



USAC
TRICENTENARIA
Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala



DGI Dirección General
de Investigación
Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala



Imploring for divine help in critical times

Deyvid Paul Molina

The Center for the Study of Cultures in Guatemala -CECEG- (from its Spanish acronym) of the *Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala* was originally created on July 8th, 1967. Science, as well as life and society itself, are in constant change and development. The *Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala* in order to respond to the new challenges of multidisciplinary research on cultural dynamics, on July 24th, 2019 a new chapter in said center began, due to its mandate, which was approved by the Honorable Superior University Council in the “SECOND point, Section 2.1 Sub-section 2.1.1 of Minute No. 18-2019 of an ordinary session held on July 24th, 2019”, aims to study culture from a holistic and dynamic vision, in constant construction and as the foundation for the development of the Guatemalan society, in a contemporary context, characterized by the global interrelation of the different cultural manifestations. This goal is achieved by strengthening all the inherited traditions of the so-called “folkloric” studies of the past, and responding to the need to understand and study the different ideologies of the current cultural dynamics.



Imploring for divine help in critical times

Deyvid Molina

Abstract

In times of crisis, whether caused by natural disasters or diseases, the human kind have turned to mechanisms aimed at stopping the ravages that such ills have brought upon them. Fasting, prayers, processions, rogations, among others, have been the mechanisms that the Christian world has placed at the disposition of the suffering. During the Covid19 pandemic in 2020, these devout practices have surfaced again in all parts of the world, and Guatemala has been no exception. This article reviews some of these practices that have been present in the country since the beginning of the Colonial period and have taken off since March 2020 with the emergence of the coronavirus. Although times change and many cultural patterns have been replaced by others, the strong belief in divine help during critical times is a crucial factor in the historical evolution of Guatemalans, especially in the absence of governmental welfare and social assistance systems. In order to write this article, some historical documentary sources have been consulted, as well as newspaper and journalistic sources, along with some site visits and random interviews.

Keywords: Fasting, prayers, rogations, coronavirus, divine help.

Introduction

Throughout the history of mankind, the world has had to face natural disasters and diseases, leading to death, distress, social inequality,

fragmented economies, among other consequences. The belief in protective and benevolent divinities has played a transcendental role in providing an answer to the pain and uncertainty that catastrophes and physical ailments have left in people.

Regarding Guatemalan popular religiosity, 2020 left as a result virtual liturgical ceremonies, fasts, prayers, closed churches, acts of rogation, vehicular processions with shorter than usual routes, frustration, sadness, longing and uncertainty were some of the characteristics common during the year. However, there is still hope that, with the introduction of a vaccine, it would be possible to return to some of what was done in the past, and to live out the faith and celebrate in grand style. Following these pages, there are some details of these events that have been present in the daily lives of Guatemalans since March.

In order to write this article, historical documents, especially from the Hispanic period, were reviewed to show how Guatemalans in the past had turned to divine help during epidemics and natural disasters. The work was complemented with hemerographic documents and site visits between the months of July and October 2020 to several towns in the country, especially during the development of their local fairs, moments that were used by the catholic parishioners to implore before their patron saints for the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

This brief research is expected to contribute to

the field of Guatemalan popular religiosity, especially within the local festivities and devotional expressions, hoping to be a starting point for future works.

Prayers

In Christianity, praying is one of the most important and widespread practices of piety. Characters of the Old and New Testament, as well as Jesus Christ himself, practiced it at times when their faith felt flacked. However, by praying to God, those who prayed found the consolation and courage they needed. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, define prayer as:

The soul's ascent to a state of divinity, or the act of beseeching the Lord for blessings that are in alignment with His will. Prayer is defined as a gift of God that extends to humanity. Christian prayer is defined as a personal and living relationship of the children of God with their infinitely good Father, with his Son Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit, who dwells in their hearts (Catechism, 535, 2012).

Therefore, it is not surprising that after the initial measures taken by President Alejandro Giammattei upon the arrival of the virus in the country, he issued a call for a day of fasting and prayer. In a similar vein, Pope Francis issued a call for a day of prayer, entailing the recitation of The Lord's Prayer, extending an invitation to all Christian denominations. This event, which transpired on March 25, was orchestrated with the objective of petitioning for the cessation of the pandemic. This example has also been replicated in countries such as Portugal and Spain (Redactor, 2020a). The practice of public prayer continued in Guatemala, with multiple instances observed throughout the region. One notable instance of supplication took place at the Basilica of Esquipulas in Chiquimula (Raymundo, 2020).

In times of national crisis and during periods of widespread illness, the recitation of special prayers dedicated to Christ, the Virgin Mary, or saints has been a common practice. A notable example of this phenomenon can be seen in the *Gaceta de Guatemala*, a publication from the 1857 cholera epidemic. During the most critical months of the disease, the *Gaceta de Guatemala* published a series of prayers specifically intended to provide solace and hope to readers facing this devastating illness. The bishop, a martyred bishop from the beginning of the third century, has been the object of profound devotion in Comitán de Domínguez, Chiapas, Mexico, since the seventeenth century. This is due to the fact that he is regarded as an intercessor in the face of the various epidemics that have afflicted the region throughout history (Solís and Culebro, 2003).

The aforementioned novena is as follows:

The Novena of the Glorious Martyr Saint Caralampio, Special Advocate against the plague, is a prayer that is recommended for those seeking divine intervention to avert a new surge in the current epidemic. As stated in Redactor (1857b, p. 8), the novena is available for purchase at the printing store, which is located within the portal of the Palace.

In many Guatemalan households, throughout the evolution of the pandemic, this pious and devotional practice has continued, as commented by Marta Perez, a resident of the city of Chimaltenango:

In the author's household, the rosary was prayed in order to request the cessation of the pandemic. Additionally, prayers were offered for medical professionals, nurses, and all individuals engaged in direct patient care. Particular attention was given to the vulnerable population, including men, women,

children, and the elderly, who, due to their precarious living conditions and pressing needs, are compelled to engage in commercial activities, such as selling goods and opening businesses, to make a living. The disease's eradication and the discovery of a vaccine are imperative, as the most profoundly affected individuals are those residing in rural communities (Pérez, 2020).

Prior to the advent of the pandemic, people customarily petitioned for health, economic prosperity, and protection in their prayers. However, since March 2020, the prevailing supplication has centered on the cessation of the coronavirus and the development of an effective pharmaceutical intervention to halt its spread. Additionally, individuals have expressed their desire to alleviate the suffering of those infected, as exemplified by Marta Perez's personal experience.

Fasting

The practice of abstaining from food and drink for ritual reasons has been a persistent feature of many human societies throughout history.

This practice is referred to as fasting, and it has been employed in certain circumstances, including during epidemics. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the practice of fasting has historically been prevalent. A notable example is the decree issued by Queen Esther to her relative Mordecai during the exilic period of the Hebrews in Babylon. The decree ordered the release of the people, which was in danger of being exterminated, and underscores both religious and political dimensions of this widespread fast in the Judeo-Christian context:

Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

Biblical history recounts how fasting helped the Hebrews avoid a tragic fate. Jesus Christ also resorted to such a practice before beginning his ministry: He fasted for forty days and was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during that time and was hungry afterward (Luke 4:2). Within Christianity, it can be inferred that fasting is a key tool for overcoming adversity. One could say that it is a reward received after previously being deprived of something consubstantial to humanity, such as eating.

In Mesoamerican societies such as the Mexica, fasting was also practiced for ritual purposes. For example: "These priests and religious leaders observed long fasts, such as five and a half days before major feasts, similar to Cuatrotemporas" (Acosta, 1963, p. 44).

Fasting has also been present within religious orders and among various lay people. This practice has been resorted to in times of crisis, as requested by President Giammattei on several occasions during the development of the coronavirus in the country. A resident of the *Villa Hermosa 2* neighborhood, in the municipality of Petapa, department of Guatemala, joined in this request:

Within the Catholic community I attend, we had always practiced fasting, however, now that we have been in danger and, as requested by the president, I joined the day of fasting and prayer, imploring the Lord to change this situation and to protect our country, from all the bad things that the virus is causing in many nations (Ramos, 2020).

Another *Petapeño* indicated that, regardless of religious creed, fasting and praying for an end to the pandemic was necessary: "Whether we are Catholic or not, whether we agree with the president or not, we must fast and do everything to help the virus leave our country"

(Franco, 2020). As the virus spread throughout the country, leaving a trail of infections and deaths in its wake, fasting became a constant practice for many people, many of whom joined the government's call to action under the leadership of President Alejandro Giammattei.

Rogations

In Catholicism, Rogations are public acts, many of which are religious processions, whose central purpose is to implore God, the Virgin Mary, or another saint for an end to natural phenomena or epidemics. These pious practices likely began in the fourth century but were not regulated until 590 when the newly elected Pope St. Gregory the Great organized a great liturgical procession to end an epidemic decimating the population. The procession departed from seven Roman churches and ended at Santa Maria Maggiore. During the procession, it is said that many people fell dead, but the pope urged them not to stop praying. Shortly thereafter, the disease disappeared (Butler, 1965, p. 533).

Throughout history, societies have faced natural disasters, wars, and plagues. Many of these plagues took the lives of thousands of people in the West. One example is the Black Death, which occurred between 1347 and 1353.

In the Christian world, divine intervention became necessary, specifically the intercession of saints before God, which would be highly effective for the fields of the earth. One of these saints was St. Roch, a French nobleman and pilgrim who assisted the infected during the epidemic that devastated Europe in the 1320s. He became infected but was healed and died in 1327 (Montes, 2001). His life exemplified devotion, placing him among the most beloved anti-pestiferous saints in medieval Europe. He

belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis, his devotion spread to America during the process of evangelization in the 16th century.

However, the rationale behind invoking the intercession of the Virgin or saints during periods of pandemic remains a subject of inquiry. The response is straightforward. Within the Catholic tradition, the faithful rely on the intercession of various figures who serve as intermediaries between God and humanity.

In the context of Catholic theology, saints and virgins are recognized as intermediaries, endowed with the capacity to mediate between God and the faithful. However, the powers attributed to these figures extend beyond a generic attribution, and are instead ascribed to the physical representation of the character, specifically the character's print carved in wood. This results in the aforementioned representation being charged with a magical sense (Bellido, 2017, p. 57).

This would explain why since the time of Pope St. Gregory the Great and in the present during the coronavirus pandemic, in the Catholic world, processions of rogations have been organized before the most devout images in parishes and towns, with the aim of bringing the disease to an end. In the case of the Catholic history of Guatemala, there is evidence of rogation processions to ask for an end to disease and natural disasters. When Europeans arrived in America, they brought diseases that did not exist on the continent. For example, smallpox claimed the lives of millions of indigenous people throughout the Hispanic period. Plagues reduced the local population and brought social consequences, such as orphaned children, widows, unprotected elderly, lost crops, and abandoned villages. In popular

ideology, people believed that changing residence would make the disease disappear. This is not the case today; one of the best prevention measures is social distancing.

During the Hispanic period, America was the target of a series of epidemics that soon claimed the lives of thousands of people, reducing in some regions the indigenous population who lacked defenses against the new diseases. The authorities on duty, doctors and religious, in spite of their efforts, were unable to contain the contagions, so, as in Europe, they had to: “resort to the anti-pestiferous saints such as Saint Christopher, Saint Roque, Saint Sebastian, Saint Michael the Archangel, or Saint George of Cappadocia, among others” (Monterrosa and Talavera, 2002, p. 164).

In Guatemala, devotion was shown to all the saints described by Monterrosa and Talavera, particularly San Sebastián and San Miguel. Several towns were placed under their protection, and brotherhoods were established to venerate them. In Santiago de Guatemala, the San Sebastián parish had an altar dedicated to San Roque (Ubico, 2014), as well as a brotherhood (Montes S., 1977). San Roque also appears on the front of the parish church in the San Miguel Escobar neighborhood of Ciudad Vieja, Sacatepéquez (Castañeda and Jickling, 2002).

However, in Guatemala, not only were the anti-pestiferous saints the object of rogatory processions, but Marian images venerated in Santiago de Guatemala's temples were also subject to them, and with local invocations, this demonstrates the attachment that the fieles have with the sculptures, which they consider sacred and which are part of everyday life. In this regard, the last chroniclers of the Hispanic period, Domingo

Juarros provides data that illustrates this, for example:

In 1601, the capital city experienced a devastating plague, known as Esquilencia, which claimed the lives of many within three days. During this time, the faithful sought the protection of the saints, paying homage to the most revered images in the city. One of these images was Our Lady of Loreto, which is preserved in the Church of San Francisco. The faithful experienced great relief during the epidemic by anointing themselves with the oil from the lamp that burns before this image, as documented in information received by the Ecclesiastical Court in 1605 (Juarros, 1999, p. 188).

The plagues continued during the XVII century, causing death and pain among those affected, it is said that the dead were so many that the religious could not attend to them spiritually, and pious acts were no longer carried out during the burials:

In 1686, a plague so cruel and violent arrived in this metropolis that, within three months, more than a tenth of its residents had died. Some died suddenly; others exhaled amid acute pain in their heads, chests, and entrails. Despite performing anatomies and other diligent efforts, they could not find a remedy. There were so many infected that there were not enough priests in the city to assist them. Bells were no longer tolled for the deceased, and burials were held communally. The contagion spread from the capital to surrounding towns and then to more remote areas, wreaking the most havoc on robust subjects (Juarros, 1999, p. 189).

Domingo Juarros mentioned that the residents of the capital made a prayer to the Mother of Mercy, for which they took from the town of Almolonga, today Ciudad Vieja, an image of the Virgin Mary, possibly the patron saint, which was placed in the temple of El Calvario on December 7, 1686, being

three days in veneration, with massive concurrence of the city people, the chronicler said that the efigie was seen sweating. Later she returned to her community and soon the plague ceased and the sick recovered (Juarros, 1999, p. 189).

In the 18th century, epidemics, most of them with a considerable number of deaths, were also reported:

In 1733, a cruel plague of smallpox struck this capital city, killing 1500 people in one month. The affliction suffered by its residents is evident in the numerous prayers made: almost every image of veneration was taken in procession to ask God for a remedy to this calamity. On June 15 and 16, Our *Señora de los Dolores del Cerro* was taken in procession to the nuns' convents after a novena was held in the Candelaria parish. A novena was held in the Cathedral for *Nuestra Señora de la Merced*, which concluded with a general procession. A novena was also held for *Jesus Nazareno de la Candelaria*, and on July 9, the last day, he was taken in a penitential procession through all the churches of the city. Likewise, the images of Our *Señora del Coro de San Francisco*, Our *Señora de los Remedios*, *San Sebastián*, and *San Serapio* were brought from their respective temples. Lastly, the image of the Ecce Homo from the town of *San Gaspar* was brought from the Temple of Calvario to celebrate nine days of rogation (Juarros, 1999, p. 191).

Although Juarros' information is basically centered on the city of Santiago de Guatemala and its surroundings, there is no doubt that similar situations arose in the rest of the country and that, in all probability, rogations or other devotional acts were made before the popularly venerated images of the towns.

Once in the New Guatemala, the epidemics continued to wreak havoc, which put the civil and ecclesiastical authorities on the defensive,

especially since the city was in the midst of reconstruction after the 1773 earthquakes. Domingo Juarros does not mention the realization of rogatory processions during that time. It could be because some devotional images were still in the destroyed Santiago de Guatemala or because the sanitary conditions did not allow it. Nevertheless, Juarros provides details about how they acted during one of the last epidemics the country experienced at the end of the Spanish colonial period:

But the greatest tribulation suffered after the destruction of Antigua Guatemala was experienced by this capital in 1780 with the cruel smallpox epidemic that spread throughout the kingdom. The epidemic was so severe that many deaths were accounted for in just a few days. To ensure that the deceased received the sacraments, the Sacred Viaticum was taken not only from the parishes but also from the regulars' churches. The corpses could not be buried in the temples because there were so many that their corruption could cause much damage, so three cemeteries were blessed outside the city to bury them (Juarros, 1999, p. 194).

It was precisely during the smallpox epidemic of 1780 that, for the first time in Guatemala, vaccination was used, a practice that gradually became popular among the indigenous population, thanks to the work of the ecclesiastics, who were in charge of:

To convince the indigenous people of the benefits of inoculation, the authorities ordered the pulpit and church leaders to ensure that the indigenous people accepted and complied with the order peacefully (Solórzano, 2014, p. 239).

Although we did not have access to information from the 19th and 20th centuries regarding acts of rogation in the face of calamities, there were undoubtedly some, especially during the devastation caused by the February 4, 1976 earthquake. On April 5, the

first community case appeared in the country. That is to say, it was not related to any imported cases. Ignoring where he had been infected, it was a 39-year-old man originally from the town of *Patzún*. For this reason, the entire municipality of Chimaltenango was placed under confinement, and a sanitary cordon was established. Soon, four other cases were reported in the same town (Escobar and Pitán, 2020). Following the president's orders, the local parish held a mass during which the Blessed Sacrament and the image of the patron saint, San Bernardino de Siena, were placed in the atrium. According to *Patzunero* ideology, the sculpture of the patron saint is miraculous, so they were soon placed under his protection.

San Bernardino has protected us on many occasions, including during the 1976 earthquake. Although the town was badly damaged, there were fewer deaths than in other places. Now, as we suffer from the virus and, historically, the patron saint has gone to the atrium, we pray that, through his intercession, this difficult situation passes and our people are free from all evil (Sincal, 2020).

In the current context of the Coronavirus pandemic, Amatitlán was one of the first places where an image was placed for public veneration despite the government-imposed restrictions. This occurred during the atypical celebrations of the Feria de la Cruz. On that occasion, El Zarquito, the Child God who tours the Amatitlán lake every May 3, was placed in the temple's atrium.

Parishioners were pleasantly surprised when, despite the sanitary restrictions due to the state of calamity, they were reunited with the image of El Zarquito, the Child God of Amatitlán. The parish authorities of San Juan Bautista placed the sculpture in the church's atrium so that it could be venerated from the central park of the municipality. The hope is that the people of Amatitlán will pray to the Child God for the

well-being of their families and for an end to the pandemic affecting the country and the rest of the world (Redactor, 2020c, p. 5).

As time went by, the virus spread throughout the country, leaving death and strict sanitary measures, including the closing of temples and the cancellation of fairs and religious activities. July arrived, and with it came the patron saint celebrations in honor of Santiago Apostle and Santa Ana. In the town of *Patzicía*, department of Chimaltenango, the parish church determined the following:

The Santiago Apostle Parish, led by our parish priest, Father Calvin Ramírez, joyfully informs all Catholic parishioners of Patzicía. Due to the events happening because of the pandemic of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), we are asking for the intercession of Santiago Apostle, the protector of Patzicía, before God for the cessation of this disease in our town. On July 18 of this year, the image of Santiago Apostle, who presides over the main altar of our parish church, will go out in a Solemn, Historical, and Festive Procession. The Apostle Santiago intercedes and prays for us before God the Father (Parish, 2020).

This event is considered historic since the image of the patron saint has rarely left the temple. In this regard, Nicolás C. (2020) stated, "It was a historic event for our people that the image of Santiago left the temple and walked the streets of Patzicía. We hope that through his intercession, the pandemic will cease." (Nicolás C., 2020).

Also, in Cuilapa, Santa Rosa, the image of the Lord of the Portents, whose festivity takes place in the first days of August, with a fair pilgrimage and a procession on the first Sunday of the month referred to, on this occasion went out in the morning hours in rogation, touring the main streets

of the town, as reported by a collaborator:

This year, the Lord of the Portents—a much-loved and venerated image here in Cuilapa—went out in a different way. Now, it is in prayer for the pandemic to end. Due to the curfew, it had to go out early instead of at night as it had always been. I was happy to hear that they were going to take it out to bless the homes of Cuilapa, which we need now more than ever (Pineda, 2020).

The news was received with joy by the devotees of the Lord of the Portents, some of whom assumed that the procession would not take place:

I had lost hope of seeing the Lord of the Portents this year, but thank God they brought him out. It was different this time, but it is pleasing to see him walk the streets of our town. We implore his protection and confirm that the illness will go away (Melgar, 2020).

Before the procession departed from the Niño Dios Cathedral, a Mass was celebrated. Then, the Blessed Sacrament and the image of the Lord of the Portents were placed in two vehicles, each with a priest. At the beginning of the route, few faithful participated, since the ecclesiastical authorities requested that crowds be avoided and that people observe the procession from their homes. Men, women, and children could be seen kneeling on the sidewalks, many of them with tears in their eyes, imploring the protection of the Lord of the Portents, a beloved image in Cuilapa, Santa Rosa.

Jesús de Trujillo is one of the most venerated images in Villa Nueva, Guatemala. It is said that he arrived in the region from Trujillo, Honduras, hence the name. Initially, he received public worship in the old town of Petapa, which is now Villa Canales. He was then transferred to

the parish of the Immaculate Conception in Villa Nueva after a flood destroyed the original location in 1762. In 1844, Pope Gregory XVI blessed the sculpture, and on October 16, 2019, Jesús de Trujillo was named the Perpetual Mayor of Villa Nueva (Valdez, 2019). For these reasons, many consider him the second patron saint of the municipality. In the month of his celebrations, it was decided to hold the festivities differently, with a daily Eucharist, participation from invited brotherhoods, and live streaming on the Association of Jesus of Trujillo's social media pages. The association is responsible for safeguarding, worshipping, and celebrating the consecrated image, as well as on other internet pages.

One of the activities that stood out in the 2020 celebration was the initiative taken by the Association of Jesus de Trujillo, to carry out a rogation with the consecrated image of Jesus de Trujillo, to which the patron saint of the municipality, the Immaculate Conception, was also invited to participate, the idea came up as follows:

The Lord gave us the light to organize a rogation. Along the way, the Lord enlightened us that we could request the Immaculate Conception as the patroness. We made this request to the Religious Committee of Concepción, and they gave us permission to have the patroness accompany Jesus of Trujillo. As we know, in Villa Nueva, they also call Jesus of Trujillo the patron. Today, we say that we have two patrons on the main altar. More than anything, our intention in making this rogation was to bring them to the feet of Villa Nueva. As a religious movement, I believe this is how we can contribute to Villa Nueva and Guatemala by praying for the difficult situation we are experiencing (Trujillo, 2020).

According to Marlon Trujillo, coordinator of the association that carried out the above activities, it is not the first time that Jesus of Trujillo has been invoked in rogation, as it is known through testimonies with elders, that, on some occasions when it did not rain it was taken out in procession or placed in veneration, and at the finalization of the pious act, the rain fell (Trujillo, 2020).

Undoubtedly, similar activities to those described in this section have been carried out in other parts of the country, but due to a lack of documentation and time, they were not included. The activities described here are just a small example of the importance of devotional images within Guatemalans' popular Catholic religiosity, whether they are patron saints or others. Their value lies in several aspects:

Overall, Sacred Images are not limited to artistic or liturgical value. They are intended to bring people closer to the divine and human mysteries, strengthen their faith, increase their love for God, and preserve their hope. The goal is to always keep alive the original and primordial relationship between God, the great artist of the world, and his greatest accomplishment: human beings made in his "image and likeness," sculpted with divine hands (Martinez, 2018, p. 29).

Ultimately, devotional images serve as a means of communication between the faithful and God. This is why, during challenging times such as the ongoing pandemic, people turn to them in a special way, believing that through their veneration and prayers, God will understand their suffering and help them achieve their goals.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

In the Catholic world, the Blessed Sacrament is

one of the pillars of faith. Catholics believe that Christ is present in the consecrated host, which is protected in the monstrance. Therefore, the monstrance occupies the most important place in temples. In other words, Jesus Christ lives in churches and is ready to receive visits from the faithful, who come with their sorrows and joys. Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is ancient and gave rise to the Feast of Corpus Christi, which was promoted by the thirteenth-century Belgian nun St. Juliana de Mont Cornillon. In Guatemala, during the Hispanic period, brotherhoods and sisterhoods dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament proliferated, proving its impact on the country's popular religiosity. Therefore, it is not surprising that, after sanitary restrictions began, including the closing of churches, those Eucharistic chapels and chapels of perpetual adoration did not close. These chapels are where such a precious element of Catholicism is kept.

In *San José del Golfo* in the department of Guatemala, for example, the local church closed due to government restrictions, but the Perpetual Adoration Chapel remained open for all who wanted to pray, while adhering to sanitary protocols and avoiding crowds (Pinzón, 2020). A similar situation occurred in the Guatemalan municipality of San Raimundo, where a small altar was set up next to the parish church to house the Blessed Sacrament. Devotees visited the altar to pray for their relatives' health and the end of the pandemic (Morales, 2020).

Another approach to bringing the Blessed Sacrament closer to the faithful was the organization of vehicular processions to avoid crowds. For example, at the beginning of Holy Week, the parish priest of the San Marcos Evangelista parish in Zone 18 of the capital city had the initiative to carry the Custody in a

pickup truck, which traveled through several neighborhoods of the locality. The population appreciated the procession and made altars decorated with the characteristic Holy Week bouquets (Recinos, 2020).

In Quetzaltenango, Corpus Christi occupies a transcendental place in the liturgical and festive calendar because it coincides with the *Fiesta del Niño del Santísimo*, an image of great faith and affection for the *quezaltecos*. The sculpture is guarded by a brotherhood and leaves its headquarters only on January 1st, the Wednesday before Corpus Christi Thursday, and on the day of the solemnity. For the latter, a procession is organized that runs through much of the historic center of the Altense metropolis. In 2020, the health emergency altered all these celebrations. The image of the Child was carried in the arms of his brothers and sisters, not on a platform. He was in the cathedral for the high mass and then returned to his brotherhood. The faithful and devotees made altars in their homes and placed paintings or pictures of the venerated image in the center. They also offered special foods, including pepián and sweets (Escobar, 2020). On Sunday, the 14th, a vehicular procession carrying the Blessed Sacrament traveled through part of the city, also starting from the cathedral.

In San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango, the ecclesiastical authorities decided to place the Blessed Sacrament at the entrance of the parish church so that the population could approach it to pray, as entering the church was impossible due to the sanitary restrictions in force. Neighbors organized their visits in shifts to avoid crowds (Sotz, 2020).

At the beginning of the patron saint fair in Tecpán Guatemala, Chimaltenango, after more than six months of not being able to enter the church, religious authorities placed the Blessed Sacrament in the atrium of the parish church.

Devotees received the news gratifyingly, arguing that it was necessary to be in the presence of God, especially in times of crisis. Prayers were offered for medical personnel who are exposed to the Coronavirus daily while caring for patients (Bala, 2020).

This was a brief tour through various corners of the country, documenting the activities that took place, especially in 2020. During this time, the faithful implored divine help in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic, asking for its end, among other requests.

Final comment:

Popular religiosity occupies a transcendental place in the lives of many Guatemalans. It is one of the elements that comprise the personal and cultural identity of individuals, particularly in diverse societies, such as Guatemala. From the time they are in their mothers' wombs, children develop a sense of belonging to religious traditions, whether Christian or Mayan.

Human beings need to believe in something that provides answers to what simple human perception cannot explain. Religion and its various forms have existed since the beginning of society, resulting in a variety of creeds and philosophies. Guatemala is no exception; magical and religious practices that are products of the fusion of Mayan, Hispanic, and African cultures still exist there today. Activities such as Lent, Holy Week, and patron saint fairs reveal the country's historical, social, and cultural richness. These are spaces longed for by many throughout the year, where people interact with cultures different from their own. They are also scenarios where fervor comes to the surface, producing a series of emotions before sculptures or paintings representing Christ, the Virgin Mary, or any saint. These sacred figures

are the guardians of their communities and, at a certain point in history, supplanted the ancient pre-Hispanic deities. They are part of daily life and a reality close to the people, who turn to them in good times and bad.

The arrival of the new disease from China in March 2020 radically altered the social fabric of Guatemalan communities. Apart from contagions, deaths, and unemployment, the disease took away much of their culture and faith. Temples, chapels, and oratories have remained closed for months as a preventive measure. Faith and religious expression have evolved into new forms, including the use of technology through social networks and other platforms. However, these changes will not fully replace human contact or the experience of entering a sacred place, kneeling, crying, and laughing in front of devotional images. Nor will they replace the joy that characterized patron saint, cantonal, and neighborhood fairs, or the joy of going to see a procession or making carpets with family and friends. Covid has brought distrust and suspicion among peers. People began to see each other as enemies because anyone could carry the virus and infect others. Handshakes, hugs, and other affectionate gestures common in brotherhoods are gone.

Bibliographic references

- Acosta, J. d. (1963). *Vida religiosa y civil de los indios*. México: Universidad Autónoma de México.
- Bellido, A. (2017). Sobre el ritual de las rogativas. *Revista de Folklore* N° 428, 54-65.
- Butler, A. (1965). *Vidas de los Santos Tomo I*. México: John W. Clute.
- Castañeda, A., y Jickling, D. (2002). *Los santos en las fachadas retablo de La Antigua Guatemala*. La Antigua Guatemala: Casa del Sol.

Juarros, D. (1999). *Compendio de la historia de la ciudad de Guatemala*. Guatemala: Academia de Geografía e Historia.

Martínez, M. (2018). *Imágenes Sagradas*. Guatemala: Cara Parens.

Monterrosa, M., y Talavera, L. (2002). *Las devociones cristianas en México*. México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología.

Montes, J. (2001). *El libro de los Santos*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Montes, S. (1977). *Etnohistoria de El Salvador: el Guachival Centroamericano, Tomo II*. San Salvador: Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Publicaciones.

Solís, J., y Culebro, R. (2003). La fiesta de san Caralapio. *Etnografía de un espacio social. Liminar Vol. 1, Número 2*, 87-98.

Solórzano, A. (2014). Los métodos físicos y médicos de prevención y erradicación de las epidemias de viruela, utilizados por el gobierno del Reino de Guatemala, de 1780 a 1820. *Tradiciones de Guatemala No. 81*, 229-291.

Ubico, M. (2014). *Capillas y altares en templos de Santiago capital del Reino de Guatemala*. La Antigua Guatemala: Consejo Nacional para la Protección de La Antigua Guatemala.

Interviews

- Escobar, L. (July 1st, 2020). Interview. Interviewed by: Deyvid Molna.
- Franco, J. (May 6th, 2020). Interview. Interviewed by: Deyvid Molna.
- Melgar, A. (August 2nd, 2020). Interview. Interviewed by: Deyvid Molna.
- Nicolás, R. (July 25th, 2020). Interview. Interviewed by: Deyvid Molna.

Pérez, M. (September 17th, 2020). Interview.
Interviewed by: Deyvid Molina.

Pineda, L. (August 2nd, 2020). Interview.
Interviewed by: Deyvid Molina.

Ramos, S. (May 5th, 2020). Interview. Interviewed
by: Deyvid Molina.

Raymundo, D. (August 1st, 2020). Interview.
Interviewed by: Deyvid Molina.

Sincal, J. (April 15th, 2020). Interview. Interviewed
by: Deyvid Molina.

Trujillo, M. (October 9th, 2020). Interview.
Interviewed by: Deyvid Molina.

Soltz, C. (September 14th, 2020). Oran por el cese de
la crisis. *Nuestro Diario, Centro Occidente*, p.
10.

Valdez, S. (October 24th, 2019). Jesús de Trujillo es
alcalde perpetuo. *Nuestro Diario, Metro*, p. 7.

Digital references

Parroquia Sanriago Apóstol Patzicía. (July 14th,
2020). <https://www.facebook.com/parroquiadepatziciasantiagoapostol/>. Obtenido de <https://www.facebook.com/parroquiadepatziciasantiagoapostol/posts/165248468441311>

Hemerographic references

Bala, J. (September 29th, 2020). Devotos toman
sus medidas de precaución. *Nuestro Diario,
Centro Occidente*, p. 6.

Escobar, I., and Pitán, E. (April 6th, 2020). Confir-
man cinco casos comunitarios. *Prensa Libre*,
p. 10.

Morales, B. (July 11th, 2020). Oran en familia para
pedir por la salud de la población. *Nuestro
Diario, ¿Qué Hay?*, p. 6.

Pinzón, H. (March 28th, 2020). Fieles suplican por
protección divina. *Nuestro Diario, Metro*, p.
5.

Recinos, E. (April 7th, 2020). Santísimo recorre co-
lonias. *Nuestro Diario, Metro*, p. 8.

Redactor. (March 25th 2020). El papa convoca hoy
a rezar el Padre Nuestro por el fin de la
pandemia. *La Hora*, p. 23.

Redactor. (August 29th, 2020). Novena al Glorioso
Mártir San Caralampio. *Gaceta de
Guatemala*, p. 8.

Redactor. (April 25th, 2020). Se encuentran con el
Niño Dios. *Nuestro Diario, Metro*, p. 5.



Figure 1. In 1733, the image of *Nuestra Señora de los Dolores del Cerro* went out in procession to pray for an end to the smallpox epidemic. (Molina).



Figure 2. During the Hispanic period in Santiago de Guatemala, *San Sebastián* was one of the devotional images before which acts of rogation were performed during natural catastrophes and epidemics. (Molina).



Figure 3. On July 18, 2020, a historic procession took place in *Patzicía*, Chimaltenango, to ask for the cessation of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The image of Santiago Apostle, the town's patron saint, was featured in the procession. (Molina).



Figure 4. Faithful praying at the passing of the image of the Lord of the Portents in Cuilapa, Santa Rosa. (Molina).



Figure 5. The Lord of the Portents, a highly venerated image in Cuilapa, Santa Rosa, went out in a rogation procession in August 2020. (Molina).



Figure 6. In Villa Nueva, in the Guatemalan department, the consecrated images of Jesus de Trujillo and the Virgin of Concepción, the municipality's patron saint, were placed on the main altar of the community's provisional temple, as a rogation imploring their protection from the pandemic. (Molina).



Figure 7. In 2020, devotees of the *Niño del Santísimo* in Quetzaltenango made altars in his honor. (Escobar).



Figure 8. A vehicular procession carrying the Blessed Sacrament traveled through the streets of Quetzaltenango during the 2020 Corpus Christi celebration. (Escobar).

This issue was printed in the graphic workshops of
Serviprensa, S.A. in the month of November 2021. The
issue contains 500 copies printed in 80 gr bond paper.

Directorate

Authorities of San Carlos de Guatemala University

Rector

Pablo Ernesto Oliva Soto

General Secretary

Gustavo Enrique Taracena Gil

General Director of Research

Félix Alan Douglas Aguilar Carrera

Director of the Center for the Study of Cultures in Guatemala

Mario Antonio Godínez López

Principal Researchers

Aracely Esquivel Vásquez Deyvid
Paul Molina Armantina Artemis
Torres Valenzuela Aníbal Dionisio
Chajón Flores Abraham Israel
Solórzano Vega Byron Fernando
García Astorga

Intern researchers

Xochitl Anaité Castro Ramos
Erick Fernando García Alvarado
Ericka Anel Sagastume García

Interior design and layout

Layout: Maite Sánchez
Text revision: Jaime Bran

Cover photo

Deyvid Paul Molina

Avenida La Reforma 0-09, Zona 10

Tel number: 2231-9171 / 2361-9260 / 2360-3952

Web: <http://ceceg.usac.edu.gt/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ceceg.usac/>