

leader in Chiapas, Subcommandante Marcos, assumes the mantle of the 1810 revolutionaries José María Morelos and Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.

Krauze's Mexico is not one nation but a mosaic of societies, in which social and economic misery persists despite modernization, and which erupt periodically in fire and blood. The revolutions of Mexico are fraught with tragedy yet eventually come to signify nothing beyond the rise to power of a new strong man, or *caudillo*. The *caudillos*, or "men on horseback," dominate entire eras, from that of Santa Anna and Porfirio Díaz in the 19th century to that of the technocrats of today. Before 1940, Mexico's strong men shot their way to power; they have since employed the modern methods of electoral fraud and patronage.

Mexico has long had constitutions, parties, councils, and congresses. Yet Krauze's application of the term *tlatoani* (Nahuatl for "emperor") to the modern presidents rings dismayingly true. The Mexican president does not preside over a federal republic; he rules a centralized empire. He controls the budget, appoints judges, and makes all important state and municipal decisions. Each *sexenio* (six-year term) takes its character not from the nation's political institutions but from the biases, quirks, even the psychopathologies, of the man in the high palace. And that man is elevated by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), not by the legislature or the people. The latter have no more say in the matter than the Roman Senate had in the choosing of its Caesars.

The value of this work, at least for American readers, lies in its incisive biographies of modern presidents since Miguel Alemán (1946–52). This history, both factual and gossipy, is little known north of the Río Bravo. Vividly alive even in translation, Krauze's narrative may contain more detail than many readers can digest, but there is no understanding modern Mexico without a feeling for its past.

Captured by none of the ideological abstractions that typically hijack academic historians, Krauze illuminates both the glories and the follies of his nation's past. Thus, he is believable when he states that since 1940 Mexico has been established "as a business and the business is power." When he discusses the prospects for reform within the PRI, there is something of Tacitus's gloomy warn-

ing of the danger of concentrating power in the hands of one leader, whether it be a Caligula or a Trajan. Or even a Marcus Aurelius. The author sums up by saying the "country needs democracy" and all that goes with it, such as honest police and incorruptible courts, without which the economic reform that justifies much of the modern authoritarianism will be "fragile and endangered." Amen.

—T. R. Fehrenbach

REDEEMING CULTURE:
American Religion in an Age of Science, 1925–1962.

By James Gilbert. University of Chicago Press. 390 pp. \$28.95

In the opening pages of this fascinating history, we see William Jennings Bryan ponying up \$5 to join the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Several months before the eminent attorney defended fundamentalism against the teaching of Darwinian theory in Tennessee's infamous Scopes Trial (1925), he was inspired by the spirit of populism to believe that science should belong to everyone. "The preservation of democracy," writes Gilbert, a historian at the University of Maryland, "demanded that [Bryan] oppose the establishment of any elite: corporations, banks, corrupt politicians, and now scientists, who would impose their esoteric reasons and secret purposes on the world."

The book's final pages evoke a different scene: the Seattle Exposition of 1962, where, during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Christian Witness pavilion, a boy in a space suit joined hands with a girl in Pilgrim costume—a gesture meant to symbolize the belief that America was founded on something greater than technology and progress. Gilbert explains that "it was simply unimaginable that the federal government or scientists themselves could present a great public scientific spectacle without including religion in a prominent position."

Between these end pieces, Gilbert assembles a wealth of documentation that adds up to an implicit argument. Beginning with an account of how 20th-century science upset "the historic American tradition that science and religion were compatible," he notes that "the theory of relativity, the uncertainty principle, quantum physics, the principle of complementarity . . . described counterintuitive ideas. They contradicted common sense." To the question of whether religion was capable of

mounting a response, he writes, "A particularly inventive religious genius, an American talent for defining new religions and revising old ones . . . has infused and saturated culture at all levels. In fact the period from World War II to the present has seen one of the longest sustained religious revivals in American history."

A closely related theme, again more implied than stated, is that the seemingly "distant reaches of American culture" are really quite close. For example, in 1951 Bell Telephone Laboratories invited Hollywood film director Frank Capra to produce four television films on scientific subjects. A devout Catholic as well as a graduate of the California Institute of Technology, Capra wanted to incorporate a religious perspective. The debate over whether he should do so occurred across a wide social spectrum, from professional physicists to network executives, university theologians to parish priests, journalists to ordinary viewers. By telling such tales in all their complexity, Gilbert suggests that American culture is created "not by isolated subcultures operating according to their own rules in self-styled obscurity, but by groups and individuals reacting to questions that discharge like sheet lightning across the sky."

—Ken Myers

FOR CAUSE AND COMRADES:

Why Men Fought in the Civil War.

By James M. McPherson. Oxford University Press. 256 pp. \$25

A perennial question about Civil War soldiers, one that especially haunts the post-Vietnam American psyche, is Why did they fight? Why did Northerners shed blood to preserve an abstraction, "the Union"? Why did Southerners fight to preserve an institution, slavery, that did not directly benefit most of them? With the publication of *Ordeal by Fire* (1982) and *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988), McPherson, a historian at Princeton University, established himself as America's most eminent and accessible chronicler of the Civil War. But he has not rested on his laurels. The present book, his fourth since *Battle Cry*, concentrates not on battlefield tactics and leaders but

on the experiences of men in the field. McPherson does not deny the existence of shirkers and skulkers. But his concern is with those who did fight, and continued to fight, whether enthusiastically or dutifully, until death, defeat, or victory.

Drawing on the vivid, poignant diaries of more than 1,000 soldiers, this account cuts against the conventional wisdom about the motives of Civil War soldiers. To be sure, those reasons were varied. Some soldiers felt a sense of masculine adventurousness, like the Wisconsin captain who craved to "lead [men] into danger to see what they are made of & if I would run," or the South Carolina planter's son who fancied himself "a knight in a beleaguered fortress" who must, "when the castle is to be stormed . . . put on my harness & wield my blade." Others harbored an unholy thirst for vengeance, such as the Louisiana cavalry sergeant who asserted in 1863 that the only thing keeping him going was "absolute hatred" of "the hyperborean vandals with whom we are waging a war for existence. . . . I expect to murder every Yankee I meet if I can do so with impunity."

But at bottom lie the factors named in McPherson's title. Time and again, he finds sentiments similar to those of a New York private who wrote in 1865 that the sacrifice of his friends had been worthwhile because they had fought "against cruelty and oppression" and had "proven to the world that the American people can and will govern themselves." On the southern side, McPherson finds idealistic affirmations of "liberty" and "the dear rights of freemen" against the "vassalage" and "degradation" being threatened by the North.

In short, McPherson concludes that there is no plausible way to reduce the motives of Civil War soldiers to low or self-interested goals. These men understood what was at stake, and a steely sense of honor made them persevere to the bitter end. The reader comes away with lasting admiration for the soldiers on both sides—and a lingering uneasiness about the mettle of our own cynical age.

—Wilfred M. McClay

