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Amazons, Wives, Nuns & Witches: Women and the Catholic Church in Colonial Brazil: 1500–1822 by Carole A. Myscofski (review)

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The Americas, Volume 72, Number 2, April 2015, pp. 356–358 (Review)

Published by Cambridge University Press



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book's epilogue has Toledo mulling over his decision to run for reelection in 2011, but the story did not end well for the former president. After months in the lead, Toledo's candidacy collapsed and he ended up in fourth place, behind not only Ollanta Humala and Keiko Fujimori but also his own former minister of finance, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.

At this writing, Toledo is facing a formal congressional indictment for money laundering stemming from shoddy real estate acquisitions in the amount of \$5 million. Despite the indictment, or perhaps because of it, Toledo has announced his intention to run for reelection in 2016. If a criticism can be made of the book, it is that it pays little attention to Toledo's dealings with his congressional party and sheds little light on Toledo's inner core of advisors, other than his influential first lady. Overall, the book provides a serious and fair assessment of a presidency that raised many hopes but disappointed as much as it pleased.

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RELIGION/RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Amazons, Wives, Nuns & Witches: Women and the Catholic Church in Colonial Brazil: 1500–1822. By Carole A. Myscofski. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013. Pp. x, 308. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$55.00 cloth.
doi:[10.1017/tam.2015.24](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2015.24)

This book is written from the premise that the Roman Catholic Church was “the dominant cultural institution of the Portuguese empire” (p. 147) and that it was thus overwhelmingly determinative for women's lives. In the sources, created by men, women's voices are mostly lacking. Myscofski is not arguing that the images in these chapters are representative of the lives and responses of women, but rather of the ideals of the Catholic Church and the desire to control women through religion. Thus, the first two chapters discuss Jesuit views of indigenous women and ways to address their faults as envisioned by the Church, and Catholic ideals for Brazilian women as discussed by religious scholars of the period. Questions of obedience to father, husband, and God, as well as humility, a modest appearance, and religious devotion are emphasized.

The question of what education was desirable for Catholic women in the colonial period is addressed in the third chapter. Here Myscofski speaks of the pervasive long-term illiteracy of Brazilian women and its social assumptions, which permitted only reluctant admission that some knowledge of household management or even numbers might be necessary to women's position as wife. Marital relationships, including consensual unions and other sexual unions, are the topic of chapter 4. While Myscofski correctly observes that legal marriage was not common for the majority of women in colonial

Brazil, she does not explain why that was true, given (as she believes) that the Catholic Church dominated Brazilian life. She does discuss the demographic imbalance of men and women of different races and how it led to sexual relationships that appeared unsuited to formal marriages.

Chapter 5, “*Freiras and Recolhidas: The Reclusive Life for Brazilian Women*” is perhaps the most deeply researched chapter. Here Myscowski looks at efforts to establish convents and *recolhimentos* (retreats or retirement homes) and women’s experiences with these institutions. Efforts often failed because the Portuguese government was very resistant to the establishment of these institutions, citing the ongoing “shortage” of white women to marry Portuguese settlers in Brazil. Also, for its first two centuries Brazil lacked the finances and labor to construct the buildings required. Of course, these institutions made “whiteness” a necessary criteria for entrance, thus effectively keeping out the majority of Brazilian women and girls throughout the colonial period. Motives for women entering religious institutions varied from the desire to preserve status, honor, and family prestige while fathers or husbands traveled, or because families could provide a dowry for only one daughter, or for an education, or as a refuge or shelter. One interesting detail was that the chastity required of residents was not confined to prohibitions on sexual activity, but also included the adoption of modest dress and lifestyle, as well as the avoidance of friendships with other women. (p. 165). Myscowski concludes that the introduction of cloistered institutions “intended to marginalize excess women” resulting eventually in a changed discourse “that emphasized the importance of women’s education” (p. 182).

Chapter 6, on women and magic, provides an interesting comparison between magical practices revealed in the Inquisition’s visits to Bahia in 1591–92, those found in Pernambuco in 1593–95, and those identified in 1763–69 in Grão Pará. Myscowski argues that the practices of the earlier period are consistent with characteristics of European magical practices in which magic was generally practiced by women in a very local and personal manner and focused on lost objects or persons, love magic, and healing. She finds that the records for the eighteenth century show that magic then was no longer so much controlled by women. She also finds that magic had diverse sources, including indigenous languages, artifacts, and indigenous people, and some Africans as well. She concludes the Catholic Church in the eighteenth century was more centralized and had “demonized” magical practices, based on the Council of Trent. She finds that magical practices were widely accepted in everyday life throughout the colonial period and that the Catholic Church did not view this as alarming.

This book provides an overview of how the Catholic Church influenced the lives of colonial Brazilian women. Most of the scholarship reveals little that is not already known through other publications. Myscowski does not consider the implications, commonly recognized in other scholarship, of the fact that priests in colonial Brazil were very few, and colonial Brazilians often had to wait years to have a child baptized or a marriage performed. However, the insights related to women in convents and changes

in magic as an aspect of religious practice and everyday life will be interesting to scholars.

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Native Evangelism in Central America. By Hugo G. Nutini and Jean F. Nutini. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014. Pp. xiv, 197. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$55 cloth.
doi:[10.1017/tam.2015.25](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2015.25)

“The fundamental assumption of this book is that evangelism of all persuasions has a definite function in the face of the monolithism of Catholicism in Mexico. . . . More precisely, it provides something that is lacking in Roman Catholicism today or was practiced in the past but is no longer part of Church praxis . . . [The Church] has become ritually and ceremonially ossified, and has forgotten that its religious success often derived from the social, economic, and psychological support it afforded the faithful” (p. 162).

Taking off from this assumption, *Native Evangelism* is an ethnographic study of two native evangelical sects, Amistad y Vida A.C. (Cristianos) and La Luz del Mundo. They are ‘native’ evangelical religions because they reject not only Catholicism but also the doctrinal and organization aspects of groups derived from American Protestant evangelism, especially Pentecostal congregations, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Both sects are based in central Mexico, in the valley and sierra of Tlaxcala and Puebla, and in the Córdoba-Orizaba region of Veracruz.

The first chapter presents an analytical model and a vocabulary the authors use to analyze religious systems. The following two chapters consist of ethnographic descriptions of Amistad y Vida, and are followed by two others that do the same for La Luz del Mundo. A final chapter discusses the process of conversion from the viewpoint of the fundamental assumption of the study. Here the authors draw from not only the previous ethnographic chapters, but also the wider literature on Protestant conversion in Mexico and Latin America. They construct a diachronic schema of conversion showing the interaction of economic, social, religious, and psychological factors. A conclusion speculates about the future growth or decline of the two religions.

Methodologically, background material is furnished by Hugo Nutini’s investigations since 1958 in Central Mexico, and those conducted with Jean Nutini since 1969. For this study, the Nutinis and a research team working from 1996 to 2006 relied on participant observation, five structured questionnaires, open-ended interviews, and most important, several local persons with detailed knowledge of their communities. The ethnographic present of the study is 2006.