Apunte bibliográfico

Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump.
Fea, John.

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The ability to synthesize is a necessity for research in the field of social studies. In this sense, the author John Fea shows such capacity in his work: Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump, in addition to showing great ability to connect issues consistently. The general description refers to the state of mind of citizenship regarding religious feelings and beliefs. It is a very interesting question, since it raises several thematic approaches that do not usually have resonance in journalistic analysis at the present moment.

The author uses very respectful language towards the evangelist community through the use of socially accepted terms among the great family of reformed Protestantism. For years, there has been a great controversy about the use of certain terms in a pejorative way, which is avoided throughout the whole book. In the same way, there is also a long tradition of linguistic “appropriationism” and terminological ideologization when describing religious phenomena and baptizing ecclesiastical organizations.

The book was published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2018). Apart from the ideological contents, with which one can be in favor of or against, methodologically the publication is an example of a job well done from the point of view of the creation of the theoretical framework, the state of the matter and the delimitation of research objects. It consists of an introductory section, five chapters, a conclusions section and a compilation of documentary sources (238 pages in total). The titles of the chapters seem typical

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of a political essay or journalistic dissemination, although the content of the book does not correspond to such appearances.

The use of the resource of historical contextualization is quite widespread in all sections, promptly generating digressions attached to the hypothesis formulation, which facilitate the understanding of the plot developments. The content of all the chapters is amplified by the analysis of the mood of public opinion (in the face of new Republican strategies), the evolution of mentalities (in the face of the emergence of Trump's political figure) and of the concept of collective thinking that emerged (the conformation of the individual political interpretation).

In the introduction, Professor Fea presents a series of intentions regarding the conception of research work. There is a shallow state of affairs on the latest political-electoral events and the manifestations of Republican political representatives. An evolution of the evangelist community, Christian morals and Protestant doctrines in the last decades of the last century is also outlined. In the analysis of the Republican primaries, some candidates (Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz) close to baptism-evangelism were opposed to Trump's image of success. Next, some summaries are presented on the different chapters of the publication.

The first chapter, surprisingly, begins with a fragment of the lyrics of a Bruce Springsteen song (Devils & Dust, 2005). In these pages, we reflect on the evolution of the political perception of the Trump candidate by white evangelists from the announcement of the candidacy to the Republican primaries (June 16, 2015, Trump Tower) until the presidential inauguration (January 20, 2017). Originally, the evangelistic hierarchies were in favor of candidates with long institutional ties who had had a meritorious trajectory, to gain the political support of the
reformed Protestantism. However, in the end, the evangelistic hierarchies, conditioned by the inertia of their social mass and their media representatives, chose to give unconditional support to the controversial candidate Trump. The title, “The Evangelical Politics of Fear,” refers to the fears, taboos, contradictions and uncertainties that marked the deliberations of Christian conservatism in electoral cycles.

The second chapter bears the title of “The Paybook,” to refer to the process of political assimilation of the electoral events of 2016 and its consequences of executive composition by the activist movements and the governing organizations of baptism-evangelism. The author, unraveling the meaning of some biblical passages, intends to sketch the mood of the conservative “America,” arising from political change and the survival needs of his lifestyle. These pages attempt to present an analysis (descriptive and interpretive) of the belief system of the groups adjacent to the reformed Protestantism. This analysis also has a comparative dimension, as there are cases of studies in time and space. That is, the comparison of cultural interpretations, media discussions, electoral strategies, judicial tendencies and legislative transformations during the key moments that have taken place since the central decades of the last century.

“A Short History of Evangelical Fear” is the title of the third chapter. This title allows you to intuit the thematic development of this part of the investigation, as not only a review of the historical evolution about fear is made, but a series of reflections on the right to doctrinal interpretation, the process of biblical exegesis and the electoral experimentation of every generation of Americans are also made. More specifically, it reflects on the individuals that adhere to the baptist-evangelist confessional block. The chapter presents several case studies
based on the regions most sensitive to political change and the most reluctant theological currents of socio-cultural transformation. The initial quotation of Neal Gabler, chosen by the author to open the chapter, condenses the main plot lines: spiritual exploration (individual and collective), doubts of interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and certainties based on tradition.

The fourth chapter focuses on the internal transformations and ideological drifts of the activist movements (known mediately as the Christian Right). “The Court Evangelicals” is open thematically, but very closed in the case studies: Moral Majority, New Christian Right and Independent Network Charismatic. In these pages a very deep review is made of the great bets of change, which occurred between conservative Protestant activist movements during the last decades. Several comparative references are set between the 1980s and the present moment; special reference is made to difficult times for conservative Protestant activists during the 1990s. The author makes a fairly detailed description of the position of these groups close to the Trump administration, highlighting the support of their media networks.

The conclusion of the book not only harbors aspects of the investigation, it also contains a kind of allegation about how the exercise of power by a good Christian political representative should be. Veiledly, an attempt is made to argue that fear does not have to be stronger than hope regarding the election of political representatives. The defense that the author makes on the historical, rigorous and serious analysis against the generalization of nostalgic feelings among the different Christian communities is very interesting. The conclusion also has a series of rhetorical questions, which are intended to make the reader reflect to reconsider some cultural concepts and ideological elements about the nature of the United States government system.
In a transversal way, the book suggests some contributions about the need to achieve the unity of criteria among the great Christian family established in the North American region and to value the cultural legacy of the Pilgrim Fathers and the Founding Fathers. The author considers it necessary to demystify political history in order to preserve Christian values and cultural identities in the face of the rise of radical policies contrary to the “American” tradition. However, the most controversial issues that have arisen since the beginning of Donald Trump's political career, issues that have direct implications on religiosity and political correctness, are not mentioned.

Bibliography