

The Americas: Central and South America

AFRO-CUBAN THEOLOGY: RELIGION, RACE, CULTURE, AND THEOLOGY. By Michelle A. Gonzalez. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. Pp. 208. \$29.95.

Gonzalez gives us a comprehensive and fresh interpretation of the interdisciplinary character of Christian theology in this wonderful and well-written monograph on Afro-Cuban theology. Undergirded by a strong feminist and theological outlook, Gonzalez reminds the reader that Latino/a theology is a task that requires particularity, and in her case, her object of study and theological reflection is the search for Cuban and Cuban-American identity. Critically using historical, literary, anthropological, religious, and popular Cuban and Cuban-American resources, Gonzalez navigates, with grace and fluidity, the complex network of encounters and interactions that construct Cuban and Cuban-American identity and rightly identifies the contribution of theological studies to this task. Gonzalez bluntly claims and argues for a racial African/Black core in Cuban and Cuban-American identity. She also locates her Afro-Cuban theological particularity in tension and dialogue with both Mexican-American and African-American theological endeavors. She reminds the reader that Latina/o theology is not monolithic. Gonzalez focuses on the religious interactions between Afro-Cuban popular religion and Roman Catholic popular devotion to raise important interdisciplinary questions and claim that race is a theological category for Cuban and Cuban-American identity. As Afro-Cuban religions continue to claim their own space as a religion, it remains a critical question *when* the theological conversation shifts from culture and religion to comparative religion and interreligious studies. The book reaches a broad audience. Scholars in the field of Latin American, Latino/a, and Caribbean studies will certainly benefit from it. Both graduate and undergraduate students can engage with it at different levels.

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THE ANCIENT SPIRITUALITY OF THE MODERN MAYA. By Thomas Hart. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008. Pp. xvi + 270; plates. \$39.95.

Hart states his intention in the preface “to show a cross section of contemporary Mayan Spirituality of highland Guatemala in the words of the Maya themselves.” The author orients readers to the state of modern Mayan spirituality with regard to both ancient Mayan traditions and colonial Christian influences. The majority of the text focuses on the “conversations” Hart collected from his approximately fifteen years of living among the Maya (1993-2008). Each of the book’s sixteen chapters focuses on a thematic collection of the narratives, songs, and expla-

nations shared with Hart; some of the themes include the calendar, divination, illness and curing, corn, ancient relics, Maximón and the saints, death, and Mayan spirituality in the modern world. As a survey of modern Mayan spirituality, this text enables students and scholars to access current Maya religious thought and practice readily.

Molly Bassett
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DIASPORA CONVERSIONS: BLACK CARIB RELIGION AND THE RECOVERY OF AFRICA. By Paul Christopher Johnson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 330, photographs and map. Cloth, \$60.00, paper, \$24.95.

Johnson has done a great service to scholars of African-based religions in the Americas with this landmark study of the little-known religious tradition of the Garifuna peoples of Honduras. In this wide-ranging study, he tells both about this tradition in its Honduran and New York manifestations while opening up the discussion of what it means to be an “African” and a “diasporic” tradition in today’s transcultural environment. By comparing ritual practices in the two primary locations of the Garifuna people commonly known as the Black Caribs, Johnson is able to explore issues of positionality and identity in ways that enlarge our view not only of these traditions but also of other more well-known and studied traditions. On the one hand, the Garifuna people have a unique historical trajectory from African slaver shipwrecks, through the Caribbean and South America to emigration to the New York City area; on the other, the religious practices of both immigrants and those who remained in the homeland have been affected, even challenged by interactions with the unique characteristics of North American society. While the first half of this book presented a detailed ethnographic study of Black Carib culture and religious traditions, the second moves into a more methodologically nuanced analysis of these findings to explore what it means to be “black,” “African,” and “Garifunan.” While of interest to scholars of African traditions in the Americas, this book would also be a fine addition to graduate courses on diasporic traditions of all types.

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LOCAL RELIGION IN COLONIAL MEXICO. Edited by Martin Austin Nesvig. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. Pp. xxvii + 289; illustrations, maps. \$24.95.

Local Religion in Colonial Mexico: The title reflects Nesvig’s inspiration—a trip to Chalma, the second most-visited pilgrimage site in Mexico—focused by the collection’s ideological springboard—W. B. Christian, Jr.’s pioneering work on local religion in sixteenth-century Spain—and theoretical framework—C. Geertz’s notion of local culture. Nesvig accu-

rately portrays the collection's depth and breadth in the introduction; in his words, the essays represent "dialogues between the formal and informal, the universal and local, the sanctioned and the sometimes only barely tolerated, forms of Catholicism that were woven throughout a very complex Mexican culture." A thoughtfully assembled compilation, the contributions include gems like A. R. García's "Icons of Devotion," which offers interesting insights into the appropriation of Catholic saints by Indians as well as Europeans and mestizos, and D. Tavárez's "Autonomy, Honor and the Ancestors," which traces clandestine practices, charges of idolatry, hybridity, and resistance in a mountainous Zapotec community in the province of Villa Alta, Oaxaca. The collection concludes with Christian's own reflections on "Catholicisms." Christian observes that while criollos adapted their Catholicism to the environs of Mexico, Indians adapted their religious beliefs, practices, and images to the structures—doctrinal and architectural—of Spanish Catholicism. For scholars and students interested in postcontact religions, this book opens windows onto the local manifestations of the Catholicisms and clandestine religions in colonial Mexico.

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THE GUADALUPAN CONTROVERSIES IN MEXICO.

By Stafford Poole, CM. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 318. \$70.00.

Behind the close association of Mexican national identity with the Virgin of Guadalupe lies a complicated and often contentious debate about the historicity of the apparition story. A serial contributor to the history of Guadalupe, Poole, in this volume, focuses on the various arguments that have been marshaled over the centuries to prove or disprove whether Guadalupe appeared to the Nahua man Juan Diego in 1531 at Tepeyac outside Mexico City. This book adds not only to the historiography of Guadalupan devotionism and its role in Mexican nationalism, it also provides a thrilling journalistic account of the battle royal among the highest echelons of the Mexican Catholic Church over the beatification and canonization of Juan Diego. Poole successfully shows how such weighty matters as papal infallibility and Mexican ethnic identity are intrinsic to these Guadalupan controversies. While Poole clearly sides with the antiapparitionist faction, his work is richly researched; the appendices to the book contain English translations of several important primary-source texts germane to the Guadalupe debates. Poole's work on Guadalupe, including this latest book, remain a required reading for scholars of Catholic devotionism, the role of religion in national identity formation, and Mexican history in general.

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BLACK BLOOD BROTHERS: CONFRATERNITIES AND SOCIAL MOBILITY FOR AFRO-MEXICANS. By Nicole Von Germeten. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. Pp. 304. \$59.95.

Afro-Mexican religious practice has, until now, barely appeared in the literature on the African Diaspora. Von Germeten's exhaustively researched study both accounts for that gap and begins to fill it in. Afro-Mexican culture has been little documented at least in part because the slave trade from Africa to Mexico ended in 1640, and by 1700 Mexicans of African descent retained few memories of, or ethnic identifications with, any specific African provenance. And in fact, few persons of color were even referred to or understood themselves as "negro." Instead, the frequently used words *mulatto* or *pardo* had taken over, indexing Afro-Mexicans' partial assimilation into the national culture and its own prestige systems, and the florescence of a class-based as well as race-based consciousness, with the two intersecting in the new social grammar of *calidad*. Von Germeten shows how membership in Catholic confraternities was a key site, indeed perhaps *the* site, of the Hispanicization of persons of African descent. Yet the book presents that broad transformation in all its rich microcomplexities. In the early seventeenth century, for example, confraternities provided the infrastructure and meanings that activated rebellions against Spanish authority. At least one African ethnic group, the Zape, maintained its identity precisely *through* its own confraternity. Von Germeten shows how confraternities interacted with race- and class-categories differently in varying towns, from the capital at Mexico City to very provincial mining or sugar outposts. Finally, she shows that confraternity-membership's meanings shifted over time: in the 17th century, they focused on insuring members' funeral costs and on processional pageantry. Africans were valued for the spectacle of their especially rigorous self-mortification and flagellation, and women often had founding roles in the associations. A century later, confraternity leadership had become exclusively male; membership now defined patronage relations, work, and class sodalities, and the Baroque exuberance of ritual suffering had been thoroughly constrained.

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The Americas: USA

THUMPIN' IT: THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS. By Jacques Berlinerblau. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. Pp. x + 190. \$16.95.

The last several years have witnessed a raft of books purporting to examine the use of religious rhetoric by American figures. Many are far from objective. In fact, they often appear to be written from a hostile perspective in a tone that suggests that Christian barbarians are somehow storming