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Spiritual Discourse in the Jesuit Missions: The Role of Nature in the Evangelization of Peru (Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries)

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Abstract

The article explores how, notwithstanding their suspicions that the devil could take advantage of the animistic beliefs of Peru's native inhabitants to consolidate idolatry, the Jesuit missionaries ultimately became more understanding of the spiritual Andean worldview. From St. Ignatius of Loyola's postulate of "Contemplation to Obtain Love" in the *Spiritual Exercises*, by which God is acting and present in nature and inhabits creatures, and thanks to their continuous contact with the aboriginal population, the Jesuit missionaries were able to better understand the indigenous relationship with nature, for example through natural medicine and pharmacopoeia. They were therefore able to bridge some gaps in an intercultural exchange that produced forms of religious hybridization that are still a feature of Andean Christianity today.

Keywords

idolatry – Andean spirituality – evangelization – Jesuit Peruvian mission – intercultural spirituality

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Introduction[1]

Anthropological studies claim that the *longue durée* of evangelization in the Andes resulted in a syncretism that came to define the contemporary religion of Peru's native rural and urban people.[2] According to this perspective, the religious elements of this syncretism had "crystallized" by the second half of the seventeenth century.[3] However, the analysis of Juan Carlos Estenssoro,[4] which offers a particularly valuable insight into this amalgamation of both cultures, Western and Andean, reveals that it was more complex than a straightforward synthesis—the two cultures instead underwent reciprocal negotiations and adaptations over the centuries.

In different ways, each perspective affirms the crystallization of a process that would define an "Andean Christianity" by which a standardized language would be developed at the same time as Christian beliefs were assimilated. This language was appropriated and often adopted by indigenous people in their endeavor to gain access to colonial power.

This article uses these studies to ground its understanding of the interaction between Hispanic and Andean spiritual/religious beliefs and practices, as the historical, ethnohistorical, and linguistic sources are undoubtedly essential for understanding the roots of the intercultural dialogue produced in colonial Peru. However, the role of the missionaries' spiritual discourse has received less attention, despite being essential to understand how the encounter between Western and indigenous cultures was sustained. Although the role of nature in colonial discourses has been explored from ethnohistorical and

1 This research is part of the R+D+i Project "Ethics and Cosmopolitan Justice in the Iberian School of Peace and Ibero-American Scholasticism: Contributions of Jesuit Thought and Tradition" (PEMOSJ2), ref. PID2020-112904RB-I00, Agencia Estatal de Investigación, Gobierno de España. Principal investigators Prof. Juan Antonio Senent-De Frutos (PI1) and Prof. Eduardo Ibáñez Ruiz del Portal (PI2).

2 Manuel Marzal, *El sincretismo iberoamericano* (Lima: PUC, 1988); Luis Millones "Mesianismo en América hispana: El Taki Onqoy," *Memoria Americana* 15 (2007): 7–39; Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez, "Otra vez sobre sincretismo," in *Los rostros de la tierra encantada: Religión, evangelización y sincretismo en el Nuevo Mundo; Homenaje a Manuel Marzal*, ed. José Sánchez Paredes and Marco Curatola Petrocchi (Lima: IFEA-PUC, 2013), 503–22; Ramón Mujica, *La imagen transgredida: Ensayos de iconografía peruana y sus políticas de representación simbólica* (Lima: Congreso de la República, 2016).

3 George Kubler, "The Quechua in the Colonial World," in *Handbook of South American Indians*, ed. Julian Steward (Washington, DC: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1946), 2:331–410; Xavier Albó, "Jesuitas y culturas indígenas: Perú 1568–1606; Su actitud, métodos y criterios de aculturación," *América indígena* 26, nos. 4–5 (1966): 249–308; Manuel Marzal, *La transformación religiosa* (Lima: PUC, 1983); Marzal, *El sincretismo iberoamericano*.

4 Juan Carlos Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santidad* (Lima: IFEA, 2003).

anthropological perspectives, my intention here is to incorporate nature into an analysis of the contents of the Jesuit missionary's mind. Due to a Jesuit's specific spiritual formation, we can better understand some variables of the "negotiations," exchanges, and adaptations underlying the elaboration of an "Andean Christianity."

In their natural desire to overcome differences, pre-Jesuit missionaries found similarities between Western and Andean culture that provided bridges or anchors to the past and even the probable shadow of a faded apostolic preaching.[5] Quechua terms were used to translate Western concepts, and original melodies were adapted to place evangelical contents in them. However, these hybrid products engendered confusion, which was interpreted as resulting from the devil's efforts to deceive the native population. The legend of an apostolic transmission, according to which Saint Bartholomew (*c.*1–*c.*69 CE) had passed through Peru, where he would have preached the Gospel to the indigenous population, was also viewed as problematic, since it assumed that there had already been an apostolic evangelization prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. As Estenssoro recalls, this story was dangerous because

> the survival of an American apostolic church in the hands of the Indians, historically independent of the authority of Rome, would threaten a church that only admitted to being, above all, indivisible. This would have intolerable implications. One aspect of the [...] hypothesis, itself irrefutable, was tempting. On the other hand, it had the smell of schism or anathema.[6]

5 Several chroniclers identify, as images of a single God, Andean deities such as (Cuniraya) Viracocha or Pachacamac. See Pierre Duviols, *Escritos de historia andina*, vol. 1 (Lima: IFEA-BNP, 2016), and Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santidad*, 106. The myth continued with the identification of the Andean hero Tunupa with the apostle Thomas (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* [Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994 (1520)]; Joan de Betanzos, *Suma y narración de los incas: Seguida del discurso sobre la descendencia y gobierno de los Incas* [Madrid: Polifemo, 2004 (1551)]; Pedro Cieza de León, *Crónica del Perú*: *El señorío de los Incas* [Caracas: Fundación Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2005 (1554)]) and was extended toward the beginning of the seventeenth century by Ludovico Bertonio, *Arte de la lengua aymara, con una silva de phrases de la misma lengua, y su declaracion en Romance* (Chucuito: Francisco del Canto, 1612); Santa Cruz Pachacuti Salcamaygua, *Relación de antigüedades de este reino del Perú* (México, D.F.: Fondo de cultura económica, 1995 [1613]); Alonso Ramos Gavilán, *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Copacabana* (La Paz: Academia Boliviana de la Historia, 1976 [1621]); and Antonio de la Calancha, *Crónicas agustinianas del Perú* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1972 [1639]).

6 Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santidad*, 133.

The fears of schism, heresy, or heterodoxy were not unfounded. The Jesuits' arrival coincided with the heresy of the most prominent leader of the Dominicans, Fray Francisco de la Cruz (1529–78), which facilitated Jesuit influence due to their participation in the Third Council of Lima (1582–83), centered on the orthodoxy of the policies of evangelization.[7] In the period that followed, the Jesuits would tenaciously combat heterodoxy. However, it is easy to overlook the fact that in the midst of this process of intercultural encounter, a great deal of discernment—of similarities and differences—continued to operate in their minds and hearts.

This is the starting point for this article's focus on the underlying Jesuit spiritual discourse in their missionary apostolate in Peru they would later use in other regions of South America. This discourse arose from the content and practice of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola (*c.*1491–1556), which, together with the Scholastic theology that emerged in the School of Salamanca, followed in the footsteps of the *semina verbi* of the patristic tradition, according to which some vestiges of the Christian revelation could be found in the Andes as traces of ancient apostolic preaching, as explained earlier. An Ignatian spiritual narrative, in which a god was active in nature and history (a central element of Loyola's spiritual theology), was added to this mythical construct. Despite the Jesuits' almost instinctive rejection of the pantheon of native beliefs as "idolatrous," this narrative would serve as an anchor to understand the indigenous sensitivity to the divinization of nature.

Following a brief presentation of some features of Andean spirituality and religiosity, the article develops this point further before investigating the internal conflicts that the Jesuit missionaries experienced. As we will see, the Jesuits were divided between their intention to see the presence of God in nature and their concern that the indigenous population could use this presence as the basis for their "idolatries."[8] Before examining these features, I briefly present Andean spirituality and religiosity, as doing so will allow me to analyze some of the dilemmas the missionaries faced.

7 Jesuit documentation mentions the leading role of Jesuits, especially of José de Acosta, in the council: see, e.g., a letter written in Lima, October 30, 1585, from Father Juan de Atienza to Superior General Claudio Acquaviva, in *Monumenta Peruana*, vol. 3, *1581–1585*, ed. Fernando Egaña (Rome: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, 1961), 706–7.

8 See Diego de Altamirano's *Historia de la provincia Peruana de la Compañía de Jesús*, ed. Juan Dejo et al. (Lima: UARM, 2021 [1704]).

The Spirituality and Religiosity of the Andean People: Some Coordinates

Ethnohistorians have done a commendable job of verifying documentary sources, guided by suspicions of Western stereotypes underlying the stories transmitted to Spanish chroniclers by Andean leaders.[9] However, few analyses have been carried out from the perspective of historical anthropology.

The Jesuit Manuel Marzal (1931–2005) perceived this underlying problem in his analysis of a letter to King Philip IV (1605–65, r.1621–65) of July 20, 1657, written by the Dominican Francisco de la Cruz (d.1660) (namesake of the one executed by the Inquisition almost a century earlier). In the letter, Cruz laments the difficulties involved in adequately transmitting the Christian faith to the native Andeans due to the absence of a concept of "a transcendental and universal God since the indigenous people believed in intramundane and local gods."[10] For Marzal, the problem resided in their lack of "abstract thinking":

> The Indians do not perceive God as transcendent, because in their language there is no word that translates such a concept and because the "huacas"[11] are not given true worship. They are given simple reverence, similar to that which they pay to the elders or the *corregidores*, as can be seen from the analysis of the way the word was used. It is a fundamentally linguistic analysis.[12]

De la Cruz emphasizes how the "invisibility" or "immateriality" of the Christian God makes it difficult for them to accept the existence of the Western God. He attributes this "error" to the intervention of the devil, whose function was

9 Albó, "Jesuitas y culturas indígenas"; Franklin Pease, *Los últimos incas del Cuzco* (Lima: P. L. Villanueva, 1976 [1972]); Pease, *El dios creador andino* (Lima: Mosca azul, 1973); María Rostworowski, *Estructuras andinas del poder: Ideología religiosa y política* (Lima: IEP, 1983); Rostworowski, *Historia del Tahuantinsuyu* (Lima: IEP, 1988); Duviols, *Escritos de historia andina*; Gabriela Ramos, ed., *La venida del reino: Religión, evangelización y cultura en América; Siglos XVI–XX* (Cuzco: Centro de estudios regionales andinos Bartolomé de las Casas, 1994).

10 Marzal, *La transformación religiosa*, 135.

11 The concept of *huaca* (or *waka*) has a wide variety of meanings that can be synthesized into the idea of "sacred" or transcendent, albeit in relation to the forces of nature. Among the varied bibliography, see Claudia Brosseder, *The Power of* Huacas: *Change and Resistance in the Andean World of Colonial Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); César Itier, "'Huaca,' un concepto andino mal entendido," *Chungara revista de antropología chilena* 53, no. 3 (2021): 480–90, http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0717-73562021005001902 (accessed November 11, 2022).

12 Marzal, *La transformación religiosa*, 135.

to deceive and thereby impede the proper conversion of the natives. Marzal similarly attributes the problem to the Andean people's "lack of abstraction."[13]

Religious systems of an animistic nature are shaped by stories resulting from anthropomorphic projection onto the plethora of supernatural beings that are considered divinities, establishing relations of kinship between them analogous to those of humans. Both animism and polytheism are therefore different modes of abstraction in which the link with the immanence of nature is not an obstacle to coexisting with a belief in transcendent realities. It is often forgotten that Christian theology is built on the basis of an abstract thought inherited from Greek rationality and is not a universal framework, as was originally believed at the beginning of Christian history.

Marzal's assertion that Andean thought lacks abstraction therefore merits greater nuance. Certainly, the thought of the pre-Hispanic people was different from that of Western thought, as it can be located in the context of an animistic framework.[14] In certain regions, the paradigm is complicated by pantheons with supernatural entities that in the West are "individualized" as *divinities*. This pattern of divinities coexisted with the animist structure that endures to this day as in the rest of the religions of the Western and Eastern world and that historically precedes the abstractions that later constituted divine pantheons.

The structure of pan-Andean animism corresponds to a spirituality based on a worldview in which the objects, the ("spiritual") forces that underlie the activity of nature, are conceived as entities with which the Andean people established relations of reciprocity, an "ontology of seeing objects outside humans as physically different entities but inwardly similar to those of man, as a discontinuity of bodies but a continuation of spirit. It allows people to give land, animals, water, etc. a subjectivity that results in various types of complex relationships and exchange."[15]

13 Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Thetford: MacMillan Press, 1978); Radhika Shivhare and Cherukuri Aswani Kumar, "On the Cognitive Process of Abstraction," *Procedia Computer Science* 89 (2016): 243–52, doi: 10.1016/j.procs.2016.06.051 (accessed November 11, 2022); Vicente Santuc, *Antropología existencial, para una filosofía de la expresión obediente* (Lima: UARM, 2014); James Deavenport, "Messiahs in the Selva: Jesuit Missions, the History of Ideas, and the Continuing Struggles toward Human and Ecological Rights in Upper Amazonia," *Global Studies Journal* 8, no. 3 (2015): 91–110.

14 Philippe Descola, *Au-delà de la nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005); Daniela di Salvia, "Contribución a la ontología animista andina: Funciones, poderes y figuras en los cultos telúricos de los Andes sur-peruanos," *Revista española de antropología americana* 97, no. 46 (2016): 97–116.

15 Jessica Pusch, "Un giro ontológico en la cosmovisión de la naturaleza: El papel del capitalismo y otras influencias en el cambio de las percepciones tradicionales de la naturaleza en la comunidad Quechua de Paru Paru," Independent Study Project (ISP)

The persistence of this paradigm in Andean belief systems demonstrates the strength of the spiritual dimension over religiosity, understood as the various systemic interpretations that, through increasingly abstract narratives, channel and shape functions of social control with an organizational and therefore political purpose.

The Andean world is no stranger to this form of thinking from other latitudes and times, two dimensions of which have subsisted up to the present day: (1) a spirituality anchored in a relationship with the forces of nature (which some call relational ontology), and (2) religious systems that overlapped with Christianity during the colonial period.[16] Thus, while the religious dimension linked to rituals, doctrines, and narratives established by the Inca regime was uniformly supplanted along the Andes by the Christian discourse,[17] the dimension that we call Andean spirituality remained deeply rooted in culture and continued to maintain the social networks of community support, establishing new "alliances" with the Christian discourse.[18]

The Jesuit Narrative of "How God Lives within Creatures"

The theology elaborated by the first Jesuits aligns with classical Scholasticism and generally follows the principles systematized by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224/25–74) and the eleventh rule of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*—"To Think with the Church."[19] In Scholasticism, movement is intrinsic to the concept of "nature" as understood in Aristotelian philosophy. From this perspective, the

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Collection, 2792 (2018): https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2792 (accessed November 11, 2022); Michael W. Scott, "What I'm Reading: The Anthropology of Ontology (Religious Science?)," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 859–72; Kimberley Raas, "*De humanos y no humanos*: Reflexiones y debates actuales en la antropología de los Andes," *Revista chilena de antropología* 42 (2020): 95–111.

16 Pease, *El dios creador andino*; Pease, *Los últimos incas*.

17 Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santiddad*; Gabriela Ramos and Henrique Urbano, eds., *Catolicismo y extirpación de idolatrías: Siglos XVI–XVIII* (Cusco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos "Bartolomé de las Casas," 1993); Gabriela Ramos, ed., *La venida del reino: Religión, evangelización y cultura en América; Siglos XVI–XX* (Cuzco: Centro de estudios regionales andinos "Bartolomé de las Casas," 1994).

18 Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz, "[…] *por decir Dios Trino y Uno, dijo Dios tres y uno son cuatro*: The Christian Trinity and the Multiplicity of Andean Deities; Indigenous Beliefs and the Instruction of the Christian Doctrine in Quechua," *Colonial Latin American Review* 25, no. 4 (2016): 414–44; Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz, "Deities and Spirits in Andean Belief: Towards a Systematisation," *Anthropos* 112, no. 2 (2018): 443–53.

19 Ignatius of Loyola, *Obras completas* (Madrid: Biblioteca de autores españoles, 1991): [363], 303–4.

nature of things depends on the purpose to which they all obey, driven by the good that is none other than God, the origin of this intrinsic dynamism. From this perspective, the entities move toward a single *common greater good*, converging toward the idea that any good will be more divine if it is more universal. Saint Ignatius uses this assertion as a *motto* to make the Jesuit mission more intelligible. The expression "universal good" as the spiritual purpose of the institution is repeated twenty-eight times in the *Constitutions* of the Jesuit order and reflects a perspective that we would today call "global":

> The more universal the good is, the more it is divine. Hence preference ought to be given to persons and places that, once benefited themselves, are a cause of extending the good to many others who are under their influence or take guidance from them. For that reason, the spiritual aid that is given to important and public persons ought to be regarded as more important, since it is a more universal good. This is true whether these persons are laymen such as princes, lords, magistrates, or administrators of justice, or whether they are clerics such as prelates. This holds true also of spiritual aid given to persons who are distinguished for learning and authority, for the same reason of the good being more universal. For that same reason, too, preference ought to be shown to the aid that is given to large nations such as the Indies, or to important cities, or to universities, which are generally attended by numerous persons who, if aided themselves, can become workers for the help of others.[20]

Another way to explore how Saint Ignatius settled the foundations of God's inhabitation in creatures is from the contemplation of nature,[21] which, as detailed in the last part of the *Spiritual Exercises*, is a prayer preparing for the "contemplation in action" and picturing reality as inhabited by divinity:

> To look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling, in men giving them to understand, and so in me, giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation and making me to understand; likewise making a temple of me, being created to the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty; […] to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth—that is, behaves like one who labors—as in the heavens,

20 Loyola, *Obras completas*, 598.

21 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* (Cincinnati: Benziger Bros., 1947), I–II, q. 1, a. 1; I–IIae, q. 6, a. 1.

> elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc. Then to reflect on myself.[22]

Despite not having developed a systematic theology, Ignatius synthesized Scholastic cosmology into a principle of understanding nature, allowing his followers to look for the traces of God in natural or historical reality. In the core recommendations of the *Constitutions*, the founder warns that new members of the order

> should often be exhorted to *seek God our Lord in all things*, removing from themselves as far as possible love of all creatures in order to place it in the Creator of them, loving him in all creatures and all creatures in him, in conformity with his holy and divine will.[23]

All entities or beings lead to God and cannot be confused with him. The missionary impulse of the Jesuit order was born with this foundational understanding.

The model of contemplation of reality as a sign of the greatness of the Christian God was undoubtedly part of the Renaissance paradigm, as Fray Luis de León (1527–91) indicated in his approval of the *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Natural and moral history of the Indies) of José de Acosta (1540–1600): "Worthy of all reading, so that you praise God for how wonderful he is in his works."[24] In this perspective, the study of nature in Acosta is founded on the theological and contemplative purpose of praising God as stated in the "Principle and Foundation" of the *Spiritual Exercises* [23]: "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created."[25]

The Conflicts of *Seeing* God in the Pre-Hispanic Past

Acosta's arrival in Peru in 1570 coincided with the discovery of the fragility of the first evangelization due to the permanence of "idolatrous" beliefs. Estenssoro has studied how these idolatries resulted from the confusion caused by the

22 Loyola, *Obras completas*, 273.

23 Loyola, *Obras completas*, 526.

24 Jaime Marroquín Arredondo, *"La historia natural* de José de Acosta y la *Física del globo* de Alexander von Humboldt," Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos: Débats (2019), http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/77934 (accessed November 11, 2022).

25 Loyola, *Obras completas*, 228–29.

semantic and "intercultural" bridges used by the first missionaries to transmit the Christian faith. By highlighting the indigenous spiritual sensitivity toward nature, the first missionaries opened the door to a subtle and dangerous legitimation of the "divinization" of natural entities. For this reason, Acosta was firmly against using the relationship with nature to anchor the Andean people's faith in the Christian God:

> [Superstitions] [...] are so widespread among our barbarians that the kinds of sacrifices and *guacas*[26] cannot be counted: it does not matter if it is mountains, slopes, prominent rocks, springs that flow gently, rivers that run quickly, high peaks of rocks, huge mounds of sand, the dark whirlwind of an abyss, the gigantic carving of a thousand-year-old tree, indicating the vein of a metal deposit, a less usual or a little more elegant form of any stone. In short, and to say it all at once, as soon as the barbarians discover that something stands out among the other beings of their species, they instantly recognize a divinity there and worship it without a moment's hesitation. The mountains are full of this most hateful plague of idolatry, the valleys, the towns, the houses, the roads are full, and there is no piece of Peruvian land that is free from this kind of sacrifice.[27]

Acosta's refusal to recognize the Andean sensitivity toward nature contrasts with the Jesuit *mestizo* Blas Valera (1544–97), one of the first Jesuit vocations in the country.[28] Known as the "Anonymous Jesuit,"[29] Valera emphasized the Andeans' "invisible" divinity (therefore drawing an analogy with the Christian God), Illa Tecce Viracocha, who in turn created other divinities. In so doing,

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26 See footnote 11, above.

27 José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1987 [1588]), lib. 5, 9, 11, 257.

28 Sabine Hyland, *The Jesuit and the Incas: The Extraordinary Life of Padre Blas Valera, S.J.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Hyland, *Gods of the Andes: An Early Jesuit Account of Inca Religion and Andean Christianity* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

29 "Blas Valera is the Anonymous Jesuit, Author of *De las costumbres antiguas de los naturales del Pirú*" was the title of the presentation of the Jesuit Enrique Fernández in 1991, later published by the archbishopric of Arequipa: *La evangelización del Perú: Siglos XVI y XVII; Actas del Primer Congreso Peruano de Historia Eclesiástica* (Arequipa: Arzobispado de Arequipa, 1992), 217–32. Sabine Hyland also attributes its authorship to the Jesuit from Chachapoyas: Hyland, *Jesuit and the Incas*. Similarly, José Cárdenas Bunsen has identified Valera as the author of the printed bilingual (Quechua–Spanish) dictionary published after the Third Council of Lima, "Circuitos del conocimiento: *El Arte de la lengua índica* de Valera y su inclusión en las polémicas sobre el Sacro Monte de Granada," *Lexis* 38, no. 1 (2014): 71–116.

Valera views nature not as an object of idolatry but as a place to worship that invisible God:

> The natural places were heavens, elements, sea, earth, mountains, creeks, mighty rivers, fountains or springs, deep lakes or lagoons, caves, sliced living rocks, mountain tops; all of which things were revered by them, not because they understood that there was some divinity or virtue of heaven, or that it was a living being, but because they believed that the great God Illa Tecce had created and placed it there and marked it with a particular and unique object, different from what commonly other places of that genre have, to serve as a sacred place and as a sanctuary where he and the other gods were worshipped.[30]

In this emphasis on rescuing nature as a place of veneration—to reflect that *invisible God*—Valera leaves open the possibility of advocating a view of this reverence as an indigenous symptom of spiritual sensitivity rather than a sign of idolatry. Instead of being idolaters, the Andean people had a contemplative sensitivity that potentially allowed them to understand the permeating "presence" of the dynamic God of the so-called "Contemplation to Obtain Love," the procedure that closes Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. However, in his eagerness to discard the intrinsically "pagan" character of the native people, Valera tangentially—and dangerously—confers a certain legitimacy to the particular connection of indigenous people with nature by means of their spiritual reverence while in turn detaching it from any sense of idolatry,

> which is seen by the prayers they made when they knelt or prostrated or were standing in such a place, since they did not speak to the mountain, bridge, river, or cave, but with the great Illa Tecce Viracocha, who was claimed to be in heaven and in that place invisibly. And this mode was very ordinary among Peruvians. And these natural places were called differently in their language, such as the Apachita hills, the Huaca caves, the Orcos mountains, the Pucyu springs, and the Hahua Pacha skies. And they did not revere all the mountains and hills, all the springs and rivers, but only those in which there was some singularity worthy of particular consideration, considering them sacred places […].[31]

30 Jesuita Anónimo, *Relación de las costumbres antiguas de los naturales del Perú* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas; Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 209, Crónicas Peruanas de Interés Indigena, 1968 [1594]), 151–89, here 157.

31 Jesuita Anónimo, *Relación de las costumbres antiguas*, 157.

Some lines later, he recognizes the possibility that the devil could have taken advantage of this link between natural sites as "sacred" spaces to disguise a variety of gods' appearances, thus engendering idolatry. He nevertheless tried to make the point that what must prevail is the reverential bond between the Andean people and the elements of nature, whether cosmic or earthly.

Acosta and Valera can accordingly be read as opposing Jesuit standpoints with respect to their understanding of Andean religiosity at the time of the deployment of their missionary activities during the Third Council of Lima,[32] where they established the policy of avoiding cultural borrowings that had generated confusion (i.e., "idolatries")[33] during the first evangelization.

The official Jesuit discourse led by Acosta dismissed this kind of hermeneutics, judging the analogical reasoning as a strategy of the devil, who took advantage of the Andean people's veneration of nature to usurp the reverence that was only due to the unique God. The *Spiritual Exercises* also contained the ancient spiritual Christian notion that in spiritual progress one should be attentive to the flow of thoughts (*logismoi*, as expressed by Evagrius of Pontus [345–99]),[34] as they could be used by the devil to deceive with false reasoning under the appearance of good (*sub angelo lucis*).[35]

The rejection of any discourse that tried to bridge the pre-Hispanic spiritual sensitivity toward nature, and the increased opposition to the confusions of religious hybridizations, displaced the search for similarities in the Andean past toward analogies and metaphors. Valera is the most solid example of this shift among the Jesuits of that generation.

32 José Antonio Benito, Luis Martínez Ferrer, and José Luis Gutiérrez García, eds., *Tercer Concilio Limense:* (*1583–1591*), bilingual ed. (Lima: Facultad de Teología Pontificia y Civil de Lima, 2017).

33 One of the clearest indications of this opposition is the use of Polo de Ondegardo (1520–75) as a source; Acosta says that this is "who I commonly follow in the subjects regarding Peru" (Acosta, *Historia natural y moral*, 6, 1; similarly in *De procuranda Indorum salute*, he affirms that he was a "man of great prudence and authority" (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984 [1588]), books 5, 9.

34 Évagre le Pontique, *Sur les pensées* (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1998).

35 Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz, "Recontextualising the Sacraments: Diego González Holguín's Construction of Christian Vocabulary in Colonial Peru," in *Translating Wor(l)ds: Explaining Christianity across Cultural Boundaries*, ed. Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag, 2019), 157–98.

Toward the "Crystallization" of the Understanding of the Others' Spiritual Sensitivity

Due to the universal impulse at the core of its missionary *élan*, Loyola's spiritual discourse stimulated the search for signs of God in the fabric of other cultures. A generation after Acosta and Valera, in 1607 the pastor of Huarochirí, Father Francisco de Ávila (1573–1647), denounced the existence of idolatries in his curate.[36] As a result of this episode, the Jesuits came to realize the complexities of transmitting the Christian narrative among indigenous populations, and it must also have strengthened their eagerness to arrive at a more appropriate understanding of the Andeans' spiritual background.

Torn between their intentions to find the *semina verbi* in the Andean culture while being discouraged by not converting the native inhabitants, they witnessed a new stage in the "crystallization" of Andean religiosity, according to Marzal. This is the same period, 1640, in which Estenssoro finds the indigenous population "renouncing" their Indian identity in order to be accepted as competent subjects for sanctity.[37]

In this process, the Jesuits were able to reach a better appreciation of indigenous spiritual sensitivity in its interaction with nature. However, this did not mean that they disregarded the obligation to convert to Christianity as a *sine qua non* for the validation of the spirituality of the indigenous people. But as the mutual knowledge of the cultures grew, the missionaries arrived at a better understanding of the connection that the natives had with the elements of nature, as a tendency to make of it an object of reverence, not just a space to be fooled by the devil's deceptions.

An example of this more objective process to the study of nature in the Andean world can be found in the work of Bernabé Cobo (1582–1657), whose monumental *Historia del Nuevo Mundo* (History of the New World) was written toward the end of his life, in 1653. Although fragmented, it would become known thanks to a nineteenth-century edition.[38]

With a structure similar to that of Acosta's *Natural and Moral History*, the first volume begins with a cosmology inspired by the philosophy of the ancient Greeks tinted with Scholasticism, focusing on the nature of the Indies, with a detailed description of the natural kingdom of Peru. The idea of a cosmic order

36 Pierre Duviols, *La destrucción de las religiones andinas* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977).

37 Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santidad*, 123, 131, 251.

38 Bernabé Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, ed. Marcos Jimenez de la Espada, 4 vols. (Seville: Imp. de E. Rasco, 1891–93 [1653]).

that leads humanity to reach its ultimate end, which is the pinnacle of order and the common good, follows the Renaissance and Jesuit perspective of contemplating the harmony of the world:

> From this admirable order and subordination that shines forth in the universe, both from its parts to each other and from all to their maker, it follows that, with nature being almost infinite, different, and unlike the parts that compose it, it is truly said that it is one because of this harmony with which all agree unanimously and in conformity for the common good of the same universe, and because for the benefit of order, the world is called one.[39]

Cobo's perspective is that of a scientist who seeks greater objectivity. Nevertheless, his detailed description of the plants is inspired by the contemplative observation of the church fathers, who see that "God gave the plants the being and state that nature demanded of each one, attentive to the quality of the climate of the place where they were born."[40]

Similarly, Cobo criticizes the limited capacity of the natives to understand nature in a more scientific way, as can be seen when talking about the case of the *achuma* (or "San Pedro cactus"):

> This is a plant with which the devil deceived the Indians of Peru when they were pagans, which they used for their deceits and superstitions. Because its juice alters the senses in a way that those who take it see themselves as dead, and some do die, because of the great coldness that the brain receives. Transported by this drink, the Indians dream all kinds of nonsense and believe it as if it were the truth. It has a cold temperament in the third degree and humid in the second, its juice is taken in warm weather against the heating of the kidneys, and if drunk in small quantities, it is good against long fevers, against jaundice, and urinary burning.[41]

Thus, Cobo overcomes the explanation of the "devil's deception," a simplistic argument used among the defenders of orthodoxy decades before him and instead proposes a more objective or "scientific" reason for the natives' ignorance. While his accounts of idolatries are interspersed with harsh criticisms of

39 Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 1:lib. 1, 2, 23.
40 Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 1:lib. 1, 4, 33.
41 Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 1:lib. 5, 7, 451.

native medicine (*curanderismo*) as being intrinsically idolatrous, at the same time he also values its medicinal properties:

> They never used compounded medicines. Their cures are all with simple herbs, and among them were some great herbalists, from whom we learned the virtues of many plants that *we now use in our cures*. Also, with some, they make fermentations and perfumes, which they apply for fever and other ailments.[42]

To a large extent, the description of the plant kingdom made by the Jesuit is a pharmacopoeia.[43] What, therefore, is the line that divides *curanderismo* and its links to sorcery from native "medicine"? This is not clear from the work of Cobo. For this reason, the Jesuit instead reinforces the impression of ambiguity through which the missionaries had to navigate in their interpretations.

I nevertheless believe that the indications left by Jesuits like Cobo gradually added nuance to the stigma of idolatry and demonization placed on healers and "sorcerers," following the pattern of discernment of the *Spiritual Exercises* (discerning the good from the bad). As a result, they were probably more inclined to conclude that not everything was due to the deceptions of the devil but to a sensitivity to nature that required clarification through greater objectivity. In this process, they were able to better understand the spiritual and universal dimension that manifested itself in the Andean knowledge of nature: "Although barbaric people with little knowledge, as the love of life is natural to all men, God impulses them to look for different ways such as preserving and defending them from what can harm and be an obstacle to them."[44] In this process of gradually coming to understand the sensitivity and "science" of the native inhabitants, the Jesuits manifested their persistence in their intention

42 Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 4:lib. 14, 10, 200–1.

43 Unfortunately, although there is an important bibliography on the Jesuits' role in colonial medicine (Sabine Anagnostou, "Jesuit Missionaries in Spanish America and the Transfer of Medical-Pharmaceutical Knowledge," *Archives internationales d'histoire des sciences* 52, no. 148 [2002]: 176–97; Anagnostou, "Jesuits in Spanish America: Contributions to the Exploration of the American Materia Medica," *Pharmacy in History* 47, no. 1 [2005]: 3–17; Franz Obermeier, ed., *Jesuit Colonial Medicine in South America: A Multidisciplinary and Comparative Approach* [Kiel: Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, 2018]), there is no specific study on the apothecary of the Colegio San Pablo de Lima, a place where missionaries undoubtedly arrived with herbal learning from their long journeys through the Andean heights; see Fernando Roca Alcázar, S.J., "La botica de san Pedro," in *San Pedro de Lima*, ed. Ramón Mujica, Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, and Juan Dejo (Lima: BCP, 2018), 129–37.

44 Cobo, *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, 4:lib. 14, 10, 199.

to find similarities, but in a different way from that of the first missionaries. If the latter tried to see traces of an evangelization in the Andean past, the Jesuit missionaries instead detected signs in nature through which to read, together with the indigenous people, the presence of their "universal" God, leading them through and toward the Christian-Occidental codes of interpretation.[45]

This transition, elaborated through the lens of Jesuit missionaries, is clearly noticeable in one of the stories in Jacinto Barrasa's (1626–1724) *Historia de las fundaciones* (History of foundations). Elaborated during the second half of the seventeenth century and in the midst of extensive accounts of the extirpations of idolatries carried out by Jesuit missionaries, it also gathers innumerable letters exchanged between the missionaries, showing the bond between religiosity and *curanderismo* that was increasingly evident to the Jesuits.

One of these stories describes the temporary missions of Cusco, in which two missionaries were able to dismantle "the lack of respect toward God and what was sacred, sacrilege, and the idolatries that were performed" by a certain type of *milagroscas*,[46] whom he qualifies as "physicians from hell." Their alleged trickery was denounced by the Jesuits, who informed the population that "only from God and natural means, applied properly, they shall seek health and life." The Jesuits dismantled the layers of deception by means of which the natives attributed power to natural forces that according to Christian spiritual logic could only be granted by God (and whose specific abstract entity, in turn, was difficult for the locals to understand). After the disclosure of the idolatrous behavior of these *curanderos* (medicine men), coincidentally, the same missionaries found a piece of white marble with some marks in the shape of a "green cross and, on one side, a candle or axe of the same color as if it was lit, ending in a red flame." This was the perfect occasion to shift the "physicality" of transcendence within the material object toward the analogy:

45 In this regard, it is worth mentioning how Gerardus (Gerard) Van der Leeuw's (1890–1950) *Phenomenology of Religion* introduced the role of power as intrinsically significant for religion and its mediations: *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986 [1938]). Analogously, we need to deepen our analysis of how the monotheistic belief reinterprets the power of nature, as Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963) did in his comprehensive study of Judaism, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

46 *Milagrosqas* ("milagro"—miracle—with the Quechua suffix -sqa) refers to people who had been subject to a supposed miraculous event that had provided them with supernatural powers. See Mario Polià, *La cosmovisión religiosa andina en los documentos inéditos del Archivo Romano de la Compañía de Jesús, 1581–1752* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial, 1999), 484.

> The miraculous sign was of great admiration to all, and with it, the missionaries demonstrated the doctrine they preached, exalting Jesus Christ, who perished on that cross for our remedy, and as a true physician and redeemer of our souls, who freed and saved us from condemnation and eternal death, and that faith in him and in his cross, would not free our whole body from diseases, if it were not convenient for us.[47]

From a symbolic image with a diffuse meaning, the missionaries seized the opportunity to elaborate the symbiosis between the Andean spiritual sensitivity centered on nature and the historical narrative of the cross of Christ. This finding, fortuitous at the same time as fortunate for Jesuit preaching, shows how the encounter between both spiritual worldviews was facilitated through the perception of signs of transcendence inside nature. The native people projected a power (and consciousness) as intrinsic to the object or phenomenon itself, while for the Christian interpretation, it was mediated by a transcendence, immaterial and invisible. There was thus a process of mental reinvention of the symbol in religious objects among the Indians, under the guide of Christian missionaries, who imposed a new dimension on it, drawing from the metaphysical transcendence associated with the historical narrative of the life of Christ.

We can therefore perceive how an object of nature was used as a bridge to a new meaning of transcendence and how the Jesuit missionaries were the vehicle to transform old signifiers, removing from the object any association with an "idol" while producing new meanings and introducing religious symbolism in the indigenous relationship with nature. The Jesuits were nonetheless aware of the persistent threat of the old habits of making an idol of the object (in this specific story, the marble). For this reason, the missionaries resorted to dogmatic explanations in order to prevent the natives from falling back into that "temptation":

> And instead of terrifying the dogmatizers and sorcerers, who in most cases were incurable, they explained that the green cross on the coat of arms of the Holy Inquisition tribunal was to investigate the idolatrous infidels to subdue or punish them with flames. That is why they placed the burning axe on the marble against the obstinate, and the green cross because nobody loses hope of forgiveness if they repent. And so, piety converts

47 Jacinto Barrasa, *Historia de las fundaciones de los colegios y casas de la Compañía de Jesús, con la noticia de las vidas y virtudes religiosas de algunos varones ilustres que en ella trabajaron*, 2 vols. (manuscript, Jesuit Historical Archives of Peru, n.d.), lib. 1, fol. 114r.

> these cases into mystery and draws even from stones the fruit of devotion and remorse for those who need them.[48]

We can therefore see a new way of understanding the elements of the Andean therapeutics and therefore of the role of nature, one that displaces the traditional Andean interpretation that takes the object as powerful in itself in order to re-signify it as a sign and mediation of a transcendence, entirely removed from all traits of immanence and temporality. With this, the Jesuits put into practice their spiritual logic of discernment, which indirectly helped them rescue the local ancestral practices while simultaneously incorporating them into a more "scientific" interpretation. Thus, power was displaced from the material objects or natural phenomena to the abstract idea of a God who does not "exist" physically in nature but is the reason why nature acts according to his will, mediated, of course, by the institutional church represented by the Jesuits.

The Jesuit missionaries' explorations of the indigenous beliefs in South America likely followed a path that started in Peru and continued in other territories. Thus, almost at the same time that Cobo, Barrasa, and other missionaries were recording their testimonies in reports and letters, Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (1585–1652) was using a similar approach in Paraguay. From this perspective, Ruiz de Montoya's *Silex del divino amor* (Firestone of divine love), a narrative of spiritual exploration within the mission itself, could be read as part of the evolution of a journey that had started in the Andes:

> The fruit of this mysterious flower is commonly called *granadilla*, due to its similarity to the pomegranate. If this is celebrated, and it is worthy that it be celebrated [...] the shape of this flower, before opening, is oval like its fruit, and contains a mysterious object that I shall tell you about. The foundation on which the globe of this flower is founded is an eye that covers it in the shape of a star, a fine green-colored one. Its leaf is divided into three parts with three points without distinction of priority or difference between them. From the point where this star-shaped leaf begins to form, the distinction between each part of the three points begins, each one distinguishing with equal proportions a needlework made of nature with the three parts distinguished without any difference in color, thickness, and perfection, a hieroglyph of the Holy Trinity, with distinction of persons in one nature. This triangular eye is God, Creator of the universe,

48 Barrasa, *Historia de las fundaciones*, 1, fol. 114r.

> who is the source of every creature as the First and Universal Cause of everything.[49]

From the first missionaries' quest for similarities in the history of the Andes to the symbolic conventions of European Christianity as evidence of a supposed evangelization vanished by oblivion—or deceit induced by the devil—the interpretation of the Jesuit missionaries was evolving toward the reading of nature through metaphors and symbols of the presence of God. Without ceasing to be concerned about the best way to communicate the Christian faith, the Jesuits were able to find a link to their own spiritual sensitivity within the indigenous peoples' special connection with nature. They came to perceive themselves as responsible for a "translation" of the signs of nature into symbols or tools of the God they sought to reveal, as marks of his existence and universal power.

This process was not without contradictions, as I have pointed out in one of Barrasa's stories, because nature, although symbolically "translated" through the Christian narrative, retained its significance as sacred space and therefore continued to have the prominence that it still retains among the native populations. In other words, they were not only able to legitimize their special link with natural entities but also ended up incorporating into their own native cosmovision new forms of abstract thought through the narrative and historicity that the missionaries disseminated among them.

Conclusion

Evangelization is a process that requires new, interdisciplinary forms of analysis that will allow us to understand why a spiritual frame of mind characterized by its search for common horizons to achieve harmony and unity ended up generating the opposite. As we have seen in this article, the narrative of a God active in nature and also in history was key to Loyola's spiritual theology, as foundation of the universality of the Jesuit mission in the world. Not only was it a motive for the expansion generated by the Society of Jesus but it was also a motivation to investigate the traces of God in all cultures and even in nature. From a spiritual perspective, it is easy to understand why the Jesuits experienced difficulties in achieving this dialogue. At that time, there was an almost

49 Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, *Sílex del divino amor*, in Juan Dejo, *Mística y espiritualidad: Misión jesuita en el Perú y el Paraguay durante el siglo XVII* (Lima: BNP-UARM, 2019 [1640]), 2:fols. 23^{r}–23^{v}.

total incommensurability between Christianity and non-Christian spiritualities due to the dogmatic discourse that disapproved of any belief that was not compatible with the Christian faith. For this reason, the apparent compatibilities between native beliefs and Christianity were seen as deceptions used by the devil to attract the indigenous people to their "condemnation," as has been analyzed by Estenssoro, to whom this work owes very much.

However, in this process, thanks to their daily contact with the aboriginal populations through their missionary work in Juli and Paraguay, the Jesuits were able to disarticulate some prejudices. The process was not without difficulties due to their commitment of faith. An increasingly scientific understanding of ancestral knowledge, as the work of Cobo testifies, allowed them to go beyond demonizing judgments, applying Ignatian "spiritual discernment" to validate the indigenous comprehension of nature. It is therefore likely that the process of extirpation of idolatries went hand in hand with a Christianized re-interpretation by which the missionaries tried to avoid identifying objects and forces of nature as conscious and transcendent entities ("deities"), instead re-signifying them as mediations of the totally transcendent Christian God in the immanence of nature.

This subtle difference was nevertheless difficult to assimilate due to the animistic rationality of the Peruvian natives as well as that of the indigenous populations in other latitudes, such as in Ruiz de Montoya's Paraguay. This led to further growth and evolution of religious imagination in the Andes and other regions in the missions of South America, adding supernatural entities from the Christian pantheon (angels, saints, and all "sacred" abstractions) to the pre-existing cosmic order of the indigenous narrative. This enriched the hybridizations and fixed syncretisms that persist to this day.

The Jesuits' understanding of the reverence of indigenous people toward natural entities helped them to lead that reverence toward the Christian spiritual narrative. Some of them were able to incorporate this discourse and, in turn, appropriate Occidental parameters to gain access to sanctity, while others remained on the margin, establishing continuous hybridizations between one belief system and the other. From the former, the Jesuits elaborated narratives of the virtuous Indians that populate their descriptions of the missions and parishes such as El Cercado in Lima.[50] Of the latter, only some traces and hints remain in the so-called popular religion.

50 Altamirano, *Historia de la provincia Peruana de la Compañía de Jesús*.