

“Tinkuy”: a theologoumenon between Latin American cultures

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*Do not forsake us, oh God, who art in heaven and earth,
Heart of Heaven, Heart of Earth...
May the people have peace, much peace, and may they be happy;
and give us good life and useful existence!*¹³⁴

This is how the *Popol Vuh* evokes the cordial, cosmic coexistence of human beings, which has an effective foundation in the sacred. The everyday happiness of peoples has its basis in interaction with the divinity of heaven and earth.

This article is inspired by a beautiful, combative folk dance of the Quechua and Aymara population.¹³⁵ Incorporating music, dance and social confrontation, *tinkuy* offers a model of exchange between different groups and is often defined as a form of interculturality. It has many components: art, social ties, historical disputes,

¹³⁴ *Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiché Maya*, trans. Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley from the Spanish translation of Adrián Recinos (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950) 173. The *Popol Vuh* or “Book of Counsel” survived in a 17th century transcription by Dominican Fr. Francisco Ximénez.

¹³⁵ The term *Tinku* designates a tradition of dance and music from Potosí and Oruro, Laimis and Jucumanis. As metaphor, it stands for a model of encounter between people. It is a form of ritual contest between communities from different districts; a kind of a game, an expression of love; it is also a reflection of social conflict and male supremacy. Furthermore, it is a feature of patronal festivals and other such occasions. See Miranda, E., *La danza folklórica y popular en Bolivia* (La Paz: The Author, 2007); Paredes-Candia, A., *La danza folklórica en Bolivia*, (La Paz: Editorial Gisbert y Cia, 1984); Romero, R., (ed.), *Música, danzas y máscaras en Los Andes* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú: Instituto Riva-Aguero, Proyecto de Preservación de la Música Tradicional Andina, 1998); Fernandez, G., “Tinku y Taypi,” in: *Anthropologica* 11 (1994), 51–78; Marquez, J.C., and Vargas, O., “Tinku: espacio de encuentro y desencuentro,” in: *Anales de Etnología* (La Paz), 2005; Luis Millones, “El encuentro o tinkuy en textos coloniales andinos” at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~icop/luismillones.html> (retrieved 8.8 2012). Other great intercultural metaphors are provided by the *Minga* of the Quechua regions and the *Mutirão* of Brazil, forms of collective organisation and labour that like *Tinku* conjoin diverse elements.

affective frameworks and forms of celebration. It seems to me that the activity and wisdom of the *tinkuy* serve the Quechua as a prism for understanding the intercultural, and I hope that this essay grounded in a small corner of Latin America may help prompt new interpretations of events of this kind in other parts of the world.

The indigenous and mestizo populations, who are disdained in Latin America, are in fact minor masters who make their sources of vitality available to humanity as a whole. They have distinctive ways of attuning to life and of elaborating intercultural mediations. With globalisation, questions of identity and encounter/non-encounter are again coming to the fore, and in this context these peoples have a wisdom of their own to offer.

I am not speaking here of folkloric curios for a post-modern elite, but of an inward and outward wisdom. In this connection, I would like to express my thanks to the many people and institutions in Bolivia and Peru who have helped over the decades to develop my awareness of the themes I am about to present.¹³⁶

Intercultural questions have become increasingly important in recent times. Within the Church, the messages of Jesus and Paul about the diversity of cultures have been rediscovered. The attitude of freedom in service has been emphasised, as by the great Paul of Tarsus: "So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people [...] I made myself weak [...] All this I do for the sake of the gospel [...]" (1 Cor 9,19-23). When we travel across ethical, spiritual and economic frontiers (thus following in the footsteps of Paul and of Peter), we are better able to apprehend the salvation that is in Christ, a salvation that accords not with omnipotence, but with human fragility. In addition, faithfulness to Jesus and his Spirit brings with it unity between different beings. We are one body with different members and diverse gifts of the Spirit. All is for the benefit of each, for the benefit of all humanity.

¹³⁶ The following remarks are indebted to discussions I had between 1979 and 2004 in the context of programmes of the IPA (Instituto de Pastoral Andina) and the IDEA (Instituto de Estudios Aymaras) in Southern Peru, of the Centro Cultural Semilla and the OLASEM (Oficina Latinoamericana al Servicio de la Misión) in Cochabamba, and of the Cultural Department of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference and of the ISEAT (Instituto Superior Ecueménico Andino de Teología) in La Paz.

We shall look, then, at modes of human and spiritual interaction in Latin America in an attempt to understand God's self-revelation in our conflicts, in human exchanges and in our relationship to the environment.

The approach we bring to our theme is autochthonous in origin and is today predominantly associated with the mestizo population. It is an approach that opens our hearts and minds to the source of life. We shall first look at the inter-relation of socio-cultural and spiritual forms; then at the theological dimension of popular Catholic experience, raising questions about the lived here-and-now on the basis of iconic New Testament images. There exists, then, an intercultural structure to theological work that emerges in regions and communities characterised by difference.

The conjunction of the socio-cultural and the spiritual

We begin our examination of the subject with a consideration of *tinkuy* as metaphor in the sense of a mode of symbolic behaviour that incorporates a religious wisdom. This indigenous/mestizo practice has not only been studied and discussed; knowledge and awareness of it have also been disseminated through virtual networks.¹³⁷ On the other hand, it can also be seen as a theologoumenon (that is, a way of understanding and teaching the faith) developed within Andean Christianity.

Tinku as a dance (a substantive) and *tinkuy* as interaction (a verbal form) connote both conflict and celebration. Within public space (transformed by the *fiesta*) people circle about in a crouching attitude, dancing a combative display to the rhythm of the band behind the dancers. Masculine and feminine elements conflict with and complement each other, married and unmarried women being distinguished by the colour of their clothes and the ribbons in their hair.

¹³⁷ There are outstanding studies on this subject (see Raúl Romero, Gerardo Fernandez, Antonio Paredes Candia, Edmundo Miranda et al. cited in footnote 2 above) and it has also been made more widely known and appreciated through folklore studies, education and media programmes. There are also a number of discussions on the Web. Of *tinku* poetry, for example, it is said that it "neither dissolves nor transcends difference in a more universal 'third term,' but by hindering diffusion or confusion gives time for each to enjoy the other in its difference" (www.tinkus.net/lapoetica.php).

The behaviour of the Andean people in the *tinkuy* context gives expression to the most important aspects of human existence: the dimension of space above and below; the temporal dimension of the yearly cycle, of days and times of celebration; the cosmic dimension of the relationship to Mother Earth; the aesthetic dimension; the sexual signals in the dance; patriarchal male supremacy and subordination of women; references to outbreaks of war between communities, etc. In these and other matters there are varying degrees of both confrontation and conjunction. There are also spiritual energies and references to Christianity. The dances often form part of religious events (especially the celebrations of Catholic saints' days).

These observations allow us to go beyond restrictive interpretations, whether in the form of an essentialist and dichotomous reading (sacred/profane, good/evil, peace/war, work/holiday) or a pluralistic approach that commonly favours the status quo (as between indigenous and mestizo, tradition and modernity), or even counterposing autochthonous to Christian elements. In my opinion, a historical reading that tends to the empowerment of marginalised populations and an interdisciplinary reading in which theology engages in dialogue with the human sciences are most fruitful.

In the conjunction of differing elements the vital energies of the people of Latin America are made manifest. In all fields of human life and the environment we find signs of transcendence. To all these we attend, taking as our criterion of discernment the most essential. By this I mean the Christian principle of the love of God, given expression in love of our neighbour. The first commandment is inseparable from the second: without solidarity with the poor, one cannot be faithful to Jesus (Mark 12:28-34; Matt. 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28; and the criterion of final judgement in Matt. 25:31-46). Solidarity with people in need is a sacramental sign of the presence of Christ. Graced by God, suffering humanity finds the Lord through "horizontal" compassion.

Thanks to *sensus fidei*, human beings are capable of assuming their historical responsibility within history and to recognise God incarnate. And thanks to each inculturated and intercultural form of the faith they are able to understand and promulgate the divine revelation. Does the *tinkuy* then possess the characteristics of a theologoumenon? I believe so, for it is one of many wisdoms that generate faith from the

festive. This happens in the here and now, at the local and the global level.

This means facing up to everyday realities and global processes. An insatiable desire to consume things is inculcated by the markets. We, therefore, need to deal with this globalised exaltation of desire that leaves so many frustrated in the face of the fantasies and euphorias of consumption, paradoxically creating an inner emptiness. A public celebration does not revolve around the consumption of goods, but is rather a sharing of earthly joy and spirituality.

Put in positive terms, every celebration in its own way is committed to seeking the joyful justice of the Kingdom of God. In the light of this commitment, cultural elements have to be evaluated in terms of their economic context, differentiating between the emancipatory and the enslaving. A highly controversial question is the extent to which the totalitarian market encourages idolatry. But here I would emphasise the positive: to opt for an economy of solidarity, giving tangible expression to the justice, the equity, of the feast of the Kingdom of God.

We find ourselves, then, in the complex area of intercultural reflection, which comprehends interrelated social, political, economic and spiritual dimensions. This complexity is today accentuated by our globalised interdependency, but it is also the outcome of what happened in various historical periods: those characterised by an asymmetrical colonial Christianity; the different phases of scientific and technical progress (bringing the subordination of the majority to the centres of world power); and the current postmodernity characterised by fragmentation, instantaneous communication and spiritual search.

It is against this complex background that the people of Latin America are today rethinking their faith. In doing so, they draw on immemorial socio-spiritual norms ("popular religion"); there are forms of art and ceremony that cross social and geographical boundaries, the countless daily practices of trust between different people, as well as social initiatives that challenge the apoliticality of the postmodern. These and other rules coalesce in what I see as the most important Latin American theologoumenon: the religious wisdom that emerges in the festive. Not only does the time of the festival stand

out, but it gives personal and social existence a meaning and shapes the Christian wisdom of the people. Its theology sprouts and leads to a festival of faith. Nonetheless, one finds in it not only humanising coalescences but also harmful asymmetries.

These complex, intercultural realities call for a discernment without simplification. The community hears and understands “with the help of the Holy Spirit...the many voices of our age”.¹³⁸ In engagement with the social scientific and critical understanding of phenomena the Church confronts modern pseudo-absolutes, discerning them for what they are through the healthy relativism of the Gospel. Everything is relative – that is to say, everything is evaluated “in relation to”...the love of God, the only absolute!

In our day, one manifestation of the utopian is the Quechua notion of *sumak kawsay* (living well). It finds expression in (highly ambivalent) socio-cultural processes in Ecuador, Bolivia and other parts of the continent.¹³⁹ The age-old paradigm of living well together that today goes by the name of *sumak kawsay* is no relic, but rather a spur to transformative action. If only many parts of the world had programmes of intercultural dialogue that found expression in cultural change, in laws and new constitutions, social communications media and public administration!

As for the Church, we note with concern that what the Church encourages between cultures is sadly not as a rule encouraged between religions. From a unilateral pastoral attitude towards culture we have moved on to an evangelisation in and between symbolic processes. A more relaxed stance has on occasion been adopted, as in the Roman document *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). Others in turn, such as the declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2000), emphasise a kind of absolute truth, placing obstacles in the way of ecumenical and interreligious progress. We know that the encounter with Jesus, the Way and the Truth, is a universal gift not hedged about with barriers. The Church is its sacrament.

¹³⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* (EN) (1965), ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,’ no. 44, at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

¹³⁹ See my article with bibliography, “Sumak Kawsay, Sum Sarnakaña, convivir/andar bien” (2011) at www.amerindianlared.org

In this matter, a more realistic approach is to recognise in the spiritual trajectories of human beings the signs of God's revelation and his love. Amid the increasing symbolic exchanges and human polylogues, the Church must give reason for hope. Its fundamentals are: a) the practice of Jesus, oriented to the Reign of God and b) the ongoing Pentecost process in the different languages of love.¹⁴⁰ One might say that the intercultural strategy draws upon the following biblical-spiritual images: a) the joy of the Gospel, which on the basis of the feast of the Kingdom accommodates difference and warmly embraces the "Other". So it was with the widow of Zarephath, the leper from Syria, the Syrophenician and the Canaanite woman, the centurion, the Samaritan woman; and b) the Spirit of Pentecost, that makes its way everywhere, even if one wants to confine it to the socio-religious field. This image includes Jews, Greeks and all others who dwell on earth; each in his or her own way acknowledges God's miracles. One might say, then, that the human imagination of God always lies not only within and between but also beyond the varied modes of being human. It is therefore intra-, inter- and trans-cultural.

In every situation one can meditate on these images of the unbounded Kingdom of God and on the Pentecost event that joins all together in God's love. The practice of the *tinkuy* too can be interpreted in this sense (as can that of the *minka*, the *mutirao* and other signs of emancipation). These are metaphors for interaction between different persons (interculturality) and with the environment. Each of these is either open to the energy of God in human history (in equitable interaction) or closes itself off from it (in dehumanising asymmetry).

Catholic forms of encounter and non-encounter

On our continent, where the vast majority describe themselves as Christian, and a good many of these as Catholic, these characteristics shape everyday realities (whether properly denominational in reference, or describing "a way of one's own of being Catholic" or having a more diffuse cultural character). Various kinds of syncretism,

¹⁴⁰ In the last twenty years, theological research in Latin America has rediscovered the significance of the Kingdom or Reign of God and of Pentecost. On this, see Sobrino, J., "The Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology", and Comblin, J., "The Holy Spirit," in: Ellacuría, I./Sobrino, J., eds, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

too, are on the increase.¹⁴¹ Faced with the polysemy of Catholic experience, I shall limit myself here to considering the intercultural ritual of a Catholic carnival ceremony in Bolivia, spiritual therapies involving the cult of Santa Muerte (“Saint Death”), and the intra- and intercultural Catholicism manifest in the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe and in the account of its origin, the *Nican Mopohua*.

Before turning to these complex phenomena, we must straightforwardly acknowledge the intermixtures in every personal experience and every current figuring of God and the sacred. In all these, the true and the alienating, the absence and presence of the transcendent, the utilitarian and the gratuitous, personal responsibility and magical attitudes, works of faith and the sacralisation of power are all intermixed. Furthermore, these large-scale forms of Catholic expression neither belong to the Church as an institution, nor should they be idealised. Every single one has light and dark sides, various dynamics of harmony in heterogeneity, and a confrontation of opposed and antagonistic forces.

A good example of civic-Catholic ceremonial is afforded by the Carnival of Oruro (Bolivia) which coincides with the *fiesta* of the Virgin of Socavón. It represents a rich assemblage of scarcely complementary elements: there are many encounters and non-encounters, but these signify no mutual insult, given the prevailing codes of toleration.

Marcelo Lara describes it as follows: “[...] a religious festival, an opportunity to be happy and to enjoy oneself, a place to define what we are or what we claim to be, a means of setting economic policy, individually and collectively, a pretext for social critique, a site for the expression of conflict, a space in which to struggle for power”.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ On this topic see Marzal, M., *El sincretismo iberoamericano*, (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1985), which examines syncretism in Central and South America, and also the Candomblé religion; and Sanchis, P., (ed.), *Fiestas e Ciudadanos, percursoros de sincretismo no Brasil*, (Rio de Janeiro: EdUERJ, 2001), which looks at charisma, Afro-American religion, and religion and youth.

¹⁴² Lara Barrientos, M., *Carnaval de Oruro: Visiones oficiales y alternativas* (Oruro, Bolivia: CEPBA; Latinas Editores, 2007), 115; cf. Lara Barrientos, M. and Córdova, X., *Fiesta urbana en los Andes*, Oruro 2011; Pauwels, G., (ed.), *La Virgen del Socavón y su Carnaval*, Oruro 1999 (this publication contains accounts of the Marian devotions).

There exist official versions of this national symbol (among the power elites and among representatives of the cult of the Virgin Mary as the protectress of mining) and a whole range of interpretations by the multitudes who treasure the carnival.

It seems to me that encounter/non-encounter happens at a number of levels. In the sacred narrative, Wari, the god of the Uro civilisation, is ousted by Ñusta, the heroine of the Incas, and later during the European colonisation by the Virgin Mary, who overcomes plagues of frogs, snakes and ants. As for today's practices, rural and urban forms and their respective dances and power-struggles are juxtaposed to each other and to the student celebration that has its own distinctive ritual. Folkloric competition, the commercial fairs all over the city, the liturgical celebrations and carnival licence all interweave while maintaining their own identity. In addition, there are also ethical dimensions: the ideas of material well-being thanks to assistance from the sacred; of the protection offered by the Virgin, the Mother of God; and of thanks to Life (through wholesome entertainment, lots of alcohol, argument, and the cultivation of friendships).

We move on now to another liminal terrain, that of the individual spiritual therapies associated with death. Present throughout the continent, these involve forms of belief and ritual relating to a number of sacred beings (including both the "official" and the "informal" saints that have a mass following). This complex cult of images of Death is well documented in Mexico,¹⁴³ Argentina and the Andean region. People seek in it an immediate solution to problems of social identity, of deprivation, and of relationship to death.

Those who practice this cult at home and at the barrio level describe themselves as Catholic and often combine images of saints together with the picture of a skeleton with a cape and other adornments. In Mexico this figure with its scythe is a major national symbol (called

¹⁴³ See Lomnitz-Adler, C., *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2005); Lara Mireles, M.C., *El culto de la Santa Muerte en el entramado simbólico de la sociedad de riesgo* (San Luis Potosí: Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, 2006); Perdigón, K., *La Santa Muerte, protectora de los hombres*, Mexico 2008; Gil Olmos, J., *La Santa Muerte: la Virgen de los Olvidados* (México, D.F.: Random House Mondadori, 2010). Gil explains: "At the beginning of... the new millennium, death is more present than ever in our country ... in the religious world of Mexico, and has entrenched itself outside the temples and the ecclesiastical hierarchies" (107).

the “Most Holy,” “dear skinny friend” or “White Virgin”) and death is venerated in many parts of the continent in the form of a skull.

In Mexico, one form of ritual concludes as follows: “Ninth day. Protective and Blessed Death. Through the power God has conferred on you, I ask you free me of all curses, dangers and diseases and grant me in their stead good luck, happiness and money. I ask that you be my friend and that you protect me from my enemies, and also cause [so-and-so] to come to me and humbly beg my forgiveness, gentle as a lamb, true to his/her word, and that s/he will be loving and biddable his/her whole life long. Amen. Three Our Fathers to be said”.¹⁴⁴

Originating in animism and incorporating Catholic elements, these practices are seeing a revival among people who have little or no connection with the Church. They are on the increase, too, in regions where violence and social insecurity prevail. Paradoxically, it is death that protects and ensures well-being! Devotees are clients in search of a solution to an urgent problem; they move between this world and the beyond, and witchcraft, too, is on the rise in marginalised urban populations and also in certain circles of power and influence. So the flux of encounter and non-encounter does not occur just at the spiritual level, but above all in people’s painful everyday experience.

We look now at a good example of interaction: the experience and wisdom of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who expresses the racial mixture of Mexico and has served as a symbol for landmark political movements. How did it all begin? It was in the mid-16th century that Antonio Valeriano wrote the *Nican Mopohu*, an encounter between two worlds.

Miguel León Portilla sums it up as follows: on the Hill of Tepeyac there occurred “an exchange of ideas, metaphors and signs that originate in two different ways of thinking and feeling the mystery of human existence on earth... There is a Mother who stands beside the Giver of Life... the noble heavenly Lady in light blue is (for the Aztec Juan Diego) his compassionate Mother, she is Tonantzín Guadalupe”.¹⁴⁵ From that time until today, the Guadalupean vision has

¹⁴⁴ Gil Olmos, J., *La Santa Muerte*, 186.

¹⁴⁵ León Portilla, M., *Tonantzín Guadalupe, Pensamiento náhuatl y mensaje cristiano en*

shaped the identity and history of Mexico, giving rise to a whole series of political, cultural and mystical phenomena. The God of the Nahua and Marian Christianity came together and the sacred has masculine and feminine aspects. The ethical is many-sided: survival under domination, integration as a people, entrusting oneself to the Giver of Life and his compassionate Mother, forming a religious community independent of clerical norms, and celebrating the human and cosmic story together with Mary and Christ. The whole represents a Catholicism "within" and "between" cultures. There are also, however, fanatical features that are supportive of exploitative elites.

Speaking generally, we can say that there are different theologoumena: interreligious wisdom (as in the case of the vision on the Hill of Tepeyac) and the asymmetric Catholic festival (as in the Oruro Carnival). Both involve modes of encounter and non-encounter. We have also considered the individual therapeutic rite as an example of devotion to Santa Muerte. These kinds of language – with their tension between witness, myth, worship, politics, analysis and symbolism – mean that many fight shy of dealing with intercultural aspects in Christian reflection.

In my opinion, religious reality in all its many dimensions is inescapable. One cannot remain indifferent in the face of it. Rather it prompts a religious discernment whose evangelical foundation is the wisdom of love. In addition, we have major paradigms or images available to us. On the one hand, the intercultural accords with the message of the feast of the Kingdom of God. One of its great metaphors is the festive practice of the poor. On the other hand, cultural interaction is valued, thanks to the Pentecost event. This invites us to acknowledge different religious identities and to promote the alliance of cultures within salvation history. The ecclesial community venerates the purifying fire and the breath of the Spirit that blows where it pleases; for this reason it thinks not in mono-cultural chains, but in the clarity of the intercultural.

el Nican Mopohua (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional y el Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), 90. An outstanding interpretation is offered by Siller, C., *Para comprender el mensaje de María de Guadalupe* (Buenos Aires, Editorial Guadalupe, 1989); for a more comprehensively Latin American perspective see Boff, C., *Mariología social, O significado da Virgem para a Sociedade* (São Paulo: Editora Paulus, 2006).

To summarise: in every context and cultural process the ecclesial community has the Good News as its standard. This goes for us all, not just those who occupy leadership positions. The *sensus fidei* of the people of God brings with it the ability to understand and communicate the faith. Every one of them has the nature of a theologoumenon. “Ordinary” people have extraordinary knowledge. They engage in symbolic interactions, practice different modes of living, and re-shape what it is to be Christian.

I have here highlighted lessons in the intercultural offered by the Andean *tinkuy* – the story of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Catholic festival of Carnival, and the cult of Santa Muerte, although each of these has its own limitations and aberrations. They represent human historical realities, rather than experiences to be idolised; and they have been interrogated by the message of unconditional love.

Every theologoumenon is subject to biblical-doctrinal criteria. The Word and the Spirit mark the pilgrim journey of humanity and the theological creativity of human communities. In the communication of faith by the people, however, the signs of the Word incarnate predominate. To these must be added the signs of kenosis of the Spirit.¹⁴⁶ This humble yet transformative energy within humanity and within the universe shapes all Catholic experience. None of the Latin American cultures, nor any encounter between them, are sacralised on account of their Catholic characteristics, nor is what we call Catholic absolutised. Rather, life in fullness has to be attributed, as in the Mayan prayer, to the Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth.

¹⁴⁶ See Luccetti Bingemer, M.C., “Die verborgene Liebe. Bemerkungen zur Kenose des Geistes in der westlichen Tradition,” in: *Concilium* 47/4 (2011), 384-394, which draws on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

MISSION AND DIALOGUE

Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission



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