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## The Creation Of Sacred Mormon Myth

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# MISSIONARY, NATIVE, AND GENERAL AUTHORITY ACCOUNTS OF A BOLIVIAN CONVERSION

*By David C. Knowlton*

In 1976, a congregation of Aymara speaking peasants in Bolivia petitioned the Mormon mission to send them missionaries. After a period of negotiations, missionaries were sent and within a few weeks had baptized almost the entire congregation and organized a thriving branch. This event was soon mythologized, entering into the canon of "miracles" the mission had experienced.<sup>1</sup>

The missionaries who served in Huacuyo used the folk themes and genres they were accustomed to in order to comprehend the events they had experienced (Wilson 1981). These were communicated to other elders and eventually an article was written in the *Church News*, using a mythic format, describing the supposed events in Huacuyo. Finally, Elder Gene Cook made passing reference to this community as a substantiating example in his General Conference talk on "Miracles among the Lamanites."<sup>2</sup>

The further removed from Huacuyo these narratives were, the less they corresponded to the actual, empirical happenings of 1976. Instead they spoke the "truths" of Mormon religious and folk culture. They were thus myths in the popular, negative sense; that is, they were false because they only minimally corresponded to what really happened. But they are also myths in a more technical and positive sense, as sacred narrative. They transformed the happenings of Huacuyo to fit the requirements of this genre of Mormon discourse. As such they tell us more about Anglo Mormonism and what it considers important. They teach "higher" and different "truths" than those of mere empirical reality.

This article explores the stories told by Elder Cook, by Vira H. Judge in the *Church News*, and by an elder who served in Huacuyo to understand the genre constraints of these tales and their social logic. These tales have divergent origins and social contexts—talk in general conference, journalistic article, and conversation between me and the elders—but they form a set unified by their topic and, as we shall see, by the way they

select themes from what happened in Huacuyo. These will be contrasted with how the people of Huacuyo understood the events, from their very different cultural tradition.

### HUACUYO

The Church in Bolivia has generally limited its growth to the cities and towns. There its style of proselyting and the formality of its organization work. In the rural areas, the hills, valleys, and plains where most of Bolivia's population lives scattered, it has yet to find a way to work with the people.

Huacuyo is a rural community. It has a ritual center that passes as a "town" to those untutored in Aymara culture. In reality Huacuyo covers two broad valleys in the heart of the Copacabana peninsula in Bolivia. Its people do not live in the various small adobe houses of its ritual center. Rather they live scattered in individual homesteads across the two valleys. In this remote setting their conversion to Mormonism really is unusual.

Huacuyo as a whole has about 1000 inhabitants. They survive by raising potatoes and herding sheep and cattle for subsistence and for market. In addition, many of the community's members work in the city of La Paz, to which they commute, or in the neighboring town of Copacabana, the political capital of the province. Some also migrate seasonally between Huacuyo and the tropical colonization zones in the Yungas and Santa Cruz. As a whole Huacuyo's greatest problem stems from its relative overpopulation. There simply is not enough land for its children to continue within the community. As a result parents struggle to find enough cash to educate their sons, and to a much lesser extent their daughters, so that they can obtain meaningful employment in the cities. At the same time the people hold the somewhat contradictory goal of seeing their community as a whole progress and maintain itself as a vital, Aymara-speaking entity.

In pursuit of these aims the people have become known as activists and even somewhat radical. They have lived, over the last century, an incredible social odyssey. Before 1952, the people of Huacuyo lived as quasi-serfs on an estate owned by

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the sanctuary of the Virgin of Copacabana. Bolivia previously legislated social stability by prohibiting the acquisition of education by peasants/Indians. The people of Huacuyo assiduously fought this restriction and obtained full education for their children. The community even became a regional center to which the children of neighboring communities came for secondary schooling. With the agrarian reform, they obtained ownership over the land of the community, throwing out the hacienda. Through careful political action, the peasants gained considerable independence from the nearby city of Copacabana and its political and religious hierarchy. They also sought every developmental assistance they could from outside the community.

As part of this process, Huacuyo became institutionally diversified. Shortly after the agrarian reform the Quakers established a small congregation in the community. Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists and other Evangelicals set up churches in neighboring communities. A freelance preacher came to Huacuyo around 1974 and organized a fairly large congregation. Later, the members of this group became dissatisfied with their pastor and asked him to leave. He tried to negotiate with the Mormons and various other missions to pass the congregation to them. Meanwhile a delegation of peasants met a group of Mormons in an Aymara-speaking branch in La Paz. From the encounter they took home literature and an interest in Mormonism.

While the pastor tried to find a formal mission that would take over this rebellious congregation, its members drafted a formal letter to the Mormon mission asking it to send missionaries. The mission at first was skeptical because of its previous interactions with the pastor, who at one time had been a Mormon. It did send missionaries to investigate the situation and meet with the people while the people sent delegations to meet

with the mission and correspondence continued. Finally permanent missionaries were sent to Huacuyo toward the end of 1976 and soon baptized the vast majority of the congregants. For a while the missionaries continued to find converts, but soon their success diminished drastically and they were withdrawn. The branch in Huacuyo was left to fend for itself, in which condition it pretty much remains today.

Huacuyo is composed of four sectors. The missionaries baptized the majority of one of the four sectors, Kalamarka, which has pretensions of striking out as a community in its own right.

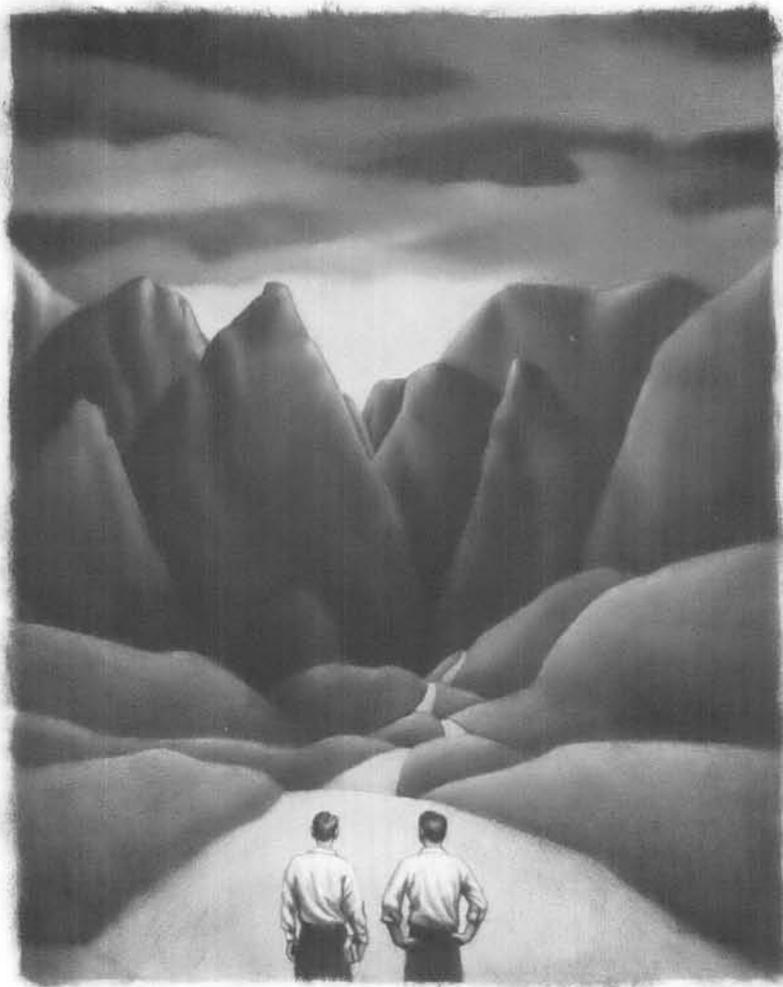
Few people from the other sectors—Supukachi, where the people are Quakers, Baptist and Neo-Catholic; Axanani, where they are more modernist and secular; or Kallakami, where they are traditionalist—ever joined the Church. Its limits became those of Kalamarka, reflecting the importance of religion in inter-sectorial and inter-community politics.

#### GENERAL CONFERENCE

Myths function in all societies. Thus it should not surprise us to find them in our own. In 1980, Elder Gene R. Cook gave a talk in General Conference, entitled "Miracles among the Lamanites" (Cook 1980). In that context he used the example of "a small village of Aymara Indians is converted within the matter of a few weeks, the entire village" which probably referred to Huacuyo. As

we have seen in Huacuyo, only the people of Kalamarka became Mormon, not the entire village. But Huacuyo became known in the mission as "the town that converted," even though this was not the case. In fact, the missionaries eventually were withdrawn, at least in part because this misapprehension became current.

Elder Cook used Huacuyo to demonstrate how "their lives teach of simple truths like faith, confidence, trust in God." This is a theme that occurs many times in our discussion of narratives



From *The Church News*

# ENTIRE ANDES VILLAGE JOINS

## *They All Wanted Baptism*

By *Vira H. Judge*

HUACUYO, BOLIVIA – Every inhabitant of this village, set in the high Andes mountains and remote from communication with the Church, asked for baptism after hearing the Book of Mormon read to them by their children.

Just a little more than a year after the request came to the missionaries, the families in the area have all joined the Church and the branch has an activity rate of about 96 percent.

The elders are still proselyting. They thread their way along the connecting hillside paths on horseback in search of more people who want to learn of the gospel.

In June of 1976, few people in the Bolivia La Paz Mission had heard of Huacuyo. Then a letter came, signed with the thumbprints of more than 100 villagers. The letter, written by a lawyer for the villagers, asked for missionaries to come to stay there.

DeVere McAllister, president of the mission, was skeptical of the letter. Because of the severe shortage of elders who could speak the Aymara language used by the villagers, and because of the six-hour four-wheel-drive vehicle trip to the village, he waited.

Then, a few weeks later, another letter came.

"Please send missionaries to us," the letter pleaded. "Our children have learned to read Spanish in school. At our village, they read the Book of Mormon to us. We know it is true, and we want to be baptized." It isn't known how the villagers first obtained a copy of the Book of Mormon.

This time, Pres. McAllister assigned two elders to spend several weekends in the remote village. The first four weekends convinced him that Huacuyo should have full-time missionaries.

When Elder Brandt Clark of Bedford, Wyo., and Elder Ernest Richter of El Centro, Calif., arrived in Huacuyo, they found a chapel of adobe walls with a tin roof had been built and the people were anxious to hear the gospel.

On Oct. 28, 1976, two weeks after the elders arrived, they held a mass baptismal service. The icy waters of the river were dammed to form a pool and 36 persons were baptized. Two weeks later, 23 more persons were baptized, and by May of this year, 96 persons, mostly in family units, had become members of the Church.

At the first service, there were only two outfits and each

person had to slip into the wet, cold clothing of the person who went before.

The elders took turns baptizing, one remaining on the river bank thawing out while the other performed the ordinance. The service lasted three-and-one-half hours.

"The people were eager to help," said Elder Richter. "But we still couldn't have done it without the help of the Lord."

The elders had to learn the Aymara language with no tapes or books. Their only training was by memory and a few notes from a previous missionary. They lived in an upstairs apartment across from the chapel.

With only a couple of chairs and a table, they learned to live like the villagers. Water had to be brought from the river, and a truck brought in supplies once a week.

From the time they first came to the village, the people welcomed them with open arms.

"The leader greeted us and helped us get settled," said Elder Richter. "By dusk, people started coming down out of the hills bringing gifts of potatoes, eggs and other foods.

"I am with the most humble people in the world," he later wrote in his journal. "I love them. I love this place. I have never been happier or more filled with the gospel."

Activity in the branch has thrived. Entire families have joined the Church. Recently, 51 men and boys attended priesthood meeting. There were 112 in attendance at Sunday School. At fast and testimony meeting, 125 attended.

One converted villager bowed his head and sobbed as he bore his testimony. "I used to drink and use drugs," he said when he could finally control his voice. "I was mean to my wife and children.

"Now we are happy. We know God loves us. We know the Book of Mormon is true and this is Christ's true Church."

After the service, the sisters in an orderly manner sat in a semi-circle on the meadow. Their colorful skirts were spread around them and derby hats perched jauntily on their heads. They uncovered their food—boiled potatoes, a root vegetable the color of yams and bowls of spicy sauces for dipping. Some of them brought roast guinea pig, a favorite food, to serve the elders.

Since the letter came from the Huacuyo villagers, the Church has developed a language training program in Aymara and a related language, Quichua. Plans are being made to take the gospel to other villages, many more remote.

about Huacuyo and in a sense expresses the didactic purpose such “myths” are supposed to have.

In this way, stories take what is abstract and make it tangible. They take the great themes of the religion and give them a reality that can motivate believers and recreate their beliefs, ever fresh, in new circumstances, thus uniting continuity and change. For example, Elder Cook states that today is a day of miracles. He claims to have witnessed these “spiritual miracles” wrought by the Lord in fulfillment of prophecy among the Lamanites. Furthermore, he holds the lives of these Lamanites should teach Godly principles for us to emulate.

Elder Cook did not need to elaborate on any of the myths. He merely stood in Conference and testified that he had seen the miracles with his own eyes and then in an extremely compressed form he made reference to them. This brought his discussion down to earth, gave it empirical believability. Anyway, those of us who are native Mormons can easily fill in the basics of the stories from the brief reference he made. We intuitively know the essentials of that genre of tales. It stems from our folk tradition.

When Elder Cook speaks of a village being “converted” suddenly, we understand how this took place because of the hundreds of similar stories we have heard since childhood. As we shall see, the people of Huacuyo understand something radically different by “conversion” than do we. This fact alone should make us take pause and raise our implicit assumption to the level of explicit awareness for examination. Fortunately, the tale in the *Church News* does that for us.

#### THE CHURCH NEWS

ONE of the probable sources for Brother Cook’s talk was an article about Huacuyo in the quasi-official *Church News*.<sup>3</sup> Its author, Vira H. Judge, evidently visited Bolivia and spoke with the mission leaders and the missionaries who had baptized the congregation of Huacuyo. Using this information she prepared her story. However, it is not the story told by the missionaries or by the people of Huacuyo, as we shall see. Rather, it is a more elaborate form of that relied upon by Elder Cook. In many of its particulars, the article is simply wrong. It does, however, transform the happenings of Huacuyo into an easily grasped form that is meaningful to Mormons in general.

Her article stresses the miraculous. (The entire article is included in the sidebar; here I merely stress its important themes.) She writes that the people of Huacuyo, far removed from easy knowledge about Mormonism, learned about it when their children read to them out of the Book of Mormon. From reading it they obtained a “testimony,” she argues, a “desire to be baptized.” One could almost annotate this with reference to the scriptures supposed to motivate human action, e.g. Moroni 10:4-5, making this event a subtle witness to the validity of what was instead supposed to have motivated the people of Huacuyo.

As we shall see, the actual motivations listed by the people for their actions are substantially different, residing in their own

social problematic. Mormons assert from their own cultural understanding of religious motivations that “Testimony” is crucial for conversion. It occupies a central place in our religious practice, where it is heavily ritualized, and in our rhetoric, where it is a particular recognizable trope with complex, many-layered meanings as well as a distinct mode of discourse (Knowlton n.d., 1988).

Without previous interaction, she writes, the people of Huacuyo wrote to the mission office to ask for missionaries, greatly surprising the skeptical and overworked mission president. When institutional constraints permitted, he sent missionaries to investigate this invitation. Two themes here are intriguing: first, the contradiction between the resources of the institutional Church with their inherent limits and the free movement of the spirit which must be socialized; second, the similarity in this instance between missionaries and Roman Catholic investigators of miracles.

To ground her “myth” in ostensibly observable, empirical reality as narrators often do by locating their narrative in a place everyone knows, she quotes from the letter.

“Please send missionaries to us,” the letter pleaded. “Our children have learned Spanish in school. At our village, they read the Book of Mormon to us. We know it’s true, and we want to be baptized.” It isn’t known how the villagers first obtained a copy of the Book of Mormon.

Unfortunately, I cannot find this quote anywhere in the correspondence between the mission and Huacuyo. I question its reality because it does not have the rhetorical form that the Aymara-speaking people of Huacuyo used either in their conversations with me or in their letters in Spanish to the mission.

Furthermore, this quote is important in Mormon ritual practice, where it is a formal statement of belief. The people would have had to spend long hours with the missionaries in order to grasp the concept of “the Book of Mormon is true.” This is not a self-evident and universally meaningful claim. Such a meaning is extremely difficult to communicate within the constraints of Aymara or in common Bolivian Spanish. As used here “truth” refers to ritual and to religious understandings of epistemology that we Mormons are only marginally conscious of, but which nevertheless occupy such an important place in our lives that we restructure events to reflect them.

She goes on to say that the elders visited Huacuyo periodically until two missionaries were sent to stay. On their arrival they found that the faith of the people was such that they had already built a chapel, indicating how anxious they were “to hear the gospel.” The chapel of Huacuyo was built under the previous preacher and was one of the points of contention between him and the community, according to what the people of Huacuyo told me. Neither the preacher nor the people could find the money to put a roof on the chapel and furnish it. So he evidently told the people to turn to the Mormons because they were “rich” and could finish the chapel. They did and the Mormons, as part of the contract with the community, completed the building. Recently they put an elaborate and,

by local standards, luxurious cinder block chapel in the community.

But, for the narrative, this kind of empirical cavil is not important. The story must witness to the almost heroic work the people did as proof of their unusual interest in Mormonism. To do so, it uses a particularly Mormon image, "the people were anxious to hear the gospel." "Hearing the gospel" here stands for the entire act of conversion, making it something significant. Once again, this is not important in Aymara culture, but it is in Mormonism. Much of our "worship" consists precisely of "hearing the gospel." Like going to the temple, partaking of the sacrament, etc., it is a central ritual act that we constantly perform to reemphasize our belonging.

Next Judge presents the mass baptism, reminiscent of those told about Wilford Woodruff. She stresses the physical hardships involved as testimonies of the people's and the missionaries' "commitment," another crucial Mormon word. The river water was "icy" and had to be socially domesticated by "damming" to "form a pool" first. There were only two sets of clothes, and the people had to change into clammy, wet clothes to be baptized.

Her tale continues in a similar vein, emphasizing the unusualness of Huacuyo as an indication of the movement of the spirit of God on the people. In and of itself, this tale becomes a mythic formal "testimony" of the "truthfulness" of Mormonism. This becomes clear when, near the end, she quotes a villager in words that sound more like a missionary's mistranslation, common journalistic hyperbole, or an extreme wrenching of a snippet from its original context than like the actual statement of an Aymara-speaking native.

One converted villager bowed his head and sobbed as he bore his testimony. "I used to use drugs," he said when he could finally control his voice. "I was mean to my wife and children."

"Now we are happy. We know God loves us. We know the Book of Mormon is true and that this is Christ's true church."

#### MISSIONARIES' ACCOUNTS

GENERALLY the missionaries use similar cultural presuppositions to those found in Elder Cook's and Mrs. Judge's narratives. But they are closer to the event. Consequently, their accounts perform less of a transformation. They are less mythologized, being stories told in conversation rather than more formal tales. They also do not make the error of assuming that all of Huacuyo became Mormon.

Bolivia's culture is extremely different from Anglo American culture, and therefore, presents difficulties of understanding for Anglo missionaries. Mission folklore as developed and passed among missionaries provides a cushion of understanding that allows them to make sense out of the otherwise unintelligible (Wilson 1981). For the present, two themes, which appear over and over in mission tales, are important.<sup>4</sup> First, Bolivia appears as a place of extreme hardship and persecu-

tion. The missionaries elaborate endlessly on their physical woes in this underdeveloped country, running the risk of seriously alienating the Bolivians, should they overhear. The missionaries understand their social alienation and the Bolivian ambivalence towards strangers, as well as their frequent anti-Americanism, in terms of persecution. The missionaries misunderstand Bolivian culture as being immoral, filled with drunkenness and devil worship. But they also balance this with a second theme of Bolivians as extremely humble and spiritual people, who in their untutored simplicity are spiritual giants and can teach us much about the gospel.

One of the first Aymara-speaking elders to visit Huacuyo said the following:

The people of Huacuyo were different from most Aymara in that they were terribly interested in the Church. The people seemed really excited about the gospel. We had barely gotten there when we were surrounded by people wanting to shake our hands. They asked us to have a meeting with them and to teach them some songs and to teach them about the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. . . .

We were surprised that some of the people had really been studying the Book of Mormon and D & C. They asked really complicated questions. Four or five people really knew about the Church. They seemed enlightened and gave momentum to the community in joining the Church.

The people of Huacuyo were just ready, they were prepared to receive the gospel. They were so spiritual that I felt I was polluting them because they were so much better than me. They should have been teaching me. Instead of coming home, I wanted to go and live among them for a while so as to learn of their great faith and spirituality.

This statement of love expresses not just some of the noblest of themes of mission culture, it also describes very real feelings the elders had in Huacuyo. It also forms another example of how Anglo Mormons define conversion.

#### A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE

IN contrast, I shall present at some length a narrative by Mr. Quispe, the then branch president of Huacuyo which mythologizes the events in a different way. He produced this tale when I asked him how they came to know the Church. His story is similar to the others the people told me when asked.

I always wanted to enter the religion. We couldn't enter until this Mr. Vargas came. I wanted to enter the . . . the evangelist, that which is called the Friends, in it. We couldn't go until we met.

When this Vargas came, he came here to my house and from there we had to follow him he told me and I said OK. And he put a Bible on my head and said "you are now a believer and from Sunday on you have to come.

At Justino's we will be in a meeting this Sunday," he told me.

So we went. When we got there it was just beginning. Then we carried the meeting. Then we rested at noon and everyone together we ate our food, all together. And then again the meeting of . . . sacrament meeting he said also and then we carried it. . . .

With another name (Vargas) came to add to the Friends. Christ the Conqueror was its name and then for almost a year we walked with Mario Vargas. And then my brother Domingo was president. They named him. Then a year exactly and then they changed. They named me also. And for almost three or two months only I was directing as president. Then the missionaries came, from President McAllister.

I had a letter written as a request and the people signed. I sent it to the mission and then the answer came. Then "three times the missionaries will come to visit" they told me and the missionaries came. "Then on the fifteenth of October the permanent missionaries will come." And they arrived on that day with ten benches and two tables. They also brought four chairs.

After the Saturday when they came Sunday arrived and we went from house to house visiting. The elders told me "make us know the houses where they live" they told me. From there we started and went up, all day Sunday.

From Monday the missionaries began to go from house to house teaching, Elders Richter and Clark. And there they told me "you are no longer president." Then they named me president then the mission told me that Elder Clark was the first president here.

From there I learned little by little how the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was. In the pamphlets we have read and the Bible. Only then did we learn.

First for a year we learned from Vargas. I couldn't even talk. He spoke alone every Sunday and singing hymns in the afternoon. We almost learned by memory, what's it called, the Baptists their hymnal CALA we almost memorized it well. Then later when the missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ, it was a little difficult to learn their hymns. We have now learned little by little. And that is how we have been!

There is much here that could be explored. In manner of expression, this account requires a substantial understanding of Aymara culture to make it intelligible. For now, though, it is enough to point out the extreme differences between it and the article in the *Church News*.

The point of view is immensely different. While Mrs. Judge stresses the "miraculous" break with the past the Church represented to Huacuyo, Mr. Quispe here stresses continuity. In his community there was something called "religion" which he always wanted to join. For him, "religion" is merely a part of the community, although his choice of language marks forcefully the disjuncture between this and the traditional politico-religious organization of Aymara communities. Most of the tale

involves the changing authority structure of the congregation. The Mormons represented a break only because it did not allow Mr. Quispe to fill his term of office. Other than that it was a continuity.

Three other themes of interest here appear. First, the conversion to "the religion" is unlike that conceptualized by Elder Cook and Mrs. Judge. Rather the preacher comes to Mr. Quispe's home, metaphorically dissolving the social distance between Mr. Quispe and "the religion." The new unity by which Mr. Quispe became "a believer," a significant term in its own right (c.f. Knowlton 1988), was marked by the ritual placing of a Bible on his head. The other narratives stress the baptism, the ritual rebirth from a pool of water. The difference stems from the distinct cultural traditions of the Aymara and Anglo Mormons.

Second, the understanding of "worship" varies. For the Anglo Mormon it was receiving the "word of God" in various different ways. The Aymara here focused on "carrying," i.e., performing adequately, the "meeting." We Anglos do not usually see our "meetings" as ritual performances, although they are. To exalt our differences with Catholic tradition we would rather deemphasize what we see as ritual. For Mr. Quispe, the "meeting" is the crucial, minimal unit of Religion. It was not believing or obeying the commandments, per se. It was "carrying the meeting." The word "carrying" stresses that this is probably a ritual burden, like many others in their tradition, that must be carried by the communally selected leaders for the benefit of the entire community.

Mr. Quispe further stresses within the meeting that they talked and sang. Although we would stress this as well we would mention that these are merely vehicles for the spirit and word of God to manifest itself to us. Mr. Quispe stresses them in their own right and further emphasizes the transformation when Mormonism came: the people replaced Vargas as the speakers and the hymns were difficult to learn.

Third, for Mr. Quispe the essential event in the coming of the missionaries was that they kept their word, coming when they said they would and bringing the benches, chairs, and tables they had promised. We would have stressed the message, the gospel, that they brought. Mr. Quispe emphasized the material facts of reciprocity and gift giving, following his culture. Furthermore, like Mr. Vargas, the missionaries visited house to house, reducing the social gap between themselves and the future members as well as initiating thereby a formal relationship of sociability with each household.

Mr. Quispe's account does not vary significantly in its choices among the possibilities provided in the actual coming of Mormonism to the community from those of others in Huacuyo. It merely stresses his own leadership role and subtly refers to the frustrations he and the community felt with the Church's misunderstanding of how the congregation should be organized in terms of rotation of authority. For those of us who are Anglo Mormons, it presents an "alien" view that is not easily grasped. But it should clarify for us the cultural presuppositions in our own accounts.

## CONCLUSION

**N**ARRATIVES are necessary. They enable us to make sense of the inchoate experiences and feelings we all have in life. Through their form they provide a sense of stability and continuity. But they also work with a censor's scissors when they pick and choose what is relevant for the story. Out of this arbitrariness, social scientists discover a people's culture.

For example, here we have seen how the Aymara and Anglo Mormon perspectives give very different understandings of an event. They especially diverged in how they defined the process of conversion. These differences of ideas are significant because around them people build their ritual and their interpersonal interactions. These stories could serve as a jumping-off point for an extensive analysis of both cultures. For now they merely remind us that myths and other stories compose and comprise knowledge.

Truth is an exceptionally slippery word. It defies even the professional epistemologist to pin it down. Yet it is a concept we rely on almost daily in our discussions one with another. It certainly is important in Mormon ritual, where we stand to bear testimony about it and claim that it validates our faith. We think we know what it means and for most intents and purposes we probably do. Every once and a while, though, its inherent contradictions rise up, challenging the word itself and all that depends on it. Here we have seen myths told from the pulpit or in Church publications as didactic validations of faith that really only minimally correspond to what actually happened. Are they, therefore, "false" and "untrue"? No, they merely raise for analysis our conflicting assumptions about "truth." At such moments of conflict, of clashing expectations, we can probably learn more about "truth" than at any other time. ☺

## NOTES

1. The research on which this paper is based was funded by a generous grant from the Inter-American Foundation and by the kind assistance of the people of Huacuyo and the missionaries who served there. For all this I am very grateful.

2. Cook, Gene R. "Miracles Among the Lamanites." *Ensign* 10:11:67-69, 1980.

3. Judge, Vira H. "Entire Andes Village Joins: They All Wanted Baptism." *Church News*, July 30, 1977.

4. This account of Bolivian missionary folklore is not merely based on my research. From 1974-1976 I was a native of that particular sub-culture.

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## DAVID'S MUSIC

I

It ought to have worked—  
—some simple shepherd songs,  
a young clear country voice,  
just the things for poor King Saul:  
a few strings snapped,  
others slipping, sinking into madness.  
Saul listened, his sons and daughters  
listened, the servants listened,  
the doorposts listened like  
forest trees who hear a high wind  
and answer softly with low sighs.

Saul could not stand it. Taking his  
javelin like a baton, he thought to fix,  
to still the song, but David only danced  
and never missed a step until  
it seemed that there was nothing  
left to do but take him back and  
play along—give him an extra daughter  
(with only minor strings to the offer),  
ask only a simple warrior's gift:  
two hundred Philistines represented  
by parts at the gala affair.

II

The rounded river stone  
had its own sort of song,  
drowsy from rocking in the pouch  
at the boy's waist, warm  
in his hand, cradled in the sling,  
waved off with a quiet sound,  
the sort a shepherd makes for sheep,  
a lullaby to leave Goliath  
dreaming of battle, his head,  
like Jacob's, propped on a stony pillow.

The victory music was all ram and bull  
horns and the hard-edged clanging  
of sword flats on brazen shields,  
the hero bouncing high on the shoulders  
of a strong blown music,  
like Joshua at Jericho, an awful  
unison, stamping at the walls  
chanting and blowing till  
the horns have cowed every heart,  
unrelenting, determined to see  
every last gate part.

—M. D. PALMER