



The Deceased Child and his Configuration as Little Angel. Northern Argentina and Southern Paraguay

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Abstract

We present the results of the research on deceased children and their configuration as little angel (delimiting cases to spontaneous or natural abortions, children who died before delivery or shortly after birth) among the population of the Catholic faith, in the North of the Argentine Republic and the South of Paraguay. The ethnographic method, in-depth interviews and observations with different degrees of participation have been prioritized; the field work has been carried out between 2010 and 2018. We focus on the analysis on the ways of understanding, explaining and experiencing the death of the cases mentioned. We realize a particular way of constructing death in close connection to the emic category of little angel. In the types of death indicated, the post-mortem destiny will be the Third Heaven. The little angel will be given a special space in the universe of the dead. Being protector of the living, he is empowered to make the mediation relationships between the human and the sacred; namely: between men and God.

Keywords: Deceased Children; Little Angel; Death; Burials; Divine Mediation

Abbreviations: FHyCS: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; SIVyPG: Secretariat for Research and Postgraduate Studies; UNaM: National University of Missions.

Introduction

The following essay deals with the registration, description and composition of part of the religious imagination of the Northeast of the Argentine Republic and South of Paraguay, focusing mainly on the ethnographic present. The records that we present narrate and explore the configuration of the idea of the angel, among families of Catholic faith, in cases of spontaneous abortions, children who died before childbirth or shortly after birth. First-hand ethnographic records are focused between 2010 and 2018. The information on which this essay is elaborated corresponds to the corpus of Projects,

- a. Death, Death, Society and Culture. Funeral memory and daily life. Nordeste Argentino and Sur de la Región Oriental del Paraguay accredited in the Secretariat for Research and Postgraduate Studies (SIVyPG) of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHyCS) of the National University of Missions (UNaM) and
- b. The wake of the angel in the Northeast of Argentina and the South of the Eastern Region of the Republic of Paraguay. Nineteenth, twentieth and present centuries ethnographic, developed as Researcher of the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) enrolled in the Institute of Social and Human Studies (IESyH).

The problems of death and dying in the area under study have been addressed from various viewpoints and fields of knowledge, anthropology (with a focus on ethnography),

history, communication, folklore, literature and semiotics present a description of the general components of the funerary culture of the tempo-spatial cut that summons us. It is worth mentioning some of the general contributions and recurrences that we find throughout the readings and analysis of the sources. The experiences recorded to date motivate us to affirm that in the area under study the links with death, situations of death and death are configured as intense, familiar, very elaborate and often daily; for example we can mention the relations between mourners, cenotaphs and altars dedicated to angels, other deceased or saints [1].

Referring to death and its domestic presence in the region Banducci A, et al. [2] point out that “Em casa, os altars repletos de imagens de santos, também constituem em locais para rezas constante em favor dos vivos e dos mortos”. These everyday micro-rites Finol JE [3], when referring to the dead, condense a significant double function: to help the soul of the recently deceased and to foster unity among the living [4]. In this way, “coming together to pray for the dead” occupies a very important place in daily life, even more so on the anniversaries of birth or death [1]. In the same way we can list other practices that allow us to refer to the complexity of death in the area worked; the veils present body, cross and clothes, the novenarios, the Black Table, the use of mourning, the configurations of graves in public cemeteries, celebrations during the days of souls, Faithful Departed or Day of Angels and Saints, the use of shrouds in adults and the tunic or tunic in children, the dressing of finates and angels, the prayer of agony, the astonished, souls in pain; all of them founded on a clear distinction between adult death and infant death. In this spectrum of possibilities we find the one that motivates us special attention in this essay: the configuration of the deceased child as an angel.

This complexity involves highly elaborate schemes that enable the re-elaboration of the links between man and the dead. Consequently, in the daily life of the region they germinate chained practices and beliefs that require comprehensive, progressive and holistic approaches. From this complex condensed of senses we abstract some practices that allow us to reflect on the links between the deceased child and the bereaved family. The following statements constitute some of the hypotheses that have directed the interests of the research; corroborating its descriptive validity and its contextual and analytical relevance.

- a. The practices and beliefs around deceased children denote a set of particularities that clearly distinguish them from those referring to the death of adults; particularities that we work under the names of death girl, white death or death without crying [5].
- b. These practices constitute not only a particular way of conceiving death and death, but also a set of relative and specific material, symbolic and socio-cultural

relationships between the child, the mourners and the community.

- c. These significant cultural coordinates -in the proposed tempo/spatial cut-are nuanced with dissimilar socio-cultural elements constituting interpretative schemes, comparable at the regional level, but circumscribed to markedly local spheres of significance.

Methodology

Given that this is a highly sensitive subject for the population that is under study and that we have set out to deepen it through ethnographic work that includes interviews and records, the research processes of these projects meant a constant reflection on the risks involved in the researcher's interference in the emotional life of the subjects. Also, the nature of the topic to be investigated required a specific work on the possible resistances by the subjects to express their experiences and beliefs. It should be noted that some of these dimensions were resolved because the fieldwork, being of long duration, has allowed the construction of firm social networks and trust between the researcher and the interlocutors. As noted above, we have prioritized the ethnographic method, observations in different contexts, and in-depth interviews with key interlocutors and records in various technological devices. In the same way, bibliographic material from various fields has been analyzed; prioritizing in the contributions of anthropology, literature and regional folklore.

For this essay we take from the archive of the projects referred to the interviews made with families that have deceased children, identifying as interlocutors parents, uncles, grandparents and godparents of baptism. It has also relied on the expertise of Priests, Funeral Directors and Wake Rooms, Cemeteries, gravediggers and specialists in regional literature and folklore. Whenever the interlocutor has enabled the interviews have been recorded and discounted for transcription. Written interviews had also been conducted with children up to the age of 12 in order to investigate the oral inheritance linked to the image of the deceased child or angel. Observations were made in public cemeteries and funeral rites in children and adults (between 2010 and 2018, more than ten wake-ups of children have been observed in northern Argentina and more than fifteen in southern Paraguay, other cases have been reconstructed through ethnographic interviews or community participation focus groups). The corpus of total interviews of the projects amounts to more than three hundred for which less than 40% is taken for this essay based on the specific cut that is proposed to address, in the same way the descriptions given in journals and field notes are taken up. Also, a lot of information that allows us to reflect on the problem arises from the recording and systematization of the experiences

gathered in what we have called Circles of parents with angels; a strategy of collective meetings and interviews with focus groups with similar experiences.

These first observations led us to the need for a differential approach to the problem, enabling a space for dialogue, reflection and listening that allows not only the collection of information, but also a more personalized consideration for the interlocutors in terms of dealing with this issue. From there the idea of implementing "Circles of talk and listening" formed by parents who have gone through experiences of death. The general objectives which motivate the operation of these Circles.

- a. To know the experiences of the participants regarding the parent-death-deceased child relationship,
- b. To outline the modalities of the duel as regards the death of the children between the participants,
- c. Recognize distinctions in the different deaths of children or young people. Similarly, regarding the modalities of deaths (natural, violent, etc.),
- d. Provide a space for reflection and socialization of the experiences around death, and
- e. Outline methodological premises for addressing the relational problems parents-death-deceased son [6].

The Death of the Child and the Notion of Angel

We entrust you, Lord, humbly to this(a) child(a) N. whom you have surrounded with your immense love: in your goodness receive him(a) in paradise where there will be no more death, no more crying, no more complaint, no more pain, but peace and joy, with your Son and with the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen. Ritual E [7] Among the interlocutors who have contributed to this investigation the post mortem configuration in cases of: spontaneous abortions, children who died before childbirth or shortly after birth, is similar and recurrent in that it corresponds to the place that is attributed to them among the dead. Thus, from now on, when we refer to deceased children we encompass the three explicit modes of death; making specific references and clarifications when required. The first consideration is that we include in this trial the cases of deceased children from 0 to 1 year, known as baby angels among the testimonies collected.

The death of children, among the population under study, is explained and interpreted on the basis of various significant, particular and specific premises. It is widely believed that the child having no sins (venial or mortal) -and having been delivered from original sin- returns to God. In this way the deceased children occupy a differential place in the scheme of post-mortem ordering. Nancy SH [5] states that the dead baby was identified as an *anjinho*, "a cherub", an innocent creature who died without causing sorrow

because his future happiness was guaranteed." Nancy SH [5] When the deceased child is veiled, it is possible to observe very marked particularities that distinguish him from the wakes of adults. Although we will not stop at the wake it is worth mentioning that the rite has been significantly modified in relation to the records of religious and travelers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; preserving some components that distinguish it within the funerary rites. Based on the experiences gathered, between 2010 and 2018, we can mention that at the wake of the children the use of light or pastel colors will prevail (yellow, blue, pink, white) either in the burning chapel or in the mortuary trousseau, will not pray for the salvation of the child's soul, will have active participation the female gender is special aunts, grandmothers and godmothers, its duration in time will be short, It is usually enhanced in the home of the family with the purchase of the coffin in a funeral home in case of owning the resources or homemade clothing when the family cannot afford the expenses.

In the case of a family group rooted in the traditions of the angel's wake, they shall incorporate into the veiled body the tunic or tunic (depending on whether it is a girl or a boy), a pair of wings, a crown, the hands in a praying position and a bouquet of flowers; generating a direct symmetry between the veiled body and the image of the angel diffused among the Catholic creed: winged child, dressed in white, with orb (coronita) and flowery. Also in the coffin or between the fingers of the angel will be left little skeletons with messages that he is expected to deliver to God in his encounter [8,9]¹. Among the population under study, stillborn children and those who died shortly after birth are tributaries of the funeral rite, but not spontaneous abortions [10]².

Among the records that we take up for this work are listed a set of qualities inherent in the condition of the deceased or angelic child, qualities that are summarized in a kind of significant triangle: young child-without the use of reason-without sins. In some of the versions we can see that the angel is defined as the deceased child up to about 6 or 7 years; while others reduce the age to 0 to 1 year, range of time we select for this writing. It is important to note that among the population under study there is an emic category that partly solves this discrepancy: the idea of the Angel Loro. The Angel Loro would be the deceased child who already handles articulated language, which has surpassed early childhood, but who still can not speak clearly or discern

1 To deepen on the theme of the wake of the angel in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century is suggested the readings of Bondar (2017- 2014-2015-2017)

2 To deepen on the burials in the courtyards of houses is suggested. Bondar (2012b)

between good or bad actions, still does not know what it says (therefore can not sin). The body can be in this case of a child who is more than a year and up to six, then it will be already an ANGEL LORO, who receives this denomination because it is understood that “the guru is not yet right at that age”, and having no discernment between good and evil is an innocent who does not know what he says Lopez B, et al. [11].

Coluccio F [12] mentions that “... in almost all of America, [angel refers to] the corpse of a child, and especially the one who is preparing to give rise to the “wake of the angel “ Coluccio F [12]. Alvarez MR [13] points out that the angel is the young child who dies. They mention that dead children who have not been old enough to sin, of neither thought nor action, are considered angels. For the author, all children up to the age of four or five would be angels. About the experiences in Pedro Juan Caballero and Bella Vista (Paraguay) Banducci A, et al. [2] highlight that as pessoas, que morreram antes de completar os sete anos, posto que muito jovens, não cometeram pecados, são considerados anjinhos e, portanto, a elas não se reza o novenario. Essas preces-o novenario-são destinadas às pessoas adultas, “animas”, que talvez pudessem em vida ter cometido pecados e necessitem das rezas dos amigos e familiares para alcançarem o direito de ir ao reino dos céus.

This conception is reflected in the contributions of Ambrosetti (1947: 45). it is a general belief that the young creatures, dead without having been able to sin, go straight to heaven, being transformed there into angels; so instead of suffering much for the loss of the son, the parents are comforted and with this reason they celebrate dances before the corpse, alternating with some sentences.

Another traveler who reviews with significant clarity the image of the angel is Beaumon JA [14]; in the text written after the trip through Buenos Aires, Entre Ríos and the Banda Oriental made between 1826 and 1827 points out, reflecting on a “angel’s wake” observed in San Pedro, province of Buenos Aires. We were later informed that this custom comes from the common belief among these people that, if a child dies before reaching the age of seven, he will surely go to heaven. It is assumed that before that age the child has not acquired the defects of human nature; thus removed in his early years from the worries and disturbances experienced by the elderly, the transition from this life to the other is seen as a special favor of the Almighty: hence they are designated with the name of angels [14].

Kubler RE [15] reports that “In the case of very small children -two or three years old, for example- whose grandparents, country and all other known relatives are still on Earth, they are usually the guardian angels”.

Deceased Children and their Differences with other Dead

Another specificity that we must break down when referring to the angels lies in the distinction that is made between these and the other dead. It is mainly based on the condition of innocence, to which are added other relevant conditions. For example the re-memorative place assigned to him in the official liturgical calendar; the angels are remembered on the first of November and not on the second of November; Day of the Faithful Departed. We expose some textual transcripts of narrations of children where the meanings of the dates are refracted; clearly two border spheres are distinguished: deceased/dead/deceased and angels. These narrations correspond to experiences collected, in part, in the moments of preparation for November 1 and 2 [1].

November 1° is Angelus Day and November 2° is Day of the Dead (Textual Transcription [sic] of a Written Narrative. Girl, 11 years old) On 1 November the day of the angels is celebrated... on 2 November the day of the dead is celebrated (Textual transcription [sic] to that of a written narrative. Girl, 12 years old) October 31 and November 1 on is the day of Angels and November 2 is the day of the dead. (Textual transcription [sic] to that of a written narrative. Child, 11 years old) 1° is Angelus Day. 2° is Day of the Dead. (Textual transcription [sic] to that of a written narrative. Girl, 11 years old) On November 1 people went to the sementerio because some have their Angels and were going to remind him to light a candle and the next day that is 2 is Day of the Dead (Textual transcription [sic] to that of a written narrative. Girl, 12 years old).

This is one of the bases on which the communicative system is mounted (common), this system requires a shared memory. The symbols present in the narratives carry information on contexts, temporalities, religious calendar, holidays and specific rituals for angels or the deceased. This re-configuration of temporalities responds not only to the collective cultural memory, but also to the emotional and self-biographical memories of the participants in the socialization process.

On Innocence and “No Use of Reason”

On the other hand the angel is defined taking into account the condition of purity, the impossibility of distinguishing between good or bad actions and the impossibility of the use of reason. Although we often hear that reference is made to the angelic condition of children in life we emphasize that the state of angel, as we work in this investigation, presupposes the assimilation of a post-mortem condition; directly linked to the specificities of innocence and the absence of the

possibility of incurring sins of any kind (basically for not having “use of reason”). María DCGH, et al. [16] points out that the innocence of childhood was one of the most widespread and recognized traits at the end of the Middle Ages. He adds that this precept implied the idea that children did not deliberately harm and were bearers of a significant purity that guaranteed their entry into Heaven immediately after death, as long as they had been anointed by baptism.

The contributions of the author referenced up above enable us to comment that: conceiving the possibility of transmutation from the state of the dead child to the state of the angel presupposes belief in other possible worlds beyond the terrain. Likewise the belief in the duality of the human: a perishable body and an immortal soul; intimately linked -in the case of children- to the faculty of the beatific vision in the Third Heaven. We believe that these dimensions are strongly influenced by certain dogmas that have become Christianity. An angel does not assume this state by simple bio-physical death, to complete-but to initiate-the passage must be freed from original sin through baptism; in many situations the “water of help” intervenes that offers an alternative of purification until the ecclesiastical intervention of the hand of an authorized Ordinary. We will return to these issues later.

We incorporate in this instance considerations of utmost relevance around the notion of “non-use of reason”. When the interlocutors refer to the “non-use of reason” they do not refer only to a condition proper to biological age, but also to the nullity of this faculty, for example, due to a severe mental deficiency. Consequently, some handicapped persons would be considered as angels whose condition is extremely serious and they cannot discern between actions considered good or bad.

Angels are dead children until they're seven, eight years old. Also the disabled are angels, they do not know what they do right or wrong, they are like children, innocent are (Interview to Woman. 50 years, Paraguay) My boyfriend had a handicapped sister, she died. The mother has in the house a photo of her with a blue background, she put together an altar, has flowers and lights candles. She says that's her little angel (Entrevista a Mujer, 24, Corrientes. Argentina).

In the same way other interpreters of the term come from the popular poetic culture. We believe that the contributions of this field will promote a permeable vision and the continuity of the senses. Thus, the purity and innocence of the deceased child and his connection with the celestial figure are exposed in the verses expressed by the angel singers, in this regard rescues Ramirez JA [17] from the anonymous letter of the Canto a los Angelitos:

I've come down a road
With a light by my side,
To watch over this little angel
That the Child God has taken him.
Don't forget my little angel
To tell your mommy,
Let me light you a candle
It must be a little flower.
Mother of my life,
Don't cry, don't be sad
Your little darling is leaving
Out of your chains.
God repay you, my mother,
God will pay you,
For the milk you've given me
With such fine will

Also, among the lullabies and children's games we find references that combine the pure image of children and the heavenly image of angels. These verses, of regional and global diffusion, take from the domestic, family, religious and secular spaces different qualities that allow to mark a particularity difference in the angel/child relationship, clearly absent among adults. We present the following examples [18]:

An angel came down from heaven
An angel came down from heaven
He came down from heaven.
With wings outstretched
And in the hand a flower.
Of the flower a rose
Of the rose a carnation.
Of the carnation a girl
Her name is Isabel.
Why so many flowers
They're not for me.
They're for a little angel
That's about to go to sleep

Maria Santa Ana
Maria Santa Ana
Light the candle
And just who walks
At the head.
Are the angels
Who run
Waking the child
To go to school

Go to sleep my child
Go to sleep, my child,
What I have to do:
To wash diapers,
Put me to sewing.
Go to sleep, my child,

I'll tell
 Butterflies
 What's in the rose bush.
 Each butterfly
 Is an angel
 That will keep the dream
 Of my precious

Purity (in)complete. Relevance of Baptism³

Death is not a foreign issue to children, as they too die [19]. In fact since they are born they are welcomed by society through the religious tradition translated into baptism, a child cannot die without having passed through this ritual that allows it an official and public acceptance before the community, it becomes more than necessary to confer on the child spiritual tranquility and divine vitality, otherwise it would be necessary to wait for life itself to take pity on him [20].

The notion of "purity (in)complete" suggests the exposition of a critical journey built on the basis of some nascent conjectures of contemplation and the complexity of the image of the "angel" and its socio-cultural (collective) significance. It is conceived that the pure image of the child without venial sins is at the same time an incomplete purity. Among the stories collected we can perceive how the death of the child does not guarantee his conversion to angel. The child must be freed from original sin by being anointed by the sacrament of baptism [7]⁴.

It should be noted that from the Catholic Church the salvation of the souls of children without baptism has been explained until 2007 on the basis of a theological hypothesis: the limbo of children [21]⁵. This hypothesis has been refuted

3 We extend the current information in Bondar (2017)

4 The book *Ritual of Exequias* (Vatican Council II- 1962-65) establishes differential ritual processes according to whether baptized children, unbaptized children and children with reason (to these corresponds the rite of adults with some re-adaptations). While these rites have been significantly transformed in the public uses of the community and by the perceptions of the Church itself, it is illustrative to consider how should be (ideally) the post-mortem ritual processes in these deceased children.

5 The Council of Carthage, in 418, ruled against the optimistic theory that it wanted dead children without baptism fully admitted to supernatural happiness. Saint Augustine pointed out that the "Limbo of children is eternal", their condition as carriers of original sin lasts forever. Throughout the Middle Ages this was the doctrine of the Church. In the Catechism of Pius X of 1904, in which Catholics were educated for almost the entire twentieth century, it is taught that ... dead children without baptism go to Limbo, where they do not enjoy God but neither suffer because having the original sin, but only he, do not deserve Paradise but neither do Purgatory and Hell". The version that the Pope approved in 1992 preferred a more serene fate for dead children without baptism. "The Church, says point 1261, cannot entrust them to the mercy of God". And God "wants all men to be saved". And the tenderness of Christ that made him say: "Let the children come to me and not stop him". All this "allows us to hope that there will be

in the document "The hope of salvation for children who die without baptism" currently legitimized by the Vatican. The document states that "All the factors we have considered (...) give serious theological and liturgical foundations to the hope that the dead children without baptism are saved and enjoy the beatific vision"⁶. Although on this subject there are discrepancies between the Theologians it is established that the deceased children, baptized or not, maintain the hope of the vision of God in the Third Heaven⁷.

While this new conception maintains the hope of salvation for those unbaptized children, it is recommended- and establishes- the necessity of baptism as a rite of salvation and detachment from the original bond: "If such funerals are celebrated [funerals to children without baptism], care must be taken by means of a suitable catechesis, which does not obscure in the minds of the faithful the doctrine about the necessity of baptism" [7]. Consequently, it is stipulated that Original sin deprived the human race of an unearned right to heaven. Through Divine mercy this obstacle to the joy of God is removed by baptism; but if baptism is not conferred, the original sin remains, and the unregenerate soul, having no claim for heaven, is not unjustly excluded from it [22]⁸.

In this regard, and in view of these differences and uncertainties about the post-mortem fate of deceased children, it is possible to refer to a practice that enjoys a high degree of cultural legitimacy in the area under study: the baptism by water of relief. This baptism may be submitted by any member of the community (as long as he is baptized). It is instrumental in the absence of Ordinaries who can dispense the sacrament of official baptism. Faced with the danger of imminent death of the child, many families turn to the water of help, although it is considered that the ritual should be completed in the Church with the presence of a priest. We note that the relief water was ordered by order of the III Council of Lima (1582-1583) promoted by Bishop Toribio Alfonso de Mogrovejo, in line with the Council of Trent [23]. These expressions persist in popular usage, in that every Christian is enabled to provide relief water to infants in danger of Death It was a common formula to

a way of salvation for the dead children without Baptism", states the last Universal Catholic Catechism ... (Diario Clarín. 29/XI/2005)

6 [...] Funeral of unbaptized children. 295 According to canon 1183 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law, "the local Ordinary (Bishop or Vicar) may allow ecclesiastical funerals to be held for those children whom his parents wished to baptize, but died before receiving baptism". 296 In both cases the use of white ornaments is the one that best expresses the joy of the transit with his risen Savior from whom he has had no personal sin ... (Celebration of Death - Grants for the celebration of the funeral- accompanying the Rite of Exequias. 2010: 8).

7 From the Tridentine Council (1542-1563) comes the belief that the child accesses the glory of God if he is baptized, since he is a pure soul.

8 Catholic Encyclopedia. Omnia Docet per Omnia, "Unbaptized Infants". s/p.

console parents who lost their fruit by reminding them that the dead child had already become a “Paradise angel”. The children were baptized early so as not to be at risk, since baptism was a rite of initiation whose absence prevented access to the Heavenly Kingdom. Hence this belief was at the origin of many attitudes, behaviors and even creations. Synods and councils recommended that the laity should be taught the formula of the sacrament in the common language, in case there was not a priest nearby after a dangerous birth, and hence also that in certain areas the license to exercise the office of midwife should be issued by the bishopric. The fact of delaying baptism was understood as a symptom of perversity and/or fictitious conversion on the part of those who had renounced Judaism, had not given themselves to Christianity at heart and delayed the moment of initiating their descendants, as stipulated by his new faith [16].

On the salvation from original sin through the water of relief we can mention the contributions of Larraburu (in Escalada Salvo and Zamboni) and Alvarez MR [13] What joy that of that mother, who, having realized that her son at birth and almost immediately, receiving the waters of help’ that enable him to be people of God’, has been called to be part of the hosts of heaven. The solidarity of the neighbors, which is never challenged, leads them to consecrate themselves in the courtyard of the house of mourning’ and with his presence help the mother in her joy’ Escalada SR, et al. [24]. When he has not yet been baptized, any person, familiar or not, in his agony, pours on his head the “water of help” using a very simple formula. Thus he is baptized. Cleansed of sin, he goes straight to heaven [13].

The child, whose condition as a child does not guarantee salvation or angelic state, requires the ritual mediation of baptism or, for the interlocutors consulted, its equivalent in the relief water. As Sacramental act and transmutation de-builds the (in) pure nature of the creature, re-adds it to conditions that: a) in life mean the beginning of a new life, and b) in death necessarily involve the same act; a new state, in a new place, in a new way, a life as an angel.

There are significant controversies over the legitimacy of relief water. The most outstanding case we have found was exposed by Inocencio MRLG, et al. [25] who develops in his “Treaty of Sacred Embryology” two special sections to baptism, calls these “Of the form of baptism” and “Of the subject of baptism”. In the first, he reviews significant considerations about the “relief water”; he stresses that the steps of baptism-to be effective-must meticulously respect the ritual canons handled almost exclusively by the parish priests. It therefore recommends that all parish priests should baptize sub-parish children who have received relief water, notes that “even if it has been the physician, midwife or other person of known intelligence; the reason is because

in those moments of precipitation, either ablution is wrong, or matter is badly applied to the form” [25].

These positions on the purification of children are echoed in the pastoral indications for the baptism of children in Argentina; this stipulates that 7.f. In the Hospitals and Sanatoriums only the “relief water” can be administered, explaining to the parents that it is true Baptism and that they are normally obliged to complete the celebration in the Parish. 7.g. It is the responsibility of the one who administered the “relief water”, that the child be presented in the Church to complete the Rites, as well as that the Baptism be duly recorded in the parish books of the jurisdiction where it was admitted [26].

We are faced with a tense relationship between what is stipulated as appropriate and the re-adaptation that these practices experience in the everyday life of culture. The interviews have allowed us to recognize people who have never received baptism in the Parish and who legitimize the water of relief as an equivalent. Thus to date we find elderly women who fulfill the cultural mandate of being “bridesmaids of relief water” the creature was baptized with relief water, it is like baptism, I have many godchildren of relief water (Interview to Woman, 75 years, Argentina) Yes, they died only with that baptism, difficult for the priest to come or to reach the Chapel for baptism, and already of great less ... we continue baptizing (Interview with Woman, 45 years, Paraguay) My husband has been baptized by relief water, his godmother has already died ... always the blessing, yes, the priest never said anything (Interview to Woman, 70 years, Paraguay).

On the Anointed Baptism of the Deceased Children

After the rejection of the theological hypothesis of limbo the salvation of the souls of the children who die without baptism is guaranteed by divine mercy and mercy, these perceptions are worked on the contributions of Medina explaining that salvation is guaranteed to all human beings killed before the use of reason or without the use of reason:

- Of human foetuses killed by natural causes, whether or not their mothers were aware of their existence.
- Of human foetuses deprived of life by abortion.
- Of children born and dead before they have received baptism.
- Of adult humans who did not come to reason [27].

Although we take up this idea in the closing considerations, we can rescue the suggestions of the Catholic Encyclopedia that in its Volume I exposes. In case of death of the mother, the fetus must be immediately removed and baptized, if it had any life in it. Infants have been taken alive

from the womb after the mother died. After the Caesarean incision has been performed, the fetus may be conditionally baptized before extraction if possible, if the sacrament is administered after removal from the womb the baptism must be absolute, as long as there is any certainty of life. If after extraction it is doubtful whether he lives, he should be baptized under the condition: "If you are alive". Doctors, mothers and midwives should be reminded of the grave obligation to administer baptism under these circumstances. It should be borne in mind that according to the prevailing opinion among the learned, the fetus is animated by a human soul from the very beginning of its conception. In cases of childbirth in which the product is a mass certainly not animated by human life, it must be baptized conditionally: "If you are a man"⁹.

If the death of a pregnant woman is foreseen, it is recommended, before her death, that she drink holy water, minimally guaranteeing the child's contact with the intensity of baptism. This is what María Luisa Bemberg tells us about in the Argentine film production "Camila", starring Susú Pecoraro and Imanol Arias. Camila O'Gorman, condemned for her affair with the priest Ladislao Gutiérrez, is shot while pregnant. Before the sentence is fulfilled she is induced to drink blessed water promoting the liberation from the original sin of the creature that lives in her womb: "Drink my daughter, so that the holy water reaches the body of the innocent Our Lord" (Transcript of what was expressed by the Priest who gave him the last rites). Similarly, the death of a pregnant woman implies special treatments in the wake ritual. It should be mentioned that the pregnant woman spread is consecrated with symbols proper to the small death, namely: colors, chants, prayers. In Paraguay, we have recorded cases of funerals to pregnant women.

These baptismal rituals cited in the Catholic Encyclopedia, unknown in their strict sense by many of the practitioners of Catholicism, take popular forms and are reThe Committee of the Regions is of the opinion that the Committee on Legal Affairs and Citizens' Rights and Citizens' Rights should be consulted. In this way we find, throughout the field work, varied situations of the so-called "padrinazgos de muertitos": product of baptismal rites in cases of children already deceased, concretizing the baptism at the time of the birth (having been born dead) or on the threshold of the wake¹⁰.

I am godfather of my friend's baby, he was baptized at the wake, he was already born dead, she asked me if I wanted to leave godfather and I said yes, grandma did the baptism

and he was named and everything, then he was veiled until the other day (Interview. Male, 30, Corrientes. Argentina)

This quotation illustrates the case of a baptism that we have called postmortem, closely related to the baptism of the dead or by intention that makes manifest the wish that the soul of the deceased be Christian. This type of baptism, in the order of popular expressions, is carried out through relief water, a practice presided primarily by grandmothers or the so-called "old women of the place" who have in "their possession" several godchildren awarded by this popular purification formula.

These experiences were also recorded in the situations of natural boarders in which mothers "dismiss" the fetuses (already in human form). In these situations the same baptismal formula is used, giving the fetus the attributions it would have had in its extra-uterine bio-physical life. Most of the products of these natural abortions are buried in the courtyards of homes [10].

As we have mentioned in Bondar CI [23], the godmothers and godparents for relief water have in their scheme of "ahijadazgo": a) guardians alive, b) children died after a time of being among the living and c) children born in a state of death. These godparents of the dead assume the responsibility that would be given to them while their godchildren were alive. We could affirm that this bond is even more complex, since many baptisms are performed on the death bed of the newborns, this confers to that patronage by relief water a salvationist complexity: it will be the baptism that will free the child's soul. In this way, taking into account the fieldwork carried out, the complexity of the baptismal rite can be understood taking into account what we have called the condition of the child, the baptismal chronotopo and the baptismal typology. The latter, the baptismal typology, is represented by two general forms: relief water and baptism in the parish by the hand of an Ordinary. The elements condition of the child, baptismal chronotopo and baptismal typology are combined generating alternative ways of proceeding in baptism depending on the state of life or death, or the greater or lesser proximity of the bio-physical death of the child. On the interviews we can build the following diagram of interrelationships [23].

- a) Live-born and surviving children: they are baptized within a few days, weeks or months. Relief water and baptism are often used in the parish.
- b) Children born alive and in serious health or foreseeing their death: baptism is performed on the death bed or immediately after delivery. Baptism by relief water usually takes precedence.
- c) Dead children before childbirth or abortions: post-mortem baptism is performed and relief water usually takes precedence.

9 Enciclopedia Católica. Omnia Docet per Omnia, "Infantes no bautizados", s/p.

10 Ampliamos la información vigente en Bondar (2017)

On Patronage in Cases of Deceased Children

We consider that the understanding of the system of patronage must start from the contemplation of the relations of *compadrazgo* understanding this as a form of ritual kinship derived from sponsorship before the Catholic Church found in Spain, Latin America and the Philippines. The relationship of godparents creates permanent bonds of obligation and mutual affection between the godparents and their godchildren, as well as between the godparents and the natural parents of the godchildren [28].

Another aspect intimately linked to baptism and godparents is what Lopez B, et al. [29] describes under the notion of “blessing”. The blessing, he points out, is an ancient tradition and consists in requesting to be blessed by the elders; among these are especially the godparents of baptism. In this way “with the formula: the taita blessing! or the godfather blessing! To which it is answered: may God give you his grace! or may God bless you! It is an institution respected by the people” Lopez B, et al. [29]; this practice spread throughout the area worked constitutes a significant part of the obligations acquired by the rite of baptism. The ritual relatives, in office of their rights and duties, claim blessing; and the godparents, in fulfillment of this mandate significantly mediated by God, bless and protect. Cortazar AR [30] states that the bond that is generated between the godson and the godparents is as complex as that of father and son; the godparents will possess the primacy of punishment and advice in moral and behavioral matters. Highlights that if by fate the godson died as an angel, the godmother presides over the wake with preponderant and almost exclusive intervention. Warned of the fatal gravity of the creature or its death, the parents call the godmother, who from that moment presides over all activities and ceremonies.

This protection of patronage extends throughout life. Among the groups that we have worked it is a strong established custom. In accordance with the foregoing, in the folkloric accounts, the costs of the angel’s wake are covered by the godparents: either setting up the burning chapel, paying the pecuniary demand of the refreshments, floring the

enclosure or covering the expenses of the burial: “Everything (pause and sigh)... yes, yes... I pay the godfather” (Interview. Man, 38. Corrientes. Argentina) Cerruti A, et al. [31] state that the strengthening of the bonds created through ritual kinship is clearly seen in the angel’s wake. The godfather provides the costume for the dead man and has the ability to borrow the body by watching it at home. This direct relation is shown in the couplets recorded by Plath O [32].

What a glorious angel
That is going in the right direction
Begging for their parents
And also for his godparents.
Well haiga my father,
For him I am proud;
Well haiga the godfather

The bond between the child and the godparents does not recognize the borders between the world of the living and the dead, the relationship of patronage is projected beyond biophysical life. Ramírez JA [17] notes that the cord that the child will wear at the waist during the wake will serve so that the godmother, after his death, can “climb” and leave Purgatory trying to access Paradise, where his godson lives [17].

We could observe how bio-physical death re-discharges some of the parental obligations. In life the child is protected, helped and cared for by his godparents, whom he pays with respect and consideration. When the child dies, the godparents will have a protective angel to pray and ask for blessings, and the latter will have to attend to the demands that his godmother will receive in the afterlife, at the time of his death. Sentenced to Purgatory, like every adult with venial sins, she (looking up) will seek the cord of her godson to save herself from this penalty. The cord is part of the ritual clothing that the child will wear at his wake, it should be noted that it is usually woven by the godparents, also the tunic or tunic; the floral arrangement of the coronite that will dress the angel will be composed of paper flowers made by the godmother or with the remains of the bouquet of brides that has used in their marriage [23].

Godparents and Godson/Child Alive		Godparents Alive and Godson/Child Dead	
Attributes of the Godparents	Attributes of the Godson	Attributes of the Godparents	Attributes of the Godson
Protectors	Protected	Protected	Protector
Advisors	Aconsejado	Counselees	Advisors
Counsellors	Oriented	Oriented	Guidance counselor
Strong-important	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Strong-important

Source: own elaboration based on ethnographic interviews. 2010-2018.

Table 1: Conversion of attributes according to the state of life or death of the child/godson in relation to the figure of the godparents.

This ritual kinship is constituted on the basis of the official baptism or having as reference the relief water. The godparents can be the same or vary. So we have recorded cases of children who have four godparents. Sometimes we choose godparents who are not around, then until those come we make them the relief water and there they look for others. Later it is done by church, some not, and there are the godparents those chosen who were not (Interview. Woman, 40 years. Paraguay) Baptism cleanses impurities-aspects with which it is not recommended to pass into the world of the dead-. Subministered many times on the deathbed or post mortem promotes the possibility of these children flying to the sky. The child and his condition of purity (completed by any of the rites exposed) is not the result of a static form of hybrid culture, on the contrary it is a complex socio-historical re-configuration of the senses, forms and meanings.

Continuity Proposal

As a closing space of the essay we have decided to expose some of the examples that allow us to continue thinking about the problem of the deceased child and his configuration as an angel; in this case recombining certain socio-cultural situations typical of the deceased children, and that are presented in relation to other subjects, processes and modalities of death: disability and "virgin maidens" as carriers of angelic state; deceased pregnant women as "angel possessors" It should be clarified that these are exemplary situations that have not been developed in depth in this essay but their strangeness deserves to be included in this outline of closure and continuity. We cannot ignore them as they constitute significant parts that could guide other readings triggered from this article.

The specimens that we present blur the linear association between biological age and angelic condition, predominant (if not dominant) association in the totality of the literature that refers to the problem of the angel in the area under study. It is clear that the angel, almost romantic and baroque, illustrated in the prints of regional folklore seeks to approach an almost purist expression of practices and beliefs. We could say that we have understood this problem clearly and creatively; but without denying other forms of significant associations such as those mentioned, namely Disabled > not use of reason > deceased > angelic state

- a) Virgin > maiden > deceased > angelic state
- b) Deceased > pregnant > woman > carrying angel

The schematization seems linear but it is circumscribed transversely by the acquisition of the state of death and by the particularity attributed to the deceased children. Although we could affirm that death is not acquired but possessed, in the sense developed by Thomas LV [33] mentioning that since birth we are potentially a corpse and that the human

body is embedded in a complex and continuous chain of life/death/life. And it is precisely in this chain that "dying", depending on the situation and condition of the subject at the time of death, can place him closer or more distant from God, in relation to other dead. In this sense we recall that all the interlocutors, whose testimonies have contributed to the construction of this essay, manifest their attachment to the Catholic creed; this allows us to access a particular way of understanding, explain and experience the situations of death and death, as we could see in the development of the text.

We consider that the cases presented demonstrate a differential position before death, and the post-mortem state, since they have a direct relationship with the state of purity become, basically, of three qualities:

- a) The non-use of reason
- b) The non sexual initiation (virginity) or,
- c) The carrying of an angel.

The qualities (a) and (b) correspond to the religious imagination linked to the figure of the angel-baby; while the quality (c) involves carrying an angel-baby.

We consider these aspects of utmost relevance in the sense of the valuations that society builds around the attributes that guarantee purity and similarities with the angel

- a) Disabled > angel on earth, no guilt, no distinction between good and bad
- b) Pure virgin > maiden, spotless, without knowing the carnal pleasures
- c) Deceased pregnant woman > carrying an angel, her impurity/purity will be "negotiated" by the intrauterine death of her child.

The three cases mentioned, found during the field work, and are tributaries of mortuary rituals and sacred meanings similar to those of the angel. At the wake you can see the presence of symbols typical of the death of the angel: light colors, abundance of flowers, white coffin, etc. In the same way as regards the assembly of the tomb: that of the virgin maiden wears epitaphs such as "DEAD IN CARNAL PURITY"; or offerings attached to a girl: dolls, pink cloths, plush bears. It is worth mentioning that the images of women who died during pregnancy are included, albeit between the lines, in the Christian Encyclopedia which we cited in the course of the work; when we referred to the need for the baptism of the innocent lying in the womb of the deceased.

Likewise, these experiences and records lead us to considerations that are clearly linked to the relationships between initiation and sexual desire; carnal pleasures, virginity and state of purity. In the case of disability it is

clear that the “No use of reason” is taken as relevant in this construction; but we must not forget that among the cases perceived in the field we find references on how the disabled is attributed a kind of a-sexuality, not the use of sex, but the denial of sexual desire (or the possible desire that can be expressed towards the subject in that condition). In these cases, the disabled person is not perceived as a pro-creator, a bearer of sexual desire; in the first instance, because he is assimilated to children, the possibility of procreation and/or sexual life is usually repressed before the prejudice that the biological inheritance of this condition is unavoidable: it is kept in a “state of purity” taking into account a complex combination between its -budget- the state of childhood and its uncorrupted corporeity.

The same situation of “what is not corrupted” is found in the virgin maiden; of course, it is the example exposed by González A, et al. [34] The procession for unmarried boys or girls [who were presumed virgins by their bachelorhood] required equal attention but in white color, as the costumes that are these cases could be clear (...) When Sara Dante died tragically -suicidate by sorrows of love- this characteristic occurred (The author refers to the use of the funeral thrown by white horses that was used in the case of girls).

Similar case is that of the pregnant woman who dies; the situation of “premies” clearly indicates that it has been initiated in sexual life, but her death in this state places her in another initiation: in the possibility of accompanying her angel (the interlocutors did not know how to define whether in the beyond), but in the post-mortem ritual process. We will pray for the salvation of the soul, but this woman has an advantage represented in the angel who has perished with her and in her womb. In death, the child who is protected by his mother reverses the roles and becomes protective [35]. Consequently, having perceived the vigorous validity of the imaginary around the angel, made it possible to understand some of the links that are established between the living and the dead and to approach the complex plot of the funerary cartography and the ordering of the earthly and sacred worlds; aspects that can be translated into a calendar of activities, festivities and temporalities to worship, re-remember or visit the angel. This conception of the deceased child as an angel is a recurrent transversal in the area under study.

Thus, the death of the little angel, the subsequent practices and rituals, at least among the population of Catholic faith in northern Argentina and southern Paraguay, do not distinguish between the rural or the urban, greater or less economic capital; simply pivot between the public and the private, the grieving family and the community, the funeral home and or family home, the thanatologist and dressing room, the Cemetery or burial in the courtyards.

Unfinished forms that seek to restore continuity before the rupture of an anthropological chain that is presupposed must not be broken: the desire for the impossibility of a child dying before its parents; the dead calf, the dissolved imprint, the interrupted socialization.

These notions about the continuity and the validity of the expressions are linked to the death of the little angel and they struggle with a position that conceives as valid the testimonies of the memory lived by the interlocutors; With this we expose that throughout the research process we find references, basically, of two types: those interlocutors who had experienced the death of a child and others who recognized the cultural figure of the angel due to oral inheritance (case of children interviewed). It is important to rescue the strength of this component of the religious imagination, since although the children had never been before the death of a baby angel they clearly knew how to perform before this mode of death and how to classify it; this refers to the validity of a socio-historical memory strongly rooted.

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