



WORLD CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIO-COSMOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE ANDES AND AMAZONIA

University of East Anglia, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts
Norwich, 11-12 November 2010

PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS

Convenor: Aristoteles Barcelos Neto

In recent years major efforts have been undertaken to understand Amerindian Christianity not as a cultural variation of European Christianity, but as an ontology in its own terms. This symposium invites scholars to debate how specific socio-cosmological relations make Christianity meaningful to Andean and Amazonian peoples, or in other words, how Christianity is becoming Amerindian. Although there is a consensus that Andean and Amazonian societies have been transformed by Christianity as much as they have transformed it, little is known about the dynamics of recent religious changes in both regions. How does the newest missionary move, anchored on mass media and represented by Latin American mega churches, confront the sedimented forms of Andean/mestizo/caboclo Christianity? What does it mean for Amerindians to embrace a religion centered on the word and on an individual relationship with the Holy Spirit? Is this a new process of Amerindianization of Christianity or the contrary, a de-Amerindianization of it? How social scientists and historians should approach sudden and dramatic religious changes in indigenous South America? The Andes and Amazonia have been historically exposed to the same missionary agents: Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans in the first centuries of the colonization, and Evangelicals and Pentecostals in recent decades. Although Andeans and Amazonians have mostly given different responses to Christian proselytism, we hope this symposium will be an opportunity to explore both the differences and similarities in Indigenous South America.

PROGRAMME

Thursday, 11 November

Venue: SRU seminar room, SCVA Crescent Wing

13:30 – Registration

14:00 – Welcome and introduction

14.10 – *Re-inventing idolatry as alterity process: Pentecostals in Catholic Peru*. Aristoteles Barcelos Neto (University of East Anglia)

14:50 – *The dense history of an indigenous religious conversion: the Palikur case*. Artionka Capiberibe (Universidade Federal de São Paulo)
15:30 – Coffee break
16:00 – *Becoming Civilized Christians: Histories and Socialities of Christian Conversion in Amazonian Ecuador*. Casey High (Goldsmiths College)
16:40-17:20 – Debate lead by Roger Sansi (Goldsmiths College)
17:30 – Drinks reception
19:00 – Dinner

Friday, 12 November

Venue: WAM room 21

10:00 – *Don Cristóbal, Llocllayhuancupa and the Virgin: The battle of words in a colonial Quechua conversion narrative*. Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Saenz (University of Stirling)
10:50 – *Becoming Baptist in P'iya Qayma, Bolivia*. Miranda Sheild-Johansson (London School of Economics and Political Science)
11:30 – Coffee break
12:00 – Debate

ABSTRACTS

Re-inventing idolatry as alterity process: Pentecostals in Catholic Peru

Aristoteles Barcelos Neto, UEA

This paper is an exploration of the place of image adoration in Andean Christianity. Following the trends of the iconoclasm debate (Latour & Weibel 2002), I try to frame the problem within the discourse of recent converts to Pentecostalism and to highlight the unstable nature of mediation in religions marked by a strong divide between mundane and transcendental orders. Image adoration is considered the very essence of Andean culture and religion. There are thousands of colorful variations of image cult and endless layers of meanings and biographical trajectories associated to them. My recent fieldwork in Peru aimed at understanding a new and relatively external layer of meaning, a layer that reduces all this diversity to one thing: idolatry, which in Peruvian contemporary context is widely understood as the worship of inert objects and false gods. I show how the re-invention of idolatry by Peruvian Pentecostals is anchored both in the readings of metaphors of the past and the Bible. Idolatry is considered a 'cultural' sin, inherited from Spanish colonization of Peru, with wide socio-political ramifications. The historical impossibility of fully extirpating it is understood as a strong signal of the second coming of Christ, a much expected event that consolidates the new cosmological map where Peruvian Pentecostals have found a special place.

The dense history of an indigenous religious conversion: the Palikur case

Artionka Capiberibe (Unifesp)

This paper takes as its main theme two Christian Churches first introduced among the Palikur Amerindians over thirty years ago: the Assembly of God Evangelical Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My starting point is the Palikur process of conversion and the analysis of its effects in their lives, or in other words, to explore Palikur adherence to these Churches. In particular, this paper will analyse the cultural transformations on the palikur life on one hand, and on the other, the transformations we can see in these specific Churches. One of my working hypotheses is that these Churches have taken hold among the Palikur because of their relation (or anti-relation) with indigenous shamanic practices.

Becoming Civilized Christians: Histories and Socialities of Christian Conversion in Amazonian Ecuador

Casey High (Goldsmiths College)

The Waorani people of Amazonian Ecuador became a focal point for Evangelical missionaries around the world in the second half of the twentieth century. Their conversion to Christianity in the aftermath of killing five North American missionaries in 1956 became a key narrative of Christian self-sacrifice published in numerous missionary texts. My paper explores how this process of conversion is expressed today in a Waorani cultural narrative of 'civilization' - a periodized historical narrative that emphasizes the contrast between past violence and the current growth and expansion of Waorani society. In contrast to the focus on 'indigenous Christianities' in much contemporary anthropology, I describe how Waorani people value Christian conversion as a historical narrative rather than an explicit Christian identity today. While few Waorani today embrace a Christian identity, the past process of what they call becoming 'civilized' Christians is central to the expression of contemporary sociality. My exploration of the interface between biblical notions of Christian self-sacrifice and Amazonian concepts of ontological predation provides an example of how Amerindian socio-cosmologies and Christian theology cannot easily be separated in Amazonian social life, even 30 years after the official closure of the Waorani mission. The paper raises more general questions about the place of conversion and Christian theology in Amerindian historical narrative and sociality.

Don Cristóbal, Llocllayhuancupa and the Virgin: The battle of words in a colonial Quechua conversion narrative

Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Saenz, University of Stirling

The presentation analyses certain aspects of an early 17th century Quechua conversion narrative which forms part of a collection of myths and rituals written in Quechua by anonymous authors. In order to contextualise it in its colonial temporal and ideological frame, I will look at how Andean and European traditions of dreams and visions might have influenced the narrative. Particular attention will then be given to the way in which the narrator presents the fight over old and new values. This 'battle of words' between the indigenous, converted Don Cristóbal Choquecassa and an Andean deity, the *huaca* Llocllayhuancupa, shows how the two protagonists use diction and rhetoric in their efforts to overpower the adversary, and thereby it reflects the importance of the verbal medium, now transferred into writing. The outcome of the battle is ambiguous as far as Andean-Christian relationships are concerned. With respect to verbal art this narrative is part of a new, highly complex and sophisticated genre of indigenous colonial writing. Both results make it clear that, far from being victims, certain indigenous persons were creative agents and, once 'empowered' by the colonial 'masters', ingeniously interwove indigenous and European means of expression and thinking.

Becoming Baptist in P'iya Qayma, Bolivia

Miranda Sheild-Johansson – LSE

In the early 1980s Canadian Baptist missionaries visited the small village of P'iya Qayma in Provincia Bolívar. The whole community now consider themselves Baptist. As part of a small albeit expanding group of Baptist villages in an overwhelmingly Catholic area the people of P'iya Qayma are very aware of their Baptist identity and consciously perform their new personhood to outsiders, each other and themselves. Apparent in these performances are the struggles people are undergoing to become good Baptists - the main struggle being to re-situate all divine power with Jesus Christ, purging the surrounding landscape of any divinity. This is a difficult task as they continue to live on and off the land and the powers that inhabit the land still appear to demand attention and rule over bountiful harvests and untimely deaths. The conversion began some 25 years ago but is still ongoing today as the people of P'iya Qayma work to re-model themselves and their surrounding world. This paper discusses the struggles and creative processes of becoming Baptist and looks at what kind of Baptism is emerging from this specific conversion.