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Decolonizing Religious Landscapes for a Pluriversal Church

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Across the *Abya Yala* continent,¹ Indigenous people, many Christians themselves, are decolonizing the religious landscape by placing their epistemologies and philosophical/spiritual principles on the theological table. Responding to Pope Francis's call to embody a synodal church and value Indigenous peoples' cultures, Indigenous theologians are proposing an "epistemological disobedience."² They want to drink from the millennial spiritual wells of their cultures with the confidence that the Spirit of God of Life has always been present in their midst. In short, they want the space to decolonize or heal the colonial Christian wound.

In this article, I suggest that the first step to incarnate Pope Francis's cultural dream of intercultural encounters and support Indigenous peoples' right to heal from the colonial wound is to demission (*de-mission*) or pause missionary work. The kenotic process that demission entails does not mean that we stop being the best Christians we can be, but that we take responsibility

¹ The term and concept of *Abya Yala* emerged toward the end of the 1970s "in *Dulenega*, or what, for others, is today San Blas, Panama, a Kuna Tule territory. *Abya Yala* in the Kuna language means 'land in its full maturity.' ... After the Kuna won a lawsuit to stop the construction of a shopping mall in *Dulenega*, they told a group of reporters that they employed the term maturity to refer to the American continent in its totality. After listening to this story, Takir Mamani, the Bolivian Aymara leader, and Tupaj Katari, one of the founders of the indigenous rights movement in Bolivia, suggested that indigenous peoples and indigenous organizations use the term *Abya Yala* in their official declarations to refer to the American continent." Emilio del Valle Escalante (K'iche' Maya, Guatemala), "Self-Determination: A Perspective from *Abya Yala*," in *Restoring Indigenous Self-Determination, E-International Relations (E-IR)*, May 20, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/05/20/self-determination-a-perspective-from-abya-yala/>.

² Roberto Tomichá Charupá, "Diez consideraciones para una pneumatología cristiana en perspectiva indígena," *Revista Teología* 56, no. 129 (May-August 2019): 32.

for the effects of a colonial and imperial Christianity and take the time to truly comprehend complex Indigenous philosophical systems. If we fail to demission, we run the risk of perpetuating a colonial, monocultural, and monotonous Christianity. Despite our best desires, we will find ourselves supporting a neo-colonizing mission, incapable of truly living and working interculturally among peoples, and contributing to the extinction of Indigenous peoples' cultural identities. Furthermore, we would be going against God's continual self-revelation because each culture and each worldview that receives the Gospel enriches the church with the vision of a new facet of Christ.

Years ago, I turned to my ancestral tradition after realizing that my Andean way of theologizing described a God that did not easily fit into mainstream theological conceptions. After a discernment process and not without fear, I decided to journey toward the borders of my Christian tradition and enter into an interreligious, intercultural dialogue with Andean philosophical/spiritual systems. My decision to *de-mission* created the space to marvel at the complexity and richness present in Andean philosophical tradition. I invite the reader to walk with me to *el mercado/qhathu*. From there I describe one small aspect of Andean cosmology, the birthing of *Pacha* and all her children. With a sense of awe, we will realize that we are in front of a completely different metaphysical system that challenges substance ontology, Aristotelian causation theory, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, God-world relations, and anthropocentrism. In the third part of my essay, I suggest that a “multicultural church” metaphor does not respond to the challenge introduced by Indigenous metaphysics; instead, we need a decolonial and critical intercultural dialogue to address the *pluriverse* of multiple worlds existent at this time, a serious challenge to current missiology rooted in the metaphysical belief that there is one single world with many cultures. Furthermore, if we are in a *pluriversal* reality, we need to find better

metaphors to imagine a pluriversal Christianity. In agreement with Andeanist Swiss theologian Josef Estermann, I propose the metaphor of an onion to conceptualize a pluriversal Christianity in a way that is more attuned to Indigenous metaphysical traditions.³

Is the Good News a Peach or an Onion?

A Critical Revision of Current Inculturation Models

The question of which imagery best describes how we understand Christianity has a direct correlation to how we relate to inculturation and interculturality, and to mission. Inculturation is a concept that has been widely used in the Catholic Church to describe how the encounter with the Gospel transforms culture. Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing, editors of *Interculturalidad en la vida y en la misión*,⁴ tell us that inculturation of the Church becomes “a force that animates, guides and innovates that culture to create a new unity and communion not only in the culture in question, but also as enrichment of the universal Church.”⁵

Inculturation is, without a doubt, a major improvement in Christian mission.⁶ it recognizes a Christianity that has many faces, most of them living the global South. Hence, it is not surprising that Pope Francis calls for a new evangelization that encounters the stranger or the

³ Josef Estermann, *Cruz y coca: Hacia la descolonización de la religión y la teología* (La Paz, Bolivia: ISEAT, 2013), 39–41.

⁴ Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing, eds., *Interculturalidad: En la vida y en la misión* (San Bernardino, CA: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2017).

⁵ Stanislaus and Ueffing, 15.

⁶ The post-Vatican II Catholic Church sees itself as a pilgrim church, proclaiming the universal nature of God's salvific love in all corners of the world; there is a resignification of mission and a demand to enter in dialogue with cultural diversity.

“other” as our *fratres* and *sorores*,⁷ and to appreciate the beauty of cultural diversity.⁸

Fundamentally, Francis sees cultural diversity as a gift of the Holy Spirit.⁹ From his perspective, once “a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel.”¹⁰ Yet one cannot avoid feeling tension despite the expressed openness to the “cultural other.” The goal is to construct, from within that local culture, a universal Christian culture with different faces but, in essence, the same Christianity.

Within the still prevailing mission model,¹¹ it seems that the Christian message is like a peach's seed surrounded by a pulp, whose consistency, color, and texture vary according to the variety, but a peach seed will always remain an unchanged peach. The peach metaphor, with a core seed and a variable pulp, reeks of ontological and metaphysical dualism, which Estermann

⁷ Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), 58-86, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_ enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

⁸ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117-122.

¹⁰ Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (2020), 68, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html

¹¹ In their book *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers*, the Catholic bishops of the United States understand inculturation as “a theological term for the engagement of Sacred Scripture and Church Tradition, especially the Gospel, in which culture is understood as a people’s way of thinking, feeling, acting, and being; also called ‘evangelization of cultures.’ This process consists mainly of the transformation of a people’s identity and deepest motivations and desires, especially their sacred stories, symbols, and rituals, through dialogue and the power of grace that accompanies the Christian proclamation. This process may pertain to discrete cultures (e.g., Mexican, United States, or Filipino) as well as to the overarching global cultures of modernity or postmodernity.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* [bilingual, English & Spanish] (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2014), 41.

connects with Platonic and Aristotelian thought. The seed or core would supposedly remain untouched by historical and intercultural changing processes, while its pericarp or cultural or historical envelope would adapt to its context.¹² In other words, the Christian message here is a transcultural and metacultural, uncontaminated message that, once planted or incarnated in any culture, purifies the hosting culture through its Gospel values.

For some, the peach metaphor that I just describe correlates to Stephen Bevans's translation model, which focuses “on the faithful transmission of the gospel.”¹³ According to Bevans, “culture is seen not as something good and revelatory in itself but as a neutral means for doing so.”¹⁴ In Bevans’s view, we find more positive theological attitudes toward culture or context in the anthropological and transcendental models. Within these models, missionaries ought to engage different cultures with an open heart and mind, moving toward an intercultural dialogue. The idea is to exculturate the Gospel from its Western context and philosophical underpinnings, which Estermann correlates to the process of undressing the Gospel from its Jewish ground and Hellenizing it, a process that in the Andes has been truncated.¹⁵ Inculturation sees Indigenous cultures as something positive, yet the old wineskins in which it was created (the Aristotelian dualism of essence and accidents) do not allow it to move forward. We are still left with the idea that through a positive encounter with local culture, the Gospel germinates, purifying its context. The idea that the Church itself undergoes a process of reception, as Pope

¹² Estermann, *Cruz y coca*, 40.

¹³ Roger Schroeder, “Interculturality as a Paradigm of Mission,” in *Intercultural Living: Explorations in Missiology*, ed. Lazar T. Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2018), 131.

¹⁴ Schroeder, “Interculturality as a Paradigm of Mission,” 131.

¹⁵ Estermann, *Cruz y coca*, 27.

Francis proposes, and that it is able to be enriched with the fruits of what the Spirit has already mysteriously sown in that culture,¹⁶ remains a dream. We no longer hear calls to extirpate idolatries; instead, like Pope Francis, I have been accused of promoting a neo-paganization. At the end, inculturation seeks the construction of a universal Christian culture with different faces.

In *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis calls evangelizers to move beyond a “monocultural and monotonous Christianity”¹⁷ and finds Gospel values in the Indigenous cultures of the Amazon. He particularly highlights Indigenous peoples’ “openness to the action of God, a sense of gratitude for the fruits of the earth, the sacredness of life, solidarity and common good.”¹⁸ In the document, Pope Francis describes many Indigenous cultures as sharing a deep relation with the earth and the whole cosmos, values that, in his view, can only be fulfilled through inculturation. Once Indigenous people become Christian, they are called to turn their relationship with God present in the cosmos into an increasingly personal relationship with a “Thou,”¹⁹ a personal God whose grace can be felt through creation.

In Francis's vision, inculturation and interculturality go hand in hand. In *Querida Amazonia*, Francis describes the intercultural mission as “intercultural relations where diversity does not mean threat and does not justify hierarchies of power of some over others, but dialogue between different cultural visions, of celebration, of interrelationship and of revival of hope.”²⁰ He invites evangelizers to approach people “starting from their roots, and invit[ing] them to sit

¹⁶ Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 68.

¹⁷ Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 69.

¹⁸ Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 70.

¹⁹ Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 73.

²⁰ Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 38.

around the common table, a place of conversation and of shared hopes.” In this way, Francis says, “our differences, which could seem like a banner or a wall, can become a bridge. Identity and dialogue are not enemies.”²¹ Interculturality implies accepting the diversity of cultures, and choosing to dialogue based on equality, aware of the dignity of all cultures. Intercultural dialogue precedes inculturation, which is the ultimate goal.

Many evangelizers from the global South share Francis’s vision. In Latin America, many Indigenous theologians hope to construct Indigenous Christian theologies based on an “intercommunication between indigenous ancestral theologies and the official theology of the [Catholic] Church,”²² after the former (Indigenous cosmologies/spiritualities) go through a purification process. Within this process, Christianity retains control of the interaction, for it is not clear how the purification process will take place, who would set the parameters or what those parameters are, and finally, who will participate and have the final decision. If intercultural dialogues are only a preface to inculturation, it is important to consider who is in the position of power. Who chooses which elements of Indigenous culture will be included and how would they be transformed or fulfilled? Are they expressions of respect and inclusion that leave theological interpretations unchallenged? Or would they lead to the development of doctrines in the Catholic Church? Would beliefs, practices, and political agendas in the Catholic Church be fundamentally reconsidered? Interculturality needs to be critical, especially considering Christianity’s role in the colonization and exploitation of millions of Indigenous people in what is current-day Latin America.

²¹ Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 37.

²² Eleazar López Hernández, “Hacia una teología del Espíritu de Dios en pueblos mesoamericanos,” in *Espíritu Santo y pueblos originarios*, Estudios Preparatorios al VII Simposio de Teología India (Mexico: CEM, 2019), 103.

Colonialism, says Anibal Quijano, is “the systematic oppression of expression of knowledge, knowledge production, perspectives, images, symbols and the imposition of the colonizer's own patterns of expressions.”²³ Deemed as lesser humans, Indigenous people were forced to see themselves through the gaze and cultural categories of the colonizer. European culture was established as universal. Coloniality is the permanence of the colonial imaginary. It is a mental construction, an idea that has left marks on the colonized bodies. Coloniality continues to affect the lives of millions of Indigenous people; those lives have arguably worsened under liberal republics. Indigenous cosmologies and spiritualities have been continuously ridiculed as primitive, backward, pagan, and superstitious. They are perceived as the products of simple-minded people who ought to be herded into modernity.

Analytical categories such as coloniality of power (binary categories, e.g. primitive/modern), coloniality of being (human/nonhuman), and coloniality of knowledge (rational/irrational) provide comprehensive analyses of the systematic invisibility of Indigenous communities. To this list, I add *the coloniality of the real*, which effectively erases different ontologies for the establishment of a Western substantive ontology that is deemed universal. For the Euro-modern mind, there is only **one** world with many cultures, **one** valid way of knowing, and **one** way of being. The substantive ontology that grounds Christianity and Euro-modernity has been taken for granted and never challenged.

Christianity played a pivotal role in establishing and justifying the colonial categories discussed above. The extent to which Christianity contributed to the domination of the spiritual imagination of the colonized is beyond the scope of this essay, but one thing is clear: We, the

²³ Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (March 2007): 169, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>.

colonized others, continue to feel the effects of coloniality in our bodies. I say “we” because I am one of the millions of colonized others, uprooted from my Indigenous roots. Like me, millions of Indigenous people are undergoing a process of decolonizing their minds, learning new ways of seeing themselves, and uncovering old/new ways of understanding the world. The colonial wound is real, and in order for us to heal, we need to decolonize Christianity.

The Afro-Brazilian theologian Silvia Regina da Silva writes that a colonial theology accompanied the colonial project, and it is still present in the church. For many Indigenous peoples, Christian missions are still identified with the “dominant culture; therefore, they have not experienced what it could be like to assume Christian values from the diversity of their Indigenous cultures and cultures of African descent.”²⁴ Decolonizing Christianity requires an epistemological delinking from a Eurocentric Christianity and its philosophical assumptions that support Euro-modernity. Roberto Tomichá Chapurá talks about an “epistemological disobedience” or drinking from our ancestral wells of knowledge to return to an “evangelical obedience.”²⁵ Interculturality could help in the process, but it needs to be critical and decolonial. First, we need to set aside intercultural definitions that may seem good, but at the core, continue to enforce the same colonial matrix of power disguised as a liberal Christian global village.

Aymara scholar Simón Yampara writes that

Interculturality for us [Aymaras] means to agree, to dialogue—between peoples and civilizations—between the different ways of “knowing how to do,” the knowledge and wisdom of the different peoples [civilizations] in conditions of equity, respecting

²⁴ Silvia Regina da Silva, “Una misión descolonizadora de nuestras mentes en relación con los afrodescendientes,” in *La misión en cuestión*, ed. Agenor Brighenti and Rosario Hermano (Bogotá, Colombia: Amerindia, 2009), 47.

²⁵ Tomichá Charupá, “Diez consideraciones,” 137.

constitutional rights and culture. In other words, it means to share, complement, exchange, and reciprocate knowledge and values of peoples [and civilizations] through processes of periodic and continuous *tinkhus* (encounters), respecting (and, of course, forging) the identity and dignity of peoples. That is, to forge and reconstitute mutual respect. Placing in the balance of history the cosmogonic, ethical, ecological [praxis] that is compatible with the health of the life of the *ecobiotic* community of the planet, and [then] see which ones [cultures, civilizations] find the route/wheel of life, rather than invasion, hegemony, and imposition.²⁶

Yampara's statement encapsulates an Indigenous decolonial conception of interculturality and its role. To begin with, he presents interculturality as a dialogue between civilizations and not cultures. Yampara is not interested in an intercultural dialogue that, despite some assumed symmetrical relationship between diverse cultures, aims to simply transcend tolerance and endorse a liberal global village where ethnic minorities have some representation, without challenging the metaphysical assumption behind the existence of "one world, many cultures." Yampara's vision of interculturality is similar to Raimon Panikkar's, when Panikkar says that interculturality "arises from the existential encounter between the different visions of the world"²⁷—which opens the possibility of multiple or a *pluriverse* or multiple worlds.

²⁶ Simón Yampara Huarachi, "Interculturalidad: ¿Encubrimiento o descubrimiento de las matrices civilizatorio culturales?" *ISEES (Inclusión Social y Equidad en la Educación Superior)*, Reflexiones sobre interculturalidad y equidad en la educación, no. 4 (2009): 39, <https://www.fundacionequitas.cl/isees-inclusion-social-y-equidad-en-la-educacion-superior-4/>.

²⁷ Raimon Panikkar, "La interpelación intercultural," in *El discurso intercultural: Prolegómenos a una filosofía intercultural*, ed. Graciano González R. Arnaiz (Madrid, España: Biblioteca Nueva, 2002), 26.

Yampara also describes intercultural dialogues as *tinkus* or encounters between two different yet equal forces searching for harmony. The goal is a constant and dynamic engagement between forces, not achieving a Hegelian synthesis. Here Andean epistemology and a triadic logic become evident. Andean logic says that in order for something to be truth, the other does not have to be wrong; there can be several truths. Knowledge production aims to learn right or reciprocal relations within a web of life, which explains Yampara's final point. Yampara offers a principle of evaluating whether a given culture supports the web of life or hinders it. He is not dismissing Western ontology, but he is asking that through a critical and decolonial intercultural dialogue with Andean ontology, Western ontology be evaluated on the basis of its role in ensuring the flow of life.

Within the framework described above, a decolonial and critical interculturality calls the church to cease and reevaluate mission efforts. While this may be interpreted as going against the very nature of the church because the church exists to proclaim the Good News, it is necessary to reevaluate who has the power and control in intercultural dialogues. The colonial reality was built on a colonial theology that stripped Indigenous peoples' humanity and rendered their cosmologies primitive superstitions. Despite significant advances in theologies of mission, the Catholic Church continues to maintain control even in intercultural dialogue efforts. Instead, I propose that we follow the Cuban intercultural philosopher Raúl Fonet-Betancourt and move away from a "mission of transmission" to a "demission." Like Fonet-Betancourt, I understand demission as an abdication of "our cultural rights so that through this 'contraction' of the volume of who we are, could emerge within ourselves, spaces of reception, open spaces in which we

could encounter the other and experienced conviviality.”²⁸ The term “contraction” refers to the Hebrew concept of *zimzum* or “self-contraction of God, God's contraction from Himself [*sic*] into Himself. God, who is all and everywhere, contracts Himself back into Himself to create space for something else.”²⁹ Within this context, evangelizers interested in intercultural dialogue renounce sacralizing the origins of cultural or religious traditions, including their own, and learn the relational history of the Christian tradition and its dogmas, deconstructing a monocultural and monotonous Christianity. Christianity ceases to see itself as a peach’s seed and becomes more like an onion; each peel is as Christian as the prior one, formed through a series of centuries of interculturalizations that together create a pluricultural Christianity.

The metaphor of the onion invite us to imagine a Christianity without an essence or untouched core. Each onion layer is the onion in itself, which can only be fully appreciated with all its layers together, and no layer is more important than the other. This way of thinking is closer to Indigenous ways of thinking that are more inclusive. Estermann suggests that “inculturation of the contents of faith means that the essential determination is not a matter of a definition taken *a priori*, but the result of an intercultural (and even interreligious) polylogue.”³⁰ Furthermore, using the Neoplatonic Christological dogma, Estermann suggests that “the essence of the Christian faith and its historical, cultural and civilizational manifestations are ‘without confusion and without separation’ in all contexts of religious experience.”³¹

²⁸ Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *La Interculturalidad a prueba* (Aachen: Verlagsgruppe Mainz, 2006), 43.

²⁹ Christoph Schulte, “Zimzum in the Works of Schelling,” *The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (January 1992): 21.

³⁰ Estermann, *Cruz y coca*, 41.

³¹ Estermann, *Cruz y coca*, 41.

The metaphor of the onion takes the Incarnation very seriously. God's self-revelation becomes flesh in each culture, and its first incarnation was in the first century Jewish community. There is no need to exculturate the essence of the Gospel from its Jewish and Western medieval enfleshments as the peach metaphor requires; each embodiment has its particular odor and way of being. To think of a disincarnate or essentialist Christianity is to negate its enfleshment.

Coming back to my proposal of contraction or demission, I see it as humble recognition of our current socio-cultural and historical enfleshments. On the one hand, it gives Christians the opportunity to go the Gospel, and search within themselves and their faith communities God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ for our contemporary times. On the other hand, demission gives Indigenous communities the space to heal, decolonize, recover, and strengthen their own traditions, epistemologies, and identities. When the time is right, non-Indigenous Christians could learn about Indigenous cosmological, philosophical, and spiritual traditions and through a decolonial and intercultural dialogue, based on epistemic equality.

A Decolonial and Critical Intercultural Dialogue

at el Mercado/qhathu

To encounter Andean people as epistemic subjects, I invite you to visit *el Mercado/qhathu* with me. I grew up in Bolivia going to *el Mercado/qhathu* on Saturdays with my grandmother. *El Mercado/qhathu* is a vibrant marketplace full of splashing colors, varied smells, and bustling crowds. The loud music competes with the noise from cars and the singing voices of vendors. During the colonial period, *el Mercado/qhathu* was the last link in the production and sale of

goods that were fully modern yet grounded in Indigenous technologies and knowledge.³² For the *jaqi/runa*,³³ *el Mercado/qhathu* was also a place to engage and process cosmic and spiritual energies, dialoguing with that which is not visible to the senses in search of conviviality and the harmonizing of life energies.³⁴ Both meanings emerge in a contested exchange between two different *mythoi* or horizons of intelligibility.³⁵ For the *jaqi/runa*, this non-innocent intercultural exchange is informed by decolonizing agendas that reshape interculturality and “make visible lived legacies and long horizons of domination, oppression, exclusion, and colonial difference (ontological, political, economic, cultural, epistemic, cosmological, and existence based).”³⁶

For many non-Indigenous people, *el Mercado/qhathu* is the place where uncomfortable memories of an Indigenous and distant past become tangible in the *qhatheras*.³⁷ They are Quechua and Aymara women, wearing lively *polleras* or wide embroidered skirts, capes, and shawls. They are offering their products while keeping an eye on their children. Their bodies bear the signs of a hardworking life. Their skins are tanned by the Andean sun and dried by the

³² Simón Yampara Huarachi, Saúl Mamani Morales, and Norah Calancha Layme, *La cosmovisión y lógica de la dinámica socioeconómica del Quathu/Feria 16 de julio investigaciones regionales El Alto* (La Paz, Bolivia: Fundación PIEB, UPEA, 2007), xvi.

³³ To honor the way in which Aymara and Quechua people refer to themselves, I will use the terms *jaqi* (being-in-relation) in Aymara, *runa* (being-in-relation), and *runasimi* (being who speaks Quechua) in Quechua.

³⁴ Yampara Huarachi et al., *La cosmovisión y lógica de la dinámica*, xv.

³⁵ Raimundo Panikkar, “What Is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” in *Interpreting across Boundaries*, ed. Gerald James Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 130, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400859276.116>.

³⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, “Interculturality and Decoloniality,” in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (Duke University Press, 2018), 57.

³⁷ *Qhathera* is the castellanization (*castellanización*) of the Quechua term for Aymara/Quechua women merchants selling at the *qhathu*.

cold winters. Their hands are cracked, their heels fissured, and their brown breasts suckle their infants. The heirs of the colonial period, with their colonial mentality, gaze upon them as smelly Indians, ignorant peasants, dark and ugly.³⁸

El Mercado/qhathu is not unique to the Andean region; we can find it all over Latin America. As such, it serves as a theological metaphor for creating a methodological decolonial space that reflects the Latin American religious milieu (muddy, *hibrido*, and contested). *El Mercado/qhathu* is the perfect place for a *tinku* or a decolonial and critical intercultural dialogue between Christian cosmology (creation story) and Andean cosmology. The conversation takes place amidst the presence of a colonial matrix of power that establishes Western epistemology and theories. Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes these “key sites in which Western research of the Indigenous world have come together ... [and] have constructed all the rules by which the Indigenous world has been theorized”³⁹ while silencing Indigenous voices. Hence, I prioritize Indigenous epistemologies, research methods, and architectonic texts to bring Christian cosmology (creation story) and Andean cosmology into dialogue. I intentionally engage in a decolonizing process that places the self-determination of Indigenous peoples at the center. I acknowledge and, to the best of my ability, respect the relational nature of Indigenous research.

I am an Andean Latina woman with Quechua/Aymara ancestry. I grew up in the Quechua valley of *Cochapampa* or *Cochabamba* (*cocha* meaning water and *pampa* meaning plains). As

³⁸ Julia Ramos, an Aymara woman, remembers her father’s tearful warning words: “Children, you have to study, never be like me, a donkey, [an] Indian, a smelly peasant.” *Testimonio* of Julia Ramos in *Tejiendo de otro modo: Feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala*, ed. Yuderlys Espinosa Miñoso, Diana Marcela Gómez Correal, and Karina Ochoa Muñoz, (Popayán, Colombia: Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2014).

³⁹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999,), 32.

such I am a *llajtamasi* (*llajta* means “land” and *masi* “fellow country person”), with the caveat that the connection is to land and not to a nation-state. *Cochapampa* is part of one of the four federations of the Inca confederacy or *Tawantinsuyu* called *Qollasuyu* (belonging to the *Qollas*); hence I am a *Qolla* from what is today Bolivia. My parents are Maria Luisa and Jaime. I have a daughter, Lucia, and we live in the unceded territories of *Chochenyo* and *Ramaytush* Ohlone peoples. I am grateful to the *Chochenyo* and *Ramaytush* Ohlone peoples, their ancestors, and other human people for letting me live in their territory. Therefore, I respectfully ask the permission of my ancestors (*awichas* and *achachilas*) to share what I am about to share in the remaining pages of this article.

Andean Cosmology and the Birthing of the *Tirakunas*

In the Andean world, creation comes out of the watery depths of the Creator Female/Male or the dancing between Light and Earth of an already existent chaotic materiality. The Andean Divinity organizes out of it/themselves. There are five steps or processes of unfoldings and differentiations. I will only focus on the fourth unfolding, where creation, understood as the organization of *Pacha*, takes place. *Pacha* is a pan-Andean term—*pa* means two and *cha* energies—which is usually translated as cosmos, spacetime, or all that exists.

The fourth unfolding or Quality occurs when, out of the unfathomable amniotic watery depths of *Mama Cocha* (Mother/Lady Water), *Pacha* takes a form or is organized. It is a pre-metaphysical state where the light or divine male function and the divine female function are already differentiated through a reciprocal relationship, in a state of equilibrium, organizing *Pacha*.

The Fourth Quality is the unfolding self-inverted reflection of the Andean triadic divinity. In its triadic state, with the Third Quality remaining hidden, the Andean triadic dual

complementarity is ready to unfold into a tetralectic state, creation. *Pacha* is the reflection or analogy of Andean triadic dual complementarity, and *partially* similar to its organizer or creator. *Pacha* is the dual complementarity of opposites, the fulness of duality or the duality of the dual. This movement would explain why Andean people refer to *Pacha* as “pair-cosmic.”

What should be noted here is that the dual unit—and therefore triadic—projects and refers to a complementary and opposite pair, with which fullness of duality (the duality of the dual) is represented symbolically as a tetra-partition, and within which the mediator and medial *chawpi* is manifested as a fifth element from which the mediations corresponding to each linked pair flow. Henceforth, the recurrence of number five in the Manuscript (of Huarochiri), as a symbol of fullness.⁴⁰ The Fourth Quality is represented as the sum of two sets of two dual spirals indicating their own self-inverted reflection.

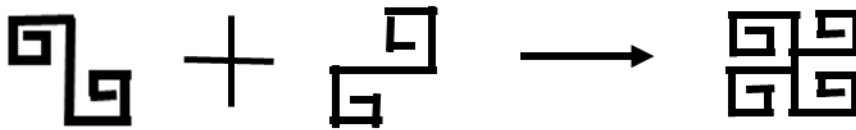


Figure 6. The Fourth Quality.

Jorge Miranda-Luizaga, *Filosofía andina, fundamentos, alteridad y perspectiva* (La Paz, Bolivia: Hisbol, 1996), 40.

Pacha as the non-antagonistic dual complementary of the Divinity is the “fulness of duality”⁴¹ or “the most real equilibrium.”⁴² The Fourth Quality represents this perfect

⁴⁰ Zenón Depaz Toledo, *La cosmo-visión andina en el manuscrito de Huarochirí*, first ed. (Lima, Perú: Vicio Perpetuo, 2015), 82.

⁴¹ Depaz Toledo, *La cosmo-visión andina*, 83.

⁴² Jorge Miranda-Luizaga and Viviana del Carpio Natcheff, “El ‘en si’ y el ‘para si’ y el ‘porque si’ de la filosofía andina,” in *Aportes al diálogo sobre cultura y filosofía andina*, ed.

equilibrium between the Divinity and *Pacha*. It exemplifies the unfolding of life into a material reality. In its symmetrical (2+2) balance, *Pacha* reflects the triadic nature of the Divinity, which appears in creation as a set of a dual complementarity, symbolized by the first set of two connected spirals. One crucial aspect to keep in mind here is that even though the Divinity appears as a pair of dual complementarities, it is constituted by the Third Quality, which remains hidden. *Pacha*, as its inverted reflection of the Divinity, appears as the second set of a dual complementarity pair. Together they form a tetra-complementarity. In *Pacha*, the Third Quality, now sustaining the dual complementary relation between the Divinity and *Pacha*, is the *taypi/chawpi* or Fifth Quality.

Furthermore, the Divinity, even though it appears as a dual complementarity, is triadic because the third Quality constitutes and sustains their individuation, relation, and actualization. Therefore, the triadic logic of relationality that sustains the Andean Divinity also guides *Pacha* ontologically. Because *Pacha* is the inverted reflection of the triadic Divinity, all things in *Pacha* experience a yearning to be with their complement *-ntin*. This yearning to establish relationships to exist and find harmony in the relationship says something about the presence of a metaphysical law or ordering principle driving them. In this sense, there is an ontological principle of relationality driving this yearning.

Going back to the tetra complementarity apparent in *Pacha*, we find a good example of these sets of two dual complementarities on earth, the complementarity of non-antagonistic opposites such as light and darkness, sun and moon, men and women, and life and death, as well as their ontological plurality that produces life. We also encounter a social representation of the

Jorge Miranda-Luizaga, Viviana del Carpio Natcheff, and Javier Medina, *Filosofía y Cultura* (La Paz, Bolivia: Publicaciones SIWA/ Consejo del Saber Qulla/ Goethe Institut, 2000), 43.

ontological necessity to be with its complement in the Incas' famous designation of their empire as *Tawantinsuyo*, a Quechua word. *Tawa* means the number four, *-ntin* is a suffix that qualifies the noun as belonging to, and *suyo* is parts. Gary Urton ponders over the nature of *-ntin*:

The formulation of the concept of pair(s) is closely linked to the suffix *-ntin*. Anyone familiar with the Andean culture history will already be alert to the possible significance of the suffix *-ntin* in grammatical constructions denoting a grouping of things, as this suffix was central to the formulation of the name by which the *Inkas* referred to the political unity of the four (*tawa*) quarters, or parts (*suyu*), of the Inka empire ... the four quarters/parts intimately bound together.⁴³

Urton then asks: "What is the nature of the nature of the binding force that is exerted syntactically and semantically by the use of the suffix *-ntin* as the principal maker of the pair?"⁴⁴ To which he answers: "When added to a kinship term, *-ntin* signifies the connection between the named kinship status and a relation; e.g. *yayantin* (the father with his son) ... The force that binds these individuals together into various named groupings is that of consanguineal family relations." Then he concludes: "When added to temporal nouns *-ntin* signifies the wholeness of the unity of time."⁴⁵ Therefore, the suffix *-ntin* suggest a unifying link of what appears as separate but in reality, is not. Depaz elaborates: "It is as if its unification corresponded to the action brought by a force, energy or need that is hardly alluded to in that suffix. Thus, *yanatin* means 'with its complement' ... and *tawantin* means 'with its four.'"⁴⁶ *Pacha* reflects the triadic

⁴³ Gary Urton, *The Social Life of Numbers: A Quechua Ontology of Numbers and Philosophy of Arithmetic* (Austin: TX: University of Texas Press, 1997), 63.

⁴⁴ Urton, *Social Life of Numbers*, 64.

⁴⁵ Urton, *Social Life of Numbers*, 64.

⁴⁶ Depaz Toledo, *La cosmo-visión andina*, 85.

dual complementarity of the Andean Divinity. The multiplicity of relational becoming confronts the necessity of being with their *-ntin* or complement in order to exist. This drive or yearning towards multiplicity, amidst a material reality, becomes tangible through the principle of correspondence.

The principle of correspondence is usually explained as addressing equivalence or similarity between the macro- or cosmic level and the micro-level. Nicanor Sarmiento Yupanqui, Josef Estermann, and Jubenal Quispe,⁴⁷ among others, seem to have borrowed the Pythagorean concept of microcosm and macrocosm⁴⁸ to describe the fundamental precept that “distinct aspects, regions or spheres of reality correspond to each other in a harmonious way.”⁴⁹ Estermann, however, explains that etymologically correspondence (*con + respondere*) implies a correlation, a mutual and bidirectional relation between two camps of reality.⁵⁰ He challenges the principle of efficient causality, and opens the possibility for other types of theories of causation

⁴⁷ Josef Estermann, *Filosofía andina: Estudio intercultural de la sabiduría autóctona andina* (Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala, 1998); Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui, “Andean Christian Theologies, Elements of a Rainbow of Theological Voices of the Indigenous Peoples of Abya Yala: A Missiological and Anthropological Study of the Andean Trilogy” (Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2011); Jubenal Quispe, *Ecosofía andina: instituciones ecológicas en la filosofía andina*, Texto y Taller (Cochabamba, Bolivia: Verbo Divino, 2006).

⁴⁸ “Macrocosm” and “microcosm” are philosophical terms referring, respectively, to the world as a whole and to some part, usually the human person, as a model or epitome of it. According to one version of this ancient analogy, the human being and the universe are constructed according to the same harmonic proportions, each sympathetically attuned to the other, each a cosmos ordered according to reason. Donald Levy, “Macrocosm and Microcosm,” ed. Donald M. Borchert, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), 639.

⁴⁹ Estermann, *Filosofía andina*, 136.

⁵⁰ Estermann, *Filosofía andina*, 136.

such as the one proposed by Alfred North Whitehead.⁵¹ I suggest that the Andean principle of complementarity needs to expand beyond the *Pachasófico* concept of macrocosm-microcosm to include God-world relations. It seems that the Divinity sustains and guides, while also *Pacha* guides the Divinity.

Perhaps Miranda-Luizaga and del Carpio Natcheff can help us craft a more nuanced understanding of different implications implicit in the principle of complementarity, or analogy, as they call it. They write: “The principle of Andean analogy is not an attribute or logical structure of a final cause; but the force and the reason that reflects dynamic states of processes that transmit the unfolding of the cosmos expressed in the mystery of life.”⁵² Miranda-Luizaga and del Carpio Natcheff’s statement that the principle of correspondence “reflects the dynamic states of a process” sustains the possibility of underlying activities or principles similar to Whitehead’s creativity and order, present in Andean metaphysics. In Whitehead’s own words, “[creativity is] the one underlying activity of realisation individualizing itself in an interlocked plurality of modes,”⁵³ while “order is the limitation or structuring of creativity, both of them are

⁵¹ For Alfred North Whitehead, it is an essential attribute of God to be fully involved in and affected by temporal processes. This idea contrasts neatly with traditional forms of theism that hold God to be or at least be conceived of as being in all respects non-temporal (eternal), unchanging (immutable), and unaffected by the world (impassible), as presented by Thomas Aquinas. Process theism does not deny that God is in some respects eternal, immutable, and impassible, but it contradicts the classical view by insisting that God is in some respects temporal, mutable, and passible. Donald Viney, “Process Theism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2014), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/process-theism/>.

⁵² Miranda-Luizaga and del Carpio Natcheff, “El ‘en si’ y el ‘para si’ y el ‘porque si’ de la filosofía andina,” 35.

⁵³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, Lowell Lectures, 1925 (New York: Free Press, 1967), 70.

necessary and interconnected.”⁵⁴ Therefore, the Andean Divinity brings forward and guides the becoming process of *Pacha*, and *Pacha* guides the becoming process of the Divinity.

There are a couple of terms to describe the presence of metaphysical principles in Andean thought. Zenón Depaz Toledo and Mario Mejía Huamán talk about *kamaq* and *tiqsi* and both translate them as “foundation and principle.”⁵⁵ We will closely study both terms at a later point; the priority here is to acknowledge their presence and role in creation. The presence of an ordering principle means for the world or *Aka/kay Pacha*’s inhabitants that they must live in harmonious ways, always searching for a balanced relationship with all that exists through reciprocity. The human community is called to life as ethical communal lives searching for balance. It is in *Aka/kay Pacha* where we find at play tetra-complementarities of air-earth and fire-water. Spacetime and multidimensional figures such as the *Chakana* demonstrate that creation is the dual-complementary of the divine unfolding Totality through a process of organizing and differentiation. Life, in its material dimension and continual becoming, keeps unfolding and changing is once more introduced into this open process.

The voraciousness of the multiplicity of becoming, inscribed in the principle of creativity, struggles to keep its complements. It is not easy to maintain a harmonious balance with one’s *yana*. This precarious situation is exemplified in the Aymara term *jiwasa* that corresponds to the fourth singular person and could be translated as “*nosotros dositos*” or “*nosotritos*” (we the little

⁵⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected ed., Gifford Lectures 1927–28 (New York: Free Press, 1979), 146.

⁵⁵ Mario Mejía Huamán, *Teqse: La cosmovisión andina y las categorías quechuas como fundamentos para una filosofía peruana y de América andina* (Lima, Perú: Universidad Ricardo Palma, Facultad de Lenguas Modernas, Instituto de Cultura Andina, 1999), 16; Depaz Toledo, *La cosmo-visión andina*, 211–20.

two).⁵⁶ The word *jiwasa* is composed of the prefix *jiwa*, related to death, and the suffix *sa*, related to *ours*. Hence *jiwasa* could be translated as “our death,” yours and mine, so that the fourth singular person, which constitutes the couple, could exist.⁵⁷ The existence of a fourth singular person is only possible because in Aymara a couple is seen as a plurisingular person (*chachawarmi* or *malefemale*). Auto-sacrifice to maintain the balance present in the Andean Divinity does not come easy in a creation that drives toward multiplicity and complexity. In *Pacha*, dual complementarities tend to lose their fullness of being more often than not, allowing imbalance and disorder to take its course. This would explain why the Andean *jaqi/runa* (being-in-relation) lives in constant dialogue with all members of *Pacha* to ensure reciprocal relations.

Reciprocal relations or *Ayni* involve humans and other-than-human persons. Quechua and Aymara communities speak of a mutual co-nurturing between all beings; there is no ontological differentiation between humans and other-than-human people. Personhood is attained through reciprocal relations between equals. In the Andes, Quechua people call other-than-human persons *tirakunas* or earth-beings. Marisol de la Cadena translates *tirakunas* as *seres-tierra* or earth-beings. *Tirakunas* are “non-human persons; they are animals, plants and many other elements of what we would call ‘landscape.’”⁵⁸ *Tirakunas* are sentient entities; they are mountains, rivers, lagoons, and other visible marks of the landscape and can enter into mutual relationships of care with other *jaqi/runa*, including humans.

⁵⁶ Carlos Milla Villena, *Ayni: Semiotica andina de los espacios sagrados* (Cochabamba: Asociación Cultural Amaru Wayra, 2004), 161.

⁵⁷ Milla Villena, *Ayni*, 161.

⁵⁸ Marisol de la Cadena, “Cosmopolítica indígena en los Andes: Reflexiones conceptuales más allá de la ‘política,’” *Tabula Rasa* 33 (2020): 284, <https://doi.org/10.25058/20112742.n33.10>.

To better comprehend *Tirakunas*'s origin, we need to look back at the moment *Pacha* emerges as the dual-complementarity of the Andean Divinity. *Pacha* is part of the divine, and all creation has *Ajayu* or Spirit and *Qamasa* or Life energy. Within this context, all creation has self-awareness and agency. Hence, a river that provides water and food contributes to life's advancement, participating in the cosmic community as a *jaqi/runa* (being-in-relation).

Andean cosmology is a formidable conversation partner. First, the Andean divine is a dual *malefemale* complementarity present in creation. Second, *Pacha* emerges out of the Divinity through a self-organizing and differentiation process and complements the Divinity. *Pacha*, with all its members, is the image of the divine, not just of humans. Finally, all members of *Pacha* and the Divinity seem to be going through a continual process of becoming. There is still much work in front of missionaries before anyone can say that they deeply understand this complex philosophy.

From Universality to Pluriversality

From this quick look at Andean cosmology, it becomes evident that we are in front of different metaphysics, ontology, and ethics from our own. Euro-modern naturalism, described as the idea of nature as unique and universal, separate from humans, is the result of a Western cosmological conception, a way of organizing the world built by the moderns in the 17th century yet still grounded in Christian cosmology. Euro-modern naturalism affirms that “only humans are endowed with inner life. The other ‘existents’—plants, stones, animals—are deprived of it.”⁵⁹ Yet, as we learned from the Andean people, that is not the case; all members of *Pacha* have an inner life, each in their own particular way. An easy solution would be to cry incommensurably

⁵⁹ Luisa Corradini, “Philippe Descola: ‘Los hombres no son los reyes de la naturaleza,’” *La Nación*, August 2006, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/cultura/philippe-descola-los-hombres-no-son-los-reyes-de-la-naturaleza-nid833801/>. Translation mine.

and relativism, a perspective based on a Eurocentric ontology that claims the presence of multiple cultures without revising its own ontological and epistemological assumptions.

First, Andean ontology is relational; in other words, relationship constitutes beingness. Second, *Pacha* is in the Divinity. Hence existence itself points towards the presence of a Spirit of Life and life energy. This Spirit of Life permeates all creation, giving everybody a sense of awareness that facilitates right relationships. Third, there is no dualistic division within this ontology between spirit and matter or natural and the supernatural. Fourth and finally, the Divinity is always immanently present, sacralizing all creation. A profound encounter with this philosophical system would require that Christianity evaluates the philosophical tenets upon which it has developed its doctrines.

An intercultural dialogue with Indigenous cultures ought to lead to the recognition of the presence of different ontologies and the construct of diverse realities or worlds. Hence, we can no longer claim the existence of **one** nature/reality/world and many cultures. Instead, there are many ways of constructing worlds. *In other words, we are moving beyond universality to a pluriversality.* A *pluriverso* speaks of many worlds, many interculturalities, and a Christianity that, like an onion, continues to grow, mature, and guide the worlds. This transition is already taking place more and more among Indigenous communities immersed in healing or decolonization process.

As I mentioned above, decolonization and healing require spaces where the colonized feel free to drink from their ancestral wells, to recover, reconstruct, and display hidden knowledge that had gone underground or almost disappeared. As such, decolonization is a sensitive, creative, and contested process. The conscious decision to demission or to stop

missionary work supports Indigenous people who still find themselves battling against cultural genocide and supports the protection of land and self-determination.

A decolonial and intercultural dialogue supports the *thinku* or encounter between what Yampara calls cultural matrixes. It places ethics at the core of the conversations. With a dying planet on our hands, it cannot be otherwise. Christianity needs to take responsibility for its role in creating the colonial difference, or racism and the coloniality of the real, and for being the eraser of other ontologies that have led us to a climate catastrophe. We Christians need to remember that we are the youngest siblings in the large family that is creation. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. An intercultural Christianity, perhaps seeing itself as an onion, would be diverse, beautiful, and life-giving.

The decolonization of the religious landscape and the arrival of Indigenous philosophies at the theological table will transform the way we understand mission. Within this new religious landscape, the Catholic Church cannot simply be pluricultural, it will have to become a pluriversal church, something that we have not begun to imagine. Still, we can certainly sense it as a possibility thanks to our brief encounter with Andean cosmology. I trust that deep faith in the presence of the Spirit of God in creation can ground a kenotic process that allows for decolonial and critical intercultural dialogues.