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Editors' Introduction

Antonia Darder
Loyola Marymount University

Luis R. Fraga
University of Notre Dame

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Introduction to Special Issue: Latinos, Education, and the Church

Antonia Darder, Loyola Marymount University
Luis Ricardo Fraga, University of Notre Dame

The origins of this special issue lie in a meeting of the National Symposium on Catholic Hispanic Ministry (NSCHM) held in Sierra Madre, CA, in June 2014. The NSCHM is comprised of a group of Catholic institutions of higher education committed to building bridges of access and integration for Latino communities within the Catholic Church of the United States. Most of the working groups that are part of this meeting focus on issues of theology and ministry. In 2014, a working group on “Hispanic Ministry and Education” was organized for the first time.

Antonia Darder, Leavey Endowed Chair of Ethics and Moral Leadership at Loyola Marymount University (LMU), was invited by Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu, Professor of Theology at LMU, on behalf of the symposium program committee, to write a foundational essay to focus the discussions of the education working group. A longer version of the essay is featured in this issue. In the essay, Darder developed both a theoretical framework and related arguments about the continuing challenges Latino families face in attempting to gain greater educational opportunity in the US. It is important to note that her focus was on Latinos and education generally, not just Latino education in Catholic schools, colleges, and universities. Luis Ricardo Fraga, Arthur Foundation Endowed Professor of Transformative Latino Leadership and Joseph and Elizabeth Robbie Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, was the assigned respondent. There were nine other members of the education group. They represented a broad cross-section of Catholic educational practice, including those with responsibilities for the training of seminarians, a former president of a Catholic university, an advocate of outreach to Latino communities, and an active participant in the development of strategies to provide Latino families more access to Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

Not surprisingly, there was a very active and robust discussion of Darder's essay. Some were uncomfortable with the essay's deep theoretical under-

pinnings; others felt that her critique of the history of how institutions of Catholic education have served Latino communities was misdirected, in that it did not fully acknowledge the major role they felt they played in providing expansive educational opportunities at elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels for earlier waves of predominantly Catholic immigrants and their descendants. Others, however, were excited by the challenges to theory and practice developed in Darder's arguments and greatly appreciated her calls for more expansive and innovative action, if Latino communities are to realize the full range of their hopes and dreams for their children.

Among the most interesting of Darder's arguments was her call to Catholic bishops that they could not properly minister to their Latino congregants without taking a clear and morally grounded stand in support of the need for transformational educational change, specifically directed at institutions of Catholic education and institutions of public education. She justified this claim by accurately noting that the vast majority of Latinos in institutions of education at all levels are currently enrolled in public institutions. Further, she noted that it is overwhelmingly likely that this trend will continue in the future. By not calling for educational reform in public institutions, she argued, Catholic bishops were not fully complying with their stated obligations to serve their congregants. Not everyone in our group agreed with this highly provocative assertion, but a number did.

What became clear from this meeting was a need for continued thinking and writing about the role of the Catholic Church in responding to the interests and needs of Latinos for greater access to and successful completion of education at all levels. A number of participants noted how rare—and how needed—it was for a cross-section of education scholars, advocates, and practitioners, with distinct positions in the complex array of educational institutions in the US to come together as they did in the working group.

It was in this spirit of providing an unutilized venue to discuss the role of Latinos and education that Darder approached the editors of *The Journal of Catholic Education*, published at Loyola Marymount University, to propose that they devote an entire issue of the journal to Latinos, education, and the Church. With the enthusiastic support of the editors, Darder and Fraga assembled a set of educators at different institutions to write essays on distinct aspects of Latinos and education, with a specific focus on Catholic education. First drafts of the essays were presented at a working symposium in April 2015 funded by the National Symposium on Catholic Hispanic Ministry

(NSCHM), the Institute for Latino Studies (ILS) at Notre Dame, and the Institute for Educational Initiatives (IEI), also at the University of Notre Dame.

It was apparent that the varieties of positions, experiences, writing styles, and political perspectives of such a diverse group of educators would lead to essays that each have a distinctive voice. The focus of the essays varies: Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu provides a thoughtful Latina theological reflection on education; Eduardo Lopez's article is a historical discussion of Catholic education in Los Angeles; Corena Marasco's is a self-reflective examination of a new principal in a Catholic school; another article describes the hard won advocacy of Father Joseph Corpora's active participation in expanding educational opportunities for Latinos in Catholic schools; Luis Fraga's article examines two-way language immersion in a Catholic school context; Hosffman Ospino and Patricia Weitzel-O'Neill provide evidence-driven assessments of Latino presence in K-12 Catholic education; Ursula Aldana's presents an ethnographic study of a Catholic high school; and Frances Contreras examines Catholic college and university enrollment and graduation rates of Latino students. Similarly, the four books reviewed for this issue point readers to consider different perspectives that can shed light on the education of Latino communities, as well as the potential role of the Church in this effort.

We consider this variety of approaches and conclusions an accurate reflection of the range of experiences and outlooks that surround debates and dialogues on Latinos, education, and the Church. However, despite the differences apparent in these perspectives, the authors are clearly united in three important points: (a) a vision of using transformative possibilities within the Catholic Church and Catholic education to expand educational opportunities for Latino families; (b) the priority that leaders of the Catholic Church in the US should give to expanding educational opportunities for Latino families; and (c) the need to continue to work strategically to leverage the resources necessary to improve the educational attainment of Latino students across the nation.

It is significant to note here that this special issue represents one of the first efforts to consolidate educational scholarship that critically engages the practice of Catholic education in Latino communities. With this in mind, our larger goals for this special issue are several. First, we want to present evidence of Latino students' lived experiences in distinct aspects of Catholic education. Although many anecdotal experiences exist, each of the essays

here discusses what is properly understood as a set of interactions, sometimes favorable and often times unfavorable, with the practice of Catholic education in the US today. We want to shed light on how Catholic education does and does not affect the lives of Latinos today. Second, we want to use these essays as an opportunity for committed educators to self-reflect on their own experiences within Catholic education and to share their learning with a broader audience as to what does and does not work as Latinos attempt to access educational opportunities in Catholic schools and universities. We are confident that this type of self-reflection will lead to readers becoming more self-reflective about their own experiences and work to assess what does and does not work in their own educational milieu. Lastly, and most importantly, we anticipate these essays will prompt greater discussion, dialogue, debate, and consensus-building that can serve as the foundation for innovative action in the establishment of culturally inclusive policies and especially practices that will promote greater access and completion by Latinos in institutions of Catholic education across the country. Stated differently, we have as a goal that realistic expectations, based on evidence and self-reflection, can serve as catalysts for transformative innovation in Catholic education.

The continued growth of the Latino population, and especially the great increase in the presence of Latino youth in the US for the foreseeable future makes the stakes for Latino families and their communities clear. Without greater access to and success in all types of educational institutions, including those that are Catholic, the participation of Latinos in social, economic, and political institutions will be stifled and the entire country will suffer as a consequence. The stakes are just as high for Catholic schools. Given the continued decline of enrollment in Catholic schools and the continued closing and consolidation of Catholic schools throughout the country, Latino families can stem this enrollment decline and pattern of school closures and consolidations by infusing new life into many Catholic schools. Perhaps most importantly, the stakes for the active practice of Catholicism in the US are most at risk. Declining church attendance and growth of those who are best described as former Catholics, even among Latinos, does not bode well for the Catholic Church in the US. Greater access to Catholic schools and universities by Latinos could be a key factor in stemming these growing trends and revitalizing the U.S. Catholic Church.

We are well aware that the presence of such stakes for Latinos, Catholic schools, and the Catholic Church is no guarantee that action will be taken

to realize what can be described as a convergence of interests. However, it is apparent to us that it would be very unfortunate if it was a lack of will and commitment by leaders of Catholic schools and universities that are standing in the way of taking more action to serve these mutually beneficial interests. We are confident that the experiences, thinking, and analyses presented in these essays will go a long way to ensure that the necessary will and commitment have every opportunity to be realized.

Antonia Darder holds the Leavey Endowed Chair of Ethics and Moral Leadership at Loyola Marymount University and is Professor Emerita of the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign.

Luis Ricardo Fraga is the Arthur Foundation Endowed Professor of Transformative Latino Leadership, Joseph and Elizabeth Robbie Professor of Political Science, and Co-Director of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame.