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L.A. needs progressive Latino archbishop

Mario T. García | Mar. 16, 2010 NCR Today

A few weeks ago, Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Los Angeles archdiocesan announced that he would be retiring shortly. The L.A. archdiocesan is one of the largest if not the largest community of Catholics in the country. It is also one of the largest collections of Latino Catholics in the United States. It is a microcosm of the profound ethnic transformations that are affecting the church.

It is estimated that anywhere between 40 and 50 percent of all Catholics in the U.S. are of Latino descent. Not only is the Latino population among American Catholics growing, this is also ushering important cultural and liturgical changes in the church. Latino religious influences including popular religious traditions such as D'a de los Muertos and the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe are being integrated within Catholic churches throughout the country.

Because of this Latinization of the Church, some have speculated that Cardinal Mahony?s successor should be a Latino. I agree with this. Such an appointment would represent recognition by the Vatican that the future of the Church in the U.S. -- to quote from Fr. Virgilio Elizondo -- is mestizo or Latino. However, I would also add that it is not enough to just have any Latino appointed to this august position. It needs to be a Latino who is progressively in tune with the needs of the mostly poor, working class, and immigrant status of many Latinos in the Los Angeles area. It must be a Latino who emulates the strong position that Cardinal Mahony has taken in defense of working class Latino immigrants and against the measures by immigration officials to round up the undocumented and deport causing havoc and separations within families.

There is a limit to the politics of identity and it is not enough to just appoint any Latinos; they must be progressive ones who challenge the status quo rather than apologizing for it.

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