

weakness (p. 200). Had they followed the example of San Agustín sooner, might he, or Wahunsonacock, have sought a similar accommodation?

*A Brave and Cunning Prince* shares with Horn's other works an up-to-the-minute sense of the historiography, deep research, and storytelling verve. The debate about don Luís's identity will go on—but now with fresh vigor.

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*The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas.* By JENNIFER SCHEPER HUGHES. North American Religions. New York: New York University Press, 2021. Maps. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xviii, 245 pp. Cloth, \$35.00.

The question of how Spanish and Indigenous people grappled with the real and existential threat of widespread colonial epidemic diseases is the subject of a timely new book by Jennifer Scheper Hughes titled *The Church of the Dead: The Epidemic of 1576 and the Birth of Christianity in the Americas*. It focuses on the religious dimensions of the catastrophic deaths due to illness in the late sixteenth century, events labeled with the author's adopted term of *mortandad*. Hughes relies on colonial visual and textual sources to reveal the harrowing origins of Mexican Catholicism. It is a welcome addition to the field of understanding the epidemics, which has been based largely on sterile demographic accounts.

Arguing broadly, Hughes claims that in place of a millennial hope we should be evaluating the colonial church as forged in countless deaths, as best encapsulated in the phrase "ecclesia ex mortuis," the church of the dead (p. 23). The analysis is anchored in the emotional landscape of the people who comprised the church and how their reactions to the *mortandad* influenced the development of the institution. Thus, the author claims a three-pronged approach to the topic: cataclysmic, theological, and decolonial. The approach is cataclysmic in examining the full emotional register of any document related to the deaths, in contrast to minimization that would dismiss the tenor as exaggeration. It is theological by pursuing the Christian meaning available in the consulted sources. Finally, it is decolonial by highlighting the agency of Indigenous communities and the survivance of their cultures.

The book is divided into two parts, the first focused on lived and imagined corporality and the second on the altered geographies left in the wake of the cataclysmic epidemics. The first chapter explores how ailing Indigenous bodies necessitated medicalized sacraments in which missionaries would treat the body in addition to the soul. Indigenous corporality is centered in the second chapter, which explores the development of a new spiritual regime based on a wounded New World body of Christ. Moving from the body to the environs, chapter 3 stalks the path of Archbishop Pedro Moya de Contreras as he processes lands devoid of humans and filled with death. The final chapter presents the ways that survivors conceptualized and enacted their own vision of the

church and their abilities to map their landscape; thus the chapter scrutinizes the maps of the *Relaciones geográficas*.

In the same vein of her previous scholarship, Hughes focuses on how communities sustain syncretic practices independent of the directives of church officials. In the most original contribution, the author details the collective maintenance of sacred buildings and practices following the century of epidemics; by dubbing such communities the Catholic *altepetl*, Hughes revitalizes the Nahua social unit of organization during and as a method to cope with disastrous times (p. 136). The formulation of such religiously sovereign pueblos, she argues, was brought to fruition not by Spanish missionaries but instead by Indigenous Christians and their descendants.

The least developed but by no means uninteresting facet of the work relates to the effort to decolonize its approach. Hughes explains that part of this approach includes relying on related histories in the United States to open new avenues for interpretation (p. 26). Complex Indigenous practices from cultures distant geographically and temporally are found in brief explorations. These include references to food justice at the Pine Ridge Reservation, activists in New Mexico protesting the statues of the Spanish invasion, the Ghost Dance movement at Standing Rock, and related Hopi terminology (pp. 57, 97–99, 142, 172–73). I admire the effort to situate Tenochtitlan (rather than Plymouth Rock) as the origin point of North American Christianity. Yet such a momentous objective requires an appreciation of specific context (i.e., the differences in missionizing strategies in northern territories) in addition to broad cultural similarities and topical connections. The author does explore how some modern Indigenous Mexican people participate in their heritage, but these are found only in the introduction and conclusion.

*The Church of the Dead* is a unique history of Christianity in the Americas because it centers death as a founding principle but examines the surviving practices as exceptionally autonomous in Indigenous communities. Best suited for theologians and historians, it breathes affective life into our understanding of past pandemics, at a time when everyone struggles with the reality of COVID-19. This book recenters our understanding of Catholicism in Mexico as a coping and mourning practice, one that supported autonomous Indigenous communities that survived such cataclysmic death from epidemic diseases.

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*The Business of Conquest: Empire, Love, and Law in the Atlantic World.*

By NICOLE D. LEGNANI. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xv, 282 pp. Cloth, \$55.00.

Nicole Legnani's *The Business of Conquest* is an intriguing examination of the rhetorical constructions of law and empire in the Spanish Atlantic world. Legnani argues that conquest, although it had real consequences, was a type of fiction or artifice. She reads polemical texts by Felipe Guáman Poma de Ayala, Bartolomé de Las Casas, José de Acosta, and others, as well as chivalric novels and legal documents such as the *Requerimiento* and