

Science and the Hispanic Community of Faith

Results of a Hispanic Clergy Survey
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Introduction to the Survey Process

About 30 years ago, Rev. Luis Cortés, founder, President and CEO of Esperanza began dreaming about a way to bridge the gap between faith and science, particularly among our Hispanic communities of faith. In time, his desire became actualized in this program, the Ciencia, Fe y Esperanza project (Science, Faith and Hope).

Esperanza has almost 35 years of working with Hispanic Clergy at a local, regional and national level. As a matter of fact, it was founded by Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia in 1986. Among the Hispanic Clergy Board of Directors, we represent over 100 years of Pastoral work. However our first hand and anecdotal knowledge may be, we set out to in assess with greater accuracy the views of Hispanic clergy regarding science relative to their faith. To that end, during the summer of 2020, we surveyed our Hispanic clergy network to better understand their perceptions and opinions around the issues of faith and science. This led to a sample population comprised of 30 Clergy members which represents 24 congregations from within our local Hispanic community, which provided invaluable input and insight.

I'd like to share with you several of the things we discovered.

Key Findings

1. Most Clergy believe that there is a relationship between science and faith This means that, for most pastors, religion or faith is central to all science or at least to some science.

The data showed that 50% of all our respondents reported that religion is central to all science, 20% expressed that religion is central to some science, while 17% provided other types of correlation, and only 13% suggested no relationship between religion and science.

2. Pastors believe that Faith and medical/scientific advances are only sometimes compatible with Christian faith/ethics.

Most Clergy believe that, to some extent, medical and scientific advances are compatible with Christian values. However, there are levels of compatibility that vary depending on the respondent. They believe that medicine comes from God, but what is appropriate is informed by their faith. According to our survey, 50% of our pastors reported that faith and medical/scientific advances are only compatible sometimes, and 17% declared that faith and medical/scientific advances come from God, so they are compatible with faith. This is significant because 20% reported that they are not compatible at all. This is one of the points of contention we seek to change or at least influence with this project.

3. We also found that our clergy do not view science and religion as constantly in a state of war.

We began with the presupposition that a significant number of Clergy would understand or interpret faith as opposed or conflicting with science; however, a significant segment of our Hispanic Clergy (i.e., 57% of all respondents) understand that science and religion are not always at war. Nevertheless, this perception is somewhat tempered with 36% of Clergy responding that they see science and religion as juxtaposed or at war. Again, this is another key metric we seek to influence through this dialogue with people of faith.

4. We were also surprised to learn that, in some congregations, major life decisions must be approved by their Pastor.

We asked if, “as a pastor, I must give permission to my parishioners when making major life decisions (such as education, employment, etc.)” The majority of our respondents (i.e., 48%) reported that they do not feel they must give permission. They rather see their role as a counselor or advisor. However, 29% reported they feel these decisions must be approved or sanctioned by the pastor. This finding demonstrates how central and influential a local pastor within the Hispanic community may be in the life of the parishioner.

5. Finally, and related to the previous finding, we learned that a significant majority of our pastors support a member’s decision to enter into a career in the medical/scientific field.

The data showed that 67% of our Clergy supports a member’s decision to pursue a career in the medical or science field because they see it as compatible with their Christian faith. Interestingly, 20% of our Clergy believe that a career in science or medicine is not compatible with the Christian faith and would not support a member’s decision to venture down that career path. We hope, pray and are working towards the idea that pursuing careers in this

space should be considered a vocation and not just a job. An acceptance and pursuit of the calling of God during these uncertain yet faith-filled times.

Importance of These Findings

“Why are these findings important?” “Why should we pay attention to these numbers, figures, and statistical data?” The answer is simple: our world is changing rapidly, and, sometimes, scientific advancement affects us in ways that we cannot foresee. In a recent conversation with Rev. Luis Cortes during the production of one of our podcast episodes, he referred to Artificial Intelligence and the potential for change and disruption this technology poses to our community. But he also spoke about the great opportunities it affords our young people as they are encouraged to enter into STEM-related career fields.

What we are proposing through this effort is that faith and science are not mutually exclusive. In fact, faith and science are compatible and work together to help us understand in a better way how God works and how he reveals himself to us. We already have the framework to understand this confluence of faith and science: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly light...” (Reina Valera: “Toda buena dádiva y todo don perfecto desciende de lo alto, del Padre de las luces...” (James 1:17, NIV).

This survey shows us that we already agree on some significant issues. We agree that there is a relationship between faith and science. We also agree that faith and a significant number of scientific advances are compatible. More importantly, we have come to understand that faith and science are not really at war. Furthermore, we have arrived at a point where our Pastors support a member’s decision to pursue a career in the sciences and see their role as a resource to guide them as they pursue their vocation and their calling in life.

At Esperanza, we rejoice with these findings. We know that members of our congregations, nuestros hermanos y hermanas, look to their Pastors for spiritual, personal, and moral guidance. That is a given. We understand that our Hispanic Clergy has great influence within their congregations and their communities. In fact, we are convinced that Pastors play a crucial role in bridging the gap between faith and science. Therefore, we want to help you in fulfilling your call. We want to provide you with the tools you need to help your people, both young and less younger reach their full potential in Christ. Join us as we continue our journey of Ciencia, Fe y Esperanza.

