

Latino Catholicism

**Transformation in
America's Largest Church**

(Abridged Version)

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Alliance for Catholic Education
ARIS	American Religious Identification Survey
CARA	Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
CCR	Catholic Charismatic Renewal
CNSH	<i>Comité Nacional de Servicio Hispano</i>
HCAPL	Hispanic Churches in American Public Life
IPLA	<i>Instituto Pastoral Latino Americano</i>
La Red	National Catholic Network de Pastoral Juvenil Hispana—La Red
MACC	Mexican American Cultural Center/ Mexican American Catholic College
NCCB	National Conference of Catholic Bishops
NCCB/SHA	NCCB Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs
NCCHM	National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry
PADRES	<i>Padres Asociados por los Derechos Religiosos, Educativos, y Sociales</i> (Priests Associated for Religious, Educational, and Social Rights)
PARAL	Program for the Analysis of Religion Among Latinos
PFRPL	Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life
PHC/PFRPL	Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life
PICO	Pacific Institute for Community Organizations
SEPI	Southeast Pastoral Institute
UFW	United Farm Workers
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

PREFACE

Catholics comprise the largest religious group in the United States, nearly a fourth of all U.S. residents. Hispanics constitute more than a third of U.S. Catholics. They are the reason Catholicism is holding its own relative to other religions in the U.S. According to the American Religious Identification Survey, without the ever-growing number of Latinos in this country, the U.S. Catholic population would be declining at a rate similar to mainline Protestant groups. And given the relative youthfulness of the Latino community, Hispanic Catholics will continue to represent an increasing percentage of U.S. Catholics over time. Robert Putnam and David Campbell, the authors of a 2010 study on American religion, avow the Catholic Church in the United States “is on its way to becoming a majority-Latino institution.”

The expanding number of Latinos alters the demographics of U.S. Catholicism. Although the traditional Catholic institutional base is in the Northeast, the Latino presence has helped shift the demographic weight of U.S. Catholics to the Southwest. From 1990 to 2008, the proportion of Catholics in Texas and California increased by 9 and 8 percent respectively, while that of Massachusetts and New York decreased by 15 and 7 percent. The demographic changes are especially dramatic in states with a historically weak Catholic presence, like Georgia, where Hispanic Catholics now outnumber Catholics of European descent. Catholic dioceses with the largest Hispanic-population growth since 1990 include locales that previously had few Latinos, such as Charlotte, North Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; and Boise, Idaho.

But numbers alone do not define the significance of the Latino presence in the U.S. Catholic Church. The mutual influence of Catholicism and Hispanic peoples in the United States is shaping not just the future of American Catholic life but also that of the nation. Latinos are altering U.S. church and society through their responses to demands that they become “Americanized” and adopt the English language; their advocacy for Hispanic ministry and for immigration rights; their participation in parishes, apostolic movements, and denominational switching; their responses to the crisis of clergy sex abuse and bishops’ knowing transfer of offenders; and their proclivity for public ritual and devotional traditions. At the same time, the lives and faith of Latino Catholics are being refashioned in dramatic ways: through the pressures of assimilation, English-only movements, civil-rights struggles, conservative political forces, religious pluralism and growing secularization, the rise of small faith communities and of Pentecostal and evangelical religion.

This book examines these mutual influences. Although I treat a number of themes and distinctions between particular Latino groups when pertinent, the primary interpretive lens of this book is how the U.S. context, the U.S. Catholic Church, and Latinos mutually transform one another. After an opening chapter on Hispanics in U.S. Catholic history, subsequent chapters examine Latinos’ integration in Church and society, initiatives to develop structures and a core vision for Hispanic ministry, participation in parishes and apostolic movements, worship and devotion, and efforts to pass on the faith to their young. The challenges posed by Pentecostal and evangelical churches and by rising numbers of Latinos who claim to have no religious affiliation are treated in various sections throughout the volume, particularly in chapter 4. An epilogue offers a final assessment and view toward the future of Latino Catholics and the mutual transformations discussed in these pages.

It is difficult to make simple generalizations about Latinos. Although *Latino Catholics* may be a convenient term to distinguish those with ancestral or personal origins in the Spanish-speaking world from U.S. Catholics with ties to the majority culture or other ethnic and racial groups, the idea of a generic Latino Catholic is no more useful than that of a generic African, Asian, European, or Native-American Catholic. Spanish is a primary language in twenty-two countries, all of which have native daughters and sons now residing in the United States, the fifth-largest and most diverse Spanish-speaking nation in the world. Historically, of course, Spanish-speaking people share a common Iberian heritage in which Roman Catholicism plays a significant role. At the same time, indigenous and African roots have come to influence Spanish-speaking peoples. In the Caribbean, where Spanish colonizers decimated native populations and forcibly resettled African slaves, the African influence remains strong. In countries such as Peru, Guatemala, and Mexico, where many significant elements of the Incan, Mayan, and Aztec civilizations survived the Spanish conquest, indigenous cultures continue to shape contemporary life. The mixing, or *mestizaje*, of Iberian, African, and indigenous cultures has been a complex process with local, regional, and national variations. Moreover, differences of socioeconomic status as well as regional and generational differences contribute to the tremendous diversity among U.S. Hispanics.

Even the terms Latinos use to identify themselves vary. While some describe themselves by their nation of origin and others insist on *American* to highlight their U.S. identity, many Latinos employ terms such as *Mexican American* or *Cuban American* to accent their dual heritage. Persons of Mexican descent and some others embrace the term *Chicano*, usually to express a strong ethnic consciousness and orientation toward social struggle and justice. As Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans, and other groups come into

greater contact and collaborate on mutual concerns, they more frequently employ umbrella designations such as “Hispanic” and “Latino” (and “Latina”) to accentuate commonalities of language and ethnic heritage, as well as perceived differences with other U.S. residents. “Hispanic” is more commonly used in official Catholic documents and among Catholic leaders, while “Latino” and the gender-inclusive “Latina” are gaining ascendancy among scholars and activists. Regional differences can influence which label one chooses; for example, “Latino” is strongly preferred on the West Coast. As no one label enjoys universal acceptance, the most common ones are employed interchangeably in this book.

Where appropriate, information is drawn from sociological surveys of Latinos, such as those of the Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life; the Program for the Analysis of Religion among Latinos; the Hispanic Churches in American Public Life project; the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate; the National Research and Resource Center for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry; the National Study of Youth and Religion; the American Religious Identification Survey; and the Latino National Survey. The book also benefited from interviews with key Latino Catholic leaders and grass-roots Hispanic Catholic faithful and has used published materials, websites of Catholic organizations, official Church documents, and secondary literature on Latino religion.

Although I hope to provide a balanced view, it would be misleading to describe this book as a work of dispassionate analysis. My scholarly work, teaching, and public speaking have enabled me to get to know many of the people who appear in these pages. In writing this book I hope to engage interested general readers and the many Hispanic-ministry leaders whose dedication I admire. I will consider my mission accomplished if some of these ministry leaders find this book a source of useful reflection.

CHAPTER 1

Remapping American Catholicism

Father José Antonio Díaz de León died mysteriously in 1834 near the east-Texas town of Nacogdoches. A judge exonerated an Anglo-American accused of murdering him amid rumors that the priest's death of a gunshot wound was a suicide. Mexican Catholics decried this decision. How could their pastor, a Franciscan who had served faithfully on the Texas frontier for almost his whole life as a priest, have committed such a desperate act?

Seven years later, Vincentian priests John Timon and Jean Marie Odin made a pastoral visit to Nacogdoches. They deplored the conditions of Mexican Catholics, whom Anglo-Americans had killed, driven away, and robbed of their lands. Father Odin reported that Anglo-Americans had burned down the local Catholic church. Yet Mexican-Catholic laity continued to gather in private homes for feast days and weekly worship services and celebrate rituals such as funerals. Catholicism in Nacogdoches remained almost entirely a lay-led effort until 1847 when Bishop Odin appointed two priests to replace Father Díaz de León. Parishioners' eager reception of the sacraments from their new pastors testified to their enduring faith amid a tumultuous period.

These largely forgotten events occurred simultaneously with more widely studied episodes in U.S. Catholic history, such as the atrocities of the anti-Catholic mob that burned down the Ursuline convent at Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1834. Historical overviews also explore the saga of European-Catholic immigrants

whose migration flows increased significantly during the same decades that Mexican Catholics at Nacogdoches struggled in faith for their survival. Irish-born John Hughes became bishop of New York in 1842, the same year that Odin became the first bishop of Texas. But Odin's two decades of endeavor to advance the Catholic Church and faith in Texas are far less recognized than Hughes' labors in New York.

Building on the groundbreaking work of colleagues like Moises Sandoval, who helped found the U.S. chapter of the *Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en Latinoamérica* (CEHILA, Commission for the Study of the History of the Church in Latin America), this chapter is part of the larger effort to rethink the narrative of U.S. Catholicism, in this case through the lens of Latino-Catholic experience. How do Latinos fit into and shape this narrative? The answer is subject to interpretation, but how one responds is decisive for issues fundamental to understanding the Hispanic presence and the future of Catholics in the United States.

For Latinos, the most contentious renderings of the U.S. Catholic past are those that obscure their contributions. Some histories of U.S. Catholicism do address the Hispanic presence and contribution, beginning with the Spanish colonial era instead of the later Protestant British colonies. But even by 2008, James M. O'Toole's book *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* provides only two brief references to Hispanics from the origins of U.S. Catholicism to the twenty-first century. Its final chapter depicts Latinos as an important component of Catholicism in the United States today but leaves the impression that only now are Hispanics becoming a noteworthy element of the U.S. Catholic story.

Though Catholics were a small minority in the British colonies, from Florida to California they comprised a substantial population under Catholic Spain. The first mass group of Catholics to settle in the United States was nineteenth-century European im-

migrants, but the first large group of Hispanic Catholics became part of the nation during that same era without ever leaving home, incorporated into its boundaries during U.S. territorial expansion into Florida and westward. Just as European immigration diminished to relatively minuscule numbers after 1920's restrictive immigration legislation, Hispanic immigration began in earnest with the Mexican Revolution. The counter-trajectory of Latino-Catholic history to that of its European-descent coreligionists necessitates reanalysis of each epoch in the standard historiography, particularly that since World War II, as waves of Hispanic immigrants have comprised an increasingly significant portion of what was purportedly an established, Americanized, post-immigrant Church.

A Latino perspective on U.S. Catholic history necessitates reviewing U.S. and Latin American history. Following the Spanish colonial presence in lands now part of the United States, U.S. expansionism led to the conquest of nearly half of Mexico's national territory at the mid-nineteenth century. It consolidated U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico five decades later, fueled economic shifts that led to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigration from Mexico, and resulted in a U.S. presence throughout the Caribbean and Central America that helped induce migrations from those regions. And it has driven the globalization process that in recent decades fed an immigration explosion from throughout Latin America. This latter process blurred the border between Latin and North America, accelerating the development of previous links between Catholicism in the United States and Catholicism in the rest of the Americas. It also produced an unprecedented degree of diversification of national-origin groups among Latinos in U.S. Catholicism. Examining the U.S. Catholic past through the lens of this diverse Hispanic experience is essential for understanding the current Hispanicization of Catholicism in the United States.

Colonial Origins

Jay Dolan's introduction to his U.S.-history survey course includes asking students the significance of three dates: 1607, 1608, and 1610. The date 1607 is recognized as the founding of the first British colony, Jamestown, but rarely is 1608 identified as the founding date for Québec and 1610 for Santa Fe. Dolan attests that he wants "to impress upon the students the French and Spanish dimension of American history as well as the more familiar English aspect."

Spanish-speaking Catholics have lived in what is now the United States for twice as long as it has existed. The first diocese in the New World was established in 1511 at San Juan, Puerto Rico. Subjects of the Spanish Crown founded the first permanent European settlement in the continental U.S. at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, four decades before Jamestown, and established the first Marian shrine around 1620. Before the end of the 1500s, Spanish Jesuits and Franciscans initiated missionary activities in present-day Georgia and as far north as Virginia. In 1598 Spanish subjects traversed present-day El Paso, Texas, and proceeded north to establish the foundation of Catholicism in what is now the Southwest.

Catholics in the thirteen British colonies were a repressed minority in a Protestant land, scarcely 1 percent of the population at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Meanwhile, in Hispanic settlements from Florida to California, Catholicism was the established religion under Spain and, in the Southwest, under Mexico after it won independence in 1821. The origins of Catholicism in what is now the United States were Hispanic.

Contemporary Latinos acclaim this foundational role in various ways. El Paso residents maintain that members of the Juan de Oñate expedition celebrated the "first Thanksgiving" in the United States on April 30, 1598, in gratitude for surviving their trek across the Chihuahuan Desert. Their festivities included a