

Patricio, Presente, ahora y para siempre; Present, now and forever

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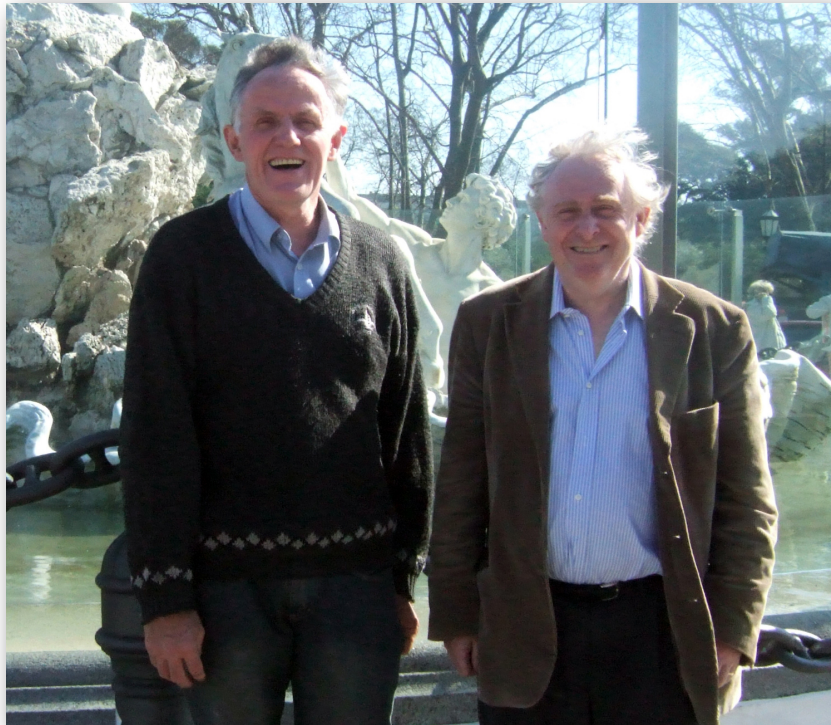
Families, friends and human rights activists gathered in autumn 2010 at the Palacio San Martín, the Foreign Ministry of Argentina in Buenos Aires, to pay homage to six survivors of the dirty war in the 1970s and early 1980s.¹ The Argentine Government, led by the Peronist, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, had decided to honour six religious leaders of different churches and faiths for their courage and bravery in defence of human rights during and after the period of military dictatorship in the 1970s and early 1980s. Two retired Bishops of the Evangelical Methodist Church, Aldo Manuel Etchegoyen and Federico José Pagura, were among those to receive the honours. Rabbi Bernardo Javier Plaunick was also a recipient, as were Frs. Raúl Troncoso and Elias Musse. All had been kidnapped, illegally imprisoned and tortured by officials of the state in places of secret detention in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina. After their release, they distinguished themselves as lifelong opponents of state repression in that country and throughout the world. It was a moving occasion, recalling a dark phase in the history of Argentina, the citation stated that all six were being honoured

*por su compromiso con la justicia social y la defensa de los derechos humanos, en ocasión del XXIX aniversario de la 'Declaración sobre la eliminación de todas las formas de intolerancia y discriminación fundadas en la religión o en las convicciones' proclamada por la Organización de las Naciones Unidas.*²

¹ See the following works by Dermot Keogh: *Romero: Church and State in El Salvador* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1981):170; *Central America: Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1985):168; *Witness to the Truth, Church and Dictatorship in Latin America* (Cork and Dublin: Hibernian University Press, 1989), *Church and Politics in Latin America* (London: Macmillan, 1990), collection of essays with introduction by Graham Greene: 430; 'El Salvador and the United States', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.13, No.2, Summer 1984: 153-183.

² Translation: 'for their commitment to social justice and the defense of human rights on the occasion of the twenty-ninth anniversary of the "Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance founded on religion or beliefs" proclaimed by the Organization of the United Nations'.

The Secretary for Religions, Ambassador Guillermo R. Oliveri, gave a formal address, praising the courage and the tenacity of each person being honoured.³ Each recipient spoke briefly in turn about their experiences, their hopes and their continued commitment to the struggle for the achievement of universal respect for human rights. Patrick Rice, or Patricio as he was known throughout Latin America, was among those being honoured. The Cork-born former priest was the only recipient not present to receive the award. He had died suddenly in Miami on 7 July 2010 while returning to Buenos Aires to begin a new phase in a life dedicated to the protection of human rights, as director of the Coalition



Patrick Rice and Dermot Keogh, Buenos Aires, 2006. (Clare Keogh collection)

against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED) [*Coalición Internacional contra la Desaparición Forzada*]. Patrick, who would have been the youngest among the recipients had he lived, was represented by his wife, Fátima Cabrera, and by his three children, Carlos, Amy and Blanca. Fátima, like Patrick, was a survivor of enforced detention and torture under the military *junta*. She was seventeen when she was kidnapped with Patrick, tortured in a cell adjacent to his and held for three years in prison. She spent two further years under house arrest. Surrounded and supported by their children,

³ I travelled to Buenos Aires with my wife, Ann, to be present at the event. I do not have transcripts of what was said on that occasion but I took my own notes.

Fátima spoke with great force and eloquence about her own kidnapping and of how she owed her life to Patrick.

On 7 December 2010, another ceremony was held again to pay homage to Patrick Rice and his contribution to the defence of human rights. On that occasion, what was formerly the chapel in the naval academy, ESMA, was to be dedicated as the '*espacio Patrick Rice*'. The invitation was headed, '*El Ente Espacio para la Memoria, Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*'. In the company of Fátima, and Patrick's three children, together with two friends from Venezuela, Fr. Jesús Silva and Eleana Gonzalez, we made the long journey to the wealthy *Avenida Libertador*, in the suburb of Nuñez, where the spacious grounds of the former naval academy, the *Escuela de Suboficiales de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), is situated. By law of the National Congress on the 5 August 2004, the extensive ESMA premises were turned into a museum named the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights. However, in 1976, the attic and the basement of the officers' quarters in the ESMA, which was also the residence of the *junta* member, Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera between 1976 and 1978, were used as an illegal detention and torture centre. From the first day of the coup on 24 March 1976 and during the subsequent dirty war, that building was the seat of Task Unit 3.3.2, *Unidad de Tareas 3.3.2*. It was led by Rear-Admiral Rubén Jacinto Chamorro and Captain Carlos Acosta Ambone. The names of Jorge Eduardo Acosta, Alfredo Astiz, Ricardo Miguel Cavallo and Adolfo Scilingo were among those who would become infamous when news of their evil deeds became widely known. The ESMA chaplain during 1977 was Father Alberto Ángel Zanchetta. Horacio Verbitsky, a well-known Argentinian journalist, published a book in English in 2005, *Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior*, based on the memories of Scilingo. The latter, now serving a thirty-year jail sentence, broke the vow of silence which has bound senior Argentine officers to keep their respective mouths shut. So far, Scilingo is the only senior officer to 'sing'. Under the direction of those mentioned above, ESMA became a centre for forced disappearance, torture and illegal execution. An estimated 5,000 were 'disappeared' from the ESMA. There were also cases of children, born to mothers imprisoned there, who were given over to illegal adoption because their mothers were 'disappeared'.

There was something very poignant about our visit to the extensive grounds of ESMA. I had been there once before to be shown around the same house which had served as an officers' quarters, a torture centre and a workshop in which the 'disappeared' were employed to forge identity documents. Walking through the grounds on this, my second visit, we were searching for the building which was once a chapel for the officers of the academy, soon to be renamed '*Espacio Patrick Rice*'. It was difficult to put out of one's mind the fact that the ESMA was a place where evil once

resided and evil acts had been perpetrated under the pretext of ridding the country of the threat of communism and of the revolutionary left. The warm summer weather made it hard to believe that ESMA was once a place where evil triumphed and men of good will, if there were any serving there at the time of the dirty war, kept a vow of silence, then and now. The birds were singing and the trees were in bloom on the long avenues between the different buildings. Our companion, an elderly Uruguayan priest, Jesús Silva, had lost his brother, Mauricio, in the dirty war. A confrere of Patrick Rice, he had been working as a road sweeper and had been 'disappeared' on 14 June 1977. He simply disappeared, or was 'disappeared', never to return to his fraternity community in La Boca. We walked in silence. Then Fr. Silva said what was in the minds of each of us, 'the ESMA was a sad and evil place'. He was thinking of the 5,000 who had been 'disappeared' there and of the thousands of others who had been tortured and brutalised in that now infamous building. Fr. Silva did not know if his brother had spent his last days in the attic of the ESMA, the same building in which Admiral Massera, the commander of the academy, had his private residence. Hannah Arendt's phrase, 'the banality of evil', came to mind as we thought that it was probable that Fr. Mauricio Silva had been a captive there, and that he had been injected and drugged before being taken by plane out over the *La Plata* estuary and dumped into the river below.

It was not that difficult to find the way. A file of people walked in that direction and a large crowd had already gathered in front of the former chapel, a more modern building than the others, with its doors wide open. The small plaza outside the front door would have been once used to allow officers to get in line and to march into the church. Now, everything had changed. There were no military trappings. The church had been stripped of all furniture and religious objects. It was an empty space and there was a large screen on which was being shown a film about Patrick's life and witness to the truth. Among the large crowd outside were a number of Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo*, human rights leaders and veterans of the dirty war, including a number of former and current government ministers. The recently arrived Irish ambassador to Argentina, James McIntyre, was also present.

In the ceremony that followed, outside the former Catholic Church, Fr. Raúl Silva, eighty-three years of age, spoke movingly about his friend Patrick and about the struggle for justice and for the defence of human rights in Latin America. He recalled the death of his brother and of others who had fallen in the struggle to maintain human dignity. He had been a priest for most of his life and he had been moved by the values of the

Gospel. He shared that vision with Patrick Rice. It was a very forceful presentation.⁴

The Minister for Human Rights, Dr Eduardo Luis Duhalde, said he had known Patrick since 1979, and in the following thirty-one years their paths had crossed many times. Duhalde regarded him as having been a good man, moral and a tireless militant who stood in solidarity with those who fought to defend human rights. He said that the dedication of the space in his name was highly justified. Patrick was, he added, a militant with *patas de bronce*, one of those who did not seek the limelight but worked continuously for the defence of human rights. The minister hoped that Patrick Rice's name would be incorporated into the historical memory of all Argentines for the role he had played in their recent history.

The President of the Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo* (*Línea Fundadora*), Marta Vázquez, recalled meeting him first in Costa Rica, 'I don't want to neglect to point out the long road that he travelled lobbying at the UN for the ratification of the convention on enforced disappearances which he brought to final success after twenty-two years of struggle'. She said that the convention would come into effect on 23 December 2010 at the General Assembly, 'We should toast his memory,' she said with force, adding that the *espacio Patrick Rice* that had once been a place of terrible suffering may be converted into a little bit of heaven, *un lugar de pequeño cielo*.⁵

What was particularly moving about this occasion was the realisation that Patrick had been working very hard with the Memory Project to convert the former church into a center for interreligious dialogue and a space for reflection on the historical role played by the churches in Argentina at the time of the dirty war. Fátima Rice, ending the dedication, said that a dream of Patrick's had now become a reality, and that the pain and suffering had been transformed into homage and joy.

Writing of his own detention in a book he helped to edit, *En Medio de la Tempestad*, Patrick reflected, '*nunca pensé seriamente que algún día me iba a tocar. Hasta hoy me cuesta creer que como pudo haber seres tan depravados y perversos que torturan a otros seres humanos en estado de total indefensión. Ahora sé que es así y que el ser humano tiene una capacidad única para la brutalidad y la maldad. Si bien fue una experiencia atroz, también tengo que confesar que pude descubrir a Dios en medio de todo*

⁴ Fr. Silva, a cultured, eloquent and holy man, died in early 2011 at a home in Caracas, which he helped run for street children.

⁵ From my gathered notes and newspaper clippings of the occasion.

ese dolor y esa incertidumbre'.⁶ In that reflection, which I have left in Spanish as he wrote it, Patrick explained how he never expected to be taken by the military. Until today, it was painful for him to think about how it was possible for depraved and perverse human beings to torture other completely defenceless human beings. Even if it was a terrible experience, he explained further that it was possible to find God amid such suffering and uncertainty.

Motivated by the conviction that what had happened in the 1970s and early 1980s in Argentina should never be allowed to happen again, he had given a great deal of time and energy to thinking about how that former ESMA chapel space might be used as a way of confronting the churches with their past sins. Patrick wanted the dialogue to include all sections of society, lay and religious. Writing in 2008, Pat commented pointedly in an obituary of Cardinal Pio Laghi, the Papal Nuncio to Argentina between 1974 and 1980, regarding the death of his late confrere, Fr. Mauricio Silva.

Among the many Church related cases that were on Pio Laghi's agenda (French missionary sisters Alice Domon, and Leonie Duquet, disappeared in December 1977, and others) was that of Little Brother Mauricio Silva of the Charles de Foucauld Fraternity who was disappeared on 14 June 1977. Most of the petitions were made through Pio Laghi and it would be impossible to detail all. The superior general of the Fraternity Francisco Hulsén even met with Pope John Paul II on the eve of his mediation trip to Argentina in 1980 where he moved to avoid war between Chile and Argentina and made the petition for Mauricio. Nothing happened, and it was afterwards that the Nuncio echoed strongly the rumor that Mauricio had supposedly died in a Buenos Aires hospital. There is no doubt in Brother Hulsén's mind who had personally met with Nuncio Pio Laghi in Buenos Aires, 1978, that the Nuncio was an accomplice to the crimes of

⁶ Conversations with Fátima Rice, 2000- 2010; See also, Patrick Rice and Luis Torres (eds.), *En Medio de la Tempestad (In the Eye of the Storm) The Brothers of the Gospel in Argentina, 1959-1977* (Buenos Aires, 2007); the contributors are: Arturo Paoli, Fabert Gerardo Francisco Hulsén, Fernando Portillo, Patrick Rice, Juanin Pilatti, Stephen of Quirini, Marita Felipe Gonzales, Enrique de Solan, Ada D'Alessandro, Fátima Cabrera, Juan Jose Kratzer, Joao Face, Marta Garaycochea, Julio Baquero, and Roberto Scordato. While both Fátima and Patrick were being tortured, Doña Blanca, Fátima's mother, had gone to the police station to inquire about the whereabouts of her daughter. She recalled seeing a blond man but they would tell her nothing or give her no information. Her family had contacts in the military but those sources did not yield any results either. She had to travel to Tucumán, where Fátima was born, to get some documentation necessary to process the disappearance complaint with the police. She told me of the long journey of eighteen hours during a state of siege. The bus was stopped several times and the military took passengers away. When she arrived in Tucumán, she found soldiers posted all around the main square. She got back to Buenos Aires with the documentation and went on a round of police stations. She found out nothing and the police would tell her absolutely nothing about the whereabouts of her daughter or, even, whether they had her or not. She lived in a macabre world where the military had literally power over life and death. Conversations with Doña Blanca, 2000 to 2008.

the dictatorship. 'An accomplice with white gloves' he said to me recently on hearing of his death, and then explained that the *Junta* needed a Nuncio like Pio Laghi to be able to carry out their crimes; one who mediated, negotiated and then wanted all to be forgotten. 'Without people like that dictatorships would not exist,' said Francisco who is now pastor in a community en El Alto (Bolivia).⁷

Patrick Rice, my personal friend for nearly fifty years, felt that he had good reason to be critical of the role of the former Papal Nuncio. The above is an example of his forthright and combative style. He took the Gospel at face value and felt, believing that the imperative to live up to the challenge was his life's vocation. He wrote again about Pio Laghi,

There are however those who find this kind of position too harsh. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Nobel Peace Laureate) is one who says that the Nuncio supported him to get him out of the country. That was also the case of many Church people that had to leave Argentina at the time. In fact, his secretary, Monseigneur Kevin Mullen, was very considerate and helpful. However there is a sad epilogue here. Mons. Mullen was later transferred to Cuba where he died suddenly and mysteriously soon afterwards. In fact his sister was demanding a criminal investigation and did not rule out some sinister and unknown motives. The fact is that one of the key witnesses to Pio Laghi's time in Argentina is no longer alive. Recently we went to the *Nunciature* in Buenos Aires to consult files on Mauricio's case which will be in the courts later this year, 2009, and we were told that all such files were now in the Vatican Archives and would not be released for many years (100) when all the protagonists are dead and gone (including ourselves). So historians will have a job to uncover the truth about those years.⁸

Patrick would like to have been able to help the historical process by using the former chapel in the ESMA to hold discussions and reflections on sections of the Catholic Church, in particular, which had been complicit in the maneuvers of the Argentine armed forces during the dirty war. Paradoxically, the former chapel in the ESMA, his final project for dialogue and reconciliation, now bears his name and his legacy will live on there.

Patrick Rice would have been embarrassed by all the attention that he received after his death, the very large funeral, and the tributes that flowed

⁷ Rice, Patrick, 'Obituary: Pio Laghi's Work in Argentina Doesn't Measure Up!' *La Prensa San Diego*, 20 February 2009. <http://laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/2009/february20-09/Pio.Laghi.022009.htm>

⁸ Ibid.

in from all over the world. He was an intensely shy person, slow to draw attention to himself in company. He grew up on a farm, Strawhall, at Curraghmore in Fermoy, County Cork. He studied at the Christian Brothers School in the town where he had mixed memories about his education. After earning his Leaving Certificate, as was commonplace for young men in the early 1960s, he joined a religious order, the Divine Word Missionaries and did his novitiate in St. Patrick's Donamon, Roscommon. He studied philosophy there until he went to St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, in 1966 where he graduated with an honours BD (Baccalaureate in Divinity) in 1969. He was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in the Divine Word Missionary Society in 1970 and the same year, he was sent to Argentina where he would spend almost the rest of his life. Between 1970 and 1972, he was a Catholic chaplain at the Agronomy and Veterinary Science Schools (FAVE) of the Catholic University of Santa Fe in Esperanza, Province of *Santa Fe*, Argentina. He was also an assistant professor in the Philosophy Department of the same University. During those first two years in Santa Fe, he encountered the writings of the third world priests' movement. He re-evaluated his vocation and took the radical step of joining the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, known as the Little Brothers of the Gospel Fraternity, a religious group founded to follow the spirituality of the French army officer, turned hermit who was murdered in 1916 at Tamanrasset, southern Algeria. Patrick was later sent



Photo of Patrick Rice is either from a press conference Rice gave at CAFOD in 1976 after his release, or from an interview in Mexico in 1982.

to do a second novitiate on the docks of Cartagena, Colombia, working as a labourer.

Patrick was physically very strong. He was tall and lean, a fine long distance runner and an outstanding oarsman for the Fermoy Rowing Club. Raised on a farm, he was not afraid of intense physical work. Patrick's grandfather, William, a doctor in the Fermoy area, inherited the farm at Strawhall from his father, also William. The Rice family had a tradition of struggle and resistance dating from the time of the land war in the 1880s. They were friends of William O'Brien MP and his wife Sophie. Pat's father had a grandaunt, Mary Rice, who lived at Bonard House, Castlelyons, County Cork and married David Kent, a substantial farmer. They had seven sons and two daughters. Her eldest son, Thomas Kent, worked on the farm and emigrated at nineteen to Boston in 1884 where he joined two of his brothers. His family had played an active part in the Land League and when he returned to Ireland he spent some months in jail for agitation. He was sent to prison a second time for two months in 1914 when police discovered firearms in his home at Bonard. When the Easter Rising took place in April 1916, Thomas was ready for mobilization. When the Irish Volunteers stood down in Cork, Thomas returned on 2 May with his brothers to Bonard House. The police laid siege to the house the following day in the course of a three-hour battle a head-constable was killed. Mrs Kent was actively involved in the siege, reloading the three shotguns and one rifle while shouting encouragement to her four sons. Her son, David, was wounded and a second brother, Richard, was shot down as he ran for the trees. The remaining two brothers, William and Thomas, were taken into custody and narrowly escaped summary execution. Both were tried on 4 May in Cork. William was acquitted but Thomas was sentenced to death and executed on 9 May.⁹

Patrick's grandfather, Dr. William Rice, married Kate Connell, Cahermee House, Doneraile in 1907. Their son, also William, married Amy Noonan and Patrick was the second oldest. He had an elder brother, Liam, and four younger brothers, John, Tom, Edward and Dennis, and a sister, Kathleen.

Working frequently in the fields with his father, Patrick was taught the basics of construction, carpentry and farming; skills he would use later as a priest. Six feet five inches tall, his father was known locally as 'Tiny'. He had studied pharmacy in Dublin but had, for reasons unknown, never

⁹ A note on the Kent family, Castlelyons Parish, <http://www.castlelyonsparish.com/history/local-history/kents/>. See also Desmond McCabe and Lawrence William White, 'Thomas (Ceannt) Kent', Dictionary of Irish Biography, <http://dib.cambridge.org.proxy.bc.edu/quicksearch.do?jsessionid=D97FBFFD70A19B6BE2B8625D77499902>

completed his studies. He was a quiet gentle man, soft-spoken and reflective with not a great interest in farming, according to his son, Liam. Patrick's mother was a most hard-working and generous woman. She was a great reader and enjoyed her private time with her books. Patrick's gentleness, generosity and openness came from his parents but so, too, did his steely determination to stand up for what was right. He found his inspiration in the Gospels and his life revolved around trying to live up to those high ideals of 'naïve' teachings like the Sermon on the Mount. What drove him throughout his life was the very dangerous commitment to, and belief in, the tenets of a primitive Christianity, untrammelled by the weight of an authoritarian Catholicism.

He carried the values of selfless generosity and commitment to the essence of the Gospels wherever he went as a priest and as a defender of human rights during his forty years of campaigning in Latin America. Those values were reinforced and deepened by his formation in the Divine Word Missionaries in the 1960s where I had first made his acquaintance. The Gospels were his bedrock, and his lifelong inspiration and the preferential option for the poor was not, for him, an abstract theological concept.

Returning from his novitiate in Colombia, Patrick was assigned in 1973 and 1974 to work with the Little Brothers of the Gospel Fraternity in the region of Fortín Olmos, Santa Fe Province both as a priest and as a work project coordinator.¹⁰ Patrick's activities were coordinated within the pastoral and social plan of the *Diocese of Reconquista*. This focused on the unionization of forest workers and on horticultural and other training for rural youth. Many of his former parishioners made the long journey to be present at his funeral and spoke of the extraordinary work that he did in his short time with them.

His life changed in 1974 when he was assigned to work with the Fraternity in the neighborhood of La Boca, the old port of Buenos Aires and home to the football team of the same name. He was by then head of the Fraternity house. He later worked in the shantytown of Villa Soldati and as a 'worker' priest he took up the trade of carpentry and worked for different building firms in the city.

The Argentine military seized power in March 1976. In the so-called dirty war that followed, gross violation of human rights quickly became the hallmark of the new regime. Some 30,000 people were estimated to have 'disappeared' through a system of state terrorism before the regime fell in 1983. The military authorities viewed the pastoral mission of the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld with great suspicion and many of its members were forced to go underground. Mutilated bodies, the victims of

¹⁰ One project, a carpentry shop, continued to operate in 2011.

state repression, were dumped near Villa Soldati, where Pat worked. On 4 July 1976, the military murdered three Pallottine priests and two seminarians in the monastery in Belgrano. The outspoken Bishop of La Rioja, Enrique Angelelli, was killed by the military on 4 August 1976. Disregarding personal safety, Pat, accompanied by a member of the Fraternity, made the long and difficult twenty-hour bus journey during a 'state of siege' to the murdered-bishop's diocese in order to investigate the suspicious circumstances in which he had died. The military claimed that the bishop had died in a traffic accident. But, as many studies have shown, it was murder plain and simple.

Returning to the capital with his findings, Pat continued his investigations into disappearances and helped produce a report 'Violence against the Argentine Church' which, published in several languages, received international attention. Patrick later described that report as his first work in the field of human rights. A publication of that kind placed him under even greater suspicion in the eyes of the military. He was very outspoken in his sermons and in his contributions to public meetings. It was a time of great fear and of great suspicion in Argentina. Lay people and religious could not count on widespread support in a fear-ridden country. Instead of a universal condemnation of human rights abuses, many people, concerned for their own safety, remained neutral while others responded to the frequent disappearances with the now infamous self-serving phrase, '*algo habrán hecho*', or 'they [that is, those who were 'disappeared'] must have done something' to deserve being detained. The complicity, the fear and the resistance is related very well in Emilio Mignone's *Witness to the Truth, The Catholic Church and Dictatorship in Argentina* (1988).

However, for the Papal Nuncio, Pio Laghi, the world of *Junta* Argentina was a very different place. In an interview on 29 March 1977 with the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights in the administration of President Jimmy Carter, Ms. Patricia Derian, he spoke of a country where the political institutions had been functioning poorly long before the military coup of March 1976. He placed responsibility on Perón over a thirty year period for bringing the national political institutions to a state of collapse. The country had sunk 100 meters beneath the water and was in need of recovery. Since the coup, the nation had 'begun to float on the surface' now, but it was covered in the mud of corruption and disorganisation and recovery had taken, and would take longer, than anticipated'. He said that there was 'guilt in the leaders of the country; they knew that they have committed evil in human rights matters and do not need to be told of their

guilt by visitors. This would be “rubbing salt into the wounds”.¹¹ Laghi’s thesis was that General Videla represented ‘moderate elements’ and that there was a danger that ‘other hardline generals would take power in their own coup’. The Nuncio was convinced that ‘Videla and other leaders are good men at heart’ and that Videla ‘was a good Catholic, a man deeply aware of and concerned over the personal religious implications of his responsibilities’. Videla had visited him at the nunciature within the week and such matters were discussed. ‘Many of the military were men with grave problems of conscience, which they brought to the military chaplains. The Nuncio was aware of their deep disturbance and the probability of becoming sick. At the same time, they believed that they were doing what was necessary’.

Laghi’s response to Derian’s question on whether he considered that the Church and Catholics were being persecuted in Argentina was of ‘surprise and quick denial’. He said that,

individuals among the 5,500 priests and 11,000 nuns had been arrested or abused, but rejected the suggestion that the Church as such was under attack. At the moment there were twelve priests in detention, seven of whom were non-Argentine. Several of them were detained up to two and one-half years ago, under the preceding government, and were under charges. Trials had even been started, but there had been delays such as changes of judges at the time of the *coup*, and the Church was pressing for resolution of their cases. The Nuncio stated that about seven of the total of twelve priests had admitted their involvement in or association with subversion. For example, two had been captured arms in hand leading an assault on a police station, another had hidden arms for the guerrillas. The church hoped that in the cases of the foreigners at least it would be possible to secure their expulsion from Argentina after trial. But aside from these cases and isolated episodes such as those involving Father [Patrick] Rice and Father [James] Weeks, it could not be said that the Church was subject to special persecution by the government.¹²

Laghi also denied that Jews were subject to persecution. He kept in touch with Jewish leaders and believed that Jews were not singled out for persecution as Jews. He acknowledged that individual anti-Semitic military or police officers might exhibit their bias when dealing with a subversive

¹¹ Memorandum of conversation between the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Pio Laghi, and Patricia Derian at the nunciature, Buenos Aires, 29 March 1977; also present were Fernando Rondon and Robert S. Steven, American Embassy, Buenos Aires. http://www.cipol.org/pdfs/las_visitas_de_patt_derian_documentos_desclasificados.pdf

¹² Ibid.

suspect who also happened to be Jewish, but felt that in the broader sense there was no anti-Semitism in Argentina'.¹³ Laghi, of whom Patrick had been very critical, while Nuncio of the United States explained the subtleties of Liberation Theology to President Ronald Regan by saying, 'theology is like spaghetti, Mr. President. Served with too much sauce and too much salt', it is 'bad for the digestion', he reportedly said. 'Liberation theology, as served up by the Sandinistas and the priests who support them, is ruined by too much seasoning'.¹⁴ That was not a form of argument with which Patrick would, or could, meaningfully engage.

While one section of the Catholic Church, other Christian Churches and leaders of the Jewish community suffered torture and 'disappearance', the official church, according to Patrick, enjoyed the financial and political backing of the *Junta*,

Meanwhile, General Videla installed a private chapel in a Government house, bishops got substantial salaries and seminarians were also given special state scholarships. No control was exercised on reactionary bishops such as Archbishop Adolfo Tortolo (except he never received the red hat) and others such as Cardinal Primatesta and Cardinal Aramburu who were moderate at one stage became totally reactionary as they took on key leadership roles in the Argentine Bishops Conference. It was during those years that there was a serious impasse in relationships with the American Bishops Conference on the issue of human rights, and I know of no serious effort by Pio Laghi to resolve that question even after becoming Papal Delegate to the US in 1980.¹⁵

Despite the growing danger and the assassination of churchmen and women, Patrick continued to work quite openly in Villa Soldati. On one occasion, an Irish Passionist priest was picked up in a pharmacy in Buenos Aires and on being released, he was told by the police that they had in fact mistaken him for Patrick Rice. A week later, on 11 October 1976, as Patrick was leaving an evening prayer meeting in his Villa Soldati parish, accompanied by a seventeen-year-old catechist, Fátima Cabrera, they were both surrounded by armed men who had been lying in wait. Patrick explained at a press conference organised by CAFOD, the Catholic human rights organisation on December 1976 what happened next. He explained how they had been held up at gunpoint by a man while walking with

¹³ *Derian Report*, 29 March 1977, <http://www.cipol.org/pdfs/Patt/0000a0d9.pdf>

¹⁴ Quoted by Massimo Franco, *Parallel Empires: The Vatican and the United States — Two Centuries of Alliance and Conflict*, Doubleday, 2008 – Quotation taken from *New York Times* obituary of Pio Laghi: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/13/world/europe/13laghi.html>

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 8.

Fátima Cabrera, a young catechist and helper in the parish. The gunman did not identify himself, firing a shot into the ground. Their assailant was quickly joined by a second armed man. Both Fátima and Patrick were bundled into the back of a car, probably a Ford Falcon, and taken to Police Station 36. He was taken to a room, his shirt pulled over his head, and he was beaten. When he identified himself as a priest, he was told, 'Now you will find out that the Romans were very civilised towards the early Christians compared with what's going to happen to you'. The beatings continued but the interrogation stopped.

Later that night, Patrick was hooded, his hands tied behind his back, and he was bundled into the boot of a car. Fátima Cabrera was put in the back seat of the same car and they were taken to what he thought was an army barracks. When they arrived, his hood, which was made of rags, was replaced by a yellow hood with a string around the neck. The man changing the hood said to him, 'Don't look at me. If you look at me you're a gonner'.¹⁶ Earlier during his transfer, his captors had joked amongst themselves that they were running out of hoods, business was so good.

His interrogators told him that they belonged to the Triple A, a right wing anti-communist terrorist organisation. Patrick said he was accused of painting subversive slogans on walls. 'At no stage have I cooperated or collaborated with any revolutionary organisation in Argentina', he told a press conference in London following his release in December 1976. Patrick was then beaten up and subjected to water torture. He explained how his nose was held and water poured down his throat, 'you swallow a lot of water and it has a drowning effect,' he said. The beatings and the drownings continued through Tuesday 12 October, at intervals of three to four hours. Later that evening, he was walked to another room where he knew he was going to be given electric shock torture. His interrogators applied the electrodes to different parts of his body. At a certain point, he realised that Fátima Cabrera, who had been kidnapped with him, was being tortured at the same time in the same room. She was seventeen years-old.¹⁷

Fátima, in the book *En medio de la Tempestad*, [*In the Eye of the Storm*] remembers that there were moments when she had the sensation that she was no longer alive, '*Ellos, los militares, eran los dueños de la vida*', she wrote later. That is, she said, that their military torturers were literally the arbiters over life and death. She said that 'they tortured us all night. When we asked to go to the toilet, we were taken but then tortured with greater

¹⁶ Conor O'Cleary, 'Priest describes his torture in Argentina', *The Irish Times*, 8 December 1976.

¹⁷ Ibid.

intensity. Finally, we did not ask to go to the toilet'.¹⁸ At one point, when Patrick and herself were being tortured in adjacent rooms, she heard one of the interrogators say excitedly, *El cura canta*, or the priest is 'singing', meaning that he was ready to talk. Somebody rushed to get an English translator who quickly discovered that Patrick was not 'singing', but praying for his captors and torturers in Latin and in Irish.¹⁹ On 14 October, Pat was again bundled into the boot of a car and taken to the Central Police Station, at 1550 Calle Moreno, in Buenos Aires where he was placed in a cell.

Due to the quick thinking and actions of a number of people, Patrick's kidnapping had been swiftly reported to the Irish Embassy. An Irish Dominican nun, the late Sister Terence, who lived opposite the church of Santa Cruz, was possibly the first to get word to the embassy. The Irish embassy, according to Patrick, also received information of his disappearance from Fr. Mauricio Silva, one of his confreres in the Fraternity, who was himself 'disappeared' on 14 June 1977, tortured and murdered. His body was never recovered.

Prompt and courageous action by the staff of the Irish embassy in Buenos Aires certainly helped save the lives of both Patrick and Fátima. Justin Harman, the third secretary at the Irish embassy, worked with Ambassador Wilfred Lennon, to establish his whereabouts. Mr. Harman, the current Ambassador for Ireland to Spain, did not give up and searched the police barracks in Buenos Aires without any immediate success. *The Irish Times*, on 14 October, carried a front-page story stating that the Irish Embassy had contacted the Argentinean Foreign Ministry to enlist the aid of the local authorities in tracing his whereabouts. Justin Harman explained that Patrick had been abducted while conducting a prayer meeting in a shanty town on the road to the Buenos Aires Ezeiza International Airport when he was seized by unidentified gunmen in civilian clothes who were travelling in two cars. 'No word has been heard of him since', Justin Harman said, adding, 'we look on this with extreme concern in view of happenings here over the past years'. Ambassador, Wilfred Lennon called twice at the Foreign Ministry and was assured that machinery had been set in motion to locate Fr. Rice. Justin Harman also said that it was understood that local Church authorities had also asked the government to investigate Pat's kidnapping. The report mentioned the deaths of seven priests and seminarians who had died in the recent

¹⁸ Conversations with Fátima Rice, 2000- 2010; See also, Ibid. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid 7.: 52.

violence, among them Alfredo Leaden and Alfredo Kelly, both of Irish descent and both of whom had studied in Ireland.²⁰

A Reuter's report was carried in *The Times* (London), the following day, 'An Irish priest has been kidnapped by unidentified gunmen here, an Irish Embassy spokesman said today. He is Father Patrick Rice, aged 31, of the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, a French Roman Catholic mission'. The spokesman said that he was abducted on Monday while holding a prayer meeting. Informed sources said the Irish Embassy and church authorities had asked the Argentine Government to investigate the kidnapping, which happened after an appeal by the Pope for an end to what he called 'blind violence' in Argentina.²¹ *The Washington Post* also carried virtually the same report on the same day. It read, 'ABDUCTED IRISH PRIEST, Argentine police and Roman Catholic church leaders searched for an Irish worker-priest who was seized by gunmen while conducting a prayer meeting in a Buenos-Aires slum. Rev. Patrick Rice, 31, who works as a carpenter and ministers to the poor, was led away by unidentified gunmen in civilian clothes who arrived in two cars at the Villa Soldati slum, according to Irish Embassy reports'. There was a second news item in the same paper that day, 14 October, about Patrick's disappearance. Irish embassy sources were again cited as the source of the information.²²

On 19 October, ten days after his illegal detention, Patrick was, without warning or explanation, shaved by his captors and given fresh clothes. He was told that he was to receive visitors. He was also warned that if he did not want to wind up in a sack at the bottom of the River Plate he should say that he had fallen down stairs. Taken to another room, he was surprised to see the Irish Ambassador and Justin Harman. Delighted to see him, both were distressed by his appearance as he still bore the marks of the beatings from his captors. Ambassador Lennon noticed the marks on his arms and inquired whether they had been done by cigarettes. Patrick replied that cigarette burns were the least of anyone's worries in such places of detention. Both diplomats left assuring him that they would continue to work hard to get him out of jail.

In the Dáil, on 16 December 1976, Michael O'Kennedy (FF) asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, if the Irish

²⁰ 'Concern over fate of missing Irish priest in Argentina', *The Irish Times*, 14 October 1976; Both Kelly and Leden were Pallottines, two of the five, killed in the San Patricio Church massacre on 4 July 1976.

²¹ 'Irish Priest kidnapped by gunmen in Argentina', [Reuter, Buenos Aires, 13 October 1975]; *The Times* (London), 14 October 1976.

²² *The Washington Post*, 14 October 1976.

government had protested against the brutality and the torture inflicted on Fr. Rice, and if any redress had been sought from the Argentinean government? In reply, the minister said that, once there was reason to believe that he had been ill-treated, the matter was taken up with the Argentinean authorities in Dublin and in Buenos Aires. 'We are not aware that Father Rice suffered any further ill-treatment after our protests', the minister said, 'as I indicated in the House on 4 November we also urged most strongly at the highest level that Father Rice should either be released or brought to trial without delay. I am glad to say that our intervention in the case led to Father Rice's release. The Deputy will be aware from the replies I have just given to his previous questions that basic standards of human rights should be upheld in other countries'.²³ While the diplomatic pressure for his release intensified, Patrick was kept another month and a half in jail. Ambassador Wilfred Lennon, Justin Harman, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, and other members of the Department of Foreign Affairs, worked very successfully as a team to get Patrick released from jail in Argentina. The department had applied the maximum pressure at the United Nations, and had successfully mounted an international press campaign to lobby for his release. Irish diplomats and Dr. FitzGerald were very much aware of the short-coming of the UN in the guaranteeing and protection of human rights. The problems were diagnosed. But Patrick, during his time in London in 1977, would speak with an increasingly more critical voice about the limitations of Irish refugee policy and on the failure of the Irish government to lobby on behalf of victims of torture who were not Irish citizens. In one way or another, he would devote the remainder of his life to advancing the respect for human rights internationally and in ensuring that the UN adopted strong protocols for the protection of the individual from enforced disappearance and torture.

Patrick found ways in prison to show defiance and to subvert prison authority. I learned of one such act of defiance in a court room in La Plata in July 2007 while attending the trial of Fr. Christian Von Wernich (69), a priest accused of complicity during the dirty war in seven murders, forty-two kidnappings and thirty-two instances of torture. Survivors claimed that, the former prison chaplain, who had served in that role between 1976 and 1983, had gained the confidence of prisoners and then passed on information to the military authorities. Witnesses said that he had even attended several torture sessions and had given absolution to the interrogators, saying that they had been doing God's work. He accused those who testified against him as having been influenced by the devil,

²³ Dáil Eireann Debates, 16 December 1976, <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1976/12/16/00046.asp>

‘responsible for malice’ and ‘the father of evil and lies’.²⁴ An elderly woman witness, at the session I attended, told of the disappearance of two of her children. She, too, had been ‘disappeared’ and illegally detained. One day, she recalled, she was in a corridor in the prison together with many other prisoners. Her memory was a little hazy as she was trying to recollect events that had happened thirty years before. But she remembered that a priest prisoner called Patricio had said Mass clandestinely in the corridor of the prison in defiance of, and under the very noses of, the authorities.²⁵ She recalled that ‘Patricio’ had shaped silver cigarette paper into the form of a miniature chalice. The prisoners had collected scraps of bread which the celebrant consecrated. The elderly witness was not a believer, she told the court, but she found the Mass to have been among the most moving and emotional experiences of her life. Later, during a break in the proceedings, Patrick and she were reunited after over thirty years amid scenes of great joy.²⁶

The Von Wernich trial acted as a catalyst, and Patrick attended as many sessions as he could. Another priest Rev. Rubén Capitanio, who had been in the seminary with the accused, testified and condemned the Catholic Church in Argentina for complicity in the atrocities committed during the dirty war. He told the panel of three judges, ‘The attitude of the church was scandalously close to the dictatorshipto such an extent that I would say it was of a sinful degree’. The church ‘was like a mother that did not look for her children’, Fr. Capitanio added, ‘it did not kill anybody, but it did not save anybody, either’. He added, ‘many men and women of the church, bishops as well, have come to agree with my way of looking at the reality of the church’s role [and] ‘we have much to be sorry for’.²⁷ On 9

²⁴ See BBC report, ‘Dirty War’ Priest Gets Life Term’, 10 October 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7035294.stm> Von Wernich had fled to Chile where he worked under an alias. When the amnesty laws, passed at the end of military rule, were struck down, and deemed to be unconstitutional in 2003, he was extradited to Argentina the same year. There was outrage over his particular case because he was accused of gaining privileged information in his pastoral role as a priest and passing it on to the authorities.

²⁵ Ironically, Patrick did not have the faculties to celebrate Mass in jail in 1976. Von Wernich retained full faculties despite the charges brought against him. He continued to be permitted to celebrate Mass while in jail and on trial for complicity in seven murders, forty-two kidnappings and thirty two instances of torture.

²⁶ The other observers at trial together were Dr. Hiram Morgan and Dr. Lawrence Geary, History Department, University College Cork.

²⁷ Alexei Barrionuevo, ‘Argentine Church faces “Dirty War” past’, *New York Times*, 17 September 2007; <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/17/world/americas/17church.html>

October 2007, after a three-month-long trial, Von Wernich was sentenced to life imprisonment.²⁸

The diplomatic pressure by the Irish government and international human rights groups paid off eventually. On 6 December 1976, Patrick was released from jail, taken to the airport in Buenos Aires under armed guard, and put on a plane for home. Before being released, his captors, quite astonishingly, asked him to write something positive in their release book. With characteristic understatement, Patrick wrote laconically in Spanish, 'I might have been treated better.'²⁹

Nearly thirty years later, a fellow prisoner and survivor told Patrick he believed that many of the prisoners in that holding centre where he had been imprisoned were permitted to live only because he had seen them alive. He knew the identities of many of the captives. In those circumstances, the military were unable to make them 'disappear' without Patrick, now free, being able to testify that he had seen them alive while he was a prisoner. Patrick remained incredulous of this thesis but those who survived are not so sceptical. The person who believed that most strongly is Fátima Cabrera, the girl captured with him, who would later become his wife in 1985.

Patrick travelled back to London on 7 December where he gave a press conference organised by the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), and not Amnesty International, as reported in *The Irish Times*. *The Times* (London) reported that there was a total war in Argentina between the military and the guerrillas with the civilian population caught in between. The British reporter said Patrick was a boyish thirty-one and that he 'spoke haltinglyand was obviously suffering the effects of the electric shock and water torture to which he was subjected after his abduction.' Patrick said 'his abductors belonged to the Anti-Communist Alliance (AA) and had accused him of 'collaborating with revolutionaries and painting propaganda slogans'. Patrick said that he never had any requests for assistance from guerrillas and, as far as he knew, he had never been in contact with any. But, he added, it was impossible to distinguish a

²⁸ Ibid. 25 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7035294.stm> ; For video of verdict and for the full text of the judgment, see <http://juicioavonwernich.wordpress.com/> See Pablo Morosi, 'Condenaron a reclusión perpetua a Von Wernich', *La Nación*, 10 October 2007: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/951794-condenaron-a-reclusion-perpetua-a-von-wernich>; 'Reclusión perpetua para Von Wernich', *Clarín*, 9 October 2007; <http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2007/10/09/um/m-01515747.htm>; the same edition carried a report that the Argentinean Episcopal Conference stated that any member of the Catholic Church who participated in violent acts of repression acted on their own responsibility. The statement was issued under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Beroglio.

²⁹ Conversations with Patrick Rice, 2000-2010.

guerrilla from any ordinary person.³⁰ *The Irish Times* carried a full fuller version of the press conference. Patrick denied that he had painted slogans, as was alleged, 'At no stage have I co-operated or collaborated with any revolutionary organisation in Argentina', he said. He identified completely with the church in not endorsing violence. It was the only institution which had the confidence of the mass of the people, he said but he was critical of the 'unfortunate support' given by military chaplains and some members of the hierarchy to the Argentinean regime.³¹

After psychiatric rehabilitation, Patrick lived and worked in London, dedicating himself to human rights and solidarity work on behalf of Latin American refugees. He was the founding Chairperson of the Committee for Human Rights in Argentina and also of the Latin American Centre. From the time of his release, Patrick had become a persistent thorn in the side of the military. *The Times* (London) published a letter from Patrick on 2 February 1977 about 'Peace Sunday', he said that there were then six to eight people in detention in Argentina and that 18,000 had 'disappeared' in recent years. He wrote that widespread repression and torture continued unabated under the military regime. He gave the example of one member of his own religious community house, of which he had been the superior, had 'disappeared' near his family home, 'and has never been seen since'. His name was Fr. Pablo Gazarri. Patrick spoke about the mysterious death in custody of a journalist friend with whom he had been in prison. He wrote of the unknown fate of Fátima Cabrera, asking the Irish authorities to give her asylum and an airline ticket to Ireland had already been paid for.³² Patrick worked very closely with Amnesty International and British institutions such as the Joint Working Group for Refugees and the Catholic Institute for International Relations. He also did speaking tours denouncing torture in Argentina to the UN in March, 1977, and in France, Spain and Scotland. The European Parliament organized a panel on Human Rights and Patrick was invited to participate in one of the panels. His human rights work was accompanied by his work as a chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospice in Hackney, East London.³³

Between 1978 and 1980, he lived in Washington DC where he campaigned for Argentine Church workers who were 'disappeared'. He

³⁰ David Watts, 'Tortured Priest Speaks of "Total War" in Argentina', *The Times* (London), 7 December 1976.

³¹ Conor O'Cleary, 'Priest Describes His Torture in Argentina', *The Irish Times*, 8 December 1976.

³² Pat Rice, 'State Violence in Argentina', 2 February 1977, *The Times* (London), 2 February 1977. His address was given as Little Brothers of the Gospel, Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Holloway, N7.

³³ Patrick Rice *curriculum vitae*.

was a founding member of the Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina and became part of Tabor House (a grass roots Christian community dedicated to solidarity with Latin America). He lobbied the US Government and Congress on human rights issues in Argentina and Latin America. In 1979, he organized together with Senator Chris Dodd, a hearing on the Disappeared in Argentina. He also worked closely with the Inter- American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) participating in a hearing on the Argentine situation, 1978, and also in the preparation and follow up of its *in loco* investigation of 1979. The IACHR condemned the Argentine *Junta* for torture in his case and the subsequent report was approved by the OAS General Assembly in La Paz, Bolivia, 1979), which he attended, narrowly escaping the military coup which occurred at the end of the meeting.

Two incidents should be singled out from his Washington sojourn. On Argentine National Day, it was the custom to have a *Te Deum* sung in the cathedral in Washington. Before the Mass began, Patrick walked into the sanctuary in clerical dress. He addressed the congregation briefly telling them of his imprisonment and torture for two months and of his priest friends who had been murdered in government detention. As he was about to ask the congregation to join him in a prayer for reconciliation, the organist drowned him out and the microphone went dead. The rector of the cathedral approached him and told him to leave. As he moved off the altar, six of his friends, two of them nuns, stood up facing the congregation, put on hoods and displayed peace banners. At that point, the police, having been called by the dean, arrived and escorted the demonstrators out of the church, together with others who were with Patrick but had mingled with the congregation, 'the police looked the other way when members of the embassy goon squad punched some of the demonstrators and belligerently yanked cloth hoods from the heads of some of the others, observed McCarthy'.³⁴

On another occasion, Admiral Emilio Massera, a member of the Argentinian *Junta*, visited Georgetown University where he had been invited to give a seminar. Patrick managed to get into the seminar room and confront him in open debate. Massera, who was the head of the Naval Academy, or ESME, where thousands were tortured and 'disappeared', did not acquit himself very well when confronted by Patrick's testimony against state terrorism. Ironically, the name of Patrick Rice, together with a photograph taken during his honorary conferring at the University of Cork, is now part of the permanent fabric of the ESME, which has been given over as a location for the reconstruction of memory of the years of the dirty war.

³⁴ Colman McCarthy, 'Mass at St. Matthew's drives Argentines from church,' *The Washington Post*, 1 June 1979.

On 7 March, probably 1979, Pat wrote to the Department of Foreign Affairs explaining how he had met two friends from Argentina who had given him his first real news of Fátima Cabrera. She was apparently under a type of house arrest and was quite ill. In fact, Fátima had been in jail for three years and then had been placed under house arrest, having to report to the local police station daily. At the time, she was suffering with severe asthma and the aftermath of torture, ill-treatment and harsh prison conditions, as she told me later.

In 1980, Patrick moved to Venezuela where he lived with the Fraternity in an area of shanty towns to the east of the capital, Caracas. He began activities of promotion of human rights within pastoral programmes of the Archdiocese of Caracas and helped set up Association for the Defence of Individual and Collective Rights of Petare (ASODINCOP). He also cooperated actively in the assistance of refugees from Haiti and became a member of FUNDALATIN, a Venezuelan human rights organization, working on a project for the 'disappeared'.

Patrick helped organize the First Latin American Congress of families of the disappeared in Costa Rica, January 1981, where he was coordinator and became one of the founding members of FEDEFAM (The Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees). He became Executive Secretary of the Federation from 1981 to 1987 during which time he worked preparing projects, reports and FEDEFAM activities. He visited most Latin American countries to investigate situations of enforced disappearances and began to lobby actively at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. He represented FEDEFAM in New York after the ECOSOC NGO Committee gave consultative status to FEDEFAM in 1985. He also represented FEDEFAM when the organization received the Spanish Human Rights award in 1982, and visited ten cities in the US on a speaking tour organized by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation. In that year the first RFK Human Rights Award was given to COMADRES from El Salvador. Patrick had presented that organisation as member of its International Advisory Board. In the years that followed, he continued to work very closely with the RFK Memorial Foundation.

With the fall of the Argentine military *Junta* in 1983, Patrick returned to Buenos Aires. There he made contact with a remnant of the pastoral community with whom he had worked for many years, mourning the loss of so many members of the Fraternity and friends. Returning to Villa Soldati, he met Fátima Cabrera whom he had not seen nor been in contact with since prison in 1976. She had, in the interim, spent three years in jail and a further two years under house arrest. Patrick returned to Venezuela to continue his work, keeping in touch with her by letter. Their relationship changed and they fell in love. Patrick left the priesthood in

1985 and they married in Caracas in May of that year. One of their earliest decisions was to have children as soon as possible. As two survivors of the dirty war, who had been 'disappeared' and tortured, the decision to give life was an act of defiance to those who had almost taken their lives. Their military torturers, no matter how much they brutalised Fátima, were no longer '*dueños de la vida*.' Carlos and Amy, were born in Caracas in 1986 and 1987. Their third child, Blanca, was born in Buenos Aires where they returned to live. They lived in Monte Grande from 1988 to 1994 and Villa Soldati from 1994-1996 where Patrick once ministered as a priest. They then moved to Constitución. Although I never asked him, I know that he found it very hard to stop working as a priest; the church authorities could not prevent him being a priest. For the rest of his life, he lived the religious life of the Lay Fraternity of Charles de Foucauld. Even when he was being tortured, he did not lose his belief in God, even if he could never reconcile the existence of a loving God with the prevalence of torture in the world.

Patrick became involved in Human Rights training and education at the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH). He coordinated training courses, seminars and workshops in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos and the North East. His course material was published by the MEDH. In 1992 he became MEDH national coordinator and was involved in prison visitation, assistance to families of the 'disappeared' and advocacy for housing rights. During those years the MEDH had funding agreements with the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and for a legal assistance programme with the European Union.

Patrick continued to coordinate the Human Rights Education Programme at MEDH and began organizing courses for offenders who were obliged by the courts to complete such programmes as part of their probation requirements. In 1998, he participated in the activities of Forum 1998 in Geneva, held to commemorate the fiftieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That same year he coordinated training courses in human rights especially for teachers, and the course material he had jointly prepared with other defenders was published by the Buenos Aires City Education Department as part of commemorative activities for the fiftieth Anniversary. Due to restructuring plans, he left MEDH in 1999. He never explained to me the full circumstances of his departure from that organization, but MEDH was all the poorer for his absence.

Patrick then began to work again with FEDEFAM and was nominated as Senior Adviser to the Executive Committee by the FEDEFAM Mar del Plata Congress in 1999 and ratified in that position again by the XVI Congress in La Paz, Bolivia 2001. He lobbied annually at the Commission for the adoption of an international instrument against involuntary

disappearances, participating in the ICRC Missing Project. This included a workshop in August 2002 and an International Conference in 2003. He represented FEDEFAM on many occasions such as a training seminar organized by the Asian Federation on Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) which was held in Sri Lanka in 1999, a consultation on Disappearances in Africa, Benin 2002, a general meeting of Families of the Missing in Roving, Croatia 2002 and consultations with the Office of Forensics and Missing in Pristinha, Kosovo in 2003.

The Irish Mission in Geneva nominated him as the Western Group's candidate for membership of the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances in 2002. He participated in much of the advocacy at the UN to get approval of an international instrument against enforced disappearances which finally happened on 23 September 2005 in Geneva. In 2007 he participated in a *Journée des Etudes* in the University of Paris II on the phenomenon of disappearances, and was invited by the French government to the signing of the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons against Enforced Disappearances at the Foreign Ministry in Paris in February 2007. Patrick was a panelist at the International Conference on Solidarity held at the Argentine Foreign Ministry, in Buenos Aires in March 2007. He also gave several conferences on the subject of enforced disappearances in Indonesia and the Philippines in September 2007.

Patrick was a fine teacher and in 2003 and 2004, he was invited to act as a facilitator at the Geneva Training Course (GTC) organized by the International Service for Human Rights during sessions of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Annually, twenty-five defenders largely from Asian, Eastern European and African countries receive training in lobbying the Commission and working with the Human Rights procedures of the United Nations.

Patrick began to work in 2007 teaching English at the Latin American Faculty for Social Science (FLACSO). He previously worked with training staff in many leading companies in Argentina (TELECOM, VIVENDI, and the food industry). He was an interpreter at an International Foreign Debt Moratorium Conference in 2000 organized by Nobel Peace Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel. He also acted as a facilitator at a board meeting in Argentina of the World Campaign against Landmines. Up until his death in 2010, Patrick, apart from his work in the area of human rights, specialized in English teaching for young people from lower socio-economic neighborhoods. He saw it to be especially important as it would enable them to avail of more opportunities, especially in the tourist industry.

So much of his work was conducted in cooperation with his wife Fátima, a teacher, and an expert in adult literacy. She worked as a coordinator of adult literacy for a number of years with responsibility at a national level and with particular responsibility for the greater Buenos Aires area, which has a population of over nine million. Meanwhile, they both remained active members of the Lay Fraternities of Charles de Foucauld. In 2000, the General Assembly of the Lay Fraternities of Charles de Foucauld elected Patrick and Fátima to the International Coordinating Team as representatives of the region of the Americas. In that capacity, Patrick visited communities in the US, Venezuela and participated in meetings in Barcelona, Spain in 2001 and Germany in 2003. He also helped organize many celebrations on occasion of the Beatification of Charles de Foucauld in October 2005. In 2006, he spent a few weeks in Kenya and Tanzania preparing the Fraternity International Conference. Together with Fátima, he remained a member of the South American Fraternity team until his death.

In parallel with those activities, between 2002 and 2005 he participated in a programme in Washington DC with the Torture Abolition Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) on the occasion of the International Day for Victims of Torture. His testimony and that of his wife and family have been featured on the television station, *Univisión*, in the US in 2002 and in Ireland on Irish National Television (RTE) in 2001. Both were active members of TAASC and participated regularly in activities in the US, which were coordinated by Sr. Dianna Ortiz, a torture survivor, and author of *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth* (2004). At the time of his death, Patrick was a member of the Board of Directors of TASSC.

In the final years of his life, Patrick's human rights work took him to every part of Latin America, to Asia, Africa and Europe. In 2008, he received an honorary doctorate in law from University College Cork and on that occasion, I had the opportunity to fill in the gap in public knowledge for this highly accomplished but most unassuming man. In 2010, he was appointed the head of ICAED, an international human rights organisation. Visiting Pat and his family was always a real pleasure. His home in Buenos Aires was a constant meeting place for people from all over Latin America and other places around the world. Nobody left his house without food and being offered a bed for the night. Among his many attributes, Pat was a very good cook, and a master of the *asado* or Argentinian-style barbecue. He was an outstanding carpenter and builder, taking on the job of reconstructing his own home in Avenida Constitución, a colourful part of Buenos Aires.

Unassuming and without any sense of self-importance, he appeared to know large numbers of people in public life in Argentina. As part of my

work as Head of the Department of History at University College Cork, I wanted to set up an exchange with universities in Buenos Aires. I asked Patrick if it would be possible to meet the Minister for Education, Daniel Fernando Filmus, to facilitate such an exchange. That will not be a problem, Patrick replied, 'we know him and, besides, I am teaching him English'. In fact, Patrick had worked for many years with Daniel Fernando Filmus at FLACSO. The meeting took place and the exchange was established.

After attending a piano recital by the well-known Argentine pianist, Miguel Angel Estrella, he said to me and members of his family, 'I will introduce you. I know him. We were in jail together'. That celebrated pianist agreed to cooperate, following the death of Pat, in the continuation of his work for the preservation of memory at the ESME.

The last time I spoke to Patrick was at the family home, Strawhall, near Fermoy, in early July 2010. We had dinner with his brothers and sisters. Later, expecting to meet him the following day for a longer discussion, I asked him about meeting the then Argentine Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jorge Taiana for my research on Ireland's relations with Argentina. He did not think that would be a problem either. 'How can you be so certain', I asked, 'We were in jail together', he replied with a smile. As it happened, Taiana had just left his job and I asked Patrick did he know his successor, Héctor Timerman, who had been Argentine Ambassador in Washington. Pat had been friends with his father, Jacobo Timerman, the famous human rights activist and, like himself, a survivor from the ranks of the 'disappeared'. He had worked with Héctor in Washington on the campaign to have his father freed from jail in the late 1970s.

As it turned out, I never had that long conversation with Patrick. We spoke on the phone briefly before he left for Dublin for meetings in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He was enthusiastic about his new job. He had been to Europe twice within two months and his latest trip had involved a punishing schedule which would have tired even a much younger man. He had flown to Miami and then to Chicago where he had a meeting. He then flew to New York where he had more meetings and took the 'Chinese' bus to Washington DC where he had led a human rights seminar for three days instructing those who were themselves directors of human rights programmes. He had then taken the same bus back to New York, flown to Geneva where he worked for a few days, then taking the train to Paris for another series of meetings. He flew to Dublin and took the bus from the airport to Fermoy. His visit home was short and he looked much more tired than I had ever seen him before. In the two year interval between last seeing him in 2008, he had aged visibly. He told my daughter, Clare, who had stayed with his family in Buenos Aires for six months, that he was worried about my health and that she should

encourage me to get back to cycling. 'We are old Dermot', he said to me as we parted in Strawhall, 'it is up to the new younger generation now'.

Was it any wonder that so many Argentines came to pay their final respects to Pat in the Church of the Holy Cross; this courageous man who had helped bear witness against state terrorism and the heinous crimes of a depraved military dictatorship. He had shared the nightmare of those dark days of the 1970s with his fellow Argentines and they would not easily forget.

The speed with which the Argentine Government and the human rights movement had chosen to honour Patrick Rice was no surprise to those who had worked with him for over forty years. For those who were privileged to attend his funeral in Buenos Aires in the Church of the Passionist Fathers, Santa Cruz, they saw with their own eyes the esteem in which he had been held. It took seven hours for all the people who came to the Church of the Holy Cross to express their appreciation of his life's work in words, in song and in prayer. They came from Santa Fe, from the first parish in which he had worked when he came to Argentina and from Villa Soldati. There were government ministers and ex-ministers.³⁵ The former Foreign Minister, Jorge Taiana, who had been in jail with Patrick, was present, as were other leading politicians and leaders of the human rights movement.

Tribute after tribute was paid to Patricio Rice by members of the distinguished gathering, among them the journalist, Horacio Verbitsky. A group of Indians, who had travelled from the north of Argentina to be present, played throughout the evening. There were scores of wreaths from various organisations, including one from the Irish ambassador to Spain, Justin Harman, who had helped save Pat's life in 1976.

They came in their hundreds to the Passionist church of the Holy Cross; a little piece of Ireland in Buenos Aires, built and paid for with the *pesos* of Irish working men and women at the end of the nineteenth century, according to the last of the Irish chaplains, Fr. Egan.³⁶ The seats are beautifully carved, and many bear the names of Irish benefactors. Stained glass windows commemorate St. Patrick, St. Columbanus and St. Bridget. In that bastion of Irish Catholic symbolism, Patrick's remains were placed at an altar in the centre of the church. The Irish, Argentine and Fermoy rowing club flags accompanied the scarves on the coffin. The Mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo*, with whom Patrick was particularly close, were also

³⁵ The Foreign Minister, Hector Timerman, who was travelling with President Kirchner in China, sent his apologies.

³⁶ Interview with Fr. Egan, Buenos Aires, Autumn, 2010.

present. A number of the mothers left on the coffin their treasured white headscarves, on which were written the names of their ‘disappeared’ children.

What was strikingly evident, to an outsider like me, was the impact that Patrick had had on so many people in so many countries, and on a wide cross-section of Argentine society in particular. He was mourned by all as a greatly-esteemed and courageous defender of human rights which first began almost forty years ago during the darkest hour in the recent history of Argentina. All present paid heartfelt and eloquent tribute to Patrick for his life of witness to the truth. Many had worked with him and all knew of his courageous role in denouncing the dictatorship.

Patrick was a very prominent name in human rights circles in Latin America. He had also worked in Asia and in Africa and at the United Nations in Geneva. But knowledge of his life’s work on behalf of the cause of human rights was little known in Ireland. Except for his family and friends in Ireland, knowledge about his work on behalf of human rights was a closed book. He did not advertise on his regular trips home over almost forty years exactly what he was doing as a priest and later as a human rights activist in the countries of Latin America. He was very reticent to go into any detail about his personal work. It was only the circumstances of his kidnapping and disappearance in 1976 which brought him into the public domain in Ireland for a short time, but he never craved or sought the limelight. He simply did his work, put in the hours and had been there for the long haul. When in Buenos Aires, he never missed a visit on a Thursday to the *Plaza de Mayo* where he walked in solidarity with the ‘*madres*’.

Patrick remained very tough in his judgment of those who in the Catholic Church he regarded as having been complicit in facilitating the longevity of the dictatorship. Writing at the time of Cardinal Pio Laghi’s death, Patrick said,

By affirming that Pio Laghi was a “necessary accomplice” to the crimes of the dictatorship, I say that if it were not for his acquiescence and his tolerance of their reactionary Catholicism, with the Pentagon Doctrine of national security included, his silencing of the clear condemnations by Vatican II of torture, human rights violations, his “moderating” influence on the diplomatic corps in Argentina so as not to antagonize the *Junta*, his support for bishops who “toe the line”, then the *Junta* would not have been able to have carried out their genocidal campaign against all real or imaginary opponents including many from the Churches. History, I believe, will have no doubts as to the damage that Pio Laghi caused to the Argentine people and Church by his “moderation” and “behind the scenes” diplomacy. Those were historical times when decent men and

women stood up and said “no”. Sadly I believe that Pio Laghi was not among them. It is not a question of heroism but of ordinary decency. Did the *Junta* think the Vatican was behind them? Unequivocally “yes”. Pio Laghi had hundreds of opportunities to say “no” but he preferred to dine wine and play tennis with the perpetrators. The *Junta* Dictatorship with its systematic practice of forced disappearances of thousands of people was no doubt sophisticated and deceptive, but Pio Laghi had every opportunity to really know what was going on, but he chose not to see.³⁷

There was a final farewell ceremony in Santa Cruz on the cold winter’s morning in July 2010 of the funeral. Fátima and the children spoke eloquently to the relatively small congregation. A few hundred people were waiting at the cemetery when the remains arrived, including the Irish Ambassador, Philomela Murnaghan. Fátima again spoke in the reception building inside the main gates of the ‘English’ part of the main cemetery of Buenos Aires. She spoke of her husband’s commitment to a universal God, a God of unity and of compassion. The mourners processed to the graveside led by a lone Argentinean bagpiper, who played an Irish lament as the coffin was lowered into the ground. A mountain of wreaths was then placed on the grave. The silence was broken by a mourner, following the custom at all meetings where the ‘disappeared’ are remembered, who called out his name, Patricio Rice, to which the mourners gave the familiar reply, *Presente, ahora y para siempre*; Present, now and forever.

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³⁷ From an obituary in *La Prensa*, San Diego, written by Patrick Rice. <http://laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/2009/february20-09/Pio.Laghi.022009.htm>