Abstract

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This thesis analyzes the presence and social role of Neo-Pentecostal churches in Guatemala. It focuses on the laity with a view to understanding how they are thinking and what they are doing about social issues in the light of the fact that they as well as their participation in society have not always been taken into account. Previous studies have been mainly concerned with the opinions of pastors or with the role of some politicians who have emerged from these churches. Indeed, some analysts take it for granted that what the laity thinks is nothing more than a reflection of the opinion of their pastors. Hence this study seeks to open the way towards an understanding of the manner in which lay people see themselves and their role in society.

For the purposes of this study the researcher carried out field work in order to observe, discover, grasp, understand and systematize the ideas and experiences of the laity, examining how they perceive their role in society and how they live it out. The main sources of information were interviews, some documents written by pastors, observations from field work and the use of interviews to gather the opinions of the laity about their role and presence in society. The study argues that social change can be seen in the sphere of culture, which is the context in which the lay people live. It is here that lay people face their personal challenges and take their part in the development of the Guatemala’s socio-economic processes.

This analysis is essentially qualitative in character though it makes partial use of the quantitative method. The interviews were done among a cross section of the Neo-Pentecostals in six churches in the capital city of Guatemala. A questionnaire was also used among a larger number of people in order to gain a wider perspective of the thought and participation in society of the laity in these churches. In the course of the work the researcher took part in various activities, church services and dialogue with pastors and lay people, in order to gain an overall view of their ideas concerning their role and presence in society.

This study shows that potentially these churches have a laity which, with the support of other Evangelical churches, could form a critical driving force for social change in the long term. Social capital is a key factor for the strengthening of democracy and of the social and economic development of society. This thesis is a contribution towards understanding the social role of the laity in Neo-Pentecostal churches which aims to stimulate the growth of a wider consciousness and commitment to Guatemala’s social transformation.