

Cara y Corazón (Face and Heart)

Toward a U.S. Latino Spirituality of Inculturation

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The author explores the significance of Our Lady of Guadalupe for an inculturated Latino spirituality, and presents the evangelization of culture and the inculturation of spirituality as possible forces for unity and inclusivity.

Many years ago, I had a strange dream that periodically calls me to reflect on who I am as a Mexican-American Catholic. The dream begins in St. Peter's, in Rome. I am watching and at the same time I am entering into the dream as one of thousands of Latinos gathering for the unveiling and blessing of an image of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Our Lady of Guadalupe). There is an excitement in the air as we gather to have our patroness take her place in the Church. At the same time, we are anxious to see the Holy Father who will bless the image for us. As the dream develops, the pope finally enters the Basilica making his way in procession to the image. A veil is dropped, revealing a magnificent almost life like statue of *la Morenita* (the dark skinned woman). The pope says the prescribed prayer and reaches out for the holy water. As he takes the sprinkler, the statue of the blessed mother begins to hover slightly above its pedestal. Undaunted, the pope begins to sprinkle the image as it begins to fly towards the congregation of Latinos gathered there. The pope hurries after her anxiously trying to get the holy water on the image. The more he chases and sprinkles, the more the blessing lands on the people rather than the statue. Our Lady's statue grows and expands, hovering over the heads of the people. As she gets larger she begins to dissolve into thousands of particles that come to rest on and pene-

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trate the people she blessed. As the dream concludes, the pope is throwing water everywhere and *mi raza* (my people), drenched in blessing, begins to disperse into the world.

I begin with this dream because I believe that it represents a call to a spirituality of inculturation that respects and challenges my people. It is a dream that shows where my people are in the U.S. American Church and where we need to grow, if we are to be blessed and to bless. Before addressing the spirituality of inculturation, I would like to define both culture and spirituality.

Cara y Corazón (Face and Heart): *A Hispanic Look at Culture and Spirituality*

The ancient Nahuatl peoples believed that humans are born without a heart and without a face. It is the job of parents, in collaboration with the rest of the clan, to give the newborn person *cara y corazón* (face and heart). This is an important task. Even today no Mexican or Mexican-American wants to be accused of being *descarado* (faceless/shameless) or *sin corazón* (heartless/cruel). Face and heart of course are symbolic of what makes up an authentically human person. The face is our exterior manifestation. It is who we are, as the world sees us: our traits, our characteristics, and our persona. The heart, on the other hand, is not seen; it is our interior self, our motivation and animator. As with *cara y corazón*, humans are born without culture or spirituality, for neither is given to us by nature. We are, however, born into a certain family in a certain time and place, and belong to a certain people. It is this people to whom God entrusts the work of forming our *cara y corazón*, our culture and spirituality.

We all know what spirituality and culture are. We all have spirituality, just as we all have a culture. They are the air we breathe, the place in which we dwell, the tenor of our relationships and the sound of our calling out to the “other,” who is God and neighbor. Spirituality and culture are living things, they grow and develop just as they mold and shape the people who live them.

Having admitted to the awkwardness of defining spirituality and culture, I will attempt to explain my perspective on both. Besides the Franciscan and Christian formation that I have received in religious life and through study, mine is a perspective formed from the theological musings of my father and the liturgical administration of my mother. Although most of us would be hard-pressed to acknowledge such titles for our parents, in many of our households, our fathers are usually the theologians while our mothers are the priests of the family.

Cara: Culture

According to a secular dictionary, culture can be seen in elitist or inclusive terms. Some definitions given are elitist, referring to culture as those things that

make a person cultured, which is to say educated, refined and debonair, in other words sophisticated and enlightened. It would seem that culture would never be something for the masses, but rather reserved to the educated elite. On the other hand, the dictionary also gives an inclusive definition of culture in which the arts, music, literature and intellectual activity of an individual are replaced with beliefs, folksongs, legends and social behavior of a group of people. In her book *Theories of Culture*, Kathryn Tanner does an excellent job of explaining how the notion of culture has moved from a very elitist understanding to a broader and more inclusive view (3–37). Yet the use of the word culture continues to vacillate between the elitist and inclusive perspectives.

Culture comes from the Latin *cultura* (“tillage”), and *cult*, the past participle stem of *colere* (“to inhabit,” “cultivate”). Culture has everything to do with nurtur-

ance and with growth. An individual cannot be nurtured or grow in a vacuum. The individual will always be nurtured and will grow in relationship with a specific people just as a biological specimen is grown in a culture or nutrient substance with controlled conditions. Certainly I am not saying that a member of a culture has no freedom from said culture. Quite the contrary; as individuals rub shoulders with persons of other cultures they grow and change. Thus, they become agents of change in their own culture. Cultures also grow and change. Speaking from my own reality, I see that Hispanics in the United States of America are constantly in contact with Latin American cultures and other minority cultures. We live as a culture within a majority

Euro-American culture. This constant contact with other cultures or processes of acculturation is changing our own cultures. We have been Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Chileans, or Hondurans, but now from these various Latin American cultures we are developing a Hispanic/Latino culture that is different from our many cultures of origin. At the same time this developing culture is nurturing us in new ways so that we can become a new people along side the other peoples that make up the salad bowl, not melting pot, we call the United States. At the same time we, like other minority cultures, are changing the Euro-American culture that seems to be the majority culture in the United States. Just as Latinos are being anglicized, Euro-Americans are being latinocized.

Returning to the teaching of the ancient Nahautls, culture with all its traditions, customs, and behaviors is what gives a person *cara*. It is that which helps form an individual’s personality and character. For this reason culture cannot be elitist; it must be inclusive. All humans need to belong to a culture if they are to

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cultivate a *cara*. At the same time, given that culture is not an a-historical or an internally consistent whole, it needs all the individuals that make it up. Individual members interacting positively and negatively within and without the group form and shape the culture's *cara*.

Corazón: Spirituality

Spirituality, like its root word (*spiritus, pneuma, ruah*) is hard to grasp. It, like culture, is difficult to define. I once asked a group of Latino theology students to give me a definition of spirituality. Surprisingly, not one of them referred to "spirit" with either a capital "S" or a lower case "s" in their definition. What they did come up with again and again was "relationship," "serenity," and "purpose" in various manifestations of these terms.

A look at a secular dictionary reveals that, like culture, spirituality has an elitist definition and an inclusive definition. Some would consider spirituality as the domain of religion or the official institutional church. "Spirituality" and "spiritual" in this case refer to all that is in contrast to non-religious and worldly, material things. Spirituality, however, is also defined inclusively as all that concerns the spirit and/or soul.

In his book, *Beber en su propio pozo: En el itinerario espiritual de un pueblo*, Gustavo Gutierrez defines spirituality as "a walking in liberty according to the Spirit of love and of life" (49). It is straightforwardly explained as "life in the spirit." The spirit in question is the human spirit touched by and in *conjunto* ("union with" or a "musical group") with the Spirit of God. Spirituality is all about relationship, for no one can live an authentic human life without relating to the "other," with God and neighbor. It is in relationship that we are formed and that we develop who we are. In this way every human person, even outside the Church, has a spirituality. For spirituality is all about relationship, serenity and purpose. It is about those things that all human beings aspire to in order to live an authentic human life. It is about the human spirit or the *corazón* being formed as it cries out for fullness and completion.

Spirituality, then, is the *corazón* that motivates a person's actions. It is that which stirs us up and enlivens us in moments of excitement. It is that which sustains us and keeps us alive in times of trouble. Spirituality is that which helps us to relate to God and to each other, for the agent of all relationships is the

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spirit. An individual's spirit relates to that of another and in that relating both spirits are touched and changed. As Hispanics meet and share faith with Latin Americans and Euro-Americans, their spirits are growing and their *corazones* are being formed. A new Latino spirituality is being born through this process of inculturation.

The Need for Inculturation in Christian Spirituality

I have no memory of the pre-Vatican II Church, but I have often heard it said that prior to Vatican II the Church was European, specifically Roman in its culture. Since Vatican II however, the Church has become consistently more "catholic" (*Gaudium et spes* 42; 53) through a post-modern respect for culture and an evangelical process of inculturation. Inculturation has become a much talked about way of evangelization.

You will be hard pressed to find inculturation in most secular dictionaries. It is a Christian word. It is a composite of the words "enculturation" and "incarnation." Basically, it is a way in which Jesus and by extension his Church are incarnated in a certain culture. It has become a part of our way of looking at the world around us, and, as such, it is changing our spirituality. As a Latino, I view inculturation as a dialogue animated by the Holy Spirit. It is sitting down *cara a cara* (face to face), and conversing with the *corazón* (heart) of a people. This dialogue must be a mutual exchange and, as such, if spirituality is about relationship between spirits, then it is moved and altered by the exchange. As John Paul II attests in *Redemptoris missio*: "Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values and, at the same time, takes the good elements that already exist in them, thus renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission" (*RM*, 52).

I noted earlier that my dream ended with *mi raza*, the Latino people, leaving the Basilica and going back to the world. They had been drenched in God's blessing and it was only natural that they take this blessing out of the church and onto the streets. A spirituality of inculturation can do no less than this. When the eternal Word took on our flesh, it had to do so in a specific time and place. Christ entered our history through the Incarnation and like all children underwent a process of enculturation. He did not deem his equality with God something to be grasped at, rather he took on the culture of a first century Palestinian Jew and, as such, he took God's blessing out into the streets and fields of Galilee and Judea.

My work with the *Comunidades de Base* (CEB, Ecclesial Base Communities) led me to an interesting understanding of Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:41-52). Without specifically saying so, the CEB members spoke of Jesus as being inculturated by his Mother and her husband. When he was a child, he was lost in the Temple, where he conversed with the religious authorities of his day. When Mary questioned why he did this, he mentioned that he was about his "Father's business." Latino parents in the CEBs like to point out that *José y María* took Jesus back home with them. There he "grew in wisdom and age and grace," quietly taking on the cultural values of his people. When Jesus appears again in the Gospel story at the age of thirty, He is still about his "Father's business." Yet something has changed. He is no longer lost in a Temple, caught up with institutional Judaism. Quite the contrary, he has taken his blessing to the streets. The culture given him by his parents and kinsfolk has challenged his spirituality, and, throughout his ministry, his spirituality will challenge that same culture.

Explaining the Dream

Returning to my dream, I see in it a spirituality of inculturation at work in a variety of ways. First, I am a Mexican-American Latino, and, as such, it is only natural that the vehicle for God's intervention would be both Guadalupe and the institutional Church. My dream begins with a statue of Guadalupe awaiting its dedication in the Basilica of St. Peter. The Basilica is a frequent reminder of official Catholicism. It is in the Vatican, and is where the Pope has his seat. Latino Catholics have a love for and mistrust of the institutional Church that is not always understood by non-Latinos. Our culture was painfully birthed with the evangelization efforts of the Spanish Church in America. It was born of a clash of cultures and the Spanish rape of indigenous tribes. In all that pain and violence, the official Church represented by friars and priests both defended and abused the native. Throughout our history, our culture slowly developed, meeting a new Church when the United States invaded our land. Once again, the Church of the conqueror both defended and abused us depending on the religious or priest that came to us. For the most part the U.S. Catholic Church has all but ignored us for over 150 years and in many ways continues to do so. Hispanics are culturally Catholic. Thus, the Church seems to take for granted that we are Catholic and that we will always be Catholic. It is no wonder that we have ambivalent feelings toward the institutional Church.

In my dream the institutional Church has decided to take Guadalupe into itself, placing her upon a pedestal and thus taming her wild spirit. By Euro-American standards, Guadalupe is not a decent virgin. She hangs out at bars and barrios. You will see her on the dashboards of buses, cars and semi-trailers. She is painted on walls in the projects and tattooed on the arms, legs and backs of

many a *pachuco* (hoodlum). She is a wild woman. At the time of the Spanish Conquest she appeared at Tepeyac where Tonantzin, the Nahuatl mother goddess had once had her shrine. She incarnated the Gospel into an indigenous culture that was dying and into a *mestizo* (mixed blood) culture that was being born. She took the bastard children of *la chingada* (“the raped woman”) and made them the children of God. It is no wonder that as a people, *la raza* is very Marian. Throughout all of Latin America, Mary, in various manifestations, has helped the Church to inculturate the Gospel message and to bring indigenous and *mestizo* peoples into the loving arms of God the Father.

Spiritually, Guadalupe is the symbol of who we are as Latino Catholics. She is *la morenita* who has taken on our colored flesh, much like the Logos took on

Jewish culture. As a result Marian devotion is a powerful yet external manifestation of Latino spirituality. I am not talking here of the transplanted European Marian devotion centered on praying the rosary, but rather the native Marian devotion centered on relationship. Maria is our mother; she loves us and walks with us. She cries with us and she struggles at our side. She is the virgin of the *Fiat*, the woman of the *Magnificat*, the concerned guest at Cana, and the sorrowful mother at the foot of the cross. She is also the princess on Tepeyac, and the symbol on many banners of liberation.

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As my dream continued I saw the pope attempt to bless the statue of Guadalupe. The statue, like the woman it portrayed, refused to stay put. It flew off its pedestal with the pope running after it sprinkling water left and right. But *la bendición* (“the blessing”) never landed on the statue; instead it landed on us, the Latinos gathered for the celebration. The statue of Guadalupe challenged both the institutional Church and the popular Church. The institutional Church in the person of the pope was challenged to run after her, to go where she went and to extend blessing to her children. The popular Church or the faith community was challenged to look beyond the trappings of our tradition and see Guadalupe deep within us. Look at our *cara*, look into our eyes and you will see that Guadalupe is our *corazón*. We are Guadalupe and Guadalupe is us. In this way the Gospel is inculturated in our land and in our people.

The Hispanic/Latino Challenge

In 1531, Guadalupe met Juan Diego on a hilltop. She sent him to ask the Church to build a *templo* (temple) on Tepeyac: to move from the center of power to the margins. Today, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans offer Guadalupe as the

corazón of our people. We offer her as a Marian meeting place that takes the children of our struggle and empowers them as children of God. We offer her, for, as the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts teaches us, where Mary is, there too is the Spirit of God. With Guadalupe and other Latin-American *virgencitas* (Madonnas), we Latino Catholics are called to a mission *ad gentes* (to peoples) that is directed to all the peoples of the United States, to the peoples at the margins and at the center.

At the Margins

Latinos are in many ways a group of various marginalized peoples. Yet as my dream ends we are a people drenched in blessing. Ours is a blessing of inculturation. A blessing that challenges Christian spirituality to do as Jesus did in his incarnation, that is to deny itself and embrace the world rather than flee from it. It is time to come back in from the desert, to come down the mountain and inculturate the Gospel by evangelizing all cultures. Speaking as a *Tejano* (Latino Texan), I realize that *la raza* has spent a long time in the desert. For almost 125 years we lived in an ecclesial wasteland left to nurture and sustain our brand of Latino spirituality. Our *abuelitas*, *tias* and *curanderos* (grandmothers, aunts and native-healers) became the lay ministers that kept us Catholic and Christian. Without knowing it, we were slowly inculturating the Spanish and Mexican spiritualities of our ancestors for the reality of the United States. The Spirit blew in our midst with the coming of Vatican II and the civil rights movements of the 1960s and '70s. We began to come back from the desert, to come down the mountain. We have a slowly increasing representation in ecclesial hierarchy and religious life. We are finally producing our own theologians. These advances, however, should not blind us to the call of Guadalupe. We come to the institutional Church as Juan Diego once did to call it from the center of power. We invite it to come to the margins, to a spirituality of inculturation.

We do this primarily by evangelizing our own culture and inculturating our own spirituality. We are especially called to purge ourselves theologically, socially and politically of any divisions that keep us from uniting as Latinos, Hispanics, Mestizos or whatever we choose to call ourselves. This does not mean forgetting our national origins, this means placing the wealth of our native traditions, customs, symbols and archetypes at the service of all.

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I cannot pretend to speak for all Latinos. In my limited experience as a Latino theologian I realize that I have much to learn about the various cultures that make up the Latino reality. According to the 2000 census, we are now the largest minority group in the United States, numbering well over 35 million people (12.5 percent of the U.S. population). We come from many different cultures, yet, I believe that we share a similar *cara y corazón*, each one with its own integrity. There is a variety of ways in which we can join together to invite the center to conversion, the center being the majority culture of the United States. We need to challenge it, not as we did in the days of the brown berets, when we were angry because of years of oppression. Rather, it is essential that we heal the wounds of the past and forgive the United States for the harm it has caused our nations of origin while, at the same time, calling it to task for injustices committed. We come to the center out of the realization that the dominant Euro-American culture has little objectivity when it comes to self-analysis. It needs us and other minority cultures to question it and challenge it to grow. The center must relate to the margin. An axle will never move unless it has spokes that come and go from the margin of the wheel.

In Conclusion

Our long struggle to inculturate our spirituality has developed in us a spirituality of inculturation that we can share with the other cultures that are at the margins of the U. S. dominant culture. Evangelization of the center is done by inviting the many marginalized and central cultures around us into relationship and conversation. History teaches us that this is not easy because there is no such thing as a truly Christian culture. Yet, every culture and every people has the seeds of the Logos. We must learn to discover, nurture and care for these seeds in our Latino cultures and the other cultures around us. Our spirituality can become a road map that will help other cultures look at their stories, symbols and archetypes as a way to nourish and sustain their own spirituality in an innovative manner.

The spirituality of inculturation is closely associated with incarnational spirituality. Both attest to the goodness of creation, especially of the human creature. Both affirm the generous love of God for His people. Yet, while incarnational spirituality focuses on the people as the whole human race, the spirituality of inculturation recognizes that the human race is made up of various peoples with a countless number of ever changing cultures. It attempts to bring cultures into relationship with each other and help them evolve into cultures that are expressing what we are and what we want to become. These cultures will in turn continue to form the *cara y corazón* of each individual member so that each one, compelled by God's Spirit, will develop an ever more Christian *persona*.

My dream challenges the Latino Catholic to be at peace with the institutional Church. But it also challenges the institutional Church not to domesticate us, but to pay us heed as members of one body. Ours is a spirituality that goes deep into life and it cannot be contained in Basilicas or statues. We are Guadalupe!

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