

the *Scarlet Threads* reprint series

# ***PERSECUTION, Roman Style***

In almost every issue of the *Scarlet Threads* newsletter, (1995-1996) modern persecution of believers by the Roman System or its members was documented.

Here are those articles.

*Special credit to the (now retired) News Network International (NNI), responsible for most of the material.*

***From the very first issue of Scarlet Threads, January, 1995:  
Can a Holy Church KILL Those Who Differ With It?***

To ask the question is to answer it, provided one has even an inkling of church history. Most moderns don't. The following quotes are from Catholic sources. From the December 24, 1908 issue of *The Western Watchman*:

"The church has persecuted. Only a tyro (beginner) in church history will deny that...Protestants were persecuted in France and Spain with the full approval of the church authorities."

And from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume XIV, p. 766:

"During the middle ages the church guarded the purity and genuineness of her apostolic doctrine through the institution of the ecclesiastical (and state) Inquisition, which, with many excellent qualities, had unfortunately also its drawbacks."

From non-Catholic Paul Blanshard, author of *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power*, page 106:

"For exhibition purposes the Papacy preserved the rule that 'The Church abhors the shedding of blood,' but in practice the rule simply exempted priests from duty as executioners...The assumption behind the Inquisition was that the Pope, as the highest representative of truth on earth, had a special assignment to search out and punish disbelief. The disbelief might be quite trivial; any deviation from orthodoxy which in the eyes of the clerics seemed important was enough for retributive slaughter. The Waldensians were massacred in a body in Piedmont for advocating Christianity in its pristine form and for opposing such purely clerical contrivances as indulgences, purgatory, and prayers for the dead..."

Student of Catholicism Avro Manhattan speaks of our own century:

"The ordinary individual cannot accept as yet the startling facts that only a few years back the Catholic Church advocated forcible conversions, helped to erect concentration camps, and was responsible for the sufferings, torturing and execution of hundreds of thousands of non-Catholics."

He offers clear documentation. And with insight typical of his writing he comments,

"The Ecumenical revolution, although seemingly alluring, has shown itself to be nothing more than a Trojan horse via which Catholic power, apparelled in contemporary garb, continues to assert itself as effectively as ever."

(from *Vatican Holocaust*)

***In February, a follow-up question:  
PERSECUTION? Who Says?***

Lyle R. McCoy does, for one. The McCoy's are a missionary family working with the Indians of Mexico. To question him personally, contact him through the Central Park Baptist Church of Carrollton, Texas.

In a newsletter of 1994, he describes the dilemma and spiritual darkness of several Indian tribes of southern Mexico.

He then discusses the establishment of a new Catholic diocese in Tlapa, Guerrero, 1992. From there, he says, the resident bishop closely supervises all activities and keeps suppressed any attempts to bring the true Gospel to these lost souls.

He even says that "war has been declared against all gospel preaching in the Diocese of Tlapa."

Only Satan-inspired religion will attempt to keep God's Word out. Will you pray for the McCoy's, that God will have His way regardless of the schemes of men?

Here is only one verifiable instance of Roman abuse in other lands, *while in America showing the face of a lamb.*

***A Maryland reader offers the following, in March:***

The logo (pictured in the newsletter) is from a letter sent by a volunteer "activity coordinator" of the Southern Maryland Pre-Release Unit, of Maryland's Division of Correction (aka prisons system).

After suggesting some clerical changes to the system, she continues :

"The next item of business to discuss is adherence to Religious Service Directive 140-120. According to the directive 'inmates may only attend worship services of their registered religion.' For example, a registered Roman Catholic inmate cannot attend a Baptist, Pentecostal, etc. service. One way around this is if I can receive from each registered volunteer who conducts a meeting, bible (*sic*) study or service to submit a declaration claiming that your service is a nondenominational, generic program so any inmate can attend. Your church affiliation will remain the same, but the declaration will allow us to be less restrictive on who attends your program. Your immediate response is appreciated."

Our immediate response is this: It is no secret that the population of MARYland is largely Catholic, and that the likelihood of the great majority of prisoners coming into the system being Catholic is great. And once in, always in, says the directive, in the spirit of "*Catholics and Evangelicals Together*," the document recently signed by leaders of both camps. The document sternly warns believers not to grab "sheep" from other church communions, but only from the unchurched.

Our point in documenting these things is not to suggest political protest, but to show to true believers the nature of the

enemy, and to call out a people for His Name.

### ***And From Among Your Own Selves...***

*(the following article was written by a Chicago pastor who has begun to pay a price for his stand against falsehood.)*

Everyone was eager to find out what I was going to preach on that first Sunday morning in February. Especially when I said much trouble would surely come upon me for the stand I would be taking. I reminded the brethren of the great amount of trouble I had received from pastors and Christian organizations because I had come against so-called Christian psychology. I told them that the trouble I had received would be small compared to that which would come from the stand I was about to take.

I announced that I planned 5 or 6 messages in which I would compare some of the major teachings of the Catholic Church to God's Word. In the past I had occasionally mentioned some of Catholicism's falsehood, but I had never done anything like this. I prayed and proceeded to show that the few verses on which the Catholic Church bases the doctrine of purgatory were taken completely out of context. I quoted here and there from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* so everyone could be sure that this is exactly what is taught in Catholicism. I showed that the doctrine of purgatory is Scripturally baseless, and I said that it is a "demonic teaching that completely destroys the power of the blood of Christ."

As I was preaching there was a brother who appeared angry about the message. I was not really surprised, though he had stood solidly upon the Word of God, and on many occasions over the past two years had encouraged me to continue to stand upon the Word. After the service I chatted momentarily with this brother, whom I will call "Jimmy." Things seemed fine, but I still prayed for him over the next few days.

On Thursday, only a few of those who regularly gathered for Bible study and prayer were in attendance. Jimmy's wife had missed Sunday, but although she was there Thursday, Jimmy wasn't.

Just before we were beginning to pray, Jimmy's wife, "Janine," wanted to tell us of something that was extremely troubling to her. She began to tell us about the situation which began when Jimmy returned home the previous Sunday. He was in a rage about my preaching against the Catholic Church. As far as he was concerned I was going too far when I contrasted Roman teaching with God's Word. This convinced Jimmy that I was a "cult leader," and he decided that it was therefore right for him to "destroy" the church...As the weeks progressed, Jimmy's actions digressed to a very sinful point.

After much encouragement from the two sisters, we spent time praying for this and other concerns. Roger (*other elder besides pastor, name changed*) and I met together a little later that night and prayed. We decided that we would talk with Jimmy and Janine as a couple the following Sunday.

We had been in fervent prayer as Sunday arrived. Jimmy was there earlier than usual. He seemed just fine, as if things were quite normal. I preached for the second week about teachings of the Catholic Church (particularly the teachings regarding salvation.) As planned, Roger approached the two of them about the four of us talking together. It was agreed that we would get together at church on the next Thursday evening.

Roger and I were again in much prayer for the coming meeting. We hoped that Jimmy's appearance on the previous Sunday was a sign that he had repented. We quickly found that he was very hard-hearted. Not too long after we began the meeting, Jimmy became loud and hostile. He made many accusations and sought to justify his wicked actions of the past week. In addition, he accused me of being a cult leader. He stomped out of the room, shouting like a child!

After only a few minutes he returned and threw some of the church's valued items to the floor in a heap. I went to him and said he needed to settle down. He drew back his fists and told me to get away or he would hit me. I said nothing. He was acting like a punk, and I would not, and did not, let a "punk" scare me away. He immediately began hitting and kicking me. I did not even raise a hand. He ran back a few feet, and I followed him. I received a few more kicks and punches before Roger intervened, and Jimmy ran from the church.

Roger and I talked with Janine for a while. Though she was frightened for her own safety, she decided that returning home would best defuse Jimmy. The next day my wife and I talked with Janine, and found she had decided to stay with her parents, for safety's sake.

I showed up Sunday with my black eye. Jimmy showed up, too. I told the congregation that the black eye came from a fall, so as not to embarrass the one who had acted so foolishly. It was with much interruption that the service finally began, and unfortunately the interruptions didn't end. Jimmy interrupted my preaching and, among other things, publicly accused me of being a hypocrite and a cult leader.

Things have been taken care of regarding Jimmy. We all hope and pray that he once again humbles himself before God's Word. Speaking of God's Word, I knew much trouble would come from speaking against the Catholic Church. However I never anticipated that it would come so soon, nor that it would bring such destruction. And I never thought that it would affect someone who I thought was standing upon the Scriptures. I can only wonder what trouble lies ahead. One thing I do know, whatever comes I must continue to proclaim and call upon Christ, "the great High Priest."

***( This story is printed as a warning to the comfortable Laodicean American church that there is a price to pay to preach the pure Gospel.)***

*in the same (June '95) issue came this article:*

## Dear Departed Brothers? Or Victims of Genocide?

The Roman church has been very humble lately. Just days ago, in Chicago's *Tribune*, there was a story of Catholic higher-ups admitting hundreds of years of guilt in regards to the Jews.

Well, now, no less than the Pope has issued a statement about the "sin" of a nearly 1000-year schism between the two branches of "Christianity".

"Orientele Lumen", the Pope's chosen term for this address and presumably for the *Orthodox church*, means "light of the east."

Oh, that's nice. The light of the west wants to combine its rays with the light of the east. To form, of course, a bright beam that will signal to the world the truth of the Gospel.

If you believe that, read more of the *Tribune*, or any paper carrying this statement, to find *the rest of the story*:

What threatens to be a third world war as it escalates daily, burgeoning as it did decades ago into World War II, is an OJ/Oklahoma -hidden news article about a Catholic-Orthodox conflict in the Balkans. The current phase has Catholic Croatia retaliating for Orthodox Serbian aggressions of two years ago, which were retaliations for Croatian atrocities in the Nazi era, which were... and so on, back through the Dark Ages.

The religious nature of this war is hidden to moderns, but was not hidden in the Hitler Years. Only a little bit of research uncovers a priest-run, Rome-blessed effort to annihilate the Orthodox presence in Croatia by any means necessary. Archbishop Stepinac was the spiritual, and later the actual, leader of this effort. He took over when Ante Pavelic, political boss, was forced to flee to various Catholic countries for sanction. Some of you remember those days. That was when the conscience of the world finally caught up with what was happening.

In our day, the world's conscience is being darkened daily by sweet words from the Vatican, speaking peace, peace. Come home, our dear orthodox brothers. But in Croatia, the song is more sinister. Die, you dogs. Croatia is Catholic. Period.

I know, that's "over there." Maybe. But people living in Malta, portions of Latin America, and elsewhere, still have a taste in their mouth of what Rome will do when she has the chance. We need to pray for those "over there." And, if I understand Scripture, it won't be long until the whole thing is "over here." The day of "evangelicals and Catholics together" is perhaps closer than we think.

***FROM NNI*** (from June '95 to NNI's shut-down in April of '96, we leaned exclusively on them for persecution stories. NNI was a professional news source for church news, especially news of persecution of the church. There are many culprits reported by NNI. The Roman Catholic church is reported as victim and persecutor in its various stories. I believe the day will come when Rome will be the sole perpetrator of all religious atrocities. At present she does not have the political clout. But she did. And she will.)

### *Mexico*

PROTESTANTS SEE TENSIONS EASING IN SOME AREAS OF CHIAPAS

**By Elisabeth F. Isais, NNI Correspondent**

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (NNI)--Despite continuing discrimination and violent attacks against evangelical Christians in several areas of Chiapas, the situation for many Protestants in the region has improved in recent weeks,

"Some 20 evangelical groups that returned to the Chamula area are being treated with tolerance."

Tensions between evangelicals and local tribal leaders have been high for decades in the embattled southern state of Chiapas. Nearly 600 Protestants were expelled from their lands as a result of the conflict, although many of those returned to their homes late last year.

In October, three Protestants in the Chamula community of Icalumtic were murdered in an assault by some 300 local tribal members.

However, on March 13, the State Committee for Evangelical Defense in Chiapas issued a statement of optimism, proclaiming that "hostilities and expulsions have ceased in the Chamula municipality."

Tovilla told NNI that spiritual renewal in that part of Chiapas has helped ease tensions. "People are being converted to Christ and requesting Bibles as never before," he said. "One of the worst attackers in the past, Manuel San Juan, became a believer in January in the Chamula suburb called Arbenza I, and he is now trying to convert the other chiefs."

In the town of Cuchulmuc, in the San Juan Chamula municipality, an interdenominational evangelical church building was dedicated in late December. Chamula political leaders had not previously permitted any churches other than the Catholic church in San Juan.

However, Protestants admitted that hostilities are continuing in other parts of Chiapas.

Presbyterian Salvador Heredia Gonzalez was shot three times on March 31 when a group of masked gunmen attacked his home in Paraje Pilalchen, shooting at windows and doors with high-powered weapons and setting fire to the

interior of the dwelling. Heredia was wounded as he went out to challenge the attackers.

The evangelical community has officially denounced the aggression at the Chiapas state court.

In the Zinacantan municipality, another violent incident occurred on March 29 when 30 families of the Independent Pentecostal Tzotzil Church dedicated their new church building in the town of Apaz. Protestants from nearby communities were invited to attend the ceremony. But when the out-of-town visitors attempted to return home after the ceremony, Chamula chiefs set up road blocks in three locations.

When the evangelicals left their vehicles to remove the rocks, they were attacked with gunfire. Four people were wounded, including an eight-year-old boy who was shot in the chest, according to Rev. Rafael Ruiz Jimenez.

And despite the recent improvements no one has yet been arrested for the October murders of three evangelicals who had returned to their lands.

Nonetheless, a pastor-lawyer told NNI he is optimistic about the future. "The new generation is our hope," he said.

Meanwhile, an official with the United Bible Societies (UBS) has asserted that the recent events in Chiapas must not be defined as a religious conflict. (*listen carefully to this! ST*) According to Dr. Robert Bascom, Translation Consultant with the Bible society in Mexico, the clash should be termed a "traditionalist versus innovators problem," not a Catholic-Protestant conflict. (*this man sounds deceived!ST*)

Bascom said that UBS is working with Roman Catholics on several translation projects in the area.

"Catholics are having the same problems as Protestants," he told NNI during a recent meeting of UBS officials in Quito, Ecuador. "If anybody tries to be different than the local traditionalist culture--**which is nominal Catholic involving syncretistic practices combining Catholicism and their own beliefs**--they are thrown out." (*emphasis, ST, and I remind readers that syncretism is the normal way Rome works in culture after culture!*)

Bascom agreed that spiritual renewal is the key to resolving the conflict. (*God says, "come out from among them and be separate". ST*) "By reading the Bible, they will discover some forgiveness, some tolerance, and some ability to work together," he said. (*Discovering works of righteousness by reading a book, even God's Book, will change no one. These people do not need "re-formation," or "re-newal." They need re-pentance, re-birth, and re-moval from the Roman system!*)

*With additional reporting by Kenneth D. MacHarg in Quito, Ecuador, and comments in italics from Scarlet Threads*

## Argentina

### CHURCH CONSIDERS RESPONSE AS NEW 'DIRTY WAR' DETAILS EMERGE

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--As Argentina's Roman Catholic Church contemplates its response to accusations of church complicity during the so-called "dirty war" crackdown in the late 70s, the military official who made the first public allegations has released new information about church leaders' roles.

Argentine Navy Captain Adolfo Scilingo said the church issued pardons for those participating in the dirty war. In March, Scilingo broke decades of silence to charge in public hearings that the military had thrown dissidents alive from airplanes during a time of leftist unrest in Argentina.

Scilingo said he would "never forget" the first two such flights in which he participated. On the first flight, he said, there were two well-dressed young men who were dropped from the plane alive, and on the second flight, "an older woman, around 65, and a young boy" were pushed off the plane.

"I went to see a priest who was a chaplain at the military school. He consoled me with the famous biblical passage of the separation of the wheat and the tares. He pardoned me," Scilingo told the newspaper.

"For this reason, I struggle with the church continually," the former officer added "I killed thirty people, and if I miss Mass or am not able to take communion, I am afraid."

Meanwhile, church officials have again promised to investigate the accusations and admit any culpability in the events. The church will develop, "with time and serenity, an examination of its conscience and will publicize its most grave sins," Argentina's bishop announced (*they'll need plenty of time and serenity to find a way to explain it! ST*)

Pope John Paul II has urged Argentina's Roman Catholic leaders to ask forgiveness for the church's role. Monsignor Gerardo Sueldo said the Argentine bishops were considering the request.

Some bishops have already been speaking out individually. Monsignor Miguel Hesayne has asked the Roman Catholic Church to suspend any priest found guilty of collaborating with the military in the dirty war abuses.

"If any clergyman, priest, deacon or bishop collaborated with the military regime's torture, repression or kidnapping, there is a very serious canonical punishment: they should be suspended from the ministry, if it is proved," asserted Hesayne (*if you or I collaborated to kill or torture, we'd lose a lot more than our job!ST*)

"It worries me, and it has always worried me, that some men of the church did not have a very clear idea that torture is never humane nor Christian," said Hesayne. (*where's he been? Rome has been torturing since she inherited the methods from the Caesars!ST*)

Meanwhile, five senior Argentine bishops have issued a public statement of remorse for their actions during the

dirty war era. "We will surely carry on our consciences for the rest of our lives our repentance for not having done much more to prevent young people who belonged to our church from choosing guerrilla violence and to prevent the repressors from committing such aberrations against human rights," the bishops asserted.

Argentine Cardinal Pio Laghi has also issued a statement explaining his actions. "I did all that was possible to save human life," he said. "It was not possible to do the impossible."

The cardinal has been criticized for associating with high-ranking military leaders. "The problem is that the military acted in darkness. I promised to help all who came to my office, but I had to confront impossible obstacles of silence, pride, cynicism and threats."

One of Argentina's most active human rights groups has called for a swift response from Catholic leaders.

"The guilty priests should not be able to lift the Eucharist with hands covered with blood," the group asserted in a statement sent to the Catholic hierarchy. Human rights groups say that at the height of the dirty war against leftist guerrillas, some 4,000 people were killed, and another 10,000 disappeared. (*how many of these stories are still untold?ST*)

## ***Bolivia***

### **CHURCH LEADERS CONFRONT GOVERNMENT OVER STATE OF SIEGE**

By Dave Miller, NNI COCHABAMBA, Bolivia (NNI)--A state of siege imposed by President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada has drawn vigorous responses from leaders of Bolivia's Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, with ***Catholics alleging human rights violations and Protestants calling for renewed prayer efforts*** on behalf of the nation. (*note the difference of approach!ST*)

Sanchez de Lozada decreed the 90-day emergency measure on April 19 due to mounting tensions between his government and the Bolivian Laborers Central, the country's chief labor union. During the preceding weeks, striking teachers and farmers, unhappy with recent policy decisions such as the Education Reform Act had conducted hunger strikes, blocked roads and organized mass demonstrations in protest.

The 90-day state of siege suspended constitutional rights including the freedom of assembly. Upon enacting the measure, officials arrested more than 400 labor activists and journalists and interned them in remote prison camps.

Monsignor Edmundo Abastoflor pointedly criticized the government crackdown. Referring to Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical "The Gospel of Life," Abastoflor called upon civic leaders to respect their fellow citizens' human rights in accordance with principles outlined in the papal letter.

"Services of the church were used to a certain point and then they dismissed her like a faithless handmaiden."

Leaders of Bolivia's Protestant Christian community responded to the state of siege by organizing a National Day of Fasting and Prayer, to which they invited Sanchez de Lozada and his vice-president, Victor Hugo Cardenas. Though both men declined the invitation due to "overloaded schedules," they expressed gratitude for the gesture.

"The President of the Republic appreciates your noble convictions and values your prayers a great deal. We believe that God is not removed from the problems of man. Putting that into practice means that all of us, governors and governed alike, should come together to present ourselves before God."

*With reporting by Djanira Blanco*

## ***Mexico***

### **NEW PROTESTANT CONVERTS PRESSURED IN CENTRAL MEXICO**

By Elisabeth Isais, NNI Correspondent

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (NNI)--Local political leaders in central Mexico used threats, imprisonment and forced labor in late May to pressure new evangelical converts to recant their faith, according to Mexican Protestant leaders.

According to Ladislao Hernandez, pastor of the Evangelical Free Church in the town of Aguatitla in Hidalgo state, the harassment was aimed at several families in the nearby town of Pueblo who converted to Protestantism in early May.

Hernandez told NNI that two recent converts, Fortino Genares and Caldino Romero, were jailed overnight on May 28 and denied food and water throughout their detention. Enrique Hernandez, a local resident who tried to defend the two men, was detained with them. A fourth man, Victorino Hernandez, was tied to a tree all night for also trying to defend the Protestants, the pastor said.

On May 29, the Protestants were ordered to begin four days of forced labor without pay, hauling rock and breaking it up for 12 hours a day under the strict supervision of local authorities. The men were then ordered to sign a statement asserting that they would not worship with evangelicals.

Hernandez told NNI that local political leaders held a town assembly on May 28 and announced that the "new" religion of Protestantism was false and should be eradicated from Pueblo. (*3 guesses as to what the "old" religion is. ST*)

Local townspeople then threatened to burn down the homes of evangelicals and chase them out of town. (*But haven't they read "Evangelicals and Catholics Together? Rome loves Protestants now!"*)

Officials of the national Evangelical Free denomination have expressed concern about the situation. According to

denomination President Gamaliel Novelo in Mexico City, there are seven Evangelical Free Churches and 40 "preaching points" in central Mexico. Visiting Evangelical Free preachers evangelized the Pueblo families in early May.

## ***Ecuador***

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGION LAW STILL DELAYED**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI Correspondent

QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--Under a controversial law passed late last year, mandatory religion classes were to begin last month in all of Ecuador's primary and secondary schools. However, the lack of sufficient financial resources and ongoing fall-out from Ecuador's brief border war with Peru have indefinitely delayed implementation of the law.

Still, Ecuador's Roman Catholic Church, the motivating force behind the legislation, is moving forward with plans to begin the religion classes as soon as possible.

Monsignor Antonio Arregui, secretary general of the Ecuador Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic), acknowledged that religion classes should have begun last month with the opening of the new school year in the coastal region of the country.

Arregui said that several factors have delayed implementation of the law, including the government's preoccupation with the January and February war, the failure of Ecuador's Congress to provide a budget for the classes, the absence of implementing regulations from the Ministry of Education and no official plan for training religion teachers. *(Why not just the fact that they didn't want to do it!?)ST*

Despite the government's inattention, however, the priest asserted that the Catholic church is moving forward with a plan to develop its own curriculum and training program. During an assembly in May, the country's bishops reviewed possible curriculum and textbooks for the classes.

Church leaders have been training their own teachers who will offer religion classes in both church-related and public schools, Arregui said, noting that the church has already trained 540 teachers along the coast.

In addition, the priest said the church will begin with pilot programs in some schools, eventually expanding the plan to all schools as required by the law. He said the church is trying to obtain foreign financial help for the training.

In spite of the delay in implementation, the religious education law has continued to generate opposition from Protestant denominations, *(bravo!ST)* teacher's unions and other civil groups. Even though a state of emergency continues in Ecuador, strikes and demonstrations have resumed in opposition to the measure.

The law mandates that the government finance the religion classes in both public and private schools. Early criticism by government and Protestant officials questioned whether the government had sufficient reserves to pay for the new classes.

That concern has now escalated. Facing up to a \$350 million bill for the recent conflict with its southern neighbor, the government has increased electrical, water and telephone rates, placed a two percent "war tax" on all vehicles and demanded a one-time tax equal to two days' salary in order to meet deep budget shortfalls.

Ecuador Minister of Education Fausto Segovia admitted he is concerned that Congress has not allocated money for the religion program in the upcoming school year, adding that he doubts there will be any budget to implement the law until the 1996 school year.

"There are more than 20,000 schools in the country," he said. "We don't know yet what system of classes or budget we will have."

The minister is consulting with other countries which have similar religion laws as he develops regulations for Ecuador. However, he expressed concern that attention on the controversy

over the new law will deflect work from the larger issue of general curriculum reform, which is already underway.

*(Should Rome gain the ascendancy in America, look for similar measures to surface. Even now, she joins forces for those fighting for "prayer in school," which will open the door, not to the salvation of young people, which can always be accomplished by truly praying youth, but to a host of religious demons that will be invoked by Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and of course the ones who want them all together, Romanists. Can you imagine, in the name of fairness, a "hail Mary" coming over the public address system of your child's public school? I think the home school/Christian school movement would have a strong growth surge! ST)*

## ***Nepal***

### **ELEVEN DETAINED CHRISTIANS STILL AWAITING TRIAL**

By Andrew Wark, NNI Correspondent

HONG KONG (NNI)--Eleven evangelical Christians arrested in eastern Nepal in September 1994 for reportedly proselytizing Hindus remain in detention and are still awaiting trial, according to church sources in Kathmandu.

The detained Christians, 10 ethnic Nepali refugees from Bhutan and one Nepali national, were arrested in the remote village of Jhapa in eastern Nepal's Ilam district. Authorities claimed they took action after receiving complaints from local Hindus about their evangelistic activities.

However, church sources have alleged that the actual reason for the arrests was because their church was located too close to a Hindu temple.

In Nepal, a person can be held in prison for up to a year before being brought to trial. A 1992 law grants Nepalis the freedom to change their religion, but evangelism is still technically illegal, with a maximum three-year prison sentence for those convicted of attempted proselytism.

*(As you pause to pray for these dear saints, consider: Is this the same religion currently dialoguing with the Roman system in hopes of a united presence of religion in the world? Does the "evangelicals and Catholics together" tribe realize the significance of unity with Rome, in the light of persecution by Roman allies? "Hindus and Catholics together" is on the agenda, too!ST)*

## **China**

### **RAIDS ON HOUSE CHURCHES RISING IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN CHINA**

By Andrew Wark, NNI Correspondent

HONG KONG (NNI)--Tensions between security officials and unregistered house church Christians in central and eastern China have escalated in recent weeks, with authorities in several provinces conducting mass arrests of church members for "illegal religious activities."

According to Hong Kong church sources, Public Security Bureau officials in Yingshang County, Anhui Province, conducted a series of raids on Protestant house churches throughout the county in mid-June, arresting up to 300 Christians for meeting illegally.

The officials were reported to have used electric batons during the raids, injuring a number of those taken into custody.

Sources told NNI the majority of church members arrested during the raids have since been released--after paying fines ranging between 800 and 1,000 renminbi (\$96-\$120).

*(In most parts of the world, Rome works together with the government and thus avoids such problems. Church and state is her goal, with ultimate triumph of the church. )*

## **Muslim World**

### **POPE CALLS FOR END TO MUSLIM PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS**

By Elisabeth Farrell, NNI Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNI)--Religious rights groups are praising Pope John Paul II for his recent and forthright call on Muslim nations to extend full freedom of worship to Christians.

The Pope made his remarks on June 21, the day that Europe's largest Islamic mosque was dedicated in Rome, just a few miles northeast of Vatican City, seat of the Roman Catholic Church.

"It is significant that in Rome, the center of Christianity and the see of St. Peter's successor, Muslims should have their own place of worship with full respect for their freedom of conscience," the Pope said. *(significant indeed, since Rome has stood for religious persecution for centuries! Only in our modern time has a call for "unity" been used in place of the sword ST)*

"On a significant occasion like this, it is unfortunately necessary to point out that in some Islamic countries,*(not to mention some Roman Catholic countries ST)* similar signs of the recognition of religious freedom are lacking," Pope John Paul II continued. "And yet the world, on the threshold of the third millennium, is waiting for these signs."

... the Pope called the opening of the mosque "an eloquent sign of the religious freedom recognized here for every believer."*(oh, please..ST.)*

"Religious freedom has now become part of many international documents and is one of the pillars of contemporary society," asserted the pontiff. "While I am pleased that Muslims can gather in prayer in the new Roman mosque, I earnestly hope that the right of Christians and of all believers freely to express their own faith will be recognized in every corner of the earth."*(EVERY corner, indeed!ST)*

Human rights advocates were pleased by the comments. "We applaud what's been said," noted James P. Dretke, acting executive director of the Zwemer Institute for Muslim Studies in Pasadena, California. "The Vatican has a lot of leverage. When [they] speak out, the Muslim community sometimes has ears that can hear."

*(The obvious question is , will the bishops of Latin America, and other Catholic-dominated areas, have "ears that can hear" and stop the persecution of believers in Romanist countries? ST)*

## **Bolivia**

### **RURAL LEADERS THREATEN PROTESTANTS FOR WITHDRAWING FROM FESTIVALS**

Djanira Blanco, Special to NNI

LA PAZ, Bolivia (NNI)--Representatives of the Assemblies of God denomination in Bolivia have filed formal complaints with the government charging that Protestant Christians in the rural province of Loayza are facing pressure from local authorities to participate in traditional festivals which mix pagan and Catholic rites.

Evangelicals in an area 10 hours travel from La Paz have endured vandalism and physical abuse for refusing to take part in ceremonies known as prestes and challas, according to Teofilo Tambo Salgado, an Assemblies of God elder.

Observed in veneration of the Andean goddess Pachamama, the Christopagan rites are notorious for bouts of communal drunkenness.

Village leaders threatened to expel the evangelicals from their farms and confiscate their livestock in retaliation for their

refusal to join in the festivities.

Protestants also complained that local schools discriminate against them, requiring parents to produce Roman Catholic baptismal certificates and marriage licenses in order to register their children for classes.

Dr. Carlos Encinas, legal consultant for the Assemblies of God, joined in filing a brief with the Loja Provincial Sub-prefecture denouncing the threats as a violation of the evangelicals' constitutional rights of freedom of conscience and worship. "Should abuses continue in these communities, leaders of the [Assemblies of God] church and I will appear in the provincial capital of Loja to initiate a constitutional appeal for the transgression of religious liberty," Encinas told NNI.

Encinas also said he had sent a letter to Under-Secretary of Worship Martha Urioste, chief governmental authority on matters of religion, informing her of the abuses and asking for her immediate intervention.

Eusebio Mamani, an Assemblies pastor from the Manco Kapac canton, told Encinas of similar abuses occurring there. In that case, Mamani said, local priests had threatened evangelicals for their refusal to participate in Catholic festivals.

*With additional reporting by David Miller.*

## ***Latin America***

### PROTESTANTS REACT CAUTIOUSLY TO CATHOLIC CALLS FOR UNITY

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI Correspondent

QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--While Protestant leaders in Latin America are praising recent Catholic calls for Christian unity, many are also expressing skepticism about whether the calls will result in less religious discrimination in this predominantly Roman Catholic region.

In the wake of Pope John Paul II's new encyclical "Ut Unum Sint--That They May Be One," Catholic leaders around the world have been joining the Pontiff's call for Christian ecumenism and unity. Among the calls have been statements issued by church leaders in Latin America--a region not known for Catholic-Protestant ties.

One of the most forthright statements came from Archbishop Oscar Rodriguez, newly-elected president of the Roman Catholic Latin American Episcopal Conference, who urged "a largeness of heart to open our arms to our brothers in the evangelical churches in healthy ecumenism."

At a Mass in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, attended by some 25,000 Catholics, Rodriguez encouraged wider ecumenical contacts. "It is Christ only that we serve," he said. "As the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II said, in the third millennium of the church, we must be united, not separated."

But Protestants in the region are responding with mixed reactions. Many Protestants have long complained about religious discrimination in the predominantly Catholic continent.

"It is necessary to see Latin America as a plural religious society," prominent Argentine Methodist theologian Jose Miguez-Bonino told a group of students and theological leaders. "This is the hour to pass from religious tolerance and freedom of worship to a practice of religious equality among all religious expressions on the continent."

The Methodist theologian said one key sign of wider ecumenism would be for Catholic leaders to cease talking in absolute religious terms which reflect only one religious experience--that of the Roman Catholic Church. "When you presume the existence of only

one religious body among the Latin American people, you give rise to privileges which limit, and in many cases exclude, the activities of the other religious groups," he said.

Miguez-Bonino argued that religious cooperation should begin without losing the unique views which Protestants bring. He called

on Latin American societies, and the Roman Catholic church in particular, to recognize the validity of Protestant viewpoints.

Many Protestants said they want to see concrete actions that will lead to unity. "The call from these church leaders is real, but I don't see any implementation," said Rev. Lenin De Janon, pastor of a large evangelical church, in Quito, Ecuador.

"To say something with words is very easy," De Janon added, "but to put them into action takes a lot of work."

Some Protestants see Roman Catholic calls to ecumenism as a ploy to control the Protestant church in Latin America, De Janon told NNI. (He said) that Protestants may be forced to enter into ecumenical relationships only on Catholic terms.

"Catholics will never give up the spiritual leadership of the Pope," De Janon said, a position which he asserted is unacceptable to Protestants.

The pastor said he has no problem working ecumenically with Roman Catholics on social concerns but in what he termed "spiritual areas," he said that Protestants cannot cooperate because to do so would compromise their beliefs.

## ***Bolivia***

## NAVY CAPTAIN PUT UNDER HOUSE ARREST AFTER RELIGIOUS BROADCAST

By Djanira Blanco, Special to NNI

LA PAZ, Bolivia (NNI)--Bolivian Commander of the Navy Remberto Barrios ordered a Protestant Christian captain placed under house arrest following the broadcast of his religious testimony on a local television station.

Adalid Ramirez, captain of a Bolivia navy vessel and an active member of the Assemblies of God, received the order confining him to his home for 15 days after he declared himself a member of the Association of Christian Police and Military Officers. His statement was aired by Channel 27, an evangelical television station in La Paz.

"The order for my arrest that I received from Commander of the Navy Admiral Barrios makes reference to the statements I made on Channel 27," Ramirez told NNI.

"The only thing I did was to grant an interview in which I shared information about the activities of the Association of Christian Police and Military Officers," he added.

The admiral's July 18 order called for Ramirez's arrest because his remarks violated Article 120 of the Fundamental Law of the Naval Forces of Bolivia which states: "That officer will be punished who is found speaking against the armed forces of the nation or who is lacking in ethics or discipline."

"This severe attitude has surprised us all," said one association member. "Several [evangelical Protestant] Christian officers have publicly declared their faith in times past and never suffered this type of punishment."

(AG pastor and attorney Carlos) Encinas said the incident typifies the situation facing evangelical Protestants in Bolivia. "What happens is that they consider us [evangelical] Christians fifth class citizens," he said. "And how are they not to consider us as such, if we are incapable of asserting our constitutional rights of freedom of worship and conscience?"

Ramirez completed his house arrest term on August 1. "The arrest order was evidently emitted under pressure from the Roman Catholic Church," he told NNI. "The [Roman Catholic military] chaplains enjoy prestige and privilege."

*With additional reporting by David Miller.*

## *Costa Rica*

### RIGHTS GROUP FILES COMPLAINT TO U.N. FOR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI Correspondent

QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--A Costa Rican human rights group has filed a complaint with the United Nations alleging that religious minorities are facing serious discrimination in the officially-Catholic Central American country.

"Religious discrimination exists in Costa Rica and as a consequence violates the human rights of many of its citizens," stated the complaint filed by the Costa Rican Commission on Human Rights.

The Commission alleged the discrimination originates with the Costa Rican Constitution, which establishes "the Catholic religion, Apostolic and Roman" as the state religion and requires the government to contribute financially toward it.

The group charged that by favoring Catholicism, Costa Rica is violating other constitutional guarantees of religious expression.

The situation in Costa Rica was first brought to the attention of the United Nations in 1990, Protestant leaders in Costa Rica have long argued that their churches have to confront multiple obstacles to overcome the privileges enjoyed by the Roman Catholic Church.

## *Former Yugoslavia*

### RELIGIOUS MINORITIES 'VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED' IN BANJA LUKA

By Jonathan Luxmoore, Special to NNI  
WARSAW, Poland (NNI)--Almost 95 percent of Roman Catholics from the Serb-held Bosnian city of Banja Luka have been forced to flee, according to local church sources. However, further expulsions have now been temporarily halted in expectation of an offensive against the region by combined Croatian and Bosnian forces.

Speaking in Germany, Banja Luka's Roman Catholic Curia Vicar, Father Miljenko Anicic, said his bishop, Franjo Komarica, had remained under house arrest for several months in Banja Luka and had pledged to leave "only if removed by force or at the recommendation of church authorities." He added that all but 5,000 of the estimated 80,000 Roman Catholics living in Banja Luka before the mid-1992 start of the Bosnian war had now left under local Bosnian Serb pressure. The only Catholics left in the region are mostly elderly and infirm citizens who had been unable to move, he said.

In an August 14 letter to Cardinal Franjo Kuharic of Zagreb, head of Croatia's Roman Catholic Church, Komarica stated that he believed Banja Luka was now witnessing the "final violent conclusion" of a three-year Serb campaign to rid the city of its Croat and Muslim population. He added that officials from the Serb-run council had given his own family one hour to leave their homes and had held a knife to the throat of his elderly mother during a new mid-August wave of "ethnic cleansing."

Croatia's Catholic Information Agency reported that up to 5,000 Roman Catholics from the neighboring town of Bukovica were locked in a Banja Luka sports stadium in August and ordered to pay a fine before finally being allowed to

leave the city. A Catholic church was blown up at Slanski Most in late August, bringing to 43 the number destroyed in the Banja Luka diocese. Only three Roman Catholic churches were reported still functioning by the start of September, while Bishop Komarica's residence and cathedral were badly damaged by several previous bomb attacks.

Pope John Paul II said September 13 that he planned a special meeting with Bishop Komarica and other Roman Catholic leaders from former Yugoslav republics in October. He added that Catholic leaders would be ready to play an "active role" in current U.S.-led peace efforts.

*(let us indeed weep and pray for these tragic souls, but let us keep a sense of history: Roman Catholics did the same things and worse to Serbs during WWII. The Holy War continues. No Pope was crying out for "peace" when Catholics slaughtered their enemies. ST)*

## *Bol i vi a*

### PROVINCIAL OFFICIAL UPHOLDS LOCAL FREEDOM OF WORSHIP

By Djanira Blanco, Special to NNI

LA PAZ, Bolivia (NNI)--An official in the rural Bolivian province of Loayza has ordered local indigenous leaders to stop pressuring Protestant Christians to participate in traditional religious festivals and to respect the evangelicals' freedom of worship. Justiniano Diaz, Sub-Prefect of Loayza--a rural province some 10 hours travel from Bolivia's capital city of La Paz--issued his ruling in response to complaints from local Protestants.

According to Teofilo Tambo Salgado, area representative of the Assemblies of God, members of his church in Loayza had complained after local officials demanded that they take part in ceremonies known as *prestes*, which are marked by drunkenness, dancing and Christopagan rites. Protestants also complained that local educators forced them to present Roman Catholic baptismal certificates in order to enroll their children in public school.

La Paz attorney Carlos Encinas, who serves as legal consultant to the Assemblies of God, told NNI that he had received a copy of a legal brief in which Diaz directed officials of six Aymara-speaking villages, Malla, Aroma, Murmuntani, Challoma, Cotana and Villa Huancane, to cease discriminatory actions against evangelical Christians. "By disposition of the Sub-Prefecture, you are hereby notified that you must abstain from obligating fellow citizens who belong to the Assemblies of God Church to observe the *preste*," Diaz wrote in the memorandum.

Diaz reminded community leaders that the Bolivian Constitution guarantees freedom of worship and instructed them to guarantee its free exercise. "This is a development of great interest," Encinas said. "We hope that every civil authority in the country will enforce respect for our laws." Assemblies of God leaders had also brought the Loayza problem to the attention of Undersecretary of Worship Martha Irioste at the Ministry of Foreign Relations. Irioste is the Bolivian official with highest authority in matters of religion.

"This is one of the few times in which brothers in isolated areas facing pressure for their religious beliefs have received support from civil authorities to make sure the law is respected," Encinas said.

*With additional reporting by David Miller.*

## *Indonesia/East Timor*

### MUSLIM OFFICIAL'S ALLEGED SLUR OF CATHOLICISM SPARKS RIOTS By Andrew Wark, NNI Correspondent

HONG KONG (NNI)--Religiously-inspired riots have again rocked the Indonesian territory of East Timor, with hundreds of Roman Catholic protesters taking to the streets and attacking Islamic study centers and businesses after a Muslim prison guard's alleged slur of Catholicism.

According to Catholic sources in Jakarta, four Catholic religious educators were conducting a catechism class for inmates in East Timor's Maliana Prison on September 4 when the Muslim guard began making derogatory comments about the Virgin Mary and claiming that Catholicism was a "nonsense religion." The enraged inmates immediately chased the official, who only narrowly escaped being caught and beaten by the group.

Later that day, as news of the incident began circulating, a group of young Catholic men surrounded the prison guard's home and set fire to it. Catholic prisoners in Maliana Prison also composed a letter to East Timor Governor Jose Apilio Soares protesting the prison official's comments. Sources said anti-Muslim riots began to erupt in many parts of the provincial capital, Dili, as the letter was distributed more widely.

The majority of East Timor's 750,000 people profess to be Roman Catholics. Predominantly-Muslim Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony in 1975 and annexed it in 1976. Since that time, there have been a series of bloody confrontations between the Indonesian military and East Timorese protesters.

Sources told NNI that during the recent week-long riots, many markets, shops, cars and Islamic study centers were destroyed by protesters. Police arrested at least 75 people during the rioting. There are also reports that four people were killed during the protests, although government officials have denied that anyone died.

The leader of East Timor's Catholic community, Bishop Carlos F.X. Belo, appealed to the protesters for calm, issuing a statement asserting that "violence is against Christianity."

*(Is it only the clergy who understand this principle? Are any of these proceedings even remotely related to Jesus of Nazareth? ST)*

In a separate incident, a group of Roman Catholics in the East Timorese town of Uatolori responded angrily to the September 6 marriage of a local Catholic man to a Protestant woman, setting fire to the Protestant church where the marriage occurred. Although there have been no reports of injuries or arrests, the church is said to have been destroyed during the incident.

## ***September 22, 1995*** (NNI special report, severely edited to feature R C interests)

### EDUCATION INCREASINGLY A BATTLEGROUND OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

By Paul Marshall

The deterioration of American views of religious freedom not only produces judicial nonsense, but it also moves the U.S. from an international example to an international laughing stock on this issue.

In Canada, things are scarcely better. The government of the Province of Newfoundland is pushing for a constitutional change to destroy the province's long standing denominational school system, even though the preservation of that system was one of the conditions that Newfoundland put on its agreement to become a part of Canada in 1949. In Ontario, the government will not fund Jewish and Protestant schools, even though it funds Catholic schools. In Alberta, the government's new Charter School program forbids participating schools to be affiliated with any "religious faith."

Education has also become a key religious freedom battleground in Latin America. The 1994 Bolivian Education Reform Law made Catholic instruction compulsory in public schools. Costa Rica rejected United Nations criticism of its ban on non-Catholic religion teachers in its schools. Ecuador's proposal to require government financed religious education in all schools was supported by the Catholic church but opposed by almost all other religious groups.

Education is the focus of religious difference, since it shapes the next generation, something that historically has been the responsibility of religious bodies. It is when modern states try to usurp rather than support this function that conflict has arisen. Religious freedom is not some pocket of freedom tucked away in a corner of human life. It is a question of the degree to which people are free and able to live out their deepest commitments in every dimension of their lives, and it requires protection in every area of society. Consequently, religious freedom must not be confined to ecclesiastical or personal matters. It is a matter of the freedom to live one's life according to one's deepest beliefs.

*Paul Marshall is professor of political theory at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada and the academic advisor to the World Evangelical Fellowship's Commission on Religious Freedom.*

## ***Mexico***

### PROTESTANTS CONTINUE TO FACE HARASSMENT IN SEVERAL AREAS

By Elisabeth Isais, NNI Correspondent

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (NNI)--Protestants in various parts of Mexico continue to face religious discrimination and harassment at the hands of local community leaders, according to evangelical officials.

Five Mexican families who recently became Protestant Christians in the state of Oaxaca have been shut out of their homes and told to leave Monte Verde, according to Enoc Hernandez, an evangelical leader in the nearby town of Nochixtlan. Hernandez reported that the families, who are the first Protestants in Monte Verde, were meeting in a house on August 20 when local authorities raided the meeting, arrested the five men and took them to the Monte Verde jail. Five hours after the arrests, state police arrived to take the men to the state capital for trial. However, according to Hernandez, when the officers discovered the only charges against the five were religious, they freed the Protestants.

Since the release, however, neighbors and local community leaders have cut off electricity and water to the evangelicals' homes and prevented them from using the local flour mill and pasture land for their animals. Hernandez said local political leader Francisco Cruz Miguel is attempting to expel the evangelicals from their property.

Similar situations have occurred in many areas of Mexico, where families who become Protestants refuse to drink and buy locally-made hard liquor (poch), which is sold at a high profit, or to participate in local religious festivals, which are often a mix of Catholicism and pagan rites.

In the southern state of Chiapas, evangelical tribal leader Domingo Lopez Rangel recently reported that more than 35,000 Tzeltal and Tzotzil Indians have been expelled from the Los Altos area of his state over the past 20 years "for having abandoned the Catholic faith and professed the evangelical religion." Lopez said the expelled Protestants have been forced to leave behind more than 247,000 acres (some 400 square miles) of farm land.

Presbyterian lawyer Abdias Tovilla Jaime told NNI that political unrest continues to dominate Chiapas, while government officials still show little determination to seek solutions. Identified assassins of three evangelicals killed one year ago remain at large, he said.

On July 9, two more Protestants, Salvador Hernandez Jimenez and Juan Gomez Ruiz, were expelled from their homes in the San Juan Chamula area. Both were seriously injured in the incident.

In 1983, residents attacked a small provisional chapel, tearing down walls and beating a group of Protestant believers worshipping there. Last year, 50 opponents arrived with clubs to interrupt construction on the new church.

However, according to Enriquez, when they saw some 350 people working on the church, they put down their clubs.

## ***Mexico***

### PROTESTANT PASTOR, ASSISTANT MURDERED IN CHIAPAS

By Elisabeth Isais, NNI Correspondent

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (NNI)--A Protestant pastor and his assistant were murdered on October 5 in Mexico's troubled southernmost state of Chiapas.

According to church officials, Pastor Aurelio Gomez Ramos of the Interdenominational Christian Church of Ejidal Sinai in the Chiapas municipality of Huitiupan was shot to death during an attack by five masked assailants.

Pastoral assistant Gustavo Hernandez Perez was also killed during the attack, and a 14-year-old boy, Virgilio Hernandez Perez, was shot in the arm, according to Interdenominational Christian Church Pastor Antonio Dominguez of Tuxtla Gutierrez in Chiapas.

Further details about the attack were unavailable at press time. However, church sources said eyewitnesses were able to identify three of the five masked assailants to local authorities.

Rev. David Martinez Hernandez, president of the Chiapas Presbytery of the Interdenominational Christian Church, told reporters from La Prensa newspaper on October 9 that local Catholics had threatened to kill the evangelicals because of their refusal to join the Zapatista Liberation Army.

One year ago, three Protestants from the Chamula community of Icalumtic were assaulted and murdered in ongoing Chiapas strife between local tribal leaders and evangelicals. Miguel Mendez Santiz, his wife, Veronica Diaz Jimenez, and Miguel Lopez Perez, were killed during a September 29, 1994 attack on their homes.

Some 600 Protestant Christians have been violently evicted from their homes in recent years by tribal leaders who claim the Protestants disrupt the cultural traditions and act independently of the tribal leadership. The three murdered Protestants were part of a group of evicted evangelicals who returned to their homes in August 1994 despite the fact that state and federal authorities refused to guarantee their safety in view of ongoing threats against the group.

According to San Cristobal attorney Abdias Tovilla Jaime, Mexican authorities have still not taken action against the perpetrators of the 1994 attack--even though suspects have been identified by witnesses.

## ***EUROPE/CIS***

### REPORT DOCUMENTS ONGOING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY VIOLATIONS

By Jonathan Luxmoore, Special to NNI

WARSAW, Poland (NNI)--Significant religious liberty violations continue to occur in several European and ex-Soviet states, according to a new report presented to delegates gathered in Warsaw for a biannual meeting of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The report, prepared by the Vienna-based International Helsinki Federation, particularly singled out Bulgaria and Greece, where non-Orthodox religious minorities report ongoing discrimination and harassment. *[The Orthodox Church is Rome's twin sister, with whom she is negotiating now for unification- ST]* The Federation is an independent non-governmental organization that monitors human rights implementation in European nations.

According to the Federation report, "grave violations" of religious freedom "increased significantly" in Bulgaria following ratification of amendments to the February 1994 Law for Persons and the Family.

The Federation noted that the law allowed "non-profit juridical entities engaged in religious or related activities" to apply for government registration, but failed to define "religious activities" or offer implementation or appeal procedures.

Although 78 groups have applied for registration, only 24 have so far been accepted, the report asserted. Those refused registration by Bulgarian officials including Protestant, Muslim and Orthodox communities, have been given no explanation.

"The procedure violates the Bulgarian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion," the report stated.

"Moreover, the law violates the constitutionally established division of powers, in that the commission, appointed by the government, repeals decisions by established courts," the Federation continued. "Decisions are given without procedural guarantees on the basis of unknown criteria."

In addition, the Federation reported that local Bulgarian authorities had used "administrative measures" to curb non-Orthodox activities, including fines, the banning of meetings and work dismissals. Violent attacks against religious minorities had encountered a slow police response, while the Bulgarian media had waged a "highly emotional campaign" against "non-Orthodox sects," using unsubstantiated allegations, the survey stated.

The Federation, which has monitoring committees in 29 countries, compiled its report for the Biannual OSCE Implementation of the Human Dimension meeting held in Warsaw. The OSCE was established in 1994 out of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose guiding document was the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

The meeting, which concluded on October 19, reviewed implementation of the Final Act's famous "Basket Three" commitments including "freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief."

Also highlighted in the report was Greece, where according to the Helsinki Federation, all religious communities outside the majority Greek Orthodox Church face "discrimination in various forms," especially Catholics, Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Many non-Orthodox Greeks have been prosecuted and convicted of proselytism, despite the fact that this practice has been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights," the report stated.

The report noted that Greeks are required to list their religion on identity cards, adding that non-Orthodox citizens are denied jobs in education, law enforcement and the army. Opening churches requires consent from both the state and Orthodox churches, and police often fail to react to attacks on those belonging to non-Orthodox faiths, the survey reported. Greece is also the only European Union member-state not to recognize the right to conscientious objection, the report noted.

In its report, the Helsinki Federation also listed religious rights violations in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Armenia. The report stressed that failure to name other countries did not imply that violations are not occurring elsewhere as well.

In an interview with NNI, Vatican chief OSCE delegate Monsignor Alain Lebeauin endorsed the Federation's criticisms of Greece, adding that the rights of Christian minorities were also under severe pressure in neighboring Turkey. *[no mention made here of Vatican-sponsored persecutions! ST]*

The priest said current cases demonstrate that religious rights are "not only an issue for ex-communist countries" where religions were previously restricted, but also are generating concern elsewhere in Europe.

Lebeauin added that European governments should explore "deeper problems" facing religious communities, in order to "harmonize" their practices and ensure religious freedom is "integrated into the system of state sovereignty."

The priest told NNI: "Although many European countries are saying everything is now perfect, some have faced problems in improving their legislation and are also having to cope with legal conflicts and in inter-church relations."

Lebeauin said better provisions were needed to ensure minority faith rights in countries such as Russia, where current laws appear to favor older religions against new ones. He added that while the Roman Catholic Church had been able "to reflect at length on human rights" at its 1962-5 Second Vatican Council, Orthodox churches needed to ponder "what it means to be a church member." *[It refelected thus: We better cool our persecution where we can't get away with it any more, but continue it where we can...all things to all men.ST]* During the Warsaw meetings, religious issues were addressed by representatives of the official OSCE delegations from Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Hungary and Belarus. In a speech during the meeting, American delegate Jerry Powers expressed the United States' concern that all OSCE member-nations uphold the right to religious liberty *[good luck...ST]*

## **Nicaragua**

### **MEDIA CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED FOR PROTESTANT TV CHANNEL**

By Joan Wilson Carter, Special to NNI

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (NNI)--Human rights advocates in Nicaragua have launched a media lobbying campaign to restore the nation's only completely Protestant television channel, which was forced off the air by a law adopted in July.

The Permanent Commission for Human Rights is sponsoring a series of newspaper, radio and television stories and guest appearances to champion the cause of Channel 21, which exclusively broadcast Protestant news and evangelical programming.

"The Protestant community of this country has the right to receive the channel signal on equal conditions that all the other television stations receive," said Lino Hernandez, secretary general of the commission.

Channel 21 directors and the Association of Evangelical Churches in Nicaragua also continue to publicly protest the loss of UHF Channel 21 to the government in July with ratification of the General Law of Telecommunications and Postal Service.

Under the law, all UHF channels became the property of the government-owned TELCOR, the national telephone and postal service. All previous users of UHF channels, including Channel 21, were denied access to their previous broadcasting frequency. In media interviews, Hernandez is calling for legislative changes to restore Protestant access to the channel.

"God wants that whoever has in their hands the capacity to correct this error, that they understand, as the people here say, 'Justice is not too late,'" Hernandez said. "Those who can, should make rectification."

Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro announced that she has asked the National Assembly to review the telecommunications law and make whatever changes are necessary to create a more equitable situation. In a recent interview, she said she has no further information about the status of amendments that would benefit Channel 21.

National Assembly Deputy Moises Hassan said the communications committee of the legislative body was reviewing the complaints about the loss of Channel 21. But he added that no legislative revisions have been proposed to the full Assembly.

## **Bulgaria**

*PROTESTANTS CONCERNED ABOUT EXPECTED NEW RELIGION LAW*

By Willy Fautre, NNI Correspondent

BRUSSELS, Belgium (NNI)--European evangelicals are expressing concern that a new religion law expected to be introduced in the Bulgarian Parliament before the end of the year could impose new restrictions on non-Orthodox religious minorities already under pressure in the former communist nation.

Among Bulgarian evangelicals, "there is a general feeling that the new law will worsen the situation or will open the door to later amendments which will cause difficulties," said Julia Doxat-Purser, European Evangelical Alliance Representative in Brussels.

Doxat-Purser, Stuart Allister, general secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance, and John Langlois, chairman of the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, were part of an international evangelical delegation that traveled to Bulgaria in October to meet with Bulgarian church leaders, politicians and human rights leaders.

The delegation was invited by the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance, which is comprised of Bulgaria's five largest evangelical denominations: Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Pentecostals and the Church of God.

Evangelicals and other non-Orthodox minorities assert that they experience severe harassment and discrimination in Bulgaria. "Non-Orthodox religious groups have to cope with a number of problems with regard to their meeting places, their registration and intolerance in the media," said Doxat-Purser.

On February 3, 1994, the National Assembly passed amendments to the Law for Persons and Family which ordered all non-denominational religious organizations to seek government approval for re-registration.

While the five alliance evangelical denominations were re-registered, numerous parachurch groups, missionary agencies, independent churches and theological schools were denied re-registration. Most continue to operate "unofficially," but face being closed down at any time.

The international evangelical delegation expressed their concerns about possible new legislation during a meeting with Christo Matanov, director of the government Directorate for Religious Affairs.

Doxat-Purser said Matanov assured them that any new religion law "would be in conformity with the international human rights conventions." She said the official asserted that "evangelicals have nothing to fear from it, and they would be invited to join the consultation procedure."

However, in the meeting, Matanov confirmed that the current process of re-registration for religious groups "would remain in force."

According to delegation members, Matanov admitted that he is in "a very difficult situation" with regard to evangelicals and said he is being pressured by both the government and the Orthodox church.

"He recognized that religious intolerance was a reality in Bulgaria and agreed that there should be a law against libel and campaigns," Doxat-Purser said. However, she added, "he has not done anything visible to curb religious intolerance and discrimination."

Matanov did announce that the government would hold a seminar in Sofia to discuss democracy and religion in mid-December.

Doxat-Purser told NNI the European Evangelical Alliance is concerned that adoption of a restrictive religion law in Bulgaria could have wide-ranging implications. "Such a setback would be a disaster not only for Bulgaria, but also for other former communist countries dominated by the Orthodox church which might find some inspiration and some justification for passing new restricting religious legislations," she said.

## *Latin America*

*PROTESTANT LEADERS OBJECT TO PAPAL COMMENTS ON DANGER OF 'SECTS'*

Interreligious Tensions Rise in Brazil

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI Correspondent

QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--Protestant leaders in Latin America have reacted strongly to recent statements by Pope John Paul II that Protestant "sects" are spreading like "an oil stain" in the region and "threaten to pull down the structures of faith in numerous countries."

The Pope denounced the "danger" of various Protestant "sects" in a message forwarded to a September conference of Latin American church leaders gathering to discuss the expansion of non-Catholic groups in the region.

The term "sects" is "a classification that we do not accept," said Manuel Quintero, director of the Department of Communications for the Latin American Council of Churches.

"The Catholic church is in a very difficult situation in Latin America," Quintero told NNI. In the long run, Quintero said, the church is seeking to hold onto its power.

"The so-called sects acquire more power every day. Each day they attract more people, including Catholics which convert to become members of these churches and new religious movements," he said. The loss of members to Protestant churches is what worries the Catholic church, he added.

Latin American Council of Churches General Secretary Felipe Adolf agreed. "My reading of all of this is that the

Roman Catholic Church is convinced that in the long run they are going to lose religious hegemony," he told NNI.

Adolf, a member of the Congregational church in Argentina, said that fear has led to Roman Catholic support for religious teaching in public schools in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia.

The Catholic church will continue to exert influence in Latin America, Adolf told NNI. "In the majority of Latin American countries it is very difficult to name a Minister of Education without consulting the Catholic church," he added.

Still, he added, "the Catholic church is determined to maintain its political power in Latin America."

The object of the September conference was to discuss strategies to confront the propagation of sects and new religious movements, according to a Vatican communique on the gathering. European experts and Catholic representatives from throughout Latin America participated in the conference held in early September in Petropolis, Brazil.

Pope John Paul II forwarded a message via visiting bishops from Brazil stating that "certain sects are destroying the faith of the people, at times in a violent manner." He charged that Protestant groups are attacking "the mystery of the Eucharist, the Holy Virgin, the ecclesiastical structure of the church, the primacy of the Pope and the expressions of popular piety."

The pontiff also expressed concern about "the psychological pressure exercised by certain sects on new believers that promise to help them financially and cure their health problems."

Pope John Paul II condemned those who continue to receive the sacrament in the Catholic church but contribute money to other churches, "cults" or philanthropic organizations. The Pope said that the origin of this phenomenon is "a panorama of religious and doctrinal ignorance" that leaves the people "at the mercy of pernicious influences in a society where moral permissiveness reigns."

Adolf told NNI that he was especially concerned about papal charges that non-Catholic groups are destroying the faith. "I am critical of certain evangelical groups in Latin America because of their attitude toward poor and humble people, because there are cases in Latin America where there seems to be a commercialization of faith and abuse of the gullible and pious," he acknowledged. However, he added, "We also know of priests and Catholic bishops who profit by the faith of the humble to manipulate them."

Meanwhile, in Brazil, Catholic-Protestant relations have reached a boiling point. A senior Brazilian Roman Catholic bishop has urged Catholics to remain calm after an evangelical preacher, while preaching on television, slapped and kicked a statue of the Virgin Mary.

"Don't accept provocation, however insidious it may be, don't meet insult with insult, don't repay evil with evil," Lucas Moreira Neves, president of the Brazilian Bishops Conference, said in a television interview.

Reuters news service reported that tensions between the Catholic hierarchy and leaders of the powerful Church of the Universal Kingdom of God had been running high since preacher Sergio Von Helder lashed out at a statue of Our Lady of Aparecida on October 12. Neves, who was in the Vatican when Van Helder's action was broadcast, said the Pope was "shocked" by the incident.

Police have charged Von Helder with violating the beliefs of others. Several Universal Kingdom churches were pelted with stones shortly after the incident.

Established in 1977 as an offshoot of the Pentecostal Church, the Universal Church is Brazil's fastest growing religious movement and now claims to have some 1.5 million members. However, many mainstream evangelical leaders have criticized the group's emphasis on materialism and prosperity.

Prominent Presbyterian evangelist Caio Fabio D'Araujo, who heads the Brazilian Evangelical Association, has publicly denounced the Universal Church's practices of selling holy water, holy oil and holy corn to mainly poor religious seekers.

*[Sounds familiar! ST]*

## ***Ecuador***

### ***PROTESTANTS ANNOUNCE POLITICAL EFFORT TO ACHIEVE RELIGIOUS EQUALITY***

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI Correspondent

QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--Protestants in Ecuador have announced their organized participation in upcoming elections--the first time in the nation's history that an evangelical group has become involved in a political campaign.

The Protestant political group, which calls itself the Evangelical Restoration Movement, will field candidates for congress and the mayor of Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city.

The group announced its decision to enter politics after the conservative government of Sixto Duran-Ballen approved a Roman Catholic-sponsored law which mandated government-funded religious teaching in all schools. Protestants, teachers' unions and other social groups vigorously opposed the law, arguing that it was in fact a means of imposing Catholic teachings on students.

Participation of the Evangelical Restoration Movement in the 1996 elections will be under the slogan "A fair government for all people, and a government under the fear of God."

Franklin Yunda, a congressional candidate and director of the movement, said his group's "principle objective is to demonstrate the lordship of Christ to all and to serve the Ecuadorian people."

Yunda said his platform is to delay implementation of the religious education law and to develop Christian churches and institutions. He added that the movement bases its principles on biblical passages mixed with the current political reality of Ecuador.

"This is the hour to restore the fallen walls of Guayaquil and Ecuador, along the line of (the Old Testament prophet) Nehemiah who called the people of Jerusalem together to restore its walls which had fallen," Yunda said.

Ecuador has been rocked by a political scandal in recent months that has touched the congress, Supreme Court and administration. Vice-President Alberto Dahik escaped impeachment on charges of misappropriating government funds, but later sought asylum in Costa Rica after a warrant was issued for his arrest.

The president of the Supreme Court was impeached, and some members of congress are still working to impeach Duran-Ballen and the newly appointed vice-president.

Miquel Sanchez, the evangelical candidate for mayor of Guayaquil, said that Protestant involvement in politics is the will of God. Sanchez said he does not consider the current mayor, Leon Febres Cordero, to be his political enemy. "My political enemy is definitely Satan," he said.

Sanchez said the Evangelical Restoration Movement is studying the possibility of launching a campaign for the presidency, but currently has not identified a candidate. Ecuador will elect a new president in April to replace Duran-Ballen who cannot run for a second term under Ecuadorian law.

According to the Constitution of Ecuador, the official state religion is Roman Catholicism. Ninety-three percent of the country's 12 million people are Catholic, while nearly four percent are Protestant, according to the 1993 edition of Operation World.

Protestants are considered a growing influence in the country, however, and constitute up to 50 percent of many indigenous groups.

## *Latin America*

### **PROTESTANTS REMAIN PESSIMISTIC ABOUT CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL OVERTURES**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg  
Staff Correspondent  
News Network International

In 1995, several Catholic leaders issued new calls for stronger Protestant-Catholic unity around the world, including in Latin America. Among those advocating a new ecumenism was Archbishop Oscar Rodriguez, newly-elected president of the Roman Catholic Latin American Episcopal Conference. During a June Mass in Honduras, Rodriguez urged "a largeness of heart to open our arms to our brothers in the evangelical churches in healthy ecumenism."

That is a revolutionary concept in a region of the world not known for smooth Protestant-Catholic relations.

But as the year comes to an end, Protestant ecumenical leaders are expressing doubts that any formal relationship will develop in the near future. "In Latin America, there have never been formal ecumenical relations between the Catholic and Protestant churches," Felipe Adolf, general secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches, told NNI.

"The Catholic church has never recognized the non-Catholic expressions in Latin America as churches of Jesus Christ," he said.

Adolf said that during the 1960s and 1970s, there were good relations between individuals from both groups, but those relationships never developed into any formal dialogue, cooperation or recognition by the Catholic church of the legitimacy of Protestant churches. And he added that in recent years, relations between Catholic and Protestant churches have decreased.

Adolf welcomed Rodriguez's call for wider ecumenical contacts between Catholics and Protestants but expressed skepticism that any true changes will occur. "Ecumenism does not figure on the agenda of the Catholic church in Latin America. It has not been a priority," he said.

"For many people, to be Catholic and to be Latin American was the same. That which gave identity to Latin Americans was the Roman Catholic religion," Adolf added.

However, the recent growth of the evangelical movement in many Latin American countries has significantly challenged that notion.

According to Operation World, about 12 percent of Latin Americans are Protestant, compared to 3.4 percent in 1960. In Guatemala, Chile and El Salvador, more than 20 percent of the population is Protestant and in Brazil, Nicaragua and Panama, it is over 15 percent," the mission handbook reports. Nearly 40 percent of the world's Pentecostals live in Latin America.

These groups have been labeled "sects" in many areas of Latin America where the Catholic church has been dominant for some 500 years. But Protestants reject the term in strong words. "That is a classification...we do not accept," said Manuel Quintero, director of the Department of Communications for the Latin American Council of Churches. "Each day [evangelical churches] acquire more importance; each day they attract more people, including numerous Catholics

which convert," he said.

Adolf, a member of the Congregational church from the Entre Rios department of Argentina, acknowledged that the evangelistic zeal of many Protestants has accentuated tensions with the Catholic church. "The big problem for the Catholic Church are those groups or churches which have as their goal to convert, to bring new people into the church," he said.

Evangelical leaders said they have been receiving mixed signals from Catholic leaders about whether their response to the growth of Protestantism will be cooperation and dialogue or new tensions and restrictions.

On the one hand, Rodriguez and others have appeared to favor cooperation. Adolf noted that in his recent encyclical, "Ut Unum Sint--That They May Be One," Pope John Paul II **"affirmed that ecumenical relations between churches is an essential part of the church and that dialogue among the churches has to change our attitudes."** [s.t. emphasis]

However, Adolf compared such overtures to recent statements by Pope John Paul II warning that some Protestant "sects" are spreading like **"an oil stain" in the region and "threaten to pull down the structures of faith in numerous countries."** [s.t. emphasis] The pontiff also charged that some "sects are destroying the faith of the people."

The Pope's comments came in a message forwarded to a September conference of Latin American church leaders gathering to discuss the expansion of non-Catholic groups.

**"In Latin America, we find this contradiction for Catholicism between putting into practice what comes from Rome, where the Pope says that ecumenism is crucial for the church, and at the same time, to know that the church may no longer be the majority and that other Christian expressions exist in Latin America,"**[s.t. emphasis] Adolf asserted.

"Within the Catholic church there are different forces in conflict: those who want to open dialogue and recognize the reality of religious plurality, and other sectors who, in contrast, try deliberately to fortify the regional hegemonic role of the church," said Quintero, a layman from Cuba working with the Council in Quito. Because of this internal Catholic struggle, he added, "it is difficult to carry out an ecumenical dialogue with the evangelical churches."

Quintero pointed to recent legislation in Ecuador and Bolivia as an example of more conservative forces wishing to maintain the traditional role of the church. Both countries have adopted legislation supported by the Catholic church which mandates religious teaching in all public and private schools.

According to Adolf, **many of the church's programs in Latin America are designed not only to recoup religious dominance, but also to maintain political power.** [s.t.emphasis] "The Catholic church feels the threat of losing not only its sociological majority, but also is suffering a loss of its spiritual, social and political influence," Adolf said. **"For me, my working hypothesis is that the Catholic Church fundamentally wants to maintain political power, not religious [power]."**[s.t.emphasis]

While he remains pessimistic about any imminent establishment of formal ecumenical relations, Adolf said he is encouraged that the topic is at least being broached in the region. "Ecumenism is being rethought in Latin America," he said. "I think this is what we ought to understand from Archbishop Rodriguez. The Catholic church is beginning to understand that they cannot continue thinking nor declaring that all of the other non-Catholic Christian expressions are sects."

Adolf said that it should be easy for Protestants and Catholics to work together on several issues including the environment, poverty and aid for street children. And he acknowledged that it actually would be easier for Catholics to become involved ecumenically in these issues than Protestants, because of internal concerns among some Protestant groups.

In 1996, the Latin American Council of Churches plans to be in touch with Archbishop Rodriguez to follow up on his comments and to seek dialogue with the Catholic Church. But Adolf admitted that both faiths have work to do before ecumenical projects can occur. As Protestants become more numerous, he said, they will need to develop a common evangelical identity in the face of Roman Catholic dominance and influence. And, he said, Catholic bishops will need to acknowledge and address growing Protestant influence in their communities.

## *Mexico*

### **TEN TRIBAL LEADERS ARRESTED FOR ABDUCTION, MURDER OF EVANGELICAL**

U.S. Religious Liberty Group Urges Chiapas Investigation

By Elisabeth Isais

MEXICO CITY, Mexico (NNI)--Ten Chamula Indians have been arrested in Chiapas for the September abduction and murder of evangelical leader Agustin Perez Lopez Segundo.

One of the arrested suspects gave information which led to the discovery of Lopez Segundo's badly decomposed body in mid-December. Lopez Segundo had been missing since his abduction in the troubled southern state of Chiapas on September 20.

Mexico Protestant leaders praised Chiapas authorities for taking action in the case. According to local

Protestants, in previous cases, the perpetrators of violence against evangelicals have gone free.

Religious tensions in the Chamula area date back to the mid-1960s. Over the past 30 years, an estimated 30,000 Protestants and sympathetic Catholics have been forced into exile by local tribal leaders who claim the Protestants disrupt cultural traditions and act independently of tribal leadership.

Violence erupted in the region again in late November when local Protestants attempted to take two men to authorities for questioning in Lopez Segundo's case. A group of traditionalist Catholics attacked the evangelicals' homes in an attempt to "rescue" the two suspects. Six people were killed and six others wounded. The Chiapas State Evangelical Defense Committee blamed the state government for the incident. According to a document released by the committee, the government had issued arrest orders for the kidnapers of Lopez Segundo. However, lawyer-pastor Abdias Tovilla Jaime told NNI that evangelicals had attempted to bring the men to justice themselves when local authorities failed to act.

Funeral services were held for Lopez Segundo on December 17 in San Cristobal de las Casas. Mourners carried the casket in a long procession through the city before going to the cemetery.

Because of the arrests, local evangelical leaders have agreed to participate in a dialogue with political and Catholic leaders about the ongoing tensions in Chiapas.

According to Tovilla, Protestants have won another concession from local authorities as well. Chamula tribal leaders have now agreed to permit evangelical children to attend school. For three years, more than 300 children in Chamula have been prevented from attending the territory's primary school because of their religious affiliation.

While Mexico Protestants praised the improvements in Chamula, they also expressed concern about the situation in another area of Chiapas. According to Mexico City's El Universal newspaper, 10 evangelical families from Sinai-Guayabal in Huitiupan municipality have asked for government help to defend themselves against armed guerrillas. The December 19 report stated that guerrillas have threatened the evangelicals because the Protestants have refused to join their cause.

Dozens of evangelical families from the area are living as refugees in the Interdenominational Christian Church of Tuxtla Gutierrez because of the threats.

Meanwhile, the Rutherford Institute, an international religious liberty advocacy organization, is urging the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to send a fact-finding team to Mexico to investigate the situation for evangelicals in Chiapas.

In a December 14 letter to Commission Executive Secretary Edith Marquez, Rutherford Institute President John Whitehead recommended that an independent team "gather information from eyewitnesses and...examine the situation under closer scrutiny."

Earlier this year, the Rutherford Institute filed a legal complaint on behalf of evangelical Chamula Indians who have been evicted from their Chiapas homes and subjected to discrimination and violent attacks at the hands of local and regional authorities.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights forwarded Rutherford's initial complaint to the Mexican government, which recently responded that Commission intervention would be inappropriate at this time because the Chamula Indians have not yet exhausted all their legal recourses.

In his letter, Whitehead called the Mexican government's response "at best theoretical and superficial." According to him, "the Chamulas are incapable of seeking further legal remedies in a region where intimidation, discrimination and murder take place with the indifference if not complicity of local and regional authorities."

*With additional reporting by Kim A. Lawton in Washington, D.C.*

## ***Latin America***

### **POPE AGAIN DENOUNCES THREAT OF NON-CATHOLIC 'SECTS'**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg, NNI Correspondent

QUITO, Ecuador (NNI)--Pope John Paul II has once again called on faithful Roman Catholics to work against the expansion of "religious sects," particularly in Latin America.

Roman Catholic leaders in Latin America normally refer to any non-Catholic group, including Protestants, as "sects."

Speaking to a Vatican commission responsible for the placement of priests around the world, the Pope said the propagation of Catholicism faces great challenges from sects and consumerism.

"In recent decades, missionary expansion has not been able to keep pace with the increase in population and is being challenged, especially in Latin America, by the destructive work of the sects," he said.

The Pope also said that the decades of atheistic emphasis by communism in eastern Europe and secularization in the West are posing difficult challenges to Catholicism. In the West, the Pope said, people often have forgotten God and think only of material goods.

"The response to these challenges ought to bring together all of the local churches in common work," he said.

Observers said the Pope is likely to focus on the same themes during his upcoming eight-day trip to Guatemala,

Venezuela, Nicaragua and El Salvador in February.

In September, the Pope also strongly denounced the "danger" of various Protestant sects to the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. In a special message, the Pontiff told visiting bishops from Brazil that "certain sects are destroying the faith of the people, at times in a violent manner."

His comments have been challenged by Latin American Protestant leaders who reject the term "sects" and charge that the Catholic church is fearful about retaining its hegemony in the largely Roman Catholic region.

"The Catholic church feels the threat of losing not only its sociological majority, but also is suffering a loss of its spiritual, social and political influence," said Felipe Adolf, general secretary of the Latin American Council of Churches, in a recent NNI interview.

According to Operation World, about 12 percent of Latin Americans are Protestant, compared to 3.4 percent in 1960. "In Guatemala, Chile and El Salvador, more than 20 percent of the population is Protestant and in Brazil, Nicaragua and Panama, it is over 15 percent," the mission handbook reports. Nearly 40 percent of the world's Pentecostals live in Latin America.

## ***Bolivia***

### **MOB DESTROYS RURAL PROTESTANT CHURCH**

By Djanira Blanco, Special to NNI

LA PAZ, Bolivia (NNI)--Bolivian police have yet to make arrests one month after a group of drunken men attacked evangelical Christians in Achacachi and destroyed the Friends Holiness Church.

According to eyewitness reports, on December 16 more than a dozen men attacked Pastor Agustin Condori and then leveled his small adobe church which served the Parqui Pararani congregation of Achacachi, a rural community about 50 miles northwest of La Paz, the nation's capital.

A complaint filed with Achacachi police by Condori's brother, Florencio, charges that the offenders burst into the building during a prayer meeting and "completely ravaged the building, breaking down windows and doors."

"According to witnesses present in the prayer meeting, the attackers dismantled the corrugated tin roof and destroyed everything inside," said Carlos Encinas, a La Paz attorney and legal counsel to the church.

"They caused serious personal injury to the worshippers as well," Encinas told NNI in an interview. "We have filed the proper charges with provincial authorities."

The Friends Church is the oldest and largest evangelical congregation in Parqui Pararani, a village of approximately 300 inhabitants. According to recent census figures, about 60 percent of the local residents claim to be evangelical Christians.

Following an inspection of the site three days after the attack, Encinas and attorney Jackeline Villalobos requested local police to arrest the perpetrators, whom they identified by name. However, at press time, no arrests had been made.

"This makes three or four times that the church has been attacked in this way," Encinas said. "The previous incidents were so violent that the church had to completely rebuild."

According to Friends members, sporadic violence against Protestants continues to plague the area.

Bolivia, whose 6.6 million population is predominantly composed of Aymara and Quechua-speaking Amerindians, has a long history of ethnic and religious tensions. Leaders of the evangelical community believe it is necessary to amend the country's constitution to abolish official state religion.

Article 3 of the constitution declares that the state "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith and guarantees the public exercise of all other worship."

In 1993, a petition signed by 24,000 citizens calling for church and state separation was presented to the National Congress. However, a lobby effort mounted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy convinced congressional members to exclude Article 3 from constitutional reforms enacted that year.

*With additional reporting by David Miller.*

## ***Sudan***

### **SUDAN RELEASES THREE CATHOLIC CLERICS SUSPECTED OF REBEL TIES**

By Richard Nyberg, NNI Correspondent

GABORONE, Botswana (NNI)--Two Roman Catholic priests and a seminarian have been released by Sudanese authorities after several days of detention under suspicion that they were working alongside anti-government rebels fighting against the military Islamic regime.

The Rome-based Sant'Egidio Catholic community announced on January 17 that Father Romeo Todo and seminarian Paul Lomana were detained by government secret service agents in the capital Khartoum on January 5 and were subsequently freed on January 14.

"The motive of the arrests, confirmed officially by the authorities in Khartoum, was suspected clandestine activity

in favor of the [Sudan People's Liberation Army]," the statement noted.

The Sant'Egidio community, which had intervened to secure the priests' release, said Sudan's government appeared to be "very irritated with supposed contacts between the Catholic church and the movements of armed opposition in the south.

"It is the first important incident after several months of different signals, during which there was a certain improvement of relations between the church and the government, including the beginning of official meetings between government and church representatives to resolve the major problems the Catholic community faces in Sudan," the statement added.

Sant'Egidio did not mention the third cleric, Father Mark Lotede, who, according to a January 17 report by the official Sudan News Agency, had confessed to drawing up plans to blow up security installations in the key southern town of Juba where he had been working.

Sudan News Agency reported that Lotede admitted to setting up an organization comprised of several local politicians to send students to Naros in Eastern Equatoria, a territory under the control of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army.

The agency further noted reported that after confessing, the priest pleaded for mercy from the Sudanese authorities and the country's Catholic community.

Church sources at the Vatican quoted by Western media reports said the priests may have been jailed while trying to reach areas controlled by rebel factions in Sudan's mainly Christian and animist south.

The Sudan News Agency stated that Lotede was released in the presence of the Vatican's ambassador to Khartoum, Archbishop Gabriel Zubeir Wako and Sudan Council of Churches Secretary-General John Dingi.

Rebels have been fighting to set up an autonomous state in a bid to rid the non-Muslims in the south from hardline, militant rule by Islamic extremists.

Last year, a fact-finding mission led by Britain's Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords, Baroness Caroline Cox, and Christian Solidarity International's John Eibner, both veteran Sudan observers, found that the government is continuing to use slavery and other coercive measures to turn the ethnically and religiously diverse African nation into an Arab, Islamic state.

Nuba Mountains leaders told the team that in recent years government soldiers have executed at least three Protestant clergymen: Rev. Matta Nur, Rev. Matta Stepanous and Rev. Harun Angelu.

Last March, troops burned down the Protestant churches in the villages of Dere and Abri, both in the southeastern quarter of the Nuba Mountains. The pastor of those churches, Rev. Isaac Ghanian, was captured. There have also been persistent reports of crucifixions of non-Muslims in the area.

Since the team visited Sudan, the government has refused to allow Baroness Cox back into the country. The U.N.'s council called on the Islamic government to "desist from engaging in activities of assisting, supporting and facilitating terrorist activities."

In what appeared to be a direct response to the U.N.'s action, the United States announced it was suspending its diplomatic operations and pulling out embassy staff members and their families for security reasons.

## ***Mexico***

### **PRESIDENT MEETS WITH EVANGELICAL LEADERS**

By Elisabeth F. Isais, NNI Correspondent

MEXICO CITY (NNI)--Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo met with 18 Protestant evangelical leaders at his official residence on January 22, in his first meeting with such leaders since taking office in 1994.

Evangelicals presented Zedillo with a six-page document in which they request moves toward greater democracy and justice, the resolution of civil conflict in the southern state of Chiapas, and an end to religious intolerance, among other things.

Zedillo responded by promising to continue dialogue with evangelicals. He also ordered the head of the State Department to ask all state governors to treat Catholics and evangelicals equally.

In a press conference following the meeting, evangelicals declared, "Regarding religious intolerance, we insist that although the laws have been changed, the culture of intolerance has continued.

"The religious minorities, particularly the evangelicals, are still objects of persecution...Although Mexico is a country of laws, it still is not a country where law and justice are the privilege of all.

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