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Remapping Catholicism in the U.S.: An Interview with Timothy Matovina

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Editor's Note: Dr. Peter Casarella, Director of the Center for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology, DePaul University, interviewed Timothy Matovina in July 2012 in the DePaul University Office of Missions & Values. Matovina is Professor of Theology and Executive Director of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, and author of *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church*.

Peter Casarella (PC): Before we begin the interview let me introduce Dr. Matovina's many important accomplishments. He is a Professor of Theology, and he was recently named Executive Director of the Institute for Latino Studies at University of Notre Dame. His education was completed at Indiana University, Toronto School of Theology, and has a Ph.D. in the history of Christianity from the Catholic University of America in 1993: In addition to Notre Dame, he has taught at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. He served for a number of years as the William and Anna Jean Cushwa Director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at Notre Dame before transitioning into his new position.

Citing his publications would take up the entire time of the interview, but I would like to highlight his edited volume, *Virgilio Elizondo: Spiritual Writings*, published with Orbis Books in 2010; and *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present*, published with Johns Hopkins in 2005. I'll mention one book chapter, "Horizons of Faith: San Antonio *Tejanos* in the Texas Republic"—because I think it's indicative of a very important topic of which he is practically the world expert—in *By The Vision of Another World: Worship in American History*, edited by James Bratt, published by Eerdmans in 2012. Matovina has received a number of awards, of which I'd like to cite two: the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of The United States' very prestigious Virgilio Elizondo Award for distinguished achievement in theology (in

keeping with the mission of that academy), and the Julian Zamora Award (named after a great scholar of Latino Studies at Notre Dame), for his dedication to research, teaching and service in the empowerment of Latino and Latina students, by *La Alianza* Students at Notre Dame.

Timothy Matovina, welcome to DePaul.

Timothy Matovina (TM): Thank you, Peter.

PC: Your book is fascinating; it's got very high acclaim from all sides. Could you begin by explaining, after your detailed research on Our Lady of Guadalupe, and on *tejanos*, why you decided to write a synthetic book weaving together so many different important themes from your past research? Can you give us just a little bit of information about the overall shape of the book and what the main contribution is?

TM: Well, part of the response to that question is personal. After having written various case studies, I thought it was time to try to bring things together, as you said, more synthetically. A part of it is the changing in the Latino communities around us, especially the immigration of the last twenty years, which has changed the realities tremendously from what I was writing about twenty-some years ago when I started in this work. The perspective of the book is what's important to me as well, and the reason I wanted to do something synthetic, and that is a perspective of mutual transformation: how the U.S. Catholic Church, U.S. society, and Latinos are mutually transforming one another. A lot of books, including some of my own, have taken more of the perspective of how Latinos have tried to retain their culture, retain their tradition, in the U.S. context, church, and society. This book takes a different slant. How are Latinos being transformed and how are they transforming the Church and the society of which they are forming more and more of a part, both numerically and in terms of their influence? And so, each of the topics in the book, I look at them from the perspective of mutual transformation. The topics include public Catholicism, immigration, worship

and devotion, leadership, young Latinos, apostolic movements/parishes and other topics such as that. But in each case, the lens is mutual transformation.

PC: That's really interesting. I want to turn for just a second to the contribution you state your book might make to the field of Latino Studies. Scholars in Latino Studies and DePaul students in Latin American/ Latino Studies are well aware of the Catholic background of Latinos and the new dynamics in the Church. What lesson might these scholars take away from your book?

TM: I hope several. There are still books written in Latino Studies and in other fields which treat populations that are extensively Catholic, but don't really refer as much to the religious dynamics, for good and for ill, of what's going on within those communities. So there is a certain type of book in Chicano studies and Latino Studies that rightfully is focused on other topics, say politics or demographics or immigration, but don't bring in the religious dimension. I hope that those scholars will find helpful insights in my work about how religion, and Catholicism particularly, figures into the various disciplines and sub-disciplines that form the interdisciplinary field of Latino Studies. I hope the lens of mutual transformation—how Latinos are transforming and being transformed by church/society—will also be helpful to others. I have tried to take a historical approach, and unfortunately we don't really have as much as we need yet on the Latino Catholic heritage, which is not just a recent immigrant heritage, but goes back to the very foundations, even before, of the British Colonies (the Spanish Colonies were here before the British Colonies in what's now the United States of America). I hope the interdisciplinary approach I took on the book, drawing on sociology, American Studies, religion, theology, history, to examine Latino Catholics in various aspects will also be helpful to my fellow scholars.

PC: I think it will be. I mean it's a very multifaceted book and it brings in all those dimensions you just mentioned. But if you just focus for a minute on what you wrote about Latino youth, their religiosity, their Catholicism, what would a dialogue between Latino Studies scholars and yourself be like on the question of Latino youth?

YOUTH AND IMMIGRANTS

TM: Well I think this is actually one of the most important questions facing any scholar of Latino Studies today. We are all very concerned about immigration, and we should be. It's the Civil Rights issue of our day. But we also have a huge generational transition that's taking place right now among our Latino populations. One striking statistic that I cited in the book is this: in the next thirty years, the percentage of second generation Latinos will double, the percentage of third generation Latinos will triple, and the percentage of Latinos who are immigrants—the percentage, maybe not the raw numbers—but the percentage will actually decrease. We are headed into a massive generational transition of the children and the grandchildren of those who have immigrated in the last two to three decades. And what this means for the United States in terms of work force, economics, politics, what it means for the Church—and the Church is Catholic, Protestant and otherwise—in terms of handing on the faith to their young people, is one of the hugest issues facing Latino communities, and I think Latino scholars today. So I focused on this in the book, and it's the last chapter of the book, not because it's the kind of tail wagging the dog, but because it's the most important topic of all. The way the Catholic Church hands on the Catholic faith to young Latinos is not just an issue for Hispanic Ministry. What the Church will be in thirty years depends almost entirely, or at least primarily, on the way the faith is handed on to these young people. So I think young Latinos should be a topic across disciplines in Latino Studies because the adjustments they're making—church, society, education, workforce, politics, media and so on—is a major factor in what's going to develop in the Latino community and the wider society and churches over the next twenty to thirty years.

PC: That's really, really fascinating. On the topic of immigration, scholars of American history, particularly scholars of American religion, have noted for a long time (and here in Chicago it's kind of a case study), that the early twentieth century Euro-American immigrants—the Irish, the Italians, the Germans for example—became the center of Catholic immigration to the U.S. And one of the big debates that you take on in your book, in a very sophisticated manner, concerns the similarities and differences between the Euro-American immigration and Latino immigration, which as you noted is not

just a recent phenomenon. Can you talk a little about where you come down on that issue?

TM: Some would say that, and I'm thinking here now of historians of American Catholicism, they are often of the mind that European immigrants assimilated to American society in three generations—by the grandchildren's generation—and that Latinos will follow a similar pattern. And I don't fully accept that perspective. And there is another body of scholars, usually in the Latino scholarship end, who will argue, kind of conversely: No, Latinos retain their language, they retain their culture it's important to them because the place of origin is closer; they didn't cross an ocean, they only crossed a border, often they are from Mexico or at least

Latinos never adapt and become part of the society of this country, the fact of the matter is many of them do that. But as they do, more immigrants come, and that has effects on both populations, because many Latinos retro-assimilate: That is, those who grew up not speaking Spanish go back and learn Spanish because immigrants are still coming in (for whom Spanish is the primary language). Let me add one other point that is related. There are those in the likes of Samuel Huntington who say Latinos are a problem because they don't adapt to the language and the culture of this country. I think, actually, the problem can be precisely in the opposite direction. Many young Latinos assimilate to the worst aspects of the society here, and we get what's called the immigrant paradox, which is this: First generation Latinos

“It's now more than a century that we've had ongoing immigration in the midst of those who are integrating.”

they are still proximate if they are from the Caribbean or South America. Because of the media, because of ongoing immigration, there is a stronger tendency to retain language and culture. And I sort of take, if you will, a kind of a middle position. Because my view is there are lots of Latinos who in fact are English-dominant or monolingual English speakers now, several generations here. What's different about the Latino pattern primarily is this: that Latinos have been coming to this country, almost unabated, for a hundred years now, since the time of the Mexican Revolution, and in large numbers. The waves of immigration came from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and now South America. Some of them are now English dominant and integrated into the larger society, but for every one that does that, others are just arriving. And so the period of newcomers and those who are now here three, four, five, and more generations is just that much longer. It's now a century, more than a century, that we've had ongoing immigration in the midst of those who are integrating. And what I'm arguing is one of the most unique aspects of Latino immigration. Of course prejudice—as well as the fact that the middle class is not expanding now as it did in the middle of the twentieth century when many European immigrants and their descendants were coming of age in this country—make some of these dynamics different as well. But I think the main one is it's not the case that

tend to have less formal years of education, lower paying jobs, less access to healthcare, less access to social welfare systems that might be of assistance to them—sometimes they even pay into those, social security and so on, and receive no benefits—and yet, despite their greater poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunity, lack of social services, they tend to, statistically, have higher life expectancy, lower divorce rates, lower alcohol and drug abuse rates, lower rates of incarceration and at risk behaviors, lower rates of teen pregnancy, than Latinos who are second and third generation here and have the benefits of more access to education, healthcare, and other such services. This is called the immigrant paradox because the thought is the longer someone lives in the United States, the better their quality of life is going to be. And in fact, for many Latinos, it moves in the opposite direction. Because they do assimilate to precisely some of the worst aspects, the worst behaviors that are available in this society, in terms of teenage at risk behaviors and so on. And so that's one of the real problems with immigration, how do we enable and help Latinos to become part of the society, become part of the Church here, but not adopt some of the worst aspects of American society and bring, in fact, their own positive treasured cultural aspects with them to enrich and improve the society and church of which they are becoming a part.

PC: Professor Matovina, I wanted to go back to what you said about the monolingual English speakers, and basically the problem of identity that many Latinos have. *Ni de aquí, ni de allá*. I see that in a lot of my students at DePaul, there is a sense of confusion, and even on a psychological level, anxiety. They go to Mexico over the

But for those at DePaul or young students elsewhere who are getting a college education, and then rediscover or never have lost or retain those deep traditions and values of their background, they have a tremendous possibility for leadership in many fields, because there is a great need for role models that can help other young people

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summer, and they are not fully accepted as Mexicans and then in Chicago, in downtown Chicago taking classes at DePaul, people see them as immigrants even if their parents have been here for generations. Could you maybe talk a little bit more about this challenge of retro-assimilation and how young people could look at their Latino identity in terms of all these many complex dynamics that you are addressing in your book?

TM: I think that if in the Catholic Church, we addressed in every class we teach, in every sermon we give, every catechetical program we have, the difficulties of the young Latino who is between cultures, whose parents have their feet and their heart in one world and whose peers are in another world. If we addressed the difficulties, the struggles, the process of adjustment for young Latinos in every one of those venues, it wouldn’t be enough. This is one of the most difficult aspects of Hispanic Ministry, and of generational transition in Latinos families. The young people, who as you say are *ni de aquí, ni de allá*, they don’t know exactly where they fit, and in fact they often feel they don’t fit anywhere. So this is a huge concern that I don’t think we’ve begun to address in the ways that it needs to be addressed. It’s not just simply the adaptation or the transition from one generation to another. The parents come with a set of values and customs, a rich set of values and customs, that the young person is taught to see as old fashioned, or out of vogue, or unworthy of someone in this country. Or it will make him or her unpopular within their peer group, for whom these things just aren’t right anymore. And for that young person who says, “you know, this is what I have learned in the schools, from the media, from my peers, but I am going to go back and rediscover what my parents have that is of value—my language, my culture—try to regain some of what I have lost.” That’s a tremendous step of courage. Not all, in fact, relatively few, are able to do it.

navigate that difficult path of “where do I belong? How do I fit between the world of my parents in which I was raised, and the world of my peers in which I now live and where much of my adult life is going to be lived?” Those who can help others navigate that, in faith and in deep respect for their culture and the culture of this country, and bring out the best of all of those aspects, they’re going to have a valuable gift to give to many, many others: in their lives, in their families, in their communities.

LEADERSHIP

PC: Absolutely. Leadership is a key term here, looking to the future. One of the things you highlight, with respect to the models of leadership, the kinds of leadership that young Latinos are attracted to, is what you call apostolic movements in the Catholic Church. That’s a term that not everyone is familiar with. Could you say a little bit about the meaning of that term and then also the variations within Latino communities?

TM: For many, many years, centuries actually, Latinos were involved in pious societies, what is called in Spanish, *cofradías*. And these would be things like the Society of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Society of St. Anthony or some other saint, the Holy Name Society, *el Santo Nombre*. And largely, these were societies that helped with leadership, they were centered on devotional activities, centered on group reception of communion at Mass and other things that would encourage and deepen people’s Catholic faith. In the last fifty years or so, we have had a rise of more of what I would call, and which we are calling here, apostolic movements. Because more and more, it’s not just enough—and as important as those other *cofradías* and pious societies are, and many of them still are operative in lots of places, even here in Chicago—for many Latinos, particularly our

younger people today, they are not living in a completely Latino, Mexican, or Cuban, or Puerto Rican cultural environment. They're in a world with lots of choices. And Catholicism becomes something to which you must make a conscious, everyday commitment if you're truly going to live your faith. And so the pious society of village life of yesteryear, while it still can be very, very important, doesn't always meet the needs of a Catholic trying to learn and live their faith in a modern context. And so we had the rise of things like *Cursillo*, *El Movimiento Cristiano Familiar*, Marriage Encounter; all of these initially arising out of a Spanish-speaking context. And then, although this started amongst English-speaking Catholics, it's now very much prevalent amongst Latinos, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. These movements are focused on fellowship, they're focused on faith formation, they're focused on prayer, and they're focused on the renovation of one's Catholic faith or the renewal and inspiring of that faith for the first time, in such a way that it becomes a daily lived commitment; something that someone has consciously chosen as their lifestyle. And we need that for our young people; we need that for every age in the Church today; because in the culture we live, a culture of many, many choices, it's not enough to just have Catholic traditions—although those are very important. One must know the faith and make a conscious choice. And I think that's what the apostolic movements focus on and help people to do—to truly live their faith as a consciously lived commitment that's at the center of their lives. It helps people, in the end, to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ which is at the center of any Catholic's faith. Ultimately, that is what we all seek and want to try to experience and live out.

PC: That's a fascinating narrative. Many people are familiar, particularly in Chicago, with the phenomenon of the national church and the way in which parishes became identified with particular nationalities in the course of the twentieth century. Could you maybe do a comparative analysis between these apostolic movements and national parishes, in that way?

TM: National parishes were very important among German, Polish, Lithuanian, Italian and other Catholics, because they enabled these Catholics, who were newcomers when they arrived as immigrants, to have a place in the U.S. Catholic Church where they could truly feel at

home. Sometimes these parishes were poor, they didn't have as much ornamental beauty and so on, but they were the people's own, often built with their very own hands. Now for various reasons in the last fifty-sixty years, as the numbers of Latinos has increased exponentially, we don't have the number of priests, we don't have the economic resources to maintain as many national parishes. In fact, in lots of places, Latinos come into parishes that are already there, that other groups have abandoned. And it doesn't make as much sense to build a new church when there is another church that is sitting there already built. A lot of times Latinos end up in parishes with other groups, English-speaking Catholics especially, those descendants of previous European immigrants. And so they are not in a parish that is all Latinos some are neighborhoods like Pilsen, in which there are lots of parishes where the congregation is overwhelming Latino—but more and more Latinos are in parishes where there is a Mass in Spanish but there is also a Mass in English, and there may be a Korean or a Vietnamese Mass as well. And so they are in these shared spaces, and then very often they're not the ones that are allowed to make decisions so they will notice right away, "our image of our saint or our image of Mary is not prominent in the sanctuary." The Spanish Mass is the last Mass at the end of the day, and not in, if you will, a prime-time slot. And so there are lots of ways in which they feel, "we are guests in someone else's church" at best, or sometimes they even feel certain hurts and pains that people are criticizing them for the way they are practicing their Catholicism or for their activities in the parish. So like those immigrants of yesteryear, Latinos look for a place, a space that "is our own, in our language, our prayer style, our culture, where our traditions are prominent and respected." And the apostolic movements, which usually operate within parishes, give them precisely that space. As does the Spanish Mass, a place where they can practice Catholicism in a way that is familiar and that deepens their tradition in their own language, in their own way of practicing the faith. So it's a space within the parish that performs the same function the national parishes have for immigrants for many, many years, which is a place in the very diverse Catholic Church that really feels like one's own. Some say this causes disunity. I disagree. Every Catholic needs a place where they can truly have their faith built up and then they need other kinds of celebrations where they join with other Catholics of other

cultures, of other languages, to celebrate our unity in Christ. But when we force people to practice Catholicism our way, if you will, the U.S. Catholic way, they vote with their feet because they perceive the Church as not being truly the Body of Christ, a Church where everyone is respected for the faith and the person that they are.

PC: Rightly so, you make a big deal in your book about the distinctiveness of Latino worship. It's not just about the language—Spanish—but it's a style, and you highlight the work of a number of emerging Latino liturgists, and this also goes back to your many important publications and work on the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio. What is the heart of Latino liturgy and where is the scholarship going on this question?

TM: Well, of course, as you know, for our colleagues in ACHTUS, the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States, this has been a very important topic, the topic of the religious traditions of our Latino people: Not to study them as devotional phenomena but as deep reservoirs of the theology, the soul, the faith of the people. And the question liturgists and others would ask, "how does that fit in with the celebration of the liturgy, particularly the Sunday Eucharist?" In the fifty years since the Second Vatican Council, Latinos have struggled mightily in this country to find ways that their own traditions, their own worship style, can be incorporated into an inculturated liturgy within the United States. And this is nothing less, I argue, than a different stream of the renewal of the Catholic liturgy in this country. In the English-speaking U.S. Catholic world, there has been lots of emphasis on the active participation of the congregation. There is a big focus on getting people more focused on the word, on the sacrament, and this is rightly so. I think this is very important and exactly what the Second Vatican Council and subsequent movements in the Church have called for. Latinos remind us that in the very documents of Vatican II and other documents since then, there is also a strong focus on respect and even incorporation into the liturgy of the local styles and traditions of people, especially in the famous Vatican II document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the liturgy numbers 37 to 40, and so Latinos have been insistent that the Second Vatican Council never said to do away with devotions, it never said to do away with Marian piety, and other kinds of piety, and indeed to foster those things

in such a way that they enrich the liturgy and the way we celebrate feast days, the decoration of our churches, and so on. And so Latinos have really, I think, developed this strong sense of the living out of liturgical renewal mandated in Vatican II in terms of how we bring our devotions, our traditions, into deep and mutual enrichment with the Eucharist and with the sacramental liturgy of the Church, and draw people more fully into the celebration of those sacraments.

THE U.S. CHURCH

PC: So this would be an obvious example of how Latino styles enrich and contribute something vital to the whole Church in the United States?

TM: Absolutely. And you see in many places Latino devotion to Mary has reignited devotion to Mary by other Catholics. Latino desire for festive celebration has reignited that in other Catholics. Latinos' celebrations of Good Friday, which are often very public, have attracted the participation of Catholics of other backgrounds as well. But above all, just this desire for truly celebratory worship, I think, has been a great contribution where others have looked at Latinos and said, "we can learn from this, we can benefit from this, this is something we should inculcate in all of our Catholic communities."

PC: You mention the Good Friday processions as public. In Chicago, of course, the *Via Crucis* in Pilsen is very, very public and a beautiful and moving experience to witness. But this gets into a kind of question or problem from the dominant perspective in U.S., non-Latino, culture. I want to maintain that the dominant perspective in U.S. culture is that worship, particularly things like Marian devotion, are private; these are in your heart, something you keep to yourself. And yet, you keep saying that the Latinos are public in their devotion. What is the underlying connection here between worship and public action, and social justice? You talk about that in your book.

TM: Well, there are many ways: one of course is when you see *Via Crucis* celebrations, like the one in Pilsen, it certainly connects very directly the suffering of Jesus two thousand years ago to the suffering of Jesus' people today. As in Pilsen, many of the Stations of the Cross are directly related to particular struggles and particular, if you will, victories of the people in their desire for

justice, in their struggle to make a life for themselves, in their struggle to make their neighborhood a place of unity, a place of peace, a place of living, of good living for the people there no matter how poor or struggling they are. But I think it goes even beyond that. These celebrations of Latinos become a public witness of the

devotion to Mary on Good Friday because Mary is always present in the *Via Crucis*; you don't just accompany Jesus in his suffering, you accompany Mary and you remember that in His hour of greatest need, Mary accompanied Jesus. And in her hour of greatest need, *La Dolorosa* losing her Son, Jesus accompanied her. So

“As in Pilsen, many of the Stations of the Cross are directly related to particular struggles ...victories of the people in their desire for justice.”

Catholic faith in the public spaces of our society. There is such a tendency on our society to view all religion as private, as something that should be left to one's personal taste, something that should be left to the private domain of church, of home, of one's heart. And without denying anyone's religious freedom, Latinos take their public witness into the streets of our cities, and say, “this is something real, this is something that is part of life, it is not confined to the church building, the faith that we live as Catholics is lived in every corner of our lives, in the streets, in our homes, in the workplace. Christ on the cross, Christ risen, Christ in all aspects of the mystery of the person of Christ is present to us in the attitudes, in the events, in what we call *lo cotidiano*, the elements of everyday life.” And so there is this tremendous public witness, and one of the powerful elements of it is that, when you go to a celebration, like the one of Pilsen, if you blink your eyes you don't know if you're in 2012 Chicago, if you're back in a village somewhere in Mexico, or if you're in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. This public witness is a witness where time and place are suspended and you're truly being made present to saving mysteries that are here and now active, in the lives of all people, whether they are aware of it or not; at least this is what our Catholic faith proclaims. Now Latinos, they're not so unenlightened as to think somehow, this actually is Jesus. But this is what our Catholic faith teaches us; memory is not just memory of something that happened, memory means making present the saving mysteries of yesterday in the here and the now. And I think in a very deep way, that's what those *Via Crucis* celebrations do, they make present in the here and now the saving mysteries that we as Catholics believe are for all times and for all places. And we give public witness to that. And one last point: There are many more to make, but let me make just one more. Latinos' Marian devotion encompasses a

there is this great, what Roberto Goizueta calls the theology of accompaniment, this great accompaniment of Good Friday: Jesus accompanies Mary, Mary accompanies Jesus, and we accompany them. By our participation in this ritual, we walk with them, we weep with them, we mourn with them, and in the resurrection we rejoice with them. And so we accompany them in the confident assurance that they always accompany us. And so Latinos publicly witness we are walking with Mary and Jesus in this hour of their greatest need, but this is reminding all of us that they always are walking with us. We may have to suffer in this world, but we never suffer alone. So there is that tremendous witness, and it is a devotion yes, but it's a devotion to one of the deep beliefs of our Catholic faith.

PC: Are you saying that these ideas of cultural memory and accompaniment also apply to the models of community organizing that you talk about in your book? I'm thinking about COPS in San Antonio, Ernesto Cortés, even César Chávez.

TM: Well you don't often hear this explicitly stated, but if you ask the grassroots person who is walking in a *Via Crucis*, or saying a rosary, or making a devotion, what's the direct link between this and the struggles for justice that are part of the life of the Church? They may immediately make that connection explicitly. But I think that in a deeply intuitive level they do. Our people of Pilsen or other Latino communities that I know around the country, have no difficulty connecting their prayer life, their devotional life, with the struggle for immigration reform. They see this as a seamless part of the Catholic faith. If we are going to call Jesus our Brother, God our Father, and the power of the Holy Spirit, we must see each other as brothers and sisters—that's what it means

to evangelize. Since God is our Father, all our sisters and brothers are just that, our sisters and brothers. And so at the intuitive level I see a deep connection in Latino spirituality between devotion, between prayer, between spirituality, and between the struggles for justice. And I'm also glad you brought up COPS in San Antonio. COPS means the Communities Organized for Public Service. It was founded in 1973, and the organizer's name was Ernie Cortés. It was founded among Mexican-American Catholic parishes on the west side, a very poor *barrio* of San Antonio, by Euro-American and Mexican-American priests and largely Mexican-American parishioners. And what they did was they got all the churches together to begin to struggle for community issues. Non-partisan, they don't endorse political candidates; they don't get involved in lobbying, in politically partisan causes. They lobbied for things like getting streets paved, getting better education programs for their children, getting drainage because there was always horrific flooding on that west side of San Antonio. And in the many years that COPS has been around, they have done well over one billion dollars in infrastructure improvements in those poor neighborhoods. How? Because they brought their faith to bear on the important issues of their local community. Latinos made a tremendous contribution there because that was a largely Latino organization. Community organizing existed before COPS, but COPS leaders are credited by many—myself included—with being the ones who brought the faith-based element of community organizing into that community. Now there are community organizations in almost every state across the country. Catholics are involved in numerous of these; the U.S. Catholic Bishops have given more money to support the organizing of these groups than any other religious body in the country, and what have they done? They have not supported one political party or the other; they have enabled grassroots people to bring their faith to bear on the issues, the local issues, and sometimes even national issues that affect the lives of working and lower class people. In COPS, the first president was a man. After that all the successive presidents have been women; most of them mothers, presidents of the PTA, people involved in their parish who have said, "I'm a mother, I'm a family member, I'm a faithful Catholic, I have something to say about how our city should serve and do better work in serving the poor neighborhood where I and my church and my family and my community live."

THE LATINA

PC: Could you say a little more, then, about the way that you treat Latinas, [and] Latina Feminist Theology, in your book? That's a very important component in the whole picture.

TM: Well, I want to start with a little story. One of the things I tried to do in each chapter, not just in one chapter, in every single chapter, is to try to talk about the tremendous contribution of Latinas: in theology, in church life, and in many other ways. So the example of COPS is just one. One of my favorite examples is from the missions, going back to the colonial era, before there even was a United States, and there was a woman named Eulalia Pérez who lived in San Gabriel Mission, who was married to a man who was a soldier there, but then he died and many of the Franciscan priests left to the point that there was only one elderly Franciscan priest left in the entire mission. And Eulalia Pérez, who was a widow with five children, basically ran the entire mission. She distributed the food to the indigenous converts; she led the catechetical program; she helped organize the sacristans; she helped organize the sacramental celebrations; and was a community animator in many other ways of the life of that community. This is hundreds of years ago, but she really was a lay ecclesial minister, a great example and there are many more in the book, I can't cover all of them, of Latinas who have made incredible contributions, often unnoticed, to the life of the Church, to theology, and to the wider society, and of course, to their communities and families.

PC: What about the younger Latinas? Are they moving in this same direction of lay ecclesial ministry, or is it a more complicated picture?

TM: Unfortunately, not just the young or women Latinas, Latinos are underrepresented in many of the leadership categories in U.S. Catholicism. Whereas Latinos are approximately forty percent of the Catholic population, they comprise only about six percent of the priests, and only eight percent of the lay ecclesial ministers, that is, those people who are in [the] sort of jobs that are paid to do youth ministry or director of religious education or other kinds of jobs that lay people get working within the ministries of the Catholic Church. So unfortunately,

“Whereas Latinos are approximately forty percent of the Catholic population, they comprise only about six percent of the priests and only eight percent of the lay ecclesial ministers.”

across the board, our Latinos are underrepresented in many of these categories. There is one piece of good news. And here is where I think Latinas are very, very important: young Latinas, middle aged Latinas, and even elderly Latinas. Of the leadership categories in all the formation categories in U.S. Catholicism, there is only one where Latinos are overrepresented, and that is Latinos and Latinas who are preparing in leadership formation programs for lay ministries. I don't mean here necessarily Master's degree programs, although a few are in that, I mean the programs at the diocesan level where someone is taking the highest level of certification formation, which is usually offered in Spanish and English—so you can take it in one or the other. Of the people who are enrolled in those faith formation/leadership formation programs at the diocesan level, Latinos and Latinas are actually overrepresented, compared to the wider Catholic population. There is a deep hunger among Latinas, as well as Latinos, a deep hunger to learn the faith, to be leaders in the parish, to be leaders in the apostolic movements, to be leaders in the Church. And there's where I see tremendous young Latinas doing things that aren't often known in terms of catechesis, in terms of evangelization. Now mind you, we do still have tremendous challenges because a lot of our young people are not participating in the Church, they're not participating in their faith. I'm not speaking across the board here, but by the same token there are lots of young and middle aged and older Latinas and Latinos who are dedicating themselves wholeheartedly to learning and living their faith and to ministering and leading others. You think of the young Latinas who are running *Pastoral Juvenil*, who are leaders in trying to help other young Latinos, immigrants, and non-Latinos in their lives. And their sacrifice is really the engine that keeps the Catholic Church turning in this country.

DIVINITY STUDIES

PC: We have a program of that sort here at DePaul in *Pastoral Juvenil*; it's called ESFOR, run by the Vincentian Father, Padre Guillermo Campuzano. And it's very

successful, vibrant in exactly the way you described. But it doesn't feed into a degree program and looking more generally at this phenomenon, do you see a kind of double standard here where Anglo-Catholics are going and getting a Master's in Divinity Studies and getting jobs in diocesan ministries, and Hispanics are just as well trained in these not-for-credit programs and often have problems showing that they have credentials?

TM: Yes, this is a huge difficulty and, as someone who works in the university, one of the greatest frustrations of my work in Hispanic Ministry and in Latino Catholicism. There are a number of parishes, around the country, where the Director of Religious Education is an English-speaking person with a degree, and well prepared often, who runs the English-speaking catechetical program that might have—let's take as an example six hundred young children and into high school age children or young people—receiving catechesis. And along comes the Spanish-speaking person, who does not have the degree, but has a great *corazón*, a great heart for ministry, who says to the pastor or to the Director of Religious Education, “Hey, there are a lot of children in this parish who really need the catechesis in Spanish or it would be better to have it in Spanish because that is the language that their parents are teaching them the faith, so we'll go ahead and start something up.” And before long they have not six hundred, but a thousand or twelve hundred or fifteen hundred Spanish-speaking children in the Spanish-language catechesis program, but they are not paid (the Spanish-speaking minister) even though their program is actually much bigger. The reason they aren't paid is because they don't have the degree and they are doing their work “as a volunteer.” My frustration is, very often Latinos, in fact, as you said quite well, are very well prepared ministerially, very well prepared theologically, but don't qualify for our degree programs or they can't afford them or they don't have access to them because they can't go across the country or even across town to DePaul, or Notre Dame, or another place to access these programs. And so for us in universities, it's a real challenge. How do

we make these degree programs more accessible? And I think for diocese and parish personnel, how do we get beyond saying, “only those with degrees?” How do we begin to look at the abilities of the person and what formation they do have, and say, “well this person may not have an academic title, but they have a tremendous formation, training, and passion, and capacity for ministry.” I think we have many, many challenges there and if we’re going to call forth these laity Latinos who are preparing themselves and well qualified and so passionate, we need to start thinking about how all of our systems can receive them and the gifts they bring to the Church.

U.S. LATINO HISTORY

PC: Are there any other aspects of the book that we have left out that you want to highlight before we move on to another topic?

TM: One thing that I think would be very important to me is the history as well—that Latino Catholics were here before any other Catholics in this country. The first settlements that Europeans founded permanently in what’s now the United States were founded by Latinos. But more importantly than that, in terms of our own history, Euro-American Catholics, we tend to think that there was a great period of immigration; from about 1820 when the Irish and Germans started coming, till about 1920 when U.S. restrictive immigration laws effectively cut off the large numbers of European immigrants. And then we think that Catholics became more English-speaking Americanized, often epitomized with the election of John F. Kennedy as kind of a moment when Catholics were more accepted in America because they had endured prejudice for so many generations. What we forget is, as those descendants of European-Catholics were learning English and becoming more and more a part of the U.S. society, new immigrations were just starting up. And that in fact, in the Catholic Church and in the United States today, for the first time more than half the Catholics of this country are not of European descent, if you take the Latinos, Africans, African-Americans, Native Americans, Asians, and Asian-Americans together. And so we are not in an era, historically, when we are just talking about the descendants of former European immigrants now becoming more Americanized. We are in an era when that’s taking place, but there are whole large new groups coming in. And we leave Latinos out,

we forget them. As if somehow they are merely in temporary way stations and will soon become part of this wider body of former immigrants, when in fact, that’s just simply not the case. Our history shows us that way of depicting who we are, and how we have come to be as Catholics, but doesn’t account for about half the Church. This is a point that’s well known. I spend a lot of time in the book, I hope, trying to make the point in such a way that many of our sisters and brothers will be convinced of seeing our Church, its history and its present reality, through a different lens.

PC: So you’re saying, then, that the so-called minorities in the Catholic Church—Latinos, African-Americans, Asians—are the majority of the Catholic Church?

TM: Numerically that is the case. Although “minority,” of course, doesn’t just apply to numbers, it applies to power and the ability to affect major decisions, and in that sense, you know, the Euro-Americans still are most of the bishops, most of the priests, most of the parish ministers, people who make the decisions. And I know we don’t always like to talk about power in the Catholic Church, but when you have any group, a parish, or any other group, one group gets to make more of an influence on decisions than another group. That’s often, unfortunately, the way human dynamics go; in fact, usually. And so, in that sense, Latinos are still very much newcomers to the decision-making processes in American Catholicism. Beyond that, this is the main point I make at the very end of the book. If you read a newspaper report, secular or religious newspaper, or get into a discussion with theologians or pastoral leaders, it is often our default thinking about the Catholic Church in this country. Here is an issue, be it a new Pope or some kind of a controversy. The reporters say, from a secular newspaper, “We’ll go and interview ‘progressive’ Catholics and then go and interview ‘conservative’ or ‘traditional’ Catholics” and feel they have covered the story well if they get these two perspectives. But for a lot of Latinos, they don’t fit into either one of those perspectives; at least the way they’re usually articulated by those groups. Latinos are very traditional in some ways, and they’re very progressive in other ways, in terms of their social stances on immigration and so on. But Latinos, very often, what they’re telling the Church is, “we don’t want to be a part of this argument.” They don’t say this directly,

they say this in the way that they act within the Church: “We want the Church to serve our suffering immigrant sisters and brothers. We want the Church to be a place where we can celebrate in our way, in our language, our traditions and so on.” And so they bring a very different set of concerns, not that they necessarily would agree or

the U.S. Latino population, many of whom have come from Latin America but are now living a different kind of reality. We have a very strong Latin American program at Notre Dame already; we want to complement that with a program that focuses on U.S. Latinos. So faculty hiring is surely one thing. Student recruitment,

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disagree with everyone else; what matters to them is very different. And we just very often don’t notice that. We perceive, be it those outside the Church or from within, that the issues within the Church or the concerns are to be decided by this progressive-conservative debate and which side is right. And Latinos actually bring, in many ways, a completely different way of looking at what matters and how we should be proceeding with our ministries, our worship, our life within the Church. And that’s what is very often not listened to at the tables where decisions are made, be they in dioceses, parishes or otherwise.

PC: Well thank you very much for that summary. I hope people not only read the book, but take to heart these many lessons you have given us to ponder. But before we conclude, I wanted to ask you about your new position as Executive Director of the Institute for Latino Studies at Notre Dame. You’re going to be working together with the literary scholar and English professor, José Limón, to fill the shoes of the great Gil Cárdenas. Can you tell us just a little bit about what we can expect from ILS in the future?

TM: We want to try to carry on the foundation that Gilberto and other colleagues have built so strongly at the Institute for Latino Studies (ILS), where Gilberto was the founding Director. One of the ways to do this is, of course like any university, we want to hire more Latino faculty. We have increased the number of Latino students, [and] we want to get more. But we feel we need to make far greater strides in terms of hiring Latino faculty, and not just Latino faculty who will teach any subject, but Latino faculty who have a particular, and maybe not an exclusive but a particular expertise, in Latino Studies itself. This means of course, as you well know,

graduate and undergraduate students, is another. These are not new goals, they’re just goals that we simply want to build on the accomplishments of our predecessor. I would like to see us, and we’ll see how things develop, I would like to see us be even more focused on Latinos and religion. There are twenty-five major research centers on Latino Studies throughout the country. There is a group called IUPLR¹, which is a consortium of those twenty-five—which is actually housed at Notre Dame because Professor Cárdenas is the Director—but none of those twenty-five focuses primarily on Latinos and religion. So there is a real opportunity that a place like Notre Dame has a particular interest in. Now this won’t be exclusive, not all of our Latino colleagues that we have now, our Latino professors, focus on religion in their research, but I would like to see us do more and more in that area as we can because it would be a distinctive contribution. Another area I would like to see ILS develop, and in fact Professor Limón and I are talking about making this our first major conference as new Directors of the ILS, for which we would convene a conference next April (we actually have dates already; the fourteenth to the sixteenth) on young *latinidad*. What I was talking about earlier: these second and third generation Latinos, and subsequent generations of young Latinos. What has been their experience in the social world, the political world, in the world of education, in the economy, and in the life of the Church? What do scholars tell us from various places around the country about the dynamics of changing generations among young Latinos today? And I would like to see us build on that, and build more expertise at Notre Dame and elsewhere, because I think we need more nodal points where we bring together scholars and think about this transition process of these young Latinos who are becoming the leaders

of tomorrow; who are preparing themselves and passing through the process of the difficult adaptation from the immigrant generations to the U.S. born generations of Latinos in the United States.

PC: Thank you very much, Dr. Matovina, that's a very exciting and important agenda. We wish you all the best for the future and thank you above all for coming to DePaul and participating in this interview. Thanks so much.

TM: *Gracias Pedro.*

PC: *De nada.*

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Editor's Note: The Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) headquarter is currently relocating to another university and executive director. DePaul University's Center for Latino Research is a member of the consortium.