

Nahua and Maya Catholicisms: Texts and Religion in Colonial Central Mexico and Yucatan. By Mark Z. Christensen. The Academy of American Franciscan History. Stanford, CA: Stanford University. 2013, Pp. xiv + 318. \$65.

In recent years historians of religion in colonial Latin America have been studying the varieties of Catholicism to be found there. Hence it is becoming common to refer to the plural Catholicisms, rather than the singular. Scholars have also focused on the challenges faced by the missionary friars as they undertook the daunting task of translating European religious concepts into languages that had no equivalent. This also involved adapting unwritten languages to the Latin alphabet.

In New Spain this challenge included terms for God, hell, and sin. Often missionaries used native terms, giving them Christian meanings or explanations, such as *teotl dios* for God and *mictlan* for hell. In the process the meanings were often slanted toward a native understanding, leading both to confusion and to an unwitting syncretism. Scholars are increasingly realizing that the natives were not hapless, helpless victims but active participants in negotiating their religious and social status. In the case of New Spain, the late Charles Dibble called this process “the nahuatilization of Christianity.” As Christensen points out in this excellent study, an adaptation of his 2010 doctoral dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, “Far from a Spanish-dominated enterprise, the evangelization of Mesoamerica largely depended on preexisting cultural traits, rhetoric, and native assistants to convey its message” (263).

C. has taken this a step further. He seeks to explore this process by comparing religious texts in both the Nahuatl (Aztec) and Maya languages. He is uniquely qualified to do so because of his knowledge of both languages and his deep-seated understanding of the religious concepts underlying the process.

C. divides his work into three parts: creating Catholicism, prescribing Catholicism, and reflecting Catholicism. Part I “discusses the production of native-language religious texts in Central Mexico and Yucatan and their role in creating various versions of Catholicism” (10). This includes creating orthographies and vocabularies from spoken Nahuatl and Yucatec Maya. He explains the great difficulty that the early Franciscans encountered with the Maya languages and dialects. The friars’ attempts at accurate translations often ended in failure or confusion. Part II shows how these texts conveyed the basic tenets of the Catholic faith, citing examples such as baptism and confession. One chapter each is devoted to these two sacraments, which are important because of their connections with everyday religious practice among the newly converted natives. The sources for baptism in Yucatec Mayan are meager compared with those in Nahuatl.

C.’s discussion of confessional manuals shows the wide divergence in practice expounded in these manuals. There is also a briefer treatment on devotion to the saints that illustrates sharp differences between Nahuas and Mayas regarding the cult of the saints. “For the colonial Yucatec Maya, the cult of the saints remained largely a corporate enterprise dominated by *cofradías* [confraternities] with few saints entering into the home” (263).

Three kinds of texts contributed to the diversification of Catholicism among the Nahuas and Mayas: those written and published by ecclesiastics for a Spanish and native readership, those written by ecclesiastics for natives but not published, and those composed by natives for natives and not published. The last were subject to the least supervision and not surprisingly contained many deviations from orthodox doctrine. Especially interesting is C.'s explanation of the use of militaristic rhetoric in explaining Catholicisms.

C. illustrates the rich variety and creativity of the friars' approaches to evangelization. He also shows clearly the difference in approach of the Franciscans and Dominicans. "Franciscan Nahuatl texts on baptism in both central Mexico and Yucatan are brief and consistently lack the depth and detail seen in texts deriving from the Dominican and Augustinian orders" (147).

He is right to emphasize the Spanish government's and the Catholic Church's concern for uniformity and conformity. While it is true that this gave rise to the reaction and confiscations of 1577, it should be noted that they arose from the crown's fear of a renewed identity and the possibility of separatism rather than a commitment to orthodoxy.

M. has a profound knowledge of Catholic doctrine and practice. He is also a master of secondary sources, as his copious footnotes and bibliography attest. While technical terms are explained in the text, a glossary would have been useful.

This important book contains a vast amount of useful information. It is in many ways groundbreaking. As extremely detailed and technical, however, its appeal may be limited to specialists and graduate students. Others may find it difficult reading but useful as a reference work.

This is also an important resource for understanding the missionaries' methods in facing a challenging task, one that the church still faces in many parts of the world.

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The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race. By Rebecca Anne Goetz. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2012. \$55.

In this fine book, Goetz examines how religion influenced the development of racial identity in seventeenth-century Virginia. This is an important issue because, as she points out, most historians have overlooked Christianity's influence on emerging ideas of race. At the start of the seventeenth century, she argues, "English people did not think of themselves as 'white.'" But "Anglo-Virginians created whiteness during the 17th century and redefined Christianity as a religion of white people" (6).

When the English first settled Virginia many had high hopes for converting Native Americans to Christianity. Whiteness and Christianity were not yet mutually engrained. The English believed that because all races of people were of one creation, Christianity was a universal faith. For many Anglo-Virginians, however, this view shifted, especially