Protestantism and the Spirit of Sociology: An Afro-Caribbean case study

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Introduction

The shortcomings of Weber's theory that protestant ethics gave rise to capitalism have often been pointed out, yet sociologists cling to the theory tenaciously.[1] Thus, Stokes argues that Calvinism made Afrikaners avoid capitalist opportunities for 300 years; yet he affirms Weber's thesis because of Afrikanerdom's 'unique social context'.[2] Unfortunately, I cannot accept such argumentation for it not only defies canons of scientific falsifiability but also unconvincingly implies that in places where capitalism grew rapidly there were no 'unique social contexts'. In any case, 'unique' is not a useful concept; all social contexts, regardless of their economic consequences, have differences from, and similarities to, other social contexts which it is sociology's task to explain.

In the course of research in Antigua in 1968 I recorded data about Seventh Day Adventists. I shall explain their beliefs in terms of their practical problems.[3] I shall argue that similar beliefs in Black Africa are associated with similar practical problems. In making this theoretical comparison I shall differ from many scholars, of whom p'Bitek is a notable exception, who extract beliefs from social contexts, thus producing theologies rather than sociological analysis.[4] Finally, in discussing the bearing of my data on Weber's thesis, I shall argue that the practical problems of Antiguan Adventists are a consequence of the rise of capitalism.

The Cultural Ecology of Glanvilles Village

The tiny island of Antigua lies only 17°N of the Equator, yet tourists from New York can fly there in less than three hours. In 1968, it had the curious status of being a 'state independent in association' with Britain, but in 1981, after uncertainties about future economic viability, it attained full constitutional independence. Over 90% of the islanders are 'black', descendants of African slaves.

Glanvilles, where I concentrated my observations and interviews, is in the north-east, on the north side of a road which runs east from the capital. Most of its inhabitants came originally from the coastal village of Seatons, a mile to the north. The movement happened after two hurricanes in 1950, when government, which had been building cheap houses in Glanvilles with the aim (never realised) of clearing Seatons for a tourist resort, speeded up its construction for the benefit of those whose dwellings had been stricken and assisted people to buy the new houses. Even after the building programme, however, people continued to move to Glanvilles, bringing their wooden houses with them. In 1968 there were roughly 500 people in each of the two villages.

Many villagers worked as cane-cutters on government-owned estates, which offered little pay, and in the sugar factory, which offered little employment. Sugar, bound up with the history of the people as slaves, plantation workers and day-wage labourers,

had had its day. Many villagers possessed goats and chickens, three were fishermen in small boats, and some rented an acre or two of 'grounds' from the government, which owned 80% of all land. Making a living from such resources, however, was very precarious. Antigua, originally well forested, had been, like the slaves brought to her, uprooted and dominated by sugar monoculture. Glanvilles lies on a slope, from which infrequent rains snatch more than they give, leaving to the heat the villagers' sugar, cotton, maize and vegetables. Some villagers were domestic servants, and in recent years work had been taken up in hotels, public works and house-building. Many Antiguans, however, have to go elsewhere, for 'the way to better yourself is still to leave the island'.[5] The three years in the 1960s for which vital statistics are available (1960, 1963, 1964) had a net emigration rate which exceeded the natural population increase. Chances of work elsewhere obliged individuals to leave children with various relatives.

During fieldwork the local council was no longer functioning. Of the eight councillors elected $2\frac{1}{2}$ years previously one had died, one had resigned because of the government's refusal to build a second primary school, one was living in St. Croix, one was about to leave for Canada and one was sick and died soon afterwards. Fresh elections were supposed to have taken place six months previously, but the officer in charge had left the island.

Bringing villagers together in their spare time were a rum shop, dominoes in the grocery shop, an informal cricket club, TV sets owned by two homes, and the three churches. Antigua's exception to Mintz's generalisation that Caribbean churches are 'very unimportant in community social life' may be explained by the fact that its slave-owners and plantocracy had encouraged rather than opposed missionary work.[6] Applicable to Glanvilles is a statement about another peasantry: 'The parish is not an economic unit, and from most points of view it has no culture of its own. Its nearest approach to a social centre is the parish church, and it is here that the largest crowds gather, that common beliefs are affirmed and changes in social life receive public recognition'.[7] When people moved to Glanvilles they came closer to their three churches, Anglican, Methodist and Adventist. The chief statistician estimated that of the people of Seatons and Glanvilles 45% were Anglicans, 30% Methodists and 20% Seventh Day Adventists. Villagers, however, commonly attended each other's churches. Moreover, people who had attended other denominations while abroad quickly changed their affiliation back to that of friends and relatives when they returned to Glanvilles even though some of these other denominations existed in other parts of the island.

The characteristics of the three churches, however, were by no means uniform. Anglicans claimed high status but core Methodists criticised them for lack of joy in their church singing and excessive ostentation in their Sunday clothes. Even more demarcated were the Adventists, who referred to only themselves as Christians. Its eloquent pastor, however, forecasting world-shattering events that would one day strike the humdrum lives of the islanders, attracted not only 'Christians' but also 'followers'. Such events, harbingers of Christ's return, were conditional on a worldly asceticism which jarred with most Antiguans' hedonistic values. Pork, shellfish, smoking, alcohol, coca-cola, tea, coffee and the cinema were all taboo. Regardless of one's parentage formal membership was conditional on passing strict tests in Biblical knowledge. Nevertheless, many 'followers' became converts, although, as we shall see, expulsion of members prevented a significant increase in the number of 'Christians'.

Mating Patterns in Antigua

Everybody in Glanvilles was assumed to be sexually active. In gossip about children of nine or ten the question was not whether they had had sex but with whom. People observing a male and female walking near bushes automatically inferred that they would take the opportunity for sexual pleasure. Men described themselves as 'dogs', which were considered never to go long without sexual gratification.

Smith points out that in the Caribbean there are three stages of mating (though not necessarily with the same partner): extraresidential mating, consensual union and marriage.[8] Childbirth normally happens long before marriage, which, very dependent on accumulated finance and age, is a status reached by few.

In Glanvilles, the first two stages were not easily separable. Lovers rarely formed a productive unit, and they felt no imperative to eat together rather than with relatives. There was little increment in status in living together. Marriage, by contrast, was a much more definite and public transition, as exemplified by the elderly lady who had previously occupied the small house where I lived. She had had a longstanding relationship with a bachelor in Seatons. Not long before my arrival the couple had married and she had moved to his house. Their very lavish church wedding had been attended by their children, not all of whom had been the issue of both partners, and by their many grandchildren.

Church Attitudes to Sex and Marriage

The white Anglican priest preached the obligations of matrimony and the sin of fornication. He did not conceal his disdain for the latter activity but indicated that he could do nothing about it outside the pulpit.

The Adventist pastor was even more outright. The penalty for extramarital sex was to be 'read out' - the guilty were denounced in church and expelled. This ritual indeed happened when a premarital pregnancy became apparent. Such events, however, were not weekly occurrences, and it is important, therefore, to note a definite and regular opposition in the Anglican and Adventist ministers' manner of preaching. The former used the Bible to moralise to his congregants. The logic of the Adventist tended to a reverse order of argument: any notable events were smartly composed into a text to authenticate the Bible. Thus, the noise of a group of boys standing outside the church one Saturday morning and staring in at the girls was seized upon by the pastor as demonstration of the truth of a forecast by Jesus that people would scoff at and reject him just before his return.

Of joyous singing there was plenty in the Methodist congregation, which, however, I joined in vain for sermons about sex and marriage. The young minister explained that he excluded such topics from his sermons as a matter of policy; in his frequent visits to Methodist homes, however, he would, without condemning extramarital sexual relations, stress one's responsibilities to one's partner and children, and marriage as a recommended, but not a necessary, corollary of responsibility combined with love.

One might have expected this more accommodating attitude to the mating practices of most villagers to effect a reduction in attachment to the other churches. This, however, was not the case. Figures for Antiguan residents classified by denomination show that changes in the number of Methodists between 1960 and 1970 were statistically insignificant.[9] It is necessary, therefore, to go more deeply into people's attitudes towards the different denominations.

Sexual and Marital Behaviour in relation to Religion

The Anglican church had once been exclusive to white masters. Its priests had always been white Englishmen. In a society in which light skin pigmentation was an index of status and wealth, and in which the black power movement had not yet arrived, the Anglican church retained adherents. On the walls of humble homes were pictures of the Queen and Prince Philip, symbols par excellence of majestic matrimony. Antigua's position as a tourist economy in which white was wonderful had done nothing to diminish the practice of white weddings, at which the expense of new clothes, car-hire, feast and hired band sometimes cost hundreds of dollars, and it was in the Church of England that the most lavish weddings took place. Indeed, although such displays were seen as a form of social climbing and were referred to as 'shitting in high grass', it seemed to be the ambition of many villagers to reach a position in which they could indulge in it. Thus, the Anglican church may have repelled a number of congregants in its attitude to informal mating, but it may have gained or regained a similar number in its related attitude to marriage as the proper and ordained union between man and wife.

Contrariwise, the non-judgemental attitude of the Methodist minister seemed to be of no avail when partners were able to make the transition to matrimony and one of them was an Anglican, for in such circumstances they invariably married as Anglicans. In one case a Methodist woman and an Anglican man had lived together for many years and produced six children, who were all baptised as illegitimate offspring in the Methodist church. The couple were then able to afford a wedding. They married in the Anglican church, where their seventh child was baptised.

The Adventist pastor claimed to have a membership of 132, but only one wedding had taken place in his church in the previous five years. Moreover, villagers declared that the sexual behaviour of Adventists was *not noticeably different from* that of other people, which Adventists did not deny, though they invariably added the dogma that 'All men are sinners'.

Adventism's ability to maintain a considerable constituency in the face of the sexual mores of village life requires explanation, and it does so in an area in which there has been considerable intellectual obfuscation. Thus, Wilson refers to 'an unusual transformation' whereby the faithful deem themselves select despite contravention of their church's high standards - *a phenomenon which he labels as 'antinomianism'.*[10] I do not consider that such theological classification explains anything. It merely rephrases the problem and does so in dubious doctrinal terms.

Adventism distinguished itself from the other churches by its evangelism. The faithful were called upon to go out among their fellow villagers and make them into 'Christians'. A crusading drive, however, does not in itself explain why villagers responded to it. We must briefly return, therefore, to the socio-cultural setting for further discussion of the *context in which certain villagers became, and even* remained, Adventist converts.

Dependence on one's near ones and Dependence on Christ

A central hypothesis of this paper is that there were two main circumstances favourable to conversion to *Adventism:* experience of severe or prolonged insecurity which relatives and lovers either caused or failed to alleviate and a widespread tendency to express insecure feelings in religious terms. I shall, therefore, briefly

illustrate two phenomena: the impressive strength of kinship connections which had been called into play when non-Adventists had been faced with misfortunes, and the readiness with which Antiguans made religious statements whenever the reliability of significant others seemed in doubt. We will then be in a better position to understand Adventist conversion in the next section.

Many of the villagers had suffered unemployment, poverty and ill-health but few looked upon such crises with self-pity for in so many cases food, comfort and other basic needs had been provided by relatives. Indeed, a number of people in Glanvilles had come to live there because of mutual aid. For example, Jacob, aged 58, being sick, left Pares village in 1965 to come to Glanvilles because a paternal half-sister who could look after him was there. He was not the only member of his family to make such a move. Jacob's maternal half-sister, Anna, aged 56, a cane-cutter, being sick, left Freemansville for Glanvilles in 1967 because her sister's daughter, whom she had once adopted for eight years, was there. She brought her house with her and placed it on a plot of ground granted to her by a cousin. Interestingly, Jacob and Anna had previously had only a slight mutual acquaintanceship, for Jacob had grown up in Seatons in his father's mother's home, whereas Anna had never lived in Seatons or Glanvilles before. Yet, soon after Anna's arrival she adopted one of Jacob's children. Both James and Anna considered that the arrangements they had come to had mitigated their crises of ill-health. Their rediscovery of each other had been an added bonus. For Anna, who was childless, now had a young companion, Jacob's ten year old daughter.

Other villagers, however, expressed uncertainty about the reliability of others they had had to turn to in times of trouble. One such person was Sarah, an elderly lady who had had two daughters both of whom had died, so that she now lived alone. She remarked that had they lived they would have had boyfriends who would have helped her. She had a number of younger relatives but they were all either abroad or in other villages. Her assets were limited to three sheep. She also worked an acre of land rented from the government, but income from that source was being used in badly needed repairs to her house. She also received money from two lovers from time to time. In talking about making ends meet she said that managing to do so was never easy, but Christ always provided. At the time of my fieldwork Sarah was an Adventist follower.

In the course of conversation with another lady, Mary, she told me that her regular male friend had ceased visiting her several days previously when his former lover had unexpectedly arrived from New York on a visit to her relatives. When I asked Mary if she still loved him she replied that it would be a lie for her to say otherwise and added the Wesleyan verse:

> Earthly friends fail and leave us,
> One day soothe, the next they grieve us,
> But this friend, Christ Jesus, will never deceive us,
> Oh how he loves.

She then added, 'And that is my comfort'.

Mary's lover's diversion was of short duration, but it is significant for my argument that in the meantime she conceived of Christ as a dependable emotional surrogate.

The Adventist pastor capitalised on this tendency. Looking out at an all-blue sky he was wont to quote chapter and verse to support the promise that Christ's unending love would be coming with the clouds. Apt in this respect is Firth's proposition that 'religious beliefs are related in content, form and expression to the attempt of

individuals to secure coherence in their universe of relations both physical and social.'[11] We must now discuss which individuals, in seeking such coherence, became Adventists.

Becoming an Adventist

Many Glanvilles women were vociferous that men should marry and be faithful to their wives. This was a demand, however, rarely satisfied. That most converts were female, therefore, seems to suggest that Adventism's central message of the nearness of Christ's redeeming and endless love appealed to women unable to obtain such an aspiration from an earthly partner. Admittedly, an excess of female to male converts is expectable in an island in which there was an excess of resident females to males (34,205:30,585), but that excess was 12% whereas the excess of Adventist females to males was 32% (2059:1555) and far greater than in the Anglican and Methodist churches.[12]

An analysis of individual cases, moreover, of both males and females, revealed that converts had been unable to find a lasting solution to repeated or prolonged insecurity. An example is that of Cary, whose mother, an Anglican, had died in his fourteenth year. Shortly afterwards his mother's husband, Paul, ceased to support him, though they continued to share a house. Cary's father in Willikies village had only once given him some money. Cary's needs were great, for he had won a place in the island's secondary school and had books to buy. He approached a maternal half-brother, Luke, who had earned some money in St. Croix. Luke responded, but some months later his girlfriend became pregnant and he could no longer help. Cary was again in difficulties, which, however, were slightly ameliorated when a few months later his sister, Rachel, acquired a boyfriend, Ben, who gave him money occasionally. But by then Cary had become a keen Adventist novitiate and soon afterwards, at seventeen, he was baptised in that denomination.

Rachel had also recently had her ups and downs. When Ben made her pregnant Paul told her that he could no longer accommodate her and her offspring. She became a lodger for a considerable time in different houses of three of her late mother's sisters. Eventually, a cousin, Sam, gave her and Ben half his house. Sam ate at his mother's house, but Rachel now washed his clothes and tidied his half house. She spent most of the day, however, at the house of Ben's brother and sister. The latter had recently become a teacher at Seatons, and Rachel and Cary cooked on her expensive stove. It was doubtful, however, if this arrangement would last, for Ben was making plans to join his parents in England. It was generally expected that after his departure Rachel, who was already attending Adventist services, would apply for baptism.

To test the hypothesis that a significant variable in conversion to Adventism was difficulty in improving one's security by negotiating reliable support from others required a painstaking task of gathering individual case studies. There were some instances, however, where no such great effort was required. For example, one old lady made it clear that she did not like Adventism but had joined because her son, an Adventist lay preacher, had threatened that if she did not he would cease being her sole support.

Similarly straightforward was the situation of young people who had been socialised into a favourable attitude to Adventism by the adult or adults who had brought them up.

The relationship between the Adventist church and its members, however, was by no means a lifelong commitment. The proportion of Adventists as a percentage of the Antiguan resident population increased, between 1960 and 1970, from 5.4 to only 5.6.[13] Reasons for the proportion of Adventists scarcely increasing in spite of the fact that at any given time there always seemed to be a considerable number of citizens converting must now be considered.

There is a tendency in sociology loosely to assume that religion corresponds closely to the needs of its believers. As Fischer has pointed out, however, Marx described religion as the opium of the people - not for the people.[14] Religious organisations are rarely democratic institutions and their norms are rarely the creation of the lowly, especially when, as in the case of Seventh Day Adventism, they are quite literally multinational corporations which dispense their commodity of consolation in the form of tied aid. Thus, many converts to Adventism were young women like Rachel, but such women were most at risk of being expelled from the church because of further extramarital pregnancy. In theory such a sanction was not irrevocable, but re-admission was rarely requested since it was conditional on not repeating the offence, which meant sacrificing both the attention of lovers who might turn out to be dependable partners as well as the desire for further children.

Female converts, however, were composed not only of young women but also of post-menopausal and/or married women. The circumstances in which the latter became converts is illustrated in the following case study.

Mr King was brought up as an Adventist. When, however, he made the woman who later became Mrs King pregnant he was 'read out'. He explained that he had never applied to be re-baptised as he envisaged the possibility of being read out again. He married Mrs King in the Methodist church to which she belonged rather than in the church from which he had been expelled. In 1967, Mr King started an affair with Mrs Jeremy, whose husband had recently left her. Once a member of a no longer extant Adult Education class in Seatons Mr King enjoyed writing essays in his spare time. One of his essays was entitled '13 Years of Unhappy Marriage', which he left lying in the house. After the essay was seen by Mrs King he asked her for a divorce, which she refused. He then pinned his hopes on her finding a lover so that he would have legal grounds for divorcing her. Mrs. King, however, remained unloved. About the same time, however, Mrs. King's younger sister, Iris, was jilted by a lover, and when she started attending Adventist services she encouraged Mrs. King to accompany her. Just before I arrived in Glanvilles the two sisters were baptised as Adventists (though Iris later left the church) and Mrs King's children were also being prepared for Adventist baptism.

In this section I hope I have offered some 'apt illustrations'[15] of concatenations of events which led individuals to be drawn to the message of the redeeming love of a Christ returning 'at a time near but undisclosed'. I have also indicated, however, that it was not within their power to reshape more to their desire the rules of the church which put such emphasis on this doctrine. It would be wrong, however, to infer that ordinary Adventists made no unofficial selection of items of the message to which they wished to give most emphasis. For example, they were refreshingly unconcerned about notions of damnation, for, as among West Indian Pentacostalists in England, 'although members believe in a literal hell, a place where the unsaved go after death, they are over-interested in it. The emphasis is more on the alienation of the unsaved from God'.[16] Sinful mankind was a notion to which Adventists made frequent reference. It is a notion which required particular attention, for, as Weber has persuasively urged, it is important to understand human action not only in terms of outward behaviour but also in terms of inner meaning. Moreover, the idea of sin has

been central to much religious ritual and belief in many other societies. Indeed, there is a danger that it can too easily be taken for granted.

'All Men are Sinners'

When Adventists talked of their extramarital sexual activity, about which they evinced neither guilt nor shame, I asked their opinion of the explicit puritanical attitudes of their church. 'All men are sinners' they said, as they shrugged the matter aside. In their belief, therefore, that Christ would bring salvation to all who had faith in his imminent advent faithful sinners were not excluded. Moreover, in discussing the importance of people becoming Adventists they again insisted that all men were sinners. Their folk theology, therefore, contained mutually consistent ideas whose logic, as in the case of so many other closed systems of belief, was irrefutable. Only the premiss of that theology required analysis. For, although, as village opinion affirmed, Adventists might not be indulging in less sexual misconduct than others, there seemed to be no indications that they were indulging in it more. I was, therefore, in the light of data about interpersonal relations illustrated above, led to the tentative hypothesis that when Adventists talked about sin they were not necessarily alluding at all to acts of illicit sex - or any other form of misconduct - but to a condition of mind which apparently corresponded to the experiences of insecurity which they had undergone. Thus, arguably, Cary was preoccupied with the idea that he was a sinner because significant others had been unable to give him consistent security - because, to put it in what now seemed my own ethnocentric terms, significant others had sinned against him.

This intellectual observation turned out to be nothing new. Schwartz, for example, says of Adventists, that 'this notion that life involves personal risk sustains many of their specifically ideological orientations to personal matters. Seventh-day Adventists conclude that everyone is a sinner'.[17] Nor is the distinction between sinning and being a sinner alien to 'mainstream' Christianity, for, though theological modernists define sin as 'the purposeful disobedience of the known will of God'[18] they recall the logic of 'most of the great schoolmen ... that in every natural conception the stain of original sin is transmitted'.[19]

The intellectual need to understand Christianity, however, is not a prerogative of Christians; nor is it best understood outside the framework of comparative religion. In the next section, therefore, I shall address the following questions. Firstly, in what circumstances here in Africa might a similar connection be found between sin as one's disagreeable spiritual state and what Schwartz calls a sense of personal risk? Secondly, in what - presumably contrasting - circumstances might sin conceptualised as pertaining to one's disagreeable actions be found? Needless to say, since the attempt to tackle these problems has not, as far as I know, previously been undertaken in this form, the deductions which I shall make, suggestive as they may be, must at present be regarded as hypothetical in the extreme.

Sin in Africa

For the purpose of my argument two conditions must be met. Firstly, information must be cited from 'traditional' (rather than neo-traditional) religion in order to be sure that religious conceptions have not been influenced by Christianity. Secondly, we have to choose societies for which ethnography has been so penetrating that we can be confident that dependability on significant others is either definitely positive or definitely negative. Such conditions narrow our statistical universe enormously.

However, it is possible that I have missed cases which satisfy both conditions. If so, then the world of ethnography remains open to all to falsify my hypotheses, for scientific hypotheses are falsifiable ones.

In pre-industrialised Africa, as has often been shown, social relations tended to be 'multiplex', in the sense that kinship relationships were frequently also relationships of status, economics, politics, etc. Such multiplexity also applied to marriage, so that, for example, adultery by a wife could imply potential transfer elsewhere of her various duties to her husband, his children and his kin group. Such a wife could be readily disciplined in societies in which marriages were normally stable, but rather less so where this was not the case, such as among the Nuer, Bemba and Nyakusa. Of the Nuer Evans-Pritchard states that 'families are ... loose and unstable associations ... individual and "family" associations of one kind or another seem to float about, as it were, and have an independent existence'.[20] Men did not quarrel about the frequent adulteries of their wives,[21] but, given the ease with which wives could elope with lovers, husbands were often faced with the risk of being deprived of 'cook, dairymaid and nurse'[22] and, feeling insecure, tended to interpret untoward events as signs that they were in a state of sin. As Evans-Pritchard points out, 'it is not the adulterer but the injured husband who is likely to be sick ... Nuer show deep insight with regard to ... consequences of sin'.[23] Richards and Wilson make similar statements about the Bemba and Nyakusa respectively.[24]

In sharp contrast, in societies in which the family was 'a closed and integrated unit',[25] 'not evil thoughts or evil feelings, conscious or unconscious, but evil deeds are what matters; these, Tallensi believe, sooner or later redound on the heads of their perpetrators by reason of ancestral anger'[26] (emphasis mine).

Attention to the ethnography of societies in which groups are very amorphous, however, indicates that situations are not entirely lacking in which sin is connected with the perpetrators of evil deeds. But even in such situations in such societies the logic concerning the consequences of sin is quite contrary to that of the Tallensi referred to above. In contrast to the reasoning of the Tallensi God may send misfortune or he may not; if he sends misfortune to a person then an action which he committed was a sin, but if God does not do so then the same action was not a sin. For example:

> Nuer do not express indignation at sin and ... what they get most indignant about is not thought of as sin. Nuer do not reason that incestuous congress with a kinswoman is bad and therefore God punishes it but that God causes misfortune to follow it and therefore it is bad.[27]

Fascinating in this respect was the position of the Adventist lay preacher in Glanvilles. This position is an interface between, on the one hand, the professional pastor paid by his international church organisation to preach retribution against, among other things, illicit sex and, on the other hand, that of the congregation, which was more interested in the promise of the coming of 'the sinner's friend'. On one evening, a lay preacher connected sin with illicit sex, but he did not convey to his audience any notion of its innate repugnance. Instead, he exemplified its possible unfortunate consequences. Thus, he recalled a night when he got up to go to a girl's house but then turned back when the thought struck him that he might become involved in a fight if he encountered the girl's more regular boyfriend. He thus demonstrated the uncertain and unpredictable dangers of extramarital sexuality. His exposition was as utilitarian as the attitude of the Nuer towards 'incestuous congress with a kinswoman', and were he not a preacher in a church his sermon would have been wholly secular. (I have discussed elsewhere the element of practical risk, among

the Nuer, consequent on a man's forming a domestic union with a kinswoman so close that intercourse with her might be regarded as incestuous.[28])

Conclusion and Discussion

This essay began with criticism of an article which argued that, although Calvinism retarded the growth of capitalism among Afrikaners for 300 years, Weber's theory that protestantism is conducive to capitalism remains intact. In the same year as that article appeared another writer argued that a major factor in explaining the growth of capitalism among Afrikaners in the last fifty years is their adherence to Calvinism![29] I consider that such intellectual gymnastics are incompatible with the spirit of sociology. By contrast, the present case study may be regarded as part of a basis for raising doubts about Weber's main theoretical assumptions. For, whereas Weber hypothesised that insecurity about one's future salvation led protestants to search for signs of it by engaging in a worldly asceticism which led to capitalism, I would suggest that capitalism in Antigua contributed to impoverishment of its protestant population and an insecurity in social relations which is relieved only by worldly hedonism and a faith in one's future salvation. Five assumptions in particular seem to call for more critical scrutiny than they have previously received.

1. Weber's assumption that protestantism is influential in the rise of capitalism

On the first page of Weber's famous book, he asserts that the occupational statistics of 'any country' indicate that business leaders are overwhelmingly protestant. It does not take much further reading, however, to find that his evidence is drawn only from those countries of his own choosing. Virtually nothing is said about Catholic France, which was such a formidable thorn in the side of Germany's capitalism which Germany's leaders had helped to develop. South Africa, with its considerable population descended not only from Dutch but also from French Calvinists receives no mention whatsoever.

Glanvilles' population consisted of protestants who were, like most Antiguans, 'very religious' and regular church-goers.[30] The main entrepreneur was probably the grocer, but it would be rather absurd to suggest that he possessed the spirit of capitalism. His capital consisted of little more than the provisions on his shelves and the pig in his back yard. He made his own ginger beer, which he sold at a very reasonable price. He probably spent less time in business activity than in drinking rum with customers and playing dominoes with them.

It would not be unreasonable to reverse Weber's assertion and argue that in Antigua capitalism has influenced the rise of protestantism. Capitalism in Antigua has led to extreme underdevelopment. For the whole of this century Antigua has been dependent on importing basic commodities, including sugar! The balance of trade deficit has roughly doubled every five years since 1955, and largely on account of an ever-increasing need to import food from elsewhere.[31] No wonder that so many Antiguans find that they cannot rely on friends and relatives for support when they are in difficulties and that they turn in hope to those forms of Christianity which insist on the undiluted truth of New Testament prophecies, such as the imminent advent of an ever-caring Christ.

2. Weber's assumption that protestantism encourages worldly asceticism

In Glanvilles no trace of that worldly ascetism which Weber considers essential for capitalist investment was to be found. Accumulated funds were used for conspicuous consumption which apparently derived from the status system and lifestyle of the capitalist plantocracy which had been responsible for Antigua's underdevelopment. Those protestants who had been fortunate in accumulating funds spent them on wedding festivities in the ambience of the church and its sacramental blessings. Less fortunate protestants had to find other ways of extracting 'meaning from an eroded landscape of unfulfilled promises and fragmented hopes'.[32]

3. Weber's assumption that worldly asceticism leads to capitalism

It is irrefutable that expenditure can be sternly restricted in favour of investment in profitable capitalist enterprises, provided there is a market for the goods which they produce. But it may be of more than passing interest to note that in certain circumstances capitalism can lead to worldly asceticism! Thus, McAllister has recently written about elaborate rituals which are performed among the Gcaleka of the Transkei when a young man sets off as a labour migrant to work for capitalism in 'white' South Africa.[33] One of the main messages of these rituals is that the young migrant should not waste his money while he is away on prostitutes or any other city pleasures since his future status in the Gcaleka community depends on his returning with gifts and a plentiful supply of cash. I would conjecture that this is not an isolated case of a community religiously defending itself against impoverishment by enjoining asceticism on its members who are wage-earners.

4. Weber's assumption that capitalism cannot be adequately explained without consideration of religious factors

Contradicting Weber I would argue that history provides numerous examples of mechanisms of capitalist expansion where religion seems not to have played a significant part one way or the other. One of the most familiar of these mechanisms is the application of the repressive apparatus of the state to keep labour costs cheap so that investment and profit can be quickly generated. Thus, Williams has shown how Britain restricted the level of migration overseas in order to maintain cheap labour at home while at the same time she transported slaves from Africa to the New World in order to enable high profits to be made there.[34] South Africa provides another example of state oppression leading to cheap labour and capitalist expansion based on high profits. Yet a further example is furnished by the Soviet Union, where 'state capitalism' was the direct consequence of Stalin's strategy of keeping down the level of economic reward of his own generation in favour of greater economic reward for the proletariat of future generations.

Weber was not unfamiliar with religionless examples similar to these. Indeed, they quickly intrude into his argument and, once having done so, exit just as suddenly in accordance with his tendency which Andreski discusses to switch subjects confusedly.[35] Thus, in a passage arguing that in 18th century New England the spirit of capitalism was highly developed but that capitalism itself had not yet emerged from mere handicraft production, he asserts that it is 'beyond doubt' that capitalism was even less developed in the southern states of the USA. The reader is thus left wondering what criterion Weber is applying.

For during this period, were plantations less well organised bureaucratically than workshops; were slaves a less 'rational' investment than machines; or were plantocrats less inclined to reinvest profits in a 'calculating' way than small manufacturers?

5. Weber's assumption that the attitude of protestants can be usefully deduced from the opinions of famous men or official theological doctrines.

The views of the opinionated famous are easily dealt with. Benjamin Franklin is Weber's archetypal protestant. Franklin, however, statesman, philosopher and scientist though he was, frequently held opinions quite contrary to those of his fellow men. His opposition, for example, to the transportation of convicts to the New World may have been most puritan but it was eccentric as far as other American colonists were concerned, who treated the past felonies of imported propertyless labourers as a matter of indifference.[36] Similarly, Franklin may have practised worldly asceticism, but we have no certitude that other New England puritans did likewise; indeed, there is socio-historical evidence that they did not.[37]

Weber repeatedly and casuistically refers to the teachings of Calvin, Luther, Wesley and other protestant theologians. But, as Theobald points out, one cannot foretell, without knowing a congregation, which items it will select from its denomination's doctrinal repertoire as meaningful in its social circumstances.[38] Thus, the conceptions of sin of the Adventists of Glanvilles were interesting not only because of their logical coherence but also because they were different from what their pastor's preaching would have led me to expect. Similarly, I have said nothing about what the reader might consider as one of the most distinctive doctrines of Seventh Day Adventism - its Sabbatarianism. The fact is simply that this feature was not elaborated in Glanvilles. When an Adventist found a job which required working on Saturday he did so and nobody, as far as I could tell, criticised him. Indeed, a most evangelical Adventist who was my next door neighbour woke up one of her sons every Saturday to go to work before going to church herself. Contrariwise, in a study, in which I was the principal researcher, of another Sabbatarian group in Zimbabwe the refusal of its members to be other than self-employed was invariably explained in terms of the danger of having to work on the Sabbath; moreover, they averred that because of Sabbath observance the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of learning new skills quickly.[39]

I offer, therefore, the methodological caution that church leaders may be misleading informants about the beliefs of their followers, for their sermons are rarely subjected to expressions of critical scrutiny by their audience. Moreover, what the priest presents as truth is constrained by the expectation that it will accord with scripture, whose doctrines are based on an accumulation of myths and beliefs from social situations of different times and varied origins. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a sociologist studying beliefs of Hindu priests found himself confronted with unfathomable parodoxes.[40] His quest would have been no easier if he had remained in the Occident and studied the views of religious specialists who insist on the literal truth of both Testaments, perhaps beginning his inquiry with questions about the mothers of the children whom the sons of Adam, the first man, begat.

My own account, however, also ends with a paradox, though it is in tune with my final argument. The Adventist pastor in Glanvilles not only talked about the days drawing near for the coming of Christ's love but also preached that his congregation should

reserve their sexual gratification for marriage. One wonders, however, whether this sermon was consistent with the doctrine of Seventh Day Adventism's founder that 'the principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation ... of the Jewish religion. Satan had implanted this principle. Wherever it is held men have no barrier against sin'.[41] In my view, trying to iron out such puzzles on an abstract level, as Fuller attempted after spending a year in a Hindu temple studying the meaning of purity, not only leads to discussion which may 'rapidly become almost theological', it also deviates from the spirit of sociology.[42]

Footnotes

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21. E. Evans-Pritchard, Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951, p.120.

22. Ibid., p.134. Among the Nuer, milking is defined as an activity which women only can do.

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