

May 2004

## Religious Business

Tonya Haynes

[anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com](mailto:anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium>

---

### Recommended Citation

Haynes, Tonya (2004) "Religious Business," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol2/iss1/5>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* by an authorized editor of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact [repository.library@miami.edu](mailto:repository.library@miami.edu).

My father is a black-conscious, white-people-are-the-devil kind of man, so I don't go to church. But everybody else at school does go to church, and teachers have a habit of asking from time to time: "Who doesn't go to church?" You really don't want to be the only person with your hand up, feeling ostracized like hell, so I does lie. Only thing is when people ask you which church you go to and you say, "St. Leonard's church," 'cause that is the only church you know even though they are plenty churches everywhere. And when somebody else that goes to St. Leonard's church in truth ask how come they never see you at Sunday School, you just feel like you would cuff the person in their mouth. Then you have to think of something real quick to say like maybe you does go to the early morning service instead of Sunday School. I does go to weddings and funerals and that sort of thing, and we even went church last week (including my father), but that was because my grandmother was taking her first communion, and that is something big, or at least strange, 'cause most people don't wait till they is seventy-seven to decide that they need the Lord.

Truth is I didn't want to go to this first communion thing neither 'cause it ain't like a wedding where you got food or a funeral where somebody will be drunk and say something funny and then afterwards is rice and peas, macaroni pie and drinks at the wake. This did a long-ass boring service and the dress did itching me, and the shoes did pinching my toes, and I did want to pee, but my mother keep giving me the look, which mean if you know what best for you, you would sit down and keep your mouth shut and try not to even breathe too loud.

Anyway, I start going to Inter-School Christian Fellowship on Fridays at lunch time, not like I need my soul save or any of that foolishness, 'cause like I say already, we is more conscious people than that, but nearly everybody else going to I.S.C.F., so you could either be lonely as hell with nobody to play with, or you could go since everybody else going, and besides, my best friend Nola is a Christian, and we do everything together. Of course I don't let my father know that I going to I.S.C.F. I know I talk a lot, but I don't talk everything. My father does take this thing serious. He was even planning to write the teacher a letter, so I wouldn't have to go to prayers, but I beg he not to, and I promise he that I will pretend I closing my eyes and that I not going to get brainwashed by this religion business, and so he ain't bother to write the letter, and I happy as hell, 'cause you don't want to be like that Jehovah witness girl, standing up outside by yourself when everybody else inside.

Well the I.S.C.F. thing is not too bad, lots of singing and games and stories. It do you a lot of good to go too 'cause then you get better at Religious Education (that might even be my best mark this year), and maybe you don't feel the teacher hand between your two shoulder blades as often as before because you forget to memorize some Bible passage the night before. Pretty soon you know most Bible stories by heart, and that is something that make your mother real proud, and even though she will never see you get confirm, at least she know that you know about Jonah and the whale and the widow's mite, which are things she believe are indispensable to your education.

This Jesus business don't seem so evil to me, but I take my father word that it is 'cause he is a smart man and a peaceful man too. When the Jehovah witnesses knock on our door on Christmas Day, which is a big day for us, and had the gall to tell my father that he going to hell just because my father say that God don't exist, he just say he busy and shut the door. Beryl, who live next door, started to cuss and tell them if they don't step out of her garden she will pour some hot water on them, and I could hear her banging her pots and pans so you know she boiling the water in truth.

Well the term soon over and tests finish, and the teacher busy writing up reports. "Ayodele Brown," teacher call me up. I get up a bit frighten 'cause them teachers real quick to throw some licks in you if you talking too loud or too much. I get beat for talking so many times. When I get to the teacher desk, she have my report open to the first page and her hand above a little space that say extra-curricular activities. The report never used to have nothing 'bout no extra-curricular activities before. She ask me, "You're a member of I.S.C.F., right?"

I pause for a minute 'cause I don't know what to say. I measure my options, and I say "Not really."

She say she does see me every Friday.

I say I only go because Nola go.

The teacher about to write I.S.C.F. in the space for extra-curricular activities, and my heart start to beat so fast I nearly have a heart attack 'cause this is a serious thing.

My father say the Bible full of lies, and priest only robbing poor people out of they money and that white people invent this thing to keep us down, and my father wouldn't even let my mother send us to church, so you know is no joke just how strong he feel 'bout this thing. Whenever my mother say that we too unruly and we need to go to church, my father say, "Children don't need church. They need discipline." Or he say, "Children don't need church. They need food." When he start talking about religion, a vein in he head does start to bulge and quiver, and he face does get serious, serious. Besides, I ain't do too good in class this year.

Maybe if I had all A's he woulda just glance over the report quick, and he might not even notice the extra-curricular activities section, but I ain't get not one A (not even for religious education), and for "Attention to Lessons," I get a D. The teacher write it big and red, and she even circle it, so you know a report like this would get scrutinize. My father say he stay up many nights reading books, and that is why he glasses so thick, so you know a D for "Attention to Lessons" is a real disappointment. I know I going to get licks anyway since it is a bad report, but the I.S.C.F. thing could really spoil my whole summer vacation, not to mention my life, 'cause next term he would surely write the teacher a letter and say I can't go to prayers and I can't go to I.S.C.F. Then I would be more lonely that the Jehovah Witness girl, and maybe Nola might even stop playing with me.

Well, while at the teacher desk, two boys in the back start fighting. The teacher jump up out of her chair to go and part them, and while she is gone, it cross my mind that maybe I should just snatch up my report and hide it. But I can imagine the kind of licks I would get if the teacher find out, so I start to pray, just like how they pray at I.S.C.F. I bow my head, and I close my eyes, fighting back tears. When the teacher finish beat the two boys, she sit back down, look at me and ask, "You're a member of Brownies?"

I say "Yes," and I watch her write "Brownies" in the space for extra-curricular activities, and I say "Amen," even though I ain't no member of the Brownies. If my father ask about it (and I doubt that he would), I could always find a way to explain it. I know how to think on my feet.