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THE RISE OF ANTICLERICALISM
IN MEXICO

A thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of Historical Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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May 1949

Approved by:



N. G. Palmer

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THE RISE OF ANTICLERICALISM IN MEXICO

Introduction

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The prominence of this law indicates its importance in the eyes of the men who framed it. They realized that it was absolutely imperative to maintain this provision if they were to avoid the bitter and destructive religious troubles which plagued the Old World. Deprived of their possessions and rights because of one form of religious intolerance or another they decided to come to the New World and set up a government which would do away with all these difficulties by completely severing the Church from the State.

Thus by these few words they set a course which was to prove one of their greatest assets. Such was not the case with all the countries founded in the New World. To the south all the lands settled by Spain began with an established church and usually with provisions that no other religion was to be taught. Because of this they were to suf-

fer problems which their northern neighbor never had to face in such terrible measure.

Such a country was Mexico. Conquered by the Catholic conquistadores and evangelized by the Catholic Church it was soon confronted with the same problem that plagued most of the Old World, namely the eternal intrigues and plottings of the secular clergy and the demoralizing effects of the regular clergy. Smouldering for three centuries it lay seemingly dormant, only to break out time and again in the following century with the greatest violence. The political result was the passing of the so-called Religious Laws. This name can be misunderstood. Actually the Laws have nothing to do with religion in the proper meaning of the term. As Elias tells us, "They have to do with an ecclesiastical establishment -- a Church Hierarchy -- which had misused religion as a means of building up a great temporal power."¹

Hence it would be improper to call this paper, the rise of atheism or anti-religion elements in Mexico. The revolt came not against religion but against the corrupt clergy which had used the cloak of religion to further its own ends. The same writer, former Consul-General of Mexico in the United States, states the issue clearly thus:

Those who have led the forces in each generation against the temporal power of the Church have had

1. Arturo M. Elias, The Mexican People and the Church, p.3.

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nothing but respect for true religion. It has been a battle against those who have dared to use the cloak of the Christ to hide their greed for power and earthly riches. It has been a battle to improve the physical and mental conditions of the Mexican people, and thus to give their spiritual life an opportunity to flower. It has been a battle against the forces of darkness whose chief allies were ignorance and intolerance.²

The Laws were first passed in 1859. This may lead some to think that the problem did not exist before this, and to a certain extent this is true. During the Colonial period, for example, there was peace, but it was the peace which is based on an absolute despotism. Actually the problem was there from the time the first priests landed with the soldiers of Cortez.

This thesis will treat this problem as objectively as possible. It will trace first the historical background out of which the Religious Laws came. A clear picture of these conditions is necessary if one is to appreciate the incidents which occurred later. Then it shall consider the revolt itself and finally the results of the anti-clerical movement in Mexico.

The writer would like to gratefully thank Rev. Bernard Pankow for the many helpful suggestions which he received from him during his stay in Mexico City; also Rev. Herman Mayer, assistant Executive Secretary of Foreign Missions of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, for his kind assistance in providing major source material; also Dr. L. W. Spitz of

2. Elias, op. cit., p. 5.

I. Rome and the State

In order to fully appreciate the problem of anticlericalism in Mexico it will be of value to study the institution and conditions in the Old World out of which it stemmed. Briefly this was the position of the Roman Catholic Church over against the ruling secular powers, the State.

Doctrinally the Roman Church holds that the Pope is the supreme ruler of both the Church and State as Christ's vicar here on earth. The first demonstration of this position was made by Stephen III in 755 when he put on two swords, one on each side, symbolizing that he held both temporal and spiritual power and crowned the father of Chalemagne the Great. When the latter was declared emperor of the old Roman Empire in 800 by Pope Leo III, he declared that one-tenth of all incomes had to be given to the Church. And as historical grounds for the assumption of such power the famous "Decretals of Bishop Isadore" were brought to light. These false documents were said to prove that already as early as the fourth century the first Christian emporor, Constantine, recognized the supreme authority of the Roman bishop in all matters of life. But, as has been stated, they were undoubtedly forged. "It was, in fine, a fraud intended to authorize the arrogated power of an inviolate priest - caste, especially of the bishops; and,

chief of all, of the Pope."¹

This position became more strongly entrenched as each succeeding pope assumed more and more power. For example, John XII crowned Otho I in 962 as the "King of the Holy Roman Empire of the Germans"; Hildebrand forced celibacy upon his English clergy in 1073; Adrian IV gave Ireland to King Henry II in 1156. The acme of papal presumption was perhaps reached when Boniface VIII issued the famous bull Unam Sanctam. This bull, based on a misuse of Luke 22, 38, stated that "both are in the power of the Church, namely, the spiritual sword and the temporal. But the latter is, indeed, to be wielded for the Church; the former, however, by the Church; the one by the Pope, the other by the hand of kings and soldiers, but by the license and will of the Pope." The encyclical issued by Pius IX in 1864, although of a much later date, serves to show the Church's position already four centuries prior. It lists the 15 following points:

1. It is necessary to salvation that every man should submit to the Pope.
2. This is a necessary consequence of the dogma of papal supremacy.
3. It condemns the assertion by the State of any power over the church property.
4. The temporal power of Christian princes does not exempt them from obedience to the head of the Church.
5. The material sword is drawn for the Church, the spiritual by the Church.
6. The material sword must cooperate with the spiritual and assist it.
7. The secular power should be guided by the spiritual, as the higher.
8. The spiritual has the preeminence over the ma-

1. L. Fuerbringer, et al., "Pseudo Isadorian Decretals," Concordia Cyclopedia, p. 627.

terial. 9. The temporal power is subordinate to the ecclesiastical, as to the higher. 10. The temporal power, if it is not good, is judged by the spiritual. 11. To the ecclesiastical authority the words of the prophet Jeremiah apply: "Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations and over the kingdoms to root up and pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant." 12. When the temporal power goes astray, it is judged by the spiritual. 13. For obtaining eternal happiness, each one is required to submit to the Pope. 14. The supremacy of the Pope, even in temporal things, is to be enforced. 15. The Pope recognizes human authorities in their proper place, till they lift their will against God.²

On this presumption the prelates operated in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and subsequently. The reading of any good history book of this period is all that is necessary to see how this affected almost every phase of life. Nothing could be done either politically or economically without taking this position of the pope into consideration. Thus for example, when the dispute arose between the Portuguese and the Spaniards as to who would own the lands they might discover the matter was referred to the pope, Alexander VI. On May 4, 1493, he issued the bull Breve Noverint Universi, which declared that to Spain fell everything discovered by her and not as yet taken over by any Christian power up to Christmas Day, 1492, lying west of a line drawn one hundred leagues from the Azores and Cape Verde, and to Portugal everything discovered east of this line. Certain Catholic writers assert that this was done in order to avoid any serious conflict which might

2. Th. Engelder, ed., Popular Symbolics, pp. 164-165.

arise between the conquerors over the newly discovered lands. This is true only partially for the bull was also issued to somewhat help justify the conquest of and despoilment of the new continent for other than just the rankest kind of greediness. Consequently this spiritual ~~b~~aking was sought out. Actually such an action was undertaken without any right and by men wholly incompetent to judge as can easily be seen by consulting a map. Gil gives us the consequences of this decision of Alexander.

By virtue of that spurious concession, the King of Spain declared that the lands and soil of the Indies were the property, not of the Spanish Nation, but of his own royal estate. There was no law other than the right of conquest, provisions issued for the protection of the Indians remained a dead-letter; they were illtreated by the "encomenderos," who were monks well aware that the soil by itself was worth nothing without the work of the Indian laborers, who were tied to the land, who had no rights of any kind and who were in reality slaves, inexorably bound by "encomiendas" and allotments.³

This incident will serve the reader as an example of how this doctrine of the Church worked out in a specific instance. It shows that the hierarchy considered itself supreme. And it was with this definite conviction that the priests set foot on the shores of Mexico. The church authorized Cortez to conquer the Indians in order to convert them to Christ. This was the stated reason for the invasion. But Cortez probably came closer to the real reason when he told an Aztec chieftain in

3. Emilio Portes Gil, The Conflict Between the Civil Power and The Clergy, p. 11.

Vera Cruz: "The Spaniards are troubled with a disease of the heart for which gold is a specific remedy." And much of that gold flowed right back to the church. Similarly this mixture of ecclesiastical and secular power can be seen throughout the history of Mexico. It is always in evidence. Each attempted to gain the primacy. The Church, older and more adept through experience, succeeded unquestionably the first three and a half centuries. After that its power was broken. But the teachings of the Roman Church in regard to the State still stand, as absolute today as ever.

II. The Conquest by Hernan Cortez

In 1493 the first permanent religious work in the New World was begun by the Roman Catholic Church in Haiti. Bernardo Boil landed at this time with a band of twelve missionaries and built a rude church structure, the first in the new discoveries. This was the beginning of a program of missionary activity which was to spread over major portions of both continents in a matter of just a few decades. In 1514 the first bishopric on the mainland itself was created at Darien in the Panama isthmus. And only a few years later, 1517 to be exact, the first work was done in what we now know as Mexico. That was the year in which the first expedition left Cuba to check on the many fabulous reports which had reached the Spaniards as to the untold amounts of gold which were to be found in the country to the west. This expedition first touched land at Cape Catoche on the north-eastern tip of Yucatan and captured two Indians in the skirmish that followed. A priest by the name of Alonso Gonzales was with the expedition and immediately baptized the two which are reckoned as the first fruits of Christianity in Mexico. An account of this is given in the report taken back by the leader of the expedition, De Cordoba, to Cuba and which finally reached Pope Leo X in the Old World. Subsequent to receiving this re-

port the Bishopric of Yucatan was created by the pope, but the prelate appointed never occupied his unconquered See and it was allowed to lapse.

The greed for gold did not long lie dormant for in 1518 another expedition set out for Mexico, but was driven off by the Indians. However in 1519 the man arrived on the scene who was to completely change the picture. This was Hernan Cortez, an adventurous but poor member of the Spanish nobility, who had come to the New World, in hopes of gaining a fortune. This highly gifted soldier landed near Vera Cruz and after two years of brilliant fighting conquered the stronghold of the Aztec rulers, the island city of Tenochtitlan, chiefly with the help of other Indian tribes held in virtual slavery by the cruel Aztecs and a strategic use of the many superstitious beliefs the Indians had about a white god which was to return one day.

During this conquest the clergy played a prominent role. Wherever Cortez went the clergy accompanied him. Behind each conquistador stood a monk enrolled in his service. One, Fray Bartolomeo de Olmedo, a member of the order of Our Lady of Mercy, acted as chaplain for the Spaniards, saying Mass for them before battle, and giving Christian burial to those that were killed. Afterwards we are told that the labors of this man did not end with the completion of the Conquest, but that he remained in Mexico in charge of hospitals established there, and watched over his Indian flocks until his death in 1526.

Fray Bartolomeo was either accompanied or followed al-

most immediately by twelve priests led by a certain Valencia. These men are said to have toiled barefoot all the way from Vera Cruz to Mexico City where they were received cordially by Cortez. Brown speaks of this reception:

"The Conquerers came out to meet the missionaries, and on bended knee bade them welcome to their field of labor, promising them all due homage and help in their arduous work. The scene is supposed to have impressed the natives with a proper idea of the sanctity and self-sacrifice, the poverty and power, of these humble representatives of the Church, before whom the haughty conquerors bowed in meek subjection."¹

Thus the natives identified the two often, and not without some reason. Brown has this to say of the conquerors:

"They might lead very immoral lives; they might be guilty of avarice and untold deeds of cruelty and bloodshed; but they were devout Catholics, upheld by a strong, if superstitious faith in the righteousness of their cause. They were soldiers of the Cross, fighting in a holy war; and their careers form the last chapter of medieval chivalry."²

Already at this time we are confronted with one of the many contradictions to be found in Mexican history, both religious and secular. Many of these first missionaries were zealous, consecrated men. They were educated and promoted education. And as evidence Catholic writers point to the U. of Mexico, one of the earliest institutions of learning founded on this continent. Hospitals were erected in many places and in general the early priests took the side of the people

1. Hubert Brown, Latin America, p. 66.

2. Ibid., p. 73.

over against the cruelty of the soldiers. An example of this type of priest is Fray Francisco Ximenez, the author of the first grammar of the Aztec language. Another, Fray Torribio de Benevente was an eminent chronicler of his age. Yet here is where the contradiction enters in. For at the same time these men were doing these beneficial deeds, the conquistadors completely vitiated them in the minds of the peons by their cruelty, seemingly without rebuke from the priests who were their companions.

"For some of the early apostolic missionaries, the conquest was a spiritual mission. These enlightened men, however, are worthy of consideration, because in spite of their unusual moral qualities, destiny allotted to them the cruel mission of carrying out their noble work in the midst of clerical disorder, the disorder of that same clergy, which, under the pretext of overthrowing the idols of the Indians and of building Catholic Churches, took part with the conquerors in the looting of the towns, and subjected the Indians to torture in their eagerness to ascertain the whereabouts of fabulous wealth."³

This set of conditions could not but help confuse the simple Indians as they looked upon their white conquerors. Nor did the manner in which they were converted help this situation much. Accounts of this "conversion" provide both startling and sometimes humorous facts. It is a strange but true fact that there are an amazing number of similarities between the old Aztec religion and the new religion taught by the missionaries. To mention a few we might consider these. The

3. Gil, op. cit., p. 14.

use of incense was common to both religions. Holy oils and holy water were known in Mexico long before the first white missionaries arrived with them. Penitence and fasting were not at all uncommon. In fact Gruening says, "They (the Indians) were lavish with their own blood, shedding not a little to appease the infernal thirst of their gods. One cannot hear without blenching of the penitences which they inflicted on themselves, either in expiation of their sins, or to carry out worthily their religious festivals." This self-torture was carried over directly in the Catholic religion. The writer himself has seen crowns of thorns and scourges which were used by the nuns of a secret convent discovered as late as 1935 and such extreme self-flagellation is still common. Confession also was to be found in the old Aztec religion as also charms, amulets and scapularies. Something as remote as bells and ashes even are to be found in both religions. Gruening states, "The Aztecs used bells during certain religious ceremonies. Ashes were rubbed onto a part of the body on occasions, but instead of being Ash Wednesday and on the forehead, it was on the knee of the child shortly after birth."⁴ Nor was the tonsure unknown. The Aztecs believed in three states in the life hereafter, corresponding to hell, purgatory, and heaven. They had a sort of canonization - women who died in childbirth were ipso facto sainted. Perhaps the outstanding example of this simil-

4. Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage, pp. 231-232.

arity between the two religions is represented in the Worship of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico. The shrine of this great saint is located exactly on the site of the ancient temple of Tonantzin, patron of the tribe of the Totonqui Indians, and their Goddess of the Earth and Corn. The two were definitely identified. Gruening states that today yet, four centuries after the Conquest, he has asked Indians in the Mesa Central who Tonantzin is, and received the answer, "Es la virgen."⁵

And as could be expected the many lesser deities of the Aztecs were substituted for the many saints of whom the padres spoke. In short everything included in the new religion, even Christ himself, went through a process of Indianization, so that the hybrid can hardly be called Christianity any more.

The statistics given in the early chronicles support this view if we glance at them briefly. After victory baptism was carried out wholesale. Father Motolinia is quoted by Gruening thus:

"***in the five days that I was in that monastery another priest and I baptized by count fourteen thousand two hundred and some odd, anointing all with holy oils, which was no small task for us.

In that period a single priest would in one day baptize four, five, and six thousand; and in Kochimilco in one day two priests more than fifteen thousand."⁶

In their effort to include everyone the priests often

5. Ibid., p. 236.

6. Ibid., p. 229.

were deceived, as is borne out in the following:

***the Indians were accustomed to apply a number of times for the rite, in order to get each time "a new name and a new shirt." The early missionaries, not being practised in the Indian types, were unable to distinguish one from the other readily, and were thus often imposed upon, and baptized the same neophyte a great number of times.⁷

Often the Indians themselves went and begged the priests for baptism as a protection against the conquistadors. Brown quotes the Mexican historian, General Vicente Riva Palacio on this point:

The conquered American, who feared everything, and rightly, from the hardness of the conquerors, came to the conclusion that conversion and baptism were the most powerful shield behind which to protect themselves from further cruelties. They, therefore, entered the towns en masse asked the missionary to baptize them; and in search of the precious guaranties of liberty and life.⁸

One of the prominent features of the early work of the Roman Church was its complete destruction of everything that was connected with the old Aztec religion in any way possible. In the early accounts of Bernal Diaz del Castillo as in the letters of Cortez himself, we are told time and again that the altars were overthrown and the temples leveled to the ground. Usually this was followed immediately by the construction of a new church on the same site. It is not at all uncommon today yet to find the remains of the older structures

7. Arthur Howard Noll, "Mexico: Its Religious History," The Church Review, LVIII (July, 1890), p. 125.

8. Brown, op. cit., p. 75.

in the foundations of the present building. This destruction was a costly one for later generation? The Aztecs had a considerable library full of the writings of their astronomers and priests. These codices were ferreted out and destroyed with a zeal that matches the destruction of the library at Alexandria by the Moors. So complete was this destruction that today we have only some thirty or forty manuscripts left.

Thus at the end of the period of the conquest itself around 1530 we might say that the common people, the Indian peons, were in a state of confusion as to the clergy more than anything else. On the one hand they saw the efforts on the part of some of the clergy to protect them against the conquerors, the hospitals and the churches. On the other hand they saw the cruel conquistadors who supported the priests, they saw the ruthless manner in which their old way of life including their possessions were handled and the many hard to understand mysteries of the new religion. Their reaction to all this may be characterized as a nominal accepting of the new religion under the pressure of force, an acceptance, modified, however, by the many ways in which they clung to their old way of life and religion.

III. The Colonial Period (1521-1821)

Spain ruled Mexico as a colony for almost three hundred years to the day. This period was in general the most peaceful in the history of Mexico. But it was the peace which comes with an uncontested absolutism. During this time the Spaniards ruled with an iron hand, concerning themselves mostly with getting the untold mineral wealth of the land out of the mines. But this was also the period in which the church gradually gained that strangle hold on the country, which was to be so difficult to throw off in later years.

As was typical in the Spanish colonies, the government of Mexico was headed by a powerful viceroy. These were invariably men of Spanish nobility and were appointed by the emperor in Spain. Their quality varied from one extreme to the other. Some were kind to the Indians, others were noted for their tyranny. In Mexico, as in most Catholic dominated countries, there were close connections between the political and religious leaders throughout this period. The first man to occupy the bishopric of Mexico City was Fray Juan de Zumarraga. He it was who initiated the destruction of all the historical records of the Aztecs mentioned in the previous chapter. On the other hand he is also responsible for the first printing press in the New World.

Already in these early years the rulers of the church and state had their difficulties with each other, but almost always the clergy succeeded in gaining its point. Noll tells us of this period:

The viceregal government, adopted in 1535 and continued ^{with} the overthrow of the Spanish dominion in 1821, was the suggestion of Zumarraga and was generally under ecclesiastical influence. In default of a civil ruler, some prelate has frequently held the office of viceroy ad interim, and thus the names of ten prelates appear in the list of sixty-two viceroys. One of them held the office for six years, and another of them was appointed the second time. There were some notable instances in which the civil and ecclesiastical authorities were at variance, but in each case the victory belonged to the ecclesiastical power.¹

The colonial period was the time in which the various orders became firmly entrenched. The first order to arrive was the Franciscan, represented by the twelve priests under Valencia. Monastic houses were built in Texcoco, Tlaxcala, Huexotzinco, and in the city of Mexico. Each of these was the center of an extensive work. The Dominicans quickly followed the Franciscans arriving in groups in 1526, 1528, and 1530. Their leader was Fray Tomas Ortiz and they set up houses in the city of Mexico, Chimalpopoca, Coyoacan, Chalco, and Huaxtepec. Later on they became the leaders of the Holy Office and in this capacity they achieved their greatest power. The Augustinians arrived in 1533 and the other major orders followed these from time to time in the 16th century. These orders were very active at first. The extent of their

¹. Noll, op. cit., p. 128.

missionary enterprises in Mexico in the 16th and 17th centuries may be grasped by glancing at a map of the country then known as New Spain. Almost every Spanish name on such a map is a religious name. Very many towns are named after some particular saint. By 1547 they had become sufficiently established to send missionaries to Florida and also one to Japan. The Jesuits arrived in Mexico, in September, 1572.

All of the orders were active in building convents, monasteries, and churches. In order to erect these imposing structures, however, the forced labor of thousands of Indians had to be resorted to. Brown speaks thus:

They could use the Indians in forced labor and had the right to inflict corporal punishment. Montufar says of the Franciscans that the "Indians had them in such great fear, by reason of the great punishments which they inflicted, that some of them dared not speak or complain." Another tells of a beating administered by monks, in which the rods were broken on the Indian's back. Mendieta says that the friars complained bitterly when Philip II withdrew his authority, on the ground that "this people is so debased that unless one has over them all authority he has none, and if they are not held way under and subjected, they cannot be held in subjection at all." In some cases the law required Indians to travel as far as twelve leagues to attend services at the monasteries. This was very hard for the sick and for women with little children to care for or carry.²

This forced labor produced some interesting results. For as one scrutinizes the carvings in and on many of these buildings it is possible to see much heathen symbolism. The Indian was forced to carve and chisel but often he carved and chiseled something which betrayed his adherence to his old be-

2. Brown, op. cit., p. 88.

liefs in spite of everything said or done by the padres. Stuart Chase gives an instance of this in his description of a typical Catholic Church in Mexico. He mentions that in front of the doorway there stood a stone cross whose arms ended in symbolic Aztec serpents.³ Often the Indians concealed idols of their old gods in various niches in the new churches, in hidden places where the priests could not find them. Gruening has a picture of such an example which he took himself showing that this attitude has persisted throughout these many years.⁴

The economic results of this forced labor are told us by Gil:

It nearly always happened that he (the Indian) was not paid for his work; he was either deceived by promises for the life to come or was obliged by force to render his services. Lands lay untilled and industries were not developed. If some part of the effort devoted to the building of churches had been available for really useful works, if the fields had been cultivated, and bridges and roads built, so as to gain genuine and immediate economic results, Mexico would have established her economic organization on a sound basis.⁵

The number of such monasteries and convents built during the Colonial period is exceedingly high. During the eleven years in which Don Juan Perez de la Serna was archbishop, for example, some fifteen monasteries, convents, churches, hospitals and chapels were built. The traveller in Mexico today

3. Stuart Chase, Mexico, p. 13.

4. Gruening, op. cit., p. 232.

5. Gil, op. cit., p. 21.

yet is amazed at the number of such structures almost all built during the Colonial period. The town of Cholula, a suburb of Puebla boasts 365 churches as a tourist attraction. Yet it does not have an unusually large population.

The country itself reached its greatest wealth during the Colonial period. The mines produced an unbelievable amount of silver, enough, in fact, to lower the price of silver throughout the world. The viceroys lived amid the greatest splendor and luxury. And the ecclesiastics did not overlook this wealth. Already as early as 1531 the Queen wrote to the Dominicans and asked them to moderate their expenditures. With the money that flowed into its coffers the Church bought more and more land. Gil gives us an indication of as to the extent of this wealth at the end of the 16th century when he states that the Jesuits alone possessed 123 haciendas, of the enormous area usual among great landed estates in colonial times. Accurate figures are at a minimum as to what the clergy actually took in but one report states that under the head of return from invested capital alone the archbishop of Mexico took in 123,000 pesos a year, the archbishop of Puebla 110,000, and the archbishop of Guadalajara 90,000 pesos a year.

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the Colonial period was the tribunal of the Inquisition. February 28, 1574 marked the launching of the first major attack of this Old World institution in Mexico, which lasted until 1815 when the last notable auto da fe was held which condemned and executed the rev-

olutionary priest, Morelos. Minor action had been taken as early as 1536 but nothing was done along prominent lines until the first great exhibition of 1574. This was performed with a solemnity declared by eyewitnesses to be the equal, save for the presence of royalty, to that of Valladolid, May 21, 1559. Lea says some 74 persons were involved, among them 36 Englishmen, the remnant of the crew of Sir John Hawkins which were taken captive near Vera Cruz. Describing the affair Lea writes:

Of these, 3 were for asserting that simple fornication between the unmarried was no sin; 27 were for bigamy; 2 for blasphemy; 1 for wearing prohibited articles although his grandfather had been burnt; 2 for propositions; 1 because he had made his wife confess to him and 36 for Lutheranism, of whom 2, George Ripley and Marin Cornu were burnt. The Lutherans were all foreigners of various nationalities, but mostly English, consisting of Hawkin's men. One of these, named Miles Phillips has left an account of the affair, in which he says that his compatriots George Ripley, Peter Momfrie and Cornelius the Irishman were burnt, 60 or 61 were scourged and sent to the galleys and 7, of whom he was one, were condemned to serve in convents; the wholesale scourging was performed the next day, through the accustomed streets, the culprits being preceded by a crier calling out "See these English Lutheran dogs, enemies of God!" while inquisitors and familiars shouted to the executioners "Harder, harder, on these English Lutherans."⁶

The period of greatest activity on the part of the Holy office were the years from 1575 to 1600. During this time there were 879 processes. The Indians themselves were not generally included in the actions of the court. One of the main reasons for this, especially in the earlier years was be-

6. Henry Charles Lea, The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies, pp. 205-206.

cause the inquisitors felt them too low in the scale of humanity to be capable of the faith. During the 17th century some 1402 victims came under the jurisdiction of this institution. The great auto general of April 11, 1649, marks the acme of the Mexican Inquisition, the cases becoming fewer and fewer after 1660 particularly.

The methods used in the Mexican version of the Inquisition, as in the Spanish, often involved highly ingenious means of torture and long prison terms. In many cases the confiscated goods of the condemned were used as a source of revenue by both the clergy and the government. The executions themselves were carried out mainly in the eastern portion of a park now known as the Alameda in downtown Mexico City. The headquarters of the Holy Office, with its cells and dungeons, in which the autos were held, still stands and is now the Medical department of the National University.

The Inquisition is also responsible to a large degree for the gradual decline of culture and education during the later years of the Colonial period. In order to keep out heresy all books coming into the country were, of course, subjected to investigation. Thus "everything of the nature of scientific progress was an impossibility in New Spain, because any books arriving from abroad were subjected to the strictest censure, and the reading and circulation thereof were prohibited, any surreptitious introduction of same being severely punished and any indications of freedom of thought

letting themselves at times be seen, being repressed."⁷

The last notable auto da fe was that which condemned the insurgent leader, Morelos. Father Hidalgo, the priest who first started the fight for independence, had been apprehended and executed several years prior to this. However he was not condemned by the Holy Office. This indicates that by this time it was nothing more than a shadow of what it had once been and even its dealings with Morelos were little more than a show of formality. With his execution on December 22, 1815 we may say the office of the Inquisition died also, its power gone. The royal decree of March 9, 1820 was the final deathblow.

Nevertheless the Inquisition had served its purpose. Through it the enormous power of the clergy was established more firmly than ever. And that is the most prominent feature of the Colonial period as far as the clergy is concerned. During these years of unrestricted freedom and power the priests gradually assumed complete control of the life and thought of the country. Ecclesiastical dominance is the keyword. Through censorship they achieved a despotism over the country's entire thinking. Their ranks increased as never before, to such an extent, in fact, that Ferdinand VII was compelled to decree in 1754 that no one could enter the religious orders for the next ten years. There was no open resistance to the clergy to amount to anything. Anything that even resembled this was dealt with summarily, but the stage was set and

7. Gilx, op. cit., p. 25.

with the coming of independence and free thought through the revolution the long struggle with the clergy began.

IV. The Years of Independence and the Following Years

On September 16, 1820, in the early morning hours, the people of the small village of Dolores in the State of Guanajuato were awakened by the ringing of the bells belonging to the parish of San Miguel. In itself this was an insignificant event but with it the lovely parish priest, Father Hidalgo initiated the movement which was eventually to bring independence to Mexico. Hidalgo was a native Guadalupe priest, not very old, but intelligent, who at one time had held the rectorship of the university of Mexico. It was this act, together with a young army officer named Allende, who gathered the first group of Indians and marched against the rich and big town of Queretaro. Making the sacred virgin of Guadalupe their protectress this army, actually more a rabble than army, was at first eminently victorious, only to fall eventually into a royalist trap in the north. Hidalgo, along with various other sympathetic ecclesiastics was executed in Michoacan on June 30, 1821. This phase of the war was different from those which followed in that both sides distinctly maintained that they were the loyal followers of Ferdinand VII. Hidalgo always considered himself as such and would only to reform the existing government, if this was possible.

The most prominent leader however realized from the be-

IV. The Wars of Independence and the Following Years

On September 16, 1810, in the early morning hours, the peons of the small village of Dolores in the State of Guanajuato were awakened by the ringing of the bells belonging to the parish of San Miguel. In itself this was an insignificant act but with it the lowly parish priest, Father Hidalgo initiated the movement which was eventually to bring independence to Mexico. Hidalgo was a native creole priest, rather old, but intelligent, who at one time had held the rectorship of the university of Morelia. It was this man, together with a young army officer named Allende, who gathered the first group of Indians and marched against the rich mining town of Guanajuato. Making the famed virgin of Guadalupe their protectress this army, actually more a rabble than army, was at first eminently victorious, only to fall eventually into a royalist trap in the North. Hidalgo, along with various other sympathetic ecclesiastics was executed in Durango on June 30, 1811. This phase of the war was different from those which followed in that both sides staunchly maintained that they were the loyal followers of Ferdinand VII. Hidalgo always considered himself as such and meant only to reform the existing government, if this was possible.

The next prominent leader however realized from the be-

ginning that a break with the peninsula was the only solution to Mexico's problems. This was Morelos, a priest from the Mexcala country.¹ Born in 1765 he had taken his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mexico in 1795 and had subsequently become more and more interested in the political scene. After Hidalgo had been executed Morelos assumed leadership and continued the struggle. As with Hidalgo he was very successful at first taking many important towns such as Oaxaca, Chilpancingo, and Cuernavaca. However he allowed himself to be encircled inexplicably in the town of Cuautla where he lost many of his men. He recovered from this set back, however, and later captured such cities as Tehuacan, Orizaba, and Acapulco. But his forces had been so decimated by this time that he too was eventually captured by the loyalist forces under Calleja and executed in 1815 as described in the preceding chapter.

Two other priests also deserve mention here. The one is Father Matamores. This man was a general in the army of Morelos and helped him a great deal in his work. He was captured in the engagement at Morelia and executed there. The other ecclesiastic is Father Mier, a member of the Dominican order. Mier was a man of considerable culture, perhaps more so than the other men mentioned so far. At an earlier date he had

1. Morelos, self-admittedly, was the father of several children. This fact was brought out at his trial, but was considered only in passing.

been sent to Spain because of some difficulties with his superiors. However he had escaped, as he was to do again later in Italy and England, and had organized a group in London to come to America and help the insurgents. While in London he had become particularly associated with a man named Mina, who became the military leader of this group. After some time they sailed for Mexico, set up a fort in Tamaulipas, and began a campaign southward, which, however, also ended in defeat at Guanajuato in 1817.

These are just a few examples to show the prominent part played by the clergy in the Mexican War for Independence. The men mentioned were all of the lower clergy, but the higher clergy was just as prominent, differing only in that they were on the other side, supporting the viceroys and the Spaniards. This curious state of affairs continued throughout the War of Independence. Thus Gil:

When the movement for independence began, the Clergy, as Altamirano asserts, split: the higher and wealthier clergy, that which enjoyed the most lucrative benefices in the large towns and administered the great properties of the regular monastic institutions declared against independence from the very outset, while the lower Clergy, the village priests, those of the countryside and of the mountains, the friars of certain humble monasteries, sympathized with the movement for independence, and its first and most illustrious leaders sprang from that poor clergy, who had been in close contact with the misery of the people.²

Thus the last viceroys such as Iturrigaray, Apodaca, and

2. Gil, op. cit., p. 42.

O'Donoju were all controlled to a large degree by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. That these ecclesiastics were not primarily interested in the people is testified to by no one less than Father Hidalgo himself. Speaking of them he said, "They are Catholics out of policy alone, their God is Mammon, they avail themselves of religion itself to drag it down and destroy it."³ As can be expected all of the insurgent priests were excommunicated. The edict was first issued by the Bishop of Michoacan, Miguel Abad y Queipo, on September 24, 1810, and was declared valid and lawful by the Archbishop of Mexico in the following month. This split between the higher and lower clergy during the years of independence is in itself an indication of the defects which were to be found in the clerical system by this time. And the manner and method in which these priests were arrested and tried is also a revelation of the corruptness which characterized major parts of the clergy. As Brown tells us:

Some of the bishops made themselves ridiculous by the number and violence of their anathemas; and also by their pusillanimity in withdrawing the same whenever the patriots gained control in their Episcopal cities. It all went to show that the clergy, as an organized body, put the retention of its power and wealth above the independence and prosperity of the people as a whole. It was this attitude which has led to the frequent denunciation of the Mexican clergy by liberal orators as having thrice proved themselves traitors to their country.⁴

3. Ibid., p. 43.

4. Brown, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

Then in 1820, when the movement for independence was seemingly quelled, a surprising development occurred. The royalist commander Iturbide, sent to wipe out the remaining forces of the last insurgent leader, Guerrero, joined with him instead and both marched on Mexico City and took it on September 27, 1821. What caused this about-face on the part of Iturbide? Secret documents show us today that the clergy was largely responsible for this move. In 1812 a constitution had been given to Spain and her colonies, which had been soon set aside. However, in 1820, it seemed as though Ferdinand VII was determined to enforce it and this was intolerable for the hierarchy. For in this constitution there were various clauses which the clergy did not like and which they considered an attack on their authority. This prompted them to decide to seize control themselves and this was to be done under the leadership of Iturbide. He, in turn, finding that he was unable to defeat Guerrero, joined with him, and then returned to take Mexico City, at least.

Iturbide did what he could to promote the Church but his reign was short. He was overthrown and exiled after a few years by a new figure on the scene, Santa Anna. Iturbide made one more effort to regain his crown but was captured and executed by the same man. It was at this time that the Church, through a stroke of boldness, gained one of its major victories. This was when it seized the right of patronage in 1822 which had formerly rested in the monarchs. This patronage was

the right of appointment to episcopal sees, subject only to papal approval, and held up until now by the King of Spain. After independence was won, the Mexican clergy boldly stated that this patronage now had reverted to the Church and not to the Chief Magistrate of the New Republic. However this bold action initiated a great deal of discussion on the part of the legislators as to the real position of the Church in the State and may be said to have been one of the direct causes for the earliest anti-clerical action taken by any controlling body. This was the decree of the Congress of Tabasco, issued on February 22, 1829, in which could be seen the first symptoms of rebellion against the power of the clergy.

In 1833 more definite action was taken. In the highly moderate Law of October 18, 1833 the clergy was ordered to behave quietly and to leave political matters alone. A bureau of public instruction was established in that year. Also to be noted is the Circular of the Ministry of Justice which stated that the civil obligation to pay tithes no longer existed. These provisions were never carried out to any extent however, because Santa Anna interfered by passing his own Plan of Cuernavaca, devised to protect the clergy and do away with the obnoxious rulings given above. Gomez Farias, the anti-clerical leader, wanted to wrest the schools from the Church in particular, but he was squelched by the ever-present Santa Anna. This man, prominent in Mexican history until as late as 1850 supported the clergy at first but became increasingly in-

volved in difficulties with them, especially over financial matters. Called upon to lead Mexico in the war with the French and later on with the United States, Santa Anna applied to the Church for various loans with which to carry on the struggle. However, he was given only very small sums, and these only after long and threatening affairs with the higher clergy.

In this manner conditions between the clergy and the rest of the nation grew more precarious during the years between the gaining of independence and the final passing of the Laws of Reform in the late 1850s. Both branches of the clergy, the secular and regular, were in a most deplorable condition. There seemed to be no limit to the licentiousness and ignorance of the priesthood. Solicitation on the part of the priests at confession was considered to be little more than normal. All spirituality seemed to have left the church. Because of the rights of primogeniture many younger sons of Spanish families chose a life in the Church and thus in time all the lucrative and easy benefices in Mexico came into the hands of these irresponsible men.

And yet it was not this immorality of the clergy or the lack of spirituality which was the main issue with the anticlerics. Actually it was the untold wealth which they saw resting in the hands of the Church at a time when the government needed it the most. This wealth had been accumulated gradually over the centuries until now it amounted to a staggering total. According to Abbe Domenech, one of the promi-

ment clergymen who came with the French later on, more than half of the productive land was held by religious corporations or the clergy and the annual revenue of the Church was more than twice that of the State. Almost every one of the orders held numerous estates and property. All of it was exempt from taxation and since it was steadily increasing it was but a matter of time when the Church would finally absorb all of the worthwhile land to the complete seclusion of all others.⁵

This wealth was the immediate cause then for the rising anti-clerical feeling on the eve of the new regime under Juarez. True, the clergy was corrupt through and through morally, but this did not affect the government in such a direct manner as the sight of all these riches before it at a time when it needed such wealth more than anything else. And so the stage was set for the next act, the passing of the Reform Laws of Juarez, which were to take away all this wealth with one blow. The time of reckoning had come.

5. Noll, op.cit., p. 133.

V. The Laws of Reform and Benito Juarez

Benito Juarez has often been called the Mexican Washington and in many respects this is true. He is perhaps the first truly great leader to rise out of the masses of Mexico and really serve his country. Born on March 21, 1806, in the small village of Gueletao in Oaxaca of lowly Indian parents, he was raised amid all the miserable conditions of the average peon during the Wars of Independence. Serving as shepherd boy for his uncle's flocks until he was twelve, Juarez soon showed his marked ability. It is one of the ironies of history that he studied for the priesthood for a short time before he turned to law. In 1834 he was admitted to the bar and was elected governor of his home state which soon became one of the most prosperous in the Republic. Because of his liberal views, however, he was exiled by Santa Anna for a brief time to the United States. Upon his return during the presidency of Alvarez he became the Minister of Finance because of his great integrity in money matters and it was in this office that the clergy first felt his influence.

In November, 1855, Juarez secured the enactment of a law subjecting the clergy and the army to the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts. This special privilege of the clergy and army which had been enjoyed by them for centuries had been nothing but a curse on the rest of the country. Offi-

cers and men in the army could be tried only by courts martial and the clergy only by their ecclesiastical courts. A casual reading of the operation of these courts is all that is necessary to see why Juarez wanted them abolished.

This action aroused the Church to increased resistance. Alvarez was forced to give way to the less liberal Comonfort under whom Juarez became vice-president. This move on the part of the Church was a futile one, however, because their real foe, Juarez, was still on the scene. Comonfort then called the Constituent Congress of 1857 in order to form a new Constitution for Mexico after this Church-inspired revolt against Alvarez in 1856. Describing this Congress Elias writes:

The Constituent Congress largely represented the growing liberal sentiment of Mexico. It was not in any sense opposed to religion. It did, however, stand for the right of everyone to worship God according to the dictates of his or her conscience. Its members had in the vast majority of cases been brought up in the Catholic faith, but they were opposed to the special privileges given to the Catholic Hierarchy.¹

The Constitution which these men adopted would hardly be considered radical to the present-day reader. The first few Articles simply establish the basic rights and freedom of every citizen of Mexico. Article 3, for example, began with the statement, "Instruction is free." And it was along these lines that the entire constitution was framed. Yet it was held anathema by the clergy because of such Articles as num-

1. Elias, op. cit., p. 16.

ber five, which forbade "irrevocable sacrifice of the liberty of man, whether by reason of labor, education, or religious vows." The opposition of the Church to this and other Articles was based almost entirely on fanaticism. Elias tells us that:

The debate upon this question was most illuminating. Conditions in the convents were dealt with by those who knew whereof they spoke, and some of the statements stung the Hierarchy to the quick. The charges could not be successfully answered, and all that it was possible for the Church authorities to do was to arouse the fanaticism of their followers by charging that those who stood for such a provision in the Constitution were trying to destroy religion.²

Article 13 again abolished the super-privileges, the fueros, that the clergy enjoyed, particularly the right of ecclesiastical courts. These privileges of the Church had placed the priesthood completely beyond the civil law and the Congress decided to root this evil out once and for all. Realizing that the foundation of any true democracy must rest on the basis of universal justice for all, such privileges had to be done away with if the aims of the Congress were to be achieved. Yet the Church objected most strenuously.

Article 27, dealing with the property of the Church read as follows:

"No religious corporations and institutions of whatever character, denomination, duration or object, nor civil corporations, when under the patronage, direction or administration of the former, or of ministers of any creed, shall have legal capacity to acquire title to, or administer, real property, other than the buildings immediately and

2. Ibid., p. 19.

directly destined to the services or purposes of said corporations and institutions. Nor shall they have legal capacity to acquire or administer loans made on such real property."³

This Article was directed at the wealth of the Church and, of course, hit where it hurt. The wealth of the Church was one of the chief pillars, if not the chief pillar, holding up the power of the Church. The Congress realized that it had to be curbed if the Church was to be dealt with effectively.

Article 123 dwelt on the separation of Church and State and began thus; "The Federal authorities shall have exclusive power to exercise, in matters of religious worship and outward ecclesiastic forms, such intervention as by law authorized."⁴ It was this Article that brought down pontifical wrath in its greatest abundance. Speaking particularly of it, but also of the other Articles in the Constitution of 1857, Pope Pius IX in a mandate issued at that time stated:

Thus we make known to the faith of Mexico, and to the Catholic universe, that we energetically condemn every decree that the Mexican Government has enacted against the Catholic religion, against the Church, and her sacred ministers and pastors, against her laws, rights, and property, and also against the authority of this Holy See. We raise Our Pontifical Voice with apostolic freedom before you to condemn, reprove, and declare null, void, and without any value, the said decrees, and all others which have been enacted by the civil authorities in such contempt of the ecclesiastical authority of this Holy See, and with such injury to the religion, to the sacred pastors, and illustrious men.⁵

3. Ibid., p. 21.

4. Ibid., p. 22.

5. Ibid., p. 12.

The passing of this constitution roused the Church to renewed efforts to overthrow the government. Comonfort came in for repeated attacks from the clergy and their followers and finally gave way to the Church candidate for president, Zuloaga. Juarez was imprisoned but escaped to Guadalajara and eventually to Vera Cruz setting himself up as president on the basis that with the resignation of Comonfort, he as vice-president was supposed to assume control. Here he was recognized by the government of the United States in 1859, a fact which added greatly to his prestige. While in Vera Cruz he issued the most devastating blow the Church was to receive, even though at the time he was without any substantial backing. On July 12, 1859, he put forth a Reform Law stating that all the property which the secular and regular clergy had been administering, no matter of what nature it was, belonged henceforth to the Republic. There had been previous offers to repay the Church for its property, but with the issuing of these laws Juarez denied them even this.

Because he was in no position to enforce these laws immediately, Juarez could not do much about them. He was primarily concerned with taking Mexico City which he did on January 11, 1861. Upon entering the city he issued the following statement to be found in Gil:

The Reform laws are not, as stated by party spirit, an act of hostility to the religion professed by a majority of the Mexicans: far, from being so, they grant to the Church the fullest liberty, and leave it free to carry on its work

in the spirit and conscience of the people; they separate it from the unworthy influences of politics and put an end to that fatal partnership of two powers that gave rise to such scandalous situations as that the Governments abused the name of religion by oppressing it, and at others by the clergy's becoming an instrument of domination. The Government is firmly resolved to carry into effect the reforms decreed: to introduce them throughout the Republic and to make their benefits felt by spreading them over all classes of society, from those at the top to the most destitute.⁶

With the victorious entry of Juarez into Mexico City the clergy decided upon a new plan of attack. Chances of overthrowing the government of the great reformer from within were meagre, so the clergy immediately set to work on a plan to replace it from without. As Elias put it, "The bringing of a foreign army to Mexico was their answer to the Reform Laws."⁷

The Archbishop of Mexico, La Bastida, was soon to be found in Paris seeking the aid of the court in his struggle to regain his lost wealth. The Empress Eugenie was a devout Catholic and the Emperor himself, Napoleon III, had ambitions of building up an empire in Mexico and Central America, so it was not difficult to persuade them to send a force, along with the Spanish and the British to Vera Cruz. The latter two eventually withdrew in April 1862, but Napoleon ordered his forces to stay, realizing that the United States was sufficiently concerned with its own Civil War to overlook for the time being enforcement of the Monroe Doctrine. After he had

6. Gil, op. cit., p. 67.

7. Elias, op. cit., p. 29.

conquered the poor and unorganized Mexican forces, who nevertheless made a gallant stand at Puebla, Napoleon set up the Catholic Hapsburg, Maximilian, I, Archduke of Austria as Emperor of Mexico in 1864. The advent of the French was duly celebrated with a Te Deum in the Cathedral, but the spirit of rejoicing on the part of the clergy was to be short lived. To their consternation Maximilian did not abrogate the Reform Laws but seemed to enforce them instead. Actually he was forced into such a position because the people by this time insisted on it. Both he and the Empress, Carlotta, were aware of the abuses of the clergy. Speaking of them in a letter to the Empress Eugenie, Carlotta had said that the clergy "Would with pleasure abandon its place of honor and its cross, but not its income."⁸

Maximilian proved to be one of the most tragic figures in all of history. A victim of circumstances his entire career in Mexico was marked with tragedy. The cause for which he came to Mexico was doomed to failure before he had even arrived. Speaking of him Brown writes:

Maximilian was not the man to lead such a forlorn hope as that of the Mexican clergy. To his honor be it said he was not enough like his hero, the Duke of Alva. He was not drastic enough. He shrank from the chaos and financial ruin which would have resulted had he returned the confiscated property to the clergy; he did not intend to be dictated to by priestly advisers; but he was anxious to win to his side the liberal element; and honestly desired to unite all parties about himself. He thus succeeded in pleasing nobody. It was not a time for half meas-

8. Gil, op. cit., p. 68.

ures. Both sides wished all or nothing; and when, too late for hope of success, instead of withdrawing to Europe, as he started to do, Maximilian threw himself unreservedly into the hands of the clericals.⁹

By the early part of 1866 Napoleon saw that he would have trouble enough holding his own throne without trying to hold up several others besides. Consequently he withdrew all of his troops in Mexico, leaving Maximilian alone, surrounded only by a few faithful Mexicans whom he had gained. This force proved to be insufficient to withstand the men under Juarez, who had never fully ceased to function throughout the entire reign of Maximilian. The "tinsel Emperor" and his army were trapped at Queretaro and forced to surrender in May, 1867. Here on the famous hill of Campanas he, the former Austrian Archduke, was condemned on a charge of murder and brigandage and shot along with two of his generals, Miramon and Mejia.

Juarez entered Mexico City once more in July, 1867, and from then until the time of his death in July, 1872, he actively attempted to carry out his famous Reform Laws. The monastic orders were suppressed completely and the closing of nunneries followed shortly. Much property which had been held unused by the Church was thrown into circulation once more. For example, a street was put through the main Franciscan monastery in downtown Mexico City. All gifts of

9. Brown, op. cit., pp. 169-170.

wealth to an individual among the clergy, or to anyone else not having received authorization from the Constitutional government, were declared null and void.

Thus the regime of the great Reformer of Mexico, Benito Juarez ended with a set of conditions almost the exact opposite of those which prevailed when he first made his appearance. He took the first steps along the path which he hoped would lead to that complete separation of Church and State as we know it in our country. He made several mistakes in his effort to do away with the evils he saw completely. Many writers condemn his approval of the execution of Maximilian, for example, although even in this instance, there are many who feel he acted wisely. For by it ^{he} eliminated something which would have been a constant menace. The war with the Church had been one in which no quarter was given by either party. On its side of the ledger the Church was guilty of such crimes as the brutal assassination of Alvarez, whose body was not buried until it had been whipped and his family made to pay two thousand pesos for his burial.¹⁰ In any event Juarez proved to be a man of principle, a man who thoroughly loved his country and a man who was not afraid to take the steps he saw necessary to help that country solve its most difficult problem, the problem of the clergy.

10. Gil, op. cit., p. 64.

VI. Diaz' Regime (1876-1910)

When Juarez died on July 18, 1872 he was succeeded by his vice-president, Sebastian Lerdo De Tejada, who continued the work begun by Juarez over against the clergy. In 1874 the Reform Laws of 1859 were issued once more in a more definite and amplified form. Elias gives us a resume of these:

No religious celebrations could be recognized officially, and therefore no holidays were authorized except those which had as their object the celebration of civil events.

Sundays were designated as days of rest.

Religious instruction and the practices of any creed were forbidden in public establishments and it was ordered that the principles of morality be taught in the schools without their reference to any particular religion.

Religious acts or ceremonies must be confined to the interior of churches, and ministers of religion must confine their wearing of distinctive or characteristic robes to the same place.

Ringling of bells was limited to a call to the performance of religious acts.

As soon as a church was known to have been used for other purposes than those of religion, it was to be closed.

Legacies made in favor of ministers or of persons who dwelt with them, where the minister had given spiritual help to the testator in his last sickness, or acted as his confessor, were declared null and void.

Ministers could not enjoy any privileges which would distinguish them before the law from other citizens.

All meetings taking place in churches must be public.

The right of receiving alms or gifts, which had previously been defined, was amplified in the

in the Reform Laws of 1874.

Marriage was again declared a civil contract.¹

The reaction of the Church over against these were a series of pastoral letters from the various bishops and archbishops which decreed that all those who would take the oath of allegiance to these laws would be excommunicated. These were followed by various uprisings, usually led by priests, in the States of Michoacan and Mexico. Speaking of these rebels, Gil tells us that:

The rebels who were known by the nick-name of "Cristeros" attacked defenseless villages murdering, violating and sacking and the atrocities they committed reached to such a point that at Angangueo they captured the Mayor, tarred him and set fire to him, merely because he had sworn allegiance to the Constitution; at Zinacatepec they murdered the public employees who had also sworn their allegiance substituting them by others who had not done so.²

One of the men who led a number of the uprisings which followed the passing of these laws was Porfirio Diaz. Born in Oaxaca, September 15, 1830, he had been on the military scene ever since 1848, helping in the struggles both against the United States and France. He had aspired to the presidential office already during the time of Juarez and after an unsuccessful attempt in 1872 he finally gained his objective in 1876. As can be suspected he was supported by the clergy. This support evidenced itself particularly at this time in the number of Catholic newspapers which appeared in favor of Diaz. These periodicals were very open in avowing

1. Elias, op. cit., pp. 31-33.

2. Gil, op. cit., p. 78.

this support of Diaz by the Church. For example the Catholic journalist, don Jose Joaquin Terrazas, in his paper "El Reino Guadalupano" declared that "General Porfirio Diaz had agreed with the clergy in 1876 to enter into a Concordat with the Pope and to abrogate the Laws of Reform provided that the clergy should lend him all assistance in order to bring about the downfall of Lerdo de Tejada's government."³ This Concordat was never fully achieved by either side however, due to opposition of don Manuel Dublan who happened to be a close friend of Diaz. Diaz could only hold office once according to the existing laws so in 1880 he had to step down in favor of General Manuel Gonzalez, his secretary. However in 1884 he was reelected and after that he had the law amended so that he could remain in office indefinitely.

Diaz' chief concern seems to have been his desire to remain in office as long as possible. In line with this goal he adopted a policy of conciliation wherever possible. If certain wealthy men objected to what he was doing, he would offer them certain appointments in accordance with their ability. If the Church leaders came with complaints he pacified them by closing one eye to violations of the Reform Laws. A writer in Gil sums up both this attitude of Diaz and his reason for adopting it very well thus:

General Diaz during his life as a revolutionary recognized the material and moral power of the

3. Ibid., p. 80.

clergy, the social power of the wealthy classes, the political force wielded by the Catholics, and realized that a tendency to exclusiveness is the shroud of Governments.⁴

Thus it happened that the principle members of the clergy were represented in the three branches of the administration holding positions in the Chambers, in the federal courts and in the local governments. The relationship between Diaz and the clergy is said to have been so close that it was due to the insistence of the President that the Vatican appointed Don Eulogio Gregorio Gillow as archbishop of Oaxaca. In general the enforcement of the Reform Laws was relaxed until essentially they were nullified. Diaz' regime saw Mexico take great strides forward industrially but it was at the expense of the common man in Mexico. All foreign enterprise was welcomed in Mexico by Diaz and received special privileges from him. As has been stated this was all done in accordance with his policy of conciliation which he hoped would help him maintain his office.

The Church prospered perhaps more than any other group under such conditions. It was not long before more and more property, for example, was back in the hands of the clergy. Since it was stated that the Church as a whole could not own property, the clerics sidestepped this technicality by having individual bishops, archbishops and priests hold title to the land. Another development was the formation of com-

4. Ibid., p. 81.

panies, in Mexico more graphically called Societies of Anonymous men, which controlled this wealth. Usually the boards of such companies would be made up of the principal ecclesiastical authorities, great shareholders and the prominent lawyers who were known to be pro-clerical in attitude. One such company was "La Piedad" formed in 1902 in the city of Puebla by such men as canon Jose Victoriano Covarrubias, dean of the Chapter of the Diocese of Puebla, canon Joaquin Vargas and some private persons, with a capital of \$300,000.00 which was later increased to \$1,000,000.00.

Describing the conditions which resulted from the relaxation of the Reform Laws Gil gives us the following facts. The Laws themselves became a mockery for they fell into such disuse and abuse that no-one bothered with them. Public religious processions were common. Sermons were preached in all the cemeteries, in those which were public as well as those which belonged to private and religious organizations. Convents, monasteries and seminaries existed openly under the eyes of the authorities without fear of suppression. Whenever a show of enforcement was required the respective convent or monastery was warned ahead of time so that when the government inspector arrived he found the place completely deserted, even though the obvious signs of habitation could be seen everywhere. Yet he could report back that he found no monks or nuns and usually that was sufficient to put an end to the matter. Such convents and monasteries were to be

found everywhere towards the latter part of Diaz' presidency.

The Church acquired a great deal of its lost wealth during this time. Gil states that during the Government of General Diaz the wealth of the Church could be reckoned at over eight hundred million pesos.⁵

In the State of Puebla, for example, the clergy owned two hundred rural properties between estates, farms and lands. In Michoacan it owned 26 estates and farms; 37 in Guanajuato in addition to 25 establishments for the collection of tithes. And thus the list continues.

These were the conditions which prevailed in 1910. Whereas Juarez had swung Mexico into a position where it could effectively deal with the clergy, Diaz had almost completely undone this work by swinging it back again to almost exactly what it was in 1850. The Reform Laws were still in the books, but that is about as far as the matter went. Conditions continued after this fashion until the elections of 1910. By that time the Liberal party had gained enough popularity to take definite action. The June elections turned out as could be expected with the reelection of Diaz. But this time there arose a figure on the scene who contested the election and in October proclaimed his revolutionist program known as the "Plan of San Luis Potosi." This was don Francisco I. Madero who was to inaugurate the next period of action against the clergy.

5. Ibid., p. 86.

VII. The Revolutions of 1910-1927

The government of Diaz crumbled into dust faster than had been expected even though it was backed by the clergy. Madero was successful in gaining the presidency in a matter of months and immediately began to enforce his plan of San Luis Potosi. Article III of this plan was of particular interest to the clergy for it specified new laws to be observed in the handling of property, laws which would affect the clergy to no small degree. This Article stated provisions which would make it necessary for the Church to return much of the land they had acquired in recent years to their former owners. The clergy did not long remain idle. Gil describes the situation thus:

As it has been made clear before, from the very beginning of the struggle the clergy sided openly with the dictatorship, the press subsidized by the clergy attacked the new champion of freedom, but when the clergy took cognizance of the clear and precise terms of the Plan de San Luis and especially of the contents of the last paragraph of Article III, it became alarmed and prepared itself for action.¹

Two rebellions, partially clergy inspired, occurred in July and October of 1912, the one led by Orozco and the other by Felix Diaz. When the latter was captured and condemned to death both a deputy belonging to the Catholic group of the

1. Ibid., pp. 88-89.

Chamber and a number of Catholic women addressed Madero and asked for the pardon of the rebel. However, when the tables were turned and Madero was being tried and executed by Huerta the Catholics and the clergy were quite silent. Indeed, when the death of Madero was announced there were public manifestations of joy held in various towns in the Republic.

Madero's death was one of the blackest bits of treachery in all of Mexico's history.² Yet Gruening tells us that the clergy "flocked enthusiastically to the usurper's side."³ Huerta was nothing more than an unscrupulous and unprincipled man who was interested in his own ambition and consequently his power was of short duration. Seventeen months after he had assassinated Madero, Huerta was fleeing the country. He was followed by Venustiano Carranza under whose reign the clergy reaped the whirlwind it had sowed under Huerta. During these years the country was drenched in blood from one end to the other and some of the clergy had to suffer atrociously. Gruening relates that "the outrages described took the form of violence against priests and nuns, robbery of church property, desecration of churches. Some of these acts were those of bandits and drunken rabble ever springing up in Mexico in the wake of civil commotion."⁴

After a period of three years of unrest the Constitution-

2. Gruening, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-306, for a description.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

alists finally passed the Constitution of 1917 which was put into practice slightly under Carranza, somewhat more under Obregon and fully under Calles. The call to form the Constitution was sent out by Carranza in September, 1916. The Constitution itself was promulgated on February 5 of the following year. It touched upon almost every phase of national life in Mexico but the Articles which applied specifically to the Church and the clergy were perhaps the most far reaching. All education of any kind whatsoever was to be done only under supervision of the State. This included primary education which had not been touched upon in all the laws passed on education prior to 1917. Clerical opposition to the government program to establish rural schools was the practical result.

Article 27 ruled once more that absolutely all property of the Church must be turned over to the Republic. It also dealt with the practice described in the preceding chapter of individuals holding property for the Church and declared such possession by even third parties void.

The Article which provoked the greatest storm was perhaps Article 130. It begins by restating Article 127 of the 1857 Constitution but then proceeds to amplify upon this Article which has been called the genesis of all laws aimed at curtailing the special/privileges of the clergy in Mexico. The Article declares absolute religious tolerance for any religion in Mexico. It also states that the government will recognize

no juridical personality in the religious institutions known as churches. But perhaps the most crushing provision was that which gave to State Legislatures the exclusive power of determining the maximum numbers of ministers of religious creeds for each locality as they saw fit. Usually some such figure as one priest for every 50,000 inhabitants was chosen. One can determine the effect of such a provision in rural areas particularly. Many areas in present day Mexico are consequently without any clerical service whatsoever. For the clergy this law almost spelled finis; not so for the people. Gruening states:

Except in relatively few regions the clergy passed out of the lives of the supposedly Catholic people without a ripple. The reason is simple. As long as the Mexican could go to church and worship his idol in the shape of a saint's image he was content. The loss of the priest meant little to him. Indeed in more than a dozen different villages in the states of Hidalgo, Tlaxcala, and Puebla, villagers expressed to me in the spring of 1927 their preference for the new order of things, because, as they said, they could now worship without paying for the privilege.⁵

This Article further went on with the decree that only native born Mexicans could be ministers in Mexico. This was decided upon in order to stop the large number of foreign clergy which were brought into the country by the Church. Another provision states that:

No ministers of religious creeds shall, either in public or private meetings, or in acts of worship or religious propaganda, criticise the fundamental laws

5. Ibid., p. 285.

of the country, the authorities in particular or the Government in general; they shall have no vote, nor be eligible to office, nor shall they be entitled to assemble for political purposes.⁶

Thus the right of franchise was taken away from the clergy. All accreditation of seminaries was done away with. Severe restrictions were placed upon the publication of religious journals and periodicals. These were forbidden to comment in any way upon any political affairs of the nation or give any information regarding the acts of the authorities of the country or of private individuals, "in so far as the latter have to do with public affairs." Article 130 ends with the following sentence: "No trial by jury shall ever be granted for the infraction of any of the preceding provisions." This also was one of the most drastic provisions.

The Constitution of 1917 was a hard blow for the clergy to take. Some of its provisions were of an extreme nature, as for example, the last one mentioned above. But Mexican leaders felt that this was the only step they could take in view of conditions. Elias explains the matter in the following way:

It is true that the clergy, in Article 130, are deprived of certain political rights belonging to Mexican citizens. They are deprived of these rights because they have done and are doing everything in their power to keep the people of Mexico from securing political, social and industrial betterment. The Hierarchy's betrayal of the Mexican people compelled them to place these laws in their Constitution as a matter of self-defense, and

6. Elias, op. cit., p. 39.

not as an attempt to punish the clergy.⁷

Gruening takes a similar attitude:

The Mexican clergy has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. It is still medieval. The restrictions imposed upon the Church by the Constitution of 1917 were excessive, irksome, discriminatory, unjust. Within the revolutionist ranks many have believed so - including Carranza - and believe so. When the Church so asserts, it asserts an undeniable fact. But its own actions have been largely responsible for its plight. Its present position would have been infinitely stronger, if, while recording its protest, it had submitted to the law of the land - as it has never done - and adhered to the principles of the Prince of Peace.⁸

The clergy's answer to the Constitution of 1917 was a complete economic boycott as an attempt to force the authorities to abandon the laws. It was their plainly avowed aim to paralyze the country socially, industrially and economically. It was the people, of course, who would once more be the sufferers. The struggle began with a public statement signed by all the bishops and archbishop and issued on January 27, 1926, which repudiated the Constitution. Various disturbances followed. The priests were all supposed to register in order to enforce the law demanding that all foreign born men leave the clerical office. The Episcopate told them not to do this and in addition to withdraw completely from the churches on the day the laws were to become effective, July 31, 1926, imposing something of an interdict on the country. In addition the higher clergy ordered its followers to boycott all papers

7. Ibid., p. 41

8. Gruening, op. cit., p. 284.

which either opposed the campaign or did not support it, to purchase only the necessities of life, to abstain from "the use of vehicles, electric current, lottery tickets, and attendance at theaters," and to stop attending all public schools. Small armed bands, often led by priests, rose in various sections of the country under the banner "Long live Christ the King," an action which the Episcopate never tried to stop. One such instance of this is recorded in Gruening:

***on April 20, 1927, the Guadalajara-Mexico City train was attacked by about four hundred men shouting the battle-cry of "Long live Christ the King," headed - the Government charged - by three priests. The participation of the priests was asserted by members of the Episcopate to have been in the capacity of chaplains. Various survivors testified that the priests were actively directing the assault. The entire train guard and passengers, including women and twenty children, fifty-four in all, were killed.⁹ A number of the wounded passengers were burned alive when the attackers poured kerosene on the cars and set fire to them. One man traveling with his mother, wife, and three children lost them all - and his reason. When dawn broke on the charred wreckage he was wandering around, gibbering, with a burnt baby's corpse in his arms. All this in the name of Christ King!¹⁰

This one incident will serve as an example to show the fanatical extremes to which the struggle between the clergy and the State has gone. It shows that invariably the real suffer-

9. A footnote says this is the most conservative figure. Press dispatches placed the deaths at more than a hundred.

10. Gruening, op. cit., p. 279.

ers were the common people. No matter which side happened to be victorious at the moment the people were the victims who had to bear untold hardships.

The boycott proved to be a flat failure. By July of that year, 1927, the government had completely suppressed the rebellion and the clergy had succeeded in perhaps only one point, and that was demonstrating how weak they actually were. In the minds of the people they accounted for very little as was proven when they were removed by the government. And when their attempted show of power failed their position was weakened even still more. Thus by the end of the revolutionary period the clergy reached its nadir in Mexico. Politically it was disenfranchised, socially it was persecuted and spiritually it was as lacking as ever.

VIII. Mexico Since 1928

General Plutarco Elias Calles, under whom the Constitution was fully put into effect for the first time, was succeeded in office by General Alvaro Obregon, who had also preceded him. As has been noted the Church and clergy had definitely been defeated during Calles' rule. Although Obregon had not taken the definite stand during his first term as President, which Calles had maintained in enforcing the new Constitution, he now carried on and continued the work begun by Calles. For this he was to be perhaps the last prominent victim of the assassin, so often found on the scene during the Revolutionary years. In 1928 while posing for a portrait of himself he was murdered by a Catholic fanatic, named Toral. That the assault was clergy inspired can be seen by the fact that the assassin was subsequently made a martyr by the Church.¹

This action succeeded only in widening the chasm separating the clergy and the State and bringing down a more rigid enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution. In the following years during the presidencies of Calles and Cardenas they were most carefully carried out. There were no public religious processions, the number of priests was strictly controlled, and the clergy was given very little money to oper-

1. Bernard Pankow, "Spiritual Thralldom in Mexico," The Walther League Messenger, LIII (August, 1945), p. 488.

ate with.

During these years from 1928-1938 many radical movements found a haven in Mexico because of this suppression of the clergy. To a large extent this was fostered by many men prominent in the public eye such as the well-known artists, Riviera, Orozco, and Siquieras. Wherever one travels in Mexico today one is invariably shown some of the many murals and frescoes painted by these men, who make up the government committee on art in Mexico. Many of these paintings have anti-clerical and anti-church features, often performed with a vengeance. The writer remembers seeing frescoes of Orozco done on the ceiling of the very old abandoned church to be found near the Hospital de Jesus, in downtown Mexico City, the oldest hospital in Mexico and founded by Cortez. The building is in great disrepair, having suffered the ravages of several revolutions, but nevertheless has the distinction of housing the mortal remains of the great conquistador, Cortez. These frescoes, executed in the most lurid of colors and designs, were thoroughly lewd and godless. Their being done in a church was undoubtedly to add to their anti-church character.

As late as 1935 the government uncovered secret convents and closed them. Perhaps the most notable one of these is the one discovered quite accidentally in Puebla. It serves as an example to show how little the clergy has changed even in modern times. The visitor is shown crowns of thorns,

blood stained garments, and scourges left exactly where they were found when the inmates fled. Undoubtedly they had served as the instruments for the same kind of fanatical self-torture which had been practiced centuries before. The morbid character of these convents was in evidence by the many jars of preserved hearts to be seen. The simple nuns had vowed to give their hearts to Christ and this was the extent to which this vow was carried out.

With the election of President Avila Camacho, however, the clergy began a slow movement of recovery. Camacho was elected in 1938 as the successor of Cardenas and did not have the strong anti-clerical feeling of his predecessor. Naturally the clergy has learned to move very cautiously and slowly in view of the past. But that it is regaining some of its former influence can be seen on every hand. When the writer visited the famed monastery and exquisitely carved church at Tepozotlan in 1938, for example, the building was not being used for any religious services whatsoever. It was strictly government controlled and served only as a tourist attraction. In 1948, the church was being used for religious services on Sunday only. Gradually, no doubt, this will be extended to Wednesday and ultimately the entire week.

As has been noted all religious processions were outlawed by the Constitution. But this law has been relaxed to such a degree that in the summer of 1948, 7000 thousand men, under the leadership of the clergy, made a 163 mile pilgrim-

age all the way from Queretaro to the shrine of the virgin of Guadalupe on the outskirts of Mexico City, and were not resisted in any way.² The writer himself witnessed such a procession led by a priest barely five miles from the capital. The wearing of clerical garb outside of church buildings has also once more become common. Ten years ago a robed priest outside of the church could not be found. Today one does not have to go far to see several clergy robed in the vestments of their office. Thus the clergy has begun to make small inroads upon the rulings of the Constitution.

The clergy has regained some of its wealth also as can be seen from the amount of church repair work which is being carried on at the present time. A number of years ago most of the churches were in a great state of disrepair and the building of new ones was practically non-existent. Since 1940, however, the major churches in such cities as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Oaxaca, and Taxco have undergone extensive repairs. New churches have also been erected in increasing numbers.

In recent years the hierarchy has felt itself to be in the position to make public pronouncements also in its behalf. Early in 1945 the archbishop of Mexico, Monsignor Luis Martinez, issued his famous Pastoral Letter. This letter was a strong plea on the part of the archbishop to his followers to

2. Time Magazine, July 12, 1948, for a description of this pilgrimage.

stem the tide of anti-clergy feeling and was directed primarily at halting the spread of Protestantism in Mexico. The results were appalling. The most brutal kind of persecution of all evangelicals by their Catholic neighbors was the result. The same old typical fanaticism, which accompanied so many of the past outbreaks, appeared once more. The magazine, Tiempo, the Mexican counterpart of our Time, gives an account of some of the more notable results of this letter. For example, the priest of Ojitlan, Oaxaca, placed a bomb in the house of the evangelist Porfirio Martinez, which subsequently exploded and killed Martinez and five members of his family. In San Andres Timilpan, Mexico, another parish priest led the group dynamiting the evangelical church there. In Canlote, Michoacan, the priest Rafael Martinez set fire to the church and homes of the Lutherans. One hundred and five of them escaped to Mexico City to demand guarantees of safety against any further outbreak of this nature. Thus the account continues.³

In this manner the clergy is slowly making its bid for a recovery of some of its lost power and influence. It is doing this very carefully and if needs be, slowly. But that it is succeeding cannot be denied. One of its most effective movements has been that which is trying to identify patriotism and Catholicism in the mind of the Mexican peon. Inversely, whenever Protestants or anti-clerics are referred to,

3. Tiempo, (June 8, 1945), pp. 6-7.

such phrases as foreigners, or foreign-domination are to be found. A strong appeal is made to the highly nationalistic Mexican to protect his own country by protecting his own Church.

There are still prominent men on the scene protesting this infiltration, but their voice has not been heeded to any degree. In 1943 Senator Celestine Gasca delivered a speech in the Senate Chamber which was printed in a major Mexico City newspaper.⁴ The speech was against the manner in which the Constitution was being disregarded in respect to religious processions in particular. No definite action was taken, however; indeed, the processions have become longer and larger as we have seen.

Consequently today in Mexico the clergy is in a position to once more assert itself. It no longer has to hide and remain in the helpless state in which it found itself in the early thirties. To what extent it will continue these activities can only be determined by the future.

4. Excelsior, Monday, December 13, 1943. A complete text of this speech is given in the second section on p. 12.

Resume

The history of the clergy in Mexico has been a series of waves, waves of tolerance and power followed by waves of persecution and loss of all wealth and influence. The age-old comparison of the pendulum swinging back and forth from one extreme describes this course of the clergy perfectly. For three centuries the clergy ruled supreme, unmolested until the Laws of Reform of 1857 were passed. Then followed a period of subjection - when the pendulum swung to the other extreme. During the presidency of Diaz the clergy made a complete recovery only to be thoroughly squelched again by the Constitution of 1917. Now the pendulum is swinging back to the clergy once more.

Does the clergy recognize that this has been the result of its own failure to properly stay within its own sphere, the religious? Is it making an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of the past? Is it making an effort to learn what the real causes of all the bloody strife have been? Hardly. We say this because the Mexican clergy has not only failed to recognize its position politically, but has fallen short of understanding even its basic religious purpose. Although the clergy has been in Mexico for over four centuries it has failed and is still failing in evangelizing the Mexican. Gruening summarizes this

failure aptly thus:

Thus the faith of the Mexicans, nominally Catholic, lacks the spirit, the ethical content, the uniformity, and solidarity that characterize the faith elsewhere. The Mexican's religion is his individual reaction to Catholicism. Instead of conquering Mexico, with an exclusive opportunity to do so for three centuries, the Catholic Church has been conquered by it. Politically the Church has been chained, economically its power has been nullified, ritualistically it has become adulterated by the paganism it found, morally it has succumbed to the vices of the laity. Its greatest defeat has been on its own ground in the kingdom of the spirit.¹

This failure to evangelize the Indian can be laid only at the feet of the clergy. A member of the Mexican clergy itself has recognized this. Father Rivera, quoted by Gruening, states that the "laxity of the priesthood, the education of Mexico by the priesthood, the ideas and customs of the priesthood," are the principal cause of the "backwardness and ill-being of Mexico." If the problem of the clergy could be eliminated, the problem of Mexico would be solved.²

In this fact lies the greatest lack of the general Mexican clergy. It has not only failed, but it has refused to admit and correct that failure. And until it chooses to do so, it will have to pay the price of violence and bloodshed. For the country will never rise higher than its spiritual leaders as St. John Chrysostom wrote centuries before:

If the clergy be demoralized, the entire peo-

1. Gruening, *op. cit.*, p. 273

2. *Ibid.*, p. 273

ple will become demoralized.***As all good is-
sueth from the temple, so likewise doth all evil.
The watchful horticulturist who sees a tree with-
ered and with yellow leaves, knows that it has been
injured at the roots. For as truly as you under-
stand that a tree with sore leaves has some de-
fect close to the root, so when you see a chaotic
people without a true religion, know without ques-
tion that the guilt lies with the priests.

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