

## Dateline Mexico by Hugo López Ochoa

### Catholics clash with 'art' mafia

*The political situation is explosive, as the economic crisis intersects a campaign of desecration against the Christian faith.*

Nearly half a million Catholics marched through the center of Mexico City on Feb. 28, to protest insults to Mexico's two most important symbols: the Virgin of Guadalupe and the national flag. The march was called in response to an infamous "art exposition" held earlier this year at the Mexican Museum of Modern Art (MAM), where the Virgin was displayed with the superimposed face of Marilyn Monroe, and the Mexican flag shown trampled underfoot by American Marines.

The demonstration occurred the same week that Pope John Paul II released his newest encyclical, "On Social Affairs," which pointed to the disastrous, deteriorating economic conditions in which much of the world's population lives, and called for reform of the world financial system. He identified the "structures of sin" which have so undermined Christian belief.

The crisis in Mexico is a dramatic example of what the Pope was talking about. Living standards have plummeted in the past year, and gnostic beliefs, such as those manifested in the MAM "art exposition," find fertile ground.

In an election year, the situation is particularly explosive.

The Catholic mobilization was the largest of its kind in the past six years, and has already won the suspension of the art exposition, the resignation of MAM director José Alberto Manrique, and the closing of another pagan exposition that was being held at the Institute of Visual Arts, in the city of Puebla. The Puebla institute has

been temporarily shut down by the government of Puebla state, to "revise its study plan." The institute's director, a two-bit painter, was fired.

All of these measures were rapidly decreed by President Miguel de la Madrid, in hope of preventing the mass mobilization from triggering a broader revolt against the savage economic measures that have been imposed on Mexico by the International Monetary Fund and foreign creditors.

The Catholic leaders themselves are well aware of the explosiveness of the situation. "The Mexican people can no longer be manipulated," said Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, following the demonstration. On Feb. 22, the Archbishop of the city of Morelia, in his Lenten Message, stressed that "the weight of the present crisis is falling on the poorest." Wages do not even cover basic necessities, he said, and the supposed efforts of the authorities to keep inflation in check "lack credibility."

Monsignor Genaro Alamilla Artega, the auxiliary bishop of Mexico City, warned, "One cannot play with the Mexican people any longer." In reference to the opposition parties' preparations to claim electoral fraud and foment protests in the aftermath of the July general elections, the monsignor stated that "civil disobedience is not immoral, but it should only be resorted to when all avenues of expression have been exhausted or cancelled, and we have not yet reached those extremes."

It is the spirit of the Pope's encyclical, its appeal for dismantling the

"structures of sin," which could lead the Catholic mobilization out of the trap of a futile religious crusade, where certain political forces hope to enclose it. On Feb. 7, Monsignor Alamilla denounced the existence of a "black hand" behind the various scandalous art exhibits, designed to "incite the Catholic majority, which suggests that someone is out to provoke the communities." It would be "lamentable," he added, were a new religious persecution to be launched, like the 1920s "Cristero Wars."

Such a tendency could already be detected in a political cartoon carried by the daily *Novedades* Feb. 29, which presented Mexico's Catholic demonstrators as middle-aged fanatics. *Novedades* is controlled by the mafia of Miguel Alemán, Jr., the son of the former President. Alemán, Jr. also has a monopoly on culture in Mexico, through his movie, radio, and television (Televisa) empire, which is dedicated to disseminating so-called "Aztec fundamentalism"—a gnostic glorification of that gruesome pre-Columbian culture.

Alemán, Jr. also controls key positions within the government, as well as within the ruling PRI party itself. In the latter, Alemán's man is the "leftist" Enrique González Pedrero, director of the Institute of Political, Economic and Social Studies (IEPES). González Pedrero has an iron control over the public education ministry, which authorized the "art" exhibitions.

One of Pedrero's men, Deputy Education Minister Martín Reyes Vaysade, was head of the Communist Party in Mexico City, and is the controller of the "artists" who ran the provocations. Reyes Vaysade is one of the officials whose resignation is being sought by the Catholic protesters.