

POPULAR AND ORGANIZED RELIGION IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY MEXICO

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The Maya and Catholicism: An Encounter of Worldviews. By John D. Early. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. Pp. 311. \$59.95 cloth.

Contemporary Maya Spirituality: The Ancient Ways Are Not Lost. By Jean Molesky-Poz. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Pp. 201. \$25.00 paper.

Days of Death, Days of Life: Ritual in the Popular Culture of Oaxaca. By Kristin Norget. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Pp. 319. \$35.00 paper.

Death and Dying in New Mexico. By Martina Will de Chaparro. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Pp. 261. \$32.50 cloth.

The books under review here represent the continued dynamic study of religion from the view of historical sociology. While only one of these books is strictly speaking a historical monograph (*Death and Dying in New Mexico*) and the other three anthropological studies, all four share an abiding interest in the *longue durée* of Mesoamerican religion and spirituality. Simultaneously, as a whole, they place religious mentality, spirituality, or religious ritual at the center of their analyses, although none is a throwback to studies of pure ideas stripped of social context. Although ideas—about death, death rituals, cosmology, ancestor worship, spiritual phenomenology—take center stage, the authors place them within the social contexts in which they developed and in turn discuss how structural, political, and economic developments shaped these belief systems, or how these spiritualities outlasted and endured political and social change. As a group, these studies reject stripped-down epistemological assessments of religious values and of functionalist religious anthropology.

Death is the explicit theme of two of these books, which therefore take part in a venerable historiographical tradition in early modern European studies, and certainly Mexican studies—one thinks of the works of Octavio Paz, Juan Rulfo, and Carlos Fuentes. Will de Chaparro's focus is consonant with those of the other three authors: ancestor worship and the

line between the worlds of the living and the dead, which Oaxacans, New Mexicans, and Mayas all viewed as tenuous or nonexistent. Likewise, her book fits closely with that by Norget, as both discuss death rituals and ceremonies. The other two books are linked by their examination of Maya religion. But whereas Molesky-Poz principally offers a participant-observer study, Early employs both his own fieldwork and a broad historical sociology to explain the seeming discontinuity between the persistence of Mayan forms of cosmology and religious epistemology, and the importance that Mayas place on the performance of the mass by ordained priests.

Overall, these works contribute to a growing literature that questions assumptions about the spiritual conquest of Mesoamerica. They demonstrate the deep continuities with very old Mesoamerican religious forms and their adaptation to new historical circumstances. At the same time, they show that, while some practices seem constant—ancestor worship or veneration, for example—their form varies considerably.

There are relatively few studies of death ritual and dying in colonial Latin America—Pamela Voekel's *Alone before God* (2002) is one—yet this is a veritable cottage industry among early modern Europeanists. Will de Chaparro's book is therefore a welcome addition to classics such as John McManner's *Death and the Enlightenment* (1981), Gaby and Michel Vovelle's still-untranslated *Vision de la mort et de l'au-delà en Provence* (1970), Phillipe Ariès's *Hour of Our Death* (1981), and Carlos Eire's *From Madrid to Purgatory* (1995). Will de Chaparro also adds to the vibrant literature on colonial New Mexico from practitioners such as Ramón Gutiérrez, Fray Angélico Chávez, and Marc Simmons. Nevertheless, as studies of pre-1821 (or for that matter pre-1848) New Mexico are fairly few and far between, her book offers a fine compliment to Chávez's classic *My Penitente Land* (1974), as well as to the more recent study by Michael P. Carroll, *The Penitente Brotherhood* (2002).¹

Death and Dying in New Mexico is a study of religious and social attitudes toward death, death rituals and practices, and baroque sensibilities on the northern frontier of New Spain. Like most historical studies concerning death and death rituals, this one relies on wills and testaments (from the

1. Pamela Voekel, *Alone before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Michel Vovelle, *Vision de la mort et de l'au-delà en Provence d'après les autels des âmes du purgatoire, XVe-XXe siècles* (Paris: A. Colin, 1970); Phillipe Ariès, *Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981); Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Angélico Chávez, *My Penitente Land: Reflections on Spanish New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974); Michael P. Carroll, *The Penitente Brotherhood: Patriarchy and Hispano-Catholicism in New Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

archives of Santa Fe and the diocese of Durango) to discuss the ways that Spaniards in particular understood death both metaphysically and practically from 1704 to 1899, although the main focus is the period from 1750 to 1850. The book's principal argument is that "in New Mexico popular piety remained more baroque than modern in character" through the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when, in New Spain, there was a general shift toward a more individualized and "interiorized piety" (xvi).

Chapter 1 examines "good death." Throughout the Hispanic world, the manner in which one died was quite important for one's fate afterward. Illness and preparing for death were seen as possible blessings—opportunities to right wrongs, repent and prepare for purgatory, and hope to avoid hell. Will de Chaparro examines wills and popular literature on "how to die well" such as Joaquín Hermenegildo Bolaños's *La portentosa vida de la muerte* (1792). Chapter 2 examines the practice of drawing up a will in preparation for good death and its importance, both as a method of dispensing property and settling debts, and as a "meditation on death." (33) But New Mexico differed from much of the Hispanic world as a result of its geographic and political isolation; notaries were scarce and this hindered the process of drawing up official wills. It was common in the early-modern Hispanic world to call on saints in one's will, and Will de Chaparro examines not only this directive but also other pious bequests and the freeing of servants or slaves.

In particular, Will de Chaparro indicates several aspects of religion that distinguished New Mexico from other parts of New Spain and the Hispanic world. First, New Mexicans had a particular affection for the dead and souls of purgatory at levels higher than one would find contemporaneously in New Spain or Spain. Second, they used goods to pay for masses and funerals, as New Mexico had for centuries suffered from a lack of specie. Third, New Mexicans tended not to endow gifts to the poor as acts of good works in the same ways as did elites in New Spain. Fourth, they had a special affinity for burial in the garb of friars, especially Franciscans. Finally, in line with general trends, pious bequests tended to fall off in the early nineteenth century—a trend seen previously in New Spain in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 3 discusses rituals in preparation for death and the soon to depart soul. In particular, Will de Chaparro examines the administration of the last rites, finding that in major towns like Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Santa Cruz more than 80 percent of the deceased received the last rites during the period under study. She also shows that, given the sparse physical structure of the church in New Mexico and the absence of priests, people relied heavily on the community and later the Penitente Brotherhood to help prepare for death.

Chapter 4 discusses funerary practices. In New Mexico, burials were "much less entangled with reinforcing social hierarchies than those of

contemporaries in central Mexico" (115). This is based on the tendency to not mark graves in church sanctuaries, to have common graves, and to use coffins infrequently. Likewise, burial sites in New Mexico were often impermanent, with reburials fairly common. Will de Chaparro draws on works by archeologists for physical evidence of this practice. There seems to be some misfire here between the argument that New Mexicans had little concern for the physical remains of the dead and the idea that they maintained a baroque sensibility. If anything, baroque conceptions of death and burial stressed social hierarchy and the very physical pomp of burial, for which this chapter is a bit muddled, in that the book as a whole argues that New Mexico remained baroque longer than did New Spain.

Chapter 5 discusses burial and cemetery reform in the Bourbon era. Here, the argument about baroque sensibilities seems to have a sharper focus. Will de Chaparro shows that, while in New Spain Bourbon reforms pushed to end burials in churches and the related emphasis on the location of burial as a means to reinforce social hierarchies, such reforms did not seem to take hold until later in New Mexico. For example, it was not until the 1820s and 1830s that there was a marked decline in burial locations requested in wills in New Mexico and that a decline in registering such burial locations similarly began to decline in the 1810s (164–165). An epilogue treats changes in the post-U.S. era, when an influx of Anglos brought cultural interaction to a different level, especially concerning religion and attitudes toward death.

Will de Chaparro's themes present similarities to Norget's study of Oaxaca, though their methodologies are dramatically different. Norget relies on participant observation and puts it to effective use. In this, her work offers a fine compliment to Claudio Lomnitz's magisterial *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (2005), to recent regional histories of Oaxaca by Francie Chassen de López and Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, and to work on popular religion in Oaxaca by Edward Wright-Rios and Daniela Traffano.² *Days of Death, Days of Life* combines anthropological fieldwork in *colonias populares* (working-class and urban-poor neighborhoods) on the outskirts of Oaxaca City with a sharp eye for observation and a real flair for the human quality of the subject matter. The book as a whole is "an exploration of the role of religion, particularly popular religion, in the shaping of people's senses of themselves" (13). It is also an analysis of how popular

2. Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2005); Francie Chassen de López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca: The View from the South, Mexico 1867–1911* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Mark Overmyer-Velázquez, *Visions of the Emerald City: Modernity, Tradition, and the Formation of Porfirian Oaxaca, Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Edward Wright-Rios, *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Vision, Shrine and Society in Oaxaca, 1887–1934* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Daniela Traffano, *Indios, curas y nación: La sociedad indígena frente a un proceso de secularización, Oaxaca, siglo XIX* (Turin: Otto, 2001).

death rites function to “affirm aspects of a unitary identity” of the working classes in Oaxaca City (13). Social class and status are very much at the center of the analytical framework of this study and Norget examines popular-elite dichotomies without oversimplifying their implications.

The book is divided into three parts: “Rites of Popular Life,” “Rites of Popular Death,” and “The Day of the Dead.” It begins with a broad outline of the historical anthropology of Oaxaca City. At the core of this analysis are the complex relationships of community obligation and reciprocity, and of *compradazgo* and *confianza*, which characterize popular religious sensibilities and death rituals. An overview of popular religion in Oaxaca follows, interrogating the problem of dividing religion between official and popular, when for many Mexican Catholics the two, while distinguishable, are not incompatible. Norget discusses the emphasis put on the cult of the saints during five centuries of Catholicism in Oaxaca and argues that Catholicism was less a superimposition than an addition for most Zapotecs and Mixtecs. The result was less syncretism than parallelism in religious attitudes, especially concerning saints, spirits, ancestor worship, and pre-Hispanic festivals. She also points out that relative pastoral disinterest in rural Oaxaca led to a religious sensibility in which formal Catholic doctrine was never well assimilated, nor seriously considered.

Part 2 is more methodologically sophisticated. It first argues that death and death rituals in Oaxaca are not socially disruptive, but rather “emanat[e] organically from everyday life” (114). According to this interpretation, being dead is only the beginning, and the living and dead continue to exist in a reciprocal relationship in which the “living must contribute to the welfare of the dead,” so that, in “Oaxaca, life and death are not viewed as mutually exclusive ontological states” (115). An engaging account of death rituals and attitudes toward death in Oaxaca’s popular classes follows, blending anthropological and social theory with observations on death and life in Oaxaca.

Norget outlines various death rituals such as the *velorio* (vigil over the deceased) and the complex praying processes, which not only mourn the dead but, as in many Buddhist traditions, also guide the soul of the dead while it wanders in limbo for nine days. She also describes the stages following the *velorio*: the funeral, the placing of decorative crosses on the floor of the house of the deceased, the raising of that cross after nine days of prayer, burial, and the mass celebrated one year after death. Norget then discusses the “drama” of death. This involves prayer for the dead to lessen the time to be spent in purgatory, a proper funeral and burial, and the expectations of the *velorio*. Here Norget offers more thematic discussions of how death rituals act to reinforce community identity. In her interviews, she found that members of the *colonias populares* view death rituals through the lens of class. For them, the middle and upper classes are imperfect Catholics, impious and cynical, because they tend not to

hold extensive *velorios* or pray *novenas* for the departed. Whether this is objectively true is quite irrelevant, insofar as Norget shows that this distinction is used by the working class and urban poor to reaffirm their community dignity because they invest so heavily in death rituals.

Part 3 examines the Day of the Dead—the most visible and best-known death ritual of Mexico. Tracing the origins to pre-Hispanic ancestor worship, Norget discusses how the Day of the Dead also reinforces community norms of reciprocity and care for the souls of the dead in Oaxaca. This is reflected most notably in the construction of altars with offerings for the souls of the dead—a favorite mescal, a preferred brand of cigarettes, a particular dish or fruit are often standard items awaiting departed parents, grandparents, and others. Norget discusses the Day of the Dead in a changing, globalized economy, asking, What, exactly, is authentic culture and who possesses it? Norget cautions against the totalizing impulse of some anthropological models that see culture as somehow belonging to a particular group, and that reflect an inherent folk *gestalt*, while noting that such concepts have become all but inescapable in anthropological discourse. The Day of the Dead has increasingly become commercialized and trumpeted as a tourist attraction in Oaxaca City. That said, Norget argues that there will remain two versions of the festival—one official and polished, packaged for tourism, and the other popular and private, “a communal devotion of various members of the popular classes” (263).

Norget concludes with some thoughts about popular religion. She rejects the tendency to view Oaxaca as an unspoiled, exotic, “real” Mexico, where the magic and folklore of colorful markets is all that the outsider sees. She does not see popular religion as resistance to dominant forms or as blind obedience to Catholic dogma. She neither praises nor attacks globalization but argues that “current anthropology in Mexico must attend to popular culture not as a vestige of past, ‘folk’ culture or as a uniform expression of resistance or opposition to dominant culture and society.” Likewise, she sees popular religion as “a vital dimension of down-to-earth, everyday reality of poor social groups” (267). This is a book that will appeal to a wide range of readers. It offers a detailed portrait of the religion of the working class and poor, and as such has relatively little to say about formal religion or the religious sensibilities of the middle or upper classes.

Norget’s suggestions about religious parallelism are amplified by Early and Molesky-Poz in their studies about the Maya. Early’s book is the most ambitious of the four under review here. It is historical sociology of religion among the Maya as it relates to Catholicism. At the heart of this is the question, “Why do the Maya demand that non-Mayan Catholic priests perform Catholic rituals that fulfill the same purposes as the shamans’ activities?” (7). To answer this, Early looks at syncretism, parallelism, spiritual conquest, and missionary indoctrination. His conclusions are as

nuanced and complex as the topic of study itself. Early argues that if “syncretism means the emergence of a third, distinct religious system out of the two previous ones” (255), then Maya religion is not syncretistic. If syncretism means the adoption of Spanish saints into a pantheistic system, then it is. Many religious sociologists, however, describe the latter system as parallelism, but the point here is semantic. For Early, the Maya adopted elements of Spanish Catholicism into a broader, inclusive system, but did not necessarily create a new religious system or abandon the pre-Hispanic system. This is because Maya religion is not monotheistic. But Early shows that the Catholicism that came to Mesoamerica was not always that of university-trained theologians but instead a folk version imbued with a proliferation of saints, local lore, and to the horror of many reformers in sixteenth-century Spain, a fair amount of pagan superstition.

In some ways Early’s study is difficult, though rewarding, to read. It is structured clearly, but in ways that make it possible for readers to focus solely on certain sections, which may very well have been the author’s goal. Part 1 is the introduction. Part 2 discusses the “anomaly” of “Catholic elements in Mayan festivals” in the contemporary world. Part 3 discusses the “cultural logics” of Mayan cosmology in the face of Spanish conquest and presence. Yet it is not until part 4 that we are given the historical sociology of the evangelization process. It seems a little strange to put this so late in the book, but that may only be the prejudice of a historian, and sociologists, anthropologists, and others may find this hardly disconcerting. It would certainly be possible to read part 3 first if one desired, as the individual parts to an extent stand alone. Part 5 is “Mayan Perception of Spanish Christianity” and part 6 concludes.

Early provides a schematic discussion of the central components of contemporary Maya Catholicism and religion. Part 2 explains how the physical plant of the church is run largely by Mayas through a variety of laypersons such as the *mayordomo* and *alférez*, and through the *cofradía* system. Yet while Maya communities handle saints’ festivals, the upkeep of images, and physical churches almost entirely, the latter still insist that the mass and baptism be celebrated by ordained priests—scarce as they have always been in Guatemala and Chiapas—despite centuries of abuse by priests in the Maya highlands. With this enigma in mind, part 3 attempts to explain the cultural logic behind the Mayas’ desire for priests and the mass in the face of largely autochthonous religious and spiritual practices. Writing for general readers rather than specialists, Early outlines pre-Hispanic Mayan customs and spirituality, with its focus on reciprocity and relationships between humanity and the earth, and provides a gloss on early-modern Spanish religious mentalities. He argues that the adoption of Spanish saints was part of a long Mesoamerican tradition of accepting the gods of conquering tribes or empires into one’s pantheon. This will not come as much of a surprise to specialists, and certainly a

good deal of recent scholarship has shed more sophisticated light on this subject. An example is the anthology on similar themes edited by Laura Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, *Indian Conquistadors* (2007).³

Like all of the authors under review, Early takes a very broad view of religious forms and mentalities. Part 3 offers the most convincing evidence for how and why Mayas developed a religious system and mentality so separate from the church itself. It shows that early missionary efforts were undertaken by friars engaged in a semicloistered life, who had less time to dedicate to catechesis. On the surface this seems logical, but it does not explain why friars in other areas such as the Valley of Mexico or Michoacán were so dedicated to catechesis and the study of indigenous languages. Early's strongest argument is structural: the ratio of Indians to priests was spectacularly high. For example, in sixteenth-century Spain the ratio of households to priests was around forty to one; in the Maya highlands ratios ranged from between three hundred and five hundred to one. Likewise, it appears that Spanish priests in the Maya highlands were incredibly inept or lazy when it came to learning indigenous languages. Guatemala and Chiapas were also prone to frequent transfers of priests, which hampered language acquisition. Finally, secular priests, as well as friars in general, rarely resided in Indian towns. The result, over a long period, was that Mayas came to view priests not as teachers or members of their communities but as "ritual functionaries who performed masses and baptisms in a symbolic code that was foreign to them" (179).

Early's study is a valuable and ambitious effort to provide a long view of Maya religious mentality and practice. It bridges classic studies of the colonial Maya such as Matthew Restall's *Maya World* (1997), Inga Clendinnen's *Ambivalent Conquests* (1987), and Nancy Farris's *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (1984), and others of the church and religion by Adrian van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism: A Parish History of Guatemala, 1524–1821* (1986) and Edward O'Flaherty, whose 1979 dissertation has been published in Spanish as *Iglesia y sociedad en Guatemala, 1524–1563* (1984).⁴

Early's historical sociology provides a context for understanding religious parallelism in the western highlands of contemporary Guatemala. This is the focus of Molesky-Poz's engaging study of Maya spirituality, pri-

3. Laura Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

4. Matthew Restall, *Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550–1850* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517–1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Nancy M. Farris, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Adrian van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism: A Parish History of Guatemala, 1524–1821* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Edward O'Flaherty, *Iglesia y sociedad en Guatemala, 1524–1563: Análisis de un proceso cultural*, trans. Elías Zamora (Seville: University of Seville, 1984).

marily during the last two decades. Based on extensive fieldwork and the coterie surrounding her husband Martín, an *ajq'ij* or keeper of the Maya calendar, this study offers a close look at late-twentieth-century Maya cosmology. Much like Early, Molesky-Poz argues that Mayan religion and spirituality was never fully Christianized and that its belief system was largely unchanged, given the sparse physical presence of the church in Guatemala: "ancestral practices, often masked or shrouded in secrecy, have continued to sustain highland people . . . and highland communities developed religious teachings and rituals relatively free from control of the Catholic hierarchy" (1).

According to Molesky-Poz, a central tenet of Maya spirituality is that there is no central tenet. As such, there is no organizing or centralizing theology. Molesky-Poz provides a thematic framework for this, drawing on the concepts of sympathetic understanding and live entering of Mikhail Bakhtin to understand Mayan spirituality, which she sees principally as an interaction with the universe. This is because Molesky-Poz, in the guise of an anthropologist who is herself very much a part of the scholarly project, argues that she must have a "simultaneous experience of empathy and 'outsideness'" (5). Likewise, "sympathetic understanding" means that she must recognize the cosmological system under study as "outside," but simultaneously transformative of the anthropologist. As in Norget's study of Oaxaca, this book is as much about the author as it is about the subject. The main goal is to "illuminate ancestral Maya spiritual beliefs and practices that have significance for individual, collective and historical lives" (7). To that end, Molesky-Poz sees Maya spirituality (again following Bakhtin) as decentered, with multiple voices and "immanent meaning for consciousness as one of the categories through which the self is constructed" (8).

Chapter 1 examines the reemergence of the *ajq'ij* in the aftermath of war and genocide in Guatemala in the past two decades. Molesky-Poz sees this as evidence of the resilience of Maya spirituality, which has persisted despite an ineffectual spiritual conquest and, later, gruesome attacks on Mayas and, by extension, their traditions. Chapter 2 outlines Maya cosmology, which centers on reciprocal relationships between humanity and the physical world. Such reciprocity extends, in Molesky-Poz's view, from cosmology to social relations, in which one is less an individual than a "relational being, that is, one [who] cannot be conceived of without multiple relations; with one's family and community, the earth, all created elements, the living and the dead, and Ajaw [Owner of the Earth]" (41). Relational cosmology also extends to ancestors, who are seen as connections between the living and the dead.

Chapter 3 examines the role of the *ajq'ij*. Not really a priest and not really a shaman, the *ajq'ij* is a keeper of spiritual traditions; but, in a religion without formal theology, this role is fluid. Some feel they are born to

become an *ajq'ij*, while others feel they have been called after experiencing a life-changing event or dramatic illness. Training involves apprenticing oneself to a master, attending ceremonies, memorizing the 260-day ritual calendar, the *Mayab' Rajalb'al Qu'ij*, and mastering the significance of each day's spirit, or *nawal*. The apprentice accompanies the master to sacred sites to understand the interaction between each *nawal* and the spiritual properties of various locations in the highlands. Eventually, after completing a set number of ceremonies, the master chooses a day for the initiation ceremony. The newly initiated *ajq'ij* receives a bundle of 260 *tz'ite'* beans, which becomes his companion for life, serving as a device for divination and spiritual counsel. He also receives a headscarf that denotes authority, called a *stuib'al su't*. Thus initiated, the *ajq'ij* engages in ritual practices such as dream interpretation, reading the *tz'ite'* beans, and interpreting signs according to the sacred 260-day calendar. His role is also a community responsibility, in keeping with traditional views of reciprocity and relational existence.

Part 3 addresses the specifics of Maya cosmology and spirituality. It examines sacred geography and shows the intimate relationship between the physical world and religion. In this, it follows the broader Maya belief that the universe sustains human life and that human life is but a "transitory passage on earth"—a view that undergirds the Maya's "reciprocal relationship with the land" (126). Molesky-Poz also examines the processes by which the ritual calendar is interpreted by the *ajq'ij*, a practice that "endures as a source of personal discernment, social organization, and political memory" (153). In this, like Early, she adds to the social science literature on contemporary Maya life in Chiapas and Guatemala that tends to be dominated, as one might expect, by discussions of horrifying political violence in Guatemala, Zapatismo, and the cold war.

Together, the books under review here offer evidence of the continuing dynamic quality of social science research on religion in Latin America by North American scholars who reject the easy characterization of religion, whether popular or orthodox, as a tool of the right, agent of superstition, or enemy of modernity. It is certainly true that the church has, on more than a few occasions and through a variety of mechanisms, supported state-sponsored terror, reactionary political coups, or repressive political regimes in Latin America. Nevertheless, these books also show that religion, religious mentalities, spirituality, and popular religious forms do not map neatly onto formal religion and that, even when they do intersect with formal religion, the result is not necessarily monochromatic.