

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

### Religious conflict in the wings?

*The Salinas de Gortari government wants the Vatican to support its economic model of "savage capitalism."*

On Jan. 10, the archbishop of Yucatán, Manuel Castro Ruíz, publicly warned of the danger that "either through personal or group interests, religion be used as an instrument of power, producing conflict and confrontation." He continued that "by no means can a resurgence of fundamentalism and fanaticism be permitted. We cannot allow ourselves to be seduced by an apparent security which, sooner or later, will end up being shattered."

Coming shortly after the Carlos Salinas de Gortari government reformed Article 130 of the Constitution, granting the Catholic Church official recognition which had been denied it for almost a century, the archbishop's warnings are highly significant, not only for Mexico's past, but also for its present and future. During the 1920s and 1930s, Yucatán, like Tabasco, Campeche, and Chiapas, was torn apart by religious warfare when Garrido Canaval (a.k.a. The Red Scorpion) founded the Socialist Party of the Southeast under the slogan of "annihilating the Catholic Church," with the intention of creating a "new religion."

To what degree the Church participated in the reform is unknown. What is known is that members of Mexican masonry wrote it. Key among them were federal deputy from the ruling PRI party Manuel Jiménez Guzmán, Grand Master of the Orient Lodge, and Guanajuato Deputy Luis Dantón Rodríguez.

Inside the PRI's hierarchy, debate on the reform was reportedly intense.

The chief adviser to the Presidency of the Republic, Joseph Marie Córdova Montoya, was called upon to explain the Executive's motives. Unofficial versions of Joseph Marie Córdova's argument emphasized that the key word was not "recognition," but "control." In exchange for certain "concessions" from the government, the Church would guarantee political control of the largely Catholic population, especially in rural areas, keep the National Action Party (PAN) in line, and give its political support to the Salinas government.

From the standpoint of the government and the Masons, the aim is clear. They want both to have the Vatican's support for their Protestant and utilitarian economic model of "savage capitalism," while ensuring that no moral political opposition to that model arises. At no time during the public discussion of the constitutional reforms has the spiritual recognition of Catholicism, or the sacred supremacy of human life it upholds, been affirmed. In fact, Catholicism is given the same status as other creeds.

On Jan. 1, after celebrating mass at the Basilica of Guadalupe, papal representative Msgr. Jeronimo Prigione told a press conference that the country's bishops "ended 1991 with satisfaction." He urged them to continue "protecting national unity and concord . . . because Mexico is growing and the President has a firm hand, intelligence, and a vision of the future." On the national economic situation, he added, "let's not speak of belt-tightening, we have to be realistic."

Similarly, in his New Year's homily, Mexico's Primate, Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, announced that "the Church will collaborate in governmental actions such as the National Solidarity Program, and calls on Mexicans to back the negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement" with the United States and Canada, "as benefits are expected for Mexican society."

Such assertions from the Church's top leaders can only cause confusion and discouragement among the faithful who, being "realistic," derive few of the "benefits" promised.

On the other hand, in commenting on the Free Trade Agreement, the Church's Social Pastoral Commission, presided over by Archbishop Héctor González Martínez, argued that "Mexico's future is very disconcerting. It is doubtful that our country will resolve its growing social inequalities within the framework of a free market with the United States."

The Church's Commission on the Family, led by Archbishop Norberto Rivera, recently denounced "the anti-natalist campaigns promoted by the health sector and the National Council on Population." They "are criminal, unjust, immoral, and violate human rights," he said. "Instead of helping to eliminate poverty, our politicians and many foreign agencies and governments seek to destroy human life with contraception, sterilization, and abortion."

These contrasting views indicate that no constitutional reform based on positivist law will fool natural law: Human life is sacred. Hence, Archbishop Castro Ruíz's warning to people not to be seduced by an "apparent security." Difficult times for Mexico are yet to come. The Prelate of Yucatán affirmed that "man's dignified battle is against all types of egotism, oppression, hate, and violence."