

- 39 Alex García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres: The "Little Stories" and the Semiotics of Culture*. Orbis, 1995. \$16.95.

In this book, Alex García-Rivera demonstrates the dynamic relationship that exists between "official" theology and popular religion. He provides a sometimes idiosyncratic, often brilliant, always accessible interpretation of the popular religious movement that developed around St. Martín de Porres. Martín, a mulatto, was born in 1575, and later became a Dominican friar in the Convento del Santo Rosario in Lima, Peru. He became legendary throughout Lima for his great skill in healing and for his charity among the poor of the city. He died in 1639 and was finally canonized in 1962 by Pope John XXIII.

Using the beatification testimonies given on behalf of Martín as the texts for the "little stories," García-Rivera pieces together a "*new world* 'Big Story.'" He shows how this new "Big Story" subverted and reconstructed the official theological anthropology undergirding the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. According to the official anthropology of the Roman Catholic Church, Amerindians, Africans, mestizos, mulattos and other members of the underclass were simply lower fixtures on a grand Hierarchy of Being. The "little stories" of St. Martín, however, reverse this hierarchy and render an "anthropology of creatureliness." Within this anthropology,

there exist true differences among human beings. This means that each human being is so unique that the Creator can call this creature by his or her own personal name.

This book accomplishes several important things. First, it makes semiotic theory accessible and interesting. Second, it demonstrates how fruitful cultural anthropology can be for the discovery and interpretation of local theologies. Finally, it demonstrates that, when motivated by genuine religious vision, there are deep resources residing within the oppressed human spirit for transforming theological reflection and religious practice. I highly recommend this book for homileticians and preachers who want to understand more clearly what they have long suspected—that sermons are embedded within popular religious traditions that may be more truly significant than are our "official" traditions for the hearing of the Gospel.

□ John S. McClure

- 40 Tex Sample, *Hard Living People and Mainstream Christians*. Abingdon, 1993. \$10.95.

Some liberation theologians advise preachers to preach to people who are not yet there on Sunday morning. With this colorful and exciting book, Tex Sample seeks to equip us for preaching and for all phases of ministry with a vast army of people rarely seen in our pews: the "hard living." As such, Sample's work not only helps us understand how what we do in the pulpit, sanctuary, and fellowship hall excludes people living on the margins of our society, but how also to reach out to them in ways that do not diminish their hard-won humanity.