

Theos | Cosmos | Ontos: Rethinking religion's politics from Latin America

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Latin America—a region whose very name evokes ideas of an enduring colonial past—has frequently figured as a site of failed liberal-democratic and secular arrival. Authoritarian states, the staying power and emergence of charismatic Christian sects (Roman Catholic and Pentecostal alike), “folk” religions based on Indigenous offerings to mountains, lakes, rivers, and rocky outposts (what early colonists condemned as idolatries requiring extirpation), social movements wherein potentially violent hordes of workers, unionists, and miners lay siege to mestizo urban centers—these and other “popular” formations are often narrated by foreign onlookers as evidence of the region’s backwardsness: its historical lagging behind the so-called developed West (Asad 1993; Quijano 2000).

Given this perceptual arc, it is perhaps remarkable how quickly the region’s emerging textures of public-facing Indigenous spirituality—including political appeals to Amazonian ontologies and Andean relationalities with the natural world—have become sites of renewed scholarly and public interest, newly enshrined in Earth Rights law as valuable alternatives or supplements to late liberal political and economic orders (Kauanui 2017; Winchell 2023). This raises an obverse question: What is it about these formations of the sacred that make them more tolerable to liberal multiculturalism than, say, Islam or the rise of evangelical Christianity in the United States? Apprehended together, emergent appeals to theopolitics, cosmopolitical, and ontological multiplicity in Latin America invite us to rethink the ground (or “flesh”) of politics in the region, and beyond.

The essays of this volume of *American Religion* draw together analyses of the political lives of vernacular theologies or “theopolitics” (McAllister and Napolitano 2020, 2021), “subversive cosmopolitics” (Bacigalupo 2022), and “critical ontologies” (Winchell 2023), to explore how a range of more-than-humans, including God, the Pachamama, named places, and other spirits, ghosts, and ancestor-kin participate in politics. We can draw together such practices via the phrase *theos | cosmos | ontos*—variously referring to (a.) political engagements with vernacular Christianity that chafe against presumptions of liberal secularity (theopolitics), (b.) critiques of the epistemic neutrality of natural worlds and of depoliticized cultural worldings (cosmopolitics), and (c.) attunements to agencies that unsettle secular ideas of a passive materiality usually opposed to singular human capacities for creativity and change (ontological politics). A theopolitical approach recasts Latin American histories of colonialism less as the sources of failed liberal arrival in the present but rather as infusing politics there with textures that complicate the promise of church/state separation (McAllister, this volume). More-than-humans participate in fraught processes of political action even and precisely where they have historically been marginalized by multicultural frameworks of neutralized culture or, before that, targeted by Spanish colonists as “false” beliefs and idolatrous devils. As Bacigalupo (this volume) shows, they also offer material and discursive frames with which to “challenge the justice of neoliberal capitalism,” supplying alternate models for doing politics. This reveals Europe’s project of separating church and state as radically incomplete. Such incompleteness opens up theistic and ontological possibilities for Indigenous and Black demands for racial and environmental justice in ways that challenge the putative secularity of modern liberalism.

Contributors fiercely contest religion’s place in (often) racialized civilizational logics, apparent in the political uses of secularity (including what are cast as more reasoned expressions of Christendom),

as a basis from which to separate advanced Man from what modernizing reformers have cast as his immature, child-like doubles (Nandy 1995, Wynter 2003). Moreover, the volume highlights the centrality of illiberal orders like folk religions, emergent spiritualities, and embodied and deeply affective formations of mysticism, grace, and virtue less as exceptions or anomalies to global (liberal) political orders but rather as broader points of insight into the constitutive role of vernacular religious experiences in making up contemporarily politics. The volume demonstrates how illiberal orders and their non-human agencies demand reckoning, not only given their increased centrality to national party politics, Indigenous and Afro-descendant social movements, and popular struggles for climate justice, but also for their significant challenges to received categories of scholarly writing and analysis.

Combining attention to the contemporary revival and refashioning of Christian, Black, and Indigenous traditions in their intersections with nationalism, reparation demands, inculturation projects, and anti-extractivist politics, the volume attends to the fleshy underbelly of an ostensibly abstracted religion in the modern world. This approach refuses to relegate these political formations either to inherited religious orders (colonial Catholicism), timeless difference (Indigenous culture), or a detached only emergent order (earth rights, other-than-human political claims, emergent indigeneity). Likewise, the pieces refute normative social scientific paradigms that would slot such practices either on the side only of a redemptive anti-colonial politics, on the one hand, or a strangulated or domesticated difference evacuated of force through the powers of secular modernity. We have here, rather, a supple and nuanced, fleshed out and embodied, account of how vernacular theologies and other-than-human entanglements are transforming the scope of the political.

This is not a depoliticized culture, and neither is it a form of politics that affords squarely with liberal frameworks of private/public, religion/politics, embodied affect/rational volition. Indeed, perhaps most urgently, the contributors to this volume invite the reader to reassess to what degree such ostensibly universal modern binaries have ever been the dominant navigating points for Latin American political and religious lives. Not only have we “never been modern,” but the “we” that can assert such a stance is one that is presumed to have passed through a historical era requiring thorough mediation by secular liberal virtues. This volume calls such absolute mediation into question, not only for the Latin America, but also more broadly for the contemporary world. How, then, to allow our scholarly analytics to reflect this reality? How to weave the continued distributions of flesh, grace, and illiberal and nonsecular ethics into interpretive paradigms and categories of analysis? How do more-than-humans arise as agents of political change and as interpretive frames for advancing alternate worlding projects? This volume performs for us an anthropology of religion that stands up to this challenge.

In particular, the volume opens up three distinct sets of conceptual questions: First, the papers invite us to rethink the political in light of competing models of freedom and emancipation. Quentin Skinner (1998) outlines the historical supplanting of positive liberty (the right to maintain relations, to practice one’s religion, to reproduce the terms of one’s tradition) by what has become a more hegemonic model of negative liberty (freedom from external constraint, individual volition, and choice). In the context of the struggles described in these articles, this question arises as the problem of a model of politics organized toward subversion or disruption of the status quo as opposed to projects of continuity and endurance. While the emphasis on continuity of tradition can risk depoliticizing culture as a passive, ahistorical process, the ability to maintain ties to kin, tradition, and land assume noteworthy force in the aftermath of violent colonial systems of fragmentation of family and religion alike, as evident in forced sterilizations, the theft of children to settler run boarding schools, missionary efforts to upend attachments to land and practice a more interiorized model of faith, among other examples (Pictou 2020; TallBear 2019, 2020; Mahmood 2004; Rifkin 2017; Kauanui 2017). This volume demonstrates ways to rethink but also re-attune Leftist politics to the anti-colonial force of tradition, one that requires attention

to relational forms as a key modality by which marginalized groups contend with ongoing processes of loss and degradation.

Secondly, the papers allow scholars to think beyond presumed binaries that oppose materiality to abstraction, immanence to transcendence, the physical and the metaphysical. The papers show us the unexpected ways that political forms combine seemingly-opposing forms, such as the (arguably metaphysical) work of grace to grounded refusals of secular sociality as inscribed through the legal positivism of environmental assessment processes (McAllister, this volume) or an insistence on the theopolitical dimensions of new media forms premised on shifting materialities, from the Cemi spirits as embedded in carved stone to TikTok videos Dew (this volume), or from lengthy peregrinations on foot to pilgrimages by car (Mendoza, this volume). Here, we are invited to think carefully about the what and where of politics, and what the goals may be of a given act or practice. Is it the reordering of material hierarchies, the sustaining or rebuilding ties to invisible (or material) beings, the capacity to be recognized (or evade recognition) as a legal collectivity, or to make claims and enter into dialogue with more-than-humans regardless of formal recognition? In short, we are asked to rethink the political while holding in abeyance presumptions of a unified (universal) politics or a single telos (say toward freedom as a detachment from history or tradition).

Finally, and related to the preceding two questions, the volume leaves us with urgent questions about heterogeneity's limits and losses. What transformations are elicited by way of contact, dialogue, or intermeshing with formal politics, be it party politics, legal assessments protocols, anti-mining or anti-dam activism, or international legal bodies and their capacities to grant Indigenous recognition? The papers insist on writing against a telos of ethnocide, of the inevitable fraying and displacement of ties to land, to spirits, to "culture" at large, but I am also struck by the potential political work of mourning, and of mourning loss. Here loss seems to arise as the unthinkable in a set of conversions and translations. Perhaps one way to reconcile this is to think through how a given political form can both do the work of revival and mourning simultaneously. Dew's interlocutors, such as Ramos, reframe the condition of dialogue with the cemi but surely they also mourn the loss of worlds in which such urgent work of revival would not be required in the first place. Similarly, Bacigalupo's interlocutors acknowledge the necessity of certain practices of destruction (like mining) while they also seem to mourn the ties those necessities render obsolete, or into renewed site of care and refashioning. Here we have an alternative between linear narratives of continuity or ruination, revival, or loss. Recounting the ambiguities of theopolitical refractions that follow from colonial histories of missionary violence and conversion, these papers invite us to sit with and meditate on ambivalent inheritances whose normative consequences cannot be decided in advance and in this way partly elude fixing within formal (liberal) politics.

I now turn in detail to the individual papers to draw out ethnographically these themes and the broader argument put forth by their cross-germinations.

Zoila S. Mendoza (this volume) examines mountains, rocks, and stones for how they become "the means to re-establish a positive relationship between humans and superior forces." Focusing on the Peruvian pilgrimage for Taytacha Qoyllurit'i (dear father of the shiny snow), she draws attention to the sensory experience of the pilgrimage, in which movement sensations or kinesthesia becomes key. Acts of leveling the earth (*pampachay*) combine older Andean spiritual principles with Catholic beliefs, which together afford agency to stones as "living entities" who hold transformative power (this volume). Reassessing her earlier work on pilgrimage and in dialogue with Classen's work on Andean sensory regimes, Mendoza poses two key questions: why are these practices so central to the formation of collectivities? And why, within these practices, are stone agents afforded the power of social action? She argues that the kinesthetic qualities of pilgrimage offer a privileged form by which to reckon with belonging in spaces defined by histories of willed and unwilled movements and dislocations. In the

Qoyllurit'i pilgrimage, people to grapple with histories of displacement and their wider entailments for belonging with people as well as more-than-humans, including Tayta Qoyllurit'i and other personages materialized in stone. This argument reinterprets of earlier understandings of pilgrimage practices as sites of historical repair and accounting. For instance, in the aftermath of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) violence, such a pilgrimage practice allows for an accounting for the past based more in leveling or equalizing present-day relations than in burying or hiding the past, as argued by Theidon.¹ The importance of carrying stone for the *pampachay* pilgrimage practice materializes an aspect of the weightiness of relational obligations across hierarchies. Along the way to the summit, participants “burn” their *huchas* (sins or misdeeds) in preparation for arriving at *hanaq pacha* (the world of above). Through this burning, the soul or *alma* is understood to be “liberated” from earlier misdeeds.

Mendoza argues that such practices respond to understandings of persons as “permeable, vulnerable, and having multiple levels of existence” in ways that depart from a legalistic framework of individual guilt and redemption. Less than a loss of humanity as such, practices of repair through *pampachay* allow for the drawing out of qualities of personhood that have been downplayed or neglected. This is a practice that cannot be understood outside the influence of the Catholic Church, yet one that nonetheless also responds to a range of beings and sensorial capacities not constrained to the frames of formal Christianity in the region. It follows, that *hucha* should be understood less as a sin or fault and more as “an obligation in a reciprocal relation” with more-than-humans. In this way, what has previously been understood as the importance of the pilgrimage for the forgiving of sins might be re-interpreted as an act of upholding obligations to re-establish reciprocal attachments. If histories of peregrination are mimicked through pilgrimage routes, so too the act of carrying embodies the “weight of one’s obligations” in and to such places (Mendoza, this volume). This pilgrimage involves offerings at distinct places of rest (*descansos*) which offer opportunities to greet and comingle with other-than-human entities (*apachatas*) in their sites. Increasingly performed using motor transport, Mendoza nonetheless notes that such visits to ritual sites along the pilgrimage route remains key, allowing participants to affirm lapsed or forgotten obligations through acts of burning and the carrying of stones. Stones here “carry the power to effect transformation in situations of in-equilibrium produced in the preceding the year.” Even as the powers of kinesthetic experience are changing with motor transport, stones retain their transformational power as agents of leveling with which to address inequalities across people and with ancestors, named places, and kin.

Ana Mariella Bacigalupo (this volume) examines acts of offering for Campana, the oldest apu or mountain-ancestor-lord in the coastal Moche and Chicama Valleys, including of water, liquids, fruits, and blood on the part of norteños (including locals of Indigenous Chimu descent, Indigenous migrants from the jungle and highlands). In the context of a range of vulnerabilities related to climate change, Apus emerge as “moral leaders” with whom alliances can be built but also can be resentful and express “pain and anger at the injustice in the form of earthquakes, mudslides, and torrential rains.” The forms of interpretation that gather around these fragile relations to Apus highlight how more-than-humans are tangled up both in alternate ways of worlding but also offer “frames” by which to make sense of and engage with climate change and structural vulnerabilities. Apus here act as “intentional subjects” who are perceived to act as political leaders in local movements seeking justice. This occurs in part through the mediating power of local *curanderos* (healers) who “communicate through the actions of Apus, animals, plants, and ancestors” and via dreams and visions induced by Wachuma, the mescaline San Pedro cactus. Part of this involves what might be understood as a sort of auto-revivalism, a heightened awareness of what are cast as the losses of secular modernity and individualism. An ethical relation that can heal relations to Apus is seemingly one that reclaims the genealogical subject—the subject of

tradition (Povinelli 2011), requiring a recommitment to tradition in the face of violent histories of tradition's displacement, abandonment, and loss.

Norteños' place in this revivalist configuration is complicated, not least insofar that abetting extraction is what allows for the making of life in the region. Norteños juggle "European ontologies with Indigenous relational ones in their everyday lives and practices" in ways that achieve no smooth synthesis or equilibrium. Likewise, their epistemic orientations to Apus bear the traces of ambivalent histories of secularity and Christian intervention: For while "many norteños claim that they do not believe in Apus, they also acknowledge that Apus exist," regardless of whether norteños believe in them or not." Belief here cannot exhaust the possibilities for being touched by, and vulnerable to, the powers of agents said belief would deny. More broadly, then, the piece invites us to consider the ontological entailments of multiplicity's failure: How easily can one move across competing traditions? Is multiplicity smooth? What cancellations, gaps, and incommensurabilities do such translations confront? Can a mountain simultaneously be resource and kin? If I sell my sibling's leg for money, can the kinship relation hold? And once a body part is sold, say in an organ donation, is it still kin or has it become something else? If ontologies are made through relation, can relation also undo them? Secondly, Bacigalupo reveals uncertainties in the telos of the political. While "pan-indigenous norteños use Apus as a frame for subversive political activism for justice," in these movements the content of that justice is at times obscured. Is theirs a project of reconfiguring statehood, undoing liberal multiculturalism, demanding inclusion, resisting assimilation, or refuting erasure? Is the political here mainly about the interruption of the status quo (what Skinner calls "negative liberty") or also about building allegiances and alliances and collectivities ("positive liberty")? What can this scene teach us about the heterogenous ways that justice is understood and fought over?

Such questions are urgent given how, as Bacigalupo points out, norteños are at times also racist against serranos (Indigenous highlanders) while also "engag[ing] selectively with an often-romanticized version of their own Indigenous past." One wonders where, here, the lines between appropriation and revivalism might be drawn. We are left with a portrait of a practice of auto-essentialism that can also be racist and divisive, that can welcome more-than-humans while excluding classes of racialized people (like *serranos*). What does this tell us about how this case challenges humanist frames of the political? What parts of that project appear as sympathetic (cosmopolitics), and which might seem to carry risks as well (the exclusion of some raced persons from such a nascent cosmos? These tensions signal what Bacigalupo terms the "contradictory" nature of this political configuration. She concludes that "Pan-indigenous coastal norteños use the Andean system of social relations with humans and places, which is built through commensality—the sharing of food and resources and cohabitation." The key question that remains is: What are the entailments of social relations as political tools to "use" or adopt? Are practices affected by their transformed conditions of enactment? For whom, and why, might that come to matter? More broadly, how to contend with the slippage of anthropological languages and activist languages, what Max Liboiron calls theoretical compromise? And how to foreground the force of other-than-human agencies without downplaying the vulnerabilities such agencies face, their capacity to be frayed or undone through bad, or indeed absent, relations (Hauter 2023; Winchell 2023)?

Florencia Tola (this volume) builds on these questions in her call to recompose "capacities and abilities" including toward beings usually seen as non-sentient and unthinking. This approach offers an urgent rejoinder to the question of how to perceive, and address, climates and indeed Nature otherwise. In following with Bacigalupo (this volume), Dew (this volume) and Manrique (this volume), Tola's piece is curious about rethinking Indigenous and evangelical revivalisms not only as loss or displacement but also as openings to other ways of attuning bodies and thereby remaking the conditions of political collectivity. By looking closely at several Qom philosophical notions, Tola demonstrates

engagements with climate crisis (related largely to extractivism in the region) that do not assume binaries of nature/culture, body/soul, masculine/feminine and cognition/emotion, nor humans' exceptional status in resolving this crisis. Tola reveals the ways that agencies and practices associated with the illicit and the hidden ("non-human beings of the forest, of the water, of the night, of dreams, and of the various levels of the cosmos, the shamanic practices of healing, of capturing emotions and of counter-attack, the universe of vengeance and of witchcraft") have gained greater visibility in religious practices, something that suggests a marked departure from their earlier condemnation by official evangelism.

Unlike injunctions for ontology to be taken up in a more explicitly political frame, Tola argues that such preoccupations are already political insofar that the capacity for worldings "reinstates [...] entities that for indigenous people make up the world, history and life in common, and which, as long as they remain in the shadows, contribute to the generation of conflicts between indigenous and non-indigenous people." Recalling Kauanui's (2017) insistence on "enduring Indigeneity" against the erasures of settler colonialism (and reproduced in settler colonial studies that again absent indigeneity) here the making of a world in relation with agencies long denied not only power but existence (ontology) itself is already political, not even considering how such worldings push back against structures of dispossession that have denied their very existence (see Asad 1993). In Qom mythological stories, the body is a "collective project" that includes also "animals, spirits, animal owners and the dead" rather than "a wrapping that covers an individuality" (Tola 2012). Given all this, Tola questions the adequacy of interpretive categories inherited from Christian theological concepts, particularly mediated through Protestant presumptions about bodily interiority and belief. This leads her to doubt canonized readings of Qom cosmology that borrow concepts from a Judeo-Christian tradition, including notions of "deity, theophany, soul/body, religion, theology, harmony with nature, [and] spirits. She raises the question "not only of how to speak of that universe but, fundamentally, of how to consider it from another angle and, from what angle to do so."

Tola describes how, from the 1940 onwards, shamanic practices (today known as "spirituality") present in Pentecostal cults (known as "religion") elicited institutional efforts on the part of evangelical churches to banish such practices and replace them with "belief in the Christian divinity." Despite those efforts, however, a slippage remains. While a notion of "belief" as "something unseen" remains, it continues to be contrasted with the "natural knowledge of the shamans, elders and ancient Qom," one instead rooted in an act of "knowing" (*yauat*) that requires making that thing visible or perceptible. By tracing this way of knowing, Tola aspires to describe Qom practice without projecting "Western categories towards other cosmologies." To such Christian epistemologies belong notions of "spirituality" and "ancestrality" (Fernando 2017, Kauanui 2017). Against such projections of Indigenous purity and innocence (see Winchell forthcoming), Tola moves past analytics of "adaptation or struggle" to instead ask how "people inserted in capitalism and globalization for centuries [...] compose their world in-between." Instead of presuming Nature/Culture as the Great Divide, and its disruption as anti- or post-humanism, Tola instead ends by inviting us to "recompose affective, perceptual and cognitive capacities and abilities around those we naturalists have declared as non-human, non-thinking and non-sentient." Such practices show that "the relations [Qom] maintain with States and non-indigenous people do not disable animistic inflections in their ways of composing the world."

Alhena Caicedo Fernández (this volume) takes up the other side of the scene of compromise Bacigalupo introduces, tracing spirituality's extension into organized party politics by examining the role of a "llamado espiritual" (spiritual calling) of a *minga* (an organized work party with precolonial origins) in Columbia's General Strike of 2021. She takes up this case to ask, "how the religious gets expressed outside of the usual social fields to which it is assigned," an expression that reframes the

relation between spirituality and politics at odds with the normative logics of secular liberalism. The author focuses on the role of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) in the National Strike of 2021, a group that has vocally challenged the government for the continued attacks on political leaders since the 2016 signing of the peace accord with Farc. CRIC members call themselves Kiwe Thegnas or “millenarian fighters” (*guerreros milenarios*). As Caicedo Fernández notes, for members this name carries a “profound cosmological significance” in describing those who “care for the earth, for people, and especially for children” as Kiwe Thegnas. What, Caicedo Fernández asks, should we make of the ways that “spirituality” here operates in CRIC’s public discourse? Usually, this connection is explained by way of a binary understanding of religion as the property of the church and of “spirituality” as being closer to Indigenous cosmovisions. But the obviousness of this alignment, the author suggest, can distract from the relative newness of appeals to the spiritual on the part of CRIC. Since the 1990s, “the notion of ‘spirituality’ has gained visibility at the same tie that ‘culture’ has lost representation.”

Caicedo Fernández’s piece belongs to a range of works that position current uses of the spiritual within earlier Indigenous appeals to land as a sacred relation or attachment, such as in the 1970s Red Power movements and related appeals to Indigenous religion (Ari-Chachaki 2014). Like the CRIC, elsewhere in Latin America racialized appeals to religion. Appealing to Aymara groups as the “blood of the earth” (*jallp’a sanchis*) whose land claims must be headed, Indigenous intellectuals in Bolivia from the 1940s onward recast longstanding colonial understandings of the telluric ties binding Indigenous peoples and landscapes as a key source of political rights (Bowman 1909: 159, 167; for a comparison with Black geographies, see McKittrick 2006).ⁱⁱ Likewise, Black theologians have frequently drawn upon Biblical figures of Exodus to make claims for the political (and land) rights of the formerly-enslaved, thereby attributing freedom sacred qualities (Marbury 2014, see also Manrique this volume). Such configurations suggest how appeals to the spiritual grow out of transnational networks of anti-colonial struggle that have rearticulated race, land, and the sacred since at least the early 20th century.

Following this insight, one could ask whether secular liberalism is about the separation of religion and politics or rather, perhaps, is it built upon the integration of religion that is then denied? This can be seen as true both for centrality of Christian imaginaries to colonial and then settler colonial governments and also true in new Earth Rights movements (see Fernando 2017). This can reveal something intrinsic about religion’s place in ostensibly “secular” legal orders, including its frameworks of humanity and the just (Asad 1993; Winchell 2023). Indeed, it is remarkable that the “spiritual calling” that CRIC activists enacted was understood as “valuation of life, reconciliation, and collective care.” The very question of life, and of a sacred duty toward its protection (including of the innocent, see Ticktin 2017), are in part outgrowths of a Christian vitalism with deep roots (Jones 2011) whose protection of life became a central calling of the modern liberal state (Cheah 2002). In her examination of a “refrescamiento” using water mixed with herbs that was flung over the bodies of those present, Caicedo Fernández notes, the “spirits of the plants clean and clarify” the people whose bodies they touch. Caicedo Fernández argues that in this act, spirituality acts as a cure or treatment for negative affect (*malestar*) that populism creates and must metabolize. Through such acts, Columbia’s indigenous movement has claimed the notion of spirituality, one that is not necessarily practiced as standing outside or against formal religion (here the Catholic church and clergy). Practices like these suggest legal, cosmological, and bodily/ethical elements that go past the constraining of religion to the private sphere which remains a formal part of secular state policy and epistemological foundations of ostensibly modern democracy. Non-alignment, the uneasy conjoining of practices aligned with the spiritual and the religious, can here be a “virtuous misunderstanding” whose new potentials allow for a reimagining of social power and its construction of the collective.

Hence, if Bacigalupo emphasizes new kinds of alliance between relations to Apus and anti-extractivism, and Tola performs the work of untranslation (refusing to mediate Qom terms through Protestant-tinged scholarly analytic of religion), Caicedo Fernández draws out attention to the productive work of disagreement as a virtue that can remake the social. This includes an insistence on forms of activism not built upon closed organizational forms or purity, in this case Indigenous opposition to Catholicism, but rather on a spirituality that is partly “contaminated” by what it has been assumed to stand outside. Rather than reading such practices as affronts to secularity, they might be understood as affronts to more romanticized frameworks of spirituality achieved through its externality and innocence to formal (and colonial-derived) religion—here the Catholic church and members of clergy.ⁱⁱⁱ An analytic labor like this stays with the fragmentary but less as a symptom of loss than as an opening to other ways of composing worlds (cosmos), and with them, popular politics.

Carlos A. Manrique (this volume) examines black social movements in Columbia’s pacific region to move solidly away from instrumentalist readings of appeals to alterity. Instead, he asks how the kinds of telluric and racialized attachments that have historically formed the basis for Indigenous claims to land operate in relation to Afro-descendant struggles, and how theological notions of the distributions of the divine in God’s people shape possibilities of advocacy for black recognition and rights. Proposing a notion of “onto-theo-logy,” Manrique elaborates on the theological notion of “incarnation” as a key element in the positing of “a distinctive, non-secular, ontology of the social that is performed in this historical experience.” We move here from the ontology of things to the ontology of the social, and from the theology of the church and clergy to the people as theological embodiments of the divine. Manrique asks what this can tell us about the reach of “popular black Catholicism” in struggles for social, racial, and environmental justice.^{iv} Frameworks of laicism and multiculturalism, Manrique contends, are unhelpful as they conceal the explicitly juridically focused nature of this work, making difference appear as if it merely existed on the ground rather than belonging to historically situated and accumulate trajectories of political organizing.

Manrique argues that inculturation policy is not merely a magnanimous extension of recognition to alterity on the part of the church but rather is something that the church needs for its continued vitality: according to protagonists of these struggles, this policy responds to “the church’s need to immerse, mix and impregnate itself with black peoples’ ritual, aesthetic, and social practices and sensibilities.” Nonetheless, this increased juridical orientation of the church implies a “cleansing” of catholic materialities and vocabularies. To achieve a form of “ethnicity” that is identifiable by a multicultural state requires downplaying traces of catholic religion that have historically shaped black community life and political organizing in Columbia, evident for instance in the fact that grassroots organizing since the early 1980s occurred mainly in church spaces like Ecclesial Base Communities. This erasure follows from the ways that multicultural law understands and defines religious identity. Following a formal policy of laicism adopted in 1991, as plurality and formal religious neutrality, religion is understood to be “a matter of personal individual choice and inner intimate belief.” Here, ethnic identity is “codified in terms of a collective and rooted communal belonging defined by clear and discrete biological or cultural markers.” In this way, and not unlike the minoritization of religious difference (Mahmood 2016) or the reification of (Indigenous) sexual practices apart from religious meaning (TallBear 2019, Rifkin 2010), belief and ethnicity are not only codified but also treated as separate: “independent, and to some degree incommensurable, forms of identity.” Through this squeezing or siphoning of difference into discrete spheres, other worldings—including the broader “historical materiality and sensorial density of the struggles” of an “insubordinate black Catholicism”—become unthinkable.

Manrique proposes “collective flesh” as concept that gets at shared experiences of “material, bodily and sensorial density” at odds with the emptying out of difference by discrete conceptions of ethnicity and religion, identity and belief. Not only do formal programs of ethnic revitalization often seek an indigeneity purified of catholic traces, but new formations of evangelical Christianity often hinge on an aspirational shedding of inherited material attachments not only to sacraments but also to the Pachamama, saints, and named places.^v In my understanding, Manrique here is concerned with how answers to the problem of the denial of the theo-political re-impose a hollowed out understanding of the subject. This emptying out follows from Western political theories of sovereignty that imply a passage away from embodied religion and toward a Protestant ideal of belief (correlated with private religion and neutralized civil society). Attending rather to “collective flesh” allows for renewed attention to political forms not subservient to inherited (Protestant) logics of ex-carnation. Like Tola (this volume), Manrique presses scholars to take seriously material expressions of faith at odds with the idea not only of private belief but also of a supernatural, otherworldly, or “ex-carnated” shape of the divine (see also Fernando 2021). This approach departs from frameworks of Indigenous cosmopolitics or sentient landscapes that, he argues, at times imply a dichotomous understanding of decolonial critique that vindicates indigeneity against western Christianity. What kinds of violent ruptures are necessary to craft or carve out Indigeneity (or for Manrique, black Columbian life as “ethnicity”) from its fleshy home in a set of inherited popular Catholic traditions (see Winchell 2022)? How do these ruptures mimic the detachments implied by multicultural understandings of the discrete nature of religion and politics, ethnicity, and belief?

Soraya Maite Yie Garzón examines the ways that spiritual ceremonies known as mystics (*místicas*) have become significant in grassroots organizing in Colombia, a form of inclusion that is closer to Bacigalupo or Tola’s interest in the entailments of post-1990s efforts to revivify and recuperate Indigenous traditions. Here, however, is a political form centered on the recuperation of older strands of Catholic mysticism. Analyzing the “Popular and Spiritual Possession of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez” in Bogotá in 2022, she describes how this event involved an adherence to Catholic tradition. Known as an “ancestral possession,” the event drew from familiar materials in Columbian indigenous politics, including the figure of *mamos* or spiritual authorities. The underdetermined, flexible quality of this practice, Yie contends, allowed it to accommodate and entertain a range of “aesthetic, spiritual, and political sensibilities that have been historically marginalized.” These include “elements of catholic mysticism” that activists are reclaiming (Yie, citing Hamond 2014), ones that seek religious ecstasy through collective experience with the divine. However, Yie notes, this is not simply a recuperation but also an “introduction of a practice in a ritual repertoire” that entails reinterpretation and creative re-elaboration both of politics and of religious-spiritual traditions. More than just affirmation of tradition, such practices also re-imagine and rescript the social.

By examining this re-elaboration of mysticism in activist spaces, Yie finds that there has been an “interweaving” of elements emerging from popular Catholicism related to the cult of saints and virgins, on the one hand, and aspects of what are often called “Andean tellurism” including devotion of the Pachamama, mountains, and lakes. Following Caicedo Fernández and Manrique’s contributions to this volume, these activist enactments of the sacred highlight the entanglements between Roman Catholic and Andean material religiosities at odds with discrete formulations either of Christian mysticism or Andean cosmopolitics. Rather than see that entanglement as a stable entity (such as syncretism), Yie argues that this mysticism is shot through with “hybridization and constant transmutation.” In activists’ reformulations of such practices, however, one wonders whether their ends (or their audiences, say other activists or other-than-humans like saints or the Pachamama) remain unchanged? Yie, too, notes that mysticism “constitute a model of political composition that works with difference and, in the process,

participates in its production.” Here, as in Caicedo Fernández’s case, this production introduces a more reified frame of ethnicized spirituality. This raises questions: Do the referents and stakes of such practices remain unaltered by their meshing with formal politics, where broader aims include those of political action and not only good relation with other-than-humans? When reified in this way is the spiritual still disruptive, or does it become more stabilized, as practices take on increasingly object-like status? Yie nonetheless finds that such *mística* include a “disruptive dimension” insofar that they evoke “memories of exclusions of these forms of spirituality.” Affects here emerge as “a latent possibility of being affected by others” that can work on materiality rather than as a “religious epi-phenomenon.”^{vi} This process of affectation reminds movement leaders of their own fragility and dependency on supporters as conditions of their power.

Spencer Dew (this volume) allows us to see past a normative field in which continuity and loss emerge as the only viable narratives for making sense of Indigenous revivalist projects. His focus is diasporic Taíno politics in the United States, particularly Taíno media creator and behike (shaman) Luis Ramos, whose “theological and metaphysical” understandings of a protest against Christie’s auction house celebrated its ability to reclaim the terms of mediated attachments to cemi or spirits. In 2021, Christie’s Paris in partnership with the Musée de l’Homme, auctioned several Taíno artifacts as “masterworks,” including ceremonial tools, amulets, and carved stone which contemporary Taíno understand as spiritual entities or “gods.” While the stand-off could be cast as a failure insofar that the auction went ahead, Ramos argued that it was a successful reclaiming of “Taino creative control over objects used to facilitate direct contact with the cemi or spirits.” Dew argues that this indicates an “alternative economy of recognition” not contingent on inclusion within state or international legalities so much as focused on reclaiming sovereignty over the terms of relation with cemi in ways that implore secular time and settler chronological history. Against expert narratives that cast Taino people as “completely destroyed by the Spanish conquest” and “extinct” since 1530 or 1540,^{vii} Taino revivalists “reconstruct shared Taíno culture” using historical and archaeological sources and “pan-indigenous encounters.” Protests both online (via TikTok) and in person outside Christie’s evoked cemí as a political interlocuter in the present. On his radio program, Ramos noted that if “Christie’s did not hear the cries of the Taíno people, Yúcahu *did*.”

For Dew, such a “theological and metaphysical reading” recasts recognition as a process upheld from within the Taíno community and its temporalities (including cemí), one not cancelled out by the fact that Christie’s did not recognize contemporary Taínos or the force of cemí. The piece alerts us to the importance of media—and self-discovery via media—as tools of Taíno decolonization politics. Such media arise as embodiments of cemi that offers routes to authenticity against presumptions of overwhelming loss. Media (and Taino self-work as media creators) become extensions of Taíno technology that offer roads to collective authentication beyond a model of cultural integrity or ahistorical boundedness. Taíno media creators themselves reflect on the theologies of media, explicitly comparing contemporary forms of media like the internet to ancestral forms of media like shells and carved stones. According to Taíno creators, this metaphysics of media can maintain attachments to ancestors and refute chronological and settler time (see Rifkin 2017). Dew argues that this formation of nonsecular politics rewrites not only frameworks of recognition but also sovereignty. For diasporic Taino activists like these “sovereignty [is] neither territorial nor governmental” and hence offers a powerful critique of traditional ideas of sovereignty.

Like Tola, Dew’s piece insists on moving from the problem of *failed* translation across nonsecular worlds to the radical politics of *refused* translation. Taino activists claim relation, recognition, and sovereignty by asserting an aspirational independence from liberal secular structures of formal politics, including international law. At the same time, one wonders (following Marisol de la

Cadena's (2015) discussion of how Andean sacred objects appear in US museums) to what degree such aspirations toward untranslation hold or can be fully successful. Despite claims to the contrary, Taino politics are surely still constrained by an absence of legal recognition, and even an insistence on ontological survivance against extinction constitutes an oppositional politics that responds to settler narratives of colonial displacement and loss. Dew's attention to the theological workings of media is crucial, but one wonders about the consequences of radically reshaped materialities. How—unlike handling or producing carved stone cemi—does browsing the internet or producing TikTok videos involve a different set of sensory attunements that changes the terms of shared encounter with cemi. To be fair, this may be the point: Tainos refusal to ascribe to legalistic expectations of (empirically validated) social and material continuity as a basis for formal recognition. In this regard, immateriality arises as subversive in its overt refutation of temporal continuity as a condition for “proving” authenticity. Instead of making politics beholden to an imposed recognition frame, sovereignty is a capacity to determine the conditions of collective relation, among people and with cemi.

Following this theme further, Carlota McAllister (this volume) advances our understanding of how frameworks of ontological multiplicity can be insufficient insofar that, despite rethinking human exceptionalism and political agency, they often re-impose a framework of truth premised on secular materialism—to be real, agencies and their struggles and dispositions must be *visible*. Expanding recognition to other kinds of beings, here, may not necessarily and not always allow for a broader rethinking of established orders. Against such a demand for empirical knowability through economies of recognition and visibility, McAllister asks about the “action of grace” as a political practice and a force of collectivity that produces belonging that falls short of the terms of recognition imposed by bureaucratic formalities like Environmental Impact Assessments (and their presumed “social” interlocuters). The piece highlights a double bind generated by the fact that, in desires to make politics actionable and injury evident, certain forms of collectivity must be transformed (or translated) into knowable externality or risk irrelevance. This double-bind takes on noteworthy consequences in the context of ongoing popular struggles against the Aysén dam in Patagonian Chile, where formal opposition to the dam required the summoning of a visible social.

McAllister traces the Patagonia Sin Represas (PSR) anti-dam campaign. Following protests and then a 2012 uprising, in June 2014 several ministers reversed the state's earlier approval of the dam, citing arguments against the Environmental Impact Assessment made by PSR. While seemingly a victory for the anti-dam campaign, McAllister asks whether this shift reflected PSR's audits. The author writes as someone involved in this campaign who was asked to contribute to the assessment by demonstrating the social consequences (for “culture” or “society”) of the proposed dam. This assessment left little room for humans as more than culture-bearers, economic actors, or statistical aggregates. Her efforts sought to address this gap, but she argues they had little effect. This reflects the limits to the ways human injury was imagined in the assessment, and how residents themselves contested their smooth conversion into an injured “social” through this process.

McAllister's chapter illuminates what legal scholar Marianne Constable (2005: 9-10) calls “one very striking feature of modern law—its social and sociological character,” or what could be called “socio-legal positivism.” Such positivism “relegates connections between law and justice, if any, to empirically contingent social realities” (2005: 10). If Constable's “turn to silences” offer a possible otherwise, McAllister meditates on “grace” as a space of refused transparency to the law's requirements of sociological positivism. At the same time, she reveals an alternate trajectory of political engagement premised in what interlocuters took as the virtues of restraint, of staying “in one's world” against the risks of problematic publicness and as a way of embracing, following Pitt-Rivers (2011 [1992]) grace as a theological concept. *Gracia* alludes to going beyond “what is obligatory or predictable,” enacting an

extraordinary defined by the possibility of non-reciprocity. McAllister interprets Ayseninos' refusal to submit their collective land claims to external auditing to such an "extraordinary" act, one that she argues points to a set of virtues that had to do with avoiding transparency or facile conversion into an injured party as available through a secular language of the social.

Such "grace" worked as a negative force, requiring the absencing of relations and an avoidance to name opposition to collective relocation as a solution offered by hidroAysén, but it also ended up "convening new relation." Most unexpectedly, refusals to submit to legal definitions of the social were followed by broad participation in a new "Social Movement for Aysén" that demanded "a binding plebiscite on all megaprojects proposed for the region; for the territorial designation of Aysén as a "reserve of life" and regional control of natural resources." These demands went beyond the configuring of Ayseninos into a secular category of harmed social group, and instead insisted on undoing broader political structures solidified by processes of risk assessment and public consultation. Against a neutralized language of a social to be placated through negotiation, this movement asserted that "*Tu problema es mi problema*" (Your problem is my problem), a phrase whose awkwardness, McAllister contends, points to the "relations that operated in this state of grace." Seen in this broader historical context, the minister's cancelling of hidroAysén pointed to an effort to contain political grace by imposing the parameters of a more legible (secular) public: that "social" afflicted by megaprojects and placated by the workings of modern jurisprudence.

Nicolás Viotti and Bárbara Bartl (this volume) take further this question of the potentialities of slippage across epistemological and ontological frames, examining how Covid-19 was lived not only as an infectious disease generated by SARS-CoV-2 virus but also as a phenomenon that afforded new kinds of "experimentation with contagion." This experimentation built from Pentecostal understandings in which the pandemic offered a form of "explication and justification" within an apocalyptic code that read the disease as a test of pioussness rather than as a generalized condition of (secular) contagion. Here apocalyptic imaginaries, Viotti and Bartl argue, do not just unworld but also *make worlds* with and in conditions of mass infection and mass tragedy. Drawing upon research in the Argentinian Andes, the authors consider how knowledge about the pandemic was shaped by various modes of "ontological reconnection" among virus, bodies, fluids, substances, and persons. Following Wagner (1975), the authors challenge the presumed separation between the biological and the social to instead ask how experiences of Covid-19 responded a distinct texture of Pentecostalism informed by an "Andean cosmopraxis." More broadly, by moving past an oppositional understanding of cosmopraxis and Pentecostalism, Viotti and Bartl (like Dew, this volume) rethinks narratives of absoluteness rupture that posit conversion mainly as loss. Instead, they ask about Pentecostal engagements with Covid-19 as worlding processes that also "guard continuities" with preceding forms of sociality.

The authors focus specifically on "force" (*fuerza*)—a kolla notion of resilience and resistance to illness largely located in the body. In the Argentinian Andes, force is associated with activities common to Indigenous highlanders, such as the ability to walk in mountainous parts without tiring (an idea that arguably echoes the racialized geographies of Highland Aymara described by American geographer Isiah Bowman in the early 20th century, see footnote 4). Here, having *fuerza* is "necessary to resist potential disequilibrium that can generate illness related to an imbalance of symptoms." Force is achieved in part through what one eats, and Viotti and Bartl note that often people explain that in the past their kin (grandparents, *abuelos*) used to eat better and hence had more "force." If elicited in part by consuming "good food," *fuerza* can also be perceived in a "desire to work" (*ganas de trabajar*), a quality understood not only as physical but also moral and social. Together, both diets and work habits tend to support popular views of rural people as carrying more "force" than their "weak" urban counterparts. This regional geography of force made it appealing for many people to return to the

countryside and to inherited lands when Covid-19 appeared. The authors ask how this broader set of presumptions about bodies, vulnerability/strength, and resilience shaped the lived worlds produced by the pandemic.

In a quarantining community in 2020, this world included a perception of the pandemic as an “indicator of the arrival of the end-times, and a signal of a civilizational and spiritual crisis of humanity.” Interlocutors explained that pandemic events were “all in the Bible.” Others emphasized the arrival of “pests,” like scorpions, as further evidence of the arrival of an apocalyptic era. These materialities were read as signs of God’s calling, and the way one responded would separate those who would be saved during the second coming of Christ, of which the pandemic was an indicator. This in turn elicited efforts to ascertain the separation between those who are “in the path of the Word” and nonbelievers. Here the physical and the bodily, what the authors call the “material dimension” acquired life as a function or sign of relation with God. The authors trace how this material-divine truth regime intersected with practices of healing that co-articulated Andean “cosmopraxis” and Pentecostalism, including efforts to reject “Evil” (Milagro), understood as the cause of illnesses not explained by biomedicine. With this example, the authors contest common interpretations of conversion to Pentecostalism as “the abandonment of a great mass of practices and modes of existence associated with the [Andean] valleys.” Pentecostals continue to identify naturalistic terms and entities like the Pachamama, though they reduce them to “native beliefs of the past.” At the same time, in this formation precise conceptions of the body, of illness and health—including the notion of *fuera*—are maintained even as they are “incorporated into Pentecostal sociality.”

For Viotti and Bartl, then, “eschatology emerged as a resource,” offering an opportunity to reactivate “confidence in the presence of God in the world and to confirm the correct moral path of the chosen.” The pandemic was not experienced universally, but rather consisted also of an “amplified network that produces different agencies between humans and nonhumans.” In this regard, apocalyptic Pentecostalism might offer a model for how to “imagine an emergent language about the end” of the world that draws from a multitude of epistemologies and ontological formations. This moment of “generalized uncertainty” can awaken other “mythical imaginaries” beyond those enabled by a Western “world in suspense”, one that can give way to other ways of responding to ecological collapse that proliferates rather than precludes the existence of marginalized alterities, human and more-than-human.

Together, this collection dispels fantasies of the discreteness not only of religion and politics, materiality and the abstract or supernatural. Instead, it invites us to sit with a set of political refractions that explode civilizational models of religion’s capture by the state and its reduction to a neutral field of interior belief, depoliticized culture, or passive recursion through syncretism. With that dispelling, we can think anew emerging alignments and alliances across political forms that social scientists often treat as distinct: theo-politics, cosmopolitics, and ontological politics. *Theos* is as much about making and remaking materialities as ontological politics or *ontos* grapples with questions of reification and abstraction, the immaterial and supernatural. This intermeshing complicates a more stable or bounded approach to the cosmopolitical—what the editors of this volume call “classic cosmopolitics” (Bacigalupo, Manrique, and McAllister)—as though a cosmos or world exists a priori, outside of the processes—at once concrete and elusive, bodily and affective, inherited and emergent—that go into its making. Despite recent attunement to ontological practices as impure and as tangled up in political projects (Bacigalupo, Manrique, and McAllister this volume, Bacigalupo 2022, Winchell 2023), historically studies of “cosmological systems” and Indigenous cosmologies often continue to essentialize culture as ahistorical and apolitical.

What I have called *theos/cosmos/ontos* names this space of generative slippage that follows from modern political institutions’ failures to fix or contain religion as outside politics, but it also points to an

analytic approach that methodologically undoes the enclosures of liberal politics for which religion, nature, race, science, and the divine stand separate and can only be included through purist evocations of culture, ethnicity and race, minoritarian rights and legal entitlements. The volume opens new possibilities for apprehending the political in its productive entanglements with its would-be outside. It allows us to ascertain the political not only as efforts to reshape (human) hierarchies but also to imagine and enact worlds otherwise, to co-world with ambivalent ancestors in the scene of overlapping, double-edged inheritances. This is a co-worlding for which inheritances are not innocent, yet neither can they be dispensed with as the vital grounds for demanding justice otherwise.

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ⁱ This is in part because, Mendoza argues, Theidon read *pampachay* (leveling or accounting through flattening) through *pampay* (as the containment or burying of the dead/history).

ⁱⁱ As geographer Isaiah Bowman wrote of the Bolivian Aymara: “Their destiny must be worked out upon the soil” (1909: 167).

ⁱⁱⁱ Such activities remind us of Viveiros de Castro’s writing on “controlled equivocation” and De la Cadena’s (2015) insistence on forms of mutuality based on non-alignment or non-unification (see also Cusicanqui 2011).

^{iv} For Manrique, this reach has to do with Vatican Council II and the church’s work in Latin America, which driven by a new ethos of inculturation has endeavored to revive and resuscitate culture (as a particularistic expression of the divine, see Orta 2004) rather than displacing it with an imposed, global Christianity.

^v In fact, Manrique goes on to describe how conversions to evangelical Christianity in the Andes often entail a “de-ethnization,” one that “brings about a rupture with respect to the forms of life and relationality among human and more than human persons (the land, the mountains and other natural beings).”

^{vi} Of course, we should resist the temptation to oppose secular reason and religious affect. For, as Saba Mahmood (2009) reminds us, political structures of liberal secularism—and their retainer-like approaches to religious and cultural difference—also constitute deeply affective projects.

^{vii} This central dimension of Taíno politics recalls related arguments for Indigenous survivance, or what Kauanui calls “enduring indigeneity” against presumptions of ethnocide and insurmountable loss.