Let me begin by offering my thanks to Allan Figueroa Deck and his colleagues for inviting me for this lecture, and to Bishop Gordon Bennett, Dr. Fernando Guerra and Ms. Cecile Motus who will join in conversation about our topic this evening.

On October 4 Father Deck delivered LMU’s Second Annual Latino Ministry and Theology Lecture, addressing the topic “Towards a New Narrative for the Latino Presence in U.S. Society and the Church.” Father Deck and I coordinated our presentations, so tonight’s conversation will build on his examination of “U.S. national narratives and how they shape and distort the meaning of the Latino presence in U.S. society and church.”

While I will not be able to do justice to Father Deck’s presentation in just a brief summary, one insight is particularly important for the present and future of Catholicism in the United States. Since World War II, waves of new immigrants have comprised an increasingly significant portion of what the consensus historical narrative of American Catholicism – and the default presumption of most contemporary observers – depicts as a purportedly established, Americanized, post-immigrant church. The demographic growth in U.S. Catholicism over the past half century is heavily rooted in immigration from Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, and particularly Mexico and Latin America. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops officials estimate that for the first time in U.S. history more than half the Catholics in the country are not of Euro-American ancestry. This statistic underscores that by no means is today’s U.S. Catholic Church solely an “Americanized” church. Rather, it is a church built on the founding faith of
migratory, conquered, and enslaved peoples that currently is largely run by middle-class, European-descent Catholics with growing numbers of Latino, Asian, and African immigrants, along with sizeable contingents of U.S.-born Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, and some Native Americans.

But like Father Deck I hasten to add that numbers alone do not define the significance of the Latino presence in the U.S. Catholic Church, nor the presence of peoples of African, Asian, and Native descent. The mutual influence of Catholicism and Latino (as well as Black, Asian, and Native) peoples in the United States is shaping not just the future of American Catholic life, but also the life of the nation. While I recognize there are many facets to the Latino presence in U.S. Catholicism, as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening session of the Second Vatican Council, I will focus my remarks on four major contributions Latinos have made to U.S. Catholicism since the Council. Rather than highlight the challenges the Latino presence poses – as is often the focus in presentations such as this lecture – I will argue that in the half century since the Vatican Council Latinos have lived out elements of its vision that enrich U.S. Catholicism in at least four areas: liturgy, spiritual renewal, faith and justice, and the revitalization of ecclesial life. We can discuss some of the challenges in our subsequent conversation, but first I want to direct our attention to these ways that Latinos present a blessing and an opportunity for Catholicism and the wider society in the United States.

**Liturgy**

Latino worship and devotion reflect an approach that differs from the emphases among many Euro-American leaders of the liturgical renewal in the United States. Following the Council the predominant approach to the renewal accentuated the core Conciliar principle of promoting the faithful’s “full, conscious, and active participation” in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum
Catholic leaders in the United States often sought to enact this goal through emphases on the gathered assembly and the Word of God as integral elements of the Mass and other sacraments, vernacular celebration in which the priest and congregation pray in a dialogical format, and the removal of most imagery to focus attention on the altar and on the ambo from which the Scriptures are proclaimed. More recently, various Catholics have sought to restore what they perceive as a loss of reverence in parish liturgies since the Second Vatican Council, echoing a concern among a number of church leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI. Those acting on this concern in the United States perceive their efforts are buttressed in Vatican directives such as those concerning bodily posture at key moments of the Eucharist like the reception of communion. They also find support in new Vatican-mandated translations of Mass prayers “marked by a heightened style of English speech and a grammatical structure that closely follows the [original] Latin text.”

Latino ministry leaders have promoted additional means for fostering active participation in the liturgy. They emphasize that the Second Vatican Council enjoined pastoral leaders to respect diverse people’s wisdom and practices and even welcome those practices “into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit” (Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 37). The lament of Father Juan Sosa, president of the Instituto Nacional Hispano de Liturgia, echoes that of many Latino Catholics: “The Council especially attempted to thwart efforts to do without all these [popular] devotions and to reduce them exclusively to the liturgy. Yet unfortunately this became the attitude and the actions of many church leaders.” Moreover, while many Euro-American liturgical leaders underscored the Council’s emphasis on the “noble simplicity” of the Roman rite (Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 34), Latinos have insisted that this does not deter from the character of the Eucharist as a celebration, a joyful and festive prayer.
gathering of the Church on its pilgrim way to God. Latinos’ viewpoints are reflected in the U.S. bishops’ teaching on liturgy in their most recent document on Hispanic ministry, the 2002 statement *Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry*. This document encapsulates Latinos’ insistence on the need to foster liturgies in which worshipers “experience a true spirit of community.” It also calls on prayer leaders to ensure “all are invited to share ways of prayer that reflect their different cultural values and traditions” and are able to appropriately “incorporate popular faith expressions. . . into liturgical celebrations” (*Encuentro and Mission* nos. 34, 58).

As with most aspects of U.S. Catholicism, the more dominant Euro-American influence has overshadowed that of Latinos (and other groups) in official liturgical renewal. English-speaking Catholics developed a liturgical movement well before the Second Vatican Council and led the enactment of the Council’s directives in the United States. Latinos were latecomers to these efforts, with no national organization dedicated specifically to liturgical renewal until they established the Instituto Nacional Hispano de Liturgia 16 years after the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Even then Latinos had far fewer resources and less access to key leadership positions. Moreover, most Latino leaders during the pivotal decades of renewal after the Council focused on what they perceived were more fundamental concerns of bolstering ministerial leadership and outreach among Latinos, as is illuminated in the relatively scant treatment of liturgy in the conclusions of the three National Hispanic Pastoral Encuentros (1972, 1977, 1985).

Yet the expanding contact of non-Latinos with Latino traditions has increased those traditions’ influence in U.S. parishes. Parishioners and their leaders have responded to Latinos’ devotional images and faith expressions in ways ranging from prohibiting or restricting them,
engaging them as a means to promote causes of justice, seeing them as an inducement to recover their own ethnic Catholic traditions, or incorporating them into celebrations of the Eucharist. Through contact with Latinos a number of non-Latino Catholics have been inspired to increase their practice of Marian and other forms of piety. St. Mark the Evangelist parish in San Antonio exemplifies these developments. It is one of an increasing number of primarily Euro-American parishes with growing Latino membership that prominently celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Within a few years of beginning this annual celebration, St. Mark’s parish Guadalupana society grew from 12 mostly Latino members to nearly 140, both men and women, nearly half of them European Americans.4

Latino public rituals like those for Good Friday also draw reactions and participation from non-Latinos on the streets of a number of U.S. cities and towns. Passersby occasionally gawk at public Way of the Cross processions, and some of them annoy devotees when they “don’t even bother” to make way for the procession or “turn down their music.” A few onlookers hurl insults. On the other hand, curiosity, the devotional ambiance of the events, decisions to conduct some rituals bilingually, and non-Latinos’ personal involvement with Latino communities have attracted an increasingly diverse array of participants. Even non-Catholics join in Latino public rituals. Baptist minister Buckner Fanning attested after the San Fernando Cathedral Way of the Cross in San Antonio that “when I walked behind Jesus on the Way of the Cross I wondered what I would have done had I been there. The people of San Fernando drew me into the passion and put me right there with Jesus.” Latino leaders contend their practices provide a viable model for public worship in a society that often accents individual spiritual quests and the “privatization” of religion scholars like Stephen Carter have noted. As Virgilio Elizondo puts it, “Latinos’ love for public ritual is a contribution we make to American society. I
think there is a hunger for it in American life. It lets you enter into the power of a collective experience.”

An insufficient number of clergy and liturgical leaders who actively promote Latinos’ religious traditions keep Latino impact on communal prayer in U.S. parishes and their environs from being even greater. However, the geographic dispersion of the Latino population over the past two decades has expanded Latino influence. For good or for ill, even conflicts and debates about Latino traditions and liturgical participation illuminate that Latinos shape parish worship and public ritual in significant ways. Latinos’ ritual and devotional proclivities and their promotion of a liturgical renewal that engages their faith expressions currently comprise one of the fundamental dynamics in the prayer life of numerous Catholic parishes in the United States. Moreover, these dynamics and the ways pastoral leaders and non-Latino parishioners welcome, refine, or resist them transform Eucharistic celebrations that are at the heart of Catholic faith and worship.

Most fundamentally, Latino leaders contend Latino faith expressions mediate a communitarian understanding of the human person that shapes their lives, faith, and modes of participation in the Eucharist. In the face of emphases on the autonomous individual in modern cultures, which clearly influence Latinos as well as others, the tendency of Latino devotees to accentuate relationships like those between Jesus and Mary presents an alternative vision of what fundamentally constitutes our humanity. Pastoral leaders and theologians such as Roberto Goizueta avow that Latinos tend to derive their sense of identity more from “the community [that] forms and shapes” them than from their life as “autonomous individuals.” James Empereur, S.J. and Eduardo Fernández, S.J. explore the implications of this communitarian dimension for Eucharistic celebrations in their study of Hispanic faith expressions and the
sacraments. They conclude that “among the various gifts that the Hispanics bring to the larger church” and its worship, one of the foremost is the rootedness of their daily life and devotion in “relationality” and a “communal sacramental world.” According to Hispanic ministry leaders and theologians who present this view, Latinos’ sense of a profound interconnectedness between family members who span heaven and earth – saints and ancestors of the past, those who walk together in present struggles, future generations to come, and the eternal God who is over all – forges a spirituality that is conducive to celebrating the Eucharist as a communion between God and all of humankind. This communitarian, sacramental ethos is one of the most profound gifts Latinos offer the wider church and society.\textsuperscript{6}

**Spiritual Renewal**

The most conspicuous influences of Vatican II are usually perceived to be the structural changes in Catholic life such as the use of the vernacular in the liturgy. Yet one of the primary concerns of the Council Fathers was the spiritual renewal of the Church, particularly in response to the new circumstances of the modern world. Concurrent with the era of the Council, apostolic movements eclipsed pious societies as the primary small faith groups among both Latinos and non-Latinos in the United States. For Latinos, these new movements build on the strengths of their pious society predecessors in their resonance with the devotional penchant of Latino Catholicism and their emphases on community and worthy reception of the sacraments. But they also reflect a more widespread and explicit stress among U.S. believers on a programmatic conversion to Christianity as an intentional way of life. In fostering intense religious experience, personal transformation, knowledge of one’s faith, and fervor to evangelize others, apostolic movements are suited to the competitive religious environment of the United States and the
pressures of modern urban life, including the unwieldy and oftentimes impersonal congregations in metropolitan areas.

The premier apostolic movement among Latinos is the *Cursillo de Cristiandad* (Short Course in Christianity). Eduardo Bonnín and other Spanish laymen in Mallorca, Spain established the Cursillo in the wake of World War II. In 1957 two of their countrymen assigned to a Waco, Texas military base collaborated with local priest Father Gabriel Fernández to lead the first Cursillo weekend retreat in the United States. Four years later, Cursillista team members from previous Spanish-language weekends led the first English-language Cursillo. By the following year cursillistas had conducted weekends in numerous locales such as San Francisco, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Cincinnati, Newark, Brooklyn, Baltimore, and Boston. Over the ensuing two decades nearly every diocese in the United States introduced the Cursillo movement, impacting literally millions of Catholics from a variety of backgrounds. Consciously or not, as Cursillo spread a number of retreat programs that closely emulate its core dynamics appeared: Teens Encounter Christ (TEC), Search and its Spanish counterpart Búsqueda, Encuentros Juveniles, Kairos, Christ Renews His Parish, and the Protestant Walk to Emmaus and youth-oriented Chrysalis retreats, among others. Teens Encounter Christ, for example, began in 1965 when leaders from a local adult faith community in the diocese of Lansing, Michigan requested that Father Matthew Fedewa assist them “in creating a similar faith encounter for their youth as they had experienced in Catholic movements like Cursillo.” The Cursillo-inspired retreat movements have mirrored their predecessor in their wide impact, as is evident in the claim of Teens Encounter Christ leaders that since its establishment “hundreds of thousands of young people from multiple continents have encountered Christ through TEC.” The impact of Cursillo in the United States is a fascinating but understudied tale of a movement that Latino
Catholics initiated and over the past half century became the most influential Christian retreat movement in the United States (and beyond). Arguably the four-day weekend retreat movement that Cursillo spawned has influenced more U.S. Christians than any other spiritual renewal movement in the nation’s history.7

Various other Catholic apostolic movements have had noteworthy influence among Latinos and their coreligionists. Like Cursillo, Marriage Encounter (Encuentro Matrimonial) originated in Spain. Father Gabriel Calvo was the key leader who organized the first Encounter weekend in 1958. Calvo and Maryknoll priest Donald Hessler promoted the initial Encounter weekends in the United States in 1966. Subsequently the movement spread most rapidly among English-speaking Catholics, until the following decade when Roberto and Rosie Piña of San Antonio took the initiative to expand the Marriage Encounter among the Spanish-speaking. RENEW is the most widespread program in the United States centered on forming small communities to enable people and parish congregations to foster spiritual growth, integration of faith into daily life, and an evangelizing spirit. The Bernard Lee and William V. D’Antonio study of Catholics in small Christian communities provides a snapshot of Latino Catholic emphases on family and spiritual renewal in faith communities like those formed through RENEW, which their research found was one of the “most influential” movements in the growing trend of Latinos becoming part of small communities focused on bible study and faith sharing.8

The most widespread apostolic movement among Latino Catholics today is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Extant surveys report a wide range of findings about the extent of Latino involvement in Charismatic Renewal groups. On the high end, one survey estimates that 5.4 million Latinos in the United States self-identify as Catholic Charismatics, substantially more than the 3.8 million who self-identify as Pentecostals. Whatever the exact numbers, the various
studies agree that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the most prevalent apostolic movement among Latinos, with well over one third of parishes engaged in Hispanic ministry having Charismatic groups or activities.⁹

Cursillo, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and other apostolic movements have received cautionary comments as well as outright criticism from pastors and other church leaders. Their litany of concerns include claims that apostolic movements can drain leaders from parish ministries, lead to divisive spiritual elitism, be hindered by competition between leaders and groups, develop “parallel formation tracks” separate from diocesan and parish structures, incite emotional conversion but not deeper and more lasting commitment to the faith, and focus on prayer and personal conversion in a manner that excludes or even openly resists faith-based social involvement. Yet the value of the apostolic movements in fostering spiritual renewal among Catholics in the modern world – particularly in the religious culture of choice of the United States – is undeniable. As Allan Figueroa Deck asserts, today the Catholic Charismatic Renewal “is arguably the single most important factor in the new evangelization of Hispanics and in motivating new generations of them to serve in the Church as lay ministers, deacons, priests and religious.”¹⁰ Latinos’ widespread participation in apostolic movements, prayer groups, and small faith communities – indeed their pioneering efforts in creating movements like Marriage Encounter and the influential Cursillo – is one of their most significant contributions to the spiritual renewal amidst the modern world that the Second Vatican Council promoted.

**Faith and Justice**

Yet another Latino contribution to the living out of Vatican II in the United States is the response to the Council’s often-cited call to attend to “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” and to
embody the Conciliar teaching that “the Church, for her part, founded on the love of the Redeemer, contributes toward the reign of justice and charity” (Gaudium et spes nos. 1, 76).

The predominantly working-class Latino Catholic population is a widespread and visible reminder that the sometimes-harsh realities of everyday pastoral work are the ordinary means through which the Church lives out this mission to transform lives, communities, and society. For example, currently the most prevalent form of Catholic public presence on immigration is the numerous outreach efforts in local faith communities. At their best parishes are a “safe haven” for immigrants where an array of ministries enable émigré parishioners to learn and act on their faith and provide for one another’s everyday needs like food, shelter, clothing, parenting skills, family counseling, refuge from spousal abuse, employment, safe neighborhoods, English language classes, and legal defense. When federal authorities raided the Agriprocessors factory in Postville, Iowa on May 12, 2008 and arrested nearly 400 undocumented workers, most of them Guatemalan and Mexican men, their wives and children fled to St. Bridget’s parish. Parish life coordinator Sister Mary McCauley, B.V.M., pastor emeritus Father Paul Ouderkirk, and lay Catholics, many the descendants of earlier Irish and Norwegian immigrants, served food to the frightened families, compiled a list of the detained workers, and stood watch at the church door. Immigration officials placed electronic homing devices on the ankles of about 40 mothers they had detained and allowed them to reunite with their children, but the other workers faced deportation. Father Ouderkirk mourned on behalf of all: the raid “has ripped the heart out of the community and out of the parish. Probably every child I baptized has been affected. To see them stunned is beyond belief.” Irma López, who was arrested along with her husband Marcelo but released to care for their two-year-old daughter, stated “I came to the church because I feel safe there, I feel secure. I feel protected. I feel at peace.” A New York Times reporter concluded that
“the only redemptive thing that can be said, perhaps, is that in the crisis of Postville. . .the beacon of the Roman Catholic Church to immigrants has rarely shone more brilliantly.”

The most noteworthy instance of how the expanding Latino presence has shaped the public policy positions of the U.S. Catholic Church is the bishops’ growing public solidarity with immigrants. Among Catholic bishops, immigration is the social issue that draws the most consistent public response across regions and theological perspectives, complementing the bishops’ more frequently noted stance on the right to life. The bishops’ collective stance on immigration perceptibly supports the contention that the Catholic defense of life extends, in the words of many Catholic leaders, across the lifespan from “conception to natural death.”

Los Angeles archbishop José Gomez gave a 2008 speech that illuminates the faith and moral convictions of many Catholic leaders about contemporary immigration furor in the United States. Gomez asserted that immigration is “one of the critical challenges the Church faces in our hemisphere” and “the greatest civil rights test of our generation.” He professed that “in Catholic teaching the right to migrate is among the most basic human rights,” one “very close to the right to life. . .because God has created the good things of this world to be shared by all men and women – not just a privileged few.” While recognizing government’s right to regulate immigration, Gomez reminded his hearers that “the Church also insists that no country can deny this basic human right [to migrate] out of exaggerated fears or selfishness.” He articulated the tragic human cost of negative responses to immigrants among U.S. citizens: it “is bad for the soul of America. And it’s bad for the souls of Americans. There is too much anger. Too much resentment. Too much fear. Too much hate.” Noting that the lack of comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level had led to at least 200 new laws in more than 40 states during each of the previous two years, Gomez called for “a moratorium on new state and local legislation”
which too often is “so clearly vindictive, so obviously meant to injure and intimidate” that it creates new problems without resolving existing ones. For similar reasons, he urged “an end to federal worksite enforcement raids.” “Most troubling” to Gomez as a pastor “is that these deportations are breaking up families,” since “a fundamental dimension of Catholic social teaching on immigration is that our policies should be aimed at reuniting and strengthening families – not tearing them apart.” He called on church leaders to be instruments of reconciliation, not excusing those who entered the country without documentation, but seeking “more suitable penalties” for them such as “intensive, long-term community service” as a “far more constructive solution than deportation.” His concluding appeal was that Catholics be faithful to Christ: “We will change the hearts and minds of our countrymen on this issue only if we ourselves become living examples of the Gospel we proclaim.”

The most unnoted Latino Catholic influence in promoting justice is their foundational role in shaping the faith-based model of community organizing. While African Americans forged church involvement in social transformation through the Civil Rights movement, Saul Alinsky’s organizing model, developed in his well-known work in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago in the late 1930s and his founding of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in 1940, which was the first of several national community organizing efforts such as the Gamaliel Foundation, the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), and Direct Action Research and Training (DART). Each of these networks contractually provides professional organizers and leadership training to autonomous local community organizations. The first predominantly Hispanic faith-based community organization, San Antonio’s Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), played a key role in transforming Alinsky’s organizing model to root it more deeply in local congregations and the faith of their members. As Mark
Warren concluded in his study of IAF organizations in Texas, “While Alinsky took a rather utilitarian view of churches as repositories of money and people to be mobilized, the modern IAF developed a close collaboration with people of faith, fusing religious traditions and power politics into a theology of organizing.” Founded the year after Alinsky’s 1972 death, COPS was the first such initiative to forge a new pathway in congregation-based organizing. IAF organizer Ernie Cortés worked with lay leaders and priests to establish COPS among ethnic Mexican Catholic parishes in the working-class neighborhoods of the city’s west side. COPS leaders learned Alinsky’s tools of analysis, strategies, and tactics, but as Latino Catholics they also infused Alinsky’s style of organizing with their own religious convictions and those of their core members: parishioners who perceived their activism as an extension of their commitment to God, church, family, and neighborhood. The COPS approach of building a community organization on the foundation of congregations and faith-based leaders has been adapted and further developed in various forms throughout the national networks of community organizations, which now total some 160 organizations and exist in nearly every state.13

Unlike social service efforts such as food banks and soup kitchens, faith-based community organizations focus on active citizenship rather than temporary assistance. Unlike groups that promote a fixed moral agenda through national and state lobbying efforts, faith-based community organizations are mediating institutions that help working-class and other congregational members participate more effectively in U.S. democratic society. These organizations offer an inherent critique of a political culture with limited nonpartisan alternatives for acting on one’s faith in the political arena. The faith-based organization model Latinos led the way in developing is one of the most effective means U.S. Catholics have contributed to advancing “the reign of justice and charity” as Gaudium et spes directed.
Revtalization of Ecclesial Life

Like their coreligionists in the United States and beyond, Vatican II’s mandate for ecclesial renewal shaped the ministerial initiatives of Latino Catholic leaders. The most significant national structure for Latinos to voice their concerns and aspirations during the Vatican II era were the three aforementioned National Hispanic Pastoral Encuentros. Like the National Black Catholic Congresses first organized in the late nineteenth century and reconvened in 1987 and every fifth year since, the Encuentros were opportunities for celebration, fostering solidarity, pastoral planning, and articulating needs to bishops and other ecclesial leaders. As they have done in collaboration with African American, Asian American, and Native American Catholics, bishops responded with various pastoral initiatives and statements of their own, in the case of Latinos the bishops’ pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry (1983), National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (1987), and 2002 *Encuentro and Mission* document. Bishops also collaborated on Encuentro 2000, an initiative Latino Catholics convoked with leaders from the diverse racial and ethnic groups in U.S. Catholicism that culminated in a national summit titled “Many Faces in God’s House: A Catholic Vision for the Third Millennium.”

While retrospective analyses of the Hispanic Pastoral Encuentros must necessarily examine the documents they produced, it is important to remember that, like all such gatherings, first and foremost the Encuentros were ecclesial events. No concluding document for such an event can fully capture the sense of solidarity among Latino leaders coming together nationally for the first time, the power of such an ambiance to enhance creativity of pastoral and theological vision, and the courage these gatherings gave participants to break silence and form a united front to confront their experiences of injustice. As Pablo Sedillo, a former director of the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs and a pivotal leader in all three Encuentros, put it, “Some people
who came to the Encuentros drove all night to get there. I felt history was being played out before my eyes. People’s hunger, listening to their hearts, their struggles, it enriched my life immensely and I think the lives of many others too.” Arguably the most significant – though unquantifiable – legacy of the Encuentros is their part in forming several thousand leaders who have dedicated their energies and even their life’s work to the advancement of Hispanic ministry. Encuentro organizer Edgard Beltrán attests that “while [the Latin American episcopal conference at] Medellín produced more influential documents, the excellence of the Encuentros was in their communal participatory process from the grassroots. This broad-based process instilled in people a consciousness of their Hispanic identity, a deeper integration into the life of the Church, and an organization as a more united Hispanic Catholic community.” Many leaders avow that the Encuentros are a primary focal point for the sense of common purpose based on a shared history – what Encuentro and Mission (no. 11) calls a communal memoria histórica (historical memory) – that has linked various Catholics from Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other backgrounds in Latino Catholic initiatives and organizations. The Encuentros were the symbolic center of a wide-ranging Hispanic ministry movement that shaped and was shaped by the Encuentro’s own national gatherings and consultative processes.

Along with U.S. bishops’ efforts and pastoral statements, the Encuentros heightened recognition and respect of the Latino presence in the U.S. Catholic Church, fostered apostolic zeal for Hispanic ministry, and advocated for the expansion of resources and personnel dedicated to that work. Moreover, the Encuentros and the bishops’ statements on Hispanic ministry are the most conspicuous means Hispanics have engaged in conversations and debates about the renewal of Catholicism in the United States since Vatican II. Drawing on the teachings of Vatican II, the Latin American bishops in their conferences at Medellín and Puebla, and the popes,
particularly Paul VI and John Paul II, in the conclusions of the three Hispanic Pastoral Encuentros Latino Catholic leaders proposed core pastoral and theological precepts for the enhancement both of Hispanic ministry and of ecclesial life in U.S. Catholicism. Prominent among these precepts are respect for diverse languages, cultures, and faith traditions as part of the beauty of God’s creation; the commitment to evangelization and justice as constitutive of the Church’s mission to proclaim Jesus Christ; the urgency to serve and foster leadership among marginal groups such as farm workers, women, young people, and the wider Hispanic population; and the call to transform personal lives as well as cultures, society, and the internal dynamics of the church itself. Underlying these convictions is a core ecclesiology, an understanding of the Church, which the concluding document of the Third Encuentro deemed the body of Christ that “incarnates itself and wishes to journey together with the people in all their cultural, political, and religious reality.”¹⁵ This perspective echoes the Vatican II statement that “The Church. . .must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the women and men among who he lived” (Ad Gentes, no. 10). Underscoring the Church as a community charged to embody Christ’s presence in the concrete circumstances of human life, the Encuentro vision encapsulates the theological foundation that animated Hispanic ministry leaders in their collective efforts to transform U.S. Catholicism through their pastoral planning and action during the Vatican II era.

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Father Deck’s Latino Ministry and Theology Lecture argued persuasively that the Latino presence necessitates rethinking our narratives of the history of Catholics in the United States. If my analysis this afternoon is as convincing as his, then we must also rethink the Vatican II era in
American Catholicism. Often this era is depicted as one of conflict between progressives and conservatives, and more recently as a debate about whether interpretations of the Council should highlight continuity or discontinuity with previous Councils and Church teaching. Although Latinos have not participated extensively in these disputes, my contention is the impact of Vatican II in the United States over the past half century cannot be fully understood without an assessment of Latino contributions. The four areas which I have discussed reveal significant Latino attempts to live the Conciliar teachings. Moreover, the Latino initiatives presented here are not merely part of the recent history of U.S. Catholicism, but are also integral to its present and future. Most importantly, these Latino initiatives remind us that, while the interpretation of the Council is crucial, no examination of the Vatican II era is complete without a critical assessment of the ways and the degree to which the Council inspired Catholics in the United States (and elsewhere) to revitalize their faith, worship, ecclesial life, and evangelizing mission.


14 Two subsequent Latin American episcopal conferences, one at Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in 1992 and the other at Aparecida, Brazil in 2007, occurred after the Encuentros and the promulgation of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry and thus are not cited in any of their documents, nor in the 2002 *Encuentro and Mission* document.