

CULTURE, POWER, AND IDENTITY

Negotiating between Catholic Orthodoxy and Popular Practice*

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PLAGUES, PRIESTS, AND DEMONS: SACRED NARRATIVES AND THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW. By Daniel T. Reff. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 304. \$60.00 Cloth, \$21.99 Paper.)

FALSE MYSTICS: DEVIANT ORTHODOXY IN COLONIAL MEXICO. By Nora E. Jaffary. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. Pp. 258. \$49.95 Cloth.)

JESUS IN OUR WOMBS: EMBODYING MODERNITY IN A MEXICAN CONVENT. By Rebecca J. Lester (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Pp. 358. \$50.00 Cloth, \$21.95 Paper.)

MARY, MOTHER AND WARRIOR: THE VIRGIN IN SPAIN AND THE AMERICAS. By Linda B. Hall. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. Pp. 382. \$65.00 Cloth, \$24.95 Paper.)

CATECHIZING CULTURE: MISSIONARIES, AYMARA, AND THE "NEW EVANGELIZATION." By Andrew Orta. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Pp. 376. \$74.00 Cloth, \$28.00 Paper.)

FROM FANATICS TO FOLK: BRAZILIAN MILLENARIANISM AND POPULAR CULTURE. By Patricia R. Pessar. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Pp. 288. \$79.95 Cloth, \$22.95 Paper.)

MAD JESUS: THE FINAL TESTAMENT OF A HUICHO MESSIAH FROM NORTHWEST MEXICO. By Timothy J. Knab. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004. Pp. 287. \$19.95 Cloth.)

Religious practice involves both religious institutions and individual actors, as well as one or more official and popular versions within particular traditions. In reflecting on trends in religious research, one obviously looks to changes in how religion is practiced in the context of a complex set of historical and political circumstances, and how it sheds light on the dynamic of cultural identity and the power relations between institutions

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and social actors. Perhaps the most significant recent sea change in Latin American scholarship on religion began in 1990, with the publication of David Stoll's and David Martin's books on the growth of Protestantism and its potential implications for the region.¹ Given the extensive and ongoing research on this topic, this trend in scholarship was significant for reasons beyond the actual growth of Protestantism itself, which in Guatemala had already leveled off at about 10 percent a year by the mid-1980s (Garrard-Burnett 1998, 162), decreasing further and perhaps even becoming negative by the year these books were published (Gooren 2001, 190). In any case, Protestantism has become an established part of Latin American studies, and deservedly so. Of course other changes in the religious landscape have been taking place in recent decades, probably the most significant of which are the growth of the Catholic Church and of indigenous religions—as well as syntheses of these—in Guatemala (Garrard-Burnett 1998, 168–169) and elsewhere, as Orta's and Lester's books illustrate.²

While the works here address diverse topics, several themes link them together. Foremost, perhaps, is the absolutely central importance of popular understandings and appropriations of official religious doctrine and practice, for religious, political, social, and cultural reasons. Related to this is the extent to which the Catholic Church has always had to adapt to local contexts and popular practice, even when attempting to eliminate the latter. A third theme is the link between religion and various types of identity, and how these interact with and confront the antinomies of modernity. Finally, reflecting the institutionalization of Protestantism within academic research on Latin America, and the resurgence of Catholicism in the region, the institutional religious backdrop, if not central actor, in all of the works reviewed here is the Catholic Church, with Protestantism only mentioned here and there as part of the background.

Daniel Reff's *Plagues, Priests, and Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New* is a fascinating study of the parallels between the rise of Christianity in the late Roman Empire and in colonial Mexico. While these are two very different historical and cultural settings, they share two important features: both saw the significant growth and spread of Christianity where it had not existed before, and this happened in the context of dramatic social, cultural, political and demographic change. The book thus implicitly answers the question, What accounted

1. David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990).

2. Other studies of the recent resurgence of Catholicism, including in new syntheses with indigenous religions, can be found in Cleary and Steigenga 2004, Peterson, Vásquez and Williams 2001, Smith and Prokopy 1999, and Cook 1997. For an overview of inculturation, see Irarrázaval 2000. For an analysis of the recent growth of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal from a rational choice/religious marketplace perspective, see Chesnut 2003.

for the tremendous growth of Christianity in these two different contexts? But rather than framing it this way, Reff proceeds to trace, in an impressive display of interdisciplinary research, the conditions of life in each place and time, and to weave together an account of how epidemic diseases, the Catholic Church as an institution, and the ideology and practice that its religious workers embodied, came together to provide an alternative social and cosmological system that both appealed to and was imposed upon the plagues' many victims. The elements involved were biological, ideological, cultural, and organizational.

As Reff notes, his is the first comparative study of the rise of Christianity in the Old and New Worlds, and it fills an important gap in the literature by illuminating the similarities between the periods and places. Christianization occurred at the same time that local societies in the regions were devastated by epidemics, and members of these societies "were attracted to Christian beliefs and rituals because they provided a means of comprehending and dealing with epidemic disease and calamity," especially by the charity and reciprocity advocated for and practiced by Christian missionaries (2). In both cases, infectious diseases destroyed the previous social system, which opened the way for Christianity to take over and establish a new social and spiritual order. In a striking parallel with the massive death resulting from the European invasion of the New World, the Roman Empire was devastated by epidemic disease on a similar scale, since it lost more than 90 percent of its population to disease between 300 and 530 CE (53).

In terms of his theoretical and conceptual approach, Reff frames his work in interesting ways, contrasting it to traditional "great men" and "great ideas" accounts of church history by emphasizing the world-views and responses of local peoples to the plagues and the efforts of priests to serve and convert them in the wake of these disasters. He does this by way of citing the important and salutary effects that poststructuralist and postcolonial thinkers have exercised on our thinking about history, the relationship between texts and reality, and the sometimes subtle ways in which institutions and their agents wield their power over their intended subjects/objects. For example, while the Catholic Church benefited from the discourse of pain and suffering that both justified and explained the power it had over its members, the pain and suffering experienced by victims and survivors of the epidemics were very real, and thus more than just power-wielding discourse by the church. But equally important in Reff's view was the discourse and practice of charity in the church, which was a source of appeal and community among sufferers because of the material and psychological benefits it provided them in their time of need.

Beyond charity and reciprocity, church workers in both periods made extensive and effective use of the cult of the saints to convert people,

through the conceptual and symbolic overlay of devotional practices associated with particular supernatural figures, places and objects that paralleled those of the indigenous peoples they sought to bring into the fold of Christianity. Lastly, Reff notes the importance of the early Christian literature of hagiography and sacred history in providing models and inspirations for priests in the New World, especially the Jesuits. The appeal of being a missionary priest in both periods was spiritual, but also importantly a heroic and high-status vocation, especially for the Jesuits. To justify their endeavor to ecclesiastical and royal authorities, and to attract new recruits, Jesuit missionaries in colonial Mexico used familiar scenes, metaphors and rhetorical devices from sacred history and saints' biographies that compared their efforts to those of early Christian martyrs and saints.

In discussing the relevance of early Christian literature for the Jesuit missionary project in Mexico, Reff argues that "the 'reality' of the mission frontier is, paradoxically, both constitutive and reflected in Jesuit missionary texts" (207). Following his social constructivist approach, he stresses that the Jesuits used early Christian texts consciously to further the many goals of their project in Mexico, but at the same time those texts "gave voice to values, beliefs, and real-world experiences that Jesuit missionaries shared with their late antiquity and early medieval counterparts" (212). To understand the institutional and political context of Jesuit missionary discourse, Reff makes two other important points. First, the Counter-Reformation Church was not monolithic, and was divided over various issues. Hence the Jesuits' discursive and political tactics and strategies were part of a struggle for legitimacy, power, financial resources, new missionary recruits, and for a particular worldview. Second, this worldview was actually much closer to that of the Indians they were trying to convert in Mexico than to that of their fellow European Jesuits and others who were at the cutting edge of Enlightenment thinking by the early seventeenth century. The Jesuit missionaries and Indians were drawn to and inspired by early Christian sacred biography and history "precisely because this literature celebrated the immediate reality of an invisible world" (228).

Reff's study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the relationship between "natural" disasters, dramatic social change, and the role that (alternative) systems of religious belief and practice can play in providing alternative social systems which in turn aid the cause of the promoters of the new religion. Key to this process, and to Reff's study, however, is the importance of popular religious practice and belief, and the extent to which successful missionaries in both periods he analyzes adapted their beliefs and practices to those of the local peoples they were missionizing, and in doing so actually served to maintain those indigenous traditions to a certain extent.

The complex ways in which official and popular interpretations of the same religious system interact is also the subject of Nora Jaffary's *False Mystics: Deviant Orthodoxy in Colonial Mexico*, and her work is nicely complementary to Reff's in that it delves deeply into the ways in which the Catholic Church in colonial Mexico brought its discursive and political power to bear upon individuals it deemed heterodox and thus threatening to its dominance. Like Reff, Jaffary analyzes the ways in which official Catholic doctrine was socially constructed differently in the different historical, geographical and cultural contexts of Spain and colonial Mexico. As is often the case, the self-construction of a dominant system is done in relation to that of the "Others" from which it strives to distinguish itself. Thus in Spain, as part of the consolidation of politico-religious power by Ferdinand and Isabella, the Inquisition's primary targets of theological deviance were influences from Judaism and Islam, and later Protestantism and *alumbradismo*. There was some continuity of this orientation in Mexico, but over time the targets, and their framing, changed to reflect the different spiritual competitors and socio-political anxieties of New Spain, which were indigenous and African religious influences on the one hand, and the increase in number and wealth of criollos who threatened the symbolic and material order of the social hierarchy in colonial Mexico.

Ana de Aramburu is a particularly striking and illustrative case of a "false" mystic. She was a poor woman, apparently of African, indigenous, and European descent, who was accused of engaging in a variety of unorthodox and scandalous activities. These actions included curing the sick, levitation, ecstatic fits, bleeding from various parts of her body, viewing souls in purgatory, being "overly fond of alcohol," engaging in lesbianism, cursing and yelling in public, and "while holding the holy host in her mouth, she had 'touched herself' and had then 'put [the host] in her private parts, saying 'long live the devil and death to Jesus'" (2). Regardless of whether she actually did all these things, they illustrate that Aramburu, like most accused *alumbrados* and *ilusos*, was suspected of more than just spiritual transgressions, but of social, political and economic ones as well. Some of these derived from the differences in their mode and content of mystical practice as compared to that of other mystics, for example, their greater inclusion of everyday concerns, their interactions with God and saints, and their unorthodox interpretations of Christian doctrine. In the more social realm, the accused were scrutinized regarding their moral character and status, with those who violated gender and sexual codes, were thought to be overly independent and proud, or were poor and had significant numbers of followers being especially suspect (5).

Jaffary acknowledges the influence on her thinking of Jean Franco's and Solange Alberro's feminist analyses of *ilusas* and *alumbradas* as either symbolic gender transgressors or materialist entrepreneurs seeking a

livelihood with honor. But she critiques them for neglecting the possibility that these mystics might have been motivated by real religious faith. Her critique is an important one, but it has some complications of its own. In support of her argument for religious motives, she cites the pervasiveness of religion in everyday life in Mexico, and concludes from this that *ilusas* could not “simply have ‘used’ Christian mysticism in order to serve their political and economic ends” (14). The causal relationship between these two statements is not at all definitive or inevitable, and the conclusion seems a bit overstated, given that several of the *ilusas* she discusses did use mysticism for economic ends.

She continues her argument in a very interesting way, although it is not clear that it entirely coheres with the points mentioned above. She effectively questions the actual deviancy of the *ilusas*’ beliefs and practices, given how representative they were of many religious practices of the time which were supported by the Counter-Reformation Church itself (such as the interior mysticism of Saint Teresa of Ávila), and how the false mystics themselves fairly well reflected “the contours, in social and economic terms, of the demographic portrait of New Spain’s major urban centers” (15). In constructionist terms, the Inquisitors’ perception of the situation is the ultimate determinant of the fate of the accused, not the intentions of the latter. Thus someone like Ana de Aramburu may very well have had spiritual gifts that she used to do good and acceptable things in the eyes of the Church, but she also seems to have transgressed (or others convinced the Inquisition that she transgressed) various behavioral, moral, theological, and social norms, which is why she was found guilty and punished. In other words, the Inquisition was not an objective system of theological justice, but an institution for defining and enforcing orthodoxy and thereby maintaining the Church’s monopoly on the power to do so.

Like Reff’s and Jaffary’s works, Rebecca Lester’s *Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent*, examines the functioning of the institutional Catholic Church in Mexico. In contrast to the two previous books, however, Lester’s is an ethnography of young women’s experiences during their first year of training to become nuns in a convent in Puebla, and thus deals with a successful and complete incorporation of individuals into the orthodoxy of the Church. The Order of the “Siervas” (a pseudonym) achieves such success because of the particular historical and cultural context in which it operated when Lester conducted her fieldwork—Mexico in the early 1990s—and the ways in which it explicitly addressed the conflicts and issues facing young, educated Mexican women at the time, and provided a powerful and systematic means of dealing with those issues. Specifically, becoming a Sierva offers a third and superior model of femininity that frees them from the pressures of the two dominant and incompatible models available to young women in Mexican society:

the traditional, "moral" housewife confined to the domestic realm versus the modern, sophisticated, independent woman who must excel in the competitive social world. In converting to this new feminine subjectivity, the postulants gain access to a femininity that empowers them to change the world as they transform themselves through their rigorous work and prayer regimens. The process, goal, and means by which this takes place is the transformation of the subjectivity of these young women as they come to see themselves differently and to work with their bodies and selves to bring about both a personal and cosmic transformation.

Based on extensive and intensive participation with the nuns in their daily activities, Lester's book is a systematic, minutely detailed ethnographic account of convent life that effectively captures the atmosphere and experiences of the life of the postulants. During this first year, they must be—and for the most part are—transformed from giddy women dissatisfied with the secular world into instruments of God's work. Lester's argument is that the Siervas achieve this by means of a ritualized reconstruction of subjectivity through acting on the bodies, minds, selves, and souls of the women seeking to join the order. To achieve this they must surrender themselves completely to God, not by eliminating their selves, but by learning "to read the self through God. In genuinely recognizing God for the first time, the new nun comes to finally recognize herself, to see herself with God's eyes" (251–252).

Lester's theoretical framework is ambitious and diverse, including ritual analysis; Kohutian psychoanalysis; gender analysis and feminist cultural studies; and theories of embodiment, the self, and subjectivity. She deftly applies it to her ethnographic material and critically synthesizes a range of theoretical material to develop "a provisional theory of embodiment" (chapter 13). As with many such ambitious endeavors, the level of analysis is not equally high throughout. She is strongest in her discussion of the transformation of subjectivity involved in both conversion and therapy, and the parallels she draws between them are insightful and thought-provoking, as is her analysis of will, love, the self (and its relationship to others), and how these are manifested and modified through the nuns' relationship to God (chapter 11).

The weak point of the work comes in her discussion of "Mexican Modernities" (chapter 12). She provides a good, broad historical and cultural context for the experience of modernity in Mexico, including its complex relationship to national identity, gender, religion, and the United States. But her discussion of Catholicism in Mexico is not as well-contextualized as it could have been, especially in terms of its relationship to the state, modernity and the United States.

For example, while Mexico is a strongly Catholic country in cultural terms, there is also a strong history of secularism and anti-clerical sentiment as well, as Lester notes in her discussion of the founding of the

Order of the Siervas by "Father Muro" at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus the very public embrace of the Catholic Church by President Salinas de Gortari and especially President Fox has been controversial (as Hall describes in her book reviewed here [270–271]), though not primarily because of their strong neoliberal, pro-U.S. political and economic orientations. But these are relatively minor points given the focus of her work, and the sophisticated way in which she integrates her theoretical framework and ethnographic information.

Linda Hall's *Mary, Mother and Warrior: The Virgin in Spain and the Americas*, traces the history and development of the cult of the Virgin Mary from its origins in the Iberian Peninsula to its ongoing importance and multiple manifestations in Latin America and among Latinos in the United States. Hall's study is motivated by her appreciation for the widespread and disparate manifestations this reverence takes, its tremendous power, and the important role it has played in nationalist and other political struggles. Mary's power as a figure is based on a combination of social and psychological construct, nationalist symbol, and political protector and ally, but what is most interesting are the ways in which she has been constructed differently and similarly by both sides in many contexts, and thus how she both symbolizes the conflicts in which she is invoked, and is also constructed through them. In other words, her power as a symbol is directly related to both her great flexibility and stability as a symbolic figure.

Hall weaves together an impressive range of materials to construct her history of the cult of Mary, which she begins in Spain with Isabel, Ferdinand, and Columbus, but also much earlier in Europe and the Mediterranean. Mary was important in all these periods, and in the Conquest of the New World as well, because of her association with warfare and conquest and the frequently concomitant conversion of non-Christians, as well as with fertility, health and protection against epidemics (cf. Reff). She was thus an important figure in the formation of the nation of Spain, especially under Alfonso X in the thirteenth century, under whom "the reverence for Mary became most entrenched both spatially and ideologically" (32), and "provided [him] with all the means he needed to achieve symbolic consensus" in Spanish society (34). The cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Extremadura would arise in the fourteenth century, and Isabel would become a great devotee of that Incarnation of the Virgin Mary. Isabel was also very closely associated with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, whose iconography derived from the Woman of the Apocalypse mentioned in the Book of Revelation, and influenced many images of Mary in Spain and Latin America, including that of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico.

Hall's approach to her subject matter is scholarly but also somewhat political and personal, as well as enthusiastic and reverential, as she

notes the poignancy of Mary's ongoing appropriation by contemporary individuals, including some of her students. Despite its great diversity, there are constants in her devotion, with three overarching ones, in Hall's estimation: "strength, power, and connection" (300). Given her admiration for the ways in which so many people seek help, protection, strength, and identity from Mary, it is perhaps not surprising that Hall's view of Marian devotion is open, positive, and empowering. While acknowledging that Mary has been used as a symbol and model for the repression of women (as well as all those conquered and converted people), she emphasizes the empowering and positive ways in which this powerful spiritual figure has been appropriated by the powerless as well as the powerful. In this regard her perspective resonates with Reff's and Jaffary's in that all three focus on how non-elites appropriated and made their own the beliefs and deities of their conquerors. The results of course are "mixed" in terms of belief, identity and power, but that is a more accurate reflection of what has happened and continues to happen when different peoples encounter one another, regardless of the differences in motives, power, or belief. They by no means deny or downplay the horrors of conquest and the imposition of orthodoxy, but rather remind us that the results of such exercises of power are rarely entirely successful, and always yield alternative interpretations and practices of orthodoxy, whether we call this syncretism, hybridity, creolization, transculturation, or some other equally problematic yet necessary term for describing the process and results of mixing different religious and cultural traditions.

Andrew Orta takes up these questions directly in *Catechizing Culture: Missionaries, Aymara, and the "New Evangelization"*, as he analyzes the interrelations among colonialism and postcolonial legacies, local culture and popular agency, and syncretism. It is a stunning ethnography, for the conceptual richness of his discussion of missionization, locality, culture, identity, the body, memory, and history, and for his depth of engagement with both the experiences of his Aymara informants and the disciplinary traditions of anthropology and Andean studies. The "new evangelization" of the title refers to the theology of inculturation, a pastoral approach deriving from the Second Vatican Council that is intended to overcome some of the limitations of previous approaches, including liberation theology. It is the theological underpinning of the Catholic Church's efforts "to celebrate and incorporate cultural difference within a universal frame of Christian identity—to catechize culture" (3).

With its emphasis on returning to traditional culture and ethnic identity in the face of the disappointments of modernity, it is not surprising that it developed in the 1980s in Latin America, a decade in which many modernist visions and optimism were shattered on the rocks of dictatorship, civil war, spiraling debt and the rise of the neoliberal

project that accompanied and aggravated these phenomena. Facing losses from both liberation theology and Protestantism, the Catholic Church was in need of a new approach to gaining and maintaining members. Nevertheless, it too came with its own burden of modernist if not colonialist baggage. In his ethnographic exploration of the practice and implications of inculturationalist evangelization among the Aymara, his larger goal is to analyze the intersection of colonialism's legacies with the way we understand locality (5).

With regard to the first, he argues that "religion and the status of colonial conversion served metonymically to evoke the wider legacy of colonialism," and in the most negative views of syncretism this "legacy was seen as at once a corrupted ensemble of its source materials (Spanish and Andean) and an echo of a premodern tradition absolutely distinct from twentieth-century Western modernity" (7). His solution to the "conundrums of continuity and change" is a sophisticated reconceptualization of locality, that conjuncture of place, culture and identity, which he wants to bring back "as the situated context of social life" but as something that "is always ever emergent" rather than already existing in a simple and fixed way (9). Locality is porous and entangled in that the local is always defined and produced by forces and actors that are outside of it, but which in the example of missionaries are also within and part of it. In other words, locality is produced and constituted as much by the nonlocal as by the local, but the boundaries between these categories are also permeable and shot through with "unseen dangers and asymmetries of intention and power that give shape to such settings" (12). Finally, he wants to break down the dichotomies between core and periphery, corrupt and authentic, and official and popular that have been used to characterize religious and cultural practices in Latin America, and which undergird the inculturationalist model. These are a problem because the "traditional" Andean religious practices that the Church promotes actually "undercut important and generative differences, tensions, and secrets across regions and pose new challenges for the local enactment of missionized religious forms" (18).

The very long history of Catholic evangelization in the Andes means that not only is there no "pure," pre-Christian form of "traditional" Aymara religion available today, but more importantly, many Aymara (accurately) consider "authentic" Aymara religion to be that which they have been practicing "traditionally" for centuries—and which Catholic missionaries up until fairly recently condemned as idolatrous and pagan. Thus the Church's own latest foray into and against modernity crosscuts the conflicted legacies and experiences of colonialism as both bearer of modernity and development and imposer of underdevelopment, the resulting cultural and religious forms of which were constructed by the colonizers as "traditional." In seeking to recover this lost tradition for a

good reason, the Church attempts to reverse this process but due to the colonialist legacy of earlier missionization, and a certain colonialist aspect of the modernist “new evangelization,” “this revalued tradition is cast by missionaries as being ‘more Christian’ than contemporary Aymara and Bolivian social life” (105).

In spite of his sustained and nuanced deconstruction of many notions, dichotomies, and binary oppositions in his efforts to reconceptualize locality and culture, Orta’s goal is a more sophisticated and adequate construction rather than destruction of concepts and methodologies for understanding ethnic identity and solidarity which “ultimately generate through a different ritual route imagined Aymara and Bolivian communities; communities that look like, but are produced in ways quite different from, the ‘imagined communities’ of the literatures on nationalism and ethnicity” (272). It is an ambitious task, but Orta does an excellent job carrying it out. He ends the book with an analysis of how memory is conceptualized, put into practice, and embodied by Aymara in their situated practice of locality in the context of ongoing asymmetries of power that are historical, translocal, cross-cultural and consequently have constituted them as a “group” in important ways, though the identity of the group remains contested among its members.

Patricia Pessar’s *From Fanatics to Folk: Brazilian Millenarianism and Popular Culture* deals with many of the same themes of the other books reviewed here, particularly the relationship between popular and official culture and religion, and the conflicts between local traditions and official power. The book is an analysis of the millenarian movement begun in the late 1930s by Pedro Batista, who settled with his followers in 1945 in Santa Brígida in the Northeastern state of Bahia. Given the origins of her study in the 1970s, it is an ethnography but one that is enriched by her use of archival materials and her comparative framing of the movement in the context of studies of millenarianism more broadly, including the more famous late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Canudos, Contestado and Juazeiro movements. The methodological breadth and “hybridized genre” of her study have the goal of providing a richer understanding of the Batista movement, but also of challenging scholars “to recognize Brazilian millenarianism as a traveling cultural formation” (225). In particular, she wants to emphasize the centrality of the religious in these movements, and that they are a form of popular culture, thus “‘issues of power and problems of politics’ among and between members of the elite and the subaltern become central concerns” (6).

This can be seen in the breakdown of the social institutions and norms of reciprocity that characterized the patron-client relationship between landowners and workers in rural Brazil, and which were a prime factor in the formation of millenarian movements. This increasing “modernity” led to a crisis in the hegemonic idea of the symmetrical and harmonious

relationship between the social and the supernatural, and many poor backlanders interpreted their misfortunes and the social disruptions that caused them in the apocalyptic terms of folk Catholicism, since “they lacked a new language or set of routine practices (for example, citizens’ rights, strikes, and the creation of labor unions) to interpret and negotiate their changing times” (28).

Pessar’s portrait of Batista resonates with Jaffary’s study, since he too was a *beato* who used his supernatural gifts, charisma, and social and organizational skills to develop his following. Batista is different, however, in that he was transformed from a *beato* into a *santo* by public acclaim of his special spiritual power (*mistério*). This social construction of charisma occurs through a “sacralizing process” involving four activities: the erasure of the leader’s kin ties so as to remove him from the realm of politics, the figure’s self-presentation as a good patron to his devotees, his ability to demonstrate his spiritual powers and wisdom in public performances, and the creation of miracle narratives about him by his followers (46).

This is an important contribution of Pessar’s study, and reveals the requisite political and performative elements in the process of *santo* formation and successful millenarian leadership by Batista and others. The political aspect is particularly important in the Brazilian context because Batista’s success as a leader and the success of his community depended fundamentally on his ability to function as a patron in the political realm, especially with the landowner and political boss who allowed Batista and his group to settle in Santa Brígida in 1945. Batista’s extensive and adept political activities were in fact as essential for the survival of the group as was his hiding them from his followers. In this Batista and his movement were distinctive, but so was their fate as a movement. As Pessar clearly describes, Batista’s accommodation to the political and other demands of the larger society allowed for the growth and protection of the community, but also its increasing integration into the region’s social, political and economic networks. Inevitably this was accompanied by the routinization of charisma, followed by socio-economic stratification and division within the community.

Pessar argues that in spite of all the accommodations Batista made and the resulting transformations of the community, it retains its millenarianism goals and message, though I am not sure that her argument is entirely convincing on this point. Structurally and institutionally it seems that the routinization of charisma and the normalization of the community, which allowed its ongoing existence, has also effectively co-opted if not undermined its subversive, millenarian project. She notes that they have retained some of their dances and rituals, and as such the Batista followers in Santa Brígida who continue these, especially Os Penitentes, are de facto holdouts if not a bulwark against the homogenization of popular

culture by the media, globalization, urbanization, and other factors. While maintaining these practices is important, contextualization in itself does not seem to be equivalent to remaining a millenarian movement. In this regard, the Batista movement seems to increasingly resemble the charismatic, millenarian sect out of which it was formulated, namely Christianity.

Timothy Knab's *Mad Jesus: The Final Testament of a Huichol Messiah from Northwest Mexico* is unlike any of the other books reviewed here in terms of its form, though it shares the themes and concerns of popular religion and culture, syncretism/hybridity, the relationship between tradition and modernity, ethnic and cultural identity, and messianism/millenarianism. Like his previous work, *A War of Witches* (1995), this work is a novelistic, ethnographic account of an indigenous shaman who uses his spiritual gifts for both malevolent and beneficent purposes. It is a more lively and evocative way to convey ethnographic information than the usual monograph, given the drama and emotion that its narrative structure permits.

Knab begins his tale in the late 1960s, with his first trip to Mexico and his first encounter with two Huichols with whom he would soon become friends. One of them was Matsiwa, Jesús's elder brother, and through whom he would later meet Jesús. Besides looking for customers for their crafts, Matsiwa and his companion were looking for contacts outside of their world; Knab and his friend were looking for very much the same thing. In fact, the story Knab tells is as much about himself as it is about Jesús, with Knab as participant, storyteller, adventurer, and man in search of himself. As he recounts his experiences among the Huichol, he reveals the extensive and intimate knowledge of their culture he acquired while living with them, thus providing the necessary ethnographic context for the events that unfold in his narrative.

This historical and cultural context is essential for understanding Jesús, and Knab does an excellent job of doing so, in spite of his frequent claims of not understanding Jesús himself. This may be a narrative device, but the end result reveals that Knab either understands Jesús better than he thinks, or that he is a very good storyteller (or both). Nevertheless, the story of *Mad Jesus (Chucho Loco)*, is a troubling one for several reasons. Jesús seemed to be mentally ill, due at least in part to his witch grandfather's attempt to sacrifice him when he was a boy to the evil Huichol deity, Kieli, who is the patron of sorcery and evil and takes the form of the hallucinogenic plants, *Datura* and *Solandra*. Kieli is also the evil brother of Kauyamali, who is associated with the sacred Huichol peyote pilgrimage. Though he saved himself from his grandfather's destructive plan, Jesús nevertheless was partially overtaken by Kieli, and he was apparently never able to escape his control. This was one of several traumatic events that led to his eventual exile from the Sierra Huichol. He experienced other traumas in his life and was possibly psychotic and

delusional, but Jesús also was a healer and a shaman, a *mara'acame*, a successful artisan and businessman, and a killer. Finally, he was the leader of a messianic cult, the character of which grew directly out of his deep but troubled supernatural experiences and his ambivalent engagement with the social world. It was a vision of a new and better world, in which the Huichol Christ would come and punish all the *tewalis* (non-Huichol) for their mistreatment of the Huichol, and give them all the wealth and power that Christ has given the *tewalis*.

We learn about Jesús's life through the recordings Knab made of his tormented life story, which describe the harsh treatment of Huichols in Mexican society, and the changes that accompanied their greater integration into that society, whether by choice or by force. In one sense, Jesús was actually quite successful in this regard, as he had to leave the Sierra Huichol at a young age and fend for himself. But at the same time, it is difficult not to read Knab's narrative of Jesús's life as a kind of extreme allegory of the perils of indigenous people being forced into an alien and hostile Mexican society. It is a rough encounter with another culture, and with modernity of a sort, but without adequate cross-cultural mediation on either side. Encountering and coming to understand and be accepted by another culture is an exciting and deeply satisfying experience, but it can also be dangerous, physically and psychically, and this darker side of cross-cultural endeavors is present throughout the narrative, both for Jesús and for himself, first as outsider, and later as anthropologist and acquaintance of Jesús.

Racism, exploitation, social disconnection, and the pressures and possibilities of making a living by selling one's cultural practices and products compel and attract individuals like Jesús into the profitable but alienating world of the tourist industry. The end result for him was a striking apocalyptic vision derived from Huichol cosmology and symbols and brought to bear against *tewali* society, but one dependent upon the wealth he made from *tewalis* by exploiting his own Huichol followers who also awaited the Huichol Christ. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that his end comes in a tragic yet overdetermined way: "Jesús was assassinated by Mexican police in the name of public safety, sanity, and Mexico's never-ending 'war' on drugs. Greed, jealousy, revenge, and ineptitude were the real reasons behind Chucho's demise" (3).

All these works delve into and illustrate the complex and problematic relationships among culture, power and identity, and how these relationships shape and are shaped by the struggles between individuals and groups whose worldviews and interpretations of Catholic doctrine are different from the official version. Because of asymmetries of power, theological differences become political differences, although they are not always framed that way by those with the power to decide what constitutes orthodoxy. But in all cases, except perhaps Knab's book,

the more powerful Catholic Church nevertheless had to engage and, to varying degrees, adapt itself to the popular forms of religious practice that it was trying to control, convert, or eliminate. These encounters between popular practice and Catholic (or social) orthodoxy also involved encounters with modernity, in some cases creating alternative forms of it (Lester, Orta, Pessar, Hall), while in others being destroyed by it (Reff, Jaffary, Knab).

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