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REPRESSION OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN ARGENTINA

The continuing "SECRET DETENTION" of Fathers Gazzarri, Silva and Bustos in Buenos Aires

April, 1978.

The Little Brothers of the Gospel (Charles de Foucauld) is a recently-founded religious congregation in the Roman Catholic Church, which is especially dedicated to working among the poor, oppressed and rejected of society. In 1960, the first members of this community went to Argentina from France to work in the Chaco forests in the north of the country. Since that time, the fraternity, (as it is more commonly known) has worked in many other parts including the city of Buenos Aires itself. However, last July, 1977, it was decided to close the remaining fraternity in Argentina and leave the country because of the repression which the community had suffered particularly over the last two years. For the first time in almost twenty years the brothers had to finally say good-bye to their many friends among the poor. Because of the violence of the persecution it was impossible to continue.

The first direct attack began in 1974, when all the four brothers working in a fraternity in the province of Tucuman were imprisoned but released some ten days later. When two of them were again detained some months later in October, it was decided to close down the fraternity there. During the same year, a fraternity, which had been established in a shanty-town on the outskirts of Córdoba some years previously, was attacked by paramilitary groups, and the brothers had to leave the community. A former brother, Nelio Rougier was later arrested in September 1975 when he was travelling from Córdoba. There are many versions about what has happened to him afterwards but still no definite news, if he is alive or dead, or in what condition he is being detained.

During April, 1975 the fraternity in the province of La Rioja was raided several times by the police so that it became impossible to continue there. One brother of that community Henri de Solan, who had afterwards gone to work in the province of Corrientes, was detained in September 1976 and deported to France in February 1978. After some 12 month detention he was finally accused of giving the use of a typewriter to an opposition group of the government. However the case was found to be without substance so he was deported.

In October 1976, the brother who was superior of the community in Buenos Aires, Patrick Rice was arrested and severely ill-treated during his interrogation. He was later deported from Argentina in December. An account of his experiences appear in the Amnesty International

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Report on Argentina, March 1977.

On Saturday, the 27th of November, 1976, an Argentine priest Pablo Gazzarri who had begun his postulancy some months before and was preparing to enter the Novitiate of the fraternity in Venezuela, was arrested when he was visiting his family. Despite every form of protest on his behalf to the Argentine authorities, there is still no exact news about him.

Mr. Carlos Bustos, an Argentine Franciscan priest, had been a close friend of the community for some years. On Good Friday afternoon, April 8th, 1977, he was arrested. Now, one year later there is still no news of him.

Finally on the 14th of June, 1977, the only remaining brother Kleber Silva, was arrested at his work in the municipality of Buenos Aires. Despite an official search the following day by the police of the Fraternity, habeus corpus writs etc. there is ~~absolutely~~ no official information as to where he is being detained or of what he has been charged.

The continuing "secret detentions" of these three priests, Gazzarri, Bustos and Silva is a source of constant anxiety and suffering both for their relatives and friends, the fraternity itself and ^{for} many people in the Church. There is neither the consolation of knowing that they are alive and well, nor the sorrow of being able to mourn them if they are dead. Our fervent hope is that they are well, but for some mysterious reason, the Argentine military government does not wish to mention them in any official list of prisoners. Perhaps it is because they have been subjected to brutal forms of interrogation.

In a recent meeting of the Latin American region of the Fraternity, it was decided to make a final attempt to try and receive some definite information. There are three very simple questions:

1. Where is Kleber Silva Iribarnegaray being detained and under what charge?
2. Where is Pablo Gazzarri imprisoned, and why?
3. Where is Carlos Bustos detained and under what accusation?

We firmly believe on clear evidence that the Argentine government knows where there are being held and can no longer wash ~~the~~ hands of their arrest. We very simply call on the Argentine authorities to make that information available. Without any evidence, our community has come to be considered a directly subversive group in Argentina. As we don't fit into the traditional role of priests because of our life as workers among the poor, we are suspected of all sorts of crimes.

It is a trully sad day for a country when whoever lives and works among the poor is considered a marxist, a communist or a terrorist, as if such groups had a special claim to that role. The penalty however for that accusation without ^{ANY} basis, has not ^{BEEN} being trial or imprisonment but rather kidnapping, secret detention, torture and possibly death.

Some details about these missing priests :

KLEBER SILVA IRIBARNEGARAY

Kleber was born on the 20th April, 1925 in Montevideo, Uruguay. In 1938 he entered the minor seminary, and in 1942 the Salesian Congregation in Uruguay. He was then sent to the south of Argentina, the Patagonia, where he studied theology and was ordained a priest on the 2nd of December 1951. He continued to work there largely in schools until in 1960, he decided to return to his native city of Montevideo. He left the Salesian order, to join the diocesan clergy and dedicated himself to pastoral work among the youth of Montevideo.

In 1970 he came to Argentina to enter the fraternity. After making his novitiate in the province of La Rioja, he went to work in the fraternity of Fortin Olmos in the province of Santa Fe. Finally in 1973, he came to Buenos Aires to realise his long ambition of a community among the street-workers of the municipality of the city. They have always a very oppressed and socially despised group, and even though Brother Kleber was always careful to avoid direct political or trade-union involvement, the fact he had been work^{ing} for some four years in such an environment, was sufficient to merit suspicion. His own brother Jesus, who is also a priest had worked with him.

Kleber was an extremely active personality and totally dedicated to his work, but also consacrated much of his time to silent prayer. His health, however, was never good and it was one of the reasons why he found Argentine country-life very taxing.

The fraternity in which he lived was situated at 1450 Malabia Street and consisted of some three rented rooms, one of which was used as a chapel. On June 7th, together with Brother Giovanni Cara, the superior of the fraternity for Latin America who was visiting Buenos Aires, they had gone to speak with Cardinal Aramburu, Archbishop of Buenos Aires, who was always kept fully informed of the work and mission of the fraternity.

On Tuesday, 14th of June, 1977, Kleber left as usual for his work at the department "Villas" of the Municipality. About 8.30 a.m. a white "Ford Falcon" car carrying armed men in civilian clothes but claiming to be police, had asked other street-cleaners: "Where does Silva work?" Later a woman witness saw him been bundled into the

same car. He was then working sweeping Sanchez Street near the corner of Cervantes Street. However, it was late afternoon before the brothers realised that Kleber Silva had been arrested. Early the following day Brother Cara went to the place of work of Kleber but there was no further news. In the afternoon, he went to visit the Apostolic Nuncio in Argentina, Mons. Pio Laghi and other ecclesiastical authorities to see what they could do to help.

Later that evening, a group of four men who said they were members of the Argentine Armed Forces, and one who said he was a military judge intervening in the case of Silva, came to interrogate the neighbours and the brothers about him. It was quite clear to Brother Cara, whom they interrogated, that they had already spoken with Kleber, as they knew exactly everything about the fraternity, and had even brought a French translator along with them. They were particularly interested in knowing the political ideas of Kleber Silva. However, they refused to identify themselves.

The brothers felt relieved knowing that Kleber had been detained and not simply disappeared but it was not yet known where he was being held. The following day a habeas corpus writ was presented on his behalf to the ^{Supreme} Appeal Court. However, the days passed by with no positive response. Towards the end of July, it was known through ecclesiastical circles, that he was detained in the big Army Camp (Campo de Mayo) and had been very badly tortured. Then some weeks later he was transferred to some-place in La Plata, ^{near Buenos Aires} Since that time, there has been no news and we fear for the worst.

We have appealed for help to almost every relevant organization, the United Nations, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, the World Council of Churches, the Vatican, the American Administration, the Red Cross, Amnesty International, etc. The Argentine government insist on ignoring or systematically denying the petition.

. see more ^{about} the case of Silva page 9
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PABLO GAZZARRI

Pablo was born on the 23rd of September, 1944 in the city of Buenos Aires itself. Both his parents are still alive, as are two brothers and one sister. He ~~does~~ ^{did} all his philosophy and theology studies in the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires at Villa Devoto and was ordained to the priesthood in 1971. He began working in a parish in the western part of the city, dedicating himself particularly to youth work, encouraging them ~~particularly~~ to go and work among the poor, in the shanty-towns and in the country ^{side among} the peasants.

He was later moved ^{to} the central Santa Rosa Church in Belgrano Street, and finally to a parish in the northern part of the city. Because of his continuous work among the youth, he began to receive several threats to his life, particularly after the massacre of the Palotine religious community at San Patricio, Belgrano, in which 3 priests and two seminarians were murdered in 1976.

In April he had expressed his desire to enter the fraternity as he felt called to work more directly among the poor. Cardinal Aramburu was in full agreement, although he was very preoccupied about the threats against Pablo. In July, 1976 Pablo began to live with the community at the central fraternity on Villafañe Street, which was in the dock area of Buenos Aires. He was already preparing to go to Venezuela for his novitiate when he was arrested.

Pablo was of small stature but was always in exceptionally good humour. He was deeply committed to his Christian and Priestly life.

On the 27th of November, 1976 he was helping move some furniture for the fraternity using his family's car. He was expected home at about 9 p.m., as he had gone to return the car to his family. According to witnesses, he had parked the car and was walking towards his parent's house in central Buenos Aires when he was arrested by some plain-clothes policemen. The Papal Nuncio, and other authorities were informed of his arrest, and the daily "Buenos Aires Herald" published news of his kidnapping. On Tuesday a habeus corpus was presented before the Appeal Court by his brother. Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, the prefect of the Congregation of Religious in the Vatican, had been his spiritual director for many years, was also very active in trying to get news about him from the Argentine authorities. However to all of these appeals there has not been as yet any positive reply.

Informally, it was known that he was being held ~~in~~ in the Campo de Mayo Army camp, and that he had been very badly tortured. In March, 1977, an international Catholic Youth Movement of which Pablo had been spiritual director, published a note saying that he had been released, but unfortunately this was never confirmed. On the other hand, almost simultaneously, the French daily "Nouvel Observateur" and the Spanish feature-magazine "Triunfo" informed on the 10th March, 1977 that Pablo had died in Buenos Aires as a result of torture. This was investigated by the Vatican and found to be totally untrue.

During the visit of a military delegation to the May 1977 meeting of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, the case of Pablo Gazzarri was very much discussed, but the military claimed he would get the same treatment as any subversive. There was even the suggestion that he might be freed if the critical Bishop's statement was substantially modified.

Since that time there have been many confusing rumours which his mother usually comes to receive. For example, that he has been released, has returned to Argentina and has been detained once ~~xx~~ again. The certainty is that he is in secret detention, but there is now increasing doubt about his state of health as much time has passed.

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CARLOS ARMANDO BUSTOS

LACUMBRE

Carlos was born in ~~Crua del Eje~~, a small town in the mountains near the city of Córdoba in central Argentina. He was born in March 1942. He entered the Capuchin order and studied philosophy and theology in his native Córdoba. He was ordained in 1972 and began working in a shanty-town in Buenos Aires until 1973 when he went to Montevideo, Uruguay to integrate a mixed Franciscan community. He finally returned again the following year and began working with the Capuchin community in the shanty-town of Villa Soldati.

He was very heavily built, of dark complexion but because of his warm personality, he was very much loved among the shanty-town dwellers to which he was especially dedicated. He worked as a taxi driver in order to support himself.

On Good Friday, April 9th, 1977, he was arrested in the streets by plain-clothed policemen when he was going to the early evening service in the Nueva Pompeya Basílica, Buenos Aires. He previously received many threats and his family had also been harassed on different occasions.

His Capuchin Provincial Superior came immediately from Uruguay, presenting habeus corpus writs, and the usual presentations to the ecclesiastical authorities. Amnesty International and many other international organisations began an urgent-action campaign on his behalf. In the episcopal conference of May, 1977, the visiting military delegation again discussed his case, but they refused to bring him to trial or put him in official detention.

The latest unofficial news is that he was being detained in a cellar in the Province of Buenos Aires since October, 1977.

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EVIDENCE OF A FILM

The Argentine military government continually deny the arrest and detention of these priests. Yet, last May 1977, a military delegation visited the Bishop's meeting in San Miguel. The high-point of their conference was the presentation of a film-report on

subversion in the Argentine Catholic Church. In the alleged "documentary" a young woman reportedly confessed that she belonged to some well-known subversive organization and that this group had several priests who cooperated actively with it. Among those mentioned were Pablo Gazzarri, Carlos Bustos and several others. The military then explained that these priests will receive exactly the same treatment as any subversive, so that the bishops should not interest themselves any more in the cases. Privately it was mentioned to some bishops, that Pablo and Carlos could well be freed if the prepared bishops' statement from the conference could be substantially modified. The bishops did not agree to this exchange and demanded that these priests be given a legal detention and if necessary a legal judicial process.

This sad incident is clear proof that both Frs. Carlos and Pablo are detained by the Government, and that all sorts of accusations are invented against them. Meanwhile, the Argentine authorities are prepared to use the fact openly to bring pressure on the different decisions of the Church's Hierarchy.

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RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN ARGENTINA

It is necessary to understand the extent and ferocity of religious persecution in Argentina to appreciate the dramatic situation of these priests. Even though the military government of General Jorge Videla openly identifies itself with the Roman Catholic Church and purports to be Christian, an open persecution has been unleashed against any sector of the Church which works among the poor, or is actively concerned about the question of human rights. Scarcely a month has gone by since March 1976, without some attack on these sectors of the Church.

In June, 1976 the entire community of the Palotine fathers were massacred.

In July, 1976 the two priests in the parish of Chamical, La Rioja were kidnapped and killed.

In August, 1976, the bishop of La Rioja, Mons. Enrique Angelelli was himself killed in a road accident, which the "Observatore Romana" did not hesitate to call "mysterious".

In June, two Assumptionist seminarians Raúl Rodriguez and Antonio di Pietro, were also arrested and are being held in secret detention now for almost two years.

In August Fr. Jim Weeks and four seminarians were arrested and later expelled from the country. ¹³

November, 1976, the entire "Lourdes" Community in Buenos Aires was imprisoned and some of their members later expelled.

During Christmas, Methodist pastor Mauricio Lopez was arrested.

and has ~~been~~ disappeared now for over one year. Meanwhile there are several priests detained in La Plata prison, and are refused even any access to the Bible.

Only recently we had the very tragic case of the two French nuns , Sisters Domon and Duquet who were kidnapped in December and as yet have not been openly declared in detention.

The agents of this violence are usually anonymous para-military groups, who identify themselves with the Argentine Armed Forces and seem to have the full protection of the Argentine Government to act. Yet the Government systematically denies any responsibility for this persecution. There is no-one to appeal to.

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EXTRACTS FROM NEWS, ARTICLES, LETTERS etc. :

"Two other friends of mine used to work in shanty-towns. They were worker priests. One drove a taxi, the other swept streets. They were not politically active, but they've disappeared. The word is that both have been assassinated. Being a worker priest, now is more than enough for them to die."

Chicago Tribune Press, January 23rd, 1978.
 "PRIESTS ARE MARKED MEN", Buenos Aires

"In the case of Kleber, who worked in the municipality, the most recent news is the following: Someone has seen Carlos in a cave. Kleber could also be there, as that would explain why there has been no more news of him. People don't speak anymore of he being held in the Campo de Mayo. Is this true? As you probably know, all has finished for Pablo"

letter from Buenos Aires, 30th October, 1977.

"As President Videla himself said at a meeting granted to Rabbi Morton M. Rosenthal, in New York in September. In Argentina, there are no political prisoners and much less "prisoners of conscience". There certainly are subversive delinquents".

Letter of Argentine Ambassador in the U.S.
 Mr. Jorge A. Aja Espil, December 22, 1977.

"Especially trained military personnel hunger a vermin during several days before introducing it into the intestine of the victim. In that way Fr. Pablo Gazzarri has just died"

Nouvel Observateur 10th March, 1977.

The disappearance of Kleber Silva, priest and street-worker

(Taken from Vida Nueva, Madrid. July, 1977)

The increasing number of disappearances in Argentina is causing serious anxiety to the Church. There are also priests among these people who disappear and for whom no legal authority is prepared to answer. A friend of ours tells us of one such case. In the writ of habeus corpus, which he forwarded us, it is communicated to the authorities that Kleber Silva never "professed any ideology which was not that of the gospel itself".

This news is not an novelty, even in a country which is officially Christian. The priest's name is Kleber Silva, 52 years of age, an Uruguayan citizen. On June 14th he checked in as usual in the central offices of the cleaning department of the municipality for the zone of "Villas". He is a street-cleaner. For 4 or 5 years now, he has worked in the question of garbage. He speaks about his work very naturally. ~~Maxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

He tries to make the Church present, where it is totally absent. With no political commitment, nor links with pro-guerilla movements. Only by his witness and his presence, his desire to share the life and work of the street-cleaners, his ambition to announce Christ to the world, through a humble and poorly-paid work. It gave him enough to live on and that was sufficient.

But his activity which seems so simple becomes a crime, when one of the "new guardian angels" of society thinks that this should not be. How can a priest work cleaning the street? It is impossible for him to do this work. If Kleber works on the street and says he is a priest he is an impostor and a delinquent. If he really is a priest, he is working at something which a priest cannot do. He should not be allowed to go free on the streets.

As the matter is urgent, one has to act rapidly and with ^{out} ~~surprise~~ ^{WARNINGS} instead of using the ordinary legal process. On Tuesday, June 14th, between 8.30 and 9.30 am, a ford Falcon car stops at the street where Kleber is working and he is invited by some men to get in. Afterwards, no one knows anything more about him. As if he had been swallowed by the ground itself. ~~Maxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

When will we know something of him? When will we return to see him with his brush, and cheerful face witnessing the Risen Lord on the streets of Buenos Aires?

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"I earnestly request you, not to permit this appeal to fall into silence"

From a letter on Kleber's behalf to Cardinal Villot
by Brother Francois Vidil, Prior of the Fraternity

Normally our community is reluctant to make any public appeals. We try to assume this situation of suffering in a spirit of sacrifice and prayer. However the gravity of the situation is such that we should do everything humanly possible to guarantee the physical integrity of these three priests.

We make a final appeal to the Argentine government of General Jorge Videla, that in the name of humanity and of the Christianity ~~his government~~ ^{IC} professes, ^{at} his government would say where PABLO GAZZARRI, CARLOS BUSTOS and KLEBER SILVA IRIBARNEGARAY are detained and under what charges.

We humbly request His Holiness Pope Paul VI to intervene personally with the Argentine authorities on behalf of these priests.

We ask both the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to pursue the investigation of these cases with full vigour.

We are confident that the present American administration, and other governments will do all they can to bring pressure on the Argentine authorities in this matter.

Finally we appeal to all who come to know about this situation to do all they can to express their preoccupation to the Argentine government, and we invite them to join us in prayer for our brothers and their families and for the reconciliation of the Argentine people along the road of justice and peace.

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