

Stauffer, Brian A. (2019) *Victory on Earth or in Heaven: Mexico's Religionero Rebellion*, University of New Mexico Press (Albuquerque, NM), xiii + 392 pp. \$75.00 hbk.

One of the many regional uprisings that marked nineteenth-century Mexico, the Religionero rebellion of central western Mexico (1873-1877), has escaped the oblivion of the archive thanks to Brian Stauffer's deeply researched and well-written book. Previous commentators viewed the Religioneros through the lens of national events, as reflexive opponents of the anticlerical, land-privatising Lerdo administration. Stauffer complicates those analyses by showing the disparate regional impacts of 'lerdismo' and the overarching importance of local politics. He also reverses the arrow of causation by showing the arguably determinative effect that the Religioneros themselves had on the course of Porfirio Díaz's successful drive to unseat Lerdo.

Stauffer analyses the rebellion not as a unitary event but a coalition of local revolts erupting at roughly across central-western Mexico. After an informative introduction and an overview of the rebellion, Stauffer delves into the convulsive transformation of the official Catholic church in Michoacán under the French intervention and the restored republic, a period when a Rome-based group of Mexican prelates carved out a new diocese seated in Zamora, Michoacán, hometown of the influential Empire enthusiast Pelagio Labastida, soon named Archbishop of Mexico. The Europeanising, Rome-educated clergy of the new Zamora diocese spread the newfangled doctrine of Ultramontanism in their parishes—a key theme of the religious struggles that Stauffer relates.

The heart of the book covers three regional revolts, which collectively constituted the Michoacán portion of the rebellion. In each, Stauffer shows, the impetus for revolt came not from generalised, nationalised opposition to 'lerdismo' but from regional grievances, some based on questions of land, others on questions of religion—though not always the questions raised by Liberal anticlericalism. In the Jiquilpan district of northwestern Michoacán, rancheros and urban 'Afro-mestizo' artisans joined Purépecha villagers to rebel against assaults on their cherished religious traditions by both Liberal civil authorities and, tellingly, the Ultramontane clergy foisted upon them by new diocesan leaders. The civil and clerical urban elites, though divided on questions of church and state, agreed on the need to reform what they saw as the outdated, primitive public religiosity of 'baroque Catholicism'. Stauffer convincingly traces the armed revolt to such outrages as the repression of public processions by the same Catholic officials who, without a hint of irony, portrayed Religioneros as champions of the clergy against godless Liberals.

In the largely Purépecha pueblos of the Bajío zone of northern Michoacán, Stauffer writes, 'baroque devotions served as lightning rods for spiritual resistance against Ultramontanism as well as armed resistance against the liberal authorities' attacks on public worship and corporate religious properties' in villages around Puruándiro (pp. 159-160). By contrast, Purépecha villagers of nearby Coeneo were able to 'ward off Ultramontane challenges to their festive cultures' with the help of the flexible diocesan leadership in Morelia, so that 'rebellion proved unnecessary' (p. 159).

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Lastly, in the Nahua villagers and ‘mestizo’ rancheros of the southern coastal sierra Coalcomán district joined in revolt against recently imposed district authorities for evidently mixed reasons. The Nahuas were reacting, again, to the combination of Liberal authorities’ attacks on community property and Ultramontane attacks on traditional religion by priests. The rancho Guzmán clan, for their part, took advantage of the Religioneros to advance a more mundane political claim to continued cacique domination of the Sierra.

My quibbles with the book are the lack of legible maps and the near-absence of explanations for several basic terms. The text assumes a basic knowledge of nineteenth-century Mexican history, a potential stumbling block for general readers, and leaves unexamined the use of terms such as ‘mestizo’ and ‘Afro-mestizo’, which were likely not used in the 1870s, given the avoidance of such labels in post-independence documents—raising questions of how the labels were assigned and what contemporary social realities they reflected. The undefined catchphrase ‘Mexico’s central-western Catholic heartland’ implies that this region is somehow more ‘Catholic’ than the rest of Mexico—an odd assertion, though one in line with certain interpretations (which I do not share) of the Cristero War in the same zone fifty years later. Finally, the book scarcely touches on the relationship (if any) between the Religioneros and the later Cristeros, noting this only as a topic for future research. Indeed!

Stauffer’s book is an insightful contribution to our growing knowledge of local processes in the development of nineteenth-century Mexico. He deals admirably with issues of gender, class, local identity, national politics, and the many divisions within ‘the Church’. His deep historical descriptions provide fascinating case studies of what he aptly calls the ‘second acculturation’ of broad indigenous regions under the paired modernising assaults of political Liberals and their equally modernising clerical opponents. They also yield ample details for exploring not only the political questions raised directly by the rebellion but broader questions of identity and religiosity, including the fundamental question, as old as Christianity itself: who owns the Church, the people or the clergy?

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