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## Catholic Education for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles: A Brief Historical Overview

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*This article explores the historical development of Catholic schools for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, California. It provides a brief overview of events spanning the 1700s to the 1970s, with particular attention placed on examining the administration of Cardinal James Francis Aloysius McIntyre from 1948–1969. While his predecessor, Archbishop John Joseph Cantwell, was responsible for laying the foundation of Catholic education in Los Angeles and introducing several innovations, it was under the direction of Cardinal McIntyre that Catholic schooling experienced its most significant growth and evolution. A critical examination of this history reveals a complex and contradictory relationship of the Catholic Church with Mexican American communities. At times the Church built welcoming and affirming educational institutions; at other moments, however, it built schools that served to deculturalize and assimilate the Mexican American community in ways that worked to reproduce the political and economic interests of the dominant society.*

### Keywords

Catholic education history, Los Angeles, immigration, anti-communist efforts, Chicano movement, Mexican American.

In 2005, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) came together to discuss the state of Catholic education in the United States. Despite declining enrollment and financial struggles, the bishops affirmed and recognized the unique role Catholic schools play in providing civic education, rigorous academic preparation, and religious formation, particularly within some of the most vulnerable communities. In particular, the bishops noted how “the Church and its schools are often among the few institutions providing immigrant and newcomers with a sense of welcome, dignity, community, and connection with their spiritual roots” (USCCB, 2006, p. 268). In fact, this edict continues to be fully in line with the bishops’ most recent thinking about Catholic Social Teaching (see USCCB, 2015).

Ten years after the publication of the bishops' statement, Catholic schools have, nevertheless, continued to experience challenges and closures. As a way to address declining enrollment, religious leaders, educators, and academics have turned to the Latina/o community (Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education, 2007; Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education, 2009; Alliance for Catholic Education, 2013). Echoing the statements made by the bishops in 2005, the Catholic Church and Catholic education are viewed as important institutions that worked to protect immigrant rights and support them in mediating a new and unfamiliar cultural and linguistic context:

Immigrants come to this country to work, to better their lives, to discover opportunities for their families. Immigrants also seek to be sustained by their roots of faith—the Catholic Church, one of the few familiar institutions that immigrants find when they arrive in the United States. They look to it to support through the difficulties of navigating a new and unfamiliar culture. Catholic schools can be a true source of comfort for these families, not to mention a benefit to them and to the communities of which they become a part. (Alliance for Catholic Education, 2013, p. 13)

In the midst of such expressed commitment, what has been the historical relationship of the Catholic Church with Mexican American community? Were Catholic schools developed to provide welcoming spaces, connect with the community's spiritual roots, and navigate an unfamiliar culture? In this article, I explore the historical development of Catholic schools for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, California, and examine the religious, educational, political, and cultural factors that have shaped their relationship. This very brief overview of the historical development of Catholic education in California considers major events spanning the 1700s to the 1970s. Particular attention is placed on examining the administration of Cardinal James Francis Aloysius McIntyre from 1948–1969. While his predecessor, Archbishop John Joseph Cantwell, was responsible for laying the foundation and introducing several innovations, it was under the direction of Cardinal McIntyre that Catholic education in Los Angeles experienced its most significant growth and evolution. A critical examination of this history reveals a complex and contradictory relationship of the Catholic Church with Mexican American communities. At times the Church built welcoming and affirming educational institutions; while, at other moments, it built schools that served to deculturalize and assimilate the Mexican American community in ways that worked to reproduce the political and economic interests of the dominant society.

### History of Catholic Education in Los Angeles

The origins of the Catholic school system in Los Angeles can be traced to the mission system established in California after the military conquest of Mexico in 1521 by the Spanish government. The Jesuits were the founders of the mission system and as early as 1705 established a school at St. Xavier mission in Baja California. In 1767, King Charles III expelled the Jesuits and replaced them with the Franciscans, under the direction of Father Junipero Serra. The mission system served to religiously convert indigenous populations in the region and secure the political and economic interests of the Spanish government. The few indigenous students who received formal schooling were generally trained to assist in the colonizing effort, through an epistemology and cultural values that propagated the superiority of Europeans and, conversely, the intellectual and spiritual inferiority of indigenous populations (Burns, 1994 North, 1936; Monroy, 1990).

#### Early Efforts at Catholic Education, 1835-1900

In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. Upon overthrowing their Spanish oppressors, the new ruling Mexican government was fearful that Spanish friars would start revolts against the new regime. In 1834, the federal government issued an edict that secularized the missions. The edict, in part, called for the federal government to take possession of mission properties and redistribute them to indigenous communities (North, 1936). The following year, compulsory public elementary education was established (Menchaca, 1999). In accordance with the establishment of these types of policies, Catholic educational and missionary efforts became sporadic for the next 25 years. Several schools, seminaries, and colleges were built in California, but quickly closed because of low enrollment and lack of funds.

It would not be until the end of the Mexican-American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo in 1848 that the Catholic educational project would once again take hold in the region (San Miguel, 1999). Within this context, Catholic educational institutions rapidly grew and experienced tremendous success. In large part, the success of these schools was due to the introduction of women religious orders into California. The members of orders such as the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Sisters of Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose had been highly trained teachers and administrators in Europe. Trained in curriculum development, pedagogy, and school administration, the sisters established a number of successful schools

for boys and girls in California. In addition to offering religious instruction, the schools offered secular courses such as geography, science, history, arithmetic, spelling, rhetoric, drawing, and music. Some of the schools established under their direction included the Orphan Asylum and Academy in 1856; St. Vincent's Institute in 1857; St. Catherine's in 1880; Cathedral School in 1886, Ramona Convent in 1890; Sacred Heart in 1890, and Academy of Holy Names in 1897. By 1903, the Sisters had established a Catholic school system that had over 3000 students enrolled (North, 1936).

The Church's willingness to integrate the cultural and spiritual needs of Mexican communities in California was another important factor that contributed to the expansion of Catholic education in California. By the mid-1850s, the Catholic Church on the East Coast had already adopted an informal policy of establishing "national" parishes. Upon their arrival in the United States, European immigrants sought to maintain their cultural identities and language communities. By establishing "national" parishes and schools, European immigrants were able to create culturally homogeneous spaces in which they could preserve and pass on their cultural values and knowledge to their children. In a similar manner, the Catholic Church responded to the needs of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Seeking to maintain their cultural and spiritual identities in a rapidly changing society, Mexican Americans sought the refuge of Catholic schools that offered a bilingual education curriculum. Two of the first Mexican Catholic Schools in Los Angeles were Picpus School for boys in 1851 and Institution Caraitiva for girls in 1856. Both schools offered religious instruction and basic reading and writing in Spanish and English (San Miguel, 1999).

### **Responding to Immigration in the Early Twentieth Century**

Large-scale Mexican immigration into California during the early 1900s created increased pressures and problems for the Catholic Church. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 caused major population displacement; as a result, thousands of Mexican nationals fled to California in the hopes of escaping the ensuing chaos. But they also came, as George Sanchez (1993) has argued, because of the expansion of California's agricultural economy and the increased availability of jobs. The agricultural production of fruits and vegetables was one of Los Angeles County's main industries well into the 1930s. Employers looking to fill the vacuum of cheap and exploitable labor left following the exclusion of Chinese labor in the 1880s and Japanese labor in the 1920s often turned to Mexican workers to labor in the fields. Mexican communities were considered a good source for cheap labor, whose members'

primary function was to sell their manual labor skills. In the process, Mexican workers were systematically segmented into the lowest levels of society. Mexican workers were routinely found in unskilled or semiskilled occupations, where a substantial pay differential existed between Mexican and White workers. For example, Mexican workers were paid \$1.00 to \$1.25 daily, while White workers were paid \$1.75 to \$2.00 for the same work (Barrera, 1979).

The Church, unfortunately, seemed uncertain about how to respond to the exploitative conditions at work in Mexican American communities. This was partly fueled by the Catholic Church's unstable social and political position in American society during the early 1900s. Burns (1994) argued that mainstream American society was increasingly hostile towards Catholics. In a predominately Protestant society, Catholics were viewed as disloyal Americans who placed their loyalty first to the Pope and second to nation. Therefore, in order to gain acceptance:

The Church took as one of its duties the responsibility of ushering the Mexican into mainstream American life. Often this was done without sufficient critical attitude toward American society of which they wanted the Mexican to be a part and without sufficient appreciative attitude toward the culture brought by the Mexican immigrant (Burns, 1994, pp. 148-149).

**Better Catholics and better citizens: The work of Bishop John Joseph Cantwell.** Bishop John Joseph Cantwell, appointed in 1917 to the Monterey-Los Angeles Archdioceses, led the Church's efforts to usher the Mexican community into mainstream American life. Bishop Cantwell fundamentally believed Americanization was a Catholic responsibility, through which the Church could effectively integrate Mexican Americans into the existing social and economic system. He firmly asserted, "We believe that in making better Catholics, we shall make them better citizens" (as cited in Burns, 1994, p. 149). During the early 1900s the Church initiated a variety of Americanization programs, which echoed the larger public Americanization campaigns taking place across the nation. These Catholic education programs conflated a focus on spirituality and citizenship, by including courses in civics, English, and home economics.

One such program that combined the Church's evangelical and Americanization efforts was the creation of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes. The Archdiocese started CCD instruction in 1922, and classes administered and offered through the Immigration and Welfare Department of the Associated Catholic Charities. CCD courses provided religious instruction to immigrant children attending public schools. CCD instruction became so successful that by 1936, instruction had been offered to 28,500



students, operating out of 211 centers with 1,279 teachers (Sanchez, 1993).

Bishop Cantwell's educational efforts were not only restricted to CCD instruction. He felt that the Catholic school was the most important part of a parish because "the hope of a Christian future, the preservation of the faith, the welfare of families, the prosperity of nations and the Christian character of our civilization depend upon the Christian education of our children" (as cited in Weber, 1971, p. 160). Catholic schools were so important to the Bishop that in his first pastoral letter, he issued a mandate to his parish priests to assist in placing every Catholic child in a parochial school. Hence, it is not surprising that during Bishop Cantwell's administration (1917-1947), Catholic schools experienced a tremendous amount of growth in Los Angeles. In 1915 there were only 37 elementary schools with a total enrollment of 7,977 students. By 1935 there were 103 schools with an enrollment of 23,616 students. On average, 3.3 elementary schools opened each year during this period (North, 1936). High school construction experienced a similar growth pattern. By 1947, 35 high schools existed with a total enrollment of 9,932 students (Weber, 1971).

In order to coordinate the growth and development of Catholic schools in his region, Bishop Cantwell created a diocesan Board of Education in 1918. Initially, the Board only functioned in an advisory nature; later, however, its duties extended to school visitations, selection of a corps of religious community supervisors, approval and adoption of school textbooks, and teacher preparation (North, 1936). In order to keep teachers informed and trained in the latest curriculum and pedagogical methods, the Board created a Diocesan Teachers Institute in 1924. The idea of a teacher institute proved so successful that by 1937, the Institute's Catholic teacher preparation programs operated at the national level (Weber, 1971).

### Post-war Era

The post World War II economic boom in the US and the completion of Archbishop Cantwell's tenure stand in an interesting historical juxtaposition. As soldiers reentered society and economic profits reaped by the nation were accompanied by a powerful discourse of prosperity and procreation, Archbishop Cantwell ended his episcopate in 1947. Under his astute leadership, Catholic education in Los Angeles had grown to include 115 elementary schools and 35 high schools. However, only 30% of Mexican parishes had parochial schools, compared to 58% of parishes in the rest of Los Angeles.

**Anti-communist efforts of Archbishop McIntyre.** The appointment of Archbishop James Francis Aloysius McIntyre in 1948, however, dramatically changed this situation (Burns, 1994). Almost immediately after his appointment, he asked the director of Catholic Schools to initiate a survey of the Archdiocese school system. The results of the survey painted an alarming picture for the newly-appointed Archbishop. According to the statistics compiled, Catholic high schools enrolled 10,246 students and turned away 41,754 because of lack of space. In a similar manner, Catholic elementary schools enrolled 48,608 students but turned away 52,392 potential students (Weber, 1997). Archbishop McIntyre was deeply concerned with the results from the survey. He firmly believed that without proper Catholic school facilities, Catholic children were forced to receive an inferior education in the public school system. The Archbishop considered Catholic schools superior to public schools because they could address the mental, physical, and spiritual needs of children. He insisted, "Catholic education provides for the development of both the spiritual and physical, soul as well as body, and hence our parochial schools are in reality complete, more efficient, because their curriculum includes the knowledge of the service of God" (McIntyre, April 25, 1948)

In addition to lack of spiritual formation, Archbishop McIntyre also worried about the potential communist influence of children attending public schools. After 1945, the United States considered itself to be a necessary counterbalance to the communist governments of the Soviet Union and China. In order to establish itself as the dominant hegemonic power, American policy makers demonized communism and anyone who held socialist beliefs considered to be akin to communist tendencies. In the national political arena, the Russians and the Soviet Union were cast as evil and God-less monsters that threatened to destroy democratic nations around the world. In contrast, the United States was presented as the great defender of democracy, liberty and justice, a reputation still linked closely to the contribution of the U.S. military in saving the world from the tyranny of Hitler and Nazi Germany. Anticommunism, then, was not only used to justify and extend US imperialism, but it was also used domestically to preserve economic inequality, obedience to authority, repression of domestic political dissent, conservation of White superiority, and the preservation of traditional morality such as the nuclear family (Verdries, 1996).

Reflective of the reactionary political mood of his time, Archbishop McIntyre was deeply and frequently concerned with the evils of communism around the world and in the United States. In particular, he was troubled by



organizations he viewed as spreading communist and socialist beliefs in public schools and within working class communities. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) program was an integrated program of the Los Angeles public schools from 1946-1951. On September 1950 the Los Angeles Board of Education adopted a pamphlet entitled "The 'E' in UNESCO." Designed for secondary schools, the pamphlet emphasized similarities rather than differences between ethnic groups, improving human relations, and helping students understand and assume their responsibilities. In the fall of 1951, several conservative organizations attacked the UNESCO program because they believed it was teaching communism and socialism. Public debate and controversy became so intense that on August 28, 1952, the Los Angeles School Board held a meeting. At the meeting, the Board appointed a special committee to investigate how the UNESCO program had affected the curriculum of the Los Angeles public schools. Although the special committee found that the UNESCO program had worked to instill patriotism and love of country, it recommended discontinuation of the program (Verdries, 1996).

Archbishop McIntyre was relieved when the UNESCO program was withdrawn. He greatly feared the program was simply propaganda, rooted in the philosophies of Dewey, Hegel, and Marx. Both his writings and public commentary on the issue indicate he was quite certain that, in addition to advocating the ideas of communism, the UNESCO program would establish "a system of education that does not acknowledge God—ignores Christian civilization and specifically established moral and spiritual values as determined by public opinion, to be the form of international education" (McIntyre, September 12, 1953). In a letter to the President of the Ford Foundation, the Archbishop bemoaned the UNESCO program's absence of religious orthodoxy:

[I]t seems to be a system of education that ignores principals, traditions, and standards of long time duration, as well as experience . . . God is not mentioned in this system of education. Neither is religion. The commandments as given to Moses are waived, as is the Sermon on the Mount. The existence of Christ, even as a historical figure, is omitted (as cited in Weber, 1997, p. 636).

Similarly, McIntyre feared the manner in which activist organizations such as National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools (NCCPS) were making their presence felt in public schools. Formed in May 1949, the

NCCPS was founded as a way to address problems facing American public schools. The NCCPS worried that despite the tremendous population growth that resulted after World War II, the construction of public schools had not kept pace with the growing number of young people. As a result, children often found themselves in crowded classrooms and in schools that lacked significant resources. In order to address these issues, the NCCPS sought to make the American public realize the importance of public schools to the expansion of democracy and help communities create Citizens' Committees. The NCCPS hoped the creation of Citizens' Committees could help ordinary people address such educational issues as overcrowding, fiscal problems, increasing teacher salaries, replacing inadequate equipment, and connecting the school with the community (NCCPS, 1954). Archbishop McIntyre worried the NCCPS was rapidly spreading across the country and was receiving help from the National Education Association, an organization he also believed to be rooted in the ideas of communism. To counteract the spread of communist ideas in education, he suggested publicizing the Catholic philosophy of education through Catholic magazines, newspapers, and journals (Alexander, October 26 1953)

Archbishop McIntyre's overzealous concern also implicated Mexican American working class communities, which he suspected were influenced by communist ideas. In 1950, he asked the editor of the Catholic newspaper *The Tidings* to reprint an article entitled "How Reds Lure L.A. Workers." Written by Louis F. Budenz, an advisor to Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, the article described a campaign stop in Los Angeles by 1948 presidential candidate Henry Wallace. Wallace, a member of the Progressive Party, was endorsed by the Communist Party and campaigned to end segregation. In the article, Budenz wrote in horror how Henry Wallace had been able to attract almost 10,000 Mexican American voters to his presidential campaign. Renouncing his Communist party membership and returning to his early Catholic roots, the anti-communist advocate Budenz did not believe Mexican Americans or any impoverished community needed social reform. Instead, he maintained that their needs could be met through the work of ministers of God (Weber, 1997).

On February 2, 1949, the Archbishop announced that he was beginning a fund-raising campaign and school-building program. McIntyre asked all parishioners to help raise \$3,500,000 to purchase property and construct 15 elementary and high schools. In order to assist in collecting the funds, the Archbishop appointed Msgr. Martin McNicholas as director of the Youth

Education Fund (YEF). With the help of volunteers, committees were created to cover such activities as publicity and home visitations. Volunteers were sent to visit Catholic homes to inform parishioners about how Catholic schools ameliorated overcrowding in local public schools, to stress the patriotism of Catholic teachers, graduates, and pupils, and to solicit money for the school building program. Archbishop McIntyre also personally contributed to the fundraising effort by writing letters and making phone calls. By mid-June 1949, McIntyre reported that approximately \$3,600,000 had been pledged to the YEF but only \$2,805,630 was received. The actual cost of building the 15 Catholic elementary and high schools was almost ten million dollars. Despite not collecting the majority of the funds needed for school construction, Archbishop McIntyre considered the fundraiser a success and made it a permanent feature of his administration, establishing annual collections for the YEF (Weber, 1997).

In 1953, the very religiously orthodox and politically right-winged McIntyre ascended to Cardinal. In an attempt to further counter what he deemed as communist and socialist influences in American society, the new Cardinal expanded his ambitious building campaign, purchasing cheap available land in Los Angeles for the construction of new churches and schools. McIntyre believed steadfastly that constructing Catholic schools would be an effective tool to promote patriotism and loyalty. Through the expansion of the Catholic school system, he also hoped to address the high rate of child delinquency by offering proper religious instruction. The Cardinal, worried that young Mexican Americans were growing up in dysfunctional families and, therefore, not receiving proper moral guidance. By building Catholic educational institutions and providing proper Catholic supervision, McIntyre sought to achieve two objectives: (a) to insulate Mexican Americans from communism, moral "liberalism, and secularism" (Weber, 1997, p. 333); and (b) to "exhibit the Church to the larger society as an institution instilling American ideals into its laity of Mexican background" (p. 333). As Weber (1997), describes, the Cardinal's actions indicate his belief that "only under Catholic auspices and supervision could Mexicans be made into good loyal Americans" (p. 333).

### Mid-Century Expansion

From 1949 to 1955, the number of Catholic elementary schools in the Archdiocese Los Angeles had increased from 150 to 212 and the number of students enrolled had increased from 53,327 to 97,755. During the same

period, the number of high schools increased from 37 to 48, and the number of high school students increased from 11,130 to 20,690. By 1955, one of the most difficult challenges facing the Archdiocese was its ability to provide a high school education for the growing number of graduates from parochial schools. Despite the growth, only 60% of Catholic children were enrolled in Catholic elementary schools and only 33% of Catholic youth were being educated in Catholic high schools (Youth Education Fund, August 29, 1955). In order to meet the growing demand for Catholic education, Cardinal McIntyre initiated a new fundraising campaign based on the patronage of Pope Saint Pius X. On January 24, 1955, Cardinal McIntyre formally announced the fundraising campaign with a goal of \$3,750,000. The campaign was so successful that pledges amounted to \$4,627,613 and actual funds in hand by March 9, 1955 were \$3,895,984. Over \$4,700,00 of these funds were used to build 22 parochial schools in the predominately Mexican-American areas of Boyle Heights, Belvedere, East Los Angeles, and Pico Rivera. Similar campaign drives were again held in 1958 and 1963 (Weber, 1997).

Despite the massive school construction program in the Archdiocese, schools could not be built fast enough to meet parishioners' demands to enroll their children in Catholic schools. In 1959, an Archdiocesan survey indicated that 12,039 children would graduate from parochial elementary schools. Catholic high schools could only accommodate about 9,000 freshmen. The remaining 3,039 students would need to enroll in public schools (Youth Education Fund, May 4, 1959). The following year, 12,000 eighth graders graduated from parochial schools; only 10,000 were accepted into Catholic high schools (Youth Education Fund, June 28, 1960). The enrollment of Mexican American children in parish schools was far lower than expected, which eventually caught the attention of the Cardinal as well as the community itself.

### **The Chicano Movement and the Church**

By 1960, every parish in East Los Angeles, a predominantly Mexican American community, had a parish school. Cardinal McIntyre made it a priority to build schools in poor communities and to keep tuition affordable for all children in the Archdiocese. Despite these efforts, the percentage of Mexican American students enrolled in Catholic schools remained small. For example, during the 1963-1964 academic year, students of Mexican decent represented only 23% of the elementary school population and 17% of the high school population (Youth Education Fund, December 16, 1963). The lack

of access to schooling for Mexican American students was not just a problem within the Catholic school system, but was also found in California's public schools. Fifty percent of Mexican Americans were pushed out of school by the tenth grade. Further, despite making up only 14% of total enrollment in California schools, Mexican American students represented 40% of students enrolled in "mentally retarded" classes (Donato, 1997).

In response to growing educational and economic inequality, young people in the Mexican American community turned to the oppositional politics of the Chicano Movement (Munoz, 1989). One organized inspired by the protest politics of the movement was *Católicos Por La Raza* (CPLR). The members of CPLR questioned why the Church was not addressing the broader educational and economic inequality in Chicano communities. In order to meet the needs of Chicano communities, CPLR made several demands. Amongst them was a call for the Archdiocese to provide funding for educational programs, build low cost housing, provide free or low-cost health insurance, offer courses in Mexican American history and culture to seminary students, and publically support the Chicano movement (Garcia, 2008).

In order to call attention to their demands, approximately five hundred people met in front of the Los Angeles Catholic Chancery Office on Christmas Eve in 1969 for a candlelight procession to St. Basil's Church. The group was composed mostly of Chicano university students; some families also attended. Once they reached the front steps of the church, the group held a Mass in Spanish. Three priests celebrated the Eucharist with the group. At the conclusion of the Mass on the steps of St. Basil's, some of the members of CPLR began to pass out flyers to people arriving for midnight Mass in the church. Another group of about 50 people attempted to enter the front doors of the church, only to have them immediately closed. Determined to get inside St. Basil's, the group went around the side of the church and found a way in. As they made their way to the front of the church, off-duty sheriffs dressed as ushers attempted to stop and apprehend them. The group managed to open the front doors, but moments later the Los Angeles Police Department's riot squad ran in from the back of the church. The police joined the off-duty sheriffs and proceeded to kick and beat members of CPLR back into the streets. Approximately 21 people were arrested that day. At the end of the midnight Mass, Cardinal McIntyre derided the protesters in front of the congregation, stating "We are ashamed of the participants and we recognize that their conduct was symbolic of the rabble as they stood at the foot of the cross, shouting, 'Crucify him!' Forgive them for they know not what they do." (as cited in Gomez, 1980, p. 129).

## Historical Tensions

Cardinal James Francis McIntyre retired on January 21, 1970. During his administration, 179 educational institutions were built between 1948 and 1969. On average, eight schools were built a year. As a result of this massive school construction project, every parish in a predominately Mexican American community received a parochial school. In addition, Mexican Americans also had access to Catholic high schools such as Bishop Conaty, Bishop Mora Salesian, Cathedral, Our Lady of Loretto, Pater Noster, Sacred Heart, Sacred Heart of Mary and San Gabriel Mission High School. However, what is often missed amid the recitation of these numbers is the class overtones and conservative politics of U.S. assimilation and patriotism that, more often than not, sat at the heart of the curriculum in Catholic schools over the last century, despite civil rights efforts within this country and other parts of the world to overcome racism, sexism, class inequalities, and other forms of social exclusions. A critical examination of the historical development of Catholic education in Los Angeles reveals that a deep tension has existed in the relationship of the Church with the Mexican American community—a tension which continues today, albeit perhaps more sophisticated and with greater advocacy efforts from progressive religious within the Church and lay people involved in the forging of a Latino/Hispanic theology and serving through the efforts of Hispanic ministry. Nevertheless, as discussed above, there have been times when Catholic schools were built to affirm the religious and cultural values and identity of Mexican Americans. However, the motivation to build educational institutions often stemmed not only from the desire to provide religious instruction and academic achievement, but rather also created to mediate, extend, and legitimize the interests of the dominant group.

The tension was again very apparent as Catholic education in Los Angeles experienced unparalleled growth under the direction of Cardinal James Frances McIntyre. Steeped in the belief that communists and socialists were infiltrating public schools at the end of World War II, McIntyre appealed to families to enroll their children in Catholic schools. In so doing, he hoped to not only provide what he believed was a superior education because it addressed students' physical, mental and spiritual needs; he also hoped to very deliberately produce loyal and patriotic Catholic youth. His concerns were particularly directed toward the Mexican American community, which he considered vulnerable to communist tendencies. Meanwhile, members of *Católicos por la Raza*, who recognized not only the importance of constructing schools and providing access to a quality education for Mexican Ameri-



can children but the inequality their children were experiencing, called on the Church to make it a priority to address the poverty and inequality in the Mexican American community.

The powerful impact of Vatican II upon Mexican American communities began to take hold just as Cardinal McIntyre retired from his post. The new era brought the proliferation of liberation theology in Latin America, renewed efforts for educational justice in the US, and the broadening of educational opportunities within Catholic schools for Mexican American and other Latino populations in Los Angeles and across the country. However, it is impossible to begin to comprehend the complex relationship of the Church to the education of Mexican American communities in Los Angeles today without some understanding of the historical political tensions that have shaped the landscape of Catholic education over the years.

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