

**Translation of “Blood in Latin America”  
Regarding Fr. Raymond Herman  
A Gringo (Spanish slang for American) Among Peasants**

*Note: The events described in this account are a combination of stories retold by local Bolivian people as well as factual information from Bolivian authorities. This translation is included in these materials because it is a primary source retelling some of the events in the life and death of Fr. Ray Herman by the Bolivian people themselves. This account reflects their deep admiration and devotion to their beloved pastor.*

*It was originally written in Spanish by the Social Pastoral Commission approximately seven or eight years after the death of Father Raymond Herman, and recently translated as part of the materials used for research in filming the video. Because it is a translation, some of the syntax, sentence structure and vocabulary is more reflective of the Spanish language than the English language and could be difficult for students to comprehend. In most cases it might be best used as a resource for the catechist. We would ask that you take these considerations into account as you use this reference.*

**Introduction**

Various motives move us to remember Father Raymond Herman, this “gringo” priest who was assassinated some years ago in Morochata (Cochabamba). The first motive is to reopen the question of why they killed him. For certain we don’t know who or why they assassinated him. But we do know that he gave himself body and soul to the service of the marginalized. He worked with them, he counseled them, he helped them organize, and he made it possible to have a hospital and other services. He had opted for the poor...and this is dangerous. Could there be a relation between his opting for the oppressed and his violent death? The Bishops of Latin America who met in Puella stated that, “The obligation of the evangelizing mission of the Church has brought it to...suffer in its members, the persecution and sometimes death as testimony to its prophetic mission.”

We lament that we have to add something more. We are dealing with a crime committed many years ago in strange circumstances. However, as of today, the authorities have not cleared up the assassination nor even brought any of the guilty parties to trial according to our laws.

It is one more example among many of how our “justices” show themselves to be unjust. We live in a society where too many crimes go unpunished and too many injustices occur without a corresponding sanction. We live in a sick society and it is up to us to remedy this by fighting so there might be more justice.

Finally we hope that this pamphlet may be useful and helpful to many. There is no greater love than to give one’s life for one’s brother.

...Social Pastoral Commission

## **About His Life**

The Reverend Father Raymond Herman was born in Independence (Iowa), on January 1st, 1930. He was the son of Mr. John Herman and Mrs. Angela (Pint) Herman. He was a graduate of Iowa State University, Ames, and then Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. He was also a distinguished student at the St. Bernard Seminary in Iowa.

He was ordained a priest on February 1st, 1957. He worked in Bolivia in the following parishes from 1962 until his death:

1. Christ the King
2. Cochabamba
3. St. Raphael
4. Morochata—where he was brutally murdered on October 20th, 1975 and where Archbishop Monsignor Armando Gutierrez and Father Leon Connolly removed his body and made the funeral arrangements.

Father Raymond Herman arrived in Bolivia in 1962, as an associate with the Maryknoll, first working at Christ the King Parish. Later he worked in Cochabamba, where he helped build the local school which bears his name. In 1966 he was transferred to St. Raphael Parish shortly after it was opened. Then he worked in the Catechetical Center.

Finally in 1970 he was transferred to Morochata where he organized courses for catechist training and contributed his time to the construction of the local hospital which served the poor peasants. Ironically, it was when the inauguration festivities were under way that he was brutally murdered.

## **Recounting the Murder**

That afternoon the community of Morochata put on their best to celebrate. Finally after all their sacrifices, they would have a modern hospital facility which was constructed thanks to the generosity of their pastor, Father Raymond Herman.

The community celebrated a job well done with music and many festivities. Several hours later the festivities took a turn for the unthinkable when they learned that Father Raymond Herman had been murdered. Because he was much admired and loved, his murder devastated the simple lives of the peasants.

The construction of the hospital was an accomplishment of pride for Father Ray and the whole community. They were all rejoicing at having this new hospital facility. On the afternoon of October 20th, Father Ray said in his speech at the opening ceremonies, “When I first arrived in Morochata, I never imagined we would finish this project. This is proof of what can be accomplished when a community is united for a common goal. We must also unite towards Christ as he guides us through the right path for the well-being of our lives and our families. Let us demonstrate that our faith can bring us better days of love and justice...”

However, his charitable actions would not save him from his impending murder. Omar Baeza Acha who premeditated this horrible crime knew of these hospital festivities. That day, Omar Baeza Acha, drove to where the festivities were taking place. He parked his truck five kilometers outside of the town and practiced shooting his 22 caliber revolver. Later on he joined the crowds, hoping not to be recognized by anyone, not even his family.

Around 9:00 that night, Omar Baeza Acha noticed that Father Raymond was leaving the festivities and was headed for the rectory. However, a short time later Father Ray returned to the festivities, but

but unfortunately he had left the door open at the rectory. Omar Baeza Acha then entered the rectory and hid himself in a room across from Father Raymond's bedroom where he waited until midnight.

Around midnight Father Raymond returned to the rectory because the festivities were finished. He laid down, but had trouble falling asleep. That's when the intruder (Omar Baeza Acha) came out of his hiding place with a flashlight and a hand gun and entered Father Raymond's bedroom. It is reported that Baeza stood in front of the bed, then approached the night table to steal the keys to the Jeep. At that same moment, Father Raymond woke up surprisingly and tried to grab Omar Baeza Acha by his jacket. That's when Acha shot twice from his revolver into Father Ray's head wounding him.

Omar Baeza Acha then left the bedroom, but he realized there were other valuable things that he could take. So he then returned to Father Raymond's bedroom. He could hear Father Raymond was still alive, so he decided to finish the job by fatally strangling him.

Omar Baeza Acha took three sleeping bags, two suitcases and a wallet, a portfolio, a radio/tape recorder, a tank of gas and a gallon drum of oil. Driving the stolen vehicle, he drove to Morochata and arrived at his house four hours later. He assured his parents that the stolen articles belonged to a leader of the peasants.

Cleverly, Baeza was able to somehow get rid of or erase the numbers on the license plate of the vehicle and drove it to Cochabamba where he went to the Ministry of Cases for Peasants. This concluded his plans.

### **Homage of the Clergy of Cochabamba**

A year has gone by since the passing of the Reverend Father Raymond Herman, pastor of Morochata. Those who knew him are still in mourning and miss him dearly. At this same time, together with the people that he served, we continue to demand answers from the departmental national authorities to clarify and further investigate this horrible crime which ended the life of this noble servant of Christ.

The circumstances of this crime have led us to believe that there was more than one individual involved in this horrible act. The investigations concluded that there was only one perpetrator because only one person came forward and confessed to the crime. To the amazement of all of us, a few days after being behind bars at the public jail, he mysteriously disappeared without a trace. This action led us to believe that he used the front door of the jail to escape.

To this date no one knows the whereabouts of the only individual who confessed to this crime. There are no indications that the authorities are moving toward further investigation of the situation or trying to find out if indeed there were others involved in the crime. We, his successors and followers, demand the national authorities to give us an answer to why they have abandoned this investigation.

On this, the first anniversary of the death of Father Raymond Herman, we pray together for the eternal rest of his soul. We also ask that God grants strength to the authorities to face their responsibility without fear until they discover all the answers and clarify this horrible crime. Father Raymond's murder has put this institution of peace and justice to shame in this country, leaving our citizens with no sense of security for their own lives.

Cochabamba, October 20th, 1976...The Archdiocesan Clergy

## **Father Leon Connolly in the United States**

Father Leon Connolly, who accompanied the body of Father Ray Herman from Bolivia after his death on October 20th, preached the homily at the funeral in the Church of St. Joseph in Independence. The following is excerpted from that homily:

This morning as we, the Church, gather from different parts of the world to bid farewell to Father Ray Herman, our friend, our fellow priest and fellow pilgrim, please permit me to boast a little of what the Lord has done. And what has the Lord done? This was beautifully expressed by Msgr. Timothy Gannon from Loras College, when he said to me, 'It is certainly a joy and a source of pride to know, that at least one in our midst was found worthy to be a martyr.' It is comforting to know that the holiness of the Church is capable of producing in our own day, persons who are found worthy of this high honor.

I am personally convinced that Father Ray Herman is one of those symbolic persons who from time to time God sends into our lives and the life of the Church. And so as spokesman for our Archdiocesan community, I express for all of us our tremendous debt of gratitude to Father Herman for his eighteen years of priestly service, which gave life to silent words, and which serves as a symbolic and prophetic guide to each of us...

...On Wednesday afternoon Father Donovan went to Morochata to pick up all of Father Herman's personal belongings so that I might bring them to his family. Would you believe that other than his books and a few articles of clothing, all of Father Herman's personal material possessions in the world fit into a container not much larger than a cigar box. It seems to me that this lesson in poverty of possessions gives evidence that Father Ray was, in his own words, 'to some degree successful in giving all to Christ.'

### **Escape of the Murderer**

During the processing of the criminal summary against Omar Baeza Acha by the Judicial Police, the accused murderer mysteriously disappeared from the public jail without a trace or explanation. This led us to believe that the door was opened for him, and no one knows who might have helped him. The head jailer and fifteen guards were removed from their posts and transferred to other departmental services. They all had hearings and trials to determine what kind of disciplinary actions were to be taken. But no proper documentation was finalized through the judicial system, therefore everything remained unresolved.

The actions on behalf of justice have been ridiculed and the only perpetrator of the crime has vanished. Whether there were others involved, we will never know because they have not tried to identify them. The case has been closed quickly, so in the eyes of the people, a horrible crime has been left unpunished. This left many questions unanswered. Many people became suspicious that some members of the state or system were involved in possible collaboration. This case is like other cases where human rights have been exploited and suspicions of guilt have been unresolved. There are other members of the community who exercise their constitutional rights in expressing justice and social peace, and they are also accused of committing infamy.

The death of Father Herman must be resolved. The public officials of the state are obligated to clear up the suspicious questions raised by the community. The officials should also reassure the people

that they are there to serve justice and guarantee the security of the people. In other ways, however, all the people of Bolivia must accept the fact that in their country, there is no justice. It is difficult to ensure justice and to expect effective actions on the part of the police.  
...Parishes of South Zone.

### **Justice Must be Served**

The Archbishop of Cochabamba, Monsignor Armando Gutierrez Grainer, forwarded the following letter to the Minister of Interiors, Colonel Juan Pereda Asbun, in regards to the murder of Father Raymond Herman.

Your Minister:

On the night of October 20th, 1975, Father Raymond Herman was found dead in the rectory of Morochata. His body showed signs of a homicide committed with cruelty and in cold blood. The crime raised a wave of general disgust and uneasy feelings among the Catholic community and even those who do not share our faith.

During the seven years that Father Raymond Herman stayed in Cochabamba, he dedicated his time and strength preaching the Scriptures to all people especially the poor. He always created great spirits in the various parishes that he served, promoting humanity to the parishioners and guiding them towards better ways of living. He was not only in favor of Catholics, but for all people for whom Christ was crucified. For all this great work, his memory stays alive in us even after his death.

For all these reasons, the people of the community of Morochata, his last pastoral destination, cried for him and are still mourning his loss. In silence they protest with their indignation and their pain. Father Herman was taken away from them; he was one who served and defended them from the wolves who devour their prey to satisfy their appetites. I feel cries, pain and indignation, Your Minister, about a pastor who was conscientious in his duties. I have asked the civil, judicial and police authorities two questions many times—that the truth be known to everyone and that the law be served.

The Episcopal Conference of Bolivia in their assembly in November, unanimously established the demand of justice presented to the Archbishop of Cochabamba. His Excellency also expressed his condolences.

As you may remember, the pontifical representative accompanied us on the interview that was granted to us in La Paz. There I again restated our demand for the administration of justice. We also protested against the lack of judicial power. Judicial steps and procedures have also been taken, but not enforced in order to resolve this horrible crime. The authorities, then also offered the removal of several members of the system so more efficient actions could take place in accordance to the laws.

As a pastor, Your Minister, I have exhausted all of the means available to me and those appropriate to my mission: my word, prophetically denounced in favor of justice and the injustice of the situation on the case. I give my

comfort and strength to the peasants who have been deprived of their good pastor. I have a clear conscious that my duty has been fulfilled and now there is only the wait for the Supreme Judge to hand down the only just sentence.

But, at the same time, I cannot keep my disgust silent for these human injustices—and also for the people who have incorrectly carried out this lack of justice. Could they have purposely and deliberately done so? I feel for this country whose reputation will suffer.

Before closing I restate my stand for human rights, not only for this faithful priest but all the human race. The only one who should take a life, is also the one who grants it and He is God. Please receive, Your Minister, my distinguished consideration in the Lord.

Signed Armando Gutierrez Granier, Archbishop of Cochabamba

### **Questions About His Murder**

The parishes of the South Zone of Cochabamba remember again that the death of Reverend Father Raymond Herman, murdered in Morochata, continues to be mysterious. At this time the authorities have not yet produced any new information about the case, leaving the people of Bolivia thinking that the case has been closed, forgotten, and archived.

The religious parishioners of the South Zone of Cochabamba have provided the following document about his death.

Two years after the tragic death of Reverend Father Raymond Herman who was brutally murdered in Morochata, several attempts are still being made to resolve this crime. Many institutions, different people, ecclesiastic authorities and the entire communities of Morochata and Cochabamba are still requesting a continued investigation of the perpetrators of the crime. There are still numerous suspicions of a cover up and these continued requests remind us that the death of Father Herman will not be forgotten.

### **The Murder**

Father Herman was found with his neck strangled. His head lay in a small pool of blood caused by the two shots from a revolver. His body showed evidence of hematomas so it is suspected that:

- at least three people were involved in the murder in order to prevent his movements.
- the shots may have been fired from the revolver after the strangulation took place.

Two days after the crime, Omar Baeza Acha, was apprehended as the perpetrator of the crime. He confessed to being the only participant, showing from the beginning an evil purpose to mislead the legal authorities. He also confessed to the robbery in which he took objects from the rectory and hid in Father Herman's house to prevent the police from tracing him. All investigations were closed thus the version given by the defendant, who said

said he fired first after Father Herman had grabbed him by his jacket. They ruled out a confrontation between the two men, which did not consider the physical differences between the two men—the perpetrator being small and weak and the priest being tall and strong. Everything was presented to the public ministry without any proof: no photographs from the scene of the crime, none of the victim or the perpetrator, not even a note that appeared on the door of the rectory where someone had written URGENT TRIP, WILL BE BACK IN TWO WEEKS. They only took Acha's confession, which was a testimony based on clues not actual proofs or evidence.

On the other hand, media publications state that Omar Baeza Acha had testified first that there were three participants and that two of them fled to Chapare. The names of the accomplices were not released so they wouldn't alter the investigations. To this date, those names have not been revealed. What were the reasons that the accomplices were not captured?

### **Homily of Monsignor Armando Gutierrez**

Cochabamba, October 24th, 1977—In a solemn mass that was celebrated in the cathedral in memory of Father Raymond Herman, the Archbishop Monsignor Armando Gutierrez Granier, delivered a heartfelt homily exalting his virtues and demanding justice.

His Eminence said that it was two years ago that the Reverend Father Raymond Herman, pastor of Morochata, was brutally murdered in the rectory on October 20th, 1975. He pointed out until now our repeated requests to find out the truth have been in vain—ignored by authorities. We don't lose hope of being heard by the justice of this earth based on the justice of God that there are sometimes delays to justice, but it always comes. Reflecting upon this second anniversary of Fr. Raymond Herman brings to my mind these various thoughts: The first of them is to recognize in him the authentic (shepherd) Christ who gave his life for his sheep voluntarily suffering martyrdom on the cross. Father Herman imitated that example all throughout his life, moved by the love of God and of his brothers—so great a love that he left his own country and family in order to be a missionary in the midst of the peasants of Cochabamba, poor amongst poor, living his life with them, for them, and as they lived. He was faithful to this until his death in the Andean mountains.

A second thought that evokes this painful event is the violence, in all its forms and expressions, against human dignity and against human rights, whether they are physical, spiritual or moral. As Christians and people of nonviolence, we need to oppose the chain effect that violence unleashes on our planet in its various forms, convinced that life is stronger than death.

A nonviolent movement throughout the world would be an efficient means to eliminate generalized violence. It would be an efficient means, but it is difficult. It is capable of disarming hostility of adversaries and of opening steps to the understanding of opposites in search of peaceful solutions. Father Herman did his difficult apprenticeship of dying a little each day in the service of truth, harmony and justice. And thus he died two years ago under the blow of a homicidal gun.

The third thought is full of joy and hope. It makes us elevate our faith towards the Paschal mystery of passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, a faith that assures us that death has been conquered by the cross and resurrection of the Lord, that from death comes new life that is eternal for us all. We have this faith within us since baptism, that mystically submerged us in death to make us renew our lives. Love conquers hatred, truth conquers lies, justice conquers sin. We must be capable of building now and from here on a more human, beautiful and happier world. This is what Father Herman wanted and did during his life. He has gone from us to the Father, but he lives among us

lives among us with Christ, the Virgin and all the Saints, here in this church that unites all of us sinners until the day of final judgment.

### **After Four Years of His Death**

Four years have gone by since the death of our brother, Father Raymond Herman, and we still find ourselves with the same questions about his murder that are still not resolved. On January 3rd, 1976, Monsignor Armando Gutierrez Granier wrote a letter addressed to the Minister of the Interior, Juan Pereda Asbun, demanding justice. Unfortunately, our petition demanding such justice did not get us anywhere, and what we all feared did happen one day. The only person who confessed to the crime and assumed all responsibility, escaped from prison without any explanations on the part of the authorities. These authorities were also not punished for the lack of carrying out their duties.

I am not an expert on penal procedures and processes, that's why I would like to bring in front of you some questions. Who really were or was responsible for the murder of Father Ray Herman? What prompted them or him to commit such a horrible crime? Is the motive of the theft of a vehicle enough to explain it? Was there a cover up? Why was the possibility of more than one person involved in the crime discarded? Why was the suspicion not verified that the one who confessed to the crime was not physically able to commit such a crime alone?

These and many other questions are still unanswered. These questions are simply ignored by the authorities, bringing about suspicions that interested parties or hidden groups were involved. This has not been considered in these proceedings. But in the public opinion, there is still a bitterness about the justice that has not been carried out—that a life dedicated to serve good has been sacrificed, and the truth has been hidden, and sinister purposes have gone without punishment.

We call once more on this community to continue the investigation of the crime. A sign of democracy is a justice with no violence in the judicial processes with no cover ups that keep from guaranteeing the well-being of citizens. So we ask for the attention of the Chamber of Representatives and Senators of the Commission of Justice of Congress to clarify such a crime.

As members of the clergy, we do not seek revenge; this is against our beliefs; we seek and ask for human justice, together with the words of Monsignor Gutierrez. The perpetrators of this crime have not received any punishment and perhaps they deserve some sanction. We would have been the first ones to ask for clemency in the case that a punishment had been appointed.

...Written by The Priests of St. Raphael

## **Writ of Prison**

Doctor Adolph Claire, Second Judge of Penal Instructions.

ORDER: That, any public official put in formal detention in the public jail be processed: Omar Baeza Acha of 20 years of age, single, student, natural and neighbor of Quillacollo, with residence in #20 General Pando Street, son of Prudencio Baeza and Maria Acha. Processed within the office of organized criminal instructions for the crime of murder and aggravated theft.

In case it becomes necessary, request the help of the public force. Cochabamba, December 22nd, 1975.

WRIT: Doctor Theodore Rojas Cartagena. President of Superior Court of the Judicial District of Cochabamba.

ORDER: That, any public official put in formal detention in the public jail be processed: Omar Baeza Acha, of 25 years of age, single, student, a natural and neighbor of Quillacollo, with residence in #20 General Pando Street, son of Prudencio Baeza and Maria Acha. Processed and sentenced within the office of organized criminal instructions for the crime of murder and aggravated theft. In case it becomes necessary, request the help of the public force. Cochabamba, January 7th, 1980.

This is what is commissioned to be accomplished and returned to the Tribunal of origin as soon as possible.

Cochabamba, January 7th, 1980

Doctor Theodore Rojas Cartagena

President of the Superior Court of Justice

Doctor Raul Calisaya C

Minister of Penal Chamber/Hall

Superior Court of Justice

## **Human Rights Assembly**

The Permanent Assembly of Human Rights and the Clergy of St. Raphael Parish, remembering the seventh anniversary of the death of Reverend Father Raymond Herman, demand once more clarification of this and other crimes. The people of Cochabamba remember with deep pain the murder of Father Raymond Herman seven years ago in the community of Morochata, and that there has been no attempt to clarify such brutality and atrocious acts.

A day like today revives the hopes that Bolivians would again live without fear in peace and fraternity in a democracy which has reinstated human rights and respect. We ask of the government and its authorities a serious investigation, clarification, and sanction toward those responsible for numerous crimes that have swept the Bolivian community into desperation and suffering—crimes like the murder of Father Raymond Herman which, to this date, is still without punishment.

We petition to the international and national defenders of life and fundamental rights of humanity to unite, so that for once and for all, all political threats, tortures, incarcerations and horrible crimes that have taken place in this Bolivian country come to an end. The demands of the Human Rights Assembly and the Clergy of St. Raphael are not by any means in pursuit of vengeance; on the contrary, all we ask is for justice to be served to those responsible for this crime.

### **Baeza–A Fugitive in Caracas**

After seven years since the murder of the priest of Morochata, Father Raymond Herman, we have obtained reports through the media that the principal perpetrator of the crime, identified as one, Omar Baeza Acha, is now in Caracas, Venezuela. Baeza Acha, approximately twenty-seven years of age, is the son of an official of the Bolivian Air Force, who at the time of the murder of Father Ray Herman, was employed by the Governor of Punata.

The Permanent Assembly of Human Rights on this the seventh year since the death of the pastor of Morochata is demanding justice from the authorities. Justice, so that those responsible for the crime are brought to justice and are lawfully punished. There have been rumors or reports from several members of the penal establishment from which Baeza escaped, that say that he escaped with “help given to him from the outside” in order to avoid a scandal for certain officials. Those who helped him escape, whose identities are secretly maintained, state that Baeza played a guitar daily and that he swore several times that he would be freed prior to the last visit for inspection of the jail, which took place the first week of December in 1975. They state that his testimony was granted one day prior to the general visit or inspection of the establishment.

Some state and affirm that “he left the jail with cooperation from the outside and used the front door.” At the same time, they state that he took all of his belongings, including his guitar and his mattress. After all, the authorities of the Penal Government did not provide the true reports about the escape of Omar Baeza Acha.