

Ecuador at a Crossroads

Presidential Palace



I felt ashamed when Sr. Mary Jo, religious sister and pastoral agent in St. Columba's parish, Oban, sent me an email of a person who wished to contact me and informed me that 800 people had (I don't know the in-phrase) visited my web contribution. I suppose it was more a jet refueling touch down rather than serious readings so, amidst the turmoil of my present situation, my conscience demands that I contribute a thought or two of what is happening here in Ecuador.

ECUADOR AT A CROSSROADS

Ecuador is a journalist paradise. Political and social drama is the menu of every day. A summary would be an impossible task but that does not deter me. The story goes somewhat along these lines. A young finance professor, with little or no political experience, launched a presidential campaign two years ago. Not only did he win but obliterated all other nineteen parties in the process - a phenomenon never known in any country I am sure. Within a few months he had public elections for drawing up a new constitution and this Sunday there is another election to approve or disapprove the proposed constitution. When this is over there will be other elections so that all political posts in the country will be elected according to the new constitution. No one in his or her mind would vote for the new constitution but I am sure that the constitution will be approved simply because of the political charisma of the

president. He is young, full of energy, exceptionally intelligent but has a tongue which he loosens with a vengeance and which has sent everyone chasing for cover. It is quite incredible what he is capable of saying. He even said publicly: "if the priests criticize the constitution during Mass and tell them that they are liars as the constitution is good". At the same time he maintains that he is a practising Catholic. Meanwhile, unemployment is rising in Ecuador, foreign investment is dropping, inflation is above 10% and all the judges are threatening to resign. The young man will need more than charisma to put the country back together again!

CREDIT UNION COOPERATIVE



It was a proud building, six stories high, which stood on the main street of the Comité del Pueblo, the parish I left three years ago. I started the cooperative fourteen years ago as a motor for development in the parish. It developed very quickly and as a model Cooperative throughout the country. Branches were established in other towns and a year ago I opened another branch in Guayaquil which is functioning very well. Today the cooperative has 35,000 members (a number which many banks in the country do not have!) but it has been intervened by the Ministry because of liquidity problems. How this has come about would take too long to explain but it has been a developing problem.

I called the President of the country and we spoke about the problem (I was more interested in a solution and I am confident that he will help) and then he invited me for lunch. Then he invited me to a Cabinet meeting briefing concerning the foreign debt in the evening which lasted from 8 p.m. till 12 midnight. (I had written an article about the foreign debt which was printed in the Manchester Guardian Newspaper a few years ago and which provoked comments in many countries throughout the world, from Israel to the USA and beyond. He had read it and so he knew of my interest).

The cooperative has been a source of strain and stress for many months since I discovered the seriousness of the situation. I had been negotiating with different sources for loans, from \$1,000,000 to \$76,000,000 but it was too late. The cooperative will be saved but as it serves the poor we cannot ask for the shareholders for 12,000 million pounds, as did the Royal Bank of Scotland and the beginning of the year, in order to carry them over a rough time.

TO BE A MISSIONARY



During the past two centuries a number many countries in Latin America had few priests to serve the vast numbers of Catholics in the country. It was also the case in Ecuador. Recently, great emphasis is put on the role and responsibility that the lay people have for propagating the faith. From this point of few, people naturally accept the fact that they should be catechists and be “missionaries” of their faith in the local community and beyond. The Society of St James, to which I belong, is financing a programme of formation for lay missionaries and I have to take them to Bolivia for two weeks three times a year. We were there in July and it proved very interesting indeed. We are to be there once again in November.

I am organizing workshops for lay missionaries locally which have been taken up by the archdiocese. It is a two year programme and has three phases: the first, the human person; second, theological formation and thirdly, spiritual formation. It might be interesting to mention the themes in the first stage, the human person. They are. a). Personal psychology (who am I; why am I like this; how do I want to be); b). Self esteem; c). The ideology of Gender; d). Personal Identity; e). Multiple intelligences; f). Missionary psychology.

I think that I have written enough to salve my consciences. May God bless you all.

Fr Colin