

BOOK REVIEW

MARINA, Peter, *Getting the Holy Ghost: Urban Ethnography in a Brooklyn Pentecostal Tongue-Speaking Church*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. 314pp. Hbk. ISBN: 978073911707731. \$80.00.

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A revision of Peter Marina's PhD dissertation at the New School, *Getting the Holy Ghost* is a product of the author's four-year study of a small African-American church in Brooklyn, New York. The book is exceptionally well organized. Marina outlines his major findings in an introductory chapter and methodically elaborates these findings in the ten chapters that follow. Most chapters begin and end with excerpts from the author's field notes. He offers a brief discussion of the genesis of the Pentecostal movement in the United States, followed by a history and description of the Holy Ghost Church's Brownsville neighbourhood. Chapter 3 examines the formal and informal structures of the church, with special attention to how the church successfully maintains its charismatic qualities. Marina also provides a detailed description of titles, offices, roles and hierarchies within the church. He emphasizes that he had had little experience with Pentecostalism prior to beginning his research, and asserts that Pentecostalism is the "largest and most widely misunderstood religious movement". This is debatable. While Pentecostalism is one of the largest worldwide religious movements, the Unification Church and Scientology are perhaps even less understood.

The author advocates what he calls a "helicopter approach" to research. He goes from the macro-level to the micro-level, ultimately adopting a view of religious change that focuses on individual conversions and the process of becoming a Pentecostal – which he terms "God hunting". A secondary focus of the book is on the transformation of "charismatic" authority. Previous studies of Pentecostal organizations (e.g. Poloma and Green, 2010) concluded that authority in Pentecostal churches has become increasingly bureaucratic. Marina contends that the Holy Ghost Church of Brownsville is an exception to this trend. He argues that smaller Pentecostal churches – like the Brownsville church – are better able to maintain charisma and have been able to resist pressures to "modernize". As in much social science research, the author does not provide a consistent definition of "modernization".

Marina highlights what he sees as the most "exotic" aspects of Pentecostal ritual; namely, "grand bodily displays" and "speaking in tongues", which, for many church members, encapsulates their spiritual struggles, social aspirations, and provides evidence of divine retribution. While grand public displays are

an important aspect of Pentecostal worship, such a focus obviates the extent to which many Pentecostal churches in the United States privilege other “gifts” of the spirit such as healing and teaching. Another consequence of focusing on grand displays is that the author often ends up giving attention to individuals at the expense of institutional structures; for example, he examines charismatic authority almost exclusively from the perspective of individual converts.

Chapter 8, perhaps the most innovative chapter in the book, examines glossolalia and/or “speaking in tongues”. Marina provides a comprehensive overview of scholarship on glossolalia. Earlier researchers – most notably James Lapsley and John Simpson, William Samarin, and Felicitas Goodman (1972) – examined tongue-speaking as a distinct linguistic form that could best be explained physiologically, while Marina gives greater currency to sociological explanations. Marina cogently argues that tongue-speaking should be seen – following Thomas J. Csordas (1990) – as a vehicle of “personal empowerment” and as a form of “spiritual capital” (p. 225). Chapter 8 also features transcripts of four complete tongue-speaking episodes as described by University of Texas linguist Dr Alena Horn. Equally important, the chapter includes a compilation of members’ thoughts and attitudes about speaking in tongues. Marina contrasts “official” (pastors and church elders) and “unofficial” (rank-and-file members) ideas concerning glossolalia. He documents tremendous diversity of opinion among church members. Some church members see glossolalia as *the* major gift of the Holy Spirit, while other church members downplay its significance. Marina’s revealing accounts of failed attempts at tongue-speaking and what he calls “tongue-speaking fakers” are especially noteworthy.

Getting the Holy Ghost makes significant contributions to our understanding of African-American Pentecostalism and to the sociological study of religious conversion. The author successfully highlights some of the tensions between traditional religion and the complexities of urban life. His bibliography is solid, but not exhaustive. Marina focuses mainly on older sociological studies and neglects recent contributions of anthropologists, historians and religious studies scholars. Overall, this is an excellent study. Marina’s presentation is clear, his attention to ethnographic detail is exemplary, and his scholarship is thorough. Highly recommended.

References

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- Poloma, M. and J. Green. 2010. *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Protestantism*. New York: New York University Press.