

a field as well as discussing its present concerns, all in a limited space. In this case, though, I think four long-standing but very much ongoing bodies of theoretical work would be crying out for more sustained attention in a revised edition: discourse analysis (pulling together the existing reviews of substantive studies of media discourses with their theoretical debts to Foucault); sociologies of popular culture (Strinati's restraint in avoiding his own preoccupations is admirable but goes too far here, I think; an evaluation of, say, Bourdieu's work on cultural production and taste as well as other cultural sociologies, from Williams to McRobbie, would have given him a chance to enthuse readers about theories he finds especially suggestive); psychoanalytic approaches to popular culture (building on the cursory half-page on the gaze in the current feminism chapter, but also addressing issues of fantasy and embodiment); and cultural populism (which would allow more than the simple dismissal of a straw position and a sustained reflection on questions of power and resistance in popular culture).

That Ronseal all-weather woodstain advertisement with which I began usually runs twice in a commercial break, once at the start and then again, more briefly, at the end. Maybe that is why I cannot help coming over all Ronseal again and concluding that, even as it stands, *Introduction to theories of popular culture* offers the DIY popular culture critic convenient protection against the all-year-round batterings of theoretical confusion and ignorance. Add the word 'some' and it does exactly what it says on the cover.

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Magistrates of the sacred: priests and parishioners in eighteenth-century Mexico. By William B. Taylor. 1996. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press. xiv + 868pp. \$75, cloth. ISBN 0 8047 2456 3.

Every so often a book comes along at which one simply has to marvel, a veritable *tour de force* that leaves the reader filled with awe and admiration. William Taylor's *Magistrates of the sacred* is such a book, a rich, nuanced, elaborately wrought, exhaustive but not exhausting tome that runs to 882 pages, more than one-third of which are notes on sources. What Taylor accomplishes is testimony not only to years of painstaking archival research but also to a remarkable ability to extract essence from detail and thus to shape the events and circumstances of minute local situations into a coherent regional framework. He does this, quite unabashedly, by privileging empirical evidence over theoretical rumination, dedicating himself to the creative art of narrative exposition. He achieves it all, moreover, with a sense of intellectual modesty, and a commitment to good writing, all too rare in the academy today.

Taylor's subject of inquiry is the relationship between priests and parishioners in the Archdiocese of Mexico and the Diocese of Guadalajara in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Bourbon Reforms pitted 'the new, the improved, and the progressive against the customary and traditional' (p. 13), when 'the function of parish priests beyond the altar and the confessional was reduced' (p. 24) by moves on the part of the Crown to assert its absolute author-

ity over all aspects of life in Spanish America. The Crown's tendency to concern itself with matters of faith and religion was not motivated entirely by moral considerations, for Taylor reminds us that no fewer than 'five of the eight top revenue-producing dioceses of Spanish America at the end of the eighteenth century' (p. 125) were located within the borders of present-day Mexico. Ironically, Taylor views the impact of the Bourbon Reforms as among the key factors that advanced 'the political decline of Spain in America' (p. 26), for while 'Bourbon reformers were fond of vertical classifications and graded inequalities', some of their 'standardizing policies', such as 'promoting the Spanish language and non-Indian settlement in Indian pueblos', actually 'strengthened lateral connections' and hastened the demise 'of some vertical ones'. This is the larger political backdrop against which the myriad small-scale encounters between priests and parishioners in rural Mexico are thrown into sharp relief.

A succinct introduction sees Taylor establish his interpretive premises. 'The exercise of political power', he states, 'is filled with contingencies', adding that 'it seems unlikely that "Indians" under Spanish rule in the heartland of New Spain forged their own communities in direct opposition to colonial masters or were forced into wholesale imitation of them' (p. 6). Rather, he argues, 'their lives were deeply affected by powerful outsiders without being determined by them', a perspective he finds support for, among non-Latin Americanists, in the work of Antonio Gramsci, E. P. Thompson, James Scott and, especially, Ashis Nandy.

In Part I, 'Politics, place, and religion', Taylor stakes out a similar 'middle-ground' position with respect to the all-important issue of native religious life, preferring views that favour syncretism over full-scale transformation or full-scale resistance and rejection. For Taylor, syncretism indicates 'either a fixed state or a process variously described as mixture, amalgamation, fusion, confusion, coalescence, or synthesis in the meeting of different religious traditions' (p. 53). In terms of colonial Latin American historiography, Taylor finds himself more in agreement with the conclusions reached by Mexicanists Louise Burkhart, Inga Clendinnen, Nancy Farriss and Elizabeth Weismann than with those of most other researchers, namely that 'habits of conceiving the sacred continued while various practices and beliefs changed' (p. 60).

In Part II, 'Priests', Taylor examines the background, training, career trajectories, day-to-day experiences and annual rounds of activities of the *curas* who were 'separate but in the world', acknowledging that while 'it is hazardous to generalize about the parish clergy' (p. 77), nonetheless certain patterns and characteristics can be discerned. 'By no means all parish priests came from privileged families,' he informs us, 'but very few were sons of the peasants and wage laborers who made up the large majority of the population.' They were 'always administrators, as well as men of God', and tended to be creoles, for 'few Indians were ordained, few peninsular diocesan priests served in rural parishes, and few American-born priests identified themselves as mestizos or castas' (p. 97). Easter was the busiest and more profitable time of year for them, for the spiritual bond between priest and parishioner was also an economic one. A priest's livelihood, Taylor points out, mostly came 'in the form of direct collections from his parish-

ioners' (p. 149) for services rendered, which always carried with it the danger, real or perceived, of excessive exploitation. The Indians of Malacatepec, for instance, complained in 1774 that 'we pay much more in tribute to the *cura* than to our sovereign, the king'. Despite coming across a number of individuals with rather problematical tendencies – a fondness for the bottle, the urge to grope Indian women during confession – on the whole Taylor is inclined to regard the priests he writes about as neither 'notoriously bad' nor 'famously good' but rather as ordinary human beings who 'combined strengths and weaknesses' (p. 205).

In Part III, 'Parishioners', Taylor presents a vivid picture of native religious life, one in which Indian improvisations of Christianity are much in evidence. These must be seen, however, in the comparative context of what Taylor emphasizes earlier, that 'idolatrous or superstitious survivals of precolonial religion' are more commonly associated with southern or northern Mexico, 'where Spanish rule was weakest', than with the more prosperous, populous and thus more closely monitored regions of central Mexico under study, where 'reports of "idolatry" and "pagan" magic were numerous but ambiguous, suggesting individual and small-group practices that were neither pristine survivals from pre-colonial times nor outright rejections of colonial Catholicism' (p. 63). Lapses in cross-cultural communication occurred for many reasons, foremost among them a priest's inability to speak or understand the language of his native parishioners and, vice versa, Indian failure to learn little more than the rudiments of Spanish. Native women, Taylor claims, attended mass and confessed their sins more than did native men. While 'each parish has its particular history of saints', the 'two special patrons' most 'widely popular' were Santiago (St James) and the Virgin Mary. Important though the former came to be, 'he was never the central figure that the Virgin Mary became in local religion', especially after she appeared in the sixteenth century as Our Lady of Guadalupe 'three times to a humble Indian, Juan Diego, at Tepeyac, the sacred place of a precolonial mother goddess in the valley of Mexico, finally leaving her beautiful image on the Indian's cloak as a sign of her presence for a doubting bishop' (pp. 277–78): the 'Indian Madonna' has been a powerful and much manipulated symbol in Mexico ever since. With respect to *cofradías*, Indian sodalities or confraternities established by priests 'to promote a particular devotion', Taylor finds that they were 'infrequently the elaborately staffed, individually sponsored affairs familiar to twentieth-century ethnographers' (p. 321).

In Part IV, 'The politics of parish life', Taylor focuses on the often intense local rivalries that emerged and developed among and between the three protagonists of what he calls the 'triangle of power' – priests, parishioners and district governors. Once again the role of native agency is stressed, for Taylor's reading of the documents projects Indians 'as players more than counterplayers or nonplayers in the colonial order, even in their resistance to colonial officials and new laws' (p. 345). Native willingness to enter into litigation, especially in the late eighteenth century, resulted in court cases in which Indians complained at length against their parish priests, encouraged to do so by the Crown's 'enlarging and advertising the class of circumstances under which it was not

likely to take the priest's side' (p. 363). By far 'the most common and persistent source of friction' was related to the demands for payment for spiritual services that *curas* regarded 'as an indispensable part of their living'. District governors, themselves frequently implicated in incidents involving corruption, extortion and other abuses of office, often lent a sympathetic ear to native complaints, in keeping with the general principles and objectives of the Bourbon Reforms to distance the church from issues of state and public affairs, and to deflect attention from their own indiscretions. Parish priests clearly felt hard-pressed, the *cura* of Villa Alta in Oaxaca going so far as to accuse his district governor in 1793 of 'influencing and persuading the natives not to obey, respect, or revere us; favoring as many deals as the natives want to undertake against us; and giving them to understand that we are subject to their jurisdiction without exception' (p. 422). In the minds of some *curas*, Taylor glimpses 'a nearly apocalyptic vision of order and religion collapsing around them', an attitude that must surely have been reinforced as the turmoil of Independence drew near.

Taylor ends his *magnum opus* by reflecting on the role parish priests played in the insurgency that began in 1810 and that eventually led to Mexican independence from Spain in 1821. While 'standard histories of Mexico's beginnings as a nation' single out 'more than a dozen parish priests' as 'pivotal leaders or conspicuous insurgent fighters' – one of them, José María Morelos, is subjected to close critical scrutiny in Appendix C – Taylor reckons that 'perhaps one priest in twelve participated in an independence movement before 1820, and two-thirds of these participants were not in parish service at the time' (pp. 452–53). He concludes that a 'neutral majority . . . remained above the struggle in ways that particularly distressed royalist leaders', because 'the neutrality of most *curas* in the war was more damaging to the royalist cause than it was to the insurgents, since parish priests had been fixtures of the royal administration for three centuries and received their appointments from the crown' (pp. 457–60). Neutrality under these circumstances was viewed by prominent loyalists as 'a form of defection', one that undermined the imperial enterprise and contributed to its disintegration. It might also have been an ill-calculated form of revenge, the *curas*' way of hitting back at 'misguided royal policies and godless philosophies' that 'threatened the providential order of an America that the Blessed Mary had chosen as her own' (pp. 459–60).

With the publication of *Magistrates of the sacred*, Taylor can look back at a quarter-century of productive association with Stanford University Press, which also published his two previous books, *Landlord and peasant in colonial Oaxaca* (1972) and *Drinking, homicide, and rebellion in colonial Mexican villages* (1979). To a pioneering investigation of land and landholding and an insightful study of alcohol and social unrest, a patient, erudite mind has added a landmark contribution pertaining to religious life in eighteenth-century Mexico as the empire convulsed and shut down.

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