

BOOK REVIEW

CLEARY, Edward L., *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011. 340pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780813036083. \$74.95.

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In what became his last work, late professor Edward L. Cleary, OP, emeritus of political science at Providence College and a lifetime scholar of Latin American studies, takes on the task of giving a comprehensive account of the biggest lay movement within the Catholic Church in Latin America today, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR). When David Martin published *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (1990) and David Stoll asked the question *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (1990), scholars of religion in Latin America became aware that the most revolutionary development within Christianity in the region was no longer the ailing liberation-inspired ecclesial base communities, but the explosive growth of Evangelical Protestantism, overwhelmingly of a (neo-)Pentecostal or Charismatic character. This long overdue shift in focus, which can best be explained by scholarly sympathy towards liberation theology and a corresponding dislike for conservative Evangelical Christianity, marked the beginning of two decades of extensive studies on Latin American Protestantism from the fields of sociology, political science, anthropology and history of religions. With few exceptions, Western theologians had lost sight of Latin America after the Vatican-imposed decline of the liberationist Catholicism. What scholars from all fields failed to see was the fact that the explosion of Pentecostal and Charismatic Protestantism had a Catholic counterpart that exceeded the Evangelical churches in both growth rates and extension: the CCR, which (according to conservative estimates) has around 73 million followers among Catholics in Latin America.

Fortunately, this lack of attention was broken within the last decade, when Cleary and scholars such as Andrew Chesnut, Marjo de Theije, Cecília Mariz and Henri Gooren, among few others, began publishing studies of what Cleary termed “the invisible giant” of Latin American Catholicism. Cleary, who had served in Bolivia both as a missionary and researcher, and maintained an extended network of contacts within the Catholic Church of the region, had witnessed the introduction of the CCR in Latin America, and followed its growth and development from the sidelines for four decades.

The book consists of ten chapters, each of which is dedicated to a country or a region in Latin America. Apart from giving an often detailed historical account of the Charismatic movement in the different countries, many of the chapters also address a specific theme or question related to the spread of the CCR within Latin American Catholicism, such as the question of Charismatic engagement in social justice matters, the competition with Evangelicals and Pentecostals, and the influence of the Charismatic Renewal on the overall pastoral strategies of the Latin American Catholic Church at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This way of ordering the material by both geography and topic is not totally successful, and one could wonder whether a more strict and thematic composition would have created a more coherent book.

Cleary places the Charismatic movement within the changing and increasingly pluralistic religious landscape of Latin America. Though part of a larger tendency towards lay engagement in the Catholic Church in the region, the Charismatic Renewal differs by being a movement rather than an organization. It is much more a set of practices and beliefs that have spread throughout the Latin American Church, far beyond the boundaries of the official *Catholic Charismatic Renewal*. This makes it very difficult to define the size and the borders of the movement. This can explain discrepant statistics, where The Pew Forum (2007) states that 58 per cent of all Catholics in Brazil are Charismatic (p. 1, 243), whereas Barrett and Johnson (World Christian Trends 2001) set the number at 22 per cent (p. 1, 27–9, 96, 152, 174).

Taking Bolivia as the example, chapter 1 addresses the introduction of the CCR in Latin America. Like its Pentecostal cousin, the CCR was a North American import, which became successful once it was handed over to local believers who adopted the Charismatic experience to their context. In most countries in Latin America the CCR was introduced at the beginning of the 1970s by foreign (mostly US) missionaries, priests and sisters, who were serving the chronically understaffed Church in Latin America in their thousands at the time. From here the CCR spread to the lay people, and rapidly it became predominantly a lay movement. The main reason for Charismatic success in Latin America was and is its ability to address the everyday problems of believers and the specific emphasis on healing, which characterizes the CCR in the region. The chapter on Colombia, where 28 per cent of all Catholics are Charismatic, discusses the compatibility of strong commitment to social justice, which characterized the movement of liberation theology, and the Charismatic focus on the experience of Spirit Baptism and individual moral restoration. While these are not mutually exclusive, social justice engagement tends to decrease when people and parishes become Charismatic. Cleary sees this tendency in all countries (p. 49, 60, 86, 147). Two chapters discuss the Charismatic giant, Brazil, where almost half of Latin America's Charismatic Catholics live. Competition with Evangelical Pentecostals is fierce, and Charismatics have successfully embraced the media, an area where the Catholic Church seemed to have been totally overruled by heavily missionizing Protestants. Due to its magnitude (up to 33 million), Cleary considers the political impact of the CCR. Whereas the movement was originally decisively apolitical, this is changing, and candidates from the CCR are increasingly

running for parliament exposing their religious credentials. The chapter on Mexico addresses the transnational character of the Charismatic movement, in this case the huge influence of migration and south–north mission in bringing the CCR “back” to the US, where an increasing part of Latino Catholics are today Charismatic worshippers. In the concluding chapter on Guatemala, the growth of the CCR is related to the overall development of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the pastoral strategies applied by the bishops’ conference (CELAM). In countries such as Guatemala the majority of practising Christians are today Pentecostal or Charismatic believers. Faced with pluralism, Protestantism and secularization, Latin American bishops first launched “New Evangelization” (1992), and most recently a “Continental Mission” (2007) in order reconsolidate the Catholic Church. These efforts are increasingly carried out by Charismatic lay people, and will hence enforce the general Pentecostalization of Catholicism in Latin America.