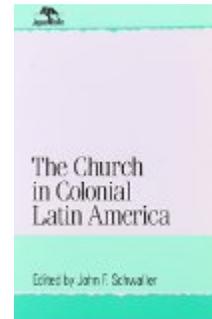


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John F. Schwaller, ed. *The Church in Colonial Latin America*. Jaguar Books on Latin America. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000. xxiii + 252 pp. \$60.00 (cloth) ISBN 0-8420-2703-3; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2704-5.

Reviewed by Brian Larkin (History Department, St. John's University)
Published on H-Catholic (June, 2002)



This book, designed for classroom use, would serve as a useful supplementary text in courses on religion in Latin America or colonial Latin America. John F. Schwaller, a specialist on the Church in early colonial Mexico, selected seven previously published articles and excerpted sections from two monographs for inclusion in this volume. These selections, which range in methodology from traditional institutional to post-structuralist cultural history, introduce students to three major themes within the study of the early colonial Church and religion—particularly, conflicts between the regular and secular clergies over the right to minister to the Indians, the growing influence of royal power over the Church, and the complex and contested process of converting the indigenous populations to Catholicism.

Schwaller's introduction deftly acquaints the reader with the important personages and institutions in early colonial ecclesiastical history and places the topics of the following nine chapters in their historical context. He divides these chapters into three sections entitled "Policy Issues," "Parochial Issues," and "Cultural Issues" and provides short chapter introductions that further situate each contribution within its historical and, frequently, historiographical contexts.

The first section of the volume contains three selections on the intellectual and institutional history of the Church in early colonial Latin America. The first chapter, an extended excerpt from a monograph by Luis N. Rivera,[1] analyzes theological-cum-political debates over the legality of the conquest and subsequent treatment of the Indian population. Rivera argues that, although many friars, most notably Bartolome de las Casas, questioned the legitimacy of the conquest on the basis of

Augustinian just war theory, they represented a minority view. Moreover, regardless of benevolent royal decrees protecting Indian subjects, practice did not follow theory. This excerpt, despite the editor's introduction, does not work well as an article because it lacks a clearly articulated unifying argument. It will more likely confuse than enlighten students.

Both the second and third chapters use the Ordenanza del Patronazgo to discuss the state of the regular and secular clergies and the conflictive relations between them in early colonial Mexico. The Ordenanza del Patronazgo, a royal decree issued by Philip II in 1574, reversed earlier royal policy and shifted crown support from the regular to the secular clergy, for it mandated the devolution of parishes administered by religious orders in the Spanish Americas to diocesan control. Robert C. Padden examines the politics behind the edict's promulgation and firmly establishes its origin in the absolutist aspirations of Philip II. Although the secular clergy had a reputation as educationally ill-prepared and morally lax, Philip issued the Ordenanza because the Spanish crown, through its right to appoint bishops in the New World, could better control it than the more independent religious orders. Philip, however, issued the decree only after the papacy had rejected his plan to establish an American patriarchate, an institution that would have served as a royal intermediary between the religious orders and Rome and thus would have bolstered royal authority over the Church. In the last chapter of this section, John F. Schwaller explores the implementation of the Ordenanza in the Archdiocese of Mexico. Because of opposition from the regular clergy and royal administrators, the main purpose of the Ordenanza remained unfulfilled. The religious orders retained their parishes. Schwaller

points out, however, that one of its secondary aims—the use of competitive examinations to fill vacant curacies—profoundly affected the secular clergy. Over time, competition for curacies prompted clerical candidates to increase their educational training significantly.

Three of the four articles that comprise the volume's second section explore interactions between the clergy and the indigenous populations and examine the processes of conversion and acculturation. Sarah Cline, employing early sixteenth-century Nahuatl (the language of many indigenous groups of central Mexico) censuses that recorded the baptismal status of inhabitants of six indigenous towns, contends that the Nahuas (speakers of Nahuatl) quickly received baptism. More important, she argues that the censuses suggest that the Franciscans and Dominicans who proselytized these towns attempted to convert the Indians at an individual level rather than concentrate their efforts on indigenous leaders in the hope that these native nobles, in turn, would persuade the commoners to undergo baptism. Moving from rites of initiation into Christianity to the cultural effects of evangelization, Serge Gruzinski in the next chapter, a complex and subtle article that will challenge most undergraduates, examines how the sacrament of penance, because of its emphasis on individual sin, conscience, and redemption, collided with a more collective sense of self common among the indigenous peoples of Mexico. Gruzinski demonstrates that Indians responded in different ways to confession, but argues that the sacrament by and large did not result in individuation even into the eighteenth century. This section's final chapter, an article by Kenneth Mills, examines the Extirpation of idolatry campaigns sponsored by the Archbishop of Lima, Pedro de Villagomez, in mid-seventeenth-century Peru. The campaigns were not simply intended to eliminate remnants of pre-Columbian religious practices, but also the many forms of indigenous-Christian religious mixture that had occurred in Indian villages over the century and a half since the conquest. Mills argues that the sometimes violent nature of the Extirpation campaigns worked against their purpose; in fact, they "bred a sort of natural resistance which allowed for myriad forms of religious intermixture" (p. 169). Mills, like Gruzinski, reveals in his detailed, subtle analysis that Indian populations, despite ready acceptance of rites like baptism, misunderstood, resisted, and adapted Spanish Catholicism in an evolving process that created multiple forms of indigenous Christianity.

This section's third chapter, an article by Karen Vieira Powers, is oddly placed. Because it traces disputes be-

tween the secular and regular clergy in the province of Latacunga (in modern Ecuador) over the right to minister to the mixed-race and migrant Indians populations rather than interactions between the clergy and parishioners, it is more closely related to chapters in the first section of the book than those of the second. Vieira Powers argues that racial mixing and Indian migration challenged the original division of labor among the clergy: regular clergy for indigenous peoples and secular clergy for Spanish populations. The jurisdictional arguments resulted in a division of labor based on space rather than race and, thus, undermined the racial, corporatist organization of the Spanish colonies.

The book's last section moves from indigenous Christianity to the religious practices of the Spanish and Hispanized populations. It contains two chapters on popular devotion to two images of the Virgin in Mexico. Linda A. Curcio-Nagy traces the changing nature and meanings of the cult of the Virgin of Remedies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Associated with the conquest in the early colonial period, the Virgin of Remedies, under the aegis of the Mexico City town council, became a general protector of the city's populace in the seventeenth century. She began to lose this status in the eighteenth century as the Spanish monarchy increasingly appropriated the image for royal celebrations. By the outbreak of the Mexican independence movement in 1810, Remedios had become so closely associated with the Spanish crown that royalists naturally adopted her as their protector and counterpart to the insurgents' advocate, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Devotion to Guadalupe is the subject of the book's last chapter, an excerpt from Stafford Poole's monograph on this advocacy of Mary.^[2] This excerpt works better than the first as an article, for its argument comes through clearly. Poole contends that devotion to Latin America's most famous image was primarily a criollo (American-born Spaniard) rather than an Indian affair in the colonial period. Miguel Sanchez, a criollo priest, presented (and may have invented) the apparition narrative (the Virgin's appearance to the Indian Juan Diego in 1531) to the Spanish population through a book he published in 1648. Sanchez and subsequent devotees used the account to promote criollo pride, for, so the story goes, the Virgin had especially blessed Mexico by granting it an image of heavenly origin. According to Poole, so "began the long process whereby Guadalupe was fused with Mexican identity" (p. 236).

John Schwaller collected excellent, if not all entirely audience-appropriate, works for inclusion in this volume.

But as a whole his selections reveal a limited focus. Only two of nine chapters broach the eighteenth century, and none focuses extensively on the period. Given the Spanish state's bold moves to subordinate the Church to royal authority and religious reformers' determined attempts to transform devotional practices in this period, the lack of an article addressing these eighteenth-century issues is a conspicuous omission.[3] Furthermore, five of the volume's nine chapters treat central Mexico. (Two chapters are not geographically specific, and the remaining two focus on Peru and Ecuador.) Although this emphasis in part results from the comparatively abundant historiography on this region, sufficient material on other areas of Latin America exists for a more geographically equitable collection of articles. Readers interested in the history of the Church and religion in Brazil, the Caribbean, or the frontiers of Spanish America will be disappointed. Likewise, readers particularly concerned with the religious history of women will find little of immediate in-

terest in this volume. Not even Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz or St. Rose of Lima, Latin America's two most famous religious women, receive mention. Because of its limited scope, instructors will need to supplement this text with other materials. Nonetheless, Schwaller has provided scholars with a useful selection of articles for the classroom.

Notes

[1]. *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

[2]. *Our Lay of Guadalupe* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995).

[3]. For a brief introduction to these issues, consult D. A. Brading, "Tridentine Catholicism and Enlightened Despotism in Bourbon Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15 (1983): 1-22.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-catholic>

Citation: Brian Larkin. Review of Schwaller, John F., ed., *The Church in Colonial Latin America*. H-Catholic, H-Net Reviews. June, 2002.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6407>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.