

JERÓNIMO DE MENDIETA (1525–1604)
HISTORIA ECLESIASTICA INDIANA (1571–1596)

Although on the one hand these servants of God were heartily content at seeing how the people attended their sermons and listened to their doctrine, on the other hand they suspected that the Indians might be attending church merely to comply superficially with the orders given them by their nobles in order to deceive the friars, and that this might not be a sincere movement by the people to seek the remedy for their souls by renouncing the worship of the idols. And the friars persuaded themselves that this was indeed the case, for they were told that, while in public the Indians no longer made their old sacrifices, which usually involved the killing of men, in the secret spaces of the hills and in fearful, remote places, and at night in the temples of the demons which were still standing, they continued to make their sacrifices, and in the temples they performed their old ceremonies, chants, and drunken celebrations. Seeing this, the friars wrote to the governor Don Fernando Cortés, who at that time had left for Las Higueras, asking him to give rigorous orders that the sacrifices and services of the demons be stopped, because as long as they went on, the preaching of the ministers of the church would be in vain. The governor very swiftly did as they asked. But the secular Spaniards, who had to execute the punishments and search out the delinquents, and who were occupied in building their houses and in taking their tribute from the Indians, were satisfied as long as no one committed a public homicide before their eyes; as to the rest, they cared nothing about it. So business went on as usual, and the idolatry continued; and yet the friars saw that time was being lost and work being done in vain so long as the temples of the idols were standing. Because it was clear that the ministers of the demons had to go there to exercise their offices, and to convoke and preach to the people, and to make their accustomed ceremonies. And attentive to this, the friars agreed to begin destroying the temples, and not to stop until they were all burned to the ground, and the idols likewise destroyed and eradicated, even though in doing this they would place themselves in mortal danger. They carried out their plan, beginning in Texcuco, where there were very beautiful temples with fine towers, and this was in the year 1525, the first day of the year. And then they destroyed the temples of Mexico, Tlaxcala, and Guexozingo. The friars took with them the children and young men they had raised and instructed, the sons of the Indian lords and nobles . . . and they also received help from the common people who were already converted and wanted to prove that they were confirmed in the faith. And this they ordered done at a time when those who might have opposed them were distracted by other things. And since in most cases they used fire, which burned rapidly, there could be no resistance. And so fell the walls of Jericho, with voices of praise and shouts of joy from the faithful children, while those who remained outside the faith were frightened and stupefied, and the wings of their hearts (as they say) were broken at seeing their temples and gods brought down. Regarding their heroic exploit, some wished to argue with the friars by saying, first, that it was a rash deed, for it might anger and incite the Indians who might kill them; and second, that they could not in good conscience do such damage to the buildings they destroyed . . . that now burned and were lost.

Taken from Jerónimo de Mendieta, "The Spiritual Conquest," in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 117–118.

BENITO JERÓNIMO FEIJOO Y MONTENEGRO (1676–1764)
DEFENCE OF WOMEN (1726)

It is with great determination that I turn to this discussion. I am not only entering into debate with the ignorant commoner: defending all women is roughly the same as offending almost all men. Rare is the man who does not believe in the superiority of his own sex or hold in low esteem the other. A common opinion scorning women has spread so widely that hardly a good thing is said about them. This opinion, morally speaking, fills them with defects, and physically speaking, with imperfections. But where this opinion is the strongest is in the limitations of their intellect. For this reason, after having defended them . . . I will discuss, at greater length, their aptitude for all types of science and sublime knowledge.

The false Prophet Mohamed denied entrance to women in that badly conceived paradise he assigned for his minions, limiting their happiness to the pleasure of seeing, from the outside, the eternal glory men are to possess from within. . . But it appears that the one who denies women the happiness of the afterlife is not much different than the one who denies them full credit in this life. Frequently the most slow-witted amongst the commoners represent this sex as a horrible sewer of vices, as if men were the only repositories of virtues. It is true that one can find many imagined things favouring this line of thinking in an infinite number of books: in such a manner that one, or even another, barely wants to approve that even one of them is good.

We now arrive at the main conflict: the dispute over their intellect; but I must confess that if my reason is of no value, I do not have much recourse to authority. The authors who treat this material (save one or two exceptional cases) greatly favour the opinion of the vulgar, so much so that they almost uniformly speak of the female intellect with scorn. But it should be pointed out that men were the ones who wrote these books, in which they condemn the female intellect to an inferior status. If women would have written these books, we would have been the ones treated with scorn.

I conclude this discourse, replying to one more objection that might be put forward on this subject: which is to persuade humankind of the error in thinking that the equality of both sexes in intellectual talents is of no benefit to the public, and that it has the potential to cause harm in as much as it encourages presumption and pride in women.

This doubt can easily be removed by simply saying that in whatever material there is a debate, it is of great utility to know the truth and turn away from error. The correct understanding of things in itself is worthy of appreciation . . . Truths have an intrinsic value . . . some are more precious than others, but none of them are useless. Neither can the truth, which we have proven, by itself induce vanity and presumption in women. [T]hey are truly the same as we are in the perfection of the soul . . .

All of this mistreatment [of women] is a result, many times, of the low concept that married men have of the other sex. Leave behind these mistaken maxims, and women will be even more faithful. Esteem them, for God sent them for you to love: and I do not understand how scorn and love can coexist in the same heart . . .

Translated by Jason Dyck. Taken from Benito Jerónimo Feijoo y Montenegro, “Defensa de las mujeres,” in *Teatro crítico universal* (Madrid: D. Joaquín Ibarra, a costa de la Real Compañía de Impresores y Libreros, 1778), 1:325–328, 349, 389, 393.