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Review/Reseña

Jason Dormady. *Primitive Revolution: Restorationist Religion and the Idea of the Mexican Revolution, 1940-1968*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011.

Restorationist Religion in Mexico Between the PRI and Catholicism

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Jason Dormady's book studies restorationist religion in twentieth-century Mexico. Posing a challenge to the dominant Catholic faith, restorationist religion has not received much scholarly attention. This book not only fills this gap in the scholarly literature, but it also makes an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between popular religion and the ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI, during the era of the so-called "Mexican Miracle" (1940-1968).

During this period, steady economic growth accompanied and facilitated the heyday of Mexico's post-revolutionary state, led by the PRI. This party held the presidency under three different names from 1929 to 2000 and has just recently returned to power as a result of the 2012 elections. The "Mexican Miracle" also featured rapid modernization by means of the growth of mass media and mass tourism, public education, as well as ambitious road building and public works projects.

In this context, restorationist religion in Mexico sought to recover a primordial religious purity as a counterpoint to both modernization and the mainstream Catholic Church. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Catholic Church and the state gradually repaired the rift opened up by the Mexican Revolution, a rift that had found its bloody denouement in the devastating Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929). Despite this rapprochement, the political and religious landscape of Mexico had changed forever. For the first time in history, the Catholic Church not only found itself challenged by an anticlerical state, but also by other variants of the Christian faith, and particularly Protestantism. Restorationist religions offered one such variant.

Dormady argues that the various forms of restorationist religions served as a venue in which the post-revolutionary state and ordinary Mexicans negotiated their terms of engagement. Focusing on three empirical examples, the author shows the inner workings of religious pluralism in Mexico at a time when the PRI remained anticlerical in theory, but accommodated religion in practice. In particular, Dormady argues that the PRI welcomed the emergence of restorationist faith communities for three reasons. First, these communities challenged the religious hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church. Second, their religious corporatist structure served as a natural counterpart to the PRI's political corporatism. Finally, the restorationist communities welcomed the state's efforts to promote patriotism through an inculcation of an official version of the Mexican Revolution.

The first example examined in *Primitive Revolution*—and probably the most compelling of the three—is an evangelical Pentecostal movement, *Luz del Mundo* (LDM) founded by Eusebio Joaquín González, a.k.a.

“Aarón,” in the central Mexican state of Jalisco in the 1920s. Under the leadership of Eusebio’s son, Samuel, LDM became the second-largest denomination in Mexico and boasted 3.5 million members in 2005. Even more surprisingly, unlike most other Protestant faith communities that have eroded the Catholic hegemony throughout Latin America, LDM is “hecho en México” rather than imported from the United States or other Anglo-Saxon nations. It is strictly hierarchical, thus resembling the Catholic Church in structure, and it promotes nationalist values. LDM has existed in a loose alliance with the PRI, helping the party assimilate rural migrants to the city.

Chapter Two examines a dissident Mormon group known as the Iglesia del Reino de Dios en su Plenitud (IRDP, or Church of the Kingdom of God in Its Fullness). Margarito Bautista Valencia, a native speaker of Náhuatl, founded IRDP in 1922 in the state of Mexico. A former Baptist, the appropriately named Bautista wrote a book of 600 pages on the past, present, and future of the Americas. He reinvented the Revolution of 1910 as the birth of a true Mexican revolution, to be consummated by a Mormon tribe that would restore the “México eterno” ravaged for centuries by Catholicism, a religion based in Italy. He and his founders founded the town of Nueva Jerusalén near his hometown. There, like traditional Mormonism—and, according to Dormady, Nahua practice—IRDP practiced polygamy, providing “community brides” for church elders. Compared to LDM, IRDP was small, and the links with the PRI more tenuous, making Dormady’s overarching argument weaker than in the other two case studies.

The third example is Mexican Sinarquismo, a right-wing political movement with strong Catholic roots. Often compared with Spanish *falangismo* in the age of Francisco Franco, Sinarquismo emerged from right-wing opposition to the populist administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). Supported by mass popular mobilization, Cárdenas carried out an ambitious land reform program, expropriated the foreign-owned oil industry, forged alliances with new campesino and worker organizations, and ultimately coopted these organizations in a corporatist state that claimed to be their ally and advocate. Despite its strident

conservatism, Sinarquismo shared some common characteristics with Cardenismo, which it carried forward into the 1940s and beyond. Like the Cardenistas, the Sinarquistas glorified rural Mexico as the essence of the nation, they expressed a strident nationalism, and they believed in a significant role of the state in public life and the economy. In contrast to the other two examples, Sinarquismo appears at first glance a somewhat odd fit, as its primary aims were political, and some of its supporters were not even Catholics. But this particular case study focuses not on the national Sinarquistas, but on the colony of María Auxiliadora in Baja California, founded by Salvador Abascal.

Dormady describes three important commonalities among the movements. They had charismatic leaders who wrote extensively about religious and political life. These leaders come to life in Dormady's engaging narrative, but some readers may argue that the analysis focuses too much on them and their writings, and especially, Abascal's memoirs. While we learn a wealth of detail about these charismatic leaders, who directed their followers toward exclusive faith communities, where they lived in relative isolation, we know far less about the followers (in large part due, one suspects, to the paucity of sources). Finally, although María Auxiliadora dated from the 1940s, the movements originated in the 1920s and 1930s, the period that historians have described, variously, as "post-revolutionary," the "official revolution," or the "reconstructive phase of the revolution." Like IRDP, the community's ties with the PRI remained tenuous due to its size and remote location.

Primitive Revolution makes important contributions to two vibrant fields of Mexican historiography: the study of popular religion and the study of the years of the "Mexican Miracle." It makes the strongest case in its analysis of the LDM, but together, the three case studies and overarching analysis greatly enrich our understanding of popular religion in twentieth-century Mexico.