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The Evangelical Church as an Extirpator of Idolatry in the Water Festival in the Andes of Peru

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Abstract: The research focuses on the Water Festival (Yarqa Aspiy), an ancient event in the Peruvian Andes, and which, as an Inca activity, survived the extirpation of idolatries by the Spanish colonization. The objective is to determine the importance of ancestral rituals in the communal work of this festival that, by merging with those of the Catholic religion, survives to this day. The participant-observation methodology in the Ccarhuaccoco community allowed us to investigate the details of this ancestral communal activity with its Andean rituals. It is concluded that this activity of Inca origin is in the process of extinction due to the growth of the Evangelical Church, which eradicates idolatry in its community practice. Additionally, thanks to religious tolerance, freedom of belief, and the necessary coexistence of water with the community, the festivity is maintained, although with variations in its ritual.

Keywords: evangelical; idolatry; Yarqa Aspiy; Andes



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1. Introduction

The Peruvian Andean inhabitants have been characterized by their resistance to not accepting the process of Catholic evangelization since the Spanish conquest. For instance, “[in] 1610, Ávila was appointed the first judge to extirpate idolatry by the Archbishop of Lima. In addition to Ávila, other extirpators were named in the following years and the extirpation of idolatries soon became institutionalized in the archbishopric of Lima” (Gareis 2007, p. 2). The worldview of the Andean people is based on the worship of divinities such as Pachamama (Mother Earth) and the Apus or huamanis (high mountains) that sustain their being: “Andean philosophy has a simile with the pre-Socratic thought of valuing nature as part of itself, the Andean man seeks security in nature, which provides him with water and security of existence” (Gutiérrez and Aronés 2022, p. 431, our translation from Spanish). This way of conceiving the world keeps alive the belief in the divinities of Andean nature.

This research work is based on the current loss of ancestral rituals that were not completely eradicated by the Spanish conquest with the implementation of the idolatry extirpation system: “hence the enormous importance of autochthonous religion in Andean cultures and the desire to fulfill the duties of worship that inspired the tenacious resistance that local groups presented to the extirpation of idolatries” (Gareis 2007, p. 26). The resistance of the Andean religion is progressively weakened due to the institutionalization of the evangelical religion, which is gaining space as its practice becomes more widespread, extirpating idolatries in a subtle and effective way. In other countries, their participation is effective, as revealed by different studies, especially in Latin America, for example, in

Ecuador: “A potential for change was glimpsed in the evangelical churches that articulated their efficient organizational structure to a social and political project that sought greater justice, freedom and democracy” (Andrade 2005, p. 59).

The last 2017 population census in Peru on religious institutions reports that “76% are Catholics, 14.1% are Evangelicals, 4.8% have another creed (which includes Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Israelites, Buddhists, Muslims, among others) and 5.1% said they had no religion” (García 2018). The predominant religion, then, in Peru is Catholic, which is also taught in the national education curriculum from the initial, primary, and secondary levels. In turn, the Peruvian state recognizes the Catholic religion in the current Political Constitution, which in its 50th article declares the following:

Within a regime of independence and autonomy, the State recognizes the Catholic Church as an important element in the historical, cultural and moral formation of Peru, and gives its collaboration. The State respects other confessions and can establish forms of collaboration with them. (Congreso de la República 1993, p. 13)

The Peruvian state, contrary to what it gives to the Catholic Church, does not contribute any budget to the Protestant churches, although they are self-financing with their economic system of tithes from their affiliates. Despite not having a budget from the state, it is the second largest religion in number of followers: “Evangelicals advance in the popular sectors and agnostics in the population with a higher educational level” (Torres 2018). The rapid and sustainable rise of the Evangelical Church in Peru reflects its consolidation with its own rituals that underestimate and eradicate, i.e., extirpate, ancestral Andean practices such as the Yarqa Aspiy (Water Festival) and other typical activities. During the Spanish colonization times, “[f]aced with the extirpation of idolatry, it is noteworthy that both the inhabitants of Huarochirí and those of Cajatambo resisted the destruction of their local cults, adopting various strategies to counteract the effects of institutionalized persecution” (Gareis 2007, p. 16).

This research was carried out in the Ccarhuaccocco community, located in the Ayacucho region, Cangallo Province, Paras District, Peru, which is at 3739 m above sea level and in the Andes Mountains. One can go through “the Pisco-Castrovirreyna-Ayacucho highway, having Ritipata and Tucopata as the closest points, approximately 20 km distant from the limit of the Paras sheet” (Palacios 1994, p. 6). The community does not have fluid contact with the capital of the region and even less with the capital of Peru; its system of government is self-managed by the authorities called the Varayocs (who use Inca command sticks also called by the same name). This system prevails to this day, which is another subject of this investigation.

The Yarqa Aspiy is an ancestral practice of Inca origin that is maintained to this day, and it does not have an exact start date because there are no written records since Quechua, the majority Andean language, is agraphic. The information is purely oral; according to the community authorities, this Water Festival dates back approximately two hundred and fifty years: “It corresponds to the beginning of the rains, sowing, thunder, lightning and hail. The villagers consider these festivities to be of Catholic origin. This is how religious syncretism was produced in Peru” (Ramírez 2009, p. 195). It is a syncretism of the Catholic religion and the forms of ritual practices of the Andean peasants who resisted the extirpation of idolatries. For hundreds of years, there was the Andean and Catholic religious practice with prayers in Quechua and Spanish.

The flat geography where agricultural planting occurs is only during the rainy season. The practice of Yarqa Aspiy “is throughout the Andean territory a collective party that includes religious rituals, music and dances, feasts, playful acts and popular merriment. What varies from region to region and from town to town are the particularities of each rite” (Robles 2010, p. 211). The community of Ccarhuaccocco has a river that is formed from the Apu Ritipata (a snow-capped mountain) at 4900 m above sea level, which feeds the Yanacocha Lagoon (Black Lagoon) from which the Ccarhuaccocco River is born, supplying water to the population with 449 registered families.

2. Results

2.1. Ancestral Rituals of Yarqa Aspiy (Water Festival)

At the national level, in the Peruvian Andes, the Yarqa Aspiy (Water Festival) has been practiced since the time of the Incas with a similar ceremony on different dates: “on December 4, the communities of the province of Vilcas Huamán, in the region of Ayacucho, celebrated the collective ritual activity ‘Yarqa Aspiy’ (cleaning ditches in Spanish), also known as the water festival” ([Ministerio de Cultura 2020](#)). This activity of cleaning, maintaining, and repairing the Incan canal system allows the survival of peasant agriculture: “August 1 marks the beginning of the agricultural season and, with it, the beginning of the most important task (called yarqa aspiy, yaku raymi, water festival, champería or cleaning or digging of the main ditches) in Yanque [in the Province of Caylloma in the Department of Arequipa]” ([Sánchez 2019](#), p. 228).

Given the circumstance of the peasant belief in the apus or huamanis (high deified hills) that provide water, the ritual that consists of care and prayer towards the snow-capped peaks in particular is fundamental: “the communal work presents a ritual and festive dimension and it is an essential part of the Andean production cycle” ([Ministerio de Cultura 2020](#)). Water and land in the Peruvian Andes have a sacred foundation because they give life and are related to feminine divinities such as Mama Pacha (Mother Land) and Mama Qocha (Mother Lagoon), and meanwhile, the high hills constitute the masculine counterpart, like the great Apu (a mighty god).

Therefore, the importance of water in life in relation to the land and the highest snow-capped mountains makes it a unique element that must be valued with a special celebration: “in many Andean communities these festivities are held during the months of August and September, which coincides with the celebration of patron saints” ([Arce 2006](#), p. 195). The farmer considers the following regarding the liquid element, water: “in the Andes it has a sacred character and continues to be Mama Yaku or Mother Water and is alive like the rest of nature, that is why they sing to it and give offerings, so that it continues to irrigate all sacred geography” ([PRATEC—Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas 2009](#), p. 97). This system of the sacred prevails to this day; it is the essential foundation to mobilize the entire population in unison and actively participate in the Water Festival.

In each Andean community where water has a sacred value, the administration of the festival is carried out in turn by its inhabitants: “the commissions and committees of irrigators or ‘tomeros’, apart from the Yarqa Aspiy, a ritual from top to bottom, sector by sector, with music and parties, with justice, for crops, wetlands, pastures and wild birds” ([PRATEC—Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas 2009](#), p. 106). Moreover, in the curricular diversification of Peruvian education, 10% of the curriculum is allocated to the development of the topics of its environment, where the Andean theme is considered: “a formal knowledge of the IBE [Intercultural Bilingual Education] pedagogical proposal, promotes the participation of wise men or ‘yachaq’; incorporates use of the community calendar, ‘yarqa aspiy’ and ‘watuchikuna’” ([Eyzaguirre et al. 2019](#), p. 4).

As said before, the ancestral rituals of the Andean worldview survived the Spanish conquest, persisting to this day in some parts of the Peruvian territory. The governments on duty give credit to these ancestral customs depending on their circumscriptions: “the Ministry of Culture delivered the declaration of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Nation to the Yarqa Aspiy ritual collective work, developed in the town center of Carcosi in the district of Congalla, Angaraes province, Huancavelica department” ([Ministerio de Cultura 2019](#)). Recognition by the government is an incentive to maintain the tradition; however, this practice is gradually being irreversibly lost due to the influence of Evangelical religious groups that are gaining territory in the Andes as extirpaters of the idolatry of ancestral rituals: “they no longer constitute an important part of the life of the community members of Paqcha due to the predominance of evangelical churches and the low percentage of residents (approximately 30%) that constitute the group of popular Catholics” ([Cabrera and Martel 2020](#), p. 222).

The Catholic Church allowed the fusion of its ritual with the Andean ancestral cult, which survive together in each important event regarding the Pacha Mama. In each Yarqa Aspiy activity, the Pacha Mama, the Apu, and the Mama Qocha are venerated and complemented with Catholic prayer, a perfect fusion of coexistence. The oral tradition in the Quechua language, which predominates in the Peruvian Andes, keeps the ancestral custom alive with similar rituals: “it is of Inca origin. Yarqa means ‘thirsty’ and aspiy ‘to dig’ or ‘to scabble’. The activity consists of cleaning the ditches, which must remain free of objects and weeds that prevent the water from leaving its source” ([Festividades Categoría 2022](#)).

During the rainy season in the Peruvian highlands, the crop is obviously not irrigated because the ditch is flooded by the downpour throughout its entire trajectory, so the task is crucial, with a special celebration of water: “it has a ritual connotation and is celebrated together with the festival of the Virgin of the Assumption. In the Libertadores and Progreso neighborhoods, the community members clean the intakes and ditches called Waqrayuq (Qanay Yaku), Nawin (Uray Yaku) and Siksi Yaku” ([Festividades Categoría 2022](#)). The important places have Quechua names that make it easy to locate where to start, where to rest, where to have lunch, their ritual, and the musicians; also, they are separated by age groups and the women who participate in the festival: “the verses allude to the local divinity San Yarqa. Along the way, the haylli will sing accompanied by the violin, the harp and the tinkling of their lilies” ([Arce 2007](#), p. 111).

2.2. Yarqa Aspiy (Water Festival) with the Participation of Catholics

As said before, the Water Festival is an ancestral ritual from the Inca era and survives to this day, coexisting with the ritual of the Catholic religion, having survived the process of extirpation of idolatry: “for the peasants of the valley, the yarqa aspiy is an event collective that involves all the community members and landholders, who are the users of irrigation water, canals and reservoirs” ([Robles 2010](#), p. 209). The flexibility in the practice of other religious congregations in Peru is used in the Andean and peripheral areas with little access to education for the massification of the Evangelical religion: “in Andean religious thought, mountains and hills are ‘living’ elements ‘who interact with men, are hungry, are kind, get upset, ‘give their waters’ to the inhabitants of the region and also punish” ([Robles 2010](#), p. 209). For Evangelicals, these practices are idolatries that make no sense, and thus, they oppose their survival, eradicating them in all their congregations.

The rituals of any religious congregation are not regulated by the Peruvian state, except when some sexual crimes are manifested, which are even aired through journalistic denunciations as, for example: “Police agents in Peru detain an evangelical pastor for alleged guilt in cases of child abuse. When they arrested him, they found several photos of his previous victims” ([Atlas 2010](#)). In the same way, similar crimes in the Catholic Church are revealed through journalistic reports: “12 priests (nine from Huamachuco and three from Trujillo) are mentioned as implicated in cases of sexual abuse” ([Goytizolo 2020](#)).

On the other hand, within formal public education, there is the possibility of exemption from the religion course, which has a Catholic content, according to article 8 of the Religious Freedom Law:

Educational institutions, at all levels and modalities, respect the right of students to exempt themselves from religion courses for reasons of conscience or due to their religious convictions without affecting their academic average. In the cases of minors, the exoneration proceeds as long as the parents or whoever has guardianship of the same expresses it. ([Congreso de la República 2010](#))

Therefore, parents or guardians can thus avoid the Catholic indoctrination of minors in their care, thus reducing the number of future Catholic faithful. In the community of Ccarhuaccocco, where the investigation was carried out, there is no priest who officiates mass for the Catholic parishioners. This is the same scenario at the national level in the Andean communities far from the capitals of the provinces of Peru: there are no Catholic priests living in them. The arrival of the priest is a bureaucratic process of legal procedures, and his transport has to be paid for by the steward of the patronal festival once a year. The

church built in colonial times is abandoned, closed for a whole year until a patronal festival is celebrated.

Also, the rivalry and coexistence between the inhabitants of the Catholic and Evangelical Andean communities is constant. In this section, we analyze the participation of the Catholic community in the Water Festival because it generates “abundance and reception of the rain that returns in the new season of ‘puquy uku’ (rainy season), because in its sacred dimension the water comes out and returns to his ‘town’ (llaqtan) which becomes the Yunka (Jungle)” (PRATEC—Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas 2009, p. 111). The rejoicing of the peasants for the puquy (rainy season) is a blessing that will give plenty of water during the year. For them, the constant rains are due to the ancestral rituals in honor of the Apus, the Mama Qochas, and the Pacha Mama, which conclude with an ancestral festival mixed with the Catholic religion. The participation of the Evangelicals in this festival is only due to the need for water, and thus, it is obligatory for them, and they do not practice any ritual in their work on the Yarqa Aspiy.

The main characteristic of Catholic rituals is the presence of a priest who blesses the preparations for the Water Festival. In this activity, there is always Coca leaf, cigarettes, alcohol (distilled cane), anise, candles, flowers, and holy water to calm the Apus. It is an Andean–Catholic religious fusion, and there are always prayers in Quechua and Spanish, depending on who plays Yachaq (Andean wise man)—generally the oldest: “Catholic believers are equally criticized by evangelicals because they sometimes show excesses in the intake of alcohol and cigarettes in religious and social festivities” (Cabrera and Martel 2020, p. 223). The entire Andean Water Festival is accompanied by musical groups hired for the occasion, generally with harp, violin, bugle (made with a bull’s horn), and qarawi (Andean song in Quechua by women). Evangelical criticism aims to banish any Catholic practice that is idolatry because harmful products for the human body are consumed in the process, which Catholicism does not prohibit but which have essential social control of the ritual.

In spite of the advance of the extirpation of idolatry from the Evangelical Church, the celebration of the Water Festival persists with some substantial changes: “‘Yarqa aspiy’ in the community, it is usual to begin with the ‘pagapu’ or payment to the land with coca leaves, maize beer and cigarettes, that is, payment to the ‘pachamama’ or mother earth” (Eyzaguirre et al. 2019, p. 84).

The pompous celebration of water in the Peruvian Andes is losing the space that resisted during the Spanish conquest. The entry of the state with the titling of lands further promoted the individualism that was alien to the peasants, and in that way, the peasant communities are gradually and irreversibly disappearing. The self-managed communal organization persists in maintaining this tradition due to the need for communal labor because the ditch is public: “Yarqa aspiy (dry cleaning): The yarqa aspiy is a minka [or communal task]. It consists of cleaning the river. When the time comes to plant corn, they have to clean the dirt from the river and the reeds from the mouth, near the lagoon” (Saldaña 2020, p. 143). It is a community concern because the planting season in winter depends on this festival.

The Water Festival is a ceremony in which the entire population participates, and it is an obligatory part of the Andean calendar of each community where there are a “set of dances and songs of the production (in agriculture: harawi, wanka, waylarsh, yupay and yarqa aspiy in raising cattle: Santiago, toril, rodeo, herranza, turo vilay, and wanka)” (Montoya 1996, p. 484).

Most of the celebrations are held in Quechua: “today this festival is still practiced for the same purpose, but there are fewer and fewer stretches of canals and reservoirs to clean, since over the last three decades cement has contributed to the improvement of the infrastructures” (Robles 2010, p. 204). In its rituals, natural products are present, and the prayers in Quechua are fused with the Catholic religion: “[the] identity of the populations is shown in the material and immaterial culture generated by each of them; the same ones

that in several regions of our country still exist, next to the traditional water festivals or yarqa aspiy” (Redacción 2011).

The peasants maintain the survival of the Water Festival with rituals accepted by the Catholic Church since colonial times and that have survived the colonial extirpation of idolatry. Nowadays, they fight against the Evangelicals to maintain their tradition: “just as its economic-political dimensions have been reaffirming and transforming since the end of the 20th century, so too have those elements of its most visible religious manifestations: Catholic-Quechua syncretism and the ritualized labor festival of the Yarqa Aspiy” (Sánchez 2017).

2.3. Ritual to Apu Ritipata and Yanacocha with Yarqa Aspiy in Ccarhuaccocco

In the Andean communities of Peru, rituals are indispensable for maintenance of the high hills with permanent snow, such as the Apu Ritipata (considered divine). Ritipata in Quechua means frozen snow peak, and in this case, it is located at an altitude of 4900 m (Figure 1). From the Apu Ritipata, the water goes down to the Yanacocha Lagoon (Black Lagoon) that forms the Ccarhuaccocco River and is part of the Yarqa Aspiy, i.e., the Ccarhuaccocco Water Festival, with a length of 45 km running to the farmlands and the town. For ten years, the ditch has been channeled with cement, and even the downpour and grasslands block the normal course. Ritipata itself supplies water to the Ayacucho region on the so-called water route from the community of Santa Fe, where there is access with surveillance for all visitors and they can see “the ancestral practice of sowing water and then harvesting it for agriculture, livestock and human consumption; then the Ritipata mountain located at 4900 m above sea level was visited, where the thaw due to climate change was verified” (Durand 2019). Climate change is a global phenomenon that generates water scarcity in the Andean population.



Figure 1. The Apu Ritipata from where the water originates at the end of the rainy season. Fountain: Photograph by the authors May (2023).

The Apu Ritipata is always covered with a blanket of snow, but this decreases progressively according to the peasants who still sporadically practice the pagapu (ritual of offerings): “in Guitarrachayocc, Anccoya and Pitu pata, in addition to the rain, snow is of paramount importance; since, when it accumulates on the peaks and slopes of Ritipata and Portuguesa, it melts, to later feed the various sources, meters below” (Najarro 2020, p. 94). The peasants interviewed say that the snowfall in the Apu Ritipata decreases due to the lack of special offerings that they stopped practicing due to the meddling of the Evangelicals who have won young people for their churches (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Apu Ritipata from where the water springs in the month of June. Fountain: Photograph by the authors June (2023).

At the summit and slopes of Apu Ritipata, the vicuña, a wild animal, abounds, which belongs to the community, and the state maintains park rangers to prevent poaching: “It also implies the protection of the water paqarinas [places of origin, and final destinations, of ancestors]; the expansion of wetlands for the breeding of camelids for humans and the vicuñas of the Apus, which are also communal vicuñas.” (Ticona et al. 1994, p. 32). Ritipata’s snowmelt provides water to Yanacocha’s lagoon, and nearby is the Titanca Forest (Puya Raymundi) that blooms every hundred years and is protected by the peasants because it is in danger of extinction.

The Water Festival in Ccarhuaccocco is held every year from May 4 to 6 in a regular way. This activity began with special preparations; on this occasion, in the year 2023, it was with a special program promoted by different media and was merged with different events. The festival of the Virgin of Carmen, which is celebrated every July 16, was left aside, as it lost importance due to the lack of Catholic peasants available to take their turn in the stewardship and because the Evangelicals who extirpated all the patron saint festivities, considering them idolatrous, did not want to be part of the stewardship. The peasants meet beforehand for the central ceremony in order “to allow and facilitate the natural flow of water to irrigate the fields and, as with the economic activities of the Andean productive cycle, this also has a ritual and festive dimension” (Ministerio de Cultura 2020). In the year 2023, it was called the “1st. Agricultural, artisan, folkloric and cultural expressions fair and traditional festival of Yarqa Aspiy, Ccarhuaccocco 2023”, held from May 4 to 7.

The programming of the activities is carried out as planned, and the first day in the early hours of the morning, the entire population walks to the water intake headed by the “butler of the intake”. They are accompanied by two musical groups that have had a previous meeting. The butler gives only a package of soft drinks and two bags of cookies because this time, the butler is Evangelical. There is no ritual ceremony, just a meeting to elect the next steward and start the Water Festival. The program previously established that on the first day of work, there would be a group of musicians in front of the group of pikemen, in the middle would go the women and elders called the group of reapers (weed cutters with sickles), and at the end would go the palafreneros (shovel workers) accompanied by the other group of musicians (Figure 3).



Figure 3. On the first day of the Water Festival, researchers take part of the activity. A group of Evangelical musicians playing Catholic music entertains the meeting for the change of steward. Fountain: Photograph by authors May (2023).

However, “many elders complain about the ‘loss of Customs’ and some authorities try to recover the lost practices. An example is the Yarqa Aspiy in Chuschi [in the province of Cangallo in the department of Ayacucho]. . . in an act of longing, an acclamation of an idealized past” (Tubino 2007, pp. 211–12). There was no ritual ceremony there; this activity was directed by the authorities, and the Varayoc was in charge of enforcing the norms: “the traditional women authorities (Mother Mayor, Councilwomen and Female Helpers) and men (compadres of Male Helpers) in Yarqa Aspiy (Water Festival), are the water itself that runs through the canals of the town so that Mother Water flows” (Proyecto Regional Andino 2019). There are three parts of the 45 km ditch that require a strong dedication of work; as it is a rugged area, this activity was done in advance to facilitate the party.

There is another group of women who carry the backpacks of the female and male workers throughout the journey, and once it is time to eat, each one is given their own backpack, and there, they have the cold meal prepared independently for this occasion: “the ritualized work parties are platforms for intersubjective experiences staged, transmitted generationally and susceptible to reinterpreting their traditions in the very practice of their own performance” (Sánchez 2019, p. 226). All the prepared food, namely cancha (roasted corn), puspó (boiled bean), cheese, boiled native potato, and corn, is divided among the groups of friends. For the musicians, the food is brought by a special group commissioned by the mayordomos. There are no Catholic rituals with cigarettes, coca, alcohol, and holy water; all this is removed during the three days of the festival. Some Catholics who work in this Water Festival smoke cigarettes, chew coca, and drink a little sugar cane liquor, but they do it minimally.

Each day has a steward, and the Water Festival is complemented on the fourth day, especially with the arrival of the “residents” (families who live in other cities). They celebrate the festival in the Catholic style: “by tradition, the last day of the festival the bands of musicians play happy farewell songs that at the same time express sadness because the reunion of the families of the town is coming to an end” (Robles 2010, p. 213). Evangelicals are passive spectators of all this social activity, and they generally remain in their churches, in their meetings, or worship services, and their members treat each other with the term “brother” (belonging to the “family” of the same religion). Their participation in communal work is obligatory because otherwise, they would not benefit from the water from the irrigation system in turn: “the irrigation canal cleaning ritual or yarqa aspiy thus contributes decisively, through song and dance, to the integration and social cohesion of communities, which will have a direct impact on productivity” (Arce 2007, p. 110).

The struggle between Evangelicals, accused of eradicating ancestral traditions, and Catholics, who have fused Christianity with ancestral rituals, is constant. The imposition of the former on the latter in this activity is evident: the activity of the first day of the 2023 festival was carried out by an Evangelical, and the musical groups belonged to his congregation; however, Catholic music was performed without any type of ancestral ritual: “many festivities, however, are disappearing due to the influence of the presence of Evangelical and eschatological churches. This is the case, for example, of Chaupihuasi, where there are no patron saint festivities” (Bolaños 2005, p. 90). In Ccarhuaccocco, as a result of the interviews, all the Catholics expressed their disagreement because the disappearance of the rituals scares away the visit of tourists, and their consequent economic income decreases in these community activities. The Evangelicals interviewed also question the actions of Catholics, who worship meaningless idols and mountains, based on biblical verses such as Psalm 115:

2. Do you want the pagans to say: “Where is your God?” 3. Our God is in heaven, he does everything he wants. 4. Their idols are nothing more than gold and silver, a work of the hand of man. 5. They have a mouth, but do not speak, eyes, but do not see, ears, but do not hear, nose, but do not smell. 7. They have hands, but they don’t feel, feet, but they don’t walk, not a whisper comes out of their throat. (Biblia Latinoamericana 2023)

The general comment is that Catholics waste time in their rituals, chew coca, and consume liquor in excess in social parties; they do not read or understand the Bible well.

The communal authorities, elected by turns, are in charge of gathering and persuading the peasants to actively participate in the Water Festival and in other tasks that require collective work. The change of the seasons of the year in the Peruvian Andes is based on the observation and reading of the stars and on exceptional manifestations of some animals and plants: “The use of the communal calendar has been incorporated, respecting the sowing times and the main community festival dates, such as in the case of the “yarqa aspiy” or water festival” (Eyzaguirre et al. 2019, p. 119). The Andean communities of Peru have a calendar that is transmitted orally, with dates for the celebration of their ancestral customs, especially the Yarqa Aspiy. Without the work of the Water Festival, the survival of agriculture, livestock, and the very life of the peasants is not guaranteed since some high Andean communities still do not receive drinking water daily.

2.4. Extirpation of Idolatry by the Evangelical Church

The official Peruvian history addresses the process of extirpation of idolatries institutionalized by the Spanish conquest during the colony, thus showing the first sources on this practice of extirpation of idolatries:

The document *Manuscrito Quechua de Huarochirí*, preserved in the National Library of Madrid, which probably belonged to the extirpator of idolatries Francisco de Ávila, dated 1608, is part of the campaign against idolatries, but it reliably photographs the water ritual of that time. (PRATEC—Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas 2009, p. 98)

The Andean divinities of Peru have been considered as givers of nature, especially water, a fundamental element for life. In this line of thought, the peasants consider the pagapu (ritual for land, lagoons, snow-capped mountains, or giant stones) as a means of reaching an inexhaustible divinity and the means by which they reverence it. This form of ritual is carried out with products extracted from the cultivation of the land and that have a life of their own.

Peruvian formal education incorporates “the case of the celebration of the ‘Yarqaaspiy’ or Water Festival, where the cleaning of nearby ditches is carried out, this is an important element as part of incorporating the values and traditions of the community” (Eyzaguirre et al. 2019, p. 84). This millennial ancestral practice, as part of the Andean experience, is gradually being “extirpated” in its entirety by members of the Evangelical Church as

well as by other non-Catholic religions that develop in the Peruvian Andes. In a similar way, it happened in Mexico: “the dimension of the conflict between Christianity and local religions and how it shaped the spiritual reality of colonial societies, we find in the acts of extirpation that were carried out in the Yucatan peninsula” (Velandía 2018, p. 260). None of the other established religions in Peru practice rituals for nature, which are called idolatry by the preachers of the Protestant churches.

The Catholic churches or temples in the Andes of Peru were mostly built in colonies with a uniform style of architecture. Currently, these constructions are completely abandoned because there are no priests or representatives of the Catholic Church to maintain them in the face of the inclement Andean climate. Evangelicals, on the other hand, do not need to build their temples with modern or classical architectural structures; they turn a normal house into a church where its members hold their worship meeting led by a preacher called a pastor regardless of gender: “the Evangelical preachers of the United Pentecostal confessions of Peru, the Quechua Pentecostal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Assembly of God Church and the Andean Pentecostal Church, have made their presence felt since the mid-20th century” (Cabrera and Martel 2020, p. 225). Men and women can lead the ritual of the Evangelical practice, generally with songs and Bible readings. They do not have images or idols to adore, and all its members have the same interests: the common good and the repudiation of idolatry, consumption of alcohol, and chewing of coca, an ancestral custom in the Andes.

In colonial times, the Andean inhabitants “deceived the missionaries with apparent submission; and yet, they continued to secretly practice all kinds of pagan rites, with the ultimate goal of worshipping the huacas [sacred places], the millenary and authentic religion of the Andes” (Rubio 1997, p. 296). They practiced their ancestral rituals in secret for fear of death sentences and the persecution of idolatries, thus maintaining their Andean beliefs: “[i]n the case of Peru, the discovery of Francisco de Ávila implied, among other things, that Archbishop Bartolomé Lobo Guerrero created a new institution for the extirpation of idolatry” (Velandía 2018, p. 258). Evangelicals disregard the rituals because they are not necessary and so pass on to the young generation an idea of change, but this action is criticized by Catholics because it condemns the eradication such ancestral rituals.

In the interview, the pastor (or Evangelical preacher) of the community of Carhuaccocco stated that there are negative actions of the religious practice of Catholics, especially the excesses of liquor and sex in the patronal festivals of the community. On the other hand, Evangelicals do not have any excess, and they preach the word of God by example, but according to Catholics, the former understand the Bible in a distorted way. Participation in the Water Festival is mandatory; otherwise, they will be excluded from the irrigators' guild, so they also assume stewardship: “it is done through tasks, accompanied by music (harawi, harp and violin) and the intervention of dancers who, like the cura, parody in Vilcashuaman, as a form of censorship and social control, the dissipated life of the Catholic priests” (Bolaños 2005, p. 45). The concept of the ethical issue of priests in the Peruvian history of the Andes is negative, and parodies are common in the social manifestations of the people.

The Evangelical congregations, which are massive in the Andes of Peru, have their own rituals in their churches set up in strategic places in the community. The churches do not have images or luxuries; they have chairs and a platform where the pastor reads the Bible and comments on it to his faithful. They usually have celebrations with a musical group made up of themselves, reaching the point of influencing other people: “For example, an Evangelical told me that most Catholics no longer make offerings to Pachamama, explaining that they ‘have read and understood the Bible’” (Hannah 2014, p. 25).

Their music blares from a stereo purchased especially for the church. The Evangelical Church does not carry out an extirpation of idolatries as in colonial times, where “[t]he persecution of idolatries allowed them [the original Andeans] to clothe themselves with religious merits before the political and ecclesiastical authorities, and with this to aspire to superior dignities in the most central, most prestigious and most profitable temples or

places” (Hidalgo 2011, p. 116). There are historically proven accusations of extirpation of idolatry by Catholics that Evangelicals take advantage of for their equally extirpatory discourse on the altars of their churches.

3. Discussion

The Andean resistance to the Spanish colonial prohibition of the ancestral rituals of the native religion is currently in the process of irreversible decline due to the growing development of the Evangelical Church that subtly extirpates idolatry from the thinking of their parishioners since for them, idolatry should not exist. The young generation does not practice the same rituals of their ancestors because the Evangelicals have changed their form of ritual; they perform the work of Yarqa Aspiy in fulfillment of social duty. This is manifested in the most important activity since Inca times, i.e., the Yarqa Aspiy (Water Festival), which takes place in the Andean region of Peru as an imperative need for survival and water access. In this activity, the Evangelicals play an important role; however, they ignore and reject the ancestral practice of worshipping nature during the Water Festival, with its essential rituals as a giver of water and life. The millenary practice that summons the entire population to rejoice is currently entering a stage of compliance by obligation and community pressure from the authorities to have water in the community without the accompanying rituals, which is a radical change for Catholics: “Since the first years of the conquest, chroniclers refer to cleanliness of ditches in their writings” (Arce 2007). Within these historical records, a festival of joy with rituals for nature is described, i.e., the Water Festival, as an essential part of the Andean culture.

Religious tolerance and freedom of belief in the currently republican Peru has led within the Andean communities to the exponential growth of Evangelical churches that have a more effective organizational structure, and the pastor is the one who directs all the activity without distinction of gender since there are women who lead the church, too, while in the Catholic Church, only the priest, a man ordained as such, can officiate the mass and, on special occasions, the patronal feast of the town. Parishioners cannot enter Catholic temples without the authorization of the respective priests, who are usually found in the provincial capitals. In the absence of the ecclesiastical authorities of the Catholics, the space is occupied by the Evangelical pastors who thus gain more followers, do not practice ancestral idolatry, and are supported by the tithes of the other members of the church.

In addition, “[t]he institution of the Extirpation of idolatry was created only at the beginning of the 17th century, but the fight against Andean religions had already begun with the Conquest” (Gareis 1989, p. 56). The other group formed by Catholics that contradicts the way of life of the Evangelicals fights for the survival of ancestral rites: “they keep alive their own customs and traditions such as carnivals, the toro pukllay (bullfighting), the yarqa aspiy (cleaning of irrigation ditches), the wasi casi (roofing of houses), the yanta chitqay (cutting of firewood), the dance of the negritos, the huaylias” (Suárez et al. 2022, p. 57). The ancestral activities that survived the extirpation of idolatries during the colony are practiced in small, reduced groups and are modified in their essence.

According to the Catholics interviewed at random, there are constant desertions of the members of the Evangelical Church because the ancestral customs, learned in childhood, are carried out unconsciously. The call of the powerful Apus and the Catholic god is strong, and thus, many Evangelicals participate in the Water Festival but also in other patron saint festivals, just like Catholics. This is accepted and considered by Evangelicals as a temptation from the devil, so they return repentant and are forgiven in their church without question.

The coexistence and tolerance between the members of the Evangelical and Catholic religions help to fulfill their objectives in the Water Festival. Once the activity is over, the Evangelicals gather in their churches to sing and to praise, while Catholics do not have a church open for their meetings with the priest: “Santa Cruz is no longer celebrated, the Yarqa Aspiy is because it is necessary to clean the canals, although it does not have the same festive character as before because the Evangelicals participate only in cleaning but

not at the party” (Tubino 2007, p. 196). Therefore, the fate of the most important festival in the Peruvian Andes is to disappear, giving way to a merely formal practice due to the need for communal water.

4. Conclusions

There are different religions in Peru, but the predominant ones are the Catholic and the Evangelical religions. The neglected space of the Catholic Church is easily won by the Evangelicals because they do not require luxurious churches or classical architectural constructions. Their churches are installed in a simple domicile, generally in the pastor’s house (who directs the congregation); at the same time, women also assume the direction of the churches. The other non-Catholic congregations that have few followers are also dedicated to extirpating the idolatries that resist extinction as a custom of the Andean culture due to their merging with the Catholic religion.

In spite of the extirpation of the idolatries formed by the rituals of the peasants who consider the Apus (high hills) or the qochas (lagoons) as deities that give life to the peasants, the custom of the Yarqa Aspiy is still in force, although without the active participation of ancestral rituals where there is now a communitarian social celebration. The extreme situation of intransigent Evangelicals and Catholics causes rivalry in their practices of the Water Festival. The Catholics claim to maintain this tradition because it brings together the whole community and generates tourism with visitors, while the Evangelicals question the excess in their festivities, such as alcohol consumption, coca chewing, the use of flowers, and praying to a lifeless hill because they do not understand the teachings of the Bible.

It is important to coexist with the farmers and to know the Quechua language and its contextual meaning in order to know the way of life of the farmers who yearn for the past. The elders, considered a source of oral information, are opposed to losing the millenary tradition; at this rate, the Water Festival, which is a necessity for the survival of the countryside’s life and access to water, an indispensable element in the Andean community, will be completely extinguished. Evangelicals discard all these rituals because they consider them pagan and believe that it is due to the lack of a correct understanding of the Bible that idolatry is generated.

5. Materials and Methods

This field research contains factual experience and analyzes the problem of the survival of ancestral customs that Andeans have valued since long before the time of the Spanish conquest; however, these activities are losing their essence with the progressive advance of the Evangelical Church in the Peruvian Andes. The inhabitants of the Andean communities defend their ritual tradition as fused with the Catholic Church.

The work was carried out in the community of Ccarhuaccocco thanks to information from the mayor of the district of Paras promoting tourism: “to the Apu Ritipata, Ñaupallaqta Qachir of the community of Ccarhuaccocco, colonial bridges, among others. In addition, we have asked the economic development department to continue identifying archeological zones. Tourism is very important because it brings money to our communities” (Redacción 2023). With this information, we visited the community and found activities such as the governing of the Varayocs (another research variable) and the ancestral custom of the Yarqa Aspiy, which takes place every May 4 for three days in a 24 km long ditch.

In order to carry out this research work, authorization was requested from the community president, who in a special meeting informed the community members to allow the research team members to enter. The researchers’ knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the Andean culture and knowledge of the Quechua language was an important factor. During our stay in the Tambo of the community, we participated in their daily activities in the celebration of their Water Festival (Yarqa Aspiy), where the villagers externalized their ancestral customs. The method was data collection with random interviews of the community members, participant and non-participant observation, and interpretation of

their customs; due to not having written sources to process the information, the researchers were guided by oral sources, mostly in Quechua, the predominant language. We shared experiences with Evangelical and Catholic farmers who, as groups, have their own forms of cultural manifestation.

The community has a well-structured organization; there is an established order of respect for the authority democratically elected among its inhabitants. The visits to the homes were carried out randomly, and we received special attention and offers of food from the Andeans. For data collection, we used a tape recorder, a cell phone camera, and field notebooks with prior authorization, and we systematized the recurring categories expressed by the villagers. The community has a Tambo (housing for visitors with essential comforts) built by the state, which was visited several times, and a coexistence with the community was part of the ethnographic work as well as the researchers' knowledge of the Quechua language. The population gathered previously to let the researchers enter, where the authority invoked the residents that they should provide them with whatever they needed for data collection, as this would serve to promote the community and more tourist visits.

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