

Dateline Mexico by Hugo López Ochoa

Political storm over Pope's visit

John Paul II's call for Mexico to reform the anti-clerical portions of its Constitution is causing an uproar.

The visit of Pope John Paul II to Mexico May 6-14 left in its wake a trail of factional battles in various political parties and within the government. In a May 9 address in the city of Chihuahua, as *EIR* reported last week, he proposed a reform of Mexico's 1917 Constitution, to guarantee the parents' "natural right" to "freely educate their children in accordance with their convictions." Mexico's Constitution prohibits religious education, even in private schools.

Sources close to the Mexican presidency confirmed to this author that Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari reacted "hysterically," since the Pope had departed from the pre-arranged program and forced Salinas to formally define the government's position vis-à-vis the demands of Mexico's Catholic hierarchy for such a constitutional reform, and for reestablishment of relations with the Vatican.

On May 10, Government Secretary Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios gave the official line in stating that no change in the Constitution was contemplated, although the government would maintain an approach of rapprochement with the Church. Dozens of newspaper editorials backed this position, and on May 14, the day of John Paul II's departure from Mexico, the official daily *El Nacional* emphasized in its editorial that during his tour, the Pontiff had "various times failed to respect the distances between political and religious matters, consolidated as historic conquests of the Mexican people in the Magna Carta. He particularly used a defiant tone of

voice during his visit to Chihuahua, in demanding religious education."

John Paul II performed at least one miracle during his visit to Mexico by causing agreement between such fierce enemies as Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, leader of the leftist opposition PRD party, and the Salinas government. Cárdenas said the Pope's statements were "belligerent," and an attempt to "revive hatreds that had been dissolving." The National College of Masonic Rites published ads in the press consisting of misplaced diatribes in defense of "national freedom and sovereignty," and the Popular Socialist Party (PPS) reached the extreme of demanding the Pope's expulsion from the country, "for violating the Constitution."

During his Mexican pilgrimage, the Pope demonstrated a great familiarity both with the history and culture of the country, and with its current disastrous economic situation. He attacked not only the "liberal capitalism" promoted by the Salinas administration, but also offered a dramatic picture of the catastrophic effects of this inhuman economic model on Mexico's national economy: a collapse in buying power, mass unemployment, extreme poverty, corruption, and drugs.

The rallying cry of his Mexican tour was "Mexico Always Faithful," a reference to the Cristero War of 1926-28. That civil war was triggered by President Plutarco Elías Calles's efforts to destroy the Catholic Church, through constitutional prohibitions imposed by a faction associated with the financial and banking friends of

U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt.

The great irony of the 1917 Constitution is that its general principles, above all those which refer to protection of workers' rights, definition of strategic natural resources as the property of the nation, and the "dirigist" role of the state in guiding economic development, are all fully congruent with the social doctrine of the Catholic Church—today known as "the Third Way," meaning that it is neither Marxist collectivism, nor liberal capitalism.

Those principles, as they appear in the Mexican Constitution, in fact reflect the influence of the 1891 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII over the Catholic majorities of all the sides that fought in the Mexican Revolution. Those principles are what made Mexico, for a time, a shining example of the "Third Way" for Ibero-America and the entire Third World, and are precisely the principles which the Salinas de Gortari government has tossed into the dustbin, in order to comply with the liberal economic prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the creditor banks.

The Pope was perfectly aware of the reactions his statements would provoke, but he also knew he would find tremendous support within the ranks of the ruling PRI party. On May 10, small business confederation leader Jesús González Gortazar, also a PRI state deputy from Jalisco, came out in favor of the proposed reforms, and suggested that the Congress would support President Salinas were he to undertake to implement them.

The president of the Episcopal Commission on Social Communication, Gebaro Alamilla, was right when he said on May 11 that "as of this second visit of Pope John Paul II, the waters have parted. Here, history divides in two."