

## BOOK REVIEW

KESSLER, Christl and Jürgen RÜLAND, *Give Jesus a Hand! Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines*. Theology and Religious Studies Series. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008. 236pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9789715505697. €41.37.

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In *Give Jesus a Hand!*, Christl Kessler and Jürgen Rüländ explore the demographics and patterns of Charismatic religiosity, and attempt to explain the success of the Charismatic movement in the country. This book review calls attention to the conceptualization and categorization of Charismatic Christians, the framework of political populism in analysing Charismatic churches, and the argument that Charismatic Christianity in the Philippines is a populist religion.

Supported and funded by the Working Group on Global Church Affairs of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Germany, this case study on the Philippines is part of a series of country studies – including Costa Rica, Hungary and South Africa – that examine the rise of new forms of religiosity. As intended by Kessler and Rüländ, the Philippine study explores the scope and sources of the charismatic revival in the country; describes varying forms, organizational characteristics, recruitment patterns, and liturgy; explains the success of the charismatic movement; and analyses the social and political implications of the Charismatic revival (p. 4). Rigour is evident in the use of mixed quantitative and qualitative methods as the authors sought the cooperation of scholars from the Philippines, US and Germany.

The authors' review of related literature (chapter 1) indicates the growing global concern among academics and institutions to study Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. Data on the increasing numbers and rising percentage of Charismatic Christians globally and in the Philippines highlight the study's significance. The authors use the concept of "Charismatic Christianity" to refer to the religious revival in the Philippines, inclusive of Pentecostalism (old and neo-Pentecostals), Roman Catholic Charismatics, mainstream Protestant Charismatics and Evangelical Charismatics (p. 4). For data collection and analysis, this conceptualization is crucial for classifying individuals, groups and churches in light of similarities and differences in their beliefs, practices, and historical background.

Viewing religion and religious movements as ways by which humans find meaning amid conditions of insecurity, the authors offer the concept of "populism" to explain the success of the Charismatic religious movement in the

Philippines. They argue that “the actors in the Charismatic movement transfer themes and techniques of populist politics into the religious sphere and their success is based on some underlying conditions and characteristics of contemporary Philippine society that foster political populism” (p. 14).

Examining this argument, the question may be raised: who are the actors in the charismatic movement? Did they knowingly use populist techniques or not? Is their success due to social conditions that foster political populism or to some other factors?

The detailed historical background (chapter 2), citing major authors and their works on church, religion and politics in the Philippines, establishes the context for Charismatic Christianity among Catholics and Protestants. The themes of church–state relations, Filipino nationhood, social justice and democracy extracted from the historical account (from 1565 to 2004) situate religion and church in Philippine politics and society.

The book provides valuable nationwide survey results and statistical analysis (chapter 3) on the Charismatic churches’ demographic variables and patterns of socio-cultural religiosity, orthodox Catholicism, and Charismatic religiosity. The findings indicate that Charismatic Christianity in the Philippines, originally among Protestant Pentecostals, has moved into the mainstream and Evangelical Protestant churches, and now predominantly into the Catholic Church. Qualitative data from interviews and participant observation (chapter 4) describe in depth the Catholic and Protestant groups’ organizational structures, cognitive patterns and practices, which, the authors say, create the Charismatic movement’s common lifeworld or “cultural milieu”.

It would be helpful for readers to be somewhat familiar with statistics in order to understand the correlation of variables. The assertions based on survey data and statistical analysis may be verified in future studies. Moreover, the vivid description by qualitative data should be taken in light of the experience of individual interviewees and interpretation of the researchers. The categories of Protestant Pentecostals, Charismatics among mainline Protestants and Charismatics among Roman Catholics are quite clear, but further clarification is needed for the terms Evangelical Charismatics and neo-Pentecostals. The general term “Charismatic” used by the authors is preferable, based on similarities across churches, groups and individuals, while recognizing distinctive nuances. Some other independent Charismatic groups have not been included. It is interesting to note the extent of Pentecostal influence.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss populism in the religious sphere. Applying the indicators of political populism in analysing the Charismatic movement, the authors draw evidence from the quantitative and qualitative data for showing patterns of anti-elitism, use of simple solutions to complex problems, and the leaders’ strategies in building and mobilizing the churches and groups. Research literature provides data on the Philippine economy’s boom–bust cycle, employment shortages, low demand, rising interest rates and declining disposable incomes, among others, as well as reporting on shifts in political power shown by critical events, crime, corruption, insurgency; even calamities, such as perennial typhoons. This forms the basis for religion to be seen as the

human search for meaning amid insecure social conditions. Despite experiences in electoral politics, the authors acknowledge that prospects are ambiguous for Charismatic Christians' political involvement in democracy (chapter 6).

The book presents the application of a socio-political perspective in the study of the Philippine Charismatic movement, implying a positivist and deductive approach. That said, a constructivist approach may provide a helpful alternative to gain additional insights. It may also be useful to compare Kessler and Rüländ's findings with other empirical studies in order to clarify concepts and categorization, demographics, beliefs and practices, and socio-political implications of Charismatic Christianity, such as in elections, policy and development.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, the book contributes new assertions that will stimulate further research.

Both authors have a track record of accomplishment and received an award for the article version on the study findings.<sup>2</sup> Their work is an encouragement for further social science research on Charismatic Christianity and religion in society and politics.

1. See [www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power](http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power).

2. See [www.pacificaffairs.ubc.ca/announcements/holland-prize/previous-winners](http://www.pacificaffairs.ubc.ca/announcements/holland-prize/previous-winners).