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The Chicana/o Movement and the Catholic Church:  
Católicos por la Raza, PADRES, Las Hermanas

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

David Jesus Flores

2017



## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Chicana/o Movement and the Catholic Church  
Católicos por la Raza, PADRES, Las Hermanas

by

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Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Robert Chao Romero, Chair

The role of religion is largely missing from the historical narrative of the Chicana/o power movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Whereas historians have documented the political, educational, and social changes that resulted from the Chicana/o movement, very few have examined the role of religion. This thesis highlights the intersection of religion and the Chicana/o movement, specifically as it pertained to the Catholic Church. I examine three faith-based organizations founded during the Chicana/o movement and explore their resistance and challenge to the church's longstanding institutional racism. I argue that the Catholic Church, like other institutions of power challenged during the late 1960's, experienced its own Chicana/o movement and the field of Chicana/o studies should recognize this important piece of history.

This thesis of David Jesus Flores is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2017

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## Introduction

Whereas the Black Civil Rights movement has been largely documented as religious leitmotif, the field of Chicana/o studies has lacked a spiritually centered social movement history.

Predominantly studied through a secular lens, the role of religion is largely missing from the historical narrative of the Chicana/o power movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's. This is surprising considering the "vast majority of U.S. Latinos claim to be religious or spiritual"<sup>1</sup>. If research broadens to include the religious or spiritual character of Chicana/os, the evidence suggests religion played a much larger role in the Chicana/o movement than has been previously documented. Furthermore, expanding the lens on Chicana/o history introduces the contributions of non-traditional agents of change. Contrary to popular and scholarly belief, "Chicana/o and Latina/o religious leaders, sisters, priests, and laity fought valiantly in the struggle for civil rights and self-determination."<sup>2</sup>. Although Chicana/o and social movement historians have documented the political, educational, and social changes that resulted from the Chicana/o movement, very few have examined the role of religion.

This masters thesis helps fill the void of religion and spirituality in Chicana/o studies and adds to the emerging literature of Latina/o religious studies. It highlights the intersection of religion and the Chicana/o civil rights movement, however, its scope is limited to the Catholic Church. In the forthcoming chapters, I provide case studies of three faith-based organizations founded during the Chicana/o Movement. I explore their resistance and challenge to the

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<sup>1</sup> Gastón Espinosa, "History and Theory in the Study of Mexican American Religions," in

<sup>2</sup> Lara Medina, *Las Hermanas*. (Temple University Press, 2005), 6.

Catholic church's institutional racism towards Mexicans in particular, and the Spanish speaking community in general. Inspired by Cesar Chavez, the United Farmworkers, and student activists during the Chicana/o movement, an organization of Catholic Priests, *Padres Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos, y Sociales (PADRES)*, Catholic Sisters (*Las Hermanas*), and faith based community activists (*Católicos por la Raza*), confronted the Catholic Church's longstanding discriminatory racial practices, such as segregated seating, lack of respect for the Spanish language, poor representation of indigenous Chicana/o leadership, and an unwillingness to support the United Farmworkers struggle.

These case studies provide a unique and overlooked narrative to the history of the Chicana/o Movement. It demonstrates the role of religion in the movimiento as well as the impact of the Chicana/o movement upon the Church. Just as students and workers experienced discrimination in the educational system and the labor market, Chicana/o priests, sisters, and laity were not exempt. *PADRES* and *Las Hermanas* experienced daily indignities as institutional members of the church, such as the lack of culturally relevant seminaries, upward mobility, or representation in the hierarchy. They were often times barred and punished for speaking or preaching in Spanish. *Católicos*, predominantly made up of community members and laity, experienced the manifestation of the church's discriminatory policies, such as limited Spanish services, lack of Spanish speaking priests, and an unwillingness to support the worldly suffering of the Mexican community.

The collective effort of *Católicos*, *PADRES*, and *Las Hermanas* displayed a unique insider/outsider strategy against the church. They each represented different levels of church membership which served to challenge the Church from different angles. *Católicos*, as formal Catholics but non-institutional members, were not bound to the consequences from the hierarchy,



therefore, their tactics were more confrontational. PADRES and Las Hermanas, employed by the Church, were subject to their authority. However, their position allowed them access and influence. Together, applying their theology in action, PADRES, Las Hermanas, and Católicos, albeit unknowingly, deployed an insider/outsider strategy to make an unprecedented challenge to the church.

This research provides evidence that the insider/outsider organizing of Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas, resulted in changes to the future and national character of the Catholic Church in the United States, particularly the Southwest. The explosion of activity demonstrated by these organizations was felt all the way to the Vatican in Rome. I argue that the Catholic Church, just like other institutions of power that were challenged during the late 1960's and early 70's, experienced its own Chicana/o movement. It is a movement that has regretfully been overlooked by history.

## **Literature Review**

Although religion and spirituality are fundamental features of Chicana/o identity, scholars in Chicana/o and religious studies have largely ignored its historical significance. There is no doubting that Mexicana/os and their Chicana/o descendants are a highly religious population. Historian Mario Garcia states, "One cannot fully understand Chicanos, or any ethnic group for that matter, without taking into consideration the significant role played by religion in shaping community."<sup>3</sup> David Badillo also stated, "To fully understand Latinos in the United States today, one must understand their unique, complex and ever-evolving relationship with the Catholic Church, the Catholic religion, and the various syncretisms born of Catholic interactions

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<sup>3</sup> Mario T. Garcia, *Católicos: Resistance and affirmation in Chicano Catholic history* (University of Texas Press, 2008), 26

in the Americas.”<sup>4</sup> Recent figures of Mexican-American religiosity state, “79 percent of people with Mexican American ancestry self-reported Roman Catholic affiliation, 7.2 percent Pentecostal, 6.9 percent Evangelical non-Pentecostal, 4 percent Mainline Protestant, and 3 percent alternative Christian, just as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormon, and other.”<sup>5</sup> With such a sizeable religious community, it is surprising that its scholarly importance has been overlooked by a discipline dedicated to understanding this population.

### *Chicana/o Studies and Religion*

For many years, scholars have been encouraging the discipline of Chicana/o studies to recognize religion as a necessary sub-field. Esteemed professor of religious history, David Carrasco, in as far back as 1982, shared his concerns about the absence of religiosity in Chicana/o studies. In *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, Carrasco stated he “was deeply concerned that Chicano studies as a multidisciplinary academic and community enterprise did not take seriously the diverse religious dimensions of Mexican American history, society, and culture.”<sup>6</sup> As Chicana/o studies continued to expand nationally over the next decade, Stevens-Arroyo and Diaz-Stevens continue to echo the same frustration about the spiritual nexus. They stated “with disappointment that... only limited and superficial importance to religion” is given.<sup>7</sup> Although the discipline has matured significantly since the first Chicana/o studies department

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<sup>4</sup> David A. Badillo, *Latinos and the new immigrant church* (JHU Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Espinosa, “History and Theory in the Study of Mexican American Religions,” 20.

<sup>6</sup> David Carrasco, “A Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimensions in Chicano Experience: BLESS ME, ULTIMA as a Religious Text,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 13, no. 1-2 (1982): 196.

<sup>7</sup> Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing the Latino resurgence in US religion: The Emmaus paradigm* (Westview Press, 1997).

was established in 1969, Chicana/o religiosity has yet to receive meaningful considerations. Garcia's 2008 book on Chicana/o Catholics stated, "Today, almost forty years after the founding of the first Chicano studies programs, it is still difficult to find many courses that specifically focus on Chicano religion."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, although a 2005 conceptual map of the field of Chicana/o Studies lists over 50 areas of research, it neglects to mention religion or spirituality as a topic of examination.<sup>9</sup> This has caused Luis León, and others interested Chicana/o religiosity, to lament that in the field of Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, research on religion and spirituality remains largely "undocumented."<sup>10</sup>

### *Religious Studies and Chicana/os*

A second layer of marginalization appears when considering the field of religious studies. It too has also overlooked the contributions of Chicana/os and Latina/os to its history. Carrasco argued that, "Neither the Western nor the indigenous religious traditions within Chicano life have been seriously looked at by Chicanos from the history of religion viewpoint."<sup>11</sup> Much like in Chicana/o studies, the long history of Chicana/o piety in United States Catholicism is all but ignored. Garcia adds, "for much of U.S. history Hispanics have constituted a relatively small and frequently overlooked group within U.S. Catholicism."<sup>12</sup> This omission is particularly strange since "Spanish speaking Catholics have been continuously *presente* in what is now the

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<sup>8</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Reynaldo F. Macías, "El Grito en Aztlán: voice and presence in Chicana/o Studies," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 18, no. 2 (2005): 165-184.

<sup>10</sup>Luis D. León, *The political spirituality of Cesar Chavez: crossing religious borders* (University of California Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Carrasco, "A perspective for a study of religious dimensions," 278.

<sup>12</sup> Garcia, "Católicos," 17.

continental United States for almost twice as long as the nation has existed.”<sup>13</sup> A closer reading in American religious history provides insight into how the oldest members of a group can be so easily forgotten.

The narrative of the United States religious history has privileged its Anglo Protestant past. Medina states that Catholic history is largely overshadowed by the extensive scholarship on Protestant Christianity, “within the field of American Catholicism, the narrative centers on Euro-American devotees.”<sup>14</sup> León suggests that religious history has followed the migration patterns of the European conquest. He states, “Localizing itself on the cities of the eastern seaboard, particularly the New England states, American religious cartography seemingly ends in the Puritan mind of the early twentieth century; too often, the Southwest is neglected.”<sup>15</sup> Lastly, Rudy Busto argues that the genesis of American religious historiography is related to the project of nation building and a triumphalist Protestant American exceptionalism.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the field of religious studies has marginalized the religious experiences of the Mexican and Chicana/o population.

#### *Re-Viewing Chicana/o Spirituality*

It would take decades since the founding of Chicana/o studies for alternative interpretations of Chicana/o religiosity to gain considerable recognition. Although the scholarly study of Chicana/o religiosity has remained on the margins, a new generation of scholars are

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Matovina and Gerald E. Poyo, *Presente!: US Latino Catholics from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015)

<sup>14</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 7

<sup>15</sup> León, *Cesar Chavez*, viii

<sup>16</sup> Rudy V. Busto, *King Tiger: The Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina* (UNM Press, 2005).

proposing the study of religion through an oppositional lens. Hjamil A. Martinez-Vazquez states, “Latina/o religious historiography can be considered a subversive enterprise since it uncovers themes, voices, and stories hidden by the dominant U.S religious historical discourses.”<sup>17</sup> Scholars slowly realized that there was more to religion and spirituality than its oppressive history. León adds “Religion – broadly and personally defined – in addition to serving power as an ideological mechanism of social control, exploitation, and domination, is effectively deployed in attempts to destabilize those very same forces by people who have access to only the bare resources that constitute conventional power.”<sup>18</sup> Chicana/os and Latina/os have recognized the rift in separating their religious and spiritual histories. Brenda Sendejo stated, “in rejecting the Church I rejected everything that went along with it, including a part of me, a part that is deeply entangled with my Mexican American identity.”<sup>19</sup> The literature began to describe how Chicana/os and “Mexicans in the United States have a complicated and interactive relationship with the institutional church, one that at different historical moments has been characterized by varying degrees of resistance and accommodation.”<sup>20</sup> The spiritual vacuum in the scholarship was beginning to be felt among the scholars of Chicana/o studies. While acknowledging the ways religion has been used as a principle vehicle for colonization, scholars

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<sup>17</sup>Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez, *Made in the Margins: Latina/o Constructions of US Religious History* (Baylor University Press, 2013), 51.

<sup>18</sup> León, *Cesar Chavez*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Brenda Sendejo, “Methodologies of the Spirit: Reclaiming Our Lady of Guadalupe and Discovering Tonantzin Within and Beyond the Nepantla of Academia,” in *Fleshing the Spirit*, ed. by Elisa Facio and Irene Lara (University of Arizona Press, 2014). 83.

<sup>20</sup> Roberto R. Treviño, *The church in the barrio: Mexican American ethno-Catholicism in Houston* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006). 4.

are also sensitive to the ways religion and spirituality has been used for liberation and self-determination.

A powerful example of research that reconsiders the role of religion in Mexican-American activism is León's book, *The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez*.<sup>21</sup> Although Cesar Chavez's faith was of utmost importance to him and his followers, spirituality was largely absent in early biographies of his life. León centered the spiritual identity of Chavez and suggests that the United Farmworkers was not simply a labor union, but a quasi-religious movement, with symbols, ceremonies, and a spiritual leader. León argues that "Chavez scripted a political spirituality and a spiritual *mestizaje* that transmuted La Causa into a religious movement – this is what I call religious politics."<sup>22</sup> Throughout La Causa, Chavez stated, "I don't think I could base my will to struggle on cold economics or some political doctrine. I don't think that there would be enough to sustain me. For me the base must be faith."<sup>23</sup> Chavez is but one example of how Chicana/o history is filled with the rich treasures of the positive contributions of religion and spirituality.

The early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century showed promise in regards to future research of Chicana/o religious studies. Using multidisciplinary methods, research is employed outside of theological and non-sectarian lenses trying to understand the social, political, and/or cultural significance to Chicana/o religious history. It "blends race, class, gender, and phenomenological analyses grounded in their historical, social, theological, and political context. It identifies,

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<sup>21</sup> León, *Cesar Chavez*, 2014

<sup>22</sup> León, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio P. Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, eds. *Latino religions and civic activism in the United States* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2005) 3.

recognizes, and interrogates religious leaders and structures, traditions, movements, and experiences on their own place of reference.”<sup>24</sup> For example, in 2006, Robert Treviño published *The Church in the Barrio*, a social history of Chicana/o Catholics in Houston. He found that Mexican-Americans practice their faith in extremely unique forms of “ethno-Catholicism”. It is precisely the everyday lived religion of Chicana/os that would become a principle focus of future research on Chicana/o and Latina/o spirituality. How does Chicana/o ethno-Catholicism, or “lo cotidiano” as Isasi-Diaz<sup>25</sup> would say, surface in their everyday lived experiences?

In 2008 the first interdisciplinary anthology on Mexican-American religion and spirituality was introduced. Co-edited by Gastón Espinosa and Mario Garcia (2008), *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture* was a collection of the “first essays to explore the critical intersection between Mexican American religions and literature, art, politics, and pop culture” outside of a sectarian or theological discourse.<sup>26</sup> The 400-page anthology was an important first step in understanding the unique popular expressions of the majority Catholic population, including the private, political, and creative. The same year, historian Mario Garcia published *Católicos; resistance and affirmation in Chicana/o catholic history*,<sup>27</sup> a collection of his own research highlighting the agency Chicana/os have demonstrated in practicing and protecting their faith throughout their history. Broadening the spectrum and including the larger

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<sup>24</sup> Espinosa, "History and theory in the study of Mexican American religions," 19.

<sup>25</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Lo Cotidiano: a key element of mujerista theology," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10, no. 1 (2002): 5-17.

<sup>26</sup> Espinosa & Gastón, *Mexican-American Religions*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> García, *Católicos*.

Latina/o community, a 2012 publication by Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*<sup>28</sup>, and another anthology, co-edited by Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*<sup>29</sup> provide further evidence to the progressive and social justice emphasis that religion has played in Chicana/o and Latina/o history. These publications would round out a positive turn of the century where Chicana/o spirituality and religion would not be framed through a deficit model, but recognized for its positive contributions to social change.

Chicana feminists, like Lara Medina<sup>30</sup>, Elisia Facio<sup>31</sup>, Theresa Delgadillo<sup>32</sup>, and of course, Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>33</sup>, pushed the interdisciplinary scope of Chicana/o religiosity in the field of Chicana/o studies. For Chicana Feminists scholars, the unique and often times private relationship women have with religion and spirituality is an important principle to their research. Anzaldúa, a pioneer of Chicana feminist theory since the mid 1970's, suggested that to navigate a spiritual consciousness is “to respond not just with the traditional practice of spirituality (contemplation, meditation, and private rituals) or with the technologies of political activism

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism* (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio P. Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, *Latino religions and civic activism in the United States*.

<sup>30</sup> Lara Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Elisa Facio and Irene Lara, *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*. 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Theresa Delgadillo, *Spiritual mestizaje: Religion, gender, race, and nation in contemporary Chicana narrative* (Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: la frontera*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).



(protests, demonstrations, and speakouts), but with the amalgam of the two: spiritual activism.”<sup>34</sup> Anzaldúa inspired contemporary Chicana Feminist scholars to follow in the path of spiritual activism and interdisciplinary research. Lara and Facio took an Anzaldúan approach in centering the experiences of women of color, co-editing a multi and interdisciplinary anthology to the study of religion and spirituality. In *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives*, they suggest that Chicana feminist scholarship is “built on the supposition that spirituality often plays a decolonizing role in creating meaning, inspiring action, and supporting healing and justice in our communities.”<sup>35</sup> This was a far cry from Chicano movement literature that suggested religion was objectively counterproductive. Delgadillo<sup>36</sup>, as a critical intervention to traditional scholarship that did not acknowledge women’s religious or spiritual nature, applied Anzaldúa’s theory of spiritual mestizaje to Chicana literature, novels, and memoirs. Discussing the powerful life force that is spiritual mestizaje, she states, “It is the transformative renewal of one’s relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflexive critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred.”<sup>37</sup> Chicana feminist scholars understood their role as “activists struggling for justice and peace and saw no conflict combining theology and activism.”<sup>38</sup> Their contributions to the evolving field of

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<sup>34</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting identity, spirituality, reality* (Duke University Press, 2015), 19.

<sup>35</sup> Facio & Lara, *Fleshing the Spirit*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Delgadillo, *Spiritual mestizaje*.

<sup>37</sup> Delgadillo, *Spiritual mestizaje*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Espinosa, "History and theory in the study of Mexican American religions," 31.

Chicana/o studies and Chicana/o spirituality, if not already leading the way, cannot be understated.

In the field of theology, Latina/o theologians became inspired by the radical interpretations of Latin American Liberation theology in the late 1960's. In Latin America, dialogues were being had about the ways European powers were interpreting the word of Jesus to justify colonization and the mistreatment of the poor. Theologians, such as Leonardo Boff,<sup>39</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez,<sup>40</sup> and others, at a conference in Medellin, Columbia, discussed that to truly walk in the way of Jesus Christ, religious leaders must ground their praxis on the preferential option for the poor. Boff states, "we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation."<sup>41</sup> A commitment to walking, struggling with, and improving the conditions of the poor became a rallying cry around the world for theologians concerned with liberation.

In the United States, Chicana/o and Latina/o theologians, such as Andrés Guerrero,<sup>42</sup> Virgilio Elizondo,<sup>43</sup> Ada Maria Isasi Diaz & Tarango,<sup>44</sup> and others adopted liberation theology to address their own systemic marginalization. Virgilio Elizondo, in *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, likened the historic life of Jesus Christ to Mexican Americans.

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<sup>39</sup> Leonardo, Boff, *Introducing liberation theology* (Orbis Books, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, Caridad Inda, John Eagleson, and Caridad Inda, *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

<sup>41</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Introducing liberation theology* (Orbis Books, 1987), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Andres G. Guerrero, *A Chicano theology*. (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Orbis Books, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> Ada Maria Asisi-Diaz, "Mujeristas: A Name of Our Own!!," *Christian Century* (1989): 24-31.

Elizondo suggests, to know Jesus is to understand the historical and cultural context of where he and his people came from. Jesus was a Galilean Jew from Galilee. Galileans were going through a biological and cultural mestizaje at the time of Jesus. That caused the “pure-minded” Jews of Jerusalem to see “Galilee [as] a sign of impurity and a cause for rejection.”<sup>45</sup> Chicana/os, suggests Elizondo, like Galileans, are both rejected by “pure” Mexicanos and Americans, “despised by both.”<sup>46</sup> Elizondo argues that Chicana/os and Jesus share a similar experience. Although looked down upon, Chicana/os have a great responsibility of assisting to liberate themselves and others. He states, “In becoming a Galilean, God becomes the fool of the world for the sake of the world’s salvation. What the world rejects, God chooses as his very own.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Elizondo situates God as walking alongside Latina/os, Chicana/os, and other marginalized communities.

Feminist theologians expanded and pointed out the blind spots of the foundational literature on liberation theology. Ada Maria Asasi-Diaz (1989) stated, “though we make up the vast majority of those who participate in the work of the churches, we do not participate in deciding what work is to be done” (p. 24). Asasi-Diaz conceptualized a Mujerista theological framework that centered the ways women used their faith to find liberation among their daily indignities. She states that a Mujerista is, “one who struggles to liberate herself, who is consecrated by God as proclaimer of the hope of her people” (1989, p. 25). Mujerista Theology, centering the daily-lived spiritual experiences of women, has been the foundation for U.S Latina Feminist Theologians. Michelle Gonzalez (2009) says, “Mujerista Theology is a voice within a

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<sup>45</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 52.

<sup>47</sup> Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, 53.

Latina feminist liberation theology that privileges the voices and grassroots struggles of Latinas” (p. 9). Mujerista theologies also de-constructs centuries old-traditional patriarchal theologies intended to relegate women to second-class citizenship. As Maria Pilar Aquino suggests, feminist theology critiques “theories and theologies that ultimately serve to perpetuate the anthropological reductionism that supports sexism, racism, homophobia, implicit or explicit colonialism.”<sup>48</sup>

Although a majority of the historical and theological lens is focused on Chicana/o and Latina/o Catholics, other perspectives are quickly gaining ground. Scholars like Justo Gonzalez,<sup>49</sup> Arlene M. Sanchez Walsh,<sup>50</sup> and Loida I. Martell-Otero<sup>51</sup> have all written from Protestant perspectives. In *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Latina/o scholars self-identify as evangélicas over Protestant to “denote the distinctive nature of Latin@ Protestantism as a popular religious faith.”<sup>52</sup> Further broadening the Latina/o spiritual and religious lens,

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<sup>48</sup> María Pilar Aquino, "Theological method in US Latino/a theology," *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (1999), 24.

<sup>49</sup> Justo L. González, *Christian thought revisited: Three types of theology* (Abingdon Press, 1989).

<sup>50</sup> Arlene Sanchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal identity: Evangelical faith, self, and society* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Martell-Otero, Maldonado Pérez, and Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 8.

scholars such as Hjamil A. Martinez-Vazquez<sup>53</sup> and Ilan Stavans<sup>54</sup> have written about Latina/o Muslims and Mexican Jews, respectively.

This masters thesis builds upon the growing research on Chicana/o and Latina/o religion and spirituality. Unlike early scholarship that viewed Chicana/o religiosity as a deficit, this research explores religion and spirituality as sources of strength, resistance and resiliency. It seeks to shorten the gap separating the body and spirit, between religion and social action. It is a social justice project, aimed not only at traditional institutions of power, but also to Chicana/o and Latina/o studies itself, to continue recognizing the important contributions of religion and spirituality to Chicana/os and Latina/os. It contributes to the dearth of existing literature that identifies moments in history where religion and spirituality have intersected for positive social change. Lastly, this project is a practice in multi and inter-disciplinary research, combining history, religious studies, and Latina/o studies to explore the role of religion in the Chicana/o movement.

### **Methodology**

Methodologically, I will be utilizing existing secondary literature from PADRES, Las Hermanas, and Católicos to provide a historical narrative of the impact of the Chicana/o movement to the Catholic Church. To gain insight on the internal organizing of the Church, I draw predominantly from published monographs of PADRES<sup>55</sup> and Las Hermanas.<sup>56</sup> To

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<sup>53</sup> Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez, *Latina/oy musulmán: The Construction of Latina/o Identity Among Latina/o Muslims in the United States* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Ilan Stavans, *Return to Centro Histórico: A Mexican Jew Looks for His Roots* (Rutgers University Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Richard Edward Martinez, *PADRES: The National Chicano Priest Movement* (University of Texas Press, 2010).

corroborate the monographs, I utilize the few other existing articles of PADRES and Las Hermanas to expand the theoretical and situational interpretations of their organizing as it related to the Chicana/o movement.

The available literature for Católicos is even more scarce. Although no monograph exists which examines this important religious organization, Mario Garcia's 2009 book, *Chicano Liberation Theology: the writings and documents of Richard Cruz and Católicos por la Raza*,<sup>57</sup> offers a seminal methodological contribution. The book is not a theological document, as its title suggests, but a compilation of primary sources that Garcia has collected and published. Furthermore, although scholars have shown interest in the external organizing of Católicos, only a handful of secondary sources are available. For the analysis of Católicos, this thesis draws from the primary source documents contained in *Chicano Liberation Theology* as well as from the limited secondary literature on the organization.

In addition to the secondary literature and sources previously discussed, this research incorporates an analysis of primary documents from La Raza Magazine housed at the Chicano Studies Resource Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. La Raza magazine was founded in the Church of the Epiphany in Los Angeles, a central location for organizing activity during the Chicana/o movement. It was a principal meeting place for Cesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers, the historic high school walkouts in the East Los Angeles high schools,<sup>58</sup> the Brown Berets, La Raza newspaper, and *Catolicós*. The archives of La Raza newspaper, and later

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<sup>56</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*.

<sup>57</sup> Mario T. Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology: The Writings and Documents of Richard Cruz and Católicos por la Raza* (Kendall/Hunt, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Will Wauters, "The Borderland Cultures Encounter the Church and a Church Gave Birth to a New Chicano Culture," in *Anglican and Episcopal History* 82, no. 4 (2013).

magazine, was one of the leading media outlets during the Chicana/o movements. As stated in the research center website, the La Raza newspaper and magazine preservation project is “dedicated to preserving, describing, digitizing, and making publicly available a collection of approximately 21,000 photographic images and negatives documenting the Mexican descent community of Los Angeles between 1967 and 1977.”<sup>59</sup> The research center provides a wealth of primary information that will add to the historical narrative of the role of religion in the Chicana/o movement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This historical study of Católicos por la Raza, PADRES, and Las Hermanas is framed using the theoretical lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and The Brown Church. Martínez-Vázquez has stated, “Many historians, particularly U.S. religious historians, do not see theory and method as essential parts of their projects. They focus too much on the development of narratives and forget the importance of what lies behind those narratives and their purpose.”<sup>60</sup> Using theoretical frameworks allows me to situate the historical narrative that developed with these three organizations as well as how they relate to larger patterns of Chicana/o and Latina/o resistance and identity.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) is a branch of CRT that highlights the specific ways Latina/os are impacted by the law. LatCrit serves to challenge the black-white racial binary in popular racism discourse and to articulate the specific needs of Latina/os, such as language, conquest, immigration status, the border, among others. Although LatCrit has been predominantly used in the field of education, very rarely has it been used in religious studies.

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.chicano.ucla.edu>.

<sup>60</sup> Martínez-Vázquez, *Made in the Margins: Latina/o Constructions of US Religious History*, 5.

This research builds off a CRT and LatCrit framework developed by Tara Yosso, community cultural wealth.<sup>61</sup> The framework of community cultural wealth contends that scholarly analysis should begin with an understanding of the cultural wealth possessed by Chicanos/Latinos, such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital. Using a community cultural wealth model to look at the resilience of undocumented students in higher education, Perez-Huber found that “spiritual capital” was an important and missing element to understanding student success.<sup>62</sup> Spiritual capital, says Perez-Huber, “can be understood as a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself...spirituality in its many forms can provide a sense of hope and faith.”<sup>63</sup>

Whereas Perez-Huber recognized the spiritual capital of undocumented women in higher education, this research intends to explore how it manifests in social justice organizing. Specifically, how did Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas utilize spiritual capital work towards social justice during the Chicana/o movement? I assert that Chicana/o activists involved in faith-based organizations during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s deployed, engaged in, and cultivated, their spiritual capital to struggle for social justice.

Lastly, Robert Chao Romero has conceptualizes the 500-year tradition of faith-based Chicana/o and Latina/o resistance in what he calls the Brown Church. Romero states, “in every instance of racial and social injustice in Latin America and the United States over the centuries,

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<sup>61</sup> Tara J. Yosso, "Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth," in *Race ethnicity and education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69-91.

<sup>62</sup> Lindsay Pérez Huber, "Challenging racist nativist framing: Acknowledging the community cultural wealth of undocumented Chicana college students to reframe the immigration debate," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 4 (2009): 704-730.

<sup>63</sup> Pérez Huber, "Challenging Racist Nativist Framing," 721.



the Brown Church has arisen to challenge the religious, socio-economic, and political status quo.”<sup>64</sup> Rather than the wholesale rejection of Christianity that “ignores not only the contemporary religious landscape of the Latino community, but also the central role that Christianity has played in social justice movements among Latinos in Latin American and the United States.”<sup>65</sup> Chao Romero acknowledges the rich history of Chicana/os and Latina/os resisting the colonization of their land, but also their spirit. This thesis offers three case studies of the Brown Church during the Chicana/o civil rights movement. The case studies presented in this research intend to articulate the innate character of Brown Church.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter one introduces *Católicos por La Raza*. This chapter examines the foundation of *Católicos* and provides the details and impact of their most famous action, the protest at St. Basil’s Church. *Católicos* were considered *outside* agitators, however, they sparked a movement against the Church. Though *Católicos* was short-lived, they inspired the *insiders*, Chicana/o priests and nuns, to reflect on their role as representative of the Church. The latter are the focus of the following two chapters.

Chapter two explores the first national organization of Chicano Catholic priests, PADRES, founded in 1969. I describe how Chicano priests, for the first time in history, organized to challenge longstanding discrimination from the Church. PADRES questioned why one of the largest and oldest Catholic groups in the United States did not have a single Chicano bishop. Furthermore, Chicano priests were no longer willing to accept the Church’s refusal to

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Chao Romero, *The Brown Church: Toward a Perspective of Latina/o Christian History and Identity* (under contract, InterVarsity Press Academic). Projected publication date, January 2019

<sup>65</sup> Chao Romero, *The Brown Church*

allow mass and confession in Spanish, and they were determined to get the Church's support for the Chicana/o movement. Once priests got organized, they realized how much they were able to challenge the culture of the Church. Their determination grew stronger when they aligned themselves with the first organization of Catholic women religious, Las Hermanas, who are the focus of Chapter 3.

Chapter three documents the important organizing of the first "national religious-political organization of Chicana and Latina Roman Catholics in the United States" (p. 1), Las Hermanas. Not only would they challenge the Church's marginalization of the Spanish speaking community in the United States, but also its patriarchal nature. No longer waiting for the church to respond to its communities needs, founders of Las Hermanas established a grassroots autonomous organization of women religious. Together, with PADRES and the momentum of the Chicana/o movement, Las Hermanas forever shifted the way the Church would respond to its Chicana/o and Latina/o communities.

By way of conclusion, this thesis offers a discussion of the role of religion and the Chicana/o movement as seen through these three organizations. Traditionally, the literature, including Garcia, Martinez, and Medina, suggest that Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas were the bridge that connected the Church to the Chicana/o movement. This research does not challenge the notion, but seeks to expand it. I argue that the Church was an institution that was deeply impacted by the Chicana/o consciousness of the late 1960's and early 1970's and they experienced their own Chicana/o movement.

When historians of social movements discuss the results or victories of the Chicana/o movement, the Catholic Church is seldom considered. This research project shows that the Chicana/o movement had a direct impact on challenging the longstanding discrimination from

the Catholic Church towards its Spanish speaking populations. Its outcomes include the first national organization of Chicano priests, the first national organization of Catholic Latina nuns, the first Chicano Bishops, the development of the Mexican American Cultural Center, new forms of theology, internationalist networks, and much more. History has not been kind to the contributions of religion and spirituality to the Chicana/o movement, however, as this research shows, the Chicana/o movement has done much to influence the religious and spiritual lives of the Chicana/o population here in the United States.

## Chapter 2

### Catolicós por la Raza

Although the relationship between the Catholic Church and Chicana/os goes as far back as 1492, this research project is situated in the 1960's, shortly after a monumental global event that triggered a social and cultural shift for the global Catholic Church. In the midst of global turmoil, an evolving membership, and an outdated character, the Catholic Church desperately needed to respond to the times. Wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold war were well under way. Furthermore, the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Revolution, African and Asian decolonization, the fight against communism, and the American Civil Rights movement all provided a backdrop that enveloped the climate of the late 50's and 60's. It was a moment of extreme social and political activity. As a result, in January 1959, from the famous basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls in Rome, newly reined Pope John XXIII called for a general council of the global Catholic hierarchy. It would mark only the second time in a hundred years that a general council would be convened.

Over the course of the next five years, the Council composed 16 documents of *aggiornamento*, meaning to update or modernize. The hierarchy had recognized the cultural isolation it had developed. Vatican II scholar, John W. O'Malley stated it looked to curtail some of that isolation and "affirm clearly that the Church was and should be affected by the cultures in which it exercises its ministries."<sup>66</sup> This change alone drastically changed the local character of the church. Latin was no longer the only language used in church, the organ was replaced by the local music and traditions, even church aesthetics were modified. The *aggiornamento* also

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<sup>66</sup> John W. O'malley, "Developments, reforms, and two great reformations: Towards a historical assessment of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 44, no. 3 (1983): 398.

would “affirm the dignity of the laity in the Church.”<sup>67</sup> Authority became somewhat decentralized. This opened the doors for the community to make demands to their local leadership for the kinds of changes it sought for church.

The documents of the second Vatican Council profoundly impacted the secular and non-secular world. O’Malley stated, “the changes the council mandated were thrust upon a membership that was psychologically and theologically unprepared to receive them.”<sup>68</sup> Agustín Garza seconds O’Malley’s statement, suggesting “the Catholic Church finds itself fighting for its very life alongside other more worldly institutions... everyone from the most pompous bishop to the most humble altar boy is suffering from an ecclesiastical identity crisis.”<sup>69</sup> While there may have been many unprepared to adopt the new order from the Church, there were certainly those who were desperately waiting for the Church to catch up with the times. Father Rodriguez, a Chicano priest in the United States, articulating Chao Romero’s concept of the Brown Church, said, “the thrust of Vatican II came as a surprise and a change of direction for many in the church, but for those of us who already had a notion of where the church should be regarding social justice and poor, it was an affirmation of what we were already doing rather than a change in direction.”<sup>70</sup> The spirit of *aggiornamento* from the second Vatican council opened the door for local church leadership to organically engage with their laity like never before. It did not take long for the Chicana/o community in the Southwestern United States to exploit those reforms.

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<sup>67</sup> O’Malley, “Developments, reforms, and two great reformations,” 394.

<sup>68</sup> O’Malley, “Developments, reforms, and two great reformations,” 398.

<sup>69</sup> Garza, 2009, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Rodriguez interview, cited from Martinez, *PADRES*, 18.

Chicana/os quickly and dramatically responded to the attempts of the Catholic hierarchy to modernize. Using the rhetoric and the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, Chicana/os, for the first time, articulated the exploitation and marginalization of the Church against the Mexican and Mexican American community. Chicana/o priests and women religious had been eager to stand alongside the Chicana/o movement, but many were reprimanded if they became too politically involved.<sup>7172</sup> Vatican II allowed them to announce their support for farmworkers, show solidarity with the Chicana/o community, and demand institutional change. The mid 1960's presented a social and political opportunity for direct action from Catholic Chicana/os. It marked another chapter in what Chao Romero calls the Brown Church.

Shortly after the Vatican II documents were released, a chain reaction of spiritual *concientización* would follow. Chicana/os and Latina/os activated their spiritual capital to challenge their beloved institution. In December of 1969, Cesar Chavez wrote a letter to the Catholic Church, "The Chicano y la Iglesia" (also known as "The Mexican American and the Church").<sup>73</sup> He called out the lack of duty the Church was showing to the poor and questioned the absence of Catholic priests siding with the farmworkers. Chavez appreciated the presence of Protestant Ministers but he recognized that a majority of farmworkers were Catholic. In the letter, he asked, "What do we want the Church to do? We don't ask for more cathedrals. We don't ask for bigger Churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for justice, and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servant

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<sup>71</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*.

<sup>72</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*.

<sup>73</sup> César E Chávez, "The Mexican-American and the Church." *El Grito*, Summer (1968).

hood.”<sup>74</sup> While encouraging the Church to take a stand with the poor, Chavez also did not ignore the spiritual capital of Chicana/os. He called on “Mexican-American groups to stop ignoring this source of power. It is not just our right to appeal to the Church to use its power effectively for the poor, it is our duty to do so. It should be as natural as appealing to the government... and we do that often enough” (Chavez, 1969). The call from Cesar Chavez was heard loud and clear.

Before the ink could dry on Chavez’s letter to the Church, three important organizations would form that would change the landscape of Chicana/o and Church relations. Institutionally, the first national organization of Chicano Priests established, calling themselves PADRES, *Padres Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Sociales*. Two years later, the first national organization of activist Chicana/Latina nuns and women religious were founded, *Las Hermanas*. Whereas PADRES and *Las Hermanas* organized against the church internally, another faith-based organization, *Católicos por la Raza* (Católicos), formed in Los Angeles that applied external pressure to the church. The Chicana/o religious faithful came together because they believed in the power of the Church and they understood that their community still believed in the Church. I begin with an examination of a history of *Católicos por la Raza*.

### **Católicos Por La Raza**

The *Católicos* narrative begins like many other Chicana/o organizations of the late 1960’s, at ground zero of *el movimiento*. In 1969, Richard Cruz, founder of *Católicos*, made the Chicana/o right of passage towards Delano, California, headquarters of the United Farm Workers (UFW). There, he would have his first encounter with the legendary labor leader, Cesar Chavez. When meeting with Chavez for the first time, the young Cruz was inspired by the religious politics and poetics of the UFW. He witnessed how Chavez and Dolores Huerta mobilized a

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<sup>74</sup> Chavez, “The Mexican-American and the Church”.

quasi-religious organization where “Political action was not only inspired or informed by mystical religious faith: [but] for the UFW, political revolt was itself a sacred action.”<sup>75</sup> Cruz would mention to Chavez that when he went home, he would see “what he could do to get Church support.”<sup>76</sup>

The beginning of *Católicos* was the coming together of three organizations. In Los Angeles, Cruz was already involved in student activism. As one of only two Chicano law students at Loyola University, he co-founded the Chicano Law Students’ Association. They made their dissatisfaction of Chicano enrollment known by pressuring the University to acknowledge “the failure of the school to recruit and support, financially and otherwise, Chicano law students.”<sup>77</sup> Although Loyola was a Catholic school, Cruz and the Chicano Law Students’ Association would lament that there were more Jewish students than Chicanos.

At the same time, Richard Martinez was organizing in United Mexican American Students (UMAS), a Chicano based student organization at Los Angeles Community College. As head of the organization, Martinez was also frustrated with the lack of attention the Church was giving to the Chicano community. They were encouraged by what was happening in the deep South of the United States where the Civil Rights movement was in full force. Martinez stated that he was “learning about some African Americans in the East who were protesting against mainline Anglo-Protestant churches that they believed were making few if any

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<sup>75</sup> León, *Cesar Chavez*, 135.

<sup>76</sup> Martinez, quoted in Alberto L. Pulido, "Are You an Emissary of Jesus Christ?: Justice, the Catholic Church and the Chicano Movement," *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 14, no. 1 (1991): 30.

<sup>77</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 133.



commitments to the black struggle for self-determination.”<sup>78</sup> Martinez saw Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. bring the Black Church into the Civil Rights Movement. He would convince “other UMAS students at his school that they should make the relevance of the Church to the Chicano community one of their top priorities.”<sup>79</sup>

Lastly, a local Chicano newspaper, *La Raza*, had been involved with a group of Chicano priests in Los Angeles who were also concerned with the Church’s negligence to the Mexican community. *La Raza* was a community-based publication from 1967-1977. The bilingual publication provided an avenue and voice for Chicana/os during La Causa. In 1969, Joe Razo, one of the main editors of the paper convened a meeting with Richard Cruz and Richard Martinez to discuss their intersecting concerns.

Holding the Church accountable to the Chicana/o community would drive these three organizations to form *Católicos por la Raza*. Their motive was clear, “to place an assault on the Catholic Church in Los Angeles.”<sup>80</sup> Cruz’s Catholic school upbringing made him better informed about the politics of the Church than Martinez and Razo, thus he would emerge as the sparkplug and leader of the organization. Martinez described him as “thoughtful, intelligent, quick-minded, determined, and possessing clear organizational thinking.”<sup>81</sup>

*Católicos*’s critique of the Church was always made with their pious community in mind. They were keenly aware of how committed their community was to the church. In their opening documents, “*Católicos* made it very clear that they were not attacking Catholic beliefs and

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<sup>78</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 133.

<sup>79</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 133.

<sup>80</sup> Garcia, “Religion and the Chicano Movement.” 133.

<sup>81</sup> Garcia, “Religion and the Chicano Movement.” 128.

doctrines, but the current leadership of the Church that had deviated from these beliefs and practices.”<sup>82</sup> They chose the name Católicos because they wanted to assure the community that they were not anti-Catholic, but “identified as Chicano Catholics”.<sup>83</sup> La Raza was chosen “because Cruz believed that it represented a more open and inclusive term and one that integrated the concept of the people and community into the title.”<sup>84</sup> From their inception, they treaded along the spiritual borderlands of religion and activism. As an organization that targeted the church, they decided that they did not have to assume a non-religious identity. Like Anzaldúa suggested, they chose an amalgamation of the two.

Their Catholic upbringing armed them with an understanding and justification in their critique. Like Chao Romero’s concept of the Brown Church, Católicos interpreted the teachings of Jesus differently than those in power. Even before Latin American liberation theology was fully articulated, the preferential treatment of the poor was the founding principle of Católicos. Cruz stated in a special issue of *La Raza* magazine, “We have gone to Catholic schools and understand the Catholic tradition. Because of our Catholic training, we know that Christ, the founder of Catholicism was a genuinely poor man.”<sup>85</sup> Believing that the Church and its leaders should be identifying with the poor, mandated by Jesus Christ, Católicos asked, “who has taken the vow of poverty – the Chicanos or the Catholic Church.”<sup>86</sup> Ready to go public, Católicos arranged a press conference to announce their demands.

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<sup>82</sup> Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, xx.

<sup>83</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 142.

<sup>84</sup> Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, xvi.

<sup>85</sup> “Católicos Por La Raza and Mexican-Americans”, *La Raza Magazine*, February, 1970, 6.

The fact that Católicos had the aptitude to organize a press conference to announce their formation shows the level of organizational capacity of the group. Although Ruben Salazar from the Los Angeles Times was the only notable reporter to attend, Católicos revealed their principle objectives, to “return the Catholic Church to the oppressed Chicano community.”<sup>87</sup> Included in their demands was a commission on Mexican American Affairs within the Church hierarchy who could address concerns of the Chicana/o community in the areas of education, housing, health, shared governance, leadership and orientation. They sought clergy to actively work in the Chicana/o movement on a full-time basis, freedom of speech for priests and nuns, the use of Church facilities, and a public commitment to supporting the Chicana/o community. In the statements conclusion, it read, “THE CHURCH WILL REFLECT THE SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE IT SERVES.”<sup>88</sup> The two most urgent points were the church’s participation in the Chicana/o movement and uncovering it’s vast property holdings.

Católicos believed the main reason there was an unwillingness to support the Chicano movement was the lack of Chicanos in the church hierarchy. Católicos noted, in 1969, of the 12 million Spanish-speaking population in the United States, 90 percent were Catholic. This made them the “largest single ethnic group within the church, constituting almost a quarter of all Catholics and 67 percent in the southwestern states.”<sup>89</sup> However, of over 720 priests in Los Angeles at the time, “only 5% of them are of Spanish surname.”<sup>90</sup> Cruz juxtaposed this with

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<sup>86</sup> Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, xix.

<sup>87</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 138.

<sup>88</sup> “Demands,” *La Raza Magazine*, February, 1970, 12.

<sup>89</sup> “The Church and La Raza”, *La Raza Magazine*, February, 1970, 8.

<sup>90</sup> “The Church and La Raza”, 8.

other Latin American countries, he stated, “Puerto Rico, with a population of 2 ½ million, has 4 indigenous Bishops.”<sup>91</sup> Most other ethnic groups, mostly European, that migrated to the United States were able to foster their own bishops and were allowed to maintain their language and respect in the Church. Católicos believed that Chicana/os were being intentionally excluded and racially discriminated against. They wanted Latina/os to be represented at all levels of the church, to be part of the decision-making processes; it was the only way to give priority to the needs of the poor. The conditions of the poor was further evident in the economic and housing conditions facing Chicano/as in East Los Angeles.

Católicos aggressively critiqued the property holdings of the Catholic Church. Their lack of investment in Chicana/o social services while grievously spending on million dollar churches insulted the community. Specifically in East Los Angeles, Católicos believed the Church was flaunting their riches at the poverty of Chicanos. For example, the closing of a Catholic high school with an 87% Mexican American enrollment happened “at the same time that the archdiocese finished construction of a new three-million-dollar church, St. Basil’s.”<sup>92</sup> Despite the vast property holdings of the Catholic Church, Católicos felt it was doing little to nothing to alleviate the poverty of the Chicana/o barrios. Católicos investigated and published a partial listing of Church properties from the county assessors office, which amounted to a billion dollars. With such a large bankroll, why could the church not do anything about the “72 percent of dwellings in East Los Angeles [that] violated the building code.”<sup>93</sup> What this meant,

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<sup>91</sup> “The Church and La Raza”, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 135.

<sup>93</sup> “Católicos por la Raza and Mexican Americans”, *La Raza Magazine*, 6.

Católicos pointed out, was congestion, decay, and demoralization for many Chicanos in that part of the city.”<sup>94</sup> For Católicos, investing in a multi-million dollar church near some of the highest concentration of communities living in poverty was not very Christian-like.

Dedicated on June 29, 1969, St. Basils’s church was located off of Wilshire Blvd, just west of downtown Los Angeles. Felipe Hinojosa stated, it was “praised for its fortress aesthetics and the contemporary artwork that graced its walls, the church assumed its place as Los Angeles’s de facto cathedral.”<sup>95</sup> Chicana/os were offended at the incredible misdirection of funds. In East Los Angeles, parochial schools were closing as a result of lack of funding due to low enrollment because of the high cost of attending private school. Católicos stated, “Chicanitos are praying to La Virgen de Guadalupe as they go to bed hungry and will not be able to afford decent education.”<sup>96</sup> At the St. Basil dedication, community members arrived with posters reading, “\$1,000,000 for glass and stone, but for the poor?” and “Where is the concern for the poor?”<sup>97</sup> Católicos also published the cost of the stained glass in the new cathedral, worth approximately \$250,000. In their inaugural statement, Católicos asked the community to think about what they would do if they had any representation in the Catholic hierarchy, “would you have voted for a million dollar Church?”<sup>98</sup> Believing the answer was no, Católicos began a

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<sup>94</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 143.

<sup>95</sup> Felipe Hinojosa, "Católicos Por La Raza and the Future of Catholic Studies," *American Catholic Studies* 127, no. 3 (2016): 26.

<sup>96</sup> Católicos por la Raza press release, Dec. 4, 1969, cited in Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, 2009. 44

<sup>97</sup> LA Times, June 30, 1969.

<sup>98</sup> “Católicos por la Raza”, *La Raza Magazine*, 6.

campaign against the Catholic church, St. Basil's Cathedral, and the Los Angeles Cardinal, James Francis McIntyre.

### **Católicos in Action**

In early meetings, Católicos discussed the necessity of direct action over any philosophical or theological issues. Of principle concern was the fear of alienating their Mexican-American community. However, after weighing the risk and benefits, Católicos believed a strategy of confrontation would be the only way to “get awareness in the community about the failures of the Church...and the only way to get publicity.”<sup>99</sup> Católicos felt that if they deployed direct action, the Church would respond with violence, proving it did not care about Chicana/os.

Católicos focused their attention upon Los Angeles Cardinal, James Francis McIntyre. He was notoriously known for his unsympathetic view of La Causa and had a reputation of being anti-Chicano. Although a champion for building Catholic schools in poor Mexican-American neighborhoods, McIntyre had a strong anti-communist worldview that made him critical of those who attended public schools, particularly Mexican-Americans.<sup>100</sup> McIntyre stirred fear among priests who fell under his authority. One Los Angeles priest, Father Romero, suggested that McIntyre was “a very conservative pro-business guy.”<sup>101</sup> Another priest, Father Bill Dubay, stated, he was “old fashioned in terms of his policies in terms of his race relations and economic

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<sup>99</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 150.

<sup>100</sup> Eduardo F. Lopez, "Catholic education for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles: a brief historical overview," *Journal of Catholic Education* 19, no. 2 (2016): 160.

<sup>101</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 20.

issues and a variety of things.”<sup>102</sup> McIntyre would prove to be a principle barrier to transforming the traditional culture of the Church. Católicos “understood that he held the power and the purse strings.”<sup>103</sup> They decided they would pursue their demands with all the physical and spiritual capital they possessed.

In fall of 1969, between 30 and 40 people gathered at Euclid Community Center in East Los Angeles to strategize the plan of action. The organization divided itself into various groups and subcommittees, including a “Lawsuit Committee, composed of the law students; a Logistics or Action Committee; and a Support Committee to publicize Católicos’s concerns to the Chicano community, to recruit Catholic clergy to its side, and to research the Church’s position on community needs.”<sup>104</sup> The result of the initial action plan was to publish an open letter to Cardinal McIntyre and personally deliver it to him.

On October 15, 1969, a Católicos delegation arrived at Cardinal McIntyre’s office. The Cardinal refused to meet with them and instead called the police. However, he agreed to meet with them two days later. When Católicos returned, McIntyre would told them “Say what you have to or get out!”<sup>105</sup> Feeling disrespected, Católicos did not continue the meeting, or present their demands. They decided that an escalation of tactics would be the only solution.

In order to force a formal meeting, Católicos began picketing at the Cardinals residence at St. Basil’s Church. The decision to picket was not unanimous; many shared concerns, worrying it would “cross the line.” This pivotal moment is an example of the unnatural tendency

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<sup>102</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 47.

<sup>103</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 151.

<sup>104</sup> Garcia, “Religion and the Chicano Movement”, 149.

<sup>105</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 150.

of those involved in the church had with challenging the hierarchy of their faith. Nevertheless, the stronghold of the organization, including Cruz, Martinez, and Ruiz, would convince the others that this was a necessary next step. Thus, on Thanksgiving Day, a picket and vigil was held at St. Basil's. It is not clear how many were at the initial picket; however, the demonstrations were ongoing.

A second demonstration was to be held on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>. A more aggressive outreach plan was created to encourage the Catholic community to participate. A flyer stated, "Do not let us down. You see, we can expect politicians, judges, governmental officials, etc. to ignore our requests as they have always done. But we cannot function if our own people fail us at this time. Somos Católicos, somos pobres, somos Chicanos. Que viva La Raza."<sup>106</sup> On Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>, 3 days before the demonstration, a press release addressed to McIntyre and members of the Catholic clergy stated,

we are demanding the Catholic Church be Christian. For you see, if it is Christian it cannot in conscience retain its fabulous wealth while Chicanos have to beg, plead, borrow, and steal for better housing, education, legal defense and other critical needs. Indeed a Christian Catholic Church would not allow the *Chicanito* to go uneducated for lack of funds; it would channel its wealth through community-controlled housing agencies to rid our society of barrios and projects; and it would allow members of the Mexican-American community to participate in all Church activities which are not of a purely religious nature.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "Católicos por la Raza", flyer published in Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, 43.

<sup>107</sup> Católicos Por La Raza Press Release, published in Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, 43.



The outreach strategy would prove effective. At the demonstration vigil, 350 supporters arrived.

Although the demonstration was successful, the Cardinal continued to refuse to meet. The event was filled with speakers, a presentation of the demands, and was attended by about 12 priests and nuns. The police presence also provided a dramatic impression. In a letter recapping the first public event, and referring to McIntyre's refusal to meet, Cruz asked, "we could only wonder what Christ would do if 350 Chicanos would want to see him."<sup>108</sup> The letter continued encouraging community members to get involved by promoting the next scheduled meeting and demonstration to take place on Christmas Eve. Católicos were confident they had made their presence known, not only to the community, but the church as well. They felt that they could not be ignored much longer. Thus, Católicos decided to pay Cardinal McIntyre another visit, this time refusing to take no for an answer.

On December 18<sup>th</sup>, a second delegation of Católicos arrived at St. Basil's to demand a meeting with McIntyre. The Cardinal's black limousine had been seen parked in the back so they knew he was somewhere in the chancery. The receptionist was not prepared to see them when they arrived, nor did she know what a Chicano was, suggesting they were from Chicago. After unconvincingly stating that the Cardinal was not in, she offered the Cardinal's assistant instead. Initially agreeing, the delegation soon lost patience and decided to rush the Cardinal's office. Forcing their way in, other priests came out to try and prevent their entry, but Razo knocked one of them down to the ground so the others could keep on going. They found McIntyre's office just as he was about to close the door, catching the arm of Garcia who would force it open.

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<sup>108</sup> Richard Cruz, "Congress of Mexican-American Unity," published in Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, 47.

Católicos encountered a “red-faced and very nervous Cardinal McIntyre.”<sup>109</sup> Again, some members were concerned about crossing the line. Rosa Martinez, a Católicos member, stated, I thought “the Holy Ghost was going to come down, as all my Catholic upbringing came back to me, and I was in terror of being struck down by God.”<sup>110</sup> McIntyre immediately screamed to call the police, but Católicos insisted he listen to their demands. Cruz did all the talking and they were out of there within a couple of minutes, worried the police would be arriving promptly. Martinez remembers that it was not a very sophisticated meeting, but a moral victory. Although the Cardinal did not respond to their demands, he did agree to look into the situation. Feeling accomplished, Católicos carried the momentum into their Christmas Eve demonstration.

### **St. Basil Demonstration**

The picketing and vigils continued at St. Basils well after the Thanksgiving demonstration. At the same time, serious preparations were underway for a dramatic protest on Christmas Eve. Cruz and Católicos knew that the midnight mass was going to be televised. They strategized that this would be the ideal time to publicly call attention to the Church’s discrimination against Chicana/os. As a result, Católicos galvanized high schools, colleges, and universities to activate students, community, and supportive clergy. Rosa Cruz recalls the broad outreach efforts, stating, “Católicos did not attract just radical activists, but also community people.”<sup>111</sup> The idea of targeting the church was not always welcomed. Martinez stated, “many students responded positively to the planned demonstration, some raised doubts as to the

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<sup>109</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 153.

<sup>110</sup> Rosa Martinez Interview, by Garcia, *Católicos*, 153.

<sup>111</sup> Rosa Cruz interview, published in Garcia, *Católicos*, 154.

correctness of attacking the Church. These students believed that the action would offend many Catholics. Moreover, they did not believe that the Church was the real enemy.”<sup>112</sup> However, the support of institutional clergy, such as Father Bonpane and other disaffected priests and nuns, added credibility to their cause. Lastly, legal representation was garnered from notorious Chicano lawyer Oscar Zeta Acosta, also known as the Brown Buffalo. Ruiz states, *Católicos* was “a good example of how the Chicano movement was always a mixture of students and community and not composed just of students, as some contend.”<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the diversity of community support would be unique to the history of the *el movimiento* and it sent a strong statement to the Church to consider the demands.

The plan for the demonstration was to begin a one-mile march from Lafayette Park to St. Basils. Once there, they were to conduct a parallel mass immediately outside of the formal services. The “peoples mass” would conclude a few minutes before midnight and then lead a procession inside where *Católicos* would read their demands at the steps of the altar. The organizing committee expected police presence, but they were not prepared to face the kind of force that would arrive that day.

A sound crowd of 200-350 arrived to the “people’s mass”. Father Bonpane led the service in Spanish and rather than the traditional wafers for communion, he used flour tortillas, giving the mass a “radical but fun” feeling. At the end of the mass, *Católicos* gathered the procession to enter the vestibule at about 12:15 A.M. Although Zeta Acosta had arranged with Cardinal McIntyre to be allowed to enter the Church “as long as they left their banners and

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<sup>112</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 154.

<sup>113</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 138.

candles outside,” a number of priests informed the protestors that the mass was at capacity.”<sup>114</sup> The huge doors in the front of the Church had been electronically locked shut, but some members discovered side entrances to the building. Garcia entered through the side and proceeded towards the main doors so he could let others in. However, when Garcia went to reach for the door handle, he was “struck in the back of the neck” by an ‘usher’, who later turned out to be undercover county sheriff.<sup>115</sup> Garcia, however, was able to put enough force on the electronic doors for them to open and allow others in.

As the doors opened, the main usher informed the others to keep them out. According to Martinez, that is when “all hell broke loose.”<sup>116</sup> Cruz explains that immediately, the ushers “viciously beat upon us and attempted to eject us.”<sup>117</sup> With the large ushers blocking the entrance, those outside began chanting, “Let the poor people in! Let the poor people in!”<sup>118</sup> The ushers covered all the entrances, and “protestors and ushers in the vestibule and apparently also in the choir loft and basement were throwing punches, wrestling, and shouting at each other.”<sup>119</sup> In a matter of minutes, uniformed Los Angeles police officers in full riot gear arrived from the rear of the Church. Reinforcing the ushers, the police utilized their riot sticks and pepper spray throughout the crowd. Five were arrested and spent the rest of the night in jail. They were released the next day.

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<sup>114</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 156.

<sup>115</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 156.

<sup>116</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 157.

<sup>117</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 157.

<sup>118</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 157.

<sup>119</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 157.

With all the disorder that occurred at St. Basil's Christmas Eve demonstration, Católicos considered it a success. Although the disturbance did not make it to televised viewers, neither McIntyre, the media, nor the community could ignore that there was a situation between Chicana/os and the Church. As the demonstration was going on, McIntyre mentioned to the congregation, "we are ashamed of the participants... we recognize that their conduct was symbolic of the conduct of the rabble as they stood at the foot of the cross shouting, 'Crucify Him!'"<sup>120</sup> *The LA Times* referred to Católicos as the "club-swinging mob"<sup>121</sup> and *The Tidings*, the archdiocesan paper, said Católicos were the "new barbarism". The demonstration did indeed prove media worthy.

Católicos continued pressuring the Church and receiving attention. The frequency of vigils, picketing, popular masses, and protesting would increasingly disturb the Cardinal and the Anglo parishioners at St. Basil who were often heard yelling "Go back to Mexico" as they went to Mass (Garcia, 2008, p. 159). The police also began seriously pursuing the political activity of Católicos, snapping photos of the pickets and allegedly tapping and following the lead members (Garcia, 2008). Following the St. Basil protest, Cruz wrote a letter to Cardinal McIntyre. He explained that if Católicos were truly rabble rousers, like the popular media and police have called them, they would have disrupted the entirety of the mass. However, says Cruz, that was never the intention. He continues, "We do not aspire to communist ideology because we know it to be as reactionary and godless as is the racist and inhumane government of this country" (quoted in Garcia, p. 55-56). During the demonstration, McIntyre encouraged the congregation to forgive the demonstrators for "they know not what they do". Cruz later called on the Cardinal

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<sup>120</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 157.

<sup>121</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 158.

to make good his word and asked for his forgiveness, “not only before God, but also before Man. Perhaps we might begin this Christian dialogue by your seeking to have charges against the demonstrators dismissed.”<sup>122</sup> McIntyre would not concede.

Although those arrested were released the following day, twenty-one members of Católicos were later detained and charged for their role in the demonstration. With charges as serious as assaulting a police officer, trials lasted until June of 1970. Defended by Zeta Acosta, “eight were found not guilty while twelve were found guilty.”<sup>123</sup> Most received minor fines, Martinez and Cruz, however, served a few months in jail.

What impact did a relatively small and short-lived organization like Católicos have on one of the largest, richest, and most powerful institution in the world? We do know that the Los Angeles Catholic Church responded. A larger description of the church’s response is found in the conclusion of this research, however, one important note is worth sharing here. In early 1970, the Church announced the retirement of Cardinal McIntyre. Although a direct connection to Católicos cannot be made yet, Garcia states, “one reporter believed that the cardinal’s retirement was welcomed by the Vatican due to the cardinal’s seeming inability to deal with what the reporter called a ‘theology of resistance’ carried out not only by Católicos, but by other discontented church sources.”<sup>124</sup> Católicos sparked a movement and moment where confronting the discrimination of the church was no longer off limits. If Católicos laid the foundation for a new Latina/o Church, PADRES and Las Hermanas continued the project. Inspired by Chavez

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<sup>122</sup> Richard Cruz, published in Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, 56.

<sup>123</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 146.

<sup>124</sup> Garcia, *Católicos*, 145.

and Católicos, Chicano priests began talking of coming together to see what they could also do about the Church.

**PADRES**

It was the longstanding institutional and systemic discrimination that generated a Chicana/o intifada to demand change from the Church in the late sixties and early seventies. While Católicos Por La Raza agitated from outside church walls, internally, an organization of priests and laywomen began challenging the Church like never before. This chapter highlights the role of the first national organization of Chicano Priests, Padres Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Sociales (PADRES), founded in 1969. As institutional “insiders”, they confronted the Church about its lack of representation, support, and accountability to its Mexican American population.

In answering their call to ministry, Chicano priests never expected to experience discrimination from the institution they dedicated their lives to. However, they quickly found their marginalization could not be avoided, “As seminarians, they faced cultural denigration and bigotry. As young priests, they faced more cultural denigration and bigotry and even job discrimination in terms of failure to receive promotions.”<sup>125</sup> Priests were kept isolated from each other, encouraged to overlook their identities, and forego their culture. The social seclusion they felt was further agitated while witnessing the rise of Chicanismo during the political turmoil of the late sixties. As subordinates to the church hierarchy, Chicano priests were discouraged and often times penalized for their participation in social politics. However, with the global reforms of the second Vatican council, the Chicana/o movement gaining momentum, and Católicos por la Raza taking the first leap, Chicano priests entered the scene. Long overdue, Chicano priests confronted the Church, demanding respect, dignity, and authentic representation.

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<sup>125</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 143.



## Chicana/os and the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church's poor track record with regards to Chicano priests goes back to the end of the American war with Mexico. Since 1848, when the United States violently took the northern half of Mexico's territory, Mexican Catholics experienced immediate second-class citizenship. Though the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war, promised full citizenship to Mexicans who decided to stay in the new American territory, the reality was much different. In the process of colonization, Euro-Catholicism absorbed the institutional responsibilities of their new land and they had little patience for the unique expressions of Mexican Catholicism.

Chao Romero's Critical Race Theory analysis is useful here because of the White Supremacist ideology that Americans implemented in the conquest of their new territories. Chao Romero states that Europeans had an implicit belief that Christianity was fundamentally theirs, it was "their property, and to be Christian was to be white. They alone held the institutional and theological keys to the Kingdom of God."<sup>126</sup> Consequently, the European Catholic hierarchy quickly took over the church, seeking "to eliminate indigenous Mexican clergy and imposed European bishops and priests."<sup>127</sup> In 1851 New Mexico, a newly acquired priest from France "expelled the sixteen native Mexican clergy... instituted tithing and threatened to excommunicate any pastor who did not comply."<sup>128</sup> The new Catholic authorities voiced their racist opinions about working in largely Mexican communities. One newly appointed priest

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<sup>126</sup> Robert, Chao Romero, "Towards a Perspective of the Christian-Ethnic Studies Borderlands and Critical Race Theory in Christianity." *ChristianityNext Journal*. Winter 2017: 45-65.

<sup>127</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 10.

<sup>128</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 15.

ranted about his placement in south Texas, declaring it “the worst sentence that could have been given to me for any crime.”<sup>129</sup> Virtually unchallenged, this legacy of racism lasted for the next 150 years.

By 1969, the face of the Catholic hierarchy was still white and European. Of the 275 Bishops in the United States, not one was Latino and only 0.37 percent of U.S Catholic priests were native-born Mexican-Americans.<sup>130</sup> In Los Angeles, of 720 priests “only 5% were Spanish speaking.”<sup>131</sup> To make matters worse, priests that did speak Spanish were prohibited from using it, nor were they allowed to give confession in their native language. Father Romero states, “In my first parish in Los Angeles, I was not permitted to celebrate Mass or preach in Spanish, although 80 percent of my confessions and about 90 percent of parlor calls were in Spanish.”<sup>132</sup> The Church took special care in marginalizing its Mexican community. Without authentic representation in the church hierarchy, Chicano priests were extremely limited in their capacity to effect or stimulate institutional reforms.

For other ethnic populations, representation was not an issue of concern. For European priests, there existed a fast track or an affirmative action towards leadership. A Chicano priest shared instances of a foreign born Irish bishop who “would bring a young nice Irishman from Ireland then within two or three years make him the chancellor and then groom the guy to be the bishop. And we couldn’t crack that thing.”<sup>133</sup> For Chicanos, no such pipeline existed. Gilbert

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<sup>129</sup> León, *Cesar Chavez*, 44.

<sup>130</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*.

<sup>131</sup> Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, xix.

<sup>132</sup> Father Romero, quoted in Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 38.

<sup>133</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 89.

Cadena states, from 1848 to 1970 “Mexicans/Chicanos had virtually no voice in the national decision making process of the church.”<sup>134</sup> The glass ceiling, the small number of Chicano priests, and the Catholic hierarchy extremely handicapped Chicano priests capacity to address and answer the unique needs of the Mexican Catholic population. Meanwhile, priests were witnessing how Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, the United Farmworkers, and Católicos por la Raza were challenging power, including the Church. Sick and tired of their hands being tied, priests began to organize.

### **PADRES Beginnings**

In the summer of 1969, Father Ralph Ruiz, a Chicano priest from San Antonio, called a Texas wide meeting to brainstorm the notion of organized resistance. No longer willing to bear with the way the Church was treating its Spanish speaking community, Fr. Ruiz believed that organized resistance was the only way real change could occur. He collected “the addresses of all the Spanish-surnamed and white priests working among Mexican Americans” in Texas and invited them to the convening.”<sup>135</sup> Father Ruiz notified the San Antonio Archbishop about the assembly, however, he made it clear that he was not asking for permission, but simply informing them about the intention of a gathering of concerned priests.

The assembly far exceeded Ruiz’s expectations. To Ruiz’s surprise, dozens of priests had arrived, many from outside Texas, and even a few Chicano Protestant ministers. The assembly triggered a mixed bag of emotions. Priests expressed anger at the Church for the discrimination that they had experienced throughout their priesthood. Conversely, they felt relief

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<sup>134</sup> Gilbert R. Cadena, "Chicano clergy and the emergence of liberation theology," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 11, no. 2 (1989): 109.

<sup>135</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 51.

that they were not the only ones to have gone through such a depressing situation. A sense of solidarity engulfed the meeting. All agreed that something had to be done about the way Mexicana/os were treated, both inside and outside the Church. Father Rodriguez stated of that first meeting, “all of a sudden you had this interest coming from everywhere and you figure if you have that kind of interest then something’s gonna happen. You don’t know exactly what and you don’t know how, ...There’s some power here that we’re not even aware of.”<sup>136</sup> Results of the initial meeting were the electing of temporary officers, a name, and the arrangement of a national congress the following year. Adding to the legacy of the Brown Church, the PADRES convening marked the first time Mexican American priests met on their own accord and on their own terms in the history of the Catholic Church.

A press conference was assembled a few days after the conclusion of the meeting. PADRES publicly accused the Church of discriminating against Mexican Catholics, stating, “we as Mexican-American and Spanish-speaking priests in the United States must make our own personal assessment as to our own role and involvement, as well as fulfill our responsibility in translating and transmitting the cry of our people to the decision makers in the Catholic Church in America.”<sup>137</sup> In the proceeding months, feeling inspired by the convening that had just occurred, PADRES developed an articulate critique of the Church and its relationship to Chicana/os, as well as a list of demands.

With a strong sense of moral righteousness, PADRES sent a robust letter to all bishops in the United States. They criticized the identity of a church that had abandoned its vow to the poor and its institutional discriminatory structures. They also encouraged the Church to endorse a

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<sup>136</sup> Father Rodriguez, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 51.

<sup>137</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 54.

Chicana/o Power agenda. In the letter, PADRES included data proving that there was indeed discrimination towards Mexican-Americans, including their lack of presence in the hierarchy, their lack of quality education, and their overrepresentation as laborers and as military casualties. The letter demanded the Church reflect on their vows, stating “If the more fortunate members of the Church in the United States refuse to hear the anguished cry of the poor and fail to respond in proportion, how can they call themselves ‘Christian’, when Christ’s foremost criterion for gaining entrance into the Kingdom, is what one does for the poor, the forgotten, the down and out, ‘the least of my brethren.’”<sup>138</sup> PADRES quickly gained a notorious reputation among the Catholic hierarchy, particularly as their principal demands were immediate institutional inclusion by way of a Chicano bishop.

The demands from PADRES included both social and institutional reforms. The first two demands dealt with the lack of Chicana/o representation in the Church. PADRES urged for Chicano pastors and bishops in order to close the growing gap between the Church and the community. Father Carrillo stated, “In the United States, eighty one percent of the Hierarchy is either Irish or Germanic decent who come from different value systems. They make the policy for our people. People who do not know the problems cannot be expected to find their solutions.”<sup>139</sup> How could those outside of the Mexican American community understand the needs and importance of bilingual education if they are not with us, Father Carrillo asked. Thus, PADRES demanded Mexican American bishops “from the ranks of the indigenous Spanish speaking clergy in areas where there is a heavy concentration of Spanish Speaking people.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 56.

<sup>139</sup> Father Carrillo, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 73.

<sup>140</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 57.

The question of *who* the Church should be serving was articulated in the proceeding three demands. PADRES demanded a preferential option for the poor, suggesting institutional economic reforms and the creation of subsidies for education to assist low-income Spanish speaking communities. Following Vatican II's recommendations of respecting the culture of the community, PADRES's sixth resolution proposed a task force to "adapt the liturgy to the Mexican American culture in the United States."<sup>141</sup> Lastly, like the demands of Católicos, PADRES called for institutional support of the farmworkers struggle. The aforementioned demands were delivered even before PADRES's first national convention.

PADRES's first obstacle arrived soon thereafter, at the first national convention in 1970. Two to four hundred people had arrived from twenty-three cities and sixteen states. Originally, the organization was founded for those willing and ready to support the Chicana/o population. PADRES never had the intention of making the organization strictly for Mexican-American priests. However, when the convention arrived, Chicano priests realized that they were greatly outnumbered by White Priests, nuns, and laity who arrived from other states. They pressed the Chicano organizers to have an "open membership policy that included laity. They also wanted to substitute "People" for "Priests" in the name of the organization."<sup>142</sup> Although well intentioned, the large number of non-Chicanos presented a great deal of concern to the PADRES founders.

The next morning, Father Ruiz made a dramatic public announcement about his concerns for the future of the organization. He declared, "Those of you who want to form an organization of Pueblos Asociados are welcome to stay in this hall. Those that want Padres Asociados and are

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<sup>141</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 60.

for having this organization for Chicano priests will follow me next door.”<sup>143</sup> Most Chicanos followed Father Ruiz to the next room, agreeing that the organization needed to be self-determining, especially as their principle demand was for a Chicano Bishop. Father Edmundo Rodriguez stated about the Chicano exclusivity, “We had many, many non-Chicano priests who at that time did a hell of a lot more in the apostolate for Mexicanos than a lot of Mexicans did, so there was a lot of good ones, but we needed to have our own identity and that’s why we started.”<sup>144</sup> Although non-Chicano priests and laypeople could be associate members, they were not allowed to vote. For the first time in history, a national community of Mexican-American Priests had established, un-bashful about their Chicanidad, and ready to tackle the Church’s longstanding discrimination.

PADRES quickly understood the function and necessity of confrontational tactics. Several were trained in Alinsky style organizing and therefore employed labor union strategies, including lawsuits of employment discrimination and threats of press conferences that would publicly expose “corrupt activity of certain bishops.”<sup>145</sup> The radical nature of the early years of PADRES went as far as suggesting a separatist national Chicano church. In a letter to the National Conference on Catholic Bishops (NCCB), Father Carrillo stated, “you don’t take care of us, or you don’t know how to take care of us or you won’t let us take care of our own people and we’re damn tired of begging you Irishmen for the privilege of working for our own people. Okay, what’s the solution? The solution is we get a National Chicano Church directly under the

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<sup>143</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 60.

<sup>144</sup> Father Edmundo, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 65.

<sup>145</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 85.

propagation of the faith in Rome.”<sup>146</sup> The impractical threat of segregating the Chicano population from the Church created enough institutional discomfort for PADRES to exploit and leverage their demands.

Obtaining the first Chicano bishop was priority for PADRES. Although appearing as a self-serving goal, PADRES understood that having a Mexican American bishop had much larger implications than just a seat in the hierarchy. Father Ruiz stated, “Just as our people have the need and want priests who can feel with them in a total way, who can experience what they experience, who can identify with them in a completely natural way, so do we as priests, along with our people, want bishops who can also hear us from the inside and from the point of view of our cultural identity.”<sup>147</sup> PADRES were prepared to confront the de facto exclusion of indigenous Mexican Americans priests in the Catholic Church as their objective number one.

At the first national congress, PADRES assembled a list of names of Mexican American priests who they would recommend as candidates to become bishop. The nominations were then sent to “Rome, to the apostolic delegate, the chair of the committee for the nomination of Episcopal candidates, the president of the NCCB, various Mexican American organizations, and the bishops of the nominees.”<sup>148</sup> The boldness of the request annoyed many bishops, but found support from others.

At the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington D.C., PADRES forced their way onto the agenda. Their requests fell on deaf ears and PADRES stormed out of the meeting literally cursing at the bishops. However, the meeting was not in vain. Father Patrick

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<sup>146</sup> Father Carrillo, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 86.

<sup>147</sup> Father Ruiz, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 88.

<sup>148</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 89.



Flores was later invited to make a presentation on behalf of PADRES to a group of bishops in San Antonio, Texas. Flores presented all kinds of evidence to the ways that Latina/os were being overlooked by the Church, he said “we really felt that Hispanics were being overlooked in two ways, that they are not getting the services that they need, and I showed all kinds of examples of that. And then, that they’re not being allowed to serve.”<sup>149</sup> When the committee responded by suggesting that Hispanic priests were not qualified, Father Flores responded, “Do you think you qualify to be bishop here in this diocese? You don’t speak Spanish. And the diocese is predominantly Hispanic...I’ve met other bishops in predominantly Hispanic parishes and they don’t speak Spanish. Do they qualify?”...We’re not going to qualify if you don’t give us a chance.”<sup>150</sup> Flores had made a strong impression. Later that same year, Bishop Furey, who had challenged, and was challenged by Flores in that meeting, nominated Flores for the bishopric.

On Cinco de Mayo of 1970, Father Patrick Flores, a PADRES member, would be ordained as the first Mexican-American bishop in United States history. At the ordination ceremony, the homily was read in Spanish, attended by Cesar Chavez and other Chicana/o movement activists, and was overwhelmingly attended by PADRES members. The victory was “living proof that PADRES and its protests had some impact on the Catholic Church.”<sup>151</sup>

PADRES became the little known non-secular arm of the Chicano movement. They deployed progressive interpretations of the second Vatican council and liberation theology to frame their positions. Within the next two years, through the continued agitation of PADRES, two more Chicano priests would be promoted to bishop and the church also conceded additional

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<sup>149</sup> Father Flores, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 91.

<sup>150</sup> Father Flores, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 92.

<sup>151</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 92.

demands. PADRES were most effective when they organized alongside their sister organization, Las Hermanas, the first national organization of Latina women religious. A further detailing of the impact that the Chicana/o movement had on the Catholic Church cannot proceed without introducing the extraordinary efforts of Las Hermanas.

### Las Hermanas

As PADRES was getting off the ground, women religious were also inspired into action by the events of the late 1960's. In April of 1971, two years after the founding of PADRES and Católicos, another unique brand of activism emerged. Calling themselves Las Hermanas, these Catholic women centered their spiritual identities to challenge Chicana/o and Latina/o marginalization in the Church. They sought to create a “counter discourse to the patriarchy and Eurocentrism of the U.S. Roman Catholic Church by creating an alternative space for Latinas to express a feminist spirituality and theology.”<sup>152</sup> If the church was indeed being forced to make reforms during the early 1970's, Las Hermanas made sure they would stand to represent Women religious and the Chicana/o community. Working with, and separate from, PADRES, Las Hermanas stimulated some of the largest reformations the Catholic Church has ever granted in the United States, specifically as they pertained to Chicana/os and Latina/os.

Although California has been ground zero of the Chicana/o movement, manifestations of Chicano Power occurred all over the Southwest. In Texas, for example, educational inequalities, segregation, and the residue of southern racism was as prevalent, if not more so, than in Los Angeles. Gregoria Ortega, a Chicana nun and co-founder of Las Hermanas, began her activism supporting local students in Abilene, Texas, who were boycotting their school district for discrimination. Once her diocese received word that she was “spreading hatred against white people” she was quickly removed from her post.<sup>153</sup> Soon thereafter, Ortega was introduced to Gloria Gallardo, another Chicana nun working in one of the roughest barrios of San Antonio,

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<sup>152</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 52.

Texas. At the time, Gallardo was interim director of the Mexican American Education Council, an educational justice organization in her Chicana/o neighborhood. She was an active community member and no stranger to the plight of Mexican Americans in early post segregation Texas. Within a week of meeting each other, Ortega and Gallardo would become roommates. Ortega traveled to Houston to move in with Gallardo and discuss the idea of developing a national organization of Chicana nuns. Together, they imagined creating a *Nueva Iglesia*.

Gallardo and Ortega wasted no time enacting their spiritual capital. By April of 1971, in Houston, the first national conference of Chicana women religious in the history of the United States took place. The two nuns gathered the names and contact information of all the Mexican-American sisters in the country. When bishops refused to cooperate, Gallardo and Ortega often had to go around them and contact the mother superiors, who they found more supportive. In the end, “fifty, predominantly Chicana sisters, representing twenty religion congregations and eight states (California, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, and Texas)” arrived in Houston for the conference.<sup>154</sup> The gathering was the springboard for the next few decades of Chicana Catholic activism.

Centering the cultural capital of their communities, the initial Houston conference would be a spiritually festive gathering. The organizers made sure it was filled with cultural and political education, including a “mariachi Mass, dancing, the showing of *Yo Soy Joaquin*, and a presentation on the Crusade for Justice by Carmelita Espinoza” (p. 56). Much like PADRES before them, the biggest impact of the first gathering was the realization that there were other sisters who shared similar experiences of discrimination from the Church. Teresita Basso, a

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<sup>154</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 54.

Chicana nun who attended the conference, said, “It was a turning point in my life, I had never known there were so many Hispanic sisters, or the pain of so many of them.”<sup>155</sup> Yolanda Tarango came to “realize it was not just my order or my life but that we were in a widespread situation. In the coming together we raised each other’s consciousness.”<sup>156</sup> Speaking to the cultural degradation that Chicanas experienced, Tarango said, the conference was a “personal call to our own identity and that of the struggling Hispanic community... We realized we needed to all go back to our orders and demand to work with the Hispanic community.”<sup>157</sup> In a test of their faith, the sisters chose to see the potential in reforming their beloved institution rather than disregard the Church altogether. With the collective energy amassed at the first national conference, the women religious were determined to transform the Church.

Las Hermanas quickly implemented an autonomous and independent organization to serve the Chicana/o community. In naming the group, Las Hermanas were purposeful in identifying with their mother tongue and their *hermanidad*. Medina states, their name “reinforced a shared vision of liberation for oppressed communities, of cultural reclamation for themselves, and of leadership development in a Eurocentric, male-dominated Church.”<sup>158</sup> The membership of Las Hermanas was broader than PADRES, but still limited certain rights to only Latinas. Membership welcomed the diversity of other Latina women, not only Chicanas, and full voting rights was limited to native Spanish speaking sisters and those from Latino America. In defending their decision for exclusive voting rights, Las Hermanas stated, “at this particular

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<sup>155</sup> Teresita Basso, quoted in Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 55.

<sup>156</sup> Yolanda Tarango, quoted in Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 55.

<sup>157</sup> Tarango, quoted in Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 22.

<sup>158</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 58.

time there is a greater need to help ourselves with our own self-identity problem and to better establish ourselves among La Raza.”<sup>159</sup> Similar to the situation that occurred in PADRES, many non-Latina sisters who had been working in Latina/o communities were not pleased with the decision, some never returned to Las Hermanas, others remained as associate members. However, the resolution showed the determination and resolve of the early years of Las Hermanas.

From its inception, Las Hermanas implemented a cultural and political strategy that became their theory of social change. Four principle goals resulted from the foundational conference in Houston. First, they wanted to implement team ministries, groups of sisters trained in education, health, and social work to travel to Chicano communities underserved by the Church. Second, they wanted to create teams to assist in the education of the social and cultural realities of Chicana/os to their Euroamerican peers. Third, they imagined a central religious formation that would provide a pipeline to prepare and encourage more young Chicanas for religious life, “providing the right ‘*ambiente*’ which they could relate to...and prevent cultural isolation.”<sup>160</sup> Lastly, Las Hermanas sought an information clearinghouse to “create [a] communication network among the members for consciousness-raising, leadership development, employment opportunities, support and collaboration.”<sup>161</sup> A busy first convention also established organizational officers, with Gallardo and Ortega serving as president and vice-president, respectively. Within months, Las Hermanas was officially incorporated as an organization along with their first national newsletter going to print.

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<sup>159</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 59.

<sup>160</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 57.

<sup>161</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 59.

Another principle goal of the conference was to garner financial support to study alongside newly forming liberation theologians in Latin America. Because of the limitations of culturally relevant pastoral and theological training in the United States, Las Hermanas and PADRES understood the need to learn about, and from, what was happening in Latin America. As a result, members traveled to Ecuador to attend the initial Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano. The trip inspired and solidified PADRES and Las Hermanas's commitment to work in the barrios of their communities. They brought back alternative organization and leadership models that challenged traditional top-down authority. These non-traditional organizational models were eventually implemented in various sectors of the Church, "including the LCWR, National Associate of Women Religious and Sisters Uniting."<sup>162</sup> Las Hermanas also began organizing regional and state conferences to continue recruiting new members and expand their networks. Within eight months, leading to the second national conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the initial 20 members of the organization ballooned to 200.

Early dialogues highlighted the liminality of being a Catholic and an activist. It is important to note that not everyone agreed on the direction of the organization. There was deep reflection of their role as Chicanas in an institution of patriarchy, wealth, and authority that did not respect their culture or history. For most of the women in Las Hermanas, their principle concern was to demand that the Church allow them to work in their communities. They saw themselves as critical religious leaders, feeling the need to convince others "to remain within their religious congregations, but on their own terms."<sup>163</sup> For others however, upon hearing how sisters were treated, could not be influenced to stay. Tarango stated of those early convening's,

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<sup>162</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 66.

<sup>163</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 62.

“a lot of rage erupted and there was nowhere to direct it except toward the institution. The congregation was not able to absorb the anger and the militancy.”<sup>164</sup> Both the church and the organization felt the exodus. Sisters were discouraged from joining Las Hermanas by their local authorities for fear they would not return. This presented a serious obstacle for future recruitment.

Las Hermanas’ resolve to be inclusive was core to its vision and longevity. As the organization matured, full voting rights were expanded to not only sisters, but Latina lay leaders as well. Medina states, “supporting former sisters and welcoming laywomen as leaders reinforced Las Hermanas’s understanding of ministry based on shared power and egalitarian relations.”<sup>165</sup> It would be their “ethnic identity, interethnic solidarity, shared leadership, women’s agency, and the tenets of liberation theology that shaped the group’s consciousness early on.”<sup>166</sup> Las Hermanas were received generally well by women superiors and authorities of the Church, however, as their activism gained popularity, the Church feared they would break off and become their own religious order. Recognizing the strategic importance of having support from the Church, Las Hermanas clearly stated that their resolve was to support and serve the community, not establish a separate congregation. Barron would reaffirm this stance when she stated, Las Hermanas and “The Chicano movement seeks no more than what the Church desires for every human being.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Tarango, quoted in Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 63.

<sup>165</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 64.

<sup>166</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 67.

<sup>167</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 62.



## Las Hermanas in Action

In its first decade, Las Hermanas disturbed what was perceived as the unbendable culture of the Catholic Church. Unlike PADRES, Las Hermanas were not as interested in climbing the institutional church hierarchy, although the ordination of women was always part of their platform for change. Las Hermanas desired immediate respect and support for issues concerning Chicana/os and Latina/os. When there was institutional support from the Church or intersecting interest with PADRES, they welcomed it. When there was none, Las Hermanas found ways to reach their ends.

The political education Las Hermanas received from their travels to Latin America served as a model to their *Nueva Iglesia Latina*. They were eager to share liberation theology to their communities, however, they soon realized the lack of institutional capacity for any type of cultural and political education. As a response, in early 1972, Las Hermanas and PADRES would team up to develop one of the most important outcomes of this period, the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC). MACC was a program “to empower the poor and to train religious leaders.”<sup>168</sup> Modeled after the training programs in Quito, Ecuador, the center housed a language institute as well as social, political, and cultural training for the Catholic community. The progressive structure of MACC respected community leadership and oversight. As a way to model the kind of church they wished to participate in, community members and ecclesial leadership sat on all decision-making councils.

The development of MACC had a profound effect on Chicana/o and church relations. It marked the “first time in the history of the Church, [where] Chicanas and Chicanos designed the

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<sup>168</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 70.

type of training religious leaders received.”<sup>169</sup> For PADRES and Las Hermanas, MACC was seen as an efficient way to increase the capacity of priests to better serve their Latina/o population. Martinez suggests, MACC “developed the reputation of being a center of progressive activity...a progressive curriculum was established that emphasized concientización, social justice teachings of the church, and critical sociopolitical analysis of U.S society.”<sup>170</sup> The early stages of MACC mirrored much of the radical nature of the Chicana/o movement, but through a non-secular framework. In other words, it developed the spiritual capital of the Chicana/o community.

Although PADRES and Las Hermanas understood the importance of a center like MACC, there were also tensions. For PADRES, MACC functioned as an institutional stepladder, preparing Chicano priests for the opportunity to qualify for promotional status in the Church, including bishop. For Las Hermanas, however, the direction of MACC was always “for the grassroots versus the institutional church.”<sup>171</sup> Medina states, “higher institutional status did not shape the aspirations of Las Hermanas.”<sup>172</sup> Las Hermanas and PADRES had a close, and often times tense working relationship throughout the early periods, however, they both understood the power of collective action.

As Las Hermanas gained a reputation in the national Catholic consciousness, they continued to show up for marginalized Latina laywomen. A sound example was the Proyecto

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<sup>169</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 70.

<sup>170</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 104.

<sup>171</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 71.

<sup>172</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 75.

Mexico project. Las Hermanas were given information about the exploitative working conditions that Mexican sisters experienced as cheap domestic labor to the church. To Las Hermanas, this was a double offense, one because the church was taking advantage of the economic conditions that drove Mexican labor north, including women religious, and two, because Spanish speaking religious women were needed in so many Latina/o communities where there were none. Deciding to investigate the situation, Las Hermanas independently visited various states and sites to see what and where this was happening. They identified “a total of fifty-nine sites including seminaries, colleges, rectories, retreat centers, and parishes...employing Mexican women religious as domestics.”<sup>173</sup> Ybarra stated of one of her visits, “the sisters were living underground in the basement with no windows. There was a ramp going up to the kitchen. One sister told me that she had been at the seminary since she was fifteen years old and that she had never gone to Confession in Spanish.”<sup>174</sup> Appalled, Las Hermanas decried the oppressive conditions and started Proyecto Mexico to support the sisters. They began fundraising in order to provide education and training at MACC so the women could be fairly employed in ministry where they were sorely needed. Ultimately, Las Hermanas did not have the resources to assist all of the women caught up in exploitative labor practices, however, it furthered their resolve to address racism, women, and the future of the church.

Intent on seeing how else the Church was responding to the Latina/o community, Las Hermanas conducted a national survey. They visited various Latino ministry programs across the country and found that the conditions were grim, “Everywhere it was the same. There were no Spanish Masses, services were held in the church basements or the Spanish-speaking were

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<sup>173</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 73.

<sup>174</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 73.

not allowed to enter the main church.”<sup>175</sup> In many places, Latinos were not even the directors of Latina/o ministry programs. A demanding letter and report of the findings was sent to the U.S bishops pressing a need for indigenous Latino leadership. Medina states this was a strong example of Las Hermanas, using “their authority as women religious to expose the conditions and circumstances facing Latina/o Catholics that the Church hierarchy refused to confront.”<sup>176</sup> It was the realization that the overwhelming lack of services rendered to the Latina/o community that ultimately caused Las Hermanas to join PADRES in the push for a Chicano bishop. Without a representative at the table, no one would be able to speak about the poor conditions of Chicana/os and Latina/os.

With Las Hermanas and PADRES working together, the timing was ripe for a national gathering of Latina/o Catholic leadership to establish a Latina/o Catholic agenda. Recognizing the moment of heightened *concientización*, Las Hermanas and PADRES flexed their strength in power and numbers. In 1972, 250 lay and religious Latina/o leaders met in Washington D.C for the first Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral. Martinez suggests that the first encuentro was “highly confrontational” and “reflected the mood of the times.”<sup>177</sup> Although seventy-eight demands were produced, the first encuentro was overly represented by white attendees working who Latina/o communities. The most significant outcome of the first encuentro was the establishment of proceeding and more influential encuentros. At the second and third, in 1977 and 1985, respectively, Latina/o representation would grow to 1,200. Elizondo, a PADRE

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<sup>175</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 75.

<sup>176</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 75.

<sup>177</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 113.

member stated, “we finally made it out of the basement of the church.”<sup>178</sup> It had seemed that a nuevo iglesia was indeed being created.

Although only a handful of demands were met over time, the national encuentros had changed the culture of the U.S. Catholic Church as it pertained to Chicana/os and Latina/os. In response to the second encuentro, the National Council of Catholic Bishops issued a statement recognizing “the Hispanic community among us as a blessing from God.”<sup>179</sup> Medina states that the “encuentros helped to reverse more than a century of viewing Mexican American and Latino Catholics as a problem.”<sup>180</sup> It was period of historic and unprecedented collaboration amongst Chicana/o and Latina/os against their most treasured institution. The fact that it happened in a non-secular arena, and that they were Catholics should have no bearing on whether we include them into the history of the Chicana/o movement.

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<sup>178</sup> Elizondo, quoted in Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 80.

<sup>179</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 80.

<sup>180</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 80.

## Conclusion

Chicana/o history is almost always remembered through the social and political changes that followed the period known as the Chicana/o movement. As a result of those freedom fighters that challenged the educational, political, and economic systems, today we have some labor protections for farmworkers, national ethnic studies programs, national Chicana/o student organizations, like Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán, even two doctoral programs in Chicana/o studies. More importantly, the period awakened a Chicana/o consciousness of pride and self-determination. This research was intended to broaden our understanding of the spaces and places that the social, cultural, and political awareness of the Chicana/o movement took place. Even in the most conservative of institutions, like the Catholic Church, Chicana/os organized for respect, dignity, and self-determination. By centering the spiritual capital of activists, we are able to discern the role of religion during the Chicana/o movement.

As members of the Catholic Church, Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas had an understanding of the history, character, and landscape of the Church. Each of the organizations occupied a different level of membership that allowed for pressuring the Church from various angles. Católicos, as laity and institutional outsiders were in a better position to confront the Church with more direct action and confrontational tactics without serious repercussions. However, because of their limited access to Church leadership, getting their voices heard proved challenging. Although the organization was short-lived, their attack on Cardinal McIntyre and the multi-million dollar church, St. Basil, had a far-reaching and long-term impact.

In their limited time, Católicos applied enough pressure to highlight and agitate the tension between Chicana/os and the Church. Their impact was reportedly felt all the way to the

Roman Vatican.”<sup>181</sup> As a result, Católicos appear to have forced the retirement of Cardinal McIntyre. McIntyre’s successor, Archbishop Timothy Manning, was much more sensitive to the needs of Católicos and Chicana/os. Soon after assuming office, he met with members of Católicos and even testified in defense of Richard Cruz. Furthermore, Manning “emerged as one of the leading Catholic bishops who helped end the grape boycott with the growers agreeing to recognize the farmworkers union.”<sup>182</sup> Most importantly, Católicos lit a fire in the seats of “official” Chicana/o church members, PADRES and Las Hermanas, to stand up for their Spanish speaking communities. Their “insider” positionalities as Chicano priests and nuns allowed for greater and quicker reforms.

As recognized clergy and nuns who have formally dedicated their lives to the Church, PADRES and Las Hermanas were in a much better strategic position to challenge the institution. As the first national organizations of Chicano priests and Latina women religious, they used their collective power to stimulate some of the largest reforms in United States Catholic history. Shortly after demanding the very first Chicano bishop, a PADRE member was ordained to the post. Within the next few years two more Latino bishops were appointed. By working together PADRES and Las Hermanas created the first pastoral training institute to prepare future Catholic leaders to work with the Mexican-American and Latina/o populations. The Mexican American Cultural Center had an international framework of liberation. It later “expanded to address systemic racism and foster intercultural understanding through a ministerial formation program accredited by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Certification and Accreditation, and in 2008 it became a Catholic college, the first post-secondary institution in the

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<sup>181</sup>Rodolfo Acuña, "Occupied America. The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation." (1972).

<sup>182</sup> Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, xxvii.

country to offer a bilingual Bachelor of Arts.”<sup>183</sup> Over the next few decades, PADRES and Las Hermanas continued to support Catholic Chicana/os and Latina/os, developing systems of support, theologies, and of course, critiques.

Criticisms were not only assigned to the Church, but also within the Latina/o religious community. Las Hermanas faced many of the same gender dynamics that women in the Chicana/o movement faced. At the second encuentro they “demanded a 50/50 share of leadership between men and women.”<sup>184</sup> Also implied in the demands was the full participation of women in the Church. One particular critique Las Hermanas delivered was the lack of risk PADRES displayed when they were not the direct benefactors. For example, PADRES were willing to sacrifice everything in order to gain more Chicano bishops, but when the question of women ordination was presented, their courage depleted. In a conference discussing joint ministry, PADRES presented a letter of apology to Las Hermanas for “those moments when we have failed to listen or to take you seriously.”<sup>185</sup> The willingness to work together, even through difficulties, speaks to the spiritual capital and commitment PADRES and Las Hermanas shared for their faith and their communities. In addition to challenging institutional discrimination, Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas were forced to navigate the spiritual borderlands of their identities as social justice advocates and as Christians.

Pérez-Huber’s concept of spiritual capital as a way to understand how Chicana/os challenge oppressive situations utilizing their spiritual identities has been useful to this research. For these three organizations, being Catholic and Chicana/o was not always smooth and

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<sup>183</sup> Mexican American Catholic College, <https://maccsa.org/>

<sup>184</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 79.

<sup>185</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 97.



presented considerable tensions. However, their strong sense of spirituality is what kept many of them involved in social struggles, and vice versa. Father Romero remembers, “at my first PADRES meeting we were talking about Chicano so much and I wasn’t really sure if I qualified as Chicano. Now, the word in New Mexico, where I was raised and where my family is from, was negative and people didn’t like it at all.”<sup>186</sup> For Romero, coming into his Chicana/o identity was a process, he stated later, “PADRES was the thing that helped us realize, ‘Yo soy Joaquin’, I am Chicano...Not as a bad thing. As something positive. I felt good about saying it, and I could say it.”<sup>187</sup> PADRES helped to blur the lines that separated Chicano from Priests. Another priest, Father Flores said, “For us it was possible to be a Chicano and to be a priest and to be as radical as you possibly could.”<sup>188</sup> The more radical confrontational tactics however, came from Católicos. Rosa Martinez, who was part of the delegation of Católicos that forced their way in to a meeting with Cardinal McIntyre, remembers thinking she was going to be struck down by God for “crossing the line.” To cross the line was to bring politics into the Church, to hold religious leaders accountable, to intersect cultural political capital with spiritual capital. Rosa and Católicos believed that what they were doing was truly Christian, returning the Church to the marginalized.

Combining religion, identity, and politics was not received well by all Chicana/os. Some women of Las Hermanas did not return to the Church after hearing of the numerous injustices against Latinas. There were certainly Chicana/o Catholics who did not believe the church was the problem and refused to picket with Católicos. Some Chicano priests were not interested in

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<sup>186</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 70.

<sup>187</sup> Father Romero, quoted in Martinez, *PADRES*, 70.

<sup>188</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 70.

integrating priesthood with an activist bend. Father Romero stated, “those who felt tensions about the two worlds or felt uncomfortable simply didn’t belong. They didn’t apply for membership, and they were not active in the organization.”<sup>189</sup> Nonetheless, once the Chicana/o movement and Chicana/o Catholics began to synchronize, it could not be reversed.

Although Las Hermanas were sensitive to those that decided to leave the Church, as an organization they understood the importance of their community’s spiritual capital. Isasi-Diaz stated, rather than leaving the Church, “we had no choice but to try and impact the institution, as it is an intrinsic part of our culture.”<sup>190</sup> Similarly, Católicos por la Raza did not want to create a divide between the spiritual nature of their communities and the political will of the Chicana/o movement. In their attempt at bridging the Chicana/o movement with Chicana/o Catholics, they included both in the organizations title. Furthermore, “members of Católicos made it very clear that they identified as Chicano Catholics”, not against doctrines of the church, but of the current leadership.<sup>191</sup> PADRES, speaking of their role as religious leaders and Chicanos, stated “Only through conscious effort will PADRES have a significant impact on the Chicano movement. The charge that we are latecomers should not disturb us. If the movement started without us, let it not continue without the special flavoring which we as Chicano Christians can give to it.”<sup>192</sup> The intersection of the spiritual and activist identities of Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas allowed them to navigate the borderlands of being Catholic while at the same time organizing for social change.

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<sup>189</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 71.

<sup>190</sup> Medina, *Las Hermanas*, 98.

<sup>191</sup> Garcia, *Chicano Liberation Theology*, xvii.

<sup>192</sup> Martinez, *PADRES*, 69.

If research centered on the spiritual capital of Latina/os, we may discover the various ways spirituality and religion has contributed to social change. Robert Chao Romero states, “In every instance of racial and social injustice in Latin America and in the United States over the centuries, the Brown Church has arisen to challenge the religious, socio-economic, and political status quo.”<sup>193</sup> Irene Lara and Elisa Facio state, “contrary to dominant views that assume that being spiritual is a passive, apolitical state, we are affirming that as deployed within a ‘spiritual activist’ worldview, it is active, it moves us into further action, and sustains the multiple ways we participate in social justice.”<sup>194</sup> This research affirms and contributes another chapter to what Chao Romero calls the Brown Church. It offers a counter narrative of the Chicana/o movement, suggesting that religion and spirituality played a much larger role than has been previously documented.

I argue that religion and spirituality was part and parcel of the movimiento and should be recognized as such. Just as key players of the Chicana/o movement challenged their discriminatory institutions, used confrontational and labor organizing tactics, and organized alongside their communities, the three faith-based organizations presented in this research represent a small portrait of how religion and spirituality participated and contributed to the social and political changes that resulted from the largest organized movement of Chicana/os in United States history. Católicos, PADRES, and Las Hermanas contested the established institutional discrimination of the oldest, wealthiest, and most powerful institution in the world. They recognized and utilized the potent nature of Chicana/o spiritual capital to continue the

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<sup>193</sup> Chao Romero, *Brown Church*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> Elisa & Facio, *Fleshing the Spirit*, 10.

tradition of the Brown Church. Their story, and others like them, deserves recognition in the history of Chicana/o studies, religious studies, and future historians of intersectional resistance.

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