



Clockwise from top left:
Mexican church at the smelter, 1907,
El Paso, Texas (Library of Congress);
Pentecostal church, New York, New
York (Creative Commons by TMatt,
2011); Parade float in the Our Lady of
Guadalupe festival, Lubbock, Texas
(Creative Commons by John Howe,
2009); The Chapel of Our Lady of La
Leche, St. Augustine, Florida (Creative
Commons by Cliff, 2010); "500 Years
of Resistance" mural by Isaías Mata,
Mission District, San Francisco, Cali-
fornia (Creative Commons by Jamie
Morgan, 2001)



Endurance and Transformation: Horizons of Latino Faith

Timothy Matovina

Spanish-speaking Catholics have lived in what is now the United States for twice as long as the nation has existed. Latinos first embraced the Protestant faith in the first half of the 19th century. Although initially their numbers were comparatively small, the famous Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles lit the Pentecostal spark among Latinos and other racial and ethnic groups beginning in 1906. Subsequently the growth of Pentecostalism and evangelicalism became a major trend in Latino religion. Today Latinos lead and participate in a wide array of religious and spiritual groups, movements, practices, and faith-based struggles for justice. Understanding Latino religion and spirituality requires an appreciation of both its colonial Catholic roots and its increasingly diverse expressions from the 19th century to the present.

Colonial Origins

Hispanic Catholics established a number of “firsts” vis-à-vis Christian institutional and ministerial presence in North America. The first diocese in the New World was established in 1511 at San Juan, Puerto Rico, now a commonwealth associated with the U.S. Subjects of the Spanish crown founded the first permanent European settlement within the current borders of the 50 states at St. Augustine, Florida in 1565, four decades before the establishment of Jamestown, the first lasting British colony. St. Augustine settlers quickly formed a congregation for regular communal worship and around 1620 established the first Marian shrine in what is now the continental U.S., *Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto* (Our Nursing Mother of Happy Delivery). Before the end of the 16th century, Spanish Jesuits and Franciscans initiated missionary activities in present-day

Today Latino religion and spirituality are increasingly conspicuous in the public spaces of U.S. society.

Georgia and even as far north as Virginia. In 1598 Spanish subjects traversed present-day El Paso, Texas and proceeded north to establish the permanent foundation of Catholicism in what is now the Southwest. Contemporary El Paso residents proudly assert that the “first Thanksgiving” in the U.S. was not that of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, but the celebration of Catholic Mass and a festive meal that members of the Juan de Oñate expedition organized with natives of the El Paso region on April 30, 1598, to thank God for surviving their trek across the Chihuahuan Desert.

Catholics in the thirteen British colonies were a repressed minority in a Protestant land, eventually even losing the elective franchise in Maryland, the only British colony that Catholics founded. Thus from the standpoints of original settlement, societal influence, and institutional presence, the origins of Catholicism in what is now the U.S. were decidedly Hispanic. Yet overall, popular perceptions have frequently relegated the historical significance of Hispanic Catholicism in the colonial period to a romanticized and bygone day of the Spanish missions. Writer Helen Hunt Jackson promoted such a view in a series of 1883 *Century Magazine* articles on Fray Junípero Serra, the founder of the California missions. Though the daughter of a strict Massachusetts Congregationalist family, Jackson found spiritual inspiration in her hagiographic perception of Serra and his fellow Franciscans, even deeming their labors superior to those of the Puritans, whom she claimed “drove the Indians farther and farther into the wilderness every year, fighting and killing them,” while the Spanish friars “were gathering the Indians by thousands into communities and feeding and teaching them.” Jackson’s bestsel-

ling novel *Ramona*, first published in 1884, solidified this idealized view of the missions in the popular mindset. A love story set against her presentation of the social upheaval after the passing of the missions, Jackson's literary success cast a long shadow of "Ramonamania": rail tours of the California missions, a 1919 D.W. Griffin film starring Mary Pickford as Ramona, an annual Ramona theatrical pageant that continues to this day, initiatives to restore Spanish missions, and, most conspicuously, the development of Mission and Spanish Revival architectural styles that mark the landscape of towns and cities across the Southwest and beyond.¹

Scholars and other commentators have noted that many restored missions and writings about them fail to account for indigenous perspectives on the mission system, including the cultural shock, brutal treatment, and death from European diseases that many Native Americans endured in mission communities. While initially the prospect of entering the missions to stave off enemies, starvation, and harsh winters seemed attractive to some Native Americans, a number of them eventually found mission life too alien and coercive. Not only were they not accustomed to the Spanish work routines and religious lifestyles, they also found unacceptable the friars' demands that they shed their traditional ways. Many became resentful and left the missions. In some cases outright rebellion ensued, most famously in 1680 when New Mexico's Pueblo Indians exploded into open violence under the leadership of a shaman or spiritual leader named Popé, driving the Spaniards and their loyal indigenous subjects from the region and purging their communities of Catholic symbols and everything Spanish.²

Yet some Native Americans remained within the world of the missions, accepted Christianity, and took on Hispanic and Catholic identities. In various locales, the native peoples revered

missionaries for their faith, dedication, and willingness to advocate for them within the Spanish colonial system. Julio César, who identified himself as a "pure-blooded Indian" of California, recalled with fondness that as a resident of Mission San Luís Rey (near San Diego) during his youth a Padre Francisco was the priest in charge of the mission and "the Indians called him 'Tequedeuma,' an Indian word which signified that the padre was very sympathetic and considerate toward the Indians; in fact, he was very loving and good."³ For the missionaries, Hispanicizing the natives entailed creating living spaces around impressive churches that became the center of everyday life. The missionaries worked diligently inculcating Catholicism, defining work regimes, establishing predictable daily life routines, teaching the Spanish language, overseeing social interactions, enforcing Christian-appropriate gender relations, and striving to modify native cultural practices they deemed contrary to Christianity.

Even as some natives were incorporated into Catholicism and Hispanic society, to varying degrees they exerted their own cultural influence on the Hispanic newcomers. For example, archeological research reveals the presence of Coahuiltecan artifacts such as pottery, tools, and blankets in San Antonio's Hispanic households during the colonial period. Coahuiltecan and other native peoples also brought to Catholic rituals some of the spirit and elements of their *mitote* celebrations, which included singing, dancing, and feasting to mark occasions like the summer harvest, hunting or fishing expeditions, or the return of the full moon.⁴

Male friars produced the vast majority of extant mission records, which consequently tend to accentuate their perspectives, accomplishments, and struggles. Nonetheless, the missions reveal a longstanding, significant element of Latino religion: the faith and leadership of women like Eulalia Pérez, who became a prominent figure at Mission San Gabriel (near Los

Angeles). A native of Loreto, Baja California, Pérez moved to the mission in the early 19th century with her husband, who was assigned there as a guard. After her husband's death, Pérez lived at the mission with her son and five daughters, where she became the head housekeeper, a leadership position in the mission community that grew increasingly significant as the number of friars decreased. Her duties included managing supplies and their distribution, as well as supervising Native American workers. As the elderly Eulalia noted modestly in a memoir she dictated to an interviewer, as the *llavera* (mistress of the keys) at the mission she "was responsible for a variety of duties." In fact, she was the lay overseer of the mission community's daily life.⁵

Historic preservationists and even professional historians often fall into the false presumptions that the missions were the only Catholic religious institutions in the Spanish colonies and Mexican territories and that *all* the missions underwent a period of abandonment and decline. In fact, parishes, military chapels, and some missions have been the homes of active Catholic faith communities from colonial times until the present day. Unlike the numerically predominant missions in which the population consisted exclusively of Native Americans save for a few friars and Hispanic military personnel, these other religious foundations provided for the spiritual welfare of Hispanic civilian and military settlers and their descendants, as well as for some natives who eventually joined their communities. Parishes first appeared with the establishment of formal towns and grew in number as some missions were secularized and became ordinary parishes. Local res-

idents built the churches and sought to obtain the services of clergy, either religious order priests like the Franciscans or diocesan priests, who were primarily trained to serve existing Spanish-speaking Catholic communities rather than to work for the conversion of Native Americans. In Spanish colonial times, Hispanic Catholics established parishes in places like St. Augustine, San Antonio, Laredo, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and Los Angeles, along with military chapels in other locales, such as Santa

Barbara and Monterey, California, where the current Catholic cathedral has its origins in a colonial military chapel.⁶



Royal Presidio Chapel, Monterey, California
(Creative Commons by Christina Cherie Allen, 2011)

Private chapels and pilgrimage sites also reveal local initiative and the origins of contemporary Hispanic Catholicism in the colonial past, such as San Antonio's *Capilla de Nuestro Señor de los Milagros* (Chapel of the Lord of Miracles) and,

most famously, *El Santuario de Chimayó* (Sanctuary of Chimayo) in New Mexico. Tewa Indians acclaimed the healing properties of Chimayó's sacred earth long before Catholic settlers arrived at this locale on the western side of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Spanish subjects completed the first chapel at the site in 1816 and dedicated the Santuario de Chimayó to *El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas* (the Black Christ of Esquipulas), a Guatemalan representation of the crucifixion associated with a Mayan sacred place of healing earth. During the 1850s, however, devotees of the Santuario de Chimayó added a statue of the *Santo Niño de Atocha* (Holy Child of Atocha) in response to a new local shrine dedicated to the Santo Niño. Subsequently the Santo Niño and the miraculous dirt became the focal points for most Santuario devotees. They remain so today for

thousands of pilgrims who visit Chimayó annually.⁷

Conquest and Communities of Faith

Latino Catholic establishments that originated in places from St. Augustine, Florida to Sonoma, California during the 16th through the 19th centuries underwent substantial transformation during U.S. territorial expansion first into Florida in 1821 and then westward. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brought an official end to war between Mexico and the U.S.; established new international borders; and purportedly guaranteed the citizenship, property, and religious rights of Mexican citizens who chose to remain in the conquered territories. Nevertheless, military defeat merely initiated the process of U.S. conquest and expansion, as law enforcement personnel, judicial officials, and occupying troops imposed U.S. rule. Mexican Catholics incorporated into the U.S. underwent the disestablishment of their religion along with widespread loss of their lands, economic wellbeing, political clout, and cultural hegemony. Thus, unlike the saga of their 19th-century European coreligionists who as émigrés sought haven in a new land, the story of the first large group of Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. is primarily a tale of faith, struggle, and endurance in places where their Spanish and Mexican forebears had already created a homeland. In one often-repeated phrase, they were “foreigners in our native land” who survived the U.S. takeover of northern Mexico.⁸

Proponents of U.S. expansion attributed it to divine providence and adopted a view of religious “manifest destiny.” One minister wrote that the Anglo-American takeover of Texas was “an indication of Providence in relation to the propagation of divine truth in other parts of the Mexican dominions[.]. . . Guatemala and all

South America” as well as “the beginning of the downfall of [the] Antichrist, and the spread of the Savior’s power of the gospel.” Subsequently the presumed superiority of civilization and Christianity in the U.S. became the most consistent justification for the nation’s history of expansionism. Willa Cather’s bestselling 1927 novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* played a large part in popularizing this justification. Set in 19th-century New Mexico, the novel sharply

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contrasts the life of Jean Baptiste Lamy, a French priest who became the first bishop (and later archbishop) of Santa Fe, with the native New Mexican priest Antonio José

Martínez. Fictionalized as Bishop Latour, Lamy is idealized as a saintly and civilizing force whose heroic efforts rescued deluded New Mexican Catholics from his antagonist, the allegedly decadent and despotic Martínez. Even Cather’s physical description of Martínez – “his mouth was the very assertion of violent, uncurbed passions and tyrannical self-will; the full lips thrust out and taut, like the flesh of animals distended by fear or desire” – evokes disdain and repulsion. Her plot line leaves no doubt that the imposition of U.S. rule and new religious leadership in New Mexico and the greater Southwest was both a sacred duty and a moral imperative.⁹

Latinos have contested such deprecating and racist portrayals, particularly the contention that U.S. westward expansion redeemed Mexican backwardness and corruption. In the renowned case of Padre Martínez, for example, contemporary biographers Juan Romero and Angélico Chávez have forcefully contested Cather’s depiction of Martínez as “a lecherous ogre,” as well as one-sided historical portrayals that caused “Padre Martínez, along with his people, [to] suffer the death of their good name.” These biographers note Martínez’s numerous accomplishments, including a distin-

guished academic career as a seminarian in Durango, the establishment of a primary school and seminary preparatory school in his hometown of Taos (from which some 30 local youth went on to be ordained for the priesthood), the operation of the first printing press in what is now the western U.S., authorship of numerous books and pamphlets, formal certification as an attorney, and extensive service as an elected representative in legislative bodies under the Mexican and later the U.S. governments. The works of Romero and Chávez exemplify those of a growing number of scholars, activists, and community leaders who scrutinize forgotten or distorted views of Latino history, as well as object to the tendency of historic preservationists to privilege the Spanish colonial missions rather than the struggles and faith of 19th-century Latinos during the imposition of U.S. rule.¹⁰

A number of local communities in the former Mexican territories asserted their heritage and pride in the public spaces of civic life through their long-standing rituals and devotions. From Texas to California, various communities continued to enthusiastically celebrate established local traditions such as pilgrimages, *los pastores* (a festive proclamation of the shepherds who worshiped the newborn infant Jesus), Holy Week, Corpus Christi, and established patronal feast days like that of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The persistence of religious traditions is particularly striking in light of the efforts of newly arrived European Catholic priests and U.S. Protestant ministers to ban, replace, and condemn them. In the face of such initiatives, as well as military conquest and occupation, violence and lawlessness, political and economic displacement, rapid demograph-

ic change, and the erosion of their cultural hegemony, Hispanic Catholic feasts and devotions had a heightened significance. These religious traditions provided an ongoing means of public communal expression, affirmation, faith, and resistance to newcomers who criticized or attempted to suppress Mexican-descent residents' heritage. As Tucson bishop Henry Granjon avowed after years of service in the 19th-century Southwest, these traditions served to "maintain the unity of the Mexican population and permit them to resist, to a certain extent, the invasions of the Anglo-Saxon race."¹¹ Undoubtedly, fear and anger at their subjugation intensified religious fervor among many devotees.



Our Lady of Guadalupe parade float, California (UCLA Library, 1958)

The most renowned lay group that served as the protectors of treasured local traditions was *Los Hermanos de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* (Brothers of Our Father Jesus the Nazarene), or *Penitentes*, in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. Penitente brotherhoods evolved in towns and villages well before the U.S. takeover of the area. Their most noticeable

function was to commemorate Christ's passion and death, although they also provided community leadership and fostered social integration. Organized as separate local entities, Penitente brotherhoods had a leader named the *Hermano Mayor* (literally "older brother") and a *morada* (literally "habitation") or chapter house where they held meetings and religious devotions. Despite the sharp criticism they often received from outsiders, the Penitentes continued providing leadership for prayer and social life in numerous local communities.¹²

Curanderos, faith healers who blended indigenous and Catholic practices, also served

among many Hispanics in the Southwest, especially those who were too poor to afford doctors or health care. The two most famous during the 19th century were Don Pedro Jaramillo and Teresa Urrea, *La Santa de Cabora*. Both were Mexican émigrés, in Urrea's case a forced exile after the Mexican government of Porfirio Díaz accused her of inciting rebellion. Subsequently she sojourned for various periods of time at places in Arizona, Texas, and California, always practicing her healing art and attracting a steady stream of those afflicted with various maladies. Like her counterpart Don Pedrito, she was known for her compassion, humility, and willingness to help her own Mexican people as well as those from other backgrounds who sought her aid and counsel. To this day, both her image and that of Jaramillo adorn numerous homes and are imprinted on candles available at religious and retail stores throughout the region. Jaramillo's home at Falfurrias in south Texas, where he ministered the last 25 years of his life, remains a popular pilgrimage site.¹³

Émigrés from various backgrounds increased the presence and diversity of Latinos in the 19th-century U.S. They encountered a majority-culture Catholicism steeped in European – especially Irish – roots and often faced ethnic prejudice from their coreligionists. Many Hispanics were even barred from entering existing churches and segregated into their own parishes. Yet Hispanics themselves also advocated for national or ethnic parishes as a means to retain their language, cultural practices, sense of group identity, and Catholic faith. Catholics at San Francisco began their successful campaign to establish Our Lady of

Guadalupe parish to serve the Spanish-speaking population in 1871. Although most Spanish-speaking residents were of Mexican descent, representatives from the consulates of Chile, Peru, Nicaragua, Colombia, Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Spain were among the leaders in this effort, making it one of if not the first pan-Hispanic Catholic initiative in the U.S. In 1879, Cuban lay Catholics in Key West, Florida worked with church officials to establish a chapel named after their patroness *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre). Worshipers at the chapel organized the Caridad del Cobre feast, other Marian devotions, Christmas pageants, and even a celebrated pastoral visit from the archbishop of Santiago, Cuba.¹⁴



*Primera Iglesia Metodista Unida, Ponce, Puerto Rico
(Creative Commons by Roca Ruiz, 2010)*

Latino participation and leadership in Protestant religions also began in the 19th century. Intermittent struggles for independence in both Puerto Rico and Cuba led some political activists into U.S. exile. Many political exiles were skeptical if not antagonistic toward the Catholic Church and its leaders, who in their native lands consisted largely of Spaniards and others who supported Spanish colonial rule. A number of them embraced various alternatives to Catholicism such as freemasonry, Protestantism, and socialism. In the Southwest, generally short-lived outreach efforts to Mexicans during the antebellum period subsequently evolved into the more enduring establishment of Hispanic Baptist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, and Presbyterian foundations by 1900. According to the thorough research of Juan Francsico Martínez, in that year a reported 5,632 adult church members formed 150 Spanish-language congregations in the

Southwest, nearly 90 percent of them in Texas or New Mexico.

Various factors hindered Protestant outreach to Mexican residents, most frequently a lack of personnel and finances, as well as manifestations of negative, paternalistic, or even racist attitudes toward people of Mexican descent. For many Latinos who embraced Protestant religious affiliation, their double minority status vis-à-vis Anglo-American Protestants and Mexican American Catholics was an acute challenge. Nonetheless, Latinos were attracted due to the availability of the Bible, their enthusiasm for evangelizing, the conviction that their alienation from Catholic neighbors and family members was worthy suffering for the sake of faith in Jesus Christ, and their desire for the education offered in Protestant schools. Congregations and churches that date from the 19th century are a living legacy to early Latino Protestants, such as El Rito Presbyterian in Chacón, New Mexico; La Trinidad United Methodist in San Antonio; and the Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana in Rosemead, California.¹⁵

New Immigrants, Religious Pluralism, and Struggles for Justice

Nascent 19th-century Hispanic immigration to the U.S. quickened over the course of the 20th century, further expanding the diversification of national origin and religious groups among Latinos in the U.S. The increase of Latino faith expressions is a visible sign of this expanding diversity, such as the Puerto Rican devotion to their patron San Juan, the veneration of Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre to whom Cuban exiles dedicated a Miami shrine in 1973, Guatemalan faith in El Cristo Negro de Esqui-

pulas, and El Salvadoran dedication to Oscar Romero, the slain archbishop of San Salvador who is popularly acclaimed as a martyr and saint.

Catholic ministries to Hispanic newcomers increased with the rising tide of immigration. Émigré clergy, women religious, and lay leaders ministered among their compatriots. During the Mexican Revolution, Mexico's Cristero Rebellion, and their aftermath, Mexican Catholics collaborated with U.S. church officials to establish new parishes in such diverse places as Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, Kansas City, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Toledo. Twelve Mexican parishes opened in Los Angeles alone between 1923 and 1928, with the total number of predominantly Mexican parishes in the archdiocese increasing to



*Azusa Street Mission, California, 1928
(Vanderbilt Divinity Library)*

64 by 1947. In other instances, U.S. Catholics engaged in outreach to the newcomers. The visionary lay apostolic endeavors of Mary Julia Workman in settlement house ministry in Los Angeles and Veronica Miriam Spellmire in establishing and fostering the phenomenal growth of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in San Antonio exemplify such efforts. So does the response of the New York archdiocese to Puerto Rican migration under the leadership of Cardinal Francis Spellman and priests like Joseph Fitzpatrick, S.J., Robert Fox, Ivan Illich, and Robert Stern. U.S.-born Hispanics also engaged in dedicated ecclesial service to their own communities, such as the Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence (MCDPs), the first and only religious order of Mexican American women founded in the U.S., who have provided leadership in evangelization and catechesis in the Southwest and beyond for more than 80 years.¹⁶

Protestant outreach to Latinos also rose concurrently with the expanding population. Despite barriers to women's and Latinos' leadership parallel to those in Catholicism, Latinas were instrumental to Protestant growth through their service as evangelists, church animators, and in some cases ordained ministers. From the outset of the Pentecostal movement, for instance, women played key roles in its development. Susie Villa Valdez was among the first wave of participants to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street. She immediately converted her family to Pentecostalism and for the rest of her life reached out to immigrants, alcoholics, prostitutes, and other marginalized persons with a preaching ministry across southern California. Beginning in 1929, Elodia Guerra conducted evangelistic revivals and services throughout Texas during four years as the designated conference evangelist for the Rio Grande Annual Conference of the Methodist Church. Beatrice Fernández became Director of Religious Education for the Texas-Mexican Presbytery in 1946 and was highly regarded for her efforts to educate and form Hispanics for leadership within the Presbyterian Church. Bishop Minerva Carcaño was the first Hispanic woman appointed a United Methodist district superintendent, directed the Mexican American Program at the Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, and in 2004 became the first Latina elected to the episcopacy of the United Methodist Church. Women of Baptist, Methodist, and other Protestant groups have also compiled works that testify to the considerable contributions of otherwise forgotten women in their respective Christian denominations.¹⁷

Latino Protestantism was initially centered in denominations like the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. After the Azusa Street Revival, Pentecostal growth ensued and, along

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with the increase of evangelicalism, became the mainstay of Latino Protestant affiliation over the course of the 20th century. Francisco Olazábal, one of the earliest and most effective Latino Pentecostal evangelists, exemplifies the zeal of many Latinos for Pentecostalism. Born

into a traditional Catholic family, the conversion of Olazábal's pious Catholic mother to Methodism shaped his own calling to the Methodist ministry. He studied at

the famous Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and then offered energetic pastoral leadership at various locales in California. To the chagrin of Methodist leadership, however, in 1917 two Azusa Street participants, George and Carrie Montgomery, converted Olazábal to Pentecostalism. Ordained to the Pentecostal ministry in the Assemblies of God, within a few years Olazábal objected to the paternalism of Pentecostal leaders like H.C. Ball and Alice Luce, whose unwillingness to promote Latino leadership within the church's Latin District Council led Olazábal to form his own denomination. His untimely death from an automobile accident in 1937 cut short his ministry. Yet across the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Mexico, in his three decades of leadership, Olazábal contributed to the genesis of at least ten Protestant denominations, led tens of thousands of Latinos to profess Pentecostal faith, and attracted over a quarter million attendees to his healing and evangelistic crusades. At the time of his death, the Latin American Council of Christian Churches that he led numbered 150 churches and 50,000 adherents throughout North America and Puerto Rico, and was the fourth largest of all U.S. Pentecostal denominations.¹⁸

Currently the historical trend of growing diversification in Latino religious affiliation is expanding more than ever. Since 1990 the estimated number of Latinos who identify as Catholics has decreased roughly 6 or 8 percent

tage points to somewhere between 60 to 70 percent and the percentage of Latino Protestants remained roughly the same at about 20 to 23 percent. The most significant and largely unreported trend since 1990 is that Latinos who claim “no religion” nearly doubled to somewhere between 8 and 13 percent, reaching a figure that is approaching the percentage of similar respondents in the general population. Approximately three or four percent of Latinos adhere to other religions, the majority of them to “alternative Christian” religions like the Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons, with about one percent affiliated with a world religion other than Christianity. Latinas and Latinos, however, do not limit their religious practice to the defined boundaries of established world religions. Many engage in practices partly rooted in African religions like Santería or in indigenous religions like the healing practices of *curanderismo*. Some Latinos maintain dual or even multiple religious attachments. Thus, they may attend a Pentecostal congregation regularly for Sunday worship but celebrate baptisms, funerals, and other events in a Catholic parish. Other Latinos follow the path of numerous religious seekers in the U.S.: once they have abandoned the religious affiliation of their childhood, their propensity for changing congregations or denominations again increases.¹⁹

Today Latino religion and spirituality are increasingly conspicuous in the public spaces of U.S. society. In numerous cities and towns, *botánicas* offer an array of religious goods such as herbs, powders, incense, candles, prepared waters, and images of saints, gods, goddesses, and other spiritual entities. In a number of *botánicas* the services of a *curandera*, *santera*,

or other healer or spiritual guide are also available. The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe adorns numerous sacred sites beyond the bounds of Catholic parishes, including a Sikh temple near Española, New Mexico, as well as the shrine room at the Kagyu Shenpen Kunchab, a Tibetan Buddhist center in Santa Fe. Latinos who profess Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Mormon, Jehovah Witness, and other faiths have attracted the attention of both scholars and the media. One of the most widespread traditions among Latino Catholics is the devotion to the crucified Jesus and his suffering mother on Good Friday, which often spills out of churches into the streets. Alyshia Gálvez’s study of Mexican immigrants in New York examines one such public ritual, *El Viacrucis del*

Inmigrante (the Way of the Cross of the Immigrant), conducted through the financial district of Manhattan. The links between Jesus’ suffering and that of undocumented immigrants are repeatedly underscored: the procession begins at the offices of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Roman soldiers order Jesus to carry his cross with the command “¡Camina, camina ilegal!” (Walk, walk illegal!), and the prayer booklet for

the event states it is dedicated “in memory of those migrants who have fallen in the struggle to survive with greater dignity, outside of their land, far from their families.” Reverend Luis Cortés, Jr. is President and CEO of Esperanza, the largest Hispanic evangelical network in the U.S., as well as the leading figure in Nueva Esperanza, a vibrant faith-based community development organization in Philadelphia. Since 2001, Cortés and his Esperanza collaborators have convened the annual National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Conference, an event that has attracted the participation of numerous



Muslim Latinas at a dawah event, Puerto Rico
(Creative Commons by Khadijah, 2008)

prominent leaders, including presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.²⁰

Many Latino civil rights leaders have perceived the churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, as institutions that did little or nothing to alleviate the suffering of their people, or were even complicit in their oppression. On the other hand, César Chávez, arguably the most renowned figure in Chicano and Latino history, conspicuously engaged prayer, fasting, non-violent resistance, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the principles of Catholic social teaching in his organizing efforts on behalf of farm workers. Overall, the increased activism of the Chicano movement and other Latino initiatives for civil rights, along with the reforms of Vatican II in the Roman Catholic Church, the growth of Latino Protestant communities, and the inspiration of Latin American liberation theology, influenced many U.S. Latino Protestant and Catholic leaders who consequently initiated efforts for ecclesial and social reform. Latina and Latino Catholics founded organizations like the priests' association PADRES (*Padres Asociados por los Derechos Religiosos, Educativos, y Sociales*, or Priests Associated for Religious, Educational, and Social Rights) and Las Hermanas, the only national Catholic organization of Hispanic women. They built faith-based community organizations such as the highly effective Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), which organizer Ernie Cortés established in 1973 with leaders from ethnic Mexican Catholic parishes in the working-class neighborhoods of San Antonio's west side. Protestant Latinos also originated various initiatives, such as the Latin American Methodist Action Group (LAMAG) and the largely evangelical and Pentecostal Latino Pastoral Action Center. Together Protestant and Catholic leaders have collaborated in a

number of ecumenical ventures, including faith-based community organizations, the Sanctuary Movement, immigration reform advocacy, and the labor struggles of farm workers and more recently other Latino workers such as janitors and hotel and restaurant employees.²¹ Shaping both church and society, such activist efforts are an important element of the ongoing evolution of Latino religion and spirituality in the U.S.

"We must identify with the poor and oppressed. By pooling experience, information and research we can arrive at informed and effective action. The solution lies in unity."

Las Hermanas

Endnotes

- ¹ Roberto Lint Sagarena, "Building California's Past: Mission Revival Architecture and Regional Identity," *Journal of Urban History* 28 (May 2002): 429-44; Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona: A Story* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884). The quotation is cited from Sagarena, originally in Helen Hunt Jackson, "Father Junípero and His Work (pt. 2)," *The Century Magazine* 26 (June 1883): 201.
- ² David J. Weber, ed., *What Caused the Pueblo Revolt of 1680?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999).
- ³ Julio César, "Recollections of my Youth at San Luís Rey Mission," in *Spanish Borderlands Sourcebook: Native American Perspectives on the Hispanic Colonization of Alta California*, ed. Edward D. Castillo (New York: Garland, 1991), 13-15, at 13.
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- ⁵ "Eulalia Pérez: Una vieja y sus recuerdos," in *Nineteenth Century California Testimonials*, ed. Rosaura Sánchez, Beatrice Pita, and Bárbara Reyes (San Diego: University of California at San Diego Ethnic Studies/Third World Studies, 1994), 32-44, at 36.
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