

PRAYING FOR THE POOR

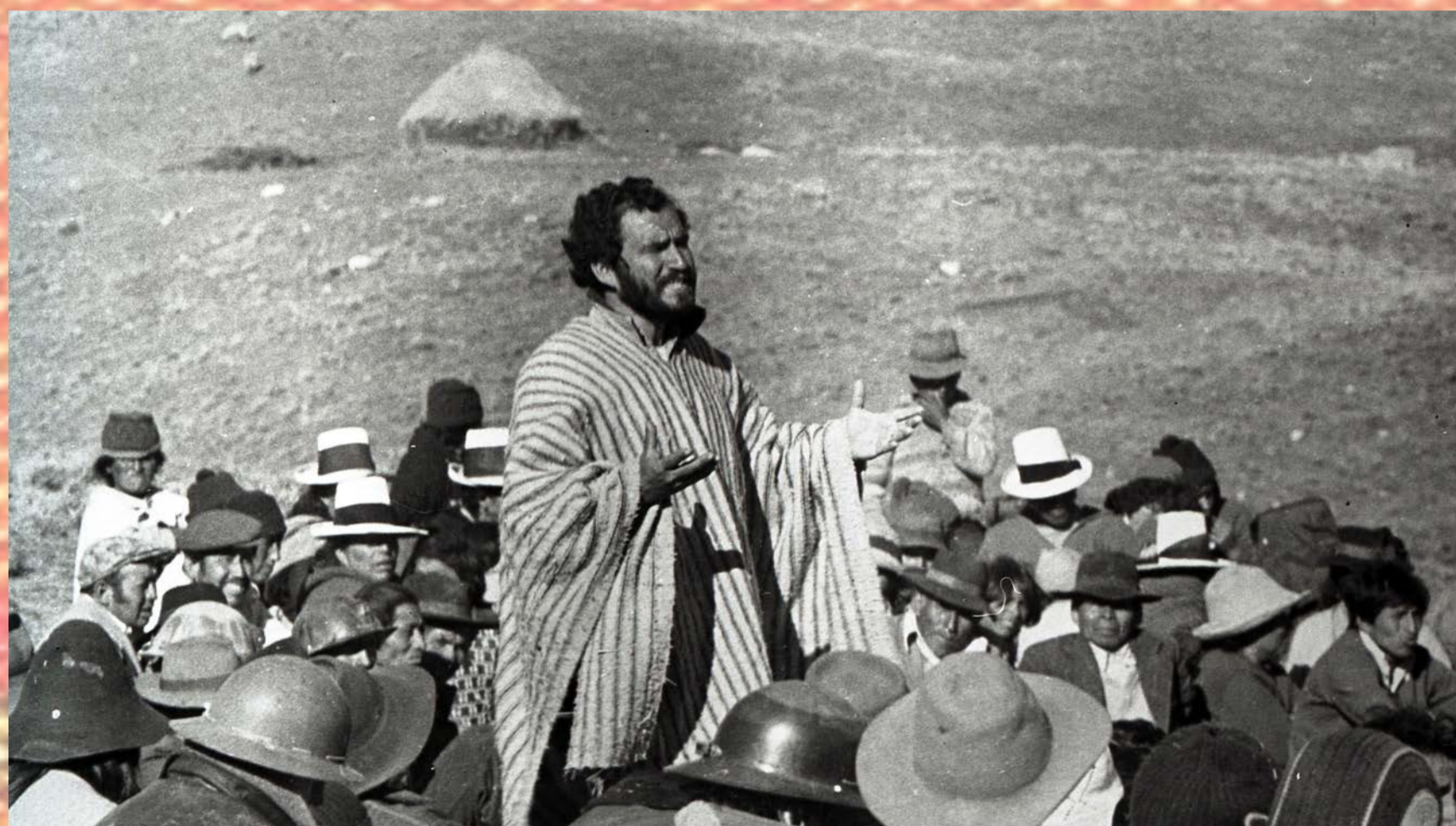
PRIESTS, 'INDIOS' AND THE NEW MISSION TO THE ANDES

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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Using a comparative and transnational perspective, this research project investigates the Catholic Church and its role in the development of peasant and indigenous movements in Ecuador and Peru from the 1960s to the 1980s. It analyzes the reforms of pastoral discourses and practices in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) and the Latin American Bishop's Conference in Medellín (1968) that came to be known as a new theological current in the 1970s – liberation theology.

Based on archival research and oral history, the project focuses on the interaction of ecclesiastical and secular actors in two case studies, the province of Chimborazo (Ecuador) and the department of Puno (Peru).



WHAT IS LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

A theological current within the Latin American Church that forged a reorientation of the Church towards the 'poor' as the central subject of pastoral concern (most prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s). This so-called 'preferential option for the poor' was based on a Marxist analysis of the socio-economic milieu of the continent. Liberation theology addressed persistent states of social, economic and cultural oppression and marginalization, and thus had a particularly strong influence on pastoral work in informal settlements, rural regions and among ethnic minorities.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How did the Catholic Church in Puno and Chimborazo adapt its pastoral discourse and practice in the context of global and continental ecclesiastical reform?
- To what extent did the clergy reconsider its approach towards the 'other', the indigenous peasant, and how did this approach challenge prevalent paradigms of 'development', 'modernity' and 'indigenismo'?
- How did religious actors contribute to the (trans)formation of social movements in the rural Andes of Peru and Ecuador? How did this ecclesiastical activism resonate among social and political actors, particularly with regards to their discursive construction of collective identities based on class or ethnicity?



PROJECT ECUADOR: CHIMBORAZO

In 1990, when mass protests paralyzed the country, the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement became known internationally as a political player, seeking rights of self-determination and cultural expression. But how, why and when did ethnicity become the core of their struggle? The Chimborazo case study argues that religious and lay actors had a significant impact on the constitution of the indigenous movement. Working in rural areas on a mission to establish a proper 'Indigenous Church', religious activists actively promoted ethnicity as a political resource. Considering power relations and contentious ideologies, the project analyzes the entanglements among actors operating at a domestic, regional and local level.



PROJECT PERU: PUNO

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the "progressive and dynamic" Church in Puno contributed to creating "a new feeling of belonging [to the Church] among thousands of peasants" and defended their organizations against incursions of *Sendero Luminoso* (CVR 2003). But to what extent did the Church seek to forge this 'feeling of belonging' and how, in turn, did its discursive construction of the (Christian) 'peasant' promote membership and militancy within the Church? This project argues that the rural population of Puno was subjugated to, and involved in, processes of 'liberation' that fueled their continuous struggle over land distribution and 'Andean identity' during both agrarian reform and internal conflict (1969 – 1986).

