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All Can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World



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Reviewed Work(s)

All Can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World. By Stuart B. Schwartz (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008). Pp. 336. Cloth, \$40.00

In the early modern period, European leaders generally believed that unity of religious belief facilitated political stability. While advocates of religious tolerance were few, they existed nonetheless, and they are the protagonists of Stuart Schwartz's latest study. Taking the phrase, "*Cada*

uno se puede salvar en su ley” (Each person can be saved in his own religion), as his starting point, Schwartz has written *All Can be Saved*, a study of immediate appeal for its effort to locate religious tolerance in the early modern Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms and their colonies – lands that, aside from the work of Henry Kamen and few others, have “had almost no place” in the historiography of toleration.[i] Schwartz acknowledges his intellectual debt to Kamen but also notes that Kamen’s work has largely dealt with relations among Christians, a panorama that Schwartz amplifies by examining Christian views of Islam and Judaism, for example.

The rise of tolerance, according to Schwartz, has typically been attributed to three factors: practical necessity, philosophical conviction, and a self interest often resulting in accommodation. Acknowledging that scholars have almost exclusively written the history of tolerance as one of intellectuals, Schwartz makes the common folk his focus. He credits Joseph Lecler, author of the 1955 classic, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme*, with recognizing that tolerance arose out of a social milieu and not from the efforts of intellectuals alone.[ii] Lecler, nonetheless, focused largely on the intellectual history of tolerance. Schwartz maintains, however, that ideas of tolerance came not from books alone but also from a “common sense” that grew out of living among peoples of different religions.

According to Schwartz, most people in Spanish and Portuguese societies were “intolerant by definition,” yet at least a small number took the risk of defending tolerant ideas regarding salvation and religion in general. In order to examine common peoples’ “attitudes and sentiments” concerning whether salvation was possible outside of the Catholic Church, Schwartz uses records of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions. Key to his purpose are cases of *proposiciones*, or statements diverging from official Catholic dogma, especially those concerning sex. According to Schwartz, dissident attitudes about fornication often walked hand-in-hand with dissident attitudes about tolerance. Schwartz demonstrates that just as some Christians believed that God would forgive simple fornication, many also believed that God had created numerous paths to salvation. Many of the individuals espousing such beliefs came from classes of artisans, laborers, and the lower classes, in general.

Early on, Schwartz confronts the question of what the protagonists of his story represent. Were they representative of some broader trend of tolerance among the common folk? While he recognizes that his dissidents certainly did not constitute a majority in their societies, he contends that common people should not only be part of history when they represent the majority. Rather, Schwartz astutely reminds the reader that historians have studied intellectuals like Spinoza, Erasmus, Luther, and Locke for so long precisely because of their individuality, and through this study he aims to grant the same privilege to common women and men.

Among the common folk, Schwartz demonstrates that we find tolerant attitudes across various subsections of the Christian population. These expressions of tolerance are evident not only among *moriscos* and *conversos* (Muslims and Jewish converts to Christianity, respectively) but also among some old Christians. Schwartz has found a number of Inquisition cases in which old Christians expressed a belief that God had created not just Christianity but also Islam and Judaism and that salvation was possible in each. Tolerant attitudes toward religions other than Christianity were even more likely in the New World, claims Schwartz. In a place like Brazil, the interconnections, from commercial to sexual, among people of different origins made it a place in which individuals were likely to be open to different religious practices. Furthermore, the fact that the New World, at least initially, lacked the same institutional infrastructure of Iberia made it a setting more conducive to individual choice and free will.

Although Schwartz focuses on commoners' attitudes throughout the majority of the book, he still provides some discussion of tolerance among intellectuals. He writes, for example, that theologians at the renowned University of Salamanca had an increasingly difficult time with the question of whether salvation was possible outside the Roman Catholic Church after Europeans had learned of the existence of native communities in the New World. Some of these theologians, however, espoused tolerant attitudes by seeking to reconcile Augustine's position of *extra ecclesia, nulla salus* (outside the Church, no salvation) with the notion of a just and merciful God.

Scholars who have highlighted the insurmountable tensions between Europeans and Indians throughout the colonial period and beyond may

take issue with Schwartz's use of phrases like "syncretic local culture" and "seamless integration" to describe New World societies. Nonetheless, Schwartz's most recent book represents a most interesting, creative, and important contribution to the social history of ideas, the history of tolerance, and the study of the early modern Spanish and Portuguese worlds.

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[i] Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). See also Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

[ii] Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la tolérance au siècle de la Réforme* (Paris: Aubier, 1955).



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