

The politics of religion and the rise of social Catholicism in Peru (1884–1935). Faith, workers, and race before liberation theology. By Richardo D. Cubas Ramacciotti. (Religion in the Americas Series, 18.) Pp. xiv + 297. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2018. €115. 978 90 04 35567 5; 1542 1279

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Until he resigned in early 2019, Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani led the Peruvian Catholic Church. His right-wing views, close alignment with the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori, and his clear disinterest in and even opposition to human rights – he once claimed that human rights organisations were ‘una cojudez’, which roughly translates as ‘bollocks’ – stood in sharp contrast to the progressive and even radical Catholicism of figures such as the Peruvian Dominican priest Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the founders of Liberation Theology. One might be tempted to assume that early twentieth-century social Catholicism is the historical antecedent of the Catholicism represented by Father Gutiérrez. However, as becomes clear in Cubas Ramacciotti’s book, social Catholicism in Peru, and arguably elsewhere, was more reactive than progressive. Still, as the author shows, it had a real impact on Peruvian politics and society, not least as a consequence of how it addressed the so-called social question, and, more specifically still, the Indian question.

In the introduction, Cubas Ramacciotti frames his study in relation to previous studies by scholars such as Jeffrey Klaiber, Pilar García Jordán and Fernando Armas Asín. The first part of the book, chapters i–iv, does not much deviate from this scholarship. It traces the role played by Peru’s ultramontane Church in contributing to the relative strength of conservatism and the weakness of liberalism in early to mid-nineteenth century and the ways in which the Church addressed the challenges of secularisation following the War of the Pacific (1879–83). The author pays particularly attention to the growing political involvement of Catholics in the 1920s, during the modernising government of Augusto B. Leguía, which saw growing social conflict, and in particular in the 1930s, when sectors of the Church responded to the emergence of what the author sees as messianic political movements, specifically Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre’s APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance), by establishing a short-lived socially progressive party, the Unión Popular. Although in some ways these chapters cover well-trodden ground, they serve as useful background to the following sections.

Part II, chapters v–vii, ‘Catholic Revival’, shifts attention to the actors and institutions that constituted the new social Catholicism. The author discusses the role played by key bishops such as Mariano Holguín, Pedro Pablo Drinot y Pierola (incidentally, a relative of this reviewer) and Pedro Pascual Farfán de los Godos in introducing a series of initiatives that reflected social Catholic doctrine to Peru. These initiatives included founding Catholic workers’ groups, publishing Catholic newspapers, establishing lay organisations such as *Acción Social Católica*, promoting the establishment and expansion of Catholic schools, and the creation of Lima’s Catholic University. As the author shows, these initiatives and in particular the lay Catholic organisations that were set up in this period to support the initiatives were key to the successful mobilisation of Catholics around social and political issues.

Section III, chapters VIII–IX, ‘Social Catholicism’, is the most original and arguably interesting section of the book. Its chapters explore the development of Catholic social thought in Peru in relation to the social question and the Indian question. In the first chapter the author focuses on the writings of intellectuals such as Victor Andrés García Belaúnde and the Franciscan Francisco Cabré, who drew on the ideas of *Rerum Novarum* and European social Catholic thought to put forward arguments for a third way between capitalism and Marxism, favouring reform over revolution in a manner that recognised both workers’ rights and the obligations of employers towards their workers and society but that shunned what they considered the extreme demands of anarchists, Communists and Apristas. The chapter then turns to examine the establishment of Catholic Worker Circles as alternatives to anarcho-syndicalist and socialist unions, and in particular to the circle that was set up in the city of Arequipa, which proved the most influential and long-lasting, and which, perhaps unsurprisingly, emphasised education and moral uplift over class struggle.

The final chapter shifts focus to social Catholicism’s engagement with the Indian question, outlining the growing attention among Catholic priests such as Holguín, Drinot y Pierola and Farfán de los Godos to the social conditions faced by Peru’s indigenous populations in both the Andes and the Amazon. These views were shaped by the direct experience that some priests had of these conditions, and what they understood to be the factors that explained what they viewed as the Indian’s backwardness. Priests had, of course, had a presence in the Peruvian highlands for centuries, but they were increasingly present in the Amazon too, as a consequence of missionary campaigns. The author also discusses the growing attention to the abuses that were committed by some priests in the highlands, who were now viewed as also in need of reform. Titled ‘Ecclesiastical *indigenismo*’, the chapter makes a strong and convincing case for broadening studies of *indigenismo*, typically understood as the series of ideas, movements and policies that non-Indians developed about Indians in early twentieth-century Latin America, and to the role that the Church played in its history.

While the book raises and addresses a number of interesting questions, at times some issues are left unexplored. The introduction, for example, discusses the relevant Peruvian historiography, but tells us rather little about how the Peruvian case relates to the broader Latin American history of social Catholicism. More on this in the introduction but also elsewhere in the book might have helped to establish the specificity of the Peruvian case. More concretely, we learn very little about the members of the Catholic Workers Circles discussed in chapter VIII. It would have been useful, for example, to know whether they were different in profession or in other ways to workers in non-Catholic unions. Similarly, in chapter VI the author discusses the establishment of Catholic women’s organisations but tells us very little about them. What type of activities did they engage in? How were they perceived? Perhaps available sources do not provide answers to these questions or perhaps these are questions that others, inspired by this fine book, will want to attempt to answer.

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