

Sacred Perspectives and Environmental Stewardship in Peru

by Gary L. Hauck

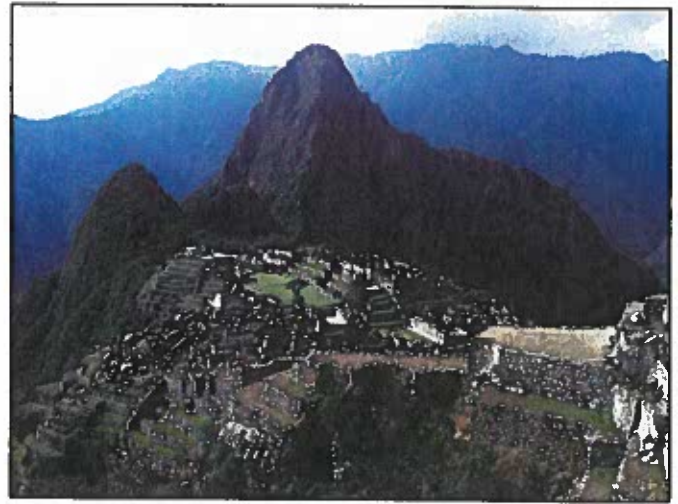
Dr. Gary L. Hauck is Dean of Instruction at Montcalm Community College (Sidney, MI), where he also teaches World Cultures and Geography, Religion, and Humanities. He is a member of the board of the Midwest Institute for International and Intercultural Education, and serves on the planning committee of the World Affairs Council of West Michigan. Dr. Hauck, who holds a Ph.D. from Michigan State Univ., is the author of the book, Exploring Humanities Around the World. He has visited 54 countries and all 50 United States, and has taught college courses in China, Ecuador, and Russia.

During Fall 2015, my son Jared and I planned a trip to Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley of Peru. Fortuitously, I had just attended a week-long workshop on the topic of global stewardship, organized by the Midwest Institute for International and Intercultural Education (MIIE) in Kalamazoo, MI. With those concepts still fresh in mind, I decided to make this a trip to explore the sacred perspectives of the Peruvian people, and how those might have influenced their care of the environment over time.

With a focus on Machu Picchu and Peru's Sacred Valley, my pre-trip study examined the relationship between sacred perspectives and treatment of the natural environment. I discovered that the unfolding of these perspectives seemed to cluster around Peru's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras on the historical timeline. Literature seemed to suggest that Peru's precolonial beliefs included the influences of ancient animism and polytheistic deities up to and including the age of the Incas in the Sacred Valley. Colonial ideologies appeared to take into account the theology of the Roman Catholic Church—especially hamartiology and soteriology (the doctrines regarding sin and salvation, respectively)—which was centered in the cathedral of Cusco, Peru's cultural capital during that era. Postcolonial Peruvian constructs, impacted by a syncretism of sacred views and the postmodern interpretation of spirituality, underlie today's struggling trends toward environmental responsibility and eco-awareness in the modern capital city of Lima.

As we embarked on our trip, I established three goals: 1. Understand the sacred perspectives of the Peruvian culture in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial eras; 2. Be able to explain the relationships between those perspectives and the Peruvians' sense of responsibility to and interaction with nature; and 3. Look for evidences of the interplay between sacred understandings and environmentalism.

My daughter Heidi, and Jared's wife Rachel, joined us as we flew first into Lima for a bike tour of the modern city and surrounds, followed by a connecting flight to Cusco for various walking tours within the high elevation of the old city nestled among the Andes. After touring the Cusco Cathedral, hiking the trail to the famous statue of the White Christ, and making fresh



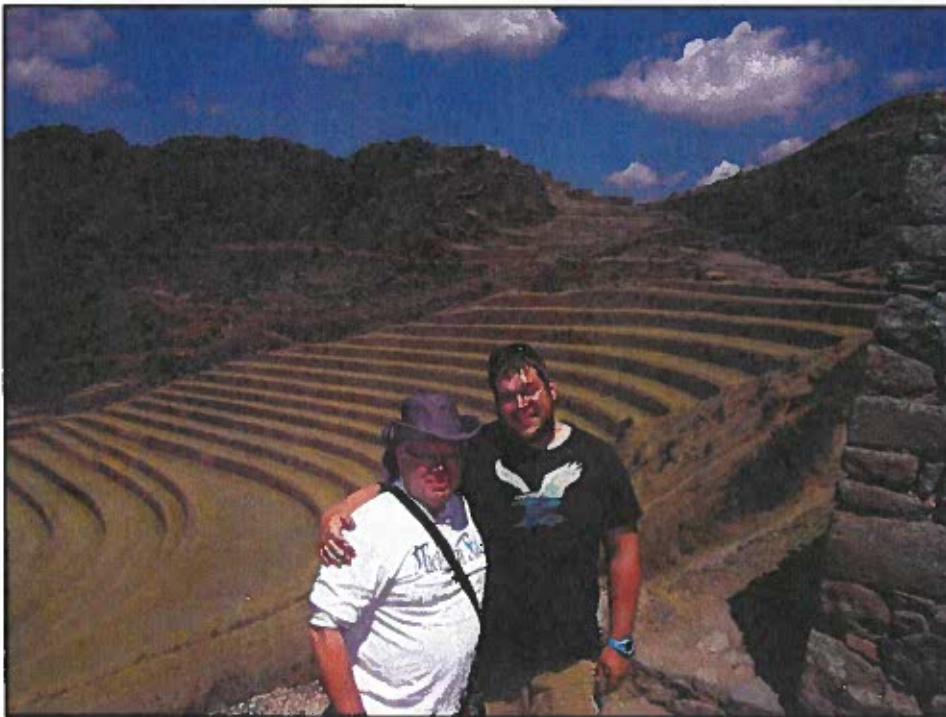
The heights of Machu Picchu. Such heights were esteemed as *huacas*, or sacred places, by the ancient Incas. All photos are courtesy of the author.

chocolate in the Chocolate Museum, we took the scenic train through the Sacred Valley and ascended Machu Picchu. Our final days were spent driving through the Valley from Cusco to Pisac to Urubamba to Chinchero, and back to Cusco for some debriefing before heading home. During our time, we interviewed several guides and local residents, investigated artifacts, and explored the vegetation, farms, museums, churches, archeological sites, and cultural centers along the way.

The Earth as Part of the Sun-God's Domain

Just before ascending the 8,000 feet to the magnificent archeological site of Machu Picchu, local tour guide Ricardo Montez explained how the ancient peoples of Peru viewed the earth, water, moon, and sun as deities. According to Montez, the Earth Goddess was called Pachamama; the Water Goddess was Mamacocho; the Moon Goddess was Mamaquilla; and the Sun God was Inti. Because of the divinity of nature, ancient peoples honored their environment as that which gave and sustained life. In fact, it was believed that the ultimate Creator, Viracocha, fathered these divine "children". So, not only were these elements of nature gods and goddesses themselves, they were also "created". This belief was blended with animism, the view that all of these natural bodies or elements also possessed the quality of life. Great care was given to them, lest they be neglected or abused.

High places were viewed as especially sacred places (*huacas* in Quechua, the Incan language). This might be the reason that Machu Picchu was constructed at such a high elevation above the valley below. According to one legend, Viracocha became displeased with the behavior of people living in the area of Lake Titicaca and sent a great flood to destroy them. Perhaps they were abusing or neglecting their divinely-given natural resources. At any rate, he spared the lives of two faithful inhabitants, Manco Capac and Mama



The author and his son, Jared Hauck, at the carefully terraced fields outside Pisac, a village in southern Peru's Sacred Valley region. Since ancient times, such terraces have allowed cultivation to take place on the steep slopes.

Occllo, who repopulated the region and brought forth the Quechua people, later known as the Incas. It was believed that only the highest peaks of the mountains were untouched by the waters of the flood, and thus they were viewed as sacred.

As we walked around the amazing ruins of Machu Picchu ("Old Peak"), we could certainly see evidences of the sacred perspective of harmony with and respect for nature. Agri-terraces graced the steep slopes, showing a creative approach to farming mountains, making use of natural resources in cooperation with their virgin setting. The Temple Precinct, Intiutana Pyramid, Sun Temple, and Southern Cross Stone, all highlighted the relationship between the earth and the stellar bodies. "The Incas worshipped the sun god, and believed that the leader of the Incas, who was called the Inca, was a divine descendant of this god" (Sanz 2015, p. 10).

A stunning feat of ancient engineering and astronomical understanding demonstrates the respect for and celebration of the earth's relationship with the sun. At the top of the Intiutana Pyramid is:

...the ritual stone found in Machu Picchu located at the top of the Intiutana hill, and the name is from the Quechua language meaning to tie up the sun. On March 21 and September 21 at midday, the sun lines up with the Intiutana and there is no shadow cast. When this happens, it looks as if the sun is standing on the pillar (Sanz 2015, p. 44).

A similar event occurs on the day of the Summer solstice when sun rays directly enter the central window of the Temple of the Sun and hit the semi-circular granite rock on the floor. That temple is in the eastern sector of the complex. It seemed that all of the major sites of Machu Picchu emphasized the relationship between heaven and earth.

Our trips to Pisac, Urubamba, and Chichero provided further ancient examples as we saw the steep and massive agri-terraces, the interplay between the sun and earth during equinoxes or solstices, and the ashlar architecture (based on fitting together precisely-cut stones) that symbolizes harmony. Following the Urubamba River,

one of the head waters of the mighty Amazon, we were also reminded of how this river, like Egypt's Nile, was revered by the people as a divine giver of life. As Fernando Salazar explains:

In the Andes the large number of interrelated ecosystems that are housed in this geography, coupled with an unstable climate, fostered through the ages the development of man's understanding and a body of knowledge directed toward finding the necessary means to sustain and create societies in harmony with the uncertain rhythm of its diverse nature; this is why they saw the world as a 'living' and interrelated whole of which man is only one part (Salazar 2005, p. 86).

The Earth as Cursed and Redeemed

With the invasion of Cusco and the Sacred Valley by the Spanish conquistadors in the years between 1532 and 1572, the Inca civilization collapsed and the region became a colony of European Spain. Machu Picchu had already been abandoned and was not discovered by the Spaniards, and the old cultural capital of the Quechua people now became the center of colonial culture, power, and thought. Sadly, the population of the Incas declined at a rate of 58 to 1 during these years, because of both slaughter and disease. And the conquistadors did much to pilfer the natural resources, rape the land, and abuse those who were now enslaved to work it. But ironically, the Spaniards also brought with them the Roman Catholic religion and theology. Through their missionaries and colonial churches, this new Christian faith became quickly adopted by the local Peruvians. A massive cathedral constructed in Cusco became the religious center of the new teachings. Construction began in 1554 and was finally completed a hundred years later in 1654.

continued on page 13

Peru *continued from page 11*

I toured the giant old structure, and learned that the doctrines of Catholicism that came into the region taught that God had created the world, Adam's fall cursed the earth, redemption is possible through Christ, and mankind is responsible to have dominion over creation. However, while the people of Peru were willing to accept and believe these new doctrines, they did not stop believing their old legends and perspectives. As a result, old and new concepts merged in *syncretism*, i.e., a synthesis of previously discrete beliefs. A somewhat comical illustration of this contextualization is seen in the large altar painting of "The Last Supper" featuring a guinea pig on the Passover plate.

Ethnographer Loren McIntyre explains how worship, doctrines, and even religious celebrations merged in an almost seamless fashion. For example, ancient Incas had celebrated Inti Raymi, a festival of music and dancing to honor the sun every June 24 for its role in the harvest:

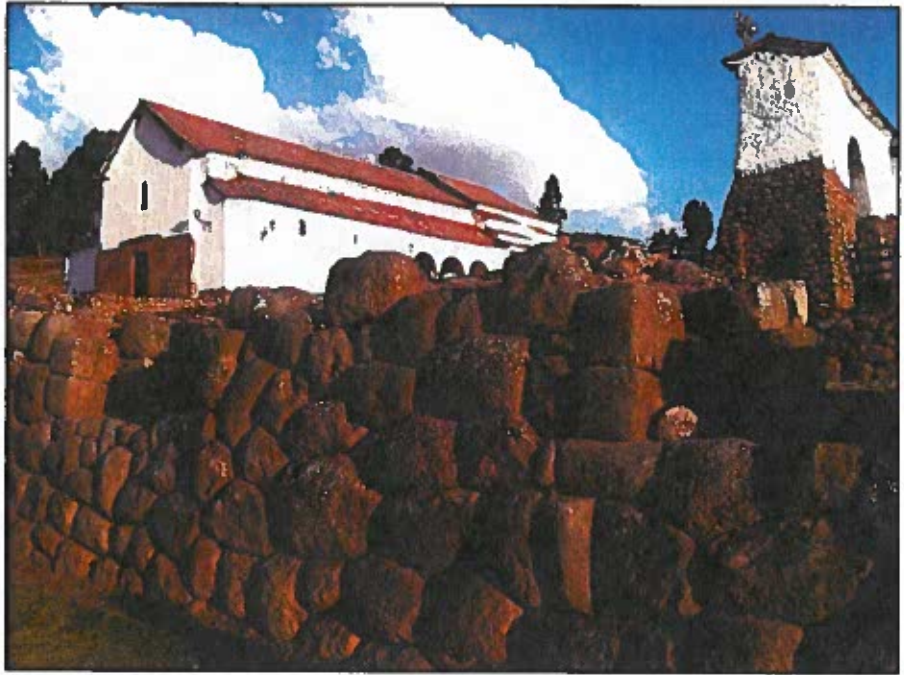
As Roman Catholic holidays merged with Inca festivals, Inti Raymi came to be observed during Corpus Christi [a Christian feast day falling shortly before Easter]. In other cities as far away as Quito and La Paz, Andean people celebrate June 24—the Day of Saint John—by jumping over bonfires (McIntyre 1986, p. 173).

Nowhere was this blend of religions more vivid to us than in the town of Chinchero, where the colonial Catholic church (still standing and still in use) was built directly on top of ruins of an ancient Incan polytheistic temple. Our tour guide, Martin Martinez, even pointed to several pagan paintings and frescoes that had been reimagined and touched up to more so resemble Jesus or the saints.

In keeping with this synergy, Catholic perspectives gave a sense of stewardship over God's creation. The Incan creator-deity Viracocha was honored as God the Father, and the Incan legend of the flood merged with the stories of Noah's ark. Harmony with earth remained a part of the syncretism, and the inhabitants of the Sacred Valley continued to believe in their responsibility to both care for and respect their natural surroundings.

Abuse of the Earth and a Struggle for Eco-awareness

To assist my understanding of Peru's post-colonial sacred perspectives and relationship to nature, we spent several days in the modern capital city of Lima. During a city-wide bike tour with guide Dee Hernandez, I learned that in general, many contemporary Peruvians no longer see a relationship between their religious theologies (Catholic, Pro-



This cathedral in the town of Chinchero was built in colonial times directly on top of ruins of an ancient Incan temple.

testant, or syncretistic) with stewardship of the earth. There is no doubt that Peru was affected by the pre-industrial economy and the industrial revolution and its consequences—especially the international market and the focus on consumerism—and that these have helped to shape the thinking of its people. For example, the deeds and misdeeds of the American fertilizer producer W. R. Grace and Co., founded in Peru in the 1800s, are relatively well-known. Such events in the past couple of centuries certainly took the emphasis off stewardship, regardless of religious traditions.

Eco-spirituality, however, is re-emerging among believers and non-believers alike, with a concerted interest in preserving and caring for the environment as spiritual responsibility. Examples of active eco-spirituality include: recycling, introduced at major sites; the goal of environmental preservation; the appearance of organic farms, of which we saw several; natural resources balanced against the needs for prosperity, sustainability, reciprocity, and stewardship; and the eco-friendly construction of Lima's Larcomar subterranean mall. Located in the Miraflores district of Lima, the shopping center is literally in a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. We walked around the mall and also enjoyed strolling the beautiful park on top of it. Developed and owned by a Chilean company, Parque Arauco S.A., the mall is a contemporary example of living in harmony with the environment.

Despite these signs of stewardship among today's Peruvian population, Hernandez was quick to also discuss examples of apathy and environmental abuse. These include

continued on next page

Peru *continued from page 13*

the ongoing legal and illegal deforestation of the Amazon rainforest for commercial purposes (Peru has the fourth-largest rainforest area in the world); abuse of the land and use of hazardous mercury by illegal small-scale gold miners; lack of sanitation and garbage removal in many areas of the country; the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs); and apathy in controlling raging forest fires. We witnessed one such forest fire during our van ride from Pisac to Ollantaytambo and our return trip to Chichero. Martin Martinez exclaimed with concern that raging fires often continue without much effort to contain them.

A Teaching Module

As part of my commitment to the Midwest Institute, I used this study of Peru to create an instructional module on the college level. First I piloted it at Montcalm as part of my own course, World Cultures and Geography, and then I made it available to the MIIE for distribution and use.

After spending three weeks covering the information summarized above, my students were responsible to submit a typed paper of 4-6 pages comparing Peru's perspectives with Cuba or another Latin American country of their choice. In the paper, they were required to include pre-colonial sacred views and relationships with stewardship, colonial Roman Catholic and syncretistic perspectives, and post-colonial viewpoints.



This Quechuan woman is explaining how she makes cloth dyes in the ancient way, from insects and plants.

In addition, I invited the students to submit an annotated bibliography of additional sources to share with the rest of the class. Some examples are given in the sidebar on p. 12.

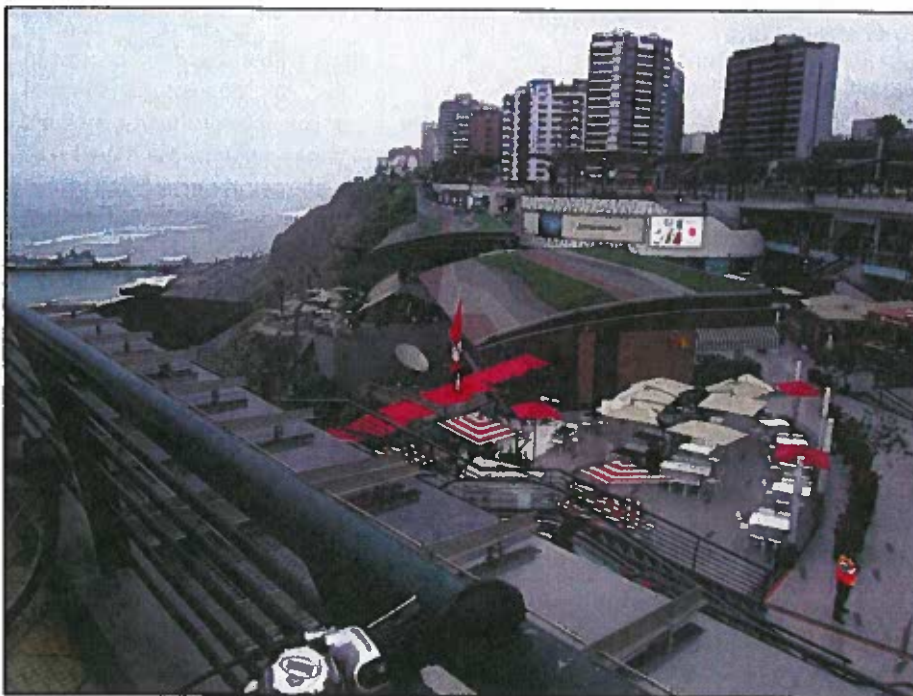
Conclusion

The views toward the physical environment and its stewardship by people in Peru were historically shaped in large part by religious and philosophical ideologies. These began in the ancient era and continued into colonial and postcolonial times.

In the face of modernization and development, there has been a growing disconnect between these ideologies and Peru's care of the land. However, a new strand of eco-spirituality is re-emerging that seeks to re-install the notion of stewardship of the earth.

A study of this material is instructive for students in courses such as world culture and geography.

continued on page 33



The park on top of Larcomar, a subterranean shopping mall dug into a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean in the Miraflores district of Lima.

students how to find resources on our own, teach students how to be an independent learner, I think that is a lifetime gift.

Q: What do you appreciate about having lived in America for a while?

A: Yes, very much, I think I have eye opened and mind blowing experiences here. I've met people and seen things that I could never meet or see in my country. I learned how privileged I am and I am very grateful. I think my whole life be influence by American culture very much, I learned English from American pop culture, I read news from media in the US. Even though there are a lot of flaws and ridiculous situations occur in the US, I still like this country very much, and it was a dream came true when I finally had the chance to stay here for a while. •

More from This Magazine on Environmental Challenges

Below is a roundup of materials previously published in this magazine that are related to global environmental challenges. All issues are freely available via the online archive,

<http://www.schoolcraft.edu/departments-international-institute/international-agenda/>

- Adren Rice's article, "We Are What We Farm: What Sort of Agriculture Can Our Earth Sustain?" (Fall 2015)
- Ann Emanuel's article on tap water, "Leitungswasser: An Untapped Resource in Germany" (Winter 2015)
- Hana Dughman's painting "Harp Seal Hunt" (Fall 2014)
- Sarah Osen's poem on micro-plastic pollution, "Plastic Beach" (Winter 2013)
- Randy Schwartz's sidebar, "Russia and the Global Battle for Energy" (Winter 2013)
- Cynthia Jenzen's book review of *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* (Sep. 2012)
- Randy Schwartz's sidebar, "Brazil: The World's First Biofuel Economy" (Sep. 2012)
- Randy Schwartz's sidebar, "Oil from Canada: Boon or Curse?" (Sep. 2011)
- Caroline McNutt's article on saving marine turtles in Brazil, "The Universe and Everything within It is Crying Out" (Sep. 2010)
- Zhanay Sagintayev's article, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: GIS Applications to Help People" (Sep. 2009)
- Anna Maheshwari's article, "A Course Assignment Motivated by the Bhopal Disaster" (Jan. 2009)
- Sam Hays and Randy Schwartz's materials about Vandana Shiva and the commodification of water and land in India (Jan. 2009).

Peru continued from page 14

A three-week course module created and piloted by the author is available through the MIIE.

Sources

Field Research. Instructor's trip to Peru, Sep. 8-13, 2015.

Graber, Cynthia, "Farming Like the Incas", *smithsonianmag.com*, Sep. 6, 2011, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/farming-like-the-incas-70263217/>.

Gray, Martin, "Machu Picchu", *Places of Peace and Power* (1982-2016), http://sacredsites.com/americas/peru/machu_picchu.html.

History Channel, "Ancient Aliens: Peru's Gate of the Gods", posted Oct. 14, 2013, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBpLIR5JA2o>.

La Costanera, "Pachamama: Incan Earth Goddess", Apr. 17, 2015, <http://www.lacostanerarestaurant.com/blog/pachama-ma-incan-earth-goddess/>.

McIntyre, Loren, *The Incredible Incas and Their Timeless Land* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1986).

Rediscover Machu Picchu, "Inca Religion" (2015), <http://www.rediscovermachupicchu.com/inca-religion.htm>.

Rousseau, Robert, "Incas, Children of the Sun". *World and I*, 22:6 (Jun. 2007), retrieved from http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA186321620&v=2.1&u=lom_accessmich&it=r&p=STOM&w=w&asid=f0788d1af09fddbc0899d69e61169261.

Salazar, Fernando E. Elorrieta, and Edgar Elorrieta Salazar, *Cusco and the Sacred Valley of the Incas* (Cusco, Peru: Tankar E.I.R.L., 2014).

Sanz, Elisabeth, *Machu Picchu Guide: Rediscovering the Mystery of the Incan Land* (Lexington: CreateSpace, 2015).

Schaeffer, Francis A., *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970).

The Innovation Diaries, "Terrace Farming is an Ancient Sustainable Practice" (2010-2011), retrieved from <http://www.theinnovationdiaries.com/772/terrace-farming-is-an-ancient-sustainable-practice/>.