As late as 1984 a standard textbook on modern Latin American political and economic history contained only a few scattered references to the role of the Catholic Church there. However, it did note in its final chapter looking to the future: "This institution bears close watching." And referring to what had already happened in Brazil, Chile, and Central America toward creating "a new consciousness and mobilization," it concluded: "Here we are dealing with an unknown. It will depend on how the new religious awareness is transferred into political terms."¹

In fact, the first few studies by North American political scientists, dealing with the political role of the Church in individual countries, had already appeared then, and others have rapidly followed. As the result of an interdisciplinary conference of these Latin Americanists, we have in the book under review four comparative studies together with seven country studies, all dealing with the interaction of political power and religion. These social scientists in almost every essay show themselves well informed on the theological issues involved in their research, and the book has a great deal of interest to theologians and pastoral workers as well. Moreover, since many of the theological and pastoral questions which are dealt with in the book are likewise vital questions in the Philippine Church — the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEB), the

nature and ambivalence of popular religion, new concepts of authority in the Church, the "popular church," the relation between popular political action and future pressures for the democratization of the Church — the book has more than ordinary interest to us. It is not so much that exact parallels for the Philippine situation will be found here, much less models. It is precisely one of the features of the book to give attention to the peculiar historical, sociological, and cultural background in each country studied, so that even the comparative chapters are careful to limit the scope of their generalizations, and to underline the differences that a particular institution will have from one country to another.

The CEB are a case in point. Not only are there major differences in their nature and vitality, for example, between Brazil and Colombia, but within Colombia itself the CEB range from those which maintain a strong political orientation to those which are simply older Catholic lay organizations given a new name. A difference in historical experience, differing political and economic situations, divergent concepts of the nature of the Church, different types of hierarchical leaders — all affect the nature and effectiveness of the CEB in different places. The same phenomenon is, of course, known in the Philippines among the different dioceses. In the concluding essay Levine summarizes the evidence from the different national studies in the book as being "scattered and contradictory." He continues: "They are distinguished by the way they fit into the understandings of church and society that guide the ecclesiastical hierarchy and, further, by the way social pressures magnify group initiatives and dispositions" (p. 247).

UNITY IN APPROACH

There is nonetheless a unity among the authors in spite of, or rather, at the base of, their diverse findings. The individual local churches studied are Bolivia, Brazil (two articles), Chile, Colombia, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. All the authors, as the editor points out, share in their rejection of certain assumptions common to the study of religion and politics, assumptions based on the ideologies of nineteenth century liberalism and Marxism. They reject:

1. The assumption that "change and 'modernization' have some direct relation to an increase in secularization and a decline in the salience of religion";
2. The assumption that "religious ideas, organizations and strategies are epiphenomenal, the product of socioeconomic or political interests, which are presumably more rational and 'real'";

3. The assumption which "holds that the popular [including popular religiosity] is either spontaneous, natural, and somehow 'unspoiled' (and hence authentic) or is simply the result of ignorance and superstition" (pp. 16-18).

Rejecting these assumptions, some of them common, from different points of view, to zealous guardians of orthodoxy and their secular adversaries, the authors emphasize the variety of elements which enter into religious belief and activity. Implicit in their orientation is the assertion, made explicit more than once, that popular and institutional religion are linked in a variety of ways, however selective the links of the popular with the institutional may at times be.

POPULAR RELIGION

From a theological point of view, perhaps the most valuable article is the study of the concept of "popular religion" by Thomas Kselman, a historian whose principal previous work has dealt with the sociopolitical aspects of popular religion, particularly Marian apparitions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His careful analysis, with its emphasis on the need to be aware of the varied presuppositions or purposes of those using the term, shows that any simple class-based analysis fails to take into consideration the ambivalence of the concept. He finds it equally unproven to say that popular religion supports the sociopolitical status quo as to say that it necessarily challenges it. Only an empirical analysis of all the elements which go into a particular form of popular religion and the perspective from which it is viewed can answer that question.

Partly as an effect of the application to the Philippines of positions derived from Latin American liberation theologians, partly as a result of the attention received by Reynaldo Ileto's interpretation of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 in terms of popular reli-

gious perceptions stemming from the *Pasyon*, and partly in response to the popular religious elements clearly manifested in the Revolution of February 1986, popular religion has received a good deal of attention in our country in recent years, though only a limited amount of serious analysis. For this reason, it may be useful to examine Kselman’s analysis in some detail and give some indications of its applicability to Filipino religion.

Kselman observes that there has been a tension between popular and official religion from the earliest days of Christianity, when preaching on the power of the saints and their shrines and relics countered the belief in pagan local deities. The mass evangelization of the barbarians in the early Middle Ages resulted in widespread syncretistic practices, which became the object of the humanist and Protestant critique of the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation, particularly the cult of the saints.

The Council of Trent affirmed the cult of the saints, while calling for the elimination of superstition, and strenuous efforts were made by the Counter-Reformation to uproot many centuries-old popular practices, which the Catholic reformers saw as an attempt to coerce supernatural intervention by means of formulas of prayer or ritual acts. Nonetheless, efforts were also made by some of the hierarchy to channel popular devotions into ways compatible with theological orthodoxy. In the face of the Enlightenment denial of the supernatural altogether, this sympathy with the affirmation of the supernatural contained in popular religion became more pronounced, particularly with regard to the Marian apparitions. However, there was care to maintain the distinction between practices which implied some kind of coercion of the


4. There has been considerable literature on the role of the Catholic Reform in suppressing “pagan” elements in popular religion in Europe. In the presentation of some historians it is concluded that rural Europe was for the most part not fully Christianized until the seventeenth century. See especially Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire* (London: Burns and Oates, 1977), originally published in French in 1971. Others, like John Bossy, though agreeing that the Catholic Reform brought about a new form of Catholicism, sees its influence negatively, in that it suppressed precisely those forms of religion connected with kinship and hence with deepest roots in the people. See his article, “The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe,” *Past and Present*, no. 47 (May 1970) 51-70. In his more recent book, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), Bossy further develops this thesis. In his introduction he rejects the idea that “there was something you can call ‘popular culture’ and distinguish radically from something called ‘elite culture,’ . . .” (p. viii).
supernatural and prayer of petition, and at the same time there was an insistence on the importance of personal commitment and sacramental life.

It was in this accommodationist line that the Latin American bishops at Puebla praised positive values of popular religion, while noting the dangers of superstition, ritualism, magic. On the other hand, some priests, at least partly under the influence of liberation theology, are critical of the emphasis on individual salvation, which they believe to be characteristic of popular religion, as detrimental to the Christian obligation to concern himself with the building up of the Kingdom of God. In this they echo, from a religious point of view, the argument of liberal anticlerical intellectuals of the last two centuries against the alleged anti-progressive effect of traditional religion.

Kselman grants considerable validity to this critique of popular religion which aims at raising religious and political consciousness among the laity. But he calls attention to the fact that it is a theological judgment and raises a caution against historians and social scientists allowing theological criteria to inform their language and analysis. He indicates that some of the research of his colleagues which sees popular religion as fatalistic (and thus less likely to support change), or other-worldly (and thus encouraging passivity), is capable of contrary interpretations, using the same empirical data. In other words, even apart from ideological manipulation from the right or the left, what may be theologically undesirable may at the same time have a positive result from a political or social perspective. The converse can also be true. Thus the opposition to Vatican II liturgical reforms and a defense of traditional piety is combined with a critique of social activism in much of Latin America by the so-called Societies for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property. Kselman comments:

In a sense, this position shares some ground with the attitude of the anticlericals, for in both cases popular religion is understood to be apolitical and to encourage resignation in the face of poverty and oppression. But unlike the anticlericals, these traditionalists view such attitudes as appropriate and regard any suggestion that religion can be used explicitly to encourage change as a heretical departure from the true faith (pp. 32-33).

In the face of the complexity of the question, Kselman emphasizes the distinctions to be made to avoid misunderstanding of what
a particular individual means as to the nature and consequences of popular religion. He points out that there are two distinct, though related, theoretical concerns found among those dealing with the problem of popular religion. The one is concerned with the intrinsic religious value of popular beliefs, thus a theological concern. The other is concerned with the impact of popular beliefs on structures of authority, whether inside the Church or in other social or political institutions, the concern of the social scientist. Within the theological concern, Kselman distinguishes three positions, which he terms "orthodoxy," "accommodation," and "anti-clericalism." The first, considering popular beliefs naive and misguided, tries to replace them by official Catholic beliefs and practices. The second, sees authentic religious elements in popular religion, despite the naive theology, as long as it is controlled by legitimate representatives of the institutional church. "Anticlericalism" rejects both the institutional and popular forms of religiosity as both implying a God whose intervention can be obtained through prayer and ritual, a concept of God which it does not accept.

Focusing directly now on the relationship between popular and institutional religion and the impact of the former on structures of authority, Kselman would distinguish between the traditional and the progressive response. The former would see popular religion as expressing and reinforcing a hierarchical and authoritarian view of the church. Progressives, on the other hand, looking on popular religion as a "cultural construction of the laity" would see it as circumventing the sacramental system controlled by the clergy, and thus undermining hierarchical power over the church. This, of course, is not unrelated to theological concerns, but the focus of interest is different. The institutional approach can also be extended to social and political institutions other than the Church and different emphases in popular religion might on the one hand lead people to support an authoritarian government, or move them to change or overthrow it on the other.

Citing the French sociologist of religion, François Isambert, Kselman also notes that for some scholars popular religion is seen as the religious beliefs and practices of the subordinate classes, workers and peasants, and contrasted with the religion of the elite. Others denominate as popular religion the spontaneous and personal response of people to the supernatural, which is found in all
classes of society though it may be stronger in some than in others.

One may think here of the widely-advertised pilgrimages from the Philippines to the site of the alleged apparitions of Our Lady in Medjugorje. One certainly cannot call this official or institutional religion, when more than once the local bishop has objected to the pilgrimages, and the Yugoslavian episcopal conference and the Holy See have taken a cautiously reserved attitude, denying the pilgrimages any official character and putting restrictions on priests involving themselves in them.\(^5\) Hence, by the second criterion these must be judged popular religion. On the other hand, such pilgrimages costing thousands of dollars can certainly not be judged expressions of the religion of the poor and uneducated, except in a very distant sense.

In the face of all these different approaches to and understandings of popular religion, Kselman is surely correct in concluding that it is "a problematic concept." He ventures that the source of the problems with the concept are to be found "in the several tasks it is called on to perform, for it is at once both an analytical tool used by social scientists and historians, and a theological term for clergymen who seek to understand and at times to change the religious beliefs of the laity" (p. 36). Hence, though there is general agreement that the social sciences have profited by a greater sensitivity to the meaning of ordinary people's religious beliefs and practices as a means of better understanding how religion operates to shape social and political values, Kselman concludes that "the ambivalence and variety of preconceptions uncovered in the concept of popular religion suggest that its utility is, if not exhausted, at least seriously in question" (ibid.). We may add that theology also has profited from the investigation of religious practice and belief by social scientists, but that theologians as well as social scientists have a need to be critically aware of the diverse values and judgments implied in the use of the term "popular religion."

This reviewer was led to reflect on the extent to which his own writings on Filipino religious practice and belief have failed to be

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5. *La Documentation Catholique* 81 (3 June 1984) 595-96, 1184-85; Archbishop Frane Frančić, "Directive on Medjugorje," *Hong Kong Sunday Examiner*, Nov. 13, 1987, p. 6. Archbishop Frančić's statement is the more significant in that it implicitly admits that other bishops do not share his interpretation that only "official" pilgrimages are included in the prohibition of pilgrimages by the Yugoslavian episcopal conference. Nonetheless he feels compelled to forbid priests to take part in the organization of pilgrimages.
sufficiently aware of his dual role as theologian and historian. Nonetheless, the two roles cannot and should not be altogether separated, for any but the most doctrinaire agnostic social scientist will hold values which he believes will better society, and will be concerned to promote them. What is necessary is to be aware of one’s presuppositions, and of the distinction between descriptive analysis and normative theological and pastoral concern. Kselman’s careful analysis of the ramifications of popular religion will certainly provide an awareness of the ambivalence of the concept.

FILIPINO RELIGION AND CONFLICT

As indicated at the beginning of this article, there is much in this entire book which will be thought-provoking for analysis of the role of religion, particularly Catholicism, in promoting sociopolitical change in Philippine society. Some points have already been at least alluded to in the course of the article. Since the book, as its title indicates, is about religion and political conflict, I should like to discuss briefly two major conflicts in Philippine history in which religion has played a significant role — the Revolution of 1896 and the Revolution of February 1986. Both offer material for reflections based on the comparative articles which have been summarized in some detail above.

One concerns the continuity between institutional and popular religion, however defined. As Levine puts it in his introduction:

Popular and institutional religion are not well understood if considered apart. Popular religion is not a spontaneous natural product. Rather, it draws on the stock of resources (material and symbolic) which religious institutions provide to build a coherent explanation of everyday life . . . (p. x).

In our respective books on the Revolution of 1896-98, Reynaldo Ileto and I have proposed explanations, both based on religion, for the mass participation of Filipinos in the Revolution. Ileto has argued that the Tagalog religious epic, the Pasyon, with its cosmic world-view extending through the whole history of salvation, provided “lowland Philippine society with a language for

articulating its own values, ideals, and even hopes of liberation . . ." 7 Though I am in agreement with the main thrust of Ileto’s thesis, I have argued that his application of it is both too wide and too narrow in its scope.Too narrow inasmuch as there were other religious sources of traditional provenance (e.g., vernacular works such as the novenas and devolucionarios) which fed into the worldview too exclusively attributed there to the Pasyon; too wide in that Pasyon did not reach as widely in its influence on the Filipino popular world-view as Ileto extends it — that is to the non-Tagalog regions, and to such dominantly secular-minded figures as Andres Bonifacio. I have maintained, rather, that the more significant factor in mobilizing mass support for the Revolution was the generally favorable attitude and large participation of the Filipino clergy, whose religious authority came from their position in the institutional church. 8

Levine’s caution might clarify the two differing emphases. Recognizing the relative autonomy by which the popular mind exercises selectivity in the perceptions and values it appropriates from originally official religious texts, one must also recognize that these perceptions and values remain rooted in the institution-sponsored text, and are not capable of being limitlessly reshaped, so as to give them just any content of meaning. If a religious text has different levels of meaning and therefore may be differently appropriated by different persons or groups, all these levels maintain some contact with the original text from whose symbols their perceptions draw their power for action. Hence to a greater or less extent the representatives of the institution will influence the explanation of life and history drawn from them. Concretely, though the Filipino popular religious perceptions did influence mass participation in the Revolution, often in independence of Revolutionary leaders as well as bishops, it was the Filipino clergy who were in the best position to harness that religious force. 9 This

7. Ileto, Pasyon, 16-16.
9. A good example of the complexity of relations between grass-roots religious movements with sociopolitical goals and the institutional church is the Guardia de Honor in northern Luzon at the time of the Revolution of 1896. Founded by Dominican friars, it escaped their control. At the same time it opposed the Revolutionary government as well as the American invaders, at least partly because of the former’s imprisonment of the Spanish friars, whom it began to rescue from government troops. The government
does not mean that they controlled it completely, any more than the Spanish friars did, and there were varying degrees of conformity between the two forces.

In his review of my book Ileto has raised the objection that "obviously the priest was himself a signifier producing meanings unintended by himself or the Church..." This is of course true. But from the historian's point of view, it is perhaps irrelevant what significations he had for people, which undoubtedly ranged from the magical to the theologically orthodox (or several variations of the latter). What is important for the historian is the empirical evidence that the majority of Filipinos were in fact influenced by their priest in their attitudes to the Revolution because of the signification they gave to him. Whether these often different significations were what the Church intended is primarily a theological question. But from the point of view of the historian trying to determine the influence of the clergy on the Revolution, it does not matter whether the source of that influence was based on orthodox theology or not. In fact, I believe that to a large extent it was, but even if not, the different significations not only overlapped but reinforced one another.

Differing religious mentalities and perceptions are, of course, also of interest to the historian as an object of particular study, but it does not seem possible to draw clear lines separating one type from another, in total isolation. In particular, it does not seem possible to identify forms of religiosity, including "popular" religiosity, with a particular socioeconomic class, except perhaps at either extreme of the class spectrum. Thus, many of the religious perceptions and values leading people to support the Revolution of 1896 identified by Ileto were not limited to the "pobres y ignorantes" he describes, but were to a greater or less extent influential through a wide spectrum of society, together with other religious perceptions and values. Only when these latter were brought together in a particular configuration did they lead to the

made use of the Filipino clergy to try to bring it under control, particularly Father Gregorio Aglipay, who had partial success. Though it apparently dissolved when the Americans captured and executed its leaders, it seems that the remnants were integrated into the newly-formed Iglesia Filipina Independiente of Aglipay, but re-emerged in the so-called Colorum revolts in precisely the same region in the 1920s. See my Revolutionary Clergy, 97-98, 113-14; and David Sturtevant, Popular Uprisings in the Philippines, 1840-1940 (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976) 96-114; 269-76.

formation of sect-like groups such as those of Mt. Banahaw, the Santa Iglesia of Felice Salvador or the Guardia de Honor. But there were others of the “pobres y ignorantes” who did not join these movements, however much they may have shared many religious perceptions and values, but in a configuration more closely attached to the institutional church. The major contribution that Ileto has made in making clear the religious factors operative in the Revolution of 1896 in contrast to the class determinism of the Marxist or pseudo-Marxist interpretations which had so negatively dominated much of Philippine historiography ought not to be reduced to another kind of class-based historiography any more than it should be used to make sharp divisions between popular and institutional religion. The continuities are more important than the discontinuities.

Turning to our other case, the Revolution of 1986, one may see a similar continuity, though in different form. Given the role of the Philippine hierarchy in delegitimizing the Marcos government through their post-election pastoral letter, based on the social teaching of the popes and the Second Vatican Council; given the fact that a very large proportion of the people present at EDSA was made up of a religious, and to some degree also socioeconomic, elite — educated Catholic lay persons, priests, religious sisters and brothers, seminarians — who provided much of the leadership for nonviolent resistance; given the role of Cardinal Sin in calling for participation; on the basis of all these one might conclude that the Revolution was mainly the work of the institutional church. But, based on the testimony of those who were there, as well as of the media accounts with significant photographs of the scene, it was what is usually thought of as popular religiosity which dominated the events — the endless rosaries recited, the people praying with outstretched arms, the images of Our Lady, the Santo Niño, and others, carried in procession, even in the face of the threatening tanks and guns, the “fiesta atmosphere” which coexisted with the deadly seriousness and commitment of those exposing their lives. In truth, one cannot make here such rigid distinctions as “popular” and “institutional,” much less categorize “popular religion” as the religiosity of only one socioeconomic class. More accurately, one should speak of Filipino religiosity.
THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

The point of view taken by the authors whose positions have been described here is that of social scientists and historians, trying to measure the impact of certain types of Catholic religiosity on change in society. Though they are conversant with Catholic theology and religiosity, one of their conclusions was to warn of the ambiguities in hidden theological presuppositions among social scientists, positive or negative, with regard to popular religion. Though the presentation has been from a social science point of view, much of what has been said ought to be considered by theologians and pastoral workers as well. These in turn ought to be aware not only of the social science scholarship dealing with religion, but also of the likelihood that theological discussion may likewise contain certain unspoken presuppositions coming from the social sciences. A theology worth the name today cannot preclude from the social and behavioral sciences, but it has to be aware of the distinct point of view and methodology involved, as well as the distinct finality.

This being said, the doubt of Kselman, cited above, as to whether “popular religion” is any longer a useful category for purposes of discussion, at least unless there is more critical reflection on the values and judgments hidden in the term, is applicable to theological and pastoral use as well. In a recent article Brendan Lovett approaches the question from a theologian’s point of view, which could well serve as a counterpart to the discussion summarized here. He argues that in using the term “popular religiosity,”

people are confusing levels of articulation or reflection on faith with the fundamental reality of faith itself. I believe simply that there is no other kind of religiosity than people’s religiosity . . . religiosity of people, and I find the suggestion that the religion of a particular class of people could ever be judged superior to that of another class is an absurd suggestion . . . 11

Recognizing that there are institutionalized practices of religion, Lovett nonetheless insists that the norm for all critical evaluation of religion is whether its forms are alienated or alienating, whether it is authentic or not, something not determinable by theoretical

criteria, but by the biblical principle, "by their fruits you shall know them." Even institutionalized religion can be, and historically has been frequently, alienating and inauthentic.

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The above-discussed topics do not give a full picture of the questions raised in the book but focus on the generalizations which find direct application to the Philippine church (and others) as well as to those of Latin America. Nonetheless, even the chapters on individual countries with their own particular historical context raise many provocative issues with regard to the role of religion and political and social change, the interaction between the church and grass-roots organizations of political and economic character, and the likelihood that once the conflict with oppressive governments has been removed, the church-supported bodies (such as the CEB) which have been a force for democratization and freedom in the political order will become a force for democratization within the ecclesial institution. The problems arising from the concept of a "popular church" are already well-known in the Philippines and there is no need to discuss them here, since they are not precisely the same as those discussed in this book. Nonetheless, Levine's concluding caution about the potential sources of conflict in Latin America is worth quoting. It is not in the institutionality of the church as such, which he recognizes as essential to it, but in

the continued attractiveness for many church leaders of notions of Christendom, according to which the good society is founded upon, guided by, and suffused with Christian principles. These principles are defined exclusively by official church leaders, who work not from a sociological analysis but rather from a stock of authoritative doctrine (p. 249).

The "Christendom mentality" which permeated the social encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI was given its doctrinal death-blow in the encyclicals of John XXIII and Paul VI and the teaching of Vatican II. Nonetheless, it is clear that it is not yet dead in fact in sectors of the Church, including the Philippine church, and has surely been a major factor in provoking the exaggerated reactions of the "popular church." A sound doctrinal foundation for a different approach in which social scientific studies on the role of religion in society can interact with and inform theological and
pastoral activity has been laid by Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens*. Until now, however, despite a considerable amount of social science scholarship on the Philippines, both here and from abroad, relatively little has been done on the religious character of Philippine society of the type contained in the book under review. Even less of it has been made use of for the theological and pastoral problems facing the local church, with a few noteworthy exceptions. It is badly needed.

12. Especially nos. 4, 42, 47.