CALLES, THE CHURCH, AND THE CONSTITUTION:

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE MEXICAN STATE,

1924-1929

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From 1924 to 1929 the Roman Catholic Church and the Mexican State engaged in the crucial stage of a long-time struggle to determine whether the former would be independent of or subordinate to the latter. This thesis analyzes Church-State relations during this five year period and stresses the activities of President Plutarco Elías Calles, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and more fanatic Mexican Catholics.

The study is organized on a chronological basis. The first chapter traces the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico from the colonial period to the 1920's. Plutarco Elías Calles—his early life, his presidential campaign, and his actions against the Church up to 1926—is the focal point of the second chapter. Chapter III discusses the factors behind the clerical withdrawal in the summer of 1926 and the immediate consequences of this act. The early phases of the Cristero Rebellion, the end of Calles' term in office, the assassination of his successor, and the consequent failure of efforts to secure a Church-State accord are considered in
Chapter IV. The final chapter examines the circumstances leading to the resolution of the clerical strike in 1929 and the implications of the Church-State settlement.

Material on the historical background of the Church in Mexico was gathered largely from John Lloyd Mecham's *Church and State in Latin America: A History of Político-Ecclesiastical Relations*, Walter V. Scholes *Mexican Politics during the Juárez Regime*, and Wilfrid H. Callcott's *Liberalism in Mexico, 1857-1929*. The most useful sources on the 1920's were the Mexican newspapers *Excelsior* and *El Universal* and the United States publications *New York Times* and *Current History*. Frank Brandenburg's *The Making of Modern Mexico*, William Weber Johnson's *Heroic Mexico: The Violent Emergence of a Modern Nation* and Charles C. Cumberland's *Mexico: The Struggle for Modernity* were among the more valuable secondary works.

Several relevant documents pertaining to the Church-State conflict were found in volume 2 of *El Clero y El Gobierno de México* by Luis C. Balderrama; in *Mexico Before the World: Public Documents and Addresses of Plutarco Elías Calles*, edited by Robert H. Murray; and in *El Conflicto Religioso de 1926: Sus Orígenes, Su Desarrollo, Su Solución*, by Aguiles P. Moctezuma [pseud.].

The works of José María Carreño, apologist for Archbishop Pascual Díaz y Barreto, contained important material concerning
the activities of this clergyman. The most helpful secondary source on the Cristero Rebellion was Alicia Olivera Sedano's *Aspectos del Conflicto Religioso de 1926 a 1929: Sus Antecedentes y Consecuencias*. Memoirs written by Mexicans who had participated in the Cristero Rebellion or who had actively opposed it provided valuable insights into the mood of the Mexican people at the time. Of these works Jesús Degollado y Guízar's *Memorias de Jesús Degollado Guízar: Ultimo General del Ejército Cristero* and Cristóbal Rodríguez's *La Iglesia Católica y la Rebelión Cristera en México, 1926-1929* are especially deserving of mention. An excellent article, "Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 38(1958): 483-505 provided basic information concerning the resolution of the Church-State conflict in 1929.

This thesis concludes that the Roman Catholic Church from 1924-1929 made a desperate attempt to maintain its independence from the Mexican government, which was determined to enforce the highly anti-clerical Constitution of 1917. When the Mexican people failed to support the clergy's bid for independence, the Roman Catholic hierarchy was forced to admit the superiority of the State over the Church. However, many members of the clergy insisted that this situation was only temporary and that the Church would someday resume its traditional position of...
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By

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

From 1924 to 1929 the government of Mexico and the Roman Catholic Church were engaged in the climactic stage of a struggle to determine which of the two would dominate the other. This Church-State conflict in which the people aligned themselves with the one side or the other was not new in Mexican history; its roots extended back to the days of conquest when the Catholic faith was brought to the New World from Spain. The Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel, faced with the task of conquering and colonizing their newly-discovered lands, relied greatly upon the Roman Catholic Church to aid in establishing in the New World, as in the Old, a government founded upon the principles of "absolutism and orthodoxy." With this transplanting of the Church and its effective utilization as a colonizing agency, the need arose for determining the proper relationship between the Church and State in Spanish America. Although willing to allow the Church its identity as a corporation with special
laws, courts, and privileges, the crown was determined to assert its dominance over that institution. ¹

To attain this position the monarchs brought pressure to bear upon the papacy in Rome, the result being a series of papal bulls granting to the ruling family of Spain a wide degree of control over the church in America. While conceding certain powers to the crown, the Pope imposed certain obligations in return. In May of 1493 Pope Alexander VI at the solicitation of Ferdinand and Isabel granted them title to lands in the Indies and the privilege of structuring the Roman Catholic Church there. In return he entrusted the Catholic monarchs with the mammoth task of converting the natives inhabiting these lands. In 1501 Alexander allowed the crown to collect and expend the tithes and first fruits of the Church in the colonies, but he stipulated that said tithes were to be used as needed to construct churches and missions and to sustain the clergy. Thus, in Spanish America was born a Church-State relationship based upon the Real

¹France V. Scholes, "An Overview of the Colonial Church," in The Roman Catholic Church in Colonial America, ed. by Richard E. Greenleaf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 19-20. (Hereinafter cited as Scholes, "Overview."). In this thesis the word church when written with a capital will refer to the Roman Catholic Church. The word state written with a capital will refer specifically to the government of Mexico.
Patronato concept whereby the Church supported the crown and allowed it certain powers of intervention in ecclesiastical matters in return for the crown's spreading and maintaining of the faith.²

While Alexander VI was the first to grant royal control over the Spanish colonial Church, his successor, Julius II, gave the crown rights of full patronage. In July of 1508 Julius granted Spain's ruling family the right of presentation (or nomination) of the persons to exercise religious offices in the colonies. When combined with the concessions of Alexander VI, this grant enabled the Spanish monarchy to make of the Catholic Church in America a State-Church, highly regulated and supervised. Civil permission was required for the emigration of clergy to the New World, for the appointment of clergy to all sees and benefices, for the building of churches and missions, for the determination of

colonial dioceses, and for the expenditure of most church tithes. Even archbishops and bishops had to take an oath of obedience to the crown. Through exercise of these and other secular controls, the crown came to exert "quasi-pontifical" authority over the Catholic Church in its overseas empire. 3

Paradoxically, while the crown acquired, used, and guarded its control over the Church, that religious institution—due to its crucial role in the colonization process—gained a large measure of power. Catholicism, as the only religion allowed in New Spain, was increasingly the preponderant influence in colonial life. The clergy, who enjoyed numerous special privileges or fueros were among the most active leaders in Spanish America. Their total impact extended far beyond religious matters. The basis for the Church's acquisition of power lay in its economic position, for the Church owned ecclesiastical buildings, had numerous tracts of land, and controlled large sums of money. Estimates are that by the beginning of the nineteenth century the Catholic Church owned approximately one half of the total productive real estate in New Spain. Because the Church

3 Shiels, King and Church, pp. 6, 8, 109-111; Mecham, Church and State, pp. 16-17, 20-22; Scholes, "Overview," p. 22.
held its property in mortmain, its continued ascendancy in
economic matters was assured. Furthermore, the clergy
virtually controlled education during the colonial period
and used that power to insure the continuance of their
privileged positions. All of these factors enabled the
spokesmen of the church to have an authoritative voice in
colonial affairs. Thus, while the Catholic Church was a
State-Church in Mexico that country was at the same time
a Church-State with the clergy exercising a wide latitude
of action in all aspects of Mexican life. 4

This intricate, mutually advantageous relationship
between Church and State functioned with only minor difficulties
until the initiation of the Latin American independence move-
ment in the early nineteenth century. As the Spanish government
was rejected and new governments were established in the
rebellious colonies, the problem of determining who should
exercise the right of patronage was reborn. Two divergent
views appeared in regard to this question. The Canonists or

4. Mecham, Church and State, pp. 29, 38-39; Scholes,
"Overview," p. 25; Frank Brandenburg, The Making of Modern
24-29. (Hereafter cited as Brandenburg, Modern Mexico.) For
an objective discussion of the probable amount of wealth
controlled by the Church during the colonial period see
Clarence Haring's "The Wealth of the Church," in The Roman
Catholic Church in Colonial Latin America, pp. 177-181.
Ultramontanists contended that patronage, because it was essentially spiritual and was specifically given by pontifical concessions to the monarchs of Spain rather than to the Spanish nation as a whole, now reverted to the papacy in Rome. Therefore, before the new governments could exercise the right of patronage, they must obtain new concessions from the Pope. The opposing group, the Regalists, argued that royal patronage was laic in origin and was inherent in temporal sovereignty. Hence, the right of patronage passed naturally from the monarchy of Spain to the newly-established Latin American governments.5

This difference of opinion was to be of utmost significance in Spanish American history; for, if the Canonists were to prevail, the Catholic Church would become largely independent of civil control. Conversely, the success of the Regalists in asserting their views would mean that the Catholic Church would continue in the future, as in the past, to be subject to state control. The Pope, as well as the Mexican hierarchy, was anxious to see the Canonists' position prove triumphant and to regain the power which had been granted to the Spanish

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crown centuries earlier. The high clergy in Mexico insisted that no state control could be exercised over the Catholic Church unless and until the Pope specifically made new concessions to the rebelling colonies. Significantly, the attaining of such concessions was impossible during the first years of the War for Independence, because during this period the papacy and the Mexican episcopate opposed the revolutionary movement. 6

Events of the years 1810-1821 eventually caused the officials of the Church to reverse this stand. The Mexican revolutionaries quickly revealed their loyalty to and reverence for the Catholic Church. During the Chilpancingo Congress which prematurely declared Mexican independence in November of 1813, provisions were made for the celebration of "concordats with the Holy Pontiff for the governance of the Catholic Church, in order that no other religion shall be recognized." 7 The later formulated Constitution of Apatzingán not only specified that Catholicism would enjoy a privileged position in Mexico, but also declared it the only religion that would be allowed in Mexico. Through

6 Farriss, Crown and Clergy, p. 252; Mecham, Church and State, p. 62; Medina Ascencio, El Vaticano, p. xv.

7 Mecham, Church and State, pp. 46-47.
these and similar actions the emancipators won the confidence of the Catholic Church. At the same time the Spanish government after the Colonel Rafael Riego revolt of 1820 passed a series of ultra-liberal, anti-religious measures which frightened and alienated the church hierarchy. Confronted with this situation, the Mexican high clergy in 1821 did a complete about-face and threw their support to the revolutionary cause, then led by Augustín de Iturbide. 8

While allying themselves with the emancipators, the hierarchy did not cease to insist upon the independence of the Church from civil authority. In 1821 the Archbishop of Mexico informed Iturbide in clear and indisputable terms that the Mexican prelates were firmly convinced that Spanish patronage had ended with Mexico's winning of Independence. Consequently, unless new papal concordats provided otherwise, the filling of ecclesiastical offices within the country devolved on the appropriate church official in each diocese. In effect the Mexican archbishop reminded Iturbide that the State, as matters stood in 1821, had no control over Church matters. 9

8 Ibid., pp. 47, 55; Farriss, Crown and Clergy, pp. 249-50.
9 Mecham, Church and State, pp. 342-43.
This declaration of independence by the Catholic Church resulted in a permanent schism within Mexican society during the nineteenth century as two opposing political parties developed. The clergy, the military, and the wealthy landowners united to protect their special privileges and combat any and all efforts to make drastic changes in Mexican life. Later known as the Conservative Party, these groups were determined to maintain a Mexico in which they exerted the dominant influence. The opposition party, the Liberals, desired to better the Mexican situation through enactment of extensive reforms designed to free Mexico from the stranglehold which conservative elements had on her. These two parties, each determined to achieve ascendancy, inevitably came into conflict.

Complicating the liberal-conservative division and closely related to it was the recurring problem of patronage over the Church in Mexico. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 stated that Catholicism was to be the only tolerated religion within the country and had provided for the national exercise of patronage. It therefore challenged the Canonists and refuted the Pope's claim to sovereignty over the Catholic Church in Mexico. In coming years, however, the reality of

10 Ibid., pp. 344-45.
the Mexican situation caused the national government to relinquish its claims of sovereignty. During the early 1830's President Anastacio Bustamante, acknowledging that the Pope had not yet extended recognition to the Mexican Republic and was not likely to do so as long as it defied the Vatican, renounced the right of national patronage. Bustamante's practical decision ushered in a two-year period of harmony between Church and State during which the Church amassed ever greater wealth and exercised increasing political influence.11

The continuing prosperity of the Church led liberals in 1833 to initiate a reform movement designed to curtail its power. Bustamante was replaced by the presidency of Antonio López de Santa Anna and Valentín Gómez Farías. Under the leadership of Farías, the Mexican Congress passed a number of anti-clerical measures which significantly reduced the privileges of the clergy. Clerical control of education came under heavy attack by liberals who felt that the clergy used their roles as teachers to instill in the minds of Mexican youth ideas favorable to conservative groups in society. In addition, attempts were made to weaken the

11 Ibid., pp. 343-44, 345-48.
Church economically and, thereby, cause a resultant loss of political power on the part of the clergy.\textsuperscript{12}

Conservatives, losing no time in meeting the challenge flung at them by the liberals, initiated a counter-revolution under the banner of "religion and privilege." The movement was led by Santa Anna who deserted the party to which he had originally sworn allegiance and now successfully conspired to overthrow his own vice president, Gómez Farías. Once in power, the conservatives nullified the reforms enacted by the liberals. By 1836 matters were so satisfactorily settled in favor of the Church that Pope Gregory XVI felt it an appropriate time to accord political recognition to the Republic of Mexico. Consequently, Mexican diplomat Manuel Díaz de Bonilla was dispatched to Rome to attain the long-desired concordat which would finally allow the Mexican government to exercise over the Catholic Church controls such as those which the Spanish crown had enjoyed during the colonial period. The Pope, however, unlike his fifteenth and sixteenth century predecessors, refused to grant the civil authorities in Mexico anything that approached the Real Patronato. Thus, in Mexico the Catholic Church

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 348-51.
remained a relatively independent institution functioning largely without civil restraint.\textsuperscript{13}

Operating under such advantageous conditions, the Catholic Church solidified its position even further as the most wealthy and powerful institution in Mexico, a fact that caused ever increasing dissatisfaction on the part of many Mexicans. Strong discontent among liberals led to the overthrow of Santa Anna in 1855 and the inauguration of Juan Alvarez as president. During Alvarez' term, lasting less than three months, a law which significantly affected the Church was passed. "Ley Juárez," named for Benito Juárez, the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs, reorganized the legal system and in so doing limited the special juridical privileges of the clergy. The measure, designed to effect equality before the law in accordance with liberal principles, was aimed not only at the clergy but at other privileged groups as well. However, it was largely among Church supporters that the law brought forth enemies for the Alvarez government. The resultant unrest, added to other domestic problems, caused the president to

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 352, 354-55; Medina Ascencio, El Vaticano, p. xviii.
resign in December, 1855, to be succeeded by Ignacio Comonfort.  

During Comonfort's term in office, two major laws were enacted which added to the indignation of church followers. "Ley Lerdo," formulated by Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, struck what to conservatives seemed to be a death blow at the Church. This law prohibited all corporations from the ownership or acquisition of real estate other than that directly used for purposes of worship. Any other land owned by such corporations was to be sold with the proceeds, excepting a sales tax, to be returned to the corporation. "Ley Lerdo" was technically expropriation rather than confiscation; for, it provided financial reimbursement to the property owner. Nevertheless, enforcement of the law, insofar as the Catholic Church was concerned, would spell the end of that institution's perpetual ownership of a large percentage of Mexico's real wealth, which would in turn severely weaken the Church's overall position in Mexico.

A second law, "Ley Iglesias," affected the Church's economic situation in a different manner. The assessment of high

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14 Walther V. Scholes, Mexican Politics During the Juárez Regime, 1855-1872 (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1969), pp. 1-5; Mecham, Church and State, pp. 359-60. (Hereafter cited as Scholes, Juárez.)
fees for the performance of clerical duties was an important source of revenue for the Mexican Church. In fact, fees imposed on the lower classes were often unreasonably high. Consequently, in "Ley Iglesias" the government set upward limits on the fees which the clergy could charge for their services. The law was designed not only to control Church revenue but also to prevent exploitation of the poor by avaricious clergymen.15

The enactment of individual laws, such as "Ley Juárez," "Ley Lerdo," and "Ley Iglesias," were significant attempts by liberals to achieve far-reaching reforms. However, the highpoint of liberal action was the formulation of the Constitution of 1857 by a small, unrepresentative group of men. This document was more radical than any which had preceded it in Mexican history. The articles of the constitution pertaining to the Catholic Church and the clergy struck at almost every area of clerical strength and privilege. Article five sought to weaken or end monastic orders by nullifying and heretofore compulsory perpetual observance of religious vows. Article thirteen, similar to "Ley Juárez," attacked the traditional fueros of the clergy by preventing

any person from being tried in private courts. Article 27, a restatement of "Ley Lerdo," forbade corporate ownership of real estate except for purposes of worship. Articles 56 and 77, intended to keep the clergy from playing a direct part in political affairs, stated that no cleric could hold the office of national representative or president. Finally, Article 123 in order to assure the supremacy of civil authority over the Church empowered the Mexican government to intervene in matters of religious worship and outward ecclesiastical form as designated by law. 16

This extremist constitution occasioned a storm of both "protest" and "approval" throughout Mexico. While the liberal minority vigorously supported the principles contained within the document, the majority of literate Mexicans, who were basically conservative, just as vigorously opposed them. The Mexican hierarchy made no secret of its dislike for the legislation. In November, 1857, the Archbishop of Mexico ordered his subordinates to refrain from taking any oath of allegiance to the constitution. Furthermore, clerics were not allowed to hear the confessions of Catholics taking

such loyalty oaths or to grant Christian burial to these persons. Lay supporters of the church joined the clergy in opposing the new law of the land. They censured the constitution for failing to name Catholicism as Mexico's exclusive religion, for depriving the clergy of certain basic rights, for prohibiting vows of monks and nuns, for confiscating the property of the Church, and for allowing the legislature to intervene in Church affairs. Acting upon these convictions, conservatives in December of 1857 issued the Plan of Tacubaya in which they openly rejected the new constitution. In their plan the conservatives called for the establishment of a dictatorship subservient to the Church, the reestablishment of traditional *fueros*, the acceptance of the exclusivity of Catholicism, and the inviolability of Church property and revenue. In effect, they demanded everything that the liberals had sought to destroy.

Although rejecting the new constitution, the conservatives recognized the legitimacy of Comonfort, who chose to throw his support behind the Plan of Tacubaya, a move which

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cost him his position as leader of the Liberal Party. Consequently, Benito Juárez became temporary president in January of 1858. Unfortunately for Comonfort, he also lost the support of the conservatives and was soon replaced by Félix Zuloaga. Thus, two opposition governments came into being in Mexico as liberal-conservative differences led to all-out war. Conservatives, who were victorious during the initial stages of warfare, established themselves in Mexico City. The Juárez government, forced to abandon the capital, eventually found its way to Veracruz, where it functioned throughout the War of the Reform.  

While in Veracruz the government was not idle. Through a manifesto of July, 1859, it announced its adherence to the same doctrines embodied within the Constitution of 1857. To effect these doctrines the Veracruz government passed a series of reform decrees in 1859-1860. On July 12, 1859, Juárez, realizing the futility of "Ley Lerdo," announced the outright confiscation of all wealth administered by either the regular or secular clergy. The only property exempted from nationalization was churches specifically designated by state governors as necessary and adequate for public worship. In a follow-up measure on the thirteenth, Juárez

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provided for the inventory and sale of all confiscated property. These two decrees, far more extreme than previous measures of the same nature, were designed to break down the economic power of the Catholic Church. Not all of the measures passed by the liberal regime were economic in nature, however, although all were intended to curtail the power of the Church. Other laws secularized cemeteries, declared marriage a civil contract, recognized legal separations, and reduced the number of legal religious feast days. Nevertheless, the Reform Laws could not be enforced in the parts of Mexico controlled by the conservative government, and in those areas the laws were real only on paper.

It was not until December of 1860 that the liberals, under the military leadership of González Ortega, were able to retake Mexico City and regain dominion over a substantial part of the country. On January 11, 1861, when Juárez re-entered the capital, the liberals felt that they were at last in a position to make the principles embodied within their decrees a reality. Many, reacting to the role which the clergy had played in the War of the Reform, demanded additional anti-clerical action. The government responded by reducing the number of convents and assuming control of benevolent

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19 Ibid., pp. 44, 47-49; Mecham, Church and State, p. 368.
institutions belonging to the Church. It was declared a
crime for a clergyman to preach against the government or
to wear clerical garb in public. And, the holding of
religious demonstrations outside of the churches was pro-
hibited. When combined with already existing restraints
upon the Church and the clergy, these measures composed a
formidable body of anti-clerical legislation. The impact
of such legislation was considerably lessened, however,
by the government's continued inability to enforce its
laws.

Although the liberal government was in ascendancy,
both internal and external difficulties hampered the workings
of the Juárez administration. Special elections for president
and for Congress in January, 1861, revealed discontent on
the part of several liberal groups. Even though Juárez won
the election with a decisive victory, there were unmistakable
signs that all was not well within liberal ranks. Compli-
cating the government's problems was the continuing presence
of conservative guerrilla bands which harassed the adminis-
tration and served as a constant reminder that the enemies
of reform, though temporarily repressed, still existed within
Mexico. Also of concern to the government was its serious

20 Scholes, Juárez, p. 42; Calicott, Liberalism, pp. 34-37.
financial situation. The seizure of Church property had failed to produce the expected amount of revenue, and other means of acquiring capital had likewise proven unsuccessful. The severity of the situation caused the president and Congress to resort to extreme measures in their attempts to alleviate Mexico's financial difficulties. In July the government officially suspended payment on foreign and domestic debts for a period of two years. This move, intended to aid Mexico internally, instead created serious international problems for the country.

Three major European powers, France, England, and Spain, were affected by the suspension of payments in 1861. In October of that year the three countries agreed to intervene in Mexican affairs for the sole purpose of debt collection. News of plans for foreign intervention greatly pleased the clergy and other Mexican reactionaries who had, in fact, hoped for such an event. They believed that their interests could best be served through the establishment of a European monarch who would possibly be receptive to their needs and desires. Thus, conservatives anxiously awaited the landing of European troops. And, they did not have long to wait. For, by January of 1862 French, English, and Spanish troops

\(^{21}\)Scholes, Juárez, pp. 68-72.
were in Mexico. The combined purpose of intervention underwent a change soon thereafter. Within three months Spain and Britain felt that they had unwittingly been partners to Napoleon III's imperialistic designs in Mexico, and withdrew their troops. Then, in April of 1862 war erupted between France and Mexico, with many Mexican conservatives allying themselves with the French. 22

Once again the Mexican nation housed two opposing governments. Juárez, as before, was forced to flee from the capital and go from one town to another during the years of conflict. The French, who centered themselves in Mexico City, by 1864 possessed a considerable portion of the interior regions of Mexico. In this year the conservatives' long sought dream was achieved when a European Hapsburg, Ferdinand Maximillian, became the emperor of Mexico. Under the new monarchy the clergy hoped to regain their traditional status by undoing the minor changes enacted by the liberal government, but they were to be disappointed. For, the emperor not only kept in effect the land laws of the Juárez government but also revealed attitudes toward Church-State relations which were alarmingly similar to those of the Juaristas. Nevertheless, to the hierarchy as to other reactionaries,

22 Ibid., pp. 75-88, passim.
a government led by the European emperor was immeasurably preferable to one headed by Juárez, who, even during the French intervention, continued to issue anti-clerical decrees. Actually it mattered little which government the clergy preferred. For in 1867 victorious liberal forces captured and executed the ill-fated emperor.\textsuperscript{23}

With Juárez' entrance into Mexico City in July, 1867, the liberals again set themselves to the task of making their dreams become a reality for the Mexican people. Their plans were complicated in 1872 by the death of the long-time leader and symbol of freedom, Benito Juárez. His place was soon filled by Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. Under Lerdo de Tejada's leadership the Reform decrees in 1873 were incorporated into the Constitution of 1857.\textsuperscript{24} The fulfillment of liberal ideals finally seemed about to be realized.

This fulfillment still did not occur, however, because of continuing dissension among the liberals. After serving as president for five years, Lerdo de Tejada was ousted and replaced by Porfirio Díaz, who assumed dictatorial control of Mexico. Díaz' rise to power represented the end


\textsuperscript{24}Mecham, \textit{Church and State}, p. 375.
of the Reform era with its major goals unachieved. Only in the area of religious reforms had the liberals enjoyed real success by weakening the Church's economic power. And, even this accomplishment was partially reversed during the Porfiriato, when Díaz conciliated the Church by allowing the Reform Laws to fall into disuse. The Porfiriato, in effect, became the "neo-conservative reaction to the Reform of 1857." During this period the Reform Laws were buried, but they were not dead, for Díaz refused to repeal them, thereby insuring the good conduct of the Church hierarchy. The principles contained within the various reform measures also remained alive in the minds of liberals. The resurrection of these goals and objectives during the twentieth century resulted in the Church's most desperate struggle for survival.

The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, was the liberals' answer to the new conservatism of the Díaz dictatorship. While Díaz had come to power in 1876 under the slogan of "Effective Suffrage and No Re-election," he maintained uninterrupted control of Mexico for nearly three

decades. Time and advanced age finally caught up with Díaz in 1910-1911. Francisco I. Madero, who in 1908 had written a book that was mildly critical of the president, ran against the old dictator in 1910 under the slogan of "Effective Sufferage and No Re-election." Madero lost the election as expected. He was jailed by Díaz during the last days of the campaign but with the aid of influential friends later gained his freedom and fled to Texas. From exile Madero announced his Plan of San Luis Potosí in which he called upon the Mexican people to overthrow Díaz. The resultant revolution quickly proved successful. By May, 1911, Díaz was on his way to exile in Paris, and Madero a few months later easily won his second bid for the presidency. 26

The triumph of the anti-Díaz Revolutionary Family, consisting of a remarkable variety of men often seeking diverse goals, was short-lived due to a counterrevolution initiated by Victoriano Huerta, who forced Madero's resignation and assumed control of Mexico in February, 1913. Huerta's period of rule proved to be even shorter than

Madero's had been. In 1914 the counterrevolutionary general
was overthrown as the result of an intra-Family quarrel that
later evolved into a civil war between two major revolu-
tionary groups, the Carrancistas and the Villistas (1914-
1916).

The Carrancistas, who eventually overcame their oppo-
sition, contained within their ranks many ardent anti-
clerics who were well aware of the detrimental role which
the Roman Catholic Church had played in the history of
Mexico. Their feelings toward the Church were expressed
during the Mexican Revolution in acts of lawlessness and
violence such as the looting of church treasures and the
killing of priests. Once they attained predominance and
their leader Venustiano Carranza became president, the more
radical Carrancistas determined to initiate a lawful but
effective attack against the Church and other agencies which
were obstacles to the social and economic betterment of the
Mexican people. Consequently, a convention met in Querétaro
in late 1916 to draft a new constitution for Mexico. Only

27 Padgett, Political System, p. 23. For concise coverage
of the years 1913-1915 and the struggle between Pancho Villa
and Venustiano Carranza see Lyle Brown's "The Politics of
Armed Struggle in the Mexican Revolution, 1913-1915," in
Revolution in Mexico: Years of Upheaval, 1910-1940, ed. by
James W. Wilkie and Albert L. Michaels (New York: Alfred A.
loyal followers of the president were allowed to serve as delegates to the convention, which quickly came under the control of its more radical members. The document compiled by these men contained a series of far-reaching anti-clerical articles. 28

Many of the provisions in the new constitution were restatements of measures in the earlier Constitution of 1857. Religious orders were prohibited, as was the wearing of clerical garb in public. The holding of religious celebrations outside of church buildings was forbidden, and clergymen were not allowed to assemble for political purposes or to criticize Mexico's fundamental law or government. As before, the federal government was granted the power to intervene as authorized by law in matters of religious worship. Despite these similarities, however, there were vast differences in the two constitutions. The new document was far more extreme than the earlier one had been.

The Constitution of 1917 deprived religious bodies of any juridical personality and, consequently, of any benefits deriving from corporate identity. It exceeded earlier measures by nationalizing all church property, including those buildings used for purposes of public worship. The government could reassign church buildings to other uses, i.e., libraries, museums, etc., if it chose to do so. No new churches could be dedicated without prior governmental permission. Clergymen were not allowed to inherit real wealth except from a very close relative, thus insuring that they could not accumulate substantial wealth in the future. For legal purposes priests were considered as persons exercising a profession in which they deserved no special privileges. Ministers, who must be native Mexicans, could neither vote nor hold office. Religious periodicals could not comment on political affairs, nor could political associations have any religious affiliation. No cleric could serve in the capacity of teacher or director of any primary school, and such schools were to offer only secular education. Finally, the legislature of each state had the power to determine the maximum number of priests of each faith to officiate within that state's borders.

To aid the government in the administration of its newly acquired property and to allow it to maintain a strict
surveillance over the churches, the constitution required
the person in charge of and legally responsible for each
religious edifice to report to the municipal authorities
in his area. In turn the authorities were to maintain an
accurate record of all churches within their jurisdiction
and the person responsible for each. Changes regarding the
priests officiating in any church were to be reported
immediately. 29

When this constitution was made public in February of
1917, the clergy were quick to react. In a published
protest the Mexican hierarchy claimed that the constitution
sanctioned a state of religious persecution in Mexico,
restricted the liberty of teaching, attacked the right of
parents to determine their children's education, violated
the liberty of free association, and destroyed the right of
all men to regulate their lives freely. These dissident
bishops, who were later commended by Pope Benedict XV for
their protest, asserted that the constitution aimed to
destroy religious society in Mexico by allowing the government
to intervene in Church affairs, by obliging the ministry to

29 A copy of the Constitution of 1917 may be found in
Vargas' Mexicano, pp. 161-272. Helpful in understanding the
motives of the men who compiled the constitution is the two
volume Diario de los Debates del Congreso Constituyente,
1916-1917 (México, 1960).
subject itself to state laws, and by confiscating the property of the Church. 30

These charges leveled by the clergy at the constitution were accurate in that the enforcement of the anti-clerical clauses would indeed destroy Catholicism as it existed in Mexico in the early twentieth century. This was the very reason for the enactment of such measures, to destroy what was in essence a medieval, reactionary institution blocking revolutionary reforms desired by the radical constitutionalists. The Catholic Church with its avowed independence, its worldly priests, its material possessions and its conservative orientation, was incompatible with the type of "enlightened" society which the revolutionaries were striving to create. Consequently, once a program of constitutional enforcement was undertaken the Church would have to admit change or inevitably come into conflict with the State.

This conflict did not occur immediately. This was not because the clergy submitted to the constitution, but rather because the Mexican presidents from 1917 to 1923, Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregón, did little to enforce the

document's anti-clerical provisions. The leftists who had gained control of the constitutional convention, although Carrancistas, had composed legislation far more radical than that desired by the president. While Carranza reluctantly accepted the results of the 1916 convention, he had little intention, if any, of implementing its provisions. Not only did Carranza refrain from enforcing the anti-clerical articles of the constitution but he also went so far as to propose the modification of radical Article 130 in order "to insure respect for liberty of conscience." 31 Although not adopted, Carranza's proposal served to lessen the impact of the constitution in religious circles by illustrating to the clergy that, while he was president, they had little to fear. General Alvaro Obregón, who became president in 1920, like Carranza, tended to ignore the workings of the Catholic Church and allow it to proceed largely without interference from the State. 32


32 A notable exception to Obregón's moderate stand in regard to the Church occurred in 1923. In January of that year Eugenio Ernesto Filipi, apostolic delegate to Mexico,
Because neither Carranza nor Obregón seriously attempted to enforce the constitution in its religious aspects, the Roman Catholic Church remained an active agency in Mexico after 1917. Sizeable numbers of foreign clergy remained active within the country. Religious orders prospered. Nuns and priests continued to serve as teachers and directors of primary schools in which traditional doctrines were taught. The clergy by and large ignored the existence of the new constitution, and they were able to do so simply because they were not affected by it.  

The Mexican clergy bided their time and maintained a "prudent silence" until they were forced to action, or rather, reaction, by the appearance of a man determined to fulfill the goals outlined by the "Jacobins of Querétaro."

attended the laying of a cornerstone on Cubilete Hill for the erection of a monument to Christ. The ceremony, which was decidedly religious and was held out of doors, violated the constitution. Obregón expelled Filipi for his part in the affair. For varying versions of this incident see Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 391; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 91; John W.F. Dulles, Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Revolution (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1961), p. 298; Mecham, Church and State, p. 390. (Hereafter cited as Dulles, Yesterday.)

33Mecham, Church and State, pp. 389-90.
CHAPTER II

PLUTARCO ELÍAS CALLES

Plutarco Elías, born in the Mexican fishing village of Guayamas in 1871, was the natural son of prominent Sonorans Don Plutarco Elías and María de Jesús Campuzano. While still a young man, he adopted a new surname to become Plutarco Elías Calles. A virtual "jack of all trades," the mestizo youth in the years before 1910 worked as a schoolmaster, town treasurer, bartender, saloon manager, and flour mill manager.¹ When the Mexican Revolution erupted, he quickly identified himself with the Revolutionary Family and began a steady rise to national prominence. Following the triumph of the Maderistas, he became police commissioner of Agua Prieta. While serving in this position, Calles made the acquaintance of a fellow Sonoran, Álvaro Obregón, with whom he was to be increasingly involved in subsequent years. During the turmoil surrounding the Carranza-Villa

¹ Sources disagree on even the most basic facts of Calles’ early life, such as names of parents and date of birth. For varying information on his youth see Johnson, Heroic Mexico, pp. 378-79; Arturo García Formenti, Biografía del Señor General Plutarco Elías Calles (México, 1928), p. 3; Juan López de Escalera, Diccionario Biográfico y de Historia de México (México; Editorial de Magisterio, 1964), p. 141.
conflict, Calles allied himself with the Carrancistas and headed the forces which inflicted a decisive defeat upon Villa's Division of the North in November of 1915. When the civil war ended soon after, Calles assumed the position of military governor of his home state of Sonora where he remained until called into national service.\(^2\)

In the Fall of 1919 Carranza brought Calles to Mexico City as his Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Labor. While acting in this capacity, the Sonoran tended to side with labor elements in their disputes with employers. Such actions caused the more conservative Carranza to regret his cabinet choice, and for Calles disillusionment was mutual. When confronted with corruption in the Carranza administration, he began to lose his respect for the president. Calles' disaffection peaked in the election year 1920, when Carranza attempted to continue his control over Mexico by assuring that his "puppet," Ignacio Bonillas, would be elected president. Disgusted, Calles resigned in February 1920 and returned to Sonora, where the governor, de la Huerta, appointed him Chief of Military Operations. Calles, de la Huerta,

and Obregón—the Sonoran triumvirate—then united in their opposition to Carranza.  

Taking the initiative, Calles with the collaboration of de la Huerta on April 23, 1920, issued the Plan of Agua Prieta in which he invited the states of Mexico to join in overthrowing Carranza and replacing him with a provisional president. According to the plan, de la Huerta, commander of the "Liberal Constitutional Army," would lead the way to victory. Exactly one week after the above pronouncement, Obregón from Chilpancingo seconded Calles' proposal by asking his followers to rise against the Carranza administration. Such extreme measures were necessary, the general explained, because Carranza's corruption made the conduct of a peaceful and fair presidential campaign virtually impossible.

Almost the whole of Mexico supported the goals of the Sonoran leaders. By the end of May, when Carranza was finally murdered, fifteen states openly declared rebellion. Even before the president's demise, de la Huerta had requested that the Mexican senators and deputies elect a provisional president. The congressmen responded by selecting de la

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Huerta for that position. While interim president, he made Calles his Secretary of War. De la Huerta's brief term ended in November, when Obregón, who had been elected president in September, assumed office.  

During Obregón's presidency, the Liberal Constitutional Party, on whose ticket he had run in 1920, splintered due to political differences among varying factions. Party disintegration made the problem of Obregón's succession in 1924 an explosive issue. Calles, as Secretary of Gobernación, enjoyed increasing political stature. As his popularity increased, anti-Calles men began to promote the candidacy of the third triumvirate member, Secretary of the Treasury de la Huerta, who initially expressed no interest in the presidency. However, in 1923 after Obregón revealed his choice of Calles as the "favored" candidate, de la Huerta reversed this position. In November he became the official candidate of the National Cooperative Party, an organization which served as the nucleus for people dissatisfied with the Obregón administration and its Secretary of Gobernación. This schism among the three Sonorans evolved into a full-scale rebellion with "anti-agrarian and counterrevolutionary overtones." At least fifty to sixty percent of the military 

participated in the rebellion; however, Obregón, who enjoyed the support of the United States government as well as both agrarian and labor sectors in Mexico, managed within four months to repress the insurrection and exile de la Huerta.  

With the removal of de la Huerta from the political scene, Calles concentrated on his presidential campaign. As a chain smoker who tended to slouch and a man who rarely smiled, he was not an appealing figure. In fact, he was often described as a caricaturist's delight. Actually, it was not his appearance that interested the Mexican people but his political views. Calles' actions since 1910 had revealed his revolutionary bent and nationalistic sentiments. In 1923 he endeavored to assure his countrymen that his past actions were indeed accurate indicators of his convictions. A man with definite ideas on how to bring Mexico to her proper level of development, Calles informed the voters that his intention for the country was to establish a purely nationalistic government, uncontrolled by small private cliques and without a spirit of sectarianism, guided in all cases by the ideals

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7 Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 379.
and the sentiments of the country as represented by the necessities of the majority and not by the interests of political parties. He left no doubt about his plans to create this "nationalistic government." If elected, he would initiate a simple, concrete program of constitutional enforcement. For he was firmly convinced that the Constitution of 1917 . . . [was] adapted to public necessities in Mexico, and that its honest application, without employing it as an arm of destruction, but as a medium for collective improvement, . . . [would] aid in a powerful manner to solve . . . weighty social problems.

Such views gained many adherents for Calles, but they also attracted many enemies, especially among those who feared an "honest application" of the constitution. As a result, the National Republican Party, which encompassed commercial interests, various hacendados, and zealous Catholics, chose Angel Flores of Sinaloa as their opposition candidate. Concerned Catholics, along with other threatened

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9 El Democrata, 12 April 1924 quoted in Murray, Documents, p. 30.

10 Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 98.
ps, actively supported Flores' candidacy; for, Calles

it clear that he was an enemy of

the priest caste which regards its position as a
privileged one . . . of the priest politician, of the
priest intriguer, of the priest exploiter, of the
priest who seeks to keep our people in ignorance, of
the priest who is allied with the hacendado to prey
upon the laborer, [and] of the priest who joins the
industrial proprietor to exploit the worker.11

ing such sentiments, ardent Catholics, believing that
es' election would prove fatal for the Church, anxiously
ted the results of the forthcoming election. So did
others.

Despite the existence of such anxieties, the election
not without its lighter side largely due to the candidacy
third man, lawyer-geologist Nicolás Zúñiga y Miranda.
man's candidacy was not an unusual circumstance, for
ad also run against Díaz, Madero, Carranza, and Obregón.
many attempts at the presidency had earned Zúñiga y
nda the title of "the eternal candidate," and he was
an "eternal" loser. The defeat he suffered in 1924,
er, was to be his last, as he died the following year.

the results of the election were tallied, the number
votes received by "the eternal candidate" did not deserve
ion. Flores, on the other hand, received 250,000 votes,

11 Calles' speech in the Theatre Ocampo, Morelia quoted
Murray, Documents, p. 59.
but it was Calles with a reported 1,340,634 votes who scored an overwhelming victory. Consequently, on December 1, 1924, before a crowd of thirty thousand spectators, Plutarco Elías Calles was inaugurated as president of Mexico for the years 1924-1928.¹²

Upon entering office, Calles discovered, as had many of his liberal predecessors, that serious internal and external problems demanded his immediate attention and delayed the fulfillment of campaign promises. In 1924 Mexico's financial situation was critical. Recognizing that problems of finance had to be solved before other programs could be undertaken, Calles concentrated on improving the condition of the treasury. By removing unsatisfactory governmental employees, by placing the national fiscal system more completely in the hands of the State, and by founding a National Banking Commission, the new administration gradually succeeded in balancing the budget, paying some internal debts, and resuming foreign debt payments. With this steady improvement in the country's economic condition, the government tackled Mexico's other deficiencies. The National Road Commission and the National Irrigation Commission were formed to meet two specific needs. Programs of hygiene and sanitation

were begun, as were efforts to raise the educational level of the people. Long-needed measures to professionalize the army were also instituted. These actions and others helped to usher in an era of prosperity and, consequently, to solidify a broad base of support for the president among the rank and file of Mexican citizenry.  

Two segments of society especially profited from Calles' programs which revealed his tendency to promote agrarian interests and strongly favor labor elements. Proclaiming himself to be the intellectual heir of Emiliano Zapata, Calles initiated a land distribution program during his four years in office that provided almost eight million acres to more than fifteen hundred villages. Furthermore, to insure that the villagers could properly utilize their new land, the government sponsored the foundation of a National Agricultural Bank and of agricultural co-operatives. Despite this assistance to agrarianists, however, Calles preferred labor above all other groups. Labor leaders were appointed to positions of influence and importance. For example, Luis N. Morones, as head of the powerful Confederación

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13Cumberland, Mexico, p. 276; Gruening, Heritage, p. 107; Brandenburg, Modern Mexico, pp. 74, 207, 216, 259; Padgett, Political System, p. 31; Parkes, History, p. 382.
Regional de Obreras Mexicanas (C.R.O.M.) and as Calles' Secretary of Industry, Commerce, and Labor, aided the president in designing programs to improve the lot of the Mexican worker. Combined, the land and labor policies of Calles, although at times causing resentment on the part of certain agrarianists who felt themselves relegated to a position of secondary importance behind labor, gained for him many strong supporters from these two critical segments. 14

Calles' popular appeal, while strong within his homeland, did not extend into the United States. Relations between the United States and Mexico were strained over the latter's payment of her external debts, the problem of reparations for damaged or confiscated American property, and the question of subsoil rights in Mexico. Of the three issues, the last had been the cause of much disagreement between the two countries since the formulation of the Constitution of 1917, which in Article 27 claimed the ownership of subsoil mineral rights for the Mexican nation. This provision, which threatened the interests of American oil companies in Mexico, had served to create a serious diplomatic problem. The situation worsened in 1925 with the passage of

14 Parkes, History, p. 382; Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 386; Gurening, Heritage, pp. 145-46; Cumberland, Mexico, p. 296; Padgett, Political System, p. 30.
a new Petroleum Code unfavorable to foreign investors. 15

Resultant tension between Mexico and the United States
was still another factor which prevented the president from
quickly initiating his campaign promises for constitutional
enforcement.

Although Calles' "honest application" of the constitu-
tion was momentarily delayed, the president did not ignore
the complex problem of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico.
Hopining to divorce the Church from papal influence, Calles in
1925 lent his support to the formation of a Mexican Apostolic
Church which would be dependent upon the Mexican government
rather than the Vatican. The schismatic church and the
president's aid to it ended the "prudent silence" which the
Roman Catholic clergy had maintained since 1917. The first
news of the schismatic church appeared on February 18 in a
manifesto signed by three priests, Joaquín Pérez, Manuel
Luis Monge, and Angel Jiménez. The three, while publicly
disavowing papal authority, announced their intention of
founding a new Catholic Church which would be distinctly
Mexican. 16

15 Brandenburg, Modern Mexico, pp. 72-73; Padgett, Politi-
cal System, p. 31.
16 Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 100-102; Antonio Ruiz
Facius, La Juventud Católica y la Revolución Mejicana, 1910-
1925 (México: Editorial Jus, 1963), pp. 275, 281. (Hereafter
cited as Ruiz Facius, La Juventud.)
The Roman Catholic hierarchy quickly responded to the possibility of a Mexican Catholic Church. Monseñor Tito Crespi, in charge of the delegation of the Holy See in Mexico, claimed that Protestants were probably behind the reprehensible movement. While denouncing the separatists, he declared his certainty that the clergy and the people of Mexico would remain true to their ancestral religion. The Archbishop of Mexico, José Mora y del Río, echoed similar sentiments. After expressing the profound disgust which the manifesto aroused in loyal Catholics, Mora y del Río announced the ecclesiastical suspension of those priests involved in the separatist affair. However, Pérez, Monge, and Jiménez, no longer declaring any allegiance to the Pope or the Roman Catholic hierarchy, were not affected by the condemnation of either Crespi or Mora y del Río. They continued with their efforts to supplant Roman Catholicism in Mexico with a rational church.

On February 21 Monge with one hundred federal troops appeared at the Roman Catholic church, la Soledad, in Mexico City. Article 27 of the constitution allowed the federal government to dispose of church buildings, and Roman Catholic priest Alejandro Silva was instructed to turn la Soledad

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17*Excelsior (México City), 19, 20 Feb. 1925.
over to the schismatics, who intended to establish their headquarters there. Although Silva complied with the government's orders, the take-over was not ultimately successful. For, the regular congregants of the church refused to allow it to be used as part of the heretical movement. Consequently, on February twenty-third, when Monge first attempted to say Sunday Mass at la Soledad, he was mobbed by some two to three hundred Roman Catholics. During the disturbances which continued throughout the day and required the presence of firemen and policemen, some fifteen hundred persons demonstrated against the national church. Popular opposition was sufficiently strong to cause the Mexican Apostolic priests to seek additional federal assistance.

In protest of the treatment accorded them, Monge, Pérez, and their followers appealed directly to Calles. Reminding him that they were organized according to prevailing legal requirements, the solicitors asked the president to insure them clear right to possession of la Soledad. Calles replied: "Received your message yesterday. Have given

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instructions for you to receive necessary guarantees."\(^{19}\)

On the following day the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* confirmed that the president had indeed given the requested guarantees, for it reported that by Calles’ express disposition la Soledad had been legally entrusted to the schismatics.\(^{20}\)

The president’s support of the Mexican Catholic Church served to strengthen the opposition of Roman Catholic clergymen to the movement. On February 25, one day after Calles’ reply to Monge and Pérez, Archbishop Mora y del Río issued a formal statement. Asserting that he did not doubt the faithfulness of the people, the cleric explained that he nevertheless felt it expedient to prevent possible evils and scandals by informing the public of the severity of the situation. The Archbishop of Mexico advised that anyone who refused papal authority could not legitimately be considered a Catholic. Consequently, any priests joining the Mexican Catholic Church and proclaiming its false doctrines were subject to excommunication, as was anyone attending services presided over by such false priests. Additionally,


Catholics could be excommunicated for marrying before a non-Catholic minister, receiving baptism before the same, or sending one's children to be instructed in a non-Catholic faith. The Archbishop's edict left no room for doubt that the Roman Catholic Church completely anathematized the schismatic movement.

Mora y del Río's prediction that Roman Catholics in Mexico, both clerical and lay, would remain loyal to their Faith proved accurate. On February 26 the priests of Mexico City met for the express purpose of declaring their allegiance to the Vatican. Similar declarations were made by clergymen throughout the country. Catholic churchgoers worked to prevent the schismatics from establishing themselves in other Roman Catholic church buildings, and because of continuing opposition encountered at la Soledad, Calles was forced in March to order the church retired from use as a religious building. The president then authorized Gilberto Valenzuela, Secretary of Gobernación, to offer Pérez, whom Calles had appointed Patriarch of the Mexican Apostolic Church, another church building. Realizing that the congregants of any active church would block such a move, Valenzuela allowed Pérez

21Ruiz Facius, La Juventud, pp. 277-78; Excelsior, 26 Feb. 1925.
to select from those buildings not then in use as churches. The Patriarch chose the Church of Corpus Christi, which became the "Holy See" for the new religion. However, the Mexican Apostolic Church remained relatively ineffectual in terms of the number of converts it attracted.

The real significance of the schismatic movement lay in the impact it had upon the Mexican people and in the side-effects which it caused. Fearful Roman Catholic laymen, aroused by the rise of the new religion, concluded that Calles was undertaking the first of measured and well-organized steps against Catholicism in Mexico. Consequently, in March of 1925 three prominent laymen, Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, Luis G. Bustos, and René Capistrán Garza, revived an idea first presented in 1917. It called for the formation of a civic religious defense league to rid the constitution of its "injustices and tyrannies" and in other ways combat governmental actions. At the initiative of these three men representatives of various Catholic societies, such as the powerful Association of Mexican Catholic Youth (ACJM) and the Knights of Columbus, met in Mexico City to discuss the

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22 Excelsior, 27 Feb. 1925; Alberto María Carreño, Páginas de Historia Mexicana (Pages of Mexican History) (México: Ediciones Victoria, 1936), p. 47; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 104-05; Ruiz Facius, La Jurisdicción, p. 281; Dulles, Yesterday, p. 300.
proposition, and they unanimously approved it. By March 14 these men had structured the organization and composed a manifesto explaining its purpose and program. The resultant National Religious Defense League (LNDR), as a new and distinct society formed to work for specific ends, was to have the support of already existing Catholic organizations. The major purpose of the LNDR was to work for the removal of those constitutional articles which restricted the rights of the Roman Catholic Church and its followers.23

The government was highly displeased with the new organization which the Secretary of Gobernación declared to be extralegal and seditious. As a political organization, Valenzuela asserted, the League was constitutionally prohibited from having any religious affiliation, yet its very name revealed such an affiliation. That it was a political group, he said, was apparent from its program of seeking constitutional reform. Thus, the Secretary concluded that the LNDR violated Article 130 of the constitution. As spokesman for the League, René Capistrán Carza answered these charges. First, he emphasized that the Catholic hierarchy had no part

in the forming or governing of the League, which was a civic, not a political or religious, organization. Regarding the matter of constitutional reform, Capistrán Garza explained, the rights of Catholics were under attack, and it was inevitable that they would eventually defend those rights. The League was their vehicle of defense. Although the League's spokesman asserted that the group was not political, he acknowledged that it might be faced with the necessity of acting on political matters, because "la cuestión religiosa en México es cuestión política." His words were prophetic in a sense; for, in future years the League was to be highly active in political matters. Valenzuela, unimpressed by the argument presented by Capistrán Garza, informed state governors and military commanders of his conviction that the LNDR was in violation of Article 130 and, therefore, that it should be carefully watched.  

While notifying state officials to maintain a close surveillance over the activities of the LNDR, Valenzuela also encouraged them to begin enforcing other constitutional provisions related to religious matters. This encouragement was hardly necessary as many states had already taken advantage

24 Ruis Facius, La Juventud, pp. 284-85; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 113, 115.
of the power granted them by the constitution to limit the
number of clergy allowed to serve within their borders or
had passed other religious restrictions. States, which
had not already taken such action, began to pass similar
legislation in 1926. The most extreme and revealing case
of anti-clerical laws at the state level occurred in Tabasco.
With a population of 244,000, the overwhelming majority of
whom were Roman Catholics, Tabasco in January, 1925, limited
to six the number of allowable priests of each faith who
could perform within the state. With this regulation in
effect, each Roman Catholic priest was required to minister
to more than 35,000 Mexican Catholics, an impossible task.
In March the state government passed other equally unrealistic
measures. All clerics serving in Tabasco were required to
be at least forty years of age, to be of good moral character,
and to be married. These measures, while applying to all
religions, were obviously most detrimental to the Roman
Catholic Church.

25 Callcott, Liberalism, pp. 353-54; Ruis Facius, La
Juventud, p. 313; Navarrete, Carranza, p. 140. For specific
discussions of state laws affecting the Church which were
passed immediately before, during, and after 1926 see
Navarrete, Carranza, pp. 132-40; Olivera Sedado, Aspectos,
pp. 67, 106; Jesús García Gutiérrez, La Iglesia Mexicano
en el Segundo Imperio (México: Editorial Campeador, 1955),
pp. 167-68.
On the third of April the bishop of Huejutla, José de Jesús Manríquez y Zárate, revealed the absolute refusal of the Church to submit to civil control of ecclesiastical affairs whether on the state or federal level. In so far as the Church was concerned, the bishop emphatically stated, "las leyes constitutionales, las orgánicas u otras de cualesquiera denominación, contrarias a las leyes divinas o eclesiásticas, . . . [no eran] de ningún valor." These remarks were declared by Mora y del Río to have the full approval of the Mexican episcopate. Because the episcopate was so open in opposing governmental proceedings, Pius XI felt called upon to justify their actions. Consequently, on September 22 he assured the Mexican people that the clergy of Mexico were not entering into politics, which was forbidden by law, but were merely doing religious work, i.e., protecting the rights of the sacred Church. Such action might conceivably be interpreted by some as being political, the Pope analyzed, because in Mexico "la política . . . [había] tocado al altar . . . y a la religión." But, this was the fault of the government and not of the clergy. This being so, Pius XI reminded the episcopate, the lower

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26 Pastoral letter of Manríquez y Zárate quoted in Ruis Faciuss, La Juventud, p. 301.
clergy, and all Mexican Catholics that it was their religious
duty to defend their God and their religion.27

Having received the papal admonition to defend their
religion, the members of the Mexican episcopate were uncertain
as to how they should fulfill that obligation. Consequently,
they formed a two-man commission, composed of the bishop of
Durango and the bishop of San Luis Potosí. The two bishops
traveled to Rome to inform the Pope of the actual state of
affairs in Mexico and to receive instructions on the procedures
the Mexican hierarchy should follow. After conferring with
the delegation, Pius XI agreed that the Mexican clergy were
being oppressed in a cruel manner by measures so unjust as
to be undeserving of the name of laws. Even so, the Pope
did not advise the clergy to participate in political matters
in order to cure the ills of the Mexican constitution, because
he felt that such action would only serve to strengthen anti-
clericalism already rampant in Mexico. Therefore, the Pope
informed the Mexican episcopate in a letter of February 2 that
their best hope for success lay in reliance upon loyal Mexican
Catholics. The clergy were to inform their followers of what

27Pius XI to Catholic youth of Mexico, 22 Sept. 1925
quoted in Aguiles P. Moctezuma [pseud.], El Conflicto Religioso
de 1926: Sus Orígenes, Su Desarrollo, Su Solución, 2d ed.,
cited as Moctezuma, El Conflicto.)
was "good for Mexico" and then to encourage them to work to achieve that "good." Naturally, the major goal of such united Catholic action was to be the reform of the anticlerical provisions of the Constitution of 1917.

Having received the above papal instructions, the Archbishop of Mexico on February 4, 1926 acted. He gave his permission to El Universal to reprint the 1917 episcopal protest of the constitution, and he stated in the accompanying article that the episcopacy, clergy, and laymen of Mexico were on the verge of initiating a campaign for the revision of constitutional Articles 3, 5, 27, and 130. The Secretary of the Interior, Adalberto Tejada, described Mora y del Río's statement as being capable of inciting "una rebelión contra las leyes fundamentales y las instituciones de la


29 Mecham, Church and State, p. 391; Callcott, Liberalism, p. 354; Dulles, Yesterday, p. 301. An article had appeared in El Universal on Jan. 27 in which Mora y del Río allegedly made an announcement similar to that later printed on Feb. 4. However, the Archbishop denied having made the earlier statement and subsequent investigations supported his denial. Most probably Mora y del Río did not officially release news of the upcoming campaign for constitutional reform until February 4.
Republica." Tejada warned the clergy that he could permit the Church to function freely only so long as it did not constitute an obstacle to progress. If necessary, the Secretary said, he would dictate measures to regulate the activities of Catholics—clerical and lay—conspiring against the government. Tejada's threat, however, only served to solidify the core of resistance offered by the episcopate, who on February 8 publicly endorsed the statement which Mora y del Río had made four days earlier. While assuring the government that their motives were not seditious, the hierarchy asserted its intention of bringing about the reforms necessary to protect the sacred rights of the Church. 30

Calles, when confronted with the blatant refusal of the episcopate to submit to governmental authority, realized that the time had come for enactment of his campaign promise of an active and forceful program of constitutional enforcement. As the president later explained, he felt that it was the government's duty to force those who "exercise[d] their ministerial functions in violation of the Constitution" to

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obey the laws of Mexico. His decision was conveyed to the appropriate governmental officials, who in mid-February initiated a series of measures directed against Church-held property, foreign clergy, and private schools. On February 11 the Mexican Attorney General declared that all Church property not already in the possession of the nation was immediately nationalized and that all foreign priests, because they had become a political power within Mexico, were to be deported. The government's attempts to arrest and deport foreign clergy frequently led to violent clashes between the municipal authorities and loyal Catholics, as did the forcible closing of schools and convents. In Mexico City, for example, services at a major cathedral were interrupted by governmental agents coming to arrest two allegedly Spanish priests. The parishioners of the cathedral in protest of the arrest held a demonstration in front of Tejada's office. When police reserves and firemen were called in to dispel the mob, several people were killed and others were injured. Such occurrences, however, did not affect the government's determination to rid the country of clergymen who were not Mexican by birth. And, by March several hundred foreign priests and nuns were forcibly deported or were allowed to leave voluntarily.31

On February 12 the government ordered the closing of all schools, orphan asylums, and convents where religious instruction was being given in clear violation of Article 3 of the constitution. On February 26 the Secretary of Public Instruction issued new regulations for the governing of those private schools allowed to remain in operation. No private elementary school could offer religious courses, be connected with any ecclesiastical corporation, have clerical staff or directors, or show religious pictures or adornments. To insure compliance with these rules, such private institutions had to register with the Department of Education within sixty days and provide information as to ownership, sources of revenue, and religious affiliation. However, before the registration period ended, the Ministry of Education realized that the closing of very many Catholic schools would cause a serious void in the Mexican educational system. Consequently, the Secretary of Education announced that Catholic schools could continue to operate if their administrators and teachers would cease imparting religious education, adopt "secular" names, and subject themselves to official supervision. Later, even these regulations were suspended to allow time for necessary talks between the Public Education Department and the principals of the schools.
concerned. The result was a new decree on April 24 which stated that no private school could have any connection with religious buildings, could offer religious subjects, or could have clerics as teachers and directors. Schools complying with these rules and registering with the government could remain in operation. Those which did not would be closed. And, some were.  

The closing of schools and convents, the forcible deportation of foreign clergy, and similar governmental actions drew forth new protests from clergymen more determined than ever to combat the government. Manriquez y Zárate wrote a livid pastoral letter in which he forcefully condemned "each and every one of the crimes and assaults committed by the Mexican Government against the Catholic Church." An equally strong condemnation came from the bishop of Tacámbaro, Michoacán, Leopoldo Lara y Torres, who cited numerous alleged cases of government atrocities committed against children, nuns, clergymen, and sick people during the closing of convents, asylums, and schools. After calling

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32 Hackett, CH 24 (1926): 116-17, 448; Mecham, Church and State, p. 394; Callcott, Liberalism, pp. 358-59.

attention to such unspeakable crimes, the bishop made three specific requests. He asked the federal government to reform the objectionable articles of the constitution, the state government to reconsider its law allowing only 96 Catholic priests in Michoacán, and the Catholic citizens of Mexico to work untiringly within legal bounds to obtain "Religión, Unión, e Independencia." 34 Both Manríquez y Zárate and Lara y Torres, because of the sentiments expressed in their letters, were arraigned on charges of attacking Mexican law and government. 35

Although individual clergymen spoke out against the government, it was not until late April that the episcopate as a whole expressed their feelings in a letter to the faithful. The prelates explained that the Catholic Church, as a spiritual, supernatural organism, admitted no superior, nor could it allow anyone to interfere with its doctrines. The Mexican government was attempting to do this by violating the right of the Church to freely teach her dogma, to

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34 Memorial from Leopoldo Lara y Torres to Calles, 16 Mar. 1926 quoted in Lara y Torres, Documentos para la Historia de la Persecución Religiosa en México de Mons. Leopoldo Lara y Torres: Primer Obispo de Tacámbaro (México: Editorial Jus, 1954), pp. 91-105, passim. (Hereafter cited as Lara y Torres, Documentos.)

35 Hackett, CH 24 (1926): 448; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 108.
administer the sacraments with complete independence, and to possess the temporal goods necessary to achieve her ends. The episcopate explained that, while the Church was over and above "political partyism," it did have the right to give norms for political action. Consequently, all secular persons were asked to organize to defend religious liberty which was seriously threatened in Mexico. Loyal Catholics were duty bound, the episcopate asserted, to use licit means to achieve necessary constitutional reforms. 

This letter revealed the manner in which the episcopate interpreted the instructions which Pius XI had passed down to them in February. The Holy Father advised them to abstain from direct participation in politics, and, by their standards, the hierarchy obeyed. They chose to act indirectly by relying upon Catholics in Mexico to serve as "champions" of the Roman Catholic Church. The episcopate would decide what needed to be done for the "good" of Mexico. Inevitably, to the prelates what was good for the Roman Catholic Church was good for Mexico. They would then inform their supporters to that effect and await the results.

Unable to achieve their goals themselves, the clergy asked

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36 Mexican episcopate to their followers, 21 April 1926 quoted in María Carreño, El Arzobispo, pp. 24-28; Moctezuma, El Conflicto, 1:22-25.
their followers to act on their behalf. Throughout the Church-State conflict of 1926-1929, the episcopate adhered to this policy of dependence upon loyal Mexican Catholics.

As might logically be expected, Calles violently disagreed with the clergy over what was good for the country. And, he failed to appreciate the hierarchy's distinction between direct and indirect participation in political matters. As far as the president was concerned, the episcopate by encouraging the people to oppose the government was entering into politics. The very document which the clergy most forcefully opposed—the Constitution of 1917—made their actions illegal, for it clearly stated that no clergyman could associate with others for political purposes or criticize the laws or government of Mexico. Herein lay the irony of the Church's situation. When they initiated their campaign against the constitution, the episcopate technically was guilty of infractions of the law. And, choosing in this instance to be technical, Calles was determined to enforce that law. His decision helped to usher in one of the most serious Church-State crises in the history of the Mexican nation.
CHAPTER III

THE WITHDRAWAL

On the seventh of January, 1926, the Congress of Mexico at the president's request ceded to him special power to reform the country's existing penal code. The following June, when confronted by the clergy's open disregard for the Constitution, Calles used this power to formulate a law providing strict and specific penalties for infractions of the constitutional clauses relating to matters of religion and religious discipline. The resultant "Ley que Reforma el Código Penal para el Distrito y Territorios Federales sobre Delitos Contra la Federación" defined penalties among other things for non-Mexicans serving as priests, clergymen acting as teachers, primary schools offering religious instruction, religious periodicals commenting on political affairs, clerics wearing religious clothes out of doors, political organizations having any religious affiliation, and authorities failing to enforce the law. The law required all priests in charge of religious edifices to register with the president of their respective municipalities. Additionally, this decree, which dissolved all religious orders, contained several
measures aimed at priest-politicians and their followers. Individuals who in the exercise of the ministry incited disobedience to the law or the government were subject to a six-year term in prison. Priests who criticized the fundamental laws of Mexico could be imprisoned from one to five years. And, ministers associating for political purposes were liable to both arrest and fine. In total the thirty-three articles of Calles' Law, which was to become effective on July 31, 1926, forbade in one document all of the practices of the Roman Catholic clergy which the Calles government had been opposing since 1924.

Upon learning of the measure, members of the various Catholic societies in Mexico expressed their dissatisfaction. Manuel de Lapeza, as acting head of the Knights of Columbus, insisted that intelligent people must protest such unjust governmental action. ACJM leaders announced their intention of actively opposing Calles' renewed religious persecution. Ultimately, however, it was the League of National Religious Defense which determined the means of protest used by the

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1 Mecham, Church and State, p. 396; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 121-22. Copies of Calles' Law may be found in Excelsior, 3 July 1926, pp. 1, 11; Murray, Documents, pp. 133-141; Navarrete, Carranza, pp. 128-130.

societies. Directors of the League early in the summer proposed a boycott to paralyze economic and social life in Mexico until Calles relented and made concessions to the Catholic Church. By mid-July the major Catholic organizations, joining in support of the movement, undertook an intensive propaganda campaign to encourage popular participation in the boycott. Loyal Catholics were asked as of July 31 to purchase only necessities, limit their social activities, prevent their children from attending lay schools, refrain from using public transportation, and limit their use of electricity. The zealous boycott promoters assured that such extreme measures were both necessary and justifiable because the Catholic Church in Mexico was engaged in a life or death battle with the State.3

Labeling the boycott a "ridiculous movement," Calles expressed his confidence that the scheme would have no lasting effect on the Mexican economy. Nevertheless, he condemned the League for being "willing to drag the citizens down to poverty ... under the banner of Catholicism, to

satisfy old grudges and bastard political ambitions."^4 After assuring obstinate Catholics that every new attempt at opposition would be met "by fresh measures of repression," the president took steps to counteract Catholic activities. Police officers, ordered to exercise a strict surveillance over the major streets of Mexico City, arrested men and women who distributed circulars encouraging Mexicans to resist the government's dictates. Federal officials closed the Mexico City headquarters of the LNDR and arrested the directors of both the League and the ACJM. Such setbacks, however, did not stop those Catholics who believed they were involved in a divine task, defending the Roman Catholic Church.5

While enthusiastic laymen reacted in behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, the heads of that institution were also taking action. The Pope after declaring that ecclesiastical

^4 Calles to Hearst newspapers, 26 July 1926 quoted in Murray, Documents, pp. 107-115; Luis C. Balderrama, El Clero y el Gobierno de México, 2 Vols. Documentos para la Historia de la Crisis en 1926 (México: Editorial "Cuauhtemoc," 1927), 2:11-16. (Hereafter cited as Balderrama, El Clero, 2.)

^5 Moctezuma, El Conflicto, 2:401; Excelsior, 23, 24 July 1926; New York Times, 24 July 1926, p. 12; 25 July 1926, p. 12; 28 July 1926, p. 2. Whenever the directors of the LNDR were arrested, the organization would elect a new set of officers and continue its activities as before.
circles were prepared to go to any extreme to check the plight of Catholics in Mexico called for a special day of prayer throughout the world. August 1, as the day of prayer, was deemed especially appropriate because it was the Feast of St. Peter-In-Chains, commemorating the persecution of early Christians in Rome. Aware of Calles' determination, the Mexican hierarchy, who had already given their approval to the proposed boycott, realized that it would require more than prayer to resolve the critical situation in Mexico. Because they believed that acceptance of Calles' Law would be an admission of the dominance of the Mexican State over the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico, they decided to take drastic action. As the episcopal committee, which had been formed in May to represent the episcopate as a whole, informed Pius XI, "The majority of the Mexican episcopate wanted to suspend the cult in the churches . . . before the thirty-first of July, because once [Calles' Law] went into effect they could not exercise the cult in conformity with the canons." Thus, when forced to choose between

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submission to the government or suspension of their religious services, the hierarchy felt suspension to be the lesser of the two evils. Papal approval of the plan was received almost immediately when the prelates were informed that "The Holy See condemned... [Calles'] law and all acts which... [might] signify or be interpreted by the faithful as acceptance or recognition of that same law."  

On July 25 the hierarchy announced the forthcoming suspension to the people. Explaining that the clergy since 1917 had maintained a "prudent silence" in regard to the constitution, the episcopate insisted that the government by flagrantly violating the rights of the Church made future silence impossible. The prelates asserted that they could not conscientiously exercise the ministry under the terms of Calles' Law; consequently, they and their subordinates would withdraw on July 31 from all churches in Mexico. The bishops warned faithful Catholics not to use the suspension of services as a pretext for leading sterile lives and not to forget the poor priests who would remain without "medios de vivir." To impress upon the people the gravity of the situation, the episcopate presented a list of excommunicable...
offenses, which included decreeing laws against the Church, arraigning a bishop before a lay judge, usurping ecclesiastical goods, marrying before a non-Catholic minister, educating one's children in a faith other than Catholicism, and raising one's hand against a priest. 9

Calles ascribed three motives to the clergy in their decision to withdraw from the churches. First, he said that they were afraid of losing sacred property, a fear which was unrealistic because such property had belonged to the nation since the War of the Reform. Secondly, he maintained that priests did not want to submit to governmental demands that the clergy in charge of each church register with the appropriate municipal authorities. Such refusals were unwarranted, the executive asserted, because the government needed such information in order to keep accurate records and compile necessary statistics. Finally, the clergy chose to believe that he was trying to make the country non-Catholic, Calles explained, but such was not the case. The government, the president said, was only fulfilling its legal obligations. It was the Catholic clergy who were

9 Mexican episcopate to the faithful, 25 July 1926 quoted in Toro, La Iglesia, pp. 404-09; Balderrama, El Clero, 2:17-21; Excelsior, 25 July 1926.
abandoning their proper sphere, which . . . [was] purely religious, [and] seek[ing] to invade . . . the spheres of the government and of politics and provoke disorderly movements and, overtly or covertly, [incite] rebellion.

Calles made it clear that he was unimpressed by the episcopate's decision. He would continue to enforce the law, suspension or no suspension.

Unlike the president, the people of Mexico, who were predominantly Catholics, were profoundly affected by the news of the pending withdrawal. During the last week of July thousands of Catholics went to church and prayed for a quick settlement of the religious controversy. Many, especially the Indians, made pilgrimages to the Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Concerned mothers brought their children to church to be baptized or confirmed before the end of clerical services. Many young couples, desiring to be married by a priest, moved their wedding dates forward. To meet the needs of these people priests performed general communions, numerous baptisms, general confirmations, and multiple marriages. Catholic churches conducted services until midnight, with masses celebrated in the larger cathedrals every half hour. Priests came into the cities from outlying

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areas to aid those already there, as Mexicans of all races and classes endeavored to fulfill their religious obligations before July 31, 1926.\textsuperscript{11}

Overt opposition among devout Catholics welled up against the government's efforts to close religious-affiliated private schools, deport foreign clergymen, dissolve religious orders, seal up ecclesiastical treasures, close church annexes and take over churches. In Mexico City, for example, officials met with resistance from fervent parishioners who refused to leave San Rafael Church when ordered to do so. Police, called to disperse the crowd, were bombarded with rocks thrown by women on the roof of the church. That same day Catholics stoned the Attorney General and other officials of the Justice Department to prevent the closing of the annex of St. Catherine's Church. Reacting to such events, the Secretary of the Interior ordered all subversive Catholics disarmed and prohibited the carrying of firearms without a permit. Mounted troops

were readied for the thirty-first should Catholic resistance continue to prove strong, which it did in several areas. 12

As the government prepared to take custody of the churches, the clergy prepared to leave them. On July 30 they held their final formal religious services. On the following day they inventoried church contents and removed their personal possessions. This done, the priests admonished their followers against violence and quit the churches. On August 1 Catholics around the world answered the Pope's supplication and prayed for their persecuted Mexican brethren. B Loyal Catholics in Mexico, especially those belonging to active Catholic societies, joined in these prayers. However, those Mexicans who prayed for the Church and sided with it against the government were largely women, children, old people, and rural folk.

By early August the majority of Mexico's adult male citizens had sworn their allegiance to the president. Congressmen--socialists, labor leaders, and others--assured

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Calles that the legislature would back him in his stand against the Church. Agrarianists, who had benefitted from Calles' land distribution policy, supported him, as did military men, local politicians, and others either pragmatically or idealistically connected with the goals of the Mexican Revolution. The strongest support for the administration came from the labor sector, especially C.R.O.M. members. At one time 330 delegates of distinct labor groups called at the presidential palace to assure Calles of their support. C.R.O.M. went so far as to sponsor the formation of the National Defense League for Freedom of Conscience, designed to combat the influence of Catholic societies such as the LNDR and ACJM. On August 1, while millions of Catholics throughout the world censured the Mexican government in their prayers, more than one hundred thousand Mexicans paraded in front of the presidential palace in support of the administration. The demonstrators expressed their sentiments toward the Roman Catholic Church by carrying placards with slogans, such as "Lay schools destroy fanatics."

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"The clergy are rich, the people poor," and "Calles is completing the work of Juárez."

The question arises, why did so many Mexican Catholics support their government rather than their church. In The Making of Modern Mexico Frank R. Brandenburg discusses the "psychopathology" of Mexican Catholicism. He points out that, while almost everyone in Mexico is nominally a Roman Catholic, Mexican Catholicism is practiced by women, children, and old people. Women tend to be intimately involved with the Church and to listen carefully to their confessors as substitute fathers. This usually causes their husbands to resent the parish priest. In their roles as mothers, Catholic women make sure that their children come into the fold of the Church. However, most boys upon reaching adolescence reject Catholicism as part of the ritual of achieving manhood. After puberty any boy who goes to church with his mother is considered a sissy. Accordingly, many men from the time they are teenagers until they reach old age never attend church or do so only on rare occasions. If men are religious, it is an internal rather than an external manifestation. Furthermore, it is considered a sign of

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machismo for a man to criticize openly the Church and its clergy. 16

One must also remember that Catholicism in Mexico is merely a catch-all label for multiple religious beliefs often bearing little resemblance to Roman Catholicism, yet all brought together under the administration and nominal authority of the Catholic Church hierarchy in Mexico. 17

Many Mexican Catholics, while faithful to their religion, which is often a combination of Catholicism and pagan beliefs, do not necessarily feel a close tie with the Roman Catholic Church as a formal institution. Therefore, many of the Mexicans who supported the State against the Church in 1926 were not necessarily rejecting Catholicism. Rather, they objected to the institutional and historical role of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico. By 1926 a substantial number of the Mexican people shared Calles' distrust for the "priest politician" and supported his enforcement of laws which the clergy now tried to block. They aligned themselves with the president because they too were committed to the goals of the Mexican Revolution. In their view the Roman Catholic Church was unwilling to allow these goals

16 Brandenburg, Modern Mexico, pp. 171-76.
17 Ibid., p. 173.
to be realized. The support of these people fortified Calles in his attempt to "see if the Revolution . . . [had conquered] reaction or if the triumphs of the Revolution [had been] ephemeral."¹⁸

In the days following the suspension of church services, loyal Catholics dressed in black to symbolize their mourning for the Roman Catholic Church, but this was not the attitude of many national leaders. Calling August 1 a glorious day of emancipation for the Mexican people, Adalberto Tejada, Secretary of the Interior, declared that the majority of Mexicans were showing their disapproval of clerics and laymen who wished to nullify the laws and institutions of Mexico.¹⁹ General Obregón remarked that high officials of the Roman Catholic Church were responsible for the conflict and offered assurance that it would disappear "when the directors of the Catholic Church in Mexico . . . subordinate[d] their vanity . . . [and] obey[ed] the laws." Meanwhile, he stated, the federal government was merely dictating the measures necessary to impose proper respect for the law.²⁰ After voicing similar

¹⁸ Calles to C.R.O.M., 29 July 1926 quoted in Murray, Documents, 125.
¹⁹ Excelsior, 4 Aug. 1926.
sentiments, Secretary of Foreign Relations Aaron Sáenz in an official press statement said that the Church-State situation in Mexico was a domestic matter and as such required no intervention from foreign powers.  

Significantly, the president of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, agreed with Sáenz. Consequently, despite considerable pressure from private citizens and public figures, the U.S. State Department maintained an attitude of neutrality and friendly relations with the Calles administration. The official reaction of the United States greatly pleased those Mexicans who supported their government in its fight against the Church.

While the people of Mexico were taking sides in the Church-State conflict, representatives of the Catholic hierarchy explored the possibility of a mutually satisfactory settlement with the government. On the first of August the episcopate revealed its willingness to allow a plebiscite to decide the issue of constitutional reform. Until such an election could be held, the prelates requested the suspension of the religious regulations of the constitution.


22 Excepción, 27 July 1926; 3, 7 Aug. 1926.
And, they made it clear that any settlement of differences between Church and State, whether based on a plebiscite or on other measures, would have to be approved by the Pope. Calles replied to the episcopal proposal by stating that the government would "act with the required energy to enforce the laws."\(^23\)

Undaunted by this rejection, the clergy again tried to come to terms with Calles. On August 16 Mora y del Río and Pascual Díaz y Barreto, bishop of Tabasco, speaking in behalf of the hierarchy, presented the president with a memorial in which they denied intent to rebel against the laws of Mexico. The episcopate assured Calles that they were only seeking the rights which they deserved as Christians and citizens and "the recognition of that personality ... necessary and indispensable to the Church in order ... [to assure its] liberties."\(^24\)

In reply Calles informed the episcopate that he considered their hostility toward the law as rebellion against the government. As president he was obligated to punish "those who by their acts or their preachings provoke acts of


rebellion." Because he was fully in accord with the principles represented in the constitution, Calles insisted that he could not comply with the episcopal request for reform. If the clergy desired reforms, the president advised, they should wait until congress convened in September and petition for redress of their grievances.  

Despite Calles' advice, the clergy tried once more in August to reach an agreement. Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, Archbishop of Morelia, and Díaz y Barreto met with Calles on August 21 to explain the Church's position to him. The two men expressed their conviction that petitions would not solve the Church-State problem. They told Calles that state legislatures were not responsive to Church petitions, as evidenced by many cases in the past. Immediate action was needed; yet, the national legislature was not in session. Therefore, the prelates said, it was up to Calles to alleviate the critical situation by suspending objectionable laws until reforms might be achieved. Calles emphatically assured the bishops that his position had not changed and that the clergy, if they chose to return to the churches, would be

subject to the law. Furthermore, the president stressed that no foreign power, papal or otherwise, would be allowed to violate Mexican sovereignty or dictate to the Mexican government. Thus, by August 21 it was obvious that chances for a Church-State accord were slight, as neither of the principals involved was willing to compromise its demands.

Papal action in late August strengthened the determination of the episcopate to resist compromise with the government. Pius XI, having read news reports of a possible reconciliation between the Church and State in Mexico, feared that the Mexican hierarchy in their desire to return to the churches might disregard his earlier instructions, i.e., not to do anything which even remotely implied acceptance or recognition of measures like Calles' Law. The Pope informed the Mexican episcopate to reject all proposals which did "not conform to the instructions given by the Holy See." The prelates quickly reassured the Holy Father that they would remain firm in their stand and obedient to the papacy. By this time, however, they were aware that

26 María Carreño, El Arzobispo, pp. 113, 126-35, passim; El Universal (México City), 22 June 1929; Lara y Torres, Documentos, p. 529.

without making some major concessions they could not hope for agreement with Calles. Therefore, they turned to the Mexican congress which convened on September 1 for relief.

The episcopate on September 6, 1926, petitioned congress for the establishment of religious liberty, acknowledgement of the parental right to educate children in their chosen faith, recognition of the legitimacy of religious schools, acceptance of the independence of ecclesiastical authority in matters relating to the church, defense of the rights of all citizens, and the return of churches and other religious buildings. Relief could be achieved through the revocation or reform of objectionable parts of Articles 3, 5, 24, 27, and 130.28 While considering the petition, the Chamber of Deputies received memorials with more than 150,000 signatures of people supporting the proposed constitutional changes. Nevertheless, the deputies, who in their debates revealed strong anti-clerical feelings, on September 24 voted 171-1 to reject the episcopal petition.29

28 Memorial of Mexican episcopate to congress, 6 Sept. 1926 quoted in Balderrama, El Clero, 2:149-54; Toro, La Iglesia, pp. 434-450. See also Hackett, CH 25(1929):287.

29 Hackett 25(1926):287. Debates occasioned in the Chamber of Deputies by the episcopal memorial of 6 Sept. may be found in part in Balderrama, El Clero, 2:155-234.
Faced with this rejection, the episcopate reminded the Mexican people that Calles had advised them to seek relief from congress. They had done so "to show that . . . [they] were willing to employ all legal methods to arrive at a solution." The members of congress, the bishops complained, had not even seriously considered their requests. Nevertheless, the clergy assured their followers that they would "remain firm and serene always demanding liberty through legitimate methods." Voicing similar views, Pius XI on November 18 condemned the arbitrariness of the Mexican constitution and the tyranny of the government. At the same time he praised those Catholic associations in Mexico which stood "by the side of the clergy like soldiers" and encouraged these groups to remain firm in their support of the Roman Catholic Church.

Because Church supporters obeyed papal dictates and remained firm in opposition to the government, Calles decided that more stringent legislation was needed to control the rebellious elements in the country. Since July 31 devout

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Catholics had tried to fulfill their religious obligations in ways that were not prohibited by law. Priests began to celebrate masses and administer the sacraments in private homes. When priests were not available, laymen held their own services. These practices, which circumvented the law, were prevalent in Mexico by late 1926. With this in mind, Calles in November submitted to congress a bill to insure complete enforcement of laws relating to religious matters. The resultant law of November 25, which strengthened even further existing regulations, also made civil marriage obligatory, outlawed services led by laymen, and prohibited the holding of private masses.  

Devout Catholics, enraged by Calles' move, now felt that religious persecution reached into their homes and denied them the right to practice their religion. They became more determined than ever to oppose the government's constitutional enforcement program. However, they were faced with the problem of determining an effective form of protest. Their boycott, although having a temporarily

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depressing effect on the economy, ultimately had failed. Attempts to negotiate a settlement with Calles had merely served to reveal his intransigency. And, congress had been equally unreceptive to Catholic demands. Aroused Catholics, therefore, concluded that "legitimate" means of protest were worthless in the present situation. They decided that military action was the only dependable means of achieving their goals. Their decision resulted in a civil war which decided the immediate fate of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRISTERO REBELLION

The occasional clashes between Catholics and governmental forces in July and August of 1926 resulted in minor uprisings in various parts of Mexico. In August Pedro Quintinar of Valparaíso, Zacatecas, along with a few followers, attacked federal troops who had imprisoned a local priest. After the skirmish Quintinar's men declared themselves to be in open rebellion against Calles. Similarly, in late September revolts at Santiago and Bayacora in Durango, under the leadership of Trinidad Mora, protested the government's restrictions upon the Catholic Church. These and other spontaneous uprisings in the late summer and early fall of 1926 were isolated and uncoordinated occurrences. While the several small rebel bands did share a hatred of the government and a loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church, they acted independently of each other.¹

¹Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 131, 139-40, 152; Cristóbal Rodríguez, La Iglesia Católica y La Rebelión Cristera en México, 1926-1929 (México: Editorial la Voz de Juárez, 1960), p. 37. (Hereafter cited as Rodríguez, La Iglesia Católica.) Probably the best single work on the uprisings of 1926 and the subsequent more coordinated military effort is the above cited work by Olivera Sedano, who had access to the records of the LMDR.
These revolts led the Mexican War Department to order the enlistment of an additional five thousand troops and to advise military zone commanders to begin necessary preparations for waging an energetic campaign against the insurgents. The government's preparations convinced the leaders of the League, who had accepted the inevitability of armed resistance to the government, that the rebels' only hope for success was to join their manpower and resources in an organized revolution. Believing that their leadership was best suited for such a movement, the League's directors devoted themselves to the coordination of a united military effort. Before undertaking this decisive step, however, the directors felt that they should consult the Church hierarchy.²

In a petition dated November 26, 1926, the leaders of the LNDR asked the episcopate to refrain from condemning armed action, to approve of the League as the leader of a military effort, to allow priests to serve canonically as military men, and to influence rich Catholics into financing the proposed rebellion.³ After careful consideration, the


³ LNDR to episcopate, 26 Nov. 1926, quoted in Olivero Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 132-33; Wilkie, "Cristero War," p. 160; Larin, La Rebelión, p. 151.
hierarchy acknowledged the right of Mexican Catholics to defend themselves, with arms if necessary, when their rights were under attack. Further, the prelates recognized the League as the logical organization to head military efforts primarily because most of the uprisings had been led by members of that association. While the bishops unanimously agreed on these two points, they did not feel it appropriate to authorize priests to serve in the military. But, any priest who desired to minister to the rebel troops could do so. Finally, the episcopate refused to use their influence to acquire financial aid for the rebellion, as such positive action would endanger their already perilous position in Mexico.

By failing to condemn armed rebellion, sanctioning the League's leadership of the proposed revolt, and allowing priests to attend the rebel forces the episcopate threw itself open to later charges of having sponsored the resulting civil war. However, the conviction of many governmental officials, such as Calles, that the hierarchy was directly responsible for the revolt was mistaken. The episcopate, careful to avoid any overt act which might associate it

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directly with the armed movement, probably had little, if any, part in the planning and execution of the rebellion. Nevertheless, the accusation of clerical complicity contained at least a germ of truth; for, the prelates of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico were in a position of moral responsibility. Had they in November of 1926 condemned the League's proposal, there most likely would not have been an organized rebellion, as it would have been incongruent for the Mexican people to arise in support of the Church if that same institution counseled against such actions. However, the episcopate wanted the people to resist the Calles government and, consequently, lent its prestige to the plan of the LNDR.

Upon receipt of the episcopate's reply, the League formed a committee to handle "asuntos de guerra" and began a massive propaganda campaign to gain popular support. The organization quickly succeeded in becoming the "punto de unión de todos los Católicos militantes ... y de todas las organizaciones [católicas]." With the encouragement of the LNDR, the diverse rebel groups already in the field agreed to a series of uprisings throughout Mexico in the early days of January, 1927. Consequently, the new year saw bands of insurgents, many of whom were accompanied by zealous
priests, attack federal forces, cut communication lines, assault public school teachers, burn government schools, attack trains, and assault private automobiles. Because the League was best organized in southwestern and central Mexico, the areas of heaviest activity were in Jalisco, Durango, Coahuila, Guerrero, Michoacán, and South Zacatecas.  

The government sent reinforcements to the commanders of the most seriously affected zones. The Secretary of War ordered that all captured rebels stand trial in Mexico City. Those convicted were quickly transported to penal colonies on the Tres Marías Islands. The arms and property of those participating in the rebellion were confiscated by the government and used to defray the cost of quashing the revolt. To prevent the smuggling of arms to the insurgents, the government reinforced Mexican border patrols and allowed only specially authorized merchants within the country to sell arms and ammunition.  

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field, Calles also dealt with the forces he believed to be behind the movement. The history of the clergy in Mexico, the episcopate's open disregard for the Constitution of 1917, the November exchange between the League and the hierarchy, and the presence of Catholic priests with rebel bands convinced the president and his advisers that the high clergy were the motivating force behind the rebellion. Calles ordered the arrest of Díaz y Barreto who had authored the episcopal reply to the League in November. Charged as the "intellectual leader" of the revolution, Díaz y Barreto was expelled from Mexico on January 12.7

On the day of Díaz' arrest, Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores and four bishops were also taken into custody for different reasons. They were charged with illegally performing religious services in a private domicile, and although the five were soon released, they had to report their whereabouts to the Minister of the Interior every day. On January 30 the president ordered all Catholic clergy, whatever their rank, to register with the Ministry of the Interior by February 10. Those who failed to register by this date

7 Hackett, CH (1927) 918; Mecham, Church and State, p. 399. That Calles believed the episcopate to be directly involved in the rebellion was evidenced by various of his actions which will be discussed later in this paper.
would be declared outlaws. While some priests complied, others, believing that registration would be a sign of submission to the civil authorities, did not. To avoid arrest dissident clerics went into hiding. Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, bishop of Colima, was one of the more prominent clergymen who refused the registration requirement. By hiding in various parts of his diocesis, he managed to avoid arrest and deportation until 1929. However, his unlawful presence in one of the areas of greatest rebel activity aided Calles, who labeled him the "supreme head" of the rebellion. 8

Calles on February 10 announced the definite supression of the "Catholic revolution." While acknowledging that a few rebels remained active, the president expressed his confidence that they too would promptly be dispersed. However, his optimism proved premature. The state of Jalisco was the scene of serious disturbances in March and April of 1927. The continuance of serious revolutionary activity led the War Department on March 7 to issue an order of "no quarter to the rebels." Following these instructions, 8

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8 El Universal, 11, 12 Jan. 1927; Hackett, CH 25(1927): 918; Mecham, Church and State, p. 399; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 157; Rodríguez, La Iglesia Católica, pp. 68, 139.
Tranquilino Mendoza, military commander of Jalisco, on April 1 arrested Anacleto González Flores, writer, orator, and leader of guerrilla activity in the Los Altos region. After questioning, perhaps under torture, González Flores was executed. His death, while a blow to the Jaliscan insurrectionists, was not fatal to their cause and resistance continued. In May Mendoza ordered that all families in the Los Altos area be concentrated into one zone where they could be watched and kept from aiding the enemy. This order met with heavy resistance and occasioned even greater fighting, but government successes severely affected the rebels in Jalisco and elsewhere by the summer of 1927.9

The actions of the Cristeros, a name applied to the rebels, had direct bearing on the Mexican episcopate. On April 19 bandits derailed and robbed a passenger train en route from Guadalajara to Mexico City. More than one hundred of the train's passengers were killed or burned alive. Survivors testified that the bandits, while attacking, had shouted "Viva Cristo Rey," the Cristero motto. The general who investigated the robbery concluded that three priests

had led the attacking band. Presented with this evidence, General José Alvarez, a joint chief of staff under Calles, announced that the guilty persons had been "organized by the Catholic Episcopate ... who wish to be the spiritual directors of the nation and take over the power." Acting on this conviction, Calles ordered the arrest of those prelates responsible for the atrocity.

On April 21 Mora y del Río, Ruiz y Flores, and four bishops were brought before Secretary Tejada and charged with complicity in the rebellion. While the Archbishop of Mexico denied that the episcopate had plotted or aided the movement, he asserted their belief "that the Catholics of Mexico . . . [could] fight for their rights by peaceful means first and with arms in an extremity." To Tejada this was sufficient proof of the hierarchy's involvement in the Cristero revolt, and the six clergymen were deported. San Antonio, Texas, became the headquarters for these exiled

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11 In retaliation for the attack on the passenger train, governmental officials hanged Cristeros without trial and in other ways committed atrocities themselves. See Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 394.

12 Hackett, CH 26(1927):472.
members of the Mexican episcopate. They were soon joined there by Díaz y Barreto, who had been in Rome.\textsuperscript{13}

From San Antonio Díaz made a second trip to Rome in the early summer of 1927. Upon his return he informed reporters that Pius XI was "confident that eventually the Church . . . [would] win her battle in Mexico." Díaz added his own assurance that "the Calles government must fall and that with its fall the Catholic Church . . . [would] regain her old standing."\textsuperscript{14} However, facts belied the optimism of Church officials. While Díaz was insisting that Calles would be overthrown, \textit{Current History}, an American journal, commented that "the first year without services in the Catholic churches of Mexico ended on July 31, and the victory of the Government appeared to be even more complete than was the case over a year ago."\textsuperscript{15} The journal was correct. The death of local leaders, the lack of adequate supplies, and the determination of the Calles

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, Mecham, \textit{Church and State}, p. 400; Rodríguez, \textit{La Iglesia Católica}, p. 143; María Carreño, \textit{El Arzobispo}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{14} Díaz y Barreto to press, 9 July 1927 quoted in Gruening, \textit{Heritage}, p. 286.

\textsuperscript{15} Hackett, \textit{CH} 26(1927):958.
government had seriously weakened the Cristero movement by mid-summer of 1927. 16

Significantly, the directors of the League were also aware of the Cristero's critical situation and were determined to correct it. Realizing that lack of qualified leadership was their most crucial problem, in May they had appointed Jesús Degollado y Guízar as Chief of Operations in Southern Jalisco, Colima, Nayarit, and Western Michoacán. This was a wise choice, as the campaign effected by Degollado y Guízar was the strongest undertaken by the Cristeros in their war against Calles. In July the League directors made another significant appointment when they named Enrique Gorostieta, who had attended the Military College of Chapultepec, as commander of the Cristero forces in Jalisco. The appointment of these two men to key positions gave new life to the rebellion by the fall of 1927. 17

While the Cristero forces struggled to regain their strength, the League feared that the episcopate upon hearing of governmental successes in the field might lose faith in

16 Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 182, 184, 192. Gruening, a contemporary observer, wrote that "the Catholic rebellion was supressed" by July, 1927. Although he was incorrect, others shared in this mistaken conclusion.

the rebel movement. To avoid this the League's officials compiled a communique to the exiled prelates in San Antonio. Stating that more than twenty-five thousand men in eighteen states had fought for the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico in 1927, the directors assured the prelates that the military effort would flourish as long as it had their benediction, prayers, and moral support. 18

True to the League's prediction the Cristero forces, also known as the National Army, did remain at war with the government. Small bands of fifteen to twenty men, specialists in guerrilla warfare, moved rapidly, committed audacious attacks, and then retreated to the safety of the mountains. Their tactics enabled the rebels to inflict disproportionately large numbers of casualties upon federal forces. Attempting again to suppress the rebellion, the Mexican government, which was never in any danger of being overthrown by the National Army, in February of 1928 declared a blockade around Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima, and Aguascalientes. The Minister of War, who personally assumed control of federal troops in these areas, initiated an offensive campaign of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and

18 LMDR to Mexican episcopate, 29 Dec. 1927, quoted in Degollado y Guizar, Memorias, pp. 259-60; 264; Olivera Sedano, Asociada, p. 185.
aerial attacks against the rebels. However, the Cristeros, relying more and more heavily upon guerrilla warfare, were not suppressed.\(^{19}\)

Various factors contributed to the rebels' successes despite strong government opposition. The weaknesses of the National Army curiously were also its strengths. Although nominally united under the leadership of men like Degollado y Guízar and Gorostieta, the diverse rebel groups continued to act fairly independent of each other. The absence of any overall strategy or battle plan meant that the Cristeros were difficult to out guess or out maneuver. The existence of so many small bands in several Mexican states prevented the government from effectively concentrating its troops in any one area. When governmental forces did score a victory, they usually defeated only one semi-autonomous Cristero group while the others remained unaffected. Because the movement lacked centralized leadership, no one person was indispensable to it. For the National Army, decentralization, disorganization, and disunity had their practical advantages.

\(^{19}\) Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 139, 209, 212; Hackett, CH 28(1928):121. General Cristóbal Rodríguez, a federal military officer who led troops against the Cristeros, estimated that approximately five per cent of the Mexican population was involved in the rebellion.
Equally responsible for the persistent survival of the rebellion was the composition of the Cristero army. Most of the rebels were zealous Catholics whose faith was largely responsible for their tenacity. Upon joining the National Army, men pledged to defend unto death the rights of the Church. And, many willingly fulfilled that pledge. Various groups of rebels consecrated their work to Christ, held daily prayer of the Rosary, heard masses on Sunday, had communion and confession, and otherwise illustrated their devoutness. Contemporary priest, J. Andres Lara noted that the rebels were filled with faith and were sure of God's help. Believing themselves to be engaged in a modern crusade, the Cristeros felt that God would aid them in their endeavors. This sustained them against overwhelming odds, and they persisted until the Church and State reached an accord which ended their crusade. It should be noted that not all Cristeros were motivated solely by religious considerations. Some were disappointed politicians; others were demoted military men, or conservative landowners, or discontented campesinos; and still others were malcontents dissatisfied with the government. However, even those who had very practical or selfish reasons for joining the movement were often devout Catholics and shared
in part the religious fervor of those fighting strictly for love of the Church. 20

While the Cristeros were defending their faith, Church and State in the spring of 1928 again considered the possibility of resolving their differences. Since 1926 Catholics in the United States had asked Calvin Coolidge to support Catholics in Mexico. Despite this pressure, the American president had considered the Mexican religious crisis a domestic affair and remained neutral in the matter. 21 Unofficially, however, during the early part of 1928, the United States government tried to encourage a resolution of the conflict. By February 1 Secretary of State Frank Kellogg gave Dwight W. Morrow, American ambassador to Mexico, permission to engage in "extracurricular" attempts to persuade Calles into negotiations with Church officials.

20 Degollado y Guízar, Memorias, pp. 7-8, 23, 43, 59, 163, 244-47, 254; Rodríguez, La Iglesia Católica, p. 174; J. Andres Lara, Prisonero de Callistas y Cristeros (México: Editorial Jus, 1954), p. 93; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 210-12, 214. Ample evidence of the deep religious fervor and devoutness of the Cristero troops appears in later Cristero literature, such as the above works by Degollado y Guízar and J. Andres Lara.

Consequently, Morrow informed Calles that U.S.-Mexican relations, strained over other matters, might improve with the attainment of tranquil conditions within Mexico. Taking the ambassador's hint, Calles assured his friend Morrow that the Mexican government did not want to control the spiritual functions of the Church, but he refused to allow any changes in the laws of Mexico as a prerequisite for the priests' resumption of their duties. However, he told Morrow that existing laws would be reasonably enforced if the clergy upon their return stayed out of politics.22

Morrow passed this information on to interested persons who took the next step in arranging Church-State negotiations. The secretary and the president of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in the United States, respectively John Burke and William F. Montavon, went to Mexico to talk with Calles on behalf of the exiled episcopate. Explaining that the clergy would like to return to their duties in Mexico if it could be done in conformity with their consciences, Burke informed Calles that formal negotiations could begin after the Mexican president gave assurances that neither he nor the laws of Mexico intended to destroy the identity of the Church and that excessive

applications of the law would be avoided. Although displaying a basically uncompromising attitude during his exchanges with Burke, Calles on April 4 offered the requested assurances. 23

As evidence of the government's willingness to meet with Church officials, Secretary of Education Puig Casauranc publicly denied on April 16 that the government desired to erase Roman Catholicism and expressed reverence for Mexico's religious tradition. The presence of both Calles and Obregón at Casauranc's speech in Celaya signified their approval of his remarks, and contemporaries saw this as an "Olive Branch" offering to the clergy. 24 In response to Calles' new attitude, the Mexican episcopal committee met to decide upon a plan of action, but sharp division among the hierarchy soon became evident. Personal distaste for any settlement reached while Calles was still in power, lack of faith in governmental promises, belief that the Cristero

23 Simpson, Many Mexico, p. 311; Ellis, "Morrow," pp. 488-89; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 228, Kelley, Altars, p. 403; Mecham, Church and State, p. 400; Burke to Calles, 29 March 1928; reply to Burke, 4 April 1929 quoted in Emilio Portes Gil, Quince Años de Política Mexicana, 3d ed. (México: Ediciones Librería Botas, 1954), pp. 317-19. (Hereafter cited as Portes Gil, Quince Años.)

rebellion might yet be successful, and the realization that any settlement reached without popular approval could be dangerous caused some bishops to oppose any reapproachment with the Mexican government. However, the majority of the prelates wanted negotiations in order to normalize Church-State relations as soon as possible. However, all of the bishops, whether for or against an immediate settlement, felt that more explicit guarantees for the Church than those made in the Calles/Burke exchange were prequisite to any agreement.  

Ruiz y Flores, the new president of the episcopal committee since the death of Mora y del Río in April, and John Burke went to Mexico to meet with Calles. The Archbishop of Morelia and the Mexican president with Burke and Morrow also present held a series of conferences in May. As a result of their discussions, Calles again indicated his willingness to publicly state that the clergy could resume their duties if they would obey the laws, laws which would be reasonably applied. However, Calles adamantly refused

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to make any further commitments or to allow any suspension of pertinent legislation. At the end of the conferences, Ruiz y Flores proceeded to Rome and informed Pius XI that Calles, while ready to participate in a public exchange with the Church, would make no major concessions.  

The negotiations between Ruiz y Flores and Calles alarmed concerned Catholic laymen. Officers of the National Army met at Los Altos and agreed that the present conflict could be satisfactorily resolved only through a military victory. Their feelings were communicated to the heads of the Church. The directors of the League feared that a settlement negotiated by the clergy would not necessarily protect the rights of "aquello que luchan con las armas en la mano por la libertad de la . . . Iglesia." This fear was not new. In March the League had asked Pius XI in the event of Church-State negotiations to allow one of its membership to act as a Church representative. Only in this way, the League officials asserted, could the rights of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Cristeros be guaranteed.


27 Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 229, 232.
Their request ignored, the League along with eleven other Mexican Catholic societies on May 31 sent a memorial to the Pope. The combined associations assured Pius XI that Calles had made no real concessions to the Church in his exchange with Ruiz y Flores, and, even if he had, Calles would betray his promises. The signators emphatically advised that loyal Catholics in Mexico did not want a peace achieved at the cost of the disappearance of the Catholic faith, the inevitable result of any agreement with Calles.  

Aware of the feelings of Church followers in Mexico, the Pope realized the dangers inherent in a premature settlement with the Mexican government. Therefore, he told Ruiz y Flores that papal approval could not be given any proposed agreement until Calles promised amnesty for those bearing arms, stronger safeguards for the returning hierarchy, and more explicit guarantees for the Church itself. This decision did not halt negotiations between the Church and the State, however. To the contrary it revealed that further talks were needed for the achieving of a mutually satisfactory agreement. Morrow continued to serve as middle man between

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28 League to Vatican, 7 March 1928 quoted in María Carreño, El Arzobispo, p. 65; Memorial of LNDR and other Catholic societies to the Vatican, 31 May 1928 quoted in Rodríguez, La Iglesia Católica, pp. 234-37.
Pius XI and Calles and tried to help the two reach a workable compromise. However, an event in July altered the course of history.

Calles' term in office was nearing an end by the summer of 1928. As his successor he supported popular ex-president Alvaro Obregón. Obregón won the presidential election in early July, but on the seventeenth, to the horror of the Mexican nation, the president-elect was assassinated by a religious fanatic, José León Toral, a member of both ACJM and LNDR. Evidence revealed the possibility of clerical complicity in the assassination, and a nun, Concepción Acevedo de la Llata, was accused of instigating the act. Obregón's murder aroused a resurgence of anti-clericalism in Mexico and ended any desire Calles might have had for settlement with the clergy. Prospects for a speedy solution to the Church-State conflict died with Obregón.  

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CHAPTER V

THE CHURCH-STATE ACCORD

The assassination of President-elect Obregón on July 17 presented unexpected problems for Calles. Because Luis Morones, head of C.R.O.M. and Calles' Secretary of Labor, had made forceful remarks against Obregón and his candidacy in April, some staunch Obregonistas concluded that Morones and other influential labor leaders were involved in the death of the Sonoran general. Calles' close association with C.R.O.M. officials and Morones' important governmental position made the president himself suspect. To stifle rumors of his complicity in the affair, Calles on July 28 announced his acceptance of the resignations of Morones and two other labor leaders in the cabinet.¹ By removing persons distrusted by the Obregonistas, Calles hoped to halt the loss of governmental prestige resulting from the mysterious circumstances surrounding Obregón's death.

Shortly after removing these three men from public office, Calles appointed Emilio Portes Gil, a lawyer of

¹Portes Gil, Quince Años, pp. 23, 25, 31-33; Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 405; Brandenburg, Modern Mexico, p. 63.
rising popularity, as Secretary of Gobernación. At the
time of his appointment in mid-August, the thirty-seven
year old Tamaulipan was governor of his home state, where
he had enforced agrarian reform measures, championed the
rights of labor, encouraged the improvement of public
education, and applied Calles' religious measures. Upon
assuming office in late August, Portes Gil informed Calles
that the fundamental problem within Mexico at that time
was the Church-State conflict, aggravated by excessive
applications of existing laws. If at all possible, he
advised, the religious crisis should be resolved. The new
Secretary of Gobernación also felt that innocent Catholics
should be protected from unscrupulous local, state, and
federal officials who used religious legislation as an
excuse to line their own pockets. Calles approved in
principle of a move toward "the politics of conciliation,"
but he insisted on the continued enforcement of legislation
pertaining to religious matters. In this atmosphere Gil
reflected a more cautious attitude toward relations with
the Church by warning his subordinates to remain strictly
within the law and to avoid acts of violence.2

2Portes Gil, Quince Años, pp. 35-37, 297; Brandenburg,
Modern Mexico, p. 63.
As Calles neared the end of his administration, Church-State problems were subordinated to the question of presidential succession. The Constitution of 1917 specifically prohibited any man from serving two consecutive terms, and Calles was clearly ineligible to remain in the presidency after November 30. Nevertheless, some Mexicans feared that he might use the confusion surrounding Obregón's assassination as an excuse to remain in office. Calles, however, was far too shrewd a politician to defy the popular Revolutionary principle of "No Reelection." In his annual message to Congress on September 1, he announced his intention of retiring from office and suggested that Congress select an interim president to serve until the electorate could choose a replacement for Obregón. Calles' pronouncement allayed the fears of many citizens, but it also provoked speculation over the congressional choice for provisional president. Congress acted quickly to settle the matter. Meeting in a joint session on September 25, 1928, Mexican congressmen with the approval of Calles selected Emilio Portes Gil as interim president. He would serve until a formal presidential election could be held in November of 1929. In his acceptance of the office, Portes Gil publicly
announced his intention of continuing policies developed by Calles.\(^3\)

Believing that the new president would indeed follow in Calles' footsteps, the directors of the LNDR decided to strengthen the Cristero Army. In late October of 1928 they designated Enrique Gorostieta as Military Chief of the Liberator Movement. Gorostieta, as the first distinct leader of all rebel forces, took his appointment seriously. He issued a "Manifesto to the Nation" explaining the essence of the Cristero movement. Reminding the rebels that they were fighting to recover their rights of religion and conscience, the new Military Chief proclaimed the Constitution of 1857—minus the Reform Laws—in effect in Mexico. Gorostieta assured that the "National Guard," his name for the rebel army, would continue its resistance until its goals, embodied in the slogan of "God, Country, and Liberty," were achieved.\(^4\)

Like Fortes Gil and the directors of the League, the officials of the Roman Catholic Church announced their determination to continue in much the same vein. On

\(^3\) Brandenburg, Modern Mexico, p. 63; Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 405; Portes Gil, Quince Anos, pp. 49, 51, 213; Hackett, CH 29(1928):321.

\(^4\) Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 187, 193, 201, 203.
November 21 representatives of the Holy See said that Pius XI would allow no resumption of services in Mexico until the government offered more "reasonable" concessions to the Church than any proposed to date. That same day the exiled members of the Mexican episcopate announced that the Church-State conflict in Mexico could only be terminated by "el mutuo respecto, la mutua concordia, la benevolencia mutua, basada ... en una amistosa independencia entre la iglesia y el estado." The sentiments expressed by the Vatican and the Mexican hierarchy, although soon to change, offered little hope that a speedy settlement might be effected when Portes Gil assumed office on December 1, 1928.

During the first few months of the interim presidency, the excitement and emotionalism surrounding the trials of José León Toral and Concepción Acevedo de la Llata prevented any immediate relaxation in Church-State tensions. When León Toral received the death sentence on February 1, 1929, aroused members of the League asked Portes Gil to stop the execution and warned that he would be sorry if he did not. Gil informed the petitioners and others that León Toral had been condemned in succession by a popular jury, by the

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5 Ellis, "Morrow," p. 496.
6 Moctezuma, El Conflicto, 2:497.
Seventh Court of the Superior Tribunal of the Federal District, and by the national Supreme Court. The provisional president explained that he respected the decisions of these judicial bodies and, therefore, would not grant a pardon to Obregón's assassin. Consequently, on February 9 León Toral was executed amid massive public protests and demonstrations staged by aroused Catholics. The following day the presidential train, en route through Guanajuato with the president and his family aboard, was dynamited by persons whom Portes Gil believed to be members of the League. On the day of León Toral's burial, subversive Catholics committed several acts of violence in the capital.7

Faced with this disturbing situation, Portes Gil acted. To insure greater control of clerical activities he ordered all Catholic priests to report their addresses to the Department of the Interior within fifteen days. Next, the president made a public statement regarding recent events. The actions of subversive Catholic elements within Mexico, he maintained, did not result from religious persecution. Rather, the instigators of violence were men who wished to protect

7 Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, pp. 219-223; Portes Gil, Quince Años, pp. 299-301, 305-06, 310; Hackett, CH 30(1929):142.
historic privileges threatened by the Revolutionary govern-
ment. The president implied his determination to stop all
reactionaries who, in order to achieve their own political
ends, exploited the Catholic masses of Mexico. 8

Other matters, however, served to distract the president's
attention from the problem of Catholic fanaticism in Mexico.
Allegedly hoping to establish a government of laws rather
than "caudillos," Calles in December of 1928 had announced
the formation of a national political party. The resultant
Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) was designed to unite
the various elements of the Revolution into one body and to
discipline the tendencies of local leaders who hindered the
achievement of Revolutionary goals. The new party met in
early March and selected an official candidate for the
November presidential election. Pascual Ortiz Rubio, 'Calles'
obvious choice for the presidency, received the nomination.
Before the convention reached its decision, however, several
dissatisfied military leaders rebelled. The most important
figure in the movement was Gonzalo Escobar, military commander
of Coahuila. But the rebellion also included among others
Feusto Topete, governor of Sonora; Francisco Manzo, Chief

8 Hackett, CH 30 (1929): 142; Moctezuma, El Conflicto, 2:513;
Portes Gil to press, 12 February 1929 quoted in Portes Gil, Quince Años, pp. 306-07.
of Operations of Sonora; Jesús María Aguirre, Chief of Operations of Veracruz; and Claudio Fox, Chief of Operations of Oaxaca. To meet this challenge Portes Gil appointed Calles as Secretary of War, and the ex-president personally led federal forces against an estimated 30,000 military rebels.9

Making a bid for Catholic Support, Escobar publicly denounced Calles' religious policies and abolished Article 130 of the constitution in all areas under his control. The Cristeros, however, were skeptical of Escobar's sincerity; for, in 1926 he had been one of the most vigorous agents of Calles' religious legislation. Therefore, the "National Guard" apparently did not officially associate itself with the short-lived March military rebellions, which were openly condemned by the Mexican episcopate.10

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9 Portes Gil, Quince Años, pp. 211-12, 228, 262-63, 295; Johnson, Heroic Mexico, p. 408; Parkes, History, p. 392; Brandenburg, Modern Mexico, pp. 63-64; Hackett, CH 30(1929):141.

10 Hackett, CH 30(1929):325; Rodríguez, La Iglesia Católica, p. 266; Mecham, Church and State, p. 201; José Reyes Estrada, Hagamos Patria Cigentando la Paz en México: Injusta Guerra de Religión y Fueros (Los Angeles, Cal.: "La Voz de Chihuahua," 1929), pp. 1, 5; Ellis, "Morrow," p. 498. Olivera Sedano states that Escobar made a pact with representatives of the League in which he promised to effect the liberties for which the Cristeros were fighting. However, this writer found no evidence of joint action by the Cristeros and the militarists. Furthermore, the Mexican government at various times stated its satisfaction that the religious rebels had not allied with the new movement, which lasted only seventy-five days.
On May 1 in an interview with a foreign newsman, Portes Gil stated that the movement headed by Escobar, Aguirre, and Manzo had been occasioned by individual quest for power and expressed his satisfaction that the Cristeros had not joined the militarists. The president then said that the religious rebels in Jalisco, Guanajuato, Michoacán, and elsewhere were fanatics "bajo la dirección de muy . . . malos elementos del clero católico." However, he went on to express his feeling that those priests who directed bands of fanatics were "sacerdotes de ínfima categoría" and were not representative of the Catholic clergy as a whole, who had shown themselves basically indifferent to the movement. On this basis the newsman asked Portes Gil whether there was any possibility of his reaching an understanding with the Catholic Church. The president answered that the clergy might at any time resume religious services in Mexico with the assurance that civil authority would not be hostile to them, but he emphasized that priests would be subject to existing laws upon their return to the churches.11

In the above press statement Portes Gil, whether he did it intentionally or not, expressed opinions which could

11 Portes Gil to Dubose, 1 May 1929 quoted in Portes Gil, Quince Años, pp. 321-25; Excelsior, 31 May 1929. See also Mautz, El Conflicto, 2:530; Mecham, Church and State, p. 401.
be interpreted as evidence of a new conciliatory attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church. Ruiz y Flores chose to interpret the president's remarks in this way. The Archbishop on May 2 informed American newsmen that

el conflicto religioso en México no fue motivado por ninguna causa que no . . . [pudiera] ser corregida por hombres de buena voluntad. Como una palabra de buena voluntad, las palabras del Presidente . . . [fueron] de mucha importancia. La Iglesia y sus Ministros [estaban] . . . preparados para cooperar con él en todo esfuerzo justo y moral para el mejoramiento del pueblo mexicano.  

Having indicated the Church's willingness to work toward a resolution of the religious problem in Mexico, Ruiz y Flores naively assured the press that Mexican Catholics would accept any agreement which the Church and State might reach.  

Ruiz y Flores' pronouncement of May 2 forced Portes Gil to decide whether to reopen negotiations with the Church and, thereby, return the clergy to their posts. The Mexican situation in 1929 influenced the president's decision. The Revolutionary Family in that year suffered from internal divisions, as evidenced by the military rebellions in March.

\[12 \text{Ruiz y Flores to press, 2 May 1929 quoted in Portes Gil, } \text{Quince Años, p. 320; Excelsior, 3 May 1929; Moctezuma, El Conflicto, pp. 530-31.}\]

\[13 \text{Portes Gil, Quince Años, p. 321.}\]
Although the government managed to meet this challenge, Portes Gil feared that the Cristeros and other reactionaries within Mexico might take advantage of the insecure position of the administration. For, the Cristero movement, although seriously weakened by 1929, still existed in western Mexico. The result was a continuing loss of life, destruction of property, and waste of resources which greatly concerned the president. Realizing the need for internal unity in Mexico, Portes Gil felt it expedient to end the religious rebellion if possible, and he had already announced a military effort toward that end. However, the president probably realized that a less costly means of stopping the Cristeros would be to remove the cause for the rebellion, i.e., to reach an accord with the Roman Catholic Church.

The domestic situation was not the only factor behind the president's later decision, however. Since 1926 Calles' religious policies had caused the Mexican government to lose considerable international prestige. Government officials and private citizens in Christian countries officially or privately had charged Calles with religious persecution and criticized his treatment of the Catholic clergy. Furthermore,

\[1\] James W. Wilkie, "Cristero War," p. 163-64; Portes Gil, Quince Anos, p. 330; Hackett, CH 30(1929):499-500.
the three year clerical strike had proved highly embarrassing for the government of a nation which was historically and actually, if nominally, more than ninety per cent Catholic. Portes Gil doubtlessly believed, therefore, that a Church-State settlement would improve the image of his administration and strengthen Mexico's international prestige.

Certain prominent persons in Mexico also influenced Portes Gil's decision. In March of 1929 Dwight Morrow had renewed his personal efforts to arrange discussions between Church and State representatives. In April a concerned Mexican, Manuel Echeverría, informed the American ambassador that most Mexican bishops now desired peace with the state. Morrow passed this information on to the president. Then in early May, Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal, ex-Chilean ambassador to Washington, and Father Edmund A. Walsh of Georgetown University came to Mexico from Rome. While there the two men had conferred with "high sources" who had authorized

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15 Cumberland, Mexico, p. 281. Examples of the criticism leveled at the Calles government may be found in the following: Hackett, CH 25(1926):288; New York Times, 24 July 1926, p. 12; 26 July 1926, p. 2; 30 July 1926, pp. 1, 3; Excelsior 27 July 1926; Committee of the American Episcopate, Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Episcopate of the United States on the Religious Situation in Mexico (New Haven, Conn.: The Committee of the American Episcopate and the Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, Dec., 1926).
Walsh to "study the religious situation [in Mexico,] ... report to Rome[,]" and discourage clerical recalcitrance regarding a possible Church-State settlement. Armed with this relevant information, Morrow persuaded Portes Gil to express publicly his appreciation of Ruiz y Flores' May 2 remarks.16

Speaking to the press on May 8, Portes Gil reiterated his conviction that the Roman Catholic Church, as an institution, was not related with the recent military rebellion. The president then expressed his happiness over Ruiz y Flores' statement that the Church was ready to cooperate with the government. He did remind the clergyman, however, that Mexico did not recognize the Vatican and could not, therefore, deal with its official representatives. But Portes Gil emphasized that there was nothing to prevent individual churchmen from having talks with the government regarding the interpretation of laws applicable to the clergy. If the archbishop wished to meet with him, the president would be willing.17

Although Portes Gil finally agreed to negotiate, this did not signify that the government had changed its basic

17Portes Gil to press, 8 May 1929 quoted in Portes Gil, Quince años, pp. 325-26; Excelsior, 8 May 1929.
position concerning the role of the Church and its clergy in Mexico. For, on May 1, as on countless other occasions, the president had insisted that the priests upon their return to the churches would be subject to existing laws. The Archbishop of Mexico, aware of this, had still taken advantage of the first opportunity to express the Mexican clergy's desire to cooperate with the government. This, added to information Portes Gil had received from Morrow, led the president to believe that the clergy were ready to accept a settlement on his terms. An end to the clerical strike would strengthen Mexico internally, improve her image externally, and probably terminate the Cristero rebellion. Portes Gil, then, had little to lose and much to gain by meeting with representatives of the Mexican hierarchy. The situation of the clergy, however, was quite different.

On May 14 Ruiz y Flores in a circular telegram to thirty members of the Mexican episcopate asked their approval for reopening negotiations with the Mexican government. The response of the Mexican hierarchy revealed a climate of opinion considerably different from that existing in the spring of 1928. By May of 1929, as Portes Gil was aware, a vast majority of the bishops not only wanted to negotiate
with the government but also wished to effect a settlement as quickly as possible, even if this might entail compromising Church demands. 18

Several factors account for this gradual change in episcopal attitude. While he was alive, Mora y del Río, as the head of the Mexican episcopate, had favored militant action. He and his adherents, bishops Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, Leopoldo Lara y Torres, Jesús Manríquez y Zárate, José María Gonzáles y Valencia, and Miguel Mora de la Mora had opposed the peace sentiments of other clergymen in 1928. With the death of the archbishop, however, leadership of the hierarchy fell to the more moderate Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto. The increased stature of this second man was especially significant, as he had led in early attempts to reach a settlement with the government. The opposition of militant bishops to negotiations leading toward Church-State accord, while still evident in 1929, became less important with the increasing influence of moderates in the episcopate. 19

Equally or perhaps even more important was the realization by most episcopate members that the clerical strike had

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been a resounding failure. When they decided to suspend clerical services in the summer of 1926, the hierarchy had expected the Mexican people to force the government to meet Church demands and, thereby, quickly return the priests to their posts. 20 This had not occurred.

Many Mexicans, still able to attend church and worship their saints after the withdrawal, had seemed to "care little, or less, about the absence of a priest and his services." 21 A sizable number of those who were distressed by the suspension apparently refused to support actively the Roman Catholic clergy in their contest with the government. The Cristeros, as representatives of the relatively few Mexicans who energetically opposed the Mexican State, had accomplished nothing positive in behalf of the Roman Catholic Church as of May, 1929. Indeed, their activities had often had adverse repercussions for the hierarchy. Furthermore, in early May, 1929, Portes Gil had announced a campaign of annihilation against all rebels still defying governmental authority. Therefore, the more realistic members of the clergy realized that the rebel movement, which was probably doomed, would be of no help to them in the future either. Their only hope

20 Howard F. Cline, The United States and Mexico (New York: Atheneum, 1963), p. 201; Cumberland, Mexico, p. 281. (Hereafter cited as Cline, The United States.)

for resumption of religious services in Mexico obviously
lay in a negotiated agreement, as popular action was not
going to bring the clergy back to the churches.

Confronted with this fact, the hierarchy had to decide
whether it desired negotiations with Portes Gil. Any
resultant settlement would undoubtedly require major
compromises on their part. However, most bishops, alarmed
by the widespread indifference of laymen to the clerical
strike, felt that an expeditious resolution of the Church-
State conflict was imperative. Realizing the weakness of
their hold upon the Mexican people, they concluded that
tolerance of "innocuous laws" was a lesser evil for the Roman
Catholic Church in Mexico than "the suspension . . . which
had taken ignorance and religious indifference to a peak."22
Therefore, the episcopate resolved to accept Portes Gil's
offer of discussing the Mexican religious problem and hope-
fully achieving its solution. Apparently approving of the
hierarchy's decision, Pius XI in mid-May appointed Ruiz y
Flores as apostolic delegate to Mexico with full authority
to confer with the Mexican president regarding the status

22 Excelsior, 20 May 1929; María Carreño, El Arzobispo, p. 400.
of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico. Thus, Ruiz y Flores was an official representative of the Vatican, even though Portes Gil would not recognize him in that capacity.

The American Department of State announced that none of its functionaries would officially participate in the upcoming conferences in Mexico. Dwight Morrow, however, continued to act privately in the matter. Returning in early June from a vacation in the United States, he traveled part of the way to Mexico on the same train that carried the representatives of the Mexican hierarchy, Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto, back to their homeland.

Arriving in Mexico City, Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto were met by Cruchaga Tocornal and Father Walsh, who escorted the Mexican bishops to the home of the American naval attaché. The two clerics rarely left these quarters except for subsequent trips to the presidential palace. However, they were frequently visited by Walsh who on June 10 informed them of Morrow's feelings that any plan for a settlement containing very many specific demands on the part of the Church was certain to fail. Before responding

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to this, Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto visited the Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe and prayed for guidance. Then, on June 11 they allowed Walsh to tell Morrow of their willingness to accept an agreement along the lines of the Burke/Calles exchange of 1928, "a gradual approach on a broad base rather than a demand for detailed and immediate governmental concessions." The American ambassador conveyed this information to the Mexican president, who then concluded that the Church-State conferences should begin immediately. Significantly, on the eleventh Calles, who had been in northern Mexico, returned to the capital and remained there throughout the period of negotiations. Although he did not participate directly, the ex-president was intimately involved in the events transpiring between Portes Gil and the Mexican bishops in June. 25

In their first conference on June 12, Portes Gil emphatically assured Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto that he would not consider altering the laws as a condition for the clergy's return to the churches. He indicated his willingness to give the Church those same assurances offered by Calles to Burke, "no more and no less." Acting out of

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necessity, the bishops conceded this crucial point, as Walsh had assured they would. However, the prelates strongly rejected Portes Gil's request that bishops Orozco y Jiménez, Manríquez y Zárate, and González y Valencia, all of whom the president believed to be actively involved in the Cristero rebellion, remain in exile despite settlement of the Church-State conflict. The president did yield on this specific point. With these and other points of contention partially resolved, Portes Gil and the bishops each agreed to "draft a tentative statement of position." If possible, the conferees would then reconcile their two statements and, accordingly, reach an acceptable compromise.

In the second conference on June 13, Portes Gil presented a formal exposition of the government's position, a presentation which the bishops claimed to be "unnecessarily brusque." The clergymen themselves made no formal statement at that meeting and little was accomplished.26

In a matter of days, however, the bishops and Portes Gil did agree upon the terms for a settlement. Their rapid

26 Ellis, "Morrow," p. 502; María Carreno, El Arzobispo, pp. 72-73. The matter of amnesty for the Cristeros was probably discussed at the meeting of 12 June, as this was of great concern to the Vatican. However, Portes Gil was apparently unwilling to concede amnesty as part of any Church-State agreement. Therefore, Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto, having little choice in the matter, abandoned this request. This decision had serious repercussions for the prelates, as will be seen.
success in resolving a bitter issue that had dragged on for nearly three years was largely due to the persistent efforts of Morrow who helped to harmonize the "proud and conflicting interests" of Church and State. Because they had no other realistic choice, the two clergymen finally relinquished most of their demands and accepted, as Portes Gil said they must, the "terms of the general Constitution and other existing laws." In return the president agreed to state publicly that neither the Mexican constitution nor the laws nor the government itself intended to destroy the integrity of the Church or to control its spiritual functions. As evidence of this, Portes Gil offered to clarify three legal matters which were of particular concern to the Roman Catholic Church. First, the law requiring the registration of the priest in charge of each church did not allow the government to register clergymen other than those designated by their hierarchial superior. Secondly, while the constitution prohibited the offering of religious education in public schools, the clergy could teach their doctrines within the churches. And, finally, the members of the Catholic Church did have the right, provided in the constitution, to petition for the reform or abrogation of any law.  

The concessions offered by the Mexican president were modest indeed when compared with the demands of the Mexican hierarchy in 1926. Yet, Portes Gil's "three guarantees" did remove certain basic points of disagreement between the clergy and the government. The Mexican episcopate greatly objected to the registration requirement, for it placed the clergy largely under civil control and enabled the government to entrust Catholic churches to priests not properly designated by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. By stating that the government could not register clergymen unless they were appointed by their ecclesiastical superiors, Portes Gil resolved this problem. Church officials also feared the effect of secular education on Catholicism in Mexico. They knew that the Church to perpetuate itself must impart its doctrines to the people. Thus, the president's assurance that the clergy could offer religious teachings if only within the churches was important. Finally, the hierarchy realized the need for a legal means of redressing its remaining grievances. Mexican congressmen since 1926 had contended that Catholic clergymen who opposed the government thereby renounced their citizenship and, consequently, the right of petition. Therefore, Congress had repeatedly rejected petitions submitted by Catholic clergy and had
similarly disregarded those of Catholic laymen. By reaffirming the right of Church members to petition for legal reforms, Portes Gil allowed the prelates to maintain the hope (or perhaps illusion) that they still might achieve desired changes in the law. Furthermore, some clergymen and laymen felt that the president, by negotiating with the apostolic delegate and by making the above concessions to the Roman Catholic Church, implied a virtual acknowledgement of its corporate rights. In this light the proposed agreement was by no means one-sided.

Although Portes Gil and Ruiz y Flores reached this agreement on June 17, the apostolic delegate informed the president that papal approval was prerequisite to finalizing any Church-State accord. Consequently he cabled the provisions of the compromise proposal to the Vatican and awaited an answer. Pius XI then faced a difficult decision. The reality of the Mexican situation allowed him only two alternatives, acceptance of the Ruiz/Portes Gil proposal or the indefinite continuation of the suspension. In 1926 the

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Mexican hierarchy had emphatically and publicly stated that the clergy would not resume their duties unless and until the government suspended or reformed existing legislation. The Holy See had reinforced such statements. The return of the clergy now, under the terms of the Ruiz/Portes Gil exchange, would undeniably be an admission of defeat and submission to civil authority in Mexico. Yet, Pius XI, like the Mexican episcopate, probably realized the inherent dangers of prolonging the clerical strike and knew that Portes Gil was highly unlikely to make any additional concessions to the Church even if the Pope disapproved of the June 17 arrangement. With these and no doubt other considerations in mind, the Pope on June 21 gave his approval to the settlement.\textsuperscript{29}

Because Mexico did not have official diplomatic relations with the Vatican, the papally approved agreement was not embodied within a formal document. Rather, as previously agreed, the president and Ruiz y Flores in separate, but simultaneous, statements to the newspapers on June 21 announced the terms of their settlement and the end of the

\textsuperscript{29}New York Times, 12 June 1929, p. 1; 22 June 1929, p. 2; Mecham, Church and State, p. 401; Hackett, CH 30(1929):918.
clerical strike in Mexico. In another statement on the same day, Ruiz labeled the Church-State concord "the beginning of a real era of peace" and stated his hope that "this solution . . . if not complete . . . [was] a road by which to reach a complete one." In this remark the apostolic delegate expressed a feeling shared by other Roman Catholic clergymen, i.e., that the June 21 accord was really an "armistice" between Church and State, rather than a definitive settlement.

With the termination of the clerical strike the government took steps to return the churches, which had been cared for since 1926 by civic committees, to the clergy. The Ministry of the Interior ordered immigration authorities to allow exiled Mexican clergymen to return to Mexico and began the registration of Catholic priests. Díaz y Barreto, appointed Archbishop of Mexico on June 22, designated the priests who were to receive churches and the government

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acted accordingly. By June 26 eleven Catholic churches in
the Federal District, including the Shrine of the Virgin of
Guadalupe, were entrusted to Catholic clerics, who received
them as custodians of government owned properties.33

While the government and the clergy worked to return
formal Catholicism to Mexico, thousands of Mexicans flocked
to the churches and offered thanks for resolution of the
religious crisis. On June 23 more than one hundred thousand
Catholics joyfully worshiped at the Shrine of the Virgin
of Guadalupe. Some Mexicans, desirous of showing their
appreciation to Portes Gil, proposed a massive public
demonstration to be held on July 6. The president, however,
vetoed such action because various Mexicans of strong anti-
clerical leaning disliked the June 21 accord. Portes Gil
believed that a demonstration, such as the one proposed
for July 6, would only antagonize these irreconciled elements.
The president under Calles' suggestion went so far as to
impose censorship upon the papers, because he feared that
detailed news of the clergy's return would heighten unrest
among dissident Mexicans.34

33 El Universal, 23, 26 June 1929; New York Times, 23 June
1929, p. 22; 27 June 1929, p. 2; Hackett, CH 30(1929):919.

34 Hackett, CH 30(1929):919; El Universal, 22, 23, 24 June
1929; New York Times, 23 June 1929, p. 22; 24 June 1929, p. 1;
29 June 1929, p. 20; 1 July 1929, p. 11.
Militantly anti-clerical Mexicans were not the only ones to oppose the Portes Gil/Ruiz pact. Members of the LNDR and of the Cristero army, neither of whom had been consulted by the hierarchy during the June conferences, did not share in the thanksgiving. Most laymen first learned of the settlement and its terms on June 22 in the newspapers, but the Cristeros received their information via explanatory pamphlets dropped from governmental planes over Jalisco, Colima, Michoacán, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas. On June 22 the LNDR publicly declared its unconditional acceptance of the settlement and expressed its allegiance to the Mexican hierarchy. Privately, however, members of the Catholic organization and of the rebel army were distressed by the agreement which provided only vague hope that "little by little" future legal reforms might be achieved. Furthermore, both groups felt themselves betrayed by Ruiz y Flores and Díaz y Barreto, who had accepted a compromise which failed to protect Catholics who, while supporting the Church, had defied the government. Palomar y Vizcarra, vice-president of the LNDR, planned a special trip to Rome to express the League's objections to the

June 21 agreement and to protest the clergymen who had negotiated it. Ruíz y Flores reacted on June 25 to criticism within Catholic ranks by addressing a letter to the episcopate, clergy, and Catholics of Mexico. He explained that both he and Díaz y Barreto had urged Portes Gil to meet Church demands before they accepted any settlement. Realizing that this was impossible, they had tried to find the best possible way to remedy the "evils" caused by the suspension and allow faithful Mexicans to profess their religion again. For this reason, Ruíz y Flores said, he and Díaz y Barreto had settled for a de facto recognition of the Church. The apostolic delegate reminded his critics that the Pope had approved negotiations and the resultant settlement. The Church, Ruíz y Flores assured, had not surrendered in the fight for its rights in Mexico. To the contrary, he said, Mexican prelates, priests, and laity should utilize the guaranteed right of petition to achieve legal reforms, which would in the long run more satisfactorily resolve the

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Church's condition in Mexico. However, he advised his followers not to be impatient, as "the evils of a century [could not be cured] . . . in one day." Nevertheless, the apostolic delegate, like other idealistic Catholic clergymen, expressed his belief that someday the oppression of the Church would end and it would again resume its historic place in Mexican life.  

The Cristeros, however, were not in a position to accept the more leisurely pace of history. While preparations for talks between Portes Gil and the bishops went forward in the summer of 1929, the "National Guard" had suffered serious reverses. In early June the death of Gorostieta and the seizure of his files by federal forces had seriously weakened the rebel movement. But, as in the past, the Cristeros under the leadership of the League received a new military commander, Degollado y Guizar, and resumed their fight against the government. The end of the clerical strike in late June was an unexpected and fatal blow to the armed movement in defense of Catholic rights. The Church hierarchy had made its peace with the government, but had

37 Ruiz y Flores to the Faithful, 25 June 1929 quoted in El Universal, 26 June 1929; Moctezuma, El Conflicto, 2:541-44. See also Hackett, CH 30(1929):919.
not arranged amnesty for the rebels. Thus, the Cristeros, while deprived of clerical support for their activities, were not protected by the Church-State settlement. Understandably, certain Mexican Catholics whose involvement in the Cristero movement was well known to the government continued to defy civil authority in the name of the Church. This obviously placed the Catholic hierarchy in an embarrassing position. 38

To remedy this situation a substantial number of clergymen withdrew both moral and active support from the Cristeros and counseled their parishioners to do likewise. This created a "grave situation" for the "National Guard," and several Cristero leaders informed their commander Degollado y Guízar that the rebellion must cease. They realized that they had lost both popular and clerical backing because the resolution of the Church-State conflict ended the legitimacy of their movement. If they continued to oppose the government, the officers advised, they would henceforth be bandits. 39

Degollado y Guízar met secretly with the directive committee of the LNDR and informed them that the inevitable

38 El Universal, 4, 9 June 1929; Degollado y Guízar, Memorias, p. 230; Olivera Sedano, Aspectos, p. 233.
39 Degollado y Guízar, Memorias, p. 234.
result of continued rebellion would be "anarchy and scandal." Despite their obvious dislike for the Church-State agreement, the League officials agreed that the Cristero movement must end, and they turned their efforts toward acquiring immunity for the rebels. Degollado y Guízar compiled a list of conditions for Portes Gil to meet before the "National Guard" would disband. Luis Beltrán, League officer, then took the list to Portes Gil. After studying the matter, the president granted the necessary concessions, which included amnesty to the rebels and the civilians who had aided them, compensation for each rifle turned over to the government, release of all religious prisoners, and repatriation of all religious exiles still outside of Mexico.

Their demands met, the officials of the League on July 14 publicly acknowledged their support of the rebel movement while denying that either the Vatican or the Mexican episcopate had been involved in it. After emphasizing their conviction that the June 21 agreement was an "armistice" leaving many key matters unresolved, the League's directors announced their decision to end "la lucha bélica" and return to "las

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40 Ibid., pp. 236-39, Monetti, Los Cristeros, 2:217-18. The fourteen conditions presented to Portes Gil may be found in Degollado y Guízar's Memorias on pages 269-70.
actividades normales." By late July, most of the Cristeros, probably some 14,000 men, laid down their arms. However, Degollado y Guízar did not officially dissolve the "National Guard" until August. When ordering the disbandment, the Military Chief, expressing the sentiments of his followers, reminded that the National Guard was surrendering not because it was "vencida por sus enemigos, sino . . . [porque estaba] abandonada por aquellos [el clero] que debían recibir . . . el fruto de sus sacrificios y abnegaciones." Regardless of such sentiments, the Cristeros, as loyal and devout Catholics, had no choice except to accept the will of the Pope and the Mexican hierarchy. The rebels, whether submissive or frustrated, returned to their homes. The war was over.

During the colonial period, the Roman Catholic Church and civil authorities in New Spain worked hand in hand to colonize the newly-acquired possessions of the Spanish monarchs. The Real Patronato gave the crown a measure of control over the Church, but it nevertheless managed to

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41 Hackett, CH 30(1929):1137; Callcott, Liberalism, pp. 379-80.

42 Degollado y Guízar, Memorias, p. 273; Portes Gil, Quince Años, p. 330.
acquire enormous privileges and wealth. When Mexico won her independence, the question of the proper relationship between the new State and the Roman Catholic Church was a critical issue. Although the Catholic clergy managed to assert their independence, they soon fell under attack. The culmination of growing anti-clericalism, evident throughout the nineteenth century, occurred in 1916-1917 with the inclusion of radical anti-clerical provisions in the Mexican constitution. Despite this, the Church and State managed a fairly peaceful coexistence until 1924.

When Plutarco Elías Calles initiated his program of strict constitutional enforcement, he precipitated a five-year conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mexican government. The Catholic hierarchy used every available resource to prevent the State from gaining control over the clergy and their activities. However, by 1926 Calles' vigorous policies left the Mexican episcopate with few alternatives. They could submit to civil authority or withdraw the clergy from the churches. Believing that threats of excommunication and suspension of services would ultimately cause them to triumph against the government, the hierarchy declared a clerical strike. But, to the distress of the clergy, a significant percentage of the Mexican people took
no action in their behalf. Furthermore, popular support solidified behind Calles and allowed both him and later Portes Gil to remain generally uncompromised in their dealings with the Roman Catholic Church. The subversive activities of loyal Catholics, who were singularly unsuccessful in their efforts against the government, served to worsen the position of the Catholic clergy in Mexico. Gradual realization of this fact caused most high clergymen to lose faith in the Cristero movement, while at the same time they recognized the imperative need to resume clerical services.

Because Portes Gil remained firm in his demands for obedience to the constitution and laws of Mexico, the hierarchy and the papacy finally accepted an agreement which not only admitted the superiority of the State but also alienated a substantial number of those Catholics who had risked their lives in defense of the faith. The clergy paid a dear price for their return to the churches. However, they regarded the June 21 accord and its consequences as temporary. It was an "armistice," a "modus vivendi," allowing formal Catholicism to return to Mexico. The Roman Catholic Church, once returned, enjoyed the advantage of both time and legal recourse in its power struggle with the State. The episcopate believed that "the life of the Church is that of its Founder
... [In but] a little while ... she will rise again filled with vitality and youth." This was the consolation which the clergy offered their discontented followers. As a perpetual institution, the Roman Catholic Church, although defeated for the present, could await the day when conditions in Mexico would allow a resurrection of Catholic strength and independence.

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43 Blount, God's Jester, p. 23.
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