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Religion in Latin America

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives

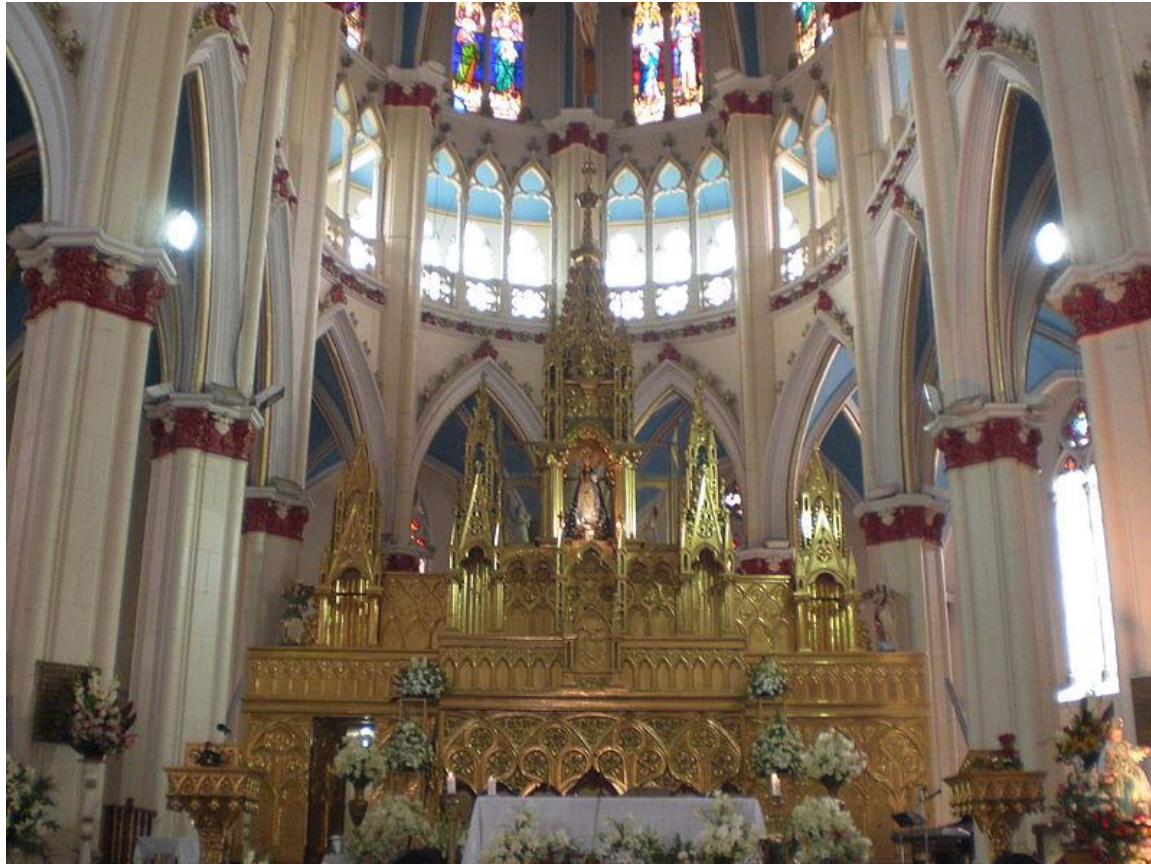


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Pilgrimage to Loja



Our Lady of El Cisne



- Usually located in a special shrine in El Cisne, a small village in the mountains, app. 40 miles outside Loja
- It is reported that the artist Diego de Robles made the statue around 1590 in Quito together with two other statues (Virgin de Guapulo and Virgen de El Quinche)
- According to legend the statue was brought to El Cisne by a group of local indigenous where she rescued the villagers on 12 October 1594

El Cisne in Loja

- Several other miraculous deeds followed => growing veneration in the region and beyond
- Loja developed in particular a strong link to the Madonna and started its own celebrations
 - first procession between el Cisne and Loja in 1720 and first festival in Loja 1830

Nowadays

- between 20 August and 1 November the statue remains in Loja
- Festival from 15 August to 8 September (including a fair)
- pilgrims coming (on foot, bus and car), most from Azuay and Loja but also from other parts of Ecuador, abroad as well as from Peru

Festival of Our Lady of El Cisne in Loja

- Begin every August 20th, arrival at the gate of the town
- Among the crowd:
Bishop, mayor, and
the army



- Most pilgrims are local people, some of them walk over 400 miles
- While the town is usually a quite place, it becomes overcrowded during the festival (some have to sleep rough, on the plazas)

La Reina de El Cisne (the Queen of El Cisne)

- Culmination in the second week of September
- Cathedral is open from early morning to late at night in order to give everyone the opportunity to see the statue
- Constant series of services
- Main attraction is procession around the main plaza in front of the cathedral





Conflict due to Protestantism

- Struggle against the veneration of saints and the Madonna
- Roman Catholic Church fights back and rejects accusation of 'worshipping statues', e.g., the bishop insisted..

"Of course, we do not worship the statue. We believe only in God."

But ...

- Due to social importance of festivals for local community invention of similar festivals for Protestant congregations
- but without statues, without alcohol, and so on.....

Ecuadorian in the Diaspora

- Joseph Fitzpatrick wrote in the 1970s that “Hispanics still cling to the basic beliefs of the Catholic Church, but do not practice as [US] Americans do. Regular attendance at mass and sacraments is not the sign of a ‘good catholic’ as it is among Americans. Folk practices are still strong and important even among youth”.

Hispanic Ministry Office (in New York)

- Church services in Spanish (sometimes in the basement of English language churches)
- And recently also festivals and processions in the neighbourhood for Latin American saints

John Brogan said...

- Latinos "have various national festivals [...] that offer people to be themselves. And for themselves, it is rather important to share what others do they are. [...] Ecuadorians [for example] do not know anything about Dominicans."

According to Brogan

- The Virgen de Guadalupe, the national patron of Mexico, has become a common figure for Latin American immigrants in the US

- but for Ecuadorians the Virgin del Cisne is still the most important figure!
- Our Lady as national symbol, in and beyond Ecuador
- But what if the immigrant story is not one of success?

Back to the pilgrimage

- No longer division between rural (traditional) festivals and urban (modern) festivals
- Hybridization visible in Loja: modern fair and traditional firework at the same time
- Our Lady of El Cisne is no longer only a *reina* (queen) for the rural people but a national figure for all Ecuadorians

- “As the Saint passes and is seen, the faithful may transfer temporarily their group, class, or social loyalties to this new focus. This is what occurs, perhaps, when people say they were blessed by a saint. What is involved is a redefinition: group and other loyalties are dissolved in favour of an intimate, visual, penetrating, affective relationship.” (Da Matta 1984, p.217)

Analysis

- Pilgrims as communitas (Turner)
 - Liminal and liminoid elements
- -> hybrid festivals (Nestor Garcia Canclini)