

[Olivia Harris](#)

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***THE ETERNAL RETURN OF CONVERSION: CHRISTIANITY AS CONTESTED
DOMAIN IN HIGHLAND BOLIVIA***¹

Olivia Harris

The scope of Christianity

There is a recurrent moment in the ritual offerings of the peasants of Northern Potosí which expresses an ambiguity in their identity as Christians.² It occurs during sacrifices to the spirits of the landscape who ensure fertility -- the mountains, the earth, powerful places such as waterfalls, springs, or spots where lightning has killed a living creature. The offerings are prepared at night. All the ingredients are raw and no salt is used. After the night of ritual libations of rum and chewing coca leaf, the officiants sacrifice one or more animals from their flocks, then, at the first light of dawn they hasten up the mountainside carrying the blood and other offerings to a designated spot and spread them out on the ground with more libations. Before the first rays of the sun appear above the horizon everybody runs away, leaving the powers of the landscape to come and enjoy their food. Nobody must look back. As the sun rises the celebrants offer each other a formal greeting, and then return to the village.

In an obvious sense, made familiar by Van Gennep's and Leach's analysis of the time of ritual, the end of all ritual performances is marked by such a break, signalling a return to everyday life. But for indigenous peasants in Northern Potosí, the time of ritual is the time when humans enter into intense communication with spirits often known as 'devils' (*yawlu*), in an Aymara version of the Spanish term *diablo*. The dilemma is, to what extent is this 'devil worship' part of their Christianity, and to what extent is it antithetical, or at least incompatible? In fact, to write about practical

Christianity is always to face a conundrum. What to include and what to exclude? This conundrum is of course nothing new. It lies, for example, at the heart of sixteenth century debates about which aspects of native practice in the New World were harmless superstitions and which were idolatry, inspired by Satan himself (Cervantes 1974:25-33, 57-62). In fact it is an inevitable consequence of a religious system which wishes to maintain clear boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not. My uncertainty about what aspects of ritual practice in Northern Potosí should count as Christian therefore seems to me diagnostic of something important about Christianity in general, whatever the denomination, rather than the stumbling block it initially appeared to be.

Perhaps the least ambiguous place to begin a discussion of popular Christianity is with God himself, where the catechism and the creed begin. As all commentators on Andean religion have noted, God is the sun (father sun, *tata inti*), an identification that draws both on the solar imagery of Christian iconography, and on the sun deity at the heart of Inca statecraft and the imperial religion (Platt 1987). For the peasants of Northern Potosí, the sun has given humans everything that makes life possible, in particular the crops and livestock on which the peasant economy depends, and the minerals in the earth that are brought forth by the work of miners. He is ‘our father’ (*awksa*), ‘little father’ (*tatituy*), ‘our Lord father’ (*tata mustramu*) or ‘the sovereign father’ (*tata suwirana*), who protects people when they go on a journey, or when they fall ill, and he is normally the first to be honoured whenever they make ritual offerings to the sources of power. Without him, I was told, we would have nothing. The dawn ritual of feeding the ‘devils’, then, which ends with formal greetings as the sun’s rays rise above the horizon, represents also a turning towards God.

But God is not eternal. He has not been there since the beginning of time. The present age is the time of the Christians (*Kristiyanu timpu*), but before the dawning of

the Christian sun there was a previous, weaker sun that survives as the moon. That was the time of the *chullpas*, the remote ancestors whose monumental tombs mark today's landscapes, and whose remains are unearthed from time to time, reminding the living of their existence and their extraordinary powers. Known in other Andean regions literally as 'gentiles' (*gentiles*), these ancestors from a previous age were destroyed by the rising of the Christian sun, which burnt them dry.³ In some accounts from this region, the rising of the sun/God is recounted explicitly as a battle with the 'Devil' (the term used is *supay* - Taylor 1980; Dillon & Abercrombie 1988; Stobart 1995:33-34). The moon today is part of God, a manifestation of his female aspect, his 'wife'.

It is this temporal scheme that will frame my discussion of popular Christianity in Northern Potosí. As a conversion religion, Christianity creates an absolute break between a pre-Christian past, and the present with its hope of salvation. In the Andes, as in other American civilizations, the idea that time could be divided into distinct epochs separated by moments of violence or destruction was already well-established before the coming of the Christians (Brotherston 1992). But the sixteenth century missionaries demanded a denial of the past, and the pre-Christian ancestors, in more absolute terms than those that underwrote indigenous temporal schemes. Moreover, worship of the dead was central to pre-Columbian religious practice. Bodies were preserved by various techniques of mummification and dehydration, and were located at all the nodes of power and significance, such as mountain tops, crossroads, the fields (Arriaga 1621; MacCormack 1991). Therefore, the relegation of the dead to purgatory, and the requirement that the newly-baptised Christians reject their gentile ancestors, posed theological problems for which many of today's practices can be seen as an ongoing attempt at resolution.

One of the recurring themes in accounts of popular Christianity in the Andean region, from the sixteenth century to the present day, is whether the indigenous peasants can be called Christians at all (Mills 1997). The very term 'popular Christianity' is oxymoronic, since it suggests deviation from a supposed orthodoxy, a contested domain. This is inevitable in so literate a religion, and one in which many denominations still require an exceptional level of education for the priesthood. But I suspect there is more at stake. Surely the very exalted conditions laid down for what constitutes a good Christian, or even a good enough Christian, mean that this state is almost unattainable. This may well be part of the reason for the schismatic and competitive tendencies within Christianity as a whole (Herrin 1989). In a situation of constitutive ambiguity, how better to confirm your own faith than by contrasting it with the lesser or misguided faith of others?

One of the best and earliest accounts of popular Christianity in the Bolivian Highlands, written by a Canadian Oblate missionary priest in the 1960s, is wryly entitled 'We thought they were Christians...' (Monast 1969). And researchers, including myself, have often showed more interest in those aspects of Andean popular religion that seem like relics of paganism (from the perspective of the Church), or continuities of pre-Colombian religious forms (from the perspective of historians and anthropologists). One of my aims here is therefore to explore what the indigenous peasants mean when they identify themselves as Christians, especially since there are many points of ambivalence where a unified religious system is hard to sustain and the objects of worship, the sources of power, ritual practices, seem to be duplicated to produce something approaching two parallel religious domains. I shall discuss this particularly in relation to ideas and practices concerning the dead, in order to bring out

what seems to me to be a central dilemma in Christian conversion, whether Catholic or Protestant.

Communicating with God

a) Hearing mass

God, the source of justice, of order, and of morality, oversees the world and the present Christian epoch. The peasants of Northern Potosí consider themselves to be good Christians, although they are aware that this view is rarely shared by outsiders. One of the main ways in which they celebrate their Christian devotion is by hearing mass (*mis isapaña*) in one of the colonial pueblos with their vast churches and extensive ritual calendars, or alternatively in one of the newer churches in the mining regions. God's power is concentrated in churches, outside the rural communities, so in order to receive God's blessing people must travel, usually on foot, to the nearest church attended by a priest. But while Sunday is usually kept as a day of rest (*warta*), the peasants do not attend mass every week. Especially for those who live a long way from the nearest priest, as is the case for all the communities in which I have lived, people go to hear mass for particular reasons, articulating time both as a personal passage through the stages of life and death, and as the communal passage from one season to the next in the cycle of patronal feasts and saints' days. So both the time of the individual and the time of the community are structured by hearing the mass and receiving blessing.

In the personal life-cycle, a baby's entry into the community is confirmed when it is baptised in Church with its 'naming godparents' (*sutiwir parinu/marina*) standing by.⁴ Later in their lives children acquire more godparents, both when their parents pay for a mass for the child's health (*misa de salud*) in order to transfer some of the godparent's

vitality to the child, and when they marry. After death the close kin offer a mass for the dead person (the *misa de nueve dias*, supposedly celebrated nine days after the death, but often many months later). And at two successive feasts of the dead at All Saints in early November the kin offer a mass for the dead soul in order to settle it into its new afterlife. The second of these masses, the 'mass of the rug' (*misa jant'aku*)⁵, lays the Christian soul to rest.

In these sacraments that succour people through their life, God's blessing is received through hearing mass. The performativity of the mass is probably clearest in baptism. Even though the brief ritual of naming the child with salt and the sign of the cross is valid, it is essential that it be confirmed later by a full baptism in church, in order to incorporate the baby as part of God's order, part of human society. Before this it belongs to the domain of the wild and fertile mountain deities, associated with the pre-Christian ancestors (*chullpas*) who eat without salt. The term used to refer to babies who die before they are baptised -- 'little moor' (*murú wawa*) -- is a clear indication that they do not belong to the Christian community.⁶ But in the other life-cycle rituals too, hearing mass is an essential element for the proper performance of passage from one state to another. In cases where people fail to do it, problems may arise, and on occasion the diviner may diagnose the cause of a problem (e.g. illness, loss) as the failure to hear mass.

Since the peasants never take communion, hearing the words spoken by the priest is central to the significance of mass. However, although the Aymara word used to express attendance at mass is 'to listen' (*isapaña*), I have not heard peasants emphasise the words of the mass as such. According to Monast, for the Aymara of Carangas the mass is a special form of long prayer (1969:178-9). If this is correct, it is a communication to, rather than from God, and the blessing received in return is not

materialised through sound. At the same time, people consider that through the mass God and the saints are 'fed' with the bread and wine, just as the mountain and earth spirits are 'fed' with blood sacrifice. From this perspective, the efficacious part of the mass is the food that is offered, which satisfies God's hunger.⁷

Moreover, paying for a mass is crucial for its efficacy. It is in giving money or gifts in kind that people make a reciprocal offering to God that ensures the success of their participation, and they require a receipt from the priest as material evidence that the proper transaction has taken place. During the patronal feast of Muruq'umarka, one of the Laymi hamlets in which I lived, I watched the Jesuit priest who had arrived from the mining town of Uncia spend several hours receiving requests for mass. The payments were mainly in produce since it was the height of the harvest season. By the time he left his jeep was loaded high with sacks of potatoes, beans, and chickens. On this occasion Padre Jaime accepted to play the role the peasants required of him. However there were ongoing tensions. As a Spanish member of a missionary order, and moreover as a individual passionately committed to the service of the poor, he often refused to accept payment for masses, and chose to finance his ministry by donations from Europe. The peasants resented this bitterly, and when they went to town to hear mass, those from the Muruq'umarka region often make the much longer and less convenient journey to the colonial pueblo of Chayanta, where the priest was Bolivian, not from a religious order, and charged high rates for saying mass since this was his main source of income.⁸ It is in paying for the Mass, then, that peasants participate in the feeding of God and the saints, and are able to receive their blessing through hearing the holy words.

Padre Jaime exemplified other tensions too. As a member of a sophisticated European order, the mass was for him an intensely personal and spiritual encounter

with the deity. In his view the peasants did not and could not understand the meaning of the mass and used it as a magical instrument for gaining specific ends. As such he considered it a waste of time, if not downright superstitious, to say mass in the Indian communities, and he avoided doing so whenever he could, preferring to preach about practical issues such as the need to build a medical post and send children to school, as well as basic Christian virtues. His reluctance to say mass, let alone to receive money for doing so, was an ongoing source of friction which the peasants saw as a refusal to enter into normal reciprocal relationships, that was endangering their livelihood and wellbeing. So even attendance at Mass is a contested domain in which the authenticity of the peasants' faith may be called into question.

It is not just human beings themselves who depend on the blessing of their Sovereign Father through the mass for their passage through life. It is equally important for the multiple sources of power associated with God (*tyusa parti* -- God's sphere) in the Andean cosmos to hear mass and be replenished by it. The household shrines (small domestic altarpieces -- *retablos* - locally as *tiwishuna* from the Spanish *devoción*)⁹ lose their power to bless unless they are periodically regenerated through hearing mass. The staff of office (*vara*, known locally as *tata santo roma* -- holy father Rome) must also be taken to mass each year by the community officer who holds it, in order to replenish its authority. Likewise the images of the saints, the banners (*istantarti* -- standards) representing advocations of the virgin, and the shawls and other clothing of the miraculous saints from larger shrines which are kept in each community as a way of distributing the powers of the miracles. All these dwell in village churches and calvary chapels and must hear mass regularly (usually once a year), or else they become angry and turn their powers against the community.¹⁰

b) Pilgrimage and penance

While ordinary Sunday masses are sufficient to celebrate and confirm aspects of the life-cycle, those for replenishing collective sources of well-being are associated with the concentrated power of 'miracles'. A miracle (*milawru*) is a local shrine of a particular saint. Even very small local shrines can have the quality of miracle but the 'great miracles' (*jach'a milawru*) are centres of annual pilgrimage whose power and blessing are widely recognised in the region, and in some cases beyond it. These great miracles have exceptional powers, and are also credited with specialised skills, and they are usually referred to by the place itself, with the name of the saint taken for granted.¹¹ Saints as miracles are intensely localised, identified not just with the place, but with the very soil and landscape. In many pilgrimages, part of the efficacy of the miracle derives from stuff picked up off the ground -- earth, stones, sheep droppings -- which are talismans of whatever it is people desire. They take these objects home with them and make offerings to them, often during a three-year cycle.¹² For example *tata Phanakhachis* brings children to the infertile; *mamita Pitunisa* confers special skills on the women weavers who worship her; *mamita Urqupiña* brings wealth; and *tata Killakasa* is a 'great doctor' who heals the sick. Each saint has a particular function, for which people make offerings. Thus *mamita Candelaria* in Chayanta is the miracle of the fertile potatoes; *tata san Antonio* in Qalaqala protects llamas; *tata san Juan* in Carasi is the patron of sheep.¹³ At the same time, saints are intercessors with God. I have often heard it said that people worship a particular saint or virgin because s/he is good at beseeching God on our behalf' (*sum mayt'asi Tyusat jiwasataki*).

Saints, whether great miracles or small ones, are God's children and called 'little father' (*tatituy*) or 'little mother' (*mamita*). Most 'little mothers', such as *mamita Rosario*, *mamita Asunta* (Assumption), or *mamita Waralupi* (Guadaloupe), are advocations of the Virgin.¹⁴ As many commentators have pointed out, the

evangelisation of the Andean region focussed especially on the cult of the saints. The Protestant denial of the efficacy of the saints had led to its reaffirmation by Rome, and it was also deeply embedded in the popular religion in which most of the priests had been raised in Spain. Moreover, the moments of the liturgy centred on the life of Christ were fixed dates, and therefore celebrated only in the main parish church, whereas the saints' days allowed for more flexibility, and were the occasion when priests could visit and attend to their flock living far from the main parish church (Marzal 1983:262,275). For these reasons Jesus Christ himself is not a significant figure in local forms of Christianity. Some people barely recognise the name, although the suffering Christ on the cross is a saint of great importance known as *tata san Exaltashuna* (holy father Exaltation).

People make invocations to the 'miracles' throughout the year. However their powers are most efficacious at the time of their annual feast-day. It is the moment when peasant communities journey together to renew the powers of their 'devotions' and protectors, and their contact with God. Within each community, households rotate the responsibility for sponsoring a feast, with all the expenses associated with journeying to the shrine and providing the entire community with food and enough drink to ensure the required state of intoxication for all who participate.

At the feast of Saint James in the valley town of Torotoro, in 1973, the musicians of each community marched around the main square, in and out of beer-shops, and at the entrance to the church itself, competing to out-play each other. Inside the church people were burning incense and candles, chewing wads of coca leaf which they then spat onto the mud floor, pouring libations and drinks from jugs of chicha and bottles of cheap rum. In the midst of the deafening noise, with drunken men sobbing and and occasionally falling on the floor, people milling about, and self-righteous

townspeople telling everyone to be quiet and show some respect, the priest said mass at the high altar. A huge queue pushed to the front to be splashed with holy water. The priest in question was an idealistic young Spaniard who had been in the area only four months and was shocked to the core by the clash between his way and theirs.

The most intensely ritualized occasions on which the peasants go to mass are the patronal feasts when ritual battles (*tinkus*) are celebrated. *Tinkus* have traditionally been the centrepiece of many fiestas at miraculous shrines, but not at all. For example, at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe at Pitunisa, near San Pedro de Buena Vista, people said that *mamita* would be angry if they fought. While the uneven incidence of *tinkus* may be merely the result of sporadic attempts to ban them as brutal and unworthy of a civilized country,¹⁵ it may also be that they are held during feasts to promote the fertility of the crops and livestock. They are often interpreted as a blood sacrifice for the earth deity (*pachamama*) and the mountains, who are responsible for the fertility of land and livestock; by contrast, the virgin of Pitunisa's miraculous powers are particularly associated with weaving skills.

When there is a *tinku*, the married couple who sponsor the feast and provide days of banquets and liquor for the whole community go in solemn procession to the church bearing the hamlet's crosses to hear mass. Much of the community accompanies them. The men of fighting age form a military band playing long bamboo pan-pipes (*suqusu* or *julajula*) commanded by the 'major' (*mayura*), and a couple of unmarried girls (*mit'ani*) march at the front waving white banners. When they pass hamlets on their way people bring out their sacred images to be blessed by the sound of the pipes. The music is based on old Gregorian chants and at designated points along their route (*ch'isiraya*) the band stops to perform spiral and circular dances and then kneel doffing

their caps and facing east to ask pardon (*pirun mayt'asiña*) from Our Father the sun, and make the sign of the cross.

Several things are striking about this act of penance. The bamboo pipes communicate directly with God, playing a genre of tunes known as *nuwina*¹⁶ and the very name of the group that goes to the tinku -- *wayli*, from the Spanish *baile* meaning a dance -- indicates that communication with God takes place not only through words but also through musical sound and movement. Moreover this act of penance is a collective one involving -- symbolically if not arithmetically -- the whole community, and contrary to Catholic orthodoxy it is performed without the mediation of a priest.¹⁷

It seems that on most occasions people ask pardon from God for their sinful state, rather than for particular shortcomings. On the one hand human beings are generically sinful; on the other one of the major attributes of God is to punish (Van Den Berg 1990:239), and disasters that afflict a whole community (such as drought, epidemic, or mudslide) are usually said to be punishment from God (*kastiku*). But people do not use the mass as a means of seeking pardon for sins.¹⁸

Another important element of the *wayli* that marches to do battle at the saints' feast-days is the crosses that are carried in this military procession to hear mass. In each of the two communities I know best, two large crucifixes are kept in the calvary chapel. They are painted with a series of motifs relating to the Passion, for example a ladder, nails, a cock, the sun, but not the image of the dying Christ which, as I have already indicated, is a separate saint. Crosses were powerful symbols in the Andean region long before the coming of the Christians, invoking notions of order and balance, and therefore serving as guardians, for example of the community, or of the food-crops (Urton 1981:129-150). Those that are taken to hear mass during the *tinku* are dressed as warriors. For example, in the highland village of Muruq'umarka the bigger cross,

known as *tata san Ijsimu* (the Spanish *eximio* means distinguished, eminent, and is an epithet of the Host), was taken to the tinku during the potato sowing season in October,¹⁹ dressed in a red poncho, a woollen sash and a helmet (*muntira*). When we stopped on the journey, the bottom of the cross rested on a garment provided by the feast sponsor, since it must never touch the ground. *Tata san Ijsimu* was also important in another feast to bring rain to the planted potato fields at the end of November (*ramaphista*).

This cross was a physical, local manifestation of God himself, manifested in the Host. Similarly, in the valley community of Saychani where I also lived, one of the crosses was a manifestation of God, but in this case in his capacity as healer -- Santiago or Saint James -- known in Saychani as *tata Kimsa Mujuna* (father Three Boundary Markers).²⁰ In both cases the God/cross was partnered with a second, lesser cross, though the details differed. In Muruq'umarka the second, smaller cross was called *tata san Phulurisa* (holy father Flowers), and he was said to be the wife (*warmi*) of *tata san Ijsimu*. He played an important role in the feast of Carnival, which is also the celebration of the first fruits of the harvest. In Saychani the paired cross was called *tata san Sebastián* (holy father Sebastian) and was said to be the older brother of -- and less powerful than -- *tata Kimsa Mujuna*.²¹

In these examples we find the typical Andean dualisms. Everything is doubled, usually as male/female or older/younger division (and as often occurs the female partner is not exclusively gendered as female). Even God is doubled, as male/female (the sun and the moon, *tata san Ijsimu* in Muruq'umarka and his 'wife' holy father Flowers) or as older/younger brother. In some senses God takes the form of the universal parents, father and mother to everything in this world, who themselves have no parents. At the same time some conceptual effort is made to align with a

monotheistic principle, in the idea of God as superior and different. For example, in the *chullpa* myth the moon (today the sun/God's female counterpart) is represented as less powerful, the deity of a previous age. Again, in the case of the paired crosses just mentioned, only the 'husband' or 'younger brother' is thought to be God, while the 'wife' or 'elder brother' is not.

At the same time, these examples indicate that in some manifestations, God is present in material form, and moreover that in certain rituals such as the penance, the peasants communicate directly with him, and not through the mediation of the priests. At the same time it is the priests, especially the foreign, modernizing priests, who repeatedly denounce the superstitious practices of the peasants whom they serve.

Colonial Christianity and devil-worship

While the very figure of God is in some senses multiple or paired, there are also forms of doubling and duplication that take us right outside the realm of things pertaining to God, and it is here that accusations of continued paganism carry most weight. There are many powers in the cosmos that must not go to mass, in fact in order to function properly they must be kept apart from it, and not participate in the circulation of blessing that derives from paying for and hearing the mass. These include representations of the mountain gods and the earth (at least in some manifestations), the powerful stones that serve as guardians of the community and the household flocks, and the shrines where a living being has been struck dead by the lightning.

These powers are often referred to generically as *saxras*. Their domain is one of chaos, fertility, danger, the possibility of great wealth, but also of destruction. It is associated with the inner, hidden world (*manqha pacha*) in contrast to the upper world (*alax pacha*) of God and the saints. These beings, like those of the upper world, get hungry and must be fed, but while the upper sphere of God (*tyusa parti*) is nourished

with the bread and wine of the mass (and the payments of those who attend), the *saxras* consume the blood of sacrificial animals, a drink made with the flour of white maize kernels, and llama fat. If they do not receive these raw offerings, made at dawn before the sun rises, they may eat their human devotees instead, causing illness and death.

Given that these powers of the inner world are also known as 'devils' (Harris 1982; 1989; 2000), it is not surprising that visually they are sometimes depicted through the European iconography of the devil. For example the devils who live deep inside the mines of the Potosí region take the form of horned men with bulbous eyes and erect penis, to whom the miners must make constant offerings to avoid their anger and court their favour. And in rural communities too, people cover themselves with black goatskins to dance as the devils of Carnival (goats are traditionally associated with the devil in European folklore). Moreover, the antipathy of the Catholic devil to salt is echoed in the way that Andean devils eat sacrificial food without salt. However, it is not easy to define who and what these devils are.

Indeed within Christian theology as a whole there is no unitary understanding of the devil, whether historically or today (Forsyth 1987; Taylor 1985). Fernando Cervantes has argued persuasively that in sixteenth century Mexico the inquisitors and theologians had little success in instilling their own notions of the devil as the cosmic antagonist of God. Sacrifices to pre-Christian deities were idolatrous since they violated the First Commandment, and therefore could only be described as devil-worship. But ironically it was this very identification of sacrifice with devil-worship that led indigenous people to embrace the devil as part of their pantheon, since they could not renounce the practice of sacrifice, and were anyhow predisposed to understand deities as a combination of positive and negative characteristics. The notion of the devil that took root, then, was more medieval than post-Tridentine, subservient to

God and even susceptible to manipulation through natural means (Cervantes 1994; MacCormack 1991:40). It is likely that a similar process took place in Andean Christianity, since it is especially through sacrifice and offerings that people communicate with those powers they call generically devils today. Devils in Northern Potosí are the sources of fertility, chaos, danger and luck.

It is tempting to interpret this inner domain of the devils as what remains of pre-Christian religious forms, driven into clandestinity and 'demonised' from the sixteenth century onwards by the absolutist demands of the new religion. And there are indeed some elements of the devils' sphere today that resonate strongly with sixteenth century Spanish accounts of pagan Andean practice. However at the same time a contrast between the sky and earth cults already existed, and so did the contrast between light and dark, order and disorder, so that affinities between a pre-Christian religiosity and present practice can also be detected in what peasants today call 'God's sphere', such as the close identification between the Christian God and the Inca Sun/Lightning (Bouysse-Cassagne & Harris 1988). On the other hand, the inner world of the devils is also deeply infused with Christian imagery and associations, so that a stratigraphical approach to the historical depth of different aspects of worship cannot be applied (Abercrombie 1998:110-116; Bouysse-Cassagne 1997). There is no unambiguous mapping of Christian practices with God's sphere and of pre-Christian practices with the devils' sphere.²²

Nonetheless, the early colonial history of evangelization in the Andes is generally recounted as one of poignant contrast. One of the emblematic stories recounts how the priest Valverde, who accompanied Pizarro to Peru, offered the Inca king Atahualpa a bible to indicate the source of the true religion. Atahualpa held it to his ears, and when the bible failed to speak he threw it to the ground in disgust. This moment of mutual

incomprehension when the Spanish and Incas first met resulted in the imposition of Christianity by force. Crucial to this version of history is the evidence of the 'extirpations of idolatry': the violent rooting out of pagan practices by priests drawing on the techniques of the Inquisition (Duviols 1971). However, it seems that the experience of extirpation was limited to certain areas of Peru, and evangelization occurred in a far more accepting and less dramatic form in many parts of the Andean region (Mills 1997). It seems likely in the case of highland Bolivia that evangelisation was initially a matter of *realpolitik*, and then conducted in close cooperation with the native ruling classes. For example, in a document relating to the 1570s, don Fernando Ayavire, the ruler of the northern part of what is today Northern Potosí, boasted that he used his authority to persuade his people to abandon their 'dancing and drunkenness' -- in other words their pagan rites -- and that he accompanied the Jesuit priests on Sunday mornings in the mining city of Potosí, rounding up the Indians to go and hear mass (Platt, Bouysse-Cassagne and Harris 2004).²³ Although many scholars have written of the 'resistance' of Andean peoples to Christian evangelisation, examples such as this evoke a far less polarised situation: not either/or so much as both/and.

The configuration of the religious domain today is still affected by a number of colonial policies. For example, a key decision taken by the Crown in the late sixteenth century was to bar Indians and mestizos from the priesthood, ironically on the grounds that their commitment to the vow of chastity and celibacy was questionable. This ruling was only partially relaxed in the 18th century (Meiklejohn 1988:133). As a result, priests were always outsiders, of Spanish descent even if born in the Americas. This policy may well have encouraged the development -- or continuation -- of two distinct religious domains, one related to the outer and upper world of the celestial deity, serviced by foreigners, the other related to an inner clandestine world serviced by

indian priests, spirit mediums or diviners, and focussed on the unpredictable powers that renew the fertility of the earth and the wellbeing of the flocks. Moreover there was always a shortage of priests to serve the rural areas, and those that there were had to travel long distances to say mass in the different chapels within their parish. There are many myths told in which a priest arrives late for mass, and is confronted by the wrath of the local Indian lord.²⁴ But it would be wrong to conclude from this that priests and the Church they represented were simply identified with the colonial administration and its abuses. Szeminski, for one, has convincingly argued that even at the height of anti-Spanish feeling during the Great Insurrection of 1780, priests were largely exempt from attack (Szeminski 1988).

Many other distinguishing features of popular Andean Catholicism which today's reformist priesthood finds problematic also derive from the strategies of the colonial evangelizers. The fiestas of patronal and miraculous saints are an obvious example, promoted by a combination of different interests in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Priests found them an effective vehicle for evangelisation, colonial functionaries saw them as a means to regroup the dispersed population in concentrated settlements, and indigenous groups themselves were thereby able to reinvent their world through the new organizational forms that accompanied the cult of the saints, such as religious confraternities (*cofradías*, Saignes 1995; Marzal 1991: 240).²⁵

The attitude of peasants today with regard to the mass is another example, in the sense that their presence at the mass is as listeners, and to be blessed with holy water. The colonial grounding of this is clear. In the first centuries of evangelization, hearing mass and the catechism were probably the central means of participation in Christian worship.²⁶ Some priests even refused to allow Indians to take communion, and neglected to teach them the meaning of the gospel and the new faith, although many

kept a strict check on which of their flock had confessed and taken communion at Easter and which had not, a practice which apparently died out only at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Meiklejohn 1988:258; Marzal 1983:288, 301-2).

On the other hand, today most Catholic priests who serve the Bolivian countryside reinforce the sense that some aspects of indigenous worship are not only 'backward' and 'superstitious' but unacceptable in a more absolute sense, although some of them merely turn a blind eye. The peasants too perceive the incompatibility between attendance at mass and some of the rites they practice to ensure fertility and the prosperity of their communities. Many stories are told of rituals hurriedly broken off and concealed when the priest arrives (e.g. Abercrombie 1998:103-7).²⁷ In some contexts there must be no mention of saints' names, nor the use of the cross, for fear of offending the devils (as for example Nash records for the mining communities of Oruro 1979:7). But while in some respects they are viewed as incompatible, in others the domain of God (*tyusa parti*) and that of the devils (*saxra parti*) mirror and duplicate each other. The very term used in Aymara for the ceremony of feeding the *saxra* -- *misa* -- is the same as the mass,²⁸ and the spirit medium who presides over the mass for the 'devils' is often referred to during the ceremony as 'father priest' (*tata cura*).

Pilgrimage shrines often reflect this doubling process. Near the colonial city of Potosí, for example, there is a chapel dedicated to Saint Bartolomew on a rocky promontory, and thousands journey there for his feast-day on 24th August. Right below the chapel in the rock there is a huge 'cave of the devil'. After hearing mass in the chapel, the devotees climb the mountainside above both chapel and cave to collect stones that represent the wealth that they desire in the coming years, pouring libations simultaneously for both saint and devil.

What we can detect in this complex field is a general distinction between two spiritual spheres or worlds, which operates differentially according to context. Sometimes the two worlds are so close as to be virtually identified; at others a sharp contrast is enacted. Sometimes parallelism is emphasised, at other times radical alterity. Moreover while the relationship between the two has generally been seen in terms of opposition and alternation, there are also senses in which the complementarity between them can be expressed in terms of a transformatory dynamic. This is the argument of Henry Stobart for example, who in analysing the mythical and ritual associations of music through the course of the annual cycle in Northern Potosí, notes how the different powers of saints and devils are uppermost at different moments of the agricultural calendar, and are embodied by people at different stages of the life-cycle; from this perspective, the ritual cycle involves a process of transformation from one to the other (1995:116).

Increasingly, however, external religious functionaries do not turn a blind eye. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the colonial model of Christian practice has been under attack in the Andean region. The first Protestant missionaries arrived in Bolivia at the very end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries (Ströbele-Gregor 1989:120; Gill 1993:184), and Baptists were active in Northern Potosí by the 1920s from their base in Torotoro. There have not at the time of writing been mass conversions to the different Protestant churches in the region, but everywhere there are a few, who refuse to join in the fiestas, refuse to drink, who go out to work in their fields on saints' days but never on a Sunday, and get together to read the Bible, pray and sing hymns each week. Often those who convert have worked as migrants in the towns, and above all they wish to avoid the periodic bouts of drunkenness and the accompanying violence associated with fiestas. One of the things that unites Protestants

-- or *evangélicos* as they are normally called -- is their repudiation of their previous religious practices as devil-worship.²⁹

In Latin America as a whole, the post-war period saw the recruitment of foreign Catholic priests in large numbers, especially from the religious orders, both in response to the challenge from different Protestant churches and as a solution to the long-term decline in local recruitment to the priesthood. They brought with them a radically different conception of the religious life, the person and the sacraments, from the colonial Christianity that had become institutionalised over the centuries. In some countries this Reform Catholicism had a profound impact on rural Christianity, training local men as catechists to promulgate the new ideas, notably Guatemala where the Catholic Action movement became a major player in the civil war (Wilson 1995). In Bolivia the more radical wing of the Catholic Church has been more influential from the 1970s onwards, involved as much in the organizing of peasant unions, in development work, the funding of NGOs, in the building of latrines and hospitals, and with the promotion of chemical fertilisers as with spiritual transformation. Since the late 1980s this was partly superceded by an interest in local forms of popular Christianity, and the forms of spirituality embodied in apparently pagan practices. At the same time, the strength of the indigenous movement in Bolivia has led to a revalorisation of 'Andean religion' with which some -- but only some -- missionary priests are sympathetic (Albo 1991; Marzal 1991; Van Den Berg 1990). In any event, the new wave of reform has reignited the debate on whether the indigenous rural peasants of the Andes can be called proper Christians, or whether a new conversion is required.

The ambiguities of the dead

The peasants of Northern Potosí consider themselves to be proper Christians. And yet at the same time many have lingering doubts, and in some ways they have internalised the view that outsiders have of them. Discussing the Protestants with Pedro Mamani, as we returned from dispatching the soul of one of his kinswomen at the end of the feast of the dead, he put it bluntly: "we drink beer, we fight, we talk with the devil, so we don't go to heaven. The Protestants do none of these things so they do go to heaven".

In many contexts the souls of the dead can be identified directly with the devils' domain, and are implicitly integrated with the pre-Christian ancestors, the *chullpas* who were destroyed by the rising of the Christian sun. They are a major force for the growing crops, since it is they who bring the rains at the beginning of November when they are collectively welcomed back into the community of the living. At the end of the rainy season, they take on the guise of devils in the feast of Carnival, embodying the vegetation and the new crops that are about to be harvested. Carnival is known as the feast of the devils, and at the end of a week of intense celebration, accompanied by the *pinkillu* flutes that sing mournful songs to the dead, the souls of the dead are dispatched to return to *Tacna marka*, the place of the dead (Harris 1982). In *Tacna marka* they cultivate chili pepper for the living.³⁰ By contrast the souls of those who die as children are called 'little angels' and fly straight to heaven because they have not sinned, that is, they are not old enough to drink beer, fight, talk with the devil and other acts of adults.

And yet at the same time, the souls of the dead are also part of the Christian world. As I have already indicated, masses are offered for them in order to make sure that they reach their final destination, even though this is not the Christian heaven. One of the most striking moments of the ritual calendar when the domains of God and the devils seem temporarily to fuse is the feast of the dead at All Saints (1st November), when everybody assembles in the graveyard. The air is heavy with the sound of the *pinkillu*

flutes that are played throughout the rainy season from November to February. High stepped altars, covered with foodstuffs, have been erected to the memory of those who have died within the previous two years. Their living kinsfolk beg the people thronging the graveyard to pray, and reciprocate with coca leaf, food, beer and rum. When I asked why the altars were stepped, and what we were praying for, people usually replied that this was to help the soul reach heaven.

On many occasions when people pray to God or the saints, or indeed to the devils, they use Aymara. They may ask for protection on a journey, help in starting something such as building a house or weaving a cloth, health for themselves, their kin and their livestock. But at the feast of the dead they pray in Latin, or at least in Spanish, not in their language but in God's, spoken also by the priests as God's intermediaries. They rarely know the literal meaning of these prayers, but every adult should know how to pray.³¹ To my knowledge, in addition to the feast of the dead, the occasions when it is important to pray in Latin or Spanish are to perform the initial rites of baptism a few days after a baby's birth, and for some curing rituals. People were mystified that I could pray neither in Spanish nor in Latin, and found my English recitations a poor substitute. Being able to pray extensively in Spanish or Latin is a skill that can bring rewards. In urban graveyards there are people -- sometimes young children -- who work for money reciting prayers in Latin for the souls of the dead.³²

Praying in Latin or Spanish is, I conclude, a means of appropriating the intermediary function of the priest.³³ It is not clear to me whether the prayers are directed to God or to the dead themselves. The fact that flute-players 'pray' with music and are paid in kind suggests that the prayers may communicate with the dead, since *pinkillu* flutes are the means for communicating with the dead.³⁴ On the other hand, on the occasions when I have witnessed the spirit medium speak to the soul of a recently deceased person,

Aymara was the language of communication. Indeed, there may not be a simple answer as to who is the recipient of these prayers in Latin and Spanish during the feast of the dead. It may be yet more evidence of the ambiguous position of the dead souls, alternating between the Christian identity they maintained while alive, and their gradual incorporation into the world of the devils who play such an important role in the promotion of the fertility of the crops.³⁵ At All Saints people pray for the souls of the departed; but by Carnival these same souls have been transformed into devils who are dangerous, chaotic and at the same time figures of play and of fertility.

The eternal return of conversion

This doubling and duplication across the two domains of God and the devils in traditional Andean Christianity might be interpreted as a classic instance of syncretism in which two distinct religious traditions are joined in a new and creative synthesis.³⁶ The developing anthropology and historiography of popular Christianity takes as a major theme the issue of how the globalizing, universalizing force of Christian missionary activity becomes embedded in new localisms, how new meanings are forged through the mutual incorporation of non-Christian and Christian cultural practices (eg James and Johnson 1988; Mosse 1994). However, in the Andean context, the debate is still mainly conducted in terms of whether or not the peasants can be said to be proper Christians at all, and it is a debate of intense concern to many different parties.

The shock experienced by many dedicated missionary priests coming from Europe has already been mentioned. With their modernising ethos they see it as their duty to save the peasants from their ignorance. By contrast, those whose position derives from the critique of colonialism are eager to demonstrate that the retention of pre-Christian elements in popular Andean Christianity is a form of resistance, and that many aspects

of contemporary practice are the continuation of pre-Christian religion with a superficial change of nomenclature. For townspeople and the educated elite, the religious practices of the indigenous peasants of Northern Potosí -- their fights, their sacrifices, their drunkenness -- are a continuing source of embarrassment and outrage, leading to denunciation and occasional attempts at prohibition. These concerns reproduce directly the attempts of earlier generations to civilize and control the indians. The Bourbon reforms of the mid 18th century, for example, led to repeated attempts to abolish religious fiestas (Sala i Vila 1994). Similarly the Liberal governments of the late nineteenth century were preoccupied with the squandering of resources and loss of working days caused by the drunken fiestas (Iruozqui Victoriano 1994).

Anthropologists and historians are not immune from the intensity of this debate. They may respect the evident fact that the peasants think of themselves as Christians, but at the same time it is hard for us not to see the continual parallels between present-day practices and elements of pre-Christian practice as revealed in sixteenth and seventeenth century writings by Spanish chroniclers and other missionary priests.

Historians have begun to flesh out the term 'conversion' and show what a lengthy and complex process the Christianisation of the Andes was. It is clear that policies differed markedly from one period to another, as did the criteria for what constituted adequate Christian practice, and the different approaches of the various religious orders and the secular priesthood also played an important part. Today the debate has been recast between traditionalists, reformers and populists within the Catholic Church, the far more stringent demands of most Protestant churches, the strong indigenous movement in Bolivia, and local elites concerned to promote a more modern culture. Christianity, in short, has been and still is a contested domain, for all its claims to absolute truth and absolute rules.

And yet the terms set by the different contestations as to what is and is not real Christianity rarely allow for mutual recognition and respect. A concern with defining orthodoxy has always been a constitutive part of Christianity, and certainly was at the forefront in the evangelisation of the Andean region. Church leaders remained preoccupied with the continuation of 'idolatry' even in the many areas where virulent campaigns were not carried out (Mills 1994:114). And although the terminology and the precise doctrinal concerns have changed the preoccupations remain. Platt notes the concern at continuing 'superstition' in eighteenth century Bolivia (Platt 1987:144). Today the fundamentalist Protestants identify the practices of Andean Christianity as devil worship, while reformist Catholics see it as paganism, resulting more from ignorance and the failings of previous generations of priests than from the seductions of the devil.

A constitutive element of Christianity is the uncertainty as to whether members of the faith have fully cast off the 'old Adam', the sins of previous existence, and the worship of pagan gods. In the sixteenth-century Andes even the most passionate adherents to the new faith might be visited by nightmare visions calling them back to the old ways, as Salomon has so vividly described (1990). Even in the Christian heartlands of Europe, there is an ambivalent recognition that practitioners of 'popular Christianity' continue to worship pagan elements to this day (Stewart 1991; Pina-Cabral 1992).

Given the radical demands of Christian epistemology, with its exclusivity, its policing of the boundaries of truth, its constant search for unity and orthodoxy (Herrin 1989), I would argue that a preoccupation with who is and who is not a true Christian is a typical attribute of the religion across denominational boundaries. The peasants of Northern Potosí are themselves not entirely immune from this concern, exploring

through their myths the ambiguities of whether they, or their frequent adversaries the mestizo townspeople, are the true Christians.

In other respects the paradoxes of their own commitment to the Christian faith and its irresolvability are lived out in repeated ritual performances. In many ways the religious practice of the peasants constitutes a 'single total field', as Tambiah argues for the heterodox practices of Buddhist peasants in N.E. Thailand (1970). But they know that aspects of their religious practice must be hidden from the priests, and are guarded in what they will reveal to outsiders. Undoubtedly many things are not only hidden from outsiders but protected in metaphor from the dangers of verbal exegesis as such. The clandestinity of much of their religious practice has a number of sources. In part it takes the form of gradual revelation for the committed typical of mystery religions. In part it derives from the domestic nature of many rituals, whose efficacy would be undermined if anyone from outside the immediate kin and residence group participated or even saw from a distance. But in part it is also secret because people know that outsiders consider it to be transgressive.

Perhaps the clearest way in which the tension between the two domains is re-enacted is when there is a clear break from the time of ritual and a return to everyday life. I described one such moment at the beginning of this paper. Another even more dramatic experience of rupture comes at the end of Carnival. After more than a week of festivities, the devils are dispatched outside inhabited space. The flutes that sing to the dead are thrown on one side. Those that have impersonated the ancestors/devils (*kiramayku/kirat'alya*) throw off their disguise, and everybody returns to their homes singing the joyful songs of the dry season, accompanied by men playing charangos (small mandolins).

These moments of ritual severance, where people break off communication with the devils, can perhaps be seen as an eternal return to the point of conversion. The process of abandoning the pre-Christian ancestors and other deities, which I have suggested remains incomplete, is reduced to a moment. A similar sense of rupture can be found in the *chullpa* myth, when the dawning of the Christian sun immediately kills all the previous inhabitants of the earth. This myth, told widely throughout the central Andes, constitutes in many senses a myth of origin, explaining how the time of the Christians started, and contrasting the people of today with the pre-Christian population. In ritual and in myth, then there is an eternal return to the experience of conversion. My echoing of Eliade's famous essay is deliberate but ironic, for in Eliade the 'eternal return' of ritual is a return to the cosmogony itself, while the experience of conversion to Christianity would constitute precisely the kind of historical event which he saw as antithetical to the integrative and therapeutic qualities of archaic ritual (1954).

We can see in the complexities of Andean Christianity a profound meditation on the implications of conversion and its ambiguities. There are many reasons why the return to the moment of conversion may be particularly pronounced in the Andean region. In particular, pre-Christian religious practice was centrally focussed on the worship of ancestors, mummified or otherwise preserved, and the ritual calendar was intricately imbricated with the agricultural cycle, so that the continuation of agricultural production involved the continuation of rituals to ensure its success, albeit in a modified form.

However, I suggest that a concern with the incompleteness of conversion is a leitmotif of Christianity in a much more general sense. Much has been written about the forms of temporality peculiar to Christian doctrines, in particular the pronounced emphasis on linearity both as a narrative of salvation and as an eschatology (e.g. Eliade 1951;

Brandon 1964). But the way in which Christian time is derived from a complete rupture with the past has not received the attention it deserves.³⁷ This radical break requires converts to renounce whatever they previously held sacred, including close kin ties. For most human populations, respect for their ancestors operates as a powerful metaphor of continuity between past and present. Therefore, conversion to Christianity produces discontinuity. For the recently converted, this discontinuity constitutes an existential dilemma which is hard to resolve. The rejected pagan ancestors may come back to haunt the living. But this tension in different professions of Christianity is not restricted to the recently converted. Even where loyalty to the pre-Christian ancestors as such has disintegrated, the permanent threat of sin, of backsliding, means that the drama of conversion is constantly re-enacted, whether through baptism, the confession of sins, or reconversion. For some, the ambiguities of conversion may be displaced onto the pagan other through missionary endeavour. For others, particularly in charismatic sects, conversion is a permanent process, constantly renewed in ecstatic confession and renunciation of the devil (Lehmann 1996:139). It is this poignant but dynamic tension at the heart of Christian faith that is illustrated so clearly by the endeavour to knit past and present, mountain ancestors and solar deity, communion with saints and with devils in popular Andean Christianity.

ENDNOTES

¹I thank the participants in the Christianity Workshops organised by Fenella Cannell and Maia Green in 1996 and 1998, and also the Social Anthropology Research Seminar at the University of Oxford, for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

²The western part of the region where my research has been based – in particular the Laymi *ayllu* - was until recently Aymara-speaking, but is experiencing language shift to Quechua. It is notable that ritual language remains largely Aymara. The main fieldwork on which this paper is based was carried out during extended stays 1972-1974 and 1986-1987, and a number of shorter visits. While obviously there have been enormous changes in indigenous communities, I am confident that at the time of writing the practices and beliefs that I describe were still current. For this reason I use the ethnographic present.

³This belief is grounded in the material reality of *chullpa* remains, since before the Christian evangelization of the Andean region the dead were regularly mummified by dessication and worshipped by the living.

⁴Babies are ‘baptized’ within a few days of birth by a high-status lay person in the local community (for example, the anthropologist). In this ceremony the baby is defined as a Christian, by the salt placed on its lips, the sign of the cross in water on its forehead, and by the recitation of prayers from the breviary.

⁵*Jant'aku* is any cloth or skin used to ensure that people do not sit or lie directly on the ground.

⁶In fact as we have seen, parents ensure that an initial rite of baptism is performed within the rural community a few days after the baby's birth, if priests are far away. Otherwise if the baby dies, it must be buried in the wild for the mountain deities to consume, and its spirit

may cause trouble to the living in the future. This initial rite is confirmed later by a full baptism in church.

⁷ This idea perhaps accords with some theological conceptualizations of the mass as a 'living sacrifice' on the part of the congregation, although belief that God is fed with the bread and wine of the mass is remote from orthodox understanding of the mass as a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ by which the congregation is spiritually nourished.

⁸ There may be other reasons that the peasants did not make explicit, for example that they have a special historical relationship with Chayanta and its patronal saints (Platt, Bouysse-Cassagne and Harris 2004).

⁹ The term 'devotion' which properly refers to the attitude of the worshipper, has in this instance been transferred wholesale to the holy image (see Christian 1972:47).

¹⁰ Conversely, the mass can also be used as a way of warding off evil and harm. A Canadian Oblate priest working in the mining district of Northern Potosí told me that he had been approached by a peasant asking him to say mass 'for a head' (*cabezapaj*). Mystified, he asked what was meant by this. In reply the man opened his bundle and produced a severed human head, which was causing him and his family a lot of trouble. The priest refused to offer mass on this occasion. Monast also reports that he was asked sometimes to say a 'cursing mass' (*misa de maldición*), and he too refused (1969:211). The implication is that some Bolivian priests would accede to such requests.

¹¹ Many myths recount how a particular image came to live in a particular spot. Often this involves wandering from one place to another, or being stolen by jealous neighbours, until the saint decides for itself where it will live (Morote Best 1988; Sallnow 1987).

¹² In the late 1980s when enthusiasm for *mamita Urqupiña* (August 15th) near the city of Cochabamba was at its height, the Bolivian national airline issued advertisements in the

papers, warning that passengers trying to board a plane with large rocks from the shrine in their hand luggage would be prevented from doing so.

¹³In Sallnow's account the role of miracles in popular Catholicism in the Cusco region is rather different, more in line with the theological notion of thaumaturgy (1987:54-5)

¹⁴One female saint who is regularly invoked -- santa Barbara, the patron of artillery and identified as one of the triple aspects of the lightning deity -- is in fact treated as male.

¹⁵The modernising campaigns of both the reformist priesthood and of secular officials such as teachers and subprefects have led by the beginning of the twenty-first century to the suppression of most *tinkus* in Northern Potosí.

¹⁶From the Spanish *novena*, a supplicatory act of worship, originally a pilgrimage of nine days (Christian 1972:60).

¹⁷Penance in Catholic Christianity is a sacrament mediated by the priest, and so it was in colonial practice (Marzal 1983:285-6). In the standard Confessional of 1585, the question "Have you confessed with any native sorcerer?" was the third question pertaining to the First Commandment, signalling its importance (Barnes 1992:75). The collective nature of the act of penance described here is in marked contrast to individual confession, which is very uncommon for the peasants, unless they have been trained as catechists by the Reform clergy.

¹⁸At the feast of the virgin of Pitunisa, after performing the ritual of penance on the journey people tied knots in the *ichu* grass above the shrine to 'tie up their sins' (*juch ch'inuña*) and leave them behind there. In addition to the calendrical feasts, the ritual of 'asking pardon' of God may be performed with the bamboo pipes at other moments of crisis.

¹⁹The tinku this cross was taken to was that of *mamita Rosario* in the colonial village of Aymaya, patron of the potato crops, the staple food of the highland populations.

²⁰The nails painted on these large crucifixes are interpreted by the peasants as *anti*, which are the rattles made of a composite of metal objects used by spirit mediums to call up the spirits. Hence the particular association of the cross -- and its painted images of objects associated with the Passion -- with curing. Saint James was identified from the earliest arrival of the Spanish with the lightning God *Illapa*, closely identified with the sun, whose powers are especially used in healing (Silverblatt 1988, Platt 1997). The round stones used by the spirit mediums are said to be the 'bullets' or slingshot of God/Lightning, and they must also hear mass in order to retain their efficacy (Platt 1987).

²¹ While *tata Kimsa Mujuna* is a 'miracle', *tata san Sebastián* is only a 'devotion'.

²² In this respect Andean Catholicism is quite different from the pattern found in more fundamentalist branches of Christian practice. Birgit Meyer's analysis of Ewe Pentecostalism in Ghana is a particularly clear example of the unambiguous association of the Devil with the past, and with pre-Christian practices (1999).

²³ There is evidence in the historical sources for the presence of a number of different orders in the region in the mid-sixteenth century -- Franciscans, Jesuits and Mercedarians, as well as secular priests (Platt, Bouysse-Cassagne & Harris 2004).

²⁴ Stories of this kind are analysed by Howard-Malverde (1990) and Molina Rivero (1986).

²⁵ As William Christian has noted for Spain, aspects of religious cult which are today seen as deriving from the 'little' tradition of a local peasantry, in fact correspond to what was official church policy in previous periods (1972).

²⁶ Sixteenth century documents are full of references to the need to ensure that the indians 'hear mass'.

²⁷Such stories usually refer to moments when an animal is being sacrificed in the community; the rejection of blood sacrifice is of course a leitmotif of both the Old and the New Testaments.

²⁸The ritual feeding of the *saxras* is usually written as *mesa* – the Spanish word for table, in order to avoid identifying it with the mass. However in Aymara there is no phonetic distinction between i and e.

²⁹See Kamsteeg 1993. In practice there is often backsliding among protestant converts, especially in rural communities, where access to community land and cooperative labour is closely linked to the periodic sacrificial offerings to the landscape deities (Spier 1993).

³⁰Tacna marka exists in geographical reality as a town on the southern Peruvian coast to the west of the Andean chain. It is a matter for speculation why the Laymis identify this place as the place of the dead, a view that does not seem to be widely shared by other groups in Northern Potosi.

³¹Monast reports the belief in Carangas that people should not get married until they know how to pray in Spanish or Latin (1969:227-8; see also Irurozqui 1994:392)).

³²In La Paz I have participated in curing sessions with a famous healer who recited Padre Nuestro and Ave Maria some thirty times each. He had been a sacristan in his earlier life and so he knew much of the prayer book off by heart, and this was one of the sources of his powers as a healer.

³³This interpretation is reinforced by the observation of Paula Sainz during his visit to Chayanta (the colonial name of Northern Potosí) in 1795, that at the feast of All Saints the priest and his assistants would go among the drunken peasants praying for the souls of the dead, and receiving a *real* coin for each prayer (quoted in Sala i Vila 1994:347).

³⁴Monast reports that in Carangas masses for the souls are offered to the dead themselves, rather than to God in the name of the soul (1969:45). Similarly, Christian notes that until the twentieth century it was accepted practice in parts of Spain to pray directly to, as opposed to for, the souls in Purgatory (1972: 94).

³⁵Saignes has argued that in sixteenth century Bolivia the use of the Spanish language by indigenous people in drunken rituals was a means of communicating with their native gods (1989). Similarly, Harvey (1991) suggests that the common use of Spanish in drunken speech in the Peruvian Andes is both a means of reflecting on the ambiguities of power, and a means of expressing the potency of the 'animate landscape' -- what I refer to as the devils.

³⁶But I have argued elsewhere that the concept of syncretism is inherently contradictory, since it evokes the incompatible points of origin of the two blended traditions in a way that detabilises the status of the new mix (Harris 1995).

³⁷Nock's theological study of the significance of conversion is an excellent early text (1933). Recently the studies of anthropologists such as Meyer (1998), van Dijk (2000), and Engelke (2004) concerning fundamentalist and evangelical groups in different parts of Africa have highlighted the temporal schemes involved in conversion, or in van Dijk's case re-conversion. However the case I am considering is very different, since it concerns not new converts, but people whose Christianity goes back four centuries or more.

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