

## PROGRESS FOR MY PEOPLE

Let a high fence be built around Ecuador  
prescribe the death penalty for anyone who  
introduces efficiency or sanitation;  
insist that Indians cling to their careless ways;  
demand continuance of dances to the Blessed Virgin;  
make it the last refuge of sanity.

Hubert Herring

We think of the Indian as our problem. We think of him as a biological entity within our collectivity. He is not exactly the proletariat, the working class of our society. He is the underdog, the outcast, the untouchable.

We admire the sheer ability of the Indian to live as an animal, to procreate his image without change century after century, to lie drunk in the cool soft air of the Andes muttering bad words and supplications to the virgin and all the pagan gods. "The Indian always works slowly, at a retarded rhythm, a monotonous and unchangeable beat. Never, or very rarely, can he be seen running, jumping, excited, realizing rapid action, violent, energetic, of nervous impulse. In his music, in his

dance, in his song, we see the repercussion of this physical state and from it the sobbing monotony of his cultural manifestations. The reciprocal action of the physiological on the psychological and vice versa complete the group of factors that account for the morbid languor in which the Indian vegetates.”<sup>1</sup> Yet despite all of this the Indian is eternal. Since he does not enter into the cycle of evolution, of progress, he neither lives in the true sense of civilization, nor does he die. This phenomena of stagnant purely biological existence may be explained from many points of view.

Biologically the Indian is inbred. His love of the particular geographically small region where he was born makes him immobile. He seldom leaves for very long the little valley or mountainside where he spent the first years of his life. It may be a desolate windswept, bleak and cold place where seemingly only a vulture could be happy, yet it is to the Indian his home. He is tied to it for life. There he will build his hut, there he will marry, procreate, and die. If necessary he will marry his niece, his cousin, or even a halfsister. But it must be a girl who feels as he does about the earth, about this particular place which he knows as his own. Historically we find that the Indian was forced, at the time of the Inca Empire, to live in one place all his life. He was not allowed to look for better land, for better climate, access to water, fuel, a forest. Undoubtedly these treeless hillsides were more fertile, more forested, in the early 16th century than now. According to the accounts we have of the soil conservation practices of the Inca Empire, life for the Indian must have been better then. There must have been more food, fewer diseases. But beyond all of this, under the Empire the Indian had a dependable social and economic organization to take care of him. Now he has nothing. He is abandoned. Nobody cares. If he wants to work for the landowners, who have all of the good land, he can make from three to five sucres (Ecuadorian national currency) a day. That is from 15 to 25 cents U.S. currency. But then he must live on the estate of the landowner and buy his food. He must

<sup>1</sup> Leonardo O. Chiriboga, *El Problema del Indio*, Quito, Ministerio de Gobierno, 1938, p. 25.

silently see his wife and daughters taken in to work as domestic servants in the big house of the landowner where they will be converted into unrecognized concubines. He must support these and many other demands and live with a huge debt over his head as ends never meet in such a situation. The Indian, as a free man, has little other liberty than that of wandering over barren mountainsides close to home. He may not even intrude on the land of other tribes or other families without causing suspicion. And if he becomes sick, or his wife and children become sick, he is helpless. If heavy rains wipe out his harvest, he will go hungry. He will eventually have to plead the landowner to accept him, loan him money in exchange for work to be done in the future. And when that work is done there will be another crisis in his life and he will always be in debt. It is this hopelessness of his existence that drives the Indian into his small world of living scepticism. "His temperament is asthenic. His spirit is apathetic, indolent, in an eternal cloud."<sup>2</sup>

Yet we should not confuse this state of neurotic escape from reality as a manifestation of mystic tendencies. The Indian is anything but a mystic. Mysticism demands discipline, concentration, fasting, physical and psychological sensity. The Indian is a materialist, but a frustrated materialist. He does not want to escape from the flesh. He does not want to bring his body under control. Instead, he will deliver himself up to the most contemptible vices he can find and afford, and they are all crude physical vices. In Ecuador the Indians are addicted to *chicha*, an alcoholic drink made out of sugar cane. The raw sugar cane is fermented and the result, with all its bacterial content, is consumed without distillation. It is a powerfully intoxicating drink, practically a poison. It eventually attacks the nervous system. As the Ecuadorian Indians have such a short lifespan, we only see a small part of the consequences in medical practice.

In Peru, and in Ecuador perhaps more than we realize, the *coca* is utilized as a permanent drug by the Indians (and by some of our high society). This is a shrub, with leaves resembling those of tea. The leaves are masticated, chewed by the Indians

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Hurel Cepeda, *Estudio Biológico sobre el Campesino Ecuatoriano*, Quito, Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1958, p. 39.

usually in groups at intervals throughout the day. The plant is generally the genus *Erythroxylon*, (esp. *E. Coca*) family Erythroxylaceae.

I am not sure which is worse as a vice or in overall biological, social, economic and mental effects in general. One can hardly separate the vice from the everyday life of the Indian except theoretically. The Indian is consecrated to his vices. In his present frame of mind he would certainly find some other vice if these were taken away from him. Biologically, he is stunted. Socially, he becomes gregarious under the influence of *chicha*, the opposite of his character otherwise. Economically, drinking is the largest single item of his expenditure and precludes any possibility of savings. The toxic effects of *chicha* drive the Indian into a state of near lunacy. In a drunken state his speech is unconnected and he will stand in the middle of the road crying and yelling at invisible objects. Just an ordinary weekend of drinking leaves him in a state that would require hospitalization elsewhere.

Despite this, the Indian as he is now could and would exist without much risk of running into the collective disorders that terminate in the final disintegration of a civilization. In his present state of confusion the Indian is a biological creature that could endure simply by instinct of survival. A collectivity without orientation will continue to exist and even expand within physical limitations because the biological forces are free. One who is still looking for something cannot die. "India will be immortal if it persists in the search of God. But if it introduces itself in politics and social struggle, it will die."<sup>3</sup>

The same could be said for Ecuador. If we never find a path to progress, we will go nowhere. We will stand still, right where we are. The cycle of evolution will not begin, so it will not end.

Objectively, the Indian is not searching for God. God is a ritual to him and the festivities that are part of the concept take several months a year. They are mass drinking parties mixed with tears and shouting, promiscuity, and emotional behavior in general. They are the escape moments in the otherwise tedious

<sup>3</sup> Romain Rolland, *Vida de Vivekananda*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Kier, 1945, p. 221.

existence of the Indian. The Indian is not a soul-searcher. He is separated from God in the psychological sense, in the sense best explained by Karl Jung. The Indian is a lonely creature, afraid of nature, afraid of others.

His deities are many, and they are not protective. They are to be appeased. Mama Virgin can be terrible, or she can be kind. But she is never the righteous man-God of protestant civilization. She never awards the good and punishes the bad. She is only kind to the humble and vengeful to those who do not light her candles.

The religion of the Indian is a sacramental rite, which if performed correctly is insurance against thunderstorms, the lack of rain or too much of it, famine, sickness, and death. It is a sacramental and ritual religion and I like to compare it with degenerated Christianity, "social Christianity" of the type that makes a perfect society the absolute ideal. Without the ideal, and the strong man-God background, this "social Christianity" would be the same, and may be someday. The religion of the Indian and Christianity are similar to the contrast between Grundtvig and Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is the impossible, Grundtvig the applicable, that which the masses can do. The Grundtvig religion is the institutionalized religion, that which can be applied to a society as a whole, backed by the State, by reason, by common sense. Kierkegaard is the individual rebellion of man against society, of man in an entirely individual search for God in a struggle with the collectivity that would make him kneel to the ritual symbol. Kierkegaard will remain for the mystic, for the martyr. Grundtvig will remain as the official religion for the people, whether they be well-behaved Danes or drunken Indians. "Christianity consists neither in holding the right faith, nor in certain religious experiences, nor in a particular ethic, but is God's dealings with man: in baptism when the Christian life is born, and in the Eucharist when it is sustained. Christianity has become ritual drama again. The word of God is not the Scriptures but the 'living word' which is heard at baptism and in Holy Communion (in the sacraments)."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hal Koch, "Religion," in *Denmark*, Copenhagen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1961, p. 215 (brief summary of Grundtvig, N.F.S.: *Kirkelige Anskuelse* [Church Opinion], 1825).

No one is better at keeping the sacraments than the Indian. He goes to mass every Sunday morning. The little Churches smell of filthy *chicha* while he reverently kneels and stares at the Mama Virgin idol. The Indian is humble, he recognizes that he is a sinner, but he also believes that because of his wretched existence the mother-God will be kind. It is the case of the naughty boy who comes to mother for meals and kneels at her feet crying and asking for forgiveness. Mother will make him say his prayers and ask Jesus to forgive him. Mama Virgin simply takes the place of both mother and Jesus. We should not blame the Catholic Church, the Roman concept of religion, for this state of man-God relationship. The Roman Catholic Church covers such a wide spectrum of religious experience, from the existential mysticism of Jacques Maritain to the everyday "be good and go to church" religion of Bishop Sheen over television. What is lacking, for the Indian, is change of life. The cycle of neurosis must be broken. This continual ritual is neither a "social religion" in the Grundtvig sense, nor is it the prelude to the honest search for God in the Kierkegaard sense. Nor is it the wild yet conscious wickedness of the youth of a saint. "It caused me great admiration to contemplate how long a space of time had passed since I had been nineteen years old, at which time I began to fervently study wisdom, with the proposition that after I had found it, I should abandon all the vain hopes and deceptive madness with which are developed the sensual appetites and jealousies of men. I was thirty years of age and I was still stuck in the same mud with the desire to enjoy the present pleasures, passing, which were destroying me, while I said to myself: 'Tomorrow I will find the truth.'"<sup>5</sup>

Some observers have felt that our Indians, although not mystical individually, would someday follow a leader to mass demonstrations of *satyagraha* (passive resistance, civil disobedience). Given a leader with the patience of Mohandas Karamchand Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) this is quite possible. We should remember that India had the background for this type of

<sup>5</sup> San Agustín, *Confesiones de San Agustín*, Buenos Aires, Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1954, p. 121-2.

movement and that it was practiced since 1919.<sup>6</sup> In Ecuador we do not have a Prince Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.) in our history, nor can we look back on a Ramakrishna (1834-1886) contemporary with our grandfathers. There is very little probability that the Ecuadorian Indian will be organized in any system without first having some philosophical background common to all Indians in our country. This is entirely lacking. An Indian from one Province is a stranger to that from another, and from one canton, even one parish to another. Although Quechua is spoken by many, this is only so because it was the official language of the Inca Empire and continued to be utilized after the Conquest. But Quechua is not the mother-tongue of most Indians. Each have their own separate language or dialect of a language.

Without even a common medium for understanding, mass movement is difficult. But even a greater factor is the lack of a common historical background. Some of our Indians are *mitimaes*, families and tribes that were transplanted by the Inca from present-day Bolivia, Chile (Northern Chile principally), and Peru. After five hundred years they are still foreigners on our soil and are considered as such by our other tribes. Yet these are usually the Quechua speaking tribes. Our original tribes, those that made up the confederation, before the Conquest by the Inca, are as independent as ever. They would not collaborate on anything and were continually fighting among themselves up to the invasion of the Inca, when a common cause was found. This confederation was broken up in fact and psychologically by the policy of the Inca of resettlement of tribes on land far from their original location. These *mitimaes* had to depend on the Inca for protection against the original inhabitants of the region where they were placed. Consequently there has never been unity of any type among the Indians of Ecuador since the confederation, and the unity then was hardly more than an alliance for war. The idea of giving support to the language and culture of Ecuadorian Indians can not be considered in the same way that this idea has been applied to the Mayas of the Yucatan

<sup>6</sup> John Shingler, "El Crepusculo de los Dioses Blancos," in *Juventud y Libertad*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 46.

Peninsula of Mexico and Guatemala for example. The Mayas are a large group with a common historical and cultural background. They were an Empire unto themselves. They must be considered in relationship to our Inca Empire, not in relationship to one of our tribes.

If we reconstruct our history, we will find that our Indians are still in the transition state between the tribal organization and the centralized empire type organization. Our contemporary government organization is a centralized type although not as centralized as that of the Inca Empire. But there is hardly any continuity between the tribal organization of the confederation, the strict centralization of the empire, the feudal landowner system of the colonial period, and the present lack of system. I say lack of system because most Indians are not affected by our contemporary government organization. The consequence is a disorientated Indian who historically has passed through the intimacy of tribal organization, the cold yet paternal rule of the Inca and the empire, the ruthless exploitation of the feudal colonial period, and now nothing. "It is difficult to determine the true nature of the Inca Empire when one consults the works dedicated to the study of its economic and social structure. Many historians and sociologists believe they see in it a state susceptible to be conceived with a modern formula: socialist state, totalitarian, *Welfare State*."<sup>7</sup>

Our conceptions are in evolution. The Spaniards of the 16th century regarded the Inca Empire as a pagan one-man centered theocracy. This conception was in accord with their epoch. In our century the Inca Empire has been idealized as a magnificent early socialist experiment. The rationalization of a society does not imply socialism however. It was more likely a totalitarian bureaucracy under military discipline. There is quite a difference. Among other factors that must be taken into consideration is that the Inca was constantly at war, a continuous policy of expansion. The dynamics of the Inca Empire grew out of constant warfare. In this sense it was like Sparta, although there was little other resemblance.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Métraux, "The Inca Empire: Despotism or Socialism," *Diogenes* No. 35, Fall 1961, p. 78.



Too many historians have tried to make the Inca Empire look like a timeless well founded dynasty, something like Egypt in the classical period. This is not historically true. The Inca Empire was a new creation when it was destroyed. It had not reached its total expansion, its maximum territorial size. It was still in the place of expansion when the Spaniards arrived. At that moment it spread from 41° South, from a point now called Port Montt, on the Gulf of Corcovado, in South Chile, to a point somewhere in the vicinity of Popayan, South-West Colombia, which is about 2° North. It covered the whole coast of the Pacific in this long coastline, but did not penetrate further into the continent than what are now present boundaries of Chile, Western Bolivia, Peru, with the exception of the Amazon region, and Ecuador. It had reached a practically uninhabited or very sparsely inhabited area in Southern Chile. It would have expanded Northward and into the continent if the Spaniards had not arrived.

A question has been asked by modern historians as to just how large an empire could be without the technological development that took place after the renaissance. The Roman Empire had the Mediterranean Sea as a convenient transportation factor. The Inca Empire could not use the Pacific Ocean in the same way that the Roman Empire utilized the Mediterranean. The Pacific Ocean is a rough waterway that requires large vessels, and most of the population of the Inca Empire were inland. Overland transportation, by foot, which was the only transportation medium of the Inca Empire, as there were no horses until the Spaniards came, is limited as to cargo weight. If we take the value of a given piece of merchandise and we begin to add to it the transportation costs of human transportation, it does not take a very long distance to make the merchandise so valuable that only precious metals or communications or very important religious and art objects would be transported in this manner. We can deduce from this that without beasts of burden, ships, or any other form of transportation facility, an empire such as the Inca would develop only an administrative and military organization throughout its territorial limits. Without the exchange of goods, without economic dependency, it would still be a primitive agricultural society in

which each region would take care of itself. The next question is, how quickly would the Inca Empire have developed a mechanical technology if the Spaniards had not arrived?

Technology is born out of need or simply because there are environmental factors that favor invention. There has to be a certain excess of capital in order for mechanical technology to develop. But the existence of this capital does not automatically bring mechanical technology into full swing.

If the Inca Empire had followed the development of other empires, perhaps a stagnant point would have been reached after the maximum territorial expansion. A huge bureaucracy with interests in preserving a state of no change might have prohibited mechanical technology from developing. Or perhaps new problems such as rapid population increase would have forced a rapid mechanical technological development. I say "mechanical technology" because the non-mechanical technology of the Inca Empire, consisting principally of agricultural arts such as land-preservation, rotation of crops, irrigation systems, road-building (by hand), and bridge building (without metal), was already further developed in the Inca Empire than in the Europe of the 16th century. Communications, with the *quipu*, were apparently much more exact in the Inca Empire than in the Conquest period, which means that numbers express practical matters rather than language. The fact that the Inca could eat fresh fish in Cuzco less than twelve hours after it was taken out of the Pacific Ocean means that communications all over the empire were more rapid than they are today by land transportation in the same area. Historians say that from even the furthestmost point in Southern Chile, only two weeks were required for communications to reach the Inca. This is over two thousand miles as a bird flies and implies that runners covered about a hundred and forty miles every 24 hours. This is not at all impossible, and it shows that a good communications system existed. Whatever we turn to in the Inca Empire leaves us with a sense of awe. How could such an empire develop without a written language, without the wheel, without beasts of burden, and without so many other things we consider essential to a civilization of its size and advancement?

The mystery of the Inca Empire is the mystery of our people.

*Progress for my People*

If we study the empire we can find all the drawbacks of our present society as a carry-over from the structure of this empire. History can not be relived, so that all we can say is that the Inca Empire was destroyed too soon. Our society has been without order since that time.