

Jesuit Priest Sheds Light on CIA Affair

By ELLIOTT WRIGHT

New York [RNS] — A Washington-based priest says he decided to break years of silence on CIA funding of church-related programs because he now believes such "entanglements" with government should be avoided.

Father James Vizzard, SJ, interviewed by telephone, confirmed that he was the source of recent press reports on two CIA funding cases, one involving a Belgian Jesuit in Chile and the other involving the National Catholic Rural Life Conference.

He said that late July news stories marked the first time he had told what he knew about either case to the press, and he added that they were the only cases of which he had "first-hand knowledge."

Asked why he chose to talk now, more than a decade after the most recent of the two cases, Father Vizzard said, "In retrospect I believe economic entanglement with U.S. government policy should have been avoided in principle."

Reports that the Belgian Jesuit, Father Roger Vekemans, received \$5 million for covert activities in Chile surfaced several years ago.

Father Vizzard added some data, including the assertion that the Belgian was promised the money, plus \$5 million in overt development funds, following a White House meeting during the Kennedy Administration.

The Vizzard report about the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), published recently, was not previously reported.

Father Vizzard said that in the 1950s, when he was NCRLC director in Washington, the organization received \$25,000 from the CIA to help finance one of several meetings dealing with land reform in Latin America. He recalled that the check came from a Philadelphia businessman. He said he commented on the generosity of the gift to Msgr. Luigi Ligutti, then head of NCRLC.

Father Vizzard said Msgr. Ligutti replied, "Oh, it's not his money, it's the CIA's money."

Father Vizzard said he did not raise objections to the CIA contribution to NCRLC in the 1950s because he was convinced then that the government agency was assisting in a "good thing."

He also objected to some press implications that Latin American

activities in which he was involved in the 1940s were aimed chiefly at rallying anti-Communist labor. Land reform, he said, was a "very important" concern.

The priest, now affiliated with the United Farm Workers Union in Washington, said he saw Father Vekemans both before and after the Belgian visited the White House in 1963.

He said he and the Jesuit were having lunch at a restaurant near Dupont Circle in Washington when a White House automobile came for Father Vekemans. The destination, he said, was a meeting with President Kennedy, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, CIA director John McCone and Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver.

Father Vizzard said that he again saw Father Vekemans that evening, and was told that two grants were made, \$5 million "covert" from the CIA and \$5 million openly from the U.S. Agency for Development.

Father Vizzard said that to the best of his knowledge Father Vekemans is now living in Bogota, Columbia, running a social science research center similar to the one he formerly directed in Chile.

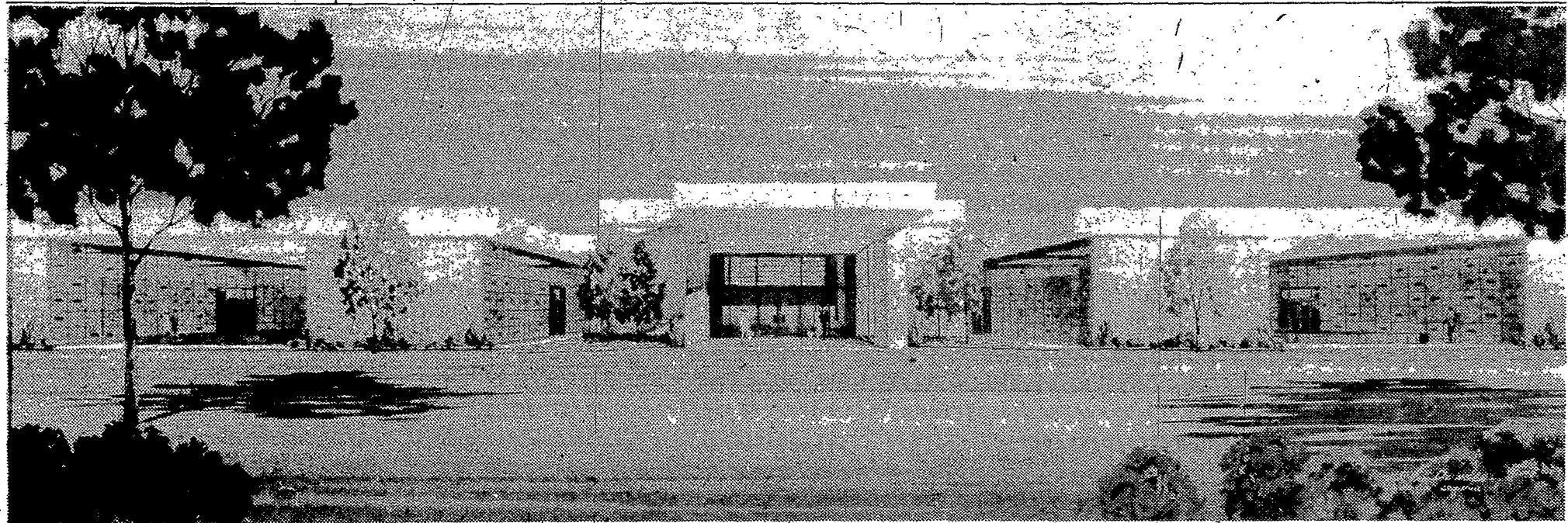
More than 16,000 Indochinese refugees have been settled in the U.S. since May through the U.S. Catholic Conference, according to John E. McCarthy of Catholic Relief Services. For the most part, they are "considerate, energetic" people, with "tremendous initiative," he told a House subcommittee at a hearing last week in Washington.

Father Jude Cleary, who joined the Benedictines in 1951, after his graduation in mechanical engineering at Georgia Tech, has been elected abbot of the Belmont Abbey, N.C., community.

Father Donald R. Campion, SJ, chief editor of the Jesuit weekly, America, since 1968, is leaving to become director of information and press activities for the Jesuit Generalate in Rome. His successor is Father Joseph A. O'Hare, SJ, who was an associate editor.

A history of Christianity among the Spanish-speaking people of America is in preparation by a group of writers, chiefly Chicano, from Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist colleges and other organizations. The project, launched last week in San Antonio, is scheduled for completion next year.

Honduras has announced the discovery of seven bodies, including those of two Roman Catholic missionary priests who had been missing since a raid by soldiers and armed landholders last June 25 on a church-sponsored farmworkers' center. The priests have been identified as American Father Michael Jerome Cypher, 34, a Franciscan from Medford, Wis., and Father Ivan Betancourt, 35, a Colombian. Colombia has withdrawn its Ambassador in protest. Bishop Jaime Brufau Macia of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, issued a statement saying the slayings "were committed principally by diehard forces opposed to the postponed social reforms in the countryside." He said that "high authorities of the government had nothing to do with the deaths."



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