Bertin M. Louis Jr.

My Soul is in Haiti: Protestantism in the Haitian Diaspora in the Bahamas. New York: NYU Press, 2015. xv + 179 pp. (Paper US\$ 23.00)

Considering the growth of Protestant Christianity in Haiti and in the Haitian diaspora, and the disproportionate amount of research on Vodou, Bertin Louis's ethnography on Protestant Haitians in the Bahamas, a major destination where a third of Haitian migrants are Protestant Christians, is significant. His examination of the shared beliefs and practices that distinguish "devout Protestants" (*Kreyen*) from other Protestants (*Pwotestan*) and people who have not converted to a Protestant Christian religion (*moun ki poko konvèti*) center on "comportment" (*konpòtman*) and appearance. Comportment involves refraining from a range of behaviors including drinking alcohol, having sex outside heterosexual marriage, and practicing Vodou. Appearance primarily concerns dressing modestly. Louis explains that "devout Protestant" Haitians not only reject *vodou*, but also interpret it as the Devil's religion, which influences their outlook on the numerous crises facing Haiti. They also believe that the fear of God (*krent pou Bondye*) is central to realizing their individual goals and rebuilding Haiti into a modern nation-state. In addition to describing these collective beliefs and practices, Louis illuminates the way the shared format of the liturgy helps to construct and maintain "devout Protestant" Christian identities.

He also describes how the divergent religious practices of "devout Protestant" Haitians conform to social class divisions in Haiti. For example, *Touloutoutou* Protestant churches operate in French, while *Tet mare* churches use Haitian Creole, and this corresponds to a distinction between restrained and charismatic styles of worship. Observing that most Haitian Protestant churches lean toward charismatic worship, Louis focused his ethnography on three churches that represent the different constituents of "devout Protestant" Haitians in the Bahamas: the New Haitian Mission Baptist Church, the Victory Chapel Church of the Nazarene, and the International Tabernacle of Praise Ministries Inc. To discuss the transnational dimensions of Protestant Christian churches in the Bahamas, he highlights the annual United Evangelistic International Crusade.

Louis uses an intellectualist approach to interpret how "devout Protestant" Haitians define themselves, their faith, and their opinions of Haitian Protestants within their religious community. But he presents minimal ethnographic descriptions of how they live out their faith in their religious community and in the greater Haitian community in the Bahamas. Moments when they deviate from adherence to "comportment" remain unexamined. For example, we learn how one woman had been denied membership at New Mission for years due

to her involvement in a common-law relationship, and how she circumvented the restriction by traveling to Haiti and getting baptized at her former church. While Louis discusses this event in terms of church privileges in which participation in the choir is limited to baptized church members, he does not explore how this woman reconciled her involvement in a “sinful” common-law union and church teachings.

The omission of the religious perspectives of Protestant Haitians who have not been baptized is another weakness of *My Soul is in Haiti*. Louis distinguishes two groups of congregants in the three churches he studied: devout Protestants who were baptized and full members of the church on the one hand, and “believers” (*Kwayan*) who are churchgoers but have not been baptized on the other. Yet he discusses only the religious beliefs of the baptized. While “believers” are excluded from being full members, they are still part of the church, particularly as potential full members. Considering Louis’s observation that parts of the liturgy, such as communion, are used to convince “believers” to get baptized and become full members, their inclusion in the ethnography would have provided a more nuanced understanding of Protestant Christianity in the Bahamas. Moreover, although Louis argues that differences between the comportment and appearance of “devout” church members and “believers” cause social friction within the churches, he does not provide descriptions of these conflicts. Comments from “devout” people like Sister Maude who expressed irritation with women wearing wigs and weaves convey the tensions between church members and believers, but are unexplored in the book. The differences in style of worship between Haitians and Bahamian youths of Haitian descent at Victory Chapel clearly indicate tensions existing within Protestant churches. Louis describes how the worship of Bahamians of Haitian descent is imbued with secular aspects of the larger African diaspora, such as dancehall reggae and hip-hop music, and reflects their hybridized identities. However, he does not analyze occasions when their style of worship conflicts with Haitian church members who seek to break from the same secularism that infuses the worship of Bahamians of Haitian descent. An analysis of the tensions arising between church congregants would have provided a more informed representation of the lived experiences of Haitian Protestants in the Bahamas, particularly the way they negotiate the challenges they encounter practicing their Christian beliefs.

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