The Trinity in the Spiritual Baptist Faith
Abstract

The Trinity in the Spiritual Baptist Faith is an examination of the relationship between Trinitarian doctrine and worship practices in the Spiritual Baptist Faith. An attempt was made to answer the question “Is the Trinity central to Spiritual Baptist doxology and is it expressed fully in the worship life and liturgical practices within the Spiritual Baptist Faith?”. A review of secondary data from various scholars on the Trinity as well as prominent Spiritual Baptist authors was conducted as well as a study of the Spiritual Baptist Manual and its attendant practices. An open-ended questionnaire on the Trinity was also administered to a small group of practitioners as part of the study. The evidence in this study suggests that there is a strong relationship between Trinitarian doctrine and Spiritual Baptist worship. Moreover it is expressed in the worship life and liturgical practices of the faith.
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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

Revival Zion and Spiritual Baptists may be considered as Afro-Christian (or African-Christian) because, while the adherents of these traditions unambiguously identify themselves as Christians, they retain African orientations and aesthetics in the way in which they understand and deploy their faith to deal with the exigencies of life. Unlike Creole African religions such as Vodou and Santería that retain African pantheons of a Supreme God and a host of lesser deities ...... Afro-Christian traditions such as Revival Zion and Spiritual Baptists abandoned these, affirming belief only in the Christian God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (Edmonds, Gonzalez, 121)

Edmonds and Gonzalez in their work History of Caribbean Religions- An Introduction, reaffirms what Herskovits discovered in 1947 about Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad, that is, that they are Christians. Marjorie Hodge in her introduction to Earl Lovelace’s The Wine of Astonishment, posited that Herskovits’s investigation discovered that the faith which the government of the day had deemed a social evil was nothing more than “ an example of how {‘African worship … had been shaped and reinterpreted to fit into the patterns of European worship’}(qtd. in Lovelace vii).

The Prohibition Ordinance which banned the worship and practices of the Spiritual/Shouter Baptists in 1917 in Trinidad as well as in St Vincent in 1913 reinforced the generally held beliefs that Spiritual/Shouter Baptists were non-Christian and a “social evil” (vii Lovelace). The African syncretism underlying the spiritual (Christian) manifestations of this group which “…. emerged from the need of Africans under slavery to fashion a cohesive worldview and a cultural identity that reflected their African heritage and the realities of their lives on the plantations” (Edmonds, Gonzalez, 121) frightened the colonists but more importantly embarrassed the coloureds who were trying to establish themselves as full citizens of these new colonies (Taylor, 4).

The stain of the Prohibition Ordinance which was repealed in 1937 continues to be within the fabric of the Spiritual Baptist faith and the question of its “Christianess” persists as the society asks the question that I am oftentimes asked, are Spiritual Baptists Christians? Edmonds
and Gonzalez posits that Afro-Caribbean Christian religions continue to struggle but “Once formed, these traditions never became static cultural artifacts but (are) were dynamic, evolving traditions that responded to new influences and adapted to the changing realities in the region.” (121). They affirmed that even though the practitioners of this Faith identify themselves as Christian they retain their African rooted aesthetics which have helped them to deal with the challenges and day to day occurrences of life (121).

Providing a rational account of the beliefs and practices of Spiritual Baptists then can contribute to bleaching the stain of fear and doubt from the minds of a public frightened by anything African. In the popular imagination, Spiritual Baptists have been associated with the ‘darker’ superstitious impulses of Black Caribbean people. The stories of darkness and fear of anything African in its manifestation told by the Colonisers continue to stoke anxiety amongst the public (Spiritual Shouter Baptists-A Faith Misunderstood|The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper). It is therefore critical that the intellectuals within the community provide a rational account of their belief and qualify the Spiritual Baptists as a legitimate (African-influenced) branch of (Protestant) Christianity. This is important because it is time to give voice and validity to a community of persons that have been too long marginalized and stigmatized in Caribbean life.

1.2 The Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is a summary of the Christian’s experience of God. It identifies the God in whom Christians believe and the God that is worshipped. The focus of this doctrine is the God who acts through Christ to provide salvation through the Holy Spirit. The Trinity as a conceptual frame of reference for worship is not articulated in any dogmatic document within the Spiritual Baptist faith but is alive within the worship life of the church. Lex orandi, lex credendi, the law of prayer is the law of belief. This ancient Christian dictum epitomizes Christian behavior in general, that is, Christians pray what they believe. An examination of the liturgy or prayer life of Spiritual Baptists then can reveal an inherent Trinitarian structure consistent with all of mainline Christianity.

Karl Rahner in his book The Trinity states ‘We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could
well remain virtually unchanged.” (11). This statement could perhaps be extended further to say that not only literature would remain unchanged but modes of worship would remain the same. Whilst many if not most Spiritual Baptists may not be able (like most Christians) to articulate the meaning of the concept of the Trinity, their modes of worship and liturgical practices are so ingrained with the triad conceptual frame, that change in the conceptual frame or denial of the concept of Trinity will have no effect on the worship. The content of Spiritual Baptist doxology is founded in the Apostle’s Creed which is the statement of faith said at the beginning of every service held by Spiritual Baptists (The Spiritual Baptist Minister’s Manual, 7). The Apostle’s Creed as a confession of faith is a Trinitarian confession which expresses fully the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship implies a coordinated relationship between a Trinitarian doctrine and the actions of worship (Thompson, Modern Trinitarian Perspectives, 94). As the opening confession of faith used by Spiritual Baptists in their worship services can one conclude then that this doctrine of the Trinity is articulated in their worship?

Hymns, a major part of Spiritual Baptist worship, address the triune nature of God and in the more traditional liturgical traditions like that of the Catholic Church, end the recital of Psalms and canticles in a Trinitarian doxology to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Spiritual Baptist Faith the same is done after each reading of the Word, after each “round” of prayer and at the end of the service.

This paper will explore the relationship between Trinitarian doctrine and the actions of worship carried out in the Spiritual Baptist Faith. This is an important issue to explore because this indigenous religion which is described as “….Christianity with a blend of Africanism. A brand of African survival” (WIUSBSO Inc. website 26/1/17), has had its Christian roots questioned by many who, because of some of its practices, are convinced that Spiritual Baptists are not Christians. This is what perhaps sparked the work by De Peza, My Faith Spiritual Baptist Christian which sought to clarify that Spiritual Baptists are Christians.

This study can help to provide a better understanding of the Christian foundations of the Spiritual Baptist faith as well as provide a clearer understanding to the administrative and spiritual clergy1 of the Spiritual Baptist faith, of the conceptual frame that is the doctrine of the

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1 The Spiritual Baptist Faith has two streams of clergy (spiritual leaders) i.e. those ordained by the diocese to fill administrative positions as Reverends, Deacons, Bishops etc as well as those believers who would have been
Trinity and assist them in their leadership and guidance to their flock. The Trinity is central to Spiritual Baptist doxology and is expressed fully in the worship life and liturgical practices within the Spiritual Baptist Faith.

1.3 Methodology

This research work used two major methods for collecting, analysing and drawing conclusions from data, that is, review and analysis of scholarly works on the subject of the Trinity from early scholars such as Karl Rahner who produced a seminal work on the Trinity as well as contemporary writers such as Thompson and Johnson. Books, Papers and other works written on the Spiritual Baptist Faith by well known and respected practitioners such as Dr Hazel Ann Gibbs De Peza, Reverend Patricia Stephens and Reverend Bury Taylor were also explored for any linkages to the concept of the Trinity as expressed in the Spiritual Baptist Faith. The Minister’s Manual used by most Spiritual Baptist Churches also formed part of the review and analysis and was used as the basis of an interrogation into the actual practices and rituals of the Spiritual Baptist from the researcher’s perspective as an adherent of the Faith.

An open-ended questionnaire seeking information from a small group of practitioners on their beliefs as well as their worship and prayer life was also administered to a varied group of Spiritual Baptist practitioners. The respondents were given a half hour (more time was given to those who desired) to provide their answers to these questions with no prompting from the researcher. The responses were then subjected to line by line open coding to draw out the main themes and then axial coding from which categories were drawn. This ensured that each piece of data was exclusive to specific themes.

It was important to capture the views of Spiritual Baptists in different dioceses so as to discern the similarities and or differences across the faith in its practices and understanding of the Trinity as part of the faith practices. The group therefore contained individuals from four dioceses in the Spiritual Baptist Faith in Trinidad. Spiritual Baptists make up roughly eight percent of the national population and a sample of 30 persons across the dioceses was used with ordained by God on their spiritual journeys (Mourning) for positions such as Shepherds, Mothers, Nurses, Baptisers etc.
the largest group coming from the W.I.U.S.B.S.O Inc. since this is the largest diocese in the Faith with sixty-eight Churches as affiliates.

Chapter 2

Literary Review

Trinitarian doxology and Trinitarian confession have been explored by Christian scholars like Kasper and Thompson. Whilst large bodies of Christians like the Catholics express a belief in the Trinity which is articulated in its dogmatic constitutions, the worshippers may not be able to express an understanding of the concept. “In his own book on the subject The Trinity, Karl Rahner lamented that so weakly does this belief function in the spirituality, theology and actual faith life of the church that if officials announced that a fourth person of the Trinity has been discovered, it would probably cause little stir.” (Johnson, 203).

Elizabeth Johnson in her work *Quest for the Living God* refers to the Trinity as the living god of love. The Trinity is “the fundamental revelation about God’s own being as a self-giving communion of love.” (202). Johnson’s discussion on the Trinity focuses on the language used to describe this triad of persons, language used to dispel any attempt at making the Trinity an expression of polytheism but a reaffirmation of its monotheistic nature. The triad of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the Trinitarian expression of God is an expression of a God who has a history with the world, a God who saves and leads us into his mystery (209).

Johnson asserts that to retrieve the vital meaning of the Trinity one should remember that the Trinity is rooted in the experience of salvation, it is spoken of allusively or analogically and not literally and finally the Trinity is expressed in concepts of our day. One of these concepts she posits is Soulden’s concept of the Trinity as one name in three inflections. As the voice changes in pitch depending on the intended message or as the voice is modulated to treat with different sounds, the Trinity is three different expressions of the same God. The first inflection is the theological inflection which is best expressed in Jesus’ prayer which he gave to his disciples, that is, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”. YWHW is not referred to directly but in the grammar of the divine passive (217). This grammar of the divine passive is
characteristic of the New Testament and is used to “enfold Jesus and the spirit into the identity of the Lord” (217).

The second inflection is the Christological inflection which centers on Christ as the filter through which God is made known. Johnson posits that this is expressed fully in the formula, “Father, son and holy spirit” which she posits is a “formula which stabilizes the referent of prayer in a single coordinated phrase.” (218). The third inflection is the Pneumatological Inflection. Johnson asserts that this inflection operates different from the other two since it is always naming all three persons in an explicit way. Johnson concludes this chapter by reminding that the Trinity is a practical doctrine with consequences for Christian life. (223). I find this conceptual frame very useful in understanding how the Trinity operates in the Spiritual Baptist Faith.

Karl Rahner in his seminal work *The Trinity* translated and published in 1970, explores the treatise of the Trinity through three main areas of discourse. This concise book attempts to provide a clearer understanding of the concept of the Trinity. The reader is sometimes challenged by the terse style of the book which makes the text a bit difficult to follow. In the first section of the treatise Rahner admits that most Christians are monotheists and so the content of their worship is absent of the Trinity. For most Christians the full meaning of the Trinity is lost in everyday life since Christians generally speak of God in a single abstract. He references texts written about the Trinity and suggests that the focus is not on explaining God first and after giving consideration to the three persons. He posits that it is through the Trinity that we can view the mystery of salvation and makes his bold statement i.e. that “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity” (5). The God who became man and operated in creation to save and redeem is the same as God who in himself begot the son through whom the spirit proceeded.

John Thompson in his work *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* spends some time distinguishing between Trinitarian Confession and Trinitarian Doctrine. He uses Kasper’s work to distinguish between the two concepts. Kasper defines Trinitarian Confession as doxology i.e. praising God for his excellent glory. Trinitarian Doctrine he posits is the content or grammar of the doxology. The doctrine of the Trinity therefore is articulated in our worship. Worship therefore implies a coordinated relationship between a Trinitarian doctrine and our actions of worship. Worship then can be offered to God the father by the Spirit through the Son or directly
to the father, the Son and the Spirit. Profession of Faith and worship of the Triune God then, go together.

Modern Trinitarian statements rightly point out that although each person of the Trinity can be addressed in worship, to do so to the exclusive sense courts danger. Overemphasis of one over the other is a virtual denial of the true God. Such separation of faith and worship in the church can lead to idolatry. Thompson points out that the passages in the New Testament which distinguish between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are those which deal with prayer. Access to the Father is the ultimate goal, through the Son who reveals the Father (when we see the son we see the Father) and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:33 ‘Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.” This is the Apostolic testimony which produced the Church, united the Christian Community as one, inspired its worship and gave it a message to proclaim.

The content of the apostolic preaching Thompson contends is basically a kerygmatic statement of faith of the New Testament community as a whole. To worship God is to listen to and embrace his Word and this can be properly received and experienced by the Holy Spirit. Christ as word and truth of God by the Holy Spirit is the one through whom and by whom we worship God the Father. There is also a close relationship between the Word and prayer, in fact he posits, Christian prayer is made possible by the Word and is bound to the Word. Thompson finishes this chapter with a discourse on the Trinity and Doxology and concludes that doxology is therefore closely linked to salvation since it praises God for the majesty of his being and acts and is an expression of our communion with him. Thompson’s work on the Trinity is of particular interest to this study since it provides a foundation for revealing the Trinity within the practices and rituals of the Spiritual Baptist.

Dr Hazel Gibbs De Peza in her work My Faith Spiritual Baptist Christian makes a case for the Spiritual Baptist Faith as a Christian Faith. She explores the stories of origin of the Spiritual Baptist Faith in Trinidad tracing its roots from Africa to the “Jordan Bank” and concludes that the Spiritual Baptist faith is a reinterpretation of Christianity (87). She makes the point that “Christianity began among the Jews but all Christians are not Jews. The Spiritual Baptist Faith is the continuation of the Apostolic Tradition of Christianity emerging among Africans in Trinidad” (88). In the five chapters she traces the origin of the Faith, its growth and
place in society; how the faith came to be called Spiritual Baptist; the organizational structure and development of the faith and finishes with a discussion on the beliefs, celebrations and practices of the Faith.

Reverend Bury Taylor in his book *Origin and the Spiritual Baptist Faith*, is convinced that the origin of the Faith is the island of St Vincent. As a practitioner who grew up in the Spiritual Baptist faith, Reverend Taylor’s experience of the Faith was through his Vincentian spiritual parents. He discusses from his perspective, the story of the “converteds” and in the typical style\(^2\) of the old Spiritual Baptist Patriarchs, weaves a story of the Spiritual Baptist’s journey especially the period of persecution during the ban\(^3\) from 1917 to 1937. He focuses on what propelled the believers to continue with their mode of worship which he identifies as their conviction in the message of Christ (6) and especially the message of John the Baptist whose ministry inspired the faith of Spiritual Baptists. “They insisted on a sanctified life and maintained that baptism, the Lord’s Supper, marriage, mourning, prayer and fasting were essential features in the Christian life…” (7).

These texts capture the essence of the concept of the Trinity and as well as the place of the Triune God in the worship of the Spiritual Baptist and so provides an excellent framework for discussion and analysis of Spiritual Baptist doxology and confession within the Trinitarian frame of reference.

**Chapter 3**

**3.1 The Structure of Spiritual Baptist Worship**

We believe the scriptures teach that there is one and only one true God and infinite, intelligent Spirit, whose name is Jehovah, the maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven ..... that in the unity of the godhead there are three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption. (*The Spiritual Baptist Minister’s Manual*, 2.The True God, Articles of Faith, ii.)

\(^2\) Spiritual Baptists were known for their oratory style. Despite their illiteracy they were able to use their orations to convert the non-believers.

\(^3\) In 1917 the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago proclaimed a Prohibition Order banning the worship of Spiritual/Shouter Baptists. This ban lasted until 1937.
The West Indian United Spiritual Baptist Sacred Order Inc.⁴ in its Minister’s Manual, has identified eighteen Articles of Faith as central to the organisation. The second of these articles is described in the opening statement and defined as Article 2 “The True God”. The foregoing description acknowledges the triad of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as constituting the “True God”. The Minister’s Manual developed by the W.I.U.S.B.S.O. Inc., which is the guidebook for liturgical practices of the Faith (and used by most if not all of the dioceses) makes continued use of the creedal statements created by the early church including the Nicene Creed and the Apostle’s Creed. The manual also reflects or is very closely aligned to the liturgical practices in reference to marriages, dedication (christening) of children and burial practices to those practiced generally by Christians and acknowledges one of its main sources as Boyd’s National Baptist Pastor’s Guide (1900) (ix).

Worship in the Spiritual Baptist Faith is centered on several liturgical rituals which include as central to its manifestation:

i) Creedal Statements
ii) Freewill Prayer⁵
iii) Hymn singing and
iv) Reading and exhortation of the word.

The Spiritual Baptist Service, (what is described as a Mass in the Catholic Church) whether in a Church, by the side of the road or in the home of a member, begins with the singing of a Hymn or hymns or with the singing of sankeys (choruses)⁶. This is the informal or introductory start of the service. The length of this section of the service depends on the specific church or the Service Leader. The official start of the service occurs when the Minister invites the congregation to say the Apostle’s Creed⁷. Every Spiritual Baptist Church starts its services with the Apostle’s Creed. After this the Service Leader would say a well-known Catholic liturgical statement “The Lord be with us” and the congregation responds with “and with thy spirit ….” (Spiritual Baptist

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⁴ The W.I.U.S.B.S.O. Inc. is one of eleven such dioceses in the Spiritual Baptist Faith in Trinidad and Tobago. The other ten dioceses have between one and fifteen churches as members of their dioceses. The W.I.U.S.B.S.O. Inc. is the largest diocese with sixty-eight churches as affiliates within the organization.
⁵ In the Spiritual Baptist Faith practitioners are allowed to pray during the Prayer sessions in their own way for whatever they wish to pray for.
⁶ The Hymnal used by the Spiritual Baptist Church compiled by the WIUSBSO Inc is closely aligned to the Anglican Hymnal.
⁷ The only difference is that the SB does not express belief in the Catholic Church but in the Holy Church.
The Church then sings a specific hymn, *Lord in this Thy Mercy’s Day*. This hymn introduces one of the most important rituals of the service, the Surveying of the Church.

After the surveying ritual the Service Leader/Minister would lead the other Ministers in the Invocation Prayer. After this the Mothers and other members of the Church would then be invited to pray. In some churches there may be as much as five or seven rounds of prayer. The Minister/Service Leader will then invite readers to read two of the three lessons pre-selected by the leader or as happens most times the readers select their own lessons. At the end of each reading the *Glory be to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit* is said. After the reading of the foundation lesson a statement of affirmation is made.

Thompson posits that Trinitarian doxology and confession can be found in the worship life of the Church. The Spiritual Baptist service begins with the Apostle’s Creed which is a Trinitarian confession of faith. The *Glory Be* is said after each lesson is read and the service ends with the benediction which is also filled with praise to the triad of God the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Is this sufficient evidence of the presence of the Trinity in the worship life of Spiritual Baptists? A large part of the service is dedicated to praying where church members are allowed to freely express themselves to God praying for their families, their communities, themselves, the country, leaders etc. These free will prayer sessions can last as long as half an hour or more and is supported by the rest of the congregation through singing, chanting and meditating as the prayer is said (*Spiritual Baptist Minister’s Manual*, 11). It is important therefore to examine these prayer sessions or confessions for evidence of a Trinitarian understanding of God.

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8 It is to be noted that some dioceses use another Hymn that is, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”.
9 The surveying ritual involves the pouring of water, grains and perfumed liquids at the four corners of the church, the center of the church and at the entrance of the church. This ritual is done to create a spiritual border for the worship. The early churches were without walls and so services were held in open spaces and the Spiritual leaders who were led by the Spirit and depended on spiritual directions, were led to demark a space for worship which they defined with liquids as well as grains. The service was then held within the defined space. This practice which has been carried out since the beginning of the Spiritual Baptist faith continues as part of the opening ritual of the service.
10 I heard the voice of Jesus say come on to me and rest, Lay down thy weary ones lay down thy head on my breast’ I came to Jesus as I was, weary, and worn and sad I found in Him a resting place and he had made me glad. I looked to Jesus and I found in him my star my sun And in the light of life I walk till travelling days are done Amen.
3.2 Prayer and the use of Hymns and Sankey’s

The Spiritual Baptist Faith was started by illiterates; ex-enslaved, the emancipated from Trinidad and St Vincent, the Black Americans (Merikins) who were given freedom and land in south Trinidad as reward for their support of the British during the American war of Independence (nalis. Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, accessed 07/10/16). These circumstances brought a group of people, who were not formally schooled, together, in their combined love for Jesus. Whilst the slave master deliberately disallowed them from participating in literacy activities (King, par 8), the slave master introduced them to Jesus and the Holy Spirit which became central to their worship life (Gibbs De Peza, 51). The pneumatological inflection became the strongest expression of their worship life (Johnson, 218). The theological and Christological inflections (Johnson) found voice in the prayer life of the Spiritual Baptist. The hymns which Spiritual Baptists use for prayer, epitomises the divine passive (Johnson) and provide the adherents of the Spiritual Baptist Faith with the vocabulary for their prayer worship. It is important to note however that the pneumatological inflection remains the strongest expression in the worship life of the Spiritual Baptist (Taylor, 26).

Illiteracy does not preclude intelligence. The early Spiritual Baptists were poor and mostly illiterate but were intelligent. The Word of God came to them through their Slave Masters, through members of the Colonial powers and they listened. Because they were unable to read their sense of hearing were attuned to what was heard.

… most of them were not educated, but in their humble way they were exemplars, teachers and counselors; these qualities were displayed in their communal spiritual vocation. I would read for them at their request, portions of scripture, and was amazed at their ability to retain and deliberate thereon thereafter, in this connection they were blessed with a unique spiritual intuition. (Taylor, 6).

They did not only hear the word of God but also heard the words of hymns which they sung at every service. This is what provided the vocabulary for their prayer.

A large portion of the content of Spiritual Baptist doxology can be found in the corpus of the hymnal. Spiritual Baptists use hymns to pray. Lining hymns (i.e. calling out the words of the hymns line by line after which each line is sung) is central to the singing, praising culture of the Spiritual Baptist. This is of course a direct result of the policy by the slave masters, and the colonial powers after them, to keep the slaves and then the emancipated, illiterate (Miller, par. 6).
This practice of lining has been incorporated into today’s style of singing practiced by Spiritual Baptists. It was through “lining” that the believers learnt the hymns and these hymns became central to their understanding of God and a critical vocabulary bank from which to draw the words to be used to speak with God. The hymn then became the language for praying to God.

The hymn is most times written in the divine passive (Johnson, 217):

‘ARISE, MY SOUL ARISE’,

Arise, my soul arise
Shake off thy guilty fears
The bleeding sacrifice
On my behalf appears (WIUSBSO Popular Hymns and Choruses, 15, lines 1-4).

This Christological inflection references the blood of Jesus as standing in for the sinner. The hymn continues, ‘Before the throne / my surety stands / my name is written on / his hands. (5-8). Another example of this divine passive can be seen in this hymn, “OH GOD OUR HELP IN AGES PAST”,

Oh God our help in ages past
Our hope for years to come
Our shelter from the stormy blast
And our eternal home. (# 33, 1-4).

A Spiritual Baptist will pray using this hymn and personalize the words to himself.

Depending on the issue a member will be praying for, or the current need for prayer, the pray will focus on a hymn or hymns which can send that message to God. A favourite hymn for Spiritual Baptists is “Jesu Lover of my soul”. The words of the hymn says

Jesu Lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
Whilst the nearer water rolls
Whilst the tempest still is high’
Hide me oh my savior hide,
Till the storm of life is past,
Safe into thy haven guide,
Oh receive my soul at last (19, 1-8).
The hymn not only provided the vocabulary for prayer but we can conclude that it also contributed to the rhythmic, rhymed patterns used by Spiritual Baptists to pray. This style of praying includes not only words from the hymns but the words used to pray for family and healing or a “breakthrough” for a specific issue. It is all voiced in the same rhythmic pattern. The language of the hymn then has become the language for prayer which is central to the liturgy of the Spiritual Baptist and therefore its doxology. The hymns in the main acknowledge and celebrate the Trinitarian nature of God and provide the Spiritual Baptist with the dictionary for prayer and praise.

3.3  **Spiritual Baptist Sacramental Practices / (Baptism, Christening, Marriage, Holy Communion (Eucharist), Mourning)**

Spiritual Baptists like other Christian Churches carry out several sacramental practices the most important of which is Baptism (Taylor, 14, 15). They also carry out dedication of young children, marriages, Holy Communion and the practice of spiritual fasting called Mourning\(^{11}\) (Taylor, 7). Except for Mourning these practices or sacraments as is called by the Catholic Church are very common Christian practices. The difference lies in the dogma that underlies the sacrament, which influences how the sacrament is carried out.

Holy Communion as it is called by the Spiritual Baptists has a Trinitarian structure built into it as an act of worship. “In it there is prayer to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit that Christ may be present with his people in worship and that we might share with him his communion with the Father.” (The BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today-Report, Study Guide and a Selection of Papers). In the Spiritual Baptist Faith all of these sacraments are done as part of a normal service with special rituals in reference to the activity included in the practices within the service. As discussed earlier the services are framed by the statements of affirmation which occur and or reoccur throughout the service.

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\(^{11}\) For Spiritual Baptists the Mourning Ground is the place where Spiritual Baptists are schooled by the Holy Spirit. It is a room with a dirt floor or floor filled with candle wax where the pilgrim/believer after preparation through a two hour service, lies for three to seven days meditating on the things of God whilst fasting for said period. During this time the pilgrim is supported by the Pointer (the Mother or Leader who prepares the pilgrim) and a nurse who takes care of the pilgrim’s physical needs and supports his/her spiritual needs. The Leader or mother together with the nurses and other supporters pray and mediate with the pilgrim providing support through praying, singing and reading and exhortation of the word of God. These prayer sessions are done at 6 a.m., 12 noon and 6 pm daily.
3.4 Creedal Statements

As has been explored earlier, Spiritual Baptists use several creedal statements as central to their services including the Apostle’s Creed, The Nicene Creed and The Magnificat. (Spiritual Baptist Manual, 31-33). These statements of affirmation especially the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed are statements of belief affirming the belief in the triune God. The Apostle’s Creed is central to the service and is the opening statement for every service.

These statements are said at particular junctions in the service at the beginning the Apostle’s creed, after each prayer session, the Glory Be, at the end of the reading of the first two lessons the glory be or at the end of the reading of any portion of the bible the Glory be is said. At the end of the reading of the foundation Lesson the affirmation statement, I heard the Voice of Jesus Say, is said or in some churches the Magnificat is said. At the end of the service the following is said:

(May) The peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds in knowledge and love of God and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be amongst you and remain with you always (14 Spiritual Baptist Manual)

The service rituals then are filled with the affirmation and reaffirmation of the triune God as integral to the worship. The question then is the one raised by Kasper, do the worshippers believe in the Triune God? Are these affirmation statements lived out in the deep belief system of the worshippers? The next Chapter then will discuss the responses of worshippers to questions related to what they believe and how it affects their worship life.

Chapter 4

What Spiritual Baptists believe about God and the Trinity / The Findings.

The findings are presented both in graphical and text form. The graphs show what the respondents said and the span of themes covered in their own answers to the questions posed. The scope of responses was fairly narrow and consistent and is represented in the graphs. The questions were open ended questions designed to elicit freewill responses from the believer in relation to their understanding of the Trinity and if their doxology and the grammar of their confession were being fuelled by a fundamental belief in the Trinity. The researcher allowed the
respondents to write their answers with no prompting or coaching in relation to the responses. The questionnaire also requested demographic information. Moreover the questionnaire sought information on what statements of affirmations were being used in the churches since these statements are affirmations of the belief system.

The survey questionnaire was completed by thirteen persons belonging to the WIUSBSO Inc; ten persons belonging to churches that were unaffiliated to any diocese; one person affiliated to the Mt. Zion diocese and six from Plumline which is a diocese headquartered in New York with Church affiliates in Trinidad. The respondents included persons of different ranks including one Bishop, five Deacons, fourteen spiritual elders and ten ordinary members.

In response to the question “What makes the Faith a Christian faith?” the majority of the respondents indicated that it was because Spiritual Baptists believe in Jesus Christ or serve the same God as other Christians. Stephens and De Peza together with the Minister’s Manual corroborate this in their work.

In response to the question on the most important things you believe about God and your Faith the vast majority identified Christian symbols like Baptism, Jesus Christ and the Bible as important to their faith. When asked what were their fundamental beliefs about God and the Spiritual Baptist Faith most respondents identified the concept of God as creator or pointed to Jesus Christ and his resurrection as fundamental to their faith. These are clear indications that the
respondents not only know that their faith is Christian but can clearly identify the artifacts which make it so.

Critical to the identification of these Christian artifacts is the connection that it makes between Spiritual Baptist symbols and these artifacts. When asked to identify the symbols of their (Spiritual Baptist) belief, most referred to Christian symbols such as the Bible, Jesus and Prayer as important symbols whilst a small group identified the implements such as the Bell, the Shepherd Rod and the Lothar and Taria used in Spiritual Baptist worship as symbols of their beliefs. It is clear then that Christian symbols common to Christianity throughout the world are embedded in the faith understanding of the respondents.

The respondents were also asked to explain their understanding of the concept of the Trinity. The majority identified the concept of the three persons in Father, Son and Holy Spirit or the idea of three persons as their understanding of the concept. The responses then clearly
indicate a high level of consciousness of the concept of the Trinity amongst the surveyed adherents of the Spiritual Baptist Faith. To ascertain if this consciousness of the concept of the Trinity goes deeper and manifests in an understanding of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity, respondents were asked who Jesus was to them. Most of the respondents indicated common Christian identifiers such as Jesus as their saviour, as mediator between man and God and as provider. In reference to the question on the relationship between Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit most of the respondents identified Jesus as the son of God or saw them as one. Most of them also articulated a clear understanding of the relationship between the three persons using common Trinitarian identifiers such as three in one and Jesus as son of God. The respondents then clearly demonstrated an understanding of the relationship amongst the three persons of the Trinity, as well as what the second person of the Trinity means to them.

![Understanding of the Trinity](chart1.png)

In response to the question on who or what is the Holy Spirit the majority of the respondents named the Holy Spirit using common Christian identifiers such as saviour, mediator between man and God and provider. Amongst the respondents it can be seen that there is co-mingling of the understanding of the three persons that is that each person of the Trinity can play any one of these roles or all of these roles. Most were able to identify what the Holy Spirit meant to them but it was noted that the Holy Spirit meant the same as Jesus meant to them so that Holy Spirit is enfolded into the identity of Jesus and together with the father becomes provider, mediator and saviour (Johnson, 217).
It can also be concluded that whilst these Christian identifiers are usually associated with the Christological or the second person of the Trinity, (Johnson) for these adherents the Holy Spirit is seen as playing this role. This “….Christianity with a blend of Africanism. A brand of African survival, ….. (where) worship emphasis is placed to a greater extent on handclapping, singing, shouting, and rejoicing more than formal worship” (WIUSBSO Inc. website 26/1/17) allows fee reign of the Holy Spirit which is seen as present in the center of this frenzied praise experience which is filled with adherents speaking in tongues. (Acts 2, 10, 11). Speaking in tongues has been central to Spiritual Baptist worship from inception which is why they were called shouters. (Taylor, 1)
The questionnaire dug deeper to find out the respondents understanding of the Holy Spirit and its effect on their relationship with God. The majority of them identified the Holy Spirit as God or as having an effect on their relationship with God. However it could be seen that whilst more respondents indicated a clear understanding of the relationship amongst the three persons, when it came to their personal relationship with the Holy Spirit a smaller number were able to articulate an understanding of their personal relations with the Holy Spirit. This was reconfirmed when the respondents were asked how their beliefs affected or influenced their prayer life and to indicate who they prayed to when they prayed most of them indicated that they prayed to God through Jesus or directly to God. The data suggests a clearer understanding of the first and second persons of the Trinity. The father and son are directly referenced whilst the Holy Spirit is perhaps seen as the medium through which they have this experience since this is the predominant way of worship (Taylor,1).

Creedal statements which are expressions of belief systems also formed part of the study. The responses to this question confirmed that the Creedal statement (the Apostle’s Creed) used in the Minister’s manual is used by most Spiritual Baptists churches represented in the survey. The majority of the respondents believes in what it says and indicated that it affirmed their faith; it was an acknowledgement of their beliefs and a reminder of the sacrifice of Jesus. It is now necessary to ascertain what these findings indicate about the doxology and confession of the Spiritual Baptist Faith.

Chapter 5

5.1 Analysis of Findings

The study of the worship practices of the Spiritual Baptist Faith sought to unearth any evidence or traces of the Trinitarian formula in the worship practices and rituals of the Spiritual Baptist Faith whilst the questionnaire sought to elicit responses from practitioners in three main areas:

1. The fundamental beliefs and symbols of Spiritual Baptists,
2. Understanding of the Trinity and
3. How the fundamental beliefs and understanding of the Trinity influence the respondents’ confession of faith.
A review of the findings from both studies indicates that Spiritual Baptist liturgical practices are built on a Trinitarian framework as detailed in their Minister’s manual. This was corroborated by the respondents who articulated an understanding of the Apostle’s Creed, an affirmation of a belief system which is grounded in the Trinity, as central to the worship and prayer life. The Minister’s manual indicated its centrality in the worship service and a large majority of respondents indicated that they believed in what it said.

That a large majority of the respondents can express an understanding of the concept of the Trinity as three in one and describe the first two persons of the Trinity in ways universal to Christianity also points to a meaningful Trinitarian presence in the Faith. The various use of the “Glory Be” throughout the services in the Spiritual Baptist Faith provides even more evidence of the Trinitarian presence. Whether this presence in the liturgy and ritual practices translates to a full understanding of the Trinity by practitioners is perhaps a different question?

It was noted that there was comingling of the understanding of the three persons with the references used for the first two persons being used to describe the third person. Explaining the third person remains shrouded in mystery for many despite the focus on a lot of “… rejoicing in the spirit’ (Taylor, 1). Like Rahner posits, most Christians are monotheists and the full understanding of the Trinity is lost in everyday life.

The findings also indicate a correlation between the worship practices as identified earlier with the beliefs articulated in the findings of the studies. Respondents indicated that they believed in the statements made in the Apostle’s Creed and were able to articulate an understanding of the concept of the Trinity. Though their responses were mixed they echoed Johnson’s assertion that the Trinity is three different expressions of the same God. Whether the prayer is to God, the theological inflection or to God through Jesus, the Christological inflection, the prayer is in the divine passive, praising God in the inflection that the worshipper is most comfortable with.

When a worshipper kneels and in his freewill prayer begins to pray using the words of the Hymn “Oh God our Help in Ages Past” and continues “Our hope for years to come / our shelter from the stormy blast / and our eternal home”, (2-4) he is using the theological inflection. When he goes on in his prayer and uses the hymn “Jesu(s) lover of my soul”:

Let me to thy bosom fly
Whilst the nearer waters roll
Whilst the tempest is still on high
Hide me oh my saviour hide,
Till the storm of life is past,
Safe into thy haven guide,
Oh receive my soul at last (19, 2-8)

He invokes the Christological inflection. By the time the believer arrives at the point in his prayer where he feels in touch with Jesus the punematalogical is invoked and he sings …. “Holy Spirit Oh, Holy Spirit / Holy Spirit Oh Holy Spirit / I want to walk and talk with my Lord Holy Spirit.” The grammar of the doxology then is Trinitarian not just in the rituals of the worship but in the confessions of the heart.

5.2 Conclusion

What then is the relationship between Trinitarian doctrine and worship in the Spiritual Baptist Faith? Is the Trinity central to Spiritual Baptist doxology and is it expressed fully in the worship life and liturgical practices within the Spiritual Baptist Faith? The evidence in this study suggests that there is a strong relationship between Trinitarian doctrine and Spiritual Baptist worship. Moreover it is expressed in the worship life and liturgical practices of the faith.

The evidence garnered from the study of the liturgical practices as designed in the Spiritual Baptist Minister’s Manual as well as the exploration of the prayer life of Spiritual Baptists are testimonies to the presence of the Trinity in the faith practices. The use of Hymns that are generally used in the Christian faith, hymns which glorify God as well as testify to the Trinitarian nature of God also points to the presence of the Trinity in the doxology. Finally the use of these hymns as the grammar of the prayer statements codifies the Trinity in the prayer experience and gives release to the various divine inflections which emanate from the believer.
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