

A "religion of revolution"

Christians fight tyranny in the 3rd world

By Frank Maurovich
Pacific News Service

Throughout much of the Third World right-wing regimes are being confronted by a new kind of opposition that many consider a greater threat than Marxist insurgency or rising terrorism.

That threat is Christian resistance, rising from both Catholic and Protestant churches.

Thomas Quigley, Latin American expert of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference, attributes the escalating resistance to three causes:

- the widening gap between rich and poor despite the growing wealth of third world countries like Brazil and South Korea.

- the rising abuse of human rights—including torture and assassination of political leaders—that, says Quigley, have "opened the door for perfectly natural involvement of Christians in revolutionary politics";

- a developing "theology of liberation" calling on Christians to become politically active in resisting oppression and building a "more just and fraternal society."

Revolutionary politics.

The theology of liberation was first developed in Latin America in the 1960s by a group of Christian activist/thinkers who claimed the Third World needed "liberation," not development.

While comprising a relatively small, closely-knit group of churchmen, these "liberation theologians" have given the broad resistance movement its unifying vision and global reach.

They insist that while parallel Christian resistance movements have developed in Africa and Asia, the Christians of each region must determine their political actions in the context of their own needs.

In the young black nations of Africa, for example, Bishop Patrick Kaliombe of Malawi says that political cooperation with the government, not resistance, is the answer. "We have much more to fight for than against," he says.

In Latin America, the theologians of liberation have rejected the development model of economic and technical aid from industrialized nations as ineffective and counterproductive.

"The supporters of development reinforced the status quo and actually widened the gap between the poor by not attacking the roots of the evil," wrote Gustavo Gutierrez in his book *Theology of Liberation*, which has been published in six languages.

The evil—social, political, economic and cultural suppression—can only be uprooted by "social revolution," according to the movement leaders.

Bible as manifesto.

This social revolution, the theologians of liberation teach, can be accomplished peacefully if the possessors of wealth and power cooperate voluntarily—or violently if they do not.

Says Kim Chi Ha, the Catholic poet writer who is a leader of South Korea's Christian resistance. "I believe in non-violence, but I also approve the violence of love and regulated violence." He defines these forms of violence as those directed solely at eradication of suffering and freedom from repression.

Such teaching naturally provokes vehement reaction from right-wing regimes,

which claim the Christian dissidents are either disguised Marxists or dupes of Marxism.

Gutierrez admits that "contemporary theology does in fact find itself in direct

and fruitful dialogue with Marxism." But he emphatically insists that Christian resistance is rooted in the Bible, not in *Das Kapital*.

Gutierrez and other liberation theologians underline the significance of Christ's own manifesto delivered in the synagogue at Nazareth, his first public pronouncement. According to Luke's gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord has appointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He

has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

"God is not neutral," Gutierrez says. "He entered human history through Jesus Christ in solidarity with the poor."

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Catholic poet Kim Chi Ha a voice from a South Korean jail



By Charles D. Lummis
Pacific News Service

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA—The conversation invariably turned toward Catholic poet Kim Chi Ha. It was striking how many people would express their inmost thoughts to me by saying, "What Kim Chi Ha is trying to say is..."

The conversations took place last December during the trial of Kim Chi Ha and other Christian dissidents who are part of a loosely knit but effective Christian resistance movement here.

The trial is over. Kim is in jail. But the impact of the event is still reverberating.

Charged as a "Marxist revolutionary," Kim denied only half the charge—that he is a Marxist. He then went on to use the courtroom to define what he perceived to be the core of Christian faith: solidarity with the oppressed and a call to action to build a world of justice and peace.

"Christianity," Kim told the judges. "is a religion of revolution whereby those in high places are brought down and chased out, and the destitute and oppressed are admitted in, satisfied and liberated."

Ironically, the trial, which was designed to isolate and silence an accused Marxist, became a public forum—much like the historic trial in Pilate's Jerusalem courtroom—that produced a stream of thinking and discussion in South Korea's Christian community. Representing about one-sixth of the country's 35 million population, the Protestant and Catholic churches here form the most active opposition bloc to the Park regime, despite some bitter internal dissent.

Illegal thought.

Kim was not on trial for anything he did. His private notebooks—including outlines for still unwritten plays and poems—were the key evidence used against him. Through them the prosecutors tried to show that he had violated the law by illegal thoughts, not actions.

At one of the hearings Kim's defense attorney asked him, "What is the Christian position on the bourgeoisie?" The poet answered in Christ's words, "It is as difficult for the rich to enter heaven as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle."

Ham Sok Hon, the 75-year-old Quaker who is called by some the "conscience of Korea," explained later that Kim's position means that the Christian must take the side of the poor, the oppressed, the wretched of the earth.

Kim testified, "The government found the word 'lumpen-proletariat' in my prison notes, and they believe this is communist terminology... Don't they know that Jesus was born in a stable? Don't they know that Jesus chose Galilean fishermen to be the pillars of his church? Don't they know that Mary Magdalene was a whore?"

In effect, Kim's answer to the charge of Marxism is, "I had no need of that hypothesis. The moral teaching for an unrelenting struggle against oppression can be found within Christianity."

A national democratic revolution.

Kim's own struggle has been unrelenting. The 36-year-old poet has been arrested five times since 1964. The first time was



(Above) In South Korea, Maryknoll mission prayer service for political prisoners in April (Below) Bishop Casaldaliga of Sao Felix, Brazil, of the Mato Grosso.



her James Sinnott being carried away from
own on the right, works closely with the poor

for participating as a student in the protest against the Japan/South Korea normalization treaty opening the door for heavy Japanese investments in the Korean economy.

The second and third times were for his writings, *The Five Bandits* (1970) and *Groundless Rumors* (1974). In 1974 he was arrested on charges of plotting with students to "overthrow the government" and given a death sentence, later commuted to life imprisonment.

In February 1975 he was released on a kind of amnesty but with the life sentence dangling over his head. Twenty-seven days later he was back in prison, this time for publishing *Asceticism 74*, an account of his imprisonment.

Kim's dramatic statement at his December trial left little doubt why the Park regime considers him the most articulate—and most subversive—spokesman of the country's growing Christian resistance.

Kim presented a revolutionary vision of a reunited Korea brought about neither by conquest of either side nor by negotiations between the two regimes. His national democratic revolution, as he calls it, is ultimately a revolution in both sectors. "The bright Spring of Athens is coming to call on the Republic of Korea. And when the

Spring of Athens has visited the South, it will then urge change upon the North. Whether in the form of intra-party democracy, or whether through some other form of popular awakening, in any case, the Spring of Prague will come to the North as well," Kim predicted in his dramatic final statement in court.

Kim described the day of unification in the language of a visionary: "At the DMZ the guns will cease to fire, and like monkeys, rabbits, pheasants and deer romping at play, the youth of the north and south will come together, talk, sing and dance until dawn, groping for a new philosophy and stepping into a whole new world of friendship..."

This "new philosophy," he added, will then spread throughout the Third World and to "the perfection of humanity."

In South Korea, where Marxism has been crushed and Christianity is strong and respected, Kim's vision is more revolutionary and—considering the basis—more dangerous.

Charles D. Lummis, professor of political science at Fairhaven College, Washington, observed the December trials of South Korea's Christian dissidents.

With Latin American left in jail, the Church stepped forward

By Harvey Levenstein

A young Catholic priest in a Northern Mexico slum parish is shot and killed by unknown assailants. He had helped his poor parishioners to defy the wealthy industrialists and landowners who wanted the land the 20,000 people lived on.

A priest working with Brazilian Indians is shot dead in a police station by the very policemen to whom he is protesting torture and mistreatment of Indian women.

In Argentina the machine-gunned corpse of three priests and two young seminarians who were ministering to the poor in a Buenos Aires slum are found in front of the altar of their church. On their bodies, the rightist "death squad" leaves notes warning of church infiltration by communists.

In El Salvador, a car driven by a priest helping peasants in their struggle against large landowners is riddled with large-calibre bullets. The priest is left dead on the road with ten bullets in his body. Two of his peasant parishioners are also killed. One is aged 76, the other 15.

Throughout Latin America, priests are paying dearly for a startling change of direction within the Roman Catholic church. In country after country, as leftists and liberals are being crushed by authoritarian rightist governments, the Catholic church is emerging as the major force working for social justice and human rights.

Opposition to military dictators.

In the past two years large segments of the Brazilian church have moved into open opposition to the army regime. In late February no less than 217 Brazilian bishops signed a document condemning increasing poverty, arbitrary arrests, "disappearances," imprisonments, and the "almost total impunity" with which the clandestine rightist terrorist groups act.

The churchmen's concerns cross national borders. The powerful Cardinal of Sao Paulo recently visited neighboring Paraguay, demanding, without success, to visit the 350 political prisoners in the capital city's main prison.

The Paraguayan clergy have also undergone a radical change. Many of the hundreds of men, women, and children mouldering in the country's prisons are poor peasants and slum dwellers organ-

ized into grassroots movements by Catholic activists. In effect, the Catholic church has become the main opponent of President General Alfredo Stoessner, Latin America's longest-running dictator.

In Chile, many churchmen have retreated from their initial support for the army's 1973 coup because of the massive repression and economic hardship it brought. As late as September 1975 Chilean bishops were criticizing the *junta* only mildly, while still praising it for having saved Chile from imminent communist dictatorship. By then, though, it was running soup kitchens for the hungry in the slums of the cities, trying to help those hardest hit by the regime's "soak the poor" economic policies.

Then it gingerly began criticizing the suppression of human rights, counting and announcing the number of "disappearances," and publicly distancing itself from the regime. Finally, last month it neared open opposition to the regime.

In a strongly worded pastoral letter, Chile's bishops demanded that the government "clear up the fate" of the thousands of Chileans who have disappeared, suspected to have been killed or imprisoned by the secret police. They questioned the legitimacy of recent *junta* political decisions and demanded an "open debate" on its economic policies. On May Day, when the government blocked a planned meeting of unionists, they rallied instead at Santiago Cathedral, where the Cardinal of Santiago delivered a sermon criticizing the government's neglect of the poor.

In Nicaragua, run by the Somoza family and their thugs since the 1930s, the church has finally condemned the torture and killing of peasants and opponents for which the regime has long been notorious. In this year's New Year's message, the publication of which the government prohibited, the Nicaraguan Conference of Bishops called for a restoration of freedoms, including the "freedom to promote a more just and serene social order."

Many still conservative.

It was not always like this. Although the church has always been involved in Latin American politics, it has usually sided with the old, wealthy, conservative landholding classes.

Many of the Catholic hierarchy still live to the old line. The Colombian

church is still dominated by arch-conservatives, although the "leftists" calling themselves such things as Priests for Latin America and Christians for Socialism, are coming up fast. Late last year 65 Colombian bishops tried to put down the leftist upsurge by condemning those in the church who claimed that Christianity and Marxism could be reconciled.

Guatemala's Cardinal Archbishop has told his priests not to emulate their Salvadorian neighbors. In a confidential letter, he warned them against expressing political opinions. "Our mission is to save souls," he wrote. "We have been taught by the Church to respect the authorities."

The declaration of the 217 Brazilian bishops aroused considerable unease among the conservative clergy. A prominent Brazilian prelate publicly denounced it, saying, in effect, that the church should mind its own business and stop criticizing the government.

In Argentina, the military coup that ousted Isabel Peron two years ago received overwhelming support in the church. Many clergymen still believe the regime's claims to have saved the nation "for Christianity and Western civilization" from the international Bolshevik conspiracy.

The fact that the leadership of the major Peronist guerilla group, the Montoneros, includes many former activists in Catholic youth organizations (including its young leader, Roberto Firminich), makes it easier for the Montoneros to gain secret support from sympathetic clergymen, but it also lends credence to the charges that the church has been infiltrated by "Marxists" and terrorists. Conservative churchmen are therefore not turning against the regime simply because over 50 priests and seminarians have been kidnapped or killed by government-supported "death squads." As a whole, the Argentine church now stands in the middle, torn and effectively neutralized by its own weakness. In Uruguay, for various historic reasons, for years the church has counted on many nominal Catholics but few real followers. When it protested the suppression of the rightist army regime there, it was easily crushed. Even the Papal Nuncio was denounced as a "Marxist" in the government-controlled press.

In Cuba, the Church's historic weakness forced upon it another unusual role: quietly acquiescing to "atheistic Communism" becoming the ideology of a Catholic country. There, though, after some initial tensions, the revolutionary regime avoided confrontations, allowing the church to function as long as it stayed out of politics. With the backbone of its clergy, who were Spanish, sent home, and others joining their middle class flock in exile in Florida, the Cuban church had little alternative but to acquiesce.

Cuba still maintains diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The few native Cuban clergymen continue to minister to their small congregations. If anything, they go out of their way to indicate their support for the general objectives of the Revolution. Their main grievance is that professing Catholicism disqualifies Cubans from joining the elite Communist organizations whose membership cards are necessary for university entrance, high bureaucratic positions, and a host of other privileges.

Unlike the Colombian bishops, they would likely be overjoyed if the regime declared Marxism and Catholicism compatible. The rise of so many priests in the rest of Latin America leaning in that direction makes it a real possibility. Leftists as well as rightists are being forced to rethink many of their old ideas about the politics of the church in Latin America.

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