

## A Sample Chapter From Faces of Holiness II: Modern Saints in Photos and Words



**Rogelio "Francisco" Gonzalez Corzo**

1932 - 1961

Cuba

"¡Viva Cuba, Viva Cristo Rey, Viva la Agru.....!"

The young man known in the clandestine Cuban resistance forces as Francisco did not deceive himself about his chances of survival. He was experienced enough to understand that no one could operate in the underground forever and that sooner or later there would be a fateful moment in which the fish would not be able to evade the dragnet. Still, he strove to serve as much and as long as possible. Recently he had grown a mustache and dyed his hair. On a trip to Miami, he visited a friend late at night. While there, he woke up one of his friend's small daughters and asked her, "who am I?" The little girl barely opened her eyes and drowsily muttered, "Francisco." The young revolutionary turned to his friend and softly said, "I am doomed." In fact, within a few weeks of his return to Cuba, Castro's police finally trapped him.

His captors knew that there was a clandestine leader called "Francisco" who commanded great respect because of his courage, discretion, and resourcefulness. One of the most important men of the underground, he was a prime target of Cuban intelligence which recognized his prowess and ability. According to official documents, he was "a well-known and extremely dangerous counterrevolutionary who had taken part in the organization of armed uprisings in many places in the country and was responsible for innumerable acts of terrorism and sabotage." In effect, "Francisco" had directed the underground's assault against cities and towns and wreaked havoc in the countryside. The young agronomist engineer organized rendezvous positions to receive weapons, explosives, and other supplies by sea, and had supported the infiltration units of the brigade. He was a leader of the M.R.R. -- Movimiento de Recuperación Revolucionaria [Revolutionary Recovery Movement] -- the group that maintained the closest contact with the United States government, specifically with the Central Intelligence Agency. In addition, he was an active member of the Cuban Catholic lay association of students and young professionals, the Agrupacion Catolica Universitaria, Castro's security people knew all this, but when they surprised a meeting of the underground chiefs and arrested all those present, Rogelio Gonzalez Corzo's youthful looks misled them, and they were unaware that they had at last captured the notorious "Francisco." Instead, they believed that their net had drawn up an obscure fish named Harold Bove Castillo.

Frantically, Cuban exiles in Miami did all they could to make it appear that "Francisco" was in the United States taking a special training course. The Miami Herald cooperated by publishing the picture of a hooded man taken while in the middle of

some sort of military drill. According to the caption of the photograph, the man was "Francisco." Other friends tried to plan a way of escape for him. Their plans failed. Within a few days, police interrogators accumulated enough information to discern the true identity of Harold Bove Castillo, and the death sentence was imposed.

Rogelio Gonzalez Corzo spent his last hours in a secluded section of La Cabana known as the "chapel." Here an eyewitness has reported that he spent his time giving Christ's comfort and strength to the other six prisoners also condemned to death. Here, too, he wrote a final, moving [letter to his parents and brothers.](#)  
[Full of concern for them, he wrote:](#)

**"I am fully aware of what it will mean for all of you to learn about my death where you are, so far away from where I am. But this is what I have always prayed for to God. I sincerely believe that your moral and even physical suffering would have been far greater had you been here and lived through the intervening time between my detention and my death - a total of thirty-two days. I hope that my imprisonment and my execution will not embarrass you under any circumstances. On the contrary, you should be proud of your son, who knew how to rise to the occasion and assume the right attitude when God and the fatherland asked him to sacrifice himself. I want you to know that such was the only attitude that your son could assume given the situation that the fatherland is going through at the present moment.**

**"I am writing this letter at 2:00 am on the morning of 20 April. I am in a cell that is called capilla [chapel], and I will be dead in a matter of minutes. It is my wish to let you know by means of this letter that my last thoughts on this earth have been for you and my dear brothers.**

**"Parents, brothers: I have only one truly serious concern at this moment, but since this is my last will I trust that this source of anxiety will become the origin of great joy. I am talking of your spiritual life, your religious life. You know that to be a good Catholic and to obey God's will has always been of great importance to me. Right now I am sure that I am conducting myself in the way that God wants, and I wish that my death, of which you should be proud, serves the purpose of making you two, mom and dad, promise me that you will attend Mass every Sunday, go to confession, receive Holy Communion, and do so regularly. I also want my brothers, Manolito and Isidro, to make**

the Spiritual Exercises every year, go to confession and received Holy Communion every month and attend Mass every Sunday. They should do their best to be good husbands, which should not be difficult since they have two gems for wives, Laurita and Fifi. I ask both of them to improve their spiritual lives, too. As to my nephew, Carlos Manuel, please tell him that he had an uncle who loved him dearly and who died so that later on he could live in a reputable and Catholic Cuba. And please send him to a Catholic school, because it is more important to save the soul than to learn English. Many kisses for my godson and my two nieces. Send them too to Catholic schools, so that they may grow to be good sons and daughters.

"Death is already knocking at my door, but as all my companions I have great peace of mind, because cost what it may it will show me the way to heaven and eternal happiness. Besides, it will take me to my grandparents' side, wherefrom I will be waiting for all of you when the time comes.

"Fix it in your minds, lamentations are uncalled-for. This is the best thing that could happen to me. Remember, I will be waiting for you in heaven. Be strong as I am strong even at this moment. And never forget that I am leaving this world worrying only about one thing: your spiritual life. Please do not neglect it for any reason. Under no circumstances my fate should be a motive for the weakening of your faith in God. Quite to the contrary, it should strengthen it. I have nothing more to say. Waiting for you in heaven, I remain your son who will never forget you, and together with [my] grandparents will be looking forward to see you again."

The morning of April 20, Rogelio was executed in la Cabana, after a summary and secret trial. His last words were "¡ Viva Cuba, Viva Cristo Rey!" He began a final Viva to the Agrupacion Catolica Universitaria, but the discharge of bullets interrupted that Viva and ended his earthly life.

Rogelio Gonzalez Corzo was born in Havana on September 16, 1932 to Spanish Catholic parents, Manuel Gonzalez and Gloria Corzo. He had two older brothers, Isidro and Manuel.

He attended the Colegio San Francisco de Sales for his primary school studies, after which he attended the Jesuit Colegio (High School) of Belen. He continued his education at the University of Havana, graduating in Agronomy. Later he took a post graduate course in the United States, in Baton Rouge Louisiana, studying rice

production. In all his studies, he proved to be an outstanding student.

At the University, Rogelio became an active member of the Agrupacion Catolica Universitaria. Devout in his religion, he was a daily communicant. He prayed the rosary daily and took an active part in the Saturday afternoon Honor Guards through which the ACU manifested its devotion to the Virgin Mary in a special way. Rogelio was deeply concerned with the problem of poverty in Cuba and helped to establish a number of cooperatives throughout Cuba that would loan money to the poor. Once he deposited all of his savings in the account of a newly organized credit union just to set an example and allay the fears of a group of distrustful workers.

Soft spoken and smooth-faced, at age 28 Rogelio still had the looks of a freshman student. This impression was accentuated by the friendly smile, which usually illuminated his handsome countenance. At the ACU, he was always the first to volunteer for even the most unpretentious jobs such as painting a room or apartment or organizing a jaunt to the countryside. His happy and outgoing nature often cloaked the depth of his spiritual strength and nature.

In 1957, Rogelio attended a play in the Auditorium Theatre in Havana, presented by the Agrupacion Catolica. He was seated next to Miss Dulce Carrera Justiz, the daughter of a local lawyer and statesman. They were introduced at intermission and when he returned from Louisiana in 1958 they began dating. Eventually, they became engaged to marry.

In 1959, when Castro came to power, Rogelio became the Director of Agriculture under the minister Humberto Sori Marin. He soon became disillusioned by Castro's redirection of the Revolution. He realized that the government was marching swiftly toward Communism. Previously, his fiance's father had warned him that many of the new government appointees were members of the Communist party, but Rogelio had responded that they would be weeded out, little by little. Gloomily, Mr. Carrera predicted that the Communists would take over the country.

When the Cuban episcopate realized that what they were seeing under the new regime was an ill-disguised attempt to transform Cuba into a totalitarian communist state, it did not hesitate to denounce the warping of the revolutionary process. It made it clear that it rejected communism and the majority of Catholics began to actively oppose the enthronement of the communists. One of the Agrupacion members, Manolo Artime attended a meeting in the fall of 1959 with Castro, Che Guevara, and other government officials and realized that Castro's real purpose was to destroy the institution of private property in the country, give no compensation whatsoever to the dispossessed landlords, and make the state the sole owner of the land. The young lieutenant immediately resigned his commission in the rebel army and published a letter about the meeting, which was widely distributed throughout the country.

Eventually the ACU became the focal point of a specifically Catholic and religiously motivated anti-Castro underground. In October of 1959, Msgr. Eduardo Boza Masvidal, Auxiliary Bishop of Havana and an active ACU member, explained why Castro's revolution could not be styled as Christian in an article published in La Quincena. In the article, he gave six reasons why he had arrived at his conclusion: 1)

Castro's revolution was not based on a spiritual conceptualization of life and man; 2) it had no room for love, only for the hatred and resentment implicit in the class struggle; 3) it failed to recognize the dignity of the human person and its inherent freedom as God's creature; 4) it negated private property, the cornerstone of individual liberty; 5) it sanctioned the indiscriminate use of slander and character assassination for the pursuance of its goals; 6) its ties with the Soviet Union and the Soviet-block countries went far beyond what was advisable and reasonable. The bishop concluded, "I might have missed something; however, what I have said suffices to show that it is foolish to keep talking about the `ghost' of communism unless of course we persuade ourselves to believe in ghosts." By December of that year, Catholic resistance was formally constituted as the M.R.R., so named because it originated from Castro's own revolutionary ranks. Along with Artime, Rogelio was among its founding members. The pro-communist government had hardened its attitude toward religion and embarked on an increasingly strident and aggressive campaign against the Church. Many young Catholic intellectuals and students believed that the time for armed resistance had finally arrived, and began to plot against the government.

Rogelio dreamed of a Cuba where Christian social justice would be in practice, and where the principles of the church would improve the lives of the people. He was totally convinced that only through the strength of a liberated Cuba could this dream come true. He offered himself totally to the effort to eradicate Communism in order to recover for God his beloved homeland. With his natural leadership abilities, he became the M.R.R.'s National Coordinator and the head of the underground in Cuba. In the underground, he became known simply as "Francisco." Fearful of the danger because of his position, he sent his parents and his brothers to Spain. He wanted Dulce to leave the country also, but she refused.

Since Dulce had refused to leave Cuba, Rogelio told her that they would pretend to break up. Later, he would call her under a different name, and he would send flowers the same way. Several times they were able to meet. To this day, she does not know where the meetings were because she would be picked up by others and taken to see him in safe houses. The meetings were brief, usually less than half an hour. From time to time, he hid out in houses that belonged to Dulce's family. Once he called her and said, "Hello, how are you? Fine? Oh, I'm sorry I have the wrong number." She understood that the call was only to let her hear his voice and to reassure her that he was O.K. Another time he called her from the United States. Once, returning from the states, he brought her a few souvenirs.

Rogelio lived through six months of the fighting, minute by minute, never resting, to provide the resistance that he felt God had prepared him for. His spiritual depth and stature came to the fore during these darkest of times. In many respects he had to set himself apart from the world in which he had previously lived. He was away from his family, his beloved fiance, his work and his companions in the ACU. He did not, however, forsake the practices on which his piety rested. Constantly being hunted by government agents, he had to move frequently, but he invariably found time to receive Holy Communion, sometimes standing on a sidewalk, sitting on a parked car, or in the house in which he happened to be hiding at the time. Never a man given to grumbling or lamenting, with unflinching courage and the strength of the ultimate rationale of his actions, he continued with imperturbable tenacity to serve as much

and as long as possible.

Rogelio was arrested on the afternoon of Saturday March 18, 1961. A number of leaders of the underground were meeting in a supposedly "safe house" to discuss plans to intensify the sabotage campaign that had been rocking the country since the previous fall when they were surrounded by Castro's heavily armed agents.

Dulce's sister Elvira learned of Rogelio's capture the following day. She felt immediately that his captors would find out who he was in spite of his false identification. She spent two weeks without telling her sister; she says she felt as if she were dying inside. Eventually, one day in the family garage, Elvira began crying and Dulce guessed, "They caught Rogelio."

She wasn't allowed to attend his funeral. The last time the young couple had spoken, they had named a date for their wedding, but the careful preparations Dulce had made were never to be completed.

Thirty-three days after Rogelio's arrest, just after the Bay of Pigs invasion, he was executed in the fortress of La Cabana on the morning of April 20. As his last words paid tribute to Christ the King, those who knew Rogelio Gonzalez Corzo believe he now attends at the court of Christ, his King.

There were a number of other devout young Catholics who were also executed in La Cabana including Virgilio Campaneria and Alberto Tapia. In September 1999, a group of Cubans living in exile petitioned Pope John Paul II to open the cause for beatification for Gonzalez-Corzo, Campaneria, and Tapia.