

POPE

Church Strives to Promote Human Dignity

Latacunga, Ecuador (NC) — Here is an NC News translation of Pope John Paul II's Spanish-language address to Indians in Latacunga Jan. 31.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Dear sons and daughters: *Pai apunchic Jesucristo yupaichashaca cachun! Cuyaschea churicuna, ushushicuna.*



In this ancient city of Latacunga, I feel happy to find myself among you as a father in the midst of his dearest children. I see here so many who have come — many even on foot — from the immense eastern forests and the great rivers of the coast and are here together with the inhabitants of this beautiful Ecuadorean mountain country. You are offering me an entrancing spectacle, with the many colors of your garments, above all your ardent

love for Jesus, whose humble messenger I am. First of all, accept my most lively thanks for coming to this meeting.

I. Indigenous values.

1. Faith in Jesus Christ reached your peoples 450 years ago. Yet even before, without your knowing it, God had been present, lighting your way. The apostle St. John tells us so: the Word, the Son of God, "was the real light giving light to every man who comes into this world" (Jn 1:9).

It was he who enlightened the hearts of your peoples, that you might come to discover traces of God the Creator in all creatures in the sun and moon, in good and great mother Earth, in the snow and in the volcano, in the lakes and rivers which descend from your high mountain ranges.

With what emotion your fathers discovered, in the light of the Gospel, that they themselves were worth much more than all the marvels of creation, for they, your fathers, had been created in God's image and likeness, as splendid portraits of him! With what joy your fathers learned that the great God who had created all things for man's service, he, that same God, had willed to come close to us in his Son Jesus Christ, by making himself into a man, so that we should become his adopted children! With what joy did they know that all of us are brethren, for all of us can also have the life of Jesus, the life of God's son. Since then, the spirit of unity and solidarity, which is so much that of your peoples, has received greater depth and strength.

This spirit of solidaritarian union shows itself in many forms: in the merriment and enthusiasm of your gatherings, in your beautiful feasts, in the generosity with which you receive strangers, in the love with which you share with your neighbors in their troubles. You thus do what God asks us to do in his Word, when he says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). This unity is manifested very richly in your families, which are united by blood and by spiritual parentage, and also in your organizations, such as your communes.

2. Seeds of Christ existed in your people even before evangelization: you are convinced that you remain together after death. Your peoples identify evil with death and good with life, and Jesus is life. Your peoples have a keen sense of justice, and Jesus proclaims that those who thirst after justice are blessed (cf. Mt 5:6). Your peoples give great value to the word, and Jesus is the Word of the Father. Your peoples are open to relationships, I would say that you live in order to relate. And Christ is the way for the relationship between God and men and among men. All these things are seeds of Christ. Evangelization found them here, then had to purify, deepen and complete them.

From the beginning, without being aware of it, you had realized also in your hearts how God has great desire that we men of all races and cultures shall continue to become united in a grand communion of love, in an immense family, the chief of which is Jesus, whose father is the Father of Jesus Christ, whose soul is the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Jesus and the Father. This family is the church, it has the Virgin Mary for mother.

3. Your bishops declared at Puebla (cf. No. 409) that Latin America, Ecuador with it, has its origin in the racial and cultural mingling of Spain and your peoples. Such mingling is a testimony of spiritual greatness, when it is a source of mutual respect between the descendants of both communities.

The profound values of your peoples are not mere folkloric realities, they are living realities (cf. Puebla, No. 398), and you have maintained them over the centuries, not without grave difficulties.

Those so positive realities are the sign of interior strength, and they speak with greater eloquence than do the remains of your cultures which we find in places such as La Tolita, Valdivia, Manta, Pachusala, Chorrera, Angamarea and Ingapirca.

II. Problems.

1. I know the difficulties and sufferings that you have encountered in your past and present history, and which have at times made you doubt yourselves and your identity.

I also know that many missionaries — among whom were Friar Bartolome de las Casas, Father Vieira, Bishop Pedro de la Pena and others — and members of various councils, struggled to defend the rights of the indigenous. They let their cry of denunciation be heard by European authorities with great energy. Men of great talent and heart, such as Fathers Vitoria and Suarez, had preceded their protests, and had proclaimed that the rights of your peoples came before other rights established by human laws. Since then "the rights of peoples" has been the measure of changing positive laws and has been what urges them to be rightful and effective.

Your community has striven for centuries to preserve its values and culture. It is not a matter of opposing proper



Pope blesses crowd in Cuenca, Ecuador. (NC Photo)

integration and living together on a broader level, enabling your communities to develop their own culture and make them capable of assimilating scientific and technical discoveries in a way proper to itself. But it is perfectly legitimate to seek to preserve one's own spirit in its various cultural forms of expression. Your bishops gave utterance to this in their document on "Pastoral Options."

2. A grave problem at the moment is that your society is losing precious values which might enhance other cultures. Religious sense is weakening and God is forgotten. Community and family feeling are weakening, above all because you find that you are obliged to emigrate through lack of land and because of the unjust relationship existing among agriculture, industry and commerce.

Other perils threaten you with death. I will only mention that of alcoholism, which is destroying the vigor of your people. I am not unaware of the complexity of the problem. Therefore, while calling upon you to maintain moral behavior which shall avoid this sad phenomenon, I make an appeal at the same time to those who can give their collaboration in this matter, to combat all causes aggravating or favoring problems of this kind. Effective struggle in this regard will also require a struggle against malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of clothing, proper housing, and work, and lack of healthy diversions, in a word: against emargination and what denies hope to the human person and a path toward his dignity as such.

III. Aspirations.

I now wish to make myself the spokesman of your deepest aspirations.

1. Above all, you rightly wish to be respected as persons and citizens. The church makes this aspiration her own, since your dignity is not less than that of any other person or race. Actually, every human is most noble, because he is the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1:26-27). And Jesus willed to identify himself so much with mankind, especially with the poor and emarginated, that he declared that whatever be done or left undone for any of those brethren, is done or not done for him. Therefore no one may claim to be a true Christian if he scorns others because of their race or culture. St. Paul wrote: "It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13), a reality which ought to take concrete shape in personal and social life.

The most aware among you yearn for your culture, your traditions and customs to be respected, and wish that the form in which your communities are governed be taken into account. This is a rightful aspiration, and it is written in the variety of expressions of the human spirit. That can enhance human living together not a little, within the general framework of a society's needs and equilibrium.

2. I desire in this regard to encourage priests and Religious to evangelize, keeping in mind your indigenous culture, and to accept joyfully the earthen elements in those things in which they themselves participate. Along this line, I make my own what your bishops called for at Puebla: "that particular churches will seek to adapt themselves, by accomplishing a transmission of the Gospel message into the anthropological language and the symbols of the culture to which it belongs" (Puebla, No. 404).

However, although the church respects and esteems the cultures of every people, hence those of your ethnic groups as well, although she tries to preserve the value of all what is positive in them, she cannot give up her duty of trying to elevate moral and customary behavior, by preaching the morality of the commandments, which is the most fundamental ethical expression of mankind, having been revealed by God himself and completed by the law of love taught by Christ. The church considers it a duty at the same time to try to uproot practices or customs which are contrary to the morality and truth of the Gospel. She has to be loyal to God and her mission. "Hence that evangelization which urges abandonment of false concepts of God, of antinatural conduct and of aberrant manipulation of man by man, is not to be regarded as outrageous" (Puebla, No. 406).

3. As part of the Latin American peasant world to which you belong, you love the earth and seek to remain in contact with it. Your culture is linked with effective and dignified possession of the land.

I know that an agrarian reform has been going on for years, and the church in Ecuador has taken a worthy part in it. I want to encourage this laudable initiative. In the light of experience it will be necessary to go on correcting deficiencies, so that the reform may be completed with due technical expertise, with the aid of further economical means, in respect for the community integration which is your own, in order to be able as well to assure better yields and subsequent marketing of produce.

The indispensable respect due to your environment may sometimes enter into conflict with demands arising from exploitation of resources. This is a conflict which faces many peoples as a real challenge. There must be a way to find solutions respecting the necessities of persons, and above economic considerations alone.

Along the path of your human promotion, you aspire to be makers and managers of your own advancement, without interference from those who would drive you to violent reactions or keep you in situations of unacceptable injustice. You desire to take part in the march of your nation, shoulder to shoulder with all your Ecuadorean brethren and with practical equality of rights. That is a just and inalienable aspiration. Accomplishment of it will lay the foundation of peace, which has to be the fruit of justice. In this process, always remember that Jesus calls us to peace, that he is our peace (cf. Eph 2:14). You will win truly only in him, with him and through him.

4. As regards your place in the church, she desires that you can occupy the place befitting you, in the various ministries, including the priesthood. What a happy day will be that on which your communities will be able to be served by men and women missionaries, priests and bishops of your own blood, so that, together with brethren of other peoples, you can adore the unique, true God, each people according to this own characteristics, but all united in the same faith and the same love.

I rejoice deeply that because all these aspirations of yours have been included in the pastoral options which your bishops drew up after having heard the various sectors of the People of God: your aspiration to communion and participation in relations with God, in relations among persons and in relations with the world ("Opciones Pastorales," No. 81).

I wish to entrust these desires and needs to Mary most holy, the mother who let her special protection fall over you. She has been loved under various names: the Virgin of El Quinche, of El Cisne, of Las Lajas, the Dolorous Virgin, the Virgin of the Holy Water of Banos, of Macas, of the Dew, of the Cloud, of Mercy, of Carmel, of the Elevation, of El Guayco, of La Paz. Keep her always as your mother, and turn to her with the love of good children.

Having been able to be with you, I regret that I cannot enjoy this meeting for a longer time, but I assure you that I take you away with me in my heart.

I know that you are going to ask me to give the Bible to the Christian communities of your peoples. I have the joy of knowing that the church in Ecuador has published 200,000 copies of the Bible for my visit. I want to entrust the Word of God to your presiders, catechists, missionaries, and acolyte readers, so that, in union with their bishops and priests, they may convey them to their communities as a power of faith, of Christian hope, of liberty, of love, of justice and of peace.

Before leaving you, I want my words of encouragement and gratitude to reach all those who serve you with love: the bishop of this Diocese of Latacunga, the other bishops, priests, women Religious, members of secular institutes, who under various titles, give their lives for your good.

I repeat my thanks to you, because, with your authorities and your committee you have received me and so many brethren so cordially.