

Religious Nonconformity in Spanish Peru

Equation of (Roman Catholic) Christianity with the Spanish colonial state

1. royal patronage
2. lack of native Indian priests (in Peru, this was legislated)

Old Inca gods were seen as being vanquished by the Spaniards' gods, but not so, the wak'a of the Peruvian countryside.

The neo-Inca state launched a revival of the traditional Inca religion in 1565, with wandering Inca preachers saying that the wak'a had come back to life, and were calling upon the Indians to reject Christianity and to return to their ancient religion. The Inca stronghold of Vilcabamba (in modern day Ecuador) fell in 1572, and concern about native Indian religion diminished.

Spanish priests in Peru discovered evidence of traditional Inca religious practices being done in secret in the early 1600s. The Inquisition was by that time, present in Spanish America, but it had no jurisdiction over native Indians—that was up to each bishop. *Visitadores* traveled to each city and village, and make public requests for anyone with any knowledge of Inca religious worship, to come forward and confess. Punishments were usually “mild,” but cult objects were destroyed, and crosses set up at native shrines. Throughout the colonial period, new visits were undertaken, but evidence of traditional Inca religion continued.

Why?

- Lack of interest in traditional native religions, by the Catholic priests.
- Resistance to conversion was only noticed when it was defiance (like the neo-Inca revolt), but not when it was passive resistance (when Inca worship was done in private).
- Native Indians saw the priest as a representation of the Spanish state. The second Provincial Council at Lima (1567) forbade the ordination to the priesthood of Indians, and insisted that they be given no office higher than that of altar boy. Even though Charles II allowed this in 1697, it was ignored until it was re-issued in 1766. Native Indians in Peru were also denied participation in the Christian ritual of communion.