

**David Abalos. *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political*. (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986) 240 pp., \$21.95.**

Influenced by the teachings of his mentor and friend Manfred Halpern, David Abalos brings in this book a radically new understanding of the political choices that Hispanics living in the United States must make in their everyday struggle for survival.

Abalos, a Mexican-American raised in Detroit with very close links to his Mexican heritage, has a profound knowledge of all the manifestations of the Hispanic cultures; he has been searching for a novel approach that would provide him with a more practical way of dealing with the contemporary issues that Hispanic communities in this country wrestle with day after day.

Not satisfied with much of the research being done in this field, he decided to try a new approach. He became a student of Manfred Halpern over fifteen years ago when Professor Halpern's theory of transformation was taking shape. In time Abalos became one of the most concerned and fruitful contributors, critics, teachers, and practitioners of the transformation theory. He decided to apply the concepts that Halpern had developed to analyze the politics of social change in the Middle East and Northern Africa to the Hispanic communities in the United States.

Abalos decided to do this because in his opinion often our best scholars are seduced by their academic training, and in order to be accepted into academic circles, end up doing statistical studies and other detached neutral scholarship. He feels that by doing so they turn themselves and their subjects into abstractions.

The theory of transformation which David Abalos pioneers in this book is both creative and critical; it is concerned with our participation in changing both underlying forces and their concrete manifestations in human relationships. The theory of transformation, as explained in the first chapter of the book, offers some new concepts, an entirely new way of seeing and living. For those not familiar with the concepts of this theory, a careful reading of the introductory chapter is suggested.

For Abalos the members of the Spanish communities anguish over their inability to merge the private world of their poverty stricken background with this new found public existence in a new environment that is hostile for many of them. Abalos sees them as fragmented individuals and claims that when a person or cultural group is cut off from its own feelings, personal sources, and institutions, it is also cut off from its creative depths. So the Hispanics are left with no other choice but to try to gain an identity by holding on to a past by romanticizing it out of proportion, which leads to an ethnic chauvinism or a strident nationalism. Other Hispanics attempt to forget their past by assimilation, which implies self-alienation and self-hatred because assimilation is a question not of both/and, but of either/or, with the element of power

dictating the choices of the predominant culture. Assimilation in Abalos's opinion creates fragmentation. Deprived of their personal feelings and emotions, Hispanics accept the real "objective" world of others. They are becoming angry because they know that their oppression is more than political; it is cultural. They feel deprived of more than money and position; they are stripped of a self.

Abalos attempts to find a solution to these serious problems by using a theory that is different from the ones used up to now by the social sciences, philosophy and psychology. He begins with the personal to develop the social and political realms. This is not a book that blindly celebrates the various Hispanic cultures. He feels that we must not project unto others what we cannot or refuse to face in ourselves. We have to take on the courage to criticize ourselves as individuals and as a group. He places emphasis on one of the most important relationships, that between men and women. He argues that we have done each other a lot of harm in the name of "affection." He admits that in addition to a high degree of sexism in our communities, there is also a great deal of racism and classism. He goes on to give a well documented historical account of the justifications that we give for such actions and alerts us to the negative implications that such actions have in our communities.

Abalos feels that we need a theory that will allow us to see, to link together our personal, social, political and religious worlds because we are personal, social, political and sacred selves simultaneously. But our education and socialization have fragmented us into many disconnected roles and faces. The theory that Abalos has evolved in this book is based on relationships in motion. It is a theory that allows us to begin with the self and to link ourselves to self, problems, others, the world, ideas, and our sacred sources. It is symbolized by the mandala, one of the oldest universal symbols pointing to the ever expanding search for the wholeness in the personal cosmic realm. Through the teachings of Halpern, Abalos has come to understand that in all of reality there are three fundamental choices, three paradigms, or archetypal ways of life: emanation, incoherence, and transformation, and that all of us enact our lives within these overreaching and underlying realities.

*Latinos in the United States* is a fascinating book, a great contribution to the field of ethnic studies. It is a book that should be read by anyone working with or associated with this field and by any member of all the ethnic groups in this country because what Abalos is saying applies not only to Hispanics but to all.

—Luis L. Pinto  
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