

WORLD & NATION

Guerrillas free Bishop Quintero

BOGOTA, Colombia (CNS) — A Colombian guerrilla group has released a Catholic bishop kidnapped and held for more than a month.

The People's Liberation Army, Colombia's smallest guerrilla group, released Bishop Jose de Jesus Quintero Diaz of Tibu to a commission headed by the president of the Colombian bishops' conference.

Bishop Quintero told reporters after his Sept. 19 release that he gave thanks to his fellow bishops and to Pope John Paul II "for his prayers and intervention" for his freedom.

"I will keep being a bishop faithful to the church and leading my people in the Diocese of Tibu," he said.

The bishop, who was kidnapped near his diocese Aug. 15, said he was treated well, but he energetically criticized kidnapping as "an evil that has no excuse, not even for political or so-called social reasons."

"My mission as bishop of Tibu will continue as usual, because my task is evangelization, and evangelization is a process that cannot stop because of violence or other difficulties," he said.

At the bishop's release in Norte de Santander, near where he was abducted, the People's Liberation Army accused the Colombian army of creating "an unstable situation" in the area.



Reuters/CNS

Bishop Jose de Jesus Quintero Diaz (right) sits in a canoe with an unidentified man after being set free by guerrillas Sept. 19 near La Gabarra, Colombia. Bishop Quintero was kidnapped a month ago near his Diocese of Tibu.

Francisco Caraballo, the guerrilla leader, jailed near the city of Medellin, said that the abduction of Bishop Quintero — kidnapped for the second time in less than two years — "was nothing personal against the bishop, but only a way to make a statement."

In a Sept. 6 letter to Colombian radio network Caracol, the guerrillas apologized to the pope for the kidnapping and said it was "a desperate measure to attract the nation's attention" to "the systematic murder of peasants by paramilitary groups logistically supported by the army."

Blood results inconclusive

SAN SALVADOR (CNS) — Blood found near the place where Auxiliary Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera of Guatemala City was bludgeoned to death last year matches samples taken from a diocesan priest and at least two other people, said a special prosecutor leading the murder inquiry.

But a former human-rights investigator at the Guatemala City Archdiocese questioned the validity of the results.

"I don't know if it will be possible to defend (the results) in court, since the scene of the crime was so badly contaminated," Edgar Gutierrez, former head of the archdiocesan human-rights project, told Catholic News Service Sept. 18.

"I know that the DNA tests are scientifically carried out, but given the circumstances in which they were collected, any defense attorney would easily be able to refute them," he said in a telephone interview.

Within hours of the killing, the scene of the crime — the garage area outside Bishop Gerardi's city-center parish home — was hosed down, supposedly on the instructions of the investigators. Bloodstains, footprints, as well as any further evidence that might have aided the investigation were washed away.

Chief prosecutor Celvin Galindo Lopez told reporters Sept. 16 that FBI analyses of bloodstains at Bishop Gerardi's parish residence were positively matched with DNA samples taken from Father Mario Orantes, who shared the bishop's house, as well from two homeless men.

Regarding the FBI's discovery of the priest's blood in the house, Galindo said, "It's normal (to say) that it's my room, I cut myself and I bled there, but it's not normal to find my blood mixed with the blood of two different people."

He said that blood samples taken from a rug in Father Orantes' room, located close to where Bishop Gerardi was found dead, were a mixture of Father Orantes, a vagrant who slept in front of the parish house and a former drug dealer.

But Galindo also said that tests taken from military officers, thought to be linked to the crime, were still inconclusive.

Father Orantes was arrested last July and charged in connection with the murder. He was later released for lack of evidence, but is still officially under investigation.

Stem-cell research generates 3-day dialogue

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Scientists and Catholic bishops in a three-day dialogue found common ground and areas of disagreement on issues of stem-cell research.

They agreed that "using embryonic stem cells to generate a child is unsafe and unethical and should be prohibited."

They recognized together that "disagreement exists about whether a fertilized egg possesses rights associated with the human person."

The dialogue, sponsored by the Committee on Science and Human Values of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, brought five bishops and 12 scientists together Sept. 10-12 to discuss the scientific and moral implications of embryonic and adult stem-cell research.

Stem cells are those cells in animals and humans that continually reproduce themselves and produce other cells to renew the body throughout an individual's life. Adult stem cells tend to be quite differentiated — some produce only blood cells, others heart or muscle or brain tissue. Embryonic stem cells are undifferentiated and have the ability to develop into nearly any type of cell.

In a series of "statements of common ground" developed during the meeting,

the group found that even in areas where participants had unresolved differences, they could agree on some aspects of an issue, if only on what are the important questions to be asked.

David Byers, NCCB staff person for the committee, told Catholic News Service that core questions the group faced revolved around how to define a human person or say when one exists.

The group agreed that "stem-cell research has great potential for stimulating advances in medicine and for increasing our understanding of human biology, including embryology."

It also agreed that "research on adult — i.e., postnatal — stem cells raises no new moral problems or issues" for scientists or for Catholic teaching, other than those that apply generally to research on human tissue.

Noting disagreements over when a developing human being is to be identified as an individual human person invested with rights, the group agreed that:

- It is appropriate for the church to ask scientists to design stem-cell research experiments in ways that respect human life.

- It is appropriate for scientists to ask the church to review its philosophical definition of "human person" to see whether it can reasonably be rearticulated.

Acknowledging the state of disagree-

ment over attributing personhood and rights to the fertilized egg, they raised three "key questions" for discussion of that issue:

- "What is a human person, taking into account both ontological status and potential for development?"

- "What entities are covered by the term 'human person'?"

- "On what grounds are these matters to be decided?"

Byers said the dialogue was the fifth in a series of annual meetings addressing issues of the moral and pastoral implications of modern technology.

Earlier sessions covered the topics of genetic testing, genetic screening cloning, and end-of-life issues.

Byers said that while it continues to explore such technology issues in September meetings, the bishops' committee also plans to begin another series on the theological implications of modern science. The series will begin with a meeting next June at the University of Notre Dame, on the topic of "mind, brain and spirit."

The committee is headed by Bishop Edward M. Egan of Bridgeport, Conn. On the science side it includes both a core group of scientists who form a permanent part of the group and others who are invited to participate in individual sessions in their fields of specialty.

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