

The Role of the Catholic Church In the Mexican Revolution

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Revolutionary leaders saw little use for the Catholic Church despite the fact that it obviously created social stability.

Few would deny that one of the most pervasive elements of Mexican society is the Catholic Church. In fact, in the 300 years between the conquest and the Mexican Revolution, church and state were virtually one and the same. As the church spread throughout Mexico, it became difficult to encounter a Mexican who did not call himself/herself “Catholic.” Witnessing the thousands of pilgrims who come to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe each day, it seems ap-

parent that the church, even today, remains the greatest unifying component in Mexico.

If the church has occupied such a prominent place in the social makeup of Mexico, why did it find itself abandoned by the Revolution? Every revolutionary leader from Madero to Calles saw little use for the Catholic Church despite its obvious characteristic of providing social stability. This study, by examining revolutionary attitudes concerning the church, will show that after the first decade of the Mexican Revolution it was not the government but the church that actually adopted a rev-

olutionary character in an attempt to retain its powerful hold over Mexican society.

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY INTRODUCTION

Before examining the role of the church in the Revolution, it is necessary to consider Mexico’s leanings toward liberalism in the nineteenth century. Although church and state were one in the colonial era, attitudes began to change with the French Enlightenment. The writings of Voltaire and Rousseau stimulated the minds of a generation

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of young aristocrats causing them not only to take up arms against the Spanish crown, but also the church that supported the crown. Thus, with Independence in 1824, the beginnings of anticlericalism took hold.

As liberalism grew in the mid-nineteenth century its followers became increasingly secularly minded. Robert Quirk points out that while the church, with its then-medieval outlook, saw the ultimate solution to the social problems in terms of the assurance of eternal salvation and happiness, the liberals viewed the matter of eternal salvation as an unfathomable mystery that had no practical bearing on the present.¹ In fact, like their European counterparts, the Mexican liberals were optimistic about the future of mankind. Man, according to them, was perfectible in this life if he followed his own reason and rejected the superstition of the past.

While the liberals did not control the government of Mexico, their influence was formidable. In the 1857 Constitution, the moderate-controlled Congress placed the first formal limitations on the power of the church. As John Rutherford points out however, the church was defeated and removed from political power only on paper.² It was not until the Reform Laws of 1859 that church and state became physically separated. Under the liberal president, Benito Juárez, the groundwork for the conflict between church and state during the Revolution was laid.

Displaying striking similarities to the Revolution, the Reform had a delayed impact on the popular classes of Mexico. Jean Meyer argues that the Reform Laws of 1859 pitted an unstable state against a stable church firmly grounded in continuous tradition. The

people of Mexico, uninvolved in events in Mexico City, the international wars and American invasion, became aware of and violently reacted to the Reform Laws only when the sacred aspects of daily life such as charitable activities became secularized.³ Therefore, as church lands and responsibilities increasingly became secularized under a liberal anticlerical administration, the people of Mexico adopted a clerical outlook.

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early 1860s a *Kulturkampf*.⁴ In other words, Mexico was breaking out of its colonial church-dominated cocoon into the modern world. Like the situation in the *Vendée* during the French Revolution however, the devout Catholics had to be forced into compliance. There are countless episodes of barbarism on the part of the government and martyrdom on the part of Catholics. The account of General Socorro Reyes provides an excellent example of the latter.

He was a straightforward and honorable man. In all his public declarations he was frank and truthful, and when asked who had encouraged him to take part in the revolution, he said, "my conscience commanded me." On being taken to the

place of execution, he asked permission to say a few words, but this request was denied. However, he asked forgiveness for any offenses that his soldiers might have committed.⁵

Obviously, the Mexican people preferred the side of the Cristeros, or the Catholic fighters to the seemingly barbarous government. Because of widespread public support the fighting took on characteristics of guerrilla warfare where neither side was able to gain the upper hand.

It is out of this turmoil that the young Porfirio Díaz saw an opportunity for peace through conciliation. Although Díaz fought for the government he recognized that

There are no...uprisings of the people except when attempts are made to undermine their most deeply held traditions and to diminish their legitimate liberty of conscience. Persecution of the Church...means war, and such a war that the Government can only win is against its own people, through the humiliating, despotic, costly and dangerous support of the United States. Without its religion, Mexico is irretrievably lost.⁶

Mexico and its church operated under this simple philosophy for 35 years. Neither the 1857 Constitution nor the Reform Laws were repealed but the government chose to ignore most of the restrictions placed on the church. The battle between church and state had been rehearsed and postponed only to re-erupt in the 1920s when the anticlerical legislation expressed in the 1857 Constitution and embodied in the 1917 Constitution was enforced.

THE CHURCH ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION

The policy of conciliation represented a *modus vivendi* for both the liberal politicians and the church. Díaz had satisfied the liberals by retaining the anticlerical laws of the 1857 Constitution. The fact that these laws were not enforced seemed a moot point. The church, while aware of its precarious position, began a course of reform that included internal reform, administrative reorganization, improved training of the clergy and an increase in their number, the mobilization of the laity, the expansion of the Catholic press and of Catholic education and the renewal of the strength of the church in rural areas.

The church even began to address the social problems within Mexico. Deprived of their privileged legal status, the church looked to the masses for support. With the publication of the *Rerum Novarum*, the church had an open invitation to foster support by addressing the problems of the Mexican workers.⁷ The letter from the Bishop of Querétaro to a wealthy government official clearly demonstrates the church's attempt to remedy social problems.

The worker, in return for this terribly exhausting labour, receives between 18 and 25 centavos a day, which is paid partly in seeds and partly in cash, and even with these low wages, there are some landowners who find ingenious ways of reducing them further.... We understand Socialism.... You rich men, there is no other way open: either you must open your hearts to charity and reduce the hours of work and increase wages, or you are accumulating hatred

and resentment...and your riches and you yourselves will be buried.⁸

The traditional role of the church in terms of good works was being replaced by a role of increased social action. With the loss of Díaz, the church, under the leadership of the archbishop of Mexico City, formed its own political party to stand up against the threat posed by those liberals who sought to enforce the anticlerical laws passed 50 years earlier.

Clearly the church had its own program to remedy the social ills of Mex-

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ico. Unfortunately, however, its legal standing prevented any direct action. When the Revolution broke out in 1910, the church was forced to sacrifice its social programs and concentrate on its own survival.

REVOLUTIONARIES AND THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CHURCH

Madero's entry into Mexico City in 1911 did not signal the end of the Catholic Church in Mexico. According to Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, Madero did not carry the banner of a revolutionary but, instead, sought to cleanse the Mexican government of its corrupt autocratic rule by the president and state governors.⁹ The church, therefore,

gave Madero cautious support. The 1857 Constitution could be enforced against the church at any time and the Catholic leadership sought to continue the policy of conciliation initiated by Díaz.

Madero's idealistic stance soon convinced Catholics that conciliation would fail. As stated in his *Presidential Succession*, Madero felt that the 1857 Constitution contained the essential ingredients for an effective state. Díaz had ignored its principles and the natural remedy, according to Madero, was merely its implementation. In addition, Madero believed that the cardinal remedy for the ills of society was education. Since the church still provided the majority of education in Mexico and abhorred the 1857 Constitution, its reaction was not surprising. A letter to the U.S. State Department sums it up well.

The Catholic support, which had been one of Madero's chief assets, and has materially strengthened his candidacy, would be withdrawn within the next few days on account of Mr. Madero's policies.¹⁰

Although Madero believed in the 1857 Constitution and its liberal ideology, he blindly refused to acknowledge the church's strong unifying influence. When the Catholic party withdrew its support, Madero lost 40 percent of his strength.¹¹

When Huerta seized power and had Madero killed, official Catholic reaction appeared conciliatory. In fact *La Nación*, the official organ of the Catholic party, referred to him as "don Victoriano" and opposed further revolutionary activity. According to the paper, the road to true peace was through the religion of



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Christ, not rebellion.¹² To the church, Huerta represented the restoration of order. In the eyes of the revolutionaries, however, the church had committed the unpardonable sin of being identified with military reaction, terrorism and debauchery.

While the church gave support to Huerta, Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa and Venustiano Carranza were unanimous in their opposition to the “usurper.” Their common condemnation of Huerta, however, was the only thing that united these men. Zapata was an uneducated rebel of lower-class origin. Ruiz calls him

A complex man of simple revolutionary faith... [who] never captured the imagination or loyalty of the man on the street. He was always a provincial figure.... only Zapata truly made the plight of the rural poor his special passion.¹³

Zapata’s ideas for land distribution, described in his Ayala Plan, seem to be similar to the Church’s desire to improve the plight of the Mexican worker as described by the bishop of Querétaro. As Quirk points out, however, Zapata’s

plan had no ideological content. Zapata was naive and parochial. In fact, while he controlled Morelos from 1911-1919 the state had no government, no administration, and no schools.¹⁴

Concerning the church, Zapata’s stance seemed ambiguous. He is described as a conservative Catholic who wanted no quarrel with religion or the church. At the same time he could shoot a priest without hesitation.¹⁵ In the eyes of the church, Zapata was an anarchist who represented the excesses of the Revolution. Beyond his program of land distribution, Zapata had no agenda. Therefore, he was neither supported by nor an ardent supporter of the church.

Unlike Zapata’s take-it-or-leave-it attitude concerning the church, Villa was a staunch clerophobe. He once told an American reporter that he believed in God, but not in religion.¹⁶ After his break with Carranza, however, Villa reversed his attitude and became a defender of the church. In a letter to Carranza he writes:

I accuse you of destroying freedom of conscience by persecuting the Church,

and of having permitted governments to prohibit religious worship and even to impose fines for activities that are definitely allowed by law, and of having grossly outraged the religious sentiments of the people.¹⁷

This devotion to Catholicism, however, appears suspect. Quirk recounts a story of how Villa treated several priests on his trek toward Mexico City. Trying to learn where the priests had hidden their money, one of Villa’s men, Fierro, locked the priests in one room and interrogated them in another. In the interrogation room with the other priests listening

Fierro ordered the priest to reveal where the Jesuits kept their buried treasures. The priest insisted that they had no treasures.... Fierro repeated his question. The priest was silent. Fierro fired his pistol.... As death loomed large in their [the priests in the adjoining room] hearts they prayed for the departed soul.... One after another they were led from the room, and the succession of noises was repeated. As the last priest was dragged into the adjoining room, he found all the priests, not dead, as he expected, but huddled silently together.¹⁸

Villa, while often using these scare-tactics, never personally engaged in religious persecution and even intervened to save several priests from the firing squad.

The leader most associated with persecution of the church was Carranza. Leading the fight against Huerta, he and the Constitutionals concluded that the 1857 Constitution had legally decided the church-state issue. His only responsibility was to insure that those principles of separation and subordination were carried out.

Meyer states that the Carrancistas believed that the priests had turned the people against them by their own propaganda, and that all enemies were in the pay of bishops.¹⁹ He abhorred the accumulation of wealth he saw in the church. His plan for saving Mexico not only involved returning to a constitutional order, but also supporting a more equitable distribution of wealth.²⁰ Infamous for its cruelty, Carranza's army was feared by both supporters and non-supporters of the church.

The strong opposition found by the Constitutionalists in some cities under the form of social armed defenses was not a sign of sympathy toward Huerta, but it was occasioned by a kind of horror toward the revolutionary soldiers, whom the Catholic clergy made appear bandits who intended to take possession of towns and villages in order to rob, loot, violate and murder.²¹

Of the three main sources of opposition to Huerta, Carranza was the most anticlerical. When he deposed Huerta and assumed power in 1917, the church was to pay dearly.

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1917

The victory of Carranza in 1913 signaled the death knell for the independent church in Mexico. The church's support of the counter-revolutionary Huerta and Carranza's personal attitudes regarding religion would greatly influence the Constitutional Congress, which met in Querétaro in late 1916. The chairman of the Constitutional Committee, Francisco J. Mújica, not only represented the liberalism of the nineteenth century, but also encour-



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aged a radical change in the social fabric of Mexico. Speaking to the Congress his attitude was clear:

I am a foe of the clergy, because I consider it the most disgraceful and perverse enemy of our people. What has the clergy given...our nation? The most absurd ideas, the greatest contempt for our democratic institutions, the most unrelenting hatred for the very principles of equity, equality, and fraternity taught by the first democrat, Jesus Christ... What sort of morality, gentlemen, will the clergy teach our children? We have seen it—the greatest corruption...²²

The resulting document was more repressive and restricting to the church than the 1857 Constitution.

Although the new Constitution guaranteed the freedom of religious beliefs, it placed severe restrictions on religious practice. Article 24 stated that every religious act of public worship must be performed inside churches, which were under governmental supervision.²³ The most devastating for the church, however, was Article 130. Under its provi-

sions every aspect of religion in Mexico was subjugated to the supervision of the state. No longer could priests hear confession or legally perform a marriage ceremony. Not only were state legislatures made responsible for determining the number of priests in a locality, but priests could not speak or publish anything dealing with national political matters or "public information." In addition, members of religious groups were banned from political participation and from owning or inhabiting land without government consent.²⁴

Church leaders, however, did not accept the new Constitution passively. Those clergy who remained in Mexico and those who had fled the religious persecution were mobilizing support in the United States and in Rome to defend the traditional rights of the church. In addition, as Meyer points out, Mexican anticlericalism, though the work of a minority, was that of a minority in power.²⁵ Most Mexicans were Catholics who had no desire to see their religious rituals changed. When the ruling anticlerical minority sought to impose their liberal ideology on the

Catholic majority a clash was inevitable. In fact, the Catholic response was, arguably, one of the only instances of a true revolutionary character in the Mexican Revolution.

THE CATHOLIC “REVOLUTION”

When Carranza seized power in Mexico City, the archbishop, José Mora y del Río, who had supported the dictatorship of Huerta fled to the United States where he led the exiled Catholic opposition to Carranza and the 1917 Constitution. In a collective letter of protest to the Mexican people the exiled leaders stated that they had no desire to meddle in political matters. They maintained, however, that they could not accept a constitution so contrary to God’s law. The bishops pledged to work within the law to change the existing conditions between the church and the Mexican government.

Mora y del Río backed up the protest in a *Pastoral Letter* to his archdiocese. The church was “a perfect society, founded by God himself,” he said, and, because of its origins, was “independent of every human power.”²⁶ According to Mora y del Río, no man had the right to oppose the divine constitution of the church or attack its rights. From Rome, Benedict XV condemned the new Constitution and expressed his approval of the actions of the Mexican bishops. “Some of the articles of the new law,” stated the pontiff, “ignore the sacred rights of the church, while others openly contradict them.”²⁷ With the support of Rome, the Catholic leaders began an aggressive campaign against the government in Mexico. In fact, the battle became international as they attempted to enlist the

support of not only American Catholics, but also the U.S. government.

Shortly after the Constitution had been adopted, an assembly of the American Federation of Catholic Societies in Kansas City adopted a resolution condemning it.²⁸ In addition, the U.S. bishops, meeting in Washington, drew up a similar letter of protest. Although it was not sent to President Wilson because many believed that he was too preoccupied with the European war to concern himself with Mexican affairs, it did demonstrate growing

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concern for the Mexican church by U.S. Catholics.

The reasons for concern temporarily subsided, however, as President Carranza found himself focused on Mexico’s worsening economic situation. He was, in fact, criticized by the radicals because he not only ignored the radical articles of the Constitution, but he also wanted to revise Article 3 so that private or church education could relieve the inadequate and under-funded public education system.²⁹ While the Catholic situation may, in appearance, have temporarily subsided, the opposition to Mexico’s Constitution did not. While some, like Mora y del Río, sought to resurrect the rights of the church diplomatically, those within Mexico began to employ revolutionary tactics.

The church’s constitutional opposition within Mexico came from a very unlikely candidate. Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, the archbishop of Guadalajara, was described as a proud aristocrat. Although he used his funds for religious and public improvements, one of his fellow priests called him “a great prelate-politician in the court of a medieval monarch.”³⁰ Quirk, in fact, calls his attitude toward the lower classes kindly, but condescending.³¹ Despite his attitudes and upbringing, he was a tireless defender of the rights of the church. While other priests fled Mexico to gather support abroad, Orozco y Jiménez remained in Jalisco building support for the church and calling on the faithful to denounce the Constitution.

Now is the time to revive within ourselves the true Catholic spirit, to eliminate all compromise with modern errors, which are condemned by the Church, and to separate the chaff from the wheat. Then the splendor of high Christian virtue will shine forth; then the enemies of the Church will recognize and glorify God and His Christ!³²

If revolution can begin from conservative or right-wing elements then Orozco y Jiménez must be labeled a revolutionary. He not only challenged established authority, but he also launched a successful campaign of passive resistance in Jalisco which eventually led to his capture and expulsion from Mexico.

In July 1918 the situation between church and state came to a head in Jalisco as the state legislature made it necessary for priests to register and obtain permission before holding religious services.³³ This law which placed the church directly under the control of

the state and the offending articles of the 1917 Constitution prompted church leaders to condemn the government's Jacobin policies.

The Committee has asserted that we must prevent the distorted interpretations which are the result of religious instruction...but this does not go far enough; it should follow the logic of its Jacobin premises; it should not be content...with smashing the images of the Saints, pulling the rosaries to pieces, tearing down the Crucifixes, getting rid of Novenas and suchlike frivolities, shutting the door against the priests, and abolishing freedom of association so that nobody can go to Church to make contact with the clergy; it should destroy religious freedom altogether, and after that, in an orgy of sated intolerance, the committee will be able to promulgate this one article: in the Mexican Republic there will only be guarantees for those who think as we do.³⁴

Refusing to abide by the new legislation, the priests in Jalisco decided to withdraw from all the churches until the government withdrew its order. According to Quirk, this movement of passive resistance proved effective. As public religious activity ceased, the people, robbed of their access to the traditional sacraments, actively supported the church. Catholics in Jalisco organized an economic boycott that corresponded to the church strike. From August 1918 through March 1919, churches as well as many businesses in Jalisco stood empty and silent. Bowing to economic pressure, the state legislature rescinded Decree 1927 and priests and laymen ended their strike. By giving in, however, the state government had sent a clear

message to church leaders: revolutionary laws could be modified.

In 1920, after the death of Carranza, Alvaro Obregón became president of Mexico. As Quirk points out, Obregón's presidency began a new radical phase of reform.³⁵ Unlike his predecessors who embraced nineteenth-century liberal political views, Obregón concentrated on social and economic reform. In an address to the archbishops and bishops in 1923 he said, "The present social program of the Government is essentially Christian, and it is

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complementary to the fundamental program of the Catholic Church."³⁶ Although it appears that he tried to make peace with the church, Obregón was merely using the church's system of education until the public system could be established and funded. When questioned about the legality of his position, Obregón replied

Yes, it is illegal, and we are not unaware of the menace of these Catholic schools, whose aim is to inculcate anti-government and antirevolutionary propaganda. But at the present there is not money enough, nor facilities for the government to teach all Mexican children. It is preferable that they receive any instruction, rather than grow up illiterate.³⁷

Like Díaz and Carranza, Obregón was granting the church its traditional rights and privileges in spite of the legality of such measures. The most striking constitutional violation was Obregón's consent for a public ceremony to erect a monument to Christ the King near León, the geographic center of Mexico. When the ceremony took place in 1923 thousands of Catholics attended to, in the words of Quirk, recognize Christ as supreme Sovereign and King.³⁸ The symbolism of this apparent counter-revolutionary religious ceremony stands in stark contrast to the revolutionary aims of the government.

If, as it has been proposed, men like Carranza and Obregón are true revolutionaries, why did they permit the traditional church customs, which are termed counter-revolutionary, to continue? Counter-revolution in any form or for any reason is always the enemy of the revolutionary. The government's revolving door of prohibition and tolerance would eventually cause a role reversal where the church would lead a revolution from the right and the leftist reformers would have no choice but to yield.

THE CRISTERO REVOLT

As the government violated its own constitution in order to stabilize the situation in Mexico, the church regrouped and prepared for a showdown. Although not ready for a conflict with the state, by 1926 the church gave the appearance of an unassailable fortress of unalterable and irrefutable truth. When Obregón stepped down, however, he handed the presidency to Plutarco Elías Calles, a revolutionary general and obstinate enemy of the church.

The Obregonian period of conciliation had given way to a period of strict adherence to the revolutionary laws.

In late 1925 many state legislatures began the implementation of the anti-clerical Article 130. Immediately, Archbishop Mora y del Río re-proclaimed the article and the entire Constitution contrary to liberty and religious teachings. Calles seized this opportunity to attack the church on two fronts. First, Mora y del Río was brought to trial for his remarks, and second, the president would immediately implement not only Article 130 but also Article 3 which prohibited schools operated by the church. Calles' actions proved to be the breaking point for the church. Church officials decided that beginning August 1, no religious ceremonies or services of any kind would be conducted in the churches of Mexico until the anticlerical laws had been amended. The church was on strike.

Calles, however, did not count on the church receiving popular support. According to Meyer, the people were not always sure why the churches were closing. What they did understand was that they would be denied access to the traditional sacraments of the church, the most unifying aspect of popular Mexican culture. As a result, the strike took on a crusading spirit against the government.

Better to die than deny Christ the King, without fearing martyrdom or death, in whatever form it might come! Sons, do not be cowards! Rise up and defend a just cause! At the same time, everybody was repeating in chorus the cries of "Long Live Christ the King!"³⁹

In addition to the church strike, the National League, the political arm of

the Catholics, proclaimed an economic boycott. As Quirk points out, however, the poor harvest of 1926 and the general economic problems within Mexico diminished its effectiveness.

Mexican Catholics did receive support from U.S. Catholics. In a collective pastoral letter, the American bishops stressed the virtues of the American system of toleration. In addition, they stated that "all men, Mexicans included, are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty,

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and the Pursuit of Happiness."⁴⁰ Calls for American-type religious tolerance were not endorsed by Mexican bishops. They held fast to a medieval doctrine of the primacy of the Catholic religion in their country. To them it was a question of restoring traditional rights. It was the restoration of a religious system that had operated in Mexico for centuries. They desired a true revolution.

At the end of 1926 it was apparent that the economic boycott had failed. In addition, the Mexican Congress refused to consider the Catholic's demands. The only choices open to the church were surrender or revolt. Since the bishops could not advocate armed rebellion, the fate of Mexican Catholi-

cism fell into the hands of laymen, especially the National League. As the church hierarchy faded into the background, the movement against the government took on a more recognizably revolutionary appearance. They embraced the banner of Christ and the battle cry "Viva Cristo Rey" (Long Live Christ the King). Their enemies dubbed them "Cristeros," and it is by this name that the Catholic revolutionaries came to be known.

While the rebels gained small successes by blowing up trains, bridges and stealing mail, the government was never in serious danger of defeat. The rebels' determination was encouraged, however, when the Vatican refused to sanction any compromise with the Mexican government. *Osservatore Romano*, the semi-official voice of the Holy See, announced that there could be "no accommodation whatever" with the "unjust" Mexican laws.⁴¹ Papal support, however, did not diminish the determination of President Calles who implemented Article 130 by presidential decree in late 1926.

Catholic leaders soon realized that the only effective means for change lay outside Mexico. The bishop of Tabasco, Pascual Díaz, who had been deported for anti-revolutionary activity in early 1927 headed up the campaign to gain foreign support for the Catholic cause. Díaz viewed the U.S. oil man William Buckley as a solution to the crisis. Buckley could not only supply funds for the Cristeros, but also, because of the American oil interests in Mexico, pressure the U.S. government to intervene on behalf of the Catholics. When the National League refused to allow Buckley to use the Cristeros, Díaz went to Rome. Unfortunately, the Vatican could not afford

to provide money for the Catholic cause in Mexico. The Vatican did issue a statement demanding that Calles “mend his ways.” As Quirk states, however, “The Vatican in 1928 lived in a dream world, believing that the head of a secular state would still heed the words of a pope.”⁴² Calles was not a medieval monarch concerned with the welfare of his soul.

Foreign influence, however, was not doomed. In late 1927, Dwight Morrow came to Mexico as the new U.S. ambassador. Although his main concern was the question of U.S. oil holdings in Mexico, he did act as a peace-maker in the church-state conflict.⁴³ Morrow, who quickly became a trusted friend of Calles, was convinced that resolving the religious controversy would improve Mexico’s international standing. In fact, he proposed that some of the laws might destroy the identity of the Church in Mexico and worsen relations with the papacy. By late 1928 Calles, who was in desperate need of loans from the United States, weakened his position against the Church. Although the Constitution was not changed, he did provide some assurances.

In the end, Morrow provided a settlement acceptable to both sides. The despised registration law for priests was reinterpreted to mean that the state could not appoint or assign priests who had not been assigned by their hierarchical superiors. In addition, religious instruction could take place within church confines. Finally, a general amnesty was agreed on as was a decision to return confiscated church residences. In the words of Quirk, “the strike ended with a *modus vivendi*, an agreement to disagree peacefully.”⁴⁴

THE SEMANTICS OF THE MOVEMENT

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Mexican Catholic Church was considered one of the most progressive. Obviously, one reason for this classification is the fact that, for most of the period, the church took a defensive stand against liberal and radical anticlerical ideologies. From the standpoint of the church, the Revolution of 1910 was not a revolution but merely an enforcement of laws already in existence. While Ruiz is correct in labeling

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1910 a rebellion, he fails to consider the reaction of the church in the early 1920s. The church wanted to go back to a time when it had exercised great power. It desired a classic “revolution.” At first the church sought redress through peaceful methods. When these proved ineffective, it was forced to adopt revolutionary measures.

In the final analysis, the Catholics, although labeled counter-revolutionaries, were the true revolutionaries of the Mexican Revolution. Not only did the Cristeros employ violent measures, but they also sought foreign support and intervention. It was, in fact, foreign intervention that resolved the church-state conflict. In addition, the church had a clear ideological pro-

gram that included social action and a system for working with Mexico’s secular leaders.

The church had effectively asserted its diminishing power. When the churches reopened after almost three years of silence, the Mexican people flocked into them for days. The bishops and other church leaders must have been proud of their accomplishments. The church had, however, regained only a fraction of its former power. It remained, in fact, under direct state control. Despite these limitations, the Mexican church had entered the modern age. Mexico had experienced an industrial surge in the final years of the nineteenth century. The church, with its medieval outlook, stood as an obstacle to modernization. Although it fought to retain its former status, it ultimately failed to attain its goals.

As in all revolutions, the years after the Cristero episode marked the beginning of the Thermidor for the Mexican Revolution. While the Mexican Catholic Church retained a powerful spiritual hold over Mexican society, it lost all legal power. The location of churches and governmental buildings in most Mexican towns and cities provides a reminder, today, not only of the church’s lost status, but also its failed revolution. The words of a Mexican short story provide a good description.

In the middle of the white dust he appeared, at once, the black point of a disheveled corpse, sad, persecuted.... He was blind with anguish, a pale green mass. On all sides he had been beaten.⁴⁵

Portrayed in the words of a Mexican novelist, this was the vision of the Mexican church after the Revolution. Like most intellectuals, José

Revueltas criticized the Revolution for its lack of social reform. In his work, *Dios en la tierra* (God on Earth), Revueltas seems to support the church as the only true revolutionary force. In the end, however, he characterizes the church as a transparent liquid that had the ability to provide life to the people but ended by betraying them to the state. Although God, according to Revueltas, had been a force in Mexico, the church's betrayal caused Him and the Revolution to pass away without accomplishing anything. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹ Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 8.
- ² John Rutherford, *Mexican Society During the Revolution, A Literary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 279.
- ³ Jean A. Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State, 1926-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 5-6.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ⁵ Ciro Ceballos, *Aurora y ocaso. Historia de la revolución de Tuxtepec*, as quoted in Meyer, op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁶ Paul Murray, *The Catholic Church in Mexico*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Editorial EPM, 1965), p. 301.
- ⁷ Interestingly, while the Catholic Congresses between 1903 and 1909 addressed this question, the revolutionaries never directly focused on the plight of Mexican workers.
- ⁸ Banegas y Galván, Bishop of Querétaro, as quoted in Meyer, op. cit., p. 9.
- ⁹ Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *The Great Rebellion: Mexico 1905-1924* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1980), p. 143.
- ¹⁰ "Embassy of the United States of America, Mexico to the Secretary of State, Washington, September 2, 1911," Gene Z. Hanrahan ed., *Documents on the Mexican Revolution*, vol. 3 (Salisbury, N.C.: Documentary Publications, 1978), pp. 42-43.
- ¹¹ "Memorandum of Mr. Dearing's interview with President De la Barra on September 5th 1911, Re: Political Manifestations," Hanrahan, op. cit., pp. 49-50.
- ¹² *La Nación* (Mexico City), 20 February 1913, p. 3.
- ¹³ Ruiz, op. cit., p. 200.
- ¹⁴ Quirk, op. cit., p. 42.
- ¹⁵ Ruiz, op. cit., p. 204.
- ¹⁶ Quirk, op. cit., p. 42.
- ¹⁷ Murray, op. cit., p. 301.
- ¹⁸ Quirk, op. cit., p. 53-54.
- ¹⁹ Meyer, op. cit., p. 13.
- ²⁰ Carranza believed in the strict enforcement of the 1857 Constitution, which barred priests from any effective political role.
- ²¹ Luis Cabrera, "The religious question in Mexico," quoted in *The Purposes and Ideals of the Mexican Revolution* (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1917), p. 13.
- ²² "Diario de los debates," *El Pueblo* (Mexico City), 17 December 1916, p. 2.
- ²³ *Constitution of Mexico, 1917* (Washington, D. C.: Pan American Union, 1968), p. 8.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
- ²⁵ Meyer, op. cit., p. 30.
- ²⁶ José Mora y del Río, *Instrucción pastoral*, as quoted in Quirk, op. cit., p. 100.
- ²⁷ Pope Benedict XV, *Carta a los arzobispos y obispos de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, as quoted in Jesús García Gutiérrez, "La Iglesia mexicana y los constituyentes," *Todo*, 23 September 1954, p. 20.
- ²⁸ For an excellent look at the dialogue between Mexican and American Catholics see Francis L. Broderick, ed., "Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927: A Debate Between Norman Thomas and John A. Ryan," *The Catholic Historical Review* 95 (October 1959), pp. 309-326.
- ²⁹ Quirk, op. cit., p. 103.
- ³⁰ Jesús García Gutiérrez, "Calumnia. Que algo queda," *Todo*, 17 January 1946, p. 40.
- ³¹ Quirk, op. cit., p. 105.
- ³² Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, *Memoir*, as quoted in Quirk, op. cit., p. 106.
- ³³ This law (Decree 1927) virtually severed the Mexican Church in Jalisco from any meaningful relationship with Rome.
- ³⁴ *Diario de los debates del Congreso constituyente*, as quoted in Meyer, op. cit., p. 14.
- ³⁵ In fact Quirk terms the period from 1920-1924 "The Obregonian Renaissance." Quirk, op. cit., p. 112.
- ³⁶ Narciso Bassols, *Obregón* (Mexico City: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1968), pp. 165-167.
- ³⁷ Obregón as quoted in Quirk, op. cit., p. 120.
- ³⁸ Quirk, op. cit., pp. 132-133.
- ³⁹ Meyer, op. cit., p. 49.
- ⁴⁰ *Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Episcopate of the United States on the Religious Situation in Mexico*, as quoted in Quirk, op. cit., p. 185.
- ⁴¹ Jesús García Gutiérrez, "Peor está que estaba," *Todo*, 14 October 1954, p. 37.
- ⁴² Quirk, op. cit., p. 232.
- ⁴³ Following Theda Skocpol's argument, the influence of foreign powers placed the Cristero revolt in an international context and, therefore, brings it closer to a true revolution. See Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 14-22.
- ⁴⁴ Quirk, op. cit., p. 245.
- ⁴⁵ José Revueltas, "Dios en la tierra," in *El cuento hispanoamericano*, ed. Seymour Menton (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), p. 264.