

Andean Report by Javier Almarino

Religious war in Colombia

President Gaviria has launched a war on the Catholic Church designed to de-Christianize Colombia.

With every intention of eliminating Christian morality and replacing it with a "lay ethic," the César Gaviria government—with the help of institutions recently created under the new masonic constitution of 1991—has launched war against the Catholic Church in Colombia. The church is simultaneously under violent attack by narco-terrorists who continue to operate with impunity.

Priests, seminarians, and church collaborators in the southern departments of Sucre and Bolívar were forced to abandon their parishes in early February in the face of threats against their lives by terrorists of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group. In the department of Huila, the pews and confessionals of the church in one town were burned on Feb. 10.

The legal assault entered a new phase on Feb. 5, when the Constitutional Court—a creation of Gaviria's new Constitution—declared that the Concordat, the international treaty that has guided relations between the Vatican and the Colombian government for more than a century, is now null and void. The ruling not only determined that more than one-half of the international agreement is unconstitutional, but also established a new doctrine that prohibits the Catholic Church from, among other things, proselytizing among Indians or blacks, founding or running primary, secondary, or university-level centers of education, and having a military vicar's office.

The court defended this prohibi-

tion by claiming that Gaviria's Constitution orders the state to protect "the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian nation," and that if the church participates in the education of youth, it is violating "freedom of worship."

Reactions to the court's decision have been varied. Several legal experts have expressed concern because it is one of the rare times that Colombia has unilaterally declared an international treaty unconstitutional. If this precedent were applied to existing treaties with Nicaragua or Venezuela, it could revive dangerous territorial conflicts. Others, such as Carlos Corsi Otorola, senator for the Lay Movement for Colombia, insist that the court decision "directly violates the human rights of Catholics and discriminates against Colombians who profess our faith, making them second-class citizens by not being able—among other things—to establish schools nor offer moral nor religious teaching."

"It is a lie to maintain that the Indians and black communities are atheist or pagan," insisted Msgr. Darío Castrillón, bishop of Bucaramanga. "I, personally, have baptized broad segments of these populations," and they have expressed support for the church. Polls show that 92% of all Colombians are Catholic.

Although the reactions of the bishops have been measured, mouthpieces for the country's ruling elite are threatening to denounce the church for provoking religious war. Enrique Santos Calderón, stockhold-

er in the daily *El Tiempo* and member of the Santos family, which has long believed that it owns Colombia, demanded in a Feb. 14 column that the church should not be "belligerent" or threaten to form a Catholic party, since it would then be accused of "inflaming" the population and provoking a war of "religious passions."

Although President Gaviria has publicly expressed his desire for relations between the Vatican and the Colombian government to be guided by a concordat, his real intentions can be understood with a look at history. Gaviria considers himself a member of the so-called Radical Olympus, which was a political party of the last century, made up of usurious bankers and merchants who took that name because they believed themselves to be gods like those of Mount Olympus.

The Radical Olympians sponsored the physical elimination of priests and believers and the expropriation of church property, to prevent the country from remaining Catholic. At the same time, they took up the banner of free trade and the free market, and physically eliminated groups of proto-industrial artisans which existed in the country then.

Gaviria's constitution is identical to those which were imposed by the Radicals in 1853, 1858, and 1863. Those constitutions, not surprisingly, led to 70 civil wars in a short period of time, until Rafael Nuñez succeeded in defeating the Radical Olympians both politically and militarily. Together with Miguel Antonio Caro, Nuñez wrote the Constitution of 1886 and signed the Concordat with the Church.

Today, the Radical Olympus thinks it has finally defeated Nuñez. As the daily *El Espectador* editorialized Feb. 8, "The radical liberals, in their happily secular Olympus, have won the battle 100 years later."