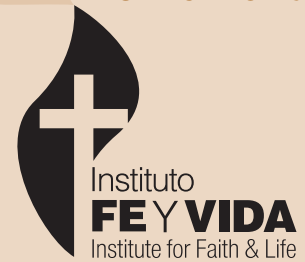




## Perspectives on Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry



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## The Dynamics of Culture, Faith, and Family in the Lives of Hispanic Teens, and their Implications for Youth Ministry

by Ken Johnson-Mondragón, D.Min. cand. and Carmen M. Cervantes, Ed.D.

Over the last 15 years, we have had the opportunity to speak with hundreds of parish and diocesan youth ministers in conferences and workshops all across the country. When we begin to focus on the particular pastoral needs of Hispanic teens as distinct from young people of other cultures, we often hear questions and comments such as:

- I do not understand why Latino/a teens need special programming when nearly all of them can speak English.
- I have a number of Hispanic teens in my youth ministry programs, and they are doing fine, no different from the other young people.
- If my focus is on developing a program that addresses all eight youth ministry components, is that not enough?

There are undoubtedly parishes in which young Catholics of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have found a welcoming peer community in which to grow as young disciples; nevertheless, recent studies have shown that such parishes are not the norm. In fact, the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) found that in most parts of the country, Hispanic Catholic teens were only half as likely as their white peers to be participants in a religious youth group. When comparing the white and Hispanic children of religiously committed Catholic parents, the differences were even more striking:

- The young Latino/as were less than half as likely to go to Mass every week (46% to 95%)
- They were about one-third as likely to be participants in a parish youth group (26% to 76%)
- They were one fourth as likely to be attending a Catholic school (4% to 16%)

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- They were one fifth as likely to be a youth group leader (4% to 21%)
- They were one sixth as likely to have attended a religious retreat (11% to 63%)
- They were one eighth as likely to have attended a religious camp (9% to 73%)<sup>1</sup>

There are many factors that may contribute to these disparities in religious participation. Studies in psychology and sociocultural issues, corroborated by our pastoral experience, show that while all teens engage in certain developmental processes associated with adolescence, there are significant social and cultural differences between Hispanic teens and their non-Hispanic peers and youth ministry leaders. We believe that these differences are the decisive factors that prevent hundreds of thousands of Latino/a teens from participating in parish youth ministry programs, often despite the concerted efforts of their parents to get them involved.

In addition, the lower incomes in Hispanic families limit their ability to pay for transportation and lodging in overnight events away from the parish. For some it may even be difficult to leave home for a youth group meeting due to the dangers in the neighborhood or lack of transportation. Also, the low-income parishes in which Latino families are more likely to reside may have a hard time recruiting, compensating, and retaining well-prepared youth ministry leaders, so their programs are less likely to be comprehensive in scope and methodology. The purpose of this paper is to explore the reasons for such structural exclusion of Hispanic teens, and to offer some practical suggestions to increase their participation in church and youth ministry programs.

### Key demographics of young Hispanic Catholics

In order to develop a more effective ministry with Hispanic teens, youth ministers need to take into account key demographics as well as the dynamics of family, culture, and generational diversity among Hispanics in the United States. Some pertinent figures stand out:

- Latino/a Catholics have surpassed their white peers as the largest segment of the young Catholic Church (under age 18)
- Among Hispanics ages 13 to 17 living in the United States in 2007, 69% had at least one foreign-born parent, and 20% were themselves born in another country

- For Hispanic Catholics, the proportion of immigrants is even higher due to the fact that immigrant Latinos are more Catholic than their U.S.-born counterparts
- About 15% of Hispanic Catholic teens are involved in a parish youth group, in contrast to about 25% of their white Catholic peers. For comparison, about 44% of the Hispanic Protestant teens are in religious youth groups.

In the face of this reality, many bishops, pastors, youth ministers, and parents are asking: What can I do to help the Hispanic adolescents in my community integrate into the church and participate in its youth ministry programs?

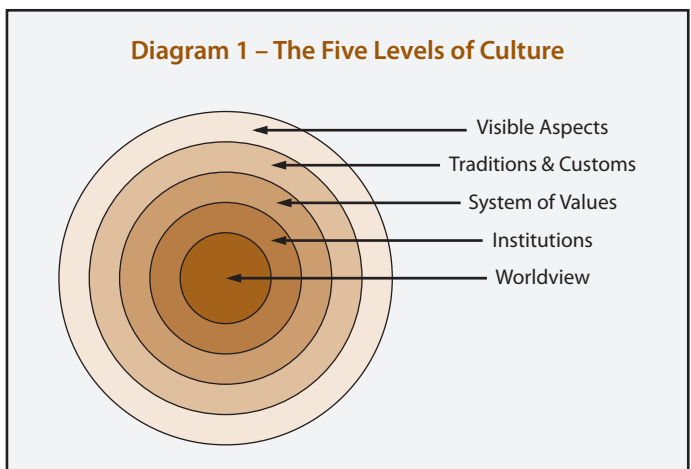
Before this question can be answered, it is necessary to understand the process of acculturation and how it relates to the religious and social development of Latino families. The analysis that follows deals with three foundational concepts that inform the practice of youth ministry in culturally diverse communities: *culture*, *acculturation*, and *inculturation*. A thorough understanding of these concepts provides insight into the ways in which Hispanic and mainstream teens may experience cultural conflicts when relating with one another. It also sheds light on the difficulties that immigrant and second-generation adolescents often have when participating in youth groups where the majority of the members are of the mainstream culture.

**Cultural competence refers to the ability to interact comfortably and confidently with others in a particular cultural framework by appropriately utilizing or referencing the assumptions, customs, values, and symbols of the culture.**

## Part 1: Basic concepts in cultural studies

**Culture** can be defined as “the accumulated store of symbols, ideas, and material products associated with a social system, whether it be an entire society or a family.”<sup>2</sup> Culture creates a shared identity and establishes the boundaries of a human group by defining behavior patterns that allow individuals to feel confident when relating to other members of the group. Culture is both learned and in a constant process of being created as it is passed from generation to generation.

The elements of a culture can be described as forming five distinct levels. A full understanding of the deeper levels depends on familiarity with the cultural elements at the more superficial levels, as shown in Diagram 1.



- The **visible aspects** of a culture form the first level, which includes styles of dress, music, technology, housing, tools, and foods.
- **Traditions and customs** are the parameters for conducting daily life and family relations. Social norms in personal and business interactions, the meaning of gestures and body language, and the way special events in life are celebrated are all part of the second level.
- The third level of culture is formed by the **system of values** that gives direction and stability to life. These values are translated into attitudes, behaviors, habits, and assumptions about family life, work, the use of time, etc., in order to organize and prioritize the activities of daily life.
- At the fourth level, social **institutions** give structure to a society, as well as to the experiences and struggles of its people(s). They include the political, educational, religious, and economic institutions, among others, that give consistency to daily activities and define the stages of the life cycle.
- The **worldview** makes up the deepest level of a culture. It is the underlying framework by which a person interprets and gives meaning to life and significance to particular events.

As a manifestation of culture, language cuts across all five levels. At its most superficial level, language is used to discuss or explain objects and events that can be directly experienced between two or more people. At the deeper levels, spoken and written communications are often used to express and reinforce the traditions and customs of a culture; they are grounded in the assumption of shared values so that meaning can be implied without explicitly stating what is intended. At the receiving end of the communication process, language is interpreted from the context of the cultural worldview and perspectives of the listener or reader, which is presumed to be held in common with the speaker or writer.

While most people can readily talk about the first two levels of their culture, each succeeding level becomes more and more difficult to describe in words, especially for those who have not had much contact with other cultures. Interactions between people of different cultures are often awkward and subject to misunderstanding because the deeper levels of culture are not shared—even though they may be speaking the same language. When communication is interpreted based on assumptions that do not apply, the intended meaning gets lost even though there may be openness and sensitivity toward the acceptance of cultural differences.

**Cultural competence** refers to the ability to interact comfortably and confidently with others in a particular cultural framework by appropriately utilizing or referencing the assumptions, customs, values, and symbols of the culture. When people communicate with others of their own culture, this is usually done intuitively and without any self-conscious effort. However, when dealing with people of another culture, it takes conscious effort and years of experience to master the use of the symbols, values, customs, and touchstones of the culture. For people who are not of the mainstream culture, educational institutions including churches have a crucial role in transmitting language and facilitating the development of cultural competence so they and their children can be full participants in society.

## The acquisition of culture

No one is born with a culture, but rather culture is acquired over time by exposure to the social environment. The natural process of cultural acquisition is called **enculturation**, and it occurs in two basic ways:

- **Endoculturation** occurs mainly in the home, where culture is acquired primarily through repeated exposure to the values, behaviors, and actions of the parents and/or extended family.
- **Socialization** occurs mainly outside the home, where culture is acquired through repeated exposure to the values, behaviors, and actions presented in the media, in peer groups, and in social institutions such as schools and churches.<sup>3</sup>

In traditional monocultural societies, endoculturation and socialization support and reinforce one another to transmit cultural values, norms, traditions, and religious faith from one generation to the next. Due to the influence of globalization through the widespread availability of the mass media, such monocultural enclaves are much more difficult to find today. All over the world, the pace of cultural change has accelerated due to the availability of television, radio, telephones, and the progress of science and technology.

One consequence of this rapid cultural change is that the values that have held communities together for generations are being replaced by the alternative values of a global consumer culture. This shift is evident among the young worldwide in their common styles of dress, use of certain words and phrases, and the popularity of video games, movies, cell phones, and the Internet. As a result, the endoculturation teens receive from their parents is sometimes at odds with the socialization they are receiving from their peers, the media, etc. Furthermore, the separation of age groups in many of our social institutions (including schools and churches) tends to accentuate the cultural influence of peer groups among the young. This **generation gap** is especially prominent among the children of immigrants due to differences at the deeper levels of culture, and it may cause adolescents to question the values they are receiving from their parents—including their religious beliefs and practices.

## Cultural adaptation and integration

When people find themselves in a new cultural setting, some of the daily life behaviors and assumptions about the world that they developed from childhood no longer apply. The process of developing cultural competence in this new setting is called **acculturation**.<sup>4</sup> Initially, it is common to experience frustration from dealing with people who do not behave “as they should” because they are operating from different customs, assumptions, or values. This frustration is called **cultural dissonance** or **culture shock**, and it can easily be generalized into judgments about the people of the other culture. When people of two or more cultures live in close proximity to one another, these experiences may become opportunities for human enrichment, or they may develop into attitudes or patterns of ethnic distrust, prejudice, and discrimination.

In addition, when two distinct cultures are brought into extensive contact with one another over time, both the people and the cultures themselves may be transformed by integrating or rejecting elements of the other culture. The degree of reciprocity in this exchange largely depends on the number of people from each culture involved and their relative power or prestige in the social environment. **Mestizaje** is the transformation and integration of two or more cultures over an extended period of time, especially through intermarriage, so that a new culture and a new people are formed over time and across generations.

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For Latino/a adolescents in the U.S.—especially among the 69% that has a foreign-born parent—it can be difficult to make sense of the contradictory cultural cues they receive from their parents at home and the dominant culture of the social environment. As a result, it often takes Hispanic teens longer than their peers of the mainstream culture to develop confidence in dealing with adults of either culture. As they struggle to make sense of their culturally ambiguous world, frequent experiences of mistaken assumptions and the frustration of trying to reconcile the sometimes incompatible values systems tend to reduce their self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of identity. Consequently, Hispanic teens are at a higher risk of engaging in destructive behaviors and relationships such as substance abuse, gangs, and promiscuous sexual activity.

## Part 2: A model of acculturation

The reasons for immigration and the life circumstances of each immigrant group affect the process of acculturation at a personal and social level. For example, the acculturation of African-Americans in a context of racism and slavery was very different from that of European immigrants, who experienced milder sociocultural contrasts because the initial discrimination against them was not based on racism. By the middle of the 20th century, the many immigrant European cultures had undergone a process of **mestizaje** with the Anglo-American culture to form the mainstream culture of the United States.

In contrast, the Latino cultures that had been in North America since the 1500s did not participate in the process of **mestizaje** to the same degree as the European cultures did, in part due to racism based on the color of their skin. Furthermore, Latino immigration has continued constantly throughout the history of the United States, and we are presently in the midst of a new wave of immigration from all parts of Latin America.

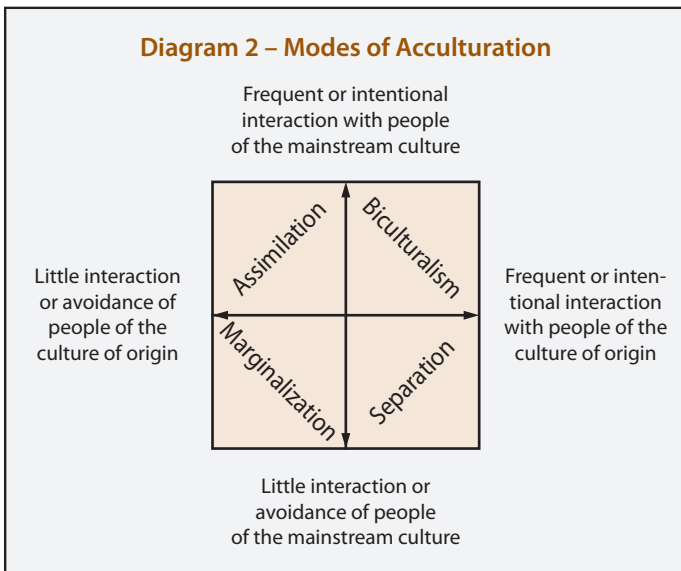
The processes of enculturation and acculturation among young Latino/as in the U.S. today are different for each person based on their particular history, culture of origin, and social environment. Nonetheless, they will have a major impact on the development of their personality, how they live their faith, and their experience of the church. A full description of the historical, cultural, and social characteristics of the many Latino groups in the United States is beyond the scope of this article. However, there are some excellent resources listed at the end of this paper for further study.

Bishops and pastors need to understand and embrace both the challenges and the opportunities represented by providing culturally appropriate ministry to these communities. On their part, youth ministry leaders should take the time to learn about the national origins of the Latino/as in their community, as well as the historical and social forces that have brought them to this country.

## The acculturation process

The pattern of acculturation followed by each person depends on the frequency with which they interact with people from the mainstream culture and their culture of origin, and how motivated they are to develop their relationships with each group. The four

**Diagram 2 – Modes of Acculturation**



modes of acculturation among immigrants express the combined level of cultural competence in both the ethnic culture of origin and the mainstream culture of their new environment, as shown in Diagram 2:<sup>5</sup>

- **Biculturalism** occurs when adults who were raised in one culture migrate to a place in which they are not familiar with the new mainstream culture, and they slowly become culturally competent through frequent or intentional interactions with the people of that culture. Children who are raised in an environment in which they have regular interactions with people of both cultures may also become bicultural as they mature into adulthood.
- **Assimilation** takes place among immigrants when they have an intensive participation in the new mainstream culture and little or no interaction with anyone from their culture of origin for an extended period of time. Little by little, the worldview and values of the culture of origin are replaced by those of the mainstream culture, and the person adapts to the new institutions, traditions, and customs. At the end of this process, the person may be so changed that they would experience cultural dissonance, or **reverse culture shock**, on return to their culture of origin.
- **Separation** occurs when a significant number of people of a particular immigrant culture are living in close proximity to one another within a broader social context of the mainstream culture, thereby forming an ethnic ghetto. Immigrants in the separation mode adapt to their new location by avoiding uncomfortable interactions with people of the mainstream culture and forming a tight community with others of their own culture. As a result of this separation, they do not develop cultural competence for the new culture. Children raised in such communities may experience cultural dissonance in ways similar to an immigrant when they start to venture beyond the ethnic enclave.
- **Marginalization** means that a person does not feel comfortable interacting with people of either culture, so they attempt to avoid both. This situation may develop when a family lives in an area where there are few people of their own culture, and due to experiences of discrimination, xenophobia, or their own inability to adapt to their linguistic and cultural environment, they do not feel confident when interacting

with the local people. In order to avoid uncomfortable social encounters, they become isolated or take on an oppositional stance toward the mainstream culture (i.e. refusing to make any efforts to learn the language), thereby making it harder for them to develop competence in it.

Marginalization is more common among the children of immigrants, because they never had the opportunity to be fully immersed in their parents' culture of origin. Among marginalized adolescents, substance abuse sometimes provides momentary relief of the psychological pain of isolation. If they find a peer group of other marginalized individuals, they may choose to associate primarily with them in gangs and engage in risky antisocial behaviors as a protest against the society they blame for their feelings of alienation. In a sense, they take control of their social environment by creating an alternative subculture in opposition to the cultures around them.

### Acculturation in the second generation

The process of acculturation is more complex for the children of immigrants and for children who migrated with their families to a new culture at a young age. Recent studies have shown that acculturation in the second generation usually falls into one of four distinct patterns, depending on the respective modes of acculturation of the parents and their children. These four patterns are summarized in Diagram 3.<sup>6</sup>

- **Consonant assimilation** processes occur when the parents favor the development of cultural competence only in the new mainstream culture for themselves and their children. Here the concept of **social capital** is very helpful; it refers to the relationships and social networks that facilitate socioeconomic advancement for individuals and their families. When the ethnic community has little social capital as is the case in many low-income Latino communities, the parents may not see an advantage in fostering their ethnic culture in their children. In other cases, they may not have opportunities to connect their children with other families of their culture of origin, so they focus on the integration of their children into the mainstream society. Since the parents are also striving to learn the new culture, the children are surrounded by parental, peer, and social affirmations of the mainstream culture, and they may observe and even internalize negative stereotypes of their culture of origin.

Although the parents may become bicultural in this process, the second generation tends to lose the parents' language, remain unaware of their ethnic history and cultural heritage, and feel discomfort when interacting with their ethnic community. If the children feel acceptance and belonging in the new culture, they usually assimilate without major problems, and children coming from lower socioeconomic classes may experience upward mobility. However, if experiences of discrimination and prejudice predominate, the children may be pushed into marginalization.

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- **Consonant resistance** processes occur when the children experience parental and peer affirmation of the ethnic culture over the mainstream culture because the family engages in social relationships primarily with people of their own culture. In some areas, such as large parts of Texas and California, this occurs simply because the vast majority of the local population is Latino. In other areas, experiences of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class may contribute to the tendency to avoid interactions with people of the mainstream culture. Socialization at school and through other social institutions is often unavoidable, but even that may be met with an attitude of resistance from the children.

Although the parents may be comfortable relating primarily to people of their own culture, this pattern often leads their children to low educational attainment, social stagnation or downward mobility, and continued discomfort in interactions with people of the mainstream culture. These children are generally bilingual, yet they tend to develop a limited historical understanding of both cultures, and they are at risk of being marginalized because their disjointed socialization may not provide the opportunities to become fully competent in either culture.

- **Dissonant acculturation** processes usually occur in places where the ethnic community is weak or has low social capital. Consequently, the primary socialization of the children is accomplished through peer and institutional affirmation of the mainstream culture over their ethnic culture. At the same time, the parents either find it impossible to develop competence in the new culture because of their life circumstances, or they choose not to do so for their own reasons.

The disparity of linguistic and cultural competence between parents and children often leads to role reversals in the family when children are asked to interpret for their monolingual parents at school, in business transactions, or at medical appointments. The children may also develop low self-esteem and feelings of embarrassment about their parents or their lifestyle at home. Many eventually choose to fully embrace the worldview of the mainstream culture and abandon their ethnic community and language. Others retain a degree of competence in their parents' language and

culture, but they feel most comfortable relating to people of the cultural mainstream.

- **Consonant integration** processes occur when parents and children are regularly exposed to both the culture of origin and the mainstream culture, and they develop competence in both. For this to happen, the ethnic community generally needs to have a high level of social capital so that it can make strategic accommodations to the mainstream culture from a position of strength. The ethnic community is then able to be the primary agent of socialization for the children, even in social institutions such as church and school, and the children are exposed to parental, peer, and institutional affirmations of both cultures.

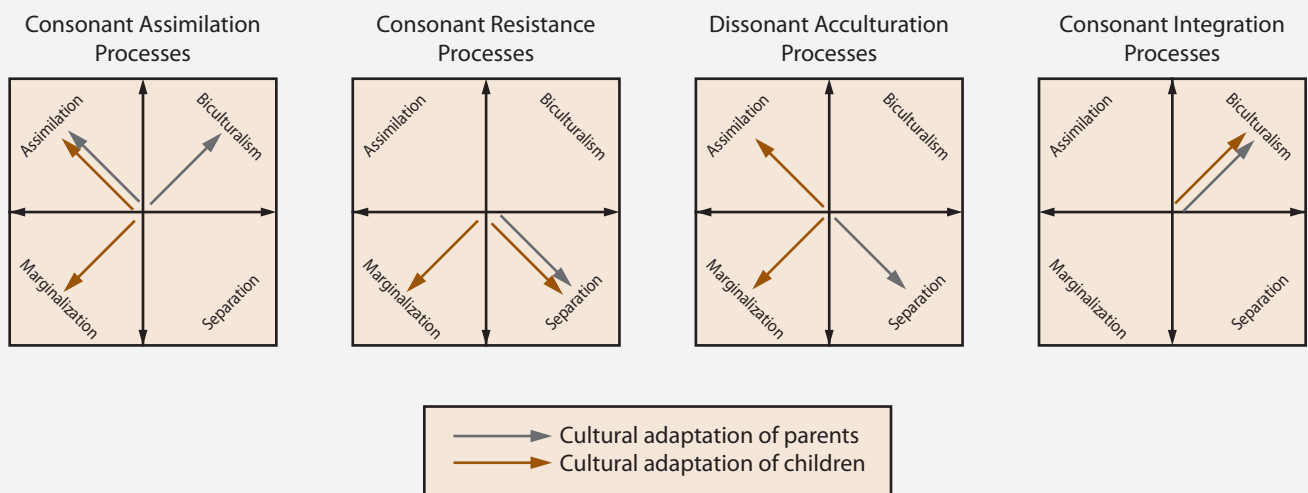
The outcome produced by this pattern is often called **integration without assimilation**. In this case, the traits of the second generation are: bilingualism, high self-esteem, preservation of cultural values, upward mobility, awareness of ethnic history and cultural heritage, and a selective embracing of elements from both cultural worldviews. In other words, the children effectively become bicultural. Of the four acculturation patterns, this is the only one in which marginalization is not likely to occur.

While the acculturation patterns described above help to illuminate the experiences of Latino/a adolescents being raised between two cultures, they should not be taken as absolute predictors of life outcomes for these teens. Exceptions and variations may occur based on the gifts, limitations, personality traits, and life circumstances of a given person. In addition, many people who did not develop a particular cultural competence when they were younger find the motivation as young adults to become competent in either the mainstream culture or their parents' culture of origin.

### Part 3: Inculturation of the Gospel

For parents and youth ministers who work with young Latino/as, it is important to recognize that faith development and religious identity in adolescence are deeply related to identity formation in its cultural, social, emotional, and intellectual dimensions. In other words, it is not surprising that some young Hispanics begin to question

**Diagram 3 – Patterns of Acculturation in the Second Generation**



whether they want to integrate Gospel values and Catholic beliefs and practices into their life—especially if they have difficulty relating to both their culture of origin and the mainstream culture.

If parents and youth ministers hope to nurture the Christian faith and Catholic identity in the young Latino/as they serve, they should become partners in facilitating two essential tasks that teens need to accomplish in order to become mature Christian adults:

- Integrate Christian beliefs and practices into their worldview and way of life at every level of culture.
- Develop self-confidence in their relationships with other members of the community and engage with them as active participants in the life and mission of the Church.

The relationship of the church to human cultures has always been marked by a certain degree of dialog, which has allowed people being evangelized to receive and express the Gospel in terms that are familiar to them. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI pointed out the necessity of evangelizing the whole human person—filling all dimensions of life with the life of God and reaching the deepest levels of culture:

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them...

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it. – *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §§20 and 63.

Pope Paul VI's new way of seeing the relationship between the Gospel and culture gradually generated a new focus of evangelization that we call **inculturation**. Defined broadly, the term inculturation refers to the process by which the church infuses the life and message of Jesus in a culture, so that the Gospel becomes incarnated in the soul of that particular culture, responds to its highest expectations, and reshapes the culture by making it grow in Christian faith, hope, and charity.

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Inculturation occurs when people and sociocultural groups welcome the Gospel into the totality of their life in all of its aspects. The inculturation of the Gospel is a dynamic process that involves:

1. listening to the culture of the people for an echo of God's word
2. discerning the presence or openness to authentic Gospel values in the culture
3. reinforcing and building on the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions that are compatible with the Gospel
4. transforming the elements in the culture that are opposed to the Gospel through Christian praxis by the members of that culture, such that the task of building the Reign of God becomes the principle that moves and guides the people's interpersonal relationships and their active participation in history
5. inviting other people and groups in a particular sociocultural milieu, both Christians and non-Christians alike, to collaborate in the works of justice and peace, always ready to share with them the reason for our hope in Christ Jesus
6. welcoming, affirming, and celebrating each culture—including all the gifts that God has given it for the benefit of humanity—in the life of the ecclesial community

Inculturation therefore must take into account the age, experience, language, and sociocultural reality of the young people being evangelized, creating meaningful communal experiences that include proclamation of the Gospel, reflection, action, and celebration. Producing such communal experiences represents a challenge to the Catholic Church, which is formed by people of diverse cultural traditions. This fact requires all pastoral leaders to give special attention to the way they promote inculturation in the ethnic and sociocultural groups under their care and to seek appropriate ways to foster a truly Christian communion among the different groups.

The process of inculturation challenges the vision, methods, content, and objectives of all evangelization and catechesis among young people to be responsive to the “youth culture” that is in many ways distinct from the mainstream culture of adults in the United States. In parishes where the young people themselves have different ethnic backgrounds and/or are on different trajectories of acculturation, inculturation must also penetrate their diverse cultural horizons in appropriate ways. In the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the U.S. bishops provide several suggestions for the inculturation of the Christian message in catechetical practice, including:

- Present the same Gospel message that was given by Jesus Christ in its integrity and purity, avoiding any division, subtraction, or distortion of it
- Gather information on the diverse cultural makeup of the community
- Develop and use culturally appropriate catechetical methods, tools, texts, and resources
- Cultivate catechetical leadership that reflects the cultural diversity of the locality
- Prepare catechists in their native language and cultural situations
- Ensure that catechesis is grounded in the cultural environment in which it is presented
- Ensure that catechesis employs popular devotions and the distinctive symbols of faith common to various cultural groups

- Ensure that catechetical initiatives work toward making catechetical formation programs into centers of inculturation that employ, with proper discernment, the language, symbols, and values of those being catechized<sup>7</sup>

### Inculturation at the different levels of a culture

The bishops' recommendations are concise and clearly stated, yet challenging to implement in practice. For example, what can youth ministers do to "ensure that catechesis is grounded in the cultural environment in which it is presented" in parishes that serve immigrant families from many different parts of the world? Even in parishes that are primarily Hispanic, cultural differences based on country of origin, generation, economic status, and mode of acculturation can be substantial.

The task of preparing adult catechists in their native language and culture is more easily defined because adults are likely to have a more developed cultural identity. However, among adolescents who are still in the process of forming their identity and learning to relate to adults and peers in different cultural and linguistic contexts, their cultural environment can be difficult to grasp, even by adults who come from the same country as the teens' parents.

One way to clarify what it takes to ground evangelization and catechesis in the cultural environment of Hispanic teens is to describe the process of inculturation at each of the five levels of culture identified on page 2. This section examines how faith is immersed in each level, and offers some suggestions for achieving inculturation in the practice of youth ministry.

#### First level: the visible aspects of a culture

This level is present in all societies, and the visible cultural elements often spread from one society to another through commerce, transportation, and technological and social communication. Although the external elements of modern culture can facilitate the development of young people, they may cause damage if young people fall into the traps of consumerism, self-centeredness, competition, materialism, or hedonism.

Because external elements appear simply to represent the material aspects of a culture, young people tend to accept them uncritically, without being aware of their influence on the deeper levels of their life. For example, mass marketing tells young people that their identity and happiness is grounded in their consumer choices: "you are what you have, what you listen to, what you wear, what you eat, etc."

Such messages have a powerful social impact in the lives of teens as cliques are often formed based on the shared preferences of a small group. For example, country music lovers might not associate with people who listen to alternative rock or reggetón, and young people who wear designer jeans tend to stay away from their peers who do not. Thus, the differences in clothing, music, and food between teens from different cultures and social classes can make it more difficult to create a sense of unity in a parish's youth community, even though they may all speak English.

Evangelization at this level must encourage young people to reflect on the various cultural environments that impact their life and consciously choose how and to what ends their benefits should be used. To make these conscious choices, young people need to develop their capacity to analyze culture and exercise critical thinking. They also need to acquire an interior freedom that enables them to choose items and activities that promote personal dignity and foster personal development while avoiding activities, fashions, and technologies that dominate and manipulate.

### Second level: traditions and customs

Among the traditions and customs that make up the second level of culture, the following stand out: the use of spoken language (especially slang) and body language; music, the visual arts, and literature; ways of reacting and adjusting to diverse life situations; styles of celebration, relaxation, and expression; and the calendar of meaningful holidays, tastes for certain foods, and folkloric heritage. All of these elements are means by which people communicate and interact. They are the channels used to express the psychology and philosophy that give coherence and identity to a people. Therefore, people tend to adhere to them and make serious efforts to pass them on to subsequent generations; parents sometimes have cultural conflicts with their children when the teens fail to respect or appreciate the language, traditions, and customs of the parents' generation.

To evangelize this second level of culture, one must distinguish between tradition and traditionalism. **Tradition** conserves the roots and cultural elements that have a permanent value through history. Tradition is alive when people find creative and new ways of expressing their culture's roots and values, responding to new circumstances without losing their essence.

In contrast, **traditionalism** tends to fixate on past customs, maintaining them in unchanging forms, without identifying their essential values or trying to relate them to new cultural forms and historical contexts. Through traditionalism, customs can lose their meaning and reason for being. As Latino/a young people are confronted with both Latino and Euro-American traditionalism, they have a tendency to uncritically reject one, the other, or both, because they do not understand the values behind the traditions.

The same is true with respect to the religious traditions they experience with their parents and in their parish. Youth ministers should bear in mind that the relationship between faith and culture is stronger at this second level than it is at the first level. Language, household customs, and social traditions express and transmit the feelings and religious beliefs that are important to people. For example:

- Pilgrimages symbolize an arduous but joyful journey to God.
- Family altars reinforce an awareness of God in the home.
- Giving witness to miracles testifies to God's marvelous works in one's life.
- Music, song, dance, and other art forms arise from deep within a people's heart to capture and express their profound personal and communal faith experiences, their devotion, and their religious awareness.
- Rituals, gestures, and symbols signify people's union with God and the rest of the community.

Hispanic young people that engage in these traditions without recognizing their meaning and value run the risk of falling into meaningless traditionalism. On the other hand, those who grow in appreciation of these practices may find little meaning or support for their spirituality in the English masses and mainstream youth ministry programs of their parish. The greatest risk occurs when Hispanic young people reject the religious traditions and traditionalisms they received from their parents without finding a place of welcome in mainstream liturgies and youth ministry programs. In such cases, they may abandon their faith altogether, or they may seek a different church that offers greater socioreligious meaning for their life.

To become aware that they are active builders of a new tradition, young people need to learn about and analyze their present

situation and the religious traditions of both their culture of origin and the mainstream culture. They should be encouraged to find creative new ways to express their values and religious beliefs, according to their own way of life and cultural context. Given the multicultural makeup of the Catholic Church, young Catholics also need to develop their capacity to dialog about the faith with people from other cultures and traditions. Generally, such dialog is most easily begun by sharing art, food, music, and folklore, but achieving a deeper intercultural dialog usually requires acquainting people with all five levels of one another's culture.

### Third level: cultural values and the values of the Gospel

Values give direction to life, and they are vitally important in forming the emotions, intellect, and will of young people. They also shape young people's attitudes, lifestyles, and ways of relating socially; they provide the perspective and viewpoint from which young people interpret life, set priorities, and make judgments; and they provide the criteria for adapting to diverse situations and circumstances.

Values are acquired little by little, and they are formed and structured throughout life—first as a heritage received from one's parents, then in making choices oriented toward solidifying a personal system of values. Young people need consistent and repeated formation in the values of the Reign of God in order to integrate them in their lives. For this reason, a family focus is vital in youth ministry. The family, as a domestic church, is the first level of ecclesial community, in which these values should be lived out from day to day.

Ideally, youth ministry should support and complement the work of parents by providing additional role models and reinforcing the values being instilled at home. The process of values transmission and formation is achieved through four complementary types of action:

1. witnessing other people in the embodiment of a particular value
2. being encouraged to embrace that value through reason and positive reinforcement
3. having the opportunity to exercise the value in real-life situations
4. reflecting on how to live and express that value in one's own life

The ideal of close collaboration and mutual support between parents and youth ministry programs in the formation of Gospel values among Catholic teens can be hindered in two ways. First, values instilled in the family without an echo in other social institutions such as school and church are highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of modern culture and social pressure. During adolescence, when many young Hispanics are questioning the values of their parents, it is especially important that they recognize and experience traditional, positive Hispanic values both at home and at church, such as: personal relationships, cooperation, personal sacrifice for the sake of others, a strong connection between faith and life, and participation in the life of the community. If youth ministry leaders do not foster these and other values of Hispanic cultures, they may inadvertently undermine them by promoting conflicting values of the mainstream culture. This only causes confusion or alienation among the teens and distrust from their parents.

Second, when the parents were never fully evangelized, are not active in the parish, and/or are not very effective at transmitting

the Christian values they have received, they tend to fall into patterns of moralizing, imposing arbitrary rules, and insisting on meaningless traditionalism. These behaviors only elicit negative reactions from young people and encourage them to reject their parents' cultural values. If the teens do not have Christian role models outside the family, they may easily embrace other values that run counter to the Reign of God, such as relativism, materialism, hedonism, and vice.

Youth ministry programs may be the only experience of a faith community available to such teens, so youth ministry leaders should be prepared to take a missionary approach, seeking them out and providing a place of welcome for them. Once they have established a relationship with these teens, they can also work with their parents to assist them in fostering and transmitting Gospel values at home.

Being a Christian means taking on the values of Jesus as ideals and making those values a reality through a continuous process of conversion. This conversion should progressively touch all

the attitudes and behaviors with which people respond to specific situations in their personal and social life. Through his words, his actions, and his own person, Jesus clearly communicated the values of the Reign of God. Jesus' radical authenticity, love, service, commitment, courage, and faithfulness to God and to God's plan for salvation—all

these values strongly attract young people. Youth ministry has the mission of working with parents and the whole faith community to shape young people's values, for these values are the basis of every moral decision. Values formation promotes a Christian vision of life while avoiding legalistic and overly intellectual positions.

Given the cultural pluralism in the United States, young people also need opportunities to get to know the values of other cultures. By learning about others, young people will not confuse respect for the authentic human and religious values of other cultures with an "anything goes" relativism that leads to indifference toward people who are different from themselves. Valuing diversity enriches the process of affirming and living out Gospel values. Rather than experiencing divisions among themselves as a result of their differing ways of living or expressing the faith, young people can feel a common pride in the fact that in the Catholic Church, unity in the Spirit is realized through a variety of cultural expressions and complementary gifts.

### Fourth level: social systems and institutions

Social systems and institutions generally reflect the culture in which they develop. Young people need to learn the workings of these institutions in order to claim their rights in the society, fulfill their civic obligations, and transform those institutional elements that undermine their dignity, stand in the way of their human development, or impede their incorporation into society.

In the Christian ideal, every social system and institution should be a source of life for people, especially for the most defenseless and needy. The church has the mission to evangelize all of society's institutions and structures—including the church itself—so that their goals and processes promote the common good. Furthermore, the church is committed to maintaining pastoral

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institutions that satisfy people's needs for belonging; identity; self-esteem; and socioeconomic, human, and Christian development. These pastoral institutions promote the participation of young people in the church and in society.

The church as an institution is called to embrace all its members, regardless of their race, language, or culture, in order to fulfill its evangelizing mission with them. Latino/a teens relate to the institutional dimension of the church primarily through pre-sacramental preparation, youth ministry, Sunday worship, communal popular religious practices, and Catholic school for some. The quality of these contacts strongly influences their faith-life and attitudes toward the church. When young people have positive church experiences and encounter a true community there, they more easily open themselves to the Good News and accept their mission as Christians. On the other hand, when young people do not find a welcoming social environment, they may have painful or destructive experiences of the church that affect them at a deep and personal level. Young people who have such experiences normally become alienated from the church, and reconciliation requires special efforts on the part of the ecclesial community.

The cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity of many Catholic parishes today, combined with the limited intercultural competence of most youth ministry leaders, has undoubtedly contributed to Hispanic teens being only half as likely as their white peers to participate in their parish youth ministry programs. It is critical for pastors and youth ministers to recognize that the church cannot promote the integration of its young Hispanic members in church and society if it cannot gather them in a community setting.

When cultural dissonance or other factors limit the participation of certain groups in the parish, youth ministers need to develop alternatives to the one-size-fits-all parish youth group. In such situations, this structure can become an obstacle to the participation of one or more segments of the young church—often the very young people who are most in need of the church's assistance.

Parish groups, apostolic movements, and small communities are all examples of ecclesial institutions in which young Hispanics can encounter God, express their faith, and discover the meaning of their life in Christ. These groups should be allowed to multiply under the direction of properly formed adult leaders and catechists. In this approach, it is essential that the various groups maintain communion with the rest of the church through structures that promote their participation in all important aspects of ecclesial life—especially the Sunday Eucharist. This communion will help the church become a better sign and promoter of the Reign of God in the multicultural society of the United States.

#### **Fifth level: personal worldview and the meaning of life**

It is at this level that young people ask and respond to the key and existential questions of life. A worldview includes a way of defining human nature, an understanding of God, and a way of relating to God, oneself, other human beings, and the universe. People throughout history have formulated worldviews expressed in various ways and founded on various systems of belief. Most of these worldviews recognize God's presence and action in all of creation.

Christians believe that the Incarnation of Jesus in the history of humanity liberates people from sin and death. This is the central axis of the Christian worldview that comprehends the truth about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; about the human person created in God's image; and about the church and its mission to extend the Reign of God in society. This worldview gives Christian meaning and orientation to life. It also encourages every baptized person to journey toward God by following Jesus, animated by the Holy Spirit in the company of Mary and the ecclesial community.

Although the root and goal of religious experience lies at this cultural level, evangelization must occur through continuous and complementary experiences at all cultural levels in order for the person and message of Jesus to reach the hearts and minds of young people. Becoming a new creation in Jesus Christ requires that the Gospel be inserted in all the dimensions of personal life and all five levels of culture in order to clearly and decisively reach the deep realms from which young people's beliefs, ideals, values, and behavior emerge.

Every culture creates its own unique way of expressing the ultimate meaning of life. Intimately connected to this level of culture is language—written, spoken, expressed through gestures, silences, tones, intensities, symbols, rituals, and so on. Language gives birth to ideas, concepts, and shared meanings that express a person's deepest and most intimate experiences. The language that carries the most profound meanings for a person is almost always the language originally spoken at home, the language of the heart, which shapes the experiences that forever mark a person's emotions, values, personal attitudes, and way of thinking. Thus, religious language tends to be expressed in a person's "mother tongue"—even when the person is bilingual or multilingual.

*It is critical for pastors and youth ministers to recognize that the church cannot promote the integration of its young Hispanic members if it cannot gather them in a community setting.*

For this reason, it is crucial that evangelization be carried out in the cultural language of the heart. Young people must be allowed to choose the language and cultural environment in which they can best relate to their sisters and brothers and to God, and best express their

deep spiritual experiences. In addition, many Hispanic young people have been formed in the faith through experiences of popular religiosity and the Charismatic Renewal. Evangelization among young Hispanics should take into account both of these ways of transmitting the faith, as well as the language—English or Spanish.

#### **Implications for youth ministry with Latino/a adolescents**

Because the vast majority of Latino/a teens in the U.S. today are either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, their acculturation pattern plays a prominent role in their religious formation. In most cases, the language and cultural expressions of the faith in Latin America are quite distinct from those in the United States, even though the religious tradition may be Catholic in both places.

Part of the challenge of cultural transition for Latino/a adolescents is to negotiate the differences within their religious tradition and faith community. For Hispanic adolescents following the patterns of consonant assimilation or consonant integration, this is generally not a problem: they can simply integrate into the mainstream youth ministry programming—as long as they feel comfortable

socially with their mainstream peers. However, if their parents have become alienated in some way from the church, which is fairly common among Hispanics whose families have been in the U.S. for three or more generations, there may still be a need to reach out intentionally to the Hispanic teens.

Providing pastoral accompaniment and faith formation to Latino/a adolescents following the consonant resistance and dissonant acculturation patterns can be much more challenging. In these cases, the cultural dissonance they experience may go to the very heart of their religious identity and Christian values. For example, some Hispanic teens will find it difficult to relate to the religious expressions of the local faith community at worship, whether the services are conducted in English or in Spanish. The rejection of their parents' culture in dissonant acculturation may also extend to a rejection of their parents' religious faith, such that the teens do not want to have anything to do with church. In the consonant resistance pattern, the teens may be content to participate in worship services in Spanish, but they are likely to find participating in youth ministry programs with teens of the mainstream culture to be uncomfortable because of the cultural dissonance they experience with them—even though they can speak English.

With respect to Hispanic adolescents whose parents are charismatic or very traditional in their religious devotions—especially those who are accustomed to attending prayer meetings with their parents—there is the additional risk that they will find the parish youth group to be too secular. Unless the youth ministry team is very aware of the cultural differences in religious expression, spirituality, values, and worldview, the youth ministry programs likely will not support or connect with the religious formation the teens have received from their parents. Socioeconomic differences and ethnocentric attitudes on both sides can create additional barriers to participation for these “culturally squeezed” Latino/a teens, and they will generally choose not to participate in the youth ministry programs. Even in areas that are predominantly Hispanic, the linguistic and cultural differences between recent immigrants and U.S.-born Latino/as can be problematic.

For these reasons, youth ministry leaders who are not fully bicultural should adopt a missionary approach to ministry with the Hispanic adolescents in their community. This means that they must intentionally seek out the marginalized young Hispanics who live within the parish boundaries and incorporate Hispanic

leaders—both adults and adolescents—into their team to design and carry out the pastoral efforts to serve them. They can then decide as a team whether it is preferable to create a special program for the marginalized adolescents, or adapt the content and style of the existing programs to make them feel more welcome. Either way, they should engage all of the parish teens in a process of cultural awareness and appreciation, irrespective of their cultural background.

## Additional resources

- Avalos, Hector, ed. *Introduction to the U.S. Latina and Latino Religious Experience*. Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004.
- Badillo, David A. *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.
- Brankin, Patrick. *Bilingual Ritual of Hispanic Popular Catholicism*. New Hope, KY: New Hope Publications, 2002.
- Cervantes, Carmen M., ed. *Evangelization of Hispanic Young People*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Latino Catholic Youth and Young Adults in the United States: Their Faith and their Culture*. Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2002.
- De Luna, Anita. *Faith Formation and Popular Religion: Lessons from the Tejano Experience*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.
- Elizondo, Virgilio P. and Timothy M. Matovina. *Mestizo Worship: A Pastoral Approach to Liturgical Ministry*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998.
- Fernández, Eduardo C. *Mexican-American Catholics*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007.
- Johnson-Mondragón, Ken. “Welcoming Hispanic Youth/Jóvenes in Catholic Parishes and Dioceses.” Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Pathways of Hope and Faith Among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion*. Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007.
- Matovina, Timothy and Gary Riebe-Estrella, eds. *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Romero, C. Gilbert. *Hispanic Devotional Piety: Tracing the Biblical Roots*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See *Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry: Recent Findings* (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007) and Ken Johnson-Mondragón, *Youth Ministry and the Socioreligious Lives of Hispanic and White Catholic Teens in the U.S.* (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2005), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Allan G. Johnson, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology, Second Edition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000), 73.

<sup>3</sup> Carmen M. Cervantes, ed., *Hispanic Young People and the Church's Pastoral Response*, Vol. 1 of the Prophets of Hope Series (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1994), 81.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Based on Bryan Kim and José Abreu, “Acculturation Measurement: Theory, Current Instruments, and Future Directions” in Joseph G. Ponterotto, J. Manuel Casas, Lisa Suzuki, and Charlene Alexander, *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling: Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 398. Where Kim and Abreu used the term “integration,” this article opts to use “biculturalism” in order to avoid confusion with the concept of racial integration in society, which is unrelated to the dynamics of acculturation.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Alejandro Portés, Patricia Fernández-Kelly, and William Haller, “Segmented Assimilation on the Ground: The New Second Generation in Early Adulthood,” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 28, no. 6 (2005), 1000-1040.

<sup>7</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 82-83.

La transición cultural de los adolescentes latinos incluye el reto de negociar las diferencias de su tradición religiosa y comunitaria. Para los adolescentes hispanos que siguen los patrones de asimilación o integración consiguiente, generalmente esto no es un problema: simplemente pueden integrarse en los programas pastorales de la cultura dominante, mientras se sientan socialmente a gusto con sus compañeros. Sin embargo, si sus padres están alienados de la iglesia, lo que es común entre los hispanos con varias generaciones en EUA, puede haber la necesidad de salir a buscarlos intencionalmente.

Ofrecer acompañamiento pastoral y formación en la fe a adolescentes latinos en patrones de resistencia consiguiente y aculturación disonante tiende a ser más retador. En ambos casos, la formación disonante puede llegar a lo más profundo de su identidad religiosa y valores cristianos, y no encontrar afinidad en las expresiones religiosas de la comunidad local ni en inglés ni en español. En la aculturación disonante, el rechazo a la cultura de sus padres puede llevarlos a rechazar su fe, al grado de no querer tener nada que ver con la iglesia. En el patrón de resistencia consiguiente, los adolescentes pueden estar contentos de participar en español, pero es probable que se sientan incómodos en programas de la cultura dominante, aunque hablen inglés.

Los adolescentes hispanos cuyos padres son carismáticos o muy tradicionales en sus devociones religiosas — especialmente los que participan con ellos en grupos de oración — pueden encontrar el grupo parroquial demasiado secular. Se requiere que el equipo de pastoral esté consciente de las diferencias en expresión religiosa, espiritualidad, valores y cosmovisión, para que los programas apoyen y conecten con la formación religiosa recibida de sus padres. Diferencias socioeconómicas y actitudes étnocéntricas en ambos lados pueden crear barreras adicionales para la participación de estos adolescentes “culturalmente estrujados”, por lo que generalmente ellos optan por no participar en los programas. Aun en áreas donde los hispanos predominan, las diferencias lingüísticas y culturales entre los recién llegados y los nacidos en EUA pueden ser problemáticas.

Por estas razones, los CPA que no son totalmente bicultural-les deberían adoptar un enfoque misionero con los adolescentes hispanos en su comunidad. Esto significa buscar de forma intencional a los adolescentes marginados que viven en el territorio parroquial e integrar líderes hispanos — adultos y adolescentes — en

## Recursos adicionales

Avalos, Hector, ed. *Introduction to the U.S. Latina and Latino Religious Experience*. Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004.

Badillo, David A. *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

Brankin, Patrick. *Bilingual Ritual of Hispanic Popular Catholicism*. New Hope, KY: New Hope Publications, 2002.

Cervantes, Carmen M., ed. *Evangélica de la Juventud Hispana*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995.

—. *La Juventud Católica Latina en Estados Unidos: Su Fe y Su Cultura*. Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2002.

De Luna, Anita. *Faith Formation and Popular Religion: Lessons from the Tejano Experience*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

Elizondo, Virgilio F. and Timothy M. Matovina. *Mestizo Worship: A Pastoral Approach to Liturgical Ministry*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998.

Fernández, Eduardo C. *Mexican-American Catholics*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007.

Johnson-Mondragón, Ken. “Welcoming Hispanic Youth/óvenes in Catholic Parishes and Dioceses.” Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2003.

—. ed. *Pathways of Hope and Faith Among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion*. Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007.

Matovina, Timothy and Gary Riebe-Estrella, eds. *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Romero, C. Gilbert. *Hispanic Devotional Piety: Tracing the Biblical Roots*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ver *Pastoral Juvenil Hispana: Datos recientes* (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007) y Ken Johnson-Mondragón, *Youth Ministry and the Socioreligious Lives of Hispanic and White Catholic Teens in the U.S.* (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2005), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Allan G. Johnson, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology*. Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000), 73.

<sup>3</sup> Carmen M. Cervantes, ed., *La Juventud Hispana y la Respuesta Pastoral de la Iglesia*, vol. 1 de la serie Profetas de Esperanza (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1994), 81.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Basado en Bryan Kim y José Abreu, “Acculturation Measurement: Theory, Current Instruments, and Future Directions” en Joseph G. Portorotto, J. Manuel Casas, Lisa Suzuki, y Charlene Alexander, *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling: Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 398. Mientras que Kim y Abreu usaron el término “integración,” este artículo opta por usar “biculturalismo” para evitar confusión con el concepto de integración racial en la sociedad, el cual no está relacionado con la dinámica de aculturación.

<sup>6</sup> Adaptado de Alejandro Portés, Patricia Fernández-Kelly y William Haller, “Segmented Assimilation on the Ground: The New Second Generation in Early Adulthood,” en *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 28, no. 6 (2005), 1000-1040.

<sup>7</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Directorio nacional para la catequesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 91-92.

Debido a que la mayoría de los adolescentes latinos hoy día son inmigrantes o hijos de inmigrantes, su patrón de aculturación juega un rol importante en su formación religiosa. El lenguaje y las expresiones culturales de fe en América Latina son muy distintos a los de EUA, aunque la tradición religiosa sea católica en ambos lugares.

## Implicaciones en la pastoral con adolescentes latinos

Por esta razón, es crucial que la evangelización se lleve a cabo en el lenguaje cultural del corazón. Debe permitirse que los jóvenes escojan la lengua y el ambiente cultural donde pueden relacionarse mejor con Dios y con sus hermanos y hermanas, y donde puedan expresar mejor sus experiencias espirituales profundas. Además, muchos chicos hispanos han sido formados en su fe a través de la religiosidad popular y la renovación carismática. Por lo tanto, su evangelización debe tener en cuenta ambas maneras de transmitir la fe, así como su idioma, sea español o inglés.

El idioma que expresa el significado más profundo de la vida es casi siempre el hablado en el hogar, la lengua del corazón en la que se reciben y expresan las experiencias que marcan para siempre la afectividad, el modo de pensar, los valores y las actitudes personales. Por lo tanto, el lenguaje religioso tiende a ser expresado en el "idioma materno", incluso cuando la persona es bilingüe o multilingüe.

Toda cultura crea un lenguaje y expresiones únicas para transmitir el significado último de la vida. Intimamente conectado a este nivel cultural está el lenguaje, sea hablado o escrito; simbólico, artístico o ritual; con sus gestos, silencios, tonos e intenciones. El lenguaje da origen a ideas, conceptos y vivencias compartidas, que expresan lo más íntimo y profundo del ser humano.

Llegar a ser una nueva creación en Jesucristo requiere que el Evangelio se encarne en todas las dimensiones de la vida personal y los cinco niveles de la cultura, de modo que impacte con fuerza y claridad los rincones de donde surgen las creencias, ideales y conductas de la persona.

Aunque la raíz y la meta de toda vivencia religiosa se encuentran en este nivel, la evangelización debe darse mediante experiencias continuas y complementarias en todos los niveles culturales. Sólo así llegará la persona y el mensaje de Jesús al corazón y la mente de los adolescentes.

Los cristianos creen que la encarnación de Jesús en la historia de la humanidad libera a las personas del pecado y la muerte. Este es el eje central de la cosmovisión cristiana que abarca la verdad sobre Dios Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo; la verdad sobre la persona humana, creada a imagen y semejanza de Dios, y la verdad sobre la Iglesia y su misión de extender el reino de Dios en la sociedad. Esta cosmovisión da significado y sentido cristiano a la vida. También motiva a toda persona bautizada a caminar hacia el Padre, al seguir a Jesús, animada por el Espíritu Santo, en compañía de María y la comunidad eclesial.

Es a este nivel donde los adolescentes se cuestionan y responden a las preguntas clave y existenciales de la vida. La cosmovisión incluye la manera de definir la naturaleza humana; un entendimiento de Dios, y una forma de relacionarse con él, consigo mismo, con otras personas y con el universo. Todos los pueblos, a través de la historia, han formulado cosmovisiones expresadas de distintas maneras y fundamentadas en diversos sistemas de creencias. La mayoría de estas cosmovisiones afirma la presencia de Dios y su acción en la creación.

## Quinto nivel: cosmovisión personal y el sentido de la vida

**Es vital que los párrocos y coordinadores de pastoral con adolescentes reconozcan que la iglesia no puede promover la integración de los jóvenes hispanos si no puede reunirlos en un ambiente comunitario.**

Los grupos parroquiales, movimientos apostólicos y pequeñas comunidades nos ejemplo de instituciones eclesiales en donde los adolescentes hispanos pueden encontrar a Dios, expresar su fe y descubrir el sentido de su vida en Cristo. Hay que permitir que estos grupos se multipliquen bajo la dirección de líderes adultos y catequistas bien formados. En esta visión es esencial que todos los grupos se mantengan en comunión con el resto de la Iglesia a través de estructuras que promuevan su participación en todos los aspectos importantes de la vida eclesial — sobre todo la eucaristía dominical. Esta comunión ayudará a que la Iglesia sea mejor signo y promotora del reino de Dios en la sociedad multicultural de EUA.

Cuando la disonancia cultural u otros factores limitan la participación de ciertos grupos en la parroquia, los CPCA tienen que desarrollar alternativas al modelo de "un grupo juvenil sirve para todos". De otra manera, esa estructura obstaculiza la participación de uno o más segmentos de la Iglesia joven — frecuentemente de adolescentes que más necesitan el apoyo de la Iglesia.

La diversidad cultural, lingüística y socioeconómica de muchas parroquias católicas de hoy, combinada con la competencia intercultural limitada de la mayoría de los CPCA, ha contribuido indirectamente a que los adolescentes hispanos participen sólo la mitad de las veces que sus compañeros blancos en programas parroquiales. Es vital que los párrocos y CPCA reconozcan que la Iglesia no puede promover la integración de los jóvenes hispanos en la Iglesia y la sociedad si no puede reunirlos en un ambiente comunitario.

La calidad de esta relación influye fuertemente la vida de fe de los adolescentes y sus actitudes hacia la Iglesia. Cuando tienen una experiencia eclesial positiva y encuentran allí una verdadera comunidad, se abren más fácilmente a la Buena Nueva y aceptan su misión como cristianos. Por el contrario, cuando no encuentran un ambiente social acogedor en la Iglesia, tienen una experiencia dolorosa o destructiva de ella que les afecta a un nivel profundo, significativo y personal. Los adolescentes que tienen tales experiencias espe-

por lo regular se alejan de la Iglesia y se requieren esfuerzos especiales de la comunidad eclesial para que se reincorporen en ella. La Iglesia como institución está llamada a acoger a todos sus miembros, sin distinción de raza, idioma o cultura, para cumplir su misión evangelizadora con ellos. Los adolescentes latinos se relacionan con la dimensión institucional de la Iglesia principalmente a través de la catequesis presacramental, la pastoral con adolescentes, el culto dominical, las prácticas de religiosidad popular y, en ocasiones, la escuela católica.

En el ideal cristiano, cada sistema e institución social debe ser fuente de vida para la gente, especialmente para los más indios y necesitados. La Iglesia tiene la misión de evangelizar todas las instituciones y estructuras sociales — incluso a sí misma — para que sus metas y propósitos promuevan el bien común. Además, la Iglesia tiene el compromiso de crear instituciones pastorales que satisfagan las necesidades de pertenencia, identidad y autoestima de las personas, así como su desarrollo humano, socioeconómico y cristiano. Estas instituciones pastorales promuevan la participación de los adolescentes en la Iglesia y en la sociedad.

Los sistemas e instituciones sociales generalmente son coherentes con la cultura donde se desarrollan. Los jóvenes necesitan conocer bien cómo funcionan estos sistemas e instituciones para gozar de sus derechos en la sociedad, ejercer sus obligaciones cívicas y transformar aquellos aspectos que atacan su dignidad, dificultad y crecimiento humano e impiden su incorporación en la sociedad.

#### Cuarto nivel: sistemas e instituciones sociales

Dada la pluralidad cultural de EUA, la juventud necesita oportunidades para conocer los valores de otras culturas. De esta manera, los adolescentes no confundirán el respeto a los auténticos valores humanos y religiosos de otras culturas, con un relativismo en el que "todo vale igual" y que conlleva indiferencia hacia personas diferentes a sí mismos. Valorar la diversidad Enriquece la afirmación y vivencia de los valores evangélicos. En vez de sentirse divididos por su manera de vivir o expresar su fe, los adolescentes pueden sentir un orgullo común en el hecho de que en su iglesia, la unidad en el Espíritu se alcanza a través de variedad de expresiones culturales y complementariedad de dones.

La pastoral con adolescentes tiene la misión de trabajar con los padres y la comunidad de fe para formar los valores de los jóvenes, pues son la base de sus decisiones morales. Esta formación debe promover una visión cristiana ante la vida, evitando posiciones legalistas o intelectualistas.

Ser cristiano exige asumir los valores de Jesús como ideales que se van haciendo realidad mediante un proceso de conversión continua de actitudes y conductas para responder a las situaciones concretas de la vida personal y social. Jesús comunicó claramente los valores del reino de Dios a través de su persona, palabras y acciones. La autenticidad y radicalidad de Jesús, su amor y servicio, su compromiso, valentía y solidaridad, su fidelidad a Dios y a su plan de salvación, atraen fuertemente a la juventud.

Los programas de pastoral pueden ser la única experiencia de comunidad cristiana para esos adolescentes. Por eso, los CPAs deben tener un enfoque misionero y estar listos para buscarlos y ofrecerles un espacio acogedor. Una vez que han establecido una relación con los chicos, tendrán la oportunidad de trabajar con sus padres para ayudarlos a fomentar y transmitir los valores evangélicos en el hogar.

Segundo, cuando los padres no fueron bien evangelizados, no están activos en la parroquia y/o no son eficaces en la transmisión de los valores cristianos, pueden caer en posiciones morales, tienden a asumir desvalores contrarios al reino de Dios como adolescentes no tienen ejemplos de vida cristiana fuera de la familia, tienden a asumir desvalores contrarios al reino de Dios como adolescentes no tienen ejemplos de vida cristiana fuera de la familia, tienden a asumir desvalores contrarios al reino de Dios como adolescentes no tienen ejemplos de vida cristiana fuera de la familia, tienden a asumir desvalores contrarios al reino de Dios como

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El ideal de la colaboración estrecha y apoyo mutuo entre los padres y los CPAs en la formación de los valores del Evangelio puede encontrar dos obstáculos. Primero, valores de la familia que no tienen eco en otras instituciones sociales, como la escuela y la iglesia, son muy vulnerables al impacto negativo de la cultura actual y de las presiones sociales. Cuando los adolescentes hispanos cuestionan la vigencia de ciertos valores de sus padres, es importante que reconozcan y vivan los valores positivos de la cultura hispana en el hogar y en la iglesia; por ejemplo, las relaciones interpersonales, la cooperación, el sacrificio personal para el bien de los demás, la estrecha conexión entre la fe y la vida, y la

1. El testimonio de otras personas en la encarnación de un valor determinado.
2. La motivación para adoptar ese valor a través de la razón y su afirmación en la práctica.
3. La oportunidad de ejercitar el valor en situaciones de la vida real.
4. La reflexión en sobre cómo vivir y expresar ese valor en la propia vida.

accion complementarios: proveend modelos ejemplares de conducta. El proceso de transformación y formación de valores promovidos en el hogar y idealmente, los CPAs deben apoyar y complementar la labor de los padres reforzando los valores promovidos en el hogar y deben vivirse día a día los valores del Reino.

Los valores se adquieren poco a poco, y se forman y estructuran a lo largo de la vida, primero como una herencia recibida de los padres; después, eligiendo y formando con ellos el sistema de valores personal. Los adolescentes necesitan una formación consistente y constante en los valores del reino de Dios para poder integrarlos en su vida. Por esta razón, el enfoque familiar es vital en la pastoral con adolescentes. La familia, como iglesia doméstica, es el primer nivel de comunidad eclesial donde

Los valores dan dirección a la vida y son de vital importancia para moldear las emociones, el intelecto y la voluntad de los adolescentes. Los valores determinan las actitudes, modo de vivir y manera de relacionarse socialmente; proporcionan perspectivas y puntos de vista desde los cuales interpretar la vida, establecer prioridades y formar juicios; proveen criterios para adaptarse a diversas situaciones y circunstancias.

#### Tercer nivel: valores culturales y valores del Evangelio

Para que los adolescentes adquirieran conciencia de que son constructores activos de una nueva tradición, necesitan conocer y analizar su realidad presente y las tradiciones de su cultura de origen. Debe animarse para encontrar nuevas formas creativas de expresar sus valores y creencias religiosas, según su estilo de vida y contexto cultural. Dada la realidad multicultural de la Iglesia católica, los adolescentes necesitan desarrollar su capacidad de dialogar sobre la fe con personas de otras culturas y tradiciones. Por lo regular, el diálogo se empieza fácilmente al compartir el arte, la comida, la música y el folklore; sin embargo, para tener diálogo intercultural profundo, se requiere conocer los cinco niveles de la cultura ajena.



Entre las tradiciones y costumbres que forman el segundo nivel de la cultura, destacan: el uso del lenguaje hablado y corporal, especialmente los modismos y gestos; la música, el arte plástico, la poesía y la literatura; los modos de reaccionar y ajustarse a diversas situaciones de la vida; la manera de celebrar, relajarse y expresarse; el calendario de días feriados, el gusto por determinadas comidas y el patrimonio folklórico. Todos estos elementos son medios de interacción y comunicación entre las personas; son los canales usados para expresar la psicología y la filosofía que dan coherencia e identidad a un pueblo. Por eso, las personas que dan coherencia e identidad a ellos y hacen verdaderos esfuerzos para transmitirlos a las siguientes generaciones; los padres algunas veces tienen choques culturales con sus hijos cuando los adolescentes no respetan o aprecian su idioma, tradiciones y costumbres.

### Segundo nivel: tradiciones y costumbres

El **tradicionalismo** tiende a mantener costumbres del pasado de manera idéntica, sin identificar sus valores esenciales ni relacionarlas con nuevas formas culturales y contextos históricos, con el riesgo de perder su significado y razón de ser. Cuando los adolescentes latinos se enfrentan a tradicionalismos de la cultura latinoamericana y euroamericana, tienden a rechazar sin sentido crítico una, otra o ambas, al no entender los valores que respaldan las tradiciones.

Lo mismo sucede respecto a las tradiciones religiosas que experimentan con sus padres o en la parroquia. Los CPA deben tener en mente que la relación entre fe y cultura es más fuerte a este segundo nivel que en el primero. El idioma, las costumbres hogareñas y las tradiciones sociales expresan y transmiten los sentimientos y creencias religiosas importantes para un pueblo. Por ejemplo:

- Las peregrinaciones representan una jornada ardua pero gozosa hacia Dios.
- Los altares familiares simbolizan la presencia de Dios en el hogar.
- Los exvotos o testimonios de milagros atestiguan las obras maravillosas de Dios en la vida.
- La música, el canto, la danza y otras formas de arte nacen del fondo del corazón de un pueblo para comprender y expresar sus vivencias profundas personales y comunitarias de fe, sus devociones y su conciencia religiosa.
- Los rituales, gestos y símbolos manifiestan la unión de las personas con Dios y con el resto de la comunidad.

Algunos adolescentes hispanos que viven estas tradiciones sin conocer su significado y valor tienen el riesgo de quedarse en tradicionalismos sin sentido. Por otro lado, aquellos que crecen apreciando estas prácticas, muchas veces no encuentran sentido y apoyo a su espiritualidad en las Misas en inglés o en los programas parroquiales de la cultura dominante. El riesgo mayor sucede cuando los adolescentes latinos rechazan las tradiciones o tradicionalismos religiosos de sus padres y tampoco encuentran un espacio de acogida en las liturgias y programaciones de la cultura dominante. En dichos casos pueden abandonar su fe por completo o pueden buscar otra iglesia que les ofrezca mayor significado socioreligioso en su vida.

Las recomendaciones de los obispos son concisas y están claramente indicadas, aunque desafiantes para llevarlas a cabo. Por ejemplo, ¿qué puede hacer un coordinador de pastoral con adolescentes para “cerciorarse de que la catequesis se cimiente en el ambiente cultural en el que se presenta”, en parroquias que sirven a familias inmigrantes de diferentes partes del mundo? Incluso en parroquias principalmente hispanas, las diferencias culturales de las vidas al país de origen, generación, estatus económico y estilo de aculturación pueden ser significativas.

### Inculturación en los diferentes niveles de la cultura

Una forma de ver lo que se necesita para encarnar la evangelización y catequesis en el ambiente de los adolescentes hispanos es describir el proceso de inculturación en los cinco niveles de la cultura, identificados en la página 2. A continuación se examina cómo se inserta la fe en cada uno de ellos y se ofrecen algunas ideas para lograr la inculturación en la pastoral con adolescentes.

### Primer nivel: los aspectos visibles de una cultura

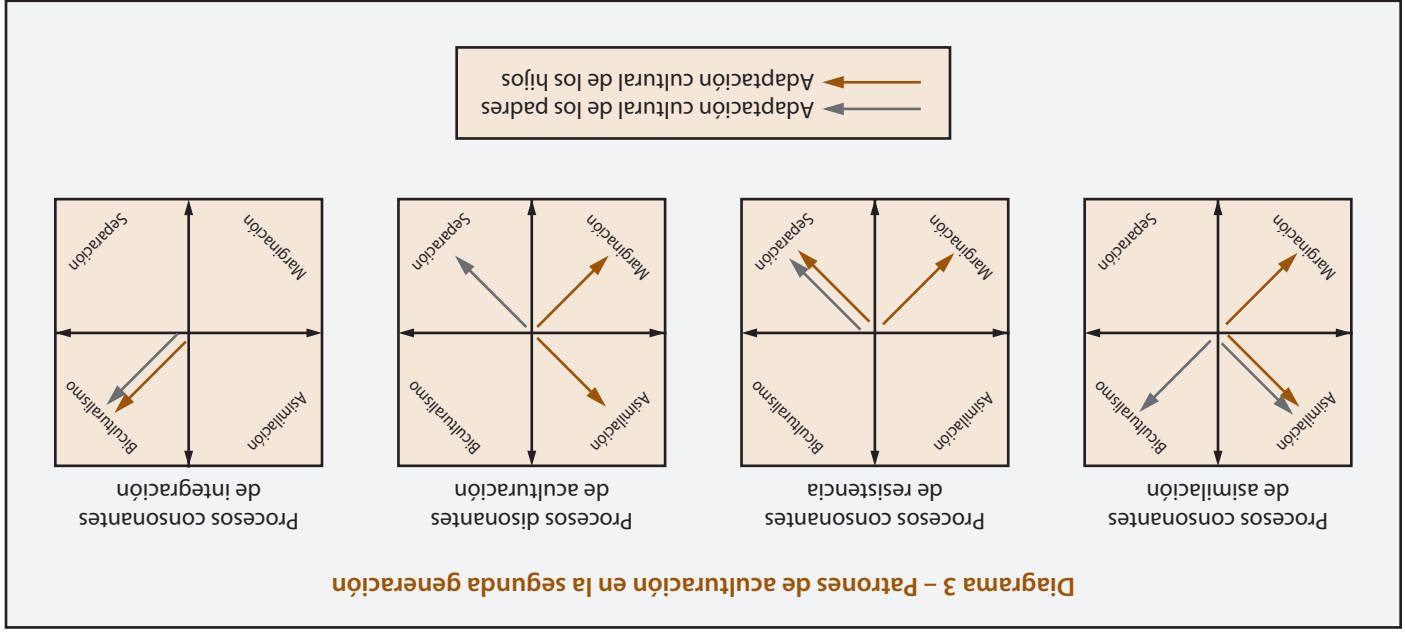
Los elementos visibles de una cultura con frecuencia se transfieren de una sociedad a otra mediante el comercio, el transporte y la comunicación tecnológica y social. Aunque los elementos externos de la cultura moderna pueden facilitar el desarrollo humano de los chicos, pueden causarles daño si caen en las trampas del consumismo, egocentrismo, competición, materialismo o hedonismo.

Puesto que los elementos externos, aparentemente correctos, ponderan sólo a aspectos materiales de la cultura, los adolescentes suelen aceptar sin sentido crítico y sin estar conscientes de su influencia en los niveles más profundos de su vida. Por ejemplo, la mercadotecnia masiva les dice que su identidad se basa en sus elecciones de consumidor: “eres lo que tienes, lo que escuchas, lo que llevas puesto, lo que comes, etcétera”.

Tales mensajes tienen un impacto social poderoso en la vida de los adolescentes, quienes tienden a formar camarillas con base en las preferencias compartidas por grupos pequeños. Por ejemplo, los aficionados a la música ranchera no se relacionan mucho con los fanáticos de rock o reguetón, y los que llevan ropa de marca tienden a distanciarse de quienes no la usan. De ahí que las diferencias en la moda, música y comida entre culturas y clases sociales, suelen dificultar la creación de un ambiente de unidad en la comunidad juvenil parroquial, aunque todos hablen inglés.

El evangelización a este nivel debe motivar a los adolescentes a reflexionar sobre los diferentes ambientes culturales que impactan su vida y a elegir conscientemente cómo y para qué deben utilizar los elementos que les ofrecen. Para hacer esta elección consciente, necesitan desarrollar su capacidad de analizar la cultura y ejercitar un pensamiento crítico. También necesitan adquirir la libertad intelectual que les permita escoger actividades y tecnologías que promuevan su dignidad personal y fomenten su desarrollo humano, al tiempo que evitan aquellas que los dominan y manipulan.





Los padres de familia y los agentes de pastoral que trabajan con adolescentes hispanos necesitan reconocer que el desarrollo de la fe y la identidad religiosa en la adolescencia están íntimamente relacionados con la formación de la identidad cultural, social, emocional e intelectual. En otras palabras, no es sorprendente que algunos adolescentes hispanos cuestionen la integración de los valores de la cultura dominante.

### Parte 3: Inculturación del evangelio

Mientras que los patrones de aculturación descritos anteriormente ayudan a comprender las experiencias de los adolescentes latinos criados entre dos culturas, no deben ser tomados como un pronóstico seguro de su vida. Existen excepciones y variaciones según los dones, imitaciones, rasgos personales y circunstancias. Además, muchas personas que no desarrollaron competencia cultural cuando eran chicas, encuentran la motivación para llegar a ser competentes en la cultura dominante o su cultura de origen, durante su juventud o siendo ya adultos.

Al resultado producido por este patrón con frecuencia se le llama **integración sin asimilación**. En este caso, los rasgos de la segunda generación son: bilingüismo, autoestima elevada, conservación de valores culturales, ascendencia social, conciencia de historia étnica y patrimonio cultural, y una aceptación selectiva de elementos de ambas culturas. En otras palabras, los hijos llegan a ser biculturales al ser competentes en las dos culturas. De los cuatro patrones de aculturación, éste es el único en el que no suele ocurrir marginalización.

Los **procesos consonantes de integración** ocurren cuando padres e hijos están en contacto regular con la cultura de origen y la cultura dominante, y desarrollan competencia en ambas. Para que esto suceda, la comunidad étnica generalmente necesita tener un alto nivel de capital social que le permita integrarse de manera estratégica en la cultura dominante, desde una posición de poder. Así, la comunidad étnica puede asumir el rol de agente primordial de socialización para los hijos, aun en instituciones sociales como la iglesia y la escuela, y los chicos están expuestos a una afirmación de ambas culturas por parte de sus padres, compañeros e instituciones sociales.

La disparidad de competencia lingüística y cultural entre padres e hijos, muchas veces lleva a invertir los roles en la familia; por ejemplo cuando se les pide a los hijos servir de intérpretes para sus padres en la escuela, en transacciones de negocios o citas médicas. Por otro lado, los hijos pueden desarrollar autoestima baja y avergonzarse de sus padres o su estilo de vida. A la larga, muchos escogen abrazar la cosmovisión de la cultura dominante y abandonar su comunidad étnica e idioma. Otros conservan cierto grado de competencia con el idioma y la cultura de sus padres, aunque se sienten más cómodos relacionándose con las personas de la cultura dominante.

Los **procesos disonantes de aculturación** normalmente ocurren en lugares donde la comunidad étnica es débil o tiene capital social bajo. En consecuencia, la socialización de los hijos se realiza principalmente mediante la afirmación de la cultura dominante sobre su cultura étnica, por sus compañeros y las instituciones sociales. En contraste, los padres encuentran materialmente imposible desarrollar competencia en la nueva cultura por las circunstancias de su vida, o deciden no hacerlo por sus propias razones.

Aunque los padres se sientan cómodos entre personas de su propia cultura, este patrón muchas veces causa niveles bajos de educación escolar, estancamiento social, movilidad descendente e incomodidad en interacciones con personas de la cultura dominante. Los hijos son generalmente bilingües, aunque suelen tener un entendimiento histórico limitado de ambas culturas y correr el riesgo de ser marginalizados, dado que su separación social no les permite ser competentes en ninguna de las dos culturas.

La socialización en la escuela y a través de otras instituciones sociales con frecuencia es inevitable; sin embargo, puede ser enfrentada con actitud de resistencia por los chicos. A evitar interacciones con personas de la cultura dominante, a evitar interacciones con personas de la cultura dominante, es latina. En otras áreas, experiencias de discriminación basada en raza, étnica o clase socioeconómica pueden contribuir a evitar interacciones con personas de la cultura dominante. En algunas áreas, como en grandes partes de Texas y California, esto ocurre simplemente porque la mayoría de la población local es latina. En algunas personas de su propia cultura. En algunas áreas, como en grandes partes de Texas y California, esto ocurre simplemente porque la mayoría de la población local es latina. En otras áreas, experiencias de discriminación basada en raza, étnica o clase socioeconómica pueden contribuir a evitar interacciones con personas de la cultura dominante.







El patrón de aculturación que sigue cada persona depende de la frecuencia con la que interactúa con personas de la cultura

### El proceso de aculturación

Los obispos y párrocos necesitan entender y abrazar los retos y oportunidades que se dan al ofrecer atención pastoral culturalmente apropiada a esta comunidad católica joven. Por su parte, los CPa necesitan dedicar tiempo para aprender sobre los orígenes nacionales de los latinos/as en su comunidad y las fuerzas históricas y sociales que los han traído a este país.

**Mestizaje es la transformación e integración de dos o más culturas, lograda a lo largo de varias generaciones, especialmente a través de matrimonios interculturales que van creando una nueva cultura y un nuevo pueblo.**

Sin embargo, se presenta una excelente lista de recursos al final de este documento, para un estudio más detallado.

Una descripción de las características históricas, culturales y sociales de los muchos grupos latinos en EUA está más allá del alcance de este artículo.

Los procesos de aculturación y asimilación entre los adolescentes hispanos hoy día son distintos para cada persona según su historia particular, cultura de origen y ambiente social. Sin embargo, siempre tienen un fuerte impacto en el desarrollo de su personalidad, la vivencia de su fe y su experiencia de iglesia.

En contraste, las culturas latinas presentes en Norteamérica desde el siglo XVI, no participaron en ese proceso de mestizaje al mismo grado, en parte debido al racismo que los discriminaba por el color de su piel. Además, la inmigración latina ha continuado constantemente a lo largo de la historia de EUA, y actualmente estamos en medio de una nueva ola de inmigración significativa desde todas partes de América Latina.

Las causas de la inmigración y las circunstancias de la vida de cada grupo inmigrante afectan el proceso de aculturación a nivel personal y social. Por ejemplo, la aculturación de los afroamericanos en un contexto de racismo y esclavitud fue muy diferente a la de los inmigrantes europeos, quienes vivieron contrastes socioculturales más suaves y no fueron discriminados racialmente. Para mediados del siglo XX, muchas de las culturas europeas habían experimentado un proceso de mestizaje con la cultura angloamericana, dando origen a la cultura dominante actual en EUA.

### Parte 2: Un modelo de aculturación

Para los adolescentes latinos suele ser difícil manejar el choque entre la cultura de sus padres y la cultura dominante, especialmente cuando una nueva cultura y un nuevo pueblo.

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Además, cuando dos culturas entran en contacto constante una con otra, tanto las personas como las culturas pueden transformarse al integrar o rechazar elementos de la otra. El grado de reciprocidad en este cambio depende, en gran parte, del número

de patrones de desconfianza, prejuicio y discriminación étnica. Cuando personas de dos o más culturas conviven, esa experiencia puede generar un enriquecimiento humano o puede causar actitudes

que no se comportan "como debiera" porque actúan con diferentes costumbres, expectativas o valores. Esta transformación se llama **cultural o choque cultural**, y puede ser fácilmente traducida a juicios etnocéntricos sobre las personas de la otra cultura.

Cuando las personas están en un ambiente cultural nuevo, algunos comportamientos y expectativas que desarrollaron en la niñez, no aplican. El proceso para lograr competencia cultural en su nueva situación se llama **aculturación**.<sup>4</sup> Al principio, es común experi-

### Adaptación cultural e integración

mentar frustración al tratar con gente que no se comporta "como debiera" porque actúan con diferentes costumbres, expectativas o valores. Esta transformación se llama **cultural o choque cultural**, y puede ser fácilmente traducida a juicios etnocéntricos sobre las personas de la otra cultura.

Como consecuencia de este cambio acelerado, los valores que han dado congruencia a las comunidades por generaciones, están siendo reemplazados por valores alternativos de una cultura global consumista. Este cambio es evidente en el estilo de vestir, uso de ciertas palabras y frases, y la popularidad de juegos de video, películas, teléfonos celulares y el Internet en la juventud mundial. Como resultado, la endoculturación de los adolescentes en su familia, con frecuencia está en desacuerdo con la socialización que reciben de sus compañeros, medios de comunicación, etcétera.

Además, la separación social por edad, común en muchas instituciones sociales incluyendo escuelas e iglesias, tiende a acentuar la influencia cultural de los compañeros. Este **choque generacional** es especialmente relevante en los hijos de inmigrantes, ya que las diferencias en los niveles profundos de la cultura suelen causar que cuestionen los valores de sus padres — incluso sus prácticas religiosas.

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En las sociedades tradicionales monoculturales, la endoculturación y la socialización se apoyan y refuerzan mutuamente en la transmisión de los valores culturales, normas, tradiciones y fe religiosa, de generación en generación. Dada la globalización de la comunicación masiva, dichos enclaves monoculturales son difíciles de encontrar actualmente. En todo el mundo, los cambios culturales se han acelerado debido a la televisión, radio, teléfono y al progreso de la ciencia y tecnología.

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En un ambiente social determinado. El proceso natural de obtener una cultura se llama **endoculturación**, y ocurre en dos maneras básicas:

- La **endoculturación** se da principalmente en el hogar, donde la cultura se obtiene por exposiciones repetidas a valores, comportamientos y acciones de los padres y/o la familia inmediata.
- La **socialización** ocurre principalmente fuera del hogar, por exposición constante a las instituciones sociales, como escuelas e iglesias, y a los valores y acciones de los compañeros y los presentados por los medios de comunicación.<sup>5</sup>

### Adquisición de la cultura

Nadie nace con una cultura, sino que se adquiere con el tiempo al vivir en un ambiente social determinado. El proceso natural de obtener una cultura se llama **endoculturación**, y ocurre en dos maneras básicas:

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La **competencia cultural** consiste en la habilidad de interactuar con comodidad y seguridad en un marco cultural particular, al utilizar o referirse apropiadamente a las suposiciones, costumbres, valores y símbolos de dicha cultura. Cuando la comunicación es con personas de la propia cultura, tiende a darse intuitivamente, sin ningún esfuerzo consciente. Sin embargo, al tratar a personas de otra cultura, se requiere un esfuerzo consciente y años de experiencia para dominar el uso de símbolos, valores, costumbres y detalles de su cultura. Las instituciones educativas, incluyendo la iglesia, tienen un rol crucial en la transmisión del idioma y el desarrollo de la competencia

Mientras que muchas personas pueden hablar fácilmente del primer y segundo nivel de su cultura, es más difícil describir en palabras los niveles más profundos. La interacción entre personas de diferentes culturas suele ser difícil, complicada y sujeta a malas interpretaciones, a pesar de que se hable el mismo idioma, porque no se comparten los niveles más profundos de la cultura. Cuando la comunicación se interpreta según suposiciones que no aplican, el significado de lo que se dice puede perderse, aunque exista apertura, sensibilidad y aceptación de las diferencias culturales.

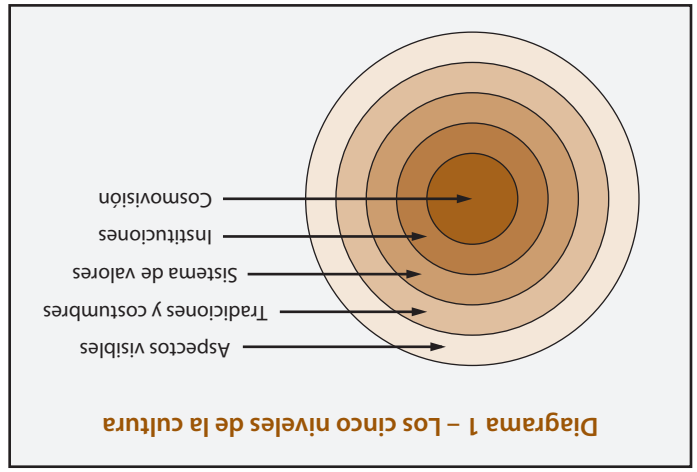
El lenguaje, como manifestación cultural, penetra los cinco niveles de la cultura. A nivel superficial se usa para describir objetos o explicar eventos experimentados por dos o más personas. En los niveles más profundos, la comunicación — verbal y escrita — expresa y refuerza las tradiciones y costumbres culturales; al estar basada en valores compartidos, su significado se sobrepone sin necesidad de explicitar lo que se dice. Cuando el receptor — oyente o lector — comparte la cultura del emisor — orador o escritor — el lenguaje es interpretado desde la misma cosmovisión y perspectivas culturales.

- El tercer nivel está compuesto de los valores que dan dirección y congruencia a la vida, y que se traducen en actitudes, conductas, hábitos y expectativas en la vida familiar, trabajo, uso del tiempo... Los valores se integran en un **sistema de valores** coherente, para organizar y priorizar las actividades diarias y las decisiones clave en la vida.
- Las **instituciones** sociales, que forman el cuarto nivel, estructuran la sociedad y las experiencias y luchas del pueblo. Abarcan las instituciones políticas, educativas, religiosas, deportivas, financieras... que conforman las actividades cotidianas y señalan las etapas en el ciclo de la vida.
- La **cosmovisión** o visión del mundo es el nivel más profundo de la cultura. Es el marco subyacente por el cual una persona interpreta y da significado a la vida y a la importancia de eventos particulares.

- Las **tradiciones y costumbres** en el segundo nivel, son los parámetros para la vida diaria y las relaciones familiares. Las normas sociales para las interacciones personales y de negocios; el significado de los gestos y el lenguaje corporal, y la manera de celebrar eventos especiales pertenecen a este nivel.

- Entre los elementos de la cultura pueden identificarse cinco niveles, presentadas en el Diagrama 1. La comprensión de los niveles más profundos depende de la familiaridad con los elementos culturales de los niveles más superficiales.
- Los **aspectos visibles** de la cultura forman el primer nivel e incluyen estilos de vestimenta, música, tecnología, vivienda, herramientas y comida.

**La competencia cultural consiste en la habilidad de interactuar con comodidad y seguridad en un marco cultural particular, al utilizar o referirse apropiadamente a las suposiciones, costumbres, valores y símbolos de dicha cultura.**



se crea constantemente de generación en generación. Cultura puede definirse como "el conjunto de símbolos, ideas y productos materiales, asociados con un sistema social, sea de una sociedad en su totalidad o de una familia". La cultura crea una identidad compartida y establece un sentido de grupo humano, al definir los patrones de conducta que permiten a los individuos sentirse seguros al relacionarse unos con otros. La cultura se adquiere mediante procesos de transmisión, a la vez que

### Parte 1: Conceptos básicos en el estudio de la cultura

Antes de contestar dicha pregunta, es necesario entender el proceso de aculturación y su relación con el desarrollo religioso y social de las familias latinas. A continuación se analizan tres conceptos fundamentalmente para la pastoral con adolescentes, en comunidades culturalmente diversas: "cultura", "aculturación" e "inculturación". Una buena comprensión de estos conceptos permite visualizar los conflictos culturales que suelen darse en la relación de los hispanos con sus compañeros de la cultura dominante. Además, arroja luz sobre las dificultades que tienden a enfrentar los adolescentes inmigrantes y de segunda generación, al participar en grupos juveniles donde la mayoría de sus miembros es de la cultura dominante.

Ante esta realidad, muchos obispos, párrocos, coordinadores de pastoral con adolescentes y padres de familia, se preguntan: ¿qué puedo hacer para ayudar a los adolescentes hispanos de mi comunidad a integrarse a la iglesia y participar en sus programas pastorales?

- Cerca de 15% de los adolescentes católicos hispanos participa en un grupo parroquial de adolescentes, en contraste con 25% de sus compañeros católicos blancos. En comparación, el 44% de los hispanos protestantes participan en grupos de adolescentes.
- Entre los católicos hispanos, la proporción de inmigrantes es mayor, pues hay más católicos entre los inmigrantes latinos que entre los latinos nacidos en EUA.
- Entre los hispanos de 13 a 17 años de edad, que vivían en EUA en 2007, 20% había nacido fuera del país, y 69% tenía por lo menos a un padre nacido en el extranjero.

