

**Jaime M. Pensado, *Love and Despair: How Catholic Activism Shaped Politics and the Counterculture in Modern Mexico***

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In recent decades, scholars have sought to move beyond East–West interpretative frameworks to study the political and social realities of Latin American societies during the Cold War. They have re-evaluated the region’s postwar history by focusing on the agency of Latin American actors and the emergence of transnational networks of activism that connected Latin Americans across national boundaries. This historiographical shift has resulted in historical interpretations that underscore the impact of the global Cold War while examining local and regional developments. Jaime Pensado’s *Love and Despair* provides an innovative and insightful interpretation in this regard, for it underscores the activism of Mexican Catholics as they interacted with key local, regional and global changes. It sheds light on the various ways conservative and progressive Catholics – including student activists, intellectuals, filmmakers, journalists and priests – experienced and participated in the era of modernity brought about by the Cold War. Pensado argues that Mexican Catholics adopted the language of ‘love’ to advance social justice and a more inclusive society but, in the context of authoritarianism and repression, expressed a sense of ‘despair’. They simultaneously embraced a conservative and liberal discourse even as they became radicalised by the progressive turn within global Catholicism and the age of revolutionary upheaval during the 1960s.

Pensado divides his book thematically and chronologically. The first part focuses on the activism of Mexican youth and their encounter with modernity. It examines, for example, the transnational story of Emma Ziegler, the leader of the Mexican Female Catholic Youth (JCFM) and representative of the International Catholic Office for Cinema (OCIC). During the 1950s and 1960s, Ziegler put forward a conservative and moralising language while articulating a ‘new liberal discourse’ that called for engagement with modernity through a greater understanding of Mexican youth in Mexican cinema. Pensado also traces the rise of a new ‘university consciousness’ among student activists such as Luis Sereño. Leader of the Movement of Professional Students (MEP), Sereño embodied the rise of Mexican Catholic youth as a vanguard of change. He and other student activists crafted an ideological and political ‘middle ground’ or ‘third way’ by criticising US imperialism, the excesses of capitalism and corruption within the Catholic Church while warning about the societal dangers of communism. In doing so, Mexican Catholic youth forged a Latin American identity, which was informed by the progressive turn within Catholicism.

In the second part of his book, Pensado delves into the ascent of progressive Catholicism amid the changing political context of Mexico during the 1960s. He documents the evolution of Mexican Catholicism by analysing divisions – between conservatives and progressives – within the Carlos Septién García School of Journalism and the shifting political and religious discourse in publications such as *Señal*. For conservative Catholics, including the members of the National Action Party (PAN), the Cold War stood ‘as a fight between the aspiring love for liberty and the frustrating consequences of oppression and despair’ (p. 106). This multifaceted stance was also evident in the aftermath of the Tlatelolco (1968) and Corpus Christi (1971) massacres, which caused the gradual radicalisation of Mexican Catholics and the coalescence of new forms of radical Catholicism and the New Left in Mexico. Pensado reminds us that Mexican Catholics were a diverse group. He concludes this part of the book by examining the political trajectories of the young journalist José Luis Sierra, of the French Dominican friar Alex Morelli and of the Claretian priest Javier Hernández, all of whom spoke to varying degrees of the ‘efficacy of love’ and importance of human rights to advance the notion of a non-violent path toward a socialist revolution. Their radicalisation, Pensado contends, should be understood as gradual and oftentimes unpredictable.

The final part of Pensado’s study tackles the interaction of Mexican Catholics with modernity through their participation in ‘*La Onda*’, the name given to the counterculture movement in Mexico. This section chronicles the formation of numerous cultural spaces of engagement whereby Catholics interacted with various aspects of *La Onda*. Considering *La Onda* as a ‘genuine form of liberation’ (pp. 165–6), Catholic intellectuals at the National Autonomous University (UNAM) viewed love reciprocally, that is, as capable of producing harmony, goodwill and solidarity. Pensado reconstructs the activist path of Vicente Leñero, a Catholic novelist, journalist and film critic who called for dialogue with the counterculture, in the process concluding that the liberationist message of the sexual revolution was needed for the creation of a democratic nation. By emphasising the ideological transformation of Leñero from a conservative during the 1950s to his support for the sexual revolution and progressive Catholicism during the 1960s and 1970s, the author provides a welcome interpretation of the manifold trajectories of ‘progressivism’ and the radicalisation of Catholic activists. The book’s last chapter investigates the significance of three films – *De todos modos Juan te llamas* (1975), *La guerra santa* (1977) and *A paso de cojo* (1978) – about the Cristero rebellion of the late 1920s. Although often dismissed by film critics, these cinematic interpretations project an understudied critique of authoritarianism and state repression. They signal a shift from the language of love and optimism that prevailed during the 1960s to a sense of despair that crept up on Mexican society during the 1970s.


In writing about Mexican society’s relationship with various aspects of modernity, Pensado provides a valuable contribution for understanding how local, regional and global developments shaped politics and culture during the Cold War. Like the historian José Andrés-Gallego and other scholars, he highlights the heterogenous nature of Catholicism. In this light, Mexican Catholics emerge as a diverse and multifaceted sector of society. *Love and Despair* also reveals the complexity of political and cultural change during the Cold War. It underscores the extent to which

Catholic activists experienced political transformations and radicalisations but not in predictable ways, so that their conversion from conservatism to radicalism did not occur in linear ways. Finally, scholars will find in *Love and Despair* an indispensable study of the Cold War in Latin America, for Pensado treats Catholicism (and religion, more generally) seriously, not simply as a reactionary or declining force. Despite the advance of secularism and the political radicalism that surfaced during the age of revolutionary upheaval of the 1960s, Catholicism remained intrinsically tied to Mexico's national life and thus inevitably shaped how Mexicans related with modernity.

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## **Claudia Brosseder, *Inka Bird Idiom: Amazonian Feathers in the Andes***

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Thanks to both the extant material record and efforts of scholars alike, the Inka are now synonymous with stone and camelid fibre, two substances that were deeply embedded in their understandings of the world and their place within it. Claudia Brosseder's remarkable new book asks us to add a third: the tail feathers of the scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*). Yet if the first pair of materials seem at home in the high Andes where the centre of Inka power resided, macaws, denizens of the lowland forests that lay thousands of metres below to the east, seem out of place. One of Brosseder's aims is to address this discrepancy directly by using what she terms 'Inka bird idiom' – the dense networks of knowledge and associations that wove around birds like macaws and their feathers in the Andes during the fifteenth to mid-seventeenth century (periodised in the book as the Long Late Horizon) – to connect the Inka of the Andean *altiplano* to the human and non-human inhabitants of Amazonia, populations that scholars most often treat in isolation.

This desire to call attention to the material and intellectual networks that linked these regions in the period is but one of many such acts of connection that animate this study. In fact, it takes as its subject the ways in which the Inka themselves conceptually connected what to modern Western eyes appear to be a dizzying array of seemingly unrelated things: the plumage of the *camantira* (Paradise Tanager, *Tangara chilensis*), the unification of sun and rain, the creation of lowland plants and animals, and successful warfare, for example. Brosseder likens these Inka