

Book Review

WINGEIER-RAYO, Philip D., *Where are the Poor? A Comparison of the Ecclesial Base Communities and Pentecostalism – A Case Study in Cuernavaca, Mexico*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series, vol. 153. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011. xii+164pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781606089019. \$16.00.

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The religious landscape of Latin America has undergone significant transformations for quite some time now, which should most of all be attributed to two newer movements: the Christian base communities (comunidades eclesiales de base, or CEB) within the Catholic Church, and the multiple Pentecostal communities of a more or less Protestant affiliation. This development comes with a number of questions:

- Are the CEB organized politically or rather spiritually oriented?
- Are the Pentecostal communities an expression of political escapism or are they developing a social awareness?
- Which of the two does more for the marginal sectors of society, or promotes modernization and democratization to a larger extent?
- Why does the same social situation engender such different movements?

Wingeier-Rayo, who teaches at the Methodist Pfeiffer University in Charlotte, North Carolina, asks these and similar questions in his rather thin book, which targets both movements in a comparative study. The author is of North American background, but well acquainted with Latin America through long years of service in Sandinista Nicaragua, Cuba and Mexico.

The book is divided into two parts. After introducing the main questions, the first theoretical part discusses the standard literature for both movements, being followed in the second part by the results of an ethnographic field study. In the first part (chapters 2–4, pp. 1–80) the author begins by discussing the relevant literature about Pentecostalism, from its origins in the USA (Azusa Street) to the developments in Mexico. In his discussion he pays attention to both diverging interpretations of the phenomenon. On the one hand there are d'Epinau, Bastian and others, who find Pentecostalism counterproductive to modernity, leaning towards the re-establishment of the traditional social order. On the other hand there are Willems, David Martin, Stoll and others, who see a tendency towards modernization as well as a symbolic protest against the social order. Following this, the author presents the standard literature (Azevedo, L. Boff, Gutiérrez, Segundo) pertaining to the CEBs, whose origins he sees in the pastoral plans

of Brazilian bishops, in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, in the experiment of Solentiname, and in the continental synods (Medellín, Puebla), regrettably not taking into account the most recent one in Aparecida (2007). This part also considers the special Mexican development, where the movement was especially promoted by the former bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo (1907–92). In his subsequent review of comparative literature, the author draws from the older studies by Rolim, Mariz and Burdick, and emphasizes most of all rationality, emotionality, small groups and leadership styles.

After this theoretical orientation, the second part (chapters 5–7, pp. 81–150) presents ethnographic findings in a CEB and a neighbouring Pentecostal community in the barrio Alta Vista Alegre in the Mexican city of Cuernavaca, south of Mexico City. The author participated in the activities of both groups for one year, and collected data via participant observation. The communication consisted of interviews, field notes, questionnaires, conversations and participation in meetings. The resulting source material is then analysed along a slightly varying pattern of ecclesial structure, membership, activities, doctrines, leadership, music and social engagement, and the comparative discussion carves out insightful commonalities and differences. The book concludes with a bibliography and an index.

The theoretical part of the study is neatly executed and provides a good and reliable overview of the (older) standard literature. Unfortunately, publications from the twenty-first century are hardly considered, so that the most recent decade is bibliographically absent, but at least the basic developments of both newer Christian communities are correctly delineated until the turn of the century. One important question is whether the author is aware of the limited representative nature of his case study. While it may exhibit some typical basic structures, it cannot be used for generalizing conclusions about the whole of Latin America on account of the large historical, cultural, ethnic, social and political divergence across the continent. Cuernavaca, for example, is quite unique for CEBs, because this is where Bishop Méndez Arceo worked, but seen within the whole of Latin America, it is quite atypical. Also, the type and distribution of Pentecostal groups can vary significantly. The field study of both communities adheres to the established standards, but it is important to take into account that the participant observer always remains embedded: his observations co-determine what is observed, and the observed are also observers. Moreover, since the growing Catholic Charismatic movement has also changed the overall picture in Latin America by introducing a third variant, some references or comparisons in this regard might have been instructive (cf. Cleary, 2011). Finally, two minor comments should be noted: the relationship between church and state in the 1917 Constitution of Mexico is depicted in a rather trivializing manner (p. 108); and Ernesto Cardenal was not a Jesuit (p. 43), but his brother Fernando was.

To conclude, the present micro-study gives a first overview over the (older) literature concerning the two important religious movements of Pentecostalism and CEBs, which is illustrated in a comparative manner by using empirical examples from the Mexican Cuernavaca. However, such an overview also

calls for deeper empirical and theoretical research, taking into account the larger quantitative picture in Latin America, as well as spiritual practices and theological positions.

Reference

Cleary, E.L. 2011. *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813036083.001.0001>