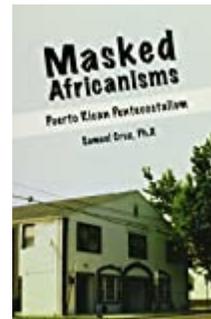




Samuel Cruz. *Masked Africanisms, Puerto Rican Pentecostalism.* Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2005. xvii + 102 pp. \$43.40 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7575-2181-2.



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Unmasking Africanisms

In the first paragraph of his book, Samuel Cruz states the subject of his work: the appeal of Pentecostalism to Puerto Ricans. The title of the book gives much away. Cruz argues through his concise and pertinent analyses of Puerto Rican Pentecostalism that the African (and African American) influences on the origins and development of Pentecostalism played a major role in its success in Puerto Rico and, following the Puerto Rican diaspora, in the spread of Puerto Rican Pentecostalism in the continental United States.

The strength of Cruz's work relies greatly on his ability to offer a very thorough and yet succinct analysis of the theoretical approaches to the phenomenon by various scholars, and to demonstrate, criticize, or elaborate on their theses with the results of the extensive ethnographic work he undertook among several Puerto Rican Pentecostal churches.

In the first chapter of his book, Cruz examines the two main perspectives frequently used to explain the history of Pentecostalism: one places its roots in the preaching of Charles Parham, and one, arguing for its African American roots, sees William Seymour, as leader of the Azusa

Street revival, as the catalyst of the movement. While Cruz agrees mostly with the latter view, as he states that the black roots of Pentecostalism were central to its development, he points out that tracing these roots to only one person, Seymour, is too restrictive and fails to acknowledge the influence of traditions that come from "a living community of creative, selective, pro-active believers" in the shaping of the movement (p. 14). Cruz indicates, nonetheless, that the role, influence, and contributions of parishioners of the first Pentecostal churches is one of the many areas of Pentecostal studies that need to be further researched.

Cruz gives in the second chapter of his book a solid survey on the history of Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico and in the northeastern United States. It was Juan Lugo, a Puerto Rican converted in Hawai'i, who brought Pentecostalism to Puerto Rico in 1916. Embracing the concept of a free religious market, and ignoring the "comity agreement" by which Protestant churches had divided the island into separate districts where they could evangelize without stepping on each other's toes, Pentecostal churches soon flourished on the island. By 1928, with

the growing importance of the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York City, a pastor sent by Lugo founded the first Puerto Rican Pentecostal church in the city, and many others followed.

The third chapter of the book, dedicated to the “history and traits of the African presence in the Caribbean,” is where Cruz’ thesis begins to solidify, with his assertion that “the foundational elements of the [Puerto Rican] culture are African-based” (p. 54). After a quick analysis of the history of blacks in Puerto Rico, and of their immense contribution to the economy of the island, the author states the importance of their influence at the cultural level, insisting on their contributions to the musical and religious aspects of Puerto Rican culture. Cruz gives a concise description of the Yoruba religion where, as in Pentecostalism, the “interrelationship between the spirit world and spiritual and physical life was an intense one.” He suggests that, given the influence of African-based practices upon Pentecostal worship, and the similarities between African and Pentecostal religions with regard to humankind’s relationship with the divine, “Puerto Rican Pentecostalism has served as an outlet for the expression of ... African-based religious practices” (p. 48).

Cruz then explains that the “connection of Yoruba religion with Puerto Rican Pentecostalism also exists between Yoruba religion and Catholicism,” and he gives us a brief description of how this latter gave birth to Sante-ria (p. 50). While this helps to underline Cruz’s fundamental thesis that African religious traditions and beliefs are still very present in the religious life of Puerto Ricans, the author could have stressed that these two phenomena are not parallel in their mechanisms or results. Puerto Rican Pentecostalism, though it proposes a relationship with the sacred that is very similar to that of the African religions, and includes much dancing and singing in its

worship practices as African religions do, has not integrated African gods and spirits into its doctrine as Sante-ria has.

In the fourth chapter of his book, Cruz reflects upon the question of “why [the Pentecostal movement] has been chosen over others that were offered in the diverse religious market” (p. 55). He argues that particular traits have made Pentecostalism extremely attractive and familiar to Caribbean people. Developing his argumentation from his third chapter on the continuity of African religiosity in Puerto Rican Pentecostalism, Cruz states that the Pentecostal recognition of the positive and negative influences that spirits can have on one’s life; its doctrines on prophecy, spirit possession, and divine healing; as well as its worship practices where singing, dancing, and other bodily expressions are central, all represent affinities to Caribbean culture that Puerto Ricans did not find in other Protestant churches. The socio-economic empowerment that Pentecostal churches provided to Puerto Ricans is also important to their success, as well as the fact that Pentecostalism facilitates the “participation of the Puerto Rican community in the dominant Euro-American culture religious system, while maintaining their African-based traditions,” giving them a “legitimate” way of living their culture (p. 77).

At the crossroads of many different cultures, Puerto Rico and the communities formed by the Puerto Rican diaspora offer a fascinating example of how different religions can interact with and influence one another, and Cruz gives us in his book a very persuasive exposé of how the African component of Puerto Rican Pentecostalism demands further attention and research. *Masked Africanisms* is, in this sense, a very welcome addition to the thus far little-explored field of African roots and influences in Pentecostalism.

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