

Grzegorz Rybiński

Roman Warszawski

Vilcacora – the Miracle Cancer Cure

Father Edmund Szeliga, the Polish missionary
who astonished the world

Grzegorz Rybiński, Roman Warszawski

Vilcacora – the Miracle Cancer Cure

Medical consultants
Dr Dariusz Perkowski
Dr Marek Prusakowski

Cover design

Bogusław Tomaszewski

The photograph incorporated in the cover design was taken by *Roman Warszawski*

Colour photographs

Roman Warszawski – nos. 1-5, 7-21, 23, 24, 26

Grzegorz Rybiński – nos. 22, 25

IPIFA Archives – no. 6

Monochrome photographs

Roman Warszawski – pp. 10, 15, 34, 57, 79, 98, 108

IPIFA Archives – pp. 23, 89, 101

Graphic design

Pracownia Graficzna “Linus”

Editors

Barbara Bukowska-Przychodzeń

Elżbieta Smolarz

Proof-reading

Sonia Cynke

Type-setting

Jerzy M. Kołtuniak

Printing and binding

Zakłady Graficzne ATEXT S.A.

© Copyright by Tower Press, Gdańsk, 2000

Second revised edition

ISBN 83-87342-13-0

Index 393231

*For the Lord hath created medicines from
the earth and the wise man will not despise them.*

The Holy Bible, Ecclesiasticus, 38:4.

“I don’t believe it,” I said.

We were sitting in low comfortable armchairs in the study of Wojciech Tomaszewski, the ambassador. The warm aroma of freshly-made coffee was wafting over the table, and through the half-open window drifted in muffled by the Venetian blinds din of one of the most beautiful avenues of Lima – the Avenida Salaverry, but I didn’t hear the noise. My ears were full of what the ambassador had just said.

“I just don’t believe it,” I repeated, probably with even greater confidence than before.

“I didn’t believe it at first either,” the ambassador mused. “The facts are, however, clear. **Father Edmund Szeliga, an elderly Polish missionary living in Peru, here in Lima, has been successfully curing AIDS! And he has been coping with cancer, even its most malignant forms, better than many of the most remarkable oncologists in the world!**”

A second round of coffee was served, together with a plateful of delicious biscuits.

“If it is as you say, why hasn’t anybody heard about it? Why hasn’t this man been proclaimed a national hero, a saint, and why isn’t he known all over the world?” Silence fell for a while. The ambassador smiled, offered me some Peruvian sweetmeats, which - so many countries so many customs - appeared slightly salty.

“I have often asked myself the same questions but after a few years spent in Peru I’m beginning to understand it. I also know Father Szeliga and I know how he works. He avoids publicity. He prefers to remain away from all the hustle and bustle of our times, believing that in this way he can serve the sick better than if he were in a limelight. Moreover, don’t forget that he is a monk. And Peru is a peripheral, out-of-the-way country, a long way away from anywhere.”

“At the same time, this is an exceptional country, potentially very rich, a country where anything or almost anything can happen. Father Szeliga, and what he is doing, is the best example of this. He is curing fatal diseases. **He is curing them successfully. Who knows if, despite the lack of a medical diploma, he isn’t one of the most successful doctors in the world...**”

My legs gave way under me...

August 1998. It's the fifth time that I've been to Peru. Together with a group of researchers I've come to Lima from Poland in order to lead an expedition to the mysterious Marcahuasi Plateau, where there are gigantic stone sculptures, still unexplored, which may indicate the existence of a totally unknown civilisation.¹ As usual in the case of such enterprises, especially when an expedition sets off for uninhabited or barely explored areas, the Polish Embassy in the country of destination should be informed about everything. Just to be on the safe side. In case any help is needed or an appeal to the local authorities is necessary. Therefore, I informed the Polish Ambassador, Wojciech Tomaszewski, of our arrival in advance.

"As soon as you get to Peru, contact me," I heard on the phone. "Here is the number of my mobile phone..."

That is why I got here. The ambassador was already waiting for us and after just a few words of conversation, it was clear that this was not going to be just a courtesy visit. Our host turned out to be an invaluable source of information on Peru.

After a short walk in the garden and a visit to the library, we found ourselves in a spacious study, where I told him about what we intended to do during the next four weeks.

"Marcahuasi, and a decision about whether the stone giants from the plateau are sculptures or forms created by erosion – this is, of course, the priority", I said, "but after that we will have a couple of days to spare in Lima. Whom, in your opinion, Mr Ambassador, should we meet here?"

"It would be good to discuss the results of your research with Professor Krzysztof Makowski, an archaeologist from the Papal Catholic University; it would also be worthwhile to talk to Professor Maria Rostworowska, a historian from the Institute of Peruvian Studies", suggested the ambassador. "These are the Polish scientists who have been working and living in Peru for years. They should also have something to say about Marcahuasi..."

Two and a half years earlier, during the famous taking of hostages in the residence of the Japanese ambassador in Lima by fighters from the terrorist organisation MRTA – the Revolutionary Movement of Tupak Amaru - Ambassador Tomaszewski was a prisoner of the kidnappers for four days.

"Are you interested in this subject as well?"

"Certainly. I even thought of coming here during the turmoil and of reporting those dramatic events live. Perhaps now, when the time for reflection has come, I could make up for it..."

So, we arrange possible dates for meetings: with Admiral Luis Giampietri, who as a hostage co-ordinated from the inside the action of freeing the prisoners; with Father Juan Wicht, a Jesuit, who despite repeated requests on the part of the terrorists refused to leave the building of the embassy and voluntarily stayed with the prisoners until they were rescued by Peruvian special forces in March 1997; and with a few other ex-hostages.

"There is also someone else who you should meet by all means," he said, after a moment of thought. "Father Edmund Szeliga."

"Who?"

¹ Roman Warszawski's book *Marcahuasi – kuźnia bogów?* (about the expedition organised by the monthly magazine *Nieznany Świat*) will soon be published by Dom Wydawniczy Bellona as part of the *Globtroter* series.

“Edmund Szeliga. He is a Salesian, a Polish missionary monk who has been living and working in Peru for 69 years...”

“For sixty-what?”

“Sixty-nine. **Father Szeliga is now 89 years old. In his colourful and exceptional life he has spent a lot of time among the Indians on the Upper Amazon and has learnt from them the most extraordinary methods of curing illnesses. He knows all the secrets of the medicine of the Amazon Indians. In the last thirty years at least thirty thousand people have been cured.** Shall I get you in touch with him?”

“Absolutely!”

“It will be possible provided that Father Szeliga is not somewhere deep in the jungle at this very moment. It’s August now, and therefore the best time to be there...”

This is how I learnt about the existence of Father Edmund Szeliga. A few weeks later, after our return from the Marcahuasi plateau to Lima, the first meeting with Father Szeliga took place.

The day before the meeting, the Ambassador Tomaszewski informed me about the date of the appointment and said, ‘You will have sensational material for your readers. **Szeliga is a living legend. Someone really exceptional. A real Christian guru...**’

‘The body is the best doctor’

“Father, what about this cancer?,” I asked impatiently, virtually from the doorstep.

The study was small, ascetic. A desk, a shelf with books, two armchairs, a small bed and... nothing more, in fact. Apart perhaps from lots of green plants.

“Hello! Blessed be the Lord!,” Father Szeliga energetically raised himself from behind the desk. “What a surprise! What a pleasure. In Lima, we don’t have the opportunity to speak Polish every day!”

He was slim, however, it was not the thinness of the old age. Judging by appearances, he could have been about sixty, not older. Sharp facial features formed a harmonious whole, crowned with bushy eyebrows. Undoubtedly, the eyes were the most important feature in his face. Fair, warm and clear with constantly burning penetrating little sparks. “These are wise man’s eyes,” I thought. If it hadn’t been for the clerical collar round his neck I wouldn’t have guessed that I was talking to a monk.

To be honest, I had been a bit afraid of this meeting. I was afraid that I would be treated as an intruder, breaking up the routine of the day, or - simply - that I would be a nuisance. I was also afraid of a preaching tone of voice... a disappointment after all I had heard about Father Szeliga. Suddenly, I thought that it would be much better if I didn’t confront the legend with the reality; that perhaps it would be better if I left Peru without meeting him, only with the knowledge that someone like him was working and helping the sick...

Now, in a single moment, I realised that it was not the legend which surpassed the reality but exactly vice versa. It was good that I was there.

“What about this cancer?” he returned to my question. “Hmm, I guess it’s getting better and better. We know more and more about it, we also know more and more about plants which can fight this illness. Cancer is an exceptionally complex problem, and obviously, there is no single remedy for it. This will remain so until we find the answer why it occurs. It is, however, beyond doubt that the results of our treatment are getting better all the time.”

Dear, Reverend Father,

Thank you very much for the help and the hope you have given me. Thank you also for the mixtures which are very bitter and not too tasty but I drink them as you prescribed, Father, three times a day. I do it because I am gradually feeling much better. I noticed the improvement just after one month. Despite the fear that I had in the beginning, I decided to give up some of the medicines, which the doctor had prescribed and I no longer have the nausea which I used to suffer from before. In two weeks I am going for a check-up and I am very curious what it is going

to show. I am very hopeful, as I have noticed that the swelling of the liver has diminished, which must mean that the tumour is disappearing. I really hope so, Reverend Father!

In three weeks I will come to see you, Father, and then you will decide what to do next. That is all for today. Once again thank you very much. May God bless you, Father...²

“Why is phytoteraphy, in your opinion Father, the future of medicine? Whence the optimism? Is it because the whole world believes that medicine has run up a blind alley, that it’s too expensive, too reliant on technology, too concentrated on particular organs and it is losing sight of the whole person?”

“The answer is in the question,” Father Szeliga smiled. “Modern medicine has become a huge and heavy machine. For many doctors and hospitals, it has turned into a very good business and **to some extent has started being similar to ... the armaments industry.** It has become a Moloch, almost blind to human suffering. The doctor is successfully being detached from the patient. Instead of treating the patient, he fires cobalt and chemotherapy at him. **This is as if a small disagreement in a family was to be solved by means of an atomic bomb!**”

“But cancer and other illnesses, for instance cirrhosis of the liver, are not small disagreements...”

“Of course. These are serious diseases. Generally speaking, I am far from depreciating the achievements of medicine. But today it has got to the stage that in Paris or New York the common flu cannot be treated without taking antibiotics. Or even several kinds, as it often happens that those first chosen by the doctor are ineffective, and they have to be changed for new ones...”

“Are all pharmacological medicaments ‘poisons’?”

“No, of course not. There are in fact some that do not cause the so-called side effects in the body, or just very slight ones. Not to look too far afield, aspirin belongs to such medicaments. This is a chemical compound obtained from the birch bark. In this form it is a rose without thorns. But, unfortunately, it is hard to swallow such a mixture. That is why pharmacologists have been forced to purify it, thus obtaining acetylosalicylic acid. After this transformation, it reaches the chemist’s as aspirin. I would like to draw here the following conclusion: **If we can replace pharmacological drugs with natural ones or those produced on the basis of vegetable matter, we should do so.**”

I recalled the following event:

Once, at the outset of the rainy season, I was staying for a few days near Iquitos in the Amazon jungle. During the day I had to ford a small river, the Rio Negro; then, soaking wet, for a few hours I had to force my way through the undergrowth. In the evening, I was caught in the pouring and very cold rain. Then I spent the night in a hammock in the open air, covered only with a mosquito net. Before dawn I started to feel feverish and began to shiver incessantly. “I’ve caught a cold,” I thought to myself, and in the morning, during my breakfast prepared over a bonfire, I decided to take antibiotic from our first aid kit.

“Don’t do that!” said Fernando, my Indian guide. “You’ve got a sore throat, haven’t you?” he guessed correctly. “Wait a moment, I’ll bring you something!” He disappeared in the thicket for a few minutes. I heard the sound of breaking twigs, and then something like an intense scratching on the bark with a machete. After a while, Fernando came back. He brought some

² At the request of Father Szeliga and in accordance with the principles of medical confidentiality the names of patients will not be revealed.

reddish powder which he rubbed on his palm and then mixed with boiling water. He ordered me to drink this ‘stuff’ immediately.

The mixture was bitter and smelt slightly garlic.

“What was it?” I asked, still frowning.

“This is a powder from the bark of the **anuri** tree,” he answered, “the antibiotic of the jungle. Your sore throat will have been better by the evening. If not, we will repeat the treatment tomorrow. But you are not going to fall ill. I can promise that...”

“Exactly,” Father Szeliga said when I had finished telling the story. “**Anuri** is not an antibiotic, in fact. But it is a good example. Your guide made a good comparison. I know this plant. The Indians in the area which I visit call it **anakira**. It has anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties, and indeed works just like an antibiotic. But - what is important – it does not weaken the body...”

“In fact, the body itself is the best doctor,” continued Father Szeliga. “Our task should be only to help cure it by itself. It has to be maximally activated and prepared for self-defence. If the internal defence mechanisms can be activated, very quickly they will turn out to be more effective than the most sophisticated treatments of modern medicine.”

“So, Father, instead of fighting an illness, you rather try to activate the vital forces of the body to fight the illness by itself, right?”

“In my opinion, this is the only appropriate approach. **Man is equipped with an enormous potential, not only creative and mental, but also defensive.** The problem is to awaken the dormant and dulled abilities and possibilities. The body, with appropriate encouragement, is able to cure itself...”

“And as this encouragement you use herbs and plants?”

“That’s right. Therefore my methods of curing are in fact so simple and, which is also significant today, so cheap. After all, more and more often, for lots of patients the barrier that cannot be overcome is the cost of the treatment offered by modern medicine. Sadly, most reforms of the health care systems in the world are going in the direction of pushing the greater part of the expenses onto the shoulders of the patient...”

“There are some plants and herbs which are poisonous. Aren’t you, Father, afraid of overdosing?”

“The toxicity of such plants is, in the case of many illnesses, their advantage. Owing to the fact which you’ve mentioned, these mixtures obviously cannot be taken thoughtlessly, without consultation with a doctor or experienced herbalist. A similar situation exists with other medicaments.”

“You’re talking about those poisonous plants about which an ordinary person knows very little. And what does such a person know, for example, about his pot plants? Does he know that the oleander, the ficus, the philodendron, and the common primrose are toxic? Their leaves, tendrils and roots - only if they are touched or smelt, to say nothing of being eaten - may be the reason for numerous poisonings, and, in the case of the lily of the valley, even of a collapse.

Thus, only a person who has learnt absolutely everything about their properties, can cure with help of plants.”

Dear Father,

Thank you very, very much for what you have done for our child! Pablo is almost a different boy. You have returned his will to play and learn (...) The last examination showed that the cyst he had in his stomach has disappeared completely. But we still continue giving him all the mixtures according to your prescriptions. We think, however, that soon it will not be necessary. Father, you have saved our child and we are so very grateful and so happy! When we run out of the mixtures, we will visit you in the Institute and then you will decide what we should do. Once more thank you very much and please, Father, kindly add our family to the number of people for whom you pray... Pablo asks after you every day and sends his best wishes...

“I am not a physician,” said Father Szeliga at the end of our first conversation. **“I’m a qualified...geologist!** I only learnt medicine and phytoteraphy, and acquired my knowledge of herbs here, in Peru, in the jungle, from the Amazonian Indians...”

Telegram:

WONDERFUL FATHER! ULTRASONOGRAPHY AND TOMOGRAPHY DO NOT REVEAL THE EXISTENCE OF A TUMOUR. ALPHAFETOPROTEINS NORMAL! THANK YOU SO MUCH! I AM COMING TOMORROW MORNING.

“The secret of phytoteraphy,” told me Andrzej Łochin, the famous Polish natural-therapist, after my return from Peru, “ first of all, it is due to the fact that herbs purge the body from everything that accumulates in it and hampers its functioning; secondly, phytoteraphy activates the immunology system for self-defence. Conventional medicaments work in the opposite direction. They pollute the blood and the internal organs, depriving them of the will to fight the illness. In this way, the treatment, instead of helping, is often harmful to the organism. This may lead to the creation of a spiral of negative feedback, leading to falling from one illness, after it has apparently been cured, into another.”

“Can the organism become used to the effects of certain herbs, just as it gets used to certain drugs, and stop reacting to them?”

“Of course. That is why one should resort not only to herbs traditionally known in one’s region. The herbal “diet” should be diversified, whenever possible. Using herbal mixtures from another continent may bring about much better results than those from only one climatic zone...”

Is there still a chance?

The end of January 1999. Once again, I'm sitting in an aeroplane flying to Lima. We are flying. With me is my friend Grzegorz Rybiński who I have been through a lot, and South America is to be our next adventure. Grzegorz could not believe what I had told him in Poland about Father Szeliga and he had decided to check it for himself. Looking at him, I smiled to myself, remembering what I had been like a few months earlier. Then I had also kept saying "I don't believe it". But looking through the medical histories of the patients I had rubbed my eyes in amazement.

During the last few days I did not part even for a moment with the closely-written pages which Father Szeliga had given me on my departure. I had even taken them with me for the journey. During the long flight across the Atlantic, I wanted once more to revise the names of exotic plants to be better prepared for the meeting with Father Szeliga than the last time.

Now only a few hours were left before the meeting. Apart from all the things that are usually taken for a several-day-long trip to tropical countries, this time I was also carrying **the hope of a lot of people**. I was carrying letters to Father Szeliga from people who desperately wanted his help. I was carrying dramatic questions: "What shall I do?", "Is there still a chance for me?" And the most frequent one: "Father, may I come to you?" They were written in uneven, broken handwriting, just like the voices which asked the questions...

Father, I have an inoperable brain tumour and I am already going through the third cycle of chemotherapy. I am 36 years old and in a state of complete breakdown. Could you, Father, help me in some way? Is there a chance? Can the Amazon treatment be combined with chemotherapy?

Father, I have gone through a cycle of irradiation after an operation for cancer of the left kidney. You know how painful it was. Now, I have a metastasis to the right lung. I would very much like to take up the herbal treatment in your Institute. But can the therapy cause side effects? Father, will it be so painful again?

"Phytotherapy can be combined with chemotherapy," said Father Szeliga during our first meeting, looking through the letters. "This is not, however, the best solution, since, in my opinion, it is better if the patient gives up chemotherapy. But on the other hand, I understand that many people don't want to do so. There are various reasons. Disbelief in the plants; fear that they will lose time, which will then be impossible to make up; pressure on the part of the physician. My experience tells me that the chances for a cure increase when the patient sets drugs aside. But if they do not want to do so, we still treat them and the chances are not much worse, but - I stress - **it's surely not the optimal solution...**"

"And is the treatment painful?"

“No. Not at all. It also doesn’t have any side effects or other unpleasant symptoms. **It is a non-invasive method, aimed most importantly at the activation of self-defence mechanisms in the body.** Only during the first stage - purification of the blood - headaches may occur, as well as slight muscle pains, nausea and sometimes vomiting. But these are normal symptoms, which are likely to occur when the organism is going through intense detoxification.

“After the treatment has begun, also other symptoms disappear very quickly, the symptoms which are characteristic for cancer, like excessive weight-loss. Patients start putting on weight, and day by day they feel better. This is an important signal, which always pleases us, since it means that the body has started fighting the illness. This is what we want to achieve!”

This was another very frequent question:

Father, what is the cost of the anti-tumour treatment with plant medicaments? Is it available only for ‘oil sheikhs’ or also for ordinary people?

“The treatment isn’t expensive. I try to make it in such a way that everybody who needs it is able to have it.”

“What does the typical anti-tumour treatment prescribed for the patients look like?”

“The complete treatment has few stages and lasts several weeks.³ The first stage usually consists of purifying the body from all the impurities and pharmacological residue which have accumulated in the internal organs after taking medicines. During the first month - in accordance with the Indian prescription - we prescribe **manayupa**, then **flor de arena** or **hercampuri**. These are all medicines which have been used by the Piras and Machiguengas indigenous peoples for thousands of years. Purification is just the beginning...”

“Each treatment is in essence different. It all depends on where the tumour is located and in what phase of development it is. Generally, I can say that first, for one month, we prescribe **vilcacora**, and then for about 40 days **dragon’s blood - sangre de drago**. Each of these substances has anti-tumour properties, but works in a different way. Their combination turns out to be highly effective.”

“To what extent?”

“I wouldn’t like to shock anybody with percentages or to give figures of patients cured, I do not want to upset oncologists too much. I’ll just say this: we treat all kinds of tumours and, in contrast to conventional medical centres, **for us there are no cases past hope.**”

“Preventative treatment must be much easier than actual curing...”

“Of course. Both of the mentioned substances: **vilcacora** and **sangre de drago** have excellent preventative properties, and taken in smaller amounts than during the treatment, practically preclude the possibility of becoming ill with a tumour. If we add an annual cleansing treatment of the body by means of a combination of **té indio**, **manayupa** and **hercampuri**, we can safely assume that we already know **an effective method of preventing cancer illnesses!**”

In the *Quechua-Spanish and Spanish-Quechua Dictionary*, the part entitled *Vocabulario de los nombres vulgares de la flora peruana* written by Juan Soukupa, published in 1970 in Lima, we read:

Manayupa - also manayupana, runa manayupa, pega-pega, which was later corrupted into pata de perro or pie de perro (dog’s paw). Andean plant growing usually on loam, between

³ The anti-tumour treatment is described in more detail on p. 126.

*one thousand and three thousand metres above sea level. It has a highly purifying and revitalising effect. In Inca times, it was worshipped and assigned divine properties. The use of **manayupa** - in the form of a decoction or infusion - was reserved only for Inca nobility or people connected with the ruler's court. Cultivation of the bushes, reaching up to thirty centimetres in height, by the lower classes was rigorously punished with the death penalty. In direct translation the name stands for "**Countless are the properties which it can offer a man**". Up to the present day, many Quechua Indians link it with the cult of "apus" – the deities of the mountains, and willingly offer dry handfuls of this plant to the gods inhabiting the highest parts of the Andes.*

“Does this mean that such plants as **vilcacora** and **manayupa** will change soon the course of medicine?”

“Undoubtedly, but not only **vilcacora** and **manayupa**. **Vilcacora** and **manayupa** are only the beginning, the tip of the iceberg. There is also **muña-muña**, **shimbillo**, **tahuari**, **huaco blanco**, **chuchuhuasi**, **chirisanango**, **choquetarpo**, **cola de caballo**, **yanatananca**, or the revitalising plant known already in Inca times called **wiñay-wayna**. The Amazon rainforest is the pharmacy of the future, where on countless shelves there are still lots of unknown medicines. For more than fifty years I have been studying these plants thoroughly. Their force and effectiveness has nothing to do with magic - it is real. Indians, if they wanted to, could give up using mysterious charms and believing in some curing deities. It would be enough for them to know these plants! In our institute, we've been using them for many years with better and better results. Recently, we've started to effectively cure even AIDS!”

Father Szeliga reached to a shelf and showed me some notebooks densely covered with writing containing the curing prescriptions of the Amazon Indians.

“The plants described here will make up the ABC of medicine in the 21st century!”

Restore the world to the world

When he heard that he was to go to Peru, to South America, he shook his head in disbelief. “So far?” He opened the atlas by Trzaska, Evert and Michalski, published in 1924.

To be honest, he had always thought of Africa, as it was closer to home, closer to Europe. And now suddenly it was to be South America. However, on the other hand, it should not have come as a surprise to him. Polish Salesians had traditionally worked mainly in Latin America, and their missionary work in Africa had only just started.

After a few seconds of searching he found a political map of South America. Peru was marked as a light blue patch cut with a few huge rivers. He read: “Ucayali, Urubamba, Marañon, Amazon” and saw with his mind’s eye an impenetrable and lush tropical jungle, known to him so far only from book illustrations. “So, soon I will find myself so far away and I will be able to see for myself what such a rainforest really looks like!” he thought. “How will it welcome me? How will the Indians welcome me? What should I do to gain their acceptance?”

This last thought he remembers very clearly. It was to accompany him constantly. It has become his motto and has been the guiding principle of his stay in South America. For a missionary, it was quite an unorthodox approach. For him, spreading the faith has never been a goal in itself. From the very beginning, he understood his mission as a civilising errand. It was to involve bringing the Indians closer to the world and to modern times. But it was to be a painless process.

“Peru is not only a rainforest. It is also, and perhaps mainly, mountains. This is in fact the whole of South America in miniature,” he would say 69 years later, sitting on the terrace of a flower-bedecked villa in one of the residential districts of Lima, Miraflores. “This miniature is huge - it has an area of one and a half million square kilometres and is five times bigger than Poland! There is everything here: deserts, snow-covered peaks and humid selva⁴ valleys, which have not been visited by a white man yet. “If you want to get to know this continent, come to Peru” - this should be the advertising slogan of the travel agencies.

“Yes, now I know it for sure: I was very lucky to find myself in this country...”

However, when he was parting from his hometown Tychy and saying goodbye to his beloved Kraków, he did not know that yet. But he assumed that he had to deserve his happiness and that he shouldn’t wait for what fortune would bring. That is why, while still in Europe and counting the days left to his departure, he started learning the Indian dialect of Quechua, which sounded like the chirping of birds and the rushing of mountain streams, the language of the ancient Incas.

⁴ Selva (Sp.) – humid tropical forests covering huge areas of the Amazon River-basin.

“This was one of those decisions that, later on when I was already living in South America - as becomes a missionary - I blessed many a time. You should remember that the present Peru used to be the heart of Inca country and that without knowing the language, one cannot move about in the mountainous interior. Here was Cuzco - the majestic capital of Tawatinsuyu - the “Empire of the Four Districts” with its monumental stone palaces, temples and fortifications as impregnable as the famous Sacsahuaman fortress. Here, nearby, was the famous Holy Valley, and still further to the north, on the central Urubamba, were the ruins of Machu Picchu – the excellently preserved remains of the mysterious city, where Inca sages, strategists, magicians and “amautakuna”, i.e. doctors, must have lived.

“The word “amauta” in the Quechua language means a sage or doctor. “Amautakuna” is its plural form. This is a very old word, and one of the most beautiful ones.”

He did, however, know that his stay would last long, but he did not even imagine that it would be quite so long.

“Even the author of *The Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann, couldn’t have invented that. First, I heard that it might be three years, and that if I acclimatised well and was accepted, then perhaps five years, no more. But that it would be as many as seven long decades - 69 dry and 69 wet seasons? I didn’t expect that. If I had, I probably wouldn’t have decided on this odyssey to the New World, I would have found some excuse not to go...”

“Then you would never have learnt what you had lost. And we would never have known what we had lost...”

It undoubtedly involved courage to take up such a challenge. It required great trust in divine providence to accept the mission in “**this far-away country**”. We should bear in mind that South America seventy years ago was not the same continent that we know from the “Discovery” or “National Geographic” channels. When Father Szeliga found himself in Peru, many sections of the borders had simply not been laid out yet. There were no roads, as there were almost no cars there. The interior of the country was totally unexplored, just as in the times of Alexander von Humboldt - the traveller whose diary from South America had captured Father Szeliga’s attention, when he was packing his modest little suitcase for the great voyage across even the greater ocean.

It was a Latin America not associated with Macondo yet. Gabriel García Márquez was just about 10 years old then and still listening breathlessly to the tales of his grandmother. This was a true “terra incognita”, without the plague of mercury polluting the tributaries of the Amazon, without garimpeiros⁵, without the famous trans-Amazonian motorway joining the two opposite ends of the continent. It was only known for the futile quests for the way leading to the legendary El Dorado lost somewhere in the jungle, and for the reports appearing from time in the press about some mysterious monsters inhabiting the evergreen abysses of the endless selva. It was a completely different continent, which practically nothing was known about for sure.

Nowadays, when he looks at the crowded streets of Lima, through which herds of rampaging Japanese cars dash restlessly, he sometimes misses the old pioneering times, which will never come back again...

⁵ Garimpeiros (Port.) – gold-diggers.

He was also sorry to leave Poland. It had regained its independence so recently and there was so much to be done... He comforted himself with this sole thought: that he would carry this independent Poland with him to the world, at the same time giving help to people in need.

There was no room for Humboldt's books in his luggage, of course. Apart from the Bible, only the *Trilogy* by Sienkiewicz could be taken. He read it aloud for years in order not to forget his mother tongue.

Doing so, probably unconsciously, he followed the footsteps of the protagonist of Sienkiewicz's short story *Latarnik (The Lighthouse Keeper)*. He himself might have well represented numerous Polish characters of this kind, who - at the same time as he or a bit earlier - tossed by fortune, had found themselves in some far-away destinations. Many of them, especially those who had reached South America, the continent difficult and not quite friendly to the Poles - at least on account of the unbearable climate - remained anonymous. About others we know very little. However, he - as one of the select few who managed to achieve something really great and beautiful - can speak "**for them and instead of them**". One day, undoubtedly, he will be named together with Ignacy Domeyko, Edward Habich, Ryszard Jaxa-Malachowski and Ernest Malinowski⁶, who, as a tribute to his great merits, was the only Pole to be granted honorary citizenship of Peru. Father Edmund Szeliga - *El Padre*⁷ as the people call him - has the chance to be the other one.

Even before he set off, he had dreamt of South America many a time. Gradually, he saw it more and more clearly. First, it was misty, unreal, fabulous and at the same time as if from the chronicles of Amerigo Vespucci. Then, it became more realistic, close, almost tangible. In many dreams, there appeared the character of an old monk, walking amongst tropical trees, guided through this Eden by a stout and sturdy Indian.

"Today, I know that this monk was myself," he says smiling, "and the Indian was one of the warriors of the Pira or the Machiguenga tribe - perhaps Juan Sebastian or Juan Quispe... I can't tell which of them, because I don't remember his face. Rarely can you see everything clearly in dreams. But it was one of them, I'm sure."

⁶ Ignacy Domeyko (1802-1889) – engineer, miner, mineralogist and geologist. In 1838 he went to Chile, where he created the scientific foundations for the exploitation of natural resources and was acknowledged as one of the most deserving people in the cultural and scientific development of the country. He laid the foundations for the system of higher education in Chile and organised a network of meteorological stations, as well as initiating a great deal of geographical research, writing among other things a monograph about Araucania. He gave his name to a mineral – *domeykit*, to a mussel – *Nautilus domeykus*, to Chilean ammonite – *Amonites domeykanus*, a range of mountains in the Andes and a town in Chile.

Edward Habich (1835-1909) – engineer and mathematician. In 1869 he went to Peru, where he set up in Lima in 1876 the School for Civil and Mining Construction Engineers, which became the precursor of Polytechnical education in all of South America. The modern Lima Polytechnic bears his name and his statue stands before the entrance.

Ryszard Jaxa-Malachowski (1887-1972) – architect, living in Peru since 1911. Between 1912 and 1921 the country's chief government architect; from 1927 to 1958 professor at Lima polytechnic; from 1933 the chief architect of Lima. His designs include the Presidential Palace and the Central Post Office building in Lima.

Ernest Malinowski (1815-1899) – railway and road construction engineer. In 1852 he went to Peru, where, among other things, he designed the fortifications of the port in Callao, designed and constructed the world's highest railway line from Lima to La Oroya, which attains a height of 4769 metres above sea level. In 1866, during the Spanish-Peruvian War, he helped to disperse the Spanish fleet, after which he was acknowledged as a Peruvian national hero.

⁷ El Padre (Sp.) - Father

From the beginning, he felt that, despite the fact that he was going there to teach and instruct, he would have a chance to learn a great deal himself and - if he was persevering hard enough and a bit lucky - he would discover the whole unknown world for himself. The world which had to be restored to the world. He was gradually becoming accustomed to this thought and was preparing himself during the sea journey, which lasted for many weeks. Once more- who knows for which time now - it turned out that the sea voyage was an excellent initiation rite. While passing through the climatic zones, and changing his clothes in the same rhythm for something lighter and more airy and cool, more suitable for tropical conditions and the sun, he felt as if he was changing skin and becoming a new man.

When, after 45 days spent at sea, he was entering the harbour in Callao, he was a different person than the one at the beginning of the voyage.

“When, out of the eternal mist, loomed the desert Peruvian shore, I felt that something very important was commencing.”

Not only for himself.

Between the Apurimac and the Urubamba.

From the reporter's notebook:

The last idolatrous Incas lived in the most inaccessible part of the Andes, between the Apurimac and the Urubamba rivers, the tributaries of the Amazon. It was separated from that part of Peru, which was ruled by Francisco Pizarro and the conquistadors, by five-thousand-metre-high mountain ranges, glaciers, and further on by the tropical jungle, huge precipices and mile-deep granite canyons. They erected their sanctuary there, and the Spanish could not break into it. It was a dazzling residence, built with astonishing splendour. It was not until 1911 that the world found out about its existence, when an American researcher of pre-Columbian cultures, Hiram Bingham, discovered this extinct city built in the shadow of Machu Picchu Mountain. Hidden in the range of the grand Urubamba canyon, it is nowadays a real tourist mecca.

“It was this place, the Inca kingdom, that Brother Diego of the Order of St. Augustine reached in 1568 with his solitary Christian mission. It is all described in the long “Moralising Chronicle of the Order in Peru” written by Father Calancha. This was the first book on my reading list in my preparations for missionary service. My initial knowledge about the confrontation of the Old World with the New World. Then I read “The History of the Incas As Written By Themselves”, an Indian version of history, beginning with the rule of the mythical founders of the old capital, Cuzco, and ending with the reign of all the Vilcabamba rulers of the Inca dynasty. Afterwards I read “A Tale of the Antiquities of the Kingdom of Peru” by Joan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti, a chronicle of the cruelty-filled Indian tribal battles until the foundation of the Inca empire. Finally I studied “An Account of the Conquest of Peru” by Titu Cusi Yupanqui, drawn up by the son of Manco Inca, and describing the period of the rule of his father, the emperor of Vilcabamba. This item was most instructive from the point of view of priestly duties. It expressed all the injustice suffered by the Incas, whether those resisting the conquistadors or the ones allied with the Spanish. The latter were then secretly murdered with no pang of conscience by the conquistadors. I experienced the distrust towards white men passed down from one generation to the next, during the long years of my relations with various tribes of forest-Indians. It vanished only after I spoke their languages well, beautiful languages full of metaphors, full of poetry.

“I moved through the jungle following Brother Diego's footsteps. I lived for 68 years among the Indians, the heirs of the culture of the Incas. I shared with them their daily problems, I suffered hunger with them, and experienced the birth of new souls and the death of their closest and dearest ones. This was the time of patient seeking for mutual understanding and faith in each other. Particularly their faith in me. This I recognised as the foundation of everything. In this there also resided the aims of my mission, in accordance with the motto of the St. Augustine friars: “faith seeks understanding”. Adding to this the maxim of the followers of St Thomas

Aquinas: “reason seeks faith”, I gradually brought about the inspiration for dialogue, going beyond the limits of ordinary experience.

“The beginnings weren’t easy. When the sun was rising with dazzling brightness, or the moon was shining brightly, strange atavistic yearnings awoke in them. Their hearts revived, filled with joy. They held their hands out towards the sky in a gesture of greeting and stood there motionless for a long time. It seemed to me unnatural and I could not understand it. Didn’t their ancestors worship Viracocha, the deity that had created the Incas’ world? They consecrated their temples to Viracocha, among others the one in Cuzco, the “navel of the world” in literal translation, which no longer exists. It wasn’t until later that I realised that the cult of the Sun and the Moon had been the religious form of worship of their great ancestors. It was the form widely spread not only among the Indians.

It is not possible to describe the priestly problems I was faced with. I will only say that the establishing of Christianity in our joint considerations on this huge Amazon stage was like spring rain on hard ground. It brought forth flowers, just as my teachings bore fruit.

I was happy when they said that I preached the truth and hope. And I became firmer in my belief that what mattered above all in those subtle struggles with deeply-rooted illusions and in the trials to instil love was the truth about human unhappiness and the aspiration to control it. I thought there was something sacred hidden in there. And it was there that I mostly discerned the evidence for Christianity. I called it “the piety of wishes” and “the piety of aspirations”.

In the kingdom of plants

“I tried to make my Indians construct their own biographies rationally, consciously. I taught them what to do so that food would not go bad too quickly, I told them about the world of white people, tried to convince them about planned development, considered and economical farming, the development of such specialisation as, for example, house-building, etc. And indeed, as time passed, they stopped resembling stomachs on legs, moreover ones which wasted food. They stopped living for the moment, from day to day.

But I myself also learned quite a lot of things from them as well. Most of all I became acquainted with nature.

Is there anybody who doesn't know that it was the Peruvian Indians who invented the cure for malaria? This was one of my first requests: “Please, show me what the cinchona tree looks like.” How do you obtain an alkali from the cinchona, which means bark?”

It must be mentioned here that, until now, the Indians have only once unveiled parts of their most guarded secrets, which are their own methods of curing diseases. One of the secrets was revealed to the conquistadors, who were decimated in the Amazon forests by malaria. The Incas showed them the antidote to this incurable disease: the bark of a tree that was unknown to the Spaniards. It was not until a hundred years later that Linnaeus named this beneficial plant *cinchona* in honour of the Countess of Chinchón, the wife of the viceroy of Peru, who was the first woman in Europe ever to be cured of malaria. Soon, the Jesuits began to exploit the miraculous bark from the Amazon, and to export it to the world in the form of powder, called quinine, because the government of Peru had banned the export of the seeds and seedlings of cinchona under the death penalty. It took as long as two centuries for the world to see the cinchona tree outside Peru. Its seedling was smuggled to Java by a German botanist, Hasskarl, on the orders of the Dutch. Consequently, Java is currently the largest producer of cinchona bark, and quinine still successfully competes with synthetic drugs as a treatment for malaria. But that's just a remark on the side.

I made a catalogue of all the information gathered from the Indians, together with records of the recipes for the remedies and their usage. Naturally, I identified the trees and plants provided they were known to science. **Vilca**, for example, the tree from which the soporifics and purgatives are obtained, is called *piptadenia macrocarpa*; **kuka** or **coca** - *erythroxyton*, whose leaves contain many vitamins and micro-elements, which, when chewed with calcium compounds, work as tranquillisers soothing the feeling of hunger and pain.

This is how I gradually learned to differentiate between hundreds of trees, shrubs and plants. After a few years I knew perfectly well that this was **canagua**, i.e. *chenopodium pallidicaula*, and that - **ayary**, i.e. *chenopodiaceae*, and that they were both wild varieties of the plants of the goose-foot crop family.”

From Father Szeliga's notes:

Most of all I like the moments when, in the evening, after a whole day spent in the jungle, feeling the pulsating tiredness of the whole body, I can stretch out my hammock and plunge into the sweet bliss of meditation.

The silence of the jungle is different, distinct from the silence of the sierra⁸! In the mountains, after the sunset, you simply hear nothing. It's so silent that if a man tries hard enough and concentrates, he can hear flowing of the blood in his veins and the rustle of his own thoughts. It's noiseless. Here, however, amongst the endlessly pulsating life that for a single moment doesn't stop seething and being itself, we are as if sunk in the entrails of a huge creature, in which something is continually changing, transforming, pouring and flowing. No, there is practically never any silence here. But there is the music of the cicadas, the buzz of the "sancudos"⁹, the rustle of crawling reptiles, the vibration of countless flies, the calls of the tapirs, the grunts of the capybaras... The most beautiful noises of the whole world, the most beautiful score. And I am Jonah in the depths of a whale.

"My interest in the remedies obtained from nature was enhanced by the following event:

One day, during the first year of my mission, around noon, we heard calls from the direction of the mountains. From a little rock, we saw a group of people far away on one of the mountain passes. They were coming down the steep path leading to our colony. We went to meet them. They were shepherds. They were carrying an unconscious boy in a hammock. He was 15-16 years old. Blue in the face, froth coming from his screwed-up lips. And then an astonishing thing happened. The Indians without as much as a single word set off towards the forest. I was left with the shepherds only. I found out that the boy had been bitten by a viper in the morning and was paralysed. After a few minutes the Indians came back. Every one of them with the same plant. They fed him the first dose of the infusion still on the path, and the next ones in the village. In the evening the young man opened his eyes. "You're going to live," they told him. He was given this infusion the whole night long. In the morning he regained the control of his arms and legs. At noon, after a common meal, together with the shepherds he set off on his way back.

It was then that I had brought from Lima a book called *Corpus Hippocraticum*, an outstanding work by the father of medical science describing approximately 300 medicaments, of which 200 were based on plants. I wished to know how people cured themselves fourteen centuries ago by using plant decoctions, infusions, solutions, ointments, and other patent drugs. For phytotherapy is just as old as human-kind."

From the reporter's notebook:

Egypt was the cradle of phytotherapy, the only medical practice which was indispensable both at that time and for many centuries afterwards. The so-called Ebers Papyrus, which was found in the 19th century, contains almost 900 recipes recommended by Egyptian priests in the treatment of various illnesses and ailments. The knowledge of healing plants then moved, according to documents dated three thousand years ago, from Egypt to the Babylonian Empire and Assyria, and later to Greece and Rome. It was only there that phytotherapy began to be brought out of temples, freed of prejudice and superstitious rituals. Athens was the first city to witness secular doctors. They were educated natural historians and philosophers. Even

⁸ Sierra (Sp.) – the mountains

⁹ Sancudos (Sp.) - another name for cicadas

Pythagoras, the famous mathematician, was known to fight for the scientific (in the sense of being free of magic) character of medical practice. In this way, the myths, wizardry, and the magic of medical practice have been gradually fading away.

Dear Father,

I think to myself that it really was a blessed moment when your interest in these plants started! Hardly had I seen you in the Institute, when I thought that it had to work! Today I know for sure it is so! I feel better with every day! The heaviness and pain in the intestines have almost disappeared. Initially, while drinking the concoction, I felt dizzy and generally didn't feel too well, but I endured, I never despaired. I remembered that you said that that was exactly what could happen. Then, during the second month of taking it, I felt much better. I've stopped losing weight and I feel much stronger. My desire to live and my faith that the illness can be cured have returned. I am going to continue the treatment until I'm completely healthy again.

I wish you only good health, so that you can continue helping people like me. I am sure that just like St. Francis who talked to the animals, you Father, who understands plants and their subtle souls so well, will one day become a saint, a saint to whom the faithful will pray for their health and the health of the ones closest to them.

From the reporter's notebook:

The research conducted in the first half of the 16th century by Paracelsus was a step towards contemporary medical science. He worked on healing plants to find methods of isolating the compounds that influence the human body. Paracelsus thought that the drugs obtained by means of the chemical processing of the active bodies which were isolated from healing plants in the course of active analyses were the core of medical practice. Undoubtedly, the invention of printing had a great importance in propagating his discoveries and research. Phytotherapy has ever since remained in the shadow of the medical practice which was based on the synthesis of organic bodies and preparations obtained in laboratories.

“I sent those plants which were unknown to me, the tree barks with their juices, lianas, roots, flowers, leaves, seeds and fruit to the Salesian monastery in Lima, from where my brothers passed the samples to the analysts from the University of San Marcos laboratories. In this way we examined every single blade of grass. As soon as I found, let's say, **chillci**, a plant of sour and sticky leaves which was unknown to the scientists, I would send it immediately to Lima. Analyses of natural chemical substances were added to my documentation. Various kinds of notes, records of observations, associations, and ascertainments enriched this documentation. Simultaneously I studied university textbooks of different branches of medicine for many years. I am still extending this knowledge, importing to the monastery up-to-date American scientific periodicals.”

Return to phytotherapy

“I realised when time passed that it was not until the first symptoms of the side-effects resulting from chemical preparations had been noticed that the medical world snapped out of the euphoria occasioned by synthetic medications. These side-effects, however, were very often irreversible, as far as the proper functioning of the organism goes. It was then that people realised that academic medical studies had proved, in fact, of little use in the struggle for human health. Enormous quantities of new synthetic drugs did not protect mankind at all from diseases. Quite the contrary. By weakening the immune system, they made it susceptible to various bacteria and viruses. They made it defenceless against the creation of degenerate cells. They made it defenceless against disturbances in the functioning of particular organs. Medical science, which was both so mighty and so helpless, reached a cross-roads. The doctors began asking themselves about which way to choose. Remembering Hippocrates’s motto, more and more of them were ready to head towards phytotherapy, towards new research into plants. They do not do any harm, and they encourage us to look at them more closely as their efficiency has been rediscovered, particularly as far as the treatment of incurable diseases goes.

“In this way my enchantment with the jungle’s flora grew together with my experience. Andean phytotherapy was born. If we compare it with medical sciences, it can be said with every certainty that whereas sometimes with the help of synthetic medicines the disease cannot be stopped because of the lack of some essential component, there is enough of these constituents in natural medicines for the body, functioning as a homeostatic, to choose what it needs most. It causes a diminishing of admiration for synthetic medicines. Chemistry is starting to give way to natural medicine. It gives way only because, in spite of astonishing scientific development, it is still impossible to reconstruct the structures built by nature.

“Nevertheless, academic medical practice has continued to be reluctant with respect to natural plant medications. Despite their perfection, many of them still cannot be found in pharmacies. Many found their way there only after centuries passed. Let us recall, for instance, the example of substances from the *rauwolfia* tree, which were not recognised as medicine by official medical science until 1931, even though they had been used in folk medicine in India for 3,000 years. It was in 1931 that two Indian chemists isolated from the roots of this tree pure alkaloids, which were then subject to meticulous pharmacological tests. These showed that these substances lower blood pressure in a sensational manner. Two years later, Ciba, the famous company, produced on the basis of these alkaloids an extremely valuable preparation against hypertension. They called it Serpazil. Primeval plant medicine soon gained the widespread appreciation of clinicians from all over the world. Similarly, also *ginseng*, the Chinese perennial plant with regenerative properties, waited for 3,000 years to be recognised as medicine. *Mandragora*, a perennial plant from Africa whose root is successfully used in contemporary

medical practice, also shared this fate. Another example is the evergreen tree from India called chaulmoogra. The Indians had been curing leprosy for a long time with the oil obtained from this plant, while academic medical science stubbornly considered leprosy an incurable disease. A certain leper hospital, where there were noted a significant number of recoveries resulting from using chaulmoogra oil, only evoked some interest as late as 1921. Despite the new treatment with sulphonamides, chaulmoogra oil is even today as efficient in curing leprosy as are sulphonamides. Its advantage, however, lies in the fact that it is incomparably cheaper. Therefore, plantations of chaulmoogra trees are still established in many tropical countries. Scientists think that it normally takes about 20 years before a medical product of plant origins makes its way from the forest to the market. One of the examples of this is curare, used in the past almost exclusively in the jungle, where Indian hunters used it to poison the heads of their arrows. Curare, obtained from the resin of a climbing plant under the Latin name of *chondrodendron tomentosum*, is nowadays an extremely efficient medicine for relaxing muscles. Pharmacologists have ascertained that an alkaloid called tubocurine, which is contained in the resin of this plant, saves the lives of people suffering from contractions evoked by lockjaw and asthmatic paralysis. Twenty years since its discovery, tubocurine is widely considered by surgeons all over the world as an invaluable medication in operations which necessitate the relaxation of the muscles.

The secrets of the Piras and the Machiguengas

“I learned the most from the Indians Piras from the Upper Urubamba and from the Machiguengas from the Central Ukajala. Most of all from the Piras for who, and I’m not afraid to use this word, I feel deep trust and intimate friendship. I visit them as often as I can and as weather permits. At least twice a year. Unfortunately, I visit the Machiguengas less often because they live further away in the jungle...”

“Let’s start with the most general canons the Indians revealed to you, Father.”

“Firstly, **if a tree is a remedial plant, then most of the curative substances accumulate in its bark. If such a remedy is a shrub, these substances mostly accumulate in the root.** Secondly, **the most universal form of medicine is an infusion. Usually, you have to drink it three times a day, more or less in quarter of a litre doses...** Out of these two rules follows the third one: Indian medicines are usually infusions from the roots or the bark. And if we are not completely sure which remedy to use, we should serve the remedy which is used against the bite of a venomous snake. The anti-venomous substances are something like a panacea and their spectrum of action is very wide.”

“What anti-cancer plants did the magicians tell you about?”

“Mostly about the queen of all the healing plants of Amazon, the previously-mentioned **vilcacora**. Its Latin name is *uncaria tomentosa*, while in Spanish it is *uña de gato*. It’s the Incas holy vine, whose use once was restricted to the current ruler and his closest family only. As early as the 1960s at the Naples University, a detailed chemical analysis was conducted at my commission, which showed that this plant has a completely unique composition of alkaloids and glycosides, which inhibits the growth of many varieties of cancer. **The infusion from a few grams of desiccated vilcacora drunk three times a day in quarter of a litre doses proves to be an extremely successful remedy even at the advanced stages of the disease.** This amazing plant opens up completely new perspectives for medicine!

From the paper delivered by Dr Aguirre Changa, the director of the Santa Beatriz Polyclinic in Linca, at the Second International Seminar on Traditional and Alternative Medicine in Lima:

Chemical analyses, supported by the observations conducted by the Andean Phytotherapy Institute, confirm the wide and favourable effect on the human body of a plant known by its Indian name of vilcacora. Clinical experiments show that this plant perfectly fulfils the task of an anti-oxidant, has an anti-cancer effect, and, when the tumour has already appeared, prevents metastases and causes their regress. (...) A high concentration of glycosides, characteristic of this plant, endows it with anti-inflammatory and anti-viral properties, aids the creation of white blood cells, stimulates the immune system and increases phagocytosis. It heightens the organism’s powers of self-defence and leads to a significant improvement in health even in the most serious illnesses.



“To which Indians have you become the closest?”

“To the Piras. They’re a very intelligent tribe. And although it was different in the past, their attitude is very peaceful. The Piras have adopted some elements of white civilisation, preserving at the same time what was most precious in their own tradition. There have been warm ties between the Piras and myself since before the war, which is from time immemorial. I think we were mutually close already when I held the position of director of the Salesian College in Cuzco. It was relatively close to there from Cuzco. I went into their forest-covered mountains several times a year and stayed there for some months. To win them over I even learned a few of their dances. I took part in various contests. In shooting from the “blow-pipe”, which I practised for a long time, I even managed to win the competition in which the inhabitants of the three neighbouring villages took part. The natives remember it to this day. All of this brought us closer together.

From the reporter’s notebook:

The Piras tribe is made up of around sixteen thousand members at the moment. They live on both sides of the Upper Urubamba and in the past the gold-diggers and rubber-collectors heavily persecuted them. Compared to other peoples of the Peruvian, these particular Indians become attached to the ground in a relatively easy way, and cultivate it. What seems to be rare among the inhabitants of the region of the Upper Amazon, is that they occupy themselves with pottery. They like tattooing their bodies and painting their faces red for various tribal ceremonies. For this occasion they use a dye of a plant called vaipiria, which until not long ago constituted the main object of barter between the neighbouring tribes. Other precious articles which are the currency of barter are healing herbs and plants, in the identification and use of which they are unequalled masters.

From Father Szeliga’s notes:

I saw an unusual thing today. I was going through the forest. I wasn’t on a path but rather in a thicket, quite easy to cross. I was alone, so I was paying a lot of attention not to lose my orientation and to be able to find my way back. In spite of that I was moving quite quickly. All of a sudden I noticed an Indian a few dozen metres in front of me. He was walking in the same direction as I was. I began to approach him. I was just about to greet him, when... I became speechless.

The Indian noticed something, stopped and as if stiffened. Despite the distance that separated us I assumed from his posture, which was full of worship, that what he had seen had aroused his admiration and respect. He moved back and fell on his knees... in front of a plant in bloom. He started to bow before that plant! This lasted a few minutes, then he stood up and began an ethereal, soft dance around the plant. After this act of adoration he continued walking.

The plant was beautiful; its flower resembled a huge, outspread butterfly. I saw it for the first time then. I had no idea what it was called. I never saw it again after that. I didn’t dare ask the Indians about it, because I realised that by chance I had seen something I should never have seen..

“What made me wonder about the Machiguengas was that they were hardly ever ill,” says Father Szeliga. “Their children only suffered from parasitic diseases, or from vitamin deficiency. The adults did not complain about anything, and definitely not about anything serious.”

“And the tumours? Was cancer widespread among the Indians?”

.....

“No! And this was a great surprise for me as well. **Tumours were hardly known among them.** If they appeared, however, which happened extremely rarely, the Indians, to my amazement, knew how to cure them. They were able to bring about a regress of the disease! They definitely did it more effectively than modern medicine, which does it with the use of a scalpel and chemotherapy.”

.....
“And how did they cure cancer?”

“It’s quite simple! I learned from the Machiguengas that the same plants which help to cure the venomous snake bites help to fight tumours... The amazing qualities of these plants were confirmed, as I mentioned earlier, by chemical analyses.”

From the reporter’s notebook:

I met the Machiguenga Indians in 1988 on the Central Ukajala. It’s one of the last tribes to have been discovered - at the beginning of the 20th century in the Peruvian Montaña. These Indians are related to the Shipibo tribe as well as to the Kampas, who are notorious for cruelty and belligerence. There are no more than fourteen thousand of them and they live in small communities bound by family ties. Scattered all over the jungle, usually close to one river or another, they occupy themselves with hunting, fishing and very basic agriculture. Their villages consist of simple huts on posts built around the outline of a circle or rectangle. Even fifty years ago the Machiguengas were perceived as ritual cannibals who practised the art of shrinking the heads of their enemies who had been killed in battles and skirmishes. Today they are the untiring collectors of the undergrowth and masters in plaiting mats and baskets. Their highly developed shaman traditions have won them among the neighbouring tribes the fame of good doctors and sorcerers, who can even call down rain.

“The Indian shamans put out a great forest fire?” I had once listened with great curiosity to the story told in Poland by the editor of “Niezny Świat” [“The Unknown World”], Marek Rymuszko, about the Yanomami Indians, close neighbours of the Machiguengas.

“They did indeed... Without any helicopters, foam, chemicals or asbestos overalls. Can you imagine that? There hadn’t been a drop of rain in the Roraima State in the Amazon jungle. The tropical rain forest, usually saturated with water, was then dry as a bone. The consequences were even more disastrous. At the beginning of 1988 the gigantic fires of the forests, which could not be stopped by anyone, were raging throughout Northern Brazil. Towards the end of March, on the Venezuelan border, an acreage equal in size to Belgium was covered in fire! The patience of the Indians living there wore thin when their hunting grounds became threatened... **They decided not to wait for a miracle any longer** and... reached for their own wisdom, which had been passed down from one generation to the next.

On 30 March 1988 the chiefs of the Caiapo and Xavante Indians came to the Yanomami reservation to enact the rain ritual. They transported themselves to an altered state of consciousness and started their prayers, songs and dances. They first called upon the spirit of Xapori to thin the smoke out, because it was causing their children to feel ill. Then they turned to Baruno, the spirit of fire, and to Faramini, the spirit of rain.

And can you guess what happened? The next day, before noon, a great downpour started. It rained without stopping for four hours. It rained as if somebody was pouring water out of buckets. Even the oldest Indians could not remember such a rainfall! The fire, which had lasted many weeks, ended in a day.”

“Unbelievable!”

“But true! **These are the things that the Indians can do!**” said Marek. “It wasn’t a coincidence either! Today we know already that during their ecstatic dances the Indians produce vibrations whose wavelength is very similar to the so-called Schumann Waves. And these waves are responsible for the shaping of atmospheric fronts and directly influence whether it rains or whether there is a drought...”



This was the “Amazonian” sensation in the field of meteorology. A lot was written later on about it. **Why couldn’t a similar sensation happen in the field of alternative medicine, in the field of treating AIDS and fighting tumours?**



AIDS – the first six

“There is no other person in the whole of Peru who has come to know the medical practices of the Amazon Indians as well as Father Szeliga has,” says Dr Martha Villar who is from the Peruvian Ministry of Health and who is a student of Father Szeliga’s. “But the Padre’s therapeutic efficiency is surely connected in part with his exceptional personality. Father Szeliga is a medical phenomenon, and the plants he recommends to his patients bring effects, among other things, because... **they pass through his hands!**”

“Does Father Szeliga have any exceptional predisposition towards healing?”

“Undoubtedly. Haven’t you noticed that you feel much better in his presence?”

“Well, yes, I did think I felt that way... But, given the fact that you are, after all, a representative of conventional medicine, are you not afraid to present such opinions?”

“Not at all. You cannot refuse to notice obvious facts.”

“I’ve never come across anything like this before,” says one of the patients waiting outside Father Szeliga’s surgery. She does not wish to introduce herself.

“What are you being treated for?”

The woman moves uneasily and for a moment falls silent.

“Do I have to answer?”

“Perhaps it would be better...”

Once again silence fell.

“All right... I’ll tell you: it’s AIDS...”

“So far we have had six cases of AIDS cured,” says Father Szeliga. “Fourteen other patients are going through the cycle of treatment prepared by Father Szeliga, and although there is still a few weeks left until the end of the treatment we can see a significant improvement. The results are surprisingly good – better than we could have supposed at the beginning.”

“What do you mean – six patients have been cured of AIDS?”

“It means that those patients with full symptoms of AIDS – not just those who were seropositive – after the treatment the density of viruses in the blood was lowered to such an extent that they were virtually impossible to detect. We do not say that the viruses disappeared entirely. We are cautious. We only state that their number fell to beneath vestigial amounts.”

“Are you sure this is a permanent state? Won’t the number of viruses increase again after a while?”

“We also had our doubts initially about this. But our observations indicate that it is not so. The patients I mentioned are still under our constant observation. Soon we will start to prepare a special report on this subject.”

From Father Szeliga’s notes:

I have never been put off by the fact that the chemical composition of Amazon plants is so difficult to establish. I wasn’t discouraged by anything that dissuaded the others from the vine,

the grass and the ivies. They would often withdraw from the research, give up half-way, because the chemical make-up of the local plants is so intricate and complex that no apparatus precise enough to take them to pieces and to disentangle their composition has been invented yet. It is often very difficult to decide what it really is that cures and why. Which, according to current law, makes it impossible for these plants to be officially recognised as medicines. (...)

“It’s true that formal requirements in medical experiments are becoming increasingly greater,” admits Father Szeliga. “What we are doing may not always meet these criteria, because we do not use control groups. The reason for this, however, is not because we want to stretch the results or to colour them in any way. It’s just that we ourselves didn’t expect to obtain such good and clear effects.”

“Is it possible that these people cured themselves? Miraculously? Inexplicably?”

“Six cures in such a short period of time? Even for a miracle this would be a bit too miraculous! Wouldn’t it be better to look for the reason somewhere else – in the therapy that was used, rather than in supernatural phenomena? **Aren’t we starting to fall from one extreme to the other, into magic and mysticism, refusing to accept the facts?**”

From Father Szeliga’s notes:

I found the Indians’ belief in magic, spirits, and demons amusing at first. But the more I got to know them, the more nights I spent in the jungle in a hammock, in those huts on posts, listening to the noises of the jungle, the better I understood their souls and their way of thinking. Yes - thinking. Because they also think. They perceive what happens around them and do it with much more sensitivity than any of us! It’s true that they live in a world of completely different concepts. But their phantoms, spectres, demons are the same physical and spiritual phenomena, only slightly differently described. All in all, our science with its microscopes, integrals and differential calculus varies from their magic only slightly. These are often the same concepts, just differently dressed. They are dressed up in more exotic garments, which makes them strange and unknown to us...

“Haven’t you ever been afraid, Father, that one day someone might accuse you after all those years spent in the selva of having become soaked through with paganism and respect for Indian shamanism too much?”

“I have just always tried, and I’m still trying, to be open to anyone who stands in front of me. To another person, to a human being... But you’re right, from time to time, you could hear such opinions, even among those from whom you would least expect it, from the missionaries.”

“Have they ever mentioned any secret dealings with the devil?”

“Fortunately not! Nobody has prepared a stake for me yet... To all this I have always only had one answer: “By their fruits ye shall know them”. And the fruits are there. No-one denies that. And so there is approval. What else do you need?”

“How did it come about that the Indians, who are never ill with AIDS, told you which plants are effective in fighting this illness?”

“It was my supposition that certain of these plants might be helpful in the treatment of AIDS. I based this on other, more general, properties. The experimental treatment of AIDS which we began recently in the Institute indicates initially that my hypothesis on this subject was correct, and the result is that **today in the streets of Lima, there are patients walking who were the first in the world to be cured of AIDS...**

.....

Telegram:

I BELIEVED IN YOU FATHER NOW I BELIEVE IN GOD! I CURED THE PNEUMONIA WITH A SIMPLE ANTIBIOTIC. I AM ALIVE!

“Which plants cure AIDS?”

“I don’t actually speak publicly on this subject. I can only give you the Indian names, the ordinary ones, not Latin ones. For the time being I would like to preserve at least part of this secret.”

The first plant is the **tahuari** tree – the decoction from its bark (20 grams of grated bark per litre of water) drunk three times a day for 2-3 months restores the organism’s immunological capability and causes the regression of the symptoms of AIDS. Another plant with similar effects is **shimbillo**; the pods of this plant contain substances which effectively inhibit the development of AIDS and cause the significant regression of the illness. The next one in terms of effectiveness in combating the HIV virus is **muña-muña**, a shrub found on clay ground in the mountainous jungle. Its most important part is the root, which is treated by the Indians with the same respect as **ginseng** is in China. You also have to add **perroa** to this list - another shrub, a dwarf-shrub, from the slightly moist areas in the Amazon River-basin, as well as **choquetarpo** from the mountains and the leafy **huaco blanco** from the jungle.

.....

To be ready before the flood

“Since you are convinced, Father, that these plants help in the fight against AIDS and are so effective, why are you so unwilling to talk about them? Are you afraid of competition?”

“No, it’s not about competition. **I am quite simply worried that when people find out how effective these plants are they will exhaust the supplies totally in a very short time.** I will reveal the Latin names when we start to cultivate the six plants I mentioned in our nurseries at the institute, which will guarantee them survival even in the most unfavourable circumstances.”

“Is the threat really that great?”

“There is absolutely no exaggeration in what I am saying. The irreversible devastation of vegetation in the Amazon basin as a result of the plundering of the forests is one of the modern age's most serious problems. It is estimated that **every day – I repeat – every day! 20 species of plants disappear – species which are not known to us and which have not even been classified!** In all of his thoughtlessness the man is cutting the branch on which he is sitting. Bearing in mind that a successful cure for AIDS has been found in the Amazon basin, it can be assumed that **in this way we have irretrievably lost medicines which could be used in the treatment of the unknown yet illnesses of the future!**

From the paper delivered by the Professor Lester R. Brown, the Director of the World-watch Institute in Washington, at the Ecological Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1993:

*The undertaking of work aimed at ensuring the biological diversity of the biosphere, just like the work aimed at restoring the protective ozone layer in the atmosphere, should, in the years separating us from the end of the century, as quickly as possible become our priority and gain the support of the international arena. Bearing in mind the scale of the undertaking, it will probably be necessary to engage the specialist agencies of the UNO in this process. **If this does not come about, soon many unknown so far species of plants and insects will disappear from the surface of the earth, species whose role in the creating of the atmosphere and whose function on the level of local ecosystems is still not recognised.** (...)*

The process of destruction of the biosphere is most advanced in the area of the tropical rain-forests of South America, where in the last two decades there has taken place an unprecedented expansion of the mankind – on the one hand an unplanned influx of settlers clearing the jungle at the rate of eight hectares a day; on the other hand the ruthless activities of gold-diggers – garimpeiros, who are not only poisoning the rivers with the mercury compounds but are also evicting the local Indian tribes from the increasing areas of land, tribes whose existence in these areas constitutes the best guarantee of preserving the jungle.

“An example of the plants whose existence until recently has been unknown to us is **yanali**,” continues Father Szeliga. “I discovered it not long ago, last season. And as it turns out, the root of this plant works astonishingly well in the treatment of stomach cancer. Using this plant, I have already helped several people. This is just one example. Other examples could also be given.”

.....

From Father Szeliga's notes:

Walking through the jungle above all, I notice its vitality, its rapacity and its enormous rolling and swaggering in the dance of life... On these impassable paths, the energy simply emanates, condenses in the form of unknown aerosols and elixirs. I thought to myself: If we could direct this energy into the treatment of illnesses, even the most complicated and complex ones – what then?

Should we not bring about a collision between one life force and another? Should not one complexity be replaced by another equally complex one? Yes. That's the idea. Why? To tie up the chemical energy of the illness – in order for the body to be able to revive, come out of the lethargy, gather its strength and go on to the counter-attack. The counter-attack which will end in success...

“Does it often happen that you come across some new unknown plant in the selva?”

“From my experience, I can tell you that it all depends on how much time you spend in the jungle. When you walk through the forest and look around, almost everyday you can discover some unknown species. The jungle is enormous, precipitous, and we still do not know very much about it. We have to hurry to get to know it, because something in the form of a great flood is coming. Every day in the Amazon basin several hectares of forest are disappearing under the caterpillar tracks of the bulldozers. And it is estimated that in every square kilometre of the devastated jungle several varieties of plants grow about whose existence we do not know and which only occur in this very spot only! We need a contemporary Noah's Ark – a plantation, where we could preserve all the species of endangered plants, so that one day, when the man becomes wiser and when the need arises, we will be able to recreate and restore them to their natural environment.”

“The potatoes grown on the plains are completely different from those growing wild in the Andes. Is it possible that Amazon plants under cultivation could undergo a similar metamorphosis and, for instance, lose their healing properties?”

“I don't think so,” says Pershing Hernandez, head of the Code Plam laboratory, which is conducting experiments with the planned cultivation of vilcacora. “Nothing so far indicates that a loss of healing properties could occur. I believe we could risk the statement that if somebody wanted it very much, vilcacora could even be grown in flower-pots! And there can be no doubt that when properly fertilised in plantations, vilcacora might grow much faster than in natural conditions and yield higher crops. At present, intensive work is being conducted in several areas of Peru in order to ‘encourage’ the horizontal development of vilcacora, which is a liana and which grows vertically in its natural environment. There will be many profits, should these attempts turn out to be successful. First of all, this would very much facilitate cultivation, and secondly, I think it would enable us to harvest not once but twice or even three times a year. We also hope to be able soon to grow vilcacora in hothouses, with proper temperature and air humidity maintained. Who knows whether this will not be the way to grow vilcacora in Europe?”

From the reporter's notebook:

The most notorious case of devastation of the Amazon jungle and the biggest massacre of Indians caused by gold-diggers took place in the summer of 1993 in Brazil, in the state of Boa Vista.

A mob of several hundred garimpeiros illegally entered the Yanomami Indian reservation, tempted by the rumour that unusually rich gold fields had been discovered there. They began to

burn the jungle and to attack one native village after another. Initially there was no bloodshed, since the Indians abandoned their dwellings before the whites reached them. In the end, however, when the Indians realised that escape was doing them no good, since the garimpeiros intended to capture the whole territory, bloody battles began to break out.

“The Yanomami are like children,” said the anthropologist Claudio Villa Boas to a representative of the Brazilian daily “Journal do Brasil” in August 1993. “They are not very tall and are as weak and naive as it is possible to be. But at the same time they are aggressive and they do not realise the effects that violence can bring. The confrontation of these features with the violence and ruthlessness of the gold-diggers could only lead to the most shameful consequences.”

After the battles in the jungle in which several white men died from the hands of the Yanomami, the former forgot about their search for gold and swore to take revenge upon the Indians. For several weeks the forests of northern Brazil rang with the sounds of regular warfare, in which genocide was combined with the burning of huge areas of selva. The garimpeiros not only did kill the Indians, but did it in such a horrible way in order to frighten and terrorise them. The bodies of the slaughtered Yanomami were quartered, and then the heads and limbs were cut off. The trunks and the remains were thrown into the local rivers and streams. This bloodshed came to an end only when the Brazilian army intervened at the call of one of the Indian chiefs.

It is estimated that in the summer months of 1993 some two thousand Indians were killed near the border with Venezuela. Three thousand hectares of selva got burned – even after a few months the area looked like the Siberian taiga after the fall of the Tunguska meteorite...

This was just one example. Similar events took place in Venezuela, Columbia, Honduras and Nicaragua. Many others will probably never even be heard of...

“Legislative changes should take into consideration two aspects,” says Dr Felipe Torres, a renowned lawyer in Lima. “What is very important here is the Brazilian experience. It follows clearly from this that creating sanctuaries is of little avail, because their borders exist merely on maps, and no hunter of trees, plants, or gold experiences even the tiniest problems in crossing them. The right to manage the wealth of the forest ought to be given to the Indians - owners of this land from the time immemorial - which would guarantee the preservation of a sound ecosystem. Secondly, the law should be laid down as soon as possible; the legal acts would not only protect but also **defend** particular types of plants in the way patents are protected in the developed countries...”

Father Szeliga has been invited on a number of occasions to a parliamentary commission working on this issue. The deputies have listened to him attentively and promised to undertake several legislative initiatives in the nearest future. Should they succeed, Peru will become the first country in the world to be concerned about its own forest heritage from the legislative viewpoint. This could be the first time Peru will lead the world in any field...

“Do you mean that Father Szeliga has become an authority in this respect?”

“Definitely,” continues Felipe Torres. “More and more often, he takes the floor at the international forum to talk not merely about medical issues but also about global ecological problems. And it has been so for a long time now. Suffice it to recall that, he treated General Velasco Alvarado¹⁰ as early as the 1960s, and has recently been advising the present President of Peru.”

¹⁰ Velasco Alvarado – President of Peru from 1968 to 1975

“That’s interesting. Doesn’t President Fujimori trust the Asian methods more...?”

“All I know is that he says that he feels much better after he has consulted Father Szeliga. And Father Szeliga himself says that this is another piece of evidence to prove what he has believed for a long time: that Andean and Asian (Japanese and Chinese in particular) medicine are very closely related to each other...”



The role of minerals

“How should we protect ourselves against illnesses, Father? What does it mean to lead a healthy life?”

“Yes, a lot of people ask me how to strengthen the organism by proper nutrition. Let me start with minerals, which, although they constitute as little as four percent of the body mass, play a very important role in the organism. This is so, since they serve as building material for tissues, are a part of certain body enzymes, regulate the metabolic processes, are responsible for the maintenance of proper blood pressure and acid-alkali balance, regulate water balance and digestion processes.

Let us have a look at the basic macro-elements indispensable for a proper functioning of the body:

Chromium - found in a veal liver, oils, wheat germs and chicken meat - prevents the arterial pressure from dropping. It is also a factor counteracting diabetes and arteriosclerosis. A shortage of chromium in the organism disturbs the process of the metabolism of glucose. In such cases, it is advisable to take a substitute in the form of well-assimilating zinc salts.

Phosphor - is located in bones and teeth. A little less of this element can be found in the muscles and brain. Sources of phosphor include fish, meat, dairy products, cereals, leguminous plants and nuts. A shortage of phosphor in the body leads to ossification problems, neurological problems, illnesses of gums and brittleness of teeth.

Magnesium - is part of bones, teeth and muscles, influences the metabolism of carbohydrates and the operation of the nervous and muscular systems. It is an antagonist of calcium. The main sources of magnesium in food are leguminous plants, coarse-ground cereal products, green vegetables, meat pluck products and cocoa.

Potassium and sodium - these elements regulate the water balance in the organism - sodium retains water, and potassium increases its secretion. Besides, they help to maintain the acid-alkali balance and the osmotic pressure. Potassium occurs widely in most foods, and sodium especially in animal products, and obviously in table salt. The daily sodium requirement is about 10-15g, and in the cases of greater physical effort up to 20g.

Calcium - controls the processes of blood coagulation and the proper functioning of the nervous and muscular systems, including heart action. A shortage of calcium results in softening of bones, caries and rickets. Sources of this element include milk, cheese, eggs, fish - best when eaten together with bones - e.g. like smoked sprat. Daily, the human organism needs about 1g of calcium - which is equal to 1/2 l of milk, 1/2 an egg or 50g of cheese. Note: oxalic acid occurring in sorrel, spinach or rhubarb, and phytic acid occurring in cereal and leguminous products, hinder the absorption of calcium from the alimentary tract.

Iron - indispensable for the building of erythrocytes, for the production of certain enzymes and for the transport of oxygen in the organism. A shortage of iron means anaemia. Fortunately, the body stores a stock of iron in the liver, kidneys, spleen and bone marrow. The daily iron requirement is 15mg. Good sources of iron are egg yolk, liver, meat, lights, kidneys as well as

blood pudding, black brawn and blood soup. Also dark bread, coarse groats, leguminous plant seeds, vegetables and fruit are a rich source of this element.

The main microelements include:

Zinc - is part of as many as 59 enzymes, is indispensable for the synthesis of proteins and nucleic acids. An important source of this element is the meat of animals, fish, vegetables and cereal seeds.

Fluorine - is part of osseous tissue and tooth enamel. A shortage of fluorine leads to caries. An excess is harmful too - it leads to fluorosis, giving the teeth ugly colouring and softening of the enamel. The source of fluorine is tea, sea fish and cabbage plants. Fluorine occurs in the majority of tooth-pastes. In the areas where fluorine is added to drinking water, fluorine tooth-pastes should be used with care!

Iodine - is necessary for the proper functioning of the thyroid gland - the gland which regulates the metabolism. It also influences the nervous system. A shortage results in the occurrence of goitre and hypo-function of the thyroid gland. Iodine can be found in water and air - especially in coastal areas and in the soil, and hence also in plant products grown on soils rich in iodine. It occurs also in sea fish, seafood and rock salt. It is thus worth replacing the snow-white evaporated salt with the perhaps less attractive but healthier grey salt.

Cobalt - is needed for the production of vitamin B12. It is common in nature, hence cases of a shortage of cobalt are rare. The richest sources of cobalt are liver and kidneys.

Manganese - is part of numerous enzymes, and activates others. It is found in cereal seeds, nuts, leafy vegetables and in tea.

Copper - is necessary for producing erythrocytes. It takes part in the building of bones. It occurs widely in food products. The richest sources of copper are vegetables and fruit.

Selenium - is part of the enzyme contained in erythrocytes. Prevents blood haemolysis, and together with vitamin E stabilises cell membranes and controls the metabolism of sulphur in the body. It prevents liver steatosis. Selenium is found in rock salt, nuts, corn and green peas.

These are the most important elements. Released from food during digestion, they move from the alimentary tract into the blood and are transported with it to all the tissues and organs. It is clear that the mineral balance determines the functioning of the organism, and hence our health. However, supplementing of the minerals only is hard to determine as it does not depend solely on consumption. Only a comprehensive analytical examination can show what amount of specific elements the organism has managed to store, i.e. how big the stock is and for how long it will last, as well as how quickly it is secreted.

Nevertheless, I think that Polish cuisine, which is very non-diversified, monotonous and which favours meat, is harmful beyond any means. If I could give a piece of advice, I would suggest more groats than potatoes, and if potatoes, only boiled; more cauliflower instead of pickles and pickled gherkins, and more vegetables instead of meat. I suggest eating more spinach, tomatoes, lettuce, beans, peas, cereal flakes, nuts and fruit - especially citrus. I advise you not to avoid garlic, onion and carrot, and reducing to the minimum the use of salt and sugar. I suggest avoiding coffee, tea, alcohol and cigarettes. Smokers should know that each cigarette destroys between 50 and 100mg of vitamin C. That's why vitamin C should be taken in the morning and evening.

.....

From the diary of Father Szeliga:

(...) Sleep is health. (...) I told him what people used to do in such cases long ago. In Ancient Egypt Cleopatra cured her sleeplessness by sleeping on a pillow filled with rose petals. - Try this method - I encouraged him. - The aromas did not help only her. - And finally I heard him thank me. The night inhalation worked...

.....

The significance of vitamins

“Obviously, vitamins are indispensable in the course of important biotic processes. Similarly to minerals, vitamins also occur in animal and vegetable food products... Could you, Father, make a short survey of the most important vitamins?”

“Yes, vitamins ought to be mentioned here. And thus:

Vitamin A belongs to the group of fat-soluble vitamins, it influences the synthesis of proteins, lipids, and hormones. It increases the immunity of the organism and helps in the treatment of eye diseases. It also protects the skin’s epithelium.

Vitamin A is contained in whale-oil, animal liver, milk and dairy products, eggs, carrots, spinach, lettuce, French beans, green peas, chives, and dill.

Vitamin B1 is water-soluble, as are all vitamins of the B-group. It participates in the processing of carbohydrates, water balance, tissue respiration and the composition of several enzymes. An insufficient amount of vitamin B1 leads to the dysfunction of the nervous system and dyspepsia (dysfunction of the digestive processes). The lack of this vitamin causes beri-beri disease, which leads to death by paralysing the muscle nerves. Vitamin B1 is supplied by coarse-ground cereal products, yeast, nuts, leguminous seeds, fish, fruit, and vegetables.

Vitamin B2 is the so-called growth factor, and conditions the correct functioning of the eyesight. The lack of vitamin B2 may cause changes in the cornea, evoke inflammatory states of the skin, and chapping of the mouth-corners. This can be prevented by drinking milk and eating liver, cheese, cereal products, fruit and vegetables.

Vitamin B6 participates in the synthesis of proteins and nucleic acids. Its shortage is manifested by the inflammation of lips (cheilitis), inflammation of the tongue (glossitis) and the conjunctiva (conjunctivitis), and changes in the nervous system. The source of vitamin B6 is yeast, liver, cereal and leguminous products, milk, meat, fruit and vegetables.

Vitamin B12 prevents anaemia. The lack of this vitamin leads to pernicious anaemia. Vitamin B12 is contained in liver, kidneys, eggs, and milk.

Although it does not fit the alphabetical order, vitamin PP is also connected to the group of B vitamins, as far as its properties go. The lack of this vitamin causes pellagra, and its deficit produces symptoms similar to those of an insufficient amount of group-B vitamins. The same food products are also the source of vitamin PP.

Vitamin C also belongs to the group of water-soluble vitamins. An insufficient amount of this vitamin in food is manifested by weakness, pallor of the mucous membrane and skin, ruptures of fine blood vessels, headache, gum-bleeding (gingivorrhoea), and great susceptibility to contagious diseases.

The lack of vitamin C in the diet leads to scurvy.

Major sources of vitamin C: cauliflower, cabbage - particularly sauerkraut, also sour cucumbers, parsley leaves, horse-radish, tomatoes, blueberries, briar-rose fruit, apples, and citrus fruit. Let us mention, by the way, that a level tea-spoonful of parsley leaves contains more vitamin C than a whole lemon!

Vitamin D is fat-soluble, prevents rickets and participates in the metabolism of calcium and phosphorus. A source of vitamin D which is much disliked, by children in particular, is cod-liver oil. However, this vitamin also occurs in liver, the yolks of eggs, cream, milk, butter, and fish, particularly from the sea.

Vitamin E is also fat-soluble. It regulates the reproductive processes. Moreover, it is connected with the metabolism of nitrogen and respiration. Its deficit may cause ovary dysfunction, and may lead to infertility. Fortunately, this vitamin is so common that its deficit practically never occurs.

Vitamin K is fat-soluble and indispensable for proper blood coagulation. Its deficit may even cause bleeding tendency (haemorrhagic diathesis).

Vitamin K is abundant in green vegetables, kohlrabi, cauliflower, tomatoes, strawberries, and liver. However, another source of this vitamin are... the bacteria that live in the human alimentary tract. Therefore, one should remember about the increased amount of vitamin K in food after antibiotic therapy.

Obviously, the majority of vitamins should be provided to the organism via food, not in synthesised pills. Vitamin deficit leads to avitaminosis which causes diseases that may be dangerous for the human organism. Also overdosing, called hypervitaminosis in medical terminology, may be dangerous. Therefore, strengthening of the body by means of synthetic preparations should take place only under doctor's supervision.

“What should we do to enable the organism to absorb the largest possible quantity of nutritious elements?”

“The secret lies in the processing of food, the way in which it is stored and cooked. It is during these processes that nutritious elements often lose some of their value. Let me give you, if I may, some practical advice:

We should know, above all, that all the products in tins and jars have lower nutritional value than fresh food.

When buying fresh vegetables, we should choose those that are sprinkled with water on the stall. They retain twice as much vitamin C.

Fruit and vegetables which are not designed for immediate consumption should be kept in the refrigerator after purchase. They do not lose their quality then. Meat, however, should be stored in the freezer. The temperature of freezing should remain around -30 to -35 degrees Centigrades. Such temperature prevents the development of bacteria.

All food should be washed, but not soaked, before eating.

Vegetables should be chopped immediately before being served. We should use sharp knives because tearing and crushing diminish the content of vitamin A and C. Vegetables that we are preparing for cooking should not be defrosted.

We should cook using stainless steel pots, fire-resistant glass kitchen utensils, or enamel pots. Cooking in pots made of copper destroys vitamin C and E. Similarly, cooking in cast iron pots deprives food of vitamin C.

Potatoes lose the least value if cooked for a short time. This makes them retain the maximal quantities of vitamins.

Bottled milk and bread should be protected against sunlight so that they do not lose any of their nutritious elements.

Eggs should not be stored in the refrigerator; it happens that condensed water can penetrate through the pores of eggshells, thus making it easier for the micro-organisms to find their way inside. Such micro-organisms cause food poisoning. Therefore, eggs should be stored in cool places outside the refrigerator. Moreover, we should not wash eggs earlier than immediately before consumption because it destroys the protective coating of eggshells which is supposed to prevent bacteria from getting in.

The principles of nutrition

“We usually know our body well enough to know what to eat. We know its weak sides and shortcomings. Theoretically, we even know how to help it to make it stronger. But we do not do much in this respect.

You can and should eat practically everything. On condition, however, that we maintain the correct proportions when dosing macro- and micro-elements. Only then can we reach balance which secures health of our body. Let me, therefore say a few words about the proportions:

“Almost **half of our meals** that we eat should be prepared from the grains of rye, wheat, oat, barley, buckwheat, and leguminous seeds: mainly beans, soya-beans, and peas. Therefore eat a lot of bread - best of all made from whole-meal flour, coarse-grained groats, cereals, rice, and pasta.

“**One quarter of all meals** should consist of vegetables. They should be fresh vegetables. They may be served as salads, but also steamed, boiled, stewed or baked. Two thirds of all the cauliflower, onions, radishes, carrots, cabbages, cucumbers, and broccoli should be eaten hot, and one third - raw. We should also eat garlic and horse-radish in small quantities, but relatively systematically.

“Animal and fish meat should constitute no more than **twelve - fifteen percent** of our daily diet. This should only be small portions then. We should eat fish three times a week, and poultry and animal meat twice a week.

“We may allow ourselves eggs no more than **once a week**: best of all soft-boiled, possibly scrambled eggs.

“Our everyday diet should be completed by **ten percent** of fruit, the citrus fruit in particular. Not all of us know, for instance, that one kiwi fruit satisfies the daily needs of the organism for the majority of minerals and vitamins. Similarly, not all of us realise that apart from their nutritious qualities, what was emphasised by Pliny before our era, bananas do not overload the stomach and kidneys. This is because they hardly contain any proteins. Citrus fruit should be eaten particularly by those who do not tolerate gluten, i.e. suffer from coeliac disease.

Milk products - cheese and butter - should constitute only **three percent** of the meals eaten by adults.

“As far as beverages are concerned, we should choose herbal teas, natural fruit and vegetable juices, and yoghurt.

“Best of all, we should use for frying **olive oil**. This is the healthiest type of fat. One of the Greek myths - if I might be allowed to mention it - tells a story of how the gods brought gifts to men. What people liked the best was the gift brought by Athena, goddess of wisdom, who offered an olive-tree to mankind. Thus, as we can see as early as antiquity, people realised the invaluable qualities of olive oil.

“The question of proportions in nutrition is the basic problem of the so-called balanced diet. Another problem is the size of food rations. They depend upon age, sex, body weight, height and energy requirements. More calorific food should be eaten, which is obvious, by young people and physical workers. We should also remember that after we have attained the age of thirty the pace of the metabolism decreases, just as the requirement for energy does.”

Reverend Father!

My child, a boy of nine, is sluggish, and takes no joy in life. He does not want to play with his peers, he doesn't play football, and if he does go out, then it is only to watch other children play. He is developing well, both physically and mentally. He is not overweight. Maybe I am making mistakes as far as nutrition is concerned? I have the impression that he does not have as much energy as other children do. (...) I feel sad. What can I do to help him?

“Let me repeat it once again: as **little sugar and salt** in the kitchen as possible.

Sugar is hidden in many food products; it is even in those places where we do not expect it to be, including drugs. Do you know that ketchup, pasta, and potatoes, for instance, also contain sugar? We eat excessive quantities of this hidden form of sugar alone. As a result, many people have problems with obesity, and thus, with arterial hypertension, heart diseases, diabetes, gallbladder lithiasis (cholecystolithiasis), and rheumatic diseases.

“The situation is similar with respect to excessive consumption of kitchen salt, i.e. sodium chloride. We absorb salt, among other things, by drinking beer, and eating wheat bread. There are many such ‘traps’, not to mention tinned meat, ham, or bacon.

“Salt retains fluids in the organism and disturbs the metabolism of proteins. Excessive quantities of salt cause hypertension, and, as has been recently discovered, increase the risk of the incidence of large intestine cancer (colorectal carcinoma).

“I will not scare you with salt and sugar any further.

“Allow me, please, to make a remark which is important, in my opinion: a vegetarian diet, i.e. a diet without meat, is deeply harmful, and as far as children are concerned even dangerous! Also wilfully applied starvation diets are harmful. We may use them only under a doctor's supervision. Otherwise, we are in danger of arteriosclerosis, disturbances in the flow of blood to brain, and also diseases of the digestive tract, intestines, and liver.

“A few more remarks, perhaps:

- it is absolutely necessary to eat breakfast;
- we should eat five meals a day, if possible;
- the intervals between meals should not be longer than three hours;
- we should not wash the food down while eating;
- we should eat our meals regularly, always at the same time;
- we should eat as much as we need but so we do not feel full;
- we should eat supper at least two hours before going to sleep;
- we should not eat anything in haste - no ‘stand-up meals’;

- we should make the time of the meal a nice event; we should care about the atmosphere at the table when eating supper with our family or friends;
- when we eat meals alone, we should listen to calm, peaceful music that we like.

“**Nutrition is one side of the medal. The other side is exercise.** Only then can we talk about full strength, or health.

“Obviously, it is best of all if we can manage to persist with everyday physical gymnastics exercises. They can even be the simplest, five-minute long ones: bending, rotating your arms, ‘scissors-kicks’, rotating your trunk and your head, etc. I know that sometimes we do not feel like gymnastics, and it is difficult to force ourselves to do exercises. If we stop exercising, however, it will be much more difficult to take it up once again.

“It is better, of course, if we do exercises with use of equipment, but even without it we may do exercises in which we overcome resistance of our own body.

“The bars that we can fit in the door-way, and skipping-ropes, which we can take everywhere with us, are cheap. This is for the children. As far as young people go, I would recommend riding a bicycle, rowing, swimming, and running. Adults can go for brisk walks and climb the stairs, which is good for everybody.

“When doing exercises, it is important to breathe commensurately to the effort being made. We have to learn this on our own. It is mainly about not holding our breath while exercising.

“I would recommend to smokers that they take deep breaths - at least ten - outdoors once a day.

“It is worth, perhaps, adding a warning before I finish: **new growth tumours like obese people.** Let us thus beware of obesity.”

The ominous word cancer

Reverend Father!

(...) I left Peru inspired. After what I had heard from you, Father, I stopped being scared. The association of cancer with death ceased to persecute me. I no longer return in my imagination to those nightmare visions of my heart breaking at the thought of my children's despair when they hear the nails being driven into the lid of my coffin.

(...) The lump is disappearing, I can hardly feel it. Neither is there any swelling in the armpit. The level of oestrogen in the blood has returned to normal. There are no cancer cells in the lymphatic nodes! Dear father, this signifies imminent victory!(...)

“Cancer. We fear this word. Yet we often do not know what it denotes. Could you, Father, say what a new growth tumour is? How is it formed?”

“I will try. The body of each of us, which is widely known, is built of hundreds of billions of cells. Their construction is similar: each cell is surrounded by a permeable cell membrane which is filled with cytoplasm. The organelle – the mitochondria, the Golgi apparatus, the ribosomes, and the vacuoles are suspended in the cytoplasm. In the middle there is the cell nucleus, which is the seat of the genetic information contained in the DNA.

The nucleus is also surrounded by the membrane. The nucleus contains, among other things, the chromatides, i.e. bodies with encoded instructions for the functions that are fulfilled by the cell in the tissue. There are nuclei in all cells, except for the haemocytes.

Under the mysterious name of DNA hides deoxyribonucleic acid. Using images, these are two parallel, spirally twisted polynucleotide chains. The arrangement of bases, i.e. the basic components of a single chain of the spiral, conditions the order of the polynucleotides in the parallel chain. This is important with respect to cell division, because the majority of cells, as we know, are constantly multiplying. They multiply in order to replace cells that are old or that waste away, and to slow down the process of the ageing of the whole organism. This is successful for a long time and we hardly grow any older. The situation, however, reverses when, with time, the processes of restoration become slower than those of ageing.

Let us return, however, to the reproduction of cells. During the process of cell division, the double DNA chain stretches and resolves itself into two separate ones. Each of them will later serve as a matrix to build a new chain. Therefore, it is important that the order of particular elements in the structure of the DNA (cell memory, so to say) is repeatable. Otherwise, new cells that result from the division will not be identical to their progenitors. Such ‘production wastes’, called mutants, are the first step towards new growth tumours.

Before cell division, the genes are arranged in chromosomes in order to move from one dividing cell to two descendant cells. Not delving too deeply into the details of the composition of DNA molecules and the principles of creating codes (we would need a long lecture on the heart of the so-called purine bases and pyrimidine bases), let us only call to mind that the majority of cells in our organism remain at a standstill, and this state is subject to change only in the case of tissue damage.

Some tissue, however, is in a permanent phase of regeneration: the intestinal mucous membrane (intestinal mucosa) and the skin, for instance. Thus, different cells have various life spans. Neurones - nerve cells - remain unchanged throughout the whole of human life; blood cells live for a few days only, and the cells that line the alimentary tract live for a mere 36 hours.

If the tissue is to function properly, damaged or dead cells must be replaced with new ones. These new cells that result from the cell division are not always identical, i.e. healthy. This happens when the gene that controls cell division fails to operate properly.

A cluster of abnormal cells behaves like a parasite. It deprives the tissue of its nutritious substances and energy. Some tumours are characterised by slow growth, some grow very fast. The latter are called malignant, if they metastasise.

There also exist cancer cells that do not concentrate, and only force healthy cells out. This is what we call leukaemia, a malignant disease of marrow cells.

One more sentence concerning metastases, perhaps. These result from the tearing-off of degenerate cells from fast-growing tumours, and their spreading all over the organism by means of blood or lymph. They create secondary tumours wherever they land.

Dear Father!

Vilcacora has worked miracles. There is no tumour in the intestine, which has surprised the doctors... The only thing I do not know now is: should I undergo chemotherapy? I would like to ask you, Father, for a consultation. (...) May I fly over at the beginning of December? (...)

“So, how do new growth tumours arise? - we know that. This process is familiar to every doctor, not only to the oncologist. However, why do they arise? – this still remains a question that cannot be answered unequivocally. However, some of the so-called risk factors are known. We know, for instance, that the disease may be evoked by chemical agents contained in soot, benzene, asbestos, DDT, nicotine, aromatic hydrocarbons such as crude oil, leaded petrol, paints, and lacquers, also in chlorine compounds, chromium compounds, and arsenic compounds. This list should also feature nitro-compounds, i.e. preservatives; nitrates and nitrites, i.e. fertilisers, and some hormonal drugs. Other harmful phenomena include: ionising radiation - isotopes, X-ray tubes, and also ultraviolet radiation - quartz lamps, and excessive solar radiation. Perhaps also viruses have their share in causing new growth tumours, although this has not yet been ascertained. Most suspicious are oncogenic viruses: the HIV virus; the HTLV-1 virus, to which is ascribed the property of causing leukaemia from lymphocytes T; the Epstein-Barr virus, which most probably evokes Burkitt’s lymphoma; viruses that cause hepatitis B and C, which may in turn cause primary liver cancer. Also the herpes simplex virus may turn out dangerous, even though it appears to be so banal.

“That would be all as far as the introduction to what a malignant disease is concerned. And the introduction to how to prevent it, as well.”

Diet in malignant diseases

“The formation of neoplastic cells is a normal phenomenon in the life of every organism. It is also a normal phenomenon, of course, when the intruders are destroyed by the organism’s self-defence system: the immune system and the system of antioxidants. Such a struggle carries on every day and the organism wins it every day. An abnormal situation arises when the cells that constitute the system of self-defence are unable to defeat the intruders.

One of the main forms of supporting the organism’s defences against the increase of neoplastic cells is a proper diet.

Let us begin with fats. These should originate from oils such as olive oil, for instance, not from animal fat. The decomposition of fats of animal origin creates acrolein acid, which creates favourable conditions for the formation of neoplastic cells.

Also proteins, which are built, as we know, of amino acids, should be of plant origin. Plant and fish origin, actually; under no circumstances should they come from animal meat. The lack of proteins, we should also remember, has a destructive influence upon the immune system.

The diet in neoplastic diseases should be rich in vitamins B1, B2, B6, and vitamin C. Also vitamins A, E, and K are recommended.

The patients suffering from cancer are also strengthened with food abundant in inorganic elements, i.e. minerals.

We should say here **what food should be eaten on an everyday basis**. Above all, we should include in our basic diet vegetables from the cruciate family, which stimulate the immune system: cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, and broccoli. We should eat vegetables that act as **antioxidants**: spinach, cereal sprouts, tomatoes, carrots, asparagus, and sweet peppers. As far as leaf vegetables are concerned, we should eat: young beetroot leaves, endive, and sorrel. The diet should also be rich in leguminous vegetables, beans and peas in particular, and also turnips, radishes, beetroots, and kohlrabi. As far as fruit goes, we should eat as much citrus fruit as possible, but also apples and berries. From cereal products: coarse-grained bread. We should also remember to eat nuts.

One of the basic types of food should be cereals, oatmeal, and pasta. We should, however, limit the consumption of dairy products, except for lean yoghurts, and eggs.

As far as meat is concerned, we may eat small quantities of boiled poultry, and boiled lean beef. We should eat a lot of fish, sea fish in particular.

When talking about what we should avoid, we should enumerate all sweets, coffee, and products with a high content of sodium: crisps, popcorn, and all salted food.

We should, however, unconditionally **give up drinking alcohol and smoking**. Other forbidden fruits include: pork, fatty beef and fatty mutton (even boiled), not to mention hamburgers, hot-dogs, bacon, and also tripe, or sausages. Similarly, lard and other types of animal fat are forbidden as well. We should not eat too many eggs, particularly hard-boiled ones.

We must not eat fried food: chips, fish, doughnuts, all products which are smoked, preserved, or pickled. Each of these products creates favourable conditions for the development of new growth tumours, and is responsible for their spreading.

When a shaman dies...

“Who are the discoverers of **vilcacora**: the Machiguengas or the Piras?”

“Neither of them,” replies Father Szeliga. “Both tribes had learned from the Ashanincas about the unusual healing properties of **vilcacora** long before colonisation. They are Indians who live even further and deeper into the jungle. The Ashanincas, just like the Incas did later, worshipped vilcacora as a god, and called it **kug-kukjagui**. **Vilcacora** was to them the highest deity who gave rise to all other gods. This is why the Indians carved the images of their minor gods in the mature, ligneous shoots of **vilcacora**. And because this is a long climbing plant, the gods, as you may find out when visiting any museum devoted to the Indians of the forest, have very long profiles and oval faces...”

“Where does **vilcacora** grow?”

“All over the Amazon region. There are as many as 60 species of this plant. Out of this numerous family, however, only one variety has very strong healing properties. **Vilcacora**, which is used by Indian shamans, can be found on the mountain slopes in the jungle - it is most frequent in the Montaña in Peru. It has the form of long, sometimes thirty-metre-long ligneous climbers that reach full maturity after about twenty years of age.”

“Does it take that much time for **vilcacora** to acquire its healing properties?”

“Fortunately, we do not have to wait so long. The best part is the decoction of the bark or roots of young **vilcacora** which is around three years old. The bark is just as efficient as the roots, therefore the underground parts of the plant should not be exploited. In the long term, this could jeopardise its further existence.”

“What decides that only one variety of **vilcacora** is useful in medicine?”

“Mountain **vilcacora** contains, among other things, **isopteropodin** - an alkaloid of the oxindole type, which shows the highest efficiency in activating the immune system. It is this alkaloid that makes the organism as if it was waking up from a long sleep to take up the fight against the diseases to which it had previously surrendered.”

“In contrast to many popular herbs with a long tradition, either in Asian or Western culture, **vilcacora**, as opposed to **ginseng**, for instance, is rather unknown in the Old World...”

“That’s true - but it is changing slowly. **Vilcacora** is rather well-known in South America. As I have said, the plant has been used by the native inhabitants of the jungle for hundreds, even thousands of years. It has played and still continues to play a role of a specific panacea - a cure for anything. The problem is, however, that the Ashanincas have never known handwriting, as a result of which this tradition has survived until today as an account passed on verbally from generation to generation. Thus, it was very difficult for this tradition to penetrate the world of white people for centuries, and even now, when I see an Indian shaman die, I feel as if I am watching a whole library burn...”

An Ashaninca legend:

Tasurinchi was the first Ashaninca. He was the Indian Adam. He did not have a wife at that moment, because initially he was alone in the world, and this is why he had to cook, and wash, and hunt on his own. Tasurinchi’s life was horrible. He toiled away at tasks without number, and there was no one to help him. His legs hurt from constant chasing of animals. His hands hurt

from stringing beads for necklaces. His head hurt from constant thinking about how to cope with all his chores.

One day he met a puma as he was walking, or actually running, through the forest. ‘I have a stomach-ache,’ he complained.

‘Why?’ the puma was surprised.

‘Because the food I had yesterday wasn’t fresh, I guess. Maybe you know, dear puma, what I should do?’

The puma approached a tree, reached for a thick liana that was entwined around it, and tore off some bark with its claws. ‘Suck it under your tongue’ - the puma advised Tasurinchi. ‘This will help you.’

‘What is it?’ he asked.

‘How come you don’t know? It’s **vilcacora**’.

Tasurinchi listened to the puma and his stomach stopped aching after a moment. But what of it, if his head still hurt. ‘I have handled the stomach somehow. What should I do to get rid of this horrible pain in my head?’ he wondered and kept on running. He must have covered some half a mile when he met a capybara that was heading towards the river.

‘I have an awful headache,’ he said to the rodent, instead of ‘Good morning’. ‘Don’t you know, dear capybara, what could help me?’

The capybara approached a trunk that was entwined with some plant, and scraped some rust-coloured powder off the strong stem with its knife-sharp teeth. ‘Dissolve this in water and drink it,’ said the animal. ‘You will forget the headache in a moment.’

‘What is it?’ asked Tasurinchi.

‘How come you don’t know? It’s **vilcacora**.’

Tasurinchi prepared the decoction just as the capybara had advised him and drank it with a grimace because it was bitter. Before he managed to think that he should move on, he realised his head did not hurt any more. ‘Very good,’ he thought. ‘Excellent! Fantastic! But what of it, if the wound on my hand I had inflicted on myself when forcing my way through the thickets still smarts...’

A tapir came along from across the way. ‘Hello, tapir!’ exclaimed Tasurinchi. ‘My friend, maybe you could advise me how I should dress this smarting wound?’

The tapir sniffed around for a while with his long nose, and then approached a tree that was clad with some kind of ivy. The tapir hit the thick stem a few times with its hoof, tore off a piece of the bark and passed it to Tasurinchi. ‘Make a dressing of this bark,’ said the animal. ‘Surely, this will help you. I always dress my hoof with **vilcacora** whenever I hurt it. We animals have long known this tried out and tested way...’

‘Is this **vilcacora** as well?’ Tasurinchi was surprised.

‘Why, don’t you recognise it?’

‘Could you tear off another piece for me?’ asked Tasurinchi, who suddenly realised that he had probably found the solution to all his problems. ‘I’m in a hurry and I won’t have time to stop, and I would very much like to have some of this bark for later...’

From the reporter’s notebook:

In a display-stand in a small museum of the selva Indians, which is organised by the Franciscan missionaries in Lima, in the convent of the nuns of the Order of the Holy Family from Nazareth, you can see what it is that the Ashanincas wear on their heads: headbands made from bark covered with multi-coloured drawings and feathers. The museum has a collection of such headbands: big, smaller, huge, festive ones, and those you wear everyday. These are very

important accessories, and it is difficult to imagine the members of the tribe's elders without them. The right to wear a plume is usually reserved for chiefs, sorcerers, and the bravest warriors. A high-ranking Indian without feathers on his head (usually parrot's or toucan's) feels as if... he's had his right hand cut off! Because feathers, apart from constituting a symbol of group status, help to maintain contacts with the gods from the Great Forest and the spirits of the past. They work the way antennae do. They connect with what used to be, and also with what is to come. The feathers direct thoughts, and make them compatible with what surrounds the Indians. When an Indian chief does not have a plume, he literally feels like somebody who is out of his depth. There have even been cases when an outstanding chief who had his plume taken away by his enemies died within a few days!

In the same display-stand there are also garments that cover, or rather decorate, the bodies of the Ashanincas. Necklaces with the claws of beasts of prey, bead necklaces, and also necklaces made from the small painted bones of birds. Wrist-bands made of bark, and some kinds of cloaks of dried tufts of soft grass, which fall sometimes down to the waist.

Below, there hang knee-pads made of soft patches of tanned leather. There are no shoes or even moccasins, because the Indians do not use footwear in the forest. How do they do it? - God only knows.

And there was something else, something whose use was difficult to fathom out: a small object, neither a bag nor a basket, woven from some flexible forest bark.

*'What is it? Is it a sachet for **coca**, perhaps?'*

*'No, **coca** is used by the Indians from the mountains, not the Ashanincas,' explains the sister who is presenting the collection. 'The Indians from the jungle use these bags to carry **vilcacora** - a plant which they never part with, a plant that accompanies them in whatever they do.'*

She could not believe her eyes

Dr **Klaus Keplinger** from the Austrian laboratory Immodal, holder of two American patents with the numbers of 4.844.901 and 4.940.725 concerning the means of obtaining alkaloids of the oxindole type from the root of **vilcacora**:

*“There can be no doubt, in my opinion, that the active alkaloids that occur in **vilcacora** are exceptionally useful in general stimulation of the immune system, and in multiplying the defensive strength of the organism. These alkaloids positively influence the processes of phagocytosis.*

*The most active alkaloid in the immunological sense is **isopteropodin**, or **isomer A**. Apart from isomer A and three other alkaloids stimulating the immune system, **vilcacora** contains one more alkaloid - **ryncophilin**. This compound was tested for a few years at the School of Chinese Traditional Medicine in Shanghai. The analyses conducted there show that ryncophilin has the ability to inhibit the accumulation of platelets and blood clots, which creates for **vilcacora** many applications in the treatment of diseases of the circulatory system, and the prevention of heart attacks. **Vilcacora** also increases the production of leukocytes, and particularly the lymphocytes T4, which fight many viral diseases.”*

Dr **Richard Geber**, author of the best-seller book ‘Vibrational Medicine’:

*“**Vilcacora** brings very promising results in the treatment of arthritis (inflammation of joints). This plant has very low toxicity, and thus may be applied even for a longer period of time. It also decreases the effects of radiation treatment and chemotherapy, which are inevitable when treating new growth tumours with conventional methods. The range of possible applications and their efficiency make **vilcacora** something of a pharmacological revelation of the turn of the millennium.”*

Dr **Brent Davis**, a doctor who has been using **vilcacora** for years in clinical practice in the USA:

*“**Vilcacora** is an excellent medicine for many diseases, among other things, diseases of the digestive system. This plant has a phenomenal predisposition towards cleansing of the whole digestive tract, which is important because, as many doctors claim, ‘death begins with the intestines, in the colon, to be more precise’.*

In western countries we consume food of such composition and consistency that it hinders excretion from the organism. With age and the organism growing flaccid, mini-hernias form in the colon, where the substances that are normally designed for excretion accumulate. When they get there they wedge and remain too long, and systematically contaminate the circulation of blood instead of leaving the organism. Vilcacora, however, prevents this - it cleans all depressions throughout the whole intestine. Who knows if this is not the most important, most blessed, of its workings?

Apart from this, as has been found out, vilcacora is helpful in treatment of the Crohn disease, the inflammation of the diverticulum (diverticulitis), the inflammation of the colon

(colitis), and haemorrhoids, and also prevents disturbances in the equilibrium of the intestinal flora. This is a world class herb, which has the ability to stop and reverse very advanced pathology, and, what is also important, its application does not exclude the continuation of therapy with the use of the methods of traditional medicine.”

Dr **Julie Clements**, American oncologist:

*“There has been a substantial decrease in the side-effects of radiation treatment and chemotherapy with respect to my patients suffering from malignant diseases who have been treated with **vilcacora**. On the basis of a few years’ clinical practice, I also know that applying **vilcacora**, may be compared in terms of its effects to remission, i.e. the disappearance of tumours, including substantially large tumours. **With time, I have come to like vilcacora so much that I have had my mother use it.** My mother has for a long time complained about serious circulation problems in her legs which have made it difficult for her to walk. After a few weeks of taking **vilcacora**, the circulation improved enough for my mother to walk without any suffering. **She told me with joy that she had received new legs as a present from me!**”*

Dr **Donna Schwontkowski** from the USA:

*“**Vilcacora** is successful in fighting infections of patients suffering from AIDS, and causes (sometimes as early as after two weeks!) the reduction of cancerous tumours of the skin, and cysts. When I first had the chance to find out about it, I just could not believe my eyes...”*

Dr **Philip N. Steinberg**, American scientist conducting research into the applications of **vilcacora** since 1993:

*“I therapeutically recommend from 3 to 6 grams of **vilcacora** per day, at best divided into three doses. When used for prevention, the dosage should be three times smaller, making use of the antioxidant activities of the organism and its increasing adaptive capabilities. In advanced pathological states, I even use up to 20 grams per day in one dose for a few consecutive weeks! I am not afraid of overdosing, I am rather afraid whether I have enough time and whether I will manage to help the patient. Therefore, I try to provide the organism with the largest possible quantity of invaluable alkaloids and this often **brings almost unbelievable results!**”*

Dr **Felipe Malgarejo**:

*“It has been ascertained beyond any doubt that **vilcacora** inhibits malignant cell division, activates granulocytes and macrophages, causes the disappearance of new growth tumours, and prevents the uncontrolled increase of cancer cells.”*

Dr **Lidia Obregon**, head of the American Institute of Phytotherapy in Lima:

*“**Vilcacora** is an effective medicine in various inflammatory illnesses, helps with asthma, diabetes, and gastric ulcers. It is also indispensable in fighting malignant diseases, for which there is more and more evidence.”*

As results from the clinical examinations of three groups of patients suffering from neoplastic diseases, which have been described by the American doctor Prof. Dr **H. Oswald**, the sensational results have been observed in each case after **vilcacora** had been applied.

In a group of three patients suffering from colon and ovary cancer, the new growth tumour disappeared in two cases after 4 and 7 months and became substantially smaller in one case.

In a group of twenty-two patients suffering from various varieties of new growth tumours, there was remission in 13 cases, i.e. the tumour disappeared, and the other patients lived longer than 5 years¹¹.

In the most numerous group of seventy-eight patients suffering from brain cancer, the disappearance of the tumours was observed with respect to all patients after a year.

In other clinical examinations where the efficiency of **vilcacora** was tested with respect to three women of 42, 58, and 80 years of age suffering from ovary, uterus, and colon cancers, an amazing improvement was observed in all cases, including the disappearance of the tumours.

¹¹ This means that, according to international standards, the patients have been cured.

A genius among plants

From the notes of Father Szeliga:

Vilcacora seems to be a medicine good for... EVERYTHING! Is that possible? Isn't the revelation too clear, too great? Isn't it natural that it raises the doubts of the sceptics, of whom there are always plenty, particularly in the medical world?

The evidence, nevertheless, which proves the miraculous working of the Peruvian climbing plant is more than convincing! First of all, we have succeeded in isolating many components that are favourable therapeutically, and affect various systems of the organism. **Vilcacora** is a true treasure chest in this respect! Six very rare alkaloids have been isolated together with other therapeutically helpful components such as **tri-terpenes**, **polyphenols**, **glycosides**, and **plant sterols**. The presence of these compounds may explain the anti-oxidant, anti-carcinogenic, anti-viral, and anti-inflammatory properties possessed by this plant, its bark and roots.

Secondly, none of the systems in the human body works independently of other systems. Just as the improper functioning of one system weakens other systems, also curing and improving one system enables the treatment of the other systems. Therefore, although the beneficial working of **vilcacora** may be seen in the digestive and immune system in the first place, the effects of applying this plant are felt literally in the whole body.

“Father, one could get the impression that **vilcacora** is a genius among plants! Aren't there any cases where it can do harm instead of helping?”

“The research conducted in several European laboratories has shown that Peruvian **vilcacora** is free of toxic effects and, in fact, does not cause any side-effects. It is safe even for children...”

“Can children be given the same doses of **vilcacora**?”

“No, they cannot. The dosage should depend on the weight of the body. Therefore, we recommend the dose which is half the size of the adult dose for children below twelve. What is interesting is the fact that in the case of our young and youngest patients the results of the treatment with **vilcacora** are noticeable even sooner than in the case of adults.”

“And what about contraindications?”

“There are good and bad sides to everything. There are times when even **vilcacora** may turn out to be a double-edged sword. This plant very much stimulates the immune system and the reaction of rejecting foreign bodies from the organism. **Therefore, anybody who has gone, or is to go through the transplantation of internal organs or bone marrow should not use this herb. Neither is vilcacora recommended for breast-feeding mothers and pregnant women because it may increase the probability of miscarriage. Vilcacora must not be given to children below three, people who take insulin and vaccines, people suffering from haemophilia, and also patients who are subject to some hormone therapies.** There are no more contraindications.”

From the book devoted to **vilcacora** by Doctor **Fernand Cabasies**, Professor at San Marcos University in Lima, Honorary Professor at the Universities of Trujillo, Piura, Cajamarca, Chiclayo, Cuzco, and Arequipa, and also Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Miami:

'In-vitro'¹² the whole issue is a foregone conclusion. We know that this plant stimulates the immune system of the organism by means of its absolutely unique alkaloids. This, in turn, opens the way to stating 'in-vivo'¹³ whether these substances do not cease to be active when the human immune system has stopped functioning normally. (...) Work concerning the issue whether there is any relation between what has been ascertained 'in-vitro' and what can be observed 'in-vivo' is already being conducted at very many places: at the famous Cayetano Heredia University, at the National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases, and also at several smaller centres of natural medicine – including at Father Szeliga's and Dr Anna Mirez and Dr Lidia Obregon who cooperate with him...

From the reporter's notebook:

*Due to the pioneering work of Father Szeliga, detailed research on **vilcacora** is now being conducted in many countries - not just in Peru. In the forefront, there are: an Austrian university in Graz, a university in Munich, a research centre in Huntington, Great Britain, and also several centres in Italy and Switzerland. They all confirm what has been obvious to Father Szeliga for thirty years now: **vilcacora** is useful in the treatment of cancer, the inflammation of joints, rheumatism, zoster, various types of herpes, allergy, ulcers, disturbances of the menstrual cycle (dysmenorrhoea), environmental poisoning, many intestinal disturbances, depressions, illnesses caused by the HIV virus, and even... acne! The researchers from a university in Milan, however, have discovered that **vilcacora** has exceptionally strong so-called anti-mutational effects, which explains the mystery of the plant's exceptionally efficient preventative actions that substantially decrease the probability of falling ill with neoplastic diseases!*

"Smokers inhale every day hundreds of varied substances that stimulate the mutation of cells," continues Father Szeliga.

"Which may lead to the appearance of mutants, i.e. cancer cells. **Should smokers take vilcacora as a means of prevention, then?**"

"**Exactly.** Therefore, I hope that we will soon manage to convince wealthy tobacco concerns to finance some very expensive further research on **vilcacora**. This would be an unquestionable breakthrough. A twofold breakthrough, concerning both the social perception of the companies that produce cigarettes and the research, which paradoxically lacks the basic thing..."

"Which is?"

"Money..."

*It seems that the end of the twentieth century is the best time for the popularisation of knowledge about **vilcacora**, the best time to make common use of this plant - writes Father Szeliga in one of his articles which have not yet been published. - The majority of people feel that they are losing the war against cancer, against AIDS. They feel that there are appearing still new threats from the mutating viruses, and we do not stand a great chance in the confrontation with civilisation-related diseases. This, however, does not have to be the case. This is not the case. There is a very efficient medicine literally within our reach. We should pay far more attention*

¹² in-vitro (Latin) - in a test-tube, i.e. in the laboratory

¹³ in-vivo (Latin) – in life, i.e. in the clinic

*than we have done so far to what nature in its great generosity offers us. The pharmacy of nature is our chance, it is the future. I think that **vilcacora** will soon become nature's most important weapon.*

To cure the Pope, to heal Yeltsin

Every day, when the clock strikes twelve, he returns to the monastery in the centre of Lima. It is a large, squat building with walls darkened with billowing smog, and with pointed windows resembling the cowls of medieval monks.

With the slamming of the heavy gate, which still remembers the times of Cieza de Leon, a Spanish chronicler, he melts into thin air until the next day. He does not answer telephones while in the monastery. As a young Salesian, Juan Polentini told us, he retires from the world to his cell; he works, reads, sinks into prayer and meditation. First of all, the internal rule of the Convent does not allow anything more. Secondly, his own rule, which is even more strict and rigorous, and divides days, years, and life into 'the outside time' and 'the inside time' behind the walls, does not allow anything else, either.

He gets up at a few minutes after five. He does not need a watch. The sultriness, which even in the morning does not become lighter, wakes him up in summer, in winter it is the humidity: the Lima fog called *garua*, which can be even nastier than the torrid heat.

In his small cell, with one window in the metre-thick wall, one chair and a wooden table that is always too small, where pile up the tasks to be performed. They are tasks which never disappear but which become ever more numerous...

By six o'clock he has had his breakfast and is at work.

"I feel very well and I really am in excellent shape," he will say during one of our visits to Miraflores. "But I know that at my age one should not leave important things unattended to. I keep repeating to myself: 'Eat tomorrow what you are to eat today, do today what you are to do tomorrow...'"

He lectures on geology and conducts seminars in botany at the Salesian college. He prepares topics for tests and examinations at least one week ahead of time. He celebrates Masses on Sunday, sometimes even three in a row. He outlines the topics for his sermons as early as Monday, Tuesday the latest. He has befriended the parish of Jesus Obrero de Surquillo in San Felipe, a poor district of Lima, where he also visits sick people in their houses. He prepares the medicine and medicaments for the next meeting immediately after he returns home.

"These visits are very important to me. They are as important as what I do at the institute. The feeling that these people need me gives me the same strength that prayer does."

He has had two interesting visitors recently. One from Moscow and the other from the Vatican.

"It would seem that my world revolves around the Andes, and suddenly, the East meets here with the West."

A group of doctors who are taking care of Boris Yeltsin came from Moscow. The three professors spoke about the President feeling worse and worse, they said that they had tried literally everything, and they did not know what to do any more. They were helpless. "Could you,

comrade father, help us somehow?” - it sounded funny. The power of habit – a human being’s second nature.

The Russians had heard about some miraculous, rejuvenating plants. “Is it possible to try them out?”

So he gave them several packages of **chuchuhuasi** and **wiñay-wayna**. He told them how to prepare the decoction and tincture. He frowned when they told him how they were poisoning the President with chemicals; he shook his finger at them. “You must not do that!”

“I told them to do penance,” he later told us, laughing. “Only the decoction, not a single drop of tincture! Donde pecó, alli es penado.¹⁴ They are to phone in some time and say what the results are. If they run out of bark and think that it works, they will come for more...”

Fellow-monks flew in from the Vatican to find out what could be done for the Pope. “Is there any plant growing on the Amazon River that could help in his illness? Everybody says it is Parkinson’s Disease, they are even writing about it in the newspapers. Yet this is not Parkinson’s Disease but a nerve injury after the attempt on his life in 1981. The nerve which is damaged should be somehow regenerated, Father...”

“Try giving **chuchuhuasi**,” he said. “If this is of no avail, we will search for something else. The first opportunity allowing, I will ask the Indians about things like that. When? At least several weeks. The rainy season must pass first.”

¹⁴ Donde pecó, alli es penado (Spanish) - Like sin, like penance

Adelphism and Paititi

What else does he do? He is still working on his own social theory, which is very similar to the philosophy of Ancient Greek thinkers. He thinks, among other things, that we should start to change society, beginning with ourselves.

“In my opinion, ‘adelphism’, the principle of brotherhood among men, is the rule that should govern the world in the future. Putting this rule into practice does not have to be a utopia at all. I am convinced that it can successfully function in life. Our institute is a good example,” he adds after a while. “We are neither driven by the need for profit, nor by the desire for the expansion to the outside. We simply want to help people who are in need of help and cannot find it anywhere else. Through our contacts with the Indians, we also fulfil the mission of civilisation with respect to those who undoubtedly need it most. We do not civilise or make them happy against their will, nothing of that kind. But we do not want to allow these people to remain completely forgotten and by the wayside, and to come, in a single moment, face-to-face with problems which they would not be able to cope with...”

Yes, what he is engaged in is constant dodging between Scylla and Charybdis. It is like building a phalanstery of the future, one part of which is located in Lima, while the other is more than a thousand kilometres away, in the selva. This is a constant search for a road whose existence is today called into so much doubt by many people. It is the search for something which is neither socialism, nor capitalism. Neither is it the theology of liberation, although it does have a human face.

“It is impossible to cure people without thinking at the same time how to cure society. If it were possible, this would mean that we are satisfied merely with what we have within the reach of our hand, and this would be indecent minimalism. We should always go at least half a step further, then the next half a step, and the next one... and so on without an end! This lies within human nature and constitutes the heart of humanity. Constantly exceeding the limits, exceeding what has been given, worked out, created... This endless transcendence, something like impatience, is a transformation of the same rectitude that makes the plants - which can easily be seen in the forest - turn and face towards the sun...”

And he is turning indeed. He will soon move on from the shelter of the monastery and the institute. There is now one more reason for this, apart from the medicine for the Pope. It is another of Father Szeliga’s passions, one more facet of his character. He shows how many dimensions and faces a man might have, if only he wants to and cares about it.

Juan Quispe, an Indian of the Pira tribe, whose wife he once saved from the attack of a puma, asked him during his last visit to the Miaria village whether he was also interested in archaeology. “Because you are interested in everything, aren’t you, Father?” the Indian asked, and already knew the answer. He, Quispe, knows where there is a huge, forgotten city in the selva. He has been there and seen it with his own eyes! The city is older than the most ancient

Inca ruins! If Father Szeliga wants, he can draw a plan, describe in detail the way that leads to it. Or he can go with him to the jungle to discover the city...

“The lost cities are part of the jungle’s problem. **It is an element of the same mystery to which belong the secrets of plants, Indian shamanism, and the medicines that astound professors and doctors.**”

This is also why he is interested in them and collects any available information concerning this subject.

“These cities do exist, there is no doubt about that. They are out there, waiting for someone who will discover them, bring them back for posterity. The only problem is how to find them in the ocean of the selva, which is an immense ocean with a roof so thick that no star shines through it! It is known from the information that has been collected and from other sources that the huge ruins that Juan Quispe was talking about are probably the primeval city which has been searched for for almost 400 years - **the legendary Paititi!** Much indicates that this is the capital city of the ‘Golden King’- the mythical El Dorado! The place which neither Pizarro, nor Almagro, nor Orellana¹⁵ ever reached!

‘Paititi’ in a local Indian dialect means nothing more and nothing less than ‘between rivers’. And it transpires from Juan Quispe’s description that the ruins that he was talking about are located in between three rivers. The name of Paititi would perfectly account for this localisation!¹⁶

Obviously, an expedition to Eldorado can only be organised during the dry season, when rivers flow along their natural river-beds, and create highways in the jungle. But even then you must know them well in order to travel along them. They are always dangerous. There are too many whirlpools and shoals. When the water rises, the current very often jumps from the right-hand side to the left, or from the left to the right, and you never know what is hiding around the next river-bend. Moreover, you cannot go ashore when it is raining. You immediately sink into the mud, waist-deep. And if you do manage to get out, you still have to fight the vermin and leeches...

There is also one healing motif connected with Eldorado and Paititi. According to old Spanish chronicles, the king who lived in this city (hence its name!¹⁷) regularly took ‘gold baths’. The priests covered him with gold dust, which he then washed off by floating on his raft to the middle of the lake, which was located at the base of a waterfall.

“I think that this Indian ceremony was not about splendour, because the native inhabitants of this area have, in fact, never known the value of gold ore,” says Father Szeliga. “The baths, however, could have had great therapeutic and rejuvenating significance, as gold has invaluable healing properties. The Indians did not give gold injections, which, in some cases, is recommended by contemporary medicine, particularly in the case of diseases of the joints. I should rather think they took baths in the gold-bearing mud. And, most probably, they felt all the better for it!”

¹⁵ Francisco Pizarro, Diego Almagro, and Francisco Orellana - Spanish conquistadors who conquered the area of today’s Peru.

¹⁶ Some have located the legendary Eldorado in the neighbourhood of Lake Guatavita in Columbia, in the country of the Muisque Indians. This hypothesis, however, has never been confirmed.

¹⁷ El dorado (Span.) – the golden one

To discover Paititi! Well, this really would be a sensation! It would be an even greater sensation than the discovery of the ruins of Machu Picchu in the valley of the Urubamba River in 1911, greater than the discovery of the golden tombs in Sipani near Lambayeque in northern Peru in 1987! And there would be no end to the surprise, astonishment, and admiration if the discovery was made not by some American Indiana Jones, but by a Polish monk, a healer, an expert in the world of exotic plants!

“We shall see what comes out of it. However, if I know that much already, it would be a sin to give up searching. Therefore, I want to go into the jungle. I do not know if I will manage to get to Paititi at the first attempt, but I will try again and again, if need be. Until I succeed. I have already found one treasure - **vilcacora**. Why shouldn't I find another one?”

Instead of an epilogue

I do not hide that I have become fascinated by the figure of Father Edmund Szeliga - I wrote to Marek Rymuszko, chief editor of the monthly magazine "Nieznany Świat" ("The Unknown World"). First of all, he is indeed a Renaissance man: versatile, open, without the burden of any dogma. He is, in addition, unselfish, fearless, not afraid of toil and danger!¹⁸ Secondly, this is a figure open to the most widely understood mystery and still unknown dimensions of human existence, which is proved, among other things, by the issue of Eldorado. He is a pioneer, the precursor of new thinking in medicine, the discoverer of a new world: the world of the forest which, despite so much damage, is still the heart of South America. It is the heart of this part of the world, where, as you yourself once stated, most probably we will find the key to the future, and the answer to many questions that still trouble us. (...)

You wanted to know whether in 1999, almost at the turn of the century, we should take Father Edmund Szeliga into account when considering the candidates for the annual, honorary award of the 'Nieznany Swiat' magazine?¹⁹ Yes, by all means! He is a man who has surprised the world and continues to surprise it!

Father Szeliga will visit Poland this year. This will be his second visit to his motherland in the last 69 years. It would be an excellent occasion to present him with the award of 'Nieznany Swiat', which is a magazine that, just like Father Szeliga, paves the way for new thinking and for a vision of the man who remains in accordance with the spirit of times by going upstream and against the wind...

I closed the envelope. "I guess here ends my role in the case of Father Szeliga," I thought. And it probably would have been so, had it not been for the ringing telephones:

"Yes, it is true that Father Szeliga will visit Poland this year," I told my interlocutors. I gave them his address and telephone number in Lima. "The time difference with Peru is six hours, seven hours in summer... Yes, the healing methods of Father Szeliga are indeed sensational - there is not a bit of exaggeration in what you have heard, sir..."

So many similar telephone conversations, so many similar questions, so much hope in the breaking voices. So much despair, pain...

There has hardly been an hour without a telephone call, ever since the news of the achievements of the Polish Salesian in a far-away Peru began to seep through to Poland. I have

¹⁸ This is no exaggeration. It is sufficient to mention the tragic fate of two other Polish missionaries, both Franciscans, Zbigniew Strażalkowski and Michał Tomaszek, who, on 9 August 1991, in Pariacoto in the Peruvian province of Ancash, were murdered by terrorists from the Maoist organisation "Shining Path".

¹⁹ The annual honorary award of the monthly magazine "Nieznany Swiat" has been presented for the last three years. The previous winners were Krzysztof Kieślowski (posthumously), Choa Jkok Sui, the author of *Stara sztuka uzdrawiania* and several other books, which have been translated into over a dozen languages, and last year the television channel "Discovery".

been picking up the receiver at the most unusual times of the day - many people were calling from the United States. Providing exhaustive answers every time they were desired, I felt how much a person like him is needed. How eagerly he is awaited - he and his plants.

The news that somebody like him exists was equivalent for many people to... heavenly grace. They, or their relatives, had often thought that nothing could be done, that there was no help, that the die was cast, full stop... when suddenly, it turned out that there is a chance, and a large, even a very large dose of hope...

Reverend Father!

I would like to thank you, Father, very warmly for saving my life. It was not long ago, as you know, Father, that the doctors did not give me any chance and predicted I would live three more months at the most, and now... I am healthy again, I can study, I can once again be the joy of my parents, who had almost lost their mind feeling that they would lose me. Vilcacora, sangre de drago, and manayupa have worked miracles. But, in fact, it was you, Father, who worked them...

No, Father Szeliga has not received such a letter from Poland yet. This one was written by a young Peruvian who was suffering from leukaemia not so long ago. But Father Szeliga hopes to receive similar letters and telegrams from his motherland soon. He would like it very much to be that way. He would also like it to happen as soon as possible, as time runs much quicker for those who are suffering.

“We are waiting for him,” I heard on the telephone, which rang the moment I was writing the last words of this book. “Could you tell that to Father Szeliga, please. Please, remember to do so...”

Translated into English by Tadeusz Z. Wolański
“TRANSLATOR”
