

Christl Kessler and Jürgen Rüländ, *“Give Jesus a Hand!” Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines*, Theology and Religious Studies Series (Quezon City, Phils.: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), xi pp. + 226 pp., paperback, ISBN: 978-971-550-569-7, US\$ 37.00.

“...[T]he fact that the Philippines is considered by many to be the ‘sick man’ of Southeast Asia and a loser in the globalization process” makes this nation a breeding soil for “populist religion.” (153) However, the increase of the Pentecostals and Charismatics in this nation could not be solely credited to this kind of reckoning. That is reductionism. “Such reasoning reduces religious movements to socioeconomic causes in a manner reminiscent of the ‘opium of the people,’ an approach that is too simple for the complex phenomenon of religious movements and revivals.” (153) An oversimplified analysis is not helpful. Yes, it is true that the Philippines has gone through a lot of struggles as a nation. From the Spanish, American and Japanese occupations (see 31-55) until the difficulties of the young state after World War II and the struggles of the democratic system during and after Martial Law (55-86) the religiosity of the Filipinos has been shaped in one way or another by their national experiences. And the current graft and corruption in every sector of the Philippine government continue to haunt the Filipino people. (*passim*) The dislocation of the different ethnic groups as well as the underprivileged poor people and the migration of the many Filipinos all over the world are due to basic need of humans to survive and live a better life. (e.g. 156-160) This is an evidence of uncertainty. Exploitation of people is not news. Suffering is not an uncommon sight. Politics is dirty. Government is bad. Disparity between the rich and the poor is the norm. But are the Filipinos hopeful? Yes indeed! The Pentecostal-Charismatic experience of the manifestations of the Spirit among the Filipinos is a source of hope. The growth of the Catholic Charismatic groups Couples for Christ and El Shaddai as well as the Protestant Pentecostal churches like Jesus is Lord and the Assemblies of God makes the Christian revival in the Philippines exciting. This claim is verified by social science.

The title *“Give Jesus a Hand!”* authored by Christl Kessler and Jürgen Rüländ is captivating. It gives the impression that the Lord Jesus Christ is getting “a hand,” or a help. It also makes one think that because it is Jesus the Son of God it may be implying that if a person would only give his or her one hand He can do a life changing miracle.

These thoughts came to mind when the reviewer got a hold of this book. The subtitle of the book, *Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines*, further brought an impression that the book is more about the experience of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Filipino Charismatic Christians. Although there are some ideas that the reviewer disagrees with, some information that is not accurate, a few typographical and textual errors and problematic conclusions, the volume did not disappoint the reviewer in the promising title that it carries. Kessler and Rüländ provide a book about the Pentecostals and the Charismatics in the Philippines that is decently researched. It is a study of Filipinos who claim the experience of the manifestations of the Spirit of God. Their general portrayal of the experience of the Spirit baptism as well as the Pentecostal-Charismatic revival and phenomenon among the Filipino people is straightforward and sound. The work is not only bibliographical research. It is also a social science endeavor. The authors have done field research. Not only did they use the outcomes of their own survey data and empirical result but they also employed the national statistics of the Philippine census. Thus, the scope of *"Give Jesus a Hand!" Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines* is considerably broad and generally balanced. It may be said that the product of the research of Kessler and Rüländ reflects the contemporary sociological situation and community perception of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in the Philippines.

The book, which has six chapters, begins with an outline about the transforming religious scenery in the Philippines. The authors present the contemporary estimates of the number of Pentecostals and Charismatics both in the world and in the Philippines. They also describe the identity of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Kessler and Rüländ also explain their theoretical approach and research methodology in the first chapter. The title of the chapter is "Religious Change in the Philippines: An Overview." (1-29) This part of the book summarizes what the authors will do in their presentation of materials. The next chapter which is entitled "Church and State, Filipino Nationhood, Social Justice and Democracy" (30-86) is a historical and sociological chapter. It talks about the background of the Catholic and Protestant arrival and influence in the Philippines. The third chapter is an empirical study in comparison with the previous study which is bibliographical. The title "The Philippine Religious Landscape of Today" (87-115) is very appropriate as the study uses the government statistics, different surveys and own field research of the authors.

Charts and graphs are helpful in understanding the contemporary Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Catholics and Charismatics in the Philippines. The qualitative field research and the random interviews made by the authors are nicely integrated with bibliographical information about “The Philippine Charismatic Revival” (116-151) which is also the title of the fourth chapter. The next chapter, which is the significant chapter in the whole argument of the book, argues that the Christian revival phenomenon in the Philippines is actually “Charismatic Populist Religion.” (152-179) The importance of this chapter is the synthesis that the authors have done to make their point of using the “populist” approach in assessing the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in the country. Finally, the last chapter is their summation of the study and their opinion on the force and the future of this current religious revival phenomenon. The title is a content description: “Conclusion: How Populist Religion May Shape Philippine Society.” (180-197)

Kessler and Rüländ define, describe, illustrate and apply the concept of “populism” or “populist” in politics and religion. Thus, the authors are convinced that the thriving Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal is not explainable in terms of the Filipino dissatisfaction of the available options in the society. (*passim*) And so they think that the idea of populism will bring illumination to their study of the growth and the force of this revival movement in the land that has gone through a lot of national problems. Populism for Kessler and Rüländ, using various authors, refers “in the first place, [as] a protest against the system, a revolt against the establishment and its values.” (15) “Populism thus champions the interests of the common people.” (16) “The populist tendency to propagate simple solutions for complex problems,” as well as “the populist movements [tendency] to mobilize their followers through unconventional methods...sharply distinguish them from the routines of the established order.” (17) “Populists emphasize personal relationships, face-to-face interaction and small communities in which grassroots democracy can flourish and leaders are personally accountable to their followers.” (18) In connection with the authors use of the concept of populism to the Christian revival in the Philippines they view that the Pentecostals and the Charismatics are the religious outcome of populism. (19) The noteworthy contributing result of their research is that: “Whereas political populism is confined to the problems of this world and legitimized largely by secular motives, populist religion can draw on divine legitimacy and provide support in all types of crisis—political, social, and individual. Apart

from this cognitive advantage of populist religion, the Charismatic Renewal also has far greater ability to provide its adherents with a stable lifeworld.” (20) Furthermore, although the research of Kessler and Rüländ among the Filipinos does not achieve a undisputed positive conclusion, they are still hopeful: “Populist religion has the potential to foster democracy and to keep the quest for social justice alive in society.” (197) *“Give Jesus a Hand!” Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines* is a substantial contribution to a better understanding of the current Christian revival in the Philippines specifically represented by the Pentecostals and the Charismatics who claim that they have the biblical experience of Spirit baptism and the manifestations of the supernatural charisms in this contemporary day and age.

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