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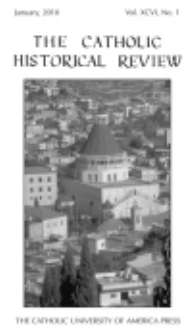
The History of the Conquest of New Spain (review)

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from the Latin American canon—parts of the Popol Vuh; the preface from Bartolomé de las Casas's *In Defense of the Indians*; a discourse of the liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez. But they also include wonderful surprises—the diary of Gunnar Vingren, the Swedish emissary of Pentecostalism; a Mormon chronicle from Mexico; and reports on Muslims, Catho-Buddhists, and “new age” Santo Daime devotees in Brazil. Peterson and Vásquez have presented the widest possible range of Latin American religious practices and revealed the region as, on the one hand, a hothouse of hybrids and innovation, and on the other, a region of traditions’ resilience. As to this latter, Catholicism is given the most space and is featured in multiple chapters—“Colonial Encounters” (chapter 3), “Independence and Modernity” (chapter 5), and “Postconciliar Roman Catholicism” (chapter 7). It provides the most continuous chronological thread with which the many other stories are interwoven. Yet even here, the editors show the enormous variety of Catholicisms: the cult of the saints of folk Catholicism; the mission Catholicism of different orders as they were variously inflected with indigenous practices they sought to transform; Catholic Action, CEBs, and the theology of liberation; Catholic Charismatic Renewal with its combination of Marian and spirit-foci (“virgophilic pneumocentrism,” p. 242); and the various shades of syncretic Catholicism as it is combined with African and Asian beliefs and rituals.

In sum, this volume is faithful to the historical record even as it pushes the reader to expand preconceived ideas of the contents of “the record” and to reread even familiar documents with new eyes. Peterson and Vásquez are not just experts on Latin America but also masters of cutting-edge theoretical issues in the study of religion. Thus this book is not just an ideal introductory text; it offers welcome challenges even for experts.

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The History of the Conquest of New Spain. By Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Edited by David Carrasco. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press. 2008. Pp. xxvii, 473. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-826-34287-4.)

David Carrasco’s revised edition of Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s classic text *The History of the Conquest of New Spain* is a welcome addition to the published primary sources on colonial history. This is an abridged version of Alfred P. Maudslay’s 1908 translation of the original manuscript, which Díaz wrote in Guatemala between c. 1550 and 1584, the year of his death.

Díaz was a capable writer who described highly dramatic events in clear and usually unemotional prose that sometimes rendered incredible events all the more incredible. Maudslay then translated the original into very readable English prose. Several features of this volume make it especially appealing for both student and faculty readers. First, Carrasco includes summaries

of the sections of the original manuscript that do not appear in the published version. Second, this edition contains several chapters beyond what was published in earlier abridged editions. This decision greatly mutes the blaring triumphalist note that closed those versions. The additional chapters provide a more accurate rendering of the longer text and allow readers a view of the chaos, killing, and infighting that accompanied Spanish efforts to consolidate and expand upon the conquest of Tenochtitlan. Finally, the book also includes a series of maps and interpretive essays that provide readers with a far greater understanding of the mind-set of Díaz and other Spaniards, as they conquered a complex group of people led by men skilled in diplomacy and the arts of warfare. In particular, brief essays by Rolena Adorno analyzing Díaz's use of rhetoric, Karen Powers on indigenous women and the beginnings of *mestizaje*, and Carrasco on the practice of human sacrifice contextualize a variety of issues raised by the text itself and the events narrated therein.

One issue, however, is left unaddressed: the question of whether Díaz actually was the eyewitness to conquest that he claimed to be. Several scholars, including Francis J. Brooks,¹ have argued that he was not. Even if he drew on other texts to aid his memory and the flow of words, the level of detail would seem to belie the claim of his nonparticipation. But the issue should have been covered because it has something to teach students about how to evaluate the use of sources by long-ago writers.

Another matter instructors need to consider is, given the availability of native-language texts in student-friendly editions (some, like Stuart Schwartz's *Victors and Vanquished* [Boston, 2000] offer both indigenous and Spanish-authored documents), whether this solely Spanish-authored text is the best choice. There is little doubt the book is a classic and has been rendered highly usable in an undergraduate classroom. The more accurate version of the overall text and the additional essays go a long way toward adding indigenous perspectives on a variety of issues relevant to Nahua culture and the events of conquest.

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¹Francis J. Brooks, "Moteczuma Xocoyotl, Hernán Cortés, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo: The Construction of an Arrest," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 75 (1995): 149–83.