

The intersection of politics and religion in 20th century Southwestern Colombia.

La intersección de la política y la religión en el suroeste de Colombia en el siglo XX.

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Recibido el 5 de septiembre del 2010.

Aceptado el 5 de octubre del 2010.

Abstract:

Historians have discussed and debated the many reasons for the Colombian Catholic church's decline. National trends such as the growing secularization of society, emergence of Protestantism, and the decline of the Conservative Party have all been cited as contributing to the weakening of the Catholic Church's importance. This article examines the evolution of the Catholic Church in the department of Cauca during the twentieth century. It focuses specifically on the changes in the relationship between the Catholic Church and indigenous people.

Key words: Catholic Church - indigenous people - Cauca

Resumen;

Los historiadores han discutido y debatido las distintas razones del declive de la Iglesia colombiana. Las tendencias nacionales, tales como la creciente secularización de la sociedad, la aparición del protestantismo, y el declive del Partido Conservador han contribuido al debilitamiento de la Iglesia Católica en ese país. Este artículo examina la evolución de la Iglesia Católica en el departamento del Cauca durante el siglo XX. Se centra específicamente en los cambios en la relación entre la Iglesia Católica y los pueblos indígenas.

Palabras claves: Iglesia Católica – pueblos indígenas - Cauca.

Introduction

Once Colombia achieved its independence from Spain, conflict emerged along partisan lines. Liberals and Conservatives fought over the control of the local and central governments in a series of civil wars throughout the nineteenth century. Most historians agree that what sharply differentiated the Conservative elite from its Liberal counterpart was its position vis a vis the Catholic Church. Conservatives wanted the Catholic Church to continue to play a key role in terms of education and government whereas the Liberals sought separation between church and state. The arrival of the twentieth century did not bring an end to partisan conflict; the war of a Thousand Days pitted Conservatives against Liberals and indirectly resulted in the loss of Panama. The last and most serious conflagration between the Liberals and Conservatives took place during *La Violencia*'s first phase, a period from 1947 to 1953 when approximately 200,000 people died. This period of conflict ended with the establishment of the "National Front" in 1958 when the Conservative and Liberal parties agreed to a power sharing agreement. Given the enduring power of the Conservative/Liberal divide in Colombia (in contrast to other Latin American countries) and the pivotal role of the Catholic Church in this divide, it is surprising how little has been written in English about the Catholic Church in twentieth century Colombia.²

Fortunately, a substantial literature exists in Spanish and new scholarly work has begun to focus specifically on the transformation of the Colombian Catholic Church in the 20th century and its political ramifications. Historians such as Fernán E Gonzalez, Michael J. LaRosa, and Ricardo Arias have written books that shed innovative light on the Colombian Catholic Church. All three authors focus from different angles on the national scene and on the evolution of the Catholic Church over a long period of time. I will discuss LaRosa and Arias's books since both focus largely on the twentieth century whereas Gonzalez's work encompasses a longer period.

Ricardo Arias argues that the clash between the Catholic world view and its secular counterpart was intense and profound in the latter part of the nineteenth century until 1960 when the Catholic Church began to accept many of the values of the Liberal and secular world (Arias 2003: 369). According to Arias, it was only in the 1980s that the Catholic Church changed profoundly (2003). In contrast, LaRosa argues that the Catholic Church was not the intransigent and inflexible actor in the 1930s and 1940s (as it is often portrayed).³ Indeed, LaRosa seeks to show that the Catholic Church was not wedded to its conservative dogma and could be flexible and pragmatic. He states that this flexibility is apparent when the Catholic Church founded FANAL (Federación Agraria Nacional) and UTC (Unión de Trabajadores Colombianos) in 1946 (La Rosa 2000: 28). Arias strongly disagrees with LaRosa's conclusions because he asserts that the founding of organizations for workers and peasants did not signify that the Catholic Church was open to Liberal or progressive positions, and that as La Rosa points out, these organizations failed because of their paternalistic and rigid structures (Arias 2003). At the heart of the debate between Arias and LaRosa is the issue of periodization and causes in terms of understanding the evolution of the Catholic Church in Colombia. Both scholars agree that the Catholic Church today is an institution that has changed considerably and that currently plays an important role in terms of advocating for peace and human rights. In other words, the days when the Colombian Catholic Church identified closely with the Conservative Party and its aims have ended. For LaRosa, the progressive Catholic Church of today has its roots in the Catholic Church that

founded FANAL and UTC, and in the teachings and practices of Catholic bishops such as Bishop Valencia Cano. For LaRosa, the Colombian Catholic bishops' rejection of the 1968 Medellín Conference agenda was due to the desire to move away from the politicization of religion due to the terrible consequences of politicization during *La Violencia*.

In contrast for Arias, this position signaled the enduring intransigence of the Colombian Catholic hierarchy. Whereas LaRosa sees the emergence of radical priests such as Camilo Torres and of radical versions of Liberation Theology through the founding of Golconda, as indicative of sweeping and permanent change within the structures of the Catholic Church, Arias characterizes the emergence of radical Catholicism as an isolated phenomenon that was limited to a small number of priests such as Camilo Torres (Arias 2003). Arias and LaRosa also disagree in their interpretation of the National Front governments' relationships with the Catholic Church. Arias sees the National Front governments as accepting the Catholic Church's preeminent position whereas LaRosa asserts that the National Front debilitated the Catholic Church as a political institution since the Conservative and Liberal parties had come to an agreement to alternate being in power without needing the intervention of the Catholic Church (LaRosa 179). Arias attributes the change within the Catholic Church as due to larger societal trends such as urbanization, changing roles of women, and the emergence of other Christian religions (Arias 2003).

The aim of this essay is to provide a window into how "religion" intersected with politics in the Southwestern part of Colombia, specifically the department of Cauca, in the twentieth century. This is by no means a comprehensive look at all aspects of religion in the department of Cauca, but rather an attempt to begin to answer some of the larger questions posed by the latest research on religion on a regional level. This essay argues that the Liberal National Front governments altered and fundamentally changed the relationship between the Catholic Church and indigenous people. During this period, the Liberals successfully characterized the Catholic Church and its missionaries as impediments to the progress and modernization of Colombia. This discourse placed the Catholic Church on the defensive and ultimately led to changes within the Catholic Church with the ordaining of an indigenous priest and the search for a more culturally sensitive process of evangelization in the 1980s. The Catholic Church fought against communal landownership in the first half of the twentieth century and sought the cultural "modernization" of indigenous groups by forcing them to Hispanicize. The Catholic Church that represented itself an instrument of modernity and "civilization" ended up being portrayed as an antiquated and colonial institution. This change in discourse and loss of cultural legitimacy had real political consequences.

The department of Cauca

The Cauca department's capital, Popayán, is renowned for its many beautiful colonial churches and its spectacular Semana Santa (Holy Week). The religiosity of this department is notorious in Colombia. In other words, both Popayán and the Cauca department are symbols of the Spanish and Catholic heritage of Colombia. Cauca is also home to a large indigenous population. Although there are 81 indigenous groups in Colombia, only two departments in Colombia have a sizeable concentration of indigenous people. The Cauca department, along with the Guajira department, has the highest concentration of indigenous people in Colombia.⁴ The specific indigenous groups that live in the Cauca are the Nasa, Guambianos, Totoros, Yanaconas, Guanacas, and Pijaos Indians. The 1997 DANE (National Administrative Department of Statistics) census estimated that there were 100,000 Nasas and 35,952 Guambianos, Totoros,

Yanaconas, Guanacas, and Pijaos.⁵ All together these indigenous groups represent 22, 9% of the population of the Cauca department.⁶ In addition, its indigenous communities played a pivotal role in the national indigenous political movement.⁷ The oldest and strongest “grassroots” indigenous organization, Consejo Regional Indigena del Cauca/ Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, CRIC emerged from the Cauca. During the 1970s and 1980s, the CRIC coordinated an impressive number of land recoveries. In the year 2000 the department of Cauca elected a Guambiano Indian, Floro Tunubala, as governor. It was the first time in Colombia that a self-identified Indian was elected as governor and in a department that had until recently prided itself on its quintessential Spanish colonial town, Popayán.

Any discussion of indigenous people and religion in Colombia must take into account the recent political success of the indigenous movement. In the Constitution of 1991, the indigenous people of Colombia obtained twenty-five percent of the national territory, judicial autonomy, and funds for the local councils of resguardos. This was a remarkable political feat considering that Colombia’s indigenous peoples (in 1991) represented only 1.7 percent of a total population of forty million.⁸ This political success has been marred by an increasing number of human rights violations carried out against the indigenous communities since 2002. Under President Uribe’s government the security situation of indigenous communities has worsened. In a Reuters article, Anastasia Moloney wrote in February of 2010, “Although indigenous groups make up only around 3.4 percent of Colombia's population, they account for seven percent of the country's total displaced population, the United Nations says. It is estimated that roughly 20,000 indigenous people were uprooted in Colombia last year.” (www.alertnet.org/db/an_art/59877/2010/01/23-160800-1.htm) While indigenous people bear disproportionately the brunt of violence in Colombia, the legitimacy of their land and cultural claims is firmly established.

The vast majority of the territory that belongs to Colombian indigenous communities is held collectively: 80 percent of the indigenous population owns 408 resguardos with a total extension of 27, 621, 257 hectares.⁹ During the colonial era, the Spanish crown created the first resguardos in response to the rapidly diminishing indigenous population.¹⁰ These resguardos were collective land grants given to a designated group of indigenous people. The land of the resguardo was inalienable and could not be sold or rented to non-indigenous people. The indigenous council allotted land plots within the resguardo to each indigenous family. During the Republican era, new resguardos were formed but the majority of the resguardos were liquidated especially in the central areas of Colombia. During the 1970s and 1980s, the indigenous movement in Colombia recovered the land of resguardos arguing that the lands of resguardos could not be legally alienated and that they therefore should be returned to the indigenous communities. Indigenous, mestizos, African-Colombian rural folk carried out the recovery of the resguardos with sit-ins and legal suits. Sympathetic lawyers, students, and activists accompanied the indigenous people. It is important to note that in 1970s and 80s the indigenous movement appealed to broad sectors of the Colombian society. Religion on the ground: Cauca in the 1940s

As a matter of fact, attendance this year was smaller than usual; only about 200 Indians came to the services. The Guambia blamed this on their potato crop, saying that they couldn’t afford the necessary offerings. It seems more likely that they are simply getting tired of Catholicism because it is so expensive. Perhaps they will turn to the Protestants, who are much cheaper. Perhaps they will go back for a time to their own cults, and later develop into orthodox Marxian atheists.¹¹

Christopher Isherwood¹², who was traveling through the department of the Cauca, Colombia in 1947, outlines, albeit in a flippant manner, many of the religious changes that some indigenous communities of Colombia underwent throughout the twentieth century. Despite the cavalier nature of his analysis, Isherwood was a perceptive and shrewd observer in his prediction that indigenous communities would switch and change their religious and political affiliations. Throughout the twentieth century the Colombian indigenous communities participated in and witnessed the expansion of the Protestant Church and the transformation of the Catholic Church. Indeed, indigenous communities of the Cauca such as the Guambianos and the Nasas converted to Protestantism in large numbers as Rappaport and Gros have documented.¹³ Other indigenous individuals turned to Marxist ideology. As Rappaport and Gros have shown, the conversion to Protestantism did not necessarily preclude a simultaneous affiliation with an organization that espoused a class discourse and/or ethnic agenda. In recent years, the indigenous communities of the Cauca have turned to beliefs grounded in their traditional culture that Isherwood qualified as “cults” from his 1940s point of view.¹⁴

Isherwood traveled to Cauca in 1947 and attended a Catholic mass in the town of Silvia. As noted previously, Christopher Isherwood’s travel diary sheds some light on the dynamics of religion and politics in the Cauca for indigenous communities. The other available source to understand the relationship between indigenous people and the Catholic Church are John Rowe’s field notes taken during his stay in the department of the Cauca on a Smithsonian expedition in 1947.¹⁵ John Rowe is an American archeologist renowned for his work on the Incas in Peru, but he also worked for a few years in Southwestern Colombia.

A few notes here and there from John Rowe’s notebook leads us to understand that the Catholic Church in general was often a burden on indigenous communities in the 1940s. The council of Pueblito is depicted as having the missionaries come in their area whenever people had money to marry. Apparently the missionaries charged less for the sacrament of marriage than the church officials in Silvia. The other interesting information is that the local Catholic father, Padre Vivas, had an agent who was the intermediary between the Church and the indigenous community. His agent, Jose Maria Ulchur, was from Caloto and his mother tongue was Guambiano. He also spoke Spanish and Paez since he had lived in Tierradentro for a year and a half. Jose Maria Ulchur collected the money that was owed to the Catholic priest and that the Church charged for the rental of its land. From Rowe’s field notes it is not clear which land or what these revenues were based on, but what is evident is that the Church is receiving money from indigenous people. Jose Maria Ulchur explained to Rowe that he was a captain/ capitán a key figure for the indigenous council. After the process of organization of the 1970s and today, the indigenous members of resguardos elect their representatives. However, there was a long tradition of certain families who “inherited” electoral posts; and Jose Maria Ulchur explained to Rowe that he had obtained his position because his father had also been a captain. Jose Maria Ulchur also stressed his opposition to the breakup of the resguardo and pointed out to the example of Caldono where he stated that “indigenous people now live like slaves.” The Catholic Church was antagonistic to the resguardos and in the Cauca campaigned actively for their removal.¹⁶

However, John Rowe and Christopher Isherwood noted the endurance and vibrancy of indigenous beliefs that overlapped with Catholic ceremonies. Isherwood described the All Souls festival:

Each women brings with her a little fiber bag containing bread, onions, and potatoes. They arrange these on the floor of the church and sit down around them

in large circles, chatting and smiling, as though a meal was being prepared. On the piles of the food they set lighted candles, one for each member of the family who has died within the past ten years. Meanwhile the men crowd around the priest, waiting to pay for requiem masses and prayers. As each payment is made, the donor's name is called and a bell is rung.¹⁷

John Rowe discussed how an indigenous woman, Maria Santos, explained to him how she brought five fiber bags to represent the dead of the past ten years. In the field notes and in Isherwood's travel diary, which described a mass that was conducted in Silvia, a certain degree of incomprehension and miscommunication was apparent between the priest and the Guambiano women. The priest, Padre Vivas, who spoke in Spanish, tried to give instructions to the Guambiano women about covering their heads and sitting down at the appropriate time. Through Rowe and Isherwood's description, it is apparent that the priests and the Catholic Church in general relied on indigenous intermediaries who were often figures of authority in their community who could translate their commands to the indigenous communities.

According to another anthropologist, Rogerio Velasquez, who also took field notes for the Smithsonian expedition, the priest kept the fiber bags with the food inside and no one knew exactly what happened to them. In addition to fiber bags, the priest received an assigned collection. The Catholic Church was often a burden on indigenous communities because of its insistence on fees, "donations", and "volunteer" work.

The Protestant Church

It was only in 1856 that the Protestant Church entered Colombia with the Presbyterian Church.¹⁸ The Presbyterian Church was only present in Bogotá and Barranquilla and thus was not really a factor for indigenous communities in this early period. According to James Goff, the Colombian Protestant Church saw a period of some growth under the Conservative governments between 1910 and 1930 and it grew even faster between 1930 and 1948 under the Liberal governments.¹⁹ The Evangelical Confederation estimated that there were 7,908 Protestants in 1948 and 11, 958 in 1953.²⁰ The non-traditional Protestant churches saw their representation increase.²¹ The second trend that accompanied the growth of the non-traditional Protestant Churches was the growing importance of reading the Bible and of personal conversion.²²

In the department of Cauca, it was the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church that was present from 1929.²³ From Rowe's field notes we learn that Frederick Smith, the Canadian missionary, was especially successful in his conversion efforts with the Guambiano community. It appears based on these field notes that Frederick Smith had settled down in Silvia, which is a small town outside of Popayán. Rowe mentions several indigenous Protestant pastors in his field notes. One distinctive feature of Protestantism compared to the Catholic religion was the training and acceptance of indigenous pastors. Whereas the Catholic Church had to wait until the 1980s to ordain an indigenous priest of the area, the Protestants were ordaining indigenous pastors in the Cauca from the 1940s. As other scholars have remarked, the possibility of becoming a leader and full participant in the Protestant Church appealed to the indigenous communities.²⁴

John Rowe also visited a protestant congregation in Puente Real, Cauca in 1947. He stated that the church had organized itself in May of 1946. It had a council of five members that governed the congregation: secretary, treasurer, two deacons and one last member who were in charge of overseeing the spiritual and social progress of the Church. The first baptisms took place in 1945. There were only 32 baptized at the time that John Rowe was present in Puente Real. However the number of adeptos/faithful was much larger, some 150-200 came to Church

meetings. The baptism took place only once the member was 13 or 14 years old. The idea was that the person had to understand the meaning of this baptism. The other important condition for baptism was to abandon all “vices”: drinking, smoking, and dances. John Rowe mentions Feliciano Tenebriel, an indigenous man, who had not been baptized because of his debts.

As James Goff has pointed out, to assess the impact of Protestantism only by the number of baptized would be misleading. Protestant congregations were often much larger than the actual number of baptized as was the case in Puente Real. To give up drinking, smoking, and dances would have been extremely difficult in a society and culture where drinking was so prevalent at any type of celebration. This was true for larger Colombian rural society but also for indigenous communities.

According to the ethnographers of the Smithsonian Institution, in order to ensure that the money that members of the Congregation gave was not stolen, the treasurer would turn over the collections amount as soon as it reached 200 pesos, and F. Smith would then deposit the money in a bank in Popayán. The other safeguard in place was that the treasurer would count the money collected in the presence of the assistant treasurer and the secretary. This manner of accounting for collections was in clear contrast with the Catholic Church where the information about the amount and destination of the collections was never shared with the faithful of the Church. The other distinctive feature of this Protestant church in contrast to the local Catholic Church was that all the baptized in the congregation had a vote even women. Women were generally excluded from the political process in indigenous communities; only men could vote and be voted in to be members of the indigenous council in the 1940s. It was only in the 1970s that women started to play a more active role in the organization of indigenous communities and even then their participation was limited. The development of bilingual education in the 1990s enabled indigenous women to gain political access as they were seen as the best guardians of indigenous cultures.

The period of growth of Protestantism in the Cauca and in Colombia at large was momentarily stalled during *La Violencia* when Protestant Churches and their members were repressed by the police force. James Goff narrates how the Colombian police was forced to attend religion classes where students were taught that Protestants were agents of communism.²⁵ Interestingly the equation of subversives with Protestants was manifest in the area of Tierradentro, a sub-region of the Cauca.²⁶ The following quote cited by Goff illustrates this point:

The whole country knows, through the reports of the Chancellery, about the union of Protestants pastors with bandits in the Llanos. Less well known is the fact that in the insurrection of the Indians of Tierradentro in January, 1950, the pastors took such an active part that when the army had to enter into action against the resistance of the rebels, one pastor was killed in the shooting, another taken prisoner, and two escaped by fleeing.²⁷

As Rappaport and Gros have shown, Protestantism was seen as an alternative to the Catholic Church’s political and economic domination of the region.²⁸ In the case of Tierradentro, the missionaries tried to implement a second colonization of the area at the turn of the 20th century and it is logical that the Protestants would have seemed like a viable counterbalance to the Catholic missionaries.

Protestantism entered a new phase when the Summer Language of Institute was invited to come to work in Colombia. Gregorio Hernandez de Alba, the director of the newly established Division of Indigenous Affairs, perceived the Summer Institute of Languages/ Wycliffe Bible

Church as a possible ally against the Catholic missionaries, (who from the Hernandez de Alba's perspective seemed to dominate the indigenous people of Colombia).²⁹ The summer Institute of Languages started its work in the early 1960s. However, the growing organization of the CRIC rejected this institute and its work. The official newspaper of the CRIC, *Unidad Indígena*, characterized the ILV as a tool of the CIA and of American Imperialism.

Catholic Church and the state:

In addition to playing a significant role in the political system, prior to the 1960s, the Colombian state saw the Catholic Church as the perfect tool for nation building and as a way to include "the other" into the nation. The Catholic Church through its missionaries was supposed to "civilize" the indigenous communities that were portrayed as backwards and as living in isolated areas. Ironically, this approach to nation building in Colombia intensified in the twentieth century when other Latin American states had abandoned their close alliance with the Catholic Church. The first important agreement that enshrined the rights of the Catholic Church was the concordat of 1887.³⁰ The Catholic Church was supposed to be the guarantor of social order.³¹ In addition, with law 89 of 1890 the Catholic Church was given an important role in the mission of "civilizing" the indigenous people of Colombia. Although Law 89 of 1890 was an effective legal tool in the 1970s in aiding indigenous communities to recover the land of their *resguardos*, the general tone of this law was paternalistic and racist. It stated that Colombian general law would not apply to *salvajes*/[savages] who were on their way to civilization. The protection that law 89 of 1890 gave was based on the notion that indigenous people who lived on *resguardos* were not "civilized." The measure was conceived as temporary since the belief was that eventually indigenous people would achieve "civilization" and would no longer need the protection of their *resguardos*.

Law 89 of 1890 also meant that certain designated areas of the Colombian territory were turned over to religious missions who essentially governed the indigenous tribes and the area they occupied or were assigned to. The nation state effectively handed over its authority to the Catholic Church and gave legal, political, and judicial power to the missions in various agreements between the Vatican and the Colombian government.

The areas where missionaries took over were generally designated as national territories because these geographic entities were not yet part of the national administrative structure and were often inhabited by indigenous peoples and/or Afro-Colombians. These treaties between the Vatican and the Colombian state did not require the Colombian Congress's approval and were decreed.³² Law 72 of 1892 cemented the missionaries' power to decide how indigenous societies should be governed.³³ A treaty that was signed in 1903 established that the missionaries would evangelize and "civilize" the various indigenous groups that were dispersed in Chocó, Caqueta, Darien, the Llanos, Antioquia, Tierradentro and Pamplona.³⁴ An additional 1928 agreement between the Vatican and the Colombian state was signed when border conflicts with neighboring nations had emerged and a push for occupying the frontier zones with missionaries was made. The rationale for sending missionaries to these border areas was that the missionaries would be the pioneers in these inhospitable zones and in turn, would encourage Colombian hispanicized settlers to come to these areas. Peruvians and other possible invaders would also thereby be discouraged from making land claims in the Colombian territory.

Ironically, many of the missionaries who were sent on this nationalizing mission were foreigners so that they were not exactly effective agents of Colombian nationalism.³⁵ The agreements of 1903 and 1928 mentioned above also placed the Catholic missionaries in charge of

public schools for boys. Forced attendance at these Catholic schools, often boarding schools, was one of the preferred methods for the Catholic missionaries to “civilize.” A third treaty between the Vatican and the Colombian state was signed as late as 1953.³⁶ Seven apostolic prefectures and 11 vicariates that covered an area of 861.000 square kilometers were established.³⁷ As late as the 1960s, the Catholic missions controlled almost sixty percent of the national territory of Colombia. The Catholic’s church power was nowhere more evident than in its control of education in the national territories. The head of the mission territories was in charge of making sure that all educational establishments were run in accordance to Catholic beliefs and ethics.³⁸ In addition, the nomination of civil employees in these areas had to take into account the missions’ point of view.³⁹

Thus the Catholic Church replaced the state in areas where the national government was largely absent. In the case of some isolated regions, the Catholic Church purported to protect the indigenous people from the exploitation of the local white or mestizo settlers. For instance, in 40 days in Vaupes, Monsignor Angel Builes stated that the missionaries of the Vaupes were supposed to protect the indigenous people from the abuses of the “white men.”⁴⁰ However as the rest of the enumeration of articles of the decree 614 made clear, cited by Builes, the missionaries did not perceive the meting out of corporal punishment of indigenous people as contradictory with their role as protectors.

Undermining the cultural legitimacy of the Catholic Church:

The hegemony of the Catholic Church over these national territories ended in the early 1970s. The discourse of anthropologists in the late 1960s propelled a crucial shift in discourse about indigenous people in Colombia and forced the Catholic missions to radically change their mission. The development of the discipline of anthropology in Colombia signified that anthropologists began to visit various areas of the country and wrote about their fieldwork and their “discovery” of remaining indigenous groups. Along with the proliferation of these studies, came a series of articles about the exploitation of indigenous peoples written by lawyers and anthropologists in leading newspapers of the country. The publication of these studies and newspaper articles in the 1960s and 1970s raised consciousness amongst the public at large that there were still “Indians” in Colombia and that indigenous cultures were valuable. This discourse also identified the anthropologist as the appropriate/modern mediator between the national state and the indigenous communities, especially in the national territories. The ideological battle between the Catholic Church and anthropologists about who was the best “representative” of indigenous people was evident in the various controversies that erupted between anthropologists and missionaries. Victor Daniel Bonilla’s Siervos de Dios, Amos de Indios published in 1968 and Juan Friede’s La explotacion indigena en Colombia bajo el Gobierno de las misiones. El caso de los Arhuacos de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta were part of this series of writings that challenged the supremacy of the Catholic church in Colombia and its role as “protector” and “mediator” for the indigenous peoples who lived in the national territories. Juan Friede argued that it was absurd to turn over indigenous communities to the direction of Catholic missionaries, especially when these indigenous communities were often fully integrated into Colombian society. Victor Daniel Bonilla maintained that it was unpatriotic to turn over large amounts of Colombian territory and its indigenous inhabitants to religious orders since these missions often had foreign members who were abusive; thus the nation state was entrusting Colombian indigenous people to foreigners who exploited them. Both Bonilla and Friede saw the emergence

of the secular national state as a positive change. In Bonilla's book, which denounced the missionaries' treatment of indigenous people, the Division of Indigenous Affairs/DAI was portrayed favorably. The DAI began its work in the area of Putumayo, a national territory, in 1960 and distributed seeds, tools, and fertilizers to the indigenous peasants.⁴¹ The missionaries opposed these measures because they were not in charge of distributing the tools, seeds, and fertilizers, which meant that their control over the indigenous population was being undermined. The other important measure enacted by the DAI was to eliminate the salaries of the members of the cabildo/indigenous council who were nominated by the missionaries since the beginning of the twentieth century. In an effort to return power to the indigenous community and to foment local agency, the DAI encouraged the indigenous communities to elect their representatives.⁴²

The grassroots organization of the CRIC was also openly hostile to the Catholic missionaries. Several articles against the presence of Catholic missionaries in indigenous areas appeared in the newspaper, *Unidad Indígena*, the official newspaper of the CRIC. The quote below is exemplary of this discourse:

But forty or forty five years ago, the Javerianos Missionaries arrived. And They came with the same stories as the others. We did not believe in them either and we did what our people did before, we told them to leave. But they stayed anyway, they stayed because of their authority, telling us that they came from the Government to civilize us, so that we could go to heaven. Once and again we told them to leave but they stayed. It was then that they started to use force to make us obey. They forbade our celebrations.... Then they founded the boarding school here amongst us on our land. And more priests and nuns came. Ant they started to come with the police to our homes and took our children of a few years. They took them away so they would not live with their mother or father. So they would forget our maternal language. So they would forget our customs. And it was then that the priests started to establish farms with the labor of our boys and girls, our youth, that they had imprisoned in the boarding school.⁴³

Some missionaries tried to argue that those who opposed them were communist, but they failed to gain the necessary support. In the period of the late sixties and early seventies, there was a sense that only a few "Indians" remained in Colombia and that it would be a genocide to allow the limited number of indigenous groups to disappear. From the 1970s on the Catholic missions adopted a position that respected indigenous cultures and imitated the anthropologists.

The Catholic Church and its missions ran counter to any agenda of recovery of identity or of indigenous culture until the anthropologists and the indigenous movement changed the prevailing view that indigenous culture was without value. The very purpose of their presence was to "hispanicize" and "civilize" the indigenous communities. However, in a bizarre and ironic way, the fact that these missions and the Catholic Church seemed stuck in a colonial discourse because of their insistence on transforming the Indians into hispanicized Colombian citizens legitimated the opposing discourse that the anthropologists and the Liberal state held in favor of the preservation and development of indigenous culture. In other words, the discourse that was racist and that disdained indigenous culture was also seen as antiquated because of its association with the Catholic Church, a colonial institution par excellence.

The impact of radical Catholicism/Liberation Theology

Some members of the Catholic clergy, however, played a role in the organization of indigenous communities in the early 1970s because of the emergence of radical Catholicism. As mentioned before, the CRIC is the most powerful and oldest indigenous organization in Colombia. The CRIC first emerged from FRESAGRO (Social and Agrarian Federation) organized by Gustavo Mejia and Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez. Although both of these men were later assassinated, they played an initially important role in the organization of the indigenous movement. Both men were committed to agrarian issues and to organizing both black and indigenous communities. FRESAGRO emerged in the context of the Agrarian Reform. The key components of the agrarian reform were the creation of a national association of peasants, ANUC and law number 135 of 1961, which determined that any unproductive land (not being cultivated) could be confiscated by the national government and redistributed. The objectives of the agrarian reform were to eliminate unproductive latifundios, to distribute land democratically, and to foment a middle class peasantry. When the national government decreed Law 135 of 1961, land issues were particularly important in the Cauca. Many rural areas of Colombia, including the Cauca, were in a state of political effervescence. FRESAGRO was a grassroots organization that hoped to take advantage of the political opening created by Law 135 of 1961. This was an organization that was indirectly influenced by Liberation Theology. Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez did not initially direct his grassroots organizing towards indigenous people exclusively. He was interested in advocating for the poor of the North of the Cauca, a region, which is predominantly Afro-Colombian. The official newspaper of the CRIC, Unidad Indígena/Indigenous Unity tells us that Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez was born in 1930 in Taminango, Nariño in a peasant family.⁴⁴

Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez had established a close friendship with Camilo Torres at the Javeriana University of Bogotá while finishing up his university studies.⁴⁵ Camilo Torres was a priest who combined Catholicism and the “Revolution” in a particularly radical manner when he became a guerrilla fighter and abandoned the priesthood. Before reaching such a momentous decision, Camilo Torres attended the Université de Louvain in Belgium, an institution, which played a crucial role in the ideological development of radical Christianity. Camilo Torres is considered to be a precursor of Liberation Theology because of his critique of the Catholic Church from within.⁴⁶ The other precursor that Levine notes is the Golconda movement, which he describes as a loosely defined group of clergy that did little more than write documents that were sympathetic to Marxism and radical Christianity.⁴⁷ However, some members of the Golconda movement were involved in the clandestine organization of revolutionary groups, and were responsible for acquiring weapons and funds.⁴⁸ As Levine has shown, the Colombian Catholic Church on the whole was very conservative and resistant to Liberation Theology especially in contrast to countries such as Brazil where the Catholic clergy encouraged the formation of base communities.⁴⁹ However, some priests such as Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez were linked to the Liberation Theology movement and radical Catholicism because of their ideological and personal affinities with Camilo Torres.

From the early 1960s Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez organized and advocated for the poor of the department of the Cauca. It was in the north of the Cauca, in the town of Corinto, that he established alliances with members of grassroots organizations.⁵⁰ He was actively involved in the acquisition of land for peasants through sit-ins of large haciendas.⁵¹ His commitment to the poor in the north of the Cauca ended only when he was assassinated in August of 1974.

The appeal to all the poor and oppressed and the initial emphasis on class identity in the early stages of the CRIC was due in part to the strong appeal of radical Christianity. An early

organizer of the indigenous peoples and co-founder of the CRIC, Pablo Tattay, also illustrates the impact of radical Christianity in the indigenous movement. While studying at the University of Antioquia, he joined radical Christian groups.⁵² He then traveled to the University of Louvain (renowned for its radical teachings and advocacy of Liberation Theology) where he decided that he really wanted to do was to bring about the revolution not study about it.⁵³ Pablo Tattay arrived to the department of Cauca in September of 1969 with the intent to organize the poor and to help bring about political change. He met up with Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez and had an immediate affinity with him because of their shared belief in radical Christianity. With Father Pedro Leon Rodriguez, he helped to organize land invasions in urban neighborhoods and became a part of FRESAGRO.

Radical Catholicism created an alliance between some middle class students, priests, and poor rural folk. While there were a variety of leftist movements and incipient guerrilla groups that were active in the 1970s, the initial advisors and organizers of the indigenous movement were distinct in their commitment to building alliances with various groups. This openness contrasted with the closed mentality of some Colombian leftist parties or guerrilla groups of the 1970s. More research is needed to understand the impact of the Liberation Theology in the Cauca and in Colombia at large. The ideology of Liberation Theology led to a commitment to the poor and oppressed, which in the case of the indigenous communities of the Cauca helped establish an alliance between non-indigenous activists and indigenous people.

In conclusion, the Catholic Church's political and cultural power in the Cauca department declined significantly in the second half of the twentieth century. Prior to the 1960s, the Catholic Church held not only enormous spiritual and cultural "capital" in Southwestern Colombia, but it was also an institution that (through its churches and missions) wielded tremendous political authority particularly over indigenous communities. The Catholic missionaries in designated "national territories" obliged indigenous people and communities to "donate" crops and labor to the Church. These religious orders also weakened indigenous political authority within the *resguardos* with their intrusion into the electoral process of indigenous councils. The arrival of Protestantism, the violent partisan conflict between Liberals and Conservatives, and the changing mores of society all contributed to eventually undermining the Catholic Church's authority. However, in the case of the Cauca, the portrayal of the Catholic Church and of its missionaries as not "modern" also diminished the Catholic Church's power. During the 1960s the anthropologist emerges as the ideal "protector" and "mediator" between indigenous people and the state. The Liberal governments of the National Front encouraged this trend by making anthropologists the privileged interlocutors in a dialogue between the national state and indigenous communities. While the Catholic Church subsequently adopted many of the anthropologists' practices, it never recovered its place of cultural, economic, and political preeminence. Thus, the intersection of politics and religion in the Cauca undermined the Catholic Church's institutional power.

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Nota

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² A notable exception is David H. Levine who has written extensively about religion in Colombia.

³ See Ricardo Arias' review of La Rosa's book in *Historia Crítica* No 23 (December 2003)

⁴ Raul Arango and Enrique Sanchez, *Los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia 1997: desarrollo y territorio* (Colombia: TM Editores, 1998) no page number.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Scholars have also produced a fair number of studies on the department of the Cauca and its indigenous communities especially in comparison to other departments of Colombia.

⁸ As of 2010, the estimated percentage of indigenous people in Colombia is around 3.4 percent. The percentage of indigenous people has increased significantly due to the greater number of indigenous people claiming an indigenous ethnic identity and better census techniques. President Barco during his presidency in the late eighties had already returned or granted the great majority of lands to the indigenous resguardos.

⁹ Roberto Pineda Camacho, "Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia: una aproximación a su historia, economía y sociedad" in *Tierra Profanada, grandes proyectos en territorios indígenas de Colombia* (Bogotá: Disloque editores, 1995), 13.

¹⁰ Gregorio Hernandez de Alba, "The Highland Tribes of Southern Colombia" in the *Handbook of South American Indians*/Vol. 2. Andean Civilizations, edited by Julian Steward (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing office, 1946), 926.

¹¹ Christopher Isherwood, *The Condor and the Cows, a South American travel diary* (New York: Random House, 1949), 69.

¹² Christopher Isherwood was a well-known British novelist.

¹³ Joanne Rappaport, "Las misiones protestantes y la resistencia indígena en el sur de Colombia." in *América Indígena* 44.1 (1984): 11-126. See also Christian Gros, *Políticas de la Etnicidad: Identidad, Estado y Modernidad* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e historia, 2000)

¹⁴ I will also not discuss the beliefs or religion of the famous indigenous leader, Quintin Lame. Gonzalo Castillo Cardenas and Joanne Rappaport have discussed extensively the writings of Manuel Quintin Lame. See *Liberation Theology from below. The life and thought of Manuel Quintin Lame*" and *The politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

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- ¹⁵ John Rowe, "Apuntes de la Excursion Antropologica de Septiembre de 1947", Smithsonian Institution/University of Cauca. This is an unpublished notebook of fieldnotes.
- ¹⁶ See Joanne Rappaport, The Politics of Memory: Native Historical Interpretation in the Colombian Andes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)
- ¹⁷ Isherwood, 68.
- ¹⁸ James Goff, The persecution of Protestant Christians in Colombia. 1948-1958 with an Investigation of its background and Causes. (Cuernavaca, Mexico: Centro Intercultural de Documentacion, 1968), 2/52.
- ¹⁹ Goff, 2/53
- ²⁰ Goff, 2/22
- ²¹ Goff, 2/24
- ²² Goff, 2/21
- ²³ Rappaport, 113.
- ²⁴ Rappaport and Gros
- ²⁵ Goff, 2/53
- ²⁶ Goff, 3/3
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Rappaport and Gros
- ²⁹ David Stoll, Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire? The Wycliffe Bible Translators in Latin America (London: Zed Press, 1982) 167.
- ³⁰ Myriam Jimeno and Adolfo Triana Antoverza, Estado y minorias etnicas en Colombia (Bogotá: Edicion Cuadernos Jaguar, 1985), 31.
- ³¹ Jimeno and Triana Antoverza, 31.
- ³² Alberto Pinzon Sanchez, Monopolios, misioneros y destruccion de indígenas (Bogotá: Ediciones Armadillo, 1979) 95.
- ³³ Pinzon Sanchez, 96.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ See Juan Friede's La explotación indigena en Colombia bajo el Gobierno de las Misiones- El Caso de los arhuacos de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (Bogotá: Punta de Lanza, 1973) on the Arhuacos and his funny yet sad description of indigenous people being taught to sing a German hymn in the midst of the Colombian jungle.
- ³⁶ Jimeno and Triana Antoverza, 32.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Jimeno and Triana Antoverza, 32.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Mons. Angel Builes, 40 Dias en el Vaupes, Cuarenta días en el Vaupés.- Del 14 de oct. al 25 de Novbre. de 1950 (Colombia: Talleres de la Imprenta Departamental de Antioquia, 1951), 50.
- ⁴¹ Victor Daniel Bonilla, Siervos de Dios y Amos de Indios, El Estado y La Mision Capuchina en el Putumayo (Bogotá, Colombia: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1968), 225.
- ⁴² Bonilla, 226
- ⁴³ Unidad Indigena, April 1975, Year 1, number 4, "Los Tunebo luchamos por la tierra y el respeto a nuestra gente."
- ⁴⁴ "Aniversario de la muerte del Compañero Pedro Leon Rodriguez" Unidad Indigena, Year 1, number 7, August 1975.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Daniel H. Levine, Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 82.
- ⁴⁷ Levine, 83.
- ⁴⁸ Interview with former member of the now demobilized army, Manuel Quintin Lame, in 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Daniel H. Levine, Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986)
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- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Interview with Pablo Tattay, Bogotá, November of 1999
- ⁵³ Interview with Jhon Jairo, Popayán, February of 1998.