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Review Of "Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction" By E.B. Edmonds And M.A. Gonzalez

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***Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction.* By Ennis B. Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez. New York: New York University Press, 2010. x + 269 pp. \ \$70.00 cloth, \ \$22.00 paper.**

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It takes time to get the kinks out of a newly launched scholarly series, and despite its inaugural annoyances in content and format, *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment* has the potential to fill an important niche for students of the long eighteenth century. Future volumes will give a better idea of how well it actualizes that potential.

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Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction. By **Ennis B. Edmonds** and **Michelle A. Gonzalez**. New York: New York University Press, 2010. x + 269 pp. \$70.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.

The historiography of New World African religious traditions has vacillated between revisions of consensus narratives to newer paradigms that incorporate perspectives from disciplines like anthropology, theology, and cultural studies. The emergent religious landscapes of the modern Atlantic have generated ever more sophisticated frameworks for defining the nature of the encounters between nations, ethnic groups, and peoples in the geopolitical arena of the Caribbean Sea, which includes the regions of the Greater and Lesser Antilles, the Virgin Islands of the eastern Caribbean, and the bounded chain of islands over the coastline of South America. From comparative studies of plantation and slave societies to social analyses of the interactions between immigrant and indigenous populations, scholars now work with a richer and more synthetic vision of the themes that constitute the complex and diverse world of the Caribbean. As the historiography has evolved, so have the theoretical models that analyze the events and conditions that have given shape to Caribbean religions. Understanding the nature of those events and conditions is at the heart of any interpretation of religious history. It is, as the authors of this important text write in their conclusion, a history that has at its center an “unequal and often violent encounter between cultures and traditions” (221).

Caribbean Religious History draws upon the best of recent interdisciplinary scholarship, revisiting older sources and creating a highly readable account of religious pluralism, growth, and conflict that spans the pre-colonial period to the present day. Authors Ennis Edmonds and Michelle Gonzalez wisely understand religion to be a “fundamental dimension” of Caribbean life, encompassing non-institutionalized forms, and profoundly shaped by

dynamic political, economic, and social forces. Integrating the distinctive cultural character of European churches and their representative religious authorities with the organic spirituality of indigenous subjects and enslaved African immigrants, *Caribbean Religious History* offers a richer and more complete historical narrative of the fertile religious landscapes inhabited by those who lived and worked within the various New World environments. The breadth of the discussion is considerable, as Edmonds and Gonzalez work to uncover the shared features of Caribbean religious life while emphasizing the structural realities that brought about religious transformation and change, moving beyond static methodological formulations that focus solely on institutional or ecclesial systems to the elaboration of lived, embodied religious experiences.

The book is divided into seven thematic areas, with the first and last chapters framing academics' approaches to the Caribbean religious world. The study of Caribbean religion has been advanced with perspectives from both within and external to the discursive categories of its context, including the frameworks of identity and myth. The narrative begins with Amerindian encounters with Spanish colonial authorities and the emissaries of the Roman Catholic Church in the Americas, including Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Equal time is given to the explication of vernacular religious life and the "folk" traditions of colonial populations, as well as native Taino and Carib Indian beliefs and practices. General readers will appreciate the attention to the origins, theological background, and contexts from which immigrant spiritualities derived, took root, and affected indigenous societies and structures. Other chapters consider the impact of an aggressive evangelizing Christianity as part of the extension of European empire, against the backdrop of Amerindian and African resistance; the challenge to Roman Catholic hegemony by an insurgent Protestant missionary apparatus, particularly in the British Caribbean; and the entrenchment of slavery and the establishment of the African-based religions of Santeria, Palo, Vodou, and Espiritismo in the creolized communities of plantation societies. In their richly textured narrative, the authors interweave historical and ethnographic data by placing all actors on shared terrain, viewing their religions comparatively in order to cover plural cultures, styles, practices, and traditions. Chapters also focus on the African background of religious founders and leaders, the Africanization of New World fraternal institutions and organizations, and the dynamic and evolving nature of African-based theologies and outlooks. Consideration of the specific impact of Christianity's distinctive forms (Catholic, evangelical, pentecostal) is detailed in pre- and post-Emancipation historical contexts.

The contemporary milieu is dealt with in several sections. A product of unique historical processes, religion in the Caribbean is presented as a kind

of mosaic of traditions, and the authors have done their best to provide a comprehensive analysis of the sort not found in other histories, stressing the shared influences of African, European, and Asian cultures and their religious products in the present day. Readers will find that some of the most timely and relevant sections, including the historical influences of Eastern religions such as Islam and Hinduism, and the rise of cultural nationalism in movements such as Rastafari, are considered as thoroughly as the formative influences of gender, race, and colonialism, which have continued to flavor religious life in the Caribbean.

As with any study this comprehensive in scope, coverage can be uneven, and the weaving of dense institutional histories with interior visions of lived spirituality can make for abrupt textual transitions. But the balance of views offered here, from the perspectives of elites to the voices of the subjugated, is refreshing. Religious studies readers might want a more sustained discussion of the worldviews that shaped the actions and the actors in the Caribbean, particularly with the sensible inclusion of popular religiosity and its myriad forms in music, theology, and the arts that are briefly treated. Then again, one of the most rewarding aspects of reading the text is the evenhandedness with which the authors treat religious and cultural diversity. Native American/Amerindian, European, African, Eastern, and Creole practitioners all share common ground, as all have contributed to the dynamic, sometimes clashing, “polyrhythmic” reality of religions in the Caribbean world today. As reflecting the ongoing power of the past in the present, and as an introduction, *Caribbean Religious History* is very much alive and complete.

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Religion in the Age of Reason: A Transatlantic Study of the Long Eighteenth Century. Edited by **Kathryn Duncan**. AMS Studies in the Eighteenth Century: AMS Press, 2009. xx + 233 pp. \$84.50 cloth.

This collection of essays examines the ways religion and reason were mixed together in British literature. The collection is wide ranging in time and subject, but is united by the authors’ pursuit of “deeper and wider” (xvii) ways poets wrote of theology, bishops used sermons in politics, theologians practiced typology, allegorists debated gender roles, and a monk could