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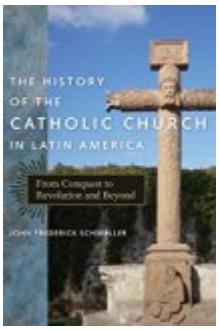
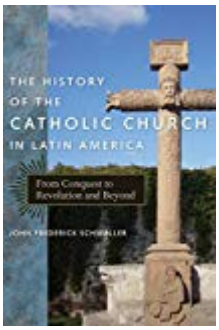


John Lynch. *New Worlds: A Religious History of Latin America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. 424 pp. $38.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-16680-4.



John Frederick Schwaller. *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America: From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond.* New York: New York University Press, 2011. ix + 319 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8147-4003-3.

Reviewed by Michael LaRosa

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Commissioned by Carolina Armenteros

Pope Francis's voyage to three nations in Latin America during the summer of 2015 reminded us of the centrality of the Roman Catholic religion in Latin America. This Latin American, Jesuit pope seems to understand what matters in Latin America, given his advocacy on behalf of normalizing diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, and his clearing the way, this past spring, for the beatification of Archbishop Óscar Romero, a peaceful martyr from the dark days of El Salvador's brutal civil war. Francis, refreshingly, seems far less concerned with the formal trappings of his post or the historical hierarchy of the institution: he has inserted himself in important worldly questions (gay people and the church) with a simple, clarifying Italian statement in 2013 (*se una persona é gay e cerca il Signore con buona volontá chi sono io per giudicarlo?*), and a powerful 2015 encyclical that addresses the reality of contemporary climate change, *Laudato si'*.

Unfortunately, the work of historian and former president (2006-13) of The State University of New York, Potsdam, John Frederick Schwaller, tacks in exactly the opposite direction. Schwaller focuses on hierarchy, the institution, the power and domination of the church, and the legal documents and policies that kept it afloat, and domi-

nant, in the Americas for three centuries or more. This book, published by New York University Press, is a cleanly written, appropriately organized, and relatively brief synthesis that will be of interest to specialists in the field of religion in Latin America. The author has established himself as an expert on the history of colonial Latin America, specifically the Roman Catholic Church and the colonial Mexican economy and the role of the Franciscans in the conquest of Mexico. Naturally, his sweeping history is strongest on the colonial questions, but the book stalls, and actually falls apart, when dealing with contemporary Catholic questions; Schwaller devotes, for example, five *paragraphs* to arguably the most important development in twentieth-century Latin American Catholicism, liberation theology, and his cool, almost cavalier treatment of the brilliant Peruvian theologian and philosopher who wrote the foundational text of the movement, Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, is both surprising and revealing. Gutiérrez is mentioned once in a hurried, dismissive sentence on p. 262.

The work is meritorious in many ways: First, it is nicely written—the author's prose is crisp, clear, linear, approachable, and thankfully jargon-free. Some sections of the book could be read by advanced undergraduate students. His approach is historical, and the narrative and structure of te book move in an appropriate fashion; the chapters are relatively short with nice, captivating introductions, and the footnotes (at the back of the book) are kept to a minimum. The book is designed to be read by experts and non-experts, but would have benefited from some minor investment in production: that is, a few maps some images and graphs would have helped brighten the text.

A careful review of the author's notes and bibliography reveals a significant time gap between the carried out research and date of publication. The text is not based on the most up to date research on religious history, or the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America; rather the author relies on work (mostly) published from the 1960s-80s; for example, his understanding of the Colombian "violencia" is shaped by one journal article published nearly fifty years ago. His limited focus on popular religion and the syncretic religious systems that emerged, almost immediately with the arrival of the Europeans, is a serious drawback. There is no mention in the book, for example, of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, a symbol of transformational power in that nation and beyond.

Schwaller does discuss Padre Cícero in Brazil (and references the classic work of Ralph Della Cava) but popular religion, miracles, and the daily use of religion by the people are mostly absent from Schwaller's excessively hierarchical treatment of Latin American Catholicism. Excellent recent work by historians Edward Wright–Rios and Andrew Chestnut, and the anthropologist Patricia Pessar, has studied popular elements in Latin American religion; a focus on "the popular" church has been ongoing for the past twenty years as scholars from a variety of disciplines consider Catholicism and religion in general with analysis drawn from cultural questions and concerns.

Another serious problem with this book involves Schwaller's almost total eschewal of Portuguese- or Spanish-language sources. The writings of Dom Helder Cámera from Brazil would have helped, together with the more scholarly work of Gustavo Gutiérrez from Peru or the Colombian Jesuit historians Fernán Gonález and Eduardo Cárdenas, or the Uruguayan historian Ana María Bidegaín.

The book would also have been richer had it included a brief bibliographic essay on "other" sources for understanding the Catholic Church in Latin America. This essay would have included nontraditional scholars and their work, such as Gabriel García Márquez's *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994) which beautifully captures—in a

short novel—the hierarchal nature of the Roman Catholic Church in colonial Colombia, the division among the clergy, and the lethargy of the European masters. The Cuban Alejo Carpentier's work ***The Harp and the Shadow*** (1979) offers many insights on the conquest of the Americas and the role of religion, and other authors such as Graham Greene present trenchant, important commentary on Catholicism in Latin America. Granted, the above-mentioned works are "fiction" and do not follow the methodology or rigor of the professional historian, but inclusion of these sources in an appendix, a short essay, or in the bibliography would have supported and expanded Schwaller's work.

The author reveals some of his biases: He refers to Native American worship sites as "pagan temples" and, while acknowledging the conquerors' quest for personal gain, he notes on p. 52, how "they [the conquerors] believed that they were participating in a divinely inspired adventure to bring all of the world's population to the Gospel of Christ." But the modern reader wonders how Prof. Schwaller actually knows this, given that he cites no documents, theory, or texts. He has clearly studied John Leddy Phelan's classic text concerning the millenarian disposition of the early Franciscans, but we can't know the motivation of all of the early ***conquistadores***. And, based on the early sermons and texts to which we do have access, i.e., the preaching and writings of Father Antonio de Montesinos in Santo Domingo, and Father Bartolomé de Las Casas in America and Europe, the evidence strongly suggests that the Gospel of Christ was not exactly the road map followed by the early Spanish conquerors.

Schwaller takes up popular religious uprisings in chapter 8 and makes the spurious claim that only the Brazilian government, the new republic established in 1889, was in opposition to the Northeastern community called Canudos and its leader, Antônio Conselheiro. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church was terrified of this individual, who was at once political leader, preacher, teacher, and counselor to the poor people of the region. The church hierarchy at Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere in the nation was displeased with the notion of having to compete with Conselheiro—a man who claimed to have spiritual powers. Conselherio directed a flock of perhaps 20,000 souls. He was charismatic and powerful, but had no training, no Catholic credentials, no institutional backing. This is one point in the book where the author's defensive position before the church gets in the way of historical fact, and common sense.

Chapter 11, the longest chapter in the book, is titled "The Decline of Liberation Theology" but Schwaller's hierarchical, institution-driven approach to liberation theology is discouraging, and his failure to mention Guttiérez's classic 1971 text ***Hacia una teología de la liberación: Perspectivas*** is irresponsible. But other important signs of the author's intellectual distance from liberation theology are found on p. 256 when he writes of the priestly involvement in the 1979 Nicaraguan Sandinista Revolution: "Two priests, Fernando Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto, became part of the public image of the movement." There were actually five priests in the early Sandinista government, and they occupied critically important posts: poet Ernesto Cardenál was one of the more well-known priests and served as minister of culture while Fernando Cardenal served as minister of education and Maryknoll missionary Father Miguel D'Escoto as foreign minister in the Sandinista government.

While the Sandinista Revolution (1979-90) rolled on, in nearby El Salvador, a civil war claimed the lives of some 70,000 people and displaced as many as a million Salvadorans in a nation the size of Massachusetts. The world took notice when a peace-seeking priest, Archbishop Óscar Romero, was murdered in March, 1980 while saying mass. Later that same year, four American churchwomen were brutally beaten, raped, and murdered for having the temerity to work with

the poor and underprivileged of that nation. Regarding this tragedy, Schwaller writes, wearily, on p. 254, "several female religious were also murdered by policemen and right-wing squads." These "female religious" were human beings with names: Sister Ita Ford, Sister Maura Clarke, Sister Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan died senselessly on December 2, 1980 in El Salvador. Their deaths helped galvanize people in the United States to finally take notice of what was occurring in Central America in general and El Salvador specifically.

Schwaller's book is ambitious, succinct, and well written; the author's institutional focus is clear and the book is a good source for understanding the interplay between the Catholic religion and history during five centuries in Latin America. Strangely, the author concludes by noting that "the Church is the earthly manifestation of God's divine purpose, the rest is interpretation" (p. 275). Nonbelievers and/or scholars who rely on texts and tangible earthly evidence will find this a curious way to conclude a scholarly text, but no book is without authorial biases. John Frederick Schwaller fearlessly and clearly champions the church's role, hierarchy, history, and "divine purpose" in Latin America.

A better book—dealing with religion in general in Latin America—is *New Worlds: A Religious History of Latin America* by the English historian John Lynch. This book was published in 2012 by Yale University Press. Lynch has had a long, illustrious, and focused career as a historian of Latin America, with emphasis on the southern cone, and Argentina. He has written widely on politics and religion, he has published solid, careful biographies of the *caudillo* Juan Manuel de Rosas and the liberator/statesman Simón Bolívar, and he published a long essay on the history of the Roman Catholic Church in the respected *The Cambridge History of Latin America. New Worlds* is distinct from Schwaller's text because it is a more critical work and the author steps back and rarely, if ever, reveals his biases.

That said, Professor Lynch does not seem impressed with the hierarchy, trappings, and institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America; he adopts a crisp analysis that is respectful of other religious and cultural practices in the region. For example, he notes on p. 7 that "native Americans already had a religious history and this was built on their indigenous cosmologies and rituals." Lynch's writing style is pleasing, and in places ironic and humorous: he recounts, for example, the demise of Dominican Father Vicente Valverde, the priest who convinced Pizarro to attack Atahualpa, but who ended his days at the "hands of cannibal Indians who killed him, cooked him in chili and ate him" (p. 19).

Of course, there is nothing funny about cannibalism, but Lynch writes with a grace and ease that is often lacking in the hurried, half-baked prose found in contemporary blogs, in some journalism, and in much academic writing. For Lynch, the written word is important and it is clear that he spent considerable time crafting this text of more than four hundred pages. He makes it seem quite effortless, and scholars, the general public, and graduate students grappling with effective historic communication should read excellent, clear, and compelling academic writing as represented in this particular book.

Like Schwaller's text, this book is a synthesis: it is not based on archival research, but unlike Schwaller's work, Lynch's book is widely sourced, from work published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Lynch lacks deference to the church hierarchy or the defensive tone found in Schwaller. For example, in chapter 2, the author takes on the difficult question of church ownership of slaves, with a special emphasis on the role played by the Jesuits in this unfortunate trade. Lynch carefully guides the reader through the theological debate and divisions concerning slavery via a balanced, scholarly perspective and analysis. His conclusion to this section is truthful, and he offers no concrete answer to the myster-

ies/inconsistencies of slavery: "The record of the church on slavery is riddled with inconsistency, evasion, and prevarication, a legacy lightened only by the efforts of a few campaigners" (p. 63).

Regarding the European Enlightenment, Lynch wastes no time in historicizing this important movement. He begins this chapter with eight simple words: "The Enlightenment was not a friend of Christianity" (p. 64). He writes in detail of the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Americas during the latter half of the eighteenth century and focuses on the socioeconomic ramifications of the forced displacement of the most "enlightened" order of the Roman Catholic Church. Lynch offers a very good discussion of the conflict in Misiones —the mission community in Paraguay controlled by the Jesuits: secular incursions, greed, ambition, money, and power weakened the church during this time (expelling the Jesuits had disastrous effects on education, finance, and commerce in the Americas) but by focusing on the Paraguayan conflict at mid-century, the author clearly exposes the near impossibility of applying European enlightenment principles to an America steeped in hierarchy, dogma, and blind obedience.

Professor Lynch dedicates three or four chapters to the nineteenth century and, wisely, he studies the independence of Latin America from an intellectual perspective rather than focusing on the military campaigns. Lynch has a deep, broad knowledge of nineteenth-century Latin America in general and reveals an extraordinary ability to synthesize. For example, he traces, for Colombia, a "long process of conflict between Church and state, religion and secularism, conservatism and liberalism" (p. 126) back to struggles between Santander and Bolívar during the first days of independence: Do we teach Bentham's treatises (Santander's position) or the Roman Catholic religion in universities, post independence? Bolívar's more conservative 1828 position won out.

Chapter 6 is devoted to "the religion of the people" and the development throughout the region of a unique syncretic blending of faiths. Church fathers tried to stamp out idolatrous behavior but it was impossible, so there developed a "fusion" that set forth and shaped Latin American culture. Professor Lynch carefully describes the history of "millenarian outbursts" in Brazil and offers an explanation for millenarianisms there that makes sense. Poor people, in the abandoned northeast of Brazil, at a time of extraordinary change (the end of slavery, the birth of a new republic) supported local leaders who offered clear explanations, and encouragement, in a strangely shifting world. This explains the strength and durability of Conselheiro's late nineteenth-century movement in the rural northeast of Brazil, the *sertão.* Church, state, and wealthy landowners were trying to hold on to power at a time of systemic change: the people turned, naturally, to millenarianism, which "was a shield protecting its adherents from an invading state and an unfriendly Church" (p. 182).

A nice transition chapter, linking the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is chapter 7, where Lynch provides an excellent explanation of the challenges of Protestantism and Positivism for Latin American church leaders. Naturally, most of his examples are drawn from Argentina but Lynch reflects, thoughtfully and carefully, on the church-state challenges in Colombia during this time period, the period from the late nineteenth century to the "liberal ascendance" in 1930. The author's analysis of this period in Colombia is shaped by the excellent work of contemporary Colombian Jesuit historian Fernán González.

The conflict between church and state, legendary and bloody in Mexico, has been studied by Jean A. Meyer, Matthew Butler, and others, but Lynch returns to the topic in a lively ten-page section of chapter 8. According to Lynch, the church, a powerful, rich institution during the colonial period, and subject of secular persecution during

the nineteenth century, became a target of the revolutionaries who struck out at all institutions of power, privilege, and hierarchy during the Revolution (1910-17). When Mr. Plutarco Elías Calles, "a ruthless operator from Sonora" (p. 246), ascended to the presidency in 1924, church-state conflict escalated, once again, to open warfare. This time, the "Cristero Rebellion" (1926-29) left 100,000 victims and represented a flood of religious fanaticism, coupled with surreal levels of anticlericalism in a modernizing, twentieth-century Mexico. The church survived, but Catholicism in Mexico was forever changed and church-state fighting, extending back to the late 1850s through the late 1920s, gives the Mexican church a unique personality, grounded in historic conflict.

Lynch's text gains strength as it moves and the author, a scholar of the colonial period, and nineteenth-century Latin America, effortlessly tackles the twentieth century in the final three chapters of *New Worlds.* He addresses three of the most important themes of twentieth-century Latin America: dictatorships, revolution, and liberation theology. On p. 286, Lynch concludes an insightful chapter on "The Church and the Dictators" with typical English understatement: "the second half of the twentieth century was not a heroic period for the Latin American Church" (p. 286). From 1964 to about 1990, cruel dictatorships ruled after toppling legitimate governments in Brazil (1964-85), Argentina (1976-83) and Chile (1973-90). The excesses were most profound in Argentina, where the church essentially stood down and Chile, where the church stood up. In Brazil, according to Lynch, the record was mixed; this is a safe conclusion given the size of the nation, and the relatively low number of extrajudicial killings there. Some discussion of the role of the Uruguayan church during that nation's military intervention would have helped as yet another point of comparison: there the military ruled from 1973 to 1985, violently and arbitrarily, yet research on the history of religion in that nation—a nation where 47 percent of the population is either atheist or agnostic—is limited.

In chapter 10, Lynch discusses, for the first time in the text, Cuba, but in the context of the 1959 revolution. This chapter would have benefited from a more robust discussion of the church's history on the island, because the revolution arrives suddenly, on p. 287, and additional exploration of the internal Cuban dynamic would help situate this chapter. The unique syncretic tradition that developed in Cuba, with a fusion of Catholicism and Santería, could have been more thoroughly addressed.

In addition to Cuba, Lynch studies revolutionary movements in three Central American nations, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala: these sections are really good, and the author shows how the successful revolutions (Cuba and Nicaragua) differed dramatically in scope and style: in one case, the church was all but outlawed; in the other case, part of the church supported the revolution, but the powerful Nicaraguan hierarchy (and, famously, Pope John Paul II) forcefully condemned the revolution.

When describing the revolutionary push in El Salvador, and the calculated, inhumane reaction of the military and landed elites in that land, Lynch wisely uses many words from martyred Archbishop Óscar Romero. These words are important, and Lynch takes the side of humanity in this section, revealing his hand as a humanistic historian, a man who hopes for more peace and security for the people of Latin America.

Chapter 11 studies the role of Jews in Latin America, Afro-American religions, and Protestantism/Pentecostalism in the region. Curiously, there is no mention, in this section, of Islam in Latin America. Islam appears in the book, but only in the context of the fifteenth-century reconquest of Spain. It seems to me that the author missed an important opportunity to include a section—or a chapter—on the contributions of Islam to Latin America. In Colombia, one of the more

traditional, hierarchical, and "Catholic" nations of the region, a new mosque opened a few years ago, not far from the very secular National University.

The final chapter deals with liberation theology and the author explains the complex philosophy of Gustavo Gutiérrez, and the criticism, within Latin America and from Rome, of his ***Teología de la liberación*** (1971). Lynch studies the important Second Vatican Council meeting at Rome (1962-65) and focuses on the closing document from that meeting, ***Gaudium et Spes***, one of four Apostolic Constitutions that emerged from the meeting, a refreshing document that declared the "Joy and Hope" of the church in the modern world—a radical departure from the previous century's "Syllabus of Errors."

This chapter would have benefited from socioeconomic data to help explain the urgency of Latin American liberation theology and some of the contradictions represented by Vatican II. For example, while the high church officials in Rome debated the language of the Catholic mass and produced optimistic, loving documents, the reality in Latin America was stark, by contrast: structural poverty, overcrowded cities, hunger, revolution, and despair were realities faced by millions throughout the region. All of these essentially moral dilemmas required solutions, but repressive governments, disaffected elites, and foreigners concerned only with stability and profit would not respond to the challenges. Only the church, an institution with *gravitas*, history, and power could respond, and the Medellín meeting of 1968—a Latin American church response to Latin America's deepening socioeconomic realities—represented a new focus on poverty, on structures of inequality, and on organizing the people to seek liberation in both the next world and this one.

Both of these books are important syntheses of the religious tradition in Latin America. One focuses on the Catholic Church and is useful for studying church hierarchy, tradition, and church wealth in colonial Latin America, specifically Mexico. The other book is more robust, more expansive, and more up to date; Lynch's text focuses on "religious history" of the Latin American region and his excellent work is a model of good historic writing, synthesis, and organization. It will find wide readership and future scholars will be challenged to produce a better book.

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