent rivalry among religious leaders. (It is interesting to note, in this context, that in Haitian oyodoun, rituals for different groups of spirits are spatially and temporally separated, although all spirits are assigned African origins, and a separation between African gods and Catholic saints is not made.)

Glazier insists that "ritual change among the Baptists must be understood as a conscious process. It is a product of rational decision making on the part of an individual church leader... often for pragmatic reasons." (p.63). In effect, he is claiming to study what happens when a "religion of the oppressed", as this one may have been twenty years ago, "joins the establishment."

Spiritual Baptist rituals include what Glazier terms both "cool" and "hot" portions, and he notes that though "cool" portions predominate (70% of the time is devoted to them) it is the "hot" portions that previous researchers have focused on. During these, various techniques are used to induce manifestations of the Holy Ghost, and persons who exhibit these in acceptable form are said to be possessed. Interestingly, heads of churches (termed "paramount leaders") are never possessed in their own churches, and some not ever, because they must remain in control of events.

With regard to visions, the other major form of altered states, these occur in the context of brief retreats, prior to baptism, or lengthier ones, termed "mourning." In contrast to earlier students, (e.g. Henney 1973, Ward and Baubrun 1979) Glazier argues that these states are not the products of sensory deprivation, which is limited only to blindfolding. While he does not
offer an explanation of how visions or dreams may be induced, he stresses the leaders' role in this process, both by accepting or rejecting some visions, and also by assisting visionaries in producing edited accounts of their experiences for public reporting. These serve as a basis for assigning church offices and ranks, of which there are twenty-two, organized into 10 levels.

Men and women play different roles in the church, and only rarely are women seen as paramount leaders. The roles they play are claimed to be complementary to those of men. Glazier suggests that women are more involved in religious experience, whereas men are more concerned with the institutional aspects of religion. Because ecstatic experience is not the primary basis for advancement in church rank, it does not open leadership roles to women. Wealth, however, does and in recent years a substantial number of East Indians have not only joined the church but have taken on a significant number of leadership positions.

Thus, as the social structure of Trinidad has changed and as its prosperity has increased, instead of disappearing as part of the culture of the poor, Spiritual Baptist religion with its worldly orientation, has been modified in significant ways and has been adapted to new circumstances. As a result, Glazier predicts, Spiritual Baptist missionaries among Trinidadians in the U.S. and Canada may also be expected to be successful.

As this book makes abundantly clear, new investigations into previously studied societies allow us both to measure change in these societies, and also to take advantage of new theoretical orientations and research strategies to shed light on questions earlier examined from different perspectives. This study is particularly valuable in that it makes clear how the author's findings are influenced both by historic changes and by his own distinctive approach.

Bibilography


July 2, 1985

Dr. Howard F. Stein, Editor
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Dear Dr. Stein:

Enclosed please find my review of S.D. Glazier's *Marchin' the Pilgrims Home*.
I found the book interesting and hope the review meets your needs.

Sincerely,

Erika Bourguignon
Professor
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