

In examining the two Chick comics, one finds that statements are made that would seem to substantiate Dr. Brewer's views. Rivera is apparently unfamiliar with Catholic doctrine, church history, and other factual information.

For example, in *Alberto*, Rivera seems to imply that celibacy is a sacrament. Also, he states that students studying for the priesthood were not allowed to read the Bible. He also claims that, in Catholic doctrine, Mary is co-equal with God the Father. These are all misrepresentations of the truth.

Rivera further calls his reliability into question by stating that the masterminds behind the Inquisition were Jesuits.

This is an impossibility as the Inquisition began around AD 1200, and the Jesuits were not established until the 1540s. [7]

CRI also discovered Rivera inaccurately quoting sources:

Rivera's believability becomes still more questionable in *Double-Cross*, when he claims that [suicide cult leader] Jim Jones was secretly a Jesuit deacon and an agent for the Vatican. He says that the Jonestown massacre was part of the Roman Catholic Church's "diabolical conspiracy." For support of this contention, he refers to Dr. Peter Beter's Audio Letter #40, November 1978 (Beter is a self-proclaimed "conspiracy" expert). But, on listening to the tape, one discovers that Dr. Beter believes that Jones was a manipulated dupe of the CIA! Thus, the authority Rivera cites for supportive evidence is opposed to his view. [8]

Rivera's response to this investigation was to call CRI "a 'tool' of the Jesuits and its director [Walter Martin, at the time] an 'agent' of Rome." [9] He subsequently claimed that Martin "was working with the Vatican and stated that his name was on a secret Jesuit list." [10] CRI further reported:

After our initial research gave us reason to question the comic's reliability, we attempted to contact both Alberto Rivera and Chick Publications' founder Jack Chick. With no success in contacting

Rivera by mail, two certified letters were sent to Chick Publications. In them, we conveyed our concern over some apparent discrepancies in Rivera's story and asked for answers. When no reply was made to our letters, follow-up phone calls revealed that Jack Chick would make no reply whatsoever. He said that he was not answerable to any man and that the comic books could stand on their own. [11]

Alberto Rivera went on to found the "Antichrist Information Center" or AIC (which later explained its initials as meaning "Assurance in Christ" [12]). He died in 1997 of colon cancer, and his ministry was carried on by his widow, Nuzy Rivera.

The impact of Alberto Rivera on Jack Chick's universe is difficult to underestimate. It was Rivera that provided Chick with his most sensationalistic, most anti-Catholic claims and allowed Chick's conspiracy theories to grow increasingly complex and bizarre.

1. Gary Metz, "Jack Chick's Anti-Catholic Alberto Comic Book Is Exposed as a Fraud," *Christianity Today*, March 13, 1981.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Gary Metz, "Alberto Rivera's False Anti-Catholic Story," *Cornerstone* (www.cornerstonemag.com/pages/show_page.asp?228).
7. Brian Onken, "Alberto: The Truth about His Story," *Forward*, February 25, 1983.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. AIC International Ministries catalogue, 1998-1999.

Note: Rivera died of colorectal cancer on June 20, 1997. According to cemetery records, Rivera is buried in an unmarked grave at Rose Hill Cemetery in Tulsa, OK.



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Pamphlet 390

Alberto Rivera

Alberto Magno Romero Rivera (1935 - 1997) was an anti-Catholic religious activist who was the source of many of fundamentalist Christian author Jack Chick's stories about the Vatican.

Rivera is most notable for his claims about his time as a Catholic priest and the inner workings of the Catholic Church. Most of these claims are fiercely disputed by the Catholic Church and others. An exposé by Gary Metz in *Cornerstone Magazine* issue 53 questioned many of Rivera's claims about his life and revealed him as a fraud.

Christianity Today's story by researcher Gary Metz revealed that:

He is being sued in a Los Angeles court at the present time [1981] by a man who said that Rivera, on behalf of the Hispanic Baptist Church, which he started, borrowed \$2,025 with which to invest in property, but never purchased the land. When the man asked for his money back, he received a receipt acknowledging his "contribution" of \$2,025. [1]

The *Christianity Today* investigation further reported:

In October 1967, Rivera went to work at the Church of God of Prophecy headquarters in Tennessee and began collecting money for a college in Tarrassa, Spain. When the Church of God of Prophecy wrote the college to ask if Rivera was authorized to receive donations for the college, it received a reply stating the college had given him a letter to collect funds only during the month of July. The college later discovered that while "he claimed to be a Catholic priest . . . he had never been one." The college reported that he left debts he had acquired in the name of the parish of San Lorenzo and that Spanish police were seeking him for "authentic swindles and cheats." Finally, they said that no funds had ever reached the college from Rivera. In a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice, Charles Hawkins of the Church of God of Prophecy said

Rivera's bank had contacted them because he had written a check on a closed account.

In 1969 two arrest warrants were issued for him in Florida. One was for the theft of a BankAmericard: The criminal division of the Bank of America reports that he charged over two thousand dollars on the credit card. The second warrant was issued for unauthorized use of an automobile. Rivera abandoned the vehicle in Seattle and went from there to southern California, where he started a number of organizations. [2]

Concerning Rivera's alleged liberation of his sister from a convent, *Christianity Today* reported:

The sequel [to the *Alberto* comic], *Double-Cross*, devotes its first nine pages to a description of how Alberto flew to London and contacted an Anabaptist church, whose people helped him rescue his dying sister Maria from her convent. Actually, the person he contacted was not an Anabaptist but Delmar Spurling of the Church of God of Prophecy. Spurling said in an interview that Rivera did not rescue his sister, because she wasn't a nun but rather a maid working in a private London home. [3]

Concerning Rivera's claim that he had been a priest, *Christianity Today* noted:

The Catholic Church denies Rivera's most important claim, that he was a priest. To substantiate the claim, the *Alberto* comic book carries a picture of an official-looking document from the Archbishopric of Madrid-Alcala in Spain, dated September 1967. It identifies Rivera as a priest and gives him permission to travel abroad in his ministry. There is no other church documentation, such as an ordination certificate, shown in the book. An individual in California, who grew suspicious of Rivera in 1973, wrote to the archdiocese office in Madrid-Alcala to ask if Rivera were really a priest. The response was that no diocese in Spain had any record of Rivera as a priest. The archbishop's office concluded that he was not a priest, and that the travel document, which was little more than a form letter, was "acquired by deceit and subterfuge" to enable Rivera to get a passport. [4]

Christianity Today further discovered that "that not only was Rivera not a Jesuit priest, but also that he had two children during the time he claimed to be living a celibate life as a Jesuit." It explained:

Although Rivera claims to have been raised and trained in a Spanish Jesuit seminary, his hometown friend, Bonilla, said Rivera was living at one point with a woman in Costa Rica named Carmen Lydia Torres. (*Alberto* says Rivera was sent to Costa Rica to destroy a [Protestant] seminary and that a woman named Carmen was with him, posing as his girlfriend. The seminary was not named.)

Rivera later stated on an employment form that he and Torres were married in 1963. Their son, Juan, was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1964, while Rivera was working for the Christian Reformed Church there. Juan died in El Paso in July 1965, after his parents had fled New Jersey leaving numerous debts and a warrant for their arrest on bad check charges. The couple had two other children, Alberto and Luis Marx. The first two children were born during the time Alberto claimed to be a Jesuit priest in Spain. [5]

Concerning Rivera's claim to have been made a bishop, Metz reported in *Cornerstone* that:

Alberto now claims that he was once a Jesuit bishop. None of his former associates remember this being part of his testimony until early 1973. Former associate Rev. Wishart (once a pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Fernando), who questioned Alberto about this, reported that Alberto admitted that he had never been ordained a bishop but used the title for prestige. He continues to call himself the bishop of his own church, the Hispanic Baptist Church (Oxnard, California). [6]

In *Alberto*, Rivera claimed that his conversion to Protestantism happened while he was being detained in a sanitarium following a public break with the Church. Yet *Christianity Today*'s piece noted that:

His later accounts of his conversion are contradictory. While speaking at the Faith Baptist Church in Canoga Park, California, Rivera pinpointed his conversion as March 20, 1967, after three months

in the sanitarium, and he said he immediately defected from the Catholic Church. Five months later, however, he gave a newspaper interview in his home town of Las Palmas [in the Canary Islands], in which he was still promoting Catholicism. He said in the interview that he was doing ecumenical work for the Catholic Church in Tarrassa, Spain, during the previous six months, from February to August 1967. According to *Alberto*, he was in the sanitarium at the time.

Rivera, who now [1981] lives in California, was asked for an interview to discuss the discrepancies in his tale, but he posed so many restrictions before he would agree that a legitimate interview was not possible. He did say that any wrongdoings prior to his conversion to Christ in 1967 were done under the orders of the Catholic Church and that any wrongdoings since his conversions are fabrications by conspirators.

Of course, if Rivera *had* been a secret Jesuit agent bent on conspiratorial acts, such deception and subterfuge might well have been part of his mission. Yet his fantastic tale lacks credibility. The numerous legal entanglements suggest that he was a simple con man. There are the contradictory accounts of his conversion, his admission that he was married, and the fact that he was the father of two children during his alleged time as a Jesuit priest. And then there is what was uncovered by the Christian Research Institute in its investigation of Alberto:

Bartholomew F. Brewer, a former Catholic priest who is now director of Mission to Catholics International in San Diego [a man long known to Catholic Answers supporters for his anti-Catholic activities and an *authentic* ex-priest] . . . related to us that several years ago Rivera wanted to work in conjunction with Mission to Catholics. Dr. Brewer did interview Rivera and decided not to use him in his ministry. Over a period of time, however, Dr. Brewer got to know Rivera better and he eventually concluded that Rivera was not only unfamiliar with Catholic theology, but obviously had never been a Catholic priest, let alone a bishop.