

Buddhist Monk Describes Repression in Vietnam

By ROBERT L. JOHNSTON
Religious News Service

New York — A top official of the Unified Buddhist Church in Vietnam, who escaped Vietnam last summer with documentation indicating widespread religious persecution there, said here he hopes to "stir up the consciences" of religious and political leaders to respond to what he calls continuing oppression in Vietnam.

The Venerable Thich Man Giac, a Buddhist monk who is a member of the central executive committee of the Unified Buddhist Church (UBC) and affiliated with the famed An Quang pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), claimed that the current policy of the Communist government of Vietnam is "to suppress all religions."

He said the regime wants Vietnamese people to consider communism their "religion" and seeks to eradicate the "potential power" that resides in the churches.

The monk, a former university professor and administrator who has served as Commissioner General for Cultural Affairs of the UBC since 1972, told Religious News Service that he was instructed by his superiors to flee Vietnam with documents showing the broad incidence of arrests, detention and torture of Buddhist monks, nuns and lay leaders. The documents also include a listing of 85 alleged violations of the right of religious freedom, a communique issued by the UBC on the arrest of six top Buddhist leaders, and remarks by a Roman Catholic archbishop on the problem of religious freedom and human rights.

In pointing out that his

knowledge of the current situation of religious persecution in Vietnam is "authoritative and first hand," the Ven. Man Giac said that Christians, especially Catholics are "suffering more than Buddhists" under the Communist regime because of their past associations with the French colonialists and the United States.

He noted that the number of Catholic priests arrested and jailed is proportionate, at least, to the number of Buddhist clergy detained, including about 25 members of the top national and provincial leadership of the UBC — which he said encompasses about 80 per cent of the Vietnamese population.

The Ven. Man Giac arrived in the U.S. in early January, after stopping in London to deliver copies of his documentation to Amnesty International and after speaking to religious and political leaders in Belgium, Holland, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden. His tour, organized by the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris is being coordinated in the U.S. by the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The 48-year-old monk, who served following the war as the UBC liaison officer with the Communist regime but in 1976 was discharged by the government from his teaching post at the Ho Chi Minh University, said he spent eight days at sea in a small boat after his escape last July and then three months in a refugee camp in Malaysia. He was in France two months seeking a visa to come to the U.S.

The monk stressed that the UBC, like many other religious groups in Vietnam,



THICH MAN GIAC

made "great efforts" to work with the Communist government following the fall of Saigon to restore the country. At one point, he himself organized 900 monks for a government "victory day" celebration.

However, he said, the new regime has pursued a policy of "shattering the religious communities in our country" even to the point of prohibiting the celebration of Buddha's birthday as a national holiday and "made it im-

possible for monks and nuns to support themselves financially" through farming and other means.

One of about 20,000 UBC clergy in Vietnam, the Ven. Man Giac told RNS that his documents "specify pagodas that have been totally destroyed, pagodas that have been turned into government administration buildings or military armories, pagodas that have had toilets built near their main shrines to desecrate the Buddha, pagodas that

have had statues of the Buddha dynamited or smashed up..."

He also said the government is making a concerted effort to reach children under 14 and "turn them from their religious beliefs." The monk added that any Vietnamese, including disabled war veterans, who ever had any association with Western nations are categorized as "CIA agents" and refused any kind of government assistance.

Reflecting on a human rights appeal made to the government by the UBC leadership just before he fled Vietnam last summer, the Ven. Man Giac said the appeal called on Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Daiists, Hoa Haoists and Marxists "to unite to work for legitimate national reconciliation and concord for the sake of building a united, peaceful and democratic Socialist Republic."

But it also called on the government to release all religious prisoners and "hundreds of thousands suffering and dying in re-education camps," and to implement seriously "the policy of freedom of worship" by allowing people to attend temples and churches, permitting religious publications, and "ending the conversion of temples into dormitories and offices."

The UBC appeal also called for an end to "corruption among governmental agents and cadres," permission for

Buddhist and Christian clergy, and lay people to resume social work activities without having to renounce their religious beliefs, and the abolition of discrimination against non-party members in schools and hospitals and in the purchasing of food and medicines.

Among the monks' documents is the record of Archbishop Phillip Nguyen Kim Dien's response to the arrest of six top Buddhist leaders. The Hue prelate said the Church has also "suffered" similar experiences as Catholic priests and laymen were charged with conspiracy against the government.

"In my poor opinion," the archbishop said, "if indeed there are people in religious communities causing trouble, this is because religious freedom is not yet a reality. Frankly, I am not yet satisfied with government policy concerning freedom of religion."

The archbishop went on to say that Catholics do not enjoy an equality in civil rights and are regarded "only as second class citizens."

The Ven. Man Giac indicated that the Communist government in Vietnam is "very sensitive to world opinion and is making every effort to keep any evidence of religious repression a secret." The monk said this was why his superiors felt it imperative that he "get the news of religious persecution out" to the world.

Retreat Stresses Marriage Communication

The Cenacle Retreat House joined forces with the Office of Family Life recently in a program to help married couples "share each other more completely through deep communication and prayer."

Seven couples met for a Marriage Communication Retreat at the Cenacle, Feb. 3-5. The exercises dealt with learning to trust each other, how to listen to one's spouse, solving marriage problems and conflicts, and

learning how to give support to one another. Each exercise was followed by dialogue between the individual couple and later with the group as a whole.

The retreat is loosely patterned after a Marriage Encounter Weekend with two important distinctions. John Barnoski of the Office of Family Life explained that during an ME weekend couples concentrate on each other with "no group interaction." He said the retreat stresses sharing

weekend experiences "in a nondestructive way" with the other participants through group dialogue.

Also, says Sister Margaret Mary Mattie, a Cenacle staff member who assisted on the retreat, Marriage Encounter is a "very structured and intense" program and the retreat is less organized and more relaxed, which enables the participants to open up to each other.

The result, Barnoski said, is a closely knit group of people able to share and perhaps solve problems together.

Barnoski and his wife Elizabeth served as lead couple. Sister Arline Brent of the Cenacle said that they hope to continue the retreats. She said that when the couples left they had "found out where they were in their marriages" and were anxious to improve still further.

All three retreat leaders said they hoped to see the program evolve into a regular part of the Cenacle's

schedule. Barnoski said that for those unable to make retreats the Catholic Family Center offers outreach programs dealing with marriage enrichment.

Sister Arline said that anyone interested in making a Marriage Communication Retreat or in finding out more about it should call the Cenacle at 716-271-8755.

Those interested in the family or marriage enrichment programs offered by the Catholic Family Center should call Thomas Hansen, Jo Ann Lytle or Barnoski at 716-546-7220.

ALL IN THE FAMILY



Sarah Child

At the beginning of Lent I began scouring cookbooks for ideas that would let us carry out our intention of having two meatless meals a week until Easter.

And because at our house we are always counting calories (sometimes with more success than others) I sought out dishes that not only featured other protein than meat, but were diet oriented as well.

One of the best sources for such entrees was Frances Lappe's "Diet for a Small Planet," the book which shows how to combine amino acids in such a way as to make one and one add up to three. Her recipes are not always low in calories but it is possible to adapt some, using very low fat cottage cheese, for example, instead of ricotta.

Oriental cuisine, I rediscovered, was perfect for our plan. Even for meals with meat, recipes calling for 3/4 pound of chicken or beef combined with plenty of vegetables and nuts will feed four to six.

But most helpful of all

was my stash of Italian cookbooks. Yes, Italian. If you thumb past the pasta, you'll find the Italians are noted for their way with vegetables principally because that's often all they had to work with.

Long ago we discovered that if you cook eggplant slices in a teflon pan minus the oil and the batter you can produce Eggplant Parmigiana with a fraction of the calories of the original dishes. The mozzarella and parmesan cheeses give you all the protein you need. And you lose little flavor.

One of my favorite dieter's soups, perfect for Lent, is straciatella which has been a standard in our kitchen for years. It is akin to the Oriental's egg drop soup. For those who might like to try it here is the recipe. May you have a fruitful Lenten Session.

Straciatella

Bring 1 quart canned chicken broth to boiling. Meanwhile mix 1-1/2 Tablespoons of flour, 1-1/2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese and 4 well beaten eggs together. Cook 1 package of chopped spinach according to directions and add to broth then add egg mixture slowly. Continue stirring for five minutes. For those not dieting, you can eliminate the spinach and add 1 cup of cooked noodles instead. Serve soup with cheese and crusty whole grain bread for entree or alone as a prelude to a salmon loaf.

Parish Sets Holy Week Schedule

St. Anthony of Padua Church, 60 Lorimer St., has planned a full Holy Week schedule this year. The events and times follow.

Palm Sunday, March 19 will follow the regular Sunday Mass schedule. Palms will be distributed after all the Masses.

Masses for March 20, 21, 22 will follow the regular weekday schedule at 7:30 and 8:00 a.m.

Holy Thursday, March 23 morning Mass at 8 a.m. Evening Mass and procession to the Repository at 7 p.m. Church will remain open until midnight for visits.

Good Friday, March 24, the church will open at 7 a.m. for private devotions. Stations of the Cross at 2:30 p.m. Church will remain open until midnight for visits.

Holy Saturday, March 25, Mass of the Resurrection. Church will open at 7 a.m. for private devotions. Solemn Easter Vigil Service, 7 p.m. (This fulfills the Easter obligations.)

Easter Sunday, March 26, Regular Sunday Mass schedule will be followed.

Confessions for Holy Week: Wednesday evening 7 p.m., communal Penance service and Stations of the Cross. Good Friday: 4:30-5:30, 7-8 p.m. Holy Saturday: 3:30-5:30 p.m. No Confessions in the Evening.

SUNDAY CONCERT

The Greece Symphony Orchestra, conducted by David Fetler, will present a concert at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 26, at Blessed Sacrament Church, Oxford at Monroe Avenue. The public is invited, free of charge.

Stanley Chepaitis of the Hochstein School faculty will be soloist in the Sibelius violin concerto. He is a graduate of both the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford and the Eastman School, where he has a teaching fellowship. The program includes the Good Friday Spell from Wagner's Parsifal and Beethoven's Symphony No. 8.

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