

Human Rights Emphasis Seen in Question

By Laurence Mullin
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President Carter, in his first speech following his reelection defeat, contended that his campaign on behalf of human rights in Latin America was an "historic movement" that would outlive his administration.

Addressing the opening session of the 10th General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS), Carter said:

"Some claim that President Carter elevated human rights and democracy on the Inter-American agenda and that the agenda will change when I leave. They are wrong.

"Today, no government in this hemisphere can expect silent assent from its neighbors if it tramples on the rights of its own citizens."

Whether Carter's analysis is correct, only time can tell. But there are strong indications that government and business leaders in several Latin American countries have welcomed the election of Republican Ronald Reagan as likely to lead to a lessening of U.S. emphasis on human rights in their countries.

In fact, that is what the government and business leaders in Chile, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil were told by a leading American banker to expect.

Said David Rockefeller, chairman of the Chase Manhattan Bank, to a group in Buenos Aires, Argentina, "I don't think anyone in this room opposes the promotion of the application of human rights. But I hope that Mr. Reagan, while in no sense abandoning the objectives, will pursue a different course."

Rockefeller has criticized President Carter for basing U.S. foreign policy too much on human rights while failing to recognize the chaos and terrorism many of the countries faced.

Reagan himself, a persistent critic of Carter's handling of human rights policy in relation to Latin America, said at a press conference following his landslide election: "I don't think you can turn away from some country because here and there they do not totally agree with our concept of human rights."

Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, and other military regimes in South America have borne much of the brunt of Carter's human rights policies, including the cutting of military and economic aid.

In Central America, the election of Reagan has already begun to change the political balance, with conservative forces moving into a renewed offensive and liberals and leftists anticipating intensified U.S. involvement in the strife-torn region.

An extreme indication of possible right-wing exploitation of Mr. Reagan's election came in El Salvador where two murder victims were found with signs on them saying, "With Ronald Reagan, the miscreants and guerrillas of Central America and El Salvador will be finished."

The acting Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador, Arturo Rivera y Damas, has warned that "right-wing fanatics inside and outside the government (of El Salvador) may now feel openly encouraged to increase repression" with the change in administrations in Washington.

The right-wing military dictatorship of Guatemala and the country's small, land-owning private sector, which have been strongly critical of President Carter's human rights campaign, were delighted by his defeat and seemed hopeful of resumed U.S. military assistance to help combat leftist guerrillas and other opponents of the regime.

Conservatives in Central America have blamed Carter's policy of promoting human rights and withholding support for authoritarian governments for the revolution against the Somoza government in Nicaragua in 1979 and for the advances of guerrilla-led mass movements in El Salvador and Guatemala.

All three countries, like the others in the region, are predominantly Roman Catholic.

In Nicaragua, the Roman Catholic bishops gave cautious endorsement of the Sandinista revolution, saying the "we and the majority of Nicaraguans seek a revolution that firmly leads toward a representative society that is authentically Nicaraguan and not capitalist, dependent, or totalitarian."

Six Roman Catholic priests serve in the Nicaraguan government of National Reconstruction, including Father Miguel D'Escoto, a Maryknoll priest, who is foreign minister, and Father Fernando Cardenal, a Jesuit, who is head of a nationwide literacy program.

Five Protestant pastors in Nicaragua have also endorsed the leftist revolution. "We believe that Christians can honestly use Marxist analysis without ceasing to be Christians and can, thus, understand the mechanism of exploitation and domination," the churchmen said in a statement.

In El Salvador, the most explosive of the five Central



A badly wounded comrad is dragged to safety by a leftist demonstrator in El Salvador, during an earlier outbreak of anti-government unrest.

American countries, political violence has reached a pitch. This year's death toll has neared 9,000 and goes on unabated.

Most were victims of government troops or right-wing "death squads," according to Catholic church sources.

The dead include 11 Catholic priests and San Salvador's Archbishop Oscar A. Romero y Galdamez, an outspoken champion of the rights of the nation's poor who was gunned down while celebrating Mass earlier this year.

Right-wing violence in El Salvador, according to Catholic sources, has included bombing of the archdiocesan offices in San Salvador, destruction of the Catholic Church's radio station, and attacks against the Jesuit-run Catholic University in the capital, as well as against several churches and convents throughout the country.

The reason the Salvadoran Catholic Church is under attack, says Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, Rochester-born general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, is because "it has embraced the pastoral task of accompanying the people in their hope, in their struggle, and in their suffering — and has paid dearly for this commitment."

El Salvador's Archbishop Rivera, like his murdered predecessor, Archbishop Romero, an outspoken critic of human rights violations in the country and of the ruling junta that allegedly condones them, had blamed the junta for the mounting political violence.

"We repudiate the indiscriminate repression of the army and security forces against the unarmed population," he said during a recent sermon in San Salvador's Metropolitan Cathedral.

In Guatemala, too, Roman Catholic bishops have been constrained to protest mounting political repression and violence.

Following a recent spate of violence in which a Belgian Roman Catholic missionary priest was machine-gunned to death and a Guatemalan Catholic priest was kidnapped by secret police and never heard from again, the bishops, in a joint statement, lashed out at "the violence which has reached unimaginable levels — killings, kidnappings, torture, and even profanation — with irrational hate — of the bodies of victims."

At least 90 percent of more than 2,000 political killings in a recent 18-month period have reportedly been done by right-wing, extremist anti-Communist groups with tacit approval, if not active cooperation, of the military government.

The International Commission of Jurists has accused the Guatemalan government, headed by Gen. Romeo Lucas Gadea, of mounting "a systematic campaign to suppress dissent which has, in fact, generated a widespread climate of fear, demoralization, and the growth of clandestine opposition."

Church voices outside Latin America have been raised in protest against repressive regimes in Latin America. At a meeting in November of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, Bishop Dale C. White of New Jersey told his

colleagues that they must continue to speak out on behalf of the world's poor and suffering, "even if it means clashing with U.S. foreign policy."

"Christians are dying for freedom and justice once again," said the prelate who has been in the forefront of liberal causes. "Tragically, many are dying to free their people from the systems American leaders have forged and continue to support in our name."

Bishop White continued: "The perceptual screen which sees as Communist-inspired every freedom movement which seems to threaten our short-range economic or political interests is being punched full of holes."

"Who can forget Archbishop Oscar Romero, assassinated as he was celebrating Mass in San Salvador? All over the world, church bodies are expressing solidarity with (the archbishop's) cause, pledging themselves to finish his unfinished Mass."



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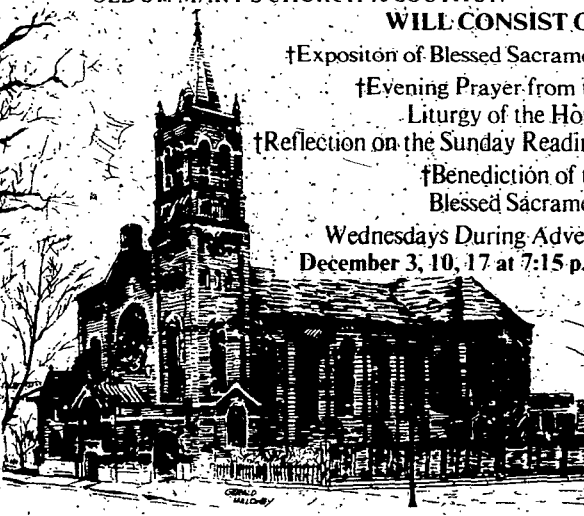
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