

Martin Lindhardt, *Power in Powerlessness: A Study of Pentecostal Life Worlds in Urban Chile*. Religion in the Americas 12. Leiden: Brill Academic, 2012. 270 pp. ISBN-10: 9004216006

Reviewed by Jim Mazurek*

Martin Lindhardt brings another excellent European contribution to the study of Chilean indigenous Pentecostalism. As the world's first "indigenous, economically and theologically independent Pentecostal church in the third world" (3) this movement holds special significance for students of Pentecostalism. Like his predecessors, Emilio Willems of Germany (1967)¹ and Christian Lalive d'Epina of Switzerland (1968)², Lindhardt employs tools from modern sociology and anthropology in an attempt to discover why so many Chileans embrace their home-grown version of Pentecostal worldview, faith and practice. Since its humble beginnings in 1909, Chilean Pentecostalism has grown into a significant religious subculture which now includes over 15% of the national population.

Lalive d'Epina believed Chilean Pentecostalism's success was due to its similarities with the *hacienda* (farm) culture, wherein a beneficent, authoritarian landowner – now represented by the Pentecostal pastor or bishop – rewards loyal service by satisfying basic needs of community, purpose and direction. Willems, in turn, affirmed that Pentecostalism's conservative disciplines enable its adherents to cope more successfully with the challenges of life in urban, capitalistic settings.

Lindhardt critiques both perspectives as out-of-date and insufficient. Most of Chile's Pentecostals today are not migrant farm workers who have recently moved to the cities, and Chilean Pentecostalism continues to grow in both urban and rural settings. These and other instrumentalist views of Pentecostalism thus fail to tell the whole story. The question should not be *what* does Pentecostalism do for people, but *how* does Pentecostalism bring about change into people's lives. Lindhardt's thesis: "Pentecostalism provides a language and a set of ritual forms by use of which objective

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structures of social differentiation are renegotiated and reconstituted as religious differences” (9). The writer seeks evidence of this in Chilean Pentecostal history, the place Pentecostals occupy in modern Chilean social hierarchies, Pentecostalism as a cultural critique, and Pentecostal views of conversion, power, gender, the devil and eschatology.

Lindhardt’s thorough review of the history of the Chilean indigenous Pentecostal movement is notable for its treatment of the period during and since the 1973-1989 rule of the military junta led by Augusto Pinochet. Another important feature of the book is the inclusion of data from recent research carried out by Chilean Pentecostal theologians and historians such as Miguel Angel Mansilla, Luis Orellana and Juan Sepúlveda.

Due to the rather accidental circumstance of being the first Chilean Pentecostal church he visited, Lindhardt carried out his research primarily in the *Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal* denomination [Evangelical Pentecostal Church or EPC]. This by no means diminishes the value of the study, but in so doing he failed to examine Chile’s largest denomination, la *Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal* [Methodist Pentecostal Church or MPC] and its hundreds of clone-like offshoot groups. He does include some data from the Chilean Assemblies of God youth, but not from the MPC. This is akin to a study of Pentecostalism in the USA that focuses mainly on the Pentecostal Holiness Church and pays little attention to the Assemblies of God or the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

The EPC is by far the most conservative of the myriad of Chilean Pentecostal denominations. EPC women must wear long dresses and use no makeup; the men must keep their hair short and wear dark suits, white shirts and ties to all church services. Only reed organs may be played in church worship – just to give the pitch. All other musical instruments are considered to be of the devil. Only hymns, and no contemporary choruses, may be sung; and that must be done *acapella* in three or four part harmony. By comparison, women in most other Pentecostal groups may wear slacks to church and men are steadily abandoning the use of white shirts and ties. Among the Methodist Pentecostal and similar churches one will find entire orchestras consisting of guitars, mandolins, violins, tambourines, accordions, electric keyboards, guitars and basses, drums and brass instruments. More and more contemporary choruses of US and Australian origin are

sung. The EPC worldview and values examined are admittedly not quite those of the majority in the Chilean Pentecostal movement.

Lindhardt explains the demographics of Chilean society and where the Pentecostals are found within it. An appreciation of Chile's social and economic hierarchies is key to understanding the appeal of Pentecostalism's rejection of "the world" and empowerment of the otherwise powerless. As the writer sees it, EPC believers and other Chilean Pentecostals believe that good things only happen when God does them. Humanness is powerlessness. Any good thing that comes – a job, a home, or a college scholarship – is a direct blessing from God and not the sole result of human effort or creativity. Church services are not perceived as symbolic rituals, but as direct encounters between the powerless and the presence and power of God.

In Lindhardt's estimation Pentecostal testimonies of personal conversion are a "cultural process through which converts reconstruct their autobiographic pasts by use of new rhetorical, conceptual resources while at the same time empowering themselves" (92).

One salient and enjoyable feature of the book is Lindhardt's inclusion of numerous citations of the dialogues he held with different church members and leaders. Though not at all a Pentecostal himself, his exchanges were kind and respectful. Holding these interviews wasn't easy, as he initially had to quell fears that he might be a Roman Catholic spy sent to infiltrate and bring harm to the EPC.

Several of the conversations mentioned illustrate how Chilean Pentecostals interpret reality through the lens of divine guidance and supernatural interactions even in the common and mundane. When visiting a local church for the first time, he was questioned by a member about who he was and why was he there. Lindhardt responded with a thorough explanation of his work as a sociologist, university professor and researcher who was in Chile to conduct an investigation about Pentecostals. When another member came alongside and asked the first member about the identity of the visitor, his sole reply was "*El Señor lo envió*" ["The Lord sent him."]

Despite its narrow focus on Chile's Evangelical Pentecostal Church, this book has value for students of Pentecostalism anywhere in the world, as so many of the issues presented are global in nature. Lindhardt's arguments for his thesis are thorough and

valuable. Nevertheless, for this reviewer, as a Pentecostal, the elephant in the room the writer does not confront, is a recognition of the validity of the supernaturalism under study. While Chile's Pentecostals do have a good measure of legalism, poor ministerial training systems, and an allegorical approach to hermeneutics and preaching, the simple truth is, God is effectively changing lives through EPC and other Pentecostal ministries. The radical, often miraculous transformations experienced by these people cannot be simply explained away as the effects of Pentecostal language or ritual. A supernaturalist perspective cannot be excluded from the conversation about the phenomenal growth of Chilean Pentecostalism.

All that being said, anyone who is involved with ministry in Chile or with Pentecostalism in the developing world will be enlightened by this book. It is highly recommended.

¹ Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Cultural Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

² Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*. English ed. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969).