

# The agony of a mother

## Irish priest in Argentina jail

By T. P. O'MAHONY

ON a remote farm outside Fermoy, Co. Cork, a grey haired lady is keeping a vigil for her imprisoned son, Father Patrick Rice, who has been arrested in Argentina for "subversive activities."

Mrs. Amy Rice (64), says she has been "shocked" by the news of her son's detention, and admits that she is very worried about him. "I thank God that he is alive. He might have been shot, the way things are going out there."

According to an Irish Embassy spokesman in Buenos Aires, Father Rice (31) was arrested on October 11 for passing out leftist leaflets, and putting guerilla posters on walls. The accusation (it is not a formal charge) according to the Embassy has been denied by Father Rice.

Last week Fr. Rice was removed from a federal penitentiary and moved into a suburban jail near Buenos Aires.

"We are in regular touch with the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin," says Mrs. Rice. "The Irish Ambassador in the Argentine has told us that Patrick is in good spirits, and that he had been asking about his family. We are thankful for that."

Father Rice has been in the Argentine since shortly after his ordination, in 1970—at first with the Divine Word Missionaries, and latterly with the French Order of the Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld, who are dedicated to working with the poor.

### Document

According to a recent controversial document smuggled out of the country, and published by the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London, about 1,000 people have so far lost their lives, in Argentina, in the past year in political violence.

"No, he never spoke that much about the dangers. Last time he was here he was not wearing priest's clothes. I got on to him about this. Afterwards I used to think that he was safer like that, out in Argentina."

"To have a son in jail is a sad thing. I feel for all those mothers here in Ireland whose sons are in jail."

Father Rice is the second eldest of a family of six boys and one girl. The family dairy farm at Strawhall, about two miles from Fermoy, is run by Father Rice's father, William, aged 66, and Mrs. Rice. "I would very much like to see him now," she told me. "I think if he were released, he would probably be deported."

"He has no wife or children to worry about. People say today that priests should marry, but I think this kind of situation makes you wonder about that."

### Visit home

"We saw Patrick just over a year ago. He was only here for a short time, but he was fine. He is the pride of the family."

She told me that three or four years ago Patrick had brought a friend over to Ireland, an Argentinian priest. "And we were all very upset sometime later when we learned that this priest had been shot by the military. It seems to be happening a lot over there. Other priests have just disappeared."

Mrs. Rice says that her son cannot write to the family now, in the present circumstances. She emphasises that she never had regrets about the fact that her son went to Argentina.

"I would never try to stop him. He is trying to spread the faith, and that is important."

"People in the town are very kind to me. They are praying for him all the time. Perhaps the prayers will help to bring peace to Ireland, as well."

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