

# The beginnings of Leonidas Proano's pastoral work in the diocese of Riobamba in Ecuador: indigenous peasants, popular organization, and conservative opposition, 1954–1964

## Abstract

This essay is a study of the beginnings of Leonidas Proano's non-conservative pastoral work in the Central Andes of Ecuador from 1954 to 1964, which focused on the indigenous peasants and favored the formation and strengthening of popular organizations through the five projects: Centro de Estudios y Acción Social, Escuelas Radiófonas Populares del Ecuador, Cooperativa San Juan, Granja de Tepeyac, and Escuela de formación de líderes Indígenas. This paper argues that Proano's new type of pastoral work that began earlier before the Vatican Council II identified the critical problems of the Diocese of Riobamba, namely, illiteracy, poverty, landlessness, and lack of local leaders. These received local support and rejection for the powerful landowners and a section of the Church. We conclude that his efforts to liberate the poor indigenous from a new pastoral perspective achieved their goals.

**Keywords:** indigenous peasants, catholic church, projects, pastoral work, social history

Volume 6 Issue 3- 2022

**Maurice Sheith Olouch Awiti**

Department of History, Simon Bolivar Andean University, Ecuador

**Correspondence:** Maurice Sheith Olouch Awiti, Department of History, Simon Bolivar Andean University, Ecuador, Tel 593 (02) 2902270/2993600, Email awitimo@yahoo.co.uk

**Received:** May 04, 2022 | **Published:** June 13, 2022

## Introduction

In 1954, when Leonidas Proano (1910-1988) began to exercise his pastoral ministry in the Diocese of Riobamba, the first ten years shaped his thirty years career as a bishop.<sup>1</sup> During this period, he dedicated efforts to identifying indigenous problems, getting to know the territory through pastoral visits, and working to find solutions. In this regard, Proano prepared and proposed the implementation of five welfare projects. Therefore, little by little, the new clerical work moved away from manipulating landowners and local authorities, provoking the opposition of said sectors. In addition, the articulation of social problems meant a break with the long episcopal and religious tradition: popular religious demonstrations and devotions of the Diocese.

On 31 August 1988, at the age of 78, when Proano died in Armenia (Quito), he was considered an outstanding bishop who defended the poor's rights, predominantly the indigenous groups. He got nominated as a Noble Peace Prize candidate based on his track record on human rights. Given his effort to understand religion and its social role within the framework of a new sense of mission, he promoted

liberation theology principles in his Diocese and beyond. His pastoral initiatives paved the way for the birth of the "church of the poor." The elements of a distinctly new pastoral style included the creation and practice of Paul Freire's alphabetization and liberation education method. The new education approach defended and strengthened the local communities and led to the discovery of local problems and the generation of homegrown solutions. Therefore, in a charismatic way, he linked his episcopal ministry with social justice, which saw him enter into ideological conflicts with the predominant political and economic groups.

As a young priest in Ibarra between 1936 and 1954, Proano dedicated his apostolate to accompanying the Movement Young Workers Association. He was a professor of minor seminarians (San Diego), Chaplain at the Christian Brothers School and the local prisons. During the same period, in 1941, with the help of friends, he inaugurated a library, "Cardijn." Four years later founded the "La Verdad," a local newspaper, where he discussed social, political, and church issues in the editor's column. From this experience, he reinforced his conviction that religion had a viable role in changing society and helping it incorporate democratic ideas and practices.

With the celebration of the II Vatican Council (1962-1964) and the II Episcopal Conference of Medellín (1968), bishop Proano advanced a dynamic process that contributed empowerment of the lay people, especially women, teamwork pastoral (*pastoral de conjunto*), and political and social conscientization. The Diocese of Riobamba reorganized its religious and social commitments and equally started closing the gap between the expectations and the projections of the followers (Figure 1).

The preceding article from a social history perspective analyzes the beginnings of the pastoral action of Proano, which discovered the indigenous problem and gave answers through social projects and the reaction of local society. In this sense, the argument is that before the II Vatican Council (1962-1965) Proano, through a new type of pastoral, managed to articulate the pressing problems related to the indigenous people: illiteracy, misery, lack of leaders, and landlessness

<sup>1</sup>Leonidas Eduardo Proano Villalba was born in a low-income family. He was the youngest and surviving son since his three older brothers died soon after birth. His parents ensured their meager livelihood by weaving hats and fabrics, everyday activity in the region. Raised under strict family discipline with deep Catholic values, Proano spent his childhood and adolescence helping parents Agustín Proano and Zoila Villalba. They transmit to their son security, love of truth, and a sense of justice that marked his personality and manifested in his passion for the poor. In this sense, Proano's fidelity is understood, which he recognizes was evident in his lifestyle until his death. Proano began his formation towards the Catholic priesthood in 1923 when he entered the "San Diego" Minor Seminary in Ibarra. On October 1, 1930, he joined the San José Major Seminary in Quito to study Philosophy and Theology. On July 4, 1936, after completing his training, he was ordained a priest by Carlos María de la Torre (1873-1968). He began his pastoral work in his home province of Imbabura (Diocese of Ibarra). His colleagues did not consider him a talented priest since he had not studied in Rome like many of them. He was not even considered a candidate for the position of bishop. However, his first assignment was not to a rural parish as was the tradition for newly ordained priests.

in his Diocese. Therefore, this approach constitutes a privileged viewpoint to observe the pastoral trajectory of Proaño, considering the various actors and the ecclesial and social structures that define and transform it.



**Figure 1** Bishop Proano visiting one of the rural communities of his diocese (source Diocesan Archives - Riobamba).

For present purposes, from the readings of the historical records (*Fondo Documental Monseñor Leonidas Proaño* - FDMLP), it is possible to identify critical moments and historical periods that marked the turning points in Proaño's pastoral trajectory (Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

Thinking about the beginnings of the pastoral work from a historical perspective, we might ask, how did Proaño discover what he had to do: pastoral and social, as a response to the indigenous problem? Within this framework, it is considered that if there is something that characterized the history of Ecuador in the middle of the 20th century and that was decisive in the pastoral beginnings of Proaño, was the social and religious structure that subordinated the indigenous population under the large, landed estate called haciendas that can be traced back to the colonial period. According to Barry Lyons, in the haciendas, the indigenous peasants "lived and worked on these estates in serf-like conditions."<sup>3</sup> What was notorious was the social system based on the concentration of economic power in a few hands, this denied the majority the satisfaction of their basic needs, such as work, food, health, housing, and education.<sup>4</sup>

The church was always involved with the hacienda system, in that this had estates, either managed directly with the church or leased out. In this way, the church-maintained allegiance to local authorities and the state, whereby the bishop and the priests served as confessors and chaplains in the estates, especially during, baptisms, weddings, and patron feasts day.<sup>5</sup>

The period covered runs from the appointment of Proaño as bishop in 1954 until 1964, which was the end of the Second Vatican Council. During the period, Proaño visited the rural communities and parishes of the Diocese, identifying the immediate problems and implementing five development projects. The identified issues were illiteracy and lack of leadership among the indigenous peasants, the agrarian question (landlessness), abject poverty, and the failure of the Church. While programming his pastoral activities, Proaño set out the following development projects: Centro de Estudios y Acción Social (CEAS), las Escuelas Radiofónicas Populares del

<sup>2</sup>The information and documentation in the Archives are kept within the diocesan policy. All the information has been conserved since the arrival of Proaño in 1954, all his pastoral activities until his death in 1988. Additionally, there is a section of documents, that is, thesis, autobiographies, newspaper cuttings, photos, and other writings about the Proaño and the Diocese of Riobamba. There are 326 boxes with up to 2444 textual documents and 20 cassettes.)

<sup>3</sup>Barry J. Lyons, *Remembering the hacienda: religion, authority, and social change in highland Ecuador*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. p. 3–26.

<sup>4</sup>Andrés Guerrero, *La semántica de la dominación: el concertaje de indios*, Quito: Ediciones Libri Mundi, 1991.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel H. Levine, *Politics, religion, and society in Latin America*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 2012. p. 34–37.

Ecuador (ERPE), Cooperativa San Juan Diego, Granja de Tepeyac y Escuela de formación líderes indígenas. The net effect of the projects was on one hand, positive among the indigenous, and opposition among the landowners, on the other. Those who complained or resisted the empowerment programs claimed that the bishop politicized religion because it threatened their interests.

This article comprises four parts: Introduction, methodology, results: from Ibarra to Riobamba, the forging of non-traditional pastoral work, the making of five iconic projects, and finally, discussion and conclusion.

## Note on the theory and method

Conventionally religions constitute a determined social order that provides ground for census among the faithful. Therefore, the theory of pastoral work will be appropriate in explaining the pattern that accompanied Proaño and his collaborators in making changes in the Diocese and their advances with new ideas about the local challenges.<sup>6</sup>

The present study follows the lines of a bibliographic review based on the findings of a detailed investigation of the pastoral action of Leonidas Proaño in primary sources. The most reputable search engines consulted (for example, WoS), where a manual search based on keywords is built based on the information determined from the objectives. Within this framework, the keywords were the following: Leonidas Proaño's pastoral action, Ecuador's religious actions, Ecuadorian indigenous movement, liberation theology, popular organization, indigenous education in Ecuador, ecclesiology, and indigenous ecclesiastical work.

The recollection of data consisted of segmenting the content of each document read, assigning respective codes and labels to uniform information, and obtaining the corpus of the concepts and the results of the investigation. After the information analysis process, the text was composed: the systematization of what was analyzed.

## Results

### From Ibarra to Riobamba

When Proaño arrived at Riobamba on 29th May of 1954, military, civil and ecclesiastical authorities received him with a guard of honor as was the custom then. The unexpected transpired, it is said, among the public was indigenous who broke the protocol to greet the arriving guest. He said: "At last, you have come *Taita-Amito* (loving father)." At the reception, various learning institutions within Riobamba also had active participation (See Figure 2—source FDMLP).

The Diocese of Riobamba had certain similarities with Ibarra and differences, especially concerning the indigenous population and their social status. Comparatively, both provinces, Imbabura, Bolívar, and Chimborazo, have an indigenous people, but the latter had a significantly higher density, and these were poor, marginalized, oppressed, and exploited. From a social and political perspective, the indigenous in Central Southern Andes had a long history of rebellion and resistance against the non-indigenous population and the landowners (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup>

In general, most studies about the indigenous tend to homogenize without considering the ethnic diversity and cultural differences. Therefore, while visiting the indigenous communities, Proaño was able to identify the differences and decided that these needed

<sup>6</sup>See Jesús Arturo Navarro, "Prólogo" en *Trasformaciones eclesiales. Propuestas del papa Francisco para una iglesia en pastoral* (iteso.mx), 7–17, 11–12.

<sup>7</sup>José Almeida, Hernán Carrasco, Luz María de la Torre. et.al. *Sismo Étnico en el Ecuador. Varias perspectivas*. (Quito: CEDIME/Ediciones Abya-Yala. 1993.

a particular pastoral and social approach. Within this framework, Proano expressed astonishment at what he saw of the indigenous peasants and wrote to his friend Roberto Morales in Ibarra: “what to say about their situation in Chimborazo? It is to cry”.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 2 Arrival of Monsignor proano to the diocese of Riobamba.

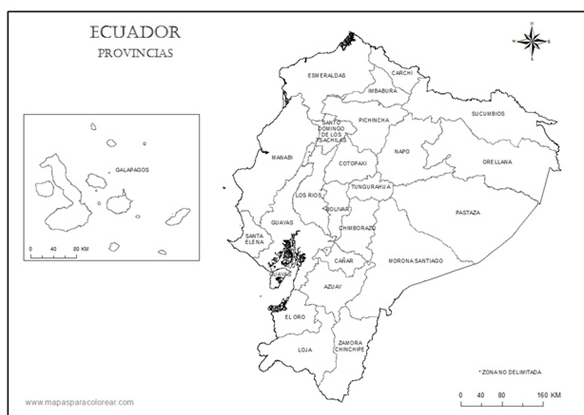


Figure 3 Map of Ecuador to draw.

Table 1 Phases of Leonidas Proano's pastoral trajectory (own elaboration)

Phase	Location / Event	Period
Phase 1	In Ibarra	1936-1954
Phase 2	Arrival up to Vatican Council II	1954-1964
Phase 3	In Riobamba Transition to a new pastoral style	1965-1975
Phase 4	Social and political awareness	1976 -1985

The history of statistics in independent Ecuador dates from 1950. The first census established that the country's population was 3 202 757. The report revealed shocking realities of the society: poverty and precarious living conditions, especially among the rural folk: the majority walk barefooted and live in grass-thatched houses or caves, without running water and pit latrines.<sup>9</sup> The subsequent census in Ecuador has demonstrated that the rural population, especially the indigenous live in precarious conditions, with high levels of poverty, school dropouts, and malnutrition. It's therefore understandable that it can be challenging to disentangle poverty and misery from government neglect.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Leonidas Proano. “YO QUISIERA DAR AL INDIO; Conciencia de su personalidad humana, tierras, libertad, cultura, Religión” en *La Verdad*, Ibarra, 1979;5.

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-libros/INEC\\_Historia\\_Censos.pdf](https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-libros/INEC_Historia_Censos.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>Ailynn Torres Santan, “Ciudadanía. Estado y regimenes de propiedad de la tierra en el Ecuador (1960-1979)”, FLACSO-Quito,

Doctoral Thesis. 2017.

The ecclesiastic territory under Proano was largely rural and with a large percentage of indigenous peasants living within or near the haciendas. His predecessor, Alberto María Ordóñez Crespo (1872-1954), nicknamed “padre Bueno y fiel” (Good father and faithful), died after a long illness. According to the Modesto Arrieta (1926-2021), a diocesan priest, the health problems of Ordóñez meant institutional disorder. He singles out that when Proano took over the Diocese's running, the rural parishes were poorly attended or practically abandoned, and most priests were not ready to assume them. The clergy was divided into two the high and the lower class.<sup>11</sup>

Agustin Bravo another diocesan priest, says the following about Ordóñez and his term: “Given his calm temperament and taking into account the horrendous division of parishes into first, second, and third-class parishes, the problem of parish transfers was one of Alberto's biggest headaches.”<sup>12</sup>

When the bishopric of Bolívar became vacant, with the death of Alberto on the 6th of January 1954, Carlos María de la Torre, bishop of Quito, was appointed the Apostolic Administrator. Incidentally, he ordained Proano, as mentioned before.

Susana Andrade and Juan Illicach's analysis of the Dioceses of Riobamba have identified Protestantism and religious sects as essential factors that significantly influenced indigenous cultural practices, political participation, and spiritual life during the studied period. Andrade has focused her research on the protestant churches, that is, the +origins and the challenges it has posed to the Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Illicachi focuses on both the Catholic Church and the protestant churches.<sup>14</sup> Both authors coincide with the fact that the protestant churches did not do so much on issues related to poverty, violence, injustice, and political activism. These shaped Proano's pastoral work and other formal actions beyond the church.

Proano, who had accumulated experience with the media (*La Verdad*), as an editor for ten years and working with the youth (Juventud Obrera Catolica- JOC), set out to know the diocese and, in the early 60s, sought to unite the local clergy by forming the group, Juan XXIII. Through these Proano helped focus the church's agenda on the issues of alphabetization, investigation, social assistance, cooperatives, and the formation of leaders.

### Forging into a non-traditional pastoral

In the decree of the 26 of June 1955, the Proano announced pastoral visits to the Diocese. On one of the visits to the diocesan farms of Zula, after listening to the indigenous peasants who had congregated, Proano celebrated the Eucharist and decided to tour the facilities, only to be surprised by some underground store-like room that used to serve as a “prison cell.” There were chains in the darkroom, used for tiering the rebellious, thieves, and lazy indigenous workers. The «offenders» were tied up, flogged, and given little food within the space. Confronted with this pathetic situation, Proano asked, “what are the urgent needs of the Diocese?”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Modesto S. Arrieta Chavéz, Mons. Leonidas E. Proano su personalidad a través de algunos hechos de vida, Riobamba. 1988; 11–13.

<sup>12</sup>Agustín Bravo Muñoz, *El soñador se fue pero su sueño queda*, 2nded. (Quito: Centro de Solidaridad Andina, 2016. 184.

<sup>13</sup>Susana Andrade, *Protestantismo indígena. Procesos de conversión religiosa en la provincia de Chimborazo*. Ecuador. Quito: FLACSO ECUADOR/Abya Yala/ IFEA, 2004.

<sup>14</sup>Juan Illicachi Gusñay. *Diálogos del catolicismo y protestantismo indígena en Chimborazo*. Quito: Abya Yala, 2014.

<sup>15</sup>Primera Carta Pastoral De Leónidas Proano (to the priests and the faithful of the Diocese of Bolivar) on the 28 of August 1954.



Based on his first impression, on the 10th of October 1954, Proaño replied to his longtime friend and collaborator, Roberto Morales, in Ibarra. He had asked him when he would write a pastoral letter about the indigenous people. In the response, Proaño declared it was not yet time to write, not until he had set an objective and there was a possibility of translating his dreams into actions. According to Bishop, a pastoral letter would be tantamount to accumulating literature about the indigenous, but it was crucial and urgent to realize actions in favor of the indigenous peasants.<sup>16</sup>

In the earlier letter, Proaño lamented that the indigenous problem was “complex and formidable”; “wears black or grey clothes, looks dirty and disgusting. They hardly ever take a shower; their hair is falling out, and their faces are unkempt. Their teeth are black and gnawed. They look like abused dogs. They live in tent-sized huts or holes like moles or caves, and his voice sounds like someone lamenting.”<sup>17</sup>

The heart of the matter was not to give “partial solutions.” The State, non-government organizations like Misión Andina, and the Church had to look for long-term solutions. Proaño concluded that without this intervention, the “indigenous would perish.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1958, Proaño invited a Colombian female religious congregation, María Inmaculada y Santa Catalina de Siena, popularly known as Laurita Missionaries, to establish a convent in Riobamba. These were renowned for their pastoral work with the indigenous communities in Medellín, Colombia, and Proaño thought they could contribute spiritually and socially to the Dioceses with their expertise. The bishop asked the father, Jorge Mensias, a diocesan priest from Ibarra, and the sisters to draw out a work plan with the indigenous.

The pastoral work developed by the religious sisters consisted of hygiene, home science, and religious education (common prayers, preparation for baptism, matrimonies). The visits and dialog to the rural communities became a vital part of the pastoral work.

### The creation of the five projects

Thinking about evangelization and civilization of the American continent since 1492, we might say that both went together and had hinges for exchange and supported one another. The first European missionary expeditions always accompanied the spread of the word of God with activities like health, technical training, and schools. Western civilization linked to Social Christian movements got its way to the mission territories. Accordingly, evangelization restructured the new colonies to respond to existing challenges like education, health, and popular organization.<sup>19</sup>

The five projects concretely responded to the immediate needs of the rural population. In the first place, in 1960, Proaño, with the help of Rodolfo Rozshazy - a professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, The World Trade Organization (WTO) created the *Centro de Estudios y Acción Social* (CEAS)- to take on the task of socio-economic development of the province of Chimborazo. Two years later, in 1962, Proaño founded the *Escuelas Radiófonas Populares del Ecuador* (ERPE), with a clear educational objective, that is alphabetization. In 1963, as part for the incipient agrarian reform, the diocesan haciendas of Monjas-Corral and Zula were donated to

the indigenous. In Ecuador, the government decreed the first land reform in 1964 and the second in 1973. Later, the name of the farm changed to Tepeyac in memory of the apparitions of Mary to the Mexican indigenous peasant Juan Diego. The other two projects were *Cooperativa San Juan Diego* and *Escuela de formación de Líderes*.<sup>20</sup>

The effort to understand the evolution of Proaño's pastoral work must be explained by the five projects. To illustrate and to avoid superficiality, we shall look at the ERPE and the Agricultural cooperative Juan Diego.

### Popular radio schools in Ecuador (ERPE)

André-Jean and Eric Manhaeghe, social media researchers in sub-Saharan Africa, find that: The radio plays a primary role. It is an essential medium there and many times the only one accessible by rural towns; in the first place, because she uses a language understood by all, the same thing happens to us with other media.<sup>21</sup>

According to what mentioned statement, the use of radio presents an excellent opportunity for rural communities to access it for a minimum receiver cost, even though this represents an essential expense for many.

In Latin America, efforts and campaigns against illiteracy began in 1940 and intensified in 1950 with the intervention of the Organization of American States (OAS) and UNESCO. Some initiatives, such as that of the religious José Joaquín Salcedo (1921-1994) with Radio Sutatenza in Colombia, would not be limited to teaching reading, writing, and formal education but instead incorporated courses aimed at improving agricultural, hygienic, and culinary (See Figure 3—source FDMLP).<sup>22</sup>



Figure 4 The ERPE and the agricultural cooperative Juan Diego.

We consider that Radio Sutatenza and Acción Popular, founded during the second half of the 20th century, had some similar elements

<sup>16</sup>L Proaño. “Yo quisiera dar al indio” letter to Roberto Morales, published in Diario “La Verdad”, Ibarra on the 17th of June 1979.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>See, Jesús García González. “La Caridad y la Justicia en la pastoral social” in Estructurando los tiempos y acontecimientos. Rescatando la memoria de una Patristica latinoamericana. 2012;192–219..

<sup>20</sup>L Proaño. “Los Cinco proyectos en marcha para el desarrollo del campesino de Chimborazo” en Leonidas Proaño, El largo camino hacia la liberación. 2010;56–67.

<sup>21</sup>André-Jean Tudesq y Eric Manhaeghe. “Radio y ayuda mutua en África subsahariana” 65-74, en Spiritus Revista de misionología, Año 48, no 189, 65.

<sup>22</sup>See Mary J Roldán. ACPO, Estado, Educación y Desarrollo Rural en Colombia. 1947–1974.

to ERPE: the model of adult literacy using radio. Through an educational strategy, both offered religious and social guidance to the peasant (Colombia) and indigenous (Ecuador) populations.

The initiative for the radio was an arduous task since neither the Diocese nor Proaño had sufficient resources. Proaño began to look for local financial support, but it was never enough; then, it went further in search of external help, a process that Proaño referred to in these terms:

There was a long and painful ordeal to go through. There was a lack of financial aid. I asked for help from those who could assist in the same province of Chimborazo. I begged for alms... at the doors of the Churches of Colombia... the money I got this way was also insufficient. It was necessary to look for foreign organizations that are beginning to help with development projects.<sup>23</sup>

ERPE's trajectory comprises three phases or periods: literacy in Kichwa (1962-1976), formal distance education (1977-1987), and popular communication (1987 to the present). We will study the first period. Around 18,000 indigenous people in the province of Chimborazo were literate between 1962 and 1976. The radio went on air with "a shortwave station and a kilowatt of antenna power: all the necessary equipment for recordings and broadcasts and ten radio receivers."<sup>24</sup>

In its beginnings, it had four radio schools in the parish of San Juan in the communities of Guabug, Shobol llinllin, Calera Grande, and Pisacaz. Each school had between 20 and 30 adult students. Schools multiplied within the province and others, namely Imbabura, Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, Cañar, Loja, and Morona Santiago. The schools had blackboards, chalk, exercise books, pencils, and a photo of the Virgin of Guadalupe (patron saint of radio). Other materials included pre-produced simple print articles and materials, all of which vary from community to community depending on the creativity of the instructors in charge on the ground.

At the same time, the rural parish priests were directors of the schools. The parish inspectors assisted the priests with visiting each center periodically. Ironically, not all parishes assumed the ERPE, for example, the parish of Calpi. Abelardo Castillo, then the parish priest stood out as one of the opponents of Proaño's activities.

Radio was not only a means of transmitting information, entertainment, and recreation but also an instrument of cultural promotion and education. ERPE developed popular education and comprehensive literacy. The peasants learned to read and write and learned skills to improve agriculture, personal hygiene, and home care. We consider the process of teaching reading and writing among the rural folk improved their interaction: at personal and community levels. In this regard, Paulo Freire would insist that, for the peasants, the literacy program:

As a starting point, it should be assumed that the capacity of knowledge of these peasants has about their context and the context of the world and their ability to express that knowledge through their language.<sup>25</sup>

The focus was broad, seeking the comprehensive development of indigenous people. The radio organization also included a medical

<sup>23</sup>L. Proaño. *Creo en el hombre y en la Comunidad*.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Iris PRIETO; DURANTE RINCON, Esther; RAMOS, María Alejandra. *Experiencia educativa de la radio en América Latina*. *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*. Maracaibo. 2008;14(1):63–72.

dispensary, an inn, general repair shops, a newspaper (Jatari), and an agricultural savings and credit cooperative. The medical assistance linked to the radio was mobile, and the nurses visited the communities taking advantage of the regular classes. In this way, the field of pastoral work was expanded where the pastoral agents had direct contact with the indigenous communities.

The radio educational programming was bilingual, and the class schedules were related to the hours that the peasants were at home: early in the morning and late at night. Proaño said: "The alphabetization and arithmetic courses are held every day in Kichwa (local language) and Spanish, from 5:30 to 7:00 and in the evening from 6:30 to 8:30, Monday to Friday. Friday." There were practical courses on agriculture, childcare, sports, traditional games, and entertainment during the rest of the day.

At the radio station, a team of teachers spent time preparing the radio classes that lasted from six to eight minutes. These were coordinated with the community assistants in charge of each "radio school," house or chapel. Each of them had a receiver. When the community members had gathered, the assistant began the classes. This learning method had a significant impact on the indigenous peasants. Most of the radio attendees were indigenous people who had received a short introductory training course, giving them skills in radio recording and broadcasting and community organization. ERPE had sporadic and short refresher courses for all community communicators, assistants, and auxiliaries. Proaño said that "the indigenous people woke up from their sleep of centuries."<sup>26</sup>

Created under the new paradigm, where indigenous peasants will have access to education and popular information, highlighted the famous newspaper "Jatari Campesino." This monthly newspaper of the ERPE (1966-1983), with up to 71 editions, opened a new civic concert since it allowed indigenous participation in the public sector, especially in the "Letters to the editor" section.

The felt need to collaborate with the newspaper was an important step given that the readers had an affinity with each other in their problems, desires, and needs. The editor, Homero García (diocesan priest) wrote the following to the readers of "Jatari Campesino":

Jatari aspires to be the mustard seed or grain that one day will accommodate the thoughts of so many peasant brothers, interested in the people (who live in this world today) and are subject to constant change, to be more than one people.<sup>27</sup>

The annual "Reading Party" program organized every December 12 (Fiesta de la Virgen of Guadalupe) by the ERPE in Riobamba was considered the climax and the most crucial moment of celebration for all adult students with their families. The indigenous peasants expressed their progress and achievements in reading, writing, and comprehension at the event.

When ERPE started operating, it was not a legal requirement to register community radios with the government. The registration process was done years later, in 1980 with the multiplication of community radios and the implementation of the new constitution. Therefore, ERPE as a community organization continued as a diocesan and non-profit entity with the participation of the indigenous people. With this, the radio would achieve autonomy and the ability to seek support financial and technical support from different non-governmental organizations.

<sup>26</sup>Pablo Freire. "El lenguaje es, en sí mismo, conocimiento".

<sup>27</sup>Editorial "Nuevamente en tus manos", in *Jatari Campesino*, Riobamba, junio de.1971;1(1).

The radio also allowed them to participate in the community, where they could record music and short messages and have them broadcast. ERPE is considered to have contributed enormously to the political empowerment among the peasants.

Since its foundation, ERPE has received much social, political, cultural, and economic attention from society. Inspired by the Freiraian aphorism “to educate is to liberate”, it promoted awareness and political formation in a reality of social deterioration and economic paralysis that characterized the province of Chimborazo. Therefore, essential support for popular organizations among indigenous peoples.<sup>28</sup>

ERPE had a social power, given its massive and extensive characteristics. He was able to break the myths of communication monopoly and the language barrier. The previously illiterate indigenous people were then able to obtain, create and transmit information, and be inserted into the dynamics of collective or massive communication.<sup>29</sup>

It is necessary to highlight some considerations by evaluating this initiative, recognizing lessons learned, and pointing out the advantages of using the radio as a tool and input for education and popular organization and empowering the indigenous peasantry. This was based on an evaluation of the programs in 1971.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, adult education was said to be an extraordinarily complex process with difficulties coming from the system and the listeners or learners. In the same way, the assistants sometimes did not have patience with the students. On the one hand, some of the assistants or collaborators were abusive, authoritarian, and had unethical attitudes. On the other hand, the community collaborators had goodwill but no pedagogical skills. Hence, the lack of competence or practical training meant that the radio schools did not meet the objectives.

Therefore, there was no effort to accompany slow students or those with learning deficiencies. In some cases, the students had little or no interest in the classes.

In this way, it's revealed that the adoption of the communication techniques was too diverse and sometimes provisional or superficial. The trainers, in general, were not very patient; women or slow students made little intellectual progress.

Concerning the advantages of using the radio in the new popular organization, it is considered that the Kichwa and Spanish literacy and arithmetic courses changed the lives of many indigenous people, that is, getting to know how to write and tell.

It was observed that in terms of practical needs, that is, agriculture courses and personal and home care, there was a substantial change through the new construction of houses with kitchens and feeding habits. Also, there was a general improvement in the issue of childcare and the application of appropriate techniques for agricultural production.

Based on the investigation in the archives, the radio allowed the collaboration of ecclesiastical authorities, volunteers, indigenous communities, and families. Thus, the Church was evangelizing and, at the same time, transmitting liberating elements, mainly when it was with the indigenous communities. In this way, remarkable

advances were made the evangelization processes in the province of Chimborazo and beyond.

As for the entertainment programs, ERPE was converted into a space of debate and dialog for the indigenous people and helped arouse and maintain their artistic expression (music, theater, poetry).

ERPE is a popular and community educational alternative since it incorporates new pedagogy that responds to the population's immediate needs. In addition, the use of local resources (instructors, simple infrastructure) and teaching materials in the community context and popular education programs, for some sectors, was highly subversive.

### Agricultural cooperative Juan Diego

As noted, most indigenous peasants did not have their land. They worked as laborers on large estates, where they were mistreated, abused, and exploited. Proaño considered it indisputable that the indigenous people had the right to fight to recover their lands. The Church of Riobamba opened its archives and handed over the deeds of land belonging to those who belonged to the indigenous communities and had been under their control for time immemorial. This situation was just a sample of the urgent need and urgency of an Agrarian Reform in Ecuador, as in many other Latin American countries.<sup>31</sup>

With the first agrarian reform in 1964, the expectation was that essential changes would allow the indigenous to be landowners and new economic relationships established. The existing hacienda system was in decomposition and bankruptcy, especially in the central region. In the 1960s, the ranchers in Chimborazo were in crisis, and some were in the process of sale-purchase. In addition, in the 1960s and 1970s, there were indigenous mobilizations claiming land and suppression of forms of servile exploitation. In some cases, low production, and a lack of credit to modernize stagnated the haciendas. Haciendas were considered a symbol of prestige and a steppingstone to local power. Part of the land belonging to the hacienda lying idle was adjudicated to the local communities through cooperatives, even though they were not very productive. At the same time, they had complicated access; in this way, the local power transformed its internal structure.<sup>32</sup>

For agrarian reform to be beneficial, the empowerment of indigenous people through education and grassroots organization was essential. This lacked from the beginning: the government did not educate the local folk on the essence of the reforms. All the same, within the diocesan pastoral work, “methodical and rational organization of agricultural cooperatives” was implemented.<sup>33</sup>

The objectives of an agricultural cooperative were to unify the efforts of the peasants to achieve their economic well-being; technical agriculture to improve crops and raise animals; promote joint work between partners and encourage the training of partners; transform peasants into owners and invigorate the economy of the country.

After unsuccessful attempts to create a cooperative with the workers of the farms of the Diocese: Zula and Tepeyac and in several other parishes, finally, in the parish of San Juan (outcasts of Riobamba town), it was possible to summon indigenous candidates. On October 15, 1963, brief information was read, and immediately the board of 15 people was constituted, and together with their families (a total of 50 people), the Cooperative was formed.

<sup>28</sup>María Belén Avalos Torres. “Comunicación contrahegemónica, ventriloquía y lenguaje de contienda en Escuelas Radiofónicas Populares del Ecuador y Movimiento Indígena de Chimborazo 1960- 1990”, Quito, FLACSO. 2017.

<sup>29</sup>Anthony Bates. “Education broadcasting”. en *Communication Research Trends*. 2020;9(4).

<sup>30</sup>Véase Centro de Estudios y Acción Social (CEAS). *La Cooperativa Agropecuaria “Juan Diego” (TEPEYAC)*, Riobamba, enero de 1971.

<sup>31</sup>See Fernando Eguren (ed.) *Reforma agraria y desarrollo rural en la región andina*, (Lima: Bellido Ediciones, 2006); José Bengoa, *Haciendas y Campesinos Tomo I & 2*. Santiago: Ediciones Sur, Colección Estudios Históricos, 1990.

<sup>32</sup>See Guerrero, Andrés. “El proceso de identificación: sentido común ciudadano, ventriloquía y transescritura” en *Etnicidades. Antología Ciencias Sociales*. editado por Andrés Guerrero. Quito: FLACSO, 2000. p. 9–60.

<sup>33</sup>L Proaño, *Cinco proyectos en marcha para el desarrollo*.



In support of the organization and formation of cooperatives, the Diocese handed over the Monjas-Corral farm. Thus, some 15 heads of indigenous families, who at the time were *huasipungueros* (Caretakers), became owners of the land they worked. The *huasipungaje* had an imaginary of reciprocity, where they worked on the farm, lived, and planted there. So, with the responsibility of taking care of the hacienda, they had some rights by mutual agreement.

The German episcopal organization, Misereor, financed the agricultural project within the framework of the cooperatives, granting an interest-free, long-term loan from the US. \$/57,000.00. The Cooperative had problems related to decision-making and loan management. In addition to sales and the distribution of responsibilities among the partners. The accounting lacked transparency, given that there was no proper accounting system and internal and external auditing. There are also testimonies that talk of the diversion of funds. In one of the Cooperative's account entries, it is said the partners are not yet mature enough to make critical management decisions. Logically then, it is up to him to take charge of the direction of the cooperative until the debt disappears and until the partners can govern themselves effectively.<sup>34</sup>

The Centro de Estudios y Acción Social (CEAS) had to intervene in assigning responsibilities among the partners for the progressive repair of the wrongs. Other measures to ensure the success of the cooperative include:

1. recruiting farmers under 40 years of age
2. encouraging in them the desire for progress
3. verifying the members' aptitude to assume a communitarian way of work and social life.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, it was necessary to review several provisions of the cooperative law to ensure a more flexible operation, following agricultural activities and with consideration for illiterate peasants. For this reason, clauses related to weekly meetings of the board of directors were deleted or modified, to the vigilance, education, and social affairs committees to the calls. In terms of the payment of contribution certificates in the form of work and the need for sustained technical assistance, this was done through general training plans for adults.

### Opposition and support of Proaño's initiatives

In a traditionalist Catholic context, a reformist pastoral was a great challenge that accumulated harsh experiences and disappointments. The attitude towards "non-traditional pastoral" was one of suspicion and concern on the part of the landowners. The new pastoral approach represented a danger to the Catholic Church and society because it was interfering with the status quo. The opposition accused Proaño of forging a violent revolution with the indigenous people; this was sustained for an exceptionally long time in the Diocese, even though there was no evidence.

The international events related to the anti-colonial struggles in the third world in the 1960s and 1970s fostered an atmosphere of suspicion and opposition to innovative and culturally committed pastoral initiatives by those in positions of power. Circumstances that were especially notable when these initiatives coincided with the advent of the Cuban Revolution (1959), where the lands were expropriated by the state and handed over to the peasants. In addition, the multiplication of guerrilla groups in Latin America raised suspicions of a reconfiguration of the ideology of the left among indigenous

<sup>34</sup>Centro de Estudios y Acción Social (CEAS). La Cooperativa Agropecuaria "Juan Diego. 57.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

people. So, he imagined that violence against the landowners could arise in the countryside or even an armed revolution.

The position adopted by Proaño of distancing himself from the traditional allies of the Church and allying himself and compromising with the indigenous people, being a novelty, led to jealousy and misunderstandings within the ecclesial structure. In the early 1960s, he formed a group of priests known as John XXIII. During the weekly meetings, the group discussed pastoral transformation and methods issues. The new consciousness that marked the pastoral paradigm shift paid attention to the new structures and ministries. Some priests who disagreed with the group, especially the bishop, formed another called Amistad. The formation of this other organization weakened the bishop's effort to reform the Church.

While Proaño was in Rome attending the Second Vatican Council (1963), part of the roof of the Cathedral collapsed. For this reason, the Cathedral was closed. Since his arrival in Riobamba, plans were already underway to build a "Monumental Cathedral" that Riobamba deserved. Nevertheless, the project never took off due to financial constraints and a lack of generosity from well-wishers.<sup>36</sup>

The group "Amigos de la Catedral" with other members of civil society, including the mayor, used the occasion to accuse the bishop of abandoning his essential duties and devoting his time to travel and politics. They also alleged that the funds destined for the construction of the Cathedral were misappropriated. The cathedral of Riobamba was closed for almost ten years, and eventually, the roof was repaired, and other modifications were made. The residents of Riobamba always wanted to have a much better Cathedral than the one in Ambato, a neighboring diocese. The controversies surrounding the repair or construction of the Cathedral lasted almost throughout the entire period of Proaño's ministry.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding new construction, Proaño said that his main task was to build living temples, not stone temples. His radical position was that it was not worth investing in the cathedral's construction while indigenous people were languishing in poverty.<sup>38</sup>

The journalist Alberto Borges affirmed that Proaño "barricaded himself in the ancient Cathedral of wood and adobe, stating that urgent human problems had to be solved before building a lavish temple."<sup>39</sup>

Historically, two groups existed in the Diocese: those against and those who supported the bishop. The latter, especially the indigenous peasants, favored the new pastoral approach. The change in perspective had to do with the closeness to the peasants and the ability to dialogue and propose possible solutions favoring popular organizations and a new social and church order.<sup>40</sup>

They say that when the Escuelas Radiofónicas Populares began to operate, the landowners launched a stubborn campaign against the bishop and commented: "he is crazy; he wants to educate the Indian..." Proaño publicly denounced and expressed his disagreement with the indigenous people's abuses, marginalization, and misery. Similarly, by handing over the lands of the Diocese as the beginning of the long-awaited Agrarian Reform, Proaño detonated an inconceivable bomb.

The documents in the archives account for the confrontations between the landowners and ranchers, and the indigenous peasants. No information has been found on a supposed conflict between

<sup>36</sup>Diario. "Hola Popular" (No 2.937, Riobamba, martes 13 de julio de 1954), 1.

<sup>37</sup>Editorial, Diario "El Heraldo", Ambato, 2 de febrero de 1967.

<sup>38</sup>Agustín Bravo Muñoz, El soñador se fue. 35

<sup>39</sup>Alberto Borges. "Un clérigo en el banquillo" en Revista Vistazo. Quito: noviembre de 1979.

<sup>40</sup>L Proaño. "YO QUISIERA DAR AL INDIOS; Conciencia de su personalidad humana, tierras, libertad, cultura, Religión".

the Protestant evangelicals with the Catholics and the indigenous organizations.

Anthropology and political science studies on Protestantism and indigenous organizations identify resistance and conflictive situations between the evangelical and catholic churches.

## Discussion and conclusions

Given the lack of “good references in terms of time,” qualified personnel, and the necessary evaluation structures, measuring the changes made in the five projects scientifically was difficult. Little attention was paid to in-depth assessment tools, interventions’ effectiveness, and their relationship to grassroots organizing. Overwhelming work and urgency took center stage, the idea being to move forward as quickly as possible with minimal evaluation and oversight. Therefore, it is vital to consider that the information on the use of Radio as a transformative instrument has been completed with the interviews, and more data still needs to be collected.

It turns out that the pastoral model proposed by Proaño with accents of the Social Doctrine of the Church (DSI) and influenced by a new notion of the Church in the Vatican II. At the same time, the evolution of anthropology contributed to a new vision of culture and the indigenous peoples in Latin America. It is worth noting that the effort of Proaño to understand the new social and ecclesiastical

changes and the role of the Church in the world allowed him to interpret theological, socio-economic, and cultural concepts. Based on the sources mentioned above, Proaño methodologically planned the pastoral and social work in the Diocese.

Within the Catholic Church, the changes championed by the bishops have influenced the ordinary life of the poor through aid projects, but mainly, the understanding of pastoral work. The bishops who succeeded Proaño have taken a different pastoral and social work line. Their relationship with the indigenous sectors has been from general principles, less concerned with their political and social struggles. In the indigenous communities, the memory of the figure of Proaño is still valid, but his absence implies the delegitimization of his initiatives and different perspectives and mentalities.

## Acknowledgments

None.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicting interests declared by the authors.

## Funding

None.