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Review of Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church

Elfriede Wedam

Loyola University Chicago, ewedam@luc.edu

Recommended Citation

Wedam, Elfriede. Review of Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church. Catholic Books Review, , , 2014. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Sociology: Faculty Publications and Other Works,

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Timothy MATOVINA. *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012. Pp. 328. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780691139791. Reviewed by [Elfriede WEDAM](#), Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60660

This book provides an overview of U.S. Catholicism through the Hispanic experience. Beginning with the sixteenth century, historian and theologian Timothy Matovina organizes his story around seven themes: integration of Latino with mainstream Catholicism; the varied and particular styles of Hispanic ministry; the development of parishes and apostolic movements; the challenges of lay and clergy leadership development, particularly in parishes; worship and devotional practices exploring the fit between various indigenous practices with each other and with Euro-American practices; public Catholicism with a focus on faith-based community organizing, immigration reform, and voting; and the problems at stake in passing the faith to the next generation through youth organizations and parochial education.

His principle argument is that the American Catholic narrative is missing the Latino contributions, including the false assumption that the earliest colonists or European heritage settlers were Anglos. He reminds us that Catholic Spaniards set foot on what became the American nation decades before Jamestown in both the southwest and Florida. Recounting the expansion and conquest by war and treaties of the northern territories of Mexico in the first half of the nineteenth century, twentieth century immigration from Puerto Rico and Cuba, and African American as well as Native American contributions, "more than half the Catholics in the United States today are not of Euro-American ancestry" (38).

Matovina has created a significant resource on the Hispanic Catholic presence in the U.S. that will be useful to scholars from every discipline. As a sociologist, I especially appreciate the historical spadework. Throughout, Matovino balances divergent views and experiences from the various Latino and non-Latino perspectives for each of the issues he discusses.

In the chapter on integration, Matovina explores the contested terrain of the Americanization process. His expansive discussion of the national parish system and the "national parish dynamic" after 1918 is valuable to understanding the struggle to achieve pluralism today. Furthermore, while several explanations have been offered for the complexity and prolongation of the integration process among Latinos, the "single most influential factor that retards assimilation is low educational opportunity and attainment" (60-61). Latinos are distinctly, though not inevitably, different from their Euro-American co-religionists but, in many ways, share more with the immigrant generation of those co-religionists.

The chapter on worship and devotion is filled with rich historical and fresh ethnographic detail on Latino ritual practices of the Way of the Cross, the Guadalupe feast, and Marian pietistic devotions. One of the important characteristics of Latino festival practices, in my view, is their unapologetic public expression. This adds a potent ingredient into the social force of public Catholicism. However, as in many other discussions, the views of Hispanics are not uniform in the role of this powerful devotion as, for example, when Matovina describes how "[o]ther Hispanic leaders

counter that their Good Friday traditions are not merely political protests intended to effect social change, but rather holy events that enable them to endure present hardships with faith and encourage them to struggle for the transformation of their personal and collective lives" (170).

In the chapter on faith-based community activism and other public effect activities such as voting, we learn that public policy advocacy by lay and clergy is another source of considerable involvement by Hispanics but also differing views among them. Catholic bishops, however, advocate persistently for a human rights view of immigration and lobby for comprehensive immigration reform. Matovina points out that "immigration is the social issue that draws the most consistent public response across regions and theological perspectives, complementing the bishops' more frequently noted stance on the right to life" (215). He adds that there are numerous outreach efforts in local faith communities. I think it is useful to point out that both issues show how institutionally sanctioned Catholic positions have some broader public influence.

In the epilogue, Matovina addresses the impending transformation of a majority post-immigrant, middle-class Euro-American church to a new immigrant, largely poor and working class Latino church. Yet he worries that if Latinos follow in the path of the earlier immigrants, including the loosening attachment to the institutional church and ascent to the middle class, their distinctive identity and communal and family-centered values may also, if not become lost, then surely be reduced. This is worth pondering.