



Spanning the Divide Latinos/as in Theological Education

Hernández, Edwin I.; Peña, Milagros; Turner, Caroline Sotelo Viernes; and Salazar, Ariana Monque
AETH, 2016

Book Review

Tags: Latino/a faculty | Latino/a theological education | student learning

Reviewed by: Kenneth Davis

Date Reviewed: August 11, 2017

Not a pedagogical tool, “This book provides a detailed look at the current state of Latino/a theological education in the United States” (26). A compilation of research, it begins and ends using data to logically demonstrate the importance of theological education beyond denominations: (1) churches are anchor institutions in areas of poverty that provide critical services which are cost effective; (2) these churches partner to build social capital and personal relationships; (3) seminary educated religious leaders are better prepared to lead such vital churches.

However, this is also an issue vital to denominations because demographic and religious adherence data suggest “Hispanic peoples are the future of Christianity” (469). Finally, it is an important issue for seminaries which not only wish to participate in that greater good beyond denomination by addressing diversity, but also wish to attract and retain faculty who are: comparatively young yet experienced, likely to hold more graduate degrees than required and speak more than one language, love teaching and excel as educators, are hard-working and open-minded, view their academic work as a vocation and persevere in their denominational affiliation, and who have a natural proclivity to span divides among races, partisan politics, languages, ethnicities as well as between seminaries and local churches. These are all descriptors of Latina/o faculty.

Though lengthy, the book is an easy read due to its helpful introduction and chapters that both provide both an opening summary and concluding recommendations. Chapter ten is the most challenging because it moves the discussion beyond inclusion to justice: “push against

tokenism, stereotyping, monocultural curricula....recognizing scholarship and teaching....[push for] greater transparency..." (326). Two chapters provide case studies on seminaries that are models of this inclusive justice. Another chapter describes the worthy efforts of the Hispanic Summer Program and the Hispanic Theological Initiative, both important partners for schools serious about increasing the number of their Latino/a faculty, which is a key take-away because "Latino/as beget more Latino/as" (445). Every positive outcome documented appears predicated on the presence of Latina/o faculty. Chapter thirteen is a groundbreaking study of Bible Institutes.

Among the most important recommendations is a kind of mutual mentoring. Latina/o faculty need and want to be mentored; non-Latino/a deans and presidents with good will but poor skills concerning diversity would profit by listening to those faculty. If they do, everyone benefits. Another urgent need is continual training on diversity for faculty, students, staff, administrators, and board members. "Through Hispanic Eyes" (chapter fourteen) serves as an example.

Although not exhaustive, the bibliography is comprehensive. An index would have been helpful, and given the repeated assertion that Catholic seminaries compare well to their Protestant counterparts, a case study of a Catholic seminary seems missing. Nonetheless, this is not a book to be shelved or filed, but rather one to spark necessary debate and urgent action.

https://wabash.center/resources/book_reviews/spanning-the-divide-latinos-as-in-theological-education/