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The Long Road to an Andean Catholic Clergy: From Solórzano to Pèlach I Feliú

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Abstract: The development of a native clergy in the Andes has long been called for but only recently achieved. Drawing from archival and ethnographic data, this article sets out how intercultural prejudice and discrimination have served to prevent the ordination of native Andeans. In the early colonial period, doubts about the authenticity of Andean conversion to Catholicism were rooted in mainstream Spanish skepticism of and disdain for Andean culture; in the modern day, these same prejudices continue, meaning it is only within the last fifty years that a native clergy has developed in the southern Andes, in the Peruvian diocese of Abancay, as the result of the concerted efforts of its second bishop. Today, Abancay boasts its first generation of native clergy, made up entirely of men who were born and raised in the diocese in which they now serve, and which promises a new, more empathetic institutional relationship between what it has historically meant to be Andean and what it has meant to be Catholic.

Keywords: intercultural; Roman Catholicism; Andes; clergy; ethnicity

1. Introduction

In 1648, the great Spanish jurist Juan de Solórzano Pereyra counseled that indigenous Andeans would one day have to be not only priests but also bishops if Catholicism were to be cemented in Peru:

“... not only Mestizos, but the Indians themselves, after [being] thoroughly converted and taught, have to be entrusted with this duty [of the priesthood], and even of Episcopal [responsibilities], for the greater persuasion and easier conversion of their companions.”¹ (Libro II Cap. XXX, p. 247)

After all, the ultimate goal of missionary activity was to establish a self-sufficient native clergy and ecclesiastical hierarchy which would not need foreign injections of priests to keep afloat (de la Costa 1947; Clark 1954). But, three centuries later, Solórzano’s admonition still had not come to pass, as the twentieth-century Popes Pius XI and Benedict XV would echo and repeat these sentiments when they exhorted dioceses around the world to cultivate a native clergy and ecclesiastical hierarchy. This included the diocese of Abancay, located in the south-central Peruvian Andes, which only recently developed an indigenous Roman Catholic clergy under the episcopacy of Monsignor (Mons.) Enrique Pèlach i Feliú, the second bishop of Abancay from 1968 to 1992. It is in large part due to his efforts that the diocese today hosts a first generation of priests who are all themselves ‘indigenous’—that is,

¹ “... no solo a Mestizos, sino los mismos Indios, despues de ser bien convertidos, y doctrinados, se les havia de fiar este cargo, y aun el Episcopal, para la mayor persuasión y mas facil conversión de sus compañeros”.

native to the diocese where they work—and it is a phenomenon which has, until now, been largely unexamined.²

Since the colonial era, indigenous Andeans have faced discrimination based on cultural grounds. This includes the widespread prejudice that although the majority of Peruvian Andeans identify themselves as Catholics, their Catholicism is considered less authentic or ‘real’ than mainstream, nonindigenous Peruvians’ Catholicism due to its location within the Andean cultural world. A generation of native Andean Catholic priests therefore runs directly against the grain of the mainstream Peruvian status quo and indeed against the prevailing ethnographic literature about the Andes, which often assumes an intercultural antagonism between local laity and the institutional Church on the basis that the Catholic clergy are likely to be foreign and therefore hostile to indigenous Andean culture.

To a certain degree, this is true: historically, Catholic clergy in the Peruvian Andes have indeed tended to be both foreign and, at best, apathetic towards their Andean Catholic parishioners. After all, discrimination against Andean peoples is deeply rooted and runs through Peruvian history, from colonial times to modern-day Peru, where indigenous Andeans face widespread discrimination based on longstanding and deeply rooted racial and ethnic stereotypes. The development of a native Andean clergy thereby marks a novel turn in the historical relationship between rural, indigenous Andeans and the institutional Catholic Church—a turn which is rooted in new understandings, built on empathy and shared cultural backgrounds.

The following article begins with an examination of early colonial attitudes towards Andean Catholicism, drawing especially on the Jesuit missionary José de Acosta’s seminal work, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (On Procuring the Salvation of Indians), to examine how the often-negative attitudes of Spanish missionaries towards Andean cultural practices meant that they were often skeptical of the authenticity of Andean conversion to Catholicism—a skepticism which underlay the willingness (or lack thereof) to develop an indigenous clergy at the time. In the modern era, Mons. Enrique Pèlach i Feliú confronted the same attitudes—particularly, that Andean culture was judged as simply inherently incompatible with ‘real’ Catholicism—when he sought to foster local Andean Catholicism and found the seminary in Abancay, where all the current generation of priests in the diocese were trained. Finally, drawing on ethnographic, participant observation fieldwork carried out in the diocese of Abancay from 2015 to 2016, the article describes the fruits of this labor in the present day, discussing the effects of an indigenous clergy on the Catholicism in Abancay today—and how these priests, in drawing on their own upbringing as Andean Catholics, exemplify a new institutional relationship between what it is to be Andean and what it is to be Catholic.

2. Early Colonial Attitudes Towards Andean Catholicism

Whether or not Andean conversion was in fact sincere was a matter hotly debated by many from numerous standpoints during the early colonial period.³ The evangelization of the Andes took off much later, comparatively, than the evangelization of what is now Mexico. The Jesuit order for instance, were initially optimistic that the truth of Christianity would speak for itself; but imperfect

² Throughout this essay, I use the terms ‘native Andean,’ ‘indigenous Andean,’ and ‘indian’ as meaning more or less the same thing: someone of native or indigenous Andean ethnicity. ‘Indian’ is only used when referring to people from colonial times, following colonial usage, as in the modern day the term ‘indio’ is a grave slur. For historical and political reasons, ‘indigenous’ (indígena) is a loaded term in Peru today, and most modern-day inhabitants of the Andes would not label themselves as such—hence the usage of the phrase ‘native Andean.’ However, as ‘indigenous’ is more widely used in Anglophone scholarly circles, I have retained the usage here for the sake of clarity.

³ This period is roughly from Francisco Pizarro and Atahualpa’s confrontation in 1532 up to approximately 1640, while Christianity was considered to be a new religion for Andeans. It should be noted that although this is the majority chronology for the evangelization of the Andes, [Estenssoro Fuchs \(2003\)](#) traces a different one, wherein an idealistic first evangelization at its height during the 1550s and 1560s was followed in the 1570s and 1580s by a stricter and orthodox-focused program in reaction to the Counter-Reformation. For the purposes of this article, however, I will continue with the mainstream and more convincing chronology ([MacCormack 1991](#); [Hyland 2003b](#)).

missions in both the northern and southern Peruvian Andes quickly convinced the Jesuits that the natives' conversion had been insincere and superficial. The Jesuit conviction that conversions were insincere, and the resulting disillusionment, would follow for the rest of Peru as mainstream clergy became increasingly disillusioned with the apparent recalcitrance of native Andeans in holding to their 'pagan' beliefs and ways (Hyland 2003b).

Many Spaniards blamed Andean resistance to Christianity on inherent Andean inferiority, arguing that one had only to look at how Andeans had refused to accept Christianity despite its self-evident truth. This kind of reasoning assumed a fundamental incompatibility between pre-Conquest Andean culture and Christian norms, a stance which set up Andean and Christian customs as anathematic and oppositional. The noted Jesuit missionary José de Acosta recognized in his seminal and highly influential work *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (On the Salvation of Indians) that the "true conversion of Indians to our holy Faith is extremely difficult" because he saw Indian customs as a durable whole which was inherited from the parents and served to impede Christian progress (Acosta[1588] 1996a, p. 12). Here, Acosta was demonstrating a neo-Thomist view of culture which was common at the time, a view which in practice held that harmful customs could only be 'fixed' after many generations of education (Hyland 2003b). People like the Jesuit father Hernández took Acosta's stance further, and argued that that pre-Columbian Andean settlement and living patterns in fact "made the natives' internal conversion to Christianity impossible" (Acosta[1588] 1996a, p. 49).

Complicating matters was the fact that in the sixteenth century, an emphasis on interiority had developed which spanned missionary orders and was part of wider "contemporary European debates over exterior versus interior forms of worship, in which many theologians viewed interior sentiment and consent to God as more worth than exterior acts of devotion" (Hyland 2003a, p. 11). In practice, it meant that standards for genuine or authentic conversion to Christianity were much higher than they had been for converts in previous centuries. As a result, apprehension about the authenticity of Andean Christians was significantly enhanced: after all, there is no way to ever truly know another's thoughts and feelings, and thus, with such a focus on a correct interior experience of Christianity to qualify someone as a 'real' Christian, there was always room for doubt and worry. For example: Acosta, drawing on the Jesuit emphasis on the "interior experience of Christianity through prayer and repentance" (Hyland 2003b, p. 37) and aforementioned neo-Thomist ideas of culture, argued Andean customs were so irreconcilable with the Gospel to the point that most baptized Andeans carried out only the motions and not the interior belief of Christianity, thus indicating that they could not be really Christians.

Furthermore, as Acosta saw it, Christianity called for a "way-of-life completely separated from greed and self-seeking and demands that we cut out, root and branch, all forms of vice that are congenital in our nature and with their use becomes profoundly deep-seated" (Acosta[1588] 1996a, p. 12)—a difficult thing to achieve. Coupled with the emphasis on interiority, meaning that an 'authentic' conversion to Catholicism meant conversion of spirit as well as practice, it "was not enough [for the Spanish] that the native people were brought to worship the Christian god with Christian rites in Christian churches; [Acosta] complained that the Indians did not truly adore the Lord 'in their hearts' and that their children and grandchildren likewise lacked an interior faith" (Hyland 2003b, p. 67).

The narrative that emerges is that many apprehensions about native Andean conversion to Catholicism—and therefore, skepticism over the viability of a native clergy—were rooted particularly in perceptions of Andean culture, customs, and practices as faulty and inferior to Spanish ways. Especially during the early colonial period, when the Conquest and subsequent evangelization of the Andes were still within living memory, the assumption was that Andeans were simply still too steeped in Andean culture to be capable of becoming 'real' Catholics—that is, that Catholicism was inherently just not compatible with Andean-ness.

This being said, I do not wish to misrepresent colonial conversation over Andean conversion as inevitably one-sided and monolithic: the consideration of cultural factors in conversion also served as a foundation from which not only Andeans but also Spaniards could be criticized. For instance:

the original manuscript of *De Procuranda* set out three reasons why the evangelization of the Andes had been less than wildly successful: “(1) the violence of the Spanish conquistadores, with whom the Indians associate Christianity; (2) the immorality of many Spanish missionaries; and (3) the tenacity of the Andeans’ ‘corrupt’ customs” (Hyland 2003b, p. 178). Acosta cast blame on the Spanish, too, for the quality of the evangelization. Likely responding to people like Hernández, Acosta contended that “the Indians have not stopped receiving the Gospel because of their bad customs, but their customs are bad because they have not received the Gospel in the first place” (Acosta[1588] 1996b, p. 9). In a chapter censored by the Jesuits for being too critical, Acosta argued that

the Spaniards are those who are totally responsible for the fact that Christianity, as established amongst the Indians, has not been productive up to this moment, nor is it now going on producing the desired results, because we have neither preached Christ sincerely nor in good faith. And above all we are denying with our acts what we have said with our words. (Acosta[1588] 1996a, p. 35)

Thus, Acosta blamed the general lack of ‘true’ conversion on the “terrible example and wanton way-of-life of the [Spanish] Christians” (Acosta[1588] 1996a, p. 94), reporting that Spaniards cheated the Indians; examiners and judges came just to fleece them; and when one reminded *encomenderos*⁴ that what they ought to be doing was teaching their Indians to be good Christians rather than exploiting them for profit, they became angry and offended. Nor did Acosta exempt Spanish priests, grumbling that many refused to learn local languages and were more interested in leaving as soon as they had enriched themselves.

The question became—what, then, might be a solution to these problems? If the Spanish were brutes, but Andeans were not to be trusted, then *mestizos*—people of mixed Spanish and Andean descent—seemed to be the obvious answer, at least for a while. Fluent in indigenous language and customs from their mothers but raised in Christian ways by their fathers, they would be the ideal priests, solving the issue of clergy who could not communicate with their flock and who had no familiarity with Andean culture.

This was not a universal consensus—during the early colonial period, the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians refused to accept *mestizos* or ethnic Andeans to their ranks at all, skeptical of the quality of their Catholicism. The First Council of Lima (1551–1552) ruled out the development of a native Andean clergy “until they might be better informed and settled in the faith and are more familiar with the mysteries and sacraments” (Vargas Ugarte 1951, p. 15).⁵ This decision was upheld fifteen years later in 1567, when the Second Council of Lima explicitly stated “that Indians not be ordained in any order of the Church” (Vargas Ugarte 1951, p. 249).⁶ But, in 1576, Pope Gregory XIII released the bull *Nuper ad nos*, which explicitly encouraged the creation of a *mestizo* priesthood “so that there might be more ministers that can preach to, teach and confess the Indians” (Solórzano Pereira 1648, Book 4, chp. 20, p. 673).⁷

The Jesuits initially intended to allow many *mestizos* to join, and a number did, such as Bartolomé de Santiago, Pedro de Añasco, and Blas Valera (Hyland 1998). Many of these *mestizo* priests tended to view Andean Catholicism sympathetically, seeing Andean culture and Christianity as compatible. Blas Valera, whose Indian (likely Incan) mother endowed him with a lasting affection for her people, argued that Andean religion was a “precursor to Christianity, and therefore mirrored Christian beliefs and practices in many ways” (Hyland 2003a, p. 3), while Francisco de Ribera, a Mercedarian priest in Andahuaylas, maintained that the religious practices of his mother’s kin were compatible with

⁴ *Encomenderos* were Spaniards in charge of *encomiendas*, which were parcels of land with Indians attached, often distributed as political favors. In exchange for the free labor of said Indians, the *encomendero* was meant to educate them in Christianity.

⁵ “hasta que estén más instruidos y arraigados en la fé y conozcan mejor los misterios y sacramentos.”

⁶ “que los indios no se ordenen de ningún orden de la yglesia.”

⁷ “porque huviese más Ministros que pudiesen acudir á predicar, doctrinar y confesar á los Indios.”

Christianity (Hyland 1998). This was a stance supported by other prominent mestizos of the time, such as the chronicler Garcilaso de la Vega, who argued “Christian truth could never had taken root in the Andes had its way not been prepared by the Incas” (MacCormack 1991, p. 364).

However, aforementioned Jesuit doubts about the genuineness of Indian conversions, rooted particularly in the neo-Thomist conceptions of culture, still meant that they also doubted the genuineness of mestizo Christians. In 1577, just a year after *Nuper ad nos* was issued, the Spanish Crown wrote to the bishop of Cuzco forbidding him from ordaining mestizos; in 1588, King Philip II similarly forbade the Archbishop of Lima from ordaining any more mestizos, fearing that “mestizo priests would cling to the beliefs of their Indian mothers, thereby endangering the evangelization of the native Andeans” (Hyland 1998, p. 437). In *De Procuranda*, Acosta wrote that he had initially thought mestizos would be the perfect priests, but later decided that they were “too degraded by the customs of their mothers” (Hyland 1998, p. 436). It is indicative that the only religious order to accept mestizos during the sixteenth century were the Mercedarians, because they had, for historical reasons, held to a “more medieval idea of conversion which emphasized the acceptance of baptism rather than the heartfelt conversion and long catechesis demanded by the Jesuits and Dominicans” (Hyland 1998, p. 436).

When the Crown banned mestizo priests, it caused an uproar among mestizo groups in Peru. Multiple letters were sent to the Crown, petitioning the Crown to revoke the order (Hyland 1998). Throughout these letters, a few themes stayed constant: namely, arguing that mestizo priests were particularly good missionaries due to their native fluency in the indigenous languages, and that without these language skills among the clergy, the evangelization of the Andes would inevitably falter and fail; and that existent mestizo priests were of excellent moral standing, diligent and faithful in their love of the Church; it was the Spanish who were the real problem, not mestizos.

These are all arguments which would resurface in the mid-twentieth century with papal exhortations for the cultivation of a native clergy, as the next section illustrates. What one sees during the early colonial period is the establishment of mainstream Spanish worries over the conversion of Indians or native Andeans that center on how anathematic their native customs are to Christianity, and worries over the interior sincerity of their faith. There was a “polarity that Acosta, like the bishops of the Third Council of Lima, perceived between Christian truth and Andean demonic imitations or perversions of it,” which became “increasingly important in missionary instruction” (MacCormack 1991, p. 276). However, “although the idea of this polarity is anchored in matters of religion, its substance was for the most part cultural and ethnic” (MacCormack 1991, p. 276)—a substance which was far from theoretical, and far from detached from wider social contexts and trends. Much of it was about cultural superiority, justified and tied into religious truths and Christian norms—as demonstrated by the arguments over the ordination of mestizos.

3. Mons. Enrique Pèlach I Feliú and the Founding of a Native Clergy in Abancay, Peru

In 1963, Romolo Carboni—then the Vatican ambassador to Peru—wrote that Peru must be provided with the “means to develop a native clergy as soon as possible. [. . .] If we do not find priests immediately for Latin America we will have no one to recruit and train native vocations for the future; we will lack a source of highly-qualified men for the episcopacy; we shall witness the Church gradually shrivel up here and die” (Carboni 1963, p. 346). A shortage of Catholic priests in the postrevolutionary period had only worsened as time passed: Carboni reported that at the end of the eighteenth century in Cajamarca, there was one priest for every 3000 Catholics; the end of the nineteenth century, one for every 5700; and at the time of his writing in the 1960s, one for every 12,000. His account of the decline in numbers of priests held true across the country—in 1969, the archdiocese of Cusco (which includes the Abancay diocese) had only ninety-eight priests (Sallnow 1987, p. 16).

In contrast, the diocese of Abancay—founded in 1959 and located in the region of Apurímac in the south-central Peruvian Andes—today has forty-eight priests who were raised, trained, and work in the diocese, with a further six who have been lent out to other dioceses or countries who are lacking in priests. The number of ‘indigenous’ priests in modern-day Abancay is thus more than half the number

of priests in the entire archdiocese fifty years ago. In analyzing this phenomenon, the continuity I draw between early colonial and modern-day Andean Catholicism is not based in unchanging religious practices, but rather in the continuing discrimination against Andean Catholics on the basis of their culture, race, and ethnicity—cultural discrimination which makes a generation of native Andean clergy so noteworthy and astounding.

In line with the rest of Peru, Catholics are the overwhelming religious majority in Apurímac: according to the most recent available census data, approximately 80% of Apurimeños are Catholic (INEI 2017). However, Apurímac has also historically been one of the most ethnically Andean regions in Peru, and is highly stigmatized as a result. It was, for instance, until very recently openly nicknamed the '*mancha india*' ('Indian stain') (e.g., Winn 2006). Nearly three-quarters of the population learned Quechua—one of the main indigenous Andean languages—as their first language, which is a primary marker for the ascription of an ethnically indigenous Andean identity in Peru. Educational standards and systems are poor due to the stigma associated with Andean culture—the illiteracy rate is at approximately twenty-five percent—and it is also one of the poorest regions in Peru: over three-quarters of inhabitants rely primarily or exclusively on firewood (which can be foraged, unlike gas propane which must be paid for) in order to cook.⁸

I list these attributes in order to emphasize that this area continues to be one of the poorest parts of Peru, and residents are stigmatized accordingly. All of the concerns which colonial Spaniards had regarding the ordination of native priests apply here at a slant too. Mainstream Peruvians today continue to doubt the authenticity and quality of Andean Catholicism, on the basis that it is perceived as too 'syncretic' or 'mixed' with Andean culture to be 'real' Catholicism—a perception which echoes the worries of mainstream colonial clergy during the early evangelization of the Andes, and which has undoubtedly assisted in the fact that this is the first time within living memory that there has been a native clergy in Apurimac.

The priests know that they are an anomaly in the history of Catholicism in the Andes, both for their numbers and for their ethnic backgrounds, and strongly credit their own existence as priests to the missionary efforts of the second bishop of Abancay: Mons. Enrique Pèlach i Feliú, who founded the seminary in which all the current generation of priests were trained. They emphasize the respect for and engagement with local Catholicism practiced by him and those priests he brought in to the diocese to work with him; their willingness to interact with rural Andeans and Andean culture without condescension or disdain; his determination to found the seminary and dedication to thoroughly educating indigenous Andeans in Catholicism.

Born in Girona, Spain, in 1917, Mons. Enrique was ordained as a secular priest in 1944. In October of 1957, he arrived to Peru, and became the second bishop of Abancay in 1968, barely a handful of years after the Second Vatican Council sought a revolutionary 'opening up' of the Catholic Church, one which was acutely felt by clergy and laity alike in the Andes (e.g., Piedra Valdez 2007; Dianich 1988; Gonzalez Dorado 1992; Amaladoss 1998). At the time, there were fewer than twenty priests in the diocese, only one of whom was native to the area. Barely twelve parishes in the whole diocese had resident priests (Pèlach Feliú 2005). The majority of priests who worked with Mons. Enrique in his first years as bishop were Spanish, and most of the priests and nuns in the diocese when he was preparing for the foundation of the seminary were foreign as well.

In his memoirs, published in 2005 after his retirement from the episcopacy, Mons. Enrique spoke of the obstacles he faced in trying to start a seminary in Abancay. There had never been a seminary in the diocese before—the one native priest in the diocese when he arrived had been trained in the

⁸ The 2007 census (<http://censos.inei.gob.pe/Censos2007/IDSE/>) also revealed, for example, that fully half of the population in Apurimac earn their living from some form of agriculture, and that nearly 90% of dwellings are built from adobe or mortar—locally considered to be inferior and low-prestige materials for houses, and is thus a fairly reliable indicator of poverty.

diocese of Ayacucho—and he faced incredulity and bafflement from both his fellow priests and local Catholics in why he would want to establish a seminary in Abancay, of all places:

“For the more informed, because they had read some newspaper or magazine, the very idea of a seminary in Abancay was simply insanity. For the majority, it was a project which they could not see clearly. ‘How will it be, Father!’ said some. ‘We’ll see . . . ’ said others, with obvious skepticism.” (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 80)⁹

“In those first post-Council years, many seminaries emptied of candidates for the priesthood and almost disappeared. Some considered them obsolete institutions, which were no longer necessary for the Church. Thus, to think of setting up a seminary in Abancay was already to go against the current but the project had the shine of the impossible. There had never been a seminary [in Abancay]. I had to begin by explaining what a seminary was and the advantages of training generous young people from the local area who Jesus undoubtedly wanted to call to his service.” (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 80)¹⁰

Nevertheless, in 1977, he officially opened the Our Lady of Cocharcas Major Seminary and the St. Francis Solano Minor Seminary. It was “necessary to lay good foundations for the challenge presented by searching for and training candidates for the priesthood,” (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 79) and he began by deliberately naming the major seminary after a devotion very popular in and specific to the diocese: the Virgin of Cocharcas.

Called affectionately ‘Mamacha Cocharcas’¹¹ by locals, Our Lady of Cocharca’s shrine was described by Mons. Enrique as “the largest and most beautiful sanctuary dedicated to the Mother of God in all the Andes” (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 76).¹² The pilgrimage dates to colonial times, when its renown reached beyond the borders of Apurímac; today, it is the most important annual pilgrimage in the diocese of Abancay, attracting thousands of visitors every year for her feast day in September. In naming the major seminary after the Virgin of Cocharcas, Mons. Enrique thus demonstrated his dedication to rooting his ministry in the local Catholic cultural landscape, and was continuing a longstanding project of his: the promotion of the figure of Sebastian Quimichu, the Indian founder of the shrine to the Virgin, of whom he published a hagiography in 1972 (Hyland n.d.). In his memoirs, he described Quimichu in glowing terms, as an ideal Andean Christian “[in whose life] Saint Mary was consistently involved . . . to the point that, with every day that passed, Sebastian Quimichu was ever happier and more generous” (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 77)—effectively, putting forth the figure of Quimichu as a native Andean Catholic to be venerated and remembered, a model of Catholic piety for local Andeans to emulate and connect with. Today, Quimichu is laid to rest within the sanctuary of Cocharcas, memorialized by a marble tombstone through the doing of Mons. Enrique, who moved his remains from its previous resting place underneath the church tower to a more prominent and visible location in a bid to bring further devotion and prominence to this native Andean saint (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 77). His promotion of the figure of Sebastian Quimichu as an exemplar of Andean Christian faith was undoubtedly linked to his decision to name the new major seminary—where he was training a new generation of native Andean priests—after the shrine that Quimichu had founded.

⁹ “Para los más enterados, porque leían algún periódico o revista, la idea de un seminario en Abancay era sencillamente una locura. Para la mayoría era un proyecto que no veían claro. ‘¿Cómo será, Padre!’, decían unos. ‘A la vista será . . . ’, decían otros, con evidente incredulidad.”

¹⁰ “En aquellos primeros años del post-concilio muchos seminarios se fueron vaciando de candidatos al sacerdocio y casi desapareciendo. Algunos los consideraban instituciones obsoletas, que ya no eran necesarias a la Iglesia. En Abancay, por tanto, pensar en poner en marcha un seminario era ir contra corriente, pero es que, además, el tema tenía visos de imposible. Nunca había habido seminario. Había que comenzar explicando qué era un seminario y la conveniencia de formar jóvenes generosos de la misma tierra que, sin duda, Jesús quería llamar a su servicio.”

¹¹ The suffix -cha acts as a diminutive that can convey affection, much as -ito/a does in Spanish. ‘Mamacha Cocharcas’ thus translates to, roughly, ‘Little Mother/Lady Cocharcas.’

¹² “el más grande y hermoso santuario de toda la cordillera de los Andes dedicado a la Madre de Dios.”

Today, Mons. Enrique is remembered and widely beloved by priests and laypeople alike for how well he seemed to settle into Abancay, choosing to die and be buried in the diocese rather than being sent back to Spain. He was known for his lengthy journeys around the most remote parts of the diocese on horseback, one of which he discusses in his memoirs; he learned Quechua to fluency, to the point of writing and publishing catechisms in that language. The popular bilingual prayer book *Rezar y Cantar*, which is still in wide use today and is now in its seventh edition, was originally written and compiled by him. He personally wrote songs for this prayer book, too—one of which is a hymn for the Virgin of Cocharcas. In his memoirs, Mons. Enrique wrote of the inspiration and encouragement he drew from seeing the continuing faith and fervent devotion of local Catholics to the Virgin of Cocharcas: “As usually happens in these cases, it is the common people who inspire us to undertake the [pilgrimage]. They seem to say to us by example that faith moves mountains. This is an experience left to us by the many generations who have made the pilgrimage to Cocharcas” (Pèlach Feliú 2005, p. 78).

Mons. Enrique’s deep and detailed engagement with the local Catholic religious and cultural landscape marked a distinct contrast with both the attitude taken by mainstream early colonial priests towards regional Andean Catholic practices and with the ethnographic record, where priests were often foreign and therefore assumed to be and portrayed as hostile towards Andean Catholicism and exploitative of locals. Isbell (1978) described how the priests in the highland Peruvian community of Chuschi in the 1970s were aligned with ‘foreign domination’: spatially, because the priests occupied the center of town, where the church is and where the other local elites live; and because the priests continued to draw on mandatory public service labor, which within living memory had only been used by prominent mestizo families, the church, and the military in order to provide themselves with servants and laborers. (Harris 2000, p. 50) observed that for the Bolivian Laymi, the Catholic priest was a “secret evil-doer who steals life-giving fat from the bodies of Indians to use for his own nefarious purposes.”

Accompanying this is a lack of care for Andean spiritual needs and formation: during the 1990s, Abercrombie described how the priest showed up in his rural highland Bolivian fieldsite to review some repairs and was only persuaded with much difficulty to celebrate Mass, during which he delivered a sermon that Abercrombie characterised as “more like a litany of abuse”:

“The priest began with reference to the new floor, which he judged the product of poor workmanship and a lack of proper Christian zeal. Speaking in a rarefied Chilean Castilian (marked by the *vosotros* verbal declinations) that was, fortunately, largely unintelligible to most of this flock, he admonished all present to take the gringos among them as their guides, to wash themselves more frequently, dress in livelier colors, eat at table with knife and fork, and rebuild their homes to make separate bedrooms for parents and children. [...] The priest pointedly addressed these chidings to the assembled authorities, to whom he referred as his *hijitos* (“little children”). All in all, the sermon struck me as profoundly insulting and deeply ethnocentric, in which the priest painted himself (and the ethnographer) in the well-known, patronizing pose of civilizing missionaries.” (Abercrombie 1998, pp. 106–7)

Mons. Enrique’s memoirs provide a notable contrast to both the rhetoric of white, Spanish priests in the early colonial period and through much of the twentieth century—and it is one which was undoubtedly deliberate on his part. His memoirs demonstrate his awareness of the skepticism held by his fellow priests towards the idea of training a native clergy and existing stereotypes about the quality of Andean Catholicism—hence, the references to the incredulity of fellow priests at his proposal to open a seminary, and his repeated mentions of how inspiring he found the Catholic faith of the ‘common people’ to be.

Priests in the diocese recall the contrast made by the Spanish priests of Mons. Enrique’s generation with those who had come before. Father (Fr.) Simón, the current parish priest of one of the more prominent parishes in the diocese and who was himself trained in the major seminary in Abancay, told one particular anecdote to illustrate the contrast between the priests who trained him and the priests

he and his community had been accustomed to before them. There was, he said, a time when he fell ill while he was studying in the minor seminary, and was sent home to his rural community to recuperate for an extended period. While he was recovering at home, he, his family, and his neighbors were astonished when one of his teachers—then Fr. Gilberto; now Mons. Gilberto, the current bishop of Abancay—made the journey up to the rural hamlet where he lived to check in on him. It was unheard of for a (white) priest to even enter a rural home like theirs, let alone out of such care.

Mons. Enrique's work as bishop in the diocese made such an impact because it was working against centuries of sedimented assumptions about Andean Catholicism as inherently inferior due to its association with Andean culture. Fr. Simón's anecdote attests to the degree to which indigenous Andeans had internalized the condescending, 'outsider' view of their Catholic practices and to the deeply felt impact of an openly and actively sympathetic priesthood. Through Mons. Enrique's memoirs and his accounts of the reactions of his fellow clergy to his projects, we see his awareness of the fact that previous generations of priests did not necessarily have to be hostile towards Andean practices, merely indifferent, in order to dampen Andean Catholic faith—and we see too his hope of the difference that native Andean saints and a native Andean clergy would make to local Catholicism.

4. The Effects of Native Clergy in Contemporary Abancay

Today, these priests' racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds are an important and prominent aspect of their ministry, both in terms of their identification with rather than against their parishioners, and in their approach to the specifically Andean 'quirks' of local Catholicism. In this section, I draw on the intensive ethnographic fieldwork which I carried out in the Abancay diocese from 2015 to 2016, particularly the parish of Talavera, in order to complement historical accounts with an ethnographic analysis of the native clergy in the current day.

The rhetoric of Mons. Enrique, emphasizing the great faith of rural Andeans, is often echoed by priests in the diocese today. Just as Mons. Enrique made such statements as an implicit critique of prevailing stereotypes of Andean Catholics as not 'real' Catholics, so too is it with these stereotypes in mind that Fr. Simón, the parish priest of Talavera (one of the largest parishes in the diocese), often reiterates, both publicly and privately, the great faith of the 'common people.' He even goes so far as to argue that it was in fact the 'humblest' people who have the most faith, not the more 'cultured' people in town—an argument which echoes those of Blas Valera, defending the character of native Andeans and the validity of their faith. Because these are priests who have grown up as Andean Catholics in the diocese, they are secure in and assured of the genuineness and authenticity of local Catholicism—their own native Catholicism.

This security extends to Andean rituals which are often interpreted by outsiders as survivals of 'pagan' pre-colonial times, such as offerings to the mountains. For the priests, however, many of them witnessed these rituals and participated in them as children, when they did not take them very seriously, and which they continue to not take very seriously. Fr. Simón recounted to me once his memories of watching 'traditional' rituals being carried out, where he and the other village children goggled and giggled as the adults solemnly went around from one site to another with the offerings. As children, it seemed such a ridiculous thing to do; he said they only stopped whispering and laughing and shoving each other when someone came over and twisted their ears until they promised to behave. Fr. Simón told me that he had never had any sense of a real, profound interior belief in the mountain spirits or ancestors, not for him or anyone else he knew. For him, his village had carried out the rituals as a way of honoring the past, of honoring one's forebears; since they had always done this, they continued to do it to remember them. In fact, he lamented to me that many traditional rituals such as this had been lost in recent decades; far from wanting them eradicated as threats to Catholicism, he wanted them brought back, because for him, they were beautiful traditions which it was a shame to have lost.

While there were limits to what Fr. Simón considered acceptable—for instance, he regularly complained that the practices of *curanderos* (itinerant traditional Andean healers) were "meaningless syncretism" because they mix prayers to the mountains and the ancestors with prayers to the Christian

God which, he said, “doesn’t make any sense”—there was no sense that they invalidated or even threatened local Catholicism. Rather, his primary line of complaint was that curanderos were conmen and quacks, charging extortionate rates and taking advantage of the people’s ignorance of scientific medicine. The authenticity of local Catholicism was taken for granted—as it would be; after all, he himself had grown up in a rural indigenous Andean Catholic community, and had seen for himself the level and quality of faith people really had.

Furthermore, the priests actively maintain and keep up markers which identify them culturally with, rather than against, the rural countryside—and the fact that they do so is an emotional one for many rural parishioners. Here, I want to examine the importance of food, land, and labor, and language in signifying the priests’ active identification with the rural countryside and the implications for the pastoral experience of Catholicism in Talavera.

The priests often openly declared that they preferred to eat highland cuisine, so the types of food served at the parish table were almost always ones specifically marked as rural—maize, guinea pig, edible lupins. These are foods which urban, whiter people do not eat, because they are branded as ‘indigenous’ and therefore stigmatized (Alcalde 2007; Canessa 2012). In not only demonstrating their familiarity with but also their open enjoyment of typically rural Andean, ‘indigenous’ foods, priests align themselves with local customs and tastes—and are often beloved by parishioners on this basis. By asserting an outright preference for rural cuisine, and eating the food rural people cook with them in their homes, the priests openly align themselves in sympathy with the rural and countryside—with ‘Indians’—and against the narrative of rural, indigenous things (especially something as intimate as food) as polluting and repulsive.

In a similar vein, as has become a theme in the ethnographic literature of the contemporary Andes, land is a deeply important part of Andean life. Connected with this is the idea that—along with food—it is physical, agricultural labor which constitutes an indigenous person (Canessa 1998). During fieldwork, the curate in Talavera returned regularly to help his family with the harvest and with farming matters. When seminarians came to stay in Talavera with the priests, Fr. Simón often made them take up pickaxes and do physical labor; being from rural communities, he said, they should know how to work in a field. After all, he said, when he was in seminary, they grew much of their own food in fields tended by the seminarians themselves.

With this history of agricultural labor also comes a knowledge and familiarity with the concerns of rural farmers, the rhythms that govern agricultural life—when to harvest, when to plant; the lived impact of a drought, of a hailstorm. The parish priest and the curate, having grown up in rural agriculturalist families, worried for rural indigenous parishioners when the rainy season didn’t start on time, or when there was hail, or when it got too hot or too cold—both remembering their own childhood in the countryside, and out of concern for their own family members who continued to farm.

Finally, this generation of indigenous clergy are native speakers of Quechua. With the exception of two, all of the priests in Abancay are native Quechua speakers. Fr. Simón, for instance, spoke only Quechua until he was twelve—his family had by then given up hope of him ever learning Spanish. He remembers that the first time he heard Mass, it was celebrated in Spanish, and it “might have been in Latin, for all I understood of it,” as he put it. Today, the priests make a point of speaking in Quechua whenever they can, sometimes deliberately delivering entire homilies in Quechua and often switching between the two mid-homily. Fr. Simón takes pride in his Quechua-speaking, as do the other priests, and delighted in making puns and clever wordplay as a way to show off the complexity and nuance Quechua is capable of. He often waxed nostalgic to me about Quechua, and repeatedly said that it was a much more beautiful language than Spanish—a statement which runs very much against the grain of mainstream Peruvian consensus, where Quechua-speaking is stigmatized and is tied specifically to a rural, indigenous identity (Weismantel 2001; Alcalde 2007).

The need to be able to communicate fluently in the local language was a prominent rationale for the need to ordain mestizo and indigenous priests from the early colonial period through to the twentieth century. Indeed, inability or unwillingness to speak so that rural Andeans might understand features

in anthropological descriptions of unsympathetic foreign priests (e.g., [Abercrombie 1998](#)). Although most people in Abancay are bilingual in Spanish and Quechua, in the rural areas, Quechua dominates and Spanish ability is often basic at best. When they traveled to rural villages to celebrate Mass, the priests I knew made a point of doing everything in Quechua, specifically in order to ensure that the rural, largely Quechua-speaking congregations would understand what he was saying. The liturgy was always in Quechua, as well as the Gospel reading; the homily was always delivered in Quechua, and the congregation were always encouraged, in Quechua, to confess specifically so that they might receive Communion. Care was consistently taken for the rural perspective, and to ensure that they too might understand and receive the sacraments.

It is with their Quechua-language efforts that we see most clearly how the current state of indigenous Catholicism in Abancay is founded on episcopal endeavors within the last half-century. The priests often draw on a Quechua-language Bible, published in 2002, which is the first, and to date only, Quechua translation of the complete Catholic Bible. Many of the priests helped translate the Bible from Spanish to Quechua during their time as seminarians in Abancay—according to Fr. Simón, they were normally assigned a few verses at a time, which each of them would translate according to their own dialects and preferences. These translations were then sent via Mons. Enrique to Mons. Demetrio Malloy (then bishop of Huancavelica), who collected and standardized them. The Quechua Mass—used when the priests celebrate Mass in rural communities, and in Talavera, every Sunday at nine in the morning—was first published in 1980, a project spearheaded by the diocese of Huancavelica. They rely heavily, too, on the prayer book *Rezar y Cantar* (Pray and Sing), which as previously mentioned is in large part the result of the endeavors of Mons. Enrique, and which contains over a hundred songs, prayers, liturgy, and catechetical information in Quechua. As of 2016, it is in its seventh edition, and it continues to be heavily used all throughout Abancay by both clergy and laity alike.

These three markers—food, labor and land, language—are deeply and intimately felt by indigenous Andean Catholics. Just as Fr. Simón vividly recalls, with visible emotion, the impact of then-Fr. Gilberto taking the pains to visit him in his own home, so too do Fr. Simón's parishioners intensely remember his own visible identification with them, and his own involvement and engagement with rural Andean cultural customs and norms. When he left his previous parish to move to Talavera, parishioners openly cried; when I visited that parish, three years after his departure, people knew that I had come from Talavera and told me that they still missed him and wished he would return. On another visit, I was approached and given bags of his favorite foods to take back to Talavera for him. They had remembered these details for years, down to the amount of salt he liked in his cheese—testament to the profoundly felt effects of his visible identification with local people in the face of mainstream discrimination.

The effects of a clergy in which virtually all the priests are native to the local area, ethnically indigenous Andeans, native speakers of Quechua and from rural farming families, are immense and mark a sea-change in Catholicism in Abancay. In particular, it potentially marks the beginning of a new conception of what it is to be an Andean Catholic in Peru—wherein it is possible and even good to be both Andean and Catholic.

5. Conclusions

The sheer existence of a locally native and indigenous clergy marks a radical change in the history of the Church in the south-central Peruvian Andes—a radical change which is built on the efforts of clergy such as Mons. Enrique, and in the face of longstanding, deeply rooted racial and cultural discrimination. Clergy and laity alike in Abancay today know that their generation of priests are historically unusual, especially in their shared ethnic backgrounds. After all, their development began in earnest barely a generation ago—the previous generations of apathetic foreign priests are well within living memory, and heighten the contrast with the priests the diocese has today. Their existence is part of the long, fraught historical relationship in Peru between what it means to be indigenous Andean and what it means to be Catholic.

Anti-Andean cultural discrimination as justified through (mainstream Spanish) religious norms has deep historical roots in Peru: worries over Andean culture ‘polluting’ Catholicism were present from the early colonial period onwards and this contributed strongly to contemporary debate over the ordination of mestizos, serving to stymie the development of a native clergy in the Andes. Even today, the same prejudices against Andean culture continue, especially the perception of Andean culture as fundamentally incompatible with Catholicism. Such stereotypes meant that Mons. Enrique Pélach i Feliú’s active promotion of local Catholic devotions and his founding of a seminary in order to train a first generation of native clergy went very much against the grain of the history of Andean Catholicism in the twentieth century.

A generation of locally native clergy who are unashamed of their own rural origins and openly embrace and even prefer rural foods, customs, and language has been highly significant and meaningful for rural Catholics in the Andean diocese of Abancay, who are encountering for the first time a priesthood who, by and large, shares a cultural background. In being so, these priests are also creating a different relationship between the institutional Church and Andean customs—one based on identification with and nostalgia for, rather than antipathy towards, local customs. In this, then, this native clergy provides the potential for a Catholicism which does not have a foreign but a native face in the Andes—an Andean Catholicism which is all the more vibrant and compelling for its Andean elements, rather than lesser for them.

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