

Editorial Foreword

COMPARATIVE POLITICS. The term *comparative politics* once primarily meant the comparison of political forms, of constitutions and parties. By the time *CSSH* first appeared, it had come to mean much more, for every species of political behavior found a place in the hothouses constructed for the scientific study of political development. Along with the important essays about political development that have appeared in these pages, many more have used comparison to explore the place in politics of particular groups (most often minorities, peasants, or elites), institutions (bureaucratic, legal, and religious), and tactics (both electoral and violent). Comparisons of whole political systems, however, have become relatively rare. Mary Fulbrook in this issue shows how valuable such an effort can be, challenging current theories in the process of constructing an original comparison of the two Germanies, an inviting subject that has been largely avoided (but readers should note Pletsch's distinctive approach to the subject in *CSSH*, 21:3). Two contrasting political systems where there recently was one tempt determinists to search for signs of something quintessentially German, and the stability of these imposed systems raises awkward questions about the nature of political legitimacy. Fulbrook faces these issues but moves beyond them, beyond differences of form, theories of legitimacy, and the practices of domination to address instead the modes of acquiescence. If this is a somewhat pessimistic or at least diminished view of politics (compare Chazan and Azarya, 29:1, and Golde on West German voting patterns in 24:1), the weight it gives to the daily life of ordinary people is consonant with a great deal of the recent historiography; and this fundamentally historical analysis accommodates both the continuity and the newness of contemporary German political systems.

The comparison of American and British politics has a longer tradition, and it might be suggestive to consider which periods historians have most often chosen to compare. For the interwar period Keller (in 22:3) probed the similar policies of Coolidge and Baldwin and then of Hoover and MacDonald to reveal the effects of politics based on class in Britain and on political pluralism in America. In this issue Kenneth Hoover looks at the policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. He, too, finds competing concerns over identity and class; but his emphasis is on the ideologies of two very ideological regimes, each of which is split between libertarian and traditionalist values. Made to seem prescient by today's headlines, his analysis seems worlds away from the debate over Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America* (5:3). The ideological approach to foreign policy so important to conservatives is less compelling, Minion Morrison shows, for American blacks whose political activism, despite an awareness of cultural ties to Africa

(see Kuyk, 25:4), concentrates on local affairs. In all these studies the politics of ethnicity and religion remains an undercurrent, but it becomes the focus of the careful study by Roy Wallis, Steve Bruce, and David Taylor, who find in Ian Paisley's conservative Protestantism echoes of Iran and South Africa (see Akhavi, 25:2, and du Toit, 27:2) as well as the United States. Even so, the violence and invective such politics foster find in Ireland a *locus classicus* (but note Smooha, 22:2, and Hechter, 21:1).

THE LIMITED POWER OF THE CLERGY. The authority of priests, expressed in ritual, embodied in institutions, and preserved for historians in Church records, is bounded by forces far less visible. Among these is the expansive energy and uncertain communication of religious imagery (see Lincoln, 25:1), which creates conceptual space even while seeking to circumscribe it. Neither proselytizing confidence nor ruthless power prevented the Mayans from preserving something of their own (Clendinnen, 22:3), nor Africans and South Americans from using the promises of theology to express values the clergy had not meant to reinforce (Lanternari, 16:4; Taussig, 19:2; Van Young, 28:3). As Vicente Rafael's unusual study demonstrates, the complexity that creates unanticipated opportunities begins with the ambiguity that communication must contain. Cultural encounters make language a weapon (Sider, 29:1), and missionaries understood its importance (Schieffelin, but also Beidelman, Rigby, and Shapiro, all in 23:1). Although the Catholic clergy could bravely command the vocabulary, they could not contain its Tagalog meanings. Even the discipline of confession became instead an exchange. Nor was the institutional front much more secure. By comparing the decline of frontier missions in Mexico and New Granada, Jane Rausch shows how the intellectual climate, social conditions, and state policy shaped Church leaders and determined the fate of one of their heroic ventures. Rafael uses concepts of dialogue and Rausch the tools of institutional analysis to reveal the limits of clerical autonomy; James Hunter turns to classical sociological categories in treating the clergy as religious elites. In contemporary America (and, he suggests, in other advanced industrial societies) they do not so much confer authority as borrow it from the intellectual elites they resemble and from the intellectual concerns all of them share. We are brought back to many of the issues discussed in the previous section on comparative politics.