

## BOLIVIA

# Huarayo Leader Discusses Theology of Liberation

*The following interview with José Urnari, Huarayo Indian and president of the Center for Indian Communities and People of Eastern Bolivia, was originally published in Boletín del Campesino Indígena del Oriente Boliviano (Casilla 4213, Santa Cruz, Bolivia).*

**Boletín:** I understand that you participated in a seminar in Ecuador. What was the topic?

**José:** Yes. It was a seminar for clergy and Indian leaders. It was about Indian programs, and the main topics were land, Indian organizations, the old and new Church, and theology of liberation. For me it was interesting because we have had problems with Bishop Ñuflo de Chavez here in the local vicarate. He is trying to force the community members to work on his ranch instead of working for the community. I have denounced this internationally.

**Boletín:** What do you see as a positive result of the seminar?

**José:** I was glad to see that the church is trying to face reality, to go back and analyze the situation. The church is also aware that European religions, along with the "discovery of America," have destroyed Indian religions and languages.

Now they are trying to use the theology of liberation. So we Indians asked, "What is the theology of liberation." We did not know the term, but we have always lived it and practiced it. So then we asked, "What theology are you going to practice? Are you going to make theology for us, or are we going to make our own theology?" We and our ancestors have had our own religion. We Indians used our own approach at the seminar so they would not impose their ideology and western religion on us. Although there were Christians and Indian Deacons present, we did not accept their opinions since they are already influenced by Christianity. I told them about what the Church did in my homeland during my father's time. As punishment, they removed an Indian's pants, gave him fifty lashes, and then rubbed salt in the wounds. We have also been told that many Indians were burned alive for practicing our religion, having been accused of worshipping the devil.

**Boletín:** How do you see Christianity responding in the face of Indian religion?

**José:** The Church is beginning to respect Indian reality. I just hope that they do not use this knowledge in order to manipulate us. We must be very careful. We are going to practice our own religion. We may ask for assistance from theologians, but they are not going to do it for us. We will do it.

