

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN MEXICO: 1924-1929

by

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## ABSTRACT

Early in 1926, the Catholic Church in Mexico initiated a campaign to challenge the religious articles contained in the Constitution of 1917. The Calles government replied to the clerical challenge by commencing to enforce most of the religious laws which had previously been ignored. When Calles decreed a new penal code that detailed severe penalties for infractions of the religious laws, the church replied by suspending public religious worship on August 1, 1926. At the same time, militant Catholic lay groups led by the Liga called for an economic boycott.

Mexican public reaction to the suspension of worship and to the economic boycott was slight. Militant Catholics, with the tacit approval of the more conservative clergy, then resorted to violence. Although the Cristeros hoped for official or unofficial United States support owing to Mexican-American differences over the land and oil disputes, it was not forthcoming. Centered in Colima, Michoacán, and Jalisco, the Cristero rebellion lasted nearly three years.

Through the successful mediation of American Ambassador Morrow, a church-state modus vivendi was reached in July of 1929. None of the fundamental issues were settled; however, the rebellion ceased and the last significant opposition to the Revolution was brought under the control of the state.

## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the functions of church and state in Mexico were nearly inseparable. It was a union arising in great measure from church-state relationships as defined by the agreement of patronato real.<sup>1</sup> When the government of independent Mexico attempted to define church-state powers after 1821, the initial difficulty arose over where the old patronato real should reside. The church position was that a concordat would have to be negotiated between the Mexican government and the Vatican. Until the signing of a concordat, the church insisted that vacant church offices remain unfilled or patronage should be exercised by the ecclesiastical

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<sup>1</sup>Two papal bulls, issued in 1501 and 1508, granted the power to appoint church dignitaries in the Americas to the Spanish Crown. Royal officials could participate in church councils and collect various tithes, retaining generous sums for Crown use. In return, the Crown was obligated to convert the native peoples and to pay the expenses of the church in the New World. Except in spiritual matters, the patronato real made the Catholic Church almost entirely subordinate to the Spanish kings. Charles Edward Chapman, Colonial Hispanic America: A History (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1933), pp. 30, 98.

hierarchy. As early as 1823, the Mexican government stated that patronage resided only in the state. This principle was incorporated into the Constitution of 1824, thus signifying that the church could not expect to function entirely independent of state control.<sup>2</sup>

Church-state disputes over patronage during the first twenty or thirty years after Mexican independence gradually assumed a less significant position in Mexican affairs. The patronage issue diminished because Mexican governments until 1853 were almost wholly in conservative hands and offered little challenge to church authority. Moreover, as church wealth rapidly increased after 1821, clerical power assumed a socio-economic stranglehold on Mexican life.<sup>3</sup> By 1854 the church owned half the land in Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Its wealth was used to support

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<sup>2</sup>Lloyd Mecham, Church and State in Latin America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), pp. 399-402.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Lucás Alamán, Historia de México (5 vols.; Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1938), I, 99.

conservative political regimes and to foment revolutions against governments opposing church demands. As the Catholic clergy challenged civil authority with increasing frequency, liberal Mexicans grew increasingly anticlerical.<sup>5</sup>

Mexican liberals contested the clerical-conservative alliance in 1833. The liberals of 1833, led by Vice-President Valentín Gómez Farías, represented the first attack by the state on the privileged status of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico. Clerical fueros were taken away and the state reaffirmed its power of patronage. Missions and public education were secularized. Monastic vows could be repudiated and the state would no longer assist in the collection of tithes.<sup>6</sup>

The ever-present Antonio López de Santa Ana and his theocratic-conservative supporters cut short the 1833 reforms. However, the church was placed increasingly on the defensive, while growing numbers of Mexicans adopted a liberalism that usually went hand-in-hand with

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<sup>5</sup> Mecham, Church and State, pp. 399-402.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 410-415.

anticlericalism. The church became the bulwark of conservative reaction, representing ever-decreasing numbers of Mexicans.<sup>7</sup>

Liberal reforms of lasting duration began in 1854 with the period known as La Reforma. While fighting a civil war and foreign intervention for nearly ten years, Benito Juárez issued a series of reform laws in 1859, 1860, and in 1862.<sup>8</sup> By these laws church and state were separated and religious toleration was declared. Most church property was nationalized in an attempt to end the political and economic basis of clerical power. Religious orders and oaths were abolished and clerical garb could not be worn in public. Public religious ceremonies were prohibited. Religious marriage contracts were voided and cemeteries were secularized.<sup>9</sup> In 1873 President Lerdo de Tejada ordered these reforms written into the constitution.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Wilfrid Hardy Callcott, Church and State in Mexico, 1822-1857 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1926), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>José Miguel Bejarano, "The Church and State Conflict in Mexico--A Mexican Educator's View," Current History, XXIV (July, 1926), 502.

<sup>9</sup>Lloyd Mecham, "Latin American's Fight Against Clerical Domination," Current History, XXIX (January, 1929), 567.

<sup>10</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 454.

Another product of La Reforma was the Constitution of 1857, which contained religious articles that lacked the severity of the reform laws of Juárez. Restrictions were placed on the temporal powers of the church, but it was unmolested in matters of dogma and spiritual authority.<sup>11</sup> Clerical response to the new constitution reflected the reactionary position of the Catholic Church. Any Mexican taking an oath to uphold the charter was excommunicated. Church wealth backed conservative forces in the War of the Reform from 1857 to 1860. Churches were stripped of all but sacramental ornaments in the unsuccessful effort to defeat the liberals under Juárez. As late as 1927, a church historian condemned the 1857 constitution:

The first article of the Constitution, by the single act of not declaring the Catholic religion to be the only one in the country was equivalent to national apostasy, a horrible crime and ingratitude for the nation which had owed everything to the Catholic religion.<sup>12</sup>

Having lost the War of the Reform, the clerical-conservatives lent their support or acquiescence to the

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<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Quirk, "The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910-1929, an Ideological Study (Master's thesis, Harvard University, 1950), pp. 9-10. Microfilm No. 659, Library, The University of Arizona.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Callcott, Church and State in Mexico, p. 5.

French Intervention. They believed that only a foreign prince could restore the feudal, hierarchal society that Juárez and the liberals had defeated. Maximilian and Carlotta, although they shocked their Mexican supporters with their generally unfriendly opinions of the clergy, could not gain the sympathies of most Mexicans. The French withdrew and the republic was restored in 1865. Re-elected president in 1867 and again in 1871, Juárez died suddenly at the outset of his third term. The death of Juárez left a vacuum that other liberals were unable to fill. Lerdo de Tejada, the liberal successor to President Juárez, proved inept and unpopular. In the background waited General Porfirio Díaz of Oaxaca, who had been one of the liberal heroes against the French. When Juárez had refused to recognize the services of Díaz with appropriate privileges in 1865, he began laying political plans for the future.<sup>13</sup>

A revolt led by Díaz placed him in the presidency in 1876. Although he promised to continue the liberal reforms, his regime soon became conservative. The religious provisions of the reform laws and the 1857 constitution were allowed to lapse. Under the Díaz

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<sup>13</sup> Mecham, Church and State, pp. 454-458.

regime, the value of church property increased from \$50,000,000 pesos to \$100,000,000. Church lands, supposedly nationalized, were often held by proxies. Tithes were re-established and Mexicans refusing to pay them were ostracized. New convents were opened in the guise of schools or charitable institutions. Religious acts were observed in public, including fiestas, eucharistic congresses, and golden anniversaries of church prelates. Despite such clerical resurgence, church and state remained separated during the Díaz period. The religious laws were left on the books to be enforced occasionally as a veiled threat to clerical ambitions and in order to appear that Díaz was continuing the liberal reforms. The prelates were willing to cease their political activity in return for the conciliatory religious policy of Díaz.<sup>14</sup>

Díaz ruled Mexico in a conservative, despotic manner for thirty-four years. The Revolution which overthrew him in 1910 was initially a struggle for electoral reform. The Maderista slogans of "Effective Suffrage" and "No Re-election," however, failed to

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

satisfy many revolutionaries and demands for socio-economic, as well as political reforms, began to be heard.

As the Revolution thus turned toward the left, clerical opposition to it increased. When a reactionary coup led by Victoriano Huerta succeeded in 1913, its success was due in large measure to clerical support. The collapse of the Huerta regime the following year accentuated the ideological differences between the Catholic Church and the Revolution. The church believed that its resurgence during the Díaz era would be destroyed by the revolutionaries and clerical propaganda increasingly equated the Revolution with socialism and bolshevism. Developing its own catechism that placed the Catholic Church outside the revolutionary pale, revolutionary ideology viewed the church as the source of most Mexican problems. Some revolutionaries began attacking the church on religious grounds, viewing its continued existence as a direct threat to the Revolution.<sup>15</sup>

By 1916 the Constitutionalists, led by Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón, gained ascendancy over the other rebel factions. A Constitutionalist convention was held at Querétaro late in the year to draw up a new

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<sup>15</sup>Quirk, pp. 2-7, 171-174.

constitution. The delegates split into two factions, the liberal Carrancistas and the Jacobinos Obregonistas.<sup>16</sup> The radical Jacobinos Obregonistas, mostly military men, controlled the convention. They ensured the adoption of religious provisions that were detailed and severe. The new religious articles included the denial of a juridical personality to the church, prohibition of all foreign clergy, controls on the maximum numbers of priests, and additional restrictions on the political and property rights of the clergy. The Jacobinos Obregonistas demanded no less than the destruction of the political, social, and economic power of the Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup> Although a quasi-official protest against the new constitution was issued by the clergy, their voices were stilled when neither Carranza nor his successor, Obregón, enforced the religious articles. The religious laws remained a future threat instead of a present reality.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Wilfrid Hardy Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, 1857-1929 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931), pp. 271-272.

<sup>17</sup>Mecham, Church and State, pp. 473-474.

<sup>18</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 288.

Both Carranza and Obregón were beset by other problems that delayed enforcement of the religious articles. Carranza probably would not have enforced the religious laws under any conditions. Obregón, on the other hand, was known to be strongly anticlerical. He was obstructed, however, when the United States refused recognition to his government for nearly three years. The United States first wished to settle long-standing claims against the Mexican government and desired clarification of constitutional provisions regarding the property rights of foreigners. Until Obregón received American recognition, his regime lacked the arms to strengthen its internal position.<sup>19</sup>

A further setback for the Obregón government occurred in December of 1923 when Adolfo de la Huerta revolted. De la Huerta, considered a "dilettante in Real-politik," had developed presidential aspirations. He believed (correctly as it turned out) that Obregón intended to support another Sonoran, Plutarco Elías Calles, as his successor in 1924. The Obregonistas suspected de la Huerta might compromise with the clerical-conservatives and the United States. The

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<sup>19</sup>Quirk, pp. 188-190.

latter had recently granted recognition to the Obregón government and American arms aided in the suppression of the de la Huerta revolt in 1924.<sup>20</sup>

Although Obregón had been faced with the aftermath of the Revolution and the de la Huerta revolt, he did not permit a clerical recovery such as the church had enjoyed under Díaz. When the church challenged both the government and the constitution in January of 1923, Obregón reacted vigorously. The incident that precipitated the church-state confrontation was a public religious ceremony that was held on the Cerro de Cubilete in Guanajuato. The occasion was the laying of a cornerstone for a monument dedicated to Christ the King. Laying the first stone at the impressive outdoor ceremony was Apostolic Delegate Monsignor Philippi. Two days after the Cubilete ceremony, Secretary of Gobernación Calles ordered Philippi expelled as a "pernicious foreigner." Although the Mexican clergy was not punished for this affair, neither prelates nor políticos regarded the incident as settled.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> José T. Meléndez, Historia de la Revolución Mexicana (Mexico City: Talleres Graficos Continental, 1938-1940), pp. 186-187; Nathaniel Weyl and Sylvia Weyl, The Reconquest of Mexico; the Years of Lázaro Cárdenas (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Quirk, pp. 188-190, 194.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MEXICAN EXECUTIVE AND THE CATHOLIC EPISCOPATE

Mexican chief executives, until recent years, have usually been hero-presidents, having attained the office primarily on the basis of personal appeal. Among Latin peoples, personalismo has held a stronger appeal than group conformity. Cooperation based upon equality between socio-economic groups has been rare. Personal relationships have been a major cohesive force binding men to a cacique, a general, or a president.<sup>1</sup>

The power of personal appeal has enabled Mexican presidents to hold both legal and extra-legal powers. A strong executive makes theories of checks and balances inoperable. The President dominates legislative and judicial bodies at all levels of government. His legal powers, called facultades extraordinarias, are detailed in Articles 29 and 49 in the Constitution of 1917. Far from being extraordinary, they are used on ordinary

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Bamford Parkes, "Political Leadership in Mexico," Mexico Today, CCVIII (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, March, 1940), 13-14.

occasions. To invoke the facultades extraordinarias, the President need obtain only the rubber-stamp of Congress and the Council of Ministers. Constitutional guarantees are then suspended and the President may rule by decree.<sup>2</sup>

Extra-legal executive powers are more difficult to define. They range from the subtle pressures a strong president can exert over his subordinates to outright repression. The Mexican electoral system furnishes an example of how a powerful executive can manipulate the electoral process. The President controls the election machinery through the Ministry of Gobernación. Since universal suffrage and secret ballots have seldom been effective, pressures can be brought to bear at the ballot box. No government since 1821 has suffered an important electoral defeat. Bullets, not ballots, have been the only means of removing an unpopular government.<sup>3</sup>

A hero-president with extra-legal powers, which include control of the election process, has often

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<sup>2</sup>Stephen S. Goodspeed, "The Development and Use of facultades extraordinarias in Mexico," Southwest Social Science Quarterly, XXXIV (December, 1953), 24-29.

<sup>3</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 318.

created considerable hardship for government opponents. During the presidency of Calles from 1924 to 1929, a new twist was added to the old ley fuga entitled the ley de suicidio. Prisoners found dead with guns in their hands were labeled as remorseful types who could not face their obvious guilt. During the same period, traditional repressive measures included secret courts-martial for civilians and immediate execution of suspected opponents by both sides during the Cristero rebellion.<sup>4</sup> In the view of one historian, such executive power "is the negation of all constitutional systems, since the initiative, the personality, the ambition of one man are all, and law counts for nothing."<sup>5</sup> Another historian states:

At no period . . . have political realities . . . corresponded to the legal forms . . . . Most Mexican governments have exercised dictatorial powers and whenever a president has been too scrupulous in his respect for the letter of the law, he has succeeded only in provoking rebellion and civil war. The reality behind the forms of the Mexican Constitution has always been the rule of individual leaders.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Lloyd Mechem, "Mexican Federalism-- Fact or Fiction?", Mexico Today, CCVIII (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, March, 1940), 32-33.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Parkes, p. 12.

Yet the same writer considers Mexico among the most democratic of nations.<sup>7</sup> Obviously, the basis of Mexican democracy does not reside in Mexican law. Mexican democracy, an often elusive force, has manifested itself in the rule of men like Juárez, Madero, Obregón, Calles, and Cárdenas, who have held the support of the masses. These men expressed the popular will of the moment despite the absence of effective democratic processes. Unfortunately, this extremely personal type of popular representation encouraged corruption and the tendency toward perpetuation of executive authority.<sup>8</sup>

Álvaro Obregón was the first of the revolutionary presidents to unite the rebel factions and make La Revolución synonymous with Mexican patriotism. La Revolución became a cult which labeled all opposition as treason and the Revolution as the only true faith. In revolutionary dogma, the opposition could only desire the destruction of the Mexican nation. As political infighting diminished among the revolutionaries, opposition to the Revolution became clearly centered in the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Despite church opposition to most revolutionary views, Obregón and his successors possessed a strong base of support. Industrial and agrarian labor became the pillar of the Revolution and the army its pedestal. Industrial labor was organized primarily in the CROM (Confederación Regional Obreros Mexicanos) headed by Luís Morones. Morones at the height of his influence was also Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor in the Calles cabinet. Labor and the government were mutually dependent upon each other. Although wages under Calles rose to three or four times their 1910 level, labor was controlled by the strike-breaking power of the state. The number of government authorized strikes dropped from 138 in 1924 to only 24 in 1926. In spite of this decline, labor fully supported the state against any reactionary movement.<sup>9</sup>

Agrarian labor did not lend itself to a tight, national union like the CROM. Most peones were illiterate mestizos or Indians who lived in isolated areas. Although lacking in cohesive organization, the agrarian laborers personified the most burning issue of the Revolution--land reform. Agrarians believed that land

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<sup>9</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, pp. 344-345.

reform was possible only under presidents who supported the Revolution. Calles carefully nurtured agrarian support by distributing 13,000,000 acres to 1,000,000 heads of families by 1927.<sup>10</sup>

The armed force behind the Revolution was, of course, the army. No longer, however, was the army the supreme arbiter of Mexican affairs. It was placed firmly under executive control by Obregón and his successors. Generals' loyalties were purchased with high salaries, automobiles, promotions, and pompous privileges instead of political power. Obregón maintained firm control of the army until his death in 1928. Calles was assured of army support because of a Calles-Obregón understanding that the two Sonorans would alternate in the presidential palace.<sup>11</sup>

Calles had risen in the revolutionary hierarchy as the protégé of Obregón. The two men maintained a lasting personal relationship that was unique in Mexican politics to that time. Their humble origins reflected the military and intellectual leadership furnished to

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 330-331.

<sup>11</sup>Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage (New York: The Century Co., 1928), p. 322.

the Revolution by the middle class. Obregón had been a ranchero and Calles a schoolteacher and merchant.<sup>12</sup> As early as 1912, Calles assisted Obregón in the field at Agua Prieta, and at Naco the following year. The latter engagement and the role of Calles in it contributed to his rapid military and political advancement. In 1914 he was made chief of all the Constitutional forces in Sonora. After defeating Pancho Villa at Agua Prieta in 1915, Calles was named Interim Governor of Sonora, at the same time retaining his military command. A short time later he was elected governor. Under President Carranza, Calles served as Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor.<sup>13</sup>

Although Carranza became president after the Constitutionalists defeated the other revolutionary factions in 1916, the one-armed Obregón remained the outstanding figure of the Revolution. As such, he expected to be designated as Carranza's successor in 1920. Carranza, however, was believed to favor Ignacio Bonillas for the office. Bonillas, then serving as

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>13</sup>Juan de Dios Bojórquez, Calles (Guatemala City: Sanchez y De Cuise, 1923), pp. 30-59.

Mexican Ambassador to the United States, was suspected of collusion with the Yankees. On the pretext that the federal government planned to nationalize the waters of the Río Sonora, Obregón revolted in 1920. Heading the Obregonista troops was Calles. Carranza's forces were quickly defeated and Carranza was murdered as he fled to Vera Cruz. Congress named Adolfo de la Huerta as Provisional President and the Sonoran triumverate of Obregón, Calles, and de la Huerta came to power.<sup>14</sup>

For his services, Calles was rewarded with the Ministry of Gobernación, thus making him the senior cabinet member in the Obregón government. He resigned the office in 1923 to run for president as Obregón's favorite. The potential opposition of de la Huerta vanished when the revolt of the latter was unsuccessful.<sup>15</sup>

Calles began his four year term on December 1, 1924. His first year in office was by necessity devoted to the financial deficits left by the de la Huerta rebellion, although an austerity program resulted in a

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<sup>14</sup>Meléndez, p. 186.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

balanced budget in nine months. Interest payments were resumed on the foreign debt and delinquent government salaries were paid, while thousands of surplus federal employees were dismissed.<sup>16</sup>

In the same year, church-state relations appeared tranquil. The religious articles in the constitution had not been implemented with enabling legislation. The church functioned much as it had under Díaz, with the threat of the religious laws only a distant reminder.<sup>17</sup> Yet certain factors indicated that Calles might be the first president of the Revolution to enforce the religious articles. The violence of the preceding years had abated, and the Mexican economy was better off than at any time since 1910. Relations with the United States were correct, if not friendly. Calles was known to be anticlerical; perhaps Mexico's new stability offered an opportunity to bring the last important opposition to

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<sup>16</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 317.

<sup>17</sup>Luis C. Balderrama, El Clero y el Gobierno de México, I (Mexico City: Centro Cultural "Cuauhtemoc," 1927), 157-161.

the Revolution into line.<sup>18</sup> Calles' anticlericalism was apparent in a 1924 campaign speech in which he said:

I am the enemy of the priest caste which regards its position as a privileged one and not as an evangelical mission. I am the enemy of the priest politician, of the priest intriguer, of the priest exploiter, of the priest who seeks to keep our people in ignorance, of the priest who is allied with the hacendado to prey upon the laborer, of the priest who joins with the industrial proprietor to exploit the worker.<sup>19</sup>

During his campaign, however, Calles equivocated somewhat on the question of enforcing the religious laws and the constitution in general, stating:

The Constitution of 1917, in its fundamental articles, is adapted to public necessities in Mexico, and . . . its honest application, without employing it as an arm of destruction, but as a medium for collective improvement, will aid in a powerful manner to solve our weighty social problems.<sup>20</sup>

Congress considered implementing the religious articles toward the end of 1925. No concrete action was taken,

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<sup>18</sup> Quirk, pp. 252-254.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Plutarco Elías Calles, Mexico Before the World, trans. Robert Hammond Murray (New York: The Academy Press, 1927), pp. 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Calles, p. 30.

however, despite nationwide appeals organized by CROM.<sup>21</sup> The religious laws continued to be ineffective and were ignored.<sup>22</sup>

Economically, the position of the Catholic Church in 1925 was little changed from the days of Díaz. The church still owned large amounts of urban real estate, including schools, convents, charitable institutions, and church edifices. Calles stated that of the Mexican-owned national wealth, 60 percent was held by the church.<sup>23</sup>

Politically and socially, however, the church position had weakened since 1910. The Catholic Party, formed in 1911, floundered and died in the collapse of the Huerta regime. Mexican attitudes toward the church altered as the Revolution progressed. Although still overwhelmingly a Catholic nation, most Mexicans no longer heeded church dictates. Appeals by the clergy for political support were met with indifference. Increasing numbers of Mexican males used church services

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<sup>21</sup>Quirk, pp. 253-254.

<sup>22</sup>Plutarco Elías Calles, "The Policies of Mexico Today," Foreign Affairs, V (October, 1926), 2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

only for baptism, marriage, and extreme unction. Although nominally Catholic, the men of the Revolution were sometimes outspokenly anticlerical. The Catholic minority who obeyed church wishes blindly were labeled "fanatics" by the revolutionaries. In associating the church with conservatism and reaction, the revolutionaries denied the Catholic clergy a place in Mexican political life.<sup>24</sup>

What popular support the church still retained after 1910 was channelled into an Episcopate-controlled program called Catholic Social Action. Established in the period of relative freedom following the overthrow of Díaz, supporters of Catholic Social Action were primarily interested in organizing Mexican labor into a sort of medieval guild system. The church would guide the guilds as elements in a stratified, hierarchal society. The workers, resigned to their class and status, were to be protected from exploitation by the goodwill of the hacendados.<sup>25</sup>

The leading labor organization in Catholic Social Action was the CNCT (Confederación Nacional Católica del

<sup>24</sup>Quirk, pp. 2-7.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 17, 164.

Trabajo) which had 22,000 members by 1926. The CNCT advocated a minimum wage, regulation of woman and child labor, housing assistance, social security, profit sharing by the workers, agrarian aid, and limitation on the concentration of wealth. Idealism and goodwill were to be the means of achieving such a program. Catholics were ordered not to join the secular trade unions because of their advocacy of the principles of class warfare. Barred from CNCT membership were "Socialists," "sectarians," and "partisans of heterodox ideas." After the religious conflict began in 1926, the CNCT ceased to function.<sup>26</sup>

Other Catholic lay organizations affiliated with Catholic Social action included: the Knights of Columbus, the National Catholic Parents Association, the Union of Mexican Catholic Dames, the ACJM (Asociación Católica de Jovenes Mexicanos), and the National Defense League (or Liga) of Religious Liberty. The Liga, formed in March of 1925, dedicated itself to the repeal of the religious articles in the constitution. Liga propaganda was supported by other Catholic lay groups and by some of

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<sup>26</sup> Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 293.

the clergy. In the church-state conflict to come, the Liga and the ACJM would provide most of the leadership and soldiery, respectively, of the Cristero forces.<sup>27</sup>

Catholic Social Action and the CNCT proved unable to compete with state-supported reform programs and with CROM. As the church-controlled program weakened, its attitude toward the Revolution grew more bitter. In the eyes of the clergy, the Revolution had destroyed a stable Mexican society and in its place had substituted socialistic class warfare. The clergy equated Mexican socialism with European, and especially Russian, communism. Reformers and reforms attacking the church were labeled socialist, communist, or bolshevist.<sup>28</sup>

Disunity among the Catholic clergy also contributed to the growing socio-political weakness of the church. Although all of the clergy were opposed to the religious articles, they proved unable to agree on the means of combating them during the ensuing church-state conflict. At a time when the church needed vigorous

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<sup>27</sup> Jesús Degollado Guízar, Memorias de Jesús Degollado Guízar; Ultimo General en Jefe del Ejército Cristero (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1957), pp. 11-25.

<sup>28</sup> Quirk, pp. 2-7.

leadership, Archbishop of Mexico José Mora y del Río was seventy-one years old and in poor health. While the state treated him gently lest his sudden demise assume an aura of martyrdom, Mora's clerical subordinates maneuvered for what they felt would soon be a vacant archbishopric.<sup>29</sup> Mora's most likely successor appeared to be Bishop Pascual Díaz of Tabasco. Bishop Díaz was secretary of an episcopal committee set up by Mora to deal with the religious laws.<sup>30</sup> Clerical disunity and weakness were to later result in Catholic extremists assuming positions of leadership in the church-state dispute.

By the end of 1925, church and state faced each other at opposite ideological poles. Each side had preconceived attitudes toward the other that would tolerate no compromise. When the church-state conflict began, the two institutions could find no avenue of compromise for nearly three years.

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<sup>29</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, pp. 355f., 362.

<sup>30</sup>Francisco Sosa, El Episcopado Mexicano; Biografía de los Arzobispos de México desde la Época Colonial hasta Nuestros Días (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1962), pp. 243-252.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONSTITUTION CHALLENGED

JANUARY-JUNE, 1926

In an apparently deliberate attempt to challenge the constitution and the will of the state to enforce it, the Catholic clergy unexpectedly initiated the church-state dispute early in 1926. Their reasons for taking such action at that particular time are unclear to this day. A pro-government historian stated that the church acted on instructions from the Vatican. In these instructions, Pope Pius XI stated that the constitution did "not seem to merit the name of laws."<sup>1</sup> He cautioned the clergy, however, not to establish or join any political party or to write for political publications.<sup>2</sup> Carrying the papal instructions to Mexico were the Archbishop of Durango and the Bishop of San Luís Potosí.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Mecham, Church and State, pp. 481-482.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Mexico's Stand on Land and Oil Laws," Current History, XXIV (May, 1926), 446-449.

<sup>3</sup>Balderrama, I, 47.

Another possible motivation for the clerical campaign against the religious laws was that the clergy expected President Calles to implement the religious articles at any time. He was known to be stubborn, uncompromising, anticlerical, and he might decide to enforce the constitution regardless of the consequences.<sup>4</sup> Not until after the church had launched its campaign, however, did Calles announce his intention of enforcing the charter.<sup>5</sup>

The Mexican clergy may have expected official or unofficial support from the United States. By early 1926 Mexican-American relations had deteriorated sharply because of the land and oil disputes. Moreover, at about the same time, Mexico and the United States were on opposite sides in an endemic civil war in Nicaragua. Although some authorities declared that the position of the United States in regard to the church-state dispute was of little consequence,<sup>6</sup> others stated that without American aid, the clergy could not hope to gain its objectives.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 480.

<sup>5</sup>Calles, Mexico Before the World, pp. 103-106.

<sup>6</sup>Gruening, pp. 285-286.

<sup>7</sup>Leopoldo Lara y Torres, Documentos para la Historia de la Persecución Religiosa en México (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1954), pp. 208-211.

The Mexican people received the first indication of the church campaign on January 27 in El Universal, a leading Mexico City newspaper. In an announcement signed by all the archbishops and bishops, the religious articles in the constitution were repudiated. Little notice was paid to the announcement, probably because the church had denounced the religious laws as far back as 1917 and had never issued any modification of this policy.<sup>8</sup>

An interview with Archbishop Mora y del Río, published on February 5, drew both civil and popular notice. Mora confirmed the church campaign against the religious laws, stating:

The doctrine of the Church is invariable because it is the truth divinely revealed. The protest which the prelates of the Mexican Church made in 1917 against the constitutional articles that are opposed to liberty and religious teaching are firmly reiterated . . . .

The information published in El Universal on the twenty-seventh of January . . . is perfectly accurate. We, the episcopate, the clergy and the Catholics do not recognize Articles 3, 5, 27, and 130 of the present constitution, but rather we shall combat them.

Under no circumstances can we abandon this criterion without treason to our faith and to our religion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Gruening, p. 275.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in J. Pérez Lugo (ed.), La Cuestión Religiosa en México. Recopilación de Leyes Disposiciones Legales y Documentos para el Estudio de este Problema Político (Mexico City: Centro Cultural "Cuauhtemoc," 1926), p. 371.

Perhaps by coincidence, February 5 was the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of 1917.<sup>10</sup>

In answer to Mora's statement, Secretary of Gobernación Adalberto Tejeda stated that in his opinion the attitude of the archbishop constituted sedition against the fundamental laws of the nation. Accusing Mora of trying to destroy the Revolution, he also labeled certain members of the Catholic clergy as conspirators who should be placed outside the law.<sup>11</sup> When it appeared that Tejeda intended to bring charges against Mora, the attorney for the archbishop said he had been misquoted. Although the interviewer denied any inaccuracies, the charges against the prelate were dropped.<sup>12</sup>

To make certain that the government appreciated the resolve of the clergy, a collective protest against

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<sup>10</sup>Walter Lippmann, "Church and State in Mexico: The American Mediation," Foreign Affairs, VIII (January, 1930), 187.

<sup>11</sup>Alfonso Toro, La Iglesia y el Estado en México (Mexico City: Archivo General de la Nación, 1927), pp. 402-403.

<sup>12</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 479.

the constitution was published on February 8 in El Universal. "La Protesta Colectiva del Episcopado" was an almost verbatim reprint of the church protest of 1917 against the constitution.<sup>13</sup> The protest offered revisions of each of the religious articles that would be acceptable to the church.

The first of the articles discussed in the protest was Article 3, which dealt with education, one of the most basic issues between church and state. The article stated that public education was free, and that both public and private schools must have a secular staff and curriculum. No church or sect could establish, direct, or maintain schools at the primary level.<sup>14</sup> The Jacobinos Obregonistas, who drew up the article in 1917, believed that fanaticism was bred in Mexican youth through religious primary education. By excluding religious groups from teaching the very young, children later attending religious secondary schools would be old enough

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<sup>13</sup>Toro, pp. 399-402.

<sup>14</sup>H. N. Branch (ed. and trans.), "The Mexican Constitution of 1917, Compared with the Constitution of 1857," in Supplement to Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science, LXXI (May, 1917), 2.

to form mature judgments. The more moderate revolutionaries believed that Article 3 was an infringement on the freedom of education and they feared that if the Catholic Church were driven out of Mexico, "Yankee Protestants" would take its place.<sup>15</sup> The church version of Article 3 would state simply that education was to be free. Believing its continued existence in Mexico depended upon reform of Article 3, the clergy demanded the right of each Catholic child to receive a Catholic education.<sup>16</sup>

Specifically stating that monastic orders were forbidden, Article 5 forbade any contract or promise that would deny the liberty of man.<sup>17</sup> Monastic orders had been used to shelter hidden wealth, as well as illegal religious schools and charitable institutions. The revolutionaries regarded them as hotbeds of reaction that produced more clerics than were needed in Mexico.

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<sup>15</sup>E. V. Niemeyer, "Anticlericalism in the Mexican Constitutional Convention of 1916-1917," The Americas, XI (July, 1954), 33-35.

<sup>16</sup>Lara y Torres, p. 140.

<sup>17</sup>Branch, p. 3.

In the church version, religious vows would be exempted from its provisions.<sup>18</sup> The clergy regarded the suppression of monastic orders as another attempt by the revolutionaries to drive the Catholic Church out of existence.<sup>19</sup>

Freedom of religion and religious worship were guaranteed in Article 24. All public religious acts were to be held inside a place of worship under government control.<sup>20</sup> The article was designed to forbid the outdoor religious spectacles, such as the Cubilete ceremony in 1923, that were believed to encourage fanaticism. Although the clergy accepted the statement on religious freedom, they said that church services should "ordinarily" be held in places of public worship.<sup>21</sup> The clerics believed that public religious ceremonies were an integral part of Mexican national life.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Balderrama, I, 20.

<sup>19</sup>Niemeyer, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup>Branch, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>Balderrama, I, 20-21.

<sup>22</sup>Niemeyer, p. 38.

Church repudiation of Article 27 was particularly disturbing to the Calles government. Besides its religious provisions, the article covered the entire spectrum of public and private property rights. Since protests by the United States over the land and oil issues were based upon Article 27,<sup>23</sup> Calles feared the possibility of a union of "oil and holy water."<sup>24</sup> The religious provisions, contained in Section 2, forbade religious ownership of loans or real property. All church buildings, including actual places of worship, were made state property. Section 3 stated that charitable and educational institutions could not be administered, directed, or maintained by any religious group.<sup>25</sup> Demanding that all of Section 2 be suppressed, the Episcopacy would agree to an interpretation of Section 3 that would give the church certain property and administrative rights over educational and charitable foundations as well as church edifices.<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup>U. S., Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, 1926, II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), 643-653.

<sup>24</sup>Calles, Mexico Before the World, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup>Branch, pp. 19-20.

<sup>26</sup>Balderrama, I, 21-22.

clergy stated that enforcement of Article 27 would take away church means of subsistence. Serious hardships were predicted if private charitable and educational institutions were suddenly closed since nearly all such foundations were owned by the Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup>

By refusing to establish or prohibit any religion, Article 130 granted religious toleration in fact. Marriage was to be a civil prerogative only. No church could claim a juridical or legal personality. Ministers were subject to all the laws and were denied the right to vote or to hold public office. They could neither criticize fundamental Mexican law nor assemble for political purposes. No religious publications could comment on political matters, nor could a political party with any religious support be formed. Within their boundaries, state legislatures could determine the maximum number of priests, all of which were to be native Mexicans. Church edifices were placed under strict government control. Infractions of Article 130 could not be tried before a jury.<sup>28</sup> The Episcopate

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<sup>27</sup>Niemeyer, p. 39.

<sup>28</sup>Branch, pp. 103-107.

desired the separation of church and state, but asked that a legal personality not be denied to the church. In order to carry out its religious function, the clergy demanded unrestricted management of its hierarchy and ownership of church buildings, residences, and schools.<sup>29</sup>

The religious articles clearly expressed the anti-clerical attitude of the revolutionaries. If enforced, the laws would subject the Catholic Church in Mexico to controls that appeared destructive to individual liberties and perhaps to the church itself. To such charges the revolutionaries replied that Mexico had been threatened with destruction on several occasions by the very institution that must now be made responsive, by force if necessary, to the realities of the Revolution.

Individual clerics echoed the Episcopate's denunciation of the religious laws. An outspoken conservative, Bishop of Huejutla José de Jesús Manrique y Zarate published a pastoral letter on March 10 vehemently condemning the 1917 charter. Entitled "Viva Cristo Rey!", it carried church-state differences beyond Articles 3, 5, 24, 27, and 130 by extending "our reprobation and anathema to each and every one of the

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<sup>29</sup>Balderrama, I, 22-24.

laws, to each and every one of the precepts violative of Divine Right, Natural Right, and the Sacrosanct Dispositions of the Church."<sup>30</sup> Bishop Manrique was arrested on May 14 and taken to Pachuca, where he delivered a strong speech reiterating his views. "Viva Cristo Rey!" later became the rallying cry of the Catholic militants whom the Callistas dubbed "Cristeros."<sup>31</sup>

As the church rapidly increased its propaganda, the Calles government began to respond to the clerical challenge. Calles told a reporter for the New York Herald-Tribune that public disobedience by Catholic lay organizations, the Episcopacy, and the Archbishop of Mexico made state retaliation necessary.<sup>32</sup> Beginning on February 11, the Calles government announced a series of increasingly stringent religious regulations. The Attorney General announced that all religious property not yet nationalized was to be seized as provided for in the constitution. At the same time, orders were

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<sup>30</sup>Quoted in Gruening, p. 276.

<sup>31</sup>Balderrama, I, 51-53.

<sup>32</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 478.

issued for the arrest and deportation of all foreign priests. Enforcement was generally prompt and thorough.<sup>33</sup>

Only isolated disturbances occurred as a result of the deportations. A riot took place in Mexico City when government agents interrupted a Mass at the Church of the Sacred Family and arrested two priests alleged to be Spaniards. This led to a mob demonstration in front of Adalberto Tejeda's office. Prominent society women were observed taking part in the riot, in which two people were killed and sixteen were injured.<sup>34</sup> Church lay groups protested government interference in the demonstration and the subsequent closing of the Church of the Sacred Family. The Knights of Columbus, the Union of Mexican Catholic Dames, CNCT, ACJM, and the Liga stated that the demonstrators were mostly women defending freedom of conscience and religion. The faithful were urged to observe mourning in their homes and businesses.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Foreign Priests Deported from Mexico," Current History, XXIV (March, 1936), 116.

<sup>34</sup>Quirk, pp. 256-257.

<sup>35</sup>Toro, p. 464.

Despite such scattered incidents, by the fall of 1926, 183 foreign clerics had been expelled of which 91 were Spaniards.<sup>36</sup> Calles defended the deportations by saying that "all the waste of Rome and of all Europe was sent to our countries [of Latin America]."<sup>37</sup>

Simultaneously with the nationalization of remaining religious properties and the expulsion of foreign priests, all asylums, convents, and primary schools were closed where religious instruction was given. Monks and friars were removed from the convents and orphans being cared for in church institutions were made wards of the state.<sup>38</sup> By September, 73 convents, 129 schools affiliated with convents, and 118 orphan asylums had been closed.<sup>39</sup> Private schools permitted to remain open had to submit to strict government controls. On February 26 the Secretary of Public Instruction ordered all private schools to register with the Ministry

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>37</sup>Quoted in Mecham, Church and State, pp. 482-483.

<sup>38</sup>Balderrama, I, 40.

<sup>39</sup>Toro, pp. 455-458.

within sixty days or be closed. Private primary schools could continue to function only if their curriculum and staff were entirely secular.<sup>40</sup>

The following month brought more specific prohibitions on religious teaching in primary schools. A commission was established to examine the positions of church and state in regard to education. Commission members included three from the Department of Education, one from the Catholic primary schools, one from non-Catholic, private primary schools, and one nonvoting member chosen by the Catholic colegios. Their report mirrored the views of the majority of the voting members, although minority opinions were noted. The majority recommended that: (1) no school space be provided for religious services, (2) no school should have any affiliation with a temple or chapel, (3) "decoration, paintings, stamps, sculpture, or objects of a religious nature" should be prohibited, (4) no minister should instruct in the primary schools, (5) the Secretary of Public Instruction should close any schools violating the laws on lay education.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 483.

<sup>41</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 359.

Religious laws passed in some of the states in 1926 exceeded those of the federal government in anti-clerical severity. While conservative Catholic areas such as Jalisco and Puebla permitted 250 and 256 priests, respectively, the more anticlerical states in the north as well as Campeche and Tabasco nearly legislated priests out of existence.<sup>42</sup> In early 1926, an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 priests were ministering in Mexico. A year later only a few hundred remained.<sup>43</sup> Anticlericalism in Tabasco reached extreme proportions during the administration of Tomás Garido. An indication of his views was apparent in his choice of names for his sons: Lenin, Lucifer, and Satan. The six priests permitted in Tabasco had to be over forty and were ordered to marry as "an effort to legitimatize the existing children."<sup>44</sup>

Further increasing the church-state turmoil, the Vatican blundered when it sent a new Apostolic Delegate to Mexico in March. Although the Holy See knew of the prohibition on foreign priests, George Caruana, a Maltese by birth but a naturalized American citizen, was

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 368-369.

<sup>43</sup>Review of Reviews, LXXIV (September, 1926), 229.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 354.

appointed to the post. Calles suspected that the appointment of an American was a Vatican attempt to involve the United States Department of State in an internal Mexican problem. Calles ordered an investigation to determine how a foreign cleric could have entered the country. Caruana was expelled on May 10, accused of telling border officials he was a Protestant theologian entering Mexico as a tourist.<sup>45</sup>

Government enforcement of the religious laws from February until July had provoked only scattered incidents from Mexican Catholics. Catholics seemed unsure just how far the state intended to go in its response to the church campaign. This uncertainty ended when Calles decreed a penal code which provided severe penalties for infractions of the religious laws.

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<sup>45</sup>Lippmann, pp. 190-191.

CHAPTER IV  
THE PENAL CODE, BOYCOTT, AND SUSPENSION  
OF RELIGIOUS SERVICES

That the Mexican government intended to enforce the religious laws with punitive measures became clear on June 21, 1926, when President Calles decreed the "Ley Reformando El Código Penal." The revised code was first published in the Mexico City press on July 3, and was to take effect on August 1.<sup>1</sup> The code reaffirmed the existing religious laws, providing fines and/or imprisonment for a cleric or any other person involved in their violation.<sup>2</sup>

Clerical reaction to the penal code was vehement but divided. Although the clergy unanimously condemned the religious laws, the prelates differed on a tactical approach toward them. Some favored open rebellion or an economic boycott. Others urged passive resistance or prayer. Still others hoped constitutional means of redress would secure amendments to the religious

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<sup>1</sup>Balderrama, I, 61.

<sup>2</sup>Calles, Mexico Before the World, pp. 133-140.

articles. A majority in the Episcopate initially favored a waiting policy of silence, as had been advised by the Vatican.<sup>3</sup>

The clerical group led by Archbishop Mora continued to urge that a peaceful settlement be reached in the dispute. They refused to endorse an economic boycott proposed by the Liga and supported by some of the more conservative clerics. Although Mora's group had the support of the Vatican, its position was somewhat weakened by the age and poor health of the archbishop.<sup>4</sup>

A second group, although differing only slightly with the Mora group, was led by Bishop Pascual Díaz. The Díaz faction unofficially endorsed Liga plans for a boycott, but did not advocate more violent solutions to the conflict. Although the position of the Díaz group was aided somewhat by Mora's debility and the assumption that Díaz was his probable successor, a minus factor was the continuing refusal by the Pope to approve or tacitly endorse an economic boycott.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Lara y Torres, pp. 270-276; Lippmann, p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>Balderrama, I, 134, 162.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 162-163.

A third group of clerics, backed by militant Catholic laymen, did not look with disfavor upon a violent solution to the dispute. Leaders of this faction included Archbishop Orozco y Jiménez of Guadalajara, Bishop Miguel de la Mora of San Luís Potosí, Bishop Manrique y Zarate of Huejutla, and Bishop Lara y Torres of Tacámbaro. The latter prelate maintained an extensive correspondence with a high Liga official throughout the Cristero rebellion in which he castigated the apathy of Mexican Catholics and praised those who were willing to die for their faith. Within church councils, members of this conservative clerical group were also outspoken in their opinions. They urged a policy of no compromise and demanded state guarantees of constitutional reforms, maintaining these opinions up to the time of the church-state agreement in 1929.<sup>6</sup>

As July progressed, Catholic clerical and lay groups began proposing various means of opposing state hostility. At a bishops' meeting on July 11, a decision was reached to suspend religious services if contrary orders were not received from the Vatican. Shortly thereafter, papal approval for the suspension of worship

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<sup>6</sup>Lara y Torres, pp. 270-276, 283.

was received.<sup>7</sup> The Liga, with the unofficial sanction of some of the clergy, drew up plans for an economic boycott.<sup>8</sup>

The increased clerical distress was reflected in the stepped-up exodus of nuns and priests after the penal code was published. Many had been teaching and preaching in violation of the constitution and would be subject to arrest under the penal code. By the middle of July, 150 nuns were ready to leave the country from Vera Cruz and another 55 entered the United States at Laredo.<sup>9</sup>

A supplementary decree to the penal code was issued on July 21 in which all ministers were ordered to register with the civil authorities by August 1. In the government view, since religious properties belonged to the nation, the state had a right to know who was using them. The Catholic position was that registration of priests would lead to state disapproval of ministers at will, or approval of clerics not endorsed by the

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<sup>7</sup>Lippmann, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup>Balderrama, I, 63; Lara y Torres, pp. 206-207.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "The Church and State Conflict in Mexico," Current History, XXIV (September, 1926), 834.

hierarchy. The registration of priests and the penal code as a whole became the most serious points of dispute between church and state.<sup>10</sup>

In retaliation for the government order concerning the registration of priests, the Liga announced that an economic boycott would begin on August 1. All Catholics were to boycott government schools, first-class streetcars, theaters, movies, promenades, public or private meetings, and communication services such as mail, cable, or telegraph. Nonessential food and clothing were not to be purchased and private vehicles were to be used sparingly. Bank deposits were to be withdrawn and public utility bills were not to be paid. If these measures were widely supported by Mexican Catholics, Mexico's economy would be paralyzed.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the clerical group led by Archbishop Mora decided to proceed with the suspension of public worship. A collective pastoral letter to this effect was published on July 25, announcing that after July 31 all services requiring the intervention of a priest would be suspended. Church buildings, however, would remain

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<sup>10</sup>Mecham, Church and State, pp. 486-488.

<sup>11</sup>Balderrama, I, 95.

open; moreover, owing to church discipline, public worship would be suspended throughout Mexico. Before leaving the churches, priests baptized, married, confessed, and held communion for thousands. Mora fainted from exhaustion as the deadline neared. The faithful knelt both inside and outside the churches to receive the blessing of the departing priests.<sup>12</sup> On August 1, 1926, for the first time since the Spanish conquest, no religious services requiring a priest were held in Mexico.<sup>13</sup>

As the priests proceeded to leave the churches, Secretary of Gobernación Tejeda ordered the edifices placed under the control of state-appointed Juntas de Vecinos. The Juntas were to be composed of ten laymen, as provided for in Article 130 of the constitution. Junta members were to demand detailed inventories from departing clerics and maintain order in the churches. Evidently several days elapsed between the exit of the priests and the entry of the Juntas; in the interim,

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<sup>12</sup>Ernesto Galarza, The Roman Catholic Church as a Factor in the Political and Social History of Mexico (Sacramento: The Capital Press, 1928), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup>Hackett, "The Church and State Conflict in Mexico," p. 837.

valuable objects disappeared from some of the churches. Otherwise, the tasks of the Juntas were largely routine.<sup>14</sup>

Mexicans appeared to accept the suspension with relative calm. An American who visited three large churches in Mexico City on August 1 found worshippers coming and going as usual. Only the absence of priests inside and the presence of military guards outside indicated that anything was amiss.<sup>15</sup> A Callista who visited five large churches in the capital the same day found no less than 200 worshippers in any of them. In most cases a lay woman conducted a service, complete with choral participation. Although the priests had left the churches, their services were not denied to Catholics who could afford them. Masses were said in hundreds of private homes and priests baptized, married, and ministered to the dying daily.<sup>16</sup>

Religious apathy and clerical disunity resulted in a nearly complete failure of the economic boycott.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Pérez Lugo, pp. 389-391.

<sup>15</sup>Hackett, "The Church and State Conflict in Mexico," p. 837.

<sup>16</sup>Galarza, pp. 168-170.

<sup>17</sup>Meléndez, p. 189.

Of no consequence in larger commercial centers, the boycott had only limited success in scattered, rural areas. Although the government ridiculed the boycott, Liga leaders were arrested for their part in it and were released on bail. Liga propaganda grew increasingly bitter, attacking laymen and clerics alike for their apathetic and even "treasonous" attitude. Despite such intransigence, the Liga failed to revive the boycott.<sup>18</sup>

Although most Mexicans acknowledged that the religious dispute was having little effect on the people, it was in some cases exaggerated abroad. Particularly in the United States, the church-state dispute was magnified by some out of ignorance, and by others for ulterior motives. American oil men with Mexican holdings generally believed their property rights would be upheld if a conservative regime replaced the Calles government. Some Mexican and American Catholics believed that the government would abrogate the religious laws if the United States pressured the Mexican government to do so. Both groups were vehement in their protests against the religious laws in the American press and to the United States Department of State.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Balderrama, I, 96.

<sup>19</sup>Foreign Relations, 1927, I, 356-363.

Catholic propaganda published in the United States emanated from both clerical and lay groups such as the Knights of Columbus. Some Catholic support for the Mexican church was to be expected since propagandists were able to show that the Mexican clergy were being denied freedom of speech, conscience, education, and religion. Mexican legal restrictions on religious groups were much more stringent than in the United States. The Mexican clergy could not vote, hold public office, or voice political opinions. Their numbers could be restricted by the states. Churches could neither own property nor administer most educational or charitable institutions. By attacking the Calles government on liberal grounds, American Catholics hoped to attract other liberal elements to their side.<sup>20</sup>

One of the earliest American Catholic protests was a resolution offered in the House of Representatives on February 17, 1926 by Congressman John J. Boylan of New York:

Resolved, That the Secretary of State is hereby authorized and directed, if not incompatible with the public interest, to furnish to the House of Representatives at the earliest possible

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<sup>20</sup>Niemeyer, p. 33.

date such data and information as he may have in respect to the expulsion from Mexico of citizens of the United States on account of their religious belief.<sup>21</sup>

Only a handful of Americans were actually deported from Mexico, the most sensational expulsion being that of Apostolic Delegate Caruana. American Ambassador James R. Sheffield successfully interceded with the Calles government on several occasions to prevent deportations of American clergy. Most American ministers in Mexico submitted to the religious laws and were not molested.<sup>22</sup>

An accusation frequently encountered in the Catholic propaganda was that the Mexican government was bolshevist. John A. Reagan of the Knights of Columbus wrote a letter circulated in the United States in which he called Calles "Señor Bolshevist."<sup>23</sup> Secretary of State Kellogg was perhaps unduly concerned with a possible bolshevist menace in Mexico. His statement presented to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations entitled "Bolshevik Aims and Policies in Mexico and Latin America" was sent to American diplomats throughout

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<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Foreign Relations, 1926, II, 702-703.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Galarza, pp. 173-174.

Latin America.<sup>24</sup> Under-secretary of State Robert E. Old leaked a statement to the press that alleged sympathy and perhaps an understanding between Moscow and Mexico City. Old refused to permit his name or that of the State Department to be used. Only the Associated Press carried the story and American public opinion was generally skeptical.<sup>25</sup> Calles indirectly replied to the Old statement, saying: "We are interested in Sovietism as a system of government only in its philosophical and humanitarian aspects."<sup>26</sup>

Mexican government propaganda published in the United States effectively explained the government position in the church-state dispute. Callista pamphlets and letters emanated mainly from the Mexican Consulate in New York headed by a brother of the President, and from the Mexican Chamber of Commerce headed by José Miguel Bejarano.<sup>27</sup> These publications emphasized that the dispute was an internal political matter in which foreign mediation was not desired. Denying that a religious

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<sup>24</sup>Foreign Relations, 1927, I, 356-363.

<sup>25</sup>Gruening, pp. 612-613.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Calles, Mexico Before the World, pp. 35-36.

<sup>27</sup>Quirk, p. 277.

problem even existed, the Callista position was that when the Catholic Church agreed to submit to the fundamental laws, the dispute would be at an end. Government propaganda contrasted the Catholic Church as it functioned in Mexico and in the United States. They discussed the history of the church in Mexico, concluding that, based on the past, current government action against the church was justified.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the lack of religious services and the announced excommunication of any Mexican supporting the government position, Mexican support for Calles was evidenced by the thousands of messages and statements that reached the presidential palace from labor unions, Congress, and individuals such as Obregón.<sup>29</sup> On the first day of the priests' departure, a parade sponsored by CROM took place in the capital. Organized to publicly demonstrate Callista support, 30,000 to 50,000 Mexicans marched past the President and his Cabinet in front of the Municipal Palace. The marchers included labor delegations, holders of communal lands (ejid-atarios), Masons, government employees, public school

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<sup>28</sup>Balderrama, I, 284-286.

<sup>29</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 490.

teachers, and faculty and students of the National University.<sup>30</sup>

The parade illustrated the continuing liaison between Calles and labor, which generally shared the anticlericalism of the President. CROM had long resented the competitive program of Catholic Social Action and sporadic violence between CNCT and CROM members had occurred over the years.<sup>31</sup> A resolution by CROM in early 1927 expressed labor's support for the Calles regime:

Be it known that the Government of the Republic has given its support and stood by the workers' movement in all of its battles and crucial vicissitudes, otherwise it would have failed in the accomplishment of its legal duties. The proletariat of the Federal District declares emphatically that it will make any sacrifice which may be necessary to sustain the Government of the Federation, and to stop the continuation of attacks on the rights and interests of the organized labor movement.<sup>32</sup>

The CROM unit in the Federal District sponsored a series of debates between government and Liga

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<sup>30</sup>Hackett, "The Church and State Conflict in Mexico," p. 838.

<sup>31</sup>Galarza, p. 171.

<sup>32</sup>Quoted in William English Walling, The Mexican Question (New York: Robins Press, 1927), p. 106.

supporters in the Teatro Esperanza Iris within days after the suspension of religious services. The crowds attracted to the theater filled the building and overflowed into the street. Most of those attending opposed the church position.<sup>33</sup> Secretary of Public Instruction José Manuel Puig Casauranc opened the debates on August 2. His oratorical opponent, who presented his speech before a hostile audience, was René Capistrán Garza, vice-president of the Liga. Puig Casauranc stated that free, lay, public education must be provided throughout Mexico in order to teach patriotism and respect for the fundamental laws. Capistrán Garza insisted upon the maintenance of parochial primary schools in order to teach Christian values and sacrifices. Although the Liga leader had intimated that the government schools were anti-Christian, Puig Casauranc pointed out that the aims of Mexican public education were consistent with accepted Christian teachings.<sup>34</sup>

Two other well-known orators took the rostrum on the night of August 4. Secretary of Agriculture Luís L. León opposed Manuel Herrera Lasso on "The Revolutionary

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<sup>33</sup> Quirk, p. 262.

<sup>34</sup> Balderrama, II, 69-84.

Movement and Mexican Clericalism." León discussed the historical precedents for the religious laws, stating that they were based on the Laws of Reform and were justified by the history of the Catholic Church in Mexico. Herrera Lasso's reply deviated from the announced topic and was poorly received by the partisan audience.<sup>35</sup>

The third debate was really no contest at all. When the topic of "Dogma Before Reason and Science" was announced, the Liga declined to send a representative because it did not wish to discuss dogma.<sup>36</sup> Juan Rico, a labor official in the capital, delivered the pro-government speech. Rico's oration presented the views of the extreme anticlericals and probably was not representative of the religious beliefs of most Mexicans. He denied the fundamental legitimacy of Roman Catholicism; namely, the conception, resurrection, transfiguration, mass, purgatory, hell, limbo, celibacy, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the infallibility of the Pope. True Christian beliefs, according to Rico, should be personal and should seek terrestrial redemption. Rico

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 92-112.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., I, 147-148.

credited Calles by his strong stand against the Catholic Church with having saved the Revolution.<sup>37</sup>

The final debate pitted Luí's N. Morones, Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor and the leader of CROM, against law professor Luí's Mier y Terán. Mier y Terán chose the topic "The Catholic Church has Protected and [now] Protects the Interests of the Labor Cause, Especially in Mexico." Although the position of both men was well-known, the theater was filled and 1,000 spectators listened outside in a hard rain.<sup>38</sup>

Obregón added his unconditional support for Calles to the strong position of Mexican labor. Although ostensibly retired, he remained a hero-figure to most Mexicans and was considered the probable successor to President Calles. Obregón issued a statement in August to the effect that the "rebellion" set off by the church was deliberately timed to coincide with the Mexican-American oil dispute.<sup>39</sup> A few months later, he reiterated a statement made in 1923 that the government

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., II, 119-121.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>39</sup>Pérez Lugo, pp. 391-392.

position was essentially Christian, calling Christ "the greatest Socialist the world has ever known."<sup>40</sup>

If the clergy thought that the suspension of religious services would soon cause the state to capitulate, their hope had proved unfounded. The prelates then initiated a legalistic approach. Petitions from the Episcopate were sent to Calles and to the Congress, stating that the clergy was exercising its right of petition as guaranteed in the 1857 and 1917 constitutions and the Reform Laws of 1873.<sup>41</sup> The prelates addressed their first petition to Calles on August 16, in which the clerics endorsed the separation of church and state, and liberty of conscience, worship, instruction, association, and press. Committing the Catholic Church in Mexico to these rights was contrary to what a rich and powerful church had advocated for centuries before its social, political, and economic privileges began to decline. Although the church was probably in no position to make demands, the petition to the President asked that its juridical personality be restored and that the religious laws and penal code be amended. In

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Balderrama, I, 296-276.

<sup>41</sup>Calles, Mexico Before the World, pp. 199-201.

the interim, the penal code should be suspended. The clergy stated that they were being accused of rebellion solely because public worship had ceased. Calles accepted the Episcopate's petition, but said he could not amend the laws since he was in agreement with them. He suggested that the prelates petition Congress, the state legislatures, or the federal courts. In his reply to the clerical petition, Calles pointed out an inconsistency in the church position: the church was asking for complete separation of church and state and yet demanded restoration of its legal personality. He accused the church of rebellion not because of the suspension of worship but because of its illegal opposition to the fundamental laws.<sup>42</sup>

Congress received a memorial from the Episcopate in September that was similar in content to the document presented earlier to Calles.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Calles, however, the Chamber of Deputies voted 171-1 not to receive the petition. In their opinion, the clergy had lost its citizenship by its failure to observe the constitution and only citizens might exercise the right

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 199-201, 127-131.

<sup>43</sup>Balderrama, II, 434-440.

of petition.<sup>44</sup> Rejection of the memorial by the Chamber of Deputies ended clerical attempts to petition for the amendment of the religious laws. The conservative faction of the clergy continued to insist that any church-state settlement should be based upon the memorial that had been rejected by Congress.<sup>45</sup>

Although the states had earlier placed limits on the number of clergy in their areas, no such action had been initiated by the federal government in the Federal District or the federal territories of Baja California and Quintana Roo. Calles proposed such limitations to Congress on September 27. Accompanying his message was a religious census of the capital which showed that out of a total of 906,063 inhabitants, 863,631 were Catholics, 12,423 were Protestants, 16,961 were of "unknown" or other faiths, and 13,048 expressed no religious belief. Before the suspension of public worship, 289 Catholic priests had been serving in the capital. Under Calles' proposal which was accepted by Congress, each religious sect could have 90 ministers in the Federal District, 18 in Baja California, and 3

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<sup>44</sup>Toro, pp. 445-447.

<sup>45</sup>Lara y Torres, pp. 270-276, 283.

in Quintana Roo. All ministers would have to register with the civil authorities.<sup>46</sup>

Congress approved another bill submitted by Calles in November which contained religious regulations concerning Article 130. Non-Mexican clerics would be permitted to minister to foreign nationals in Mexico for six years, while native Mexicans were being trained to replace them. Civil marriages were obligatory, and if a religious ceremony were performed, it must be reported. Religious services by laymen and private masses were forbidden. The latter two regulations were designed to end clandestine services that had become commonplace since the suspension of public worship.<sup>47</sup>

As 1926 drew to a close, church and state were deadlocked in unyielding positions. The economic boycott had failed and the suspension of public worship had caused little concern. Successful government enforcement of the religious laws had exposed the weakness of the Catholic Church as it had not been exposed before. Yet the hierarchy could not agree on a compromise. Both

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<sup>46</sup>Balderrama, II, 145-147.

<sup>47</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 260.

fanatical Catholics and extreme anticlericals were determined not to let the dispute be settled without a fight. The new year would bring scattered, brutal, and senseless violence, and the conflict would last into 1929.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CRISTERO REBELLION, 1926-1929

After the failure of the economic boycott and the rebuff of clerical efforts to petition for amendment of the religious laws, militant Catholics grew increasingly hostile toward the Calles government. Armed bands of Cristeros formed in some rural areas and scattered violence began to occur in the fall of 1926. In November Under-Secretary of War Pina stated that the rebels posed no real military problem. Dismissing them as fanatics or bandits, Pina said the Cristeros numbered no more than thirty men per band.<sup>1</sup> Even with as few as thirty men, however, acts of sabotage could be committed. Owing to this, and to a Yaqui Indian rebellion that also began in the fall, the War Department ordered strong military escorts placed on all freight and passenger trains. In Sonora, where the Yaqui uprising was centered, 100 men armed with machine guns were placed in the front and rear of all trains. Throughout Mexico suspicious persons

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Mexico and Central America," Current History, XXV (December, 1926), 438.

could be arrested and detained until their innocence was proved. Anyone caught destroying railroad tracks could be summarily shot.<sup>2</sup>

After the opening of the new year, Cristero violence rapidly increased. Rebel leaders had decided that having failed to secure the abrogation of the religious laws by pacific means, violence was the only recourse.<sup>3</sup> Guerrilla bands were expanded in numbers and in the extent of their operations. Besides attacking trains, the rebels robbed auto passengers, burned government schools, and held up small towns, occasionally killing some of the inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> By February, government military chiefs reported Cristero operations near the cities of México, Saltillo, Guadalajara, Torreón, Irapuato, Toluca, Cuernavaca, Tampico, Mazatlán, Morelia, Chihuahua, Vera Cruz, Oaxaca, Durango, Colima, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, Querétaro, and Morelia.<sup>5</sup>

Leading the Cristero forces was the Liga through its Comité Directivo, while the ACJM provided many

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<sup>2</sup>New York Times, November 15, 1926, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Degollado Guízar, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup>New York Times, January 5, 1927, p. 3; January 12, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Gruening, p. 278.

Cristero recruits. Most of the rebel leaders and some of the troops were members of a secret society called the Unión de Católicas Mexicanos or "U." The society, founded about 1920 in Jalisco and Michoacán, aimed "to restore the reign of Christ" by "all legal and possible means." Its leader was a priest whom all members were sworn to obey even unto death.<sup>6</sup>

Mexicans who joined the Cristero movement came from many groups. The rebels included upper class Mexicans, disgruntled army men, priests, small indigenous farmers, and resident hacienda workers (acasillados). The small landowners were not interested in the ejido program of the government which had attracted many landless agrarians to the side of the Revolution. Living in remote areas, the small farmers were superstitious, ignorant, and priest-ridden. The acasillados were considered so subservient to the hacendados that they had been specifically excluded from the ejido program by federal and state governments. It was felt that they lacked the initiative to adjust to a communal society. When the haciendas on which the acasillados lived were divided into ejidos, the hacienda workers were easily

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<sup>6</sup>Pope Pius XI ordered both the "U" and the ACJM disbanded in 1929. Degollado Guízar, pp. 11-25.

armed and aroused by priests and hacendados.<sup>7</sup> Some Cristeros were devout Catholics who sincerely believed they were fighting for a just cause.<sup>8</sup> Others saw the rebellion as a convenient lever of political expediency. A Cristero victory seemed the one hope of overturning the Calles-Obregón oligarchy which might have lasted for decades had Obregón not been assassinated in 1928. Added to the fanatics and opportunists was the usual professional bandit element that associated itself with any rebel movement.<sup>9</sup>

On January 9, 1927, Liga Vice-President René Capistrán Garza pronounced at El Paso, Texas, declaring himself the provisional president of Mexico. José P. Gandara, a young El Paso businessman and a Knight of Columbus, was named military chief of the revolutionary government. Gandara stated that neither the Catholic Church nor former rebel Adolfo de la Huerta were involved in the revolt. General Raymón López, the federal commander at Ciudad Juárez, promised a quick

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<sup>7</sup>Weyl, pp. 78-79.

<sup>8</sup>Degollado Guízar, p. 213.

<sup>9</sup>Gruening, pp. 325-328.

execution for Capistrán Garza and Gandara if they were apprehended.<sup>10</sup>

The Liga plan for the revolutionary government was published at the time of the pronouncement. Both the Reform Laws and the Constitution of 1917 would be abrogated and Mexico would be governed under the moderate Constitution of 1857. An interim government would be run by a triumverate consisting of one representative each from the Catholics, the Maderista liberals, and the Porfiristas. The permanent government would probably support the program of Catholic Social Action.<sup>11</sup> The revolt was viewed by many as both naive and premature. Only twenty-eight years old and backed by no appreciable military force, Capistrán Garza gave Calles another excuse to crack down on the church. Both Capistrán Garza and Gandara were foredoomed to failure. The former was relieved of his Liga office in May by his own associates.<sup>12</sup> The latter was sentenced to two years in a United States federal prison and fined \$1,000 for his

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<sup>10</sup>New York Times, January 11, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup>Quirk, p. 149.

<sup>12</sup>Ríus Facius, p. 239.

illegal border activities.<sup>13</sup> Although the Callistas publicly continued to link the Episcopacy with the Capistrán Garza group, their private view was that the real anti-Calles leaders might be de la Huerta or Raoul Madero.<sup>14</sup>

In retaliation for the Capistrán Garza pronouncement, Bishop Pascual Díaz, Archbishop Ruiz y Flores of Michoacán, and Bishops Jesús Echavarría of Saltillo, Miguel de la Mora of San Luís Potosí, Nicolas Corona of Papantla, and Ignacio Valdespeno of Ayutla were arrested. All were later released except Bishop Díaz. He was deported, accused of being the intellectual leader of the rebellion. Owing to the poor health of Archbishop Mora, Díaz had been acting as virtual head of the Catholic Church in Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

Later the same month the government ordered all Catholic priests to report to the Secretary of Gobernación before February 10 or be declared outlaws. Both priests and prelates then had to register daily at the Ministry.<sup>16</sup> Kept under special surveillance was

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<sup>13</sup>Foreign Relations, 1927, III, 247.

<sup>14</sup>New York Times, January 13, 1927, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. January 11, 1927, pp. 1, 11.

<sup>16</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 493.

Archbishop Orozco y Jiménez of Guadalajara, "a medieval type of bishop-knight who feels as much at home astride a charger brandishing a Springfield as on his archiepiscopal dias benignly waving the mitre."<sup>17</sup>

As Cristero violence grew, Mexican-American relations deteriorated simultaneously over the continuing question of oil. A new Petroleum Law had become effective on January 1, which partially implemented Article 27 of the constitution. Actually a compromise, the Petroleum Law stated that owners of subsoil deposits who had acquired these rights prior to May 1, 1917 would have to exchange their permanent titles for fifty year leases. Subsoil rights secured after that date would be seized by the Mexican government.<sup>18</sup> Of the 147 oil companies operating in Mexico in December of 1926, 125 submitted to the provisions of the new law and 22 refused.<sup>19</sup>

Initial American reaction to the Petroleum Law was expressed by Secretary of State Kellogg who called it retroactive to the 1917 constitution as well as

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<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Galarza, p. 170.

<sup>18</sup>Foreign Relations, 1926, II, 643-653.

<sup>19</sup>Calles, Mexico Before the World, pp. 184-185.

confiscatory. He accused the Calles government of violating the Bucareli agreements which had led to United States recognition of the Obregón government in 1923. Stating that concessions confirmed titles and could be renewed or extended, the Calles government concluded that the use of concessions was neither retroactive nor confiscatory. To the dismay of the United States Department of State, the Calles administration did not regard the Bucareli discussions as binding agreements.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the Petroleum Law, the Calles government did not attempt its immediate enforcement. Following a suggestion by the recently appointed Ambassador to Mexico, Dwight W. Morrow, appeals were permitted before the Mexican judiciary. In 1927 the Mexican Petroleum Company, which was American owned, filed suit to waive the new law on its drilling permits. The Supreme Court upheld the suit on appeal, stating that Article 27 was never intended to be retroactive "in spirit or in letter." President Calles then asked Congress to amend or repeal the law. As it was duly amended on December 27, 1927, all subsoil rights acquired prior to May 1, 1917 were confirmed.<sup>21</sup> The Calles government saved face

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<sup>20</sup>Foreign Relations, 1926, II, 643-653.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 1928, III, 292-293.

because the law had been amended through internal legal processes and not because of diplomatic pressure. Improvement in Mexican-American relations which followed lessened Cristero chances for official or unofficial American aid.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time that Mexico and the United States were arguing the merits of the Petroleum Law, the Mexican Liga made concerted attempts to secure funds from American Catholics. Liga Vice-President Capistrán Garza, carrying credentials from both the Liga and Archbishop Mora, solicited financial support from American Catholic clerics. According to the Liga, the response of the American clergy barely covered Capistrán Garza's expenses. While in San Antonio, Texas, he conferred with William F. Buckley, a director of the Pantepec Oil Company which had Mexican oil interests. Buckley arranged for the Liga leader to meet Nicolas Brady, a New York multimillionaire. Brady was a Knight of St. Gregory, a Duke of the Pontifical Court, and according to a clerical source, was "much addicted to the Church and the Holy Apostolic See." Brady suggested that he might donate \$500,000 to the Catholic cause in Mexico, but before committing himself, Brady asked the opinion of Bishop

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<sup>22</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, pp. 322-333.

Díaz who had recently been deported to the United States. Díaz maintained his position that the hierarchy should remain aloof from any open rebellion, which Brady's proposed donation would probably have financed. Although the attitude of Díaz perhaps contributed to divisions among the Mexican clergy, he may have prevented an all-out civil war.<sup>23</sup>

Failing to secure Brady's \$500,000, the Liga and the Episcopate were just as unsuccessful in obtaining aid from the United States government. President Coolidge believed that the church-state conflict was an internal Mexican matter unless American lives and property were threatened, and he refused to lift an embargo on arms.<sup>24</sup> Coolidge was reiterating the sentiments of most Americans, many of whom were still suspicious enough of "big business" to distrust the activities of oil executives who favored the position of the Mexican church.<sup>25</sup> In addition, some Protestants were outspoken in their demands for noninterference in

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<sup>23</sup>Rius Facius, pp. 137-142, 236-237.

<sup>24</sup>Foreign Relations, 1927, III, 639.

<sup>25</sup>Balderrama, I, 62.

the dispute.<sup>26</sup> The American Federation of Labor, which maintained close contacts with CROM, issued a statement of support for Calles.<sup>27</sup> Anti-Catholic prejudice in the United States was also a factor, becoming most noticeable in the 1928 presidential campaign of Alfred E. Smith.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Episcopacy denied any active role in the Cristero rebellion, the hierarchy did not publicly condemn the rebels. Individual prelates offered their blessing and sympathy to the Cristeros. Some priests actually joined the rebel forces, usually serving as chaplains.<sup>29</sup> A few were known to be Cristero leaders.<sup>30</sup> A pastoral letter issued in Rome by exiled Archbishop of Durango Gonzales y Valencia heightened government accusations of church participation in the rebellion:

Now that many Catholics have appealed to the recourse of arms, and ask advice from their Prelate, advice which we cannot refuse when asked for by our sons, we believe it to be our

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<sup>26</sup>George A. Miller, "What Is the Matter With Mexico," Dearborn Independent, January 15, 1927, pp. 2, 23-24.

<sup>27</sup>Balderrama, I, 294-297.

<sup>28</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 371.

<sup>29</sup>Lara y Torres, pp. 247-248.

<sup>30</sup>Gruening, pp. 280-281; Ríus Facius, p. 245.

Pastoral duty to face the question fully . . . .  
We did not provoke this armed movement. But now that that movement exists, pacific means having been exhausted, to our Catholic sons raised in arms in defense of their social and religious rights, . . . and after having consulted the wisest theologians of Rome, we ought to say to you: be at peace in your consciences and receive our benedictions.<sup>31</sup>

The Cristeros were strongest in Michoacán, Jalisco, and Colima. A Jesuit who was imprisoned by both Callistas and Cristeros described Cristero activity in the Cerro Grande of Colima. Forced by federal troops to go among the Cristeros to tell them they must surrender, Father Lara stated that the Cristero forces included young men from rich families in Guadalajara and Colima, old men who were used to carrying supplies, wives and children of the soldiers, and boys as young as fourteen. Although the rebels were subject to frequent air attacks and were pursued by ground forces vastly superior in numbers, they had a great advantage in their familiarity with the harsh, mountainous terrain. Federal troops sometimes became lost in the maze of canyons and arroyos, occasionally dying of starvation or having to eat their burros. Father Lara estimated that there were 6,000 Cristeros in the

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<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 370.

Cerro Grande whom he said were allied with rebels in Jalisco and other parts of Colima.<sup>32</sup>

Cruelty by both sides was especially evident in Los Altos region of Jalisco, where the Cristero rebellion was the most widespread. Cristero General Goroztieta, besides employing the usual custom of shooting prisoners, burned some captured federal troops alive and released others to spread the word of his cruelty.<sup>33</sup> Acting with similar fury, federal troops arrested and summarily shot several prominent Jaliscan Catholics in April of 1927.<sup>34</sup> Catholic prisoners of both sexes were sent to penal colonies on the Islas Marias.<sup>35</sup>

Because of the profitable employment that the Cristero rebellion provided for some army officers, it was not allowed to die a natural death. Mexico in 1927 still had too many generals: for an army of 53,000 troops, there were 158 generals compared with 68 generals for 120,000 troops in the United States. General Ferreira,

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<sup>32</sup>J. Andrés Lara, Prisionero de Callistas y Cristeros (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1956), pp. 78-97.

<sup>33</sup>Meléndez, p. 246.

<sup>34</sup>Gruening, pp. 325-327.

<sup>35</sup>Meléndez, p. 189.

the federal commander in Los Altos, deliberately kept the rebellion alive for monetary gain. Most of Los Altos was declared a military zone and its 60,000 people were forced into garrison towns. Federal troops harvested peasant crops, and the proceeds went to the generals. Urban residents could either pay blackmail or be court-martialed for treason.<sup>36</sup>

Jalisco was also the scene of the most infamous episode of the rebellion. On April 19 the Guadalajara-Mexico City passenger train was attacked by 400 rebels and unlike previous Cristero attacks, this incident resulted in great loss of life. After derailing the train near Limón, the Cristeros attacked the military escort of 51 men. The guards then spread themselves through the passenger cars. Bullets ripped through the coaches, killing and injuring some of the terrified civilians. When nearly all the federal troops had been killed, the Cristeros ordered the surviving passengers out of the coaches, which were then burned. Some of the wounded who were unable to crawl from the cars were

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<sup>36</sup>Weyl, p. 4.

burned alive. About 100 passengers were killed and \$200,000 pesos were stolen from the baggage car.<sup>37</sup>

Survivors reaching Mexico City identified their attackers as Cristeros. They said the rebels wore small pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe and shouted "Viva Cristo Rey!". Observed among the rebels were three priests, a commissioner of the Liga, and a professional bandit called "Catorce."<sup>38</sup> A Catholic source later named Father Reyes Vega as the local Cristero leader.<sup>39</sup> Although the Liga denied taking part in the massacre, its bulletin of April 30 stated that the incident had "touched the national soul." Accusing the government of distortion and censorship, the Liga defended attacks on passenger trains as a defensive measure that was harsh, but necessary and lawful.<sup>40</sup>

The incident was still another invitation for government retaliation against the church. On April 20,

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<sup>37</sup>New York Times, April 21, 1927, pp. 1-2; April 22, 1927, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Manufacturing Ill Will Between the United States and Mexico," Current History, XXVI (June, 1927), 472.

<sup>39</sup>Ríus Facius, p. 245.

<sup>40</sup>Meléndez, pp. 244-245.

a government report stated that the rebels were

a group of bandits organized by the Catholic Episcopate . . . who wish to be the spiritual directors of the nation and take over the power . . . . It is an exact repetition of the proceedings which the Catholic Church has used from the Inquisition down to the present day.<sup>41</sup>

Archbishops and bishops still remaining in Mexico were ordered expelled on April 22. Archbishop Mora had declared shortly before that "we have aided no revolution. We have plotted no revolution, but we do claim that the Catholics of Mexico have the right to fight for their rights by peaceful means first and with arms in an extremity."<sup>42</sup> Secretary of Gobernación Tejeda replied: "That statement constitutes rebellion against the Government and you will be deported from the country." Mora countered: "The present Government is not a legal Government. The world knows how it came to power and history will tell the story of its fall."<sup>43</sup>

The massacre at Limón marked the high point of the rebellion. The killing of innocent passengers probably did more harm than good to the Cristero cause.

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<sup>41</sup>Quoted in Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 360.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Hackett, "Manufacturing Ill Will," pp. 472-473.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

By July, the rebellion was confined to minor incidents in isolated locales. A renewal of rebel activity in the fall was short-lived, and at the same time the Yaqui rebellion was put down.<sup>44</sup> Calles felt confident enough of victory to decree pardons for all Catholics accused of sedition. They were released but kept under surveillance and arrested again if they continued rebellious activities.<sup>45</sup>

In September, the President's annual message to Congress noted the near cessation of Cristero operations. The government victory had not been without cost, however. Gone was the carefully balanced budget of the previous year. From January to September of 1927, there was a deficit of \$6,000,000 pesos, and the estimated deficit for the remainder of the year was set at \$19,000,000. Part of this, however, was due to steadily decreasing oil revenues. The message also revealed that the continuing nationalization of church

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<sup>44</sup>Gruening, p. 281.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Wilson Hackett, "Mexican Government Frees Imprisoned Catholics," Current History, XXVI (September, 1927), 958.

property had netted the state some 225 rural and 1,443 urban properties valued at \$21,000,000 pesos, as well as credits and legacies worth \$1,000,000. In his message, Calles further stated that priests who registered and otherwise obeyed the laws could exercise their profession. Few priests registered, however, and those who did were ostracized by the Catholic clergy as schismatics.<sup>46</sup>

Although the Cristero threat had received substantial publicity abroad, the rebels were never more than roving bands of guerrilla fighters. At no time were they strong enough to openly engage government forces, but used sabotage and hit-and-run tactics instead. Logistics and communications between Cristero groups functioned sporadically, being seriously hampered by the harsh terrain and a continuing lack of money, arms, and good leadership.<sup>47</sup> Despite the rebellion, planned decreases in the Mexican army had not been postponed. By 1927, the army had 52,000 men

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<sup>46</sup> Calles, Mexico Before the World, pp. 174-177, 188.

<sup>47</sup> Degollado Guízar, pp. 262-263.

compared with 100,000 in 1922. The greatest damage done by the Cristeros to the Mexican government was financial loss both at home and abroad.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Meléndez, p. 189; Quirk, p. 266.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHURCH-STATE MODUS VIVENDI

With the Cristero rebellion largely suppressed by the fall of 1927, a church-state settlement appeared possible. Both sides, however, publicly continued to maintain unalterable positions. The Episcopate insisted on amendments to the religious laws and refused to permit the registration of priests. Conservative clerical elements demanded that the laws be amended before a settlement and that the state provide adequate guarantees that the amended laws would be upheld.<sup>1</sup> Continuing to maintain their oft-stated position, the Callistas said that the conflict would end when the church submitted to fundamental Mexican law.<sup>2</sup>

Despite such public attitudes, a church-state agreement might have been possible as early as three weeks after the suspension of religious services. On August 21, 1926, Calles met with Pascual Díaz and Ruiz y Flores. The prelates denied any church participation

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<sup>1</sup>Lara y Torres, pp. 270-276, 283.

<sup>2</sup>Quirk, p. 282.

in rebellious acts and Calles referred to the registration of priests as a purely administrative matter. The next day the two clerics told the press, "The interview with the President was indeed satisfactory."<sup>3</sup> A small group of extreme anticlericals who were highly placed in the government then urged Calles not to agree to a settlement. This group, as well as the conservative clergy, helped delay a settlement for nearly three years.<sup>4</sup> After Calles made a veiled repudiation of the August meeting, the Episcopate declared: "The situation continues the same as before the conference with President Calles. Services will not be resumed."<sup>5</sup> Although the meeting had failed to produce agreement, its general tone was similar to the settlement finally reached in 1929.

Another factor that delayed a settlement was the position of Álvaro Obregón. When he announced his candidacy for president in June of 1927, Obregón referred to "Rome and Wall Street" as headquarters for the Callista

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Lippmann, p. 192.

<sup>4</sup>Foreign Relations, 1928, III, 326-334.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Lippmann, p. 192.

enemies and stated that he did not favor any change in the government policy toward the church. The following year, however, the rumor that he might then favor a settlement aided in the resumption of negotiations.<sup>6</sup> As an anticlerical and revolutionary leader, Obregón had long been a likely target for assassins. On November 13 he escaped injury when bombs exploded near his car in Mexico City. A Catholic priest and two members of the Liga were executed as the instigators of the plot. When Obregón was assassinated eight months later, the fact that his murder was the work of a Catholic fanatic further inflamed anticlerical sentiments.<sup>7</sup>

With church and state deadlocked in 1927, President Coolidge announced the appointment of Dwight W. Morrow as the new Ambassador to Mexico. Ambassador Sheffield, who was regarded by many Mexicans as an inept tool of foreign oil interests, had resigned in June.<sup>8</sup> Morrow's former employer, J. P. Morgan and Company, was

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<sup>6</sup>Meléndez, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Other Events in Mexico," Current History, XXVII (January, 1928), 583.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Flagg Bemis, The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy, XI, Robert H. Ferrell (ed.); Frank B. Kellogg, 1925-1929; Henry L. Stimson, 1929-1933 (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), 29-32.

not likely to endear him to the Mexican people. A comment in the Mexico City press, "After Morrow come the Marines," perhaps summarized Mexican opinion at the time his appointment was announced. Meantime, Mexican bonds advanced "sensationally" on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>9</sup>

When Morrow arrived in Mexico City in October of 1927, he soon demonstrated an interest and respect for the Mexican nation and its people. An indefatigable turista, Morrow traveled through much of Mexico where:

His small size, his untidy clothes, the utter collapse of hat and trousers, the curious contrast between the slow deliberation of his walking stick and the upturned scuffle of his little shoes, the general zest and bustle which he created around him, the gentle wistfulness of those deep blue eyes, his utter absence of self-consciousness, aroused delighted feelings such as are evoked by the spectacle of a happy and bright-mannered child.<sup>10</sup>

Morrow's personal brand of diplomacy paid rich dividends. Anticipating future cultural exchange programs, Morrow arranged for Will Rogers and Charles

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<sup>9</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Mexican Presidential Campaign Precipitates Revolution," Current History, XXVII (November, 1927), 274.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Harold Nicolson, Dwight Morrow (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1935), p. 310.

Lindbergh to visit Mexico, where Morrow used them as goodwill ambassadors. Morrow and Rogers were invited on an inspection tour of northern Mexico by President Calles, who told the press that he considered Morrow his "personal friend." When Lindbergh flew from Washington to Mexico City in twenty-seven hours, he received the excited acclaim of thousands of Mexicans.<sup>11</sup>

Morrow's mission to Mexico was regarded by both Europeans and Latin Americans as a prospectus for future United States policy toward her southern neighbors. Europeans waited to see how the United States would apply the Monroe Doctrine and Latin Americans watched to see if Marines or negotiations would be used. Insisting on peaceful cooperation between Mexico and the United States, Morrow believed that the two nations must maintain a mutual respect for the sovereignty of each, even though one was far stronger than the other. Morrow supported the belief of Elihu Root that no government should serve as a collection agency for private debts incurred abroad. Since Calles could demonstrate to Mexican Catholics that

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<sup>11</sup>Charles Wilson Hackett, "Success of Lindbergh's Good-Will Mission to Mexico," Current History, XXVII (February, 1928), 727-728.

they could expect no succor from the United States, he, too, was anxious to improve Mexican-American relations.<sup>12</sup>

If Morrow were to cement friendly Mexican-American relations, the church-state dispute had to be resolved. With a religious conflict in progress, other pressing issues between the two countries could not be negotiated. American lives and property were endangered and most Americans wanted the controversy settled. Although Morrow's role in the church-state settlement brought threats upon his life and charges of meddling from both sides, he undertook to mediate the dispute.<sup>13</sup>

Morrow had begun to explore avenues of church-state rapproachment even before assuming his post in Mexico City. In early October, Cardinal Patrick Joseph Hayes and Judge Morgan J. O'Brien of New York suggested to Morrow that he meet with Father John J. Burke, General Secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. At this meeting, Morrow agreed to ask Calles to meet with Burke. Delays ensued, however, because the

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<sup>12</sup>Stanley R. Ross, "Dwight W. Morrow, Ambassador to Mexico," The Americas, XIV (January, 1958), 278.

<sup>13</sup>Lara y Torres, pp. 239-246.

American press published reports of a possible meeting and Calles was subjected to the pressures of the extreme anticlericals. Burke and Morrow persevered and on April 4, 1928, Burke and Calles held a secret meeting at Vera Cruz where they discussed the church-state problem for almost an entire day. The two men established an immediate rapport, perhaps because Calles was conferring with a Catholic of liberal views. In a subsequent exchange of letters, they reached an understanding that might have settled the conflict if Burke's superiors had ratified the letters.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, ten of the twenty-nine Mexican bishops met in San Antonio, Texas, in late April. With conciliation apparently favored by most, the bishops unanimously stated their willingness to return to their posts on conditions agreed upon by the Holy See. Leading the bishops at San Antonio was Archbishop Ruiz y Flores, who became the senior Mexican prelate with the death of Archbishop Mora the same month.<sup>15</sup>

When Burke's superiors did not ratify the Burke-Calles letters, Burke said that more assurances were

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<sup>14</sup>Foreign Relations, 1928, III, 326-334.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

needed from President Calles. Burke asked Morrow to ascertain if Calles would meet with Ruiz and himself. Although Calles strongly objected at first to conferring with Ruiz, he agreed to a secret meeting that was held in a private home near the capital in mid-May. With Morrow also present, Calles and Ruiz agreed to exchange friendly letters that could later be published. Papal approval could hopefully be received by telegram and the churches would then reopen.<sup>16</sup>

The Vatican, instead of cabling its approval, ordered Ruiz to proceed to Rome. Although Burke had been instrumental in the negotiations from the start, he was not invited to accompany the archbishop. This was unfortunate because Calles liked Burke and distrusted Ruiz. When the press learned of Ruiz's trip, Catholic militants urged the Pope not to agree to a settlement with Calles because president-elect Obregón might be more conciliatory. Calles was again urged by anticlerical extremists not to settle the dispute. Calles, himself, was fearful lest clerical reactionaries assume high positions in the hierarchy when the prelates returned to Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

While Ruiz was conferring in the Vatican, Obregón was murdered on July 17 while attending a labor-sponsored fiesta. Calles blamed "direct clerical action" for his death. The assassin, José de León Toral, was a religious fanatic who had been instigated by a nun acting independently of any Catholic authority. León Toral was executed and Mother Concepción was sentenced to twenty years in prison after a public trial. With anticlerical emotions again aroused, no Mexican government could have settled the church-state conflict in 1928 without falling from power.<sup>18</sup>

When Archbishop Ruiz returned in November with papal instructions, Calles was reluctant to accept the Vatican conditions. Although the papal views were moderate, Calles stood on the understandings in the Burke-Calles letters written after the meeting at Vera Cruz. Calles urged Morrow to submit the problem to the incoming Interim President Emilio Portes Gil.<sup>19</sup>

Portes Gil was a rather colorless figure who had the power of Calles behind him.<sup>20</sup> Calles evidently

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>20</sup>Manuel Gamio, "Emilio Portes Gil--Mexico's New President," Current History, XXIX (March, 1929), 981-982.

wanted a church-state settlement, but not in his name. Portes Gil stated on May 1, 1929 that no religious group would be persecuted and that religious services could be resumed any time that the clergy agreed to obey the laws.<sup>21</sup> The next day Archbishop Ruiz carefully stated that "the religious conflict was not motivated by any cause which may not be corrected by men of sincere good will."<sup>22</sup> A week later, Portes Gil declared his willingness to negotiate with Ruiz. Ruiz and Díaz conferred with Portes Gil in June with Morrow again acting as mediator. Assisting the negotiators were Father Edmund Walsh of Georgetown University and a Chilean named Cruchaga, who used the Chilean diplomatic code to communicate with the Vatican. This time it was the clerics who stood on the results of the Burke-Calles letters. Since this was in accord with the position of Calles, Portes Gil stated that his government was in agreement with the views of the ex-president.<sup>23</sup>

Based upon this mutual understanding, a preliminary accord was signed on June 17 and was approved

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<sup>21</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 495.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Lippmann, pp. 203-204.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

by the Holy See four days later. Although the actual settlement was verbal, Portes Gil released a signed statement to the press summarizing its essence. The agreement, as summarized by Portes Gil, was in three parts. The first section upheld the registration of priests, but promised that no priest would be accepted by the state who had not been approved by the hierarchy. Religious instruction would continue to be prohibited in both public and private schools, but could be given freely within church confines. Lastly, the right of petition was upheld for any religious sect. The wording of the Portes Gil statement was designed to reassure Catholics that the government intended to take no action against the church that was not provided for by law.<sup>24</sup>

With the church-state conflict hopefully settled, the Catholic Church resumed religious services on June 27, 1929. Both clerics and Cristeros accepted the settlement and the rebel forces disbanded.<sup>25</sup> Shortly thereafter, Díaz was installed as Archbishop of Mexico and Ruiz became Apostolic Delegate and senior member of the Episcopate.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Mecham, Church and State, p. 496.

<sup>25</sup>Degollado Guízar, pp. 268-270.

<sup>26</sup>Callcott, Liberalism in Mexico, p. 378.

Although the church-state modus vivendi had halted the Cristero rebellion and reopened the churches, the agreement was only a truce and was regarded as such by the Liga and by some of the clergy. Since the modus vivendi of 1929 dealt only with specific grievances, no settlement had been reached on the fundamental issues between the two institutions. Whether or not the church would be accepted by the men of the Revolution or whether the church would accept the religious laws as a fait accompli was not resolved. Most revolutionaries still identified the Catholic Church with reaction and foreign intervention. The Catholic clergy remained only somewhat less fearful that the Revolution intended to destroy the Catholic Church in Mexico.<sup>27</sup>

Three years of conflict had hastened the exposure of the disunity and decline of the Catholic Church. As church power had rather steadily weakened since La Reforma, the allegiance of most Mexicans toward the church had deteriorated. Lower class Mexicans, who had traditionally taken more interest in local saints than in pastoral letters, found that they no longer had to pay for ministerial services during the suspension of

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<sup>27</sup>Quirk, pp. 283-284.

worship. In areas where land reform had been most successful, religious indifference was greatest and the priests were missed the least. Many upper class Mexicans, who had previously formed the basis for clerical power and influence, had also become religiously indifferent. In the future, the church could no longer depend upon the support of a wealthy, oligarchic class.<sup>28</sup>

Although no fundamental church-state settlement was reached in 1929, the modus vivendi was clearly a victory for the state. The church had learned that it could not combat an authoritarian government that had popular and military support. Although the conflict flared again within a few years, the last serious threat to the Revolution had been brought under the control of the state.

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<sup>28</sup>Gruening, pp. 285-286.

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