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Amos Megged, Exporting the Catholic Reformation: Local Religion in Early-Colonial Mexico

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Exporting the Catholic Reformation: Local Religion in Early-Colonial Mexico. By Amos Megged. *Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions*, vol. 2. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1996. 191 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, epilogue, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$71.50 cloth.)

Amos Megged earned his doctorate at Cambridge University and is a lecturer in history at Haifa University in Israel. As the author states in the introduction of this study, his goal "is to offer a fresh cultural interpretation of the overall impact of the Catholic Reformation in Europe on the changing facets of religious life in the indigenous communities of southern Mexico during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (p. 1). Emerging from such an intellectual vision is the author's perception of how the indigenous peoples of colonial Mexico, especially in the present-day state of Chiapas, "adopted, transformed, or rebuffed the Catholic notions impressed upon them in the process of religious conversion" (inside front cover).

One of the most impressive aspects of Megged's work is the extensive research mirrored in his bibliography of manuscript sources as well as printed and secondary ones. The last two lists of references total more than 320 citations and broadly include most of the significant secondary publications related to the subject under study. Megged has also extracted an impressive amount of historical material from collections found in several repositories that he consulted, most of it never before—or at least rarely—cited by scholars.

In this work, Megged focuses on the interaction between the local indigenous populace and Catholic missionaries, showing how in different ways both the local population and the Catholic missionaries assigned to the

area during the post-Tridentine era attempted to adapt local characteristics of religious practices to the missionizing ambiance of the universal church. Such a struggle, as it so often was, is well described. For example, in Chapter Three, titled "Translating," Megged discusses a number of developments, perhaps most important being the language barriers that hindered the effective employment of Catholic catechisms among the Chiapans.

The author's extensive research on the growth of religious *cofradías* (confraternities) among the Chiapans and the role of these within the communal structures of the indigenous communities, as the church envisioned them, prove beneficial to understanding the depth of the admixing of local indigenous religious communities with the catechetical efforts in which priests of the church engaged. Numerous other manifestations of the history of Spanish Catholic evangelization in Chiapas are also developed thoroughly.

While Megged has provided a tome that will be quite useful to the scholar and layperson alike, his study is not without flaws. It suffers particularly in two ways. First, and quite noticeably, very careless editing allowed errors in writing style to flow uncorrected throughout the book. This was evident in the inconsistent uses of tenses, the presence of misspelled words, sometimes words simply missing from a sentence, and a pattern of word usage that oftentimes appeared more imaginative than correct. Such a combination made reading *Exporting the Catholic Reformation* a difficult task indeed. Second, at times Megged fails to avoid repeating aspects of the *leyenda negra* against the Spanish. Yet, Megged's work adds considerably to the historiography of Roman Catholic missionizing in Mexico, clearly showing that, in spite of indigenous resistance to conversion and the priests' concerns about this, there exists considerable evidence of adaptation on both sides.

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