

# Aschmann Action

July 2007

... apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

Rick: We often refer to this as our “prayer letter.” We really believe in the power of prayer, especially the power of united prayer. Any missionary who doesn’t is in the wrong line of work. Over the years, in answer to y’all’s prayers, we have seen God do “great and unsearchable things” (Jeremiah 33:3). Now we have a **special, strategic prayer request**.

The planned literacy program in the El Tejar church mentioned in our March *Aschmann Action* has been put on hold. Why? It has a lot to do with this strategic prayer request, but it’ll take some explaining.

There are eight different Quichua languages spoken in Ecuador. (For details, populations, and a map, go to [www.Quichua.net/Q/Ec/Ecuador/E-English.html](http://www.Quichua.net/Q/Ec/Ecuador/E-English.html).) Five of these have either the entire Bible or the New Testament published. All of these were published before I arrived in Ecuador in 1998.

Several decades ago a movement arose, promoted not by those who had translated these Bibles, but by others who had a different agenda. This movement promoted the following ideas:

1) The spoken Quichua of Ecuador is “impure” or “corrupted,” because it contains a large number of words borrowed from Spanish, and needs to be “purified” by eliminating those words, and replacing them with words from other Quichua or Quechua languages, or with old words that are no longer used.

2) All of the Quichua languages of Ecuador should be treated as if they were only one language, with all education in a single form of Quichua.

3) Quichua should not be spelled like Spanish, but should be spelled to reflect the sound system of Quichua in the simplest way possible, using, for example, “k” instead of “c” and “qu,” and “w” instead of “hu.”

Sounds somewhat logical, doesn’t it? The idea is to simplify, purify, and standardize the language, and even, it would appear, to restore pride in their own language and ancient culture. Unfortunately, *it doesn’t work*, and far from restoring pride in the language they learned in the home growing up, and in which the Bible translations are published, it is promoting its destruction! Why? Well, let’s look at each point.

1) Is Quichua “corrupted”? Actually, all languages are “impure” or “corrupted!” Or at least, all languages are constantly changing, and every language borrows words from other languages. In 100 A.D. English and German were the same language! And perhaps half of the vocabulary of English is not English (in the sense of having been part of the language from Old English times). Just like the Quichuas, the English were conquered by a foreign power, the Norman French, in 1066, and the ruling class became French-speaking, and remained so for several centuries. A large portion of this non-English vocabulary was incorporated into English in those centuries. Do you know which words you use are “original English” and which are not? Probably very few! They are all now English words, and their history doesn’t matter. If we were to “purify” English by throwing out all the words added since 1066, nobody could understand it! I have underlined all such words in the next three paragraphs, just to show how many there are.

It is the same with the Quichuas: many of those words were incorporated into Quichua three or four centuries ago, and are now just as much a part of the language as any other words, even for those Quichuas who don’t speak Spanish! The new words introduced to “purify” Quichua are words they’ve never heard before, and don’t understand.

2) Could all of the Quichuas read a single form of Quichua? No. As I mentioned above, there are eight different Quichua languages spoken in Ecuador, and there is lots of local variation within each. Some of these are more different than Spanish and Portuguese, and each really needs separate literature for good comprehension, especially in material such as the Bible, which is largely unfamiliar.

3) The spelling issue is the least serious, and has pros and cons. However, for better or for worse, most education is still being done in Spanish, and a spelling system closer to Spanish actually makes a lot of practical sense.

This movement has a lot of backing, and many Quichuas are being told that this is the only proper form of Quichua, and the only one worthy to be used in literature and education, and some education is being carried out using this alternative way of writing Quichua.

But it doesn’t work. If I hand one of our simple reading books to a Quichua speaker who has learned his letters, he can read it and understand it. If I hand him a similar book written in this “purified” Quichua, he can’t, because many of the words are words he

To see our “Internet only” **April 2007** *Aschmann Action*, or other recent ones in color, go to: [www.Aschmann.net/Rick/Newsletter.html](http://www.Aschmann.net/Rick/Newsletter.html). To see a shorter two-page form of this letter, go to: [www.Aschmann.net/Rick/Newsletter/StrategicPrayer.html](http://www.Aschmann.net/Rick/Newsletter/StrategicPrayer.html).

## Home Ministry Assignment reminder:

*Let us know when you would like us to come visit you!*

Details: September – mid November: Southeastern U.S.  
Mid November – January: Nebraska & Colorado  
February – May: Southeastern U.S.

read the book aloud, and he followed along. After a few pages he said, “How much is the book?” And he bought one. He had learned to read in Spanish, and had had a little exposure to the “purified” form of Quichua, and was convinced that he couldn’t read Quichua, only Spanish! I have had many others say, “I speak bad Quichua,” even though they speak Quichua fluently, and use it constantly in their daily lives. Why? Because they don’t speak “pure” Quichua.

Children who study this “purified” form of Quichua in school come home and tell their grandparents, “You don’t know how to speak Quichua!” when in fact the older people are the ones who speak Quichua the best. Many children, especially those who move to the city, are ashamed to speak Quichua, and are moving rapidly into Spanish, though in the rural communities we still see good fluency in Quichua at all ages.

doesn’t know, and even the ones he does know are not always spelled the way he actually says them.

One day I asked a little Quichua boy, perhaps 10 years old, if he wanted to look at one of our books. He answered me in fluent Quichua, “Oh, I can’t read Quichua.” I said, “But you’re in school, right?” He said, “Yes, but I can’t read Quichua.” I said, “Sure you can. Here, read along with me.” I

Want to learn Quichua? The textbook that our team members have been using is now on the Internet. We will soon also have a dictionary there. To see them, and other books, go to [www.Quichua.net](http://www.Quichua.net), and then click where it says, “I don’t speak Quichua.”



The El Tejar Quichua church (in pink). Part of the blue building also belongs to them, and the building goes way, way back!  
The sanctuary seats 600, and fills up every Sunday.

The Quichuas already have enough difficulty seeing value in their own language. They were essentially slaves for some 400 years, and their language has largely been devalued by the national culture. In spite of this, they have tenaciously kept their language and passed it on from generation to generation. It has changed and adapted, like all languages, but it is still very much intact, and its fascinating and complex grammar is worlds apart from Spanish!

Even so, their perception of it is often as a language of little value in the big scheme of things. They sometimes call their language “yanga shimi.” The word *yanga* means “worthless” or “low class,” and *shimi* means “language.” The first time I heard this term, it was by a Quichua lady who was very impressed by our magazine. She said, “Where did you learn *yanga shimi*?” I was flabbergasted. Soon after this I asked our main co-worker Segundo, “Do you sometimes call your language *yanga shimi*?” “Sure.” “But doesn’t that mean the worthless or low-class language?” “Oh, I guess maybe it does, but I never thought about it before. That’s just what we call it.” And the idea that the Quichua that they speak is not “pure” just reinforces this perception.

Even the Christians and church leaders have been deceived by the propaganda. When I was attending some meetings of the association of Quichua pastors here in Quito, I saw another very sad consequence of this: the entire meeting was held in Quichua, as far as speaking was concerned, but everything that was written was done in Spanish, and then

frequently translated on the fly for those who didn't understand. There is disagreement about how to write Quichua, so to avoid controversy, they just don't write anything in Quichua! Another even more serious result has been to discourage people from reading their Bible in Quichua, but to use the Spanish Bible instead, even though we've seen time after time that they understand it much better in Quichua! Interestingly, the Bible has been translated into this "purified" Quichua, by the Catholic Church, but almost no one reads it either, because they can't understand it!

So what happened with the literacy program at the El Tejar church? A difference of opinion arose about which form of Quichua should be taught, and in the situation we did not want to be just viewed as divisive, so after much prayer and soul-searching we decided to wait until after we return from our Home Ministry Assignment next year, and in the meantime to consider the best means to clarify the issues involved among the Quichua Christian leadership.

### Strategic Long-Term Prayer Request

Pray that God would open doors of understanding so that the Quichua leadership, especially the Christian leaders, would understand that the language they learned in the home has great value in the sight of God (Acts 2:4-12, Rev. 7:9-10), and is a worthy instrument for every form of communication. Pray that those who do not want the gospel to spread among the Quichuas, or God's word to be freely available to them, and easily read by them, will be confounded. And pray that the result of all of these efforts will be greater use by the Quichuas of God's Word in their own language.

(For other prayer requests, see our March and April letters.)



## Cultural Closeup

**Betty:** We are invited to many Quichua music festivals. Many times, Rick has to go without me because they start at about 8:00 pm and end who knows when...the wee hours of the morning. The children just can't take that kind of schedule. Rick returned the last night of one recent festival with fruit and raw broccoli. I wondered why he brought that, then found out we could have had even more lively gifts except for his quick thinking.


**Rick:** One important aspect of the Quichua music festivals is a competition among all the church choirs to see who sings the best! For this, judges are needed, and often they prefer an outsider, for obvious reasons, so they asked me to be a judge this time.

On the last night one of the choirs sang a lovely Andean hymn about God's creation. (I have translated it into English, with the musical score, if any of you are interested.) As is usually the case, it was an all-ladies choir. (The men play the instruments.) They decided to bring along visual aids, so each lady was holding a fruit or a vegetable. There were even a few animals: a rabbit and a hen, alive and kicking. After they finished, the guest MC, who was a professional singer (you know what they're like), said, "Okay, ladies, now give all those things to the judges!" So of course they did. (Except for the rabbit, thankfully.) All the stuff barely fit on our table, and there was hardly room left for our evaluation sheets. The hen came with a ribbon on her leg, so we tied her to a big bunch of fruit.

Not to be outdone, the next choir brought along a potted bush with a live dove in it, and of course they left the dove with us when they finished. Unfortunately, it didn't come with a ribbon, so the young man to my right, the secretary of the Quichua pastors' association, and a computer geek, said, "You better hang onto that dove, or it's going to fly away." (We were in a very large auditorium.) He couldn't do it, because he was tabulating the scores on his computer. I tried to hang onto the dove by its legs, which of course only made it thrash wildly. He said, "No, let me show you." He hugged it to his body, and it settled down. I said, "Okay, let me try." You can guess what happened next: it pooped on me. So my colleagues very kindly started handing me napkins so I could clean up.

When we were done, the judge on my left, who was the president of the Quichua pastors' association, wanting to be nice, said, "You take the dove home." I said, "What do I do with it?" He said, "Kill it and eat it!" Betty is a farm girl, but I suspected she wouldn't be too excited about this idea, so, thinking quickly, I grabbed a big bunch of fruit and said, "I'll take these!" He then said, "Well, I'll take the hen." I also ended up with a huge bunch of broccoli. Later, on the way out, I saw that the secretary had taken the dove. I asked him, "Are you going to kill that and eat it?" He said, "Oh, no, I don't like killing things. I'm going to give it to my kids as a pet." The difference between an older man raised in the country and a younger one raised in the city!

E-mail Address:	<a href="mailto:RAschmann@mtwsa.org">RAschmann@mtwsa.org</a>
Personal web page:	<a href="http://www.Aschmann.net/Rick">www.Aschmann.net/Rick</a>
Quichua web page:	<a href="http://www.Quichua.net/Q/Ec/English.html">www.Quichua.net/Q/Ec/English.html</a>
Mailing Address in Ecuador:	<b>Rick &amp; Betty Aschmann</b> Casilla 17-08-8403 Quito, Ecuador South America
Home phone:	(011)-593-2-225-2198
Virtual U.S. phone:	972-535-4356
Rick's Cell phone:	(011)-593-9-500-2825
Betty's Cell phone:	(011)-593-9-419-5754
Mission Address:	<b>Mission to the World</b> PO Box 116284 Atlanta, GA 30368-6284
Mission web sites:	<a href="http://www.mtw.org">www.mtw.org</a> <a href="http://www.hcjb.org">www.hcjb.org</a> <a href="http://www.mtwsa.net">www.mtwsa.net</a> <a href="http://www.vycliffe.org">www.vycliffe.org</a>



**MISSION**  
to the  
**WORLD**