

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### Papal interdiction in Mexico

*The Pope's countermand to the Chihuahua bishops' strike may well have averted a new Cristero Rebellion.*

Catholic churches in the northern border state of Chihuahua were open and celebrating mass on Sunday, July 20, which would not have been the case but for an unprecedented order direct from Pope John Paul II against using the Eucharist as a political weapon.

Archbishop of Chihuahua Adalberto Almeida y Merino had announced one week earlier that the churches in his archdiocese would be closed that day in a state-wide protest, along with the opposition National Action Party (PAN), against alleged vote fraud on the part of the Mexican government in local elections July 7. Days before the protest, a telegraphed message direct from the Vatican arrived for Monsignor Almeida, delivered personally by the papal nuncio in Mexico, Monsignor Jeronimo Prigione. Prigione told the press outright: "Monsignor Almeida was asked not to carry out his decision. . . . The Eucharist can never be used as an instrument of pressure for political purposes."

The church closings, together with business shutdowns, street rallies, boycotts, hunger strikes, and other protests organized by the PAN, were to have been the signal for an escalating series of assaults on the Mexican government. Those assaults, coordinated with destabilization pressures from abroad such as those orchestrated by North Carolina Sen. Jesse Helms, intend nothing less than the overthrow of President Miguel de la Madrid's government and republican institutions of Mexico.

Although Archbishop Almeida formally adhered to the papal directive—"in full obedience and communion with the Holy Father"—he nonetheless saw to it that Sunday services were employed to harangue the faithful and agitate against the so-called corruption of the Mexican government. Almeida went so far as to tag onto his statement of "compliance" with the Pope the outrageous claim that John Paul II shared his denunciation of the alleged vote fraud in Chihuahua. He further announced that one of his priests would shortly be dispatched to Rome to "explain" to the Pontiff the state of affairs in Chihuahua.

It was with precisely such lies and provocations instigated by the Church that the Cristero Wars of the late 1920s, organized by the most reactionary layers of Mexican society, were launched against the constitutional government of Mexico. This time, however, timely intervention from the Pope appears to have defused the scenario for violence.

Almeida was by no means alone in his efforts to involve the Church in subversion against the state. A close colleague and supporter of the protest plan was bishop of Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua) Manuel Talamas Camandari, who used the July 20 Sunday services to urge worshippers to go on a hunger strike against the "electoral fraud." Both Almeida and Talamas are avid supporters of the "Theology of Liberation," and during the 1970s backed the terrorist activities of the 23rd of September League in their so-

called response to what Almeida and Talamas dubbed the "institutionalized violence" of the Mexican government.

Another noted spokesman for liberation theology in Mexico, priest Camilo Daniel, took advantage of a July 20 gathering of the PAN-backed umbrella group, the Democratic Electoral Movement, to publicly denounce the countermand from Rome, and to urge the closing of the churches despite it.

The formation of the Democratic Electoral Movement as the intended shock-troops against the ruling PRI party, is a dramatic reminder of the direction things would go if the PAN succeeded in taking power. Among its members are the Nazi-communist PAN itself; the Mexican communist party, PSUM; the neo-Nazi Ancifem (Feminine Human Development); the businessmen's organization Civic Front of Citizen Participation; liberation theologians such as Camilo Daniel, and so forth. It was precisely this Nazi-communist combination that the Mexican population roundly defeated at the polls in Chihuahua July 7.

The Pope's increasingly frequent interventions in "hot spots" across Ibero-America are playing a crucial role in the battle for national sovereignty in countries such as Peru, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico. Exemplary are the recent statements of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (and considered John Paul II's right arm) during his mid-July trip to Peru. Throughout his visit, he came down firmly against the neo-Marxist Theology of Liberation with which Almeida and Talamas are associated, insisting that because "man is made in the image of God," he must therefore be the expression of reason and morality.