

# Book Reviews

## General

*Latin America's Christian Democratic Parties: A Political Economy.* By EDWARD A. LYNCH. Westport: Praeger, 1993. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xvii, 197 pp. Cloth. \$45.00.

The role of ideology in Latin American electoral politics constitutes an important, if controversial, topic. The relationship of theory to practical politics is also provocative, especially regarding interpretations of the state. These are among the questions raised by Edward A. Lynch in his modest yet intellectually self-assured examination of Christian Democratic parties. As the subtitle suggests, he approaches his subject via detailed excursions into such topics as land reform, nationalization, and attitudes toward commercial capitalism. It is Lynch's fundamental hypothesis that the Latin American parties have deviated grievously from Catholic social thought, especially in their statist proclivities. The result, he contends, is a record of progressive decline and a failure to confront neoliberal policies that he believes are the true keys to development and modernization.

His book thereby raises a number of important conceptual and theoretical issues. In this sense Lynch goes beyond a narrow treatment of Christian Democratic theory and politics, which is a signal accomplishment. Whether or not his views are accepted, they are presented with compelling evidence. Furthermore, his introductory treatment of Catholic social thought is accompanied by an assessment of Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe—most notably France, Belgium, and Italy. This prepares the way for his lengthier excursion into Latin America. While his organization is thematic rather than by country, he considers and evaluates comparisons between and among states.

Understandably, Lynch devotes the greatest attention to those countries where Christian democratic parties have been most influential. Venezuela and Chile

therefore stand out. Ecuador, Brazil, and the Central American states also are discussed at some length. The treatment elsewhere is briefer. Unfortunately, the text contains an uncommonly large number of factual errors, some of which lead in turn to questionable interpretations. This is particularly true for Venezuela, Rafael Caldera, and COPEI; for Costa Rican politics and the role of both Rafael Angel Calderón Guardia and his son Calderón Fournier; and for Ecuador, especially as concerns León Febres Cordero and the Partido Social Cristiano. All of this proves frustrating to the reader who knows these countries well. Those who are particularly concerned with Christian Democratic philosophy and politics in Latin America, then, should read the book with considerable caution. A far more insightful work, although no longer current, is Edward J. Williams' *Latin American Christian Democratic Parties* (1967).

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*Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Evolution?* By PAUL E. SIGMUND. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Appendixes. Notes. Indexes. viii, 257 pp. Paper. \$15.95.

The central argument of Paul Sigmund's book is that since its birth, Latin American liberation theology has developed two main political positions, a democratic and an undemocratic one; and that it must now choose between them. From its inception in the late 1960s until the mid-1970s, Sigmund argues, liberation theology was marked by uncritical devotion to socialism and revolution, and hence was inherently undemocratic. In contrast, since the mid-1970s, in response to moderate critics, some liberation theologians have come to emphasize "grassroots populism," associated with the Christian Base Communities, which Sigmund applauds as inherently democratic. Despite this growing emphasis, however, liberationists' continued unwillingness to denounce revolution (as in Nicaragua), and the presence of unreconstructed socialists in their ranks, press on them the urgent choice of "democracy or revolution."

Sigmund's point that liberation theology's emphasis has shifted is valuable: since the late 1970s the theology has clearly become more concerned with spiritual, pastoral, and even liturgical matters, and discussion of the Christian Base Communities has grown increasingly central (although Sigmund overlooks the ever-spiraling competition with the Protestants as a factor in this shift). His claim that the shift represents the emergence of a more "democratic" theological option as opposed to an older "undemocratic" one, however, is highly questionable. To accept this argument, the reader must assume that a commitment to socialism is inherently undemocratic (in which case the book preaches to the converted), or at least must be willing to accept Sigmund's claim that liberation theologians who see the main problem as capitalism and the main solution as socialism are therefore unconcerned with democracy.