

Andrew Redden, ‘Angelic Death and Sacrifice in Early Modern Hispanic America’, in *Death and Dying in Colonial Spanish America*, ed by Miruna Achim and Martina Will de Chaparro (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), pp.142-69.

Chapter 6

Angelic Death and Sacrifice in Early Modern Hispanic America¹

By Andrew Redden

The springs and fast-flowing rivers of the Saviour, which pump out from the Divine heart, from the body of Christ [and] from Paradise, in order to irrigate the earth of our souls, once turned into fountains of most precious blood, are the seven Sacraments that he left to his Church.²

To strengthen us He has us eat His precious body, has us drink His precious blood./ The holiest of the Sacraments is a food and is a gift [...] / The food of angels became the food of men.³

By beginning his chapter on the Sacraments with this adaptation of a citation from Isaiah 12, the sixteenth-century Andean missionary Fray Jerónimo de Ore located the central tenets of the Catholic faith within the framework of an

¹ I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for their financial support of this research and to Martina Will de Chaparro and Miruna Achim for their helpful comments and suggestions.

² Luis Jerónimo de Ore, *Symbolo Catholico Indiano, en el qual se declaran los misterios de la Fe contenidos en los tres Symbolos Chatolicos, Apostolico, Niceno, y de S. Athanasio. Contiene assi mesmo un descripcion del nuevo orbe, y de los naturales del. Y un orden de enseñarles la doctrina Christiana en las dos Lenguas naturales Quichua y Aymara, con un confesionario breve y Catechismo dela communion* (en Lima, por Antonio Ricardo, 1598), fol. 58r. (See the facsimile edition by Antoine Tibesar (Lima: Australis, 1992), 193. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

³ Fourth Psalm for the feast of Corpus Christi, in Bernardino de Sahagún, *Psalmodia Christiana*, trans., by Arthur J. O. Anderson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 173.

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Andean sacred landscape.⁴ Once illustrated in a language evocative of springs and water sources, the Catholic sacraments would become recognisable in an indigenous cosmovision that held such features in the landscape to be sacred entry-points into the life-giving underworld. The sacred landscapes that were intimately involved with cycles of life and death, destruction and rebirth were certainly not forgotten as sixteenth-century missionaries worked with translators, scribes and catechists looking for coherent ways to explain in indigenous languages the death and resurrection of Christ.⁵ A Eucharistic liturgy located within a sacred landscape was one that could and did resonate with peoples of various indigenous cultures throughout the Americas.

This Eucharistic liturgy was, at the same time, considered to be angelic, as the above Nahuatl psalm for the feast of Corpus Christi describes, with the sacrificial body and blood of Christ being shared as spiritual food between both angels and humankind.⁶ Mendicant friars in New Spain attributed a “spirit of

⁴ Isaiah 12:3-4 *Haurietis aquas in gaudio de fontibus salvatoris. Et dicetis in die illa: Confitemini Domino et invoke nomen ejus* (You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains. And you shall say on that day: Praise the Lord, and call upon his name). Ore cites the Latin (Vulgate) here but moves immediately to interpretation rather than translation into the vernacular. The symbolism is drawn from the Judeo-Christian mystical tradition of divine love and also Neo-platonic Christian ideas about the emanation of divine grace but, as Ore's text was designed to help missionaries explain Christianity to indigenous Andeans, the emphasis he places on these types of metaphors makes them significant also within an Andean framework.

⁵ Christ's passion and death, they believed, were not merely represented by the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass but actually took place during each consecration.

⁶ The *Psalmodia Christiana* was compiled by a team of acculturated indigenous translators under the supervision of Fray Bernadino de Sahagún in mid-sixteenth-century New Spain.

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silence, admiration, wonder, joy, thanksgiving and praise” to the angels as they watched humans take communion.⁷ Angels were also considered an intrinsic part of the structure of the Universe: from a divine source they radiated light and grace through the celestial hierarchies to the rest of the Universe (and, in particular, humanity),⁸ and were intimate actors in the cycles of life and death of humankind, interceding for the living and the dying and even becoming one with the dead as they too took on the roles of intercessors.

The following essay will investigate the angels’ role in the merging of indigenous sacrificial cults with Hispano-Catholic cults of the dead and the Eucharistic liturgy and, in so doing, it will explore a range of different sources from across Hispanic America. Beginning with an analysis of a Tzotzil oral history which describes the sacrifice of an angel, the essay will use inquisitorial sources, contemporary chronicles and parish records in order to compare it with colonial religious reality. These comparisons will explore the wider implications and associations of sacrifice, angelic death and spiritual mediation (especially of

⁷ Fray Juan de Zumárraga, *Regla Cristiana Breve*, ed. Ildefonso Adeva (Pamplona: Ediciones Eunate, 1994), 127-8, cited by Fernando Cervantes in “Angels conquering and conquered: changing perceptions in Spanish America,” in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 104-33, 129.

⁸ This Neo-platonic angelology so influential in early modern Hispanic Catholicism is primarily derived from the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius although the importance of the writings of Augustine and other Church Fathers also cannot be underemphasized. For the *Celestial Hierarchy*, see *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK, 1987). For Augustine’s most influential work, see *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

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children) in Hispanic America during the colonial period. As such, the essay will be structured into three main parts. The first, which will use the Tzotzil oral history as an overarching narrative out of which specific themes will be drawn and compared to specific mythical leitmotifs and historical moments in particular indigenous and even Hispano-European group histories, will look at Angels as sacrificial victims and mediators through sacrifice. The second section will compare the theme of children as sacrificial victims and mediators through sacrifice in both pre-Columbian and Colonial Mesoamerica, New Granada and the Andes. To this point, the essay is not suggesting causality between the different cultures (however much exchange may or may not have taken place between certain groups, such as will be highlighted below) but is instead drawing attention to comparable phenomena related to the theme of sacrifice and Angelic death within indigenous and Hispanic cosmovisions. The final section, however, will move from comparing the non-causally linked phenomenon of mediation through child-sacrifice through to what was a causally linked (through dissemination of Hispano-Catholic religious culture) and distinctly pan-Hispanic consideration of dead children as Angels and mediators.

Angelic Sacrifices

In the district of San Andrés, in Chiapas, Mexico, there exists a Tzotzil folk-narrative about a hunter who “killed the son of an Angel.”⁹ A hunter passed

⁹ This oral history has been published as a children’s story *Ti Paxal Mil Chon, La*

Smilbesnich’on Jun Anjele: El cazador que mató al hijo de un ángel, translated into Spanish by

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by an object he failed to recognise, so he took a closer look, took out his machete and chopped it into pieces before carrying on his way. Another hunter, walking past the same place, was brought up short by the sound of something moaning. He looked for the source and saw what he thought were some rotten pieces of wood lying on the ground. These bits of wood were in fact an angel that begged the hunter to carry him home. So the hunter picked up the pieces of angel and carried them to where he was instructed—which in fact turned out to be a cave—delivering the dismembered angel to his father. When the angel’s father (described in the narrative as “the Lord”) saw how his son had been hacked to pieces he gathered together all the animals and snakes and asked them who would deliver justice to the assassin. In the end, a little vine snake killed the first hunter with a bite on the leg and returned to his master’s cave carrying the blood of his victim. The angel’s father, meanwhile, waited for the snake’s return with a cup in his hand for the blood. Once the cup was filled, he poured the blood over his son, the angel’s body, to release and renew his spirit.

For the purposes of an academic study, oral histories such as these present numerous methodological problems if we wish to use them as evidence. Given the difficulties of locating the story accurately in an historic past, we are limited merely to stating that within the story lie echoes of a colonial religious past and that such narratives are indicative (but not certain proof) of local historical tendencies. Nevertheless it is important that some historians at least attempt to engage with oral histories as well as more

José Pérez Pérez (Chiapas: DIF, 1992). The publication finishes with the assertion by the narrator Andrés López López, that “this is the story of our ancestors”.

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traditionally western text-based histories in order that accepted historiography does not continue to sideline other non-western European ways of reading the past.¹⁰ This is especially important when dealing with non-western history or the more liminal temporal and geographical spaces where European and non-European ideas (and therefore, ways of reading the past), merge. How to do this, of course, will always present significant challenges and responses will always differ. In the case of the Tzotzil narrative, oral histories such as this contain a wealth of cultural metaphors that can help draw out meaning in corresponding historical documentation. As such it can act as an overarching structural narrative out of which particular themes can be seen and analysed in documents that refer to specific communities and specific historical moments. For instance, the story is strikingly reminiscent of accounts of the continuation and extirpation of indigenous religious practices that took place intermittently throughout the colonial period—in particular, we can mention those practices discovered in Yucatán towards the end of the sixteenth century¹¹ and those of

¹⁰ Luke Clossey has argued for the possibility of world histories written from Buddhist and Daoist perspectives thereby producing a quite different narrative to those written using standard western historiographical methodologies. “Eurocentrism and Writing the Early Modern World” (paper presented at the Postcolonial Research Forum, Queen’s University Belfast, Northern Ireland, December 2009).

¹¹ For this infamous case see the works by Inga Clendinnen: *Ambivalent Conquests*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and “Disciplining the Indians: Franciscan Ideology and Missionary Violence in Yucatán,” *Past and Present* 94, no. 1 (1982): 27-48. See also, Dennis Tedlock, “Torture in the Archives: Mayans Meet Europeans,” *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 1 (1993): 139-152.

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the Zapotecs that caused frequent concern to the Spanish authorities in Oaxaca

(then Antequera) during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹²

In the first hunter’s destruction of what appeared to be a wooden figure we can see reflections of colonial-Hispanic encouragement of indigenous people to denounce idolatrous practices and destroy what were considered to be idols; in the vengeance taken on the iconoclast and the regeneration of the “angel-son,” we see echoes of the resurgence of indigenous religious practices and the emergence of conflict caused by religious division. By way of an example, one particularly famous denunciation that had such violent consequences took place in San Francisco Cajonos, an indigenous pueblo of the diocese of Antequera in September 1700.¹³ Two indigenous sacristans, Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Ángeles, arrived at the Dominican convent to denounce their fellow villagers to the friars for “idolatry” that was taking place. A

¹² There are a series of idolatry trials that can be examined in the Archivo Histórico del Poder Judicial de Oaxaca (AHPJO). See also David Tavárez’s essays, “Idolatry as an ontological question: Native consciousness and juridical proof in colonial Mexico,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 2 (2002): 114-39 and “The Passion According to the Drum: The Christian Appropriation of Zapotec Ritual Genre in New Spain,” *The Americas* 62, no. 3 (2006): 413-44.

¹³ The subsequent trial manuscripts have been utilised in the process for their canonisation. Transcriptions can be found in the Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Oaxaca (hereafter AHAO), *Proceso de los mártires de San Francisco Cajonos y otras informaciones*, passim. Given that the document is a transcription I have referenced the passages using modern page numbers but have also included the folio numbers within brackets to help researchers locate specific passages more easily—they can perhaps be regarded in the same way as paragraph numbers. Testimonies included within this one transcription will be referred to by specifying the date and, if available or different to the previous citation, the names of the witnesses.

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party left the convent and were led to the house of an indigenous villager called Joseph Flores, where they saw gathered in the patio: “many torches made of *ocote* and many indigenous persons [lit. *naturales*], men, women and young boys, [stood in] a great silence.”¹⁴ The Spaniards burst in, but the worshippers scattered into the night and the Spaniards (who only managed to seize one villager) were left surveying a chaotic scene in which a sacrificed doe had been left bleeding to death together with a number of beheaded turkeys in various positions in the courtyard: blood from the offerings had been poured into bowls that were placed on images of saints “painted in Mexican style” and turned face-down. Blood also had been sprinkled on a particular kind of paper made from bark called *Yxcamatl*.¹⁵ The offending items and sacrifices were confiscated and taken back to the convent.¹⁶

That night, however, an angry crowd consisting of the villagers of San Francisco and pueblos from the surrounding area laid siege to the convent.¹⁷ A crowd of about eighty began throwing stones and hammering down the doors with axes while Spaniards who had taken refuge from the rioters fired back with muskets. One witness even reported that individuals in the crowd were chanting

¹⁴ Declaration of Don Antonio Rodríguez Pinelo and consorts, 16 September 1700, AHAO, *Proceso de los mártires*, (fols. 95r-99r), 57-63, 58. *Ocote* is an aromatic pine native to the region.

¹⁵ 2 October 1700, ibid., (fols. 126r-v), 87.

¹⁶ 16 September 1700, ibid., (fols. 95r-99r), 57-63, 58.

¹⁷ Testimony of Juan Tirado to Captain don Juan Antonio Mier, 28 September 1700, ibid. (fols. 103v-107r), 63-9, 68. According to the testimonies, villagers from San Pedro, Santo Domingo, San Miguel, San Pablo, and San Matheo also took part in the riot.

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“death to [...] friars!”¹⁸ After a couple of hours of impasse, the rioters called to fray Alonso de Vargas, the parish priest and convent superior, that they wanted the Spaniards to hand the sacristans over to them, and only then would the violence stop. The friar countered that they could never do that as “the Church and its ministers defends all those who look to it for protection.” In response, the indigenous rioters apparently swore to take the roof off the convent, burn the cells and set fire to the town and so deprive the king of his tribute.¹⁹

In the ultimate parley with Rodríguez Pinelo (the senior lay-Spaniard present) the villagers refused any offer of money in return for their peaceful dispersal and stated rather that they were going to dismember the sacristans.²⁰

¹⁸ The actual chant was “[Que] frailes cornudos mueran!” (The manuscript in the AHAO has been mis-transcribed here with an abbreviated “Que” having been read as “a.”) *Cornudo* translates as “cuckold” but it is unclear whether it was intended as a generic insult (which perhaps the Spanish witnesses even reported as something they themselves would have said under similar circumstances), whether they actually wanted to imply that the friars lived hypocritically in a state of concubinage, or whether it was meant to insult their virility given that they were (should have been) celibate. *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹ Letter by Fray Alonso de Vargas, 16 September 1700, *ibid.* (fols. 55r-56r), 34-5; Declaration of Don Antonio Rodríguez Pinelo and Consorts, 16 September 1700, *ibid.* (fols. 96v-97r), 59-60.

²⁰ “...preguntó, que para que querían a los dos referidos indios, a que respondieron, para haserlos quartos” (“he [Rodríguez Pinelo] asked why they wanted the two aforementioned Indians, to which they responded, “to quarter them”). *Ibid.* (fols. 97 r-v), 60. A later testimony by the blacksmith Diego de Mora attributes the offer of money to the friars who said that the Indians could take their money but they could not and would not hand over Jacinto and Juan. Testimony of Diego de Mora, 2 October 1700, *ibid.* (fols. 131r-138r), pp. 90-95, (fol. 135v), p. 92. In a more detailed testimony than the one he had given previously, Rodríguez Pinelo added that the besiegers threatened everyone in the convent with death if they did not comply with

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With the Spanish running low on gunpowder and shot, trapped in one of the monastic cells and well aware of how precarious their position was, they agreed to hand the sacristans over.²¹ Knowing they were about to die, the two indigenous sacristans asked to receive the sacraments before being handed over to the waiting rioters.²² This was a significant act that re-affirmed their orthodoxy in the face of death, prepared them mentally and spiritually and, by partaking of “the food of the angels,” gave them strength for the transition to the next stage of life.²³ By this ritual act, the sacristans were participating in the same baroque religious spirit mentioned above by James Flaks that linked the Eucharist with notions of individual (royal) deaths being transformed into sacrifices.²⁴ The sacristans’ knowingly imminent deaths took on Eucharistic significance as they prepared themselves ritually to imitate Christ’s passion.

their wishes. Testimony of Don Antonio Rodríguez Pinelo, 2 October 1700, AHAO, *Proceso de los mártires* (fols. 125r-131r), 86-90, (fols. 128r-v), 88.

²¹ Testimony of Juan Tirado to Captain don Juan Antonio Mier, 28 September 1700, ibid. (fols. 103v-107r), 63-9, 67. Agreement to hand over the two sacristans was reached among the Spaniards defending the convent after a brief discussion that apparently excluded the friars. It was seemingly under the condition that the indigenous townsfolk had to give their word not to harm them. Perhaps, bound by codes of honour, the Spaniards honestly believed the indigenous promise not to harm the sacristans, although (perhaps more realistically) they decided that it would be better to sacrifice Juan and Jacinto in order to end the riot and save the lives of the rest while preserving the religious and municipal property.

²² Ibid. (fols. 105r-v), 67.

²³ The abovementioned Fourth Psalm for Corpus Christi continues, “A miracle was wrought for us, we who are poor, who are in need, when God’s food became our souls.” Sahagún, *Psalmodia Christiana*, 173.

²⁴ See above, 112-13.

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While members of the crowd took back their own sacrifices and instruments of worship, the sacristans were dragged to the community whipping-post next to the convent and the crowd beat them bloody, in full view of the Spaniards. They were then taken to the neighbouring town of San Pedro before being “disappeared.” Sebastian de Rua told the investigators that he had heard a rumour that Jacinto de los Ángeles had been thrown from a cliff behind the village of Santo Domingo Xagacia, part of the parish of San Francisco Cajonos, while Juan Bautista had been hacked to death in the wilderness behind the village of San Pablo of the same parish.²⁵ By the following year, it had “become common knowledge” that the two sacristans had been dragged into the woods, where their arms had been cut off, their hearts taken out and, after the dogs refused to eat them, cast into the river while the remainder of their bodies were burned.²⁶

In this tragic story of religious and factional conflict, a number of important themes can be highlighted that correspond to the Tzotzil story of the hunters and the “angel-son.” Of superficial significance is a comment in one of

²⁵ “Declaration of Sebastian de Rua, 30 October 1700,” AHAO, *Proceso de los mártires* (fol. 120r), 81.

²⁶ AHAO, *Un Sello que dice: “Villa Alta” – Juzgado de la Inst. del Partido. Año de 1701. Criminal. En Averiguación de los Mártires que padecieron en San Francisco Cajonos. Número 105*, 4. “Common knowledge,” however, did not mean “officially verified.” The same document stated that, “the two denouncers fled from the prison they were being held in after being freed by members of their families. They took their leave saying they were leaving the aforementioned pueblo because of the injuries they had received during the beatings and, to the present date, although attempts have been made to find them by order of the Alcalde Mayor [...] it has not been possible to locate them,” 3-4.

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the testimonies that in fact indicates a link between the Zapotec regions of Oaxaca and the Tzotzil and Mayan regions of Chiapas and Guatemala. During the investigation and search for the two sacristans:

The day after [the riot], Friday at about nine o’ clock in the morning, the Governor, *Alcaldes* and about forty Indians came to ask the Reverend Fathers and the *alguacil mayor* for pardon. On asking them to declare what they had done with the two denouncers [of idolatry], they replied that they had freed them from the prison of San Pedro where they were held the previous night under the condition that they went into exile, to Chiapas or Guatemala.²⁷

While this essay is not suggesting that the riot and killings at San Francisco Cajonos were directly transformed into the Tzotzil angel-son narrative, the link between the regions in the trial testimony does reveal the existence of routes of potential cultural exchange during the Colonial period. With that in mind, the parallels between the two stories can be drawn out and compared as these were not cultures that existed in isolation. Even if they did not directly influence each other, both the historical account and the traditional narrative demonstrate violent divisions in indigenous communities with respect to religious practice. They both show the perceived importance of continuing autochthonous religious rites and the link between sacrificial death and the survival of the community (and, in the Tzotzil narrative, life itself). The importance of traditional communal sacrifice was highlighted in San Francisco Cajonos by the overwhelming participation in the discovered indigenous ceremony, the subsequent riot, and the retrieval of the sacrifices and the

²⁷ Testimony of Juan Tirado to Captain don Juan Antonio Mier, 28th September 1700, AHAO, *Proceso de los mártires* (fols. 103v-107r), 63-9, (fol. 106v), 68.

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instruments of worship from the sacked convent. More significantly, this importance was highlighted by the perceived ritual sacrifice and dismemberment of Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Ángeles. In the Tzotzil story this is paralleled by the ritual killing of the iconoclastic hunter who dismembered the angel. Through the ritual death and appropriation of the hunter’s life-blood, the spirit of the angel was able to regenerate. By the same token, the Zapotec communities of the pueblos around San Francisco Cajonos were able to continue their essential sacrifices to the gods and, by the apparent ritual and collective murder of the sacristans they were also renewed and strengthened as a united community: “they said if any one Indian was taken [arrested for the crime] then all would die with him.”²⁸ The thematic links between the Tzotzil angel-story, events at San Francisco Cajonos and the Catholic Eucharist are relatively complex, however: the narratives overlap but, as we might expect, they do not fit perfectly. The Tzotzil story ritually uses sacrificial blood to give life, it yet it differs from the Catholic Eucharist from the perspective that the victim, in this case, is unwilling and, in this respect, the rite is essentially indigenous even if it has taken on the regalia of Christian Eucharistic ceremony (such as the chalice). Instead, the victim is someone who has transgressed social and ritual norms (although arguably Christ also transgressed the social and ritual norms of the society in which his “life-giving sacrifice” was originally made). The sacrifice of the Tzotzil hunter links then with

²⁸ Testimony of Francisco Ruis Mexia, 6 October 1700, AHAO, *Proceso de los mártires* (fols.

145r-147v), 100-3, (fol. 147r), 103. As a matter of fact, this apparent willingness to take collective responsibility for the violence in San Francisco Cajonos did not save fifteen of those who participated in the violence from execution. Tavárez, “The Passion,” 413-14.

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the sacrifice of the sacristans in San Francisco Cajonos—they too transgressed social and ritual norms with potentially very damaging consequences from the perspective of the indigenous community. The Eucharistic nature of the sacristans’ deaths comes from the way they “handed themselves over” after ritually preparing themselves for martyrdom.

Also worthy of mention is that the apparently ritual sacrifices of the sacristans were said to have taken place in the *monte*, wild and mountainous bush-land that surrounded the villages: this is a feature of much traditional indigenous worship during the colonial period. In actual fact, the killings most probably bore more resemblance to criminal executions than ritual sacrifices—although in both indigenous and Hispanic colonial society, punishment for religious crimes certainly involved ritual and, once again, Christ’s “sacrificial death” was arguably an execution for having transgressed social and ritual norms.²⁹ The detail of the heart excision would most likely have been added after the event by public rumour [*la voz común*] as part of a transformative process that sacralised (and sensationalised) the past. This could be true whether considered from the perspective of the Hispano-Christian community, or the traditional indigenous as, for the former, this transformative process was hagiographical with respect to the two sacristans, and for the latter, it would become part of the restoration and development of the indigenous cosmovision. The significance of these rumoured sacrifices then is that their perception conformed to another relatively widespread feature of sacrificial rituals documented during the colonial period; that sacrifices would commonly be

²⁹ David Tavárez refers to the killings of the sacristans as “executions,” “The Passion,” 413.

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made to local gods in out-of-the-way places, in the mountains and especially caves, partly and obviously because such isolation protected indigenous religious practitioners to a great extent from discovery and persecution but also because indigenous religion was always intimately linked to the natural landscape. In the Mesoamerican origin myths for example, the ancestors often emerged from caves (usually through spontaneous generation) and, in one particular representation of this, the cave is even depicted as a womb—that of the earth mother—from which the Toltecs first began their journey.³⁰ A corresponding narrative can also be found in the Andean *Myth of the Ayar Siblings* in which the ancestors of various ethnic Andean groups were said to have emerged from different “windows” in the hill of Pacariqtambo near the Titicaca basin. While these narratives are not causally linked their commonality demonstrates key recurring tropes within diverse frameworks of the sacred and, as such, they merit comparative attention within studies that consider such universal preoccupations as the connections between life, death and notions of the divine.

³⁰ See the image depicting the migration of the Toltecs from their mythical land of origin—the womb-like Chicomotzoc or “Seven Caves”—in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS Mexicain 46-58, fol. 16r. A corresponding Andean myth is the *Myth of the Ayar Siblings* in which the ancestors of various ethnic Andean groups emerged from different “windows” in the hill of Pacariqtambo near the Titicaca basin. Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, *The History of the Incas*, trans. and ed. Brian S. Bauer and Vania Smith (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 60-1.

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From Death to Life: Angelic Eucharists

In Mesoamerican iconography the earth mother, a “benign source of food and life,” is commonly depicted as a goddess of death.³¹ Portrayed with a skull-like face with a gaping maw that received the bodies of the dead and into which blood streamed from sacrifices made to her, each of the joints on her limbs contained clashing jaws with knife-like teeth to cleave through and grind the bones of the dead as she consumed them. Most importantly, however, the same deity that devoured humans in death also created life: this same imagery shows her squatting to give birth. The sacrificial blood that drained into her mouth together with the flesh and bones she consumed nourished her and gave strength for the continuation of life. Death was the ultimate payment for the debt owed to her for the consumption of the fruits of the earth. So again if we look for points of comparison, in the Tzotzil story, carrying the angel back to the cave—the womb of the earth goddess and entry point to the underworld—can be seen both as a metaphor for death whilst also returning his body to a natural place of worship, a place where life was born. In this sacred place he is regenerated by his father using the blood of a sacrificial victim (the hunter who dismembered him in the first place).

Now, however, we can proceed to the main point, which is that once again, parallels to these narrative metaphors can be found in the colonial documentation. Only two years after the uprising in San Francisco Cajonos, while hunting in the hills near the town of Tatla (similarly within the

³¹ Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 41.

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administrative jurisdiction of Antequera, Oaxaca), a man called Domingo Arias tracked his quarry into a cave. According to the testimony given to two *Oidores* of the Real Audiencia, within the cave he found fifty-six human heads, some of which appeared to have been from people long-dead but others, he noted, were really quite recent. Particular concern was caused by one bloodied head, which appeared to be that of a blond-haired Spaniard. It seemed to the Spanish authorities that, separated from their bodies as they were, the heads had been gathered in the cave for “acts of idolatry,” and the Spaniard had perhaps even been killed for that purpose.³² As with the Tzotzil narrative, the cave—as a liminal place between life and death—was the place where ritual sacrifices were carried out.

Half a century earlier, Gonzalo Balsalobre, the parish priest of Zola (also in the diocese of Oaxaca) prosecuted and documented a series of idolatry trials that he forwarded to the bishop fray Diego de Hevia y Valdes.³³ Among the

³² AHPJO, 1706-1707, legajo 22, expediente 31, fols. 1-13, *passim*. The document is a belated (by four years) order to investigate what appeared to be idolatry. The testimony given to the *oidores* was in fact second-hand as Arias had died before the investigation began. The heads were buried in the parish of Tamazualapan which came under the jurisdiction of Teposcolula, Arias’ home town.

³³ Gonçalo de Balsalobre, *Relacion autentica de las idolatrias, supersticiones, vanas observancias de los indios del obispado de Oaxaca. Y una instruccion, y practica, que el ilustrissimo y reverendissimo Señor M. D. fray Diego de Hevia y Valdes, Obispo que fué de la Santa Yglesia de la Nueva Viscaya; y que lo es actual de la Santa Yglesia de Antequera, Valle de Oaxaca, del Consejo de su Magestad, &c. Paternal, piadosa, y afectuosamente embia à los Venerables Padres Ministros Seculares y Regulares de Indios, para el conocimiento, inquisicion, y extirpcion de dichas idolatries, y castigo de los reos* (S.P.: S.N., 1656).

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testimonies he recorded was one belonging to Gregorio de Monjaraz, a Zapotec from the Pueblo of San Juan. Gregorio’s father apparently had consulted Diego Luis, an indigenous religious leader (otherwise referred to by Balsalobre as a “master of idolatries”), about what to do after the death of Gregorio’s grandmother.³⁴ He first recommended the family carry out “the traditional penance” of fasting and refraining from sexual relations with partners. Diego Luis then visited the family’s house, burned an aromatic wood named copal as incense and sacrificed a turkey to Nohuichana (the goddess of rivers and pregnant women), thereby acknowledging the link between the grandmother’s death and continued fertility and life.³⁵ Eight days later, after dusk and carrying more copal and another turkey, he led Gregorio’s father up a dry streambed known as Quecoquasa, the path to the underworld. This, he explained was to sacrifice to Coquetaha, the god of the underworld, in order to oblige him to block the path to the dead. The ritual would prevent sickness from seeping out and following the path laid by the grandmother back to her household.³⁶ In chapter one, Erika Hosselkus mentions a corresponding Nahua tradition in

Balsalobre notified the bishop with a petition to be officially appointed “visitor” (extirpator of idolatries) to the region. The petition was approved.

³⁴ Ibid., fols. 13r-v.

³⁵ Copal is an aromatic tree-resin, burned as incense in religious ceremonies in Mesoamerica.

³⁶ Somewhat unsurprisingly Balsalobre referred to this god as the “god of hell” and the path to the underworld as the “road to hell” but there is no indication in the account that the god and the place carried the same associations of absolute evil and despair in the worldview of the indigenous witnesses. Coquetaha is instead similar to the Nahua god Mictlantecuhtli. He was also known as Leraa Huila. “Hell” or rather the underworld, in this case, would be comparable to Mictlan, the place of the dead.

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which rituals to the deities surrounding death “protected not only the dead, but also those who remained on the slippery, slick, summit of the earth where misfortune struck anyone who disregarded or defiled tradition.”³⁷ In this case of the Zapotec, Gregorio de Monjaraz, it was just as important to approach the intersection of the upper and underworld with due caution and treat it with the prescribed ritual traditions. So, the sacrifice was made at the dry source of the dead spring which, just like caves in indigenous traditions throughout the Americas, was an entry-point into and, more dangerously, an exit-point from the world of the dead.³⁸ The symbolism of the dried-up river bed as the entry point to the world of the dead becomes even more significant when we consider that unless the underground river’s course had changed, even if it only occurred once every few years, sufficient rains in the mountains during the rainy season (the summer months) would cause the dead spring to flow, once again bringing life to the valley.

If, because of their link with the underworld, sacrifice in caves was relatively common during the colonial period, a more surprising aspect of the Tzotzil story is the concurrent description of the first sacrificial victim as an angel and an angel’s son. But as with other themes that can be drawn out of the story, the appearance of angels in indigenous sacrifice also has a colonial antecedent. In his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, written in 1566 shortly after the disastrous extirpation campaign that caused the crippling and deaths of so many indigenous Mayans, Diego de Landa describes the religious

³⁷ See above, 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

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ceremonies of the Quiché Maya. At one particular point in the text he uses the terms demon and angel almost interchangeably when referring to indigenous Mayan gods. In one rite, he states, they offered animal sacrifices and incense to, “a statue of a demon they called Bolonzacab,” which they then hoisted on a pole and “placed an angel on its shoulders as a sign of water [rain] [...] these angels they painted and made them look horrifying.”³⁹ According to the same account, in the rites of Yzamnakauil meanwhile, they sacrificed either a dog or a man and offered up the heart together with food whilst the old women of the community danced around the offering. Landa writes: “They used to say that an angel descended and received this sacrifice.”⁴⁰

For a Franciscan cleric and notoriously violent extirpator of indigenous religious practices, Landa shows a none-too-surprising scepticism towards the participation of angels in indigenous rites by his deliberate self-distancing from the account using the caveat “they used to say that...”⁴¹ Yet, the fact that angels even appear in an account of indigenous sacrifice so replete with descriptions of demon-gods and idols is still remarkable. Throughout his chronicle Landa candidly uses these negative epithets to describe indigenous deities and this begs the question as to why he allowed angels to slip (albeit briefly) into the narrative. There are, in fact, a few possibilities we might consider. His careful wording of this sentence in the imperfect tense may well suggest that those who made these associations between angels and indigenous sacrifices had been

³⁹ Lit. *espantables*. Diego de Landa, *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* [1566] (Editorial San Fernando, 2005), 60-61.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Lit. *Decían que*.

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“corrected” and no longer continued to do so.⁴² But we might still make a second observation in that we see here faint echoes of the voice of Landa’s indigenous informer who existed in a cosmology that was to a greater or lesser degree both Mayan and Christian. The informer appears to have made symbolic associations between the two religious cultures and, at this point in the text, these parallel associations become unusually clear. As such, these Mayan angels in Landa’s narrative offer tentative evidence of the early penetration of Catholicism into the indigenous cosmovision. Mayan belief systems continued to evolve after the Spanish arrival and as a result, it is quite plausible that indigenous understandings and memories of their own rites changed accordingly.⁴³

With regard to the ritual link between angels and sacrifice, however, it is worth considering that this particular account is strikingly reminiscent of the Eucharistic prayer that, in the Catholic Mass, calls on God to order the descent of an angel to take the sacrificial offering of the Mass up to heaven:

⁴² One might even suppose that it was not a problem for Landa to refer to these entities as angels even if he regarded them as demons, as all demons were originally angels and retained their angelic natures, even if this nature had been irreparably marred by their fall. That said, these two references to angels stand out precisely because elsewhere in the text he consistently refers to indigenous spiritual entities as demons, not angels.

⁴³ For a seminal study on these developments, see Nancy Farris, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 286-354, *passim*.

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We most humbly beseech thee, almighty God, to command that these things be borne by the hands of thy holy angel to thine altar on high, in the sight of thy divine majesty.⁴⁴

Whether by coincidence or design it would appear that Landa or his informer considered that offerings placed on an altar as a gift to the gods took on a Eucharistic significance for the indigenous worshippers: it would have seemed logical if they “used to say an angel descended” to receive the sacrifice. Of course, we can never be certain if for any period of time (however brief) the Mayan subjects of the account actually did believe this or whether it was simply a reasonable assumption on the part of the chronicler or his informer. It is important to bear in mind that this direct association of angels with the Eucharist was not confined merely to invocations from the Latin Canon and the commentaries of colonial clergy but was instead widely represented in prominently displayed sculpture and paintings in and around church buildings (see figs. 1 and 2 below). Sculptures of the Eucharist being borne aloft by angels were often placed above doorways into churches frequented by both Spaniards and indigenous people throughout Hispanic America, rendering the image (and also the idea) a common one. The sacred nature of the image was reinforced for indigenous communities by the Eucharistic host being carried in a

⁴⁴ “Suplices te rogamus, omnipotens Deus: jube haec perferri per manus sancti Angeli tui in sublime altare tuum, in conspectu divinæ majestatis tuæ.” See *The Ordinary of the Mass [Latin/English]*, “Canon,” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/lmass/ord.htm>.

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sunburst monstrance, and highlighted the clergy’s intention to replace the pre-Hispanic cult of the sun.⁴⁵

[Figure 6.1]⁴⁶

[Figure 6.2]⁴⁷

Thus, through the incorporation of angels (as opposed to demons or idols as might normally be expected) with essentially Catholic roles into the

⁴⁵ See Jaime Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs: Art and Liturgy in Colonial Mexico* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 194-9. Lara argues that while the association existed in the Judeo-Christian tradition prior to the Spanish conquest of the Americas, the emphasis placed on Eucharistic association with the sun in the New World caused a corresponding surge in European interest in this solar imagery (p. 197). For the association of Christ with the Sun in Mesoamerica see also Louise Burkhart, “The Solar Christ in Nahuatl Doctrinal Texts of Early Colonial Mexico,” *Ethnohistory* 35, no. 3 (1988): 234-56. For the Andes, see Teresa Gisbert, *Iconografía y mitos indígenas en el arte* (La Paz: Gisbert y CIA, 2004), 33-34.

⁴⁶ “Command that these things be borne by thy holy angel to thine altar in heaven.” Left: the angel draped with a Franciscan belt chord is holding aloft what appears to be flowers and either Eucharistic hosts or fruit—either would work well symbolically. Centre: the Angel is supporting a monstrance that contains the Eucharistic host distinguishable by the characters IHS, acronym for Jesus. Significantly, the monstrance bears a distinctive resemblance to a brilliant sun. This existed in the European Catholic tradition even if it was relatively uncommon before the baroque period (Lara, *Christian Texts for Aztecs*, 197) but its Andean interpretation would almost certainly have been considered here. Right: The monstrance being carried by the angel here is recognisably more baroque than that of the Church of San Francisco (which is more stylised) but the sunburst around the host is still easily distinguishable.

⁴⁷ Once again a sunburst monstrance containing the Eucharistic host (distinguishable by the symbol IHS) is borne aloft by a cherub at its base. The host is also flanked by two adoring seraphim.

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memories and contemporary beliefs of indigenous rites, these celestial beings became intertwined with ideas and practices of sacrifice during the colonial period.

One final paradox remains, however, in our comparison of the Tzotzil narrative with religious reality in early modern Hispanic America. If angels became associated with the rites and practices of sacrifice (whether Catholic or indigenous) as onlookers and participants, there is still the question of how angels might have become the object of sacrifice themselves. In Central Mesoamerica the notion of divine sacrifice was by no means unfamiliar, as according to Nahua myth the fifth sun had been created by the self-immolation of the crippled god Nanahuantzin who rose again resplendent and burning as the new sun. Spurred on by his bravery, his brothers also leapt into the fire and rose again as the moon and the stars.⁴⁸ On the north coast of Peru, meanwhile, Moche iconography depicted the journey of a hero-god across the water and his struggle against the gods of darkness and night. The hero-god, in fact, loses this struggle and is sacrificed before descending into the world of the dead. But this is not the end, as the hero-god is able to escape into the heavens by ascending a ladder made from a spider’s web. As such the story is representative both of the daily solar cycle, but also of the cycle of life, death, and regeneration. Peter Kaulicke suggests that the connection in the Moche cosmovision between spiders and sacrifice goes further than simply helping the sun-god to escape the underworld by spinning him a ladder with his web-silk. In

⁴⁸ For an account of this myth, see Bernadino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, 2 vols, ed. Juan Carlos Temprano (Madrid: Dastin, 2001), II, Lib. VII, cap. II, 619.

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order to sustain themselves they capture their prey, bind them and suck out their life-force through their vital juices. In the same way, the Moche preserved life as they saw it by capturing sacrificial victims, binding them and offering their blood and life-force to the sun to assist him after his own sacrifice in his struggle to escape the forces of darkness and the underworld.⁴⁹

Similar metaphors can be recognised in a myth of Pachacamac, also from the north coastal region of Peru, documented and published in the seventeenth century by the Augustinian chronicler, Antonio de Calancha. At the beginning of the world, Pachacamac created the first man and woman, but there was no food and the man died of hunger. The woman despaired and cried out to the Sun, Pachacamac’s father, lamenting her loneliness and very existence. The Sun, taking pity on her, descended to earth and impregnated her with his rays, causing her to give birth to a son after four days. Pachacamac, “indignant that she gave to the sun the worship owed to him and that this child had been born to spite him,” seized this “semi-god” and, “ignoring the struggles and cries of the mother,” tore his brother to pieces. But the narrative continues: “so that no one would ever again complain of the providence of his father the Sun for not providing food, Pachacamac sowed the teeth of the corpse and maize-corn sprouted [...] He planted the ribs and bones and yucca and other tubers grew. The flesh produced the cucumbers, *pacayes* and the remaining fruits and trees, and from that time on hunger was unknown [and this] they

⁴⁹ Peter Kaulicke, *Memoria y muerte en el Perú antiguo* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial, 2000), 254-8; 274.

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owed to Pachacamac.”⁵⁰ To further underline how widespread these sacrificial narratives were in the indigenous cultures of the Americas we can also refer readers to the Mayan legend of the hero twins One Hunahpú and Seven Hunahpú as recorded in the *Popul Vuh*. The twins offend the gods of Xibalbá, Lords of the underworld by playing ball games, are summoned before them and put through various trials before being sacrificed. They return to the world of the living after One Hunahpú’s skull hiding in the tree of life managed to impregnate a princess of the underworld with his saliva as she reached up to take the fruit. She was then exiled to the land of the living where she gave birth to the hero twins Hunahpú and Xbalanqué.⁵¹

Such sacrifice on the part of the gods and goddesses of creation and life incurred a tremendous debt for humanity that could only ultimately be paid by life itself. And it was precisely the need for humanity to pay a divine debt through sacrifice that enabled an association between divinities who regulated the cycle of death and the Eucharistic sacrifice: in Christian theological tradition,

⁵⁰ Pacayes are luscious fruits that grow in the shape of large green pods. The pods are opened to reveal the edible white flesh that surrounds the seeds. For the quotation see Antonio de Calancha, *Coronica Moralizada del Orden de San Augustin en el Peru, con Sucesos Egenplares en esta Monarquia* (Barcelona: por Pedro Lacavalleria, 1639), Lib. II, cap. XIX, pp. 412-13. C.f. María Rostworowski, *Obras completas II: Pachacamac y el Señor de los Milagros—Una trayectoria milenaria* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2002), 28-30; and see also Edward R. Swenson, “Cities of Violence: Sacrifice, Power and Urbanisation in the Andes,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2003): 256-96, 260-3.

⁵¹ For the *Popul Vuh*, see *Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*, trans and ed by Dennis Tedlock (New York & London: Touchstone, 1996): 91-104. See also Agustín Estrada Monroy’s translation, 3rd edition, (Mexico D.F.: Editores Mexicanos Unidos, 2005): 37-52.

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Christ was the ultimate sacrifice needed to pay the debt to God incurred by the Sin of Adam.⁵² Proof of Christ’s Eucharistic sacrifice as mentioned above by Miruna Achim was present in the many tangible representations of his terrible suffering and such realistic imagery was common throughout the early modern Hispanic world.⁵³ Although there were significant conceptual and practical differences between indigenous and Hispano-Catholic cosmovisions the essential point is to consider whether or not these differences proved an obstacle to associative tendencies. If indigenous gods and Christ could be sacrificed to repay a divine debt, then it is not altogether unsurprising that angels also became sacrificial victims.

The idea that Christ could have been an angel was by no means unknown in the Christian tradition: it had been refuted a number of times by Councils and prominent theologians in the tradition of the early and medieval Church. The Arians, who disputed the divine nature of Christ, used the term “angel” to refer to him. Similarly, the Cathars called Christ an angel as they believed he was “a messenger uncorrupted by the flesh.”⁵⁴ Even as late as the seventeenth century, Catholic theologians still thought it necessary to re-affirm the belief that Christ was superior to the angels, that he was the eternally

⁵² This theology of “Atonement” was developed primarily by Anselm of Canterbury and, later, by Thomas Aquinas.

⁵³ See above, 86.

⁵⁴ David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 40. Arianism was pronounced heretical by the Council of Nicea in the fourth century but continued to appear in various guises despite its declared heterodoxy. The Cathars were suppressed during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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begotten Son of God and that humankind was not redeemed by an angel but by a being who was both God and man. One such theologian was the Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (d. 1658) whose works were widely circulated in the Americas and who revisited the question in his work *On the Beauty of God and His Kindness*.⁵⁵ Among the various reasons he suggested for God not wishing a lesser creature than himself to redeem humanity was simply because he could not trust the creature not to become corrupted by pride and try to rise above its station on receiving the adulatory gratitude of those it had redeemed. It would only be natural for humanity to worship its redeemer, and if this redeemer were not God, such worship would be tantamount to breaking the first commandment. Any redemption would therefore be undone as it could provoke both pride, the sin of Satan the usurper, together with the sin of idolatry. To compound these negative effects, no-one less than God himself could satisfy the honour debt that was owed: Christ had to be divine.⁵⁶

We might be forgiven for thinking that by the time Christianity reached the Americas this was a question merely for the treatises and books of theologians, yet documentary evidence from Michoacán would suggest

⁵⁵ *De la Hermosura de Dios y su Amabilidad. Por las Infinitas Perfecciones del Ser Divino*, in *Obras Christianas del P. Ivan Eusebio Nieremberg, de la Compañía de Iesvs, Qve contienen los Tratados, que mas ayudan al Cristiano a leuantar el espiritu, y vnirse con Dios, con vida perfecta. Tomo II. De svs obras en Romance* (Madrid: en la Imprenta Real, 1665), fols. 163r-168r.

⁵⁶ For these arguments Nieremberg cites a Christmas Vigil sermon by Saint Bernard [S. Ber. *Serm. 6. in vigil. Natiu.* fol.12, p.2, col.2] and the “Theology of Atonement” developed by Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*.

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otherwise. In 1758, the Inquisitorial Commissioner of Guanajuato received written denunciations from two Spanish sisters and their cousin, residents of the Real y Minas de Sombrerete. The three women claimed that twenty years previously, an argument had arisen with a Franciscan friend of theirs, fray Juan Antonio de Jesús, as a result of a discussion about “the many blessings God had conferred [on them] by becoming one with humanity’s baseness and undergoing so much suffering.”⁵⁷ The friar had tried to persuade them that quite frankly it would be indecent for such a great being as God to lower himself such an extent and that they were not to believe such things. Rather, it could only have been an angel who became incarnate in the Virgin Mary and who suffered the passion and died.⁵⁸ It is important to bear in mind that there was no direct causal link between medieval Arianism, Catharism, and the friar’s theological proposition—certainly it was not traced in the inquisitorial documentation. Rather, the point here is that these angelic associations with Eucharistic sacrifice were born out of rational consideration of a difficult theological problem

⁵⁷ Archivo Histórico de la Casa de Morelos, Morelia (hereafter AHCM) D/J/Inquisición/S-Sub/Siglo XVIII/0327/c 1238/Exp.51, “Guanajuato Año de 1758: Fr Juan Antonio de Jesus, Donado de N[uest]ro P[adr]e S[a]n fran[cis]co morador en el combento de d[ic]ha or[de]n de la ciu[dad] de Sombrerete. Por Dichos hereticales,” fol. 11r. According to their testimony they had forgotten about the argument until a couple of years prior to the denunciation when, reminiscing about times gone by, they had recalled it and pieced it back together. On raising the matter with their current confessor and spiritual advisor, they were told to notify the Inquisition. By the time enough testimonies had been gathered and ratified, however, Doña Francisca de Santa Cruz de Robles who was the principal remaining witness had died in a plague and the case was left unresolved in 1767. Ibid., fols. 27r, 29r.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fols. 6r; 15v.

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and were associations that resurfaced at different times and different places throughout Christian history. A further point to reiterate is that such theological problems were not just being reasoned out by trained theologians engaged in abstract theology, but also by ordinary Catholics on the frontiers of the Hispanic World. The Spanish women’s response was one that was also born of a reasoned attempt to engage with the problem. According to their denunciation, the three women rounded on the friar and argued “along the way until they nearly rioted” but still he refused to change his opinion; instead he stubbornly insisted that, “unlike him, they did not understand these things.”⁵⁹ Not only was the question of a sacrificed angelic Christ being rhetorically proposed and rejected in academic treatises, it was also being hotly debated on the streets of a small mining town near the city of Guanajuato. Even more noteworthy is the fact that the orthodox position of the Church was being vigorously defended by ordinary Spanish women against a heterodox Franciscan friar. “God being nothing but truth,” they argued, “would not have allowed them to believe an untruth”: an angel could not have been the one to die.⁶⁰

Eucharistic Children; Dead Messengers

The notion of sacrificial victims and, by extension, the dead being mediators and taking on an angelic role between humankind and the gods was certainly not unfamiliar to religious cults of the Americas, both in pre-Columbian and colonial times. In pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, for example, child-sacrifices

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., fol. 6r.

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to the rain god Tlaloc were considered most propitious the more the child victims cried. According to Bernardino de Sahagún, “if the children being taken for sacrifice cried and shed many tears, it cheered those who were escorting them because they would understand this to be a sign that there would be heavy rains that year.”⁶¹ The prayers and petitions offered to the rain god to persuade him to send rains that year were purposefully wretched laments, among other things, decrying the pitiful condition of the *macegual* commoners, “with dead eyes and mouths dry as straw,”⁶² and bodies on which you can count all the bones: like figures of death. And children who are disfigured [with hunger] and yellow, the colour of earth [...] There is no-one that this affliction and tribulation of hunger does not reach [...] the people lose their minds and die for lack of water; all die and none remain.”⁶³

We might expect this to be a far cry from post-conquest Christian practices but, in 1616, an Italian Jesuit wrote to Rome from New Granada, describing the penitential processions that had been organised the previous year to pray for rain. He wrote:

It was necessary to hold another procession of blood to ask God for rain for the fields [...] One hundred Spanish boys went ahead in penitential habits carrying crosses on their backs and with whips [*disciplina*] spilling a great deal of blood [...]

⁶¹ Sahagún, *Historia General*, I, Lib.2, cap.1, p. 113.

⁶² A *macegual* was a commoner or tribute payer. The word *esparto* literally translates as “grass”, which I have rendered as “straw” in this context.

⁶³ Ibid., Lib.6, cap.8, 449.

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It was a spectacle that moved many to tears, something which would move the Lord to grant abundant rains.⁶⁴

Superficially, we can see similar ritual mechanisms of blood sacrifice and tears (in what James Frazer termed “sympathetic magic”) intended to provoke a divine response to provide rain.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the different degree between the child-sacrifices to Tlaloc and the bloody penitential sacrifices to God is substantial. There are also subtle differences in the “sympathetic magic” used. In the first case, the deaths of the children and their life-blood gave strength to the god, while their tears demonstrated a favourable outcome to the ritual. The lament to Tlaloc was to remind him of his obligations as a god of life, especially given the sacrifices he had been offered. In the second case, the blood shed by the Spanish boys in the penitential procession could in no way be said to nourish or strengthen God, but rather was to demonstrate the community’s sorrow at being sinners. This imitation of the Passion of Christ both acted as a dramatic and visual meditative medium for the local populace and an expression to God of the community’s willingness to amend its sinful ways. The blood and tears were intended to move God once again to compassion and pity. In this case he was not being reminded of any obligation to humanity—he had none—rather humanity had an ever increasing debt to God: a debt of gratitude for creation, a debt of honour for sin, a debt of gratitude *and* honour for

⁶⁴ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter ARSI), Provincia Novi Regnum & Quitensis, 12: *I-II Litterae Annuae* (1605-1652), “Annua della Prouincia del nuouo Regno di Granada dell’ Anno 1615” (fols. 111r-190r) 119r-v.

⁶⁵ The term “sympathetic magic” was first coined by James George Frazer. See *The Golden Bough* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), 13-15.

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humanity’s redemption by Christ. And it is here that the greatest parallels lie: in both cases children acted as sacrificial media, in essence, Eucharistic victims, through which divine debts were paid.

Children were also sacrificed as messengers to the gods in the Inca empire. These sacrifices, called *capacocha*, most frequently occurred during times of meteorological uncertainty or social crisis, especially during the period of instability after the death of the reigning Inca and the consolidation of power in the hands of his successor.⁶⁶ The purpose of the capacocha was to ritually link the Andean people to the sacred landscape, re-affirm Inca authority and, most importantly, ensure the health of the reigning Inca and strengthen ties between the centre and the periphery.⁶⁷ Duvíols, in fact, describes the ritual as “an exchange between the Inca and the divine.” Through these sacrifices, he states, the Inca gave lives and “life-force” in the hope that the god would reciprocate “in order to strengthen his physical, economic and political order.”⁶⁸

In the sixteenth-century chronicle written by Juan de Betanzos can be found a description of the capacocha sacrificed for the inauguration of Coricancha, the Temple of the Sun, by the Inca Yupanqui who ordered that: “the boys and girls who had been gathered in the same way [as the other

⁶⁶ See Pierre Duvíols, “Capacocha,” in *Allpanchis: Ritos y rituales andinos*, 9 (1976), 11-56.

Since Duvíols wrote this, the practice of Inca child-sacrifice has been made world-famous by the recent archaeological discoveries of mummified *Capacochas* such as the mummy Juanita, discovered on the summit of the volcano and powerful Apu (mountain deity) Ampato in 1995.

⁶⁷ Swenson, “Cities of Violence,” 275-6. Parents of selected children could receive wealth and privilege from the ruling Inca, thereby enhancing their social status in the local community.

⁶⁸ Duvíols, “Capacocha,” 33-4.

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sacrifices], well dressed and ornamented, be buried alive in that building which had been specially made to house the image of the sun.”⁶⁹ Although it is reasonable to assume that child sacrifice in the Andes pre-dated the Inca expansion, this narrative of the temple’s inauguration marks an Inca appropriation, centralisation and transformation of the capacocha rite. For the Inca ritual, a beautiful (unblemished) child would be selected to travel to Cuzco for an audience with the Inca and to participate in a ceremony to the sun. During the audience the victim would be given a message for the gods and would then undergo a pilgrimage along sacred lines called *ceques* that stretched from Coricancha across the Andean spiritual landscape, before reaching the final destination at the summit of a sacred mountain.⁷⁰ Once the sacrificial party had reached the summit, while the priests invoked the sun-god and the local *apu* or mountain deity,⁷¹ the capacochas would be dispatched to meet the rising sun. They were then buried along with offerings for the gods on the sacred summit.⁷²

Dead Messengers and Little Angels

As with the child sacrifices to the Mesoamerican gods of rain mentioned above we should not be surprised to find memories of these capacocha rites

⁶⁹ Juan de Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, ed. María del Carmen Martín Rubio (Madrid, Ediciones Polifemo, 2004), Parte I. Cap. XI, 89. See also Duvíols, “Capacocha,” 14.

⁷⁰ Duvíols, “Capacocha,” 16-17.

⁷¹ *Apu* means “Lord.”

⁷² In 1996 an autopsy on the mummy Juanita at John Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, revealed that she had died of a brain haemorrhage following a blow to the skull with a heavy blunt instrument.

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being described to colonial chroniclers. In 1621, the *visitador* and extirpator

Rodrigo Hernández Príncipe documented an oral history from the town of Ocros in the Andean highlands north of Lima which describes the capacocha sacrifice of Tanta Carhua, the young daughter of the noble Caque Poma.⁷³ Significantly, the extirpator was told by his aged informers that, if they were ever sick or needed anything, they would come with ‘*hechiceros*’ who would act as mediums for Tanta Carhua. She would seemingly speak through them and would advise the supplicants as to what they should do.⁷⁴ Hernández rounds off the account by giving thanks to God that “these cruel sacrifices have ended” but states that despite this, “many capacochas that were sacrificed in the time of the Incas still remain [and are still] kept and ministered to, as we have found out on this occasion.”⁷⁵

⁷³ The document has been transcribed and published in Pierre Duviols, *Procesos y visitas de idolatrías: Cajatambo, siglo XVII* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú/Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2003), 731-46, 744. For a consideration of the case in the wider context of pre-Columbian Andean rites for the dead see Frank Salomon, “The Beautiful Grandparents’: Andean Ancestor Shrines and Mortuary Ritual as Seen Through Colonial Records’, in *Tombs for the Living: Andean Mortuary Practices: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks 12th and 13th October 1991*, ed Tom D. Dillehay (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 315-47, 332.

⁷⁴ “los cuales asimilándose a la Tanta Carhua les respondían como mujer: ‘esto conviene que hagáis,’ etc.,” lit. “who, becoming one with Tanta Carhua, would answer them with the voice of a woman: ‘it would be in your interests to do this,’ etc.” Duviols, *Procesos y visitas*, 744. *Hechicero* is the Spanish term for “sorcerer.” It was used as a generic name for indigenous priests and religious practitioners.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 745.

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With regard to the latter assertion, Hernández was quite correct: extirpators and missionaries continued to find venerated capacochas as the seventeenth century progressed. Pierre Duviols draws our attention to one case from 1656 in which the inhabitants of Otuco still venerated sacrificed children in the manner of a capacocha.⁷⁶ As with the Ocros capacocha, there existed an oral history that described the journey to Cuzco and return of the capacocha who was accompanied by the local curaca.⁷⁷ With regard to the former assertion, however—that ritual child-sacrifice had ceased altogether—there is documentary evidence to suggest that the last vestiges of these ritual mechanisms surrounding death and divine mediation were still in existence in the seventeenth century.

In 1617 and 1621, Pablo José de Arriaga—a Jesuit champion of campaigns to extirpate indigenous idolatry in the region—described in two separate documents the confessions of a number of apparently homicidal hechiceros from the central Andes. The targets of these confessed homicides were invariably baptised youths.⁷⁸ I had previously thought that these events could be considered as possible evidence of intercommunal religious conflict between Andean religious traditionalists and new Christians, as the Jesuits

⁷⁶ Duviols, “Capacocha,” 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Curaca is the Andean term for indigenous noble, leader, or chieftain. The Spanish in the Andes used the term interchangeably with *cacique*, a Caribbean term meaning the same.

⁷⁸ ARSI, Provincia Peruana (hereafter Prov Peru) 14, *Litterae Annuae* (hereafter Litt. Ann.), *Tomus III*, 1613-1627, “Letras Annuas dela Prouincia de el peru de este año de 1617”, fols. 48-71, fols. 55r-v; Pablo Joseph de Arriaga, *Extirpcion de la Idolatria del Piru* (Lima: Geronymo de Contreras, 1621), 21-3.

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often targeted children and youths for catechesis and there is certainly evidence to suggest growing intergenerational tensions as Christian youths refused to carry out their Andean religious obligations.⁷⁹ However, a discrepancy between the two documents merits a closer look.⁸⁰

The account published in 1621 somewhat unsurprisingly describes these serial killings fairly generically, in a way a European readership might recognise. All mention of indigenous sun-worship is removed from the work, instead attributing all the magical events described in the testimonies directly to the devil and transforming the indigenous rites into something that resembled the stereotypical witches’ Sabbath. The letter, however, written four years earlier, describes how one hechicero confessed how they were given the power to kill by the Sun who came down from the sky one night dressed as the Inca from Cuzco. This Inca-sun gave them powders to shape-change and put their victims to sleep while they consumed the soul in a ritual banquet during which they “invoked the sun, naming him their creator and maker.”⁸¹

While the testimonies naming baptised youths as the victims of choice are still likely to be indicative of increasingly violent tensions between Christian and non-Christian Andeans, the details included in the 1617 letter hold a potentially deeper significance. Power to carry out the killings was granted to the indigenous priests by the Sun-god; authority to do so was vested in them by the Inca, evoked by the appearance of the Sun in royal Inca garb. The ritual

⁷⁹ See Andrew Redden, *Diabolism in Colonial Peru*, 1560-1750 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 126-135.

⁸⁰ The discrepancy was noted in *Diabolism in Colonial Peru*, but not followed up: note 26, 202.

⁸¹ ARSI, Prov Peru, *Litt. Ann.*, III, “1617”, fol. 55r.

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killings of the youths, essentially child-sacrifices, were carried out whilst invoking the Sun just as Andean and Inca priests did during the capacocha sacrifices prior to the Spanish conquest. In fact, these details of sun worship and communication between the Inca-sun and the Andean priests in the process of the ritual homicides may well indicate a certain degree of continuity with the capacocha rites. For some practitioners of Andean religion at least, rituals surrounding the capacocha in the seventeenth century consisted of more than simple veneration.

If Spanish missionaries found capacochas well into the seventeenth century, in the same campaigns against idolatry they were also finding numerous other mummified bodies called *mallquis* alongside clear signs of their having been venerated as part of sacrificial cults involving religiously significant plants, animals and even children. As just one example, in 1675, the Jesuits Sebastian Valente and Juan de Aranzeaga wrote from Ocros to Rome describing how they had found no less than four mallquis which they ceremonially burned along with other Andean religious instruments outside the principal town of San Francisco Chiquian.⁸² One of the mallquis they discovered was believed by the local community or ayllu to be their “primogenitor and creator, because some of these wretched people are persuaded that they do not descend from Adam, but rather that each ayllu had its own ancestor [...] and this they worship and hold fiestas for it every year on the feast of Corpus Christi and the Resurrection.”⁸³ The mallqui itself was found in a seated position with

⁸² ARSI, Prov Peru 20, *Historia, Tomus II*, 1628-81, “29 Junii 1675 Ocros”, fols.174r-179v, fol. 179r.

⁸³ Ibid., fol. 178r. An *ayllu* is an extended Andean kinship group.

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its hands resting on its knees. “Among other things,” they said, at its feet lay the body of a recently sacrificed baby girl.⁸⁴

Although the two Jesuits acknowledged the existence of indigenous belief in mallquis as ancestors of individual ayllus, they refused to (or simply could not) appreciate just how, in the Andean cosmovision, these dead ancestors were intimately linked to the continuation of life. The uncompromising demand of the Christian God for exclusive worship and the zeal with which the Jesuits tried to enforce this exclusivity prevented them from understanding the real significance of the dead to Andeans, notwithstanding the fact that in 1608 a Jesuit Gonçález Holguín was able to gloss the meaning of mallqui both as “mummified ancestor” and as a “tender plant to be planted” of “any fruit tree.”⁸⁵ It was the dead who caused new life to germinate and sprout once their *anymas* had escaped the body and returned to their places of origin.⁸⁶ Missionaries instead tried to combat ancestor veneration with a logic based on the transience of flesh: dead bodies decay, and so cannot possibly be divine.⁸⁷ However, it was precisely the permanence of death and the permanence of the mallquis in their proper context (high in the frozen mountain landscapes) that indicated to Andeans their divine nature. In the words of Frank Salomon, after a period of transition during which the soft flesh is transformed into hard bone, “what

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Salomon, “The Beautiful Grandparents”, 340.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 341. *Anyma* or *ánima* means “soul” in Spanish and carries with it connotations of life-force.

⁸⁷ José de Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* [1576] (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1987), 267.

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remains is a permanent being made of harder, purer stuff.”⁸⁸ Rather than decaying to dust, “the ancestor is unalterable.”⁸⁹

In tandem with the continuation of Andean rituals surrounding death and divine mediation in the seventeenth century, cults of the dead that were acceptable within the bounds of Early Modern Catholicism also flourished in the Hispanic-American Baroque. Even though the theological details differed, Catholic veneration of saintly relics could only affirm the Andean perspective to a certain extent. Ultimately, by belonging to the body of a saint believed to be with God, relics provided a tangible and physical link to the divine and source of life.⁹⁰

Yet the chances of ordinary people in the Americas of the Hispanic baroque having regular physical access to these saintly relics were relatively small given the much tighter ecclesiastical controls generated by the Reformation polemics of the sixteenth century. The importance of relics was affirmed by their prominent position in the altars and chapels of early modern Hispanic churches⁹¹ yet access to approved relics was strictly controlled by liturgical rites. One way of allowing people access to divine mediators during the colonial period was through confraternities that nurtured particular devotions, but much more personal and familial access to God could be through the

⁸⁸ Salomon, “The Beautiful Grandparents”, 325.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 3-11, passim.

⁹¹ For example, the skull of Santa Rosa de Lima was displayed in the centre of the Baroque altar of the Church of the Rosary, in Lima once she was canonised in the latter half of the seventeenth century (1671)—literally she was “raised to the altars”.

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mediation of children who had died while still in a state of innocence. These children became known as *angelitos*, or “little angels,” and belief in the efficacy of their mediation quickly spread throughout the entire Hispano-Catholic world. Of course with one angel (or more given the high infant mortality of the time) belonging to their own flesh and blood in heaven, a family could ask the angel-child to intercede for them before God and pray for their souls and their salvation.

In 1603 a Catalan Augustinian and angelologist called Jerónimo de Saona explained that this idea developed from the New Testament account of Jesus who told the disciples to: “suffer the little children to come unto me, because they are of the Kingdom of God.”⁹² Saona changed the passage to read: “in truth I tell you that they are like the angels in heaven who always look on the face of my Father,”⁹³ and continued by explaining that for this reason children and angels are always placed together. He further described how from this arose a manner of speaking that referred to children as angels, and this:

has reached the point that amongst women and ignorant people they no longer say this as a metaphor but think they are of the same nature as Angels: and if a child of theirs dies in the age and state of innocence (which is before they are able to use reason), they say that they have an Angel in Heaven.⁹⁴

In fact, Saona’s comment that juxtaposed only women and ignorant people in their literal devotion to child-angelitos seems hardly representative.

⁹² Mark 10:14.

⁹³ Jerónimo de Saona, *Hyerarchia celestial y terrena y symbolo de los nueve estados de la Iglesia militante, con los nueve Choros de Angeles de la Triumphant* (Cuenca: por Cornelio Bodan, 1603), 99.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

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For example, Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, an extremely erudite contemporary of Saona’s, wrote an Epistle to “one who was inconsolable for the death of a son. [The letter] declares the good fortune of those whose children die.”⁹⁵ He continues:

for certain your son is in heaven, he is pure, and beautiful as an Angel, enjoying the presence of God [...] There he will commend you to Our Lord. In the house of God, not only do you have an intimate friend, but a son of your own who will petition God with your affairs. Accompanied by many Angels and glorious souls he will come out to receive you when you die.⁹⁶

Throughout Hispanic America, belief in the mediatory powers of these “little angels” was encouraged by standard funerary practices. In 1610, a report from the Jesuit mission of Las Parras in the northern frontiers of New Spain described how many children had been baptised but how the majority had been “taken by Our Lord” after an epidemic had ravaged the population.⁹⁷ The letter continues by describing how marvellous it was to see how the children’s parents resigned themselves to God’s will “when they heard our [missionaries telling them] that their children would go straight to heaven like little angels as they had died having been baptised and without sin.” As such, the Jesuit narrator

⁹⁵ Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, *Obras Philosophicas [...]: Ethicas, Politicas, y Phisicas, Que contienen lo principal de la Filosofia Moral, Ciuil, y Natural, todo conforme a la piedad Christiana. Tomo Tercero de sus Obras en Romance* (Madrid: En la Imprenta Real, 1654), fol. 108v.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ ARSI, Provincia Mexicana (hereafter Prov Mex) 14, *Litt. Ann. 1574-1614*, ‘1610: Annuia de la Prov de la Nueva Esp an de 1610’, fols. 558-587, fol. 576r.

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wrote, “they were crowned with flowers and roses before taking them to the grave.”⁹⁸

Angelitos could also be found in the seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century parish books of the dead, in which priests (in theory) recorded all the burials they had presided over.⁹⁹ Looking at examples from parishes in Chile, Upper-Peru, Peru, New Granada and New Spain produced widespread evidence that from between 1680 to roughly 1735 it was reasonably common practice for priests to register the funerals of children under the age of four years as the “burial of a little angel,” irrespective of race or social status. Prior to 1680 parish records are extremely scant but Saona’s mention of the association as early as 1603 and the Jesuit letter from Las Parras in 1610 would indicate that the practice was widespread before then. Importantly, the registers distinguished racial difference and social status but this did not affect their status as angelitos: children of Spaniards, indigenous people, African-Americans (whether free or slaves) were also referred to little angels. By way of a few examples: in the *Book of the Dead* from the Church of Paucarpata, Arequipa, it was recorded that on 16 May 1684, fray Joseph de Villegas buried “a little *forastero* angel, son of Juan Taco who works on the hacienda of Pablo de Aguirre.”¹⁰⁰ An entry from the 1705-1732 *Book of the Dead* of the Parish of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ I am grateful to D. Fernando Ryan of the Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Santiago de Chile (hereafter AHAS) for the initial idea to search the books of the dead.

¹⁰⁰ Archivo Arzobispal de Arequipa (AAA), *Libro de Entierros de esta Yg/[esi]a de Paucarp[aj]ta, 1683-1788*, fol. 81r. By his designation as a *forastero*, this angelito was indigenous and not from one of the local ayllus native to the area.

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Colina, Santiago de Chile reads: “on 4 November 1714, I buried according to the lesser rite a little angel aged four months, of which I bear witness. Lorenzo de Godoy.”¹⁰¹ In 1716, in the parish of Yurupana, diocese of La Paz, Alto Peru, Joseph Gonsales de Rueda wrote: “On the twenty fifth of August I buried the body of a little angel named Patricio in the Church [He was] the son of the Captain Domingo de Calbo [...]”¹⁰² In 1738, meanwhile, in the doctrina of Marcabal of the diocese of Trujillo, Ildefonso de Balderrama recorded that, “On 4 of November the body of Francisco Guaccha [the] little illegitimate angel of Francisco Guaccha and Ysidora Josepha was buried.”¹⁰³

By all accounts, the existence or not of these angelito inscriptions in the *Books of the Dead* depended on the preferences of individual priests and local parish tradition. On the whole, however, as can be seen from the very limited number of examples above, this was a practice widespread throughout the Catholic parishes in Hispanic America. As a point of interest, from 1720 onwards it appears that a series of Episcopal visits began to standardise registry entries to “párvulo” or “criatura” and, by 1740, the little angels disappear from the records. The term “párvulo” means “young child” and comes from the Latin *parvulus* or *parvus* meaning “small child” or “little”; “criatura” similarly means “young child,” often “newborn child.” While these terms still carry connotations of innocence, there are no angelic associations. These changes

¹⁰¹ AHAS, *Libro de Defunciones—La Colina, 1705-1732*, 289.

¹⁰² Archivo Eclesiástico del Arzobispado de La Paz (AEALP), *Libro de Defunciones—Yurupana, 1702-37*, fol. 12v.

¹⁰³ Archivo Arquidiocesano de Trujillo (AAT), *Marcabal 1739-1786: Bautismos, Matrimonios, Entierros*, FF.3.1, fol. 157r. Even illegitimacy did not affect their angelito status.

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appear to reflect a growing theological tendency to separate nature and grace and to clarify the boundaries between humans and angels. Nevertheless, in reality, these top-down reforms had little impact on long-established beliefs and practices and the devotion to these dead little angels lived on. In 1712, for example, the *Actas de Cabildo* of the diocese of Antequera (Oaxaca) ordered that the “burials of little angels” should be marked with a distinctive chime.¹⁰⁴ The *Actas* forbade mournful funerary tolling on those occasions.¹⁰⁵ A distinctive, less sombre bell-toll from that of ordinary funerals has survived to the present day in Mitla, an indigenous parish within the diocese of Oaxaca. Martina Will de Chaparro has noted how the angelito tradition, including cheerful bell-ringing instead of mournful tolling, survived well into the nineteenth century in New Mexico¹⁰⁶. Similarly, a recent archaeological dig in Tucson, Arizona (November 2006-March 2008) unearthed numerous nineteenth-century graves of children buried with garlands of flowers indicating definite continuity of angelito mortuary practice in Hispanic communities.¹⁰⁷ In the crypt of Lima Cathedral, meanwhile, recent excavations uncovered a late-eighteenth century casket in which the

¹⁰⁴ *Actas de Cabildo* roughly translates as “Minutes of the Cathedral Chapter.”

¹⁰⁵ AHAO, *Actas de Cabildo*, 1712, fol. 260r. I am grateful to Berenice Ybarra for drawing this to my attention.

¹⁰⁶ See *Death and Dying in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 96-9.

¹⁰⁷ The dig was part of the ‘Joint Courts Complex’ project and was carried out by Statistical Research Inc. My thanks are due to Damien Huffer for this personal communication. The journal *Artes de México* dedicated a special edition to the tradition’s survival in art and folklore in Mexico from the late-eighteenth century to the present: *Artes de México: El arte ritual de La Muerte Niña*, 15 (1992). The edition was republished in 1998.

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skull of a child had been carefully placed on a velvet cushion and, just like the sixteenth-century angelitos of Las Parras in New Spain, it had been crowned with white flowers, symbolic of sanctity.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion: Angelic Death

Ya se va para los cielos/ Ese querido angelito/ A rogar por sus abuelos/ Por sus padres y hermanitos.¹⁰⁹

This Chilean folk-song, recorded by Violeta Parra in the 1960s, immortalised the Hispano-American devotion to little angels as effective mediators between the living and the divine, the impermanent and the permanent. It was a devotion that took root and spread throughout the region during the colonial period but which resonated and overlapped with pre-Hispanic traditions of child-sacrifice. Through death, children became messengers, angels that would represent family and community interests before the gods. While within the Christian tradition angelic death benefited their families’ spiritual well-being, within indigenous traditions they took part in a cycle of sacrifice that sustained life itself.

The second verse of the song continues, “the earth awaits them/ with its open heart.”¹¹⁰ These sacrificial mediators were received by the earth, but perhaps with more of a gaping maw than an open heart as we have seen. Yet,

¹⁰⁸ The excavations took place in 2004. I am grateful to Don Fernando López-Sánchez, curator of the Cathedral museum for showing me the casket.

¹⁰⁹ Opening verse of the folk-song *El rin del angelito*: “This dear little angel/ already journeys to heaven/ to plead for its grandparents/ for its parents, brothers and sisters.”

¹¹⁰ “La tierra lo está esperando/ Con su corazón abierto.”

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even as the earth consumed sacrificed human bodies, it gave forth new life, just as the sacrificed angel of the Tzotzil story was taken into the cave and restored.

In early modern Hispanic America, it would seem that angels were mediators intimately linked to life-giving sacrifice. In remote areas such as the *monte* of Oaxaca (Antequera) and the Andean highlands, pre-Columbian sacrifice, which was intrinsically bound to a sacred landscape, survived in modified form: where illicit human sacrifices were still perceived to happen, the sacrificial victims, whether the children of baptised nobles such as those described in Arriaga’s accounts, or zealous sacristans keen to denounce idolatry, took on Eucharistic roles in their martyrdoms, their deaths serving to propitiate indigenous gods and unite the participants in complicity. At the same time, accounts of indigenous sacrifice entered oral tradition such as that of the Tzotzil in Chiapas or that of Diego de Landa’s indigenous informers from the Yucatán Peninsula, and, in the process, became intertwined with an angelic liturgy, in which angels carried the Eucharistic sacrifice from the altar to God in Heaven. Such associations were disseminated by baroque imagery throughout the Americas both inside the churches and on their external façades. With the Hispano-Catholic devotion to the souls of the innocent child-dead, the notion of angels as mediators between the living and the divine in turn mapped onto pre-Columbian traditions of child-sacrifice such as the Ocros oral tradition that recounted the capacocha sacrifice of the young girl Tanta Carhua. She was not considered to be an angel yet a parallel belief in the mediation of dead children between the living and the divine existed within the Hispano-Catholic tradition. Of all the abovementioned traditions, this tradition of the angelito mediators was one that unified the Hispanic world. These dead children, these little angels,

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carried the prayers and supplications of their still living families to God, just like the Eucharistic angels carried up Mass offerings during the liturgy. If the pre-Hispanic gods gave life by consuming the dead, the Hispanic God, was perceived to give life while embracing the dead. This sacred cycle of Eucharistic life and mediation through death, in short, was Angelic death.

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