RECENT TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF WOMEN AND RELIGION IN COLONIAL MEXICO

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Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752–1863. By Margaret Chowning. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. 296. $45.00 cloth.

Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities. By Stephanie L. Kirk. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007. Pp. 241. $59.95 cloth.

Diálogos espirituales: Manuscritos femeninos hispanoamericanos, siglos XVI–XIX. Edited by Asunción Lavrin and Rosalva Loreto L. Puebla, Mexico: Universidad de las Américas, 2006. Pp. 501. Mex$125.00 paper.

Dangerous Speech: A Social History of Blasphemy in Colonial Mexico. By Javier Villa-Flores. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006. Pp. 242. $24.95 paper.

After fifteen years of studying colonial Latin America, I paused at the turn of the millennium to appraise what, by the late 1990s, had become a booming subfield: female religious writing.[1] I was pleased to see that this not only had become a legitimate focus of historical and literary inquiry, but was being integrated into the graduate curriculum as well. Pioneering works by Asunción Lavrin and Josefina Muriel (1960s–1980s), together with groundbreaking literary studies by Electa Arenal, Amanda Powell, Stacey Schlau, and Jean Franco (late 1980s), had set the stage for a decade of vital activity as historians and literary critics defined this new subfield and its possibilities.[2] As the former worked with new archival materials to

1. Kathleen Ann Myers, "Crossing Boundaries: Defining the Field of Female Religious Writing in Colonial Latin America," *Colonial Latin America Review* 9 (2000): 151–162.

2. See, for example, Asunción Lavrin, "Female Religious," in *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Louisa S. Hoberman and Susan M. Socolow (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 165–196; Josefina Muriel, *Cultura femenina novohispana* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982); Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in their Own Works*, trans. Amanda Powell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989); and Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

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understand the social history of women, the latter examined texts written by them and male ecclesiastics to understand the circumstances in which religious women wrote. During this period of extensive research, studies about Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz proliferated with the three-hundred-year commemoration of her death in 1695. New interpretations of her life, writings, and cultural-historical milieu contributed to a deeper understanding of the broader, gendered-religious, colonial context. Thus, in 2000, I discussed general trends and identified challenges that the emerging field posed, suggesting that these challenges might be addressed in part by careful attention to the nature of the materials to be analyzed, both as historical documents produced in specific circumstances and as works that participated in well-established legal, cultural, and religious discursive practices.

Pausing now in 2008 to review a few of the more recent publications on colonial Spanish American women and religion, I see a subfield that has gone beyond the foundational work of defining texts, contexts, and terms, and of noting their significance. Since 2000, scholars working in this area generally have employed methodologies that thoroughly acknowledge the complex interplay of institutional and discursive practices, and the role of women and religion within them. With this common point of departure, historians and literary critics have examined a variety of topics, including convent history and writing, lay religious women's lives, inquisitorial testimonies by women, publications by clergy about religious practices, and hagiographic requirements.[3]

3. In 2004–05 alone there was an explosion of materials published, including Isabel Arena Frutos, *Dos arzobispos de México ante la reforma conventual femenina (1766–1775)* (León, Mexico: Universidad de León, 2004); Jennifer Eich, *The Other Mexican Muse: Sor María Ana Agueda de San Ignacio* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2004); Ellen Gunnarsdottir, *Mexican Karismata: The Baroque Vocation of Francisca de los Ángeles, 1674–1744* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Jacqueline Holler, *"Escogidas Plantas": Nuns and Beatas in Mexico City, 1531–1601* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Juan Ricardo Jiménez Gómez, ed., *Creencias y prácticas religiosas en Querétaro, siglos XVI–XIX* (Querétaro, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, 2004); Alicia Mayer and Ernesto de la Torre Villar, eds., *Religión, poder y autoridad en la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004); Frank Graziano, *The Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Rose of Lima* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Nancy E. Van Deusen, *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of a Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic, Ursula de Jesús* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); Nora Jaffary, *False Mystics: Deviant Orthodoxy in Colonial Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); and Rosalva Loreto, ed., *Una empresa divina: Las hijas de Santa Teresa de Jesús en América (1604–2004)* (Puebla, Mexico: Universidad de las Américas, 2004). For Sor Juana studies, see Frederick Luciani, *Literary Self-Fashioning in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2004); Rosa Perelmulter Pérez, *Los límites de la femeneidad en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Estrategias retóricas y recepción literaria* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2004); and Grady Wray, *The Devotional Exercises/Los ejercicios devotos of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Mexico's Pro-*

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The four books considered here reflect these trends and the range of scholars working in the field.[4] One of the field's founders, Asunción Lavrin, has, with noted Mexican religious historian Rosalba Loreto L., edited a volume of primary sources with accompanying studies—*Diálogos espirituales: Manuscritos femeninos hispanoamericanos, siglos XVI–XIX*—building on their earlier *Monjas y beatas: La escritura femenina en la espiritualidad barroca novohispana, siglos XVII y XVIII* (Puebla, Mexico: Universidad de las Americas, 2002). This volume will be an essential resource for both scholars and students. Part of a new generation of literary critics, Stephanie L. Kirk carries out close readings of a broad range of texts in *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities*, further developing research about the methods used by women to establish alliances within the convent and to combat patriarchal proscriptions. Two social historians add suggestive studies to our store of knowledge. In *Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752–1863*, Margaret Chowning branches out from her previous studies in the economic history of colonial Michoacán to write a narrative history about the characters and drama involved in a late-colonial convent conflict. In several chapters of *Dangerous Speech: A Social History of Blasphemy in Colonial Mexico*, Javier Villa-Flores adds to our understanding of women and religion by studying the influence of gender ideologies on the charges of blasphemy made against men and women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico. Through these four works, we see a field that continues to broaden its scope and expand its interdisciplinary approaches.

Lavrin and Loreto provide an invaluable resource: an anthology of mostly unknown texts written by or about colonial women in a religious context, with brief studies of each text by the scholar who recovered it from the archives. Deeply expanding the scope of their earlier anthology and study of New Spanish mystics, Lavrin and Loreto include a range of discursive genres, types of religious women, and geographical regions in Spanish America. Through a variety of sacred genres, we hear the voices of lay religious women, nuns, and beatas. An informative introduction, in which the editors discuss the relationship among autobiography, biography, letters, and more traditional literary works of poetry and theater, underscores the importance of the sociocultural dynamics involved in the production of religious texts and their rhetorical characteristics. This

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digious Nun: A Critical Study and Bilingual Annotated Edition (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2005).

4. Several other recently published books are worthy of review, including Antonio Rubial García, *Profestisas y solitarios: Espacios y mensajes de una religión dirigida por ermitaños y beatas laicos en las ciudades de Nueva España* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006); and Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole, eds., *Religion in New Spain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

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stands the reader in good stead to appreciate better the contributions and nuances of the primary materials included.

In keeping with this generic focus, the volume is organized into five categories, offering two to four examples in each. Lavrin and Loreto invite both experts and novices to present the materials that they found in archives. The effect is informative and refreshing. All of the essays ring with the knowledge of researchers who have spent years studying the texts that they present. Through these primary sources, we see the multidisciplinary approaches of historians and literary critics as they join forces to elucidate a body of relatively unknown texts that offers a broader basis for studying the issues of authenticity and authorship than that found in earlier source books.[5] For example, as specialists on New Spain, Lavrin studies a newly discovered autobiographical text by Sor María Marcela Soria, and Loreto presents the biography of a nun written by the influential Jesuit Miguel Godínez. Ellen Gunnarsdottir expands on her previous studies of Querétero nuns to include the work of the highly educated María Ignacia del Niño Jesús. Fine examples of new work presented by well-established authors working mostly in the viceroyalty of Peru include Nancy van Deusen's examination of autobiographical work by Sor Jerónima de San Francisco. A newer scholar to the field, Alicia Fraschina deftly analyzes the letters of a beata influenced by Jesuit spirituality in the Río de la Plata. Having published a book on religious women brought before the Inquisition, Nora E. Jaffary further expands our store of material by presenting a spiritual treatise dictated by a New Spanish beata when examined by the Inquisition. Other scholars break new ground by examining types of texts that we have rarely seen. For example, Concepción Zayas presents "Danza Moral," a piece written in verse by a New Spanish laywoman well connected with the clergy in Puebla (and with Bishop Fernández de Santa Cruz in particular). This erudite work takes on theological issues that landed its author before the Inquisition. Zayas's essay points to the type of materials that may yet be found in archives and to the ways that these materials may help to revise our understanding of the colonial spiritual scene and "dialogues."

The organization and presentation of the essays and texts work beautifully, with perhaps the exception of the last section, titled "Poesía y teatro." As the editors note, this section is thin because of the relatively few texts available and the dearth of analyses made of them. Thus, these texts are not accompanied by studies and appear in a separate section, apart from other works of "Literatura." Nonetheless, this lonely section is important: it serves as a call to interested students and scholars to initiate work on this material. In this respect, in an era when the study of women and re-

5. As I note in my previous study, "Crossing Boundaries" (158), groundbreaking anthologies such as those by Arenal and Schlau and Muriel often incorrectly represent the words of male biographers as the speech of the women about whom they write.

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ligion in the colonial period is a vital scholarly activity and increasingly brought into the classroom, *Diálogos* is an important resource.

Whereas Lavrin and Loreto present new documents, Kirk asks readers of *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico* to consider a new approach to studying convent life. Culling a broad range of New Spanish sources and drawing occasionally on discourse and gender theory, Kirk defines two communities reflected in two types of texts. One is the church and its "*de jure* didactic literature," a proscriptive literature for women. The other is the "*de facto* practice" of religious women as seen in texts from the convent and Inquisition that, Kirk argues, elucidate the alliances that women made among themselves (176). Focusing on language that set "boundaries" and its possibilities for "negation" and "resistance," Kirk promises to "scrutinize the discursive structures the Church utilized to contrive their fields of force and to contain and control convent communities" as well as women's responses to these in the form of "alliances, friendships, and communities within the convent" that engaged with and subverted male authorities' view of a religious community (14). In occasionally awkward prose, she argues that "these conflicting views of community expose a double discourse in which solidarity among women, in its varying forms, is pitted against the concept of indistinguishable docile bodies living in communal solitude" (16).

Four chapters in Kirk's book highlight the possibilities for understanding the relationship between these two communities. The first analyzes two tracts written by the now-infamous confessor of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the Jesuit Antonio Núñez de Miranda. Going beyond the norm of detailing convent rules, he took advantage of two distinct discursive genres to depict his vision for an ideal nun's life, writing both a sermon and a letter. The second chapter studies a case from the archives of the Mexican Inquisition about a nun accused of having an affair with a servant girl. Kirk deftly contextualizes the Inquisition's charge of *mala amistad* within period literature about female relationships. Another chapter takes a closer look at sources dealing with the eighteenth-century reform of Mexican convents, and at the responses of nuns to these attempts to return the cloister to stricter observance of religious vows. This chapter explicates several letters about the *vida común* issue studied by Lavrin and complements Chowning's in-depth examination of the results of these reforms, as discussed subsequently. The last chapter serves as a bookend to the first. Leaving aside Núñez de Miranda's textual constructions of an ideal female religious community, Kirk discusses two documents that reveal the female alliances forged by Sor Juana and her sisters. Her focus on "positive" alliances that women made among themselves in the face of conflict with male ecclesiastics offers a valuable approach to these texts.

For example, in the most extensive chapter, "Sor Juana, Serafina, and

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the Nuns of the Casa del Placer: Intellectual Alliance and Learned Community," Kirk uses two texts by or about the famous Mexican nun to elucidate the connections that religious women built. Examining on the one hand the controversial *Carta de Serafina de Cristo,* written in defense of Sor Juana in the wake of the crisis provoked by her *Respuesta a Sor Filotea,* and on the other hand the *Enigmas ofrecidos a la Casa del Placer,* written by Sor Juana and a community of mostly Portuguese nuns late in Sor Juana's life, Kirk argues that the Mexican nun did not write in solitude; that intellectual work in the convent could be a communal activity (129). Although this approach was originally set out by Arenal and Schlau more than fifteen years ago and is now commonly used, Kirk states that most recent scholarship on Sor Juana discusses her exceptional talent only to "overshadow other women's writings or the importance of intellectual community and acts of solidarity" (128). Despite this oversimplification of Sor Juana studies, Kirk's agenda is a valuable and logical step in the progression of critical studies on convent writing, and on Sor Juana in particular, since the early 1980s. We have moved from seeing women writers as working at the margins to seeing them as writing subjects who used the convent space as a catalyst for agency, creating networks with sisters, texts by other women, and at times supportive male clergy. Drawing on Margo Glantz's notion of a textual network, Stephanie Merrim's idea of early modern women's textual sorority and Alison Weber's "rhetoric of solidarity" in Teresa of Avila's texts,[6] Kirk contributes to this line of inquiry by focusing strictly on women's alliances.

Using Judith Butler's theory of "performed" gender (133) and Roland Barthes's concept of the "figuration" (as opposed to "representation") of the body in a text (151), Kirk thoroughly examines the contexts in which Sor Juana's *Carta* and *Enigmas* were produced and carefully delineates the critical debates about each of these relatively little-studied texts. These discussions are followed by four to five pages of close readings of each text. Of particular interest is her reading of each of Sor Juana's twenty riddles in verse about the enigmas of love. Kirk concludes convincingly that the *Carta* may have been written by a sister in Sor Juana's convent and that the *Enigmas,* as well as the Portuguese nuns who produced this work in their equivalent of a female literary academy, created a virtual utopia for female intellectual activity. This chapter elucidates a fascinating aspect of convent life, while the book as a whole contributes to our understanding of the complex relationships—male and female, as well as

6. Margo Glantz, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Hagiografía o autobiografía* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1995); Stephanie Merrim, *Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999); and Alison Weber, *Teresa of Ávila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

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female and female—of religious members and colonial religious institutions. By focusing on female alliances, *Convent Life* is an example of the multiple readings and nuanced information that religious sources offer.

In *Rebellious Nuns*, Chowning breaks new ground by writing a narrative history of the colonial Mexican convent of La Purísima Concepción, in what is now San Miguel de Allende. This study is based on a well-known set of documents about nearly every aspect of the convent—from its inhabitants to its financial situation—and a recently rediscovered "bundle" containing letters and other materials about the rebellion that took place there. Focusing on one convent's reaction to the eighteenth-century reforms that Kirk examines in her book (chapter 4), *Rebellious Nuns* attempts to find a middle ground in the scholarship on colonial convent life. Whereas Kirk characterizes many studies as depicting convents as "a monotonous and poisonous space populated by dissatisfied and bitter women, abject victims of misogynist control" (178), Chowning identifies two camps: those that see the convent as a place for conflict and those that see it as a space for women to develop create activities (12–13).

Focusing on the vicissitudes of the convent from its foundation in 1752 to its closure in 1863, Chowning recreates the drama caused when two distinct visions of religious life came into conflict in the mid-eighteenth century: one demanding strict adherence to religious vows in the convent as set down by the Council of Trent and the other espousing a more relaxed interpretation of them. Information about the ratio of reformed versus relaxed convents in mid-eighteenth-century Mexico helps the reader to understand why La Purísima was, from the beginning, fighting an uphill battle in trying to establish a reformed house. Three chapters (1, 4, and 5) provide general background material on convent founding and reforms, while the others (2, 3, and 6) examine two periods of intense conflict—even rebellion—as well as the closure of the convent. Chapters 2 and 3 are the core of the book and study how the tension between reform and relaxation of the rules of religious observance, which was present in nearly every convent after the Council of Trent, created years of turmoil within La Purísima and extended to the larger religious community of San Miguel. Following the lines of inquiry established by Lavrin, Kathryn Joy McKnight, and Kathleen Ross in their works on convent histories and their internal conflicts,[7] but casting her own work as a narrative drama, Chowning walks the fine line between historical documentation and nov-

7. Asunción Lavrin, "Ecclesiastical Reform of Nunneries in New Spain in the Eighteenth Century," *The Americas* 22 (1965): 182–203; Kathryn Joy McKnight, *The Mystic of Tunja: The Writings of Madre Castillo* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Kathleen Ann Ross, *The Baroque Narrative of Carlos de Siguenza y Góngora: A New World Paradise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

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elistic speculation about historical figures' emotions. The book provides a highly readable examination of the dynamics of a fundamental religious conflict.

The strength of *Rebellious Nuns* lies in the flow of its narrative and in its well-grounded historical details about La Purísima, including a number of tables about the convent's finances. Chowning explains complicated church practices and terms in a clear, articulate style. She carries the reader along: we witness a century unfold inside the cloister and learn about the challenges of founding a religious institution in late colonial Mexico, a period when the great era of convent building in central Mexico had already passed. Chowning adeptly analyzes the correspondence between nuns and clergy, and elucidates each character's point of view, carefully recreating the scene, the players, and their motivations. She sets out her methodology, saying, "I have tried not to let the context overwhelm the story, for with such rich material and such a strong narrative line, it seems to me that the interests of contributing to a richer understanding of large themes in Mexican or women's or church history are better served by allowing those themes to remain 'embedded in the narrative' than by continually calling attention to them" (16). These qualities make the book easily accessible to general readers, yet somewhat diminish its value for scholars in the field. In some sections, references to primary sources are infrequent—there are quotations without notation of the document or page from which they come—and the main narrative rarely cites scholarly or theoretical works. Thus, the author re-creates "the remarkable cast of characters" (12) and their daily life within the cloister, investing them with emotions, "the nuns agonized," (266), and reactions, "How cruel, then, that her life as a nun . . ." (23). Chowning has a good sense for ascribing motivation to her historical characters and making transparent the conflicting elements of convent life. The result is a highly readable microhistory that emplots controversy, schemes, and outcomes.

Although the biggest explosion of scholarly work on women and religion in colonial Spanish America has involved the wealth of documentation about convent life and nuns, many have returned to the Inquisition's archives for a fresh look. Javier Villa-Flores's *Dangerous Speech* examines these records for cases of blasphemy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mexico. He argues that blasphemy sheds new light on the interface among class, race, and gender in colonial society. Departing from traditional anthropological studies of taboo words, Villa-Flores does not focus on blasphemous formulas, but rather on the social conditions in which such words were produced and their effect. Following the work of sociolinguists, he notes how blasphemy was "not only a manifestation of deep belief and rebellion but also a powerful verbal device for multiple social purposes" (7). Blasphemers, whether men or women, Spanish or

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slave, understood societal norms of behavior and knew that their words would have a powerful effect on their audiences. In a clear, engaging style that occasionally draws on such theoreticians as Pierre Boudieu and J. L. Austin, Villa-Flores argues that for blasphemy to be successful, it needed to be staged. This performative aspect played a significant social role in the foundation of empire. Blasphemers attempted to establish "a particular identity in defiance of or compliance with the multiple social scripts of domination articulated in terms of class, race, and gender" (8).

Dangerous Speech opens with a concise but thorough discussion of critical scholarship on the New Spanish Inquisition and on the basic historical circumstances and assumptions—such as jurisdiction over blasphemy—on which subsequent pages build. This approach helps the reader to understand the social role of blasphemy and the various reasons that it was used. Villa-Flores argues that the charge of blasphemy in the first years of the colonization of New Spain was part of an imperial rhetoric that fashioned the conquest as a holy enterprise for God and for God's right to be honored in New Spain. Villa-Flores traces how this charge was first leveled at the indigenous population and later at Spaniards. He posits that transgressors were perceived as having endangered the colonial enterprise by morally contaminating it and by invoking God's wrath. Thus, it became important to police Spaniards' behavior.

Four chapter studies based on extensive archival research in Mexico, Spain, and the United States focus on the ways different social groups used blasphemy and on the varied responses of the Inquisition to these uses. Each chapter opens with a good overview of the social position of the subjects studied and then offers compelling case histories. Villa-Flores balances empirical narratives with insightful historical analysis. Whereas Spanish men generally used blasphemous words to display assertive, daring, masculine behavior in verbal jousting (chapter 2), the blasphemy of gamblers reflects a worldview in which providentialism influenced all aspects of life (chapter 3). Slave women and men instead used blasphemy as a means to resist brutal treatment and level charges against their masters (chapter 5). Blasphemy was the most common crime for which Afro-Mexicans were brought before the Inquisition. Unlike people of Spanish descent, who resorted to blasphemy to establish their identity or rights, slaves employed it as a strategy of resistance and survival: if this crime was denounced to the Inquisition and it was determined that the master had employed a too harsh physical punishment, there existed the possibility of reassigning the slave to a new master. The process was lengthy and costly. Although this strategy for changing masters often worked early in the colony, by the end of the seventeenth century, the Inquisition increasingly refused to play along. Of eighteen cases of Afro-Mexican slave women charged with blasphemy found in the archives, Villa-Flores

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notes that most deal with urban domestic slaves attempting to counter the power of their mistresses. Situating his work within previous scholarship on slave women and the Inquisition by such authors as McKnight and Solange Alberro,[8] he concludes that race and social position, rather than gender, dictated the use and outcome of blasphemy.

In contrast, white women used blasphemy to fight those who had defiled their honor or had tried to confine them against their wills. A story about the blasphemy of Pedro de Alvarado's wife, Beatriz de la Cueva—repeated by key chroniclers such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Francisco López de Gómara, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo—showcases how in colonial society women's blasphemy was deemed more serious than that of men. According to the story, when Alvarado died, Doña Beatriz blasphemed. She replaced her husband as governor of Guatemala, but, soon thereafter, the capital city was devastated by a mudslide, killing her along with one thousand residents. Casting it as a moral story, chroniclers saw this tragedy as punishment for America's first woman ruler's defiance of God. Although women of Spanish descent were rarely officially accused of the crime of blasphemy—between 1564 and 1689, Villa-Flores found twenty-one Inquisition proceedings dealing with women and blasphemy—when they were, it compromised their status as good Christians.

Typically, society's view of female blasphemy was linked with sexual misconduct. Yet in an often-strategic inversion of societal norms for feminine conduct, women used blasphemy in an attempt to uphold their honor when it was seriously called into question. The case of a mother and daughter from Cholula serves as an example. Gossip had spread suggesting that the daughter had lost her virginity. When other measures failed to stop this rumor, the mother used blasphemy to counter the accusations. As in most cases, she lost the battle, and was moved to Mexico City and finally imprisoned for blasphemy. Another catalyst for women's use of blasphemy was their involuntary confinement in *recogimientos*, institutions for laywomen that followed religious regimens. Whereas some women willingly sought refuge in recogimientos, others were placed there as a punishment; seclusion was considered a remedy for non-Christian female behavior, especially in the case of fallen women. In these settings, women resorted to blasphemy to call attention to the injustices of the system, hoping that, once noticed, they would be excused from their blasphemy because, as "the weaker sex," they had simply fallen victim to their "unruly tongues." Once again, however, their efforts generally failed. Unlike

8. Solange Alberro, *Inquisición y sociedad en Mexico, 1571–1700* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988); Kathryn Joy McKnight, "Blasphemy as Resistance. An African Slave Woman before the Mexico Inquisition," in *Women in the Inquisition. Spain and the New World,* ed. Mary E. Giles (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 229–253.

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men's use of blasphemy, women's use was viewed as gender subversion. Denouncers of female blasphemy sought to regulate women's verbal and sexual conduct. As scholars working on nuns' self-representation have noted, theories and treatises of the period clearly show the importance of verbal restraint in the colonial social order and in the common view of Christian decorum for women. Villa-Flores takes this scholarship into consideration in his exposition and analysis of Inquisition proceedings. The result is a deepening of our understanding of how these colonial gender ideologies impacted on both lay and religious women. Supported by compelling vignettes and insightful analyses, *Dangerous Speech* helps us to see how class, race, and gender influenced a single category of behavior chargeable before the Inquisition, and how the Inquisition's responses were also informed by race, gender, and class. This highly readable, informative social history about an influential religious institution provides a valuable tool for both students and scholars.

Although space has necessarily limited the number of works reviewed here, they are evidence of a subfield that has continued to boom by drawing on new sources and developing new methods of research. In 2005, Susan Migden Socolow examined recent scholarly activity in the broader area of colonial gender and history, and suggested that many works may not stand the test of time: "perhaps authors should take the advice given to me years ago by a good friend and consider whether what they are publishing today is something that has the context and depth to stand the test and [*sic*] time and be what they would want their name associated with ten years from now."[9] My readings and observations have led me to a far different conclusion, one more in keeping with Lisa Vollendorf's 2006 review of recent trends in gender studies of early modern Hispanic women: "the emerging corpus of gender-based scholarship on Spain and Spanish America demonstrates decisively that early modern and colonial Hispanic studies have come into their own: after years of looking to other fields for methodological and theoretical approaches to gender, Hispanists are forging innovative frameworks and raising important questions for all of us who study gender and history."[10] As with all scholarship, our research is a work in progress. As our work dialogues with previous research, methods, and concepts, it opens the way for further work and revisions. Lavrin and Loreto, Kirk, Chowning, and Villa-Flores all make significant contributions to this dynamic process that has been fundamental to our understanding of women, religion, and Spanish American society.

9. Susan Migden Socolow, "Colonial Gender History," *Latin American Research Review* 40 (2005): 265.

10. Lisa Vollendorf, "Recent Trends in Gender Studies: Early Modern Spain and Colonial Latin America," *Gender & History* 18 (2006): 416.

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In fact, two new trends underscore the success and impact of scholarship in the field. First, other disciplines have begun to draw on feminist research by anthropologists, historians, and literary critics on colonial Latin American women. A recent publication edited by two art historians states, for example: "many of these scholars, especially the historians, have begun to reconstruct the contributions of specific women to viceregal history and culture, yet no art historian—with the important exception of those concerned with convents of nuns throughout Latin America and some forms of portraiture—has published a text on the contribution of women to the development of viceregal art."[11] Second, these materials and approaches are increasingly making their way into reference works in a variety of fields and undergraduate classrooms. For some years now, a few colonial Latin American histories have included essays on the role of women in religion.[12] This practice has more recently been followed by top reference sources in other disciplines, such as Oxford University Press's *Literary Cultures of Latin America* and Indiana University Press's *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*.[13] Moreover, two forthcoming publications by the Modern Languages Association signal the demand for work in translation and broader approaches to the study, especially in the undergraduate classroom, of two canonical, early modern, Hispanic religious women authors, Teresa of Ávila and Sor Juana.[14] Clearly, activity in the field is no longer limited to specialists: it has widened to new disciplines, general audiences, and students, making it exciting to contemplate the future directions that this activity will take.

11. Kellen Kee McIntyre and Richard E. Phillips, eds., *Woman and Art in Early Modern Latin America* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 3.

12. For example, Asunción Lavrin, "Women in Spanish American Colonial Society," *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 2, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 321–349.

13. Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir, eds., *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*, vol. I (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Isabel Morant Deusa, ed., *Historia de las mujeres en España y América Latina* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005–06), vol. 1. Another example is the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, ed. Bonnie Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

14. Alison Weber, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, forthcoming); Emilie L. Bergmann and Stacey Schlau, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, forthcoming).

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