



Eric Hoenes del Pinal: *Guarded by Two Jaguars: a Catholic Parish Divided by Language and Faith*

The University of Arizona Press, Arizona, 2022, 257 pages. Hardcover ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-4702-9. Ebook ISBN-13: 978-0-8165-4703-6

Andrea Althoff¹

© The Author(s) 2024

Eric Hoenes del Pinal's anthropological study about a Catholic Parish in Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, is an analysis of two lay groups in a mostly indigenous (Q'eqchi) Catholic parish in the Guatemalan Highlands. The book's most important theme concerns the conflict between these two indigenous groups—the older and dominant mainline Catholics, who consist of catechists and other active members, and members of the newer Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement. The analysis of this conflict includes the way religious identities and boundaries are constructed through rituals, including theological discourse, gestures, music, and the different uses of the indigenous and Spanish languages. The bulk of the book's data derives from fieldwork done over the course of a year, in 2005 and 2006. In the final chapter, an update of developments is provided with data from fieldwork collected in the summers of 2015 and 2017. Hoenes del Pinal received an Honoree Mention of the Geertz price in 2023 for this book.

The biographical information about the author is important because he grew up in Cobán, the town that is the subject of the book. Although not indigenous himself, Hoenes del Pinal speaks and reads Q'eqchi, the indigenous language of the subject area. This ability aided his research, given the book's subject and main theme: the impact of languages and locality on ethnic and religious identities.

The work is divided into seven chapters, not including the Introduction and Conclusion. In the Introduction, titled "Catholicism as Heteroglossia," Hoenes del Pinal provides some theoretical information, principally concerning Mikail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia" (p. 20–26) and information from "The Anthropology of (Catholic) Christianity (in Guatemala)" (p. 14–20). Also important is a letter that is reprinted on the first pages of the Introduction which outlines the basic argument of the book. According to the author, "This document laid out in rather dramatic

✉ Andrea Althoff
andrea.althoff@gmail.com

¹ German Society of European Academies, Bonn, Germany

fashion the concerns of one party in a low-level, but often quite tense, conflict that preoccupied San Felipe's Catholics in the first decade of the twenty-first century" (p. 5).

The first three chapters give a historic overview of religious pluralism in Cobán and Guatemala, whereas the first two chapters "situate the conflict within the larger social world of Cobán, Alta Verapaz, and the changing ways in which the Roman Catholic Church has conceived of its work among Guatemala's Maya people" (p. 26); Chapter 3 "focuses on how Mainstream and Charismatic lay leaders were legitimized as religious authorities within their respective congregations" (p. 27). Hoenes del Pinal argues in these chapters that "it is theoretically useful to apply the methodologies of linguistic anthropology to examine how interpersonal interactions undergird larger processes of social and religious differentiation" (p. 27). In Chapter 4, the use of the Q'eqchi and Spanish languages, particularly with singing, is taken up as providing important cues to the conflict and larger debates. Hoenes del Pinal argues here that "difference between the groups' linguistic practice – mainstream Catholic's code consistency in Q'eqchi and Charismatics' code alternation between Spanish and Q'eqchi – were motivated by key theological principles that differentiated the congregations [...] As such linguistic practice was a constitutive part of establishing their forms of religiosity" (p. 28). Chapter 5 continues with an examination of music. The author argues that "hymn singing was a crucial technique through which the congregations promoted participation in Catholic ritual and thus [became, sic] a cornerstone of how each built the religious subjectivities of its members" (p. 28). Additionally, "the conflict grew because those differences were constant reminders of a break in community solidarity, which called into question the shared project of Catholicism in a country where other forms of Christianity [mainly evangelical Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism, A.A.] had become increasingly socially influential" (p. 28). Both Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the role of the participants' bodies in religious practice. Chapter 6 examines "how the gestures, postures, and bodily movements of Mainstream and Charismatic Catholics differed as well as why those differences became the subject of cross-congregational critique" (p. 28f). Chapter 7 then analyzes "how Holy Week processions are organized and performed" (p. 29). The argument here is that "the collaborative nature of embodied ritual action served to forge intersubjective relations that were the bedrock for producing collective religious subjectivities" (p. 29). Furthermore, in discussing how these rituals were performed as public testaments of faith, Hoenes del Pinal contextualizes San Felipe's parishioners' Catholicism within the larger contested religious landscape of contemporary Guatemala (p. 29).

Having myself done extensive anthropological research on Guatemalan religious pluralism (including the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in indigenous Highland communities) and roughly at the same time as Hoenes del Pinal, I found the first three chapters (excepting the Introduction) not particularly convincing, albeit interesting. In fact, upon reading these chapters, I was quite skeptical. Both the book title and the document that was reprinted in the beginning of the Introduction, outlining a record of the proceedings of a community meeting among Catholic lay leaders, or *catequistas*, and the conclusion drawn by the author that the conflict was about "language," did not convince me. Also, the linkage with Bakhtin's theory, and in

particular “heteroglossia,” at first did not strike me for various reasons as an adequate theoretical framework. First—and the author takes up this criticism himself—the theory was meant to address poetic discourse in the novels of Dostoevsky. Second, discourse is the main term of interest here; however, the bulk of the research deals more with religious practice, the boundary construction of religious communities, and the institutional tension between traditional Catholicism and the forms of modern or postmodern Charismatic Catholicism. Third, the terms “heteroglossia” and “voicing” and “dialogism” do not capture the problematic side of religious pluralism. But I kept reading; and to the author’s credit, his approach of examining language and the overall outline of the book (incorporating religious embodiment and particularly music and gesture) was a true novelty to me. It is, I believe, certainly an inventive approach to studying religious phenomena in Guatemala, but probably more so for anthropology in general.

The author won me over somewhere in the fourth chapter. Most of what preceded it I knew from other studies about religious change in Guatemala, or I had seen it in similar documents that highlighted the religious tensions, or I had come across it in other ways while in Guatemala. Understanding that the author needed to introduce the reader to the religious landscape and its changes, I do not mean to diminish the importance of this background information. Having described the book outline, I will now highlight several ways in which I think this anthropological account is significant and ultimately successful.

First, the author employs a novel approach to characterize the different forms of embodiment and communication, namely, by describing sermons, prayer, music, hymns, gestures, and code choices. The latter exemplify how the changes in Spanish and Q’eqchi during rituals create and mark boundaries, which are a learned way of expressing new religious identities and likewise ideological choices. The author also includes in his analysis a critique of what the Catholic religious adherents saw in the embodied religious practices and a discussion of whether this critique adequately addressed the religious counterparts themselves. Whenever certain rituals were considered, which already have been analyzed extensively by other anthropologists (mainly the Semana Santa processions), the author’s anthropological perspective is quite unique. Furthermore, by participating himself in a procession, carrying a santo and singing along with Catholic Charismatics, Hoenes del Pinal is able to describe the embodied practices as a subjective experience. In other words, he does not simply describe the creation of a collective identity, as many others have done, but he is able to explain the connection to individual religious transformations, such as conversions, and the way this is attractive to people. In this way, he brings attention to the communication with the divine and how it is theologically framed.

Second, Hoenes del Pinal’s theoretical framework is not entirely linked to Bakhtin, as one would expect from the Introduction; but throughout the book, he cites an astonishing array of references from other, newer anthropological authors and sources. These references do not always feature the usual suspects (for example, Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is mentioned only a few times). Rather, newer studies from astonishing places appear. Therefore, although the Introduction does not present a convincing theoretical framework, this is more than made up for in subsequent chapters. Another point about theoretical outlines merits attention. Although they by

no means constitute a theological analysis, the occasional references do succeed in fostering a deeper understanding of the inherent faith aspects. To put it differently, the way in which the anthropological, the theological, and the data from the field work are linked in this study is, in my view, a truly new departure in the field. One example is the author's act of carrying the *santo* through the steep city streets of Cobán illustrates that "San Felipe's Catholics clearly believed that the physical act of carrying the *santo* through the city streets had a soteriological effect [emphasis A.A.] and I would argue that this belief stemmed not just from the mimetic resemblance that the ritual created between the penitent [the carriers, A.A.] and Christ but also from the ways the ritual performance itself regimented bodily agency, forcing an embodied experience of humility and submission to a force larger than oneself. Taking part in these processions constituted a technique of moral self-formation because carrying the *santo* was predicated on giving up personal agency and falling into a supra-individual order of action. In doing so the penitent entered into a distinct set of subjective and intercorporeal relations that marked the experience as extraordinary" (p. 215). "Enacting the Passion was meant to hurt, and it did. It was meant to give the penitent a taste of Jesus's suffering. The performance of the ritual was a means of reflecting on the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, and of realizing, in both senses of the word, its importance in one's own spiritual life" (p. 219).

Third, this anthropological work is an important reminder that Catholicism is not a monolith, but comprised of a wide range of different actors who all insist that "being Catholic was central to their sense of self" (p. 60). The book also provides an answer to what that means in practice and why Catholic actors choose to change from being one committed Catholic (catechist) to being another sort, a Catholic Charismatic Christian. The book often provides surprising insights—for example, when a former committed *catequista* tells the author that "[B]ecause I liked the music I entered the dynamic of La Renovación. The music interested me" (p. 166). In other words, it was not a personal crisis or a feeling of awe at the presence of the power of the Holy Spirit at a prayer meeting, but rather the process was gradual and spurred by the pleasure the interlocutor derived from the music (p. 167). The constant changes in the Catholic landscape, and through interaction with other religious and social actors, are also taken up in the final chapter. It describes a wide-sweeping diocesan evangelization project which was instituted in Alta Verapaz as a response to CELAM's call at its Fifth General Meeting in Aparecida, which had asked lay Catholics to become disciple-missionaries who would carry out a "Great Continental Mission" of Catholic renewal. Interestingly, this new institutional approach also brought about the issue of fostering peace between the different actors, as well as a larger understanding of "how to be with our brothers in the [Catholic] Church and not fight" (p. 230).

I can highly recommend this book to a whole range of readers—from the elite of the institutional Roman Catholic Church, who can learn from it how lay actors of the church enact and interpret their faith (and the tensions between different lay movements), to religious studies departments, to religious anthropologists and sociologists, and to anybody who is interested in Christian beliefs and practices.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.