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From the Editor: Who are our Ancestors?

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It is with great pleasure that we present the first issue of 2013, articles in response to a special theme created by Dr. Peter Casarella, “Cosmic Liturgy: Latina/o Catholicism Today.” Submissions range from research on a Latino-Chicago neighborhood, the diary of an early 20th century immigrant to Chicago, and the continuity of indigenous culture in Mexican-American practices. The articles tackle society and faith, community organizing and perseverance, dance hybridity and cultural history. The tender and evocative creative pieces grapple with faith and memoir.

This issue inaugurates a book and film/media review section, with provocative new angles on texts and cinema. The in-depth interview conducted by Peter Casarella with author, and Notre Dame University professor, Timothy Matovina reveals the impact of Latino Catholicism on U.S. society, a theme throughout this collection of articles.

During our second year of biannual preparation, we have improved layout and design, and the DePaul University blue will now permanently grace our front and back covers. Diálogo has long been distinguished as one of few academic journals presented in full-color, and for its mission to highlight the works of Latino and Latin American artists. We are grateful for the collaboration on this occasion of two artists: the enchanting examples, including cover image by contemporary El Salvador artist Fernando Llort, and few images by Chicago artist Eric J. García, together with his reflections in narrative on the creation of his exhibit.

We encourage reading Thomas Finger’s account (who worked closely with the artist’s daughter, María José), on the background and life of the Salvadoran artist. Fernando Llort’s images explode with vivid colors and the warm feeling of being in the tropical Latin American countryside. Influences of Catholicism, history and indigenous culture weave through works such as “Fragmento de mi país” and “Sol de Esperanza,” and Llort’s “Domingo en La Palma” is a rich, folkloric image of small-town life in harmonious ambiance.

Eric García analyzes a space provided him and the works he will hang, providing a unique glimpse into the artistic eye: He takes in all that surrounds an image, and considers the impact of reception. He brings together contemporary and past history, both European and indigenous-origin cultures and their social impact. Just as Puerto Rican-Chicago artist Bibiana Suárez described her artistic goals and types of media for her exhibit highlighted in last year’s 15th anniversary issue of Diálogo, García’s words bring new insights to the artistic process.

The present theme continues to our second issue of Fall 2013, in a slightly different manner: most articles will comprise a tribute to the influential, Cuban-born theologian Alejandro García-Rivera, who arrived in the U.S. at age eight. He pursued other careers before serving for many years as a faculty member of the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California (now merged with Santa Clara University). His impact was strongly felt long before his untimely death two years ago. Contributors will celebrate the way he tackled the mystery of faith, his influence, and legacy. We invite your subscriptions so that you do not miss this rich issue.

Throughout the readings of Diálogo 16:1, we hope you find enlightenment, explore new ideas and connections to your own heritage and history, and discover (or re-discover) the intrinsic essence of indigenous cultural heritage in traditions both Catholic and U.S. American—a legacy that has and cannot be erased despite the centuries since European arrival.

Each issue of a journal is a magical coming together of the chance encounter of narratives that together take on a personality, a unified voice as contextualized by these articles selected. In the process of receiving submissions and shaping an issue, a certain magic emerges that pulls together new themes. Here it springs from the essence of being. Who are we in the contemporary era? What is meaningful from our roots? Are they mixed with, tainted by, or removed from, histories and experiences? Such questions emerge from both research and creative articles in this issue. What is the identity of a person from the beautiful but remote, flat region of southeast Texas? (Mary Helen Pérez’s article). What is the personal impact of religion and faith during childhood or youth? (Arthur Ramírez’s and
Mesoamerican contributions were never disseminated, ancient city sites. From the inception of colonial systems, and new examples of writing have been discovered at these are studied by contemporary scholars, left in storage, and destroyed entire libraries of texts. Several were saved: letters), they categorized the symbols demonic or pagan, glyphs, much like Asian languages, rather than alphabet attempting to study a new language system (consisting of apocalyptic vision of the end of the world. Rather than long calendar with beginning and ending dates their own studying the society around them—conquerors read into a neighborhood? (Karen Mary Davalos' article). Several articles contemplate how diverging traditions are practiced, what history they teach, and how indigenous, native-to-the-continent heritage is valued.

Now that we have surpassed the much-popularized hoopla over supposed Mayan ideas that the world would “end” on (the date equivalent to our) December 21, 2012—actions that infantilized or caricaturized ancient civilizations, rather than attempting to understand its nature as a super-calendar, identified by scholars as the Long Count—it would be helpful to read and contemplate the rich studies available to us on their intelligence and contribution.

Unique to the region of now-southern Mexico and Central America, but shared by many nations, the Mesoamerican calendric system reflected complex studies of astronomy and mathematics. They had several calendars: the Tzolkin, 260-day ritual calendar, which regulated agriculture and other societal stages; the Haab’, which was a 360-day span—18 months of 20 days each, with 5 idle days (to account for leap year)—and which ran simultaneously with the ritual calendar. At junctures of about 52 years the two calendars caught up with each other. That moment was identified as a calendar round, and was met with fasting and societal rejuvenation as one cycle ended and another began. The Long Count is the most complex calendar of all (ancient portions have been found in carvings as early as 500 BCE): Consisting of a sequence of cycles of increasing length, it spans about 5125 solar years (perhaps creating one was the highest pinnacle of math achievement in those days?). The extensive cycle just completed began in 3114 BCE (before the Christian era). Wow. What was the rest of the world doing at that time?

After European arrival—due to limited interest in studying the society around them—conquerors read into a long calendar with beginning and ending dates their own apocalyptic vision of the end of the world. Rather than attempting to study a new language system (consisting of glyphs, much like Asian languages, rather than alphabet letters), they categorized the symbols demonic or pagan, and destroyed entire libraries of texts. Several were saved: these are studied by contemporary scholars, left in storage, and new examples of writing have been discovered at ancient city sites. From the inception of colonial systems, Mesoamerican contributions were never disseminated, nor propagated by the nations formed on this continent. Thus they would not be included in primary education. That is why we continue ignorant of their ideas and accomplishments.

Beginning in the early 20th century, archaeologists and other scientists began meticulous study of Mayan and other Mesoamerican inscriptions; from their texts historians have now prepared books accessible to the lay reader. We are fortunate to live in an era when new translations and studies are published, as well as books that describe, in less complex technical terms, the systems developed by ancient societies. For example, we can read historian Mathew Restall’s 2012 and the End of the World, The Western Roots of the Maya Apocalypse (2011), or Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest (2003), to understand how simplistic conclusions were drawn, and misconceptions developed (such as the “end of the world”). Also, journalist Charles McMann’s 1491, New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus (2005), to examine early civilizations from a variety of scientific perspectives: this book was discovered by former students of mine the year it was published (and provided to me as a gift), demonstrating their desire to continue learning about their hemisphere, and what was left out of our educational system.

Perhaps 2013 could become the year we begin to credit Native societies and peoples of this continent for their vast contributions, not the least of which are many excellent food products now enjoyed globally (see Chilies to Chocolate: Food the Americas Gave the World). Beginning with corn, vanilla and chocolate, where would our lives be without the discovery of the agriculture of American indigenous societies?

We wish you enjoyment in reading the articles of this issue, and that you become inspired to greater pursuit of reading and learning about our ancestors. Until our next issue, saludos cordiales.

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