

RELIGION AND RESISTANCE TO EXTRACTION IN RURAL PERU

Is the Catholic Church Following the People?

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Abstract: This article analyzes the Catholic Church's involvement in social conflicts resulting from resource extraction activities in Peru. The nature and degree of the Catholic Church's involvement vary greatly according to the type of conflict and the diversity of standpoints of the Church at the local level. The article focuses on three distinctive, widely known conflicts against the expansion of extractive activities. It shows that the importance conventionally given to the role of particular religious figures, their adherence to progressive ideologies, and the defense of the Church's strategic interests do not fully encompass the complexity of local processes. In contrast, the article contends that the Church's institutional embeddedness in local networks is the most influential factor in the involvement of Catholic organizations in anti-mining conflicts. Embeddedness coincides with a spirituality that prioritizes local people's agency, whereby the priests and Church organizations accompany and follow the initiatives of local communities instead of taking a leading role. This does not mean that the Church takes a passive stance in these conflicts. Priests and other pastoral agents have incorporated environmental and human rights discourses into an explicit religious framework that amplifies the social space of the Church and provides legitimacy for mobilizations. In parallel, locally generated doctrinal frameworks permeate the official discourse of the Catholic Church, reinforcing the position of those committed to the defense of local demands.

In contrast to some common interpretations, the Catholic Church's involvement in environmental protests against mining projects in Peru is not promoted and shaped by liberationist priests or the defense of the Church's institutional interests. This involvement is better understood as the result of a type of Church embeddedness in local communities marked by four main features: the participation of catechists in the *rondas campesinas*¹ and other local organizations; an approach based on a spirituality of accompaniment that emphasizes the primacy of local communities' viewpoints; the role of "social interpreters" who assist official representatives of the Church in understanding the local context; and the ability of pastoral agents to incorporate environmental and human rights discourses into religious frameworks. These four elements constitute an alternative type of bottom-up perspective for understanding the involvement of the Church in protest activities. This new understanding does justice to the agency of local com-

1. *Rondas campesinas* are traditional rural organizations set up to prevent cattle rustling. Later they started to play an important role in settling disputes among villagers and providing security for the population. Since the 1980s, in some Peruvian regions they have emerged as the main organizational structures in the countryside.

munities at the same time as it offers new insights into the mechanisms through which grassroots groups influence the behavior of official representatives of the Catholic Church.

I began my research on the relationship between religion and social conflicts accidentally. In June 2007 I went to Peru to undertake field research on mining conflicts. My first interviewee was a senior manager at a leading Peruvian mining company. He was a friendly middle-aged gentleman. I inquired about two of the most emblematic anti-mining conflicts at the time: the local struggle against the construction of an open pit mine in Majaz (department of Piura) and the famous popular resistance to mining the Cerro Quilish (department of Cajamarca). To my surprise, he expressed his view about the causes of mining conflicts very boldly: the coordinated action of old-fashioned revolutionary political forces, a group of foreign-funded leftist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and a section of the Catholic Church were to be blamed. He pinpointed four Catholic priests as especially pernicious. I was perplexed. I had personally met three of the priests he mentioned, and the manager's description did not match my perceptions. To the best of my knowledge, they were far from revolutionary or even sympathetic to radical political groups.

After that interview, I spent a few weeks visiting some of the conflict-prone Peruvian regions. I found no evidence to support the manager's claims (Arellano-Yanguas 2011a). Nevertheless, the meeting aroused my intellectual curiosity about the role of the Catholic Church, and religion more generally, in those conflicts. I have found that the Catholic Church has been involved in some of the conflicts related to the exploitation of natural resources. However, both the nature and the degree of this involvement vary greatly according to the conflict and the diversity of standpoints of the Church's representatives at the local level. Furthermore, in most cases, the Church's participation was more relevant in brokering the solution than to the outset of the dispute. The involvement of the Church has been especially relevant in the Majaz, Bagua, and Conga conflicts in the northern region of Peru. The central findings of this article are derived from the analysis of these well-known cases.

Before proceeding, I must clarify the use of key concepts such as "Church," "religion," and "spirituality." My analysis focuses primarily on the presence and behavior of local groups, organizations, and people that are publicly recognized as part of the Catholic Church (the Church). I identify the specific organizations, groups, or persons to whom I refer.² I use the term "religion" in a somewhat narrower sense than the editors of this special issue, restricting it to identify people, spaces, organizations, doctrines, symbols, and rituals commonly identified with the presence of the Church. Finally, here I understand spirituality broadly as personal ideas, beliefs, and practices regarding the relationship between the divine

2. Different Evangelical denominations are present in the communities involved in the conflicts analyzed in this paper. Historically, Peruvian Evangelical groups have avoided active participation in political dynamics, as is the case in the conflicts analyzed. Their relative institutional weakness and resultant political vulnerability explain, at least partially, that position. However, in the recent conflict in Conga (see below) Evangelical groups have begun to participate actively in the mobilizations.

and the world of everyday life, and the consequent values and behaviors deriving from them. Spirituality is frequently constructed through engagement with religious doctrines, as is the case with the Catholic people I study here, but spirituality is not strictly defined by doctrine (Bender 2010). Different spiritualities might coexist within the same religious institution, depending on personal experiences, the history of specific groups, and social and political contexts.

My analysis of the presence of the Church in social conflicts draws on field research carried out in five Peruvian mining regions—Ancash, Cajamarca, Cusco, Moquegua, and Pasco—between 2007 and 2009. I interviewed the main actors in the conflicts, including local authorities, personnel of local NGOs, corporate managers, and regional representatives of the ombudsman's office. My visits also included talks with local parish priests, because they were a good source of local information. For my investigation into the involvement of the Church in the Majaz, Bagua, and Conga conflicts, I added two types of information to my previous research. First, I interviewed some key religious figures that played a direct role in the protests. Second, I was invited to participate in a workshop aimed at discussing the process that led to the terrible clash in Bagua (see below) and its aftermath. The workshop was held in Santa María de Nieva (Awajun territory) in November 2010 and included the participation of pastoral agents and indigenous leaders from different religious backgrounds. I took advantage of this invitation to collect firsthand information on those events.³

CONTEXTUALIZING CHURCH INVOLVEMENT: DIVERSITY OF CONFLICTS AND PLURALITY OF THE CHURCH'S VIEWS

The high incidence of social conflicts, often violent, has been one of the most salient features of Peruvian politics over the last decade. According to the ombudsman's office, in November 2012 there were 230 conflicts in the country, the number having risen steadily since 2004 (Defensoría del Pueblo 2012). Violent demonstrations, strikes, roadblocks, and assaults on premises, buildings, and land are the most frequently reported events. These activities tend to involve peasant and indigenous communities and the inhabitants of towns in remote areas of the country.

The close relationship between the majority of these conflicts and the exploitation of natural resources is well documented (Panfichi 2009). When conflicts escalate, scholars and the public interpret them as expressions of local community resistance to the expansion of mining and hydrocarbon operations. Mining and oil companies pose a threat to rural livelihoods and local control of key assets such as water and land (Bebbington and Bury 2009). In a context characterized by the state's eagerness to promote investment, and the asymmetry of power that marks its interaction with extraction companies, local populations often see open

3. Given that some of the conflicts described are ongoing I have decided to protect my sources by maintaining their anonymity. I disclose the real identities of only those actors who have expressed their opinions in public. I give references of the interviews through a brief description of the interviewee's role and the place and date of the interview.

Table 1 *Typology of conflicts related to the exploitation of natural resources in Peru*

Conflict type	Description of local social movement goal/strategy
Decentralized revenue	Control and use of fiscal transfers related to the exploitation of natural resources
Material compensation	Strategy of laying the groundwork for a negotiation process with the companies regarding material compensation
Exploitation conditions	Strategy of laying the groundwork for the preparation of a negotiation process with the companies regarding the conditions under which extraction should take place
Anti-extraction movements	Attempts to stop the exploitation of new mines and hydrocarbon fields or the expansion of currently operating ones

Elaborated from Arellano-Yanguas (2011a).

conflict as the only way to challenge this threat. In recent years, researchers have revealed the existence of additional types of conflict that respond to diverse and frequently discrepant motives, logics, and interests. Taking into consideration the main objectives of the protesters, table 1 summarizes and classifies the conflicts related to the exploitation of natural resources into four distinct types: decentralized revenue, material compensation, exploitation conditions, and anti-extraction movements.

Political disputes over the control and use of mining and oil revenue transfers are the cause of decentralized revenue conflicts. In Peru, the municipal and regional governments of the territories where extraction takes place are entitled to receive a significant portion of the taxes and royalties paid by the extractive companies to the central government. Discontent over mismanagement by local authorities, opposition to national attempts to redistribute these revenues, disputes among mayors and the presidents of regional governments over unfulfilled promises, and claims about the delimitation of territories containing mineral deposits trigger the protests. Protesters' claims are not directly related to either the extractive activity itself or to the behavior of the companies. The Church has nothing to do with the outbreak and the development of this type of protest. However, if violence escalates, priests and bishops are frequently called upon to broker a peace agreement. The participation of the Moquegua parish priest in the liberation of sixty police officers held by protesters in Moquegua in June 2008 is a notorious example of the mediating role of the Church (*El Comercio* 2008).

In the other three types of protest, the companies come to the forefront as the main target of people's claims. Frequently, the three appear to be similar because they share the same tactics and accounts of the problems generated by extraction. However, their aims differ. In conflicts over material compensation and exploitation conditions, confrontation is the prelude to direct bargaining with the companies on the conditions under which they operate. In the anti-extraction conflicts,

however, local communities try to stop extraction, because they argue it should not take place under any circumstances.

Within protests aimed at bargaining, it is possible to differentiate those seeking material compensation to offset the problems caused by extraction from those looking at negotiating adequate safeguards against environmental damage and destruction of livelihoods. Obviously, the border between these two types is vague. Communities seeking economic compensation sometimes use environmental and livelihood discourses to strengthen their political stance. Conversely, demands over genuine environmental damage, health problems, or loss of livelihood often end in agreements on material compensation, especially when the projects are already in operation.

Similarly, the boundary between protests seeking to guarantee safe and fair exploitation of the resources and those that refuse any kind of large mining or oil operation can be fuzzy. Groups with these two objectives frequently coexist in conflicts concerning the construction of new operations. Depending on the relative strength of each group and on the results of the initial interaction with the companies, the balance tips toward one side or the other.

The Church's involvement in protests seeking pure economic compensation is very limited. Priests and bishops sometimes act as mediators between the parties or as witnesses to the agreements that put an end to the conflicts; but even this secondary participation is rare. In clear contrast, the Church's participation in protests of exploitation conditions and anti-extraction conflicts has attracted more attention, mainly from the government and the corporations that frequently hold some pastoral agents responsible for local opposition to extractive operations. However, a systematic review of those conflicts shows that the influence of the Church on these events also differs greatly from case to case. In some cases, such as disputes over the expansion of the mine in Cerro de Pasco by Volcán Compañía Minera or the construction of the new mines of Quellaveco (Anglo American) and Tía María (Southern Peru Copper Corporation) in Moquegua, the Church has been completely absent.⁴ In other cases, the Church takes on the defense of local populations' rights by taking local complaints before companies and political authorities. Pedro Barreto's actions as bishop of Huancayo regarding the environmental problems generated by Doe Run in La Oroya exemplify this standpoint. Despite corporate fury against Barreto's position, his involvement helped to channel the conflicts through institutional means, minimizing the likelihood of violence (Scurrah, Langan, and Pizarro 2008).

Finally, there have been widely publicized conflicts in which some local Catholic groups have supported local mobilizations against extractive industries. In the early 2000s this was the case for movements against gold mining in Tambogrande (Piura) and Cerro Quilish (Cajamarca). In both conflicts, the support of the local bishops and parish priests was important for the eventual success of the mobilization (Revesz 2009b; Paredes 2008). The presence of the members of the local

4. Each of these three conflicts has a long history in which episodes of contention reemerge periodically.

Church has also been reported in some of the recent conspicuous conflicts in the northern region of Peru, such as those in Majaz (between Piura and Cajamarca), Bagua (Amazonas), and Conga (Cajamarca).

An analysis of the Church's presence in those conflicts will follow in the next sections. However, it is possible to draw some preliminary conclusions at this point. First, Church support is not the key factor determining the outbreak of social conflict. Social conflicts of different types exist with or without Church involvement. Second, in those conflicts where the Church is involved, its role varies greatly depending on the local context and the type of conflict. Finally, the Church has played a distinctive role in some conflicts. Analysis of why the Church has been involved in specific conflicts and the internal processes shaping its participation sheds light on some novelties emerging in the relationship between religion and contentious political processes in contemporary Latin America.

EMBLEMATIC CONFLICTS IN THE NORTH OF PERU AND ACADEMIC EXPLANATIONS OF CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN POPULAR MOBILIZATIONS

The conflicts in Majaz, Bagua, and Conga stand out in recent Peruvian history. These conflicts occurred in three relatively nearby areas in the North of Peru. Majaz is the name of a subsidiary wholly owned by the British company Monterrico Metals PLC, whose main asset is the Rio Blanco Project located in Henry's Hill in the mountains of Piura, close to the borders of the department of Cajamarca and Ecuador.⁵ The site of the project is in a territory that belongs to the peasant communities of Segunda y Cajas and Yanta. The project included plans to construct an open pit mine that would have been among the twenty biggest mines in the world.⁶ Moreover, the mine was supposed to be a bridgehead for the construction of a mining district, due to the presence of other important mineral deposits around the site. The project's location in an important watershed, its influence on a number of districts in two different departments, its proximity to the Tabaconas-Namballe National Sanctuary, and its potential for opening the region to new mining investments made the proposal highly contentious from its inception (Bebbington et al. 2007).

The first skirmishes broke out in 2003 during the exploratory stage. The recent experience of successful popular opposition to a gold mine in the neighboring town of Tambogrande facilitated the formation of the environmental defense organization *Frentes de Defensa del Medio Ambiente* in the provinces of Ayabaca and Huancabamba. The *rondas campesinas*, members of environmentalist organizations, mayors, and councillors of the two provinces initially made up those fronts. Different views about the real possibilities of peaceful coexistence between mining and agriculture were at the core of the conflict. In 2004 hostilities escalated. Police forces stopped a popular march to the projected mine site, kill-

5. In April 2007, the Zijin Consortium, a partnership of three Chinese companies, bought 79.9 percent of Monterrico Metals.

6. Monterrico Metals PLC, "The Rio Blanco Project," 2007, <http://www.monterrico.com/s/RioBlanco.asp?ReportID=144255> (consulted January 2013).

ing a peasant and arresting twenty-three leaders. The situation became polarized. Supporters and opponents of the project engaged in heated confrontations, sometimes violent. The *rondas campesinas* actively confronted construction workers and wardens working for the mining company, whereas police, in collusion with the company, harassed local leaders opposing the project.

In this contentious environment, the Catholic bishops of Piura, Jaén, and Chulucanas sided with the peasant communities, calling for the suspension of mining activities in their dioceses due to negative environmental and social impacts (Revesz 2009a). As had occurred in Tambogrande, the Church's support of the anti-mining mobilization added to its legitimacy (Troeltsch 1931). The institutional reputation of the Catholic Church and its strong national presence helped to win the sympathy of a wider section of the regional and national population. At the same time, support from the bishops opened opportunities to coordinate with an array of national and international organizations that reinforced the challengers' position through an increase in technical ability and negotiation leverage (Paredes 2008). Obviously, the mining companies and the government disliked the Church's position. The acting vicar of Jaén and director of Radio Marañón, Fr. Francisco Muguero, SJ, was the target of corporate criticism. A national television channel and a regional newspaper accused him of associating with terrorist groups. Since then, the conflict between the company and the communities has continued. Throughout the process, the Vicariate of Jaén,⁷ officially entrusted to the Jesuits, and some of its organizations, such as the Pastoral Office for the Environment and Radio Marañón, have accompanied the communities in their demands and court cases.⁸

The conflict of Conga (Cajamarca) broke out in 2011. However, the Conga conflict should be seen as the continuation of the protracted problematic relationship between the Yanacocha Company and the surrounding communities and towns.⁹ Yanacocha began to operate the largest gold mine in Latin America in 1993. Despite its claims of being at the forefront of the "new" and more responsible mining industry, the enterprise has been plagued by recurring conflicts. In the context of declining production in its initial operation, Yanacocha proposed to invest more than US\$4.8 billion in the construction of a new open pit gold and copper mine. Peasant communities downstream of the operation and a section of the wider population opposed the project on the grounds that it would destroy the source of multiple streams that the population relies on for their livelihood and drinking water. Moreover, they challenge mining as the main strategy for development in the region. The conflict escalated at different times throughout 2011 and 2012. Violent clashes between demonstrators and police resulted in the deaths of peasants.

Various Church figures and groups have been involved in the conflict. The

7. Within the Catholic Church, a vicariate is an ecclesial jurisdiction whose management has been entrusted by the Vatican to a religious congregation.

8. Revesz (2009a) and Bebbington et al. (2007) present rigorous accounts of this conflict.

9. Yanacocha is a joint venture between Newmont (USA), which holds a 51.35 percent stake; Buenaventura (Peru), which owns 43.65 percent, and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a private sector arm of the World Bank, which holds the remaining 5 percent.

most relevant is Marco Arana, a former diocesan priest and environmental activist who has monitored Yanacocha's activities for more than a decade. He has been highly influential in coordinating local opposition to Yanacocha's behavior and expansion plans. He is not alone in his opposition within the Church. Some diocesan priests and religious congregations such as the Franciscans and the Carmelite Sisters have also taken a public stance against Yanacocha's expansion plans. However, the Church in Cajamarca has not always responded in the same manner. The bishop and other groups of clergy and lay people have separated themselves from this critical approach and have defended the contributions of mining to regional development.¹⁰

Finally, the tragic clash in Bagua began on June 5, 2009. The riot police's attempt to end a roadblock set up by a crowd of Awajun and Wampis indigenous people led to a tragic toll of 24 police officers and 10 civilians dead and more than 150 injured. The introduction of a series of laws facilitating investment in extractive activities in the Amazon (oil, gas, mining, and logging) triggered the conflict. The new legislation eased the market for land purchases, eroding the indigenous people's power to control their territory and ignoring commitments to international treaties on the protection of indigenous people.

The Awajun and Wampis people's territory is within the domain of the Vicariate of Jaén, the same ecclesial jurisdiction as some of the communities potentially impacted by the Majaz mine. However, the presence of the vicariate in each area is quite different. The Catholic Church has historically exercised a profound influence in the communities around Majaz, whereas its presence among the Awajun and Wampis goes back only seventy years and is weaker.¹¹ Despite this weak historical influence, in the aftermath of June 5, pundits and some members of the special commission reviewing the events of Bagua named the local priest and Radio Marañón, the Church's radio station, among those responsible for the conflict.¹² The official report on the Bagua clash compares the local Church's supposed confrontational perspective with the behavior of the Catholic Church in other regions of the country (Comisión Especial de Investigación 2009). In clear contrast with these accounts, interviews with different people in the region reveal that the Church did not have direct influence at the outset of the conflict.¹³ Later, during the roadblock, the vicariate provided protestors with food and water on humanitarian grounds. Moreover, the bishop mediated between the protestors and the army to achieve a peaceful and orderly withdrawal. After the clash, the vicariate and the local parishes assumed a higher-profile role, giving shelter to hundreds of Awajun and Wampis people, caring for the wounded during the clash, providing legal assistance to those accused by the prosecutor, and speaking out against the criminalization of indigenous organizations by authorities. This involvement in

10. Interview with Catholic nun 1, Lima, November 26, 2012.

11. Only around 20 percent of the Awajun and Wampis people identify as Catholic (INEI 2010).

12. This was an official commission appointed by the government.

13. Interviews with participants in a workshop held in Santa María de Nieva, November 11–16, 2010; Catholic nun 2, Lima, October 31, 2010; NGO manager in Santa María de Nieva, Lima, November 23, 2012; Catholic priest, Lima, November 26, 2012.

favor of the indigenous population has reinforced the vicariate's public image as supportive of local communities against corporate plans.

Given the diverse positions of the Peruvian Catholic Church in the social conflicts across the country, it is important to examine the reasons and mechanisms that determine the participation of the local Church in these three emblematic conflicts. Previous academic studies have highlighted three different factors to explain the commitment of sectors of the Catholic Church to the cause of marginalized groups. First, some authors stress the agency of bishops (Levine and Mainwaring 1989); priests, sisters, and lay workers (Adriance 1991); or progressive theologians and Catholic intellectuals (Peña 1994). They agree that individuals make a difference regarding the Church's stance at the local level. The second approach emphasizes the role of ideas, more specifically of liberation theology and the evolution of Catholic doctrine after the Second Vatican Council (Holden and Jacobson 2009). This approach focuses on analyzing how the emergence of a progressive interpretation of Catholic doctrine has driven the Church to defend the poor and their interests. Finally, the third group of scholars highlights the importance of the Church's strategic behavior (Trejo 2009). These scholars argue that the Church's support for popular movements in rural settings is a retention strategy to cope with the growing competition from Protestantism.

The first two types of explanation underscore the influence of factors that are internal to the Church, while the third places more importance on the context in which the Church operates. Taken separately, none of the factors satisfactorily explain the different types and degrees of Church involvement. On one hand, the focus on the agency of key persons and their adherence to progressive interpretations of Catholic doctrine tends to assume a top-down approach that downplays the agency of the local population and its interpretation of the context. Paradoxically, some advocates of the role played by the progressive wing of the Church (Holden and Jacobson 2007, 2009) coincide on this point with corporate interpretations, though they differ in their assessment; the former talk about empowerment while the latter charge that the clergy manipulates the local population. On the other hand, the explanation based on the Church's purely strategic behavior fails to account for the obvious plurality of the Catholic Church's involvement in social mobilizations, even in situations in which its institutional strength and relationship to political authorities are similar to those of Evangelical groups. My analysis of the local Church's participation in the three aforementioned conflicts reveals that internal factors and context interact in distinctive ways. In the following sections I study these interactions.

INSTITUTIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS OR PERSONAL PROMINENCE

The analysis of Church involvement in social conflicts has frequently focused on the role of bishops, priests, and nuns. This approach tends to overstate the importance of personal leadership and to simplify the sophistication of local politics. The need of governments, corporations, and mass media to make local processes readable explains this biased perspective (Scott 1998). These institutions search

for clearly recognizable actors within conflicts to whom they can attribute responsibility. Religious figures are the most visible to external observers who have a prejudiced view of local people's ability to act independently. The dynamics surrounding the conflict in Majaz contradicts this notion.

From the early stages of the Majaz conflict, Fr. Muguero has been in the eye of the hurricane. Corporate managers and some national media outlets blamed him for local resistance to the operation. Moreover, the proliferation of new mining projects in the same region and the local refusal to provide these projects with the social license to operate exacerbated corporate animosity against Fr. Muguero. Some companies were so convinced of his power that they approached him asking for his approval of their operations and his intermediation with the peasant communities. Fr. Muguero consistently answered, "I neither had the power nor the will to determine what the communities should do. We are committed to accompany the local peasant communities in their own decisions."¹⁴ It does not seem that Fr. Muguero was posturing to hide his real power and shun responsibility. The sequence of events leading to his involvement confirms the subordinate role of the vicariate in the development of the conflict.

In 2003, Church-related organizations did not form part of the *Frentes de Defensa del Medio Ambiente* against the presence of Monterrico Metals in the communities of Segunda y Cajas and Yanta. The *rondas campesinas*, environmental organizations, and a group of municipal authorities were the main actors in the front. The Church only came to be involved in 2004, after the first serious clash with the police and the prosecution of local leaders. In a context of strong popular Catholicism such as this, the outbreak of a violent conflict demands the attention of the priests, who usually mediate to reduce the tension. However, to explain the Church's subsequent open support of local demands it is also necessary to consider the close connection between the catechist movement and the *rondas campesinas* in this region.

The physical impossibility that the missionaries can serve all the rural communities personally and the lack of native clergy led to the promotion of catechists as intermediaries between the missionaries and the communities.¹⁵ For more than forty years, the Vicariate of Jaén trained thousands of catechists. In a context in which the distinction between religious and social spheres did not apply, the catechists became not only pastoral agents but true social leaders in their communities. In the early 1980s, the *rondas campesinas* spread from their birthplace in Chota to other communities in Cajamarca and the neighboring department of Piura. In this expansion, the *rondas* took root in several settlements in the provinces of Jaén and San Ignacio, both within the territory of the Vicariate of Jaén, and some of them close to the Majaz project. They also proliferated in other provinces of Cajamarca, including Celendín, where the Conga project is located. In those places, catechists were frequently elected leaders of the newly formed *rondas*. Some of them believed that "the *rondas* carried out the Christian ideal in a melding of religion and politics" (Starn 1999).

14. Interview with Fr. Muguero, Bilbao, November 20, 2012.

15. Cleary (2004) documents the crucial social role played by catechists in Peru.

The fusion of religious and social ideals generated a strong connection between the communities and the vicariate's different organizations, such as Radio Marañón, the Pastoral Office for the Environment, and Caritas.¹⁶ The relationship was cemented during the 1980s and 1990s when the collapse of the Peruvian state forced peasant communities to resort to the Church to obtain health services, technical training, information, and microcredits. The catechists exercised their role as intermediaries very effectively, strengthening both the position of the communities and the reach of the Church in the countryside.

In the early 2000s, when mining companies rushed into the Andean region searching for mineral deposits to exploit, the peasant communities in Cajamarca and Piura opposed their presence more than in other regions in an attempt to protect their livelihoods. In Majaz, as was the case more recently in Conga, the peasants perceived agriculture to be incompatible with mining. Moreover, the negative experience in peasant communities around the nearby Yanacocha mine led them to distrust official promises about the potential benefits of mining. These reasons were more than enough to catalyze local resistance. The peasants did not need the intervention of the Church to rally in defense of their livelihoods. The *rondas* were key actors in the opposition because they already had the supracommunity organizational structures needed to galvanize mobilization.

However, once the conflict broke out the communities asked for support from the Church, because this support had two different but equally important meanings. From an internal perspective, given the pervasiveness of religiosity in the rural mind-set, the backing of the Church unified the communities' resistance to companies and official policies. From the point of view of the outward strategy, the presence of the Church qualified the communities' stance within regional and national public opinion, linked the local struggle to national and transnational activist networks (Theije 2006), and sometimes provided legal defense and material infrastructure necessary to sustain the mobilization over time.

The vicariate's positive response to the communities' demands was not just a singular decision but the consequence of the history of close relations. The role of the catechists within the communities, including their active participation in the *rondas*, was crucial for the stance of the vicariate. Fr. Muguero, Radio Marañón, Caritas, and other Church organizations were compelled to side with the communities because the local pastoral agents were already deeply concerned.

The presence of the Church in Conga and Bagua followed similar patterns. In the diocese of Cajamarca, support of a section of the clergy and religious congregations for the communities and local groups opposed to Conga was prompted and reinforced by repression of the initial mobilization in October 2011. Although the work of Marco Arana has been highly influential both outside and inside Church circles, it would be misleading to think that Arana had the power to mobilize people and determine the stance of other religious organizations. In fact, the representative of a women's religious congregation deeply involved in the mobilization against Conga stated: "[We] are not moved by any ideological con-

16. Caritas is the church department in charge of channeling social and developmental support.

sideration, we just try to follow the people with whom we work.”¹⁷ The situation was even clearer in Bagua. The Church has very little influence on local dynamics among the Awajun and Wampis people, because only a small proportion of the indigenous population is Catholic. As a result, the indigenous organizations defined and organized the mobilization. Only after weeks of roadblocks, and given the deterioration in health conditions and dwindling food supplies, the vicariate started to provide food and medical care, and one nun decided to stay with the crowd “to share their fate in those tough and uncertain times.”¹⁸

Up to this point, this article might convey the idea of communities as relatively unified entities with common goals and opinions. Of course the reality is more complex. Communities engaged in conflicts surrounding extractive industries frequently face traumatic internal divisions and tensions with neighboring settlements that hold divergent interests. Companies often encourage these divisions to weaken opposition. In this situation, it is essential to ask how bishops, priests, and nuns discern which group to support. I have already mentioned the importance of the catechists and pastoral agents. However, their position is sometimes not unanimous. In such cases, the vision of social interpreters becomes crucial. Those interpreters are recognized local leaders who, beyond their official role as catechists or local authorities, enjoy privileged access to priests and nuns by virtue of friendship or personal links. Most of the priests and nuns do not live permanently in the small rural communities, and even when they do, they do not have the local historical background needed to fully understand the nuances and implications of local social interactions. Therefore, they rely on people they trust to “read” the local reality and determine their position within the communities. Through these intermediaries, priests and nuns know whom they should follow.¹⁹

The prominence of catechists and social interpreters downplays the central role given to some priests at the outset and in the development of the conflicts. However, there are still two questions to address to understand the distinctive stance of Church representatives in these conflicts. The first relates to the religious logic behind this loyalty: why do these priests and nuns bind themselves to follow the vision of the communities? The second concerns the religious discourses and practices that they use to support the mobilizations and to justify that support.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF GRASSROOTS AGENCY

Numerous studies have highlighted how priests’ and other pastoral agents’ adherence to liberation theology influences their standpoint on social and political issues (Norget 1997; Holden and Jacobson 2009). The studies convey the primacy of a causal link running from ideological to social engagement. I argue that, as lived in everyday conflicts and mobilization, the interaction between theology and practice is more complex and is mediated by spirituality.

Differentiation of two dimensions within liberation theology helps to explain

17. Interview with Catholic nun, Lima, November 26, 2012.

18. Interview with Sister Mari Carmen Gómez, Lima, October 31, 2010.

19. Interview with Catholic priest, Lima, November 26, 2012.

the distinctive behavior of the Church in Majaz, Bagua, and Conga. The first dimension relates to the content of Jesus's teachings understood in terms of liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions. The second dimension relates to the question of who promotes the liberation: the poor are the main actors in the historical process and not mere passive benefactors of liberation (Gutiérrez 1971). Giving different weight to each dimension generates different types of spirituality, thereby resulting in different forms of Church involvement in social issues. In theory, the dimensions are complementary; however, they frequently clash in real life. Church social activists who focus on the content of liberation highlight the importance of social and political analysis and the design of good strategies. This approach reinforces the priests' position vis-à-vis the communities, because priests tend to be the best qualified. This correlates with a prophetic approach in which pastoral agents feel responsible for leading the people and speaking for those without a voice. On the contrary, those who highlight the primacy of the poor's agency refuse to take on leading roles. They develop a spirituality driven by enculturation and centered on accompanying the people in their own processes. From this perspective, local interpretations of the relationship between religion and everyday local life have primacy over official religious doctrine and expert analysis (Norget 2012).

Of course, there are infinite intermediate positions between these two extreme characterizations of spiritualities derived from liberation theology. The point here is that this dual differentiation helps to explain why in Majaz, Bagua, and Conga the Church opted to "follow the people" and refused to set the agenda. It also reveals a more nuanced relationship between adherence to liberation theology and different approaches to social involvement. The concept of accompaniment is crucial to understanding Church involvement in those cases. I borrow the concept from the words of the priests and nuns that I interviewed and from their speeches in meetings and workshops. They use accompaniment to denote a pastoral strategy in which grassroots groups are not only the target of the Church mission but the main actors in that mission. Of course, the mere use of the concept of accompaniment does not guarantee the existence of a horizontal relationship between the priests and nuns and the people. The discourse can also be deployed to conceal top-down power relations. However, the story of the Vicariate of Jaén's participation in Majaz and Bagua reveals that in those cases Church agents took the approach seriously. This was not extempore but the result of decades of Church's involvement at the local level.

The Vicariate of Jaén's reputation as an advocate for the rights of indigenous and peasant communities began in the early 1990s. José María Izuzquiza, a Spanish Jesuit, was the bishop at the time. Izuzquiza was not a progressive cleric. In fact, during the previous decade he had confronted a group of young Jesuits who were responsible for training seminarians in the vicariate. He thought that the young theologians were too sympathetic to liberation theology. Despite this ideological stance, Izuzquiza was very close to the peasant communities. For decades he had been responsible for training catechists and had traveled extensively on horseback from village to village to visit them. He knew the suffering of the peasants and decided that the vicariate should work to promote development as part

of its mission. None of this was especially “liberationist.” Rather, he held a conventional modernization approach. Izuzquiza, a nuclear physicist by training, used to say that he was a practical man who did not like ideology and politics. Paradoxically, in 1992 he gained national fame by openly confronting the corrupt government of Alberto Fujimori.

During that same year, INCAFOR, a logging company linked to some members of the government, started the indiscriminate exploitation of lumber in the province of San Ignacio. Some peasants decided to defend the forest and opposed the company’s presence. The government reacted violently and arrested eleven peasants, accusing them of terrorism. Some of them were members of the *rondas campesinas* and some were catechists. Izuzquiza became involved in the defense of the peasants. He underwent a personal conversion and his religious mission took a more liberationist perspective. He decided that the vicariate should help the communities to defend their human rights and the environment and created Church organizations to accompany the communities in their demands. Supporting the position of the communities, Izuzquiza became a public figure and a nuisance to the government. From the perspective of his personal trajectory, his closeness to the grass roots helped him to readjust his view of the religious mission.

Subsequent bishops continued to support the communities in their interactions with government and business. Fr. Muguero arrived in the vicariate in the early 2000s, and he already had rich experience of social involvement. He quickly established a strong rapport with the communities by supporting their initiatives. In the context of Majaz and, more generally, concerning local resistance to any type of mining exploitation in the region, Fr. Muguero confessed that he did not always agree with the positions of the communities. He had his own ideas on specific problems and tried to share his thoughts with local leaders. However, he argues that “communities should take decisions and the Church should accompany them in their struggles.”²⁰

The same kind of spirituality that emphasizes the agency of local communities can be found in the accounts of members of religious congregations who were close to the communities in the Bagua and Conga conflicts. The nun who stayed with the Awajun and Wampis people during the roadblock said that, beyond the content of their demands, she wanted to accompany the indigenous people in those difficult times. She was definitely not a political activist.²¹ The indigenous leaders openly thanked the Church for its support. However, they repudiated allegations of manipulation by the Church or other external actors and emphasized, “We are not anyone’s puppets. We have our own agenda and we are happy that the Church has assumed it.”²²

This brief look at the internal processes of the Church shows that religious logic cannot be reduced to pure ideological projections. As lived on the ground

20. Interview with Fr. Muguero, Bilbao, November 20, 2012.

21. Interview with Sister Mari Carmen Gómez, Lima, October 31, 2010.

22. Workshop with indigenous leaders and pastoral agents in Santa Maria de Nieva, November 2010.

the relationship is more complex. The existence of a spirituality of accompaniment filters the ideological dimension of liberation theology and generates a distinctive type of Church involvement that reinforces the leadership of local communities.

THE HYBRIDIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSES INTO A RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK

Accepting the role of accompaniment in its relationship with the communities does not imply a passive Church that merely responds to external demands. Even if the Church assumes a subordinate role, it needs to articulate its support in a way that helps the communities meet the government and the powerful companies on more equal grounds. Usually the Church can offer two kinds of support. The first refers to tangible factors, such as physical infrastructure and other material resources, organizational capabilities, and access to national and international networks. The second is the Church's ability to construct discourses and symbols that mobilize people and make popular demands more legitimate. This section contends that the incorporation of references to the environment and human rights into explicit religious discourses and Catholic rituals has been the Church's biggest contribution to the legitimacy of these movements.

In the early 1990s, the Vicariate of Jaén set up an office for the defense of human rights. The internal war of the 1980s had devastated the Peruvian countryside, and the vicariate focused on the rights of peasants and indigenous peoples. The experience of the conflict with INCAFOR reinforced the bishop's determination to go ahead with the office. Simultaneously, the environment became a key issue on the international developmental agenda. The Rio Summit in 1992 represented the emergence of a post-Cold War order that attempted to displace the conventional right-left cleavage. The favorable disposition of international donors and NGOs to support the agenda encouraged the vicariate to implement development projects with an environmental focus.

Initially, that commitment to human rights and the environment was seen as external to the Church—something that some priests did but that was not essential to the Church mission. Over time, the situation changed. During the 1990s the growing involvement of bishops, priests, and nuns in this type of work raised the question of how to incorporate the defense of human rights and the preservation of the environment into the Church's doctrinal corpus. Social activism and the reformulation of religious discourse were mutually reinforcing in a dialectic process of integration. The more pastoral agents worked on these topics the more they discovered the religious meaning of their work.²³

The emphasis on God as the God of life, one of the central concepts of liberation theology, catalyzed the process of forming a religious discourse around rights and the environment (Levine 2006). The essential link between God and life had a double outcome. On one hand, it strengthened the importance of human well-being and agency. In the early 1990s, at an assembly in the Vicariate of Jaén, ad-

23. Interview with Catholic nun 3, Lima, November 28, 2012.

vocates for greater involvement in social issues used a sentence from St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon in the second century: “The glory of God is man fully alive.” This statement highlights the religious content of human plenitude, including spiritual and material well-being, as well as respect for human rights and dignity. On the other hand, the more general reference to “life” extends religious meaning to all living beings and the environment. Accordingly, nature is important not only because it serves the people but because of God’s presence within it.²⁴

In the 1980s, Jürgen Moltmann (1985), one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, had already theorized on the interweaving of God, the environment, and people. Leonardo Boff (1996) and other liberationist authors echoed those discussions in the Latin American context. However, for different reasons these reflections had little practical influence.²⁵ The real hybridization of environmental and human rights discourses within a religious framework was a process driven by pastoral practices at the grassroots level.

On one hand, priests and other Church agents quickly realized that presenting God as the creator and champion of the environment was strongly embraced among peasants and indigenous populations, because it reconnected religion with the defense of their livelihood and their traditional spirituality that recognized the sacred nature of hills, streams, and lakes (Norget 2012). On the other hand, the human rights framework allowed the Church to link its doctrine on inalienable human dignity with a secular discourse that was widely accepted. Thus, the Church could offer peasants and indigenous people a powerful discourse with which to confront abuses and social injustice without having to resort to more ideological analyses. For example, since the early 1990s, the vicariate systematically included the defense of the environment and human rights in the syllabus for the formation of catechists and *etsejim* (indigenous catechists), highlighting how these issues affect the daily life of the people. Moreover, the Church incorporated these concerns in radio programs, mainly through Radio Marañón, and publications designed to reach the Awajun-Wampis population.²⁶

The incorporation of environmental and human rights discourses into the core of religious doctrine was a complex process. A significant part of the contribution came from the grass roots. In the words of a nun living among the Awajun, “We [nuns, priests, and *etsejim*] started to formulate our mission and our own personal experience of faith incorporating these new categories.”²⁷ This bottom-up movement was well received by some bishops. The biblical roots of the environmental discourse and its apparently milder ideological approach, in comparison to conventional liberation theology, led the hierarchy to accept it. In a few years, the Church officially sanctioned the incorporation of this hybrid discourse into the core of religious doctrine. The inclusion of a section devoted to the environment in the final document of the Fifth General Assembly of Bishops of Latin

24. Interviews with Catholic priest and nun 3, Lima, November 28, 2012.

25. The condemnation of Leonardo Boff’s writings by the Vatican was a major point in determining this lack of influence.

26. *Jempe*, a quarterly magazine, is the most influential. An issue on the 2008 mobilization, *Jempe* no. 35 (January 2009), can be found at <http://www.caaap.org.pe/archivos/JEMPE%2035.pdf>.

27. Interview with Catholic nun 4, Santa María de Nieva, November 12, 2010.

America epitomized this recognition (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano 2007, 470–475).

Bishop Barreto played a key role in achieving this official endorsement. Barreto had been bishop in the Vicariate of Jaén for a little more than a year in September 2004, when he was appointed Bishop of Huancayo. His public condemnation of the environmental damage in the mining town of La Oroya upset the mining corporations but also brought him wide social recognition. In 2005 he was invited to address the Bishops' Synod on the Eucharist held in Rome. During his speech he analyzed the formula of the Offertory: "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life." He discussed how "the earth, the people, and God appear closely interconnected in the Eucharist, and accordingly, any damage inflicted to the earth or to humans would go directly against God."²⁸ The presentation was well received, and in a few years Barreto assumed relevant positions within the Church.²⁹ Barreto's recognition provided a more legitimate standpoint for those working on human rights and environmental issues within the Peruvian Catholic Church from which they could oppose corporate interests and resist pressure from conservative sectors.

The hybridization of discourses is also reflected in religious rituals that some priests and communities use as strategies in their fight against extractive activities. Since the 2004 Majaz clash, every last weekend in October the communities in the area have organized a mass on one of the hills where the companies have mining rights or where unlicensed miners have started to exploit mineral deposits. The pilgrimage of thousands of people to those hills helps to reinforce the fusion between religion and defense of the environment, consecrating those spaces. Moreover, the popular presence in those contentious territories has a dissuasive effect on companies and unlicensed miners, making them recognize the vigilant presence of communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The Catholic Church's support for popular struggles has been frequently analyzed from the perspectives of the role played by institutional actors and the influence of progressive ideologies, especially liberation theology. This article has assumed a different approach. Without denying the importance of institutional and ideological factors, this analysis of the Church's involvement in three emblematic conflicts around mining operations in Peru reveals that people at the grass roots also have a say in shaping the Church's response. The Church is neither the only nor the main actor at the local level, and its interaction with local populations is more nuanced than previously considered.

In Majaz, Conga, and Bagua, the Church's embeddedness in local social net-

28. Interview with Bishop Pedro Barreto, Lima, November 26, 2012.

29. He was appointed Vice President of the Peruvian Bishops Conference, President of the Office for Justice and Solidarity of the Latin American Episcopal Council, and member of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

works determines its support of the local struggles against companies and the Peruvian government. This embeddedness has been the result of a long history of interaction between priests and nuns and the local communities. Two types of local figures have been especially relevant in shaping this interaction. The first are the catechists, whose double role as communitarian religious leaders and members of the *rondas campesinas* facilitates connections between the religious and political spheres. The second are local leaders who act as social interpreters and provide the local Church's authorities with a sanctioned vision of local politics.

However, the recognition of this local agency does not downplay the importance of the Church's role. In its interaction with local, frequently poor communities, the Church has nurtured a spirituality that assumes and promotes the agency of the poor. Moreover, the involvement of priests and other pastoral agents in popular struggles has led the Church to develop religious discourses that incorporate the preservation of the environment and the defense of human rights as constitutive of the Catholic doctrinal core. This has been extremely important in shaping the Church's involvement in those conflicts and in providing legitimacy to popular mobilizations.

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