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## William B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico*

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*Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico.* By William B. Taylor. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. xi + 868 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth.)

Often when one confronts students in the classroom or relatively educated persons in an audience, their opinion of the Catholic Church in Mexico borders on ignorance-inspired prejudice. The Church is made to look monolithic, nearly inhuman, and painfully authoritarian. This study by William B. Taylor may not erase those prejudices, but it does an extraordinary job in investigating the minutiae of daily parish practice. The result confirms the immense influence of the non-hierarchical Church on the daily lives of the residents of Mexico City.

Neither simplistic nor superficial, this study borders on being over meticulous. Taylor sees the parish churches as "the seats of the parish priests' authority as magistrates of the sacred in the world," hence the title and theme of the book. Precisely how he managed to accumulate and analyze such a barrage of data almost defies evaluation. Nevertheless, he organizes his presentation around four "paradoxes" which help to explain his basic concepts. First, "how the relative equilibrium of the colonial era was achieved and sustained, and how Indian subjects could be at once compliant and aggressively resistant." Second, "how parish priests...were 'separate but in the world' as they had been trained to think." Third, why could some of them at the end of the colonial era lead a revolution for an independence that would threaten their privileged positions? And fourth, how could anticlericalism develop where Catholicism was not in decline? These paradoxical questions are woven into and addressed in the contexts of the entire study.

To address these methodological issues, Taylor divides his overall work into four parts. In Part 1 he deals with the backgrounds of church and society in Mexico and Guadalajara, the major eighteenth-century centers of population. As difficult as a discussion of the relations of the Bourbon monarchy and the Church can be, he accomplishes a comprehensive and erudite overview that validates his thesis of the centrality of the priest in the

social history of Mexico. Part 2 is a careful analysis of the parish priest from his seminary training, through career goals, economic and social survival, his role as judge and teacher, and the strictures under which he had to work. None of these discussions take place in a vacuum because the priest is constantly related to political authority and the parishioner. Part 3 moves into the subtle area of the parishioners and their relations to their pastors. Taylor here again demonstrates his profound ability to glean from voluminous parish records the very kind of information that reveals the nature of social contact and conflict. If anything, this section shows the strength of parish organization among the laity which posed a serious problem of authority to the parish priest. Taylor examines devotions and adulation of the saints as well as the role of *cofradías* in the practice of religion.

Having established the social characteristics of his principal actors, Taylor weaves priest and parishioner together in Part 4, labeled, "The Politics of Parish Life." In this section the tensions of political and ecclesiastical authority emerge most forcefully, as well as the manner of enforcement through power. The author's rather clear grasp of the distinctions between power and authority aids greatly in delineating the social roles of each class. These later chapters move the discussion more toward the close of the century than the beginning as the results of the Bourbon policies are seen in sharper relief.

Taylor's conclusions are couched in the events of the War for Independence wherein priests and parishioners played key roles defined less by theological difference than by political adherence. Truly this is a monumental study by a person whose grasp of documentation and the sweep of history reaches stellar proportions. Half of this ponderous volume is elaborate notes and explanation, leaving the text itself as authoritative and very readable. The bibliography is immense, as well it should be for the scope of this detailed work.

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