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Book Review

Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism. Edited by Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella, SVD. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. ix + 189 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00, £30.50, cloth; \$19.95, £13.50, paper.)

Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit. By Daniel G. Groody. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. xv + 188 pp. Illustrations, chart, appendix, notes, bibliography, index.)

The religious influences, roles, practices, and experiences of people of Mexican descent have recently received a lot of attention from ministers, lay people, and scholars. These two books contribute to the increasing focus given to these fascinating and interesting topics. In *Horizons of the Sacred*, the authors deal specifically with the Mexican American role and influence within the Catholic Church in the United States. Matovina and Riebe-Estrella state that while at one time the Catholic Church was dominated by European immigrants, the modern Catholic Church remains an entity where Mexican Americans continue to practice their religious customs and traditions, and thus have helped shape many of the rituals, practices, and traditions within the context of modern day Catholicism. Specifically, Matovina and Riebe-Estrella have compiled four major essays vividly describing Mexican American Catholic practices and celebrations centered around Our Lady of Guadalupe at the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas, the Via Crucis (The Living Way of the Cross) in Chicago, Dia de Los Muertos, and the practice of *curanderismo* (folk medicine) in Los Angeles. 1

Each essay describes not only the spiritual and humanistic meaning (such as feminine virginity and domesticity of the Guadalupan devotion) of the celebration for Mexican Americans, but additionally, the authors demonstrate that religious celebrations also contain expressions of the social injustice, political protest, inequality, and social criticism that Mexican Americans encounter in this country. The last essay highlights the many paradoxical aspects of Catholicism and Mexican traditions encompassed in the practice of *curanderismo*. 2

The editors have done an excellent job of compiling the essays, which are authored by scholars in various fields, some of which include theology, social history, Chicano/Chicana studies, and religious studies, thus giving the reader a panoramic view and interpretation of Mexican Catholicism. Yet, each essay is engagingly readable, entertaining and informative, and is documented with a wealth of resources, including books, articles, newspapers, archival materials, and interviews. Additionally, photographs throughout the text give the reader a visual perspective of the practices and customs associated with religious celebrations. 3

Overall, Matovina and Riebe-Estrella have compiled a valuable and much-needed addition to the understanding of Mexican American Catholic traditions. This book will be of value and interest to students, scholars, church ministers, and lay readers who wish to understand how Mexican American customs and traditions are, and will continue to be, a part of the Catholic tradition in the United States. 4

Border of Death, Valley of Life represents a pioneering work of the spiritual lives of Mexican immigrants. Evolving out of his doctoral dissertation, David Groody's book "has turned out to be an in-depth look at the crucified people of our own day, and a reflection of God's undying love for them as they struggle to survive" (p. 7). **5**

Chapter one documents the push-pull factors causing Mexican immigrants to leave Mexico for the promised land. In the process, they experience the ever-present perils of crossing the border, as well as the struggles, problems, and uncertainties they encounter upon reaching their destination. Retrospectively, the author claims, the journey itself represents many of all the pains, sufferings, and hardships Christ experienced on the way to Calvary. Chapter two describes the spiritual acculturation gained though a Missionary Encounter Retreat at the Coachella Valley in Southern California. Chapter three, in great detail, describes the process that immigrants undergo in the areas of affective, social, intellectual, moral, and religious conversions, which fundamentally serves as a transformation in the way they interact with the church, their families, themselves, and greater society. "Conversion is nothing less than a passage from a deathlike, dehumanized existence in a foreign land to a new meaning, freedom, dignity, and belonging. For them, conversion is the process of becoming a new creation" (p. 109). In the last chapter, the author argues that the story of Juan Diego, the Gospel, and immigrant renewal at Coachella are interconnected and account for the deep religious faith of this group of immigrants. **6**

Written primarily from interviews and English and Spanish secondary sources, the strength of Groody's book is that he has skillfully succeeded in taking the reader step by step through a long, arduous journey from Mexico to the United States. Once in this country, the reader will gain a true sense of the suffering, poverty, exploitation, political oppression, and discrimination immigrants experience. Additionally, readers will also experience the psychological and spiritual renaissance these people gain in Coachella, the Valley of Life. Another strength of this work lies in the fact that the story can be applied not only to Mexican immigrants but to other immigrants as well, and even individuals who have experienced personal suffering and tragedies and who have found comfort and succor in their religious beliefs and practices. Overall, Groody's book is clearly written, and photographs documenting the border crossing, religious shrines, and retreat activities provide a visual perspective on the topic. Academically, the book may be of use in courses encompassing border studies, but a greater audience may be among church officials and lay readers in search of their own spirituality. **7**

ROY LUJAN

New Mexico Highlands University

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