

GENERAL

Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala: A Syncretic, Expressive, and Symbolic Analysis of the Cult of the Dead. By HUGO G. NUTINI. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Photographs. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xv, 471. Cloth. \$75.00.

For many years, Hugo Nutini and various collaborators have been carrying on massive ethnographical research on aspects of rural society and religion in the important central Mexican region of Tlaxcala, publishing the results in an impressive series of volumes. The latest, the book under review, deals with the cult of the dead, centering on the early November observances referred to, a bit misleadingly, as “Todos Santos.”

At the core of the book are several richly detailed chapters, resting primarily on direct observation, which describe the practices and material phenomena associated with the cult as of about 1960. Interwoven with the description is insightful discussion of the meaning of the actions and objects. The entire complex is convincingly shown to possess a unified rationale, primarily pre-Hispanic. The household rites, featuring an elaborate food offering, emerge as more strongly indigenous and more central to the cult than the public rites at the cemetery.

Nutini shows a laudable interest in patterns of evolution over time. Internal distinctions in the community and oral tradition give him good tools for diachronic analysis over the present century. For earlier times, he draws on ecclesiastical writers of the sixteenth century, establishing a solid base of preconquest belief and practice against which to measure his twentieth-century data. Out of the same sources, plus some local ecclesiastical records and sodality books, he forms estimates about Spanish-indigenous interaction in the first century and a half after the conquest. Here, however, the analysis is severely underdocumented and suffers from overreliance on the great, but now long outdated, Robert Ricard. This aspect of the study calls for a systematic reinvestigation obeying the norms of recent historical scholarship. Nevertheless, one of Nutini’s main conclusions about the early period—that the overall Hispanic-indigenous syncretic complex reached maturity around the middle of the seventeenth century and changed relatively slowly thereafter—agrees with what I have found, using Nahuatl-language sources, in nearly every branch of indigenous life in central Mexico in the postconquest period.

At the theoretical level, Nutini is concerned to add a concept “spontaneous syncretism” to the “guided syncretism” of which he has spoken in his previous work. I welcome this additional category and its application; to me the guided syncretism interpretation, asserting that early Spanish ecclesiastics consciously fostered religious convergences between the two traditions, is not well founded in the written record, and I am glad to see it qualified to an extent. At one

point (p. 108), Nutini goes so far as to suggest that syncretism was tolerated rather than actively fostered by the mendicant friars, a position with which I would have no argument. Nutini is also increasingly interested in what he calls the expressive aspect of his topic. To do justice to this dimension, however, a far more detailed analysis of the pattern in spoken texts, gestures, and visual displays will be required. Such ambitious scholarship and such a large contribution inevitably lead into areas which for the moment remain less well explored and understood.

University of California, Los Angeles

JAMES LOCKHART

Historia de la lectura en México. By Seminario de Historia de la Educación en México de El Colegio de México. Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1988. Bibliographies. Tables. Indexes. Pp. 383. Paper.

These essays written by the Colegio de México's seminar on Mexican educational history mark a significant step beyond the customary study of teaching institutions into the domain of literacy studies and social history. The essays follow a chronological order from the conquest to the present. Some address subthemes of reading: Pilar Gonzalbo's discussion of printed materials used in the first evangelization; Dorothy Tanck's examination of the teaching of reading in the late colonial period; and Engracia Loya's analysis of the quantity and content of education ministry publications between 1920 and 1940.

Especially engaging are the essays on the nineteenth century, which establish the growing importance of the written word to political and social life. Anne Staples shows how, in the postindependence period, the production of pamphlets and periodicals via cheaper printing techniques reached increasingly differentiated audiences. The practice of reading aloud proliferated in a largely illiterate society lacking modern means of communication and entertainment. The task of state formation fostered increased use of print in legal affairs, taxation, patriotic ritual, warfare, and polemics.

María Teresa Bermúdez shows that in the period of civil war and foreign invasion reading and schooling became critical missions for those interested in nation-building and social issues, from artisans to the Sociedad Católica. Manuel Ceballos Ramírez's essay on the Catholic press in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, couched within the context of an emerging political-social movement, is a major contribution. Milada Bazant's detailed analysis of press expansion in the Porfiriato confirms the importance of the written word in the formation of national consciousness.

One could ask for less emphasis on publication and more on reading, and for regional, sectoral analyses of distribution and consumption. There is need for greater appreciation of the impact on reading of radio, television, the state, and corporate media control in the twentieth century, although these themes are