

Idolatry and Its Enemies

COLONIAL ANDEAN RELIGION
AND EXTIRPATION, 1640-1750

The background of the cover is a dark, textured illustration of a dense thicket of tall grass or reeds. A wooden staff or pole is visible, leaning diagonally across the center of the image.

KENNETH MILLS

Idolatry and Its Enemies

COLONIAL ANDEAN RELIGION
AND EXTIRPATION, 1640–1750

• *KENNETH MILLS* •

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Chichester, West Sussex
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mills, Kenneth (Kenneth R.)

Idolatry and its enemies : colonial Andean religion and
extirpation, 1640–1750 / Kenneth Mills.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-691-02979-2 (cl : alk. paper)

1. Quechua Indians—Religion. 2. Quechua Indians—Missions—Peru—
Lima Region. 3. Catholic Church—Missions—Peru—Lima Region—
History. 4. Catholic Church. Archdiocese of Lima (Peru)—History.
5. Christianity and other religions—Peru—Lima Region.
6. Christianity and culture—Peru—Lima Region. 7. Spain—Colonies—
America—Administration. I. Title.

F2230.2.K4M56 1997

200'.985'09032—dc20 96-28847

This book has been composed in New Caledonia
Princeton University Press books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for
permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book
Longevity of the Council on Library Resources

Printed in the United States of America by Princeton Academic Press

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

• *FOR LIBBIE, FELIX, AND ALDOUS* •

• A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S •

I AM PERHAPS the first historian of Peru to write any part of a book in Bangladesh, at two tables in Dhaka: one in the sweltering library of the National Museum, and the other, in the comparative cool of the air-conditioned library of the British Council. My first thanks go to the many people there, whose curiosity—I like to think—provided the perfect atmosphere for my beginning.

I am grateful to the Rhodes Trust for the scholarship which took me to the University of Oxford, where this book began as a doctoral dissertation (submitted at the end of Michaelmas term, 1991, and defended on 28 February 1992). The Trust's support also made possible my research program. I am mindful, too, of the generous assistance of Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. These awards provided essential time for reflection and writing. The research support at Balliol College, Oxford, from the Adam and the Browning funds were much appreciated and, I hope, profited from. I am grateful, too, for the Junior Research Fellowship in Latin American History at Wadham College, Oxford, which provided a welcome and interesting home. And I thank the University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Program in Latin American Studies, and the Department of History, all at Princeton University, for support that has allowed me to revise and reconstruct this book in the midst of other pursuits.

Many people have helped me in one way or another. More names spring to mind than I can possibly acknowledge here. But I should like to single out Roger Highfield, whose knowledge, counsel, and thoughtful teas provided much comfort. I thank Terence Ranger, whose lectures on religious change in Africa were nothing short of inspiring, and for the warm reception afforded this Andeanist interloper by the Africanist circle at Oxford. John Fisher listened to early versions of a few of this book's chapters with great patience. Felipe Fernández-Armesto read an earlier draft of this book, and I thank him for his perceptive comments and useful nudges. I am grateful also to Malcolm Deas, Maurice Keen, and Penry Williams for their encouragement and support. And I thank Olivia Harris, Tristan Platt, Anthony McFarlane, Stuart Clark, Penny Dransart, Denise Arnold, and Rosaleen Howard-Malverde for their extraordinary generosity. I would also like to thank the gracious folks in the Bodleian Library, and in the British Library, for their consistent smiles, and their efficient—and often patient—assistance.

In Lima, Peru, I reserve special gratitude for Luis Millones, whose interest, encouragement, and comments on my writing since my first, wide-eyed visit to Peru in 1986 have been crucial; he and his wife, Renate, and their family are true friends who have helped me a great deal. I am also grateful for the kind reception and advice I received from María Rostworowski de Diez Canseco at the Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, and for timely spurs from David Cahill and

Erwin Salazar in Cusco. I thank the former director of the Archivo Arzobispal de Lima, Mario Ormeño, for his understanding. Also at the AAL, I would like to thank Hernán Remy Barúa, who was rarely without a smile and a joke, Melecio Tineo Morón, and a gruff but agreeable man I knew only as Carlos. The staff in the Investigations Room in the Biblioteca Nacional del Perú are also appreciated.

In Rome, my work was made easier by P. Victor Gramatowski S. J. and P. Joseph de Cock S. J. at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Fathers Josef Metzler and Charles Burns at the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, and by the helpful staff in the Vatican Library. The Archivo General de Indias in Seville is an excellent place to conduct research, and I wish warmly to thank its director and staff for their courtesy and help. I am indebted to Pedro Rubio Merino and his assistant for allowing me access to the fascinating material in the archive of the Cathedral of Seville. The library and facilities at the Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos are also superb, and I thank all those responsible for maintaining such excellent living and working conditions for visiting scholars. Finally, I thank the staffs in the Biblioteca Nacional de España and the Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid, for their help.

There is an eccentric cast of historians and investigators whose words and examples have influenced my research and writing, and whom I would like to acknowledge: Pierre Duviols, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, John V. Murra, John H. Rowe, and George Kubler deserve initial mention, as do Inga Clendinnen, Nancy Farriss, Karen Spalding, William B. Taylor, Frank Salomon, and Sabine MacCormack. And I thank an excellent teacher, David C. Johnson of the University of Alberta, for helping to set me on this path, and for his constant encouragement. I am grateful also to John Langdon, Philip Lawson, and Kenneth Munro for their teaching, encouragement and friendship, and to Inge Bolin and Ruth Gruhn for their kindness and subtle introductions to how anthropology and history might work together.

Libbie Mills deserves more gratitude than I can bestow. I will say that a few years ago, with all my good fortune, I did not know I was marrying a reader and critic of such care and skill. And, quite apart from editorial abilities, I thank her for her love. It is to Libbie and to the welcome young Felix and Aldous that the book is dedicated.

I am grateful to Anthony Pagden for his careful attention to an early version of this book and for his continued support. Terry Ranger, too, made welcome suggestions early on. Peter Lake helped me to see a title that should have been staring me in the face. Discussions with and encouragement from Peter Brown, Natalie Davis, Bill Jordan, and Tony Grafton have been much appreciated, and I thank Ben Weiss for his suggestions in the late stages of revision. Ignacio Gallup-Díaz has helped with timely reactions and in preparation of the index. My students, in courses ranging from a freshman to a graduate seminar, also deserve a word of thanks even if they must go unnamed; this is my opportunity to acknowledge how much they teach me. Bill Taylor's reading of the manuscript, the wealth of his prompts and the generosity of his suggestions

have been inspirational; the warmth of his friendship and our communications are the stuff of life. I owe my deepest debt of gratitude to Sir John Elliott, for sharing his knowledge and experience of the Spanish world, and for the privilege of his friendship. His unfailing diligence and infectious enthusiasm for history have made this book much finer than it ever could have been without him.

I thank Margaret Case for her creative and editorial vigilance. And, finally, I thank the editors of *Past and Present* for the permission to use material in Chapters Eight and Nine which first appeared in my article, "The Limits of Religious Coercion in Mid-Colonial Peru," no. 145 (November 1994), pp. 84–121. Part of Chapter Six appears in a different form in my essay "Seeing God in Mid-Colonial Peru," in *Andean Art: Visual Expression and its Relation to Andean Beliefs and Values*, edited by Penny Z. Dransart (Aldershot, Avebury: World Archaeology Series, 1995). And I thank both William B. Taylor and Stuart Clark for permission to discuss their important works in progress; in both cases, I cite chapters and parts of these manuscripts and not page numbers. Taylor's *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* is forthcoming from Stanford University Press, while Clark's *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* is being published by Oxford University Press.

• **A B B R E V I A T I O N S** •

AAL	Archivo Arzobispal de Lima. Lima, Peru.
ACS	Archivo de la Santa Metropolitana y Patriarchal Iglesia Catedral de Sevilla. Seville, Spain.
AGI	Archivo General de Indias. Seville, Spain.
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional. Madrid, Spain.
ARSI	Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. Rome, Italy.
ASV	Archivio Segreto Vaticano. Rome, Italy.
BL	British Library. London, Great Britain.
BNM	Biblioteca Nacional de España. Madrid, Spain.
BNP	Biblioteca Nacional del Perú. Lima, Peru.
BOD	Bodleian Library. Oxford, Great Britain.

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Idolatry and Its Enemies



Introduction

THIS BOOK is primarily about Andean religion in the mid-colonial Archdiocese of Lima, Peru. I use “mid-colonial” as a shorthand to refer to people, events, and the religious atmosphere between 1640 and 1750. Although recognizable over a pan-Andean zone, colonial Andean “religion” (which Spanish Christians often called the Indians’ idolatry) was neither unitary nor fixed in time. It was predominantly regional and local in character, however much the religious system of one region or community might resemble that of its neighbor in structure and emphasis. Most importantly, colonial Andean religion, like its prehispanic forebears, was changing while it was enduring. Colonial Andeans resisted Christianity at the same time as they reacted to its presence and included aspects of what began as the invader’s religion into their emerging and reinterpreted ways of seeing and managing the world.

The book is also about the Christian faith as it was carried, and as it appeared, to the indigenous inhabitants of the central Andes in these times. I write about “faces” of Christianity in an attempt to displace the monolithic images that studies of evangelization too often spawn, and to capture instead the different undercurrents and approaches that coexisted and jostled each other in the central Andes. Through the controversial reinvigoration of an investigatory and penal process, the Extirpation of idolatry, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the Church in the Archdiocese of Lima sought to bring about a belated and highly ambitious religious reform of the indigenous peoples of the vast realm. The documentation that resulted from this enterprise is a rich and still largely untapped source of information about Andean religion and life in mid-colonial times.

Andeans did much to determine what constituted colonial religion, but their religion, like their history, interlocks with that of Spaniards and Christianity. The evidence allows the examination of what Quechua-speaking Andeans said about what they believed and practiced and what Spanish Christian judges and interpreters heard them say. My fundamental approach joins those of others, first, in identifying the ill effects of polarized conceptions of colonial religious history (in this context, the idea of a Spanish Christianity locked in mortal combat with Indian religion), and second, in trying to move beyond them.¹ I do

¹ I have in mind Nancy Farriss, Inga Clendinnen, and William Taylor, even though the list might easily be longer. See their works in the bibliography.

not portray a neat sort of struggle in which there are clear victors and vanquished or in which the would-be “opponents” keep to their own sides of the ring. Andean beliefs and practices survived because they changed and were adapted to colonial realities (such as being declared forbidden and demonic) by the people themselves, and because people assimilated Christian terms, ideas, rituals, and explanations into an expanding religious framework. Thus, my exploration of fundamental dimensions of colonial Andean religion is combined with my consideration of the extirpators’ Christianity and what systematic extirpation might actually have achieved in its mission to eradicate suspect Indian religiosity and to advance the Indian parishioners’ acceptance of an approved Christianity. This is a study in which native Andeans and Spaniards inhabit the same analytical space.² Although I do not pretend to have created a complete picture of colonial Andeans’ and Spaniards’ shared (if not harmonious) history, I have selected what I believe are some fundamental elements in their cultural and religious interrelations, and I have attempted to examine their significance.

There is no denying that aspects of Christianity were being embraced voluntarily by some Andean people and even incorporated into the sacred repertoires of religious ministers and specialists. But significantly, it was neither the kind of embrace nor the kind of Christianity desired by the Church at the time. Andean traditions of religious assimilation—favored famously by the Inkas and pre-Inkaic regional powers but also characteristic of more local patterns—had not disappeared in just over a century of Spanish Christian presence. Andeans in colonial times resisted the compartmentalization of their religious ideas and options. Most people could not live comfortably within the frequently dichotomous categories of the extirpators (the *visitadores generales de idolatría*, or idolatry judges and inspectors). So-called idolatry and Christianity could meet as well as compete, especially when the increasingly faint line that separated the two “religions” was less rigorously monitored than during an idolatry investigation, and especially when colonial religion is viewed as a developing manner of living and thinking instead of a stark arena for the cosmic battle of antithetical worlds. Thus the stark oppositions in the book’s title and subtitle are meant to draw you, the reader, toward the discovery of a more complicated story—a story in which the poles of idolatry (colonial Andean religion) and its enemies (Christianity and Christian extirpators) frequently look artificial and out of place.

Andean people were selective in their religious assimilations. There were often good, sound reasons for colonial Andeans to worship a patron saint, to invoke Jesus Christ, or to ally with the parish priest. Yet, just as often, religious mixtures were as unintended by native Andeans as by Spaniards. Incidents of mixture could be the gradual, inadvertent results of many years’ experience,

² The phrase is indebted to Ashis Nandy’s formulation of “colonialism as a shared culture,” and follows William Taylor’s work toward a “colonial situation . . . in which European colonists and native peoples are united in one analytical field.” W. B. Taylor, “Colonial Religion,” p. 33. A. Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 5.

practice, and contestation in an Indian parish. As will become more clear, I believe that Andean religious change in the colonial period and beyond was an uneven, fitful, and unpredictable experience. The formulation of stages, like typological classifications, works brilliantly to concentrate the mind and to stimulate discussion,³ but encourages a unidirectional and unvarying way of thinking about not only religious change but colonial history in general. Historians of religion and society in colonial Spanish America may be too conditioned to expect a certain kind and scope of change to occur, an essentially teleological process set off by the moment of Columbus's landfall.⁴

One cannot explain satisfactorily Andean religious endurance simply by invoking such things as the Andean people's remarkable determination or the strength of their reciprocal relationship with their ancestors, as important and real as such things were. Recognizably Andean religious patterns retained their significance because they changed. In many parts of the mid-colonial Archdiocese of Lima, Andean religious survival was as much about a dynamic and gradual emergence as about a more basic persistence.⁵ There were conscious religious adaptations to the conditions of colonial life, and there were many other, often slower, transformations that were imperceptible to the people themselves. Andean religion was adapted and reconstructed in colonial times, and change occurred as much from within as from exposure to the gradual and sometimes inadvertent effects of Christianity's varied presence.

I offer a new reading of some familiar sources for the mid-colonial period and on the theme of colonial religion in particular. Yet my researches into sources such as ecclesiastical correspondence, missionary and other chronicles, catechisms and other pastoral tools, books of sermons, and the Jesuits' reports primarily complement, test and enrich the religious information I derive from a diverse body of idolatry trial documentation. I undertake a close description and analysis of what is often only said to be complex and syncretic, a description and analysis drawn from the so-called idolatry testimonies, the sources derived from the Lima Church's efforts to eradicate suspect Andean religion and reform its Indian parishioners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of the declarants' testimonies surmount the legalistic formulae of the trial proceedings and the linguistic, cultural, and ideological filters through which they passed. In addition to their invaluable religious content, they are often compelling and passionate narratives. The vitality of colonial Andean religious life is

³ The phrase is Peter Hulme's, from his memorable discussion of the influence of typology and other classifications on Caribbean ethnology in *Colonial Encounters*, p. 51. See James Lockhart's cogent argument for three stages in "the general postconquest evolution of the Nahuas" of central Mexico in *The Nahuas after the Conquest*, ch. 7, and pp. 428–36, and also his discussion of stages 1 and 2 in "Sightings," which revises a portion of his Introduction to *We People Here*, pp. 1–21. On degrees of change see also S. Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico*.

⁴ O. Harris, "The Coming of the White People."

⁵ A collection of essays which employs these concepts to good effect is R. V. H. Dover, K. E. Seibold, and J. H. McDowell, eds., *Andean Cosmologies*.

best captured at the level of the individual in his or her community and region, thus my study frequently focuses on people with names who tell engaging and meaningful stories. My larger hypotheses about religious change and persistence rely, first, on native Andeans' descriptions of their own ritual actions and beliefs and those of others and, second, on my careful consideration of these statements as rendered in the documentation. Their imagery and often surprising voices can replace some of the misrepresentative and simple depictions that have so often been used in the portrayal of colonial Andean history.

I have tried, as much as possible, to allow the richness of the source material to shine through the two main intervening filters, the inquisitorial genesis and formulaic recording of this evidence, and my own retelling and analysis. The witnesses before the extirpators were predominantly Quechua-speaking, so their testimonies often passed through an interpreter before a bilingual notary recorded them in Spanish (occasionally using a few Quechua words). As scholars from diverse fields consistently warn, any reconstruction that depends on records of inquisition and recrimination for its evidence must be conducted with the utmost caution, mindful of the realities of the historical context that brought the information into being.⁶

The documentation produced by such policing bodies as the Inquisition and the Extirpation can poison the well in other ways. An historian can be led to unwarranted generalizations out of enthusiasm for a rich case study. Attention to only certain kinds of information in these documents might persuade an incautious observer to conclude, for instance, that native Andeans were resisting and countering Christianity whenever possible. Poignant cries of resistance to forms of domination have issued from Amerindian peoples from the earliest colonial times to the present, but these cries have not existed alone, nor do they tell what may be the more significant parts of the story about indigenous cultural survival and dynamism in the face of any number of pressures and influences.⁷ The idolatry judges' questions and preoccupations, for their part, often forced the Indian witnesses' answers in certain directions. And one has to be just as aware of the fact that witnesses themselves did not always speak accurately for others; indeed, for good reasons, Andeans were often enterprising in the misrepresentation of themselves. I have tried to use the Indians' testimonies and other assembled information to show not only what the people's alleged offenses were but also many other things that emerge about the encounters between extirpators and native Andeans in mid-colonial times, employing what I have come to know about these documents and the situations

⁶ See, for instance, the memorable piece by R. Rosaldo, "From the Door of His Tent."

⁷ I am thinking, for example, of Ruth Behar's excellent discussion of the case of an old Guachichil visionary in San Luis Potosí, northern Mexico, in the late sixteenth century. The woman's resistance and aggression toward Spaniards and Christianity is undeniable, yet her visions and urgings reveal her creative mixing of Christian symbolism into Guachichil patterns and the genesis of new cultural meanings. "Visions of a Guachichil Witch," esp. p. 123.

they describe, and following what Eric Van Young called “the humane scholar’s traditional map of reasonableness”—what another might call his nose.⁸

Connected with the historian’s challenge of what intermediaries and scenario might do to the evidence is the dilemma of terminology. The notaries’ occasional use of Quechua words and expressions when their constant search for approximating Spanish synonyms proved hopeless points to a problem that persists today. I record a large number of expressions and names of Andean religious beings and locations in the indigenous language because their translation so often proves inadequate or impossible (a full glossary follows the text). In the case of other words I have chosen to concede. My use of the terms “god,” “divinity,” and “force” to describe Andean numina is uncomfortable and tentative, reflecting a decision made in the interest of the text’s general accessibility and to express—however crudely—entities of great importance to people. I am the first to admit, and to want to demonstrate, just how different even a Christian Andean’s idea of divinity might be from a Judeo-Christian’s orthodox understanding of a supernatural God. With the same hesitation, I use “Andean” adjectivally not only to refer to place, but also to the experience of a range of different peoples, and I write of “Indians” and “Andeans” in order to tell of things in more than one locality and affecting more than one group of people. So the words are imperfect, and usages in English are in a state of flux. The Spanish use of the connotative rubrics of “idolatry” or “superstition,” not to mention “religion,” to refer to Andean systems of belief and practice spawns other significant problems that are recognized and discussed, even if they will not be dwelt upon in great detail here. The thread, for example, which links the original context of the charge of idolatry against others in the monotheism of Israel, through its use in the expansion of Latin Christianity in Europe, to the points of its renewed currency in the Iberian endeavors in the Atlantic islands, on the west coast of Africa and, eventually, in the Americas and Pacific islands, is the important subject of another book. It bears remembering that the distortion of realities through language is part of my book’s subject, an integral piece of a screen which can obscure the interactive colonial terrain.

On its western border, the mid-colonial Archdiocese of Lima stretched more than 140 leagues (approximately 420 miles or 675 kilometers) along the Pacific coast of South America (see the map facing page 3). It extended from the Santa River Valley (latitude 9 degrees south) in the *corregimiento* (tribute district) of Santa, its northern border shared with the Diocese of Trujillo, to the Nazca River Valley (latitude 15 degrees south) in the province of Ica, the boundary with the Diocese of Arequipa. The City of the Kings, or Lima as it came to be known, rested at the coastal center (latitude 12 degrees south). Further inland, the northernmost boundaries of the jurisdiction were at the extent of the mountainous *corregimientos* of Conchucos and Huamalies. The eastern fringe

⁸ “The Cuautla Lazarus,” p. 21.