In a succession of chapters McGuire conducts us through the different facets of the Pentecostal experience. The prayer meeting, the focus of religious practice, is carefully analyzed, the role of prayer, witnessing and prophecy in ordering social relations in the group adroitly revealed; the section on the social control functions of silence in prayer meetings is fascinating. The phenomenological awareness revealed in the analysis of the prayer meeting is deepened in a chapter on religious speaking and hearing in which Schutz’s ideas on multiple realities are skillfully employed to demonstrate the differences between everyday and Pentecostal methods of uttering, hearing and validating speech.

The analysis broadens in two long chapters on Pentecostals’ beliefs about healing. Phenomenological analysis is combined with anthropological wisdom to throw light on the social construction of categories of health and illness, culminating in an intriguing comparison between the legitimation for healing failure among Pentecostals and the medical establishment in which very similar techniques are seen being used, the difference being that the Pentecostals’ legitimation serves to protect the healing power of God; the medical doctor’s protects his own power and that of his profession.

The book provides no picture of the overall structure of Catholic Pentecostalism as a social movement, nor does McGuire concern herself with speculation about the kind of social conditions which spawn such movements. Nor is there much attention paid to the manner in which the sect has been shaped by the attitudes of the Catholic hierarchy and by competition from Protestant Pentecostals. Rather more surprising, we get little sense of how Catholic Pentecostalism fits into the everyday life of its adherents, how it informs and is informed by their family, work and leisure lives. But these are minor reservations. This study complements Fletcher’s Cult of the Paraclete on Catholic Pentecostalism and possesses the same ethnographic quality of Schwartz’ Sect Identities and Social Status on Protestant Pentecostals. However, in suggesting these parallels I do not wish to suggest that this book’s appeal is limited to sociologists of religion. The acuteness of McGuire’s observations and the lucid prose with which she reports them provide an object lesson for all sociologists whatever their field of specialization.”

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