

Church-state relations take

In recent months a series of statements and actions from sectors of the Catholic Church in Mexico have brought historically tense Church-State relations in that nation into the most serious crisis in decades.

The points of confrontation chosen by preponderant factions of the clergy center on Church reentry into active political life, which is banned by the Mexican Constitution, and on the Mexican Church's opposition to the government's progressive development policy, aimed at using Mexico's rapidly-growing oil revenues to fund large-scale industrialization and urban-centered social improvement.

The political reactivation of the Church coincides with increasing direct and indirect pressures on Mexican oil from Washington and London geopolitical factions. Nationalist commentators in Mexico have been quick to suggest there may be a link.

Of particular note is the insistence on the part of the Anglo-American interests who prefer to see Mexico's oil coopted into a North American strategic reserve, that Mexico must curb its development strategy or "suffer the fate of Iran." Mexico may not be able to reconcile its oil-spurred "modern" sector with its more backward peasant layers, goes this rationale for destabilization; the result could be "mass opposition movements." Novelist and intelligence stringer Carlos Fuentes, in a February exposition of this scenario, declared that the role of the Ayatollah Khomeini's "Moslem Revival" in Mexico would be assumed by a Church-led upsurge.

Underscoring their conscious commitment to this strategy, top Anglo-American spooks from the Yale Divinity School, Washington's Middle East Institute, and a mysterious outfit called "Probe International," convoked a two-day conference in New York June 14-15 on the theme "Religion, Politics and U.S. Business abroad." The two central topics at this single conference: the Muslim Revival and Church-State conflict in Latin America.

Cristero Rebellion

The model for the kind of Church-abetted destabilization of Mexico's progressive secular government now underway is the late-1920's counterrevolutionary movement known as the Cristero Rebellion.

In December 1925, less than a month after then Mexican President Calles moved to assert government

regulatory power over U.S. and British oil interests based on Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, this rebellion, under the slogan "Viva Cristo Rey!" was unleashed in the more backward areas of the country.

It was only "resolved" three bloody years later through the offices of U.S. ambassador and J. P. Morgan partner Dwight Morrow, who first negotiated a partial rollback of the oil legislation and then succeeded in "mediating" a solution to the rebellion. Morrow's activities were closely supervised by the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

Church-State separation

The Cristero Rebellion took place against a history of over 100 years of bitter Church-State dispute. In 1857, after decades of struggle by republican forces against a tenacious Church-landowner alliance, the Reform Constitution of Benito Juarez decreed the abolition of Church property held in mortmain and broke the Church control over education.

These measures ensuring firm separation of Church and State were further strengthened in the 1917 Constitution, a product of the 1910-1917 Revolution.

Under the clear language of the 1917 Constitution, the State has full power over the Church in temporal affairs. But the Church has corresponding freedom in religious matters.

In the constructive balance thus struck, the Mexican state has undertaken with notable success to build up industry and other productive forces in a fashion that is fully congruent with the concerns for economic development stated in Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

Now, upsetting this constructive balance, "left" church factions proclaiming the "theology of liberation" have joined forces with the most "right-wing" oligarchical church factions in seeking renewed, direct political participation for the Church. Their common front extends equally to attacks on the government's development programs for "displacing" the peasant and "neglecting" backward peasant agriculture.

Their room for action is increased by a two-year old program of political reform that is nearing its first test during congressional elections the first week in July. Three parties—the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), the Socialist Workers Party (PST) and the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM)—are newly qualified to join

a nosedive in Mexico

with four previously enfranchised parties in the balloting.

The predominant form of unconstitutional political interference has been to seize the pretext of PCM participation to warn voters not to vote "communist." In numerous areas of the country, clergy are giving signals to vote PDM—the reactionary party which is the direct continuation of the Cristero networks of the late 1920s.

—*Timothy Rush*

What the Mexican Church is saying and doing

Jan. 25-Feb. 11, 1979. Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM III) meets in the Mexican city of Puebla. Mexico City archbishop Ernesto Corripio Ahumada calls for priests to have the same political rights as the common citizen, an explicit violation of Article 130 of the Mexican Constitution which prohibits the participation of the Church in political affairs.

Mid-April. Corripio Ahumada expresses concern for the "human rights" of peasants in the Southeastern oil state of Tabasco. These are peasants, manipulated by grasping local politicians, who are attempting to stop national development efforts in order to preserve backward subsistence agriculture.

May 7. The bishops of Papantla, Veracruz, San Andres Tuxtla and Tuxpan charge that the "immoral" Mexican politico-economic system must be reformed, to eliminate such "aristocratic" unions as the oilworkers. Says one: "We bishops have the duty of denouncing an oil boom which ... only favors an elite."

Week of May 14. The Mexican Episcopal Conference (CEM) meets in Tlaxcala, east of Mexico City, to discuss implementation of the CELAM resolutions. The secretary general of the conference, Alfredo Torres Romero, provides the keynote theme: "He who does not participate in politics is a sinner. We must have the moral authority to tell the people which road to take."

Mazatlan bishop Miguel Garcia Franco: "Mexican Catholics cannot and should not vote for the Mexican

Communist Party in the upcoming elections, as this act would be in

will I tell anyone for whom to vote; I will only caution my congregation for whom not to vote."

Tlaxcala bishop Luis y Munive Escobar, referring to the PCM: "I am not going to tell my congregation to take poison." At the Tlaxcala conference, Hermenegildo Ramirez Sanchez, bishop of Huautla in the state of Oaxaca, endorses the use of hallucinogen drugs among Indian populations "for they are seeking by such means to move closer to God."

May 15. Hermosillo archbishop Carlos Quintero Arce calls on the Church to "evangelize within the Mexican Armed Forces."

June 1. Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, newly appointed cardinal by John Paul II, officiates at a special mass organized by the Mexican branch of the infamous Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (Knights of Malta). Corripio appropriately preaches that "pain is a blessing of God," in keeping with the Order's role in fomenting barbaric civil strife in such nations as Lebanon. In open activity unprecedented in Mexican political memory, the Order distributes signed leaflets announcing the mass throughout Mexico City.

June 2-10. Lavish funds from the Church-linked Banco de Comercio and other right-wing sources finance a media blitz around Pope John Paul II's trip to Poland. When the Pope leads a congregation in the singing in Polish of a church hymn which was adopted by the Cristeros as their anthem, right-wing Mexican TV commentators lament the fact that few Mexicans now remember the words.

June 7. Francisco Ramirez Reza, official spokesman for the Mexican episcopate, for the first time openly calls for modifying the Mexican Constitution to allow renewed Church political activity. This is a question of "human rights" he asserts. "If so many modifications have been made in the Constitution to adjust it to the political and economic necessities of the country, it is necessary to think about the right of the representatives of the Church."