

both continuity and change are noteworthy. In demonstrating the persistence of a flourishing indigenous political culture in the heart of the Spanish capital, *After Moctezuma* provides an important foundation for further studies of Mexico City and comparative work on indigenous politics.

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Brian Larkin, *The Very Nature of God: Baroque Catholicism and Religious Reform in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 312, \$27.95, pb.

This is a well-researched and elegantly written book aimed at changing the prevailing views of the relationship between Catholicism and modernity in Mexico on the eve of Independence. Larkin has divided his book into two substantial parts: one devoted to Baroque Catholicism, with its apogee in the seventeenth century, and the other to religious reform under the Bourbons in the eighteenth. He has taken religious motivation and the living of religion in society as serious questions in both.

Larkin's analysis of Baroque Catholicism focuses on its dogmatic faith-based underpinnings no less than on its social vitality in wedding a disparate population into one Christian and civic whole. The author sympathetically studies a world characterised by miracles and the immanence of the divine, one in which the experience of Christ could be vividly encountered in numerous ways and participation with others in his mystical body, united by doctrine, tradition and practice, was an everyday happening in corporate associations as well as in the family, which together were this society's basic building blocks. Here Larkin tends to conflate doctrine and practice so as to favour the idea that the latter responded more or less exactly to the former.

A key to Larkin's analysis is his insistence on the Eucharist as the underlying metaphor and trope for all Baroque experiences of the presence of Christ in society. For the Eucharist at the centre of the recurring sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, as understood in the doctrine of transubstantiation, offers the dogmatically defined assurance that Christ indeed lives and reigns among his faithful. This is a doctrine of faith that the Baroque faithful convert into obligation and reciprocation on the part of the believers in their society.

A tandem analysis in which religious reform both followed and transformed this vital, mystic and orthodox Baroque Catholicism is most difficult to accomplish. That said, Larkin achieves an arresting analysis of Catholic reformism as arising in the ranks of the clergy itself, represented by such outstanding reforming episcopal figures as Lorenzana and Núñez de Haro in Mexico City and Fabián y Fuero in Puebla. He successfully brings our attention to the theological bases of their thinking and their concern for a different and purportedly deeper, more knowledgeable living of the Catholic faith, its core doctrines and moral teachings. In the author's view reforming prelates were no less concerned with proximity to Christ than their more Baroque predecessors. They may have been more susceptible to the demands of economy in religious spending and decorum rather than pageantry and ostentation in church decorations, and concerned for the fiscal fate of the Spanish empire, but their religious orthodoxy and insistence on maintaining a vibrant Christian society were linked to

Tridentine definitions of the faith and thus simultaneously held back from total condemnation of many Baroque practices. Larkin does not explore the charges of 'Jansenism' which were rife in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and thus portrays religious reformism as above reproach by champions of conventional belief. An ample deliberation is still needed here.

Central to Larkin's work is his study of wills, which were mostly set down by notaries for members of the well-to-do, but not invariably wealthy, Creoles and Spaniards of Mexico City. Theologically quasi-sacramental, wills related to setting accounts straight with God and the Church before dying, preparing burial details, but also providing for spiritual acts of piety on one's behalf which might speed the way through purgatory. To deal with these wills systematically, Larkin selected seven years beginning in 1696 to study the variance in testamentary practices between then and 1813. The other years selected were 1717, 1737, 1758, 1779 and 1796. Four of these – 1696, 1737, 1779 and 1813 – were plague years and heavy on will-writing, and Larkin included non-plague years in order to achieve a balance in the content as well as the quantity of wills analysed. Unhappy with the now traditional view that Roman Catholicism was impermeable to modernity, but also with Pamela Voekel's *Alone Before God* (Duke University Press, 2002), which sees a more thoroughgoing reformed Catholicism as nicely preparing the ideological and religious terrain for the rise of modern liberalism, Larkin argues that religious reformism helped to split the Catholic heritage in Mexico by the eve of Independence. Baroque piety had by no means disappeared, but a modern Catholicism sponsored by reformers had successfully promoted a new subjectivity of internal devotion, heightened concern for an understanding of the essential tenets of the faith, more austere moral behaviour, and individualism, qualities closer to modernity. Not only were there different trends in Mexican Catholicism, but there were also often distinct tendencies within the same individual, as measured by a detailed analysis of wills by the author. Larkin does not make a significant attempt to analyse the relationship of this elite's religious orientation, as seen in their wills, with the possible transformation or persistence of popular religious beliefs and practices.

This reading, even while centred on the elite, allows for an understanding of early nineteenth-century Mexican Catholicism as more inherently conflictual and less homogeneous than is often assumed. This is a great novelty in this important book. Mexican religious faith and culture, in this view, would not be on the eve of an easy and one-directional transition to modernity and a new link between civic and religious culture. Values, it may be assumed, would eventually be more torn than transformed. And, of course, since nineteenth-century Mexican religious life was to be especially tense at certain levels, especially between modernisers and traditionalists, Larkin's interpretation of late colonial trends is valuable and suggestive. On the other hand, his finding that the will itself had been desacralised by Mexican Independence, and that will-writing was dropping off in general popularity, independently of differing religious sensitivities, is startling and provocative.

There are some areas where, in my opinion, this book does not do everything for which one might hope. The wills, as the author expresses, are very rich evidence on a number of matters: financial affairs, legal and family disputes, inheritance clauses and future family arrangements. Since Larkin is concerned above all with how the changing, or continuing, definition of divinity determined future possibilities of a felicitous equation between Catholicism and modernity, he has chosen not to do much in exploring those leads to tell us what more they might reveal about the texture

of Mexican social life and beliefs beyond his immediate focus. It is also difficult to say whether his interpretation based on seven documented years will hold once more wills for more years are studied, although it is hard to imagine that one author could have covered much more. The author has brought noteworthy devotional literature into his analysis to corroborate his conclusions, but this has been done in a supportive rather than a methodical fashion. Further analysis will be necessary, if indeed the concluding hypotheses put forth in this book are to be of greater assistance to future researchers. Larkin's cross-referencing with similar or pertinent historical work done on religion in Europe, Mexico and Latin America will be very helpful in this regard.

There is one area which I found particularly problematic. Larkin posits civic and religious reform in the eighteenth-century Spanish empire as parallel forces, but does not explore their intersections. The Catholic monarchy of Spain was at once a religious and civic institution, and the king was as much a spiritual as a temporal ruler. On the basis of patronage rights, proceeding from sovereign prerogatives or papal concession in debatable proportions, the king named bishops, exiled Jesuits, called together prelates for regional synods, and during the eighteenth century allowed for increasing discussion of clerical wealth, social privilege, juridical and fiscal immunities, and the optimal links to Rome. Spain's concordats with Rome were a hot issue among jurists and clerical elites during the whole century and the next. So is it wise to separate civic and religious reformism in such categorical fashion? Can the Bourbon reforms be understood as simply economic and fiscal in purport and consequences, as Larkin seems to do? Doing so facilitates underscoring something that few have done as thoroughly as this author: detailing the theological debate as the basis of religious reform. Certainly that is a major achievement. But what is lost here is the crisis not only of religious legitimacy, but also of civic legitimacy during the late Bourbon period. Vassalage was giving rise to citizenship, just when – perhaps, on key points, just as – the Baroque shared and corporate subjectivity was losing some ground to a new individual religious outlook attuned to more dispassionate, reasoned understanding in preference to a performative invocation of divine presence. Incipient liberalism, new interpretations of old ideas, a freer press and a weakened Inquisition were giving rise to greater discussion of both political and religious traditions, and there was a simultaneous search for the basic historical documents which might serve in the arbitration of differing opinion. Both political and religious life were increasingly seen as depending on historical documents open to public scrutiny and discussion. In the British sense of the term, these were constitutional documents whose adequate comprehension generated rights and privileges, and bound all to them.

It would seem necessary to carry Larkin's seminal work into the terrain of the mutual influence of the crisis of civil and religious legitimacy on the eve of Mexican Independence. This need not marginalise the outstanding work done by this author on the theological bases of this crisis, but might indeed help us more fully to appreciate how religious and civic identity both stumbled, searched for new parameters, and ushered Mexico into its conflictive and heterogeneous nineteenth century, all the while maintaining an ideal of political-religious harmony in an independent nation, mostly republican, down to 1857.

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