

# EDUCATION AND LIBERATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LEONIDAS PROAÑO

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## Educación y liberación desde la óptica de Leonidas Proaño

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the pastoral action of Leonidas Eduardo Proaño, appointed bishop of the Diocese of Riobamba in 1954; in a context in which the indigenous population was considered as men-objects, men-commodities and men-exchange currencies. Presently there is still persistence, as well as a constant emergence of racism and oppression in its many facets that include the marginalization of racialized groups; Worse, public attacks on the lives and dignity of indigenous people. A posteriori, the article traces in the field of the Progressive Church and the Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE) based on the dialogue with the theoretical cartographies of the philosophers Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault and the postcolonial thinker Franz Fanon, The multiple ways of liberation, struggle and resistance, concluding that no power is impassable; Where there is power there are lines of escape. The purpose is to demonstrate how the structural impacts and agency of a historically oppressed population operate, at the same time, forming other forms of political action in alliance with the bishop identified with the men of the poncho; That is to say, with men prevented from being men. The methodology that contributes to the development of the present work consists of the revision of archives and specialized literature, interviews and life histories in order to examine the horizons of liberation.

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### Keywords

Liberation, progressive church, Chimborazo, ERPE, education.

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### Resumen

El presente artículo se propone analizar la acción pastoral de Leonidas Eduardo Proaño, designado obispo de la Diócesis de Riobamba en 1954; en un contexto en el que la población indígena fue considerada como hombres-objetos, hombres-mercancías y hombres-monedas de cambio. En la actualidad aún se observa la persistencia, así como una constante emergencia del racismo y opresión en sus muchas facetas que incluyen la marginación de los grupos racializados; peor aún, los ataques públicos a las vidas y dignidad de las personas indígenas. A posteriori, el artículo rastrea en el campo de la Iglesia progresista y de las Escuelas Radiofónicas Populares del Ecuador (ERPE) con base en el diálogo con las cartografías teóricas de los filósofos Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault y en el del pensador poscolonial Franz Fanon, las múltiples maneras de liberación, lucha y resistencia, concluyendo que ningún poder es infranqueable; donde hay poder hay líneas de fuga. El propósito es evidenciar la manera cómo opera, a la vez, los impactos estructurales y la agencia de una población históricamente oprimida, configurando otras formas de acción política en alianza con el obispo identificado con los hombres del poncho; o sea, con los hombres impedidos de ser hombres. La metodología que contribuye a desarrollar el presente trabajo consiste en la revisión de archivos y literatura especializada, entrevistas e historias de vida a fin de examinar los horizontes de liberación.

### Palabras claves

Liberación, Iglesia progresista, Chimborazo, ERPE, educación.

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## Introduction

The issue of liberation or liberationism in Latin America has generated mixed opinions, since it has been closely related to ideological positions such as socialism and with a firm conviction against capitalism. This issue, however, is more complex than a particular political stance and warns of the cultural and identity issue, because it is such a diverse continent in these areas.

The radicalism with which the sector of the Latin American Catholic Church has been identified in this liberating tenor, had its origin at the end of the 1960s and lasted until the first half of 1990, which does not mean that it has culminated in a radical way, especially as has been suggested, since the end of the Cold War<sup>1</sup> This is known as *Liberation Theology* and consists, roughly, of a critical position of the Catholic Church towards the capitalist models that gained strength in the postwar period (1945)<sup>2</sup>

Much has been written about the theology of liberation, its origin and its content, but it is not enough to analyze the consequences or its projection in modern times, in order to understand the nature and objectives of Latin American alternative and liberationist pastorals. However, the possibilities of making an analysis about the theology of liberation and its projection are quite complex in a space like this, because the diversity of historical, political, cultural situations, among others, in Latin America is immeasurable. That is why we must concentrate on an ex-

emplary case that together with others in Central America such as Nicaragua, Guatemala or the Mexican southeast, is vital in the analysis of its liberationist pastoral praxis. In this case we will focus on the liberation from the Catholic Church in Chimborazo, Ecuador.

In essence, the problem identified in this area of Ecuador is related to cultural diversity, immersed in a generalized social problem of inequality adjudged to modernity and political and economic models of a capitalist nature. The liberation of the Church through the theology of liberation, assumed before this a general position of liberation of the poor and the oppressed, but in praxis it was more reflective and self-critical, to the point of understanding, in cases like the one in Ecuador and other Latin American States, the cultural complexity of indigenous peoples and their right to ethnic difference.

The acceptance and adaptation of a pastoral in the Latin American cultural diversity has not only achieved that “liberation” survives, but that it is updated, resignified and revived<sup>3</sup> But, how has this struggle for the liberation of the peoples continued? indigenous peoples, in particular those of Chimborazo, Ecuador? Hence the importance of knowing the catechesis and missionary work of Bishop Leonidas Eduardo Proaño Villalba.

This article is the result of an analysis of the indigenous people of Chimborazo who, immersed in a situation of extreme poverty caused by the legacy of colonial and racial violence orchestrated by gamonalism<sup>4</sup> or caciquism and internal colonialism (González Casanova, 2006), are still considered as men-objects, men-goods and men-exchange currencies. It is still witnessing the persistence of racism in its many facets that include the marginalization of culturally distinct groups. In addition, public attacks on the lives and dignity of the indigenous person continue.

From the pastoral action of Proaño, its educational and literacy proposal, it has been possible to lay the foundations of a project that constitutes an alternative for the liberation of the indigenous population from the domain of gamonalismo or caciquism and a liberation without violence based on the postulates of the “revolutionary” Gospel that takes as reference the model of the liberation of the Israel people from the Egyptian domination; all this from the Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE).

Among the main contributions that we intend to point out in this article, based on the educational project of Proaño still in force, is a proposal of political and epistemic liberation and resistance from the analytical and theoretical horizons of the philosophers Achille Mbembe and Michel Foucault, without neglecting the political and philosophical action inspired by the progressive Church of Riobamba, Ecuador.<sup>5</sup>



## Context of the educational base of Proaño towards the liberation

Verses a Chinese proverb: “if you make plans for a year, plant rice; If you make plans for ten years, plant trees; but if you make plans for a hundred years, then educate the people”. What the Bishop of Riobamba, Leonidas Proaño, did was precisely to open up possibilities so that the dispossessed people without access to education could change their situation through school instruction. In this sense, for Proaño the human being was worth above all things, even more than the cathedral itself:

The reactionary sectors of Riobamba were against Him. A journalist once told him: “Well, why have you come, you don’t do anything in Riobamba, do nothing for the cathedral. For you everything is the Indian, the Indian, the Indian” to which Monsignor Proaño replied: “Jesus did not build a single chapel, nor a cathedral and, for me, a single Indian, is worth more than a cathedral” (Encalada, 2016, p. 48).

The testimony shows that the indigenous population for the progressive Church of Riobamba was very important. The Indians were the *raison d’être* of a Church that sought to elevate to a condition of humanity of these individuals historically dissolved, marginalized and, to a certain extent, “transformed into men-objects, commodity-men and men-exchange currencies” (Mbembe, 2016, p. 27). To support this argument and the way in which the local gamonalism of Chimborazo reproduced the relations of force, we present the announcement of the distribution of the natives (men, women and children), which alludes more to a distribution of the “savages” and the “Unhappy”, one of the characteristics of the slave system:



Source: Rubén Patagonia. Cut out of the newspaper La Nación. October 1878-First page. It reads: “Today distribution of Indians”

This cut of the newspaper *La Nación* of 1878, was uploaded to social networks on January 6, 2016, whose title is “Today distribution of Indians.” The transcribed text reads like this:

The Ministry of War informs the public that on the 5th and 6th of the current month Indians are being handed over for use in cattle ranches. The still wild Indians (referring to woman) can be useful in domestic tasks in the residences of the Buenos Aires families. It is necessary to emphasize that the Indian’s behavior is far from being civilized, so the adaptation of the savages is necessary.

There are also available to the merchants and signatures of this plaza, Indians under age. The savages, even if they lack the graces of civilization, can be used to great advantage for various errands. They cannot be sent abroad.

The distribution of the savages will take place free of charge at the Immigrant Hotel, on October 5 and 6 from 8 in the morning to 6 in the afternoon (Rubén Patagonia).

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Today, this historical image that gamonalism had on the indigenous population was reinforced in many ways; among them are: ontological oblivion (forget who we are), epistemological oblivion (forget what we know) and historical oblivion (forget where we come from) (Santos, 2010).

The announcement in the newspaper “*La Nación*” exposed above is part of the archeology of a racist text that at that time represented an idea of the Indian or the indigenous as “barbarian”, “miserable”, “savage”, as that non-human that could only provide - and still does in certain spaces now - men-bought and sold, merchandise-men (Mbembe, 2016). In this announcement of *La Nación*, indigenous people are savaged regardless of sex or age, a mechanism by which the life of indigenous people is classified as non-human and is in turn the cause and effect of colonial institutions such as the Church, the State, the haciendas, among others, and these are in turn the cause and effect of the so-called “miserablization”, “bestialization” or “savagery” (Fanon, 2011).

The dominant subject reproduces a whole machinery of adjectives and nouns at the time of manufacturing that indigenous “Other”, discredited and considering it as an otherness incapable of ascending to the stage of civilization. Paraphrasing Edward Said, one would say that the note presented shows the way in which internal orientalism operated or operated in the sense of accounting for the construction mechanisms of the Other. Thus, ‘orient’ - as Said would define the otherness - acquired, adapting it in the context of Chimborazo, representatives and representations more and more concrete and coherent with some western demand (2009, p. 97).



In modern times, the mutation suffered by forms of exploitation cannot be denied; that is to say, there continues to be a colonial and imperial structural practice that “en-savaged” and confiscate the inhabitants of the world, albeit with different forms and discourses, not distinguishing an object from an individual. In fact, the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2016) expresses it very clearly; the distinction between the human being, the thing and the merchandise tends to disappear, without anyone -indigenous, women, men, whites, blacks, children- escaping from it.

Mbembe’s reflections in the context we analyze show that both public and private institutions, woven among them, have been participants in these forms of exploitation and that in reality little has changed in essence the situation expressed in the newspaper *La Nación* at the end of 19th century to the present; therefore, it had not changed at the time Proaño was appointed bishop of Riobamba in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup>

The pastoral action of Bishop Proaño was not in favor of these structures that generated inequality and marginalization. The way to confront it was through education, through literacy programs - Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE) - although with many limitations. According to Baylach, “there was nothing to start, neither local, nor radio station, nor technicians, nor teachers; just a beautiful idea” (1979). However, the steadfast and revolutionary attitude of Proaño weighed more than the limitations.

This educational liberation project began to operate with precise objectives such as evangelizing, raising awareness and teaching the peasants and, in particular, the indigenous people. In his pastoral work, Proaño sought to contribute in the process of humanizing the dehumanized, so that the “mis-erables” were “happy” and so that the “ensavaged” were “desavaged”. The effects of these purposes gain strength when ERPE, in the heart of the Catholic Church, officially went on the air between March 1962 and August 1963.

The statutes of ERPE were approved by the constituent board; that is, its operations were approved as a result of multiple meetings, debates, decisions and negotiations developed at the beginning of the 1960s. ERPE emerged as an alternative to all kinds of racism, prejudices, stereotypes, at a time when it was going establishing the theology of liberation in the Province of Chimborazo.

## Excluded bodies and minds

Throughout the history and configuration of Latin American society, contact between mestizos and indigenous people in spaces such as tem-

ples, municipalities, universities, markets and streets has been inevitable. These are recurrent historical and social patterns in various countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Colombia or Ecuador. In these meetings, the dominant society has used control mechanisms with a racial content that they monitored through oppression to the most disadvantaged sectors, mainly indigenous people. For Hugo Burgos (1997) this is the economic and social dominion over an ethnic and cultural group that serves as a basis to discourage the integration of the unequally treated structure. In many public and private spaces, racialized and discriminatory treatment is still visible today:

To cite only a few cases, note what happens in the Archbishop's Palace. Wednesdays and Saturdays, especially, Indians and cholos, as well as whites of the parishes, turn to the Palace for a ballot that will serve to confirm the children within the Catholic religion. All the farmers are sitting on the sidewalk of the Maldonado park or in the hallways waiting for it to be two in the afternoon. Unfortunately one Wednesday in November it rained hard. A doorman came out and insinuated: "Enter the waiting room because it's raining." Much of the peasants, cholos and mestizos did not wait any longer and went to the room to shelter from the rain, but when trying to enter the Indians, the doorman with good manners stopped them: "The rocotos must remain outside because the room is very small." The Indians had find shelter where they could" (Burgos, 1997, p. 268).

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Until today, the Bishop of the Diocese of Riobamba continued to have the exclusive right to celebrate the so-called *confirmation* to Catholic children and youth unless he himself authorizes this "sacrament" to be celebrated by a priest in the rural and urban parishes.

If we examine the indicated empirical data with the eye of the philosopher Achille Mbembe (2011 and 2016), we can say that there are bodies and *bios* that have no value. The bodies of the mestizos could protect themselves from the rain when entering the room, while the "rocotos" -as the doorman says- could take shelter anywhere, but not in the Archbishop's Palace. Discrimination and racism of the mestizo towards the indigenous work in the form of necro-power, even to this day.

The concept of "necro-politics" developed by Achille Mbembe in his work "Necropolitics. On private indirect government" and taken up in "Critique of Black Reason", it refers to politics based on the idea that for power some lives have value and others do not.<sup>7</sup> It is not so much to kill those who do not serve the power, but let them die; that is, create policies in which they are dying. In Foucauldian terms, racism and discrimi-



nation operate in the scheme of making life and letting die. “It could be said that the old right to die or to let live was replaced by the power to *live or to throw away to die*” (Foucault, 2011, p. 128).

From the perspective of Mbembe and Foucault, the case of the indigenous who was not allowed to enter the archiepiscopal room can be analyzed from the necro-power by the way it was excluded and because these subjects are those that are not profitable for the institution and structure power. Again, then, power does not need to kill those who do not serve power, but let die; that is, the old right to kill is erased.<sup>8</sup> Both for the necro-power (Achille Mbembe, 2011) and for bio-power (Foucault, 1996), power seems to work by segregating people who must die from those who must live. Thus, the exclusion continues to function in different fields and levels as seen in the following testimony:

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When I was in the fourth grade, an indigenous girl from Colta came to school to third grade. She arrived wearing a red cloth on the school sweater, a necklace full of her neck, all were watching with surprise. When she was introduced she spoke with many linguistic interferences, she changed the vowel “i” for the “e” and the “o” for the “u”, then they started to see it even more as strange, inferior and with hidden mockery. She already began to feel excluded and in fact they excluded her. It hurt a lot because I also wear the anaco, but I could not do anything to intervene, they never disrespected me because I speak Spanish well. I think that’s why I was the first indigenous vice president of the student government for the 2013-2014 school year. Continuing with the story, her pronunciation in Spanish had made her feel super bad, she had even cried. She preferred not to talk much; I think she was afraid of making a mistake. The mockery was disguised but indifference automatically excluded her. At recess, she was always alone. When they mimicked the pronunciation I stared at him and looked down. No professor was interested in that case, no one spoke on that subject, for better or for worse. In the fifth and sixth years she left her clothes that she brought from Colta. I no longer saw her with red necklaces or cloth. Her way of dressing changed almost in its entirety, but that helped her to be in the group (Interview registered by Illicachi, 2015, p. 107).

In this case, necro-education operates, understood as an education of death; not because schools are concentration camps; nor because teachers, those at the administrative or service level “kill” their students; not because the military or police come armed to the campuses to kill students, but because they let people die ontologically, epistemologically and historically. In terms of Clara Valverde (2015) it would be death in life. “Make die or let live” is, therefore, the limits of the triangular struc-



ture of coloniality: power, knowledge and being (Achille Mbembe, 2011, Mignolo, 2014).

In this line of reflection, we can point out that racism, according to Foucault (1996), is not simply the assignment of hierarchical values to a range of phenotypic expressions such as hair, skin color and nose shape. The French philosopher sees racism more as a network of intelligibility; as a grammar that does not necessarily refer to a certain group of people, but to a more generalized division within the politic body (Nelson, 2006). Biopolitics selects the body and life. In and for biopolitics not all bodies or all lives or all people fit in. There are people who are worth more and there are people who are worth less according to the phenotype, the dress, the last names, the economic position. To support these claims, in June 2017 the following questions were asked to 414 people at random; we did not use any criterion to select the surveyed subjects, taking into consideration the following idea: “The sociologist is the one who goes down the street and interrogates the first one who passes; who listens to him and learns from him. This is what Socrates did” (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 68).



**Chart 1**  
**Survey on racism in Riobamba**

Questions	Answer: Yes	Answer: No	Total
Is Ecuador a racist country?	381	113	441
Is Riobamba a racist city?	294	120	441
Is there a hidden or disguised racism?	305	108	441
Have you ever heard racist speeches?	278	136	441
Have you ever used racist messages, words and speeches?	181	221	441
Do you identify yourself as a descendant of the Puruhua or indigenous people?	249	165	441

Source: Own elaboration

In the present chart, the objective is not to analyze in depth, but to show, in general terms, the existence of racism, admitted by the mestizos of Riobamba. Although these responses are presented in an ambiguous and contradictory manner, on the one hand, the majority accepts the existence of racist discourses and practices, on the other, most of them also when the question leads to answering about their practices. In this sense it can be said that racism operates, in turn, in an open and hidden,

ambiguous and contradictory way, constructing and destroying identity. Racism erases any point in common between the dominant and the dominated, creates a relationship of irreconcilable enmity between nature and civilization, between natural and civilized beings. The natural subject is like the indomitable nature (Achille Mbembe, 2011).

Faced with this reality, in the context of Chimborazo, the indigenous people resisted in many ways. In the following sections we will return to the topic expressed at the beginning of the article, from the analysis of this situation of resistance from the education and liberation projects, taking as the fight scenarios the Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE) and the Progressive Church of Riobamba.

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## ERPE in the “Church of the poor”

ERPE is articulated in the scenario of the so-called “Church of the Poor”, determined to link its pastoral action to the interests of the peasantry (Bretton, 2001). Literacy for the progressive Church was a priority, an act of love, courage, a path to freedom, a practice of freedom itself (Freire, 2013) and a commitment to the Gospel. The conceptual matrix in which the Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador (ERPE) emerge with a deeply ecclesial accent to the more progressive sectors of the church of the 1970s is clear.

Monseñor Luna Tobar, another of the most representative personalities of Liberation Theology in Latin America, in the prologue of the book “For a Liberating Church” (Gallegos and García, 2010) mentions that the pastoral history of Monsignor Proaño is discovered in him an insistent search for light that recalls the request of the blind man from Jericho. But it was not a search for birth for the hereafter, for nonexistence, but a search for today and for the man of “flesh and blood”.

ERPE, with the installation of the station and the study team, officially opened on March 19, 1962, and began operations with ten schools in order to fulfill the objective of preferably teaching adult farmers. Literacy contributes “to give light to the blind of Jericho embodied in the indigenous.”

The construction of the cultural block<sup>8</sup> (Radio, formation centers and indigenous organizations) for the Church of the poor and the indigenous population was not an easy task; one of the limiting resources was the lack of funding, as stated in the following testimony:

“It was necessary to go through a long and painful ordeal. We did not have the required financial means. I asked for help from those who could give it to me in the same province of Chimborazo. I got very little. Rath-

er the criticisms began. I asked for alms in the company of two priests of the Diocese at the doors of the churches of Colombia, after having explained the need and the project. The money that I got through this way was also insufficient. It was necessary to go to foreign organizations that began to give aid to development projects “(Interview, Modesto Arrieta, priest, October 2016).

Already in operation, the educational radio (ERPE) openly gives the word to the people, through popular edu-communication. The silenced voices begin to explicitly resurface. They question the culture of silence to give way to oral, word and writing culture. The voices arise in Kichwa and Spanish. For several indigenous people, ERPE is one of the basic experiences of the institutionalization of Bilingual Intercultural Education, as evidenced in one of the sections of the foundation of the Bilingual Intercultural Education System Model (MOSEIB). In this sense, ERPE is the *locus* of enunciation, of dispute and of resistance against the hierarchy and the caciquism that pretended not only to naturalize the domination but to strengthen it.

In this educational media the word of the oppressed, instead of reproducing the alienating ideology, becomes the generator and instrument of an authentic transformation of man (Freire, 2013). Groups of indigenous people, peasants, women, and young people do radio production workshops. They make their own programs, their own messages and ethnic themes such as worldview, indigenous philosophy, Indian theology, *Pacha Mama* (mother earth), among others.

ERPE emerges as a field of struggle against the necro-episteme, because, in the epistemic sovereignty resides the power and the capacity to decide which of the knowledge can live and which should die. “To make die or to let live constitutes, therefore, the limits of sovereignty, its main attributes” (Achille Mbembe, 2011, p. 20).

The ultimate expression of the epistemic structure lies broadly in the power and ability to decide which knowledge can live or which knowledge should die, which has to be visible and which must not (Achille Mbembe, 2011). To paraphrase Michel Foucault (2010), we can say that biopower seems to work segregating the knowledge of people -in the first section we had said, segregating people that must die from those who must live. It seems even normal that universal knowledge consists in the will and capacity to kill to live. Its logic is to kill to live, otherwise it condemns its existence. This type of epistemic extermination can also be found in the colonial expansion, but also, it is constituted in a structure that still stands after the period of colonization. Achille Mbembe

(2011) argues that necropolitics reveals what Foucault through biopower could not reveal, for example, new forms of domination, submission and tribute, particularly in the postcolonial African continent, although this postulate can be expanded to the scenarios postcolonial geopolitics such as Chimborazo.

As counter-hegemony,<sup>9</sup> the ERPE Kichwa speakers and educators, by creating the necessary conditions, could for the first time speak openly and with ethnic pride about their Pacha Mama, Pachakutik, their leaders and the knowledge of the south. This implies the resurgence of listening to the historically distorted, erased and blurred voice of the hegemonic historiography (Restrepo, 2005).

“Listening to the voice” of the subaltern as subject-agent of his own history methodologically implied a “reverse reading” of the distortions of that pro of the counterinsurgency that had been amplified by elitist historiography (Rodríguez, 1998 cited in Restrepo, 2005, p. 177).

For several indigenous people through the radio and conscientious voice it puts in serious danger the different spheres - paraphrasing Pierre Bourdieu (1996) - of the hegemonic cultural production: art, literature, philosophy and worldview. In this sense, ERPE is a means and horizon of political and epistemic emancipation for those oppressed indigenous agents who build and claim it. It is evident that this educational environment “rejects immobility, apathy and silence” (Freire, 2013, p. 25), even, bravely denouncing the situation of injustice and poverty in which the indigenous people lived. The key is the release, which will be discussed below.

## Liberation in the thought of Proaño

The word liberation etymologically comes from the Latin *libertio*. According to the dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (RAE), liberation is the act of releasing, which may refer to independence or emancipation. The word liberation in colloquial language is used to make clear that someone has taken a weight off, a burden that was inside him and that concerned him.<sup>10</sup>

Proaño (1974) points out that the word liberation is widely used by all kinds of people and warned that it is in danger of being used by all kinds of people and in very different ways, thus sowing confusion, confusion and distrust. One of the risks is that they use the liberation category simply for economic purposes:

If we speak of liberation only thinking about economic slavery, we are faced with a partial concept of liberation, in front of a dimension that does not cover the totality of man. If we think instead that economic slavery, social slavery, psychological slavery and others are mutually implied, because they have the same root, then we are faced with a total concept of liberation and facing a dimension that encompasses all realities of man (Proaño, 1974, p. 46).

But the one who intervenes in liberation is the divinity, it is Jesus, the liberator of men, but that does not negate the capacity of people's agency nor does it only propose a spiritual liberation.

In the Latin American context, the concept of liberation is developing along with theology and philosophy, constituting as the theology of liberation of which some mention has already been made in the introduction of this article. According to Juan José Tamayo (2000), liberation theology emerges in Latin America, a poor and mostly Christian continent in the decade of the 1960s. One of the central approaches of this is the freedom of human beings who are oppressed by others.

In this lifeline of struggle for liberation, some priests, bishops and lay Catholics are inserted. At the end of the 1960s, not only liberation actions emerged, but expressions such as "irruption of the poor", "awakening of the oppressed", "irruption of the south in history".

In this sense, they are not only rhetorical expressions, but they refer to one of the most significant phenomena of our recent history (Tamayo, 2000). In addition, the II General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopate, held in Medellín (1968), replaced the category development for liberation:<sup>11</sup>

It is necessary to refer to the important role played by liberating education ("pedagogy of the oppressed"), by the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire, who had a broad and deep penetration throughout the subcontinent and greatly influenced the paradigm of liberation evangelization proposed by Medellín and developed later by a part of the Latin American Church (Tamayo, 2000, p. 33).

The purpose of this section is not to delve into Archeology or genealogy of the category "liberation", but to use it as a scaffolding to understand the way in which Bishop Leonidas Proaño used theology and the gospel to denounce oppression and accompany in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed in the region of Chimborazo. Hence, it is vital to understand the biblical notion of exodus<sup>12</sup> in liberation.

The word exodus comes from the Greek "exodus" which means exit or emigration of a people. The exodus also implies migration when there are internal displacements or emigration when these occur from



one country to another. In Biblical terms the Exodus is the second book of the Bible in the Old Testament and the heart of it that narrates the slavery of Hebrews in Ancient Egypt and their liberation through Moses that led them to the promised land (Ramos, s/to). According to the interview with the catechist Joaquín Pintag (Interview, indigenous catechist, February 2017), the lever of liberation for the Church of Riobamba is not Marxism or Communism, as has been done in more conservative sectors of the Church, but the Exodus, because it implies: “first of all the liberation of the slaves and the choosing of the people of Israel. It is an authentic liberation that reaches all human, individual and social reality: God liberates those who want to take for themselves, and Christian freedom will be far from what Western culture understands with this word” (Bible, 2005, p. 68).

The Exodus is an x-ray of the liberation of the Israelite people led by Moses, “saved from the waters”. Moses is a figure recognized as a prophet in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. For José Tamayo (2000), the biblical exodus occupies a central place in the Latin American theologians of liberation. It is one of the biblical themes most linked to LT.

Theology and theological-pastoral documents often relate the experience of oppression (Egypt)/liberation (exodus) of the people of Israel with the experiences of oppression liberation of Latin America, without implying identifying both situations or making mimetic transpositions of one to another. The biblical exodus appears as a driving force of historical praxis, or as a paradigm of liberation for the Third World today and as a focus that illuminates the emancipating historical processes (Tamayo, 2000, p. 101).

El concepto de liberación se constituye en una de las columnas vertebrales para los teólogos de la liberación, para la iglesia progresista, sobre todo, en el espacio de Chimborazo para el obispo Leonidas Proaño. La acción Israelita es un horizonte de inspiración de acción política y movilizadora.<sup>13</sup> Metaphorically it can be said that the oppressor (Egypt) is the gamonalism of Chimborazo and the oppressed (Israel) the indigenous or the peasants; while the liberator (Moses), inspired by God, is Proaño, although he never identified himself or defined himself as Moses, rather he considered himself a student of the people:

I want to do it, recognizing, with simplicity, that what I have lived and learned has not been extracted from the university classrooms of my country or any other country in the world, but from the quarry of the people, because my university has been the town and my best Teachers have been the poor in general and particularly the indigenous peoples

of Ecuador and Latin America, considered in Puebla as “the poorest of the poor” (CEDESA Archive).

For Leonidas Proaño the liberation of the Israelites was a model and reference of liberation, a biblical liberation, divine and real, at the same time. Therefore, the liberation of an oppressed people is not a human mandate, but of God. It is the people of God, who have to free themselves from subjection and inhuman living conditions.

Liberation is an action that determines the exit of a situation contrary to the dignity of the human being, but liberation is not spiritual, it is not a liberation from sins, the liberation that Proaño proposes is a more complex one that consists of liberating politics, economically and culturally. Even the Church itself has to free itself from its alienation, from its haciendas, from the dominant political parties, because “the Church has been an ally of the parties called Catholics, often composed of oligarchs and oppressors” (Proaño, 1974, p. 52) It is not a liberation for the hereafter, but in this and for this world, nor is it a solitary liberation, but a collective and peaceful liberation in which, at the same time, all and all walk, and the path of liberation is not linear, but in zigzag form, it contains cracks, ruptures, (Walsh, 2017) advances and setbacks; in this way, it can be said that the thought and praxis of Proaño is not a new dogma outside all time and space (pacha).



## Vanishing point for liberation

According to the archives of the Andean Solidarity Center (CEDSA), the education program developed by Proaño not only consisted of freeing the oppressed, but also the oppressors. The key is not a uniform release but a multidimensional one. A process of self-liberation and recognition at all reticular levels means more than independence. For this purpose, what the Diocese of Riobamba did was to contribute with the necessary resources and resources, with the logistical organization, preparation of the teaching staff and didactic materials.

Freeing yourself from your oppressors, it may relatively be “easy”, but getting rid of yourself and your oppressed subjectivity is much more complex. For the liberation of the oppressed and oppressors, the recurring questions for Leonidas Proaño were “How to awaken the sensitivity of our brothers desensitized by pain and countless sufferings? What to do to awaken in them aspirations of improvement and hopes of a less dark future? How can you make the love of life begin in your heart and, for



that matter, the love of struggle?” What are the liberation mechanisms and strategies for the oppressed?

The line of flight to liberation is two-way: oppressors and oppressed, and there is no single answer or single formula. In this section we will try to answer from different theoretical cartographies, without departing from the proposal of Leonidas Proaño. For example, for Clara Valverde (2015) it seems that liberation should not only come from the oppressed, but also from the contribution of the oppressors in the liberation process. Valverde (2015) proposes a radical empathy in the sense of putting oneself in the place of the Other, the oppressed and the suffering. This is what Proaño did, live in what the Indians lived and show the Other that the suffering of the Indians mattered to them a lot. “Proaño was not an office, it was reality. Generally, he spent time in the countryside with the Indians, in their meetings, *mingas*, struggles, education” (Interview with Joaquín Pintag, catechist, May 2017).

Radical empathy is not only to imagine and be interested in the suffering of the Other, but also to realize that the Other is not so different from us (Valverde, 2015); that is, “no one is superior or inferior, we are all equal” (Interview, Tamya, director of the Catholic choir, May 2017). No group is more human than the others (Agamben, 2010), postulates that also circulated in the pastoral actions of Proaño.

Valverde (2015) argues that to rebel against oppression, the key is the radical empathy that is not the same as tolerance, because who tolerates is because he has power over that subject, he tolerates it because he sees less to the tolerated. Tolerance is violent and reproduces exclusion, while radical empathy consists in becoming aware that one also has no education, one’s children have no education; therefore, this concept becomes insurgent and antidote to oppression.

Like Proaño, Valverde suggests uniting and facing the power that wants to atomize. With this proposal Proaño founds some indigenous organizations: in 1972 Ecuador Runakunapak Richarimuy (ECUARUNARI), in 1982 the Confederation of Indigenous Movement of Chimborazo (COMICH), in 1986 the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and in 1964 ERPE. Proaño brings together the indigenous, women, peasants and young people through these organizations of regional and national scope. Certainly, ERPE and these indigenous movements are vehicles for developing a radical empathy because it is a space for the excluded, as Clara Valverde (2015) would say. It is very difficult for the included to invite the excluded to their movements, although those included may at some point be part of the excluded.

In this context of analysis and the search for vanishing lines for liberation, the proposal of Frantz Fanon, who proposes to liberate both the oppressor and the oppressed, is interesting, because both are prisoners: the target of their prejudice and the black of color of himself. Both have to free themselves:

It is about the problem of black men and women and the search for liberation in a world divided into two: black and white, by a mechanism that he unambiguously identifies as a colonial system. Fanon wants to untie and release both of them from their prison: the target of their prejudice and the black of their own color, to populate that empty, barren, arid space, that unpopulated slope, and erase the affective aberrations of one and the other, those two metaphysics that generate exclusive relationships, some radical, and another pious and paternalistic (Zapata, 2017, p. 28).

Similar to this proposal of liberation, in the context where the present investigation was developed, Monsignor Leonidas Proaño, one of the greatest representatives of liberation theology in Latin America, points out that the rich are also dominated, because they live in slavery to money and of your pleasures. By the very fact of being dominators, they are also dominated. According to Proaño (1974), we are all enslaved by something. The means and paths of liberation that Proaño proposes are different from those of Fanon. For example, the former takes as model of liberation the departure of Israelites from Egypt by peaceful means and ponders Jesus as the liberator of men; while Fanon (2011) considers liberation as a violent process<sup>14</sup> and even painful; decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Faced with this approach, Immanuel Wallerstein (2010) assumes that the reader asks himself if this is an analytical observation, or if it is rather a political recommendation. The answer may lean more heavily to the intention that both be at the same time. Wallerstein (2010) argues that perhaps not even Fanon himself is very clear which of the two senses has priority. And maybe this for Fanon does not matter. The truth is that Fanon opens furrows for liberation or decolonization.

For its part, according to the approach of Michel Foucault, the main way to tear down those elements that tend to dominate and suppress us, would have to start from the construction of individual subjects who fight essentially against the various constituent discourses that tend to constitute us and where Biopower has played a preponderant role in the elaboration of dominant discourses. However, the main task would not be to free the individual from the macro and/or micro-powers, but to free them from both, the structure and the type of individualization that is linked to it. In other words, we would have to promote new forms



of subjectivity through the rejection of this type of individuality that has been imposed on us for centuries. That is, if we continue teaching from the time we are children that there are higher and lower humanities, there would hardly be a liberation neither “today” nor tomorrow, then, it is necessary an ontology of education that worries about what happens “here” and “now”, and that responds to the questions of today’s men (Higuera, 2014) who cry for freedom, men and women, conscious and responsible subjects of their actions and capable of perfecting them within the exercise of their autonomy (Ortega and Fernández, 2014).

This form of educational ontology contributes in the process of liberating the idea of classifying bodies, helps to denaturalize the social and mental constructions of dividing “first class” and “second class” women and men, “civilized and savage men”; at least for Proaño, “all men are equal before the eyes of God.”

It can be used as a “tool box” the critical philosophy of Foucault to combat against the “presumed normality” of our present with the intention not only to denounce, but also to make emerge a different thought, a different way of thinking (Lechuga, 2007) and let’s say in terms of Proaño, a thought from the indigenous people. What the progressive Church of Riobamba did is make visible historically buried knowledge, for example, when considering indigenous thought as a treasure:

The title of “doctor honoris causa” is a gift that is freely given to me. Among friends and siblings it is normal to establish a correspondence: the graceful with a gift is called to correspond with another gift to the generous donors. In my specific case, I want to offer you the gift that has enriched me: the treasure of the thought and teachings of the indigenous people (Proaño, 1989, p. 5).

This speech is delivered at the University of Saarland, Federal Germany, on October 26, 1987, on the occasion of receiving the Honoris Causa doctorate. In Foucauldian terms (2006), Proaño produces what we might call the insurrection of subjugated knowledge, provokes the insubordination of knowledge disqualified by the hierarchy of knowledge and science (Foucault, 2006 and 1996). Therefore, for Proaño liberation is not only of the oppressed man but the liberation of the indigenous philosophy and worldview.

Thus, the liberation that Proaño conveys is integral and complex. Moreover, Proaño diagnoses the present, his present, his actuality through the Church, ERPE, indigenous movements, that is, it problematizes our current affairs, asking us: What are we? How to escape to what we are?

How to draw the line of flight that allows us to escape the mechanisms of knowledge and power? (Márquez, 2007). The goal is not only to discover what we are, but to reject how we have been built and invented. Discard a false image that seems immanent. Questioning ontologically also implies “who am I? Am I really the one they say I am? Is it true that I am nothing else than that?” That is, my opinion, what is said and what is said. Do you see me? What is my true civil and historical state? “(Achille Mbembe, 2016, p. 68). These problematizations can be considered as an insurrection and philosophical, epistemic and ontological liberation.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault’s analyzes of resistance contribute to examine and understand the resistance of the indigenous people of the Chimborazo region to the different forms of domination produced by the exercise of power. For this philosopher, the power is never entirely controlled by someone or some, at every moment new outputs are designed in the power games. The key word to understand the games of power and avoid falling into domination is resistance, because where there is power there is resistance (Foucault, 2008). There is resistance when someone says “no”, when he opposes a certain situation with the intention of modifying it or avoiding it.

The social network is crossed by points of resistance that are not fixed either, but can move quickly and act as a group, or individually through concertation or in an unforeseen manner. “Resistance is as inventive, mobile and productive as power, it is coextensive and contemporary with power and, like him, it is strategically distributed. Where there is power, there is the possibility of resistance, which is the “irreducible confronting element” (Lechuga, 2007, p. 121). In Chimborazo, for example, indigenous resistance has always been expressed, there has never been total passivity. More specifically, the theoretical debates around the notion of resistance not only have relevance and validity, but also contribute to explore and analyze how the indigenous people of Chimborazo resist, negotiate and adapt to internal colonialism<sup>16</sup>. The search for escape lines and liberation horizons in the indigenous population in the Chimborazo region has been and continues to be a permanent cry.

## Conclusions

The indigenous Kichwas of Chimborazo, victims of racism, domination, exploitation and humiliation exercised from the gamonal power, found the “protection” and accompaniment of the progressive Church of Riobamba.

All kinds of rights denied by political parties, by the traditional Catholic Church itself and the judicial system (re) arose and questioned a power that not only drags “the colonial heritage” of its devices, but also contributes to reinforce cultural, economic and political, hegemony even from the West (Castro-Gómez, 2014). First of all, the Diocese of Riobamba, linked to the theology of liberation, presents itself as progressive inasmuch as it acts as a line of defense and political action against gamonal domination. This philosophical and political insurgency from the indigenous movements inspired by the educational projects of the “revolutionary” Curia does not intend to act outside the State or from the margins (Illicachi, 2015).

According to research data, racism and discrimination in the region of Chimborazo and the country is not a matter of the past, notwithstanding the constitutional declaration as a plurinational and intercultural State; however, few are those who know their sources and the ways in which they have installed themselves in the collective mentality throughout Riobamba’s history, until they have become a hegemonic feeling (Gómez, 2006). While in practice circulate the biopower, biopolitics, necropolitics and necroepistemics still has use and utility the thought of liberation of Proaño and of decolonization of Fanon not only for the natives, but for a whole subordinated population.

Leonidas Proaño, considered one of the greatest exponents of liberation theology in Latin America, created indigenous cohesion organizations and communication and education-literacy institutions such as the Popular Radio Schools of Ecuador in order to contribute to the process of ethnic revitalization, indigenous awakening, awareness and liberation in the Chimborazo region.

To follow the *chakiñan* (path) of liberation it seems interesting and fundamental to use “as a tool box” the theoretical and philosophical proposal of resistance and struggle of Michel Foucault, Achille Mbembe, Franz Fanon and Leonidas Proaño, without subtracting the importance of other theorists. Thus, we would have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the rejection of the type of individuality that has been imposed on us for centuries.

For the pastoral action of Leonidas Proaño, it is not a liberation for the hereafter, but in this and for this world, nor is it a solitary but collective liberation, it is not violence but peaceful. They walk, at the same time, all and all. The path of liberation is not linear, it is in the form of a zigzag, it contains cracks, ruptures, (Walsh, 2017) advances, setbacks, in this way it can be said that Proaño’s thinking and praxis is not a new dogma apart from all time and space (*pacha*).

## Notes

- 1 The “radicalism” of the Catholic Church during the period we are referring to, has been labeled as Marxist by the US, Western Europe, even Rome. For that reason it was assured that with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the theology of liberation had come to an end (Valtierra, in press).
- 2 For authors like Enrique Dussel or Phillip Berryman, part of the explanation of liberation theology is due to the social crisis that was accentuated in Latin America in the early 1960s and that is where the Latin American Church began to analyze and think about its social role, but in a more active fashion. However, there were more events that strengthened this reflection-action: the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) initiated by Pope John XXIII. Prior to this ecclesiastical reform, Catholics had as their main duty to remain “in a state of grace and reach heaven” (Berryman, 2014, p. 20), instead of accentuating more the heterogeneity of the Church, updating the political discourse and the perspective of mission of the Church in the face of the accelerated cultural, social and political change that entails what is conceived as modernity. The content of the Second Vatican Council was a break with the old order. The other important event was the Latin American Episcopal Conference of Medellín, Colombia (1968), which, in essence, synthesized the conciliar message and adapted it to Latin America.
- 3 In the pastoral action with firm foundations of liberation theology can be found the integrating and pastoral catechesis of Samuel Ruiz García who has transcended to this day in constant accompaniment to the different indigenous peoples of the State of Chiapas in agro-ecological matters, but also in the respect for religious diversity with the so-called Indian theology. In Guatemala the presence of Indian theology is also testimony to a pastoral with liberationist bases in which important religious orders have participated, such as the Society of Jesus, the Order of Preachers and the Salesians.
- 4 It is possible to date from 1920 the generalization of the use of gamonal domination as an expression to define the exercise of local power in Ecuador. The first reference that is available is located in the eighteenth century, when the word gamonal appeared mentioned in a trial of the uprising of Indians of Riobamba. With this word, a dominant sector was being designated. That is, to some group or family that has local power in the economic, cultural, etc. (Ibarra, cited in Illicachi, 2006, p. 6).
- 5 It should be noted that the methodology used throughout this investigation involves the collective effort or ethnographic minka. We make special mention of the Andean Solidarity Center (CEDESA) and Homero García, Joaquín Pintag, Tamya Illicachi, Gerardo Nieves and Estuardo Gallegos, for allowing us access to the review of files, including personal files, interviews and review of specialized literature. In addition, the ethnographic fieldwork was based on the use of personal interviews, triptychs, posters, flyers, brochures and scattered records. Another methodological aspect that is important to take into account is that of situated knowledge, in the sense of reflecting why and from what position we have given ourselves to the task of writing, as mentioned by Carmen Martínez Novo at the beginning of her article Religion, politics and identity: “start with some personal data to make my position transparent in relation to this topic” (2009, p. 21); we admit that the pages developed in this research are a warp of the continuous encounters and disagreements of personal and collective experiences among us as authors, in which we have combined our interests in issues related to liberation and religion from different spatial and temporal contexts.





- 6 Leonidas Proaño was born in Imbabura in 1910. He was appointed priest in 1936 and bishop of Riobamba in 1954. In 1976 he was taken to prison by the military dictatorship along with 16 Latin American bishops. In 1986 he was nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. He died on August 31, 1988 at the age of 78.
- 7 Achille Mbembe (2011) *esgrime las categorías: necropoder y necropolítica* para examinar los mecanismos por los que se establece y mantiene un control sobre quién puede vivir y quién debe morir. Para Mbembe, todos los Estados modernos clasifican las vidas de sus sujetos en un sistema donde la muerte de ciertos cuerpos y almas no es sólo esperable, sino incluso rentable.
- 8 In Gramsci's time, the main institutions of hegemony were the school and the churches. In our time, it is the mass media (Kohan, 2013, p. 11).
- 9 The category of counterhegemony gives an account of the elements for the construction of autonomous political consciousness in the various classes and popular sectors. It raises the dispute scenarios in the passage from particular interests to general interests, as a key political process towards an alternative social block (Gonzales, 2003).
- 10 For illustrative purposes, some concepts: liberating or liberating means removing obstacles or obligations; freeman slave given freedom; freedom is to give freedom. Derived from freedman; Liberator is the one who frees others; Freedom is the state or quality of being able to operate without obstacles; Liberal is the person who thinks without obstacles; Libertarian is the supporter of absolute freedom (Proaño, 1974).
- 11 The concept "development" was one of the components of the Theory of Dependence emerged in Latin America in the sixties as an alternative to modernization theory.
- 12 Exodus is the departure from Egypt, which in the Bible is the great deed of God. The departure from the country of slavery on the way to the promised land. God liberates his people "with great power, strong hand and outstretched arm", opening a path in the sea (Bible, 2005, p. 68).
- 13 Proaño said: "Just as Israel, the first people, once experienced the saving presence of God when it liberated him from the oppression of Egypt, when he made it pass through the sea and led him to the land of promise, so do we, God's new people, we cannot help but feel his way that saves, when there is true development, which is the step, for each and for all, of more human conditions of life (Proaño, 1974, p. 5).
- 14 The idea that a fundamental social transformation never happens without violence was not new; It was part of the radical emancipatory traditions inherited from the nineteenth century. These traditions, all affirmed that the privileged never yield the real power calmly and / or voluntarily; power is always ripped from it (Wallerstein, 2010, p. 37).
- 15 In the words of Immanuel Wallerstein (2010), Fanon seems to defend, essentially, three theses on violence, as a political tactic: first thesis, within a colonial world that is "Manichean", the original source of violence is found in the recurrent violent acts of the colonizer himself; Second thesis, is that violence transforms, both the social psychology and the political culture of all those who were colonized and, third thesis, the apparently irreversible path of national liberation and human liberation.
- 16 For Fanon (2007) in his book "The condemned of the earth" addresses the replacement of foreign exploiters by natives, emphasizing especially in class struggles. While for Hugo Burgos, internal colonialism was an expression of social relations that determined the technological and scientific backwardness, economic exploitation and political control not only of the "Indians" but also of the other groups and classes (1997, p. 333)



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