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INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONALISM AND
NATIONALISTIC PRAGMATISM:
THE UNITED STATES AND MÉXICO RELATIONS
DURING THE 1920S

By

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Independent Internationalism and Nationalistic Pragmatism: The United States and México Relations during the 1920s.

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During the 1920s, relations between the United States and Mexico revealed the extent to which the U.S. actively engaged in foreign affairs and demonstrated the process by which México defined a new era of its international relations while facing a reconstruction in internal politics. Decades ago, William Appleman Williams refuted the stereotype of American isolationism, arguing that the administrations of Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover engaged in diplomacy, even where they conducted diplomacy through public silence and backstage negotiations. Later, Joan Hoff defined American foreign policy as independent internationalism, characterized by an amalgamation of ideological and economic considerations. On the Mexican side, presidents, Obregón, Elías Calles, and Portes Gil, approached diplomacy with a nationalistic pragmatism that recognized the need for new rules governing the participation of foreigners in the economy and in religious matters. Despite their seemingly draconian nature, these new rules left room for negotiations.

Three main issues influenced U.S.-Mexican relations. The rights of American oil companies in México were settled in 1923 through the *Bucareli* Agreements. In 1927, when a new Petroleum law was enacted, American Ambassador Dwight Morrow conducted the negotiations which lead the Mexican Supreme Court to eliminate the provisions that placed time limits on foreign concessions, and the Mexican Congress invalidated the retroactivity of such laws. A second point of contention was the Church-State controversy in México. American Catholics demanded direct U.S. intervention, but Coolidge instructed Morrow to work with representatives of the Catholic Church and the Mexican State to achieve a solution that allowed each to function while respecting the other's field of influence. The successful conclusion of the religious dispute in Mexico allowed Coolidge to avoid the insertion of a potentially poisonous issue into the 1928 presidential elections.

These events demonstrated that the U. S. was anything but isolationist in the 1920s. The religious controversy offered an example of how domestic determinants influenced foreign policy and, at the same time, demonstrated how foreign policy could enter the American domestic political arena. The American intervention in the religious conflict of the 1920s shaped United States-México relations for the rest of the 20th Century.

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1920s, in the aftermath of World War I, leaders around the world looked to rearrange their internal affairs and their approach to diplomacy. In this period, both the United States and México emerged from different kinds of armed conflict - the United States from WWI and México from an internal revolution. During this period, relations between the United States and México revealed the extent to which the U.S. actively engaged in foreign affairs. This refutes not only the old stereotype of American ‘isolationism’ in the 1920s, but also exemplifies that American foreign policy during those years was characterized by what the historian Joan Hoff called “independent internationalism.”¹

Many years ago, William Appleman Williams pointed out that “Americans have come to think of the 1920s as the nation’s lost weekend in international affairs, as a period when the United States disregarded its world responsibilities by getting inebriated on the home made gin of isolationism”² Williams, however, argued that the administrations of Presidents Warren Gamaliel Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Clark Hoover actively pursued American economic interests all over the world.

In 1971, Joan Hoff also rejected the idea that American foreign policy during the 1920s was isolationist. Hoff used the term “independent internationalism” to define American foreign policy between 1920 and 1933. For Hoff, independent internationalism referred not to a philosophy of foreign policy but to a pragmatic method for conducting foreign affairs. Its

¹ Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy: 1920-1933* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1973), x.

² William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: The World Publishing Co. 1959), 78.

implicit assumption was that the United States should cooperate on an international scale when it could not, or did not want, to solve a particular diplomatic problem through unilateral action.³

For México, the 1920s were not only years of reconstruction in internal politics, but also a period in which the country redefined its international relations. Mexican Presidents Álvaro Obregón Salido, Plutarco Elías Calles and Emilio Portes Gil approached diplomacy and internal conflicts with what can be called nationalistic pragmatism. They understood the country was coming out of a civil war and engaged in a process of economic and political reconstruction. The Mexican presidents did not try to ban the participation of foreigners in that process; rather they tried to set new rules. Despite the seemingly draconian nature of these new rules, Mexican leaders left room for negotiation. The Mexican authorities always kept open the channels of communication while searching for a resolution to the disputes that arose from the implementation of their policies. Among the many issues that influenced U.S. relations with México in the 1920s, three were the most significant. One related to the oil rights affecting American companies, another was the domestic armed rebellions in México, and a third was an internal religious conflict, in which the United States government played a key role in finding a solution.

In order to provide a framework for relations between México and the United States during the 1920s, especially the years from 1926 to 1929, it is necessary to consider the historical background from the first years after the Europeans discovered America up to moment the Mexican Constitution of 1917 was enacted. Thus, the first chapter begins with the moment the Spaniards set a foot in what is now known as Latin America. It then moves on to consider how Spanish kings and Pope Alexander VI established the rules that influenced events during the next

³ Joan Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy: 1920-1933* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1973), x.

four hundred years. The initial step came when Pope Alexander VI published the Papal Bulls *Inter Caetera* and *Eximae Devotionis* on May 4, 1493. On the basis of that, Spain gained and consolidated concessions and privileges over the new territories as the sole beneficiary of the exploitation of natural resources and trade. In 1508, Pope Julius II, through the publication of the Papal Bull, *Universalis Ecclesiae*, conceded to the Kings of Spain the right of universal patronage over the Catholic Church in the Indies. The patronage allowed the Spanish King to exercise powers over the Church, including control over administrating those revenues resulting from religious services. As a consequence of the latter, the Kings of Spain constituted the Royal Patronage of Indies, by which the Spanish Crown was able to administer not only the wealth of the Catholic Church in newly acquired lands but also to intervene directly in the nomination of Church officials in the different Viceroyalties. The Church benefited from the monopoly of religious faith and the acquisition of real estate properties, while the Kings could exercise power without worrying about resistance from the Church or a political rebellion.

That situation prevailed for three centuries up to 1808, when France invaded Spain. After overthrowing Ferdinand VII, Napoleon Bonaparte appointed his brother, Joseph, king. In New Spain, Creoles (those born in New Spain from Spanish parents) rejected the French ruler and demanded the return of Ferdinand VII to the Spanish throne. Two years later, in 1810, the turmoil in Spain provided a perfect excuse to demand independence in the region now known as Latin America. The original proposal for independence called for freedom from Spain, but for México to continue under the rule of Ferdinand VII with the Creoles taking political leadership. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Catholic priest, headed a revolt, which additionally considered some social and economic changes, such as the end of slavery and better working conditions for the Mexican natives. In the case of México, it took eleven years to achieve independence from

Spain in 1821. Independence, however, did not completely change México's internal arrangements. Catholicism prevailed as the official religion in the newly independent country. In addition, a dispute arose over the way the Royal Patronage of Indies would operate. The new civilian rulers claimed that all the privileges exercised by the King over the Church under the Patronage must be transferred to them. The Church, however, rejected the proposal, arguing that it was a concession made by the Pope to the King, and, consequently the new government in México had to negotiate a similar agreement.

From 1821 to 1857, Catholicism prevailed as the official religion in México, which banned all other creeds. Even the appearance of freemasonry rites, the Scottish and the York, in the early years of the republic did not change that situation. The law required foreigners coming to the country to respect the official religion and not to perform any public act related to any other faith. From 1824 to 1857, Liberals and Conservatives battled for dominance in México. Liberals were professional people and intellectuals, advocates of democracy, and supporters of federalism; Conservatives came "from the landed aristocracy, the military and the clergy; [they favored a centralist government], supported monarchism, or even a restoration of Spanish authority under a liberal constitution"⁴ In 1825, when the United States intervened for the first time in Mexico's domestic policy, Joel Roberts Poinset, the American Minister to México, favored the liberals.⁵

In spite of the struggle between the liberals and conservatives, the Catholic Church remained the official religion in México recognized by every Constitution enacted during those years. In addition, members of the Catholic hierarchy played an active role in the political events

⁴ J. Lloyd Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America: A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 403.

⁵ Felipe Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México: 1808- 1983* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Porrúa, S. A., 1983), 167-195.

of the country. In 1847, during the Mexican War, President James Polk met the Bishops of New York and Missouri to ask for their intervention with the Mexican prelates to help the American troops. He hoped that the Mexican prelates would deny any economic support to the Mexican government and convince the Mexican people not to resist the presence of foreigners in their country. Although, he obtained an agreement from the Mexican prelates, President Polk sent Moses Y. Beach as confidential agent to Mexico to assure the support of Catholic Priests, who provided it, though not necessarily for free. According to Beach's report, he provided the Mexican Catholic priests with some financial support for their activities against the government of Antonio López de Santa Anna during the Mexican War.⁶

A dispute between Church and State took shape when the Catholic hierarchy disagreed with a series of reforms related to religion enacted by the Mexican government during the 1850s. Those reforms deprived the Catholic religion of its status as the only and official religion; other religions were allowed to offer religious services in México. The historian Deborah J. Baldwin has noted that "the 1857 Constitution legalized Protestantism, which until then had been banned, and though important seeds of the Protestant movement can be found earlier, the systematic implantation begins at this date."⁷ New laws also prohibited religious organizations, churches, or priests from owning land or buildings and established the separation of Church and State in matters related to education, registration of births, marriages, and cemeteries.

In spite of the opposition of the Catholic hierarchy, the laws prevailed. Consequently, when the French invaded México in the early 1860s, the Catholic Church supported the French. Later, the Catholic hierarchy of México tried to negotiate with Maximilian of Hapsburg, the

⁶ William R. Manning, editor. *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831 – 1860* Volume III Mexico 1831 -1848 (Mid-Year) (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1937), 906, 907.

⁷ Deborah J. Baldwin, *Protestants and the Mexican Revolution: Missionaries, Ministers, and Social Change* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 3.

Austrian Emperor, who headed the invasion. The hierarchy offered support in exchange for a return to the old status quo, which recognized Catholicism as the country's official religion.

When Maximilian rejected the proposals, the Catholic Church withdrew its support.

After the Mexican forces defeated the French Army and Maximilian in 1867, the Austrian Emperor was executed, and President Benito Juárez García returned to México City, where he reinstalled his government. Juárez's primary concern was to rebuild the country, and, in an attempt at reconciliation, he relaxed the application of the rules related to religion. Juárez himself attended mass every Sunday, although he made it clear that he did so as a private citizen and not as the President of México. His successor, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, however, returned to a hard line policy toward the Church, applying the provisions established under the Constitution of 1857. The Church shifted its support to the rebellion of Porfirio Díaz Mori, who ousted Lerdo in 1876.

When Díaz came to power, things started to change. Díaz's dictatorship, which lasted from 1877 to 1911, was characterized by the way he related to foreign powers. He linked Mexican economic development to foreign investment coming primarily from the U.S. and also from Europe. As foreign investors devoted capital, mainly to the railroad and oil sector, the participation of Mexican investors became marginal. In the end, Díaz's policies resulted in an unequal distribution of income that produced social unrest. At the same time, the Catholic Church and the Mexican government developed a *modus vivendi* that allowed each to operate without interfering with the activities of the other. By not enforcing the dispositions related to religion written in the 1857 Constitution, Díaz was able to keep the country at peace. This situation prevailed up to 1910, when the Mexican Revolution began, and its leader, Francisco I. Madero González, made some statements about agrarian and educational reforms that the Church

considered contrary to their interests. Agrarian reform would affect holdings that had been clandestinely acquired or retained by the Church. In the case of education, the clerics feared that the educational facilities they had established throughout the country could be taken by the government. The U.S. Ambassador to México, Henry Lane Wilson, reported to Washington that he saw the Catholic Church increasingly worried about the proposals made by the revolutionary leader.⁸

With the Diaz regime shaking in May 1911, Catholic hierarchy supported laymen who founded the National Catholic Party (PCN), which gave them an avenue to participate openly in politics for the first time. During the 1912 elections, the PCN's candidates won the governorship in the States of México, Querétaro, Jalisco, and Zacatecas; they won 29 seats in the XXVI Legislature, four seats in the Senate, and the Mayor's office in the capital cities of several states.

When the Mexican Revolution began to settle down, a new constitution was enacted in 1917, which included a series of policies related to religion. The new constitution provided for education without religious content, freedom of religion, and prohibition against the Church or its members owning property. Further, only Mexicans by birth could enter the priesthood, and they had to register in order to practice their profession. These dispositions were similar to the ones already established under the Mexican Constitution of 1857.

At the beginning of the 1920s, México's new leaders faced not only the problems of rebuilding the country but also of how to approach diplomatic relations with international powers. In that venue, the second chapter deals with two issues: One, the reaction of laymen and the Catholic hierarchy inside México once the government enforced the religious dispositions contained in the Constitution and another, Mexican president Alvaro Obregón

⁸ Henry Lane Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium and Chile* (New York: Doubleday Page & Company, 1927), 217, 218.

struggled to gain diplomatic recognition from the U.S. Religious conflict ignited during the early 1920s, Obregón tried to impose some restrictions on religious activities in public places. The provisions of Article 24 of the Mexican Constitution clearly stated that everyone was free to embrace the religion of their choice, but it required that every religious act of public worship be conducted inside Church buildings, which always would be under the supervision of the government.

Obregón was in a weak position internationally; the U.S. refused to extend diplomatic recognition to him because of a dispute about the retroactivity of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which affected American property rights over subsoil and agrarian matters. The article stated that “all contracts and concessions made by former governments [since 1876] which shall have resulted in the monopoly of lands, waters, and natural resources of the nation by a single individual or corporation are declared subject to revision, and the Executive is authorized to declare those null and void which seriously prejudice the public interest.”⁹ Obregon’s failure to gain diplomatic recognition from the United States prevented him from taking strong measures against the Church. To engage in conflicts with two international powers at the same time would be risky. Obregón therefore decided to postpone the enforcement of religious dispositions and devoted his efforts toward resolving the conflict with the U.S. government. Obregón received diplomatic recognition from the U.S. Government after both governments signed what in the U.S. was known as the General Claims Convention and in México as the *Bucareli* Agreements, in August 1923. According to the agreements, the Mexican government would not enforce Article 27 retroactively, and any dispute would be settled through international tribunals.

⁹ Wilfrid Hardy Callcott, *Liberalism in Mexico 1857-1929* (Stanford University, California: Stanford University Press, 1931), 280.

When Obregon's term, which started in 1920, neared its end in 1924, things did not look very promising for the members of the Catholic Church. Several factors influenced the developing conflict between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. One was the appointment of James Rockwell Sheffield as the U.S. Ambassador to México. Another was the attitude of the incoming Mexican president, Plutarco Elías Calles, toward the Catholic Church. Yet another was the development of a schismatic movement inside the Catholic Church. In February 1925, Joaquín Pérez, a Catholic priest, calling himself the Patriarch, founded *La Iglesia Ortodoxa Católica Mexicana*, an organization independent from Rome. In spite of Pérez's efforts, the new church failed to attract national support, but the friction between the Catholic hierarchy and President Elías Calles grew, because the Church accused him of supporting Pérez, a claim never attested.

At the time the religious conflict erupted, the conflict with American oil companies working in México seemed to have been settled by the *Bucareli* Agreements of 1923. The issue flared up again, however, in 1925, when President Elías Calles sent to Congress a proposal for the enactment of the Petroleum Laws. Those laws restricted ownership of subsoil rights by American citizens or companies to a period of eighty years. The dispute developed mainly around the retroactivity of the law, since it was not clear how it would affect those American companies that already had participated in the oil business in México. The announcement of this measure angered Ambassador Sheffield, who took diplomatic relations to the verge of rupture. The Mexican Government even accused the United States of preparing an invasion of México in 1927. The allegations derived from information found in some documents taken from the U.S. Embassy in México with the complicity of people working in the Embassy. Later, those documents were taken to the Mexican Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor. They finally

ended on the Mexican President's desk. Those documents "contained official correspondence between the Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg and Ambassador Sheffield, consular dispatches, reports of military attaché and some forgeries"¹⁰ It provided President Elías Calles with an opportunity to play politics at domestic and diplomatic level.

According to Emilio Portes Gil, then Governor of Tamaulipas and later Interim President of México, President Elías Calles explained him the existence of those documents and the threat of an American invasion to Mexico.¹¹ Elías Calles clearly instructed Portes Gil that in case of it happened, he must be ready to blow up all the oil wells in the Northern State of Tamaulipas. Also, Portes Gil mentioned that President Elías Calles sent a telegram to President Coolidge notifying the American president that he (Coolidge) would receive the documents and should read them before taking any action. American officials concluded that some of those documents were forgeries while others were sufficiently ambiguous to allow President Elías Calles to believe that an American military intervention in México was possible. In spite of that, both governments in the end agreed to resolve the problem, and the removal of Ambassador Sheffield from his post eased the way for a resolution.

On July 14, 1926, President Elías Calles decided to enforce the Constitution's provisions related to religion and made some changes to the Penal Code that established punishments for those who disobeyed the rules related to religious worship. He added a requirement that every priest had to register in the office of the city government in which he resided. Priests who refused to register would be fined or imprisoned. The Catholic hierarchy opposed such measures and met the President in an effort to reestablish the old *modus vivendi* developed during the Díaz

¹⁰ James J. Horn, "Did the United States Plan an Invasion of Mexico in 1927?" *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Nov., 1973): 458.

¹¹ Emilio Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana* (Ciudad de México: Instituto Mexicano de Cultura, 1964), 397.

years. They got a negative answer, and the regulations which took effect on August 1 of that year prevailed.

Even before the regulations went into effect, eight Archbishops and twenty nine Bishops published a Pastoral Letter on July 25, 1926. The letter denounced the Mexican government's actions and ordered all priests in charge of the churches to suspend religious services. It also called on Catholics to launch a nation-wide economic boycott. The plan for Catholics to refrain from purchasing anything but the necessities of life got under way at the end of July.

On August 21, the Catholic hierarchy met by first time with President Elías Calles, hoping that he would reverse the measures he had implemented. The results of the meeting did not fulfill priests' expectations, and they decided to implement additional measures to express their disagreement with the Mexican Government. In addition to the economic boycott already under way, an armed revolt began in late August and early September, 1926. Groups of Catholics took up arms in what would later be known as the *Revolución Cristera*, a rebellion that provoked serious divisions not only in Mexico but also in other countries.

The third chapter will reconsider the orthodox view, which has presented the religious conflict in México as primarily a domestic problem between the Church and the Mexican government in which the United States intervened, in a most unwelcome fashion for the members of the *Cristero* rebellion. This assertion, however, is not totally true. During the first half of 1926, some foreign priests were expelled from México, including the newly named Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop George J. Carauna. On the basis of these actions, Mexican Catholics, both inside and outside the country, began an intense campaign to oppose the new laws. Stories about the eviction of foreign priests from México and the closing of schools under the direction of the Catholic Church were circulated abroad, mainly by the expelled priests and

by Mexican Catholics who traveled to the U.S. looking for support as well as by the Knights of Columbus.

Not all, however, objected to the Mexican government's new policies. While Catholics emphasized they were living a nightmare, members of other religions felt differently. American-born Protestant ministers living in México, like Rev. William Evans Thomas, Pastor of Union Church "pointed out the law must be enforced as written and that therefore it is impossible for American-born preachers to function any longer without violating the fundamental and regulatory law."¹² That law prohibited foreigner priests to exercise their duties in México. He therefore peacefully left the country. Even the American Ambassador, James Sheffield, reported in April 1926 no more than a few cases of problems for American citizens involved in religious activities. He found no situation in which foreigners were persecuted by the Mexican Government.

In the international arena, those backing the Catholics and opposing the Mexican government tried to set the tone of the discussion. Mexican clerics and Catholic laymen received support from Pope Pius XI on July 3, 1926, when he addressed the students of the Pius Latin-American School in Rome. In that speech, he condemned the Mexican government because of its allegedly anti-religious policy. Mexican priests tried to obtain help not only inside México and from the Church but also to involve American Catholics and the Catholic hierarchy in the United States. The Catholic hierarchy in México and in the U.S. as well as its followers demanded an open foreign intervention, especially from the Pope with his moral power, and the United States with its army.

As the religious conflict in México got worse, external forces, led by the Pope himself and the American Catholic hierarchy, intervened openly in the problem. In November 1926,

¹² "Bishops of Mexico Discusses Peace Plan to Offer to Calles," *New York Times*, August 18, 1926, 1.

Pope Pius XI, published his Encyclical, *Iniquis Afflictisque*, in which he denounced the measures implemented by the Mexican Government. Later, on December 12, the American Catholic Hierarchy published a Pastoral Letter that also expressed disapproval of what was happening in Mexico and compared it to a democratic country like the United States, where such laws could never be implemented.

Various groups inside the U.S. responded differently to events in México. On one side, ministers or members of non-Catholic religions, liberals and politicians disagreed with the Catholic Church. For them, the actions of the Mexican government were legal and proper. Another group, made up of some politicians, some members of the judiciary, the Catholic hierarchy, Catholic organizations, and Catholics in general, believed that the Mexican government was committing an outrageous violation of freedom, and they publicly demanded that the U.S. government intervene. Organizations supporting that position included the Knights of Columbus, the National Catholic Welfare Council, and the National Council of Catholic Women.

Various Catholic constituencies, especially members of the Knights of Columbus, requested from the American press more intense coverage of the religious conflict in Mexico. *The New York Times* did cover the story extensively, not necessarily because of such demands but because of its commitment to cover foreign affairs. This press coverage also derived from the fact that members of the Mexican Foreign Service, especially Arturo M. Elías, the Mexican Consul in New York, and religious organizations in general actively spread news and openly expressed their opinions about the conflict. In addition, a debate took place in the pages of various publications. Some, like *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, tried to present opinions for and against the Catholic Church's positions; others, like *The Christian Century* and *The*

Christian Science Monitor, provided the opinions of members of Protestant Churches; while *Commonweal*, a Catholic journal, demanded more extensive coverage of the issue, defended the Church, and attacked the position of the Mexican government.

Within the United States, the first organization publicly to demand stronger measures against the Mexican government was the Knights of Columbus, a group of Catholic laymen. Early in August 1926, at their annual meeting, they demanded that the American government directly intervene to resolve the religious conflict in México. Later in the month, James A. Flaherty, the Knight's leader, met with Secretary of State Frank Kellogg. At the beginning of September, Flaherty met with President Coolidge. The Knights received a response from Coolidge indicating that the religious conflict was a domestic problem of México, and consequently the American government intended to keep a "hands off" policy.

The activities of the Knights, however, never stopped. Before the meeting with Coolidge, they had explicitly said that: "we hereby authorize our Supreme Board of Directors to assess our membership to the extent of \$1,000,000 for a campaign of education, to the end that the politics of Soviet Russia shall be eliminated from the philosophy of American life and the ideals of liberty of conscience and democratic freedom may extend to our afflicted fellow human beings beyond the Río Grande."¹³

Coolidge's initial response might have seemed to support the myth that American foreign policy of the 1920s was characterized by isolationism. That, however, would be a misconception. As events unfolded in México, the U.S. played an active role, and American actions had the personal seal of Coolidge. He preferred, however, to play the game of diplomacy behind closed doors, far away from strident public positions that did not always contribute to achieving results. The noted historian William Appleman Williams, wrote, "The key to

¹³"Knights of Columbus Asks Curb on Calles Regime in Plea to Coolidge," *New York Times*, August 6, 1926, 1.

understanding American diplomacy of the 1920s is the realization it was based on this coming of age of the Open Door Policy. It represented indeed, synthesis of the Open Door Notes, the Monroe Doctrine and Washington's Farewell Address."¹⁴ In other words, American diplomacy rested on the notion that all nations should have equal commercial and industrial rights when trading. Countries should always respect the spheres of influence of the main powers. The U.S. would avoid formal alliances. This approach could be called diplomacy by economic persuasion, where public silence and backstage negotiations played a key role. Or as Joan Hoff pointed out, American foreign policy during those years was characterized by a course of independent internationalism which allowed "businessmen and government officials began to forge modern American diplomacy based on the amalgamation of ideological and economic considerations."¹⁵

President Coolidge moved cautiously, but firmly, working with representatives of the Catholic Church and the Mexican State. His goal was to achieve a solution that in no sense looked like a victory or a defeat for either of the parties involved in the conflict but allowed each to develop its functions while respecting the other's field of influence. At the same time, Coolidge sought always to protect American interests.

Chapter fourth will analyze how Coolidge's approach to diplomacy also helped to neutralize a domestic problem in the United States. In 1927, the religious issue invaded the American political arena, because of the possibility that a Catholic, New York's governor Alfred Emmanuel Smith, would become the Democratic nominee for the presidency of the U.S. Many members of Protestant Churches opposed the prospect. Throughout the presidential campaign of 1928 in the United States, some groups of Catholics, Protestants, and the KKK took outrageous

¹⁴ Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 80.

¹⁵ Hoff Wilson, *American Business and Foreign Policy: 1920-1933*, xvii.

positions. However, the silent diplomacy pursued by President Coolidge, based on not taking any side related to the religious conflict in Mexico, helped to avoid injecting a potentially poisonous issue into the federal elections. In the end, religion did not become the determining issue in the final result.

A fifth chapter will cover the unofficial intervention of the United States government to resolve the religious conflict in México. The U.S. managed to help resolve the religious conflict in México while working officially to end the problems related to the enactment of the Petroleum Laws. The first shift in the nature of diplomatic relations between the two countries came on October 1927, when President Coolidge sent Dwight Whitney Morrow as American Ambassador to Mexico. Some questioned the nomination, because Morrow came from the financial world rather than the diplomatic corps, but Morrow soon demonstrated his diplomatic skills. Even before he left the United States, he met unofficially with the American Catholic hierarchy and discussed the religious conflict in México. He received a warm welcome in Mexico and, in contrast to the attitude of President Elías Calles toward former U.S. Ambassador Sheffield, the Mexican President and Morrow quickly established a warm relationship.

From the beginning, an open dialogue between Elías Calles and Morrow developed, and negotiations about the oil problem and the religious conflict moved into new stages. In November 1927, the Mexican Supreme Court eliminated the provision in the Petroleum Laws that placed time limits on foreign concessions. A month later, the Mexican Congress invalidated the retroactivity of such laws and recognized the validity of foreign concessions on which the concessionaries had made positive acts toward improvement prior to 1917. In this way, the Mexican State avoided a source of conflict with the U.S. Moreover, the companies had been suffering the consequences from a decline in oil production that cut their revenues, and this

meant a reduction in tax revenues for the Mexican government. Consequently, President Elías Calles and Ambassador Morrow, two pragmatists, found a solution to the problem.

With one difficulty solved, Morrow not only worked with the Mexican President but also continued his behind-the-scenes negotiations with the Catholic hierarchy in the U.S. in order to reach a solution to the religious conflict. By March 1928, he had convinced President Elías Calles to meet with Reverend John Joseph Burke, who belonged to the Saint Vincent de Paul Congregation and, after serving as the General Secretary of the National Catholic War Council, had become the head of the National Catholic Welfare Council. Burke was named as official envoy of Archbishop Peter Fumasoni-Biondi, the Papal Delegate to México (who was stationed in the United States).

In April 1928, President Elías Calles and Reverend Burke, accompanied by William Frederick Montavon, the Legal Advisor of the National Catholic Welfare Council, met secretly and unofficially on the East Coast of México. By the end of a six-hour meeting, movement towards an agreement was already under way. However, Reverend Burke explained to President Elías Calles, he needed to notify the Mexican prelates exiled in San Antonio, Texas, in order to get a final agreement.

When Burke explained the proposal to the Mexican priests, they agreed and asked for a meeting between their leader, Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, and President Elías Calles. This meeting took place during the summer of 1928, and, with that, the settlement was almost completed. It remained necessary, however, to consult Rome and México. Rome agreed, but the Mexican prelates and the leaders of the armed Catholic movement did not want a political solution. They wanted either the surrender of the Mexican Government or to continue fighting. In the end, the Pope agreed to wait for a while to try to convince the Mexican prelates.

When a Catholic fanatic assassinated the newly elected President, Álvaro Obregón, on July 17, 1928, the prospects for an immediate solution evaporated. Ambassador Morrow reported to Washington that the nearly concluded agreement would need to wait at least another year. Among other things, President Elías Calles preferred to leave the agreement in the hands of the incoming president. Ambassador Morrow, however, continued his unofficial efforts to convince both parties to reach an agreement. As soon as the interim President, Emilio Portes Gil, came to office, on December 1, 1928, Morrow took up the matter with him. At the same time, he continued to work very closely with the Catholic hierarchy in the United States.

By early 1929, the Catholic hierarchy had convinced Pope Pius XI that it was necessary to end the religious conflict in México. The Pope decided to leave the negotiations on the hands of the American Catholic Hierarchy. Mexican priests would play a secondary role on the agreements negotiated by the Mexican government and the unofficial intervention of the American Ambassador in México.

In May 1929, everything was set in order to arrive at a resolution of the conflict. On June 2, in Washington, Archbishop Ruiz y Flores announced through the American press that the Church was ready to settle the conflict. Days later, the members of the Mexican Catholic hierarchy met with President Portes Gil and agreed to a solution.

The main points of the agreement, reached on June 21, 1929, were: the Mexican government denied any intention of destroying the identity of the Catholic Church and consequently agreed to allow the Catholic hierarchy to designate those priests who would register in compliance with Mexican laws; religious lessons would be banned in all schools, but teachings about the Catholic faith would be allowed inside the churches; and finally, the Mexican authorities recognized the Church's right to petition for the enactment or repeal of laws.

In the end, a problem that the American government initially considered only a Mexican domestic issue required the intervention of external forces in order to reach a solution. However, at the same time, it was necessary that those intervening in the negotiations did so unofficially. Neither officials of the Mexican and American governments nor the Catholic priests officially claimed at any point to conduct negotiations in the name of the institutions they represented. Even the official announcement of the agreement was written on a couple of white sheets of paper signed by the Mexican President only as E. Portes Gil.

These negotiations and the final agreement began a new era not only for relations between the Catholic Church and the Mexican State but also between the United States and Mexico. From then on, the spheres of activities for the Church were well established, and, as far as they engaged in their activities without interfering with governmental policies, there was no problem. As for the relations between the United States and México, in spite of all the disagreements, each government respected the other, and they resolved their differences without going to extremes. That agreement allowed them to set the stage for future relations based on working quietly and behind close doors when necessary to resolve public disagreements.

The way the conflict ended was a good example of how, in spite of all the disagreements, a channel of communication between U.S. and Mexican governments and the Church's representatives always remained open and the parties found a solution. The Church and State in Mexico learned how to deal with their differences without repeating the mistakes that led them to an armed confrontation. From then on, they always found a way to settle disputes.

In the case of the U.S., the management of this problem showed how domestic politics shaped foreign policy. In particular, it revealed the operation of various lobbies that influenced U.S. foreign policy. It was necessary to deal with pressures coming from Catholics and

Protestants; each group had a different point of view of how to manage the religious conflict in México. Simultaneously, the episode demonstrated how matters of foreign policy influenced domestic politics. Finally, it demonstrated the potential for a foreign policy issue to become a domestic political matter. Any effort to support either side in the Mexican conflict would have had political consequences in the presidential elections of 1928. The best way to avoid this was to work behind closed doors, without official representation of those involved. In the end, this diplomacy produced a settlement acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants in the U.S. American diplomacy also achieved its goal of stability in México without obvious or heavy handed intervention. This episode in American history set a good example both of well managed diplomacy and the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy.

In a larger sense, the U.S. intervention in México demonstrated how the U. S. was anything but isolationist in the 1920s. The U.S. had a variety of interests in México and pursued them actively. Although it chose not to be directly involved, the Coolidge administration used other avenues to achieve its desired result.

Chapter One

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The relations of the Mexican state with foreign powers cannot be explain without first providing an account of events since Europeans arrived on the American continent at the end of the 15th century. The actions taken then by the Pope and the Kings of Spain defined the relations between the inhabitants of the new world and foreign powers for the next four hundred years.

By the early 20th century, Mexican independence from Spain had been achieved a century earlier. The Catholic Church remained a powerful organization with great influence over the Mexican population. The United States represented the main power with which México had to deal. A brief account of events during the preceding four centuries will help to clarify how the U.S.-México relations and the religious conflict of the 1920s escalated to crises.

Colonial Years

Once Columbus set foot on the American Continent in 1492, a dispute arose between Don Manuel, King of Portugal and Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic rulers of Spain. The Spanish Kings were favored in the dispute by Pope Alexander VI, a Spanish born under the name of Rodrigo Lazol y Borja. Alexander VI published the Bulls¹⁶ *Inter Caetera* and *Eximae Devotionis*, on May 4, 1493.¹⁷ The former assigned the Kings of Spain to serve as apostolic vicars with authority over spiritual matters in the newly discovery lands. *Eximae Devotionis* granted to Spain all of the concessions and rights that had been granted formerly to the King of Portugal in his overseas possessions.

¹⁶ A bull may be conveniently defined to be “an Apostolic Letter with a leaden seal,” to which one may add that in its superscription the Pope invariably takes the title of *episcopus, servus servorum Dei*. *Catholic Encyclopedia* Volume I (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), 53.

¹⁷ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 14.

Later, Pope Julius II, Giuliano Della Rovere, published the Bull *Universalis Ecclesiae* on July 28, 1508, conceding universal patronage in the Indies to the Spanish Crown. The Royal Patronage of Indies allowed the Spanish kings to manage the revenues from the ecclesiastical services and the wealth acquired by the Church. It also authorized the Spanish kings to build churches and to appoint new Church officials.¹⁸

In spite of those restrictions, the Church accumulated considerable wealth, acting as the main source of financing for the landlords. When the borrowers did not fulfill their obligations to pay on time, the lands became Church's properties through mortmain.¹⁹ In 1796, more than half of the 33,387 buildings in México City belonged to the Church. According to the nineteenth century German scientist and explorer Alexander Von Humboldt, the Church owned real estate properties valued at 260 million pesos in 1800.²⁰

The Independence Movement

The independence movement began in 1810 and México achieved its independence by 1821. Spanish dominion was characterized by exploitation of the natural resources and economic disparity among the inhabitants of the Viceroyalties. Divisions emerged not only because of economic position but also because of ancestry. *Peninsulares*, Spanish by birth, openly discriminated against the Creoles, whom they considered as inferiors and excluded from high ranking positions in the government. Not surprisingly, Creoles started the uprising for independence in the Viceroyalties.

¹⁸ Ibid., 18-20.

¹⁹ Mortmain is a disposition originated during the Sixth Century when Pope Symmachus established that all properties acquired by the Church could not be sold by any member of that institution or by the Pope himself. *Diccionario Económico de Nuestro Tiempo*. www.eumed.net/cursecond/dic/m/man.htm (July 24, 2007).

²⁰ Alfonso Toro, *La Iglesia y el Estado en México: Estudio sobre los Conflictos entre el Clero Católico y los Gobiernos Mexicanos desde la Independencia hasta nuestros días*. 1927; Segunda Edición Fascimilar, (Ciudad de México: Ediciones El Caballito, 1975), 34, 35.

An additional element behind the independence movements in America emerged when Napoleon put his brother, Joseph, on the Spanish throne. The Creoles in America, as well as the Spaniards in Spain, rejected him as an imposter. Since Spain no longer had a government, the colonists argued, sovereignty reverted to the people, and this became an argument for independence.²¹

In New Spain, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla headed a group of prominent Creoles that started the independence movement on September 16, 1810. Creoles demanded the restitution of Ferdinand VII to the Spanish throne. When Hidalgo issued a call to arms however, “it was not the local notables who rallied, but rather the long-suffering mixed bloods and Indians.”²² Consequently, the independence movement became a popular revolt.

In his journey to the Northern Region, Hidalgo and the main leaders of the movement were captured by members of the Royal Army in Acatita de Baján, Coahuila. They were taken to the city of Chihuahua, the capital of the state with the same name, where after a trial they were condemned to execution. After Hidalgo’s execution, his successor, Ignacio López Rayón, established the Supreme National American Assembly in August 1811. López Rayón proposed a first draft of a Constitution, titled *Elementos Constitucionales*, which declared America, now known as Latin American nations, free and independent from any other nation but recognized the authority of Ferdinand VII, established Catholicism as the only religion, and acknowledged the rights and privileges of the Catholic priests.²³ In 1813, José María Morelos y Pavón, a priest and former disciple of Hidalgo, took over the movement’s leadership. He wrote a document entitled *Sentimientos de la Nación*. Besides sharing López Rayón’s proposals about religion, the

²¹ Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 31.

²³ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 23-27.

text recognized December 12 as the day to commemorate the Virgin of Guadalupe,²⁴ and established tithes and *primicias*²⁵ as the only duties Catholics should pay to the Church. On the basis of that document, the *Constitución de Apatzingán* was written by Morelos and his advocates, and published on October 22, 1814. It recognized Catholicism as the only faith and provided that foreigners living in the country that favored the nation's freedom and followed the Catholic faith could acquire the Mexican citizenship. The first step to select members of Congress involved the voting of citizens living near a parish, calling it Parish Electoral Boards. To become voters, citizens had to attend a mass. Once the ballots were cast and a Representative was selected, he had to attend a solemn *Te Deum* accompanied by the members of the Parish Electoral Board.²⁶

Morelos, however, knew that besides enacting laws, help from other countries was necessary to achieve independence. On July 14, 1815, Morelos and two other members of the independent movement, José María Linaga and Remigio de Yarza, sent a letter to President James Madison asking for the U.S. support. After praying for the protection of Heaven and emphasizing their decision to die rather to again bear the yoke of slavery, Morelos and his advocates stated that they

relied on the powerful aid of the United States, which as they wisely guided us by their example would favor us with their generous assistance signing treaties of friendship and alliance in which good faith would preside and where the reciprocal interests of both nations would be remembered.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 29, 30.

²⁵ *Primicias* are the first fruits of a crop or a cattle breed delivered by Catholics to the church or a priest as a gesture of gratitude. *Encarta Dictionary*, <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/dictionary/dictionaryhome.aspx/>. (August 21, 2007).

²⁶ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 32.

²⁷ William R. Manning, editor, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States concerning the Independence of Latin-American Nations* Volume III "José María Morelos, President (sic) of México, José María Linaga, and Remigio de Yarza, Secretary of Government, to James Madison, President of the United States, July 14, 1815." (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 1596.

There was no official answer to that request. Months later, in November 1815, Morelos was captured and executed, and the fight for independence would last for six more years.

By 1821, “independence from Spain was no longer a radical or even a liberal cause. Now it devolved into a conservative goal, a mean of upholding traditional values and social codes.”²⁸ Considering that, the Chief Commander of the Royal Army in the South Region, Agustín de Iturbide y Arámbaru prepared a plan for independence. In order to achieve power, Iturbide recognized that he had to reach an accord with the leaders of the independence movement, other members of the Royal Army, the Catholic hierarchy and the Viceroy. Iturbide (a Creole) set a plan to negotiate with Vicente Guerrero Saldaña (a *Mestizo*, someone of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry) acting as the last leader of the independence movement. As a result, on February 24, 1821, Guerrero and Iturbide agreed to the so called *Plan de Iguala*. The *Plan* recognized Catholicism as the official faith, retaining prerogatives for the priests, and required that Ferdinand VII, or a member of his family to be named, as the ruler of México.²⁹

The fusion of the Royal and the Independent Armies resulted in the so called Army of the Three Guarantees. The guarantees referred to: “religion (the Catholic faith as the official creed); independence (presumably a monarchy); and union (fair treatment for Creoles and *Peninsulares* alike).”³⁰ It represented the end of the armed revolt.

Iturbide and the last Viceroy of New Spain, Juan O’Donojú signed the *Tratados de Córdoba* on August 24, 1821. Spain recognized México as an independent and sovereign nation, under the terms established by the *Plan de Iguala*.³¹

²⁸ Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 33.

²⁹ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 113-116.

³⁰ Skidmore and Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 34.

³¹ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 116.

Mexican independence was officially declared on September 27, 1821. With Iturbide as president, a *Junta Gubernativa* acted as the first government of independent México. A *Te Deum* and a *misa de gracia* followed Iturbide's inauguration.³² Later, a Constituent Congress was convened on February 24, 1822.

After the Achievement of Independence

Even with an independent government ruling México, Catholicism continued to be the only officially recognized religion. At the same time, relations between the government authorities and religious hierarchy were characterized by an increasing level of tension, mainly over who would control the Royal Patronage. The Church argued the Mexican authorities needed to engage in negotiations with the Pope to settle new rules.

With the support of the Church, Iturbide declared himself Emperor. He was crowned on July 25, 1822. Iturbide demanded control over Patronage, which involved him in a dispute with his political enemies and the powerful Church. During the next months, a series of revolts against Iturbide developed. Congress explicitly declared its opposition to Iturbide, who first arrested some deputies and later dissolved the legislature. Those measures did not end opposition, and the provinces rose in revolt against him. At that point, members of the Church abandoned Iturbide. With no support, Iturbide had no other choice but to resign his "throne" on March 19, 1823.

The advent of a civilian government represented a major change for the Catholic Church accustomed to dealing with monarchs. Archbishop Pedro José de Fonte, in the name of the prelates, announced in 1823 that:

³² Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 397.

(1) With the winning of independence the Patronage which had been conceded by the Pope to the Kings of Spain, came to an end; (2) to exercise the Patronage, it was necessary for the Mexican government to receive the same concession from the Pope; and (3) in the meantime the provision of ecclesiastical places belonged by right of devolution in each diocese to the respective ordinary acting with the canons³³

The dispositions to establish a federalist system of government written under the Constitution of 1824 divided politicians into two groups. Liberals favored freedom and demanded to take power away from the Church, and Conservatives supported public order and religion.³⁴

The Liberals' ideological leader, Jose María Luis Mora demanded a government based on the principles of republicanism and democracy organized as a federation; according to the Liberals, the government needed to have superior strength to any other entity in the country.³⁵ On the Conservatives' side, Lucas Alamán, advocated a centralist government headed by an oligarchy, a return to a monarchy, maintenance of the traditional privileges of the well to do, preservation of the Catholic faith, and opposition to the federalism or any system derived from the popular vote.³⁶ Alamán argued that the problems in México derived from the United States policy (established under the Monroe Doctrine which Alamán correctly defined as an instrument to displace European influence over Latin American nations) and the struggle between the two rites of Freemasonry, the Scottish and the York.

The Scots wanted aristocratic control of the government, while the Yorks wanted a republican and proletarian government.³⁷ Behind the Yorks was the U.S. Minister in México

³³ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 399.

³⁴ Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, "Los Primeros Tropezos," *en Historia General de México* Tomo 2 (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 1981), 754, 755.

³⁵ José María Luis Mora, *El Clero, La Milicia y las Revoluciones* (Ciudad de México: Empresas Editoriales, S.A., Colección El Liberalismo Mexicano en Pensamiento y Acción. No. 16, 1949), 142-165.

³⁶ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 199.

³⁷ Francis Clement Kelley, *Blood-Drenched Altars: Mexican Study and Comment* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1935), 167, 169.

Joel Roberts Poinsett. Poinsett wanted a Constitution for Mexico similar to that of the United States. Poinsett's efforts did not materialize in changes to the already enacted laws; the Mexican Constitution of 1824 prevailed, and Catholicism remained as the official faith.³⁸

Trying to enforce equality before the law, Vice-president Valentín Gómez Farías, appointed by Congress on April 1833 to substitute López de Santa Anna as President, made some reforms ending the privileges of army officials and the Church. Among those measures were secularization of the Church-missions in the *Alta* and *Baja California*, prohibition of charging for services provided by the church, elimination of tithes, and secularization of educational institutions. The Catholic hierarchy considered those reforms an insult and the struggle reached a peak when members of the Army rebelled against such proceedings.³⁹ López de Santa Anna the official president with license, returned to power in 1834, revoking those reforms. It must be mentioned that López de Santa Anna occupied the presidency of México eleven times between 1833 and 1855, accounting for a period of five years and ten months. The reason of such disparity was that once in power, when a problem aroused López de Santa Anna alleged illness or tiredness and asked Congress for a license, or he was overthrown by his political rivals. He would wait in his hacienda or in exile until a group of advocates asked him to return to power. It happened in 1834 when responding to pressures from the Church, he returned to the presidency for a second time.

In early 1835, a new Congress, dominated by Conservatives, convened. In July, they decided to open discussions for a new constitution. While the struggle between Liberals and Conservatives continued in the Mexican Congress, the war with Texas exploded in 1836. López de Santa Anna went into that war with an ill equipped army and a divided country. Texas

³⁸ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 167-195.

³⁹ Toro, *La Iglesia y el Estado en México*, 103-108.

achieved its independence as a consequence, and López de Santa Anna embarked on his career as a symbol of embarrassment for the Mexicans. At the end of 1836, Congress approved a new constitution.

Meanwhile the Catholic Church tried to adjust to the new situation. Pope Gregory XVI, Barlolomeo Alberto Cappellari, officially recognized Mexican independence on November 29, 1836. A month later, responding to pressures from the Vatican, Spain did the same⁴⁰

From 1837 to 1854, the country engaged in a series of internal and external conflicts, among them a war with the United States. Some members of the Church played a key role in the conflict. Taking into account the strong influence of the Catholic Church over the Mexican population, President James K. Polk met on May 19 and 20 of 1846, with John Hughes, Bishop of New York, and Peter Richard Kenrick, Bishop of Missouri, to ask for their help. Polk assured them the American government had no plans to restrict or attack Catholicism in México. The American President also expressed his intentions to engage some Catholic priests as chaplains of the U.S. Army. Bishop Hughes responded positively to Polk's idea and added that he personally knew the Archbishop of México and was willing to visit México if the U.S. Government thought it useful. After visiting the Secretary of War, Bishop Kenrick went to inform President Polk that the number of priests to accompany the army would be determined by the Bishop himself. Polk agreed and expressed Kenrick's decision would give confidence to the Mexican priests in order to obtain their help.⁴¹

Polk knew that spiritual matters needed some tangible support. He named Moses Y. Beach as Confidential Agent of the United States to Mexico to take care of direct negotiations

⁴⁰ Jorge Luís Roque Pérez, *Relaciones Iglesia-Estado en México: Un Análisis Histórico Jurídico* (Ciudad de México: México 2000, 1997) ,47.

⁴¹ James K. Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk during his Presidency: 1845 to 1846* Volume I (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co. 1910), 408, 409.

with the Church. The results were expressed in Beach's report of June 4th, 1847, sent to Secretary of State James Buchanan, in which he wrote:

...The leading Bishops were in actual treaty with General [López de] Santa Anna when I arrived, [but] I did not hesitate to pledge the good faith of our Government for the protection of the Church in its freedom; ... I found little difficulty in persuading the Bishops to Puebla, Guadalupe and Michoacán, through [the] representative the Superior of the Orders of St. Vincent de Paul, to refuse all aid...in the prosecution of the war. They also promised to dispose their friends in Congress to advocate peace at the proper moment. When the Government resolved to raise money on the Church property, I urged them to an organized resistance...At the moment of General Scott's debarcation at Veracruz they made the most important diversion in his favor by raising the civil war at the capital, at Puebla, and in a degree at Michoacán...On the tenth day of this rebellion, I was informed that forty thousand dollars would be required of the clergy to carry in another week and that it would be paid if the importance of the crisis justified the outlay...⁴²

The Constitution of 1857, the French, the Church, and President Juárez García

Once the War ended in 1847 and México lost half of its territory, struggles continued in the country for another seven years. Beginning in 1854, a new generation of Liberals started to fight for reforms to separate the State from the Church. It all began when the *Revolución de Ayutla* deposed López de Santa Anna from the presidency. After winning, Liberals enacted the so called *Plan de Ayutla* which provided for an interim president and called for a Constitutional Congress. Meanwhile Ignacio Comonfort Ríos was designated as interim President of México. Then, a series of legal reforms got underway. Promoted by Benito Juárez García, then Minister of Justice, the *Ley Juárez* appeared on November 23, 1855. This decree suppressed all special courts except the military and the ecclesiastical; and these were deprived of all jurisdictions over civil suits. Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, the Minister of Finance, sponsored the *Ley Lerdo* published on June 25, 1856. According to that *Ley*, the Church could no longer hold more than a third of

⁴² Manning, editor. *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831 – 1860*, 906, 907.

the total land in the country without any productive use. *Ley Lerdo* did not imply any restrictions about the Church ownership of temples, convents, clerical residences, and educational and charitable institutions.

The Catholic hierarchy, however, demanded a return to the Constitution of 1824, pointing out that any modification would require the Papal approval.⁴³ On December 15, 1856, in his Allocution *Nunquam fore* Pope Pius IX, Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferreti, criticized those reforms which opposed the authority of the Holy See and demanded that they be declared null and void.

In spite of those opinions, Congress enacted a new Constitution on February 5, 1857.⁴⁴ It established the separation of the State and the Church, ended the Catholicism's status as the official creed, and allowed government to define the rules for religious worship.

Another law, supported by José María Iglesias and known as *Ley Iglesias*, was enacted on April 11, 1857. It limited the fees for the performance of ecclesiastical services and prohibited government coercion in the collection of parochial subventions.⁴⁵

With the election of the acting president, Ignacio Comonfort to the presidency, a major problem arose. He considered impossible to govern México, because those measures limiting the power of the Church ran against popular opinion. He also objected to the power invested in Congress which, according to him, bypassed the authority of the president.

On May 1857, Comonfort sent Ezequiel Montes, the Minister of Justice, to negotiate an agreement with the Holy See. In July, the Papal Minister of State told Montes that the Pope agreed to the measures imposed under the *Ley Juárez* and *Ley Lerdo*, and demanded the restoration of the rights for the Church to acquire property as well as the political rights of

⁴³ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 428, 429.

⁴⁴ Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 606-629.

⁴⁵ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 435, 436.

priests. The talks continued until December, when an internal revolt in Mexico led to the overthrow of Comonfort on January 11, 1858.

As a consequence, two governments claimed to rule the country. One was headed by the Conservative Felix María Zuloaga, and another was under the leadership of the legal Vice-president, Benito Juárez García, who demanded his place as a substitute president according to the laws of succession. The Three Years War broke out in 1858 and ended in January 1861 after the Liberal Army defeated the Conservatives.

The cause of that conflict was the enactment by President Juárez of the so called *Leyes de Reforma*. These laws established separation of Church and State, creation of the Civil Register, recognition of marriage as a civil contract, concealment of the intervention of the clergy in the management of cemeteries, suppression of convents, extinction of all religious congregations, nationalization of Church property, protection of the law for all religious beliefs on a plane of perfect equality, prohibition of public officials participating in acts of religion. The Catholic hierarchy considered these measures in violation of the principle of the Church's superiority over any other institution. On December 8, 1864, Pope Pius IX condemned those measures in his encyclical, *Syllabus of Modern Errors*.⁴⁶

Conservatives realized they did not have a strong figure to oppose Juárez García. They turned to Europe for an alternative. In 1862, a group of them went to Europe looking for a foreign monarch who could come to México to reign and establish a government strong enough to oppose Juárez. They found one in Maximilian of Habsburg, a member of the family of Carlos V, who reigned in Spain during the conquest in 1521. The Conservatives signed an agreement with Napoleon III to create a French-backed monarchy in México. This would provide French

⁴⁶ Pope Pius IX, *Encyclical Syllabus on Modern Errors* Rome at St. Peter's on December 8, 1864. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/>. (March 11, 2006).

backing to stop American territorial expansionism. According to the agreement, “Maximilian would have [French] military support until the new Mexican Empire became stable; ...it assumed [because of the Pope’s approval of the scheme] that he would restore the Church the properties taken under the Mexican Reform”.⁴⁷ The Conservatives believed the future belonged to them.

Maximilian arrived in Mexico City on June 12, 1864. The same day, the Archbishops of México and Michoacán and the Bishops of Puebla, Oaxaca, Caradro, Querétaro, Zamora, Tulancingo, Chiapas, Veracruz, and Chilapa published a Pastoral Letter. The bishops demanded the recognition of Catholicism as the only faith and the restoration of all the prerogatives which in the past the Church enjoyed.⁴⁸ They did not know that Maximilian, a liberal himself, “had decided to govern against the conservatives and the Church”⁴⁹ It took six months before Maximilian met with the Papal Nuncio, Monsignor Pietro Francesco Meglia.

Maximilian believed that the best way to deal with the Church was through a Concordat, and had already sent a letter to Pope Pius IX. Maximilian thought that the Concordat would allow the revival of the Royal Patronage. It would permit the participation of the State in the internal life of religious order. The priests would get a salary from the government, take care of the civil register and could be subject to civil tribunals. The Concordat would eliminate tithes and prohibit the Church from buying or selling properties. It would establish the prevalence of religious freedom and consequently the cemeteries owned by the Church could be used by members of other religions.⁵⁰ The Catholic hierarchy, however, rejected that plan and worked

⁴⁷ Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), 48, 49.

⁴⁸ Toro, *La Iglesia y el Estado en México*, 324, 325.

⁴⁹ Jean Meyer, *Historia de los Cristianos en América Latina: Siglos XIX y XX* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Jus, 1999), 82.

⁵⁰ Patricia Galeana de Valadés, *Las Relaciones Iglesia Estado durante el Segundo Imperio* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991), 166, 167.

with a group of Conservatives to defeat Maximilian's proposal. In early September of 1865, Maximilian received a letter from Rome in which the Pope rejected the Concordat and any suggestion diminishing the clerical prerogatives.

Maximilian found himself in a weak position when the French Army started leaving the country. The French government tired of the high cost for supporting the French Army in México. The American Civil War had ended, and the U.S. Government could help the Mexican Liberals to get rid of the invaders. The U.S. Government did not grant diplomatic recognition to Maximilian. Members of the Church turned increasingly against Maximilian. In addition, the Liberal Army, under the direction of President Juárez García, increased in strength. Maximilian had no other choice but to return to his alliance with the Conservatives. He found himself without supporters, because the Church no longer supported him and the Conservatives did not trust him. This ultimately led to his defeat and execution in 1867.

Once Juárez returned to México City, in 1867, he had so many problems to solve in order to organize the country that he preferred to adopt a more relaxed position toward religion. Juárez kept Holy Week and the commemoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe as official celebrations. As a citizen, he accompanied his wife to mass every Sunday. From 1867 to 1872, "the Catholics, and the Church, enjoyed a state of benevolence derived from the government's support to religious tolerance"⁵¹ This situation, however, did not prevail for long.

Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, who succeeded Juárez upon the latter's death in 1872, made a shift in the conciliatory policy. He implemented a series of legal measures, such as the *Ley Orgánica de la Reforma*, by which the *Leyes de Reforma* became part of the Mexican Constitution. Also, the President ordered the expulsion from Mexico of the Jesuits as well as

⁵¹ Jorge Adame Goddard, *El Pensamiento Político y Social de los Católicos Mexicanos: 1867-1914* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1981), 75.

the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. As a consequence, the Archbishops of México, Michoacán, and Guadalajara wrote a Pastoral Letter pointing out the errors of the Law. They instructed Catholics how to resist against the authorities. As a result, an important segment of the population, and unofficially the members of the Church, gave strong support to the political revolt headed by Porfirio Díaz Mori under the *Plan de Tuxtepec*. Díaz won the elections in December of 1876 and became President of Mexico.

Under the Dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz Mori

Díaz Mori believed that the only way to modernize the country would be through the participation of foreigners in the economy, especially in industry, communications, and the oil industry. Initially, the foreign capital came through American investments, mainly in railroads and oil production. This trend gradually shifted as investments from Europe, especially from England, France, and Germany, started to compete with American capital. Personally, Díaz Mori, who as the general in chief of the Liberal Army defeated the Imperial forces nine times, became an advocate of the French way of life. He tried to reduce the influence of the United States, something he found hard to do, considering the geographical position of México. At the same time, a group close to Díaz Mori, the so called *Los Científicos* garnered most of the wealth and political power. Conscious of that economic disparity, Díaz Mori tried to consolidate his alliance with the Catholic Church from the first's days of his ascension to power.

On January 15, 1877, Díaz Mori announced a more conciliatory policy toward religion. As a consequence, Pope Leon XIII, Gioacchino VincenzoRaffaele Luigi Pecci, sent a letter to the Mexican Government. The Pope regretted the interruption of amicable relations between

México and the Holy See, and asked for a correction of the Liberal's past mistakes.⁵² The Mexican government did not provide an official answer, but the Catholic Church and the Mexican government developed a *modus vivendi* which allowed each to work without interfering with the activities of the other.

Two events would represent a shift in the relation between the Church and the Mexican State. One happened when, previous to his fourth election in 1892, Díaz submitted to Congress a proposal for reforms in the constitution. He asked Congress to consider unlimited reelection for the presidency. Dominated by Díaz's advocates, Congress had no objection. The other factor was the development of social Catholicism established under the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which Pope Leo XIII published in May 15, 1891.⁵³ In it the Pope supported the rights of labor unions but rejected socialism and affirmed private property.

Those incidents marked the beginning of an open participation by the Church in political and social issues. In Mexican politics, two Catholic newspapers, *La Voz de México* and *El País*, supported Díaz's reelection. These papers also published some criticism of the local governments. The Church also questioned the power gained by *Los Científicos*, many of whom got their wealth by the acquisition of properties formerly belonging to the Church. On social issues, between 1903 and 1909, the Church organized four National Catholic Congresses in which the main topics were the creation of the *Raiffeiseissen* Banks to finance small business, the Indians' problems, activities of social a character, and measures to provide employment as well as to create unions for Catholic workers.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 102.

⁵³ Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Rerum Novarum* Rome at St Peter's on May 15, 1891. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/>. (July 5, 2006).

⁵⁴ Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, *90Años de Pastoral Social en México* (Ciudad de México: Ediciones CEPS-Cáritas Mexicana, 1988), 53- 66.

During those years, a French Jesuit, Bernard Bergoend, responded to a request from a group of Catholics from Guadalajara. He developed a project for the creation of a socio-political Catholic organization which would work to fight against poverty and injustice. Catholics considered that political action would be the only way to reverse such conditions.⁵⁵ The Catholic hierarchy, however, decided to wait for a while to join the political arena openly. After all “thanks to *la política de reconciliación*, it is estimated that between 1874 and 1910, the value of the ecclesiastical property increased from 50 million pesos to double that amount”⁵⁶ In addition to that economic power, an estimated 99% of a total population of 15 million was considered Catholic.

The Church unofficially supported Díaz against the challenger Francisco I. Madero González during the 1910 presidential elections. Catholics, however, began to reconsider their support for Díaz as soon as problems derived from the elections started to arouse.

From the Start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 to the Constitution of 1917

The clergy, however, had some doubts about Madero González. Madero issued his positions on the Plan de San Luis, which formed the basis of his political program against Díaz Mori in 1910. In it, he put forward agrarian reform and educational issues. The clergy considered them socialistic. Further, agrarian reform would affect the holdings which had been acquired or retained clandestinely by the Church. Educational reform caused the clergy to fear for the educational facilities they had established during the years before. Considering that, Catholics decided to participate openly in politics.

⁵⁵ Meyer, *Historia de los Cristianos en América Latina*, 108.

⁵⁶ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 457.

Madero González protested his questionable defeat in the 1910 elections, and Díaz Mori ordered his imprisonment. Once released, Madero González went to San Antonio Texas where he and his followers planned to start an armed movement to overthrow Díaz's government. Denouncing the misery to which the government had brought the people and asking for democracy, Madero González and his advocates began the Mexican Revolution on November 20, 1910. With the Mexican Revolution already under way, the National Catholic Party (PCN) became a reality on May 3, 1911, just eight days before Díaz Mori resigned the presidency. Díaz resigned because popular discontent increased to such levels that Díaz thought the only way to stop the rebellion would be through his withdrawal. The PCN's main goal was to find solutions that conformed to Christianity for the agricultural, industrial and labor problems. The Party advocated freedom of teaching, free suffrage, single terms for elected officials at all levels, and life term for the elected judiciary.⁵⁷

After Díaz Mori departure, the interim president Francisco León de la Barra called elections. Madero became the presidential candidate under the flag of the Progressive Constitutional Party. Putting aside its reservation about Madero and acting pragmatically, the Catholic Party recommended that Madero consider adding in his ballot León de la Barra as a candidate for the Vice-presidency. Madero rejected the proposal. The PCN nonetheless on August 18, 1911, endorsed Madero's candidacy for the presidency. Madero accepted the Party's support, promised to respect the rights and liberties of the Catholics. At the same time, he said that he would not interfere with specific functions of the Legislative branch.

Madero won a sweeping victory in the elections of October 1911. Before long, however, members of the PCN became disillusioned and started to attack Madero. Catholics were afraid about the future due to the way Madero handled political problems. On July 11,

⁵⁷ Adame Goddard, *El Pensamiento Político y Social de los Católicos Mexicanos*, 173.

1911, the US Ambassador to México Henry Lane Wilson wrote to Secretary of State Philander Chase Knox: “the Roman Catholic Church and the party which takes its name have become violently antagonistic to Madero and are busily engaged throughout the Republic in aspersing his motives, decrying his policies, and censuring the weakness and vacillation which is supposed to characterize his direction of affairs”.⁵⁸ In spite of that, Madero avoided enacting measures against religious freedom or suppressing participation of Catholics in politics.

Madero called federal elections in 1912 which produced unexpected results. The candidates under the flag of the PCN won the governorship in the States of México, Querétaro, Jalisco, and Zacatecas; 29 of its members were elected to the XXVI Legislature and, four to the Senate. The PCN also controlled the mayor’s office in the capital of several states around the country. Those results contradicted Henry Lane Wilson’s assertion that: “the so-called Catholic Party [was] a nebulous political organization, apparently without direction, and not wholly submissive to leadership...the Roman Catholic Church as a political organization [did] not exist in Mexico”⁵⁹ Future events provided further proof that Wilson’s statement had nothing to do with reality.

Although Madero González did not show any signs of anti-Catholicism, the Church concluded that the right time had arrived for a return to the old times. When Victoriano Huerta overthrew and assassinated President Madero, on February 1913, not a single editorial in the Catholic newspapers criticized the coup, arguing that to do so would be to throw fuel on the

⁵⁸ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the annual message of the President transmitted to Congress December 7, 1911* (1911) “The American Ambassador to the Secretary of State,” File 812.00/2219, July 11, 1911 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), 509.

⁵⁹ Henry Lane Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium and Chile*, 217, 218.

flames. Some members of the National Catholic Party, among them [León] De la Barra and Federico Gamboa, became Ministers in Huerta's government.⁶⁰

Some historians have stated that the silence of the Catholic papers derived from a loan submitted by the Church to Huerta. Alfonso Toro wrote it was for 10 million pesos.⁶¹ Robert E. Quirk, taking as his source the Catholic newspapers, affirmed the loan was for 25,000 pesos.⁶² Others like Francis C. Kelley did not agree with that assertion. He argued that not only did the Mexican clergy give no support of any kind whatever to Huerta, but that he censored the Catholic Party organ, arrested its editor, and drove the party leader from the country.⁶³

A rebellion against Huerta's *coup d'état* developed under the leadership of Venustiano Carranza Garza, Governor of the State of Coahuila. The Catholic hierarchy took Huerta's side. The prelates published a pastoral letter condemning those rebelling against the "legitimate government" and preventing Catholics from participating in such rebellion. Consequently the revolutionaries considered the Catholic priests as their enemies.

Huerta had the sympathy and support of Henry Lane Wilson, who considered him "a devoted Roman Catholic, a believer in the Diaz régime and policies...and a sincere patriot."⁶⁴ President Woodrow Wilson, however, did not share that opinion. His administration never extended diplomatic recognition to Huerta's government. Wilson even sent American troops to invade the city of Veracruz, on the East Coast of México, but the results were not as expected. The intervention aroused Mexican nationalism, and Huerta gained support among the population. President Wilson finally decided to withdraw the troops and supported Carranza Garza in his

⁶⁰ Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church: 1910-1929* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), 37.

⁶¹ Toro, *La Iglesia y el Estado en México*, 360.

⁶² Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church*, 38.

⁶³ Kelley, *Blood-Drenched Altars*, 455.

⁶⁴ Lane Wilson, *Diplomatic Episodes in Mexico, Belgium and Chile*, 295.

efforts to get rid of Huerta. The Constitutional Army defeated Huerta and expelled him from the presidency in July 1914.

Meanwhile, the Archbishops of Guadalajara and Monterrey, had sent on June 26, a message to Cardozo de Oliveira, head of the Brazilian Delegation in México. They asked for protection in case the revolutionaries headed by Carranza entered Mexico City. They also solicited Oliveira to request that the American Government intercede on their behalf to assure that the revolutionaries afforded them full protection in their persons and property.⁶⁵ On June 30, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan cabled the Brazilian Minister to Mexico: “Department will be pleased to have you furnish shelter to Bishops if in your opinion such action is necessary to preserve their lives. It has also been pleased to instruct American Consul General, Monterey, to request Constitutionalist Chief [Carranza Garza] to afford full protection to persons and properties of Bishops.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Mexican authorities arrested one hundred priests and jailed them on July 21, 1914, although the priests were liberated without any charges. In early August, the Minister of the Interior, Manuel Aguirre Berlanga met with all foreign priests in México, notifying them that they must leave the country within five days.⁶⁷ Expelled with them were a number of Mexican priests and members of the Catholic hierarchy.

Most of these exiled Mexican priests went to the U.S. looking for support from the American Catholic hierarchy. On August 18, 1914, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore sent a letter to President Wilson, in which he pointed out that, in spite of his efforts to calm the feelings of the Catholics in México, he almost daily received letters from Mexico complaining of the

⁶⁵ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: with the Address of President to Congress, December 7, 1915* (1915) “The Brazilian Minister to Mexico to the Secretary of State,” June 26, 1914, File 320.12/20: Telegram (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1924), 1004.

⁶⁶ Ibid., “The Secretary of State to the Brazilian Minister to Mexico,” June 30, 1914 File 312.12/20: Telegram, 1005.

⁶⁷ Francisco Camberos Vizcaíno, *Francisco El Grande: Mons. Francisco Orozco Jiménez* Tomo I (Ciudad de México: Editorial Jus, S.A., 1966), 269.

bitter persecution of the Church by the Constitutionals. After mentioning how the priests were unable to return to their cities because of that persecution, Gibbons said: "I feel quite sure that just one word from you to the Constitutionalist leaders would have a great effect and would relieve the sad condition of affairs. I would be exceedingly grateful to you if you would let me know if something could not be done in this matter"⁶⁸ President Wilson answered, on August 21, saying it was not true that a word from him could change revolutionaries' behavior. Wilson thought that it would be necessary to wait until passions in México subsided.⁶⁹

The struggle between members of the Constitutional Army and the Church continued. The Catholic Church attempted to generate support in the U.S. by sending several documents to American priests, who published them. Those actions represented an antecedent of what would come a few years later during the *Cristero* revolt.

Carranza Garza continued implementing a series of measures to limit the Church's activities. First, he issued a decree enforcing the Reform Laws on December 12, 1914. Second, the Laws for Divorce appeared on December 25, 1914, and, third, an amendment to the Civil Code allowing total divorce came out on January 29, 1915. These measures constituted the first steps in a long series of changes. At the end of 1916, now in power, the revolutionaries called a Constitutional Congress in order to write and enact a new Federal Constitution.

A new Constitution was enacted on February 5, 1917. It set new guidelines for relations between the Church and the State under articles 3, 5, 20, 24, 27 and 130. Article 3 provided for free education without religious content. Article 5 prohibited monastic orders and monastic vows. Article 24 declared that everyone was free to embrace the religion of his choice. Every

⁶⁸ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the Address of the President to Congress, December 7, 1915* (1915) "Cardinal Gibbons to the President," August 18, 1914, File 812.404/8 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1924), 1006.

⁶⁹ Ibid., "The President to Cardinal Gibbons," August 21, 1914, File 812.404/134, 1006, 1007.

religious act of public worship, however, must take place inside Church buildings, which always would be under the supervision of the federal government. Article 27 decreed that all real estate, buildings, and temples previously owned by the Churches belonged to the Mexican State. It also forbade religious corporations or institutions, or their ministers or their dependents, to supervise, direct, or administrate private or public charitable institutions. Article 130 banned Congress from enacting laws establishing or prohibiting religions and denied juridical personality to religious institutions. In addition, it provided that priests be considered as any other professional. The number of priests in each locality would be determined by the respective State governments. Further, only Mexicans by birth could perform the duties of priests, and priests were forbidden to participate in politics. Finally, article 130 requested a special permit from the government in order to open a new temple.

On February 27, 1917, the Mexican Episcopate published a document condemning the new law. According to it, the Church denied participating in the *coup d'état* against Madero or providing support to Huerta's government, and expressed opposition to the measures enacted related to religion. Additionally, in April, the Episcopate issued a message to the clerics reminding them of the guidelines of the Latin-American Plenary Council that recommended parents avoid sending their children to non-Catholic schools.⁷⁰

Other voices also expressed their disagreement with the Mexican Constitution. After returning from exile, the Archbishop of Guadalajara, Francisco Orozco Jiménez published a Pastoral Letter on June 4, 1917. In it, he criticized those measures related to religion written in the constitution, emphasizing, that the revolutionaries had as their goal the enslavement of the

⁷⁰ Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *La Constitución de los Cristeros* (Ciudad de México: Librería Popular, S.A., 1963), 21-23.

Church and its members.⁷¹ On June 15, Pope Benedict XV, Giacomo Della Chiesa, sent a letter to the Mexican Archbishops and Bishops expressing his sympathy with the document they published on February 27. The Pope criticized the Constitution and encouraged them to continue to defend Catholicism against all such dispositions.⁷²

American Catholics responded to the Pope's call. An assembly of the American Federation of Catholic Societies in Kansas City adopted a resolution in 1917 condemning the Mexican Constitution. The American bishops meeting in Washington drew up a similar letter of protest and considered first sending it to President Wilson, but they did not do so because Cardinal Gibbons figured that the president was more focused on war in Europe.⁷³ In the end, American priests silenced their voices because they did not find enough support among American public opinion. "Americans looked to Europe and their men in battle, to personal casualties and deaths, and what had once been so important in México no longer seemed to matter."⁷⁴ The initial protests, however, had some impact south of the border.

Acting as a pragmatic politician, President Carranza Garza took into account internal and external opposition and delayed the full implementation of those dispositions relating to the Church. Tensions between the state and the Church nonetheless continued to increase. The Church never abandoned its battle to return to a situation similar to that before the enactment of the Constitution of 1857. In Jalisco, Archbishop Orozco Jiménez continued working to build a solid opposition to the Mexican government that would explode years later in an armed rebellion.

⁷¹ Camberos Vizcaíno, *Francisco El Grande*, 346.

⁷² Lombardo Toledano, *La Constitución de los Cristeros*, 25.

⁷³ Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church*, 101.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

Once President Carranza's term came to an end, in 1919, he tried to continue exercising power by imposing a successor. He considered Ignacio Bonilla, the Mexican Ambassador to Washington, as the best suited for that mission. As soon as Carranza Garza provided some hints about Bonilla's candidacy, Álvaro Obregón Salido - the architect of Carranza's military success - expressed his opposition. Obregón Salido, together with Governor of the State of Sonora Adolfo de la Huerta Marcor, and Secretary of Labor under Carranza's regime, Plutarco Elías Calles, openly rebelled against their former leader and issued the *Plan de Agua Prieta* on April 23, 1920. The excuse was a dispute between the Central Government and the State of Sonora over the water rights of the Río Sonora; the *Plan* declared that Carranza no longer held the Mexican Presidency.

With Obregón Salido taking leadership of the rebellion, things did not look very promising for Carranza Garza, who fled to Veracruz where he planned to establish his government. Carranza Garza was killed by enemy forces while traveling on May 18, 1920. Six days later, Congress appointed De la Huerta Marcor as an interim president. De la Huerta called elections on September 1, 1920, and Obregón obtained the victory.

Chapter Two

RELIGION AND DIPLOMACY: ONE STEP AT A TIME

When Obregón Salido ascended to power on December 1, 1920, he faced two difficult issues. One was the desire of the Catholic Church to return to the old times of privileges and political power. Another was the refusal of the U.S. government to grant diplomatic recognition to his government unless Obregón guaranteed respect for American properties and investments in México.

From the beginning of his term, President Obregón Salido publicly denied any permission to organize religious events outside the churches. On January 1922, the League for the Defense of Religion Liberty, with the support of the Apostolic Delegate Monsignor Ernesto Filippi, disobeyed that disposition by organizing to erect a monument to King Christ in the Cubilete Hill, located in the central State of Guanajuato. In what represented an open challenge to the Mexican laws, the official inauguration of the monument took place on January 11 with a great participation of Catholic believers. The Mexican government responded by ordering Monsignor Filippi expelled from the country. The statue was erected anyway and became a symbol for the Catholics. Relations between the Church and State, from then on, became very tense.

President Obregón Salido refrained from imposing harsh measures against the Church, other than those already mentioned, because his government faced a weak position internationally. He chose not to engage in an open battle against two powerful international entities, one with superior economic and military strength and the other with the support of the Pope as well as influence over the consciences of the majority of the Mexican population. Consolidating his government required taking one step at a time.

Obregón's Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition

The American Government refused to recognize Obregón's government because of a dispute about the retroactivity of Article 27 of the Constitution related to property rights on subsoil affecting the oil industry and agrarian matters. Even when "Article 14 specifically stated that the provisions of the Constitution were not retroactive,"⁷⁵ Article 27 authorized the Executive to review all contracts and concessions on natural resources, waters and lands issued by former governments since 1876. President Warren Gamaliel Harding approved a proposal prepared by the U.S. Department of State which he submitted to President Obregón on May 27, 1921 through George Thomas Summerlin, U.S. *chargé d'affaires* in México. The proposal offered diplomatic recognition to President Obregón's government if he agreed to sign a treaty that guaranteed American property rights in México acquired before May 1, 1917. It also restored to American citizens or private enterprises the rights or interests of which they may have been deprived in Mexico without compensation since January 1, 1910, and demanded compensation for damages to those properties.⁷⁶

President Obregón Salido responded by writing a personal and informal letter to President Harding, which he sent through Elmer Dover, a mutual friend, on June 11, 1921. In it, Obregón asked Harding why he demanded a treaty to assure that México would fulfill its international obligations before extending diplomatic recognition to the Mexican government. Obregón argued that

nevertheless, the non-retroactive and non-confiscatory relementation [sic] of Article 27 of the Constitution is something which is in the political atmosphere of Mexico. Apart from the political guarantees which the Constitution

⁷⁵ Callcott, *Liberalism in Mexico*, 280; Tena Ramírez, *Leyes Fundamentales de México*, 821

⁷⁶ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921* Volume II "The Secretary to President Harding (Christian) to the Secretary of State [Enclosure] Draft Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States of America and Mexico," May 21, 1921, File 711.1211/45 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936), 397-404.

gives to these principles, the agreement of the executive and legislative powers with respect thereto, has been already shown in diverse forms and occasions, and there is no reason for believing that the judicial power will adopt different views. With respect to the damages caused by our internal war, the Executive has prepared a law, soon to be promulgated, which will establish as a fact a mixed claims commission, just as effective in its operation as if it originated in an international treaty. With respect to the service of the debt, there are two convincing proofs of the good disposition of Mexico... the invitation extended to the international committee of bankers, presided over by Mr. Lamont, and the banking house of Speyer (that an arrangement has still to be made is because of their fault in not having accepted it), and the recent decree laying additional export taxes on petroleum, precisely with a view to the payment of the debt.⁷⁷

For Obregón “it [was] unnecessary to demand of Mexico the signature of a treaty upon matters already settled in a spontaneous manner, and which [he] as President [could not] enter into because the law [did] not permit [him]... to conclude treaties contrary to the laws of [his] country.”⁷⁸

President Harding replied to President Obregón, on July 21, 1921. After assuring Obregón that he wanted to reestablish relations between U.S. and México, Harding offered the reasons why the U.S. government did not extend diplomatic recognition to Obregón’s government. Harding argued that U.S.-México relations during the last decade had been far from satisfactory, and “the U.S. Government felt that its duty to its citizens demanded a more definitive understanding as to the intention of the regime which succeeded it with regard to the protection of the interests of American citizens in Mexico”⁷⁹ At the end, President Harding stated that if México signed that treaty, the U.S. would immediately give diplomatic recognition.

⁷⁷ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921* Volume II “General Obregón to President Harding” [Translation] June 11, 1921, File 812.00/26059 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936), 418.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁷⁹ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921* Volume II “The Under Secretary of State (Fletcher) to the Chargé in Mexico Summerlin [Enclosure] President Harding to General Obregón,” July 21, 1921, File 812.00/251141/2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936), 420.

On June 16, before receiving Harding's answer, the Mexican President had already enacted a decree imposing an additional tax on petroleum exports. The American oil companies operating in México openly protested to the Mexican Ministry of Finance. They awaited a final decision from the Mexican Supreme Court related to the judicial inquiry presented by The Texas Oil Company appealing the retroactivity of Article 27.

After analyzing the treaty, President Obregón declared during his first Address to Congress on September 1, 1921, that the three main issues concerning the rights of foreigners in México were the resumption of payments on the public foreign debt, a fair resolution through Mixed Claim Commissions to cover the payments of such damages resulting from the revolutionary movement, and an interpretation of the non-retroactivity of Article 27. Obregón said that a program implemented by the Mexican government had resolved all of these issues. Therefore, referring to the treaty proposed by the U.S. government, Obregón alleged it was unnecessary to include those conditions in a treaty. Further, he maintained that to do so would demean México because diplomatic relations were suspended and a treaty under such conditions would imply that the Mexican government needed to be coerced into such actions. To the contrary, Obregón pointed out the Mexican Supreme Court had reached a decision denying the retroactivity of Article 27.⁸⁰ Obregón, however, did not mention his unofficial contacts with President Harding looking for an agreement. Obregón liked to play -international politics behind close doors o through third party involvements, a procedure which is described in following pages.

Obregón also failed to mention that a decline in the oil production during 1921 had affected the government revenues resulting in “estimates of funds required by the Mexican

⁸⁰ Aarón Sáenz, *La Política Internacional de la Revolución: Estudios y Documentos* (Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1961), 46, 47.

government ranged anywhere from \$50, 000,000 to \$100, 000, 000.”⁸¹ As a result of the decline in oil production, on August 18, the President of the Standard Oil and Chairman of the Oil Executives Committee, Walter Clark Teagle, informed U.S. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes of the intention of the Committee to visit México in order to get an agreement with Mexican authorities about the tax levied on oil.⁸² He mentioned the possibility that the Mexican government would ask a group of oil men for a loan. Hughes answered that, according to his understanding, “the Department understand from Mr. Lamont [Thomas William Lamont, chairman of the International Committee of Bankers on México] the matter [of the loan] had already been discussed between your Committee and the bankers interested, and [the Department] is inclined to agree with the suggestion that negotiations for a loan, if undertaken, should be entirely independent of your negotiations with respect to taxation.”⁸³ With that recommendation in mind, the representatives of five oil companies went to México and engaged in negotiations with the Minister of Finance, Adolfo de la Huerta Marcor.

On September 3, an agreement was reached. According to its terms, the oil companies agreed to pay the Mexican government the production taxes, Mexican authorities ended the embargos pending against the oil companies which will agreed to dismiss their *amparo*⁸⁴ proceedings against officials of the Mexican government. Not mentioned in the text was the

⁸¹ N. Stephen Kane, “Bankers and Diplomats: The Diplomacy of the Dollar in Mexico, 1921-1924,” *The Business History Review* Vol.47, No. 3 (Autumn, 1973), 337.

⁸² United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921 Volume II*, “The President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W.C. Teagle) to the Secretary of State,” August 18, 1921, File 611.127/ 394 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1936), 453-455.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, “The Secretary of State to the President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (W. C. Teagle),” August 20, 1921, File 611.127/934, 456, 457.

⁸⁴ *Amparo* is a figure established in the Mexican laws which allows a situation prevailing the same as before the judicial order had been issued.

issuing of bonds by the Mexican government in order to pay sixty percent of the exportation imposts.⁸⁵

The initial optimism about the agreement would not last long; during the month of December, Mexican bonds found no buyers in the market. In the meantime, several events took place leading to future accords immediately and during the next year. Obregón's words about the Supreme Court's decision became a reality on September 26 when a final decision, related to the inquiry presented by the Texas Oil Company, was reached. It struck down retroactivity but

the decision appear[ed] to confirm the validity of the Executive Decrees of July 31, August 8th and 12th, 1918, establishing certain taxes and prescribing certain rules for the exploitation of petroleum, by virtue of the extraordinary powers in financial matters conferred on the Executive by the Congress; and states that the fourth paragraph of Article XXVII of the Constitution, in so far as it relates to petroleum and all hydro-carbons, solid, liquid or gaseous, is not retroactive as regards rights legitimately acquired prior to May 1, 1917.⁸⁶

One step had been taken but the point of destination was far away.

Financial Matters: De la Huerta-Lamont Agreement

Lamont visited México on October to discuss with De la Huerta Marcor "the restoration of Mexico's credit and the resumption of payments on the debt. The meetings resulted in a failure because Lamont refused to participate in the so-called bond purchase plan and De la Huerta considered the plan presented by Lamont for the restoration of Mexico's credit and the resumptions of payments on the debt, too onerous and too humiliating."⁸⁷ In spite of that,

⁸⁵ United States Department of State, Papers *Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1921* Volume II, "The Chargé in Mexico (Summerlin) to the Secretary of State [Enclosure] Report of a Meeting of the Committee of Oil-Company Executives with their Tampico Managers, at Mexico," September 8, 1921, No. 430, File 600.127/250, 457- 459.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, "The Chargé in Mexico (Summerlin) to the Secretary of State," September 27, 1921, No. 435, File 812.6363/1007, 464.

⁸⁷ Kane, "Bankers and Diplomats: The Diplomacy of the Dollar in Mexico, 1921-1924," 341.

during the next year and a half, members of both governments continued working in search of a solution. The U.S. government asked for the signing of a treaty and the creation of a mixed claim commission, but the Mexican government rejected both propositions.

In January 1922, negotiations between the bankers and the Mexican authorities resumed. During the next five months, different proposals came under scrutiny from both sides. The bankers doubted the ability of the Mexican government to support the bonds in the open market, and the Mexican authorities continued to ask the banks for a loan. At the same time, the Mexican authorities assured potential buyers that the country was able to pay the premium to holders of Mexican securities. At the end of May, De la Huerta Marcor traveled to New York to meet the members of the International Committee of Bankers on México. Conferences lasted from June 2 to 16, resulting with the signing of the De la Huerta –Lamont Agreement, in which the Mexican government recognized an external debt over \$500,000,000. The Mexican government also recognized interest arrearages of \$280,000,000, but all interest accruing was canceled. Repayment of the adjusted debt would begin in 1928, with payments spread over forty years. Payments of current interest, for the period from 1923 to 1928, would also begin in the latter year, part in cash and part in 3 percent government scrip. Up to this point, the agreement looked like a good financial deal, but there was something else. As a guarantee of payment, the government agreed to turn over to the International Committee of Bankers for a five year period all export taxes on petroleum, the net earnings of the National railways, and all the proceeds of a tax of 10 per cent on the gross receipts of the railways. México also agreed to return the National Railways of México to private ownership.⁸⁸ The Agreement represented a questionable short term solution because of the heavy burden imposed on government finances

⁸⁸ Kane, "Bankers and Diplomats: The Diplomacy of the Dollar in Mexico, 1921-1924," 346; Sáenz, *La Política Internacional de la Revolución*, 27-37.

while transferring problems to future administrations. The agreement had nothing to do with achieving nationalistic victories as De la Huerta's supporters tried to claim. It represented an example of how Obregón played politics in order to obtain diplomatic recognition for his government.

The General Claims Convention or *Bucareli* Agreements and the Diplomatic Recognition

During the following months, the Mexican Foreign Minister, Alberto J. Pani and Hughes continued exchanging informal notes and proposals through George Thomas Summerlin. They searched for a settlement that allowed both parties to start formal negotiations to end the dispute.

Those negotiations, however, constituted just part of the picture. Back-channels negotiations continued. For example, on March 7, 1923, Secretary Hughes sent a telegram to Summerlin. Hughes mentioned that on February 27, General James A. Ryan, the representative of the Texas Oil Company in México, had informed him President Obregón Salido “would be pleased to see the problems between the United States and Mexico discussed by a commission to be made up of representatives of the two countries.”⁸⁹ In the same telegram Hughes stated that “at a subsequent meeting, on March 5, he mentioned to General Ryan that President Harding was favorably disposed towards the suggestion, and ...ready to name two representatives of the United States to confer with two representatives of Mexico for the purpose of discussing the questions now existing between the two nations.”⁹⁰ Hughes instructed Summerlin to continue the negotiations with the Mexican government, which Summerlin did. Coincidentally enough, on March 9, *The New York Times* reported that Senator William Edgar Borah, Republican of Idaho,

⁸⁹ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923* Volume II “Recognition of the Government of General Obregón by the United States and the Resumption of Diplomatic Relations” “The Secretary of State to the Charge in Mexico (Summerlin),” March 7, 1923, File 711.1211/61a: Telegram, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 522.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 522.

had announced his formal support for the diplomatic recognition of the Mexican government.⁹¹ Later Summerlin received a letter from Pani in which the Mexican Minister expressed his satisfaction with the change of procedure presented by the American government. After that Pani engaged in a long analysis of each point contained in the agreement reached on September 3, 1921 by De la Huerta Marcor and the representatives of the oil companies. Pani explained what the Mexican government had done during this period, and offered some proposals relating to those matters pending.⁹²

What General Ryan told Secretary Hughes provided an example of how President Obregón Salido played his cards. In one way, he used personal and informal routes, which did not necessarily mean a formal proposal but offered enough for a third party to take into official circles in the US. In this case, the results came out with an unofficial answer setting the basis for continuing the negotiations. Once Obregón Salido knew about the results of his informal suggestions, he tried to appear as the one replying to a proposition. President Obregón Salido sent a letter to General Ryan on April 9, 1923. It read: “considering your proposal that both governments [México and the U.S.] named representatives to discuss about the differences, once I analyzed that, and taking into account President Harding accepted your suggestion, my government agreed to appoint two representatives, expecting the President of the United States to do the same in order to start talks to end our differences.”⁹³ Obregón Salido suggested that the conference take place in México City.

Thus, the Mexican and American governments finally agreed to work together in search of a solution. The Mexican government selected Ramon Ross and Fernando González Roa,

⁹¹ “Borah demands real World Court,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1923, 3.

⁹² United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923* Volume II “The Chargé in Mexico (Summerlin) to the Secretary of State” File 711.1211/61 No. 7270 March 31, 1923 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 523-532.

⁹³ Sáenz, *La Política Internacional de la Revolución*, 370, 371.

while the American government appointed Charles Beecher Warren and John Barton Payne as their respective representatives to what in the U.S. became known as the General Claims Convention and in México as the *Bucareli* Agreements. The negotiations started on May 14, 1923, ending three months and a day later. The content of this agreement established rules to cover claims on both countries developed during recent years, abrogated the retroactivity of Article 27, and set the basis for future understanding between the countries.

After that, Obregón's government got diplomatic recognition from the U.S. On August 31, The State Department formally recognized Obregón's Government.⁹⁴ The next day, during the opening ceremony of the Thirtieth Congress, President Obregón announced the resumption of diplomatic relations with the U.S.⁹⁵

Following those events, Adolfo de la Huerta Marcor resigned his post as Minister of Finances over his disagreement with the way the president had solved political conflicts in the States of San Luis Potosí and Nuevo León.⁹⁶ In the former, the presidents asked the Federal Senate to dissolve state's powers and avoid recognizing the victory of either of the two candidates for governorship. One of the candidates was Jorge Prieto Laurens an important leader of the Cooperative National Party (PNC), the party which later supported De la Huerta's candidacy for the presidency.⁹⁷ In the case of Nuevo León, a dispute arose between the candidates for governorship, one of whom was Aaron Saenz. An interim governor was appointed in both cases ending the conflict. De la Huerta considered those actions a flagrant violation of the dispositions established under the Mexican Constitution. In his *Memoirs*, written in 1958, De la Huerta

⁹⁴ "Full recognition accorded Mexico," *New York Times*, September 1, 1923, 1.

⁹⁵ "Mexican Congress Opened by Obregón," *New York Times*, September 3, 1923, 6.

⁹⁶ Telegrama de Adolfo de la Huerta a Plutarco Elías Calles. Septiembre 25, 1923 en Carlos Macías, editor. *Plutarco Elías Calles Correspondencia Personal (1919-1945)* (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), 106, 107.

⁹⁷ John W. F. Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico: A Chronicle of the Mexican Revolution, 1919-1936* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1972), 186.

Marcos explained that he resigned because of his discrepancies with the content of the *Bucareli* Agreements.

After De la Huerta left his post, Obregón named Alberto J. Pani as Minister of Finance. Pani found Mexican finances on the verge of exhaustion. On October 16, the government announced that the deficit had reached an amount of 90 million pesos, and there was no source to cover it. In the same statement, the Mexican government recognized that the revenues coming from the oil taxes already compromised under the De la Huerta - Lamont Agreement, had been diverted for other purposes. The country faced a financial default.⁹⁸

On December 19, the *Bucareli* Agreements went into the Mexican Senate for their approval. Some Senators, among them Francisco Field Jurado, considered the Agreements meant a surrender of national sovereignty. It contravened the prevailing Agrarian Law establishing that for similar cases the payments must be done in parts and not in a single exhibition as the *Bucareli* Agreements stated in the case of properties belonging to foreigners. The disagreements reached such level of bitterness that Field Jurado, was assassinated. Finally, in January 1924, the Mexican Senate approved the *Bucareli* Agreements by a vote of 28 in favor and 14 against. At the same time, the U.S. Senate advised ratification of the General Claims Convention, something that President Coolidge did on February 4. After ratifications were exchanged in México City, the Agreements were proclaimed on February 23, 1924. The agreements represented another step toward the consolidation of Obregón's government. He had also, however, to subdue an internal rebellion already under way.

⁹⁸ Nicolás Contreras, *La Reconstrucción del Estado Mexicano: Los Años Sonorenses (1920-1935)* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1992), 70.

De la Huerta Revolution

At the moment of the presidential succession, Alvaro Obregón Salido sponsored Plutarco Elías Calles as the candidate. Adolfo de la Huerta Marcor disagreed with that decision and stated that Obregón “turning himself into the political leader of [Elías] Calles’ unpopular candidacy with the idea of assuring for himself later on a re-election.”⁹⁹ Putting aside past alliances with Obregón and Elías Calles, De la Huerta concluded that, if he wanted political power, the only route available was to take the arms against the Mexican government. De la Huerta knew that the political machine was controlled by his former allies, and it would be impossible to defeat them in the election. On October 18, 1923, De la Huerta announced his candidacy for the presidency of México under the flag of the National Cooperative Party. On October 29, in a press conference, he denied all charges accusing him of mismanagement of the treasury funds; he dismissed them as part of the political campaign against his candidacy. De la Huerta repeatedly attacked his successor, but he never provided statistical data supporting his performance as Minister of Finances.¹⁰⁰

On December 6, 1923, with the support of almost thirty thousand men, De la Huerta and his followers started the so called *Delahuertista* Revolution. The political principles of the revolt appeared in the *Plan de Veracruz*; according to it, Obregón did not respect the popular sovereignty of the states or the independence of legislative power, leaving no other choice but to take the arms and overthrow his government to impose the return to democracy. In his proclamation, De la Huerta never mentioned anything related to the *Bucareli* Agreements as a point of disagreement with the Mexican president.

⁹⁹ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 218.

¹⁰⁰ José Iturriaga de la Fuente, *La Revolución Hacendaria: La hacienda pública con el presidente Calles* (Ciudad de México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1976), 42.

Once the rebellion started, the U.S. government supported the legally recognized government of Obregón. The U.S. denied the rebels the sale of weapons and ammunitions. In addition, the Secretary of State, on December 29, sent a telegram to George T. Summerlin announcing that

the Department has today given following statement to the press: the Mexican Government has presented a request to this Government to sell it a limited quantity of war material. This Government has expressed its willingness to make the sale, in view of the relations between this Government and the Mexican Government, which was formally, recognized last September, and of the importance of the maintenance of stability and orderly constitutional procedure in the neighboring Republic.¹⁰¹

As soon as the note was published, the members of the rebellion in México protested. Without any legal support, the rebels had constituted a fictitious government and even named representatives abroad. One of them, Enrique Seldner, called himself the General Consul of the Provisional Government of Mexico in New York. He claimed to be in charge of the interests of that Government in the United States. He sent a note to the Secretary of State, protesting the sale of weapons to Obregón's government. Seldner argued that the rebels already exercised dominion over most of the Mexican territory and in the near future the whole country would come under their control. Therefore, the action mentioned in the press release could "disturb those friendly and neighborly feelings and sentiments which should exist between the Government and people of Mexico and those of the United States, which the Government of the undersigned is so anxious to sustain and to cultivate."¹⁰² Seldner's words had no weight, and *realpolitik* prevailed.

¹⁰¹ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1923* Volume II "The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Mexico (Summerlin)," December 29, 1923, File 812.24/199a: Telegram, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 569, 570.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, "Señor Enrique Seldner to the Secretary of State," December 31, 1923, File 812.24/198, 570,571.

The U.S. administration decided that it would permit sales of weapons only to the officially recognized government of México. To that end, President Coolidge issued Proclamation No.1083 of January 7, 1924, prohibiting the Exportation of Arms or Munitions of War to Mexico except to the officially recognized government.¹⁰³

At the beginning of hostilities, the Mexican government showed some mercy toward the rebels. As things progressed, however, the level of ferocity increased on both sides. President Obregón decided to return to the battlefield. He had been the only general who never lost a battle during the Mexican Revolution. Under Obregón's leadership, the government's army defeated the rebels in the West region during February 1924 and ended the rebellion. Once beaten, De la Huerta left the country and went into exile in the United States. México paid a heavy price in order to shut down the rebellion. Besides the seven thousand lives lost, among them some valuable generals, the rebellion put a heavy burden on the finances of the Mexican State. Alberto J. Pani "stated that the rebellion cost the government not less than 70 million pesos, including the loss of tax revenue."¹⁰⁴ Now, with less than a year to the end of his term, Obregón had accomplished two important goals. First, he obtained diplomatic recognition from the U.S. and second, he had consolidated his political power and defeated the revolt of his former ally, De la Huerta. He faced the upcoming presidential elections at the peak of his political power. These accomplishments, however, did not mean the end of his problems.

¹⁰³ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1924* Volume II "Proclamation 1683, January 7, 1924, Prohibiting the Exportation of Arms or Munitions to Mexico," January 7, 1924, File 812.113/9398 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939), 428, 429.

¹⁰⁴ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 262.

At the Peak of his Political Power, Obregón Salido Transferred the Presidency to Elías Calles

In spite of his success, Obregón continued to face other challenges mainly because of the Catholic Church's political activism. The Mexican Bishops planned to organize a Eucharistic Congress in México City in 1924. They wanted to consecrate México City to the Sacred Heart of Christ. The Government threatened to take legal action against them and those attending the ceremonies because the event represented a violation of the Mexican Constitution. Reason prevailed, and the Catholics decided not to press any further. They even canceled a planned pilgrimage to the Guadalupe Basilica.

With that problem solved momentarily, elections took place in July 1924, and Elías Calles emerged as the winner. After that, Obregón was able to pass on the presidency to Elías Calles on December 1, 1924 under apparent political calm.

Before Elías Calles assumed power, two events, apparently isolated from each other, took place, both of which would influence his presidency. In October, James Rockwell Sheffield replaced Charles B. Warren as the U.S. Ambassador in México. The second event was a speech of Elías Calles given before his election in which he, by implication, attacked the Catholic Church.

My enemies say that I am an enemy of religion and of divine worship and that I have no respect for religious creeds... I am a liberal of such ample spirit that my intellect inclines me to accept all creeds and to grant them justice, for I consider them good because of the moral program contained in them. I am an enemy of the priest caste with regards its position as a privileged one and not as an evangelical mission. I am an enemy of the priest politician, of the priest intriguer, of the priest exploiter, of the priest who seeks to keep out people in ignorance, of the priest who is allied with the *hacendado* to prey upon the laborer, of the priest who joins with the industrial

proprietor to exploit the worker...¹⁰⁵

No wonder that at the beginning of the Elías Calles' presidency religious tensions increased. The trigger took place in México City in *La Soledad* Church on February 21, 1925. On that day, a group of armed men belonging to *La Iglesia Ortodoxa Católica Mexicana*, or the Schismatic Church, arrived at the church in the middle of a mass and announced in that they were taking possession of the building. They requested the worshipers and the priest to leave the place immediately. Later, another group headed by Father Joaquín Pérez showed up. Father Pérez had founded that organization in February 1925. He declared this Church would be independent from Rome, the Pope, or the Vatican. He also proclaimed members were free to interpret Holy documents and the liturgy the way they wanted. Spanish was established as official language of worship of the Church. Further, "the wine used in the Mass was replaced by mescal"¹⁰⁶ Finally, that Church allowed the priests to marry and raise families. It looked like the Schismatic Church tried to create a division among the clerics similar to the one prevailing in France after the Constitution of the Clergy was enacted in July 12, 1790, and the priests divided between refractory and constitutionals.

Immediately, Catholics accused President Elías Calles not only of supporting this movement but also of allowing the development in México of other religions, particularly Protestantism. According to the Catholics, those were heretical sects. In spite of its efforts, the Schismatic Church attracted just a few followers. The alleged support of the Mexican government for the Schismatic Church and Protestant denominations was never proven, but the

¹⁰⁵ Speech delivered at Teatro Ocampo in Morelia, Michoacán. *El Demócrata*, Ciudad de México, Mayo 12, 1924. In Robert Hammond Murray, *Mexico before the World: Public Documents and Addresses of Plutarco Elías Calles* (New York: The Academy Press, 1927), 58, 59.

¹⁰⁶ Olivier Lelibre. "20th Century Mexico's Catholic Uprising." *The Angelus* Vol. XXV, No.1 (January 2002). <http://www.sspcx.ca/Angelus/>. (January 13, 2006).

level of tension increased. On April 7, 1925, former President Obregón wrote a letter to President Elías Calles. In it, Obregón warned Elías Calles against providing any help to the Schismatic Church. Obregón believed that if the Schismatic succeeded, the country would be divided between two Catholic parties, the national party and the one supported by Rome. Consequently, it made no sense to create this disjunctive where the winner would be the clerisy, national or traditional.¹⁰⁷ As the religious conflict began to unfold, so, too, did another problem affecting U.S.-México relations.

The Oil Became an Issue, Again

Towards the end of Elias Calles' first year in power, the Mexican Congress enacted a new Petroleum Law, which became effective on January 1, 1926. In spite of assurances from Mexican officials, some of the modifications aroused severe criticism from oil producers. The law established that the oil was a property of the nation. Those companies operating or exploiting the Mexican subsoil before May 1917 and those engaged in a positive act indicating future actions in oil production would have to ask the Mexican Government to obtain a concession for 50 years. Perpetual rights no longer prevailed. Those companies participating in the oil industry would have a period of twelve months, until January 1927, to ask for a new concession substituting for the previous one. In cases where the request was not granted, the concession became null and void. Another provision contained in the Law referred to the supremacy of the Mexican laws in those cases where foreigners owning property in México sought protection under the laws of their country of origin. This meant that the Calvo Clause would become part of any further concession approved by the Mexican Government in favor of foreigners. Under the "provision, derived from the concept of the nineteenth-century

¹⁰⁷ Macías, editor. *Plutarco Elías Calles Correspondencia Personal, (1919-1945)*, 153.

Argentinean diplomat, Carlos Calvo, foreigners owning property or making contracts were considered to have renounced any rights to call for diplomatic protection.”¹⁰⁸

The conflict began when President Elías Calles announced that he would submit a bill proposing some changes to the legislation related to ownership of land in his message to Congress on September 1, 1925. The proposal meant modifications affecting the property rights of those lands where oil production took place.

As a consequence, U.S. Embassy in México began consultations with the Department of State. The embassy provided Washington with almost day to day reports of what went on in the Mexican Congress related to the enactment of those changes in the Petroleum Law. On October 10, Ambassador Sheffield sent a telegram to Frank Billings Kellogg, who had succeeded Charles E. Hughes as Secretary of State in January 1925. Sheffield informed Kellogg that, according to the press, the Mexican Senate Committee had approved modifications to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. The ambassador proposed to send a diplomatic note to protest those actions. Kellogg answered it was not the right time to do so. He thought that if the Mexican government decided to proceed in that way, the note would not stop the enactment of the law. He also pointed out that if the bill got approved as proposed, a protest from the U.S. government would make it difficult for the Mexican government later to engage in negotiations in order to modify it without getting into a great debate with Mexican public opinion. Kellogg recommended that the ambassador ask for a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and get a clear idea about the bill. Kellogg instructed Sheffield to discuss specifically those points

¹⁰⁸ Dulles, *Yesterday in Mexico*, 321.

referring to the length of concessions, land rights, nationality of landholders, and most importantly subsoil deposits.¹⁰⁹

Sheffield followed the instructions of Secretary Kellogg. Once the meeting took place, Sheffield reported to the Secretary that the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aarón Sáenz, assured him that the general purpose of the proposed law was to obviate complications with foreign governments, and it had no intent to affect the rights of use of subsoil products. The Ambassador agreed it was not necessary to send a note. He mentioned that he observed a positive change in the attitude of the Mexican government during recent days.¹¹⁰ Trying to avoid false steps, Sheffield frequently asked Kellogg how to approach the current situation in México. On November 13, in an aide-memoire, the Secretary of State again instructed the ambassador to meet with the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs and present him an aide-memoir. Sheffield did this on November 17. According to the aide-memoire, the U.S. government asked the Mexican authorities to sign a Treaty of Amity and Commerce, appealing to the friendly relations prevailing between the two governments. Secretary Kellogg wanted to start negotiations immediately.¹¹¹ The ambassador proceeded as instructed but got no immediate response from the Mexican authorities. Three days later, the American Ambassador expressed his worries in a telegram to the Kellogg, because “according to the local press, [the Mexican] Foreign Office reports that it has received nothing in the nature of a protest against the bill to regulate section 1 of Article 27. Anxiety is expressed by several of my colleagues including those of France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, as well as by interested American

¹⁰⁹ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1925* Volume II “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield),” October 29, 1925, File 812.5200/34a: Telegram (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940), 523, 524.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., “The Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield) to the Secretary of State,” November 5, 1925, File 812.5200/40: Telegram, 525-527.

¹¹¹ Ibid., “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield),” November 13, 1925, File 812.5200/50: Telegram, 527-529.

citizens.”¹¹² The American Ambassador thought it would come to a situation where the Mexican Government could later claim the U.S. government never made any representation regarding those modifications in the law. Again Secretary Kellogg wrote an aide-memoire to the Ambassador Sheffield instructing him on how to approach the Mexican authorities. Kellogg told Sheffield to ask for a response to the note of November 17.¹¹³

Throughout the crisis, Sheffield did a poor job of informing Washington about events. On November 27, Sheffield, again acting on the basis of news published in the press, sent a message to the Secretary of State mentioning that the modifications to the law had been approved by the Mexican Congress. He attached a copy of a press clipping from *El Universal*, the daily newspaper published in México City, and again asked for instructions regarding how to approach the Mexican government.¹¹⁴ Significantly it appeared that Ambassador Sheffield’s main source of information about the legislative process in Mexico was the local press. Every time Sheffield sent a note or a telegram to the Secretary of State asking for instructions or reporting the latest happenings in the Mexican Congress, his message began with sentences like “according to the local press...” or “enclosing you will find a copy of what the press published...” These limited sources of information indicated that his personal relations with Mexican authorities did not extend beyond the formalities or in some cases, not even that. Sheffield also needed to ask for permission from Washington before taking any step. Sheffield’s attitude helped to explain future events.

¹¹² Ibid., “The Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield) to the Secretary of State,” November 20, 1925, File 812.5200/75: Telegram, 529.

¹¹³ Ibid., “The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield),” November 25, 1925, File 812.5200/75: Telegram, 529-531.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., “The Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield) to the Secretary of State” [Enclosure-Translation] “Petroleum Bill Approved by the Chamber of Deputies, November 26, 1925,” November 27, 1925, File 812.6363/1590, 531-537.

Another example of the lack of communication between the American Ambassador and the Mexican Government was the attitude of the Mexican Ambassador to Washington, Manuel C. Tellez. On November 30, 1925, Tellez sent the answer provided by Minister Sáenz to Secretary Kellogg's note of November 17 directly to Kellogg. In his reply, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs established that, after submitting the mentioned communication to President Elías Calles, he analyzed it and concluded there was no reason to worry about a deterioration of the U.S.-México relations. The Mexican government had intended to fulfill all the obligations imposed upon it by international law. Minister Sáenz pointed out that the legislation in process of enactment had as its main goal the elimination of vague language contained in previous legislation. It followed the same procedures relating to foreigners established by the enactment of the Constitution of 1917. Sáenz assured Kellogg that in the modifications to Section 1 of Article 27, already approved by the Chamber of Deputies and under discussion in the Senate, the rights of foreigners had been respected. In what looked like a clear reference to the position of Ambassador Sheffield, the Mexican Minister said: "I should regret if you were misinformed in this regard and, without any wish to assume the part of adviser, I take the liberty to call your attention to the very human fact that individuals and capital are generally opposed to any innovation, even though such innovation does not mean any invasion of their rights."¹¹⁵

After that note, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent another reply to Secretary Kellogg, explaining how the new legislation did not either alter existing law affecting property rights or contravene those agreements reached in 1923 as a result of the *Bucareli* Agreements. The Mexican functionary pointed out that the law resembled prevailing laws in the States of Illinois and Arizona relating foreigners' rights of ownership. The exchange of diplomatic notes

¹¹⁵ Ibid., "The Mexican Ambassador (Tellez) to the Secretary of State" [Translation] "The Mexican Minister for Foreign Affairs (Sáenz) to the Secretary of State" [Enclosure-Memorandum-Translation], November 30, 1925, File 711.1211/236, 539.

and personal meetings intensified during December 1925. Each government tried to convince the other but finally the changes to the law were made.

During the year of 1926, Secretary Kellogg and Minister Sáenz continued to exchange diplomatic notes relating to the Petroleum Law. The tone prevailing in the written interactions reflected mutual respect. In spite of the differences, diplomatic channels always remained open. Meanwhile, the oil producers embarked on a campaign in the United States to convince public opinion of the wrongdoings of the Mexican Government. The oil producers accused the Mexican government of trying to confiscate their previously acquired rights. One of the visible heads of that campaign was Guy Stevens, the Director of the Association of Producers of Petroleum in México. During 1926 and 1927, Stevens addressed a series of lectures to different groups; those lectures appeared later in a book called *Current Controversies with Mexico*.¹¹⁶ In that book, Stevens related the oil companies' dissatisfaction with the requirement established by the Mexican government for new concessions.

On December 26, 1926, Secretary Kellogg in a telegram to Ambassador Sheffield stated: "I understand some of the companies have asked for an extension of time for filing applications for confirmatory concessions for purpose of taking up negotiations with a view to adjusting all the questions in dispute between them and the Mexican Government."¹¹⁷ Sheffield replied that, according to his understanding, up to that day, none of the important oil companies had requested such a thing. Meanwhile, Stevens sent to the Secretary of State a copy of the message he had sent to the Mexican Government on December 27, in which he declared that the petroleum companies "can not safely accept confirmatory concession under the present law...

¹¹⁶ Guy Stevens, *Current Controversies with Mexico* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1926).

¹¹⁷ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 1926* Volume II "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Mexico (Sheffield)," December 26, 1926, File 812.6363/2078: Telegram (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 673.

the companies respectfully suggest the advisability of prolonging the period allowed by Article 15 of the law in order that modifications there in may be made effective which will harmonize the language of the law with the expressed intention of your Government.”¹¹⁸

President Elías Calles responded in a note, submitted through the Minister of Industry and Commerce, Luis N. Morones. In the note, the president ratified his position in favor of the law, which he saw as an instrument not only to guarantee the interests of the industry but also as a tool for assuring the development of it.¹¹⁹ President Elías Calles knew that confrontation with the oil producers could not go farther, considering 40% of governmental income came from the oil tax. This did not mean, however, that he would go and surrender his position to the oil companies. As a consummate politician, President Elías Calles had, together with former President Obregón, started the process of negotiations looking for a solution to the oil controversy. First, Aarón Sáenz declared that México would be willing to consider arbitration as a way to solve the oil controversy. As soon as Obregón knew about it, he sent two letters, dated on January 12 and 17, 1927 to the Mexican President.¹²⁰ In each, Obregón openly opposed such step. He considered direct negotiations with the companies still open and argued that arbitration would be a severe set back for the Mexican sovereignty. Further, it represented a dangerous precedent for the future enactment of domestic laws. Obregón also mentioned that Mr. Shoup, President of Southern Pacific [Paul Shoup was then Executive Vice-President of Southern Pacific; he would become president of the company in 1929] had offered his personal

¹¹⁸ Ibid., “The Director of the Association of Producers of Petroleum in Mexico (Stevens) to the Secretary of State,” December 27, 1926, File 812.6363/ 2085: Telegram, 674.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., “The Director of the Association of Producers of Petroleum in Mexico (Stevens) to the Assistant Secretary of State (Olds)” [Enclosure-Telegram-Translation] “The Mexican Secretary of Industry, Commerce and Labor (Morones) to the Director of the Association of Producers of Petroleum in Mexico (Stevens),” January 3, 1927, File 812.6363/2105, 675, 676.

¹²⁰ Archivo Fernando Torreblanca, Fondo Fernando Torreblanca. Serie 13010213, expediente 14, foja 117. Facsímile en Sonia Carolina Quiroz Flores, *Espionaje y Controversia Petrolera en 1927* Boletín No. 14 (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca y Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993), 19, 20.

intervention looking for a meeting in San Francisco with the representatives of the oil companies and Obregón himself.

As soon as President Elías Calles got the letter, he answered it, making clear that Saenz's position derived from a strategy to keep a door open. Elías Calles agreed with Obregón about the participation of a third party in the negotiations. Elías Calles considered direct negotiations the more suitable alternative. He also recognized the legal situation at that point became very tight. Due to the enacted legislation, the Mexican government was unable to extend for a new term the registration procedure. He mentioned the only available alternative resided in judicial procedures. Most of the companies which did not conform to the legal dispositions already went asking for an *amparo*. The companies argued the disposition contained in the Petroleum Law were contrary to Mexican Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 27 of the Constitution. That argument represented an open door for a solution coming from the Court. In spite of all this, President Calles approved Obregón's trip to San Francisco.¹²¹

On February 5, on his way to San Francisco, Obregón sent a telegram from Los Angeles to the Mexican president. In it, Obregón reported that, when the representatives from the oil companies were ready to travel, they had received some suggestions from the *Casa Redonda*, (the under cover name used by the Mexican politicians then to name the White House). On the basis of that and some information he got in several meetings he held with important people there, Obregón concluded, without offering any hard evidence of his assertions, that the Papal shadow had interfered with the negotiations, and the Catholics had tried to obstruct a possible agreement about the oil conflict because a solution would end the support they had, since the

¹²¹ Ibid., Fojas 126-128, 21-23.

State Department would not have any reason to continue with its demanding policy toward México.¹²²

Religion Something More than Boiling, Erupting

Following the enactment of the Petroleum Law, President Elías Calles decided, in February 1926, to enforce the dispositions written in the Constitution of 1917 related to religious matters. This engaged the country in a deeper division resulting in an armed confrontation.

After implementing the dispositions related to religion written in article 130 of the constitution, the Mexican government requested foreign born ministers to leave the country immediately. During 1926, out of a total of one hundred priests residing in México City, 59 faced deportation. Sixty percent of the 360 priests conducting religious activities in Mexico had to leave the country, while the rest remained in hiding. The Episcopal and Methodist Churches decided not to challenge the government, so they were not molested and continued in Mexico. Members of the Catholic Church in México and their allies outside the country engaged in a campaign in order to stop these procedures. The Catholic hierarchy and its followers considered these procedures as an assault against the rights of the individual, the Church, and its members. The Mexican government responded that its main goal was to encourage the ordination of Mexicans by birth as priests, because they must be in charge of the churches and the teaching of Catholic beliefs.

On February 4, 1926, Archbishop Mora y Del Río made a statement in the name of the clergy to *El Universal*. He established that the doctrine of the Church was unchangeable, because it was divinely revealed truth. Consequently the Catholic priests ratified their opposition to the religious dispositions written in the Constitution of 1917. Mora y Del Río pointed out that

¹²² Ibid., Foja 377, 26.

any change would be considered disloyal to their Faith and Religion.¹²³ He later denied making the statement.

The Catholic hierarchy in México tried to get foreigners involved in the religious conflict. Pope Pius XI, Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti, took a very active role denouncing the measures implemented by the Mexican government. In the United States, the Knights of Columbus and members of the American Catholic hierarchy explicitly demanded the intervention of the U.S. government in the conflict already underway in México.

On July 3, 1926 the Church hierarchy opened “holy fire” against the Mexican Government. Pope Pius XI addressed a speech to the students of the Pius Latin American School condemning the Mexican government because of its policy. The next day, the Foreign Office of the Vatican sent a letter to all diplomats from countries that recognized the Vatican as well as to every member of the Church representing it in other countries condemning Elías Calles’ policies and denouncing him as an enemy of the Catholic Religion.

On July 14, 1926, in response, President Elías Calles wrote a series of reforms into the Penal Code, establishing punishments for those who disobeyed the rules related to religious worship and the behavior of priests as citizens. Those regulations established that every priest must register at the office of the city government closest to where they reside. This would be effective on August 1 of that year. In response, the Mexican Catholic hierarchy supported the call made by the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty in Mexico asking the population for an economic boycott of all domestic goods. They expected the support from Rome, “the Pope, however, refused to countenance such a plan of action. He recommended instead public prayers and seeking of peaceful means to settle the difficulty. August 1, was

¹²³ David C. Bailey, *Viva Cristo Rey: The Cristero Rebellion and the Church State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1974), 62.

designated by the Holy Father as the date for special prayers through the world for the cessation of Mexico's government's persecution of Catholics".¹²⁴

On July 25, eight archbishops and twenty nine bishops signed a pastoral letter, with Papal approval, in which they ordered that all religious services be suspended after July 31. Although the priests would not conduct services, congregations could gather in the churches, and lay Catholics maintained the buildings. The government decided, however, to take control of the buildings, since they were the Nation's property.

On August 16, 1926, prior to a formal meeting to be held on the 21st between the Catholic hierarchy and President Elías Calles, the hierarchy sent a letter to the president. In the letter, the priests tried to justify their actions in terms of their inability to carry on their ministry under the current laws. The prelates pointed out how authorities in the past had not seen fit to enforce the requirements. In practice, a situation of mutual tolerance existed which did not disturb the public peace and permitted the Church a relative liberty to live and exercise its function.¹²⁵ In the same document, the prelates argued that in order to fulfill their ministry, it was necessary to have liberties. Among them were those of conscience, thought, worship, instruction, association, and the press. They further required recognition of their status as a legal entity. That request showed the double standards under which the Church operated. The priests forgot the content of a couple of papal encyclicals. One, *Mirari Vos On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*, written by Gregory XVI on August 15, 1832, prohibited the liberty of free thinking.

...We consider another abundant source of the evils with which the Church is afflicted at present: indifferentism. This perverse opinion is spread on all sides by the fraud of the wicked who claim that it is possible to obtain the eternal salvation of the soul by the profession of any kind of religion, as long as morality is maintained ... This shameful font of indifferentism gives rise to that absurd and erroneous

¹²⁴ Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, 487.

¹²⁵ "Church Asks Calles to Suspend Laws," *New York Times*, August 19, 1926, 1.

proposition which claims that liberty of conscience must be maintained for everyone. It spreads ruin in sacred and civil affairs, though some repeat over and over again with the greatest impudence that some advantage accrues to religion from it. But the death of the soul is worse than freedom of error...¹²⁶

Another, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis On the Doctrine of the Modernists*, issued by Pius X, Giuseppe Melchiorne Sarto, in 1907, approved censorship of writings that disagreed with Church's positions, mentioning that:

...All those who have obtained an apostolic faculty to read and keep forbidden books, are not thereby authorized to read and keep books and periodicals forbidden by the local Ordinaries unless the apostolic faculty expressly concedes permission to read and keep books condemned by anyone whomsoever...It is not enough to hinder the reading and the sale of bad books -- it is also necessary to prevent them from being published. Hence, let the Bishops use the utmost strictness in granting permission to print...¹²⁷

The Catholic hierarchy met with President Elías Calles on August 21. At the meeting, the bishops repeated the requests already printed in the letter of August 16. They justified their position on the basis of religious faith. The Mexican president countered with a legalistic approach, recommending that the prelates take their proposals for changes in the law to Congress. Until the legislative branch approved those changes, the president added, they had no other alternative but to obey the laws. If they did so, they would encounter no problem carrying out their religious activities. The priests, however, wanted either a surrender of the Mexican State or nothing.¹²⁸

During the meeting between the Mexican President and the bishops, Pascual Díaz Barreto, Bishop of Tabasco, denied that the Church made any request to foreigners for help in

¹²⁶ Pope Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Mirari Vos* (On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism). Rome at St. Peter's on August 15, 1832. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/>. (March 11, 2006).

¹²⁷ Pope Pius X Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (On the Doctrine of the Modernists). Rome, at St. Peter's on September 8 1907. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/>. (November 12, 2006).

¹²⁸ Macías, editor. *Plutarco Elías Calles Correspondencia Personal (1919-1945)*, 172 -193.

order to solve the problem. Also, he referred President Elías Calles' interview with the American press in which the president mentioned that the register of priests had statistical purposes. If that were the case, the clerics did not have any trouble with the register. The president expressed his hope that Diaz's assurances were in fact the case, because, according to the information he had received Catholic priests had looked actively for support outside the country in an effort to exercise pressure on the Mexican government to reverse the measures.

The president also mentioned the active role of Pope Pius XI and how some priests around the country had been encouraging the population into rebellion against the government. Díaz Barreto explained that the latter derived from passions already aroused on both sides and promised to call the priests and reprimand them for such behavior.

Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, Bishop of Michoacán, argued the government had prohibited the free exercise of religious services. President Elías Calles asked the bishop how this was the case. Ruiz y Flores answered it was because the priests needed to meet legal dispositions forbidden by their religious beliefs. Beliefs, the president countered, were not above the law. Later the bishop proposed a referendum, like in the U.S., he said, on whether or not those laws should remain in effect. The president considered such a possibility totally unacceptable, since that procedure had not been established in the Mexican Laws.

Referring to the Pope's participation in the religious conflict in Mexico, Bishop Ruiz y Flores argued that the Church represented an international institution and then proceeded to make a comparison to union workers from Chicago or New York helping Mexican workers. He saw no reason to deny the Holy See the right to intervene in this conflict. The president stated the Mexican government did not accept any opinion about México's internal laws coming from the Pope. The bishop referred to a similar conflict between William I of Germany and Pope Leo

XIII. The president said that any discussion about history would turn out badly for the Church considering its past behavior in México.

Once the bishops failed to obtain what they demanded, they proceeded “unofficially” to encourage Catholics to take up arms and rebel against the government. In response to the arrest of some national priests and the eviction from the country of foreign clerics, an armed movement began in late August and early September of 1926. At the end of October, the *Revolución Cristera* was under way on ten states of the West-Central Region. The rebels claimed to be fighting in the name of the Holy Sacred Heart of Jesus. Priests were the moral leaders of their communities. Through them, and its importance in the everyday lives of its citizens, the Church had succeeded in promoting a rebellion

In subsequent years, the Catholic hierarchy denied any involvement in supporting the armed conflict. Some evidence, however, contradicts that. In April 1927, *The New York Times* published an article signed by T.R. Ybarra, reporting that “Archbishop Orozco y Jimenez is the heart and soul of the invisible regiment of Roman Catholics arrayed against [Elías] Calles. Plenty of people in México believed...that the doughty Archbishop had joined the rebels of Jalisco and was directing the military operations against [Elías] Calles.”¹²⁹ In 1964, one of the leaders of the *Revolución Cristera*, Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra declared to historians James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie that the Mexican Bishops took an active role behind the scenes during the armed movement. Palomar stated that the armed movement had the approval of and support of the Catholic hierarchy, mainly from Archbishop Ruiz y Flores and Bishop Díaz Barreto. When the historians asked Palomar about the Pope’s involvement in the armed conflict, Palomar answered that the armed movement had pontifical approval but denied that the Catholic priests

¹²⁹ “Silent Church Waged in Mexico,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1927 Special Features, Section 9, XX 3.

participated directly in the armed rebellion. Palomar also claimed he had in his possession enough documentary evidence to support that assertion, although he declined to provide it.¹³⁰

With Catholics in open rebellion and the representatives of the oil companies demanding changes in legislation, the situation at the end of 1926 did not provide peaceful prospects for the future. Coincidentally enough, both the Catholics and the representatives of the oil companies had been demanding that the U.S. government intervene to solve their problems with the Mexican government. President Coolidge clearly stated a “hands off” policy asserting that the religious conflict was a domestic issue of Mexico. At the same time, he kept open diplomatic channels, looking for a solution to the problem. Coolidge was looking for stability in México not only to protect American lives and interests there, but he also tried to prevent a major conflict in the neighboring country. The political, economical and social consequences of such clash could hit the United States sooner or later. Other people in both governments, however, took diplomatic relations into shaky grounds.

The Rules of Diplomacy Defied

Over the years, legends have developed relating to U.S.-Mexican relations during the first months of 1927. On the Mexican side, the story goes that México lived those days on the verge of an American invasion. According to American sources, such an issue never came under consideration.

Ambassador Sheffield’s time as U.S. Ambassador in México was characterized by tense relations with the Mexican authorities. The Ambassador seemed oblivious to the need for developing a close relationship with the political actors in the country where he served.

¹³⁰ James W. Wilkie y Edna Monzón de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX: Entrevistas de Historia Oral* (Ciudad de México: Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas, 1969), 443-445.

Sheffield put such a distance between himself and the Mexican authorities that his main source of information about the events in México was the daily press. He tried to take a hard line with respect to the oil problem. He might have been better served by taking the initiative, making proposals, and negotiating with the Mexican authorities. In the end, Sheffield's mission ended in an embarrassment for himself and his country.

While Sheffield attempted to portray the Mexican government as irrational and an advocate of bolshevism, something happened in the embassy headquarters behind the ambassador's back. Miguel R. Avila, a Mexican American private investigator, was spying for both sides. He supplied information about the Mexican government to the American Embassy, acting as a confidential informant while at the same time he had established a spy web inside the American Embassy. Daily, without the knowledge of the ambassador; some documents had been carefully selected and taken away. Avila had the complicity of William L. Copeland, a member of the office of the Military Attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davis. The papers were passed first to the Ministry of Commerce, Luís N. Morones, who took later to the Mexican President. According to one of these documents, on February 8, 1927, Major Joseph F. Cheston arrived to México. Cheston was assigned to the Military Attaché's office in the embassy. The next day after his arrival Cheston met with Ambassador Sheffield. During the meeting Cheston assured Sheffield that President Coolidge planned to invade México. According to Cheston's information, in such action would participate some Mexican generals. Toward that end, General Pablo González had been called to Washington, a move with which Sheffield did not agree because of his personal dislike of the general.¹³¹

¹³¹ Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles (Anexo). *Informe confidencial emitido por 10B. Febrero 9, 1927* Serie 030906, Expediente 11, Inventario 1558, Gaveta 91, Foja 9. Facsímile en Carlos Macías Richard, *El Embajador James R. Sheffield, 1924-1927; Una Relectura* (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, Boletín No. 44, 2003), 30.

After obtaining the information from the U.S. Embassy, Elías Calles preferred to present himself as a politician who did not want to embarrass his neighbor. Elías Calles therefore made arrangements to get the documents to President Coolidge. Elías Calles invited a journalist from *The New York Evening Post*, George Barr Baker, to Mexico to report about the Southern Pacific Railroad. In Mexico, Baker interviewed several members of Elías Calles's cabinet and met the president himself. Before leaving the country, Baker received from the President all the packages containing the documents with the instruction that such information should be delivered directly to President Coolidge. Those packages contained, according to the historian James J. Horn, "copies of about 350 documents [including] official correspondence between the ambassador and the Secretary of State, consular dispatches, reports of the military attaché, and apparently some forgeries."¹³² Once the documents arrived in the Oval Office, President Coolidge sent them to the Intelligence Division for analysis to determine the authenticity of the information contained. On February 24, the Intelligence Division reported to the State Department that some of the documents were authentic copies of telegrams and notes exchanged between the American Embassy in México with the State Department and Consular Offices, as well as between the State Department and its Military Attaché. The report also mentioned that in some other cases the documents represented forgeries written with a clear purpose of creating difficulties between the American and Mexican governments.¹³³

On February 28, Secretary Kellogg sent a request to Minister Saenz through the American Embassy asking for an explanation of how the Mexican Government got those documents. Sáenz's answered with a simple statement: "As an expression of good will, the

¹³² Horn, "Did the United States Plan an Invasion of Mexico in 1927?" 458.

¹³³ Comunicado de Aarón Sáenz a Frank B. Kellogg, March 2, 1927, Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca, serie 13010213, expediente 14, foja 423. Facsímile en Quiroz Flores, *Espionaje y Controversia Petrolera en 1927*, 28.

Mexican President will send a personal representative to explain every detail about them to President Coolidge.”¹³⁴ The lack of official information led others to speculate about the events.

In spite of the stories that circulated surrounding these events, neither the American nor the Mexican press had hard evidence to provide. On February 25, 1927, *The New York Times* reported that Ambassador Sheffield declined to talk about a rumor coming from Washington, that documents and cable dispatches had been stolen from the American Embassy in México City.¹³⁵ On March 2, another story in the *Times* reported a note not related to oil law but “regarded as of considerable importance on a phase of Mexican-American relations which State Department officials absolutely refused to disclose has been sent to the [Elías] Calles Government by Secretary Kellogg”¹³⁶ The note referred to the already mentioned communication sent to Minister Sáenz.

The lack of verifiable information about the content of the documents provided fertile ground for speculation, especially when President Elías Calles recalled the Mexican Ambassador to Washington, Manuel C. Tellez, for consultations. In spite of a denial from the Foreign Office, a rumor spread that Tellez had been considered as *persona non-grata* by the Washington government. The *Times* assured to readers that Tellez had no option but to leave the country.¹³⁷ After the meeting with President Elías Calles, Tellez returned to Washington and asked for an appointment with President Coolidge. Speaking on behalf of the Mexican president, the ambassador “explained that the papers had come to him unsolicited [which was not true] during the course of the last two years. When President Elías Calles realized that some of them pertained to current issues, he informed President Coolidge, eschewing official channels because

¹³⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁵ “Silent on Theft Rumor,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1927, 2.

¹³⁶ “New Note to Mexico Cloaked in Secrecy,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1927, 1.

¹³⁷ “Calles recalls His Envoy as Persona Non-Grata, Mexican Capital Hears,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1927, 1.

they appeared to be responsible for the situation.”¹³⁸ Tellez relayed Elías Calles’s concern that some people wanted to destroy the amicable relations between both countries.

Despite the fact that some of the documents were forgeries, some of them represented a real embarrassment not only for the Ambassador but for his country as well. Horn provided an example quoting Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davis’s Report No. 1297, December 31, 1926, entitled “A concise review of the year 1926 in México.” In the report, the Military Attaché wrote: “That the white man is somewhat disliked is natural but if the Mexican people are ever so fortunate as to be blessed with American intervention and administration this alleged bitter hatred of Americans will be proved a fake of the thinnest type...”¹³⁹ In no way did this reflect the policy of the Coolidge administration toward México. At the very least, that report indicated that the ambassador paid too little attention to what went on under his responsibility.

On March 28, the American press reported that the stolen documents were forgeries.¹⁴⁰ Without knowing who had stolen the documents, the press speculated that “students of the mystery in Mexico City hold the opinion that if the thefts and forgeries are finally cleared up it will be found that several well-known radicals in the United States and their associates here [in México] will be revealed as conspirators who were plotting against the peace and security of both countries.”¹⁴¹ Another hypothesis held that “a gang of international crooks” could be responsible for such actions.¹⁴²

In spite of the American denial, years after the events described above, some political actors on the Mexican side remained convinced that the possibility of an invasion of Mexico had existed. According to Emilio Portes Gil, President Elías Calles mentioned to him the existence

¹³⁸ Horn, “Did the United States Plan an Invasion of Mexico in 1927?” 458.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 459,460.

¹⁴⁰ “Forged US Documents Assailing Mexico Found in Plot to Bring on Crisis,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1927, 1.

¹⁴¹ “Embassy’ Papers for Sale in Mexico,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1927, 5.

¹⁴² “Thefts at Embassy in Mexico, Admitted,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1927, 1.

of those documents and the threat of an American invasion to Mexico.¹⁴³ Elías Calles clearly instructed Portes Gil to be prepared to blow up all the oil wells in the Northern State of Tamaulipas, where Portes Gil was governor, in case of an invasion. Portes Gil also asserted that President Elías Calles sent a telegram to President Coolidge advising the American president in advance that he would receive the documents and urging him to read them before taking any action. In the end, American officials concluded that some of those documents were forgeries. Others, however, were written in such an ambiguous way that President Elías Calles believed an American military intervention in México was possible.

Paradoxically, the interception of those documents represented the turning point towards a solution for the prevailing problems between México and the United States. Ambassador Sheffield resigned his post in July 1927, not necessarily because of the documents but due to his performance as a whole. In October, Dwight W. Morrow arrived as his replacement. For some, Morrow's appointment represented the imminent arrival of American marines in México. Events proved the contrary. As a result of Morrow's approach, problems relating to oil and to the Church would enter new stages and move toward a resolution. Several events, however, needed to take place before that resolution.

¹⁴³ Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana*, 397.

Chapter Three

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN AMERICA

The religious conflict in México has been analyzed mainly from a Catholic perspective which made sense considering that 99% of the Mexican population during the 1920s was Catholic. Among several books written about the topic, two of them studied the conflict from that perspective: *La Cristiada*,¹⁴⁴ written by Jean Meyer and published in three volumes, and *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution 1924-1936*,¹⁴⁵ by Mathew A. Redinger. Meyer devoted the second volume exclusively to study the conflict as a struggle between the State and the Church while in the other volumes provided an extensive analysis of the armed conflict and all the events surrounding it. Meyer offered a perspective sympathetic toward the Catholic Church, representing it as a victim of government intolerance. In his analysis of the foreign intervention, Meyer mainly focused on the participation of American Catholics priests during negotiations to conclude the conflict. Redinger also considered the perspective of a foreign intervention through the participation of American Catholics. In Redinger's analysis, American Catholics, priests and laymen, represented the leading voices searching for a solution.

Other authors, however, wrote on how members of other religions participated in the process to settle the disputes. Among those were a Mexican journalist and Methodist layman Gonzalo Baez Camargo who, together with a British Anglican layman Kenneth G. Grubb, wrote *Religion in the Republic of Mexico*. Baez and Grubb analyzed the role of the Protestant churches in México up to the 1930s.¹⁴⁶ They focused mainly on the activities of Protestants over the

¹⁴⁴ Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada*. 3 Volúmenes. 1.- *La Guerra de los Cristeros*, 2.- *El Conflicto entre la Iglesia y el Estado, 1926-1929*, 3.- *Los Cristeros* (Ciudad de México: Siglo XXI Editores, 2005).

¹⁴⁵ Matthew A. Redinger, *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution, 1924-1936* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ Gonzalo Baez Camargo and Kenneth G. Grubb, *Religion in the Republic of Mexico* (New York: World Dominion Press, 1935).

years, devoting less than five pages to the religious conflict from 1926 to 1929. The authors proclaimed the final settlement as a victory for Mexico's civilian rulers. In *Chaos in Mexico: The Conflict of Church and State*,¹⁴⁷ a Pastor of the Congressional Church, Charles S. MacFarland analyzed the problems related to Church-State relations up to 1935. He devoted a chapter to the Protestant churches in Mexico and examined the role of members of that religion during the conflict. MacFarland did not, however, even mention the struggle between members of different faiths within the U.S. during the years of the Mexican conflict. In 1971, historian Sinclair Snow published an article titled "Protestant versus Catholic: U.S. Reaction to the Mexican Church-State Conflict of 1926-29."¹⁴⁸ In it, he analyzed how members of each faith approached the conflict from a different perspective. He concluded that the final agreement of 1929 represented a victory for the State over the Church.

Any analysis of the behavior and participation of the American Catholics and the American Catholic hierarchy in the Mexican conflict must begin first by analyzing the actions of Pope Pius XI. This issue had been treated by Jean Meyer in his book, *La Cristiada: 2. - El Conflicto entre la Iglesia y el Estado 1926-1929*,¹⁴⁹ and Redinger in *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution*. Neither, however, analyzed the content of two important documents published at the end of 1926, the *Encyclical Iniquis Afflictisque* written by Pope Pius XI and a *Pastoral Letter* signed by the American Catholic hierarchy. Meyer emphasized the consequences of the Pastoral Letter signed by the Mexican prelates on July 26, 1926, and tried to portray the Pope as a figure seeking restraint and civility. However, the documents do not

¹⁴⁷ Charles S. MacFarland., *Chaos in Mexico: The Conflict of Church and State* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1935).

¹⁴⁸ Sinclair Snow, "Protestant versus Catholic: U.S. Reaction to the Mexican Church-State Conflict of 1926-29," *North Dakota Quarterly* Vol.39, No. 3 (Summer 1971): 68-80.

¹⁴⁹ Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada: 2.- El Conflicto entre la Iglesia y el Estado, 1926-1929* (Ciudad de México: Siglo XXI Editores, 2005).

support that portrayal. The Pope encouraged members of the Church and Catholic laymen to disobey the legal dispositions regarding to religion and to take action against the Mexican authorities. In early 2008, Meyer published *La Cruzada por México: Los Católicos de Estados Unidos y la Cuestión Religiosa en México*.¹⁵⁰ In it, Meyer did a very well documented analysis about the direct involvement of the American Catholic hierarchy and the American Catholics in Mexico's religious conflicts from 1914 to 1938. Meyer, however, avoided again mentioning how Popes Benedict XV and Pius XI's actions set the course of action for American Catholics involvement in the Mexican quarrels.

The Pope and his Soldiers

The participation of Pope Pius XI in the religious conflict in México followed a gradualist approach. He initially encouraged Catholics to mobilize peacefully against the Mexican authorities. Later, the Pope supported those who fought to preserve the faith in México. On February 2, 1926, the Pope addressed a Pastoral Letter to Mexican Bishops, in which he suggested restraint and peaceful measures against unjust laws enacted by Mexican authorities.¹⁵¹ Later in early July, the Pope addressed a speech to the students of the Pius Latin-American School condemning the Mexican government's policy toward Catholics. At the end of that month, on July 26, 1926, Pius XI approved the content of the Pastoral Letter signed by the Mexican Catholic hierarchy ordering to suspend religious services.

During the next two months, relations between the Mexican authorities and the Catholic Church deteriorated, and opinions prevailing on both sides moved to the extremes. On October

¹⁵⁰ Jean Meyer, *La Cruzada por México: Los Católicos de Estados Unidos y la Cuestión Religiosa en México* (Ciudad de México: Tusquets Editores México, S.A. de C. V. 2008).

¹⁵¹ "Pope Pius XI outlines policy for Mexico," *New York Times*, April 20, 1926, 4; the date was not a fortuitous event; on that day Catholics commemorate the presentation of baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem.

18, 1926, the Pope met with a group of hard line Mexican Bishops headed by José María González y Valencia, Archbishop of Durango. He was accompanied by Monsignor Emeterio Valverde y Téllez, Bishop of León, and Monsignor Gerardo Méndez Del Río, Bishop of Tehuantepec. After hearing the Mexican prelates present their version of events in México, The Pope he decided that he had no other choice but a direct confrontation with the Mexican government.

The Pope did not go into this crusade alone. Besides the Mexican Catholic hierarchy he could count on two organizations working inside the United States, the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), an organization of American priests, and the Knights of Columbus (K of C), a group of Catholic laymen. Both played a key role during the Mexican religious conflict.

On American soil, the NCWC represented the most important organization within the Catholic Church. It acted as “a permanent staff and liaison agent, [and involved itself in] such matters as education, journalism, legislation, and social work.”¹⁵² The origins of the NCWC went back to April 1919, when Pope Benedict XV gave his approval for its founding as a substitute for the National Catholic War Council, which coordinated the Catholics’ relief efforts during World War I. The new organization pursued the same goals of its predecessor, while looking out for the interests of the Church. In September 1919, an administration committee made up of American bishops became responsible for the direct management of the NCWC.

The creation of the NCWC, however, faced the hostility of some members of the Church. The Bishop of Brooklyn, Charles E. McDonnell opposed the newly created organization, because, in his opinion, the operations of the NCWC went beyond what the Pope’s letter had

¹⁵² Bernard Day, “Catholic America: Its Strength and Weakness in the Coming National Election,” *The Living Age* Vol. 33, No. 43 (September 1928): 53.

envisioned and were therefore detrimental to the authority of the bishops in their respective dioceses. Bishop McDonnell found an ally in the Secretary of the Consistorian Congregation, Cayetan Cardinal De Lai who convinced the Pope that the NCWC was a risky experiment. Pope Benedict XV offered to make a decree of dissolution, but he died on January 22, 1922, before signing the decree. Although it meant a set back for those opposing the NCWC, that did not end the story. Priests who opposed the creation of the NCWC convinced Pope Pius XI, elected on February 6, 1922, to issue a decree of dissolution. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, those in favor of the organization still expected the Pope's support. At the end of March, news announcing the Pope's decision to dissolve the NCWC was known in the U.S. The Administrative Committee of the National Catholic Welfare Conference called for an emergency meeting on April 6. Members of the Committee agreed to send a cable to the Pope asking to withhold the publication of the decree in the *Acta Sanctae Sedis*,¹⁵³ something the Pope agreed to do. After the meeting, Bishop Joseph Schrembs of Cleveland traveled to Rome to negotiations, which ultimately resulted in a decree of approval issued by the Sacred Consistorial Congregation¹⁵⁴ on June 22, 1922.¹⁵⁵ A powerful organization had been born and it would take the leading voice against those trying to make changes affecting the traditional role of the Catholic Church within and outside of the United States.

¹⁵³ *Acta Sanctae Sedis* is a Roman monthly publication containing the principal public documents issued by the Pope directly or through the Roman Congregations. It was begun in 1865, under the title of "Acta Sanctae Sedis" in compendium redacta etc.", and was declared, May 23, 1904, an organ of the Holy See to the extent that all documents printed in it are "authentic and official." *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An international work of reference on the constitution, doctrine, discipline, and history of the Catholic Church* Volume I (New York: Robert Appleton company, 1907), 111.

¹⁵⁴ The Sacred Consistorial Congregation has for its charge the preparation of matter for consistories; the erection of dioceses, election of bishops, and whatever relates to dioceses of the Western church not subject to propaganda; apostolic visitations and the spiritual welfare of immigrants. The pope himself is prefect of this congregation. *A Catholic Dictionary (The Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary)* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 118.

¹⁵⁵ *National Catholic Welfare Conference: Its Organization, Departments and Functions* (Washington: Administrative Board, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1942), 23-25 in John Tracy Ellis, editor. *Documents of American Catholic History* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1962), 603, 604.

In addition, laymen participated in some organizations spreading and defending Catholicism. The Knights of Columbus became the most important outside the official structure of the Catholic Church because of its large membership and economic power. Father Michael J. McGivney created this organization on March 29, 1882, in New Haven, Connecticut, initially as a mutual beneficial society. McGivney tried to offer an alternative to Catholics excluded from labor unions and other organizations that provided social services. From 1884 to 1928, the Knights of Columbus' membership grew from 460 to 700,000 people within the US. By 1928, The Knights of Columbus had developed into a "kind of Catholic Free Masonry designed to combat Protestant Free Masonry and to maintain effective social contact among Catholic men. With the guidance of the Episcopate, this society [performed] great services, especially of a material kind, and [was] plainly suited to the country."¹⁵⁶ Their actions would become very important under the leadership of Pope Pius XI.

On November 11, 1926, Pope Pius XI published the encyclical *Iniquis Afflictisque*. This signaled the official move against the Mexican Government. In the encyclical, the Holy See condemned those measures established by the Mexican Constitution of 1917. The Pope supported those actions implemented by Catholic organizations defending against despotic power contrary to the rights of the Church and injurious to Catholics in México. For the Pope, coercing priests to register represented an ignominious act. Priests, he mentioned, "are put on the level of professional men and of laborers but with this important difference, that they must be not only Mexicans by birth and cannot exceed a certain number specified by law, but are at the same time deprived of all civil and political rights. They are thus placed in the same class with

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 54.

criminals and the insane.”¹⁵⁷ Those dispositions were, in fact, implemented to encourage the ordination of Mexican priests and avoid mixing spirituality with politics.

The Pope referred to the Knights of Columbus, which he described as an organization with a membership of active and industrious people who, because of their practical lives, open profession of faith, and zeal in assisting the Church brought great honor upon themselves. The Knights supported the National Sodality of Parents. The Sodality promoted Catholics’ right to teach their own children, and to participate in the creation of formal education programs. They also demanded that in those cases of children attending public schools, the educational programs must include in their curriculum a sound and complete training in their religion, in this case Catholicism.

The Pope also mentioned the Federation for the Defense of Religious Liberty, an organization created in México only a short time before, as an example of those defending the faith in a time when the Church was menaced by a veritable ocean of troubles. This Federation soon spread its activities all over the country. Its members attempted to organize and instruct Catholics so that they would be able to present a united invincible front to the enemy.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the Pope recognized those activities of the Catholic Society of Mexican Youth and the Union of Catholic Women of México. These two societies, over and above the work which was special to each of them, endorsed and did all they could to promote the activities of the Federation for the Defense of Religious Liberty.

The Pope proceeded to give his support to those already engaged in a fight in México, pointing out that:

¹⁵⁷ Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Iniquis Afflictisque* (On the Persecution of the Church in Mexico) To the Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, and Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See) Rome, at St. Peter’s on November 11, 1926.

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/>. (October 25, 2005).

¹⁵⁸ Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical Iniquis Afflictisque*, 26.

without going into details about their work, with pleasure
We desire to call to your attention, Venerable Brothers, but
a single fact, namely, that all the members of these
organizations both men and women, are so brave that, instead
of fleeing danger, they go out in search of it, and even rejoice
when it falls to their share to suffer persecution from the
enemies of the Church.¹⁵⁹

Language asking for restraint and tolerance no longer prevailed. That, in turn explained why the conflict developed into an armed movement.

On December 12, just a month after the publication of the Encyclical, the hierarchy of American Bishops published a Pastoral Letter on México. The date had a special significance for Catholics in México; it was the day they commemorated the revelation of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The document criticized the religious policies implemented by the Mexican government and compared the Mexican and the American Constitutions. The bishops concluded that laws like those enacted in México could never be enacted in the United States. The letter was signed by Cardinal Patrick Joseph Hayes of New York, Archbishop John Joseph Glennon of Saint Louis, Archbishop Austin Dowling of Saint Paul, Bishop Joseph Schrembs of Cleveland, and Bishop Francis Clement Kelley of Oklahoma.¹⁶⁰

The legal claims in that letter derived from a study made by a Catholic and the President of the New York City Bar Association, William D. Guthrie, who prepared his opinion in response to a request from Cardinal Hayes. Guthrie divided his work into five headings: International Law; Separation of the Church and the State; Confiscation of Church Property; Education; and International Relations. He concluded that “Mexico’s constitutional provision and its presidential decree affecting the Roman Catholic Church were violations of long

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶⁰ Hierarchy of American Bishops, *Pastoral Letter on Mexico, December 12, 1926*. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/bishops/pl1926/>. (October 1, 2005); “American Bishops Denounce Mexico a Foe of Freedom,” *New York Times*, December 16, 1926, 1.

established rules of international law [he did not give a single example of such laws] and of the fundamental principles of liberty and justice which are recognized in all civilized countries.”¹⁶¹

The Nation published a reply to Guthrie’s study in an editorial which pointed out:

Certainly legislation analogous to that embodied in the Mexican Constitutions of 1857 and 1917 could not be enacted in the USA. We have, fortunately, never had an established church which dominated our entire nation politically, economically and spiritually. Mr. Guthrie is an eminent lawyer but he should fortify himself in Mexican history... Does he not know that the Mexican Catholic Episcopate unanimously decried tolerance of other creeds as impious, disastrous and anti-Catholic three quarters of a century after religious liberty had been written into our own national charter?¹⁶²

The messages provided by the Pope and the American Catholic hierarchy brought to a climax what had happened during the previous ten months. The Mexican government pursued its campaign to enforce those dispositions written in the law, while members of the Catholic Church kept disobeying them. Once the Catholic Church arrived at an open confrontation with the Mexican authorities, the campaign already in progress since 1926 intensified. In addition, Mexican Catholics had enough support outside the geographical boundaries of the country, particularly in the U.S., to seek the direct involvement of foreigners, acting as individuals or as institutions.

The Debate about México involved not only a Religious but a Political Issue in America

Mexican Catholics requested external assistance for what they called the preservation of their faith, which they regarded as threatened by the actions of the Mexican government. Catholics found a friendly reaction in the U.S. The publication of the Pastoral Letter intensified a debate already under way. In America, not only Catholics but also members of other religions

¹⁶¹ “Mexico Church Row weighed by Guthrie,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1926, General News E1.

¹⁶² Editorial, *The Nation* Vol.123, No.3206 (December 15, 1926): 626.

increased their participation in the debate on events in México. Politicians joined in, too. Mexican Catholics had inadvertently revived long standing frictions between Catholics and members of other religions, a matter fully exposed during the Democratic Convention in 1924. That issue would influence domestic political events in the U.S.

On the Catholic side, two organizations played a key role trying to convince American public opinion and the U.S. government that south of the border, a crime had been committed by an immoral and tyrannical government. Those groups were the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) and the Knights of Columbus (K of C). Their position represented just one side of the debate. On the other side of the spectrum, members of Protestant denominations (Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Lutherans) as well as some Jews, politicians, writers, labor leaders, and Freemasons expressed their opinions about the events in México.

The comparisons between México and the United States became a common topic in American business and political arenas during the first half of the 1920s. Then, in early 1926, a debate about religion and the role the government should play became part of that discussion. Comparing the behavior of the Catholic Church in México and the United States, a Disciples of Christ Minister and leading exponent of the Social Gospel, Alva Wilmot Taylor wrote: “The Catholic Church in México is no more like the same church in the US, in either religious or social practice, than the medieval church was like the modern. It is medievalism rooted into national life that is just now going through the pangs of a rebirth into the modern world and its surrenders its power with no more willingness than did that church of the Middle Ages”¹⁶³

In February 1926, Representative John J. Boylan of New York introduced in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives a resolution asking to withdraw recognition

¹⁶³ Alva W. Taylor, “Will Mexico Have a Living Church?” *The Christian Century* Vol. XLIII, No. 2 (January 14, 1926): 48.

from the Mexican government because of the religious persecution of American citizens in México. Boylan requested information about the expulsion of American citizens from México because of their religious beliefs. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg sent a reply to the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Representative Stephen G. Porter, on March 2, 1926. Kellogg pointed out that he received a copy of the resolution introduced to Congress by Boylan and provided an answer mentioning three specific cases. First, three ladies Ms. Semple, Ms. Evans, and Ms. Connelly working in a Catholic School, the Academy of the Visitation situated in Coyoacán in México City, were expelled, but after the American Ambassador interceded with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the latter overturned the order. After that, the women decided to close the school and return to Mobile, Alabama. Another event related to the expulsion of three teachers and Dr. J. A. Phillips an ordained Methodist Episcopal minister and Principal of the Institute of the People a school located at Piedras Negras, Coahuila, opposite to Eagle Pass, Texas. Once reported, the order was revoked and the minister returned to México. The school was allowed to reopen because, although he was a foreigner and a minister of religion, he did not teach. A third case related to five Mormon Missionaries, Elder Ralph E. Brown, Owen V. Call, Daniel H. Higgenbotham, Alton S. Hays, and another person not mentioned who were expelled by the local authorities in the States of Hidalgo and México within a period of ten days. The authorities did not specify if it included leaving the country too. The Secretary of State reported that in none of those cases had harassment or punishment of American citizens occurred.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States 1926* Volume II “The Secretary of State to the Chairman of the House of representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs (Porter),” March 2, 1926, File 812.404/306 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 702, 703; “Senate Asks Papers on Mexican Dispute; Crisis Seen Passing,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1926, 26.

Not only American citizens got involved in deportation struggles; people from other nationalities faced similar situations. In March 4, 1926, *The San Antonio Evening News* published an article signed by Rev. Eugene Sugranes, C. M. F. reporting that Mexican authorities first granted a passport to and then expelled an Italian priest named Saverio Vecchio, who allegedly never exercised his ministry and had no authority over any church in Mexico. The authorities even made Father Vecchio pay his own way to the border. Along with him, authorities deported other three other priests, ordeal-Father Miguel Pons, a Spaniard; Father Antonio Fabre, a Frenchman, and a Passionist Father.¹⁶⁵

For some, those events reinforced their perspective of México as land of terror. One of these was a special correspondent for the NCWC news services, Charles Phillips. In the fall of 1925, Phillips reported how “Mexican Catholics were living in a state of constant fear.”¹⁶⁶ In March 1926, Phillips pointed out that what had happened to Catholic priests in México would eventually involve Protestant ministers. For Phillips, the Mexican Constitution’s dispositions related to religion went farther than those in Bolshevik Russia. He concluded that “the truth is that these laws were aimed at the whole idea of religion and Christian civilization.”¹⁶⁷ Other magazines published opinions with a different perspective. According to an editorial in *The New Republic*, an anti-Mexican campaign proclaiming that México was confiscating American property and driving out religion had been quite successful with the average American citizen. The editorial maintained, however, that the campaign relied on false arguments.¹⁶⁸

Some Protestants agreed that the press overstated the degree of religious persecution. On April 1, 1926, Methodist Bishop George Amos Miller wrote an article entitled: “Is There

¹⁶⁵ “Wholesale deportation of priests in Mexico continues,” *San Antonio Evening News*, March 4, 1926 <http://members.aol.com/shhar/Mexico.html/>. (June 2, 2006).

¹⁶⁶ Charles Phillips, “Mexico Ruled by Fear,” *The Catholic World* Vol. CXXII, No. 727 (October 1925): 120-121.

¹⁶⁷ Charles Phillips, “The Law of the Land,” *The Commonwealth* Vol. III, No. 18 (March 10, 1926): 487.

¹⁶⁸ The Week, *The New Republic* Vol. XLVI, No. 589 (March 17, 1926): 85.

Religious Persecution in Mexico?” In it, Miller analyzed the events in México and concluded that the press exaggerated the mistreatment of some American citizens south of the border. According to Bishop Miller’s perspective, “the only people who have real reason for anxiety concerning ecclesiastical matters in Mexico were those refusing to comply with the law of the land.”¹⁶⁹ In the same article, Miller pointed out that President Elías Calles, speaking of members of Protestant religions, recognized their contribution spreading Christian beliefs, respect for the legal dispositions, and avoidance of involvement in political matters. Miller repeated that statement on May 5 in Washington “at the open meeting of the board of bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held in the Foundry Methodist Episcopal Church.”¹⁷⁰

Catholics, however, did not share Miller’s opinion. A Catholic-oriented magazine, *The Commonweal* raised the flag against “liberal journalism.” *The Commonweal* criticized opinions printed in other magazines like *The New Republic*, *The Christian Century*, and *The Nation*. For *The Commonweal*, those articles of opinion about the conflict could be considered as paid advertisement by the Mexican Government. The editorialist for *The Commonweal* called that kind of analysis an aberration and inexcusable, but he did not stop there and put some responsibility in the Catholics themselves, mentioning that:

the American Catholic body is itself largely responsible for the miss-apprehension of Mexican Affairs that exist round about. Far too little has been said in its name, by authoritative scholarship... Only occasionally has an effort made to grasp the social, educational and spiritual needs of the Mexican people...while the aberrations of liberal journalism are inexcusable, it must be admitted that they could hardly have been so gigantic if there had existed side by side with them an enlightened, charitable, Catholic mind about Mexico.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ George A. Miller, “Is There Religious Persecution in Mexico?” *The Christian Century* Vol. XLIII, No.13 (April 1, 1926): 411.

¹⁷⁰ “Methodist Bishop denies assault on religion by Mexico,” *Washington Post*, May 6, 1926, 2.

¹⁷¹ “*Mexico and Liberal Opinion*,” *The Commonweal* Vol. III, No. 20 (March 24, 1926): 540.

While the debate between members of different religions in the U.S. continued, other events involving American Catholic priests in México unfolded during 1926. Reverend F. J. Krill was threatened by government officials in the eastern State of Veracruz with arrest, allegedly because of his religious beliefs. Rev. Krill went to talk with the authorities explaining his situation; after that they decided to allow him to remain in México.¹⁷² The situation of the Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, Bishop of Puerto Rico and West Indies, Archbishop George Joseph Caruana, however, involved different circumstances. The Mexican government accused Caruana of false declarations at the moment of his arrival. According to official sources, he falsely stated his birth, profession and religion, as well as the purpose of his visit. Caruana said in his defense that the immigration inspector asked him only about his profession, which Caruana acknowledged as teaching without hiding any other.¹⁷³ On May 12, Caruana received a notification from the Mexican Secret Police, announcing that he must leave the country within six days. The American Ambassador to Mexico asked the Mexican Authorities to reconsider that decision. The request was denied and the order prevailed. On May 16, the Apostolic Delegate, who had arrived on March 5, had no other choice but to leave the country through Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, from where he returned to Washington.¹⁷⁴

On June 16, 1926, the Director of the Social Action Department of the NCWC, Reverend John A. Ryan, wrote: “the assumption of fact relied upon by American liberals who defend those tyrannical provisions of the Mexican Constitution are supported by no specific evidence. No instances are cited of opposition by the Mexican church or clergy to political or social or

¹⁷² United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1926* Volume II “Press Release by the Department of State,” March 9, 1926, File 812.404/338, 703, 704.

¹⁷³ “Officially defends Caruana’s ousting,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1926, 3.

¹⁷⁴ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1926* Volume II “The Secretary of State to the General Secretary of the National Welfare Conference (Burke),” May 18, 1926, File 312.1124 Caruana, George J. (Archbishop) May 18, 1926 March 9, 1926, 704- 705.

economic reform measures undertaken by the Mexican government.”¹⁷⁵ Following that pattern

Reverend Ryan stated that:

nothing in the nature of physical opposition has ever changed against the Mexican clergy. Nor I have seen any pastoral letter or statement by a priest cited in proof of the general charge that the Mexican clergy have opposed the social or political reforms of the Mexican government during the last half century. Even if the clergy had offered opposition by speech or writing it would not, on the principles of liberalism, justify governmental denial of fundamental liberties.¹⁷⁶

Rev. Ryan failed to mention that, in December 1925, the Archbishop Mora Del Río addressed those attending the National Catechistic Congress. The Congress was held from December 8th to 12th for the purpose of organizing a group of Mexican Catholic Youth. Mora Del Río also encouraged pastoral letters, tracts and lectures, petitions to the Chamber of Deputies, popular manifestations, and all form of action urging the authorities to change the religious legislation.¹⁷⁷

Reverend Ryan also neglected the words written in the Pastoral Letter signed by Pope Pius XI on February 2, 1926 or how Church officials had a very active role in politics during the *Porfiriato* or their involvement in Madero’s coup d’état and the support provided by the Church to Victoriano Huerta.

At the end of July 1926, the Mexican Catholic hierarchy called for the suspension of religious services. Catholics blamed the Mexican government for ordering the suspension. Despite the lack of evidence for that claim, even today most Mexican Catholics still believe the Mexican government ordered the suspension of religious services.

¹⁷⁵ John A. Ryan, “Liberty and the Roman Catholic Church I: The Catholic Position,” *The Nation* Vol. 122, No. 3180 (June 16, 1926): 660.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 661.

¹⁷⁷ “Mexican Hierarchy to Conduct Campaign against Anti-Religious Legislation,” *The Catholic World* Vol. CXXII, No. 729 (December 1925): 409.

Inside the United States, some believed the Mexican government was responsible for that suspension. Confusion spread, and American Christians put aside their differences and supported the Catholic Church. Late July 1926, members of the Protestant religions expressed their support for the Mexican Catholics. An Episcopalian weekly magazine, *The Living Church*, published a plea to all Americans, Episcopalians, and Protestants to join Roman Catholics in opposing the Mexican government. *The Living Church* requested that Episcopalians fall in their knees the next Sunday and earnestly pray to God to guide all who had responsibility for Christian work of any form in Mexico and to overrule the present persecution. For members of the Episcopalian Church, what happened in México was no longer an issue between the Pope and the Mexican government alone. It represented a threat against Christianity.¹⁷⁸ Thus American Catholics got some temporary companionship in their crusade against the Mexican government.

Meanwhile the General Secretary of the NCWC, Father John J. Burke, wrote that the government of México had decided to crush the Catholic Church in Mexico by every means within its power. Father Burke mentioned that, “to know those provisions of the Mexican Constitution, and the acts of the Mexican government and its agents, is to know that they are absolutely irreconcilable with justice and the rights of man. They tell of warfare against religion, a deliberate endeavor to destroy its roots.”¹⁷⁹ In what could be read as an invitation to Americans to get involved in the conflict developing in the adjacent nation, Father Burke stated that:

the Catholic Church in Mexico is fighting for the fundamental principles upon which our country is founded. Can we look with indifference on their defeat in a neighboring country? Can we view with indifference the vicious attack upon them by a government which has its own way to power

¹⁷⁸ “Protestant Prayer on Mexico Urged: Episcopal Organ Pleads for Supplication with Catholics for Persecuted Church,” *New York Times*, July 31, 2006, 2.

¹⁷⁹ John J. Burke, “Mexico We Have Ever Near us,” *The Forum* Vol. LXXVI, No.2 (August 1926): 309.

through the support of our own?¹⁸⁰

On August 7, 1926, Director of the Legal Department of the NCWC, William F. Montavon published an article criticizing President Elías Calles's early defense of the religious dispositions enacted in México. After calling the Mexican President a tyrant, Montavon classified those provisions relating to religion in the Mexican Constitution as barbarous and unchristian¹⁸¹

In spite of his previous failures on the topic, Representative John J. Boylan did not give up his campaign to portray himself as a defender of the Mexican Catholic. [In reality, he was an enemy of the Mexican government]. On August 3, 1926, Boylan went public, asking: "How long can the administrations in Washington afford to resist the pressure of the American people and the whole world to clearly and frankly define its position?"¹⁸² He accused the American government of collusion with the Mexican government, which did not respect life, rights of property and religious liberty.

Boylan's words offered a splendid opportunity for those already campaigning in the U.S. in favor of Mexican Catholics, such as the president of the newly created Association for the Protection of Religious Rights in Mexico, Former Judge Alfred J. Talley of New York. He represented an organization with a membership of allegedly 200,000 followers in New York City. That group "was designed to give the facts of a situation that has for its background the most atrocious religious persecution of modern time."¹⁸³ In that capacity, Talley "publicly [demanded] that the American Government cease recognition of Mexico and [prevented] the

¹⁸⁰ "The Case for the Church: The Church in Mexico is Fighting for Fundamental Principles upon which Our Own Country is Founded," *New York Times*, August 1, 1926, XX1.

¹⁸¹ "Catholic Council Replies to Calles," *New York Times*, August 8, 1926, 2.

¹⁸² "Talley Asks Catholics to Organize," *New York Times*, August 3, 1926, 2.

¹⁸³ "Catholic Bodies Here Form Mexico Society," *New York Times*, July 31, 1926, 2

denial of the rights of Catholics.”¹⁸⁴ This action did not represent the first time Judge Talley had jumped into Representative Boylan’s bandwagon. On March 31, 1926, Talley, as a member of the Catholic Club of New York City, a group with a membership of 1,000 people, submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives two affidavits sworn by persons who provided him with information about the kidnapping from a convent of twenty-one Carmelite nuns. These nuns were threatened with confinement in a house of ill fame. They avoided such punishment by bribing a guard, who allowed them to escape.¹⁸⁵ The story appeared to be fabricated for public consumption, even including a happy ending.

The Nation published a reply to Talley’s demands for ceasing recognition of the Mexican government. The editorial expressed sympathy with the protesting Mexican bishops but refused to support Judge Talley. According to *The Nation*,

it is not the business of the Washington government to tell Mexico what its laws should be; Judge Talley would be the first to resent any suggestion that foreigners should dictate our laws, and he ought to know better than to suggest that we dictate to others. If Mexico were as large and as strong as France in the days of her violent anti-clerical laws, Judge Talley would not dare suggest such interference. What he wants us to do is to bully Mexico.¹⁸⁶

In the meantime, members of Protestant Churches in México adopted a conciliatory approach. During early August, the Pastor of the Union Church, one of the three principal Protestant churches in México, Reverend Dr. William Evans Thomas, expressed the opinion “that the laws, fundamental as well as regulatory, concerned Mexicans only and not foreigners.”¹⁸⁷ A few days later, *The New York Times* reported that Reverend Thomas announced he “[would] leave for the US... Dr Thomas [recognized] that the law must be

¹⁸⁴ “Mexico vs. The Roman Church,” *The Nation* Vol. 123, No. 3187 (August 4, 1926): 99.

¹⁸⁵ “Talley Declares Mexicans Tried to Sell Nuns,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1926, 8.

¹⁸⁶ “Mexico vs. the Roman Church,” *The Nation* Vol. 123, No. 3187 (August 4, 1926): 99.

¹⁸⁷ “American Preaches despite Calles Ban,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1926, 2.

enforced as written and that therefore it is impossible for American-born preachers to function longer without violating the fundamental and regulatory laws.”¹⁸⁸

That conciliatory attitude was shared by other Americans who wanted to have a first hand look of events happening in México. During early August, a party of American Protestant ministers and writers headed by Alva W. Taylor traveled to México on a so called Good Will Mission. They met with government officials as well as members of the Catholic Church and other religions. The group found two conflicting views about events in México. On one side, Catholic priests mentioned “the Constitution attacked the divine origins of the Church, its ends, its ministers and its properties”¹⁸⁹ On the other, Mexican Protestant ministers said: “we are going ahead, putting our whole minds, souls and bodies into the work. We feel the handicap of the regulations, but different laws can not be made for different people. ..The government is treating us exactly as treats other people. But we are not suffering because we are obeying the law.”¹⁹⁰

While members of the Good Will Mission visited México, authorities announced that the same rules already under way for the Catholic Church’s belongings and priests would apply to members of any other religions without distinction.¹⁹¹

Visits, meetings, or the extension to others of the rules already implemented had no immediate effect over the parties involved in the conflict. Animosity prevailed on both sides. Extreme positions prevailed; unofficially an armed revolt was already underway. On August 11,

¹⁸⁸ “Bishops of Mexico Discuss Peace Plan to Offer to Calles,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1926, 1.

¹⁸⁹ “Mexicans Answer American Queries,” *New York Times*, August 7, 1926, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Alva W. Taylor, “Mexico’s Church War,” *Christian Century* Vol. XLIII, No. 39 (September 30, 1926): 1199.

¹⁹¹ “Law to Apply to Protestants,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1926, 2.

1926 Archbishop Ruiz y Flores declared that the Army had executed thirty Catholics, two of them priests.¹⁹²

That kind of news inflamed those on both sides of the question. An article in *The Nation*, entitled *The Mexican Church Goes on Strike*, by Carleton Beals argued that those regulations opposed by the Church were something other countries had already accepted. He pointed out that the Church tried to inflame the fanaticism and fear through threats of excommunication.¹⁹³ Soon, a couple of readers provided a reaction to those assertions. A librarian at Saint Louis University, Henry H. Regnet, S. J, sent a letter to the editor of *The Nation* asking for an apology for what he considered an insult to readers' intelligence. On the contrary, A. J. Petty from Newark, New Jersey, supported Beals' assertions. Petty emphasized that México was trying to put an end to the tyranny, landlordism, and the educational and political hegemony of the Roman Church. According to Petty, religious schools tended to fan the flame of narrow sectarian spirit and to keep alive the religious bigotry that was a source of discord and a menace to the most sacred rights of the individuals.¹⁹⁴

Members of non-religious organizations jumped into the debate. The President and the Vice-president of The American Federation of Labor (AFL), William Green, and Matthew Woll, stated that the American labor movement shared non responsibility for the actions by the Mexican Labor Unions, in support, of the measures against the Catholic Church. Labor Unions in America separated political action from religious beliefs. They did not join forces with either

¹⁹² "30 Executed in Mexico, Archbishop Reports," *New York Times*, August 12, 1926, 2.

¹⁹³ Carleton Beals, "The Mexican Church Goes on Strike," *The Nation* Vol. 123, No. 3189 (August 18, 1926): 12-19.

¹⁹⁴ Correspondence, *The Nation* Vol. 123, No. 3192 (September 8, 1926): 222.

the Church or the Mexican government. American labor encouraged both sides to look for adequate levels of tolerance in order to find a solution to the conflict.¹⁹⁵

Calls for tolerance had no influence on some Catholics. During early August, Reverend Thomas Shannon made a comparison, in *The New World*, between what happened in Russia and the events underway in México. Shannon criticized Bishop Miller's article dismissing reports of religious persecution in Mexico. According to Shannon, the Methodist Church would assume the same attitude than the Catholic Church if it were deprived of all its belongings and property as well as of freedom to exercise religious services.¹⁹⁶ This did not represent the only critique to Bishop Miller; in September 1926, *The Catholic World* published an editorial comment providing observations about the same topic. The piece asked if the Methodists would obey the law. It also questioned whether the Methodist doctrine held that the State was superior to the Church. The article wondered how much freedom for the Methodist Church Miller was willing to give surrender. The article then focused on the real issue of the disagreement, putting aside spiritual considerations and going straight into earthly matters; it directly asked Bishop Miller: "Are you hoping that the Catholic Church will be eradicated in Mexico and that you may come in and take her place? Is that the reason you are enduring the yoke of a gang of acknowledge infidels and atheists?"¹⁹⁷

The editorialist of *The Catholic World* asked for a more conciliatory attitude. Perhaps for him, as for other Catholics, the struggle involved which religion would control the Mexicans' conscience. In that struggle, the Catholic Church had some advantages, including a well organized group of laymen working alongside the priests.

¹⁹⁵ "Woll urges A. F. of L. to aid Mexico Peace," *New York Times*, August 16, 1926, 2.

¹⁹⁶ "Disputes Methodist Bishop," *New York Times*, August 7, 1926, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Editorial Comment, *The Catholic World* Vol. CXXIII, No. 738 (September 1926): 836-843.

In the United States, the Knights of Columbus represented the leading voice among secular Catholics supporting the Mexican Catholics. The Knights of Columbus took an active role in urging the American government for a change in its policy toward México. The Knights of Columbus declared their animosity toward the Mexican government openly and demanded that the American government dispatch a remonstrance to the President of México for his impious policy against the Church.¹⁹⁸ In August 1926, at their annual convention in Philadelphia, the K of C voted unanimously to request President Coolidge to lift an arms embargo imposed against nongovernmental factions in México. During the same meeting, the Knights also authorized

[their] Supreme Board of Directors to access [their] membership to the extent of \$1,000,000 for a campaign of education to the end that the politics of Soviet Russia shall be eliminated from the philosophy of American life and the ideals of liberty of conscience and democratic freedom may extend to [their] afflicted fellow human beings beyond the Río Grande.¹⁹⁹

The Knights had no doubt “this system in Mexico has been created under American auspices and sustain by American executive authority... Representatives of [Elías] Calles have insulted and degraded and expelled American citizens, and called upon the President and the State Department to put an end to this ignominious contempt.”²⁰⁰ The Knights’ membership also agreed to ask for an appointment with President Coolidge to express their point of view about the Mexican situation. On August 13, emissaries of the Knights failed to obtain assurances from Secretary Kellogg about a change in the U.S. policy toward Mexico.²⁰¹

President Coolidge met with the Supreme Knight James A. Flaherty and four other members of the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus on September 1, 1926. The main

¹⁹⁸ “Church and State in Mexico,” *The New Statesman*, Vol. XXVII, No. 693 (August 7, 1926,): 464.

¹⁹⁹ “Knights of Columbus Asks Curb on Calles Regime in Plea to Coolidge,” *New York Times*, August 6, 1926, 1.

²⁰⁰ “Coolidge Will Seek K. of C. Head Today,” *New York Times*, September 1, 1926, 9.

²⁰¹ “K. of C. Call Fails to Shift U.S. View Regarding Mexico,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 1926, 1; and “Ask Intervention,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 14, 1926, 5.

topic of the meeting was the religious conflict in México. President Coolidge answered that he would make a decision about their request after he met with Ambassador Sheffield.

After the meeting Supreme Knight Flaherty called a press conference. In the conference Flaherty, apparently influenced by Coolidge's attitude, changed the Knights' initial position toward México. According to Flaherty, the Knights opposed a lifting of the arms embargo, while showed support for continued recognition of [Elías] Calles' government. Flaherty concluded that the Knights considered the Mexican situation as consequence of those policies implemented during the years of Presidents Wilson and Harding. Consequently, it could not be attributed to Coolidge's administration.²⁰²

On September 8, President Coolidge made a public statement assuring that the United States government would keep a "hands off" policy in the religious conflict in México, which he considered the a Mexican domestic issue.

[T]he controversy between the Church and [Elías] Calles government is solely a Mexican internal question which can not figure in international relations. The only interest of the United States has in this difference is the protection of American rights in there. The government sees no way by which it can carry out the request of the Knights Of Columbus."²⁰³

For the time being, diplomacy prevailed as the main tool of negotiation in U.S.-México relations. On September 9, The Knights of Columbus got an official notification that their mail to Mexico had been banned because their attacks on the President of Mexico. The United States Postal authorities in Washington were cited as the source informing about the proscription.²⁰⁴

This did not help to change the Knights' attitude. Consequently they continued their activities

²⁰² "K. of C. Ask Coolidge for Aid on Mexico," *New York Times*, September 2, 1926, 5.

²⁰³ "Coolidge to Stand on Mexican Policy," *New York Times*, September 9, 1926, 1.

²⁰⁴ "Mexico Bans K. of C. Organ," *New York Times*, September 9, 1926, 12.

related to the religious problem in Mexico. They were not alone; many other laymen and members of the Church shared their attitude.

The campaign against the Mexican government continued to a point that unfair comparisons were made. *The Catholic World* criticized American newspapers for devoting so much space to complaints about the atrocities committed by Mussolini's regime while failing to see a tyrant far more violent than Mussolini at the door steps of America.²⁰⁵ For the editorialist, "what [was] in progress in Mexico [was] not a persecution of the Church; it [represented] rather, - to borrow a phrase from Cardinal O'Connell, - a defiance of the first principles upon which human government must rest, and a denial of the fundamental rights of citizens."²⁰⁶ The apology for Mussolini was somewhat predictable, given that the negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Lateran Treaty had already begun in 1926. As a result of this Treaty, the Vatican State was created in 1929. The *Duce* had become a more sympathetic figure for the Catholic Church, while the Mexican authorities represented the despicable role of enemies of the faith. The Catholic hierarchy played a pragmatic game. The editorialist for *The Catholic World* forgot that news related to the Mexican religious conflict had been widely covered by American newspapers and magazines of opinion.

In early September of 1926, the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America expressed the support of its 500 delegates for the policies related to religious matters implemented by President Elías Calles.²⁰⁷ Months later, the support for the Mexican government came from the other side of the aisle. The Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Hiram Wesley Adams, stated that "the

²⁰⁵ Editorial Comment, *The Catholic World* Vol. CXXIII, No. 738 (September 1926): 836.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 836.

²⁰⁷ "Anti-Fascists Back Calles' Program," *New York Times*, September 7, 1926, 23.

government of México [was] entirely right in this religion question, for a State-controlled Church is better than a Church-controlled State.”²⁰⁸

Supporters of the Church, however, did not refrain from complaints against the Mexican authorities. Bishop of Oklahoma, Francis C. Kelley accused the Mexican government of destroying the Catholic Church. Kelley mentioned that those in charge of the government arrived there as a result of false elections.²⁰⁹ This did not represent the first incursion of Bishop Kelley into Mexican issues. In 1923, after the United States government gave diplomatic recognition to President Obregón, Kelly sent a letter to the State Department demanding an explanation and the assurance that Obregón had agreed to respect the Catholic Church in Mexico. Once Kelley knew there was no specific assurance related to that matter, he threatened to lead a Catholic boycott against the financial institutions doing business with the Mexican government.²¹⁰ The threat never materialized.

Kelley denied the charges that the Catholic Church owned between one and two thirds of the Mexico’s wealth, as President Elías Calles asserted. Trying to defend his point, Bishop Kelly made a comparison between the possessions own by the Baptist Church in the U.S. and the alleged property of the Catholic Church in México. First, Bishop Kelley mentioned that, after a century of existence, the Baptist Church’s membership was 7.5 million adherents who attended services provided by 50, 000 ministers in 60, 000 churches. The annual income of the Baptist Church represented around 30 million dollars, and its productive holdings reached a value of around 100 million dollars. Kelly pointed out that nobody accused this religious institution of having excessive wealth. On the other hand, Kelly wrote that the Mexican Catholic Church with

²⁰⁸ “Evans Assails Smith and Catholic Church,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1926, 16.

²⁰⁹ Francis C. Kelley, “A Catholic View of the Mexican Situation,” *The Christian Century* Vol. XLIII, No. 44 (November 4, 1926): 1367.

²¹⁰ Francis Patrick Dooley, *Los Cristeros, Calles y el Catolicismo Mexicano* (Ciudad de México: Secretaría de Educación Pública. Sep Setentas 307, 1976), 42.

15 million followers, had five thousand clergymen providing spiritual support in 10, 000 churches. Its estimated annual income reached a total of 15 million dollars while the value of properties, most of them unproductive, reached a total of 30 million dollars. According to Bishop Kelley, these figures spoke for themselves. Kelley proceeded to emphasize that, at its richest the Church in Mexico had less than a certain American millionaire made in the course of his life and less than the endowment of three American universities.²¹¹

Though accurate, Kelly's figures could be misleading in the Mexican case. Kelley never mentioned an undisputable fact. Since the earlier years of the *Porfiriato* the Church found ways to avoid the dispositions written under the Reform Laws. "In order to get around these laws the title to Church property was very often vested in the name of some prominent Catholic, the understanding being that he was to hold it in trust for the benefit of the Church"²¹².

Consequently, when somebody analyzed the possessions owned by the Church in México, the results would show an organization wrestling day to day in order to survive.

On November 5, 1926, The Knights of Columbus held a reunion in Chicago, presided over by their Supreme Council. During the meeting, the Knights tried to define a plan for "the expenditure of a \$1,000,000 fund for the arousal of American public opinion against oppression of Catholic worshipers."²¹³ Without stopping there, James A. Fatherly added:

the Mexican Government has denied freedom of speech and freedom of conscience, and has suspended the writ of habeas corpus and denied the right to trial by jury. But since it has been unable to break the will of the Mexican people by such methods its agents are now resorting to murder, rapine and cruelties, the like of which have never been witnessed on the American Continent.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Francis C. Kelley, "A Catholic View of the Mexican Situation," 1367.

²¹² Edward Alsworth Ross, *The Social Revolution in Mexico* (New York: The Century Co., 1923), 137.

²¹³ "K. of C. Disavow Aid to Mexican Rebels," *New York Times*, November 6, 1926, 13.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Flaherty also accused the Mexican government of communism. He stated that every single dollar would be spend to fight that atrocity and “for our relief work among exiled priests and nuns. That was the extent of our activities.”²¹⁵ The Archbishop of Philadelphia, Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, contended that the Supreme Council’s work was proof that American Catholics could not be disregarded.²¹⁶ The K of C had decided to take an active role in Mexican matters.

The Knights attempted to involve American Catholics in Mexican issues. In early December, the Mexican General Consul in New York, Arturo M. Elías sent a report to the Mexican President. Elías informed that members of the K of C met in New York City on November 28, 1926. The reunion was headed by Democratic Representative Loring M. [Milton] Black [from the 5th District of New York]. Black mentioned that the spread of Communism in México had become a threat for the security of the United States. A former assistant to the U.S. Attorney General, identified in the Elias report as Mr. Crosby, stated that the educational campaign supported by the K of C had as its main goal the spread of American values without considering religious issues. The K of C tried to inform every American citizen, regardless of religion beliefs, about the situation in México. Consul Elías affirmed that another member of the Knights, Mr. Tobin told the meeting of the Knights that he attended the meetings with President Coolidge and Secretary Kellogg.²¹⁷ Tobin said that Coolidge recognized the important service the Knights were doing to the American Government in educating people about the real conditions in Mexico. In the case of an armed intervention, the K of C would support U.S.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

²¹⁶ Matthew Redinger, “To Arouse and Inform: The Knights of Columbus and United States-Mexican Relations, 1924-1937,” *The Catholic Historical Review* Vol. LXXXVIII, No.3 (July 2002): 488-489.

²¹⁷ Reviewing the news published after the meeting with President Coolidge, the name of Mr. Tobin was not reported among the Knights attending the meeting.

Government's actions. A Jesuit Father Carlos Heredia, acknowledged also the Knights for their actions in favor of Catholicism and justice.²¹⁸

At the end of 1926, the relations between the Mexican authorities and the Catholic hierarchy were tense, to say the least. Some American publications like the *Chicago Tribune* and *Liberty* engaged in a campaign urging the U.S. towards a forcible annexation of Mexico. The newspapers supported this demand on the basis that Mexicans were not exploiting their natural resources and therefore Americans should. *Liberty* published a photo which purported to portray "Catholics Withdrawing Deposits from the Bank of Mexico in Protest against the Seizure of Church Property." The image, however, did not match the text. It had been taken and published in México eleven months before. The persons depicted were depositing instead of withdrawing funds.²¹⁹

Due to the debate underway in the U.S., members of the League for the Defense of Religious Liberty believed wide support was waiting for their cause north of the Río Grande. In early December, Vice-president of the National League for Religious Liberty, René Capistrán Garza, traveled to New York. He was searching for something more than spiritual support. Capistrán asked the U.S. "to withdraw its support from the [Elías] Calles tyranny that oppressed us [the Catholics]."²²⁰ Claiming that the League had a membership of two million people, Capistrán predicted an economic revolution in México and the downfall of Elías Calles' regime. He declared that they were fighting for religious liberty and freedom of choice for the parents concerning the education of their children.

²¹⁸ Special thanks to Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca for allowing me to review its materials. "Informe elaborado por Salvador Martínez del Toro sobre una reunión de los Caballeros de Colón realizada el 28 de Noviembre de 1926 en Brooklyn, New York." Carpeta: Arturo M. Elías. Serie 010702, Expediente 2, Inventario 323. Legajo1/2. (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca).

²¹⁹ "Storm Signals in Mexico," *The Nation* Vol. CXXIII, No. 3205 (December 8, 1926): 576.

²²⁰ "Catholic Predicts Downfall of Calles Regime," *New York Times*, December 11, 1926, 8.

Meanwhile, in the Southwest U.S. members of other religions were looking for solutions to the problems affecting México and Hispanic Americans. From December 11 to 16, members of 30 Protestant denominations, totaling 150 people, one third of them Hispanics, met in El Paso Conference. The meeting took place under the auspices of the Home Missions Council of New York City, and was held at the Mexican Presbyterian Church of the Divine Savior. Participants concluded that a delegation of prominent ministers and laymen would visit México in January of 1927. Reverend Hubert C. Herring would head the delegation, later known as the Second Good Will Mission.²²¹

1927: Some Calling for a Coup d'état, others Looking for an Understanding

Capistrán's campaign in the U.S. did not stop in the Eastern region. In January, he went to the Southwest. Capistrán and a group of former Mexican revolutionaries published a manifesto in El Paso, Texas. In that manifesto, the rebels called on the Mexican people to take arms, and named Capistrán as the provisional president of México. A Mexican émigré, an active Catholic, and member of the Knights of Columbus, Joseph P. Gándara was appointed as military control chief. Gándara would have the support of "generals" Juan B. Galindo, Nicolás Fernández and Agustín Escobar, allegedly members of Francisco Villa's Army during the Mexican Revolution.²²² Capistrán's proclamation did not turn things around. In México, the *Cristeros* avoided any proclamation in favor of Capistrán as president. This did not represent an obstacle for the self proclaimed president of México. Capistrán asked the American Catholic hierarchy for pecuniary support, something he got in a very modest way.

²²¹ United States Department of State, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations between the United States and Mexico 1910-1929*, "Frank B. Kellogg to Charles E. Vermilga," January 11, 1927, Microcopy 314, Roll 7, 711.12/861 (Washington : National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, 1960).

²²² "Revolution is declared," *New York Times*, January 11, 1927, 11.

Capistrán traveled to Washington where he tried to convince Congressmen and government officials to lift the arms embargo on the rebels. He also asked for a prohibition of the sale of weapons to the Mexican government. Both requests were denied. Capistrán realized that his campaign was in trouble. He went to San Antonio, Texas to meet William J. Buckley. The businessman offered to introduce Capistrán to Nicholas Brady from New York. One of the most prominent laymen in America and a personal friend of Pius XI and Cardinal Gasparri, the papal Secretary of State, Brady was the first non-ordained American to receive the title of Papal Chamberlain.²²³ According to Buckley, Brady would be able to provide the financial support required for continuing the warfare against the Mexican government. Capistrán planned to ask Brady for five hundred thousand dollars. However, before Capistrán's return to New York, Bishop Díaz Barreto began to lobby intensely against the members of the League. Consequently, Capistrán never met Brady.²²⁴ That represented a set back for the Mexican Catholics.

In the meantime, the Second Good Will Mission traveled to México to meet with government officials and members of different faiths. A list of fifteen questions about the religious conflict in México was submitted to the Catholic hierarchy before its meeting with members of the Mission. Rabbi Isaac Landman, the editor of the *American Hebrew Review*, was responsible of this set of questions. Bishop Díaz Barreto, who acted as the spokesman for the Catholic hierarchy, responded to all the questions. The reply was well accepted by the members of the American delegation. Rabi Landman speaking on behalf of the visitors, "said he hoped that the unusual meeting of Jews, Protestants and Catholic Bishops would be a forerunner of better relations among all creeds"²²⁵

²²³ Quirk, 199.

²²⁴ Alfonso Taracena, *La Verdadera Revolución Mexicana: 1925-1927* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Porrúa. "Sepan Cuantos..." No. 615, 1992), 223.

²²⁵ "Americans Query Bishops in Mexico," *New York Times*, January 10, 1927, 3.

Later, the group met with President Elías Calles. He recognized the spiritual nature of the Mission and its efforts to learn the truth about the situation in México. The president's words became less conciliatory when he referred to the attitude of the Mexican Catholic clergy. He accused clerics and reactionary forces of inciting ignorant men to a revolt against the Mexican government. The president told members of the Mission that Catholic priests saw a possible rupture of relations with the U.S. government as an opportunity to gain recognition for its efforts against the Mexican authorities. Referring to U.S.-México relations, President Elías Calles asserted that the problems then underway did not represent a conflict between the people of one country against another. Rather, it was problem between the people of México and a small group of American capitalists [the oilmen] trying to induce the Department of State to aid them by force. These difficulties did not threaten in any sense the vital interests of either country.²²⁶

After returning to the U.S., Hubert Herring wrote that “[Elías] Calles’ regime seeks to break reactionary power of priests. The religious struggle in Mexico was as at heart not a religious conflict but the struggle of the Mexican people finally to establish themselves as a free Nation...”²²⁷ Others disagreed with that opinion. On February 1, 1927, Rabbi Bernard Heller sent a letter to President Coolidge mentioning that he had declined an invitation to be part of the Good Will Mission because it represented a political maneuver, and would provide a one side version of the situation in México.²²⁸ Rabbi Heller did not offer any further explanation to support his assertion. Some doubts about the real intention behind that Mission appeared when Representative Edgar Howard, a Democrat from Nebraska, sent a message to Secretary Kellogg questioning whether the U.S. government had supported the Mission. That question derived

²²⁶ Murray, 149, 152.

²²⁷ Mexican Church Controversy Viewed as Liberation Effort, *The Christian Science Monitor*, (January 26, 1927): 2.

²²⁸ United States Department of State, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations between the United States and Mexico 1910-1929*, “Communication to President Coolidge from Rabbi Bernard Heller,” February 1, 1927, Microcopy 314, Roll 7, 711.12/936.

from what Howard learned about several lectures delivered in Nebraska by a member of that Mission, Rev. W. M. Pysher of Kansas City Missouri. The acting Secretary of State, Joseph C. Grew, denied that the government supported the mission.²²⁹

Other repercussions of the Good Will Mission included some issues involving Ambassador Sheffield. Pastor of the Washington Congregational Church, Rev. Paul G. Macy, published an article in the *Toledo Times*. Macy denounced Ambassador Sheffield, calling the Ambassador's treatment of him and the group [the Mission] abominable. Immediately, the Ambassador sent a note to Secretary Kellogg denying such charges. He added that none of the members of the Mission even called at the U.S. Embassy in México. Sheffield also criticized Carleton Beals, a member of the Mission. According to Sheffield the article "Mexico's "Bloodless Victory" written by Beals and published in *The Nation* on January 26, 1927, was propaganda paid by Mexican authorities.²³⁰

Those incidents became part of a debate at the U.S. Senate. Democratic Senator J. Thomas Heflin of Alabama "spent three and a half hours attacking the Catholic Church and the Knights of Columbus for trying to drag us [the U.S.] into war with México."²³¹ This attack represented an old charge made previously by Heflin, and denied by James A. Flaherty.²³² Heflin got angry when Democratic Senator William Cabell Bruce of Maryland accused him of reviving a religious controversy more than 600 years old. Heflin engaged in a heated discussion not only with Bruce but also with Republican Senator James W. Wadsforth of New York and Democratic Senator James A. Reed of Missouri. According to *The New York Times*, Heflin "insinuated that Ambassador Sheffield had been party to a Catholic plan to force war with

²²⁹ Ibid., February 22, 1927 Microcopy 314, Roll 7, 711.12/991; and, Roll 7, 711.12/911 February 28, 1927.

²³⁰ Ibid., February 3, 1927, Microcopy 314, Roll 7, 711.12/1080.

²³¹ "Catholics assailed again by Heflin," *New York Times*, February 18, 1927, Amusements, 25.

²³² "Catholic Knights Reply to Heflin," *New York Times*, January 15, 1927, 2.

México.” Wadsforth replied that he “resented the innuendo that Mr. Sheffield, an honorable American gentleman, has been faithless to his trust by divulging confidential dispatches”²³³ Heflin said “he never dreamed of the insidious activity of the Pope who controls weak-kneed Protestants, and... Archbishop Hayes controls the Republican and Democratic candidates in New York. The Al Smith crowd will vote the Democratic ticket when they can use it, but will trade with Republicans.” This entire allegation covered the real political purposes of Senator Heflin. His main goal was to control the Democratic Party. He stated that he was tired of New York trying to run the Democratic Party, adding “we can win [presumably the presidency of the country] without New York, and nominate a candidate outside that state. New York is a liability to our party.”²³⁴ Behind this debate was a combination of xenophobic and religious issues as well as the urban-rural conflict. During the 1920s poverty increased in the rural areas while the cities flourished. Consequently, many people migrated to the cities. “With the rise in agrarian poverty and the loss of ambitious farm youths to the urban factories went a decline in rural morale.”²³⁵ Because of that disparity, some living in cities developed a sense of superiority over those still living in the rural areas. For 1924, that rivalry was transplanted to politics where

struggles between rural and urban Democrats over the divisive issues of the Ku Klux Klan, Roman Catholicism, and prohibition increased the self-consciousness and aggressiveness of both factions even as it weakened the whole party; and in the increased militancy of its camps lay a source of future strength for the entire party.²³⁶

But for the meantime, spiritual matters and faith became an excuse to conduct a battle for political power.

²³³ “Catholics assailed again by Heflin,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1927, Amusements, 25.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²³⁵ David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1923* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 78.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 79,80.

A Thoughtful Debate between John A. Ryan and Norman Thomas

The debate over the mission and the one at the U.S. Senate were part of many debates in which the Mexican conflict became a mean to express domestic political discrepancies. At a more thoughtful level was a private epistolary debate between the Director of the Department for Social Action of the NCWC, Rev John A. Ryan, and the socialist and Co-Director of the League of Industrial Democracy, Norman Thomas. The debate took place during February and March 1927. Some excerpts from the debate show how a member of the American Catholic Church tried to justify the behavior of the Mexican Catholic Church. Ryan claimed his lack of information, something hard to believe coming from a person like him. Thomas supported his assertions on the basis of the writings of Carleton Beals, Ernest Gruening, Protestant missionaries and Mexican socialists. Taking into account that neither Ryan nor Thomas had lived in México; the debate showed the level of influence that publications had over leaders of opinion.

Despite the Catholics' campaign to present themselves as victims of Mexican government's intolerance, the past behavior of the Catholic Church in México could not be erased. An example was provided by Thomas' words: "I am still of the opinion that, at least until very recently, the record of the [Mexican] church is very far from conforming to the standards of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in matters of political or economic justice"²³⁷ Rev. Ryan answered: "...it is not a fair question or a fair test. The only fair question as to the facts [not the principle] of the situation is whether the Mexican Church has opposed

²³⁷ Norman Thomas to John A. Ryan, Personal Letter, February 10, 1927 in Francis L. Broderick, editor "Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927: A Debate between Norman Thomas and John A. Ryan," *The Catholic Historical Review* Vol. XLV, No. 3 (October 1959): 311.

political or economic reforms in the last half century. I challenge you to produce the evidence which would justify an affirmative answer [to this question].”²³⁸

Evidently Ryan knew he had some advantage, considering Thomas hardly could be considered an expert about Mexican issues. Thomas had no other choice but to admit that he did not rely on first hand information. Basing his conclusions on readings and the testimonies of people living in México, Thomas concluded “that the Mexican Church by its acts of omission and commission has exploited the people in varying degree but with fair consistency from the time of the Spanish Conquest at least down to the fall of the Huerta government.”²³⁹ Ryan replied on March 3. He acknowledged offenses of both kinds (omission and commission) committed by the Church during the eighteenth century. Since the enactment of Constitution of 1857, Ryan said: “I am impelled to believe that in the period since intervening the Church has possessed very little power for exploiting the people...If you have any reliable information or can refer to any reliable source [about that] I shall be genuinely grateful to you for making me acquainted with them.”²⁴⁰ Ryan stated that, because the power of the clergy had been broken in 1857, a landed aristocracy was born and consequently the misery of the Mexican peon increased. “The condition of the masses was far worse in 1910 than it had been in 1810...”²⁴¹ This argument was very well elaborated coming from somebody alleging a lack of knowledge about México. Reverend Ryan, however, avoided mentioning how, during Porfirio Díaz’ government, the Catholic Church consolidated its economic power. From 1876 to 1910, Church’s wealth increased to 100 million pesos.

²³⁸ John A. Ryan to Norman Thomas, personal letter, February 15, 1927 in Broderick, “Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927,” 313.

²³⁹ Thomas to Ryan, personal letter, February 25, 1927 in Broderick, “Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927,” 320.

²⁴⁰ Ryan to Thomas, personal letter, March 3, 1927 in Broderick, “Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927,” 323.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 324.

Thomas provided a straightforward answer a couple of days later. “Granting that the landed aristocracy which grew up after 1857 was as bad as or worse than the Church,” he wrote, was it not on the whole allied with the Church?”²⁴² There was only one answer to that question: yes. The Catholic Church, however, would never accept that. Consequently Rev. Ryan looked for an escape, proceeding to deny such charges. He tried to divert the reality about the Church in México and showed a little bit of his intolerance toward other religions in the US.

I am inclined [to] think that the proper answer is in the negative, since the bishops and the clergy of México were deprived of the power they once exercised in that country and even under Díaz were merely tolerated. My impression is that they exercised less influence upon the government than have several Protestants in this country exercised upon our American Government through the anti-Saloon League.²⁴³

The arguments of Reverend Ryan, and those made before by Bishop Kelley, exhibited the animosity of some members of the Catholic Church toward other religions. During the next years, the debate about the religious issue would emerge as a polarizing factor within the United States. One of the reasons for such disagreement relied on the already mentioned events developing in México which day after day attracted more Americans who became interested in events there. Soon two groups had been created. One, formed mainly by Protestants, supported the actions of the Mexican government. Another, formed by Catholics and supported by businessmen, clamored for U.S. intervention in México to stop the measures implemented there or even to overthrow the government. The struggle, however, had nothing to do with faith. It was a battle for earthly power. The Catholic Church was defending its religious monopoly in México

²⁴² Thomas to Ryan, personal letter, March 5, 1927 in Broderick, “Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927,” 324.

²⁴³ Ryan to Thomas, personal letter, March 10, 1927 in Broderick, “Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927,” 325.

The Struggle Continued Far Beyond Words

The Mexican government pursued its policy of expelling those Catholic priests refusing to obey the law. That attitude provided an excellent excuse for the Church to proclaim itself as a victim of intolerance and persecution. According to the Catholic hierarchy, this started when the Apostolic Delegate Monsignor Filippi was expelled in 1923.

Although the Mexican government tried to tell its side of the story in the American press, members of the Church were more effective managing press relations. Catholics took advantage of their role as victims of government's intolerance. Every single event related to priests, members of Catholic congregations or businessmen, (even when they did not necessarily belong to the Catholic faith) became a good excuse to magnify the protests and take the message abroad. National and foreigners priests were forced to leave the country. They portrayed themselves as victims of government intolerance toward Catholicism.

By the end of 1926, around two hundred foreign priests had been "invited" to leave the country. They would not be the only ones; soon the Mexican prelates also would be asked to leave. In early January 1927, the Mexican government imprisoned Bishop Díaz Barreto and five other high-ranking members of the Mexican clergy as well as a large number of members of the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty. They faced charges of rebellion, encouraging other Catholics to take violent actions, and distributing pamphlets containing writings with derogatory epithets against the Mexican government.²⁴⁴ Bishop Díaz Barreto escaped from prison, and, on March 11, he appeared in the Church of Our Lady of Esperanza on West Broadway, in New York City preaching a sermon entitled: "The real attitude of the

²⁴⁴ "Numerous Catholics Jailed in Mexico," *New York Times*, January 15, 1927, 2.

Mexican government toward the Catholic Church.”²⁴⁵ Priests continued their “victimization” campaign.

While Catholics refused to obey the enacted rules, members of other religions considered it better to fulfill the requirements. At the beginning of January 1927, Rev. W.B. Beauchamp, Bishop of Georgia and México, announced that all property holdings of the Methodist Episcopal South Church in México, including schools and hospitals, had been registered with the Mexican Government. The value of those belongings amounted to one million pesos.²⁴⁶ Reverend Beauchamp asserted that members of his religion were not in México for profits but just to provide services.

The struggle between the prelates and Mexican authorities did not abate. In April 1927, eight members of the Mexican Catholic hierarchy, three archbishops and five bishops, got a request from government officials to report to the judiciary authorities in order to explain their participation in the armed movement. That action derived from a statement made by Archbishop Mora Del Río to the Minister of the Interior, Adalberto Tejada. The archbishop said: “that he maintained the right of the Catholics in Mexico to fight against tyranny, peaceful if possible, but with arms in an extremity.”²⁴⁷ Consequently, José Mora Del Río, Archbishop of México; Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, Archbishop of Michoacán; Pedro Vera y Zuria, Archbishop of Puebla; José de Jesús Manríquez y Zarate, Bishop of Huejutla; Salvador Uranga, Bishop of Cuernavaca; Ignacio Valdespino y Díaz, Bishop of Aguascalientes; Gerardo Anaya, Bishop of Chiapas; and, José María Echeverría, Bishop de Saltillo, had only two options. They could attend the request of the judiciary tribunals in México to answer about their support for the *Cristero* Revolt or be

²⁴⁵ “Today’s Services in City’s Churches,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1927, Editorial General News, E 4.

²⁴⁶ “Methodists register in Mexico,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1927, 4.

²⁴⁷ “Arms in Extremity,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1927, 24.

deported. On April 22, with Mexican authorities threatening to imprison them, the eight prelates boarded the train to Nuevo Laredo and went into exile to the U.S.²⁴⁸

On American soil, the Mexican clergy established their headquarters in San Antonio, Texas under the leadership of Archbishop Mora Del Río, Monsignor Ruiz y Flores and Bishop Díaz Barreto. They represented the moderate wing within the Mexican prelates. They tried to separate from the extremist group headed by Archbishop González y Valencia, residing in Rome. During the spring of 1927, Archbishop Gonzalez issued a Pastoral Letter giving his implicit support to the members of the League for the Defense of Religious Liberty and their actions. Those residing in San Antonio, however, had no intention yet to surrender and declare defeat to the Mexican government.

Bishop Díaz Barreto traveled to Rome to meet Cardinal Gasparri. During the meeting Díaz Barreto explained how, in his opinion, the *Cristero* movement had no future. Díaz advised Gasparri to end any support provided by the Church to the *Cristeros*. Under Bishop Díaz' new proposal, the search for new leaders to head the rebellion against the Mexican government would be a first step. According to Díaz Barreto, only two people could fulfill that position: the nephew of the late dictator Porfirio Díaz, Félix Díaz, or a former advocate of Victoriano Huerta, Nemesio García Naranjo.²⁴⁹

On January 27, 1927, The Knights of Columbus held a meeting in Washington D.C. The main speaker was a Los Angeles lawyer, Joseph Scott. His speech accused the Mexican government of representing Bolshevism and openly being enemies of freedom and religion. Making a comparison between the U.S. Constitution and the Mexican charter, Scott concluded:

²⁴⁸ Taracena, *La Verdadera Revolución Mexicana: 1925-1927*, 226.

²⁴⁹ Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church: 1910-1929*, 204, 205.

“we should have as a neighbor a government with our own ideals of religious liberty and political freedom.”²⁵⁰ The statement echoed Guthrie’s allegations made in December 1926.

The Knights tried to offer their advocates first hand information about events in México. Consequently, the K of C supported the travels of some writers to the neighboring country. Capitan Francis McCullagh was one of these writers. After visiting México for six weeks in 1927, McCullagh wrote a book titled *Red Mexico: A Reign of Terror in America*.²⁵¹ The book was full of epithets against the Mexican president. McCullagh classified the Mexican President as a “bewildered and half-savage dictator who hates the United States and detests the English language.”²⁵² Captain McCullagh even blamed President Wilson for supporting the socialists [sic] in power in 1914. In that year, Wilson sent troops to México to get rid of Victoriano Huerta. Years before the publication of his book, McCullagh had criticized people of his own faith. In 1925, he blamed Catholics around the world for doing nothing about events in México. He accused American Catholic newspapers of excluding news from México, pointing out they might have been acting under the influence of the State Department which, like all Foreign Offices, preferred moral suasion to open denunciation.²⁵³

In 1928, McCullagh attacked the whole American press because of its lack of coverage of events in México. He presented himself as the owner of the truth. Without mentioning its name, McCullaugh criticized a great New York paper which refused to publish his articles. Consequently, he wrote: “there is no protection for the individual against that tremendous propaganda machine which exists in America, growing stronger every year, and which may be

²⁵⁰ ‘K. of C. Plead made to condemn Calles,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1927, 2.

²⁵¹ Francis McCullagh, *Red Mexico: A Reign of Terror in America* (New York: Louis Carrier & Co., 1928).

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵³ Francis McCullagh, “What is happening in México? IV Mexican Catholics outside the Law,” *The Commonwealth* Vol. II, No. 2 (May 20, 1925): 39-41.

suddenly turned some day by its manipulators against liberty and Christianity and in favor of Heaven knows what puritanical, sentimentalist or suicidal folly.”²⁵⁴

McCullagh exhibited very limited access to readings on the American press and about the opinion of the Mexican president toward the United States. Between 1926 and 1928, the daily press and magazines of opinion had widely covered the religious conflict in México.

In relation to the attitude of the Mexican president toward the United States, McCullagh was wrong. Some excerpts of that press coverage will help to show McCullagh’s flawed interpretation. On October 28, 1924, Elías Calles attended a banquet given by the American Exporters and Manufactures Association in New York. During that event Elías Calles said: “I invite capitalists and industrials of good will – not aggressive and piratical capitalists- to assist me in the reconstructive development of a people”²⁵⁵ In February 1927, Elías Calles confirmed that attitude during an interview given to Isaac F. Marcossou of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Elías Calles considered opposition to Mexico’s economic development from within the US as an absurd. México’s growth would require more capital and consumption of goods. The natural market from which to acquire them would be the U.S. Since Europe was building a powerful coalition to take out the U.S.’s world market predominance, the future of the U.S. rested in a strong coalition within the Western Hemisphere. Because of that Elías Calles, made sure that México did not reject American investments and offered protection to those properties of American citizens on Mexican soil.²⁵⁶

During late summer 1927, in the middle of the crisis with the U.S. government over the petroleum laws, the Mexican President stated in his message to Congress: “... relations with the

²⁵⁴ Francis McCullagh, *Red Mexico: A Reign of Terror in America* (New York: Louis Carrier & Co., 1928), 382.

²⁵⁵ Address in New York delivered on October 28, 1924 in Murray, *Mexico before the World*, 166.

²⁵⁶ Isaac F. Marcossou, “Calles” *The Saturday Evening Post*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 26, 1927, in Gabriela Ibarra y Hernán Gutiérrez, *Plutarco Elías Calles y La Prensa Norteamericana: 1924-1929*, (Ciudad de México: Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, 1982), 93.

United States are fundamentally important in our national life for obvious reasons based upon proximity and the extensive commercial relations of the two countries.”²⁵⁷ Elías Calles had some disagreements with the U.S., but he was perfectly aware of reality.

Financing doubtful works such as *Red Mexico* did not necessary generate support for the K of C. Even Rev. John A. Ryan disagreed with that class of “violent statements found in Knights of Columbus’ pamphlets and in reported utterances of certain individual Catholics... I have never had any sympathy with that kind of procedure...”²⁵⁸ Opinions like this did not stop the activities of the Knights.

The struggle between Mexican Catholics and Mexican authorities continued. Both sides accused each other of wrongdoings. Political and ecclesiastic hierarchies tried to justify their actions blaming each other while the general population became victims of intolerance and stubbornness. The American press provided extensive coverage.

The news reported that government troops imprisoned and, without a trial, executed one of the *Cristeros*’ main leaders, Anacleto González Flores. Consequently, Catholics decided to take revenge. On April 19, 1927 a group under the leadership of priests [José Reyes] Vega, [Aristeo] Pedroza, [Jesús] Angulo, a lawyer named [Miguel Gómez] Loza and a bandit [Victoriano Ramírez] nicknamed No. 14 attacked a train near to the city of Guadalajara in the Western State of Jalisco, slaying or burning alive 100 people. The Mexican government vehemently accused the Mexican Episcopate as intellectually responsible for this action.²⁵⁹ The Papal Delegate residing in the United States, Monsignor Fumasoni-Bondi denied those charges.

²⁵⁷ “Extracts from President Calles’ Address to the Mexican Congress, September 1, 1927” in Murray, *Mexico Before the World*, 172.

²⁵⁸ Ryan to Thomas, personal letter, February 15, 1927, in Broderick, “Liberalism and the Mexican Crisis of 1927,” 313.

²⁵⁹ “100 Slain or Burned alive in Mexican Train hold-up; locked in cars by outlaws,” *New York Times* April 21, 1927, 1.

Fumasoni accused President Elías Calles of using his political power to blame the Church for the religious conflict in México.²⁶⁰ Backing Fusamoni's assertions, the Jesuit priest Carlos Heredia denied any involvement of the Mexican prelates in the train incident. Also, Bishop Díaz Barreto stated that "out of [his] knowledge of other things the [Elías] Calles government has done, it may well that it has already killed or is about to kill the three priests named and is this cold-bloodedly attempting to justify itself."²⁶¹ As mentioned before, eight members of the Mexican Catholic hierarchy needed to abandon the country following this event. Five days after the assault, Diaz's predictions became a reality; the Mexican authorities announced the execution of one of the priests directly involved in the robbery while twelve more rebels died during the fighting.²⁶² It looked like rational thinking had abandoned both sides. Many more lives would perish before a solution arrived.

The debate about who was responsible for such kind of actions prevailed for a long time. In 1966, Vicente Camberos Vizcaíno, in *Francisco El Grande: Francisco Orozco Jiménez, Biografía*, accused the Mexican government of trying to present the event as a common robbery to discredit the members of the rebellion. According to Camberos, the main goal of the assault was accomplished; the movement got three hundred thousand pesos to continue fighting. He concluded: "only fifty three soldiers were killed while setting fire to the train."²⁶³ Camberos showed Catholic piety at his best.

During 1927, newspapers reported how extreme positions prevailed. In December 1927, when things began to look different and rational behavior reappeared, a group of American women belonging to the National Council of Catholic Women sent a letter to President Coolidge.

²⁶⁰ "Papal Delegate Denies Charges," *New York Times*, April 23, 1927, 5.

²⁶¹ "Jesuit scores Calles," *New York Times*, April 22, 1927, 3.

²⁶² "Mexico Executes Priest as Rebel," *New York Times*, April 25, 1927, 1.

²⁶³ Camberos Vizcaíno, *Francisco El Grande*, Tomo II, 209.

This organization criticized the recently appointed Ambassador Morrow's policy and Lindbergh's mission to México as an example of condoning persecutions.²⁶⁴ These kinds of attitudes did not help to accelerate an agreement, and represented an example of the prevailing attitude among some American Catholics.

On April 23, 1928, Martin Conboy, a lawyer and prominent New York Catholic, sent a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*. Conboy commented about a speech delivered days before [April 15] by the Mexican Minister of Education, José Manuel Puig Casauranc. Puig invited Mexican Bishops to a dialogue to end the differences. The *Times* reported that the end of the religious conflict was near. Conboy, however, believed recent events did not fulfill those expectations. To support his assertion, Conboy mentioned the punishment of Catholics in México. Conboy stated that "with nuns turned out of their convents homes, the soldiers of [Elías] Calles are no gentler than the soldiers of Islam."²⁶⁵ (Once again the resounding echo of those words pronounced 833 years earlier by Pope Urban II, Otto of Lagery, became part of the debate). To demonstrate how miserable things were in México, Conboy mentioned that: "twenty-three priests were killed, most of them tortured, from the first of the year to the first week of March."²⁶⁶ More stories about Catholics victims of violence went around.

Opponents of the Church pointed out that it was no bastion of tolerance. Ernest Gruening wrote in *The Nation* how in México the terms Protestant and Jew were commonly used as epithets. Members of the clergy employed them interchangeably with atheistic, Bolshevistic and Masonic.²⁶⁷ Catholic priests openly denied tolerance toward members of other religions. Gruening stated how "incredible as it may appear to persons in the United States, Protestant

²⁶⁴ "Criticizes Morrow on Mexican Policy," *New York Times*, December 28, 1927, 2.

²⁶⁵ "Conditions in México held to be in need of clarifying," *New York Times*, April 23, 1928, E5.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, E5.

²⁶⁷ Ernest Gruening, "News from Mexico," *The Nation* Vol. CXXVII, No. 3296 (September 5, 1928): 225.

missionaries have within the last three years been set upon by mobs and killed for no reason other than that of their faith and calling.”²⁶⁸ Gruening mentioned the attitude of priests like Bishop Miguel de la Mora of San Luis Potosí, who preached sermons in which he stated that from “his new position of vantage towering above México, Christ would defy His enemies as He had defied the Jews who had crucified Him.”²⁶⁹ The attitudes revealed by Gruening prevailed for many years in México; up to the 1960s, children attending catechism lessons still listened to such comments.

Such events received very narrow coverage in the United States. On the other hand, even the funeral of a Mexican clergy got wide exposure. *Time* published an article titled *Death in Mexico*.²⁷⁰ The piece focused on the sermon delivered by Archbishop of San Antonio Arthur Jerome Drossaerts during the memorial services of the Bishop of Aguascalientes, Rt. Rev. Ignacio Valdespino. Drossaerts referred to a series of murders and assassinations committed by people connected to the Mexican government. Drossaerts emphasized cases concerning other priests killed, Catholics caught and tortured, villages burned, rape, murder, and happenings of a like nature.²⁷¹ With that framework, the words of the Archbishop of San Antonio fit perfectly with the content of his sermon. Drossaerts stated that:

Liberty is being crucified at our very door and the United States looks on with perfect indifference. Despotism seems to have become popular amongst us. Are we not sending endless goodwill parties to Mexico? Are we not courting the friends and favor of the very men whose hands are simply dripping with the blood of their innocent victims? . . . The ominous silence of the American press and pulpit is not understandable. . .²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 225.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 225.

²⁷⁰ “Death in Mexico,” *Time*, May 28, 1928, 20. <http://www.time.com/>. (January 6, 2007).

²⁷¹ Ibid., 20.

²⁷² Ibid., 20.

Drossaerts assertion was false. The U.S. government had followed closely the Mexican conflict. American press had published information and analysis on the topic. Lay organizations like the K of C had developed an intensive campaign to present their side of the story. Maybe Archbishop Drossaerts felt such disappointment because the U.S. did not invade Mexico or President Coolidge did not make any official announcement against the Mexican authorities and taking Catholics' side.

American Catholics became convinced that what happened in México represented a threat against humankind. Catholics leading spokesmen refused to give any credit to different opinions coming from members of other religions, and they lost objectivity, classifying those writing or expressing a different point of view about the events in México as opportunistic or co-opted by the Mexican authorities. Catholics alleged that defenders of Mexican policy adopted such opportunistic positions to establish Protestant denominations or sects, as the Catholics called them.

What first appeared as a debate about a foreign issue developed strong roots inside American soil and became an issue in the next presidential election.

The direct involvement of American government in Mexican issues, in one way or another, promised to offend either Catholics or Protestants. It looked like a dead end for President Coolidge. If he openly supported the Mexican government, American Catholics would immediately translate it into the presidential campaign. Coolidge would be seen as anti-Catholic, and one of the potential Democratic candidates was Alfred Emmanuel Smith, a Catholic. On the other hand, if the American president explicitly rejected those dispositions about religion implemented by the Mexican government, members of the Protestant churches would regard it as pro-Catholic. President Coolidge played the cards of domestic and foreign policy masterfully

but the seeds of hatred had been planted in American soil, and would bear fruit during the presidential campaign of 1928

Chapter Four

RELIGION AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN AMERICA

During the 1920s, the divergences between Catholics and Protestants in the U.S. represented a problem underlying the debate over Prohibition. When the religious conflict in México openly erupted in 1925, it served as an open field to test their positions and gradually move into American ground. Engaging in a debate about a religious foreign issue would allow members of different faiths to measure the reactions among public opinion, followers, and American authorities. Sooner than expected, members of all religions and their religious leaders mixed religious beliefs with political preferences. Catholics and Protestants each tried to elicit the direct involvement of President Coolidge in the conflict. It represented more than a desire to have peace. Both groups wanted to take advantage in whichever stance of a possible stance the American president would take. Coolidge refused to take a stance. In the mean time, members of the Democratic Party began to work in favor of the nomination of a Catholic, Alfred Emmanuel Smith as the presidential candidate for the 1928 elections.

Alfred E. Smith was Governor of the State of New York during four terms, from 1918 to 1920 and from 1922 to 1928. He earned a national reputation as a reformer concerned with social welfare and efficiency of government. He sponsored measures related to child labor, advocated measures to curb the use of injunctions against labor organizations, favored programs providing low-cost housing, strengthened the system of public education, supported the creation of public parks and recreational areas, reorganized the administrative structure of the state government, and overhauled the tax structure.²⁷³

²⁷³ Allan J. Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 11, 12.

Those actions made of him a prominent figure in the Democratic Party during the 1920s. In 1924, Smith faced William McAdoo for the Democratic presidential nomination. In an intense competition McAdoo had the support of the southern and western delegates, most of them Protestants, backing Prohibition and at least had some sympathy for the KKK. Northeastern delegates, many of whom were Catholics, supported Smith because of his stance against Prohibition. The KKK issue became a strong point of disagreement. Smith's supporters demanded that an explicit condemnation of the KKK be included in the Party platform; McAdoo's supporters preferred not to include that explicit condemnation. The final vote went in favor of not including that condemnation.²⁷⁴

The Democratic Convention became so divided that neither of the two candidates got the two-thirds of the votes required to win the nomination. Delegates voted 103 times before the Democrats broke the deadlock and decided to turn into a corporate lawyer and diplomat from West Virginia, John W. Davis, as their candidate. On the surface, what kept the election so close were the delegates' polarizing positions toward the KKK and Prohibition. Beneath the surface, however, many of those opposing Smith's candidacy did so because they considered having a Catholic in the White House unthinkable.

Four years later, that issue was taken into the Senate. Thomas J. Heflin, a Democratic Senator from Alabama, delivered a vicious attack against Catholics. Heflin mentioned that during the 1924 Democratic Convention he saw Roman Catholic delegates demanding a condemnation of the Ku Klux Klan as part of the Party platform. Heflin strongly opposed that action because of the division it would have among party membership. In the end the

²⁷⁴ Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (Boston, Massachusetts.: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 120, 121.

proposition was defeated by four votes. A divided Democratic party needed to turn to a compromise candidate who performed very poorly in the general election.²⁷⁵

Rivalries due to different approaches to faith prevailed in the U.S. where Roman Catholics accounted for 16.6% of the total population. An example of that kind of disputes was published by the *Times* in early April, 1924. At a breakfast with members of the New York Police department, William D. Cunningham of Ellenville, Ulster County, New York, a former Judge of the Court of Claims and a Republican, claimed it was impossible for a Roman Catholic to attain high public office because of his faith. Immediately he got a reply from Judge J. Harry Tiernan of Richmond County, New York, denying such assertion and providing the example of Governor Smith as a Catholic who had achieved public office. Tiernan added that Catholics would resent rejection of the candidacy of Governor Smith for the Democratic nomination for president solely because of his religion.²⁷⁶ Considering that kind of dispute, it came as no surprise that such disagreements prevailed during the Democratic Convention.

During the next years, different opinions emerged about the religious issue and the possible candidacy of Smith for the Democratic nomination. Members of Protestant religions, Catholics, Democrats and Republicans, all expressed opinions not necessarily determined by religious or political affiliation. The arguments did not involve only Smith's religious faith but also focused on his opposition to Prohibition.

A Preamble of Incoming Events

A number of groups opposed Smith as the Democratic presidential candidate. The KKK threatened that if Smith or any other Catholic won the nomination, their six million members

²⁷⁵ United States Senate *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 1st Session, January 28, 1928, Volume LXIX, Part 2 (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928), 1644-1655.

²⁷⁶ "Says Smith's Faith Must Not Bar him," *New York Times*, April 7, 1924, 3.

plus other sympathizers of the Klan would vote against him.²⁷⁷ Hiram Wesley Evans, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, accused the Catholic Church of openly engaging in political activities during the Democratic National Convention of 1924, where hotel lobbies and corridors of Madison Square Garden were packed with Catholic priests. Evans also expressed his intolerance toward the Catholic Church as a political organization and indeed toward any individual member of that faith participating in politics.²⁷⁸ At the end of 1926, Evans specifically attacked Smith, calling him a bad citizen by repealing the Mullan-Gage law in New York.²⁷⁹ The Mullan-Gage law was the state version of the Volstead Act related to the enforcement of prohibition by the states. “The Prohibitionists argued that New York did not have the right to repeal it and if did it would amount to the nullification of the Eighteenth Amendment.”²⁸⁰ Smith argued that the “repeal would... transfer prosecution of prohibition cases to the Federal courts. It would do away with double jeopardy of State and Federal prosecution for the violation of laws enforcing the Eighteenth Amendment.”²⁸¹

Smith tried to convince those opposing the measure

that this repeal does not in the slightest degree lessen the obligation of peace officers of the State to enforce in its strict letter the Volstead act...that the repeal of the Mullan-Gage law would not and cannot by any possible stretch of the imagination bring back into existence the saloon.²⁸²

But his political rivals like William Jennings Bryan did not agree with the repeal and said that the “Governor Smith has simply dishonored his office and disgraced himself: He cannot lead the nation back to wallow in the mire.”²⁸³

²⁷⁷ “Ku Klux Declares Against Gov. Smith,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1924, 2.

²⁷⁸ “Hiram Wesley Evans. *The Klan’s Fight for Americanism*,” *The North American Review* Vol. CCXXIII, No. 830 (March-April-May, 1926): 47, 48, 61.

²⁷⁹ “Evans Assails Smith and Catholic Church,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1926, 16.

²⁸⁰ Christopher M. Finan, *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 165.

²⁸¹ “He Uphold States Rights,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1923, 1.

²⁸² “He Uphold States Rights,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1923, 1.

²⁸³ Finan, *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior*, 165

Those charges represented part of a campaign implemented against Governor Smith. Months before Smith welcomed the papal Legate, Giovanni Vincenzo Cardinal Bonzano, and other priests, in transit to Chicago to attend the Catholic Ecumenical Council to be held during the spring of 1926. Because of that Smith was accused of disloyalty to the U.S. by a section of the KKK in San Angelo, Texas. The Klan stated that Smith officially recognized the Catholic Church while the U.S. Government did not.²⁸⁴

The KKK and Bryan did not stand alone in opposing Smith's candidacy. The whole range of Protestant opinions from strict Lutheranism to permissive Unitarianism spoke out against Smith. Leaders of Lutheranism especially warned their followers against electing a Catholic as President. Unitarians complained that members of their Church had been persecuted in Roman Catholic countries, and consequently they wanted to ban the election of a Catholic as President. Episcopalians acted as the moderates opposing Smith.²⁸⁵ Other religions took a more direct approach and rejected the possibility of a Catholic as president; some Methodists and Baptists in Georgia, South Carolina, Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana developed an intense campaign through their newspapers trying to show the danger of having a Catholic as head of state in Washington. Smith's opponents took different positions. Some argued that, as a Catholic, Smith had the Constitutional right to run for the high office, but they owned a similar prerogative to reject him because of his religious faith. Others went farther and warned that once a Catholic arrived in the White House, the country would be in total submission to Rome and the Pope. The Next step would be to persecute all those refusing to accept Catholicism.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ "Klan Criticizes Gov. Smith," *New York Times*, June 21, 1926, Social News, 14.

²⁸⁵ Richard O'Connor, *The First Hurrah: A Biography of Alfred E. Smith* (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1970), 209.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 207-209.

In New York, the President of the Anti-Saloon League and Methodist Episcopal Bishop Adna Wright Leonard of Buffalo invoked Smith in a meeting with Cardinal Bonzano. Leonard believed that Smith's faith banned him from the White House. For Leonard, "no Governor [could] kiss the Papal ring and [get] within gunshot of the White House and no nullificationist (sic) Governor ever [would] become a leader of a Constitution loving people."²⁸⁷ Leonard did not stop at Smith. Echoing the KKK, Leonard proceeded to ask for Anglo-Saxon unity against foreigners - particularly Latinos – who, he maintained, represented a big problem due to lack of law enforcement. Government officials allowed Latinos to enter into the country illegally. Leonard argued that in time "the Anglo-Saxons would see to it that the ideal of a Latino world were not attained in the U.S., but the ideals of a free, Christian land."²⁸⁸

Contrary to Leonard's expectations, his words got a negative reply. Protestants and members of both parties criticized his attitude. They considered Leonard's statement an example of bad taste and judgment. The President of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler, a Protestant himself, called those kinds of expressions totally un-Christian and un-American. Butler added it was "one more evidence of the character of the fight that was before those who proposed to promote real rather than nominal temperance, to maintain a high standard of Christian morals and Christian conduct and to protect at all cost the fundamental principles of American Government and American life."²⁸⁹ Sharing Butler's opinion, Republican Senator David A. Reed of Pennsylvania deplored Leonard's attitude.²⁹⁰

These disagreements represented a religious rivalry that would not disappear in the near future from American political life.

²⁸⁷ "Bishop declares faith bans Smith for White House," *New York Times*, August 9, 1926, 1.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁸⁹ "Butler denounces attack on Smith," *New York Times*, August 10, 1926, 1.

²⁹⁰ "Bishop's Speech Called Intolerant," *New York Times*, August 11, 1926, 5.

The Marshall Letter

During early 1927, the controversy surrounding Smith's religious beliefs reached a turning point. On March 23, *The New Republic* published an article titled "A Catholic President?" The author of the piece called on Smith to declare his position on the conflict between the state and the Church in México and wondering how it would effect his actions as president as well as to his policy toward México.²⁹¹

At that point, Smith already knew about another document questioning how his Catholicism would affect his presidency. "On the morning of March 25, all of New York papers and many journals in other cities carried in full or in abstract"²⁹² an article entitled "An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith." Written by a New York attorney and Episcopalian layman, Charles C. Marshall, it was later printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Smith considered it "the first time the qualifications of a man for public office were openly challenged because of his adherence to a particular religious belief."²⁹³

There were contradictory accounts of how Smith reacted to the letter. In his autobiography, Smith reported that he "promptly determined to make open answer to it and publish [his] reply in the same magazine."²⁹⁴ In Emily Smith Warner's biography of his father, she quoted one of her father's closet allies, Judge Joseph Proskauer. According to Proskauer, the publisher of *The Atlantic* sent a communication to Smith in March 1927 with an advance proof of the letter to be published in the magazine's April issue. The editor believed Smith might wish

²⁹¹ "A Catholic President?" *The New Republic* Volume L, Number 642 (March 23, 1927): 128-131.

²⁹² Henry F. Pringle, *Alfred E. Smith: A Critical Study*. (New York: Ams Press, 1970), 345.

²⁹³ Alfred E. Smith, *Up To Now: An Autobiography* (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1929), 367.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 367.

to prepare an answer. When one of Smith's leading advisors, Belle Moskowitz, showed the document to Smith, he refused to prepare a reply.²⁹⁵

Consequently Mrs. Moskowitz requested Judge Proskauer to come to Smith's headquarters at the Biltmore Hotel. Proskauer asked Smith "are you going to start work on your answer to this?" 'I'm not going to answer the damn thing,' [Smith] replied angrily."²⁹⁶

Proskauer insisted on the need to answer. The letter held that, because of his religion, Smith would be unable to be sworn in as president of the United States. The discussion made Smith recognize that "the Marshall letter raised questions of theology. At no time in my life have I ever pretended any fundamental knowledge of this subject..."²⁹⁷ According to his daughter, Smith added, "I never heard of these encyclicals and papal bulls and books that [Marshall] wrote about."²⁹⁸ After that, he requested that Proskauer, a Jew, answer the letter. Proskauer declined. Finally, Smith recognized the necessity of preparing a written reply. Knowing his limitations, Smith asked for help from Proskauer and Father Francis P. Duffy, who worked together to prepare a draft which they submitted to Smith. Once a final version was ready, Smith sent the document to Cardinal Hayes to check it for points of doctrine.²⁹⁹

The answer, entitled "Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies," was published in the May issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Marshall's letter and Smith's reply help to understand the differences between Protestants and Catholics not only in the American domestic political arena but also in the religious conflict in México.

²⁹⁵ Emily Smith Warner with Hawthorne Daniel, *The Happy Warrior: A biography of my father Alfred E. Smith* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1956), 181-183.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁹⁷ Smith, *Up To Now: An Autobiography*, 367.

²⁹⁸ Smith Warner with Daniel, *The Happy Warrior*, 183.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

At the beginning of his letter, Marshall made positive remarks about Smith's public performance. Marshall then got to the core of his argument.

...there is a note of doubt, a sinister accent of interrogation, not as to intentional rectitude and moral purpose, but as to certain conceptions which your fellow citizens attribute to you as a loyal and conscientious Roman Catholic, which in their minds are irreconcilable with that Constitution which as President you must support and defend, and with the principles of civil and religious liberty on which American institutions are based.³⁰⁰

Marshall pointed out that "to this consideration no word of yours, or on your behalf, has yet been addressed."³⁰¹

Smith firmly replied: "you imply that there is a conflict between religious loyalty to the Catholic faith and patriotic loyalty to the United States... no such thing as that is true. [Working as an elected officer] since 1903 I have never known any conflict between my official duties and my religious belief."³⁰²

Further, Marshall asked which of the two powers Smith would obey as president, those established under the guidance of the Pope or the ones written in the U.S. Constitution. Marshall quoted the Encyclical *The Christian Constitution of the States*, by Pope Leo XIII which read: "over the mighty multitude of mankind, God has set rulers with power to govern, and He has willed that one of them [the Pope] should be the head of all."³⁰³ After that Marshall questioned if Smith would accept that the jurisdiction of the state should prevail over religious authorities? If Smith accepted both teachings, how he would reconcile them?

³⁰⁰ Charles C. Marshall, "An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith," *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 139, No. 4 (April, 1927): 540.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 540.

³⁰² Alfred E. Smith, "Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies," *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 139, No. 5 (May 1927): 722.

³⁰³ Marshall, "An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith," 543.

Smith responded first with a question and then an assurance: “What is this conflict about which you talk? ... But in the wildest dreams of your imagination you can not conjure up a possible conflict between religious principle and political duty in the United States, except on the unthinkable hypothesis that some law was to be passed which violated the common morality of all God-fearing men.”³⁰⁴ Smith then quoted Cardinal [James] Gibbons, Archbishop [John] Ireland, and Bishop [John] England and referred to situations in which the discussion went around the prevalence of one power or another. Smith later stated he had not exercised any favoritism toward Catholics. He had appointed public officials on the basis of merit and not because of religious beliefs.³⁰⁵

Marshall brought education as a third issue. Marshall mentioned a case from Oregon in which “the Supreme Court had invalidated a law forbidding parents to educate their children at church schools.”³⁰⁶ Then Marshall stated that:

Nothing can be clearer to the American mind than that the plain political teaching of Pope Pius IX and of Pope Leo XIII, as set forth in their encyclical letters, is inconsistent with the peace and safety of the State within the meaning of those words as used by the Supreme Court of the United States in its great decision. That it is ‘not lawful for the State to hold in equal favor different kinds of religion’; that it is not universally lawful for the State and the Roman Catholic Church to be dissevered and divorced; that the various kinds of religion in theory have their place in the State, not by natural right but by favor; that dogmatic intolerance is not alone the incontestable right of the Roman Catholic Church, but her sacred duty; that in the case of conflicting laws of the State and the Roman Catholic Church the law of that Church shall prevail, are propositions that would make up a strange textbook for the instruction of American youth.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Smith, ‘Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies,’ 726.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 726, 727.

³⁰⁶ Pringle, *Alfred E. Smith: A Critical Study*, 351.

³⁰⁷ Marshall, ‘An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith,’ 544, 545.

Smith answered that he and his children went to a parochial school. They were never taught discrimination, intolerance or “that the laws of the State could be flouted.” He concluded “that the notion that any group of Catholics would teach such ideas is unthinkable.”³⁰⁸

A fourth topic of Marshall’s letter referred to the institution of marriage and its jurisdiction. Marshall wrote: “marriage is wrested from the State and appropriated to the Roman Catholic Church, its exercise reposing ultimately in the Pope. [Marshall cited the doctrine of Pope Pius IX], the Church proceeds in disregard of the law and sovereignty of the State, and claims, at its discretion, the right to annul and destroy the bond of the civil contract.” Marshall concluded by asking Smith: whether “such proceedings were consistent with the peace and safety of States?”³⁰⁹

Smith’s responded that in the case of marriage annulments,” the decree merely defined the status of the parties as communicants to the Church. Your Church refuses to recognize the ecclesiastical validity of divorces granted by the civil tribunals.”³¹⁰ Consequently there was no difference in the attitude of both Churches and their decrees in relation to the general laws of the United States.

It would have been impossible to skip the Mexican religious conflict in a debate like this. Marshall invoked “the official opinion that...William D. Guthrie prepared as a request of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of America.”³¹¹ Guthrie challenged the right of the Mexican government to deny juridical personality to the churches. Guthrie claimed those dispositions represented a violation of international law. Guthrie wrote “to project American opinion that the Mexican Constitution is intolerable because it invades the prerogatives of the ecumenical and

³⁰⁸ Smith, “Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies,” 727.

³⁰⁹ Marshall, “An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith,” 545, 546.

³¹⁰ Smith, “Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies,” 727.

³¹¹ Marshall, “An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith,” 546.

universal Roman Catholic Church.”³¹² Guthrie wrote that Catholics did not request an armed intervention “ because it is unlawful and unreasonable, but because history admonished them of the horrors of the civil war and the danger of inviting interference by foreign powers and arms...”³¹³ Marshall later pointed to the encyclical *The Christian Constitution of States* in which Pope Leo XIII wrote:

the only begotten son of God entrusted all the truths which He had taught in order that it might keep and guard them and with lawful authority explain them, and He commanded all nations to hear the voice of the [Roman Catholic] Church as if it were his own, threatening those who would not hear it with everlasting perdition.³¹⁴

Marshall concluded by asking Smith: “what authority you ascribe to that voice?” Smith responded that he had not read Mr. Guthrie’s brief; and appealed to the text of the Pastoral Letter published on December 12, 1926, which disclaimed an armed intervention in México. In an attempt to strike a balance, Smith asserted: “I recognize the right of no church to ask armed intervention by this country in the affairs of another, merely for the defense of the rights of a Church. But I do recognize the propriety of Church action to request the good offices of this country to help the oppressed of any land...”³¹⁵

After that, Smith made a closing statement recognizing his beliefs in the worship of God according to the faith and practice of the Roman Catholic Church but he also made clear that:

[he] recognized no power in the institution of [his] church to interfere with the operations of the Constitution of the United States or the enforcement of the law of the land ... [he] believed in the separation of the Church and the State,... in the support of public school,... in the right of every parent to choose whether his child shall be educated in a public school or in a religious school supported by those of his own faith, ... in the principle of noninterference by this country in the internal affairs of other nations and that we should stand

³¹² Ibid., 547.

³¹³ Ibid., 547.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 548.

³¹⁵ Smith, “Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies,” 728.

steadfastly against any such interference by whomsoever it may be urged. In his spirit I join with fellow Americans of all creeds in a fervent prayer that never again in this land will any public servant be challenged because of the faith in which he has tried to walk humbly with his God.³¹⁶

In general terms, Smith's reply received very favorable comments from politicians and members of other religions. Democratic Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York declared that the response represented a great step to clear the air in an issue that had threatened political tranquility for many years. "The governor's letter, Wagner predicted, will remove forever religious rancor from political affairs."³¹⁷ That sentiment was echoed in the words of Ambassador James W. Gerard, a Protestant himself, who considered the document "a fine, manly and convincing letter that will serve as a final end to the question of loyalty of Catholics to our Government."³¹⁸ For others, like Dr. Nathan Krass, a Rabbi, "the governor had accepted a great challenge and met it victoriously...The governor had stated he owes allegiance to Rome only in spiritual matters, that is to say, on questions concerning creed."³¹⁹ For the Rector of Saint Luke's Episcopal Church in New York, Rev. Dr. William T. Walsh, "Governor Smith's statement that he believed in absolute freedom of conscience for all men...was of a more far reaching effect than anything the Governor had said politically."³²⁰

Other parties, however, questioned Smith's response. Some critics pointed out, Smith's reply had a limited impact because it did not reach the general public. Others criticized the answer, not because the quality or the clarity of its content but due to the writing style. Critics pointed out that "undoubtedly it made an impression on the quality folk who read the *Atlantic Monthly* and on many others who saw excerpts quoted in newspapers, but it did not penetrate

³¹⁶ Ibid., 728.

³¹⁷ "Believes Smith Reply Ends Religion Issue," *New York Times*, April 22, 1927, 3.

³¹⁸ "Gerard Lauds Smith Reply," *New York Times*, April 25, 1927, Amusements, 26.

³¹⁹ "Praises Smith's Answer," *New York Times*, April 25, 1927, Amusements, 26.

³²⁰ "Governor's words Praised by Pastor," *New York Times*, April 25, 1927, Amusements, 26.

into those regions, mainly in rural America, where it would have done the most good.”³²¹ It was an undeniable truth.

The New York Times reported on an editorial published in *The Christian Herald*, written by *The Herald's* editor in chief Rev. Dr. Daniel A. Poling, who found Smith's letter an honest and acceptable answer. Poling nevertheless opposed Smith's candidacy not because of his religion but because he was anti-prohibitionist. Further, Poling made “a sharp distinction between that part of the Governor's answer written by him and the ecclesiastical answers furnished by Father Francis P. Duffy. The latter, the editorial declared, were not convincing.”³²² *The Christian Century* established a similar pattern.

Governor Smith is not a high authority on the theory or the history of the Catholic Church [something Smith himself recognized]. His technical advisor Father Duffy was a high authority but he was not in a position to make a disinterested pronouncement. A letter intended to clear the way for a Catholic to the presidency of the United States is not the place where one must look for dispassionate and accurate status of the relations of the Church and the State.³²³

Both Smith's adversaries and people working close to him concluded that the assistance Smith received from Catholic priests was a mistake. Smith's Secretary of State in New York, Robert Moses, believed that “Marshall's challenge should have been answered by Smith in his own forthright idiom rather than the loftily intellectual riposte pieced together by his advisers... it wasn't Smith. It lacked his natural brevity, roughness, downrightness and instinct for the jugular.”³²⁴

Smith had another opinion about that. For Smith, the reply represented a success, it “brought a new volume of mail to the Albany post office that taxed it to the utmost of its

³²¹ O'Connor, *The First Hurrah: A Biography of Alfred E. Smith*, 181.

³²² “Against Smith Candidacy,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1927, Amusements, 26.

³²³ “What the Smith reply settled and what it did not,” *The Christian Century* Editorial. Vol. XLIV, No. 18 (May 5, 1927): 549.

³²⁴ O'Connor, *The First Hurrah: A Biography of Alfred E. Smith*, 181, 182.

capacity... nothing in it [the reply] had ever been successfully challenged and that observation did not come to me from people of my own faith alone, it comes from fair-minded, reasonable, liberal and intelligent people.”³²⁵ Smith’s optimism, however, did not match the events of his presidential campaign. Bigotry and a nasty crusade headed by members of the KKK, other religions, and even advocates of the Democratic Party would prevail.

The 1928 Presidential Campaign: for some Religion did not represent the Main Issue but...

In spite of the problems with his Catholicism and anti-prohibition stance, Alfred E. Smith had a clear advantage in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1928. Smith’s advantage did not deter Senator Thomas James Walsh of Montana from entering the race in early 1928. Walsh’s decision to participate had nothing extraordinary except that another contender jumped into the contest. The process of nominating the Democratic presidential candidate, however, presented an unusual situation. In a country where most of the population professed Protestantism, by the first time two Catholics were seeking the presidential nomination of a major political party.

Despite professing the same faith, Smith and Walsh did not share similar points of view about other matters. Smith proposed the end of prohibition and had received support from the Tammany Hall machine. Walsh had nothing against Prohibition. He came from a barely populated state and had no connections to questionable political organizations. “The choice between a wet, Tammany Catholic, and a dry, rural Catholic suggested the possibility of a test to see whether Prohibitionist and Protestant Democrats, especially in the South, would support a

³²⁵ Smith, *Up To Now: An Autobiography*, 367, 368.

Catholic who did not symbolize the wet, machine-run metropolis.”³²⁶ Nonetheless, Walsh had some political liabilities. He lacked Smith’s charisma. Walsh supported McAdoo during the 1924 Democratic Convention, and his rivals denounced him “as a mere stalking horse for the Ku Klux Klan.”³²⁷ In the end, Walsh’s candidacy did not grow strongly enough to defeat a more charismatic candidate supported by a better organized political machine.

During the convention at Houston, in June 1928, Smith became the Democratic presidential candidate. Smith’s candidacy polarized opinions in America. Allan J. Lichtman summarized those attitudes in *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928*.

For anti-Catholics Protestants, Smith’s nomination presented the chance to join a noble crusade against a tangible menace. For Catholics a Smith victory seemed likely to enhance their prestige, whereas his defeat threatened the status they had already achieved. For civilian libertarians, the nomination of a Catholic provided a means of gauging the tolerance of protestant America. For all Americans, the fusion of religion and politics offered an endless source of fascinating speculation and dispute.³²⁸

Smith certainly confronted a nasty campaign. Opposition emerged not only from the Republican Party but also from Protestant Democrats, mainly in the South. Methodist Episcopal Bishop James G. Cannon, together with the leader of the Temperance Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Rev. Arthur J. Barton, organized the Committee of the Anti-Smith Democrats of Virginia. Cannon, also the President of the Anti-Saloon League, rejected Smith candidacy while maintaining his party loyalty. Cannon had a bitter confrontation with Wayne B. Wheeler, who controlled the Anti-Saloon League from Washington, over Wheeler’s proposition to constitute a third party as an alternative to Smith’s candidacy.³²⁹

³²⁶ Edmund A. Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956), 92.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

³²⁸ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, 58.

³²⁹ Robert Arthur Hohner, *Prohibition and Politics: The Life of Bishop James Cannon, Jr.* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 215, 216.

Besides Cannon and Barton, members of other churches engaged in a crusade to impede Smith from arriving at the White House. The leaders of this group included the editor of *The Christian Register*, Albert Diefenbacher; a pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City, John Roach Stanton; the secretary of the board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, Rev. Deets Picket; the moderator of the general Assembly of Presbyterians, Hugh Walker; and the convention of the Lutheran Editors of America.³³⁰

During the campaign, both sides focused on Prohibition as the reason for their disagreements. Their actions, however, demonstrated that prohibition served as a proxy for religious rivalries. One aspect of the campaign against Smith became an anti-Catholic campaign divided in three different dimensions. The first element consisted of scurrilous propaganda; the second involved emotional appeals from the Protestant press and clergy; the third included arguments founded on a scholarly analysis of what the nation could expect from sending a Catholic to the White House. General Manager of the *Fellowship Forum* James S. Vance synthesized the reason of the struggle in a single phrase: “Protestant Americanism versus Romanism.”³³¹

According to Lichtman, even if Catholic Church leaders yearned for the election of Al Smith, they were wise to refrain from courting Catholic support for the governor of New York.³³² Nevertheless, Smith’s opponents charged Catholics with mobilizing support for Smith. At the end of October 1928, *The New York Times* reported that Bishop Cannon accused Catholics of acting not as individuals but as members of their Church supporting Smith’s candidacy. Cannon quoted editorials printed in Catholic publications to proof his assertion. One of these

³³⁰ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, 60.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 58-61.

³³² *Ibid.*, 58.

publications was the official organ of The Catholic Missionary Union, *The Missionary* edited in Washington, D.C. under the direction of Cardinal Hayes. In its October issue, *The Missionary* published a prayer for Smith's success. In the same piece, the editorialist asked Catholics if they realized what life in America would be when it became fashionable to be Catholic. The editor next affirmed how the day wonderful would be when Americans woke up to discover the end of 400 years of an oppressive, dull, and sad atmosphere of a detested sect. Cannon also questioned the official organ of the Dioceses of Buffalo, N.Y., *The Union and Times*. In an article printed on October 4, the editorialist qualified as a fallacy the assertion that America was a Protestant country. "Once a Catholic became elected as President the drowning man, represented in the Protestant Church, would quickly sink from view. The remnants of Calvinism, Lutheranism, Wesleyan teachings and Episcopalism would die as their sects."³³³

Cannon's complaints did not rest long without an answer. The editor and manager of *The Union and Times*, Rev. Edward J. Ferger denied any action by the Catholic Church attempting to stir up intolerance, while associates of Cardinal Hayes denied that the editorial meant any intrusion into politics.³³⁴

It is hard to refute that religion represented a key issue during the campaign. In places like Tennessee, members of the Democratic Party found it difficult to sign up new members, because people were reluctant to be linked with a Catholic candidate.³³⁵

In spite of his efforts, Smith failed to put aside confrontations based on religion. Smith found a hostile environment in Oklahoma City. The levels of animosity were so high that, contrary to his advisers' opinion, Smith decided to speak frankly about the matter. On September 20, 1928, Smith delivered a speech outlining not only his political record in New

³³³ "Catholics Accused by Bishop Cannon," *New York Times*, October 20, 1928, Lost and Found, 18.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

³³⁵ "Split in Tennessee on Smith's Religion," *New York Times*, September 26, 1928, 3.

York but also refuting those attacks based on his religious beliefs. Smith mentioned that religious pluralism had characterized his governorship: “in the Cabinet of the governor sit fourteen men. Three of the fourteen are Catholics, ten Protestants, and one of the Jewish faiths...”³³⁶ To assure his campaign was not conducted on religious basis, Smith declared:

I do not want any Catholic in the United States to vote for me because I am a Catholic. If any Catholic in this country believes that the welfare, the wellbeing, the prosperity, the growth and the expansion of the United States is best conserved and best promoted by the election of Mr. Hoover, I want him to vote for Hoover and not for me. But on the other hand, I have the right to say that any citizen of this country that believes I can promote its welfare, that believes I can promote its welfare, that I am capable of steering the ship of State safely through the next four years, and then votes against me because of my religion, he is not a real, pure, genuine American.³³⁷

Regarding separation between State and Church, Smith reminded “the Democrats... that [they] belong to the party of Thomas Jefferson, whose proudest boast was that he was the author of the Virginia statute for religious freedom.”³³⁸

Historians still debate the role played by the Republican Party and its candidate Herbert Hoover. Hoover always denied any involvement in the accusations against Smith. Lichtman quoted Hoover’s words during a press conference the day after Smith’s speech in Oklahoma, saying that he suffered from the whispering campaign far more than Governor Smith and that religious intolerance was primarily a manifestation of the internal politics of the Democratic Party. Lichtman, however, expressed some doubts persisting about the sincerity of those words.

In short, the evidence shows that Republicans mounted no campaign against anti-Catholic agitation, even within their own ranks. The party organization neither disciplined those who pandered to religious bigotry nor attempted to police their activities. Until forced by circumstance, Herbert Hoover refused to denounce religious bigotry forcefully; his

³³⁶ “Text of Gov. Smith’s Oklahoma Speech, Challenging Church and Political Critics,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1928, 2.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

justifications for this restraint seem implausible when juxtaposed against personal vilification of Smith that was sanctioned by the Hoover campaign. Fragmentary evidence further suggests that the Republican leadership deliberately set out, covertly, to exploit Protestant opposition to the election of a Catholic president.³³⁹

In his autobiography, Smith argued that the Republican Party was involved in attacks full of religious bigotry and personal vilification. Smith quoted a letter written by the Vice Chairman of the Eastern Republican National Advisory Committee, George H. Mosses, to an editor of a newspaper in a small town in North Carolina. According to Smith's account Moses sent to a person named Zeb Vance Walser an article for newspaper publication. Moses described the piece as "red hot stuff," and asked Walser to print it in some North Carolina papers, and asked for copies.³⁴⁰ Articles with derogatory information about Smith went to newspapers around the country in a campaign to show that Smith had opponents in each city and towns.

The extreme degree of intolerance led to ridiculous statements. In his autobiography Smith wrote that:

I was talking to a prominent citizen of Georgia who told me that in certain churches in that state they had pictures of me attending the ceremonies incident to the opening of the Holland Tunnel under the Hudson River between New York and New Jersey, and he expressed himself as surprise to think that opponents of mine were able to convince large numbers of people that the tunnel was actually to be constructed not to New Jersey but into the basement of the Vatican in Rome in the event of my election.³⁴¹

Smith also related that "one man made the deliberate statement over the radio that a convent in New Jersey was purchased by the Catholic Church as the American residence of the

³³⁹ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, 67.

³⁴⁰ Smith, *Up To Now: An Autobiography*, 415.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 413, 414.

Pope in the event of [Smith's] election."³⁴² That imaginary purchase was supposedly to establish Papal headquarters to control the U.S. government.

Some people suggested extreme measures to end the bigotry. For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the candidate for Governor of the State of New York, recommended that "persons responsible for the literature against Governor Smith on religious grounds should be put on ships and sent out of the country and that imprisonment was too mild a punishment for them."³⁴³

In spite of the doubts stated by Litchman, nothing links any of these episodes to Hoover. "The presidential campaign between Al Smith and Herbert Hoover brought out the intellectual best in the two men and the worst in their supporters... Neither candidate directly attacked the other... Hoover refused to conduct his campaign through debate or to mention Smith's name in public."³⁴⁴

In the end, Smith lost the election by a margin of 6.4 million votes. Smith got 40.8% of the popular vote and 87 electoral votes against Hoover's 444. The old traditionally compact Democratic South splintered. The Upper South, together with Florida and Texas, voted for the Republican candidate. Smith got the Southern States of Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina plus Massachusetts and Rhode Island in the East.

Not long after the election, analysts began debating the role religion played in it. In 1931, political scientists Roy V. Peel and Thomas C. Donnelly concluded that "although the majority of Methodists and Baptists were opposed to Smith, it cannot be accurately said what proportion of them based their opposition to Smith on his religion alone... Competent observers in the South and the West have assured us that prohibition was in many cases a smoke-screen for

³⁴² Ibid., 414.

³⁴³ "Roosevelt Assails Campaign Bigotry," *New York Times*, October 18, 1928, 3.

³⁴⁴ Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (New York: Waveland Press, Inc., 1992), 129.

bigotry.”³⁴⁵ In an appendix, Peel and Donnelly quoted the conclusions of statistical studies elaborated by economist Irving Fisher, in 1928, and sociologist William Fielding Ogburn in 1930. According to Fisher, religion’s feeling was aroused in the campaign, helping Hoover because the country was predominantly Protestant. According to Fisher, a state was Protestant or Catholic on the basis of which religion had the majority of church members. Of the thirty two Protestant states, only two swung to Smith. Six of the fourteen Catholics states actually swung toward Hoover”³⁴⁶ Ogburn affirmed that “prohibition sentiment was three times more decisive an influence in the election than the religious issue.”³⁴⁷ Ogburn’s statistical study, however, focused on only 173 northern counties hardly enough to support a national pattern.

In 1950, Edmund A. Moore wrote that “although the defeat of Smith was caused by a combination of forces and factors, his religion played a large though not wholly calculable part”³⁴⁸ Six years later on the basis of a statistical analysis, Ruth C. Silva stated that “there was no statistically significant association between the index of Smith’s gain and either Protestantism or Catholicism.”³⁴⁹

Writing in 1979, Lichtman argued that

of all possible explanations for the distinctive alignments of 1928, religion is the best... Regardless of their ethnic background, their stand on prohibition, their economics status, and other politically salient attributes, Catholics and Protestants split far more decisively in 1928 than in either previous or subsequent elections...Both Protestants and Catholics responded to religious tensions of 1928.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ Roy V. Peel and Thomas C. Donnelly, *The 1928 Campaign: An Analysis* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1975), 63.

³⁴⁶ “Fisher Analyzes Hoover’s victory; Holds Women’s Vote, Religious, Dry and Prosperity Issues were important factors,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1928, N1.

³⁴⁷ “Says Wet Issue led in defeat of Smith,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1930, 22.

³⁴⁸ Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President*, 200.

³⁴⁹ Ruth C. Silva, *Rum, Religion and Votes: 1928 Re-Examined* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), 39.

³⁵⁰ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, 231.

Once the elections concluded, the domestic religious friction settled down but did not end. Americans of different faiths continued to be immersed in the religious conflict south of the border. The Catholic hierarchy abandoned its radical position and engaged in negotiations with Mexican and American authorities. During the presidential campaign, President Coolidge avoided taking sides and appointed Dwight W. Morrow as U.S. Ambassador in México. In the middle of the presidential campaign, Coolidge and Morrow were able to open the door for negotiations between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. The Church was represented by the American Catholic hierarchy with the unofficial participation of the U.S. government. Catholic priests had other things to do besides devoting their efforts to campaign in favor of Smith's candidacy.

Chapter Five

THE TIME OF THE RADICALS BEGAN TO END WHILE REASON EMERGED

While candidates in the United States contested an election in which religion divisions came to the fore, the religious conflict in México raged on. In responding to the situation in México, the American government played its cards very well. President Coolidge's policy of restraint regarding the religious conflict in Mexico yielded positive outcomes. Coolidge kept pressure on the Mexican government in order to stop the implementation of the Oil Laws affecting property rights of American citizens in México. Ambassador Sheffield played the hardliner role up to the point where his presence represented an obstacle for any further progress related to the oil and religious problems. At the same time, President Coolidge stood firm against pressures from U.S. Catholics. He refused to favor any of the belligerents in the Mexican conflict.

Despite the points of contention between their countries, President Coolidge officially kept an open and friendly relationship with President Elías Calles. That attitude would provide room for President Coolidge in domestic politics. No matter how high the level of bitterness reached during the months to come, Coolidge continued with his quiet but effective method of negotiation.

At home, the religious issue did not get out of hand in the presidential campaign of 1928. Protestants were not going to oppose the dispositions under Article VI of the American Constitution. Religious differences had a minor influence on the outcome of the election. Mexican religious conflict, however, would require more time and different skills.

A New Era in the U.S.-México Relations

In September 1927, President Coolidge took a very important step toward the resolution of the religious conflict between the Catholic Church and the Mexican government as well as the oil controversy between the Mexican government and American oil companies. Coolidge appointed Dwight W. Morrow as American Ambassador in México. Some U.S. critics expressed their disagreement with that nomination, arguing that Morrow had no experience as a diplomat but only as financier. *El Universal Gráfico*, *El Universal* and *Excelsior*, major Mexican newspapers printed comments skeptical of the nomination but expressing hope for an improvement in the U. S.-Mexican relations.³⁵¹

Before leaving Washington, Morrow took the advice of Judge Morgan J. O'Brien and Cardinal Hayes, and met with the General Secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Father John J. Burke.³⁵² As result, Morrow got a broad perspective of how to approach the religious conflict in México. The meeting was the beginning of private and unofficial negotiations between representatives of the American government with leaders of the Catholic Church. Before addressing México's conflict between Church and state, Morrow needed first to find a solution to another conflict: the oil problem.

Morrow arrived in México City on October 23. Six days later, he presented his credentials to the Mexican president. On November 3, Morrow had the first of many breakfasts with President Elías Calles. A mutual empathy developed between them. The dialogue was open and frank, taking negotiations of the oil problem and the religious conflict into new stages.

³⁵¹ "Naming of Morrow surprises Mexicans," *New York Times*, September 22, 1927, 3; "Morrow Accepted by Mexican Editors," *New York Times*, September 25, 1927, Editorial General News, E1.

³⁵² United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 326.

During the next two weeks, Morrow met with government officials and Mexican businessmen searching for more first hand information. After his first official meeting with Elías Calles, the U.S. Ambassador wrote, “the President expressed the hope that I would feel free at all times to come directly to him, stating that he was not a diplomat, and that he thought many of the matters as to which there were differences of opinion between the two governments could be readily adjusted in personal meetings, but that diplomatic notes tended to separate further the Governments.”³⁵³ The meeting represented the beginning of a new era for the U.S.-México relations. Undersecretary of State, Robert E. Olds pointed out in a letter to Morrow: “I can not help feeling that you are on the right track and have already made real progress. At any rate it delights us all, to see the old method of long-armed dealing scrapped, and the contrary method of direct personal contact tried.”³⁵⁴ Morrow had turned things around in a single reunion.

Morrow was aware of a new attitude of the Mexican authorities related to the oil problem. During the opening session of Congress, on September 1, 1927, President Elías Calles stated that: “Mexico was willing to listen in a spirit of justice and equity to any concrete case which might be presented.”³⁵⁵ With that in mind, ten days after their first meeting, Morrow had another conference with the Mexican president. During the meeting, they explored several alternatives to end the oil controversy. Those options were related to a decision of the Mexican Supreme Court to an inquiry presented by the oil companies related to the retroactivity of the law. The Mexican president stated that a final decision would take at least two months.

³⁵³ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1927* Volume III “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” November 8, 1927, File 812.6363/24211 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942), 188.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., “The Under Secretary of State (Olds) to the Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow),” November 16, 1927, File 812.6363/2433A , 193.

³⁵⁵ “Calles in Message Hopes to see U.S. Clashes Settled,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 1927, 1.

The verdict, however, took less time than expected. On November 17, the Mexican Supreme Court struck down the provision in the Petroleum Laws that established time limits on foreign concessions. In December, the Mexican Congress revoked the retroactivity of such laws. The Mexican Congress also recognized the validity of foreign concessions on which the concessionaries had made positive acts toward improvement prior to 1917. In two months, U.S.-México relations shifted from night to day.

President Coolidge pointed out in his State of the Union Address of 1927:

We have lately had some difference with Mexico relative to the injuries inflicted upon our nationals and their property within that country. A firm adherence to our rights and a scrupulous respect for the sovereignty of Mexico, both in accordance with the law of nations, coupled with patience and forbearance, it is hoped will resolve all our differences without interfering with the friendly relationship between the two governments.³⁵⁶

With One Problem Solved, Taking Care of the Next

With one problem solved, Morrow continued negotiations with the Mexican President and the Catholic hierarchy in the United States to find a solution to the religious conflict. At Morrow's suggestion, Olds met with the General Secretary of the NCWC, John J. Burke, a couple of times at the end of December 1927. The results were unsuccessful. Burke rejected Olds' proposition to go to México for a meeting with President Elías Calles. After that, in his role of General Secretary of the NCWC, Burke submitted a letter to Chairman of the NCWC Administrative Committee, Edward Joseph Hanna the Archbishop of San Francisco. In the letter, Burke rejected any possibility of engaging in direct negotiations with the Mexican government. Hanna answered to the contrary. Consequently, Burke adopted a more open attitude. In early January 1928, in an interview with Olds, Burke agreed to have an appointment

³⁵⁶ Calvin Coolidge. "State of the Union Address" Washington, D.C. December 6, 1927. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/about.html/>. (April 26, 2006).

with the Mexican president to discuss possible solutions to the religious conflict. Olds first made the necessary arrangements for a second meeting between Father Burke and Ambassador Morrow. That meeting took place in January 1928, in La Habana, Cuba, where Ambassador Morrow was attending the sixth Pan-American Conference.³⁵⁷ Morrow gave an account of this meeting in a letter to Secretary of State Kellogg. Morrow stated that “Father Burke again called on me for the purpose of discussing the religious situation in Mexico. As a consequence of these talks Father Burke requested [Morrow] to ascertain whether President [Elías] Calles would receive him if he asked for an interview and came to Mexico for that purpose.”³⁵⁸ This represented a first step on a long road to reconciliation.

Despite some leaks mentioning possible talks between representatives of the American Catholic hierarchy and Mexican authorities, the negotiations to seal the meeting between Elías Calles and Burke took place in general terms with a great deal of secrecy. Even a key player in the Mexican government’s campaign in the American press, the Mexican Consul in New York, Arturo M. Elías, remained unaware of events leading to that meeting. On February 13, 1928, Elías sent a telegram to the private secretary of President Elías Calles, Soledad González. The Mexican Consul commented that the American press had been publishing news reports stating that the Catholic Church was looking for an agreement to end the religious conflict in Mexico. The press suggested that Ambassador Morrow was the intermediary attempting to arrange a meeting between President Elías Calles and members of the Catholic Hierarchy. Reports also named Father Burke as a possible mediator. According to Elías, Father Burke, who had been in México, was capable and astute. Elías wrote that Burke was one of the American priests responsible for as yet unsuccessful a campaign spreading among American public opinion lies

³⁵⁷ Redinger, *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution: 1924-1936*, 77.

³⁵⁸ United States Department of State *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 326.

about the situation in México. Having failed to accomplish their primary goal, warned Elías, the priests were attempting to show the Mexican government as weak and willing to accept any proposal coming from the priesthood. Elías, without providing evidence, blamed the Jesuits for that campaign and the appointment of Father Burke.³⁵⁹

Obviously, Consul Elías did not have precise information, and Father Burke did not belong to the Jesuits but to the Paulist Congregation. The Jesuits did, however, exercise some influence in resolving the conflict through the role played by Father Edmund Walsh. Moreover, the Consul did not know about the most recent activities of Morrow, the State Department, and the Mexican authorities. In February 1928, President Elías Calles had already discussed with the Ambassador the possibility of the meeting with the Paulist Father. Consul Elías' negative opinion of Father Burke may have derived from some articles on the religious conflict in Mexico the priest had published in *The New York Times* years before. In one of them, Burke questioned the legality of the Constitution of 1917 because the authors of the laws had not been elected through popular vote. Burke described the conflict as a struggle of Plutarco Elías Calles and his government against the Roman Catholic Church of the whole world.³⁶⁰ In another article, Burke wrote: "by confiscating all buildings used as churches, schools, benevolent institutions, parish records and constructions and denying the right to acquire others, it reduces the exercises of the religion ministers to absolute dependency of the federal and village officers and subject the ministers to the tyranny of even village authorities."³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ "Telegrama de Arturo Elías a Soledad González. Febrero 13, 1928. "Carpeta: Arturo M. Elías (1928-1934) Expediente: 55, Legajo: 2/12, Inventario: 1719, Gaveta: 26, (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca).

³⁶⁰ "The Case for the Church: The Church in Mexico is fighting for fundamental principles upon which our own Church is found," *New York Times*, August 1, 1926, XX1.

³⁶¹ "Charges Denial of Rights," *New York Times*, August 7, 1926, 2.

Leaks about the Morrow-Burke meetings and the possibility of an interview with the Mexican President represented a temporary obstacle for the U.S. Ambassador's proposals. As a first reaction, the Mexican president "felt that no good purpose could at that time be served by Father Burke coming to Mexico."³⁶²

Besides these doubts, Morrow's efforts encountered other obstacles from Rome because Pius XI continued playing a double game through Cardinal Secretary of State Enrico Gasparri. On one hand, the Pope authorized members of the American Catholic hierarchy to engage in negotiations with the Mexican government. At the same time, Catholic layman and other priests not only disseminated strong critiques against the Mexican authorities but also proposed tribunals of supposedly public opinion to judge them.

In February 1928, a Catholic layman and founder editor of *The Commonwealth*, Michael Williams, published both a letter addressed to the Irish writer George Bernard Shaw in August 1927, as well as Shaw's answer. Williams, who worked for the bishops' National Catholic War Council, precursor of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and later, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops,³⁶³ wrote that he went to Rome and after two months there he got a document from Cardinal Gasparri which, according to Williams, stated that the "Holy Sees regards the present situation of Catholics in Mexico as the worst persecution ever known - explicitly declaring it worse than those suffered by the Church under Nero, Domitian, [and] Caligula..."³⁶⁴ Williams also mentioned that "the Pope says the reason why the secular world does not know the truth about the persecution is the success of the Mexican government in

³⁶² United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III "The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State," July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 326, 327.

³⁶³ Paul Bauman, "Catholics and Democracy; Michael Williams and the Culture Wars," *The Commonwealth* Vol. 131, No. 9 (November 5, 2004): 10.

³⁶⁴ Michael Williams, "Bernard Shaw, Mexico and the Pope," *The Commonwealth* Vol. VII, No. 13 (February 1, 1928): 1002.

suppressing the news about it. Foreign journalists confined to Mexico City are under the absolute control of [Elías] Calles.”³⁶⁵ In the same article, Williams pointed out that he asked for publication of this letter to a syndicated news agency, which name he omitted to mention, but the agency refused to publish because it was considered as Catholic propaganda. Then Williams quoted Shaw’s answer mentioning “that he [could not] imagine what the American press [was] thinking of in refusing to publish what [was] practically an interview with the Pope”³⁶⁶ Williams finally acknowledged that he offered the document he got from Cardinal Gasparri to *The New York Times*. The piece was published [in a polish version in which the Pope never mentioned Nero or Caligula or that all foreign journalists in México were under control of the Mexican authorities] on Sunday, October 2, 1927.³⁶⁷ After that, Williams proceeded to add that only the major newspapers in the country had covered the religious conflict. Most of the newspapers, reviews and magazines did not. “The same statement [was] true of the American religious press, except of course the Catholic press.”³⁶⁸ Williams did not stop there. He suggested the creation of a

non-sectarian, non-governmental Commission of Inquiry concerning the Religious Problem in México...such a Commission could determine in the court of public opinion whether the Mexican government [was] right in accusing the Catholic clergy ...and the American public would be able to judge whether or not that government [was] justified in the measures put into effect against the Catholic Christians.³⁶⁹

Williams was not alone in his position; Bishop Díaz Barreto assumed an attitude similar to him. Díaz wrote an article published on January 11, 1928 in *The Commonweal*. In that piece Díaz Barreto pointed out that: “the position of the bishops remains precisely the same [as in

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 1002.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 1003.

³⁶⁷ Michael Williams, “Preservation of World Peace and Union of the World against Bolshevism in his Thoughts – Mexican situation also Occupies Him,” *New York Times*, October 2, 1927, XX3.

³⁶⁸ Michael Williams, “Bernard Shaw, Mexico and the Pope,” *The Commonweal* Vol. VII, No. 13 (February 1, 1928): 1003.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 1004.

1926]... we demanded, in the name of the Catholic people of México the abrogation of certain clauses in the Constitution and the reform of others.”³⁷⁰ An analogous statement appeared in another article Díaz Barreto published in April 1928 in *The North American Review* attacking the Mexican authorities. He made a comparison between the American legislation and the principles of the Catholic Church. Looking for support in his struggle, Díaz declared that: “the philosophy which animates anti-religious legislation in México is as much opposed to American political ideals as is to Catholic principles, and is in fact the source, on the Mexican side, of all difficulties which have arisen between the two countries.”³⁷¹ This was good rhetoric, except that Bishop Díaz’ statement missed something. The American Constitution established religious tolerance for members of all faiths, something the Catholic Church did not accept. In México, Catholics demanded a return to a monopolistic approach to faith similar to the one it had exercised for more than three centuries. The differences between the governments of México and the United States rested on issues other than religion. Díaz, closed his article playing on the fear card that the “same philosophy is being constantly spread through Latin America and constitutes a menace that can not be ignored by any lover of peace or good government.”³⁷² Morrow nevertheless continued his efforts to find a solution to the Mexican religious conflict.

Entering Into a New Stage

In March 1928, Morrow finally convinced President Elías Calles to meet with Reverend John J. Burke. Burke would come to México as official envoy of the Papal Delegate Archbishop Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi. Fumasoni was in charge of the Mexican affairs for the Vatican. On

³⁷⁰ “What the Church in Mexico Wants: A Statement by Bishop Díaz,” *The Commonwealth* Vol. VII, No. 10 (January 11, 1928): 918.

³⁷¹ “Pascual Díaz, “State vs. Church in México,” *The North American Review* Vol. CCXXV, No. 842 (April 1928): 408.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 408.

March 29, 1928, Burke sent a letter to the Mexican President. In the opening statement, Burke said: according to information provided to me by people who I considered well informed, your intentions in any sense were directed toward the destruction of Church's identity or even disturb its spiritual activities; your only goal had been the enforcement of the dispositions written under the Mexican laws and the Constitution. Father Burke explored the possibility that, without disobeying the prevailing law, the Mexican priests could find a way to exercise their religious activities and later make some changes in the Mexican legislation.³⁷³ This opinion differed from Father Burke's early statements written in his article published in *The Forum* in August 1926. In that piece he stated:

to know those provisions of the Mexican Constitution, and the acts of the Mexican Government and its agents, is to know that they are absolutely irreconcilable with justice and the rights of man. They tell of warfare against religion, a deliberate endeavor to destroy its growth; to pull out its roots. Our whole national life has been a protest against such iniquity. It is abhorrent to every human individual of fair play.³⁷⁴

There is no recollection of whom or who was responsible for Burke's new attitude. It could be a result of the advice of Archbishop Hanna or a consequence of the meetings with Olds and Morrow. Whatever influenced this change did an excellent job. The ground had been set for a possible solution to the religious conflict. The next step would be to start the negotiations.

During early April, Father Burke and the legal advisor of the NCWC, William Frederick Montavon traveled secretly to México City. Ambassador Morrow accompanied them to the Port of Veracruz on the East Coast. On April 4, 1928 they met with the Mexican President for six hours. At the end, Ambassador Morrow reported that "President [Elías] Calles and Father Burke appeared to make an excellent mutual impression one on the other and were able to discuss the

³⁷³ Carta de John J. Burke a Plutarco Elías Calles, Marzo 29, 1928 en Carlos Macías, editor. *Plutarco Elías Calles Correspondencia Personal (1919-1945)*, 201.

³⁷⁴ John J. Burke. "Mexico We Have Ever Near Us," *The Forum* Vol. LXXVI, No. 2 (August 1926): 309.

situation in a broad and liberal way and without rancor.”³⁷⁵ The following dialogue provided an example:

[When Burke asked President Elías Calles], why does the government keep the churches closed? [Elías] Calles replied, the Mexican government has never forbidden priests to officiate or closed any church. They can be opened tomorrow if priests obey the Mexican law requiring members of all professions including the clergy, to register. The trouble is that your highest authority, the Pope, has forbidden the priests to obey the laws of México. Therefore, it is the Church which is responsible for the lack of religious ceremonies in Mexico-not the government.³⁷⁶

Morrow considered the meeting a success, and he pointed out: “They exchanged letters which, if they had been ratified by Father Burke's superiors, would have led to a prompt resumption of public worship in the churches and might well have laid the basis for a later modification of the objectionable laws.”³⁷⁷ Years later, Josephus Daniels provided the best summary of what happened. “The preliminary talk, he wrote, did not look as if agreement was near, but the truth was that [Elías] Calles was looking for a way out without surrender, and so were the leaders of the Catholic Church.”³⁷⁸ The leaders of the groups in conflict had realized it represented a no win game, but they needed to convince or force the extremists on both sides before reaching an agreement.

At the end of the summit, the Mexican president delivered a letter to Father Burke, pointing out that the Mexican laws had no intention to destroy Church’s identity or interfere with its spiritual activities. Elías Calles added that he would always be open to hear, without prejudice, any complaint about injustices derived from excesses committed by those trying to

³⁷⁵ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III, “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 327.

³⁷⁶ Josephus Daniels, *Shirt-sleeve Diplomat* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 275.

³⁷⁷ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III, “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 327.

³⁷⁸ Daniels, *Shirt-Sleeve Diplomat*, 275.

enforce the laws.³⁷⁹ With that letter in his bag, Father Burke returned to the United States, “instead of the matter being reported promptly to Rome by cable, as had been anticipated, it was delayed to get an opinion from the Mexican bishops on a possible method of settlement.”³⁸⁰ Bishop’s opinion would be a setback for Father Burke’s expectations.

The Mexican bishops were slow in changing their attitude. They always tried to win everything in one move. At the end of April, under the leadership of Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, a group of ten Mexican bishops held a conference in San Antonio, Texas. During the meeting, the bishops discussed the proposal presented by Burke. In general terms, they approved the content of the document but objected that the Mexican authorities did not totally satisfy their demands. They asked for changes in the Mexican Constitution but left the final decision to the Holy See. Days later, Bishop Díaz Barreto publicly ratified that position at the silver jubilee of the Catholic Alumni Sodality of Philadelphia. Díaz Barreto emphasized that “The Church will make no compromise on principles... at present there are no signs of either the clergy or the people giving up the fight to gain freedom.”³⁸¹ Bishop Díaz’ attitude represented an example of a desire to win all at once.

Father Burke, however, tried to keep negotiations alive. He sent a letter to President Elías Calles “in which [Burke] expressed the hope that the President might give additional and more explicit assurances than those contained in his letter of April 4th.”³⁸² As soon as Ambassador Morrow knew about that epistle, he called Robert Olds and explained it would be quite difficult to get a sudden change in México’s president’s proposal. Morrow recommended

³⁷⁹ Carlos Macías, editor. *Plutarco Elías Calles Correspondencia Personal (1919-1945)*, “Carta de Plutarco Elías Calles a John J. Burke,” Abril 4, 1928, 202.

³⁸⁰ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 327.

³⁸¹ “Sees No Peace in Mexico,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1928, 11.

³⁸² United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III, The Ambassador in Mexico to the Secretary of State, File 812.04/8956, July 23, 1928, 327.

that Burke return to México, this time with Archbishop Ruiz y Flores. Olds got in touch with Burke, who gladly accepted the idea. That part represented the easiest component of the deal; the other part would require a major effort to convince the Mexican president to meet with an official of the Mexican Catholic Church. Elías Calles did not forget how the bishop had repeatedly made derogatory comments towards the Mexican government. In spite of that, Ambassador Morrow took the proposal to President Elías Calles. As expected, the Mexican president initially rejected the idea. He argued “it would be impossible for him [Ruiz y Flores] to come without getting into discussions with Mexican prelates and with prominent Catholic laymen in México, and that publicity would consequently result.”³⁸³ Elías Calles also mentioned the presence of some extremists, small in numbers but powerful enough, who opposed any settlement. For them, the visit of Ruiz would represent an “opportunity to impede the work that Father Burke was trying to do”³⁸⁴ Burke maintained that, without the presence of Ruiz y Flores, he had no reason to continue the negotiations. With the dialogue in such a fragile state, Morrow had no other choice but to visit President Elías Calles again. Morrow asked Elías Calles for a more flexible attitude and to accept the participation of the Archbishop in the talks. In the end, Elías Calles reluctantly agreed to Morrow’s request. The next step was to keep Ruiz’s visit in secret.

Not all Catholic Americans had decided to adopt a conciliatory attitude. People like the Archbishop of San Antonio Arthur J. Drossaerts continued to criticize his government for the lack of action against the Mexican authorities.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Ibid., 328.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 328.

³⁸⁵ Alfonso Taracena, *La Verdadera Revolución Mexicana: 1928-1929* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Porrúa. “Sepan Cuantos...” Número 616, 1992), 76.

In the mean time, the Mexican president, accompanied by Álvaro Obregón, traveled to the city of Celaya, in the central state of Guanajuato. There, on April 15, the Minister of Education José Manuel Puig Casauranc delivered a speech inviting to the bishops to reconcile with the Mexican authorities. The Catholic hierarchy welcomed those words. At the same time, in another part of that city, a group of Catholic fanatics deliberated about how to kill Obregón. They considered poisoning and bombs. In the end, the members of the plot decided to wait for a better opportunity.³⁸⁶ Without knowing about the plot, the Mexican authorities returned to México City, where negotiations with Church authorities looked promising.

In the middle of May, Burke, Montavon, and Ruiz y Flores arrived in Laredo, Texas, where a private train car was waiting for them. There they met the representative of the Mexican President, M. F. Smithers, and traveled to México City. The Mexican authorities tried very hard to keep Ruiz's visit a secret. There were no public interviews or press releases. The group met only with the Mexican President, the American Ambassador, or somebody else involved in the conferences.

On May 17, they met with the Mexican President in his official residence at the Chapultepec Castle. The prevailing mood during the talks promised that a new era would come. Some clarifications were required at the beginning, but reason prevailed. By the end, it seemed that the conclusion of the religious conflict was near. Opening the conference, Father Burke presented the suggestions reached by the Mexican Bishops during their gathering in San Antonio. President Elías Calles answered that he could not comply with those proposals. He did concede that the Church could name the priests to be registered by the government. Taking into account that position,

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 58, 59.

Archbishop Ruiz expressed himself as willing to address a new letter to President [Elías] Calles in substantially the form of the letter written by Father Burke to President [Elías] Calles on March 29, 1928, with the important addition that a special reference was made to a public speech made by Dr. Puig Casauranc, Minister of Education, on April 15, 1928, at Celaya, which speech had been pleasing to the Church.³⁸⁷

Next, the Archbishop suggested a similar answer to the one previously sent by Elías Calles to Burke, “and that when the proper authority [presumably the Pope] had been received the two letters should be made public and the priests should be directed by the proper authorities to return to their churches.”³⁸⁸ Everybody agreed with that proposal, but the clerics needed to send a message to Rome for final approval. Predicting that kind of outcome, Ambassador Morrow had arranged with under-secretary Olds to be available the whole night waiting for a telegram in case any agreement came out. As soon as Olds received the communication signed by Burke, he took it to the office of the Papal Delegate. Fumasoni sent the message to Rome and waited for a reply. Archbishop Ruiz y Flores believed an immediate reply that allowed opening the churches on May 27 to celebrate the Feast of the Pentecost. Everything seemed a matter of patience; nobody in México expected a delay in the reply from the offices of the Holy See.

What happened next represented a serious setback for everybody searching for a solution. Who ever delayed the decision did not take into account how many people would perish in the months to come. The Church’s negotiators Burke, Ruiz y Flores, and Montavon had decided to stay in México until an official approval came from Rome; instead they got an order to return to Washington and proceed immediately to Rome. The message added that the only one allowed to travel there would be Archbishop Ruiz y Flores. Father Burke was put aside as a negotiator of the agreement. On his way to Rome, Archbishop Ruiz revealed the purpose of his travel in an

³⁸⁷ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 328, 329.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 329.

interview in Paris. He emphasized that: “reconciliation between Church and State in Mexico may be effected soon, through Papal intercession.”³⁸⁹ That declaration worsened the situation in México where, a couple of days earlier, members of the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty had sent a telegram to the Pope in which they rejected any possible agreement to end the conflict. Archbishop Ruiz’s statement had a negative impact on the Mexican government. In notes later sent to Burke, the Mexican prelate would argue that his words had been misinterpreted. Negotiations reached a point where favorable settlement looked unlikely in the near future.

The Pope’s curia in Rome believed negotiations required a slow pace, and continued playing politics trying to please everybody. Church officials speculated that delaying a final decision would allow them to get better terms in future negotiations with Álvaro Obregón, the intended future president of México. During early June, almost a month before to presidential elections in México, Ambassador Morrow went to Washington. There the news coming from across the Atlantic regarding the religious conflict in México was that “the subject [the proposal for solution of the conflict was submitted] to the Congregation on Extraordinary Foreign Affairs... The Vatican was very reluctant to authorize the delivery of the letter which Archbishop Ruiz had prepared.”³⁹⁰ The Vatican’s reluctance stemmed from the pressure exercised by Mexican Catholic extremists who traveled to Rome and expressed their reasons for opposing any settlement, the hope to get a better deal from Obregon’s government; and the desire for more specific assurances than those provided in the Elías Calles-Burke letters.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ “Says Pope will End the Mexican Strife; Archbishop Ruiz in Route to Rome has Faith that Pontiff will Accomplish Peace,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1928, 8.

³⁹⁰ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III “The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State,” July 23, 1928, File 812.04/8956, 330.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

The Catholic Radicals Derail the Negotiations

Once the Mexican presidential elections were over, Morrow returned to México in early July. He faced plenty of changes in the political environment. On July 1, 1928, Obregón had been elected president for the second time. The Mexican authorities faced pressures from adversaries and advocates. Priests inquired whether they could go back into the churches. Prominent supporters of the government objected to what they called surrender to the Church.³⁹² Consequently, Elías Calles decided to make public all letters and documents related to the negotiations. He wanted to show that there had been no surrender. Once again, Morrow's political ability kept the negotiations alive. He convinced the Mexican president that such a move would be devastating for any possible future settlement. It would also hit directly Father Burke, for whom Elías Calles felt special appreciation.

With Rome delaying any advance in the negotiations, Morrow continued working with the Mexican authorities. On the morning of July 17, he got together with Obregón's campaign manager, Aaron Saenz. A meeting was set between Morrow and Obregón for that afternoon at five o'clock. Saenz assured the American Ambassador that the newly elected president of México had kept open communication with President Elías Calles regarding to the religious conflict. Obregón expected the conflict would be settled before his inauguration.³⁹³ While the Mexican authorities and Morrow expected to end the conflict in the near future, others had different plans. Before attending the meeting with the American Ambassador; Obregón went to a banquet organized by a group of his supporters. During the event, a Catholic fanatic, José De León Toral, assassinated Obregón. Suddenly, the entire negotiation process blew up. The Mexican government stopped the negotiations. Morrow mentioned in his memoirs that a

³⁹² Ibid., 330.

³⁹³ Ibid., 331.

member of the Catholic Church in México predicted that the final agreement would take at least another year.³⁹⁴

After the assassination, Obregon's followers pointed fingers at President Elías Calles and the Minister of Commerce Luís Napoleón Morones, a political rival of Obregón. The *Obregonistas* accused them of using a Catholic to commit the murder. In order to please them, the Mexican president agreed that *Obregonistas* would conduct the investigation. The inquiry concluded that De León Toral was a member of a Catholic plot, something that the Church denied. Many years later, a key leader of the Catholic extremists gave another version. Other members involved in the conspiracy were Concepción Acevedo de la Llata, a nun known as the *Madre Conchita*, and a Catholic priest José Jiménez. Acevedo de la Llata was accused by those conducting the investigation of being one of the main advisors to De León Toral. Jiménez was charged of blessing the gun used by the murderer. After a trial, De León Toral was executed, Acevedo was confined to prison, and Jimenez escaped. In 1932, Jiménez was arrested and charged with conspiracy. The event remained a matter of controversy; Catholics denied their participation in the plot. In 1964, however, James Wilkie interviewed the vice president of the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty, Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra. Palomar y Vizcarra declared the assassination of Obregón was a well planned action. Palomar y Vizcarra assured "the murder of Obregón was deliberated long before the action of José de León Toral took place." For Palomar y Vizcarra, the killing of Obregón was part of a war. Consequently nothing was wrong with that action. Palomar y Vizcarra also recognized De León Toral as a member of the League and also of the Young Men Catholic Association (ACJM).³⁹⁵ These kinds of claims left no doubt as to Catholic involvement in the assassination.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 333.

³⁹⁵ Wilkie y Monzón de Wilkie, *México Visto en el Siglo XX*, 453.

In the middle of the turmoil, the Mexican priests gave an explanation to Morrow about their participation and the role of Father Burke in the negotiations to end the religious conflict. They also elucidated their allegedly support to the armed movement. On July 24, 1928, the Bishop of Tabasco Pascual Díaz Barreto sent a letter to Ambassador Morrow, in which he stated that

Father John Burke has informed me that you desire to know who is the person authorized by the Holy See to represent and to speak for the Church in Mexico. It gives me great pleasure to advise you that his Excellency, Msgr. Peter Fumasoni-Bondi, Apostolic Delegate to the USA, is also Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, and further that in a letter dated December 12, 1927, copy of which is attached, His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate, appointed me to be the official liaison between the Apostolic Delegate and the Bishops of Mexico. Father Burke is the agent of His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate.³⁹⁶

In relation to accusations that the Church supported the armed movement, Díaz Barreto made clear that the Catholic Church had nothing to do with the actions of those involved in the armed movement. He mentioned that “in the Encyclical [*Iniquis Afflictisque*] the Holy Father approved the League [for the Defense of Religious Liberty] which by legal methods alone would work zealously, patriotically and with Christian courage to win for the Church the liberty in Mexico.”

But when

later, on its own responsibility, the League decided resort to armed action to win the liberty of the Church. When things reached this stage, the Pope deemed it has duty to give to the Bishops of Mexico a clear and definitive instruction. This he did in communication dated November 16, 1927, in which, leaving Catholics as individuals entirely free, he instructed the Bishops to have no part, physical or moral, direct or indirect, in any armed action by Catholics under his direction of the League. If the League thereafter persists in this action, you will see that the Bishops have no part in it.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ “Letter from Pascual Díaz to Dwight W. Morrow, July 24, 1928.” Carpeta: Arzobispos. Expediente: 137 Legajo: 1/5 Inventario: 364 Gaveta: 5. (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca).

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

On September 1, 1928, President Elías Calles went to Congress to present his State of the Country Address. In his speech, Elías Calles mentioned that some people asked him to stay in power for two more years as a measure to keep the country in peace. He nevertheless decided to step aside effective on December 1. An interim president would be named. In an “undiplomatic” reaction, Morrow leaned forward in the diplomatic box and applauded. “I suppose,” he murmured to the British Minister, Esmond Ovey on regaining his seat after this dramatic demonstration, “I suppose I ought not to have done that?” “No,” Ovey answered. “You ought not.”³⁹⁸ That mistake was a small spot in Morrow’s brilliant performance as diplomat with no other significance than the anecdotic part.

After this announcement, Mexican authorities changed priorities. The *Obregonistas* and *Callistas* focused on who would be the man temporarily in charge of the executive branch. Negotiations to end the religious conflict became a secondary issue. Elías Calles decided to break off negotiations, and leave the final decision to his successor. On September 25, the Mexican Congress named the former Governor of the Northeastern State of Tamaulipas and then Ministry of the Interior, Emilio Portes Gil, as the interim president of México. Portes Gil, who took the oath on December 1, called presidential elections on November 17, 1929. Portes Gil announced that on December 1, 1929 he would transfer power to the elected candidate. The situation represented an opportunity for Catholic extremists to continue derailing the negotiations of the religious conflict and even trying to create an international conflict for México.

Morrow Became the Target

Obregon’s assassination was a serious set back for the negotiations. Morrow, however, was not discouraged and continued to work his diplomacy. Instead of using the common

³⁹⁸ Harold Nicolson, *Dwight Morrow* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 344.

diplomatic channels and waiting for instructions from Washington, he took the initiative. If he needed to consult with the State Department, he did not hesitate to spend literally hours talking over the phone. Once in the field, he preferred to talk directly with the Mexican president, Mexican ministers, or business leaders. The political turmoil prevailing in the Mexican domestic politics did not prevent President Coolidge for recognizing the positive results of Morrow's diplomacy. During Coolidge's State of the Union Address of 1928, the US president emphasized:

Our relations with Mexico are on a more satisfactory basis than at any time since their revolution. Many misunderstandings have been resolved and the most frank and friendly negotiations promise a final adjustment of all unsettled questions. It is exceedingly gratifying that Ambassador Morrow has been able to bring our two neighboring countries, which have so many interests in common, to a position of confidence in each other and of respect for mutual sovereign rights.³⁹⁹

In México Morrow's activism did not make him popular with either side of the conflict. Those extremists considered ambassador's activities an act of interventionism in domestic matters. In December 1927, members of the Anarchist Movement published in the newspaper *Avante* an article plenty of epithets titled "El Nuevo Embajador Mr. Morrow." The anarchists accused the ambassador of being a representative of business interests from Wall Street. The anarchists stated that Morrow came to México with two main goals: to change those articles of the Mexican Constitution affecting Americans properties and to consolidate Mexican dependency from the United States.⁴⁰⁰ Others went farther in their actions against him. In September 1928, the U.S. Embassy got an anonymous message with the title of *Atento Mensaje*

³⁹⁹ Calvin Coolidge, "State of the Union Address," Washington, D.C. December 4, 1928. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/about.html> /. (April 26, 2006).

⁴⁰⁰ "El Nuevo embajador Mr. Morrow." *Avante*, Diciembre 8 de 1927. http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/politica/viva_tierra/libradoindice.html /. (November 15, 2005).

Del Pueblo Mexicano al Sr. Morrow. The author or authors of the pamphlet attacked the American ambassador for his lack of understanding of the religious problem, his efforts to create a Protestant society, and friendship with the tyrants Obregón and [Elías] Calles. The leaflet concluded by inviting Morrow to leave the country immediately.⁴⁰¹

A few days later, the Mexican press published news related to what seemed to be a confrontation between members of the *Cristero* movement and governmental forces in Huitzilac, Morelos. It would have nothing extraordinary except that “coincidentally” at the same time Morrow was on his way to Cuernavaca, Morelos and almost got hit by a bullet. The *Cristeros* clearly target Morrow. They planned to kidnap the American Ambassador, and to kill Elías Calles or even the newly named President Portes Gil. Bishop Díaz Barreto informed to Archbishop Ruiz y Flores about this events. Díaz Barreto believed that those events interfered with the search for a solution. Díaz Barreto stated that the League was a headless entity with many mouths talking without sense and a liver secreting great amount of bile.⁴⁰²

The extremists were out of control, they no longer obeyed the leaders of the Catholic Church. Their only goal was the surrender of the Mexican State; anything else would be a defeat. On the basis of information from the State Department files, American Historian Francis Patrick Dooley wrote about the threats of some Catholics against Morrow. According to Dooley’s recount, on April 5, 1929 the State Department got a letter signed by members of the League written in harsh language and threatening Morrow’s life. On April 10, J. Ruben Clark from the State Department received the Jesuit priest Carlos Heredia, who accused Morrow of representing the financiers’ interests. Heredia also claimed the Church had some principles to

⁴⁰¹ United States Department of State, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations between the United States and Mexico 1910-1929*, “Ambassador Morrow to Secretary Kellogg,” September 19, 1928 , Microcopy 314, Roll 6, 711.12/1147.

⁴⁰² Taracena, *La Verdadera Revolución Mexicana: 1928-1929*, 143.

defend in the religious conflict in México. After that, Clark and Arthur Bliss Lane met with William Montavon to express their worries about the potential kidnapping or assassination of Morrow by a Catholic extremist. Montavon granted that some Catholics were capable of doing anything to get the U.S. involved in an armed conflict in México. After that meeting, Montavon sent a telegram to one of the few bishops in favor of a settlement, Bishop Antonio Guizar y Valencia, and asked Guizar y Valencia to condemn publicly the idea of any attack or threat against Morrow.⁴⁰³

Attacks on Morrow could serve different purposes other than to ignite religious prejudices. Others used the issue to raise nationalistic sentiments and argue against foreign intervention in political domestic affairs. José Vasconcelos, the former Minister of Education under Obregón, and the rightist presidential candidate for the Anti-Reelection Party, accused Morrow of being the mastermind behind the candidate of the newly born National Revolutionary Party (PNR), Pascual Ortiz Rubio. Despite that accusation, Vasconcelos asked for Morrow's support for his candidacy, something Morrow did not provide. In 1939, Vasconcelos wrote a book, *El Proconsulado*, devoted to criticize Morrow's participation in Mexican political life.

The extremists' position put the Catholic hierarchy in Rome in a dilemma. The Church officials were well aware of how important was to reach an agreement to end the religious conflict in México. The Church, however, needed to move cautiously. Catholic officials at Rome accepted the participation of some of its members in the negotiations, but emphasizing there was not an official involvement from the Pope or somebody close to him in such discussions.

⁴⁰³ Dooley, *Los Cristeros, Calles y el Catolicismo Mexicano*, 177, 178.

Negotiations at a Dead Point...At Least on the Surface

On September 27, 1928, *L'Observatore Romano* published a denial of rumors that two representatives of the Holy See had traveled to México. This publication did not refute the Church participated in the negotiations to end the conflict, between Church and state in México but just clarified that there was no direct involvement by the Pope or anybody close to him.⁴⁰⁴ After several months in Rome, Archbishop Ruiz y Flores returned to the United States. During the trip, Ruiz y Flores wrote a letter to the Mexican bishops, dated on November 5, 1928. The document seemed more like a guideline for the surrender of the Mexican authorities than an invitation to continue with negotiations. According to Ruiz y Flores, the Pope asked for a meeting between members of the Catholic Church and representatives of the government of Mexico to take place in Rome. The Pope, as Ruiz y Flores explained, thought that the Mexican government needed to make changes in the Mexican Constitution and guarantee the security of the members of the clergy. After that, the Holy See agreed to authorize the return of Church's services to México, as soon as he would get the assurance that religious freedom would prevail.⁴⁰⁵ Some misgivings about those words emerged. Antonio López Ortega, in *Las Naciones Extranjeras y la Persecución Religiosa*, quoted that letter which contained words attributed to the Pope blessing the Mexican Catholics, priests and everybody involved in the dispute, even those fighting against the church.⁴⁰⁶ However, at the Plutarco Elías Calles Archives in México City there is a copy of a letter dated October 21, 1928, addressed by López Ortega as Secretary General of the *Unión Internacional de Todos los Amigos de la Liga Nacional para la Defensa Religiosa de México (U.I.T.A)* to the Bishop of Durango, José María

⁴⁰⁴ Antonio López Ortega, *Las Naciones Extranjeras y la Persecución Religiosa* (Ciudad de México: Edición del Autor, 1944), 279, 280.

⁴⁰⁵ López Ortega, *Las Naciones Extranjeras y la Persecución Religiosa*, 281.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 281.

González y Valencia. In that letter López Ortega, supposedly quoting Ruiz y Flores' words, mentioned that the Pope

did not disapprove the armed uprising... since all the pacific means were exhausted. The Pope, also, acknowledged as an achievement the actions against the government. The government had been forced to make pleas –although indirect- to reach an agreement. The Pope approved that, even if an accord was reached, those involved in the armed revolt can continue fighting until the government please their demands.⁴⁰⁷

The radicalization of some members of Church toward the Mexican conflict was real. According to extremists, there was no alternative, the Mexican government needed to make changes in the Constitution or the Church would not accept any more negotiations. On November 22, 1928 the Apostolic Delegate, Fumasoni Bondi called Father Burke to a meeting at his office. During the meeting, Fumasoni delivered a document to Burke in which the Holy See asked for more favorable options than those contained in the letter the Mexican president sent to Burke in April 1928.⁴⁰⁸

The same day, without knowing the results of that meeting, Ambassador Morrow went to visit the Mexican president. Morrow mentioned his recent talk with Father Burke, who considered it viable to open a discussion about the points contained in the letter. Elías Calles argued that it made no sense to engage in negotiations, since he had only a few days left in office. Further, the domestic political situation would make it impossible, even for next president Portes Gil, to discuss possible changes in the Mexican Constitution. Elías Calles

⁴⁰⁷ “Carta de Antonio López Ortega al Obispo de Durango, Octubre 21, 1928.” Carpeta: Arzobispos, Expediente: 137, Legajo: 3/5, Inventario: 364, Gaveta: 5 (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca).

⁴⁰⁸ Dooley, *Los Cristeros, Calles y el Catolicismo Mexicano*, 171.

agreed that Burke's visit to México was a good idea, but that would be a matter which Portes Gil would have to take the responsibility of deciding.⁴⁰⁹

Emilio Portes Gil became the President of México on December 1, 1928. It did not seem likely that the religious conflict would end anytime soon. During early December, Morrow met in Washington with Father Burke and Montavon. Burke mentioned the possibility of going to Rome in February as a new effort to change the path of the negotiations. Morrow would not do anything else unless Burke asked him to.⁴¹⁰ In fact, the Vatican had displaced Burke as the main negotiator. The Church's political figures were replaced by new actors. Since June 1928, the Pope believed that some Catholics and Mexican priests were no longer operating on a religious basis. They had adopted an extremist and inflexible political attitude, which represented a no win game. The Pope decided to put what he believed were more open minds and individuals in charge of the negotiations. The vice-president of Georgetown University, the Jesuit Father Edmund Walsh, would take control of the negotiations. When Walsh met Morrow, he introduced himself as Pius XI's personal envoy. Since the spring of 1928, Walsh had been engaged in a series of covert activities. A personal friend of Pope Pius XI, Walsh had contacted the one-time Chilean Ambassador to Washington, Miguel Cruchaga Tocornal. Cruchaga provided Walsh information about the situation in México based on his correspondence with a Mexican bishop, whom he did not identify. Cruchaga and Walsh came up with new plans for a settlement which were explained to Pius XI in June 1928. Father Walsh conveyed that the Pope's agreement with the need for a rapid solution to the conflict. Walsh introduced himself to

⁴⁰⁹ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1928* Volume III "The Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow) to the Secretary of State," November 23, 1928, File 812. 404/939: Telegram, 335.

⁴¹⁰ Dooley, *Los Cristeros, Calles y el Catolicismo Mexicano*, 171, 172.

Morrow as the Pope's representative in charge of reporting to the Pope regarding the development of the negotiations.⁴¹¹

When Walsh went to Rome in June 1928, he needed to revise his plans. Events that happened earlier that month, such as the report given by Ruiz y Flores to the Pope, made necessary to add other ingredients to that solution proposed by Walsh and Cruchaga. On June 7, 1928 Pius XI had a meeting with Cardinal Gasparri and Under-Secretary of State for Extraordinary Affairs, Monsignor Gongorcini-Duca. In that meeting, they analyzed a report that Archbishop Ruiz y Flores had given the Pope the night before.⁴¹² That report enclosed opinions of all Mexican bishops living in exile in San Antonio, Texas. According to *The New York Times*, the report did not “contain any suggestions as to the best method of overcoming the crisis, and left it to the Pope to draw his own conclusions.”⁴¹³ Speaking for his colleagues, Ruiz y Flores emphasized “that there never [had] been a more favorable time to settle the difficulties between the Catholic Church and the Mexican government.”⁴¹⁴ Once Pius XI, Gasparri, and Gongorcini-Duca analyzed the information provided by the Mexican Archbishop, the Pope made a decision. On June 8, “the Pope entrusted the Congregation on Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs with the study of the minimum conditions that the Mexican government should grant to permit the return of the Catholic Church to Mexico.”⁴¹⁵ During those days, the Pope also met with Walsh and Cruchaga who provided him with a new proposal to solve the religious conflict in México. After all that, the Pope decided to name Father Walsh to replaced Father Burke as the main negotiator. The statement written by Archbishop Ruiz y Flores in November 1928 and the emergence of

⁴¹¹ Redinger, *American Catholics and the Mexican Revolution: 1924-1936*, 87; L. Ethan Ellis, “Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 38, No. 4 (November 1958): 498.

⁴¹² “Pope takes up plan for ending crisis on Mexican Church,” *New York Times*, June 8, 1928, 1.

⁴¹³ “Pope Orders study of Mexico Problem,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1928, 3.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

Father Walsh as the Church's negotiator suggested that the Church was seeking a solution to the religious conflict in México.

In early February 1929, after spending almost three months in Washington, Morrow returned to México. Morrow had no hope for a quick solution to the religious conflict. Events in Mexico during the first days of 1929 gave Morrow further cause for pessimism. On March 3, 1929, some members of the *Obregonismo* radical wing, the generals José Gonzalo Escobar, Fausto Topete, Jesús M. Aguirre, and Francisco R. Manzo, headed a rebellion of about 20 percent of the Mexican Army against the government. Behind that uprising was a political issue. During the days from March 1 to 4, 1929 gathered the members of diverse political forces in México. The goal was to merge all those people sympathetic to the Mexican Revolution's principles into a single national political unity. As a result of the meeting the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) was born. Some saw in the creation of this political party the opportunity to launch their career into new stages. One of them was the former Minister of the Interior Gilberto Valenzuela who expected that members of the new party would support his candidacy to the presidency of México. Because the expectation was not fulfill, his supporters decided to take the arms. The rebels, however,

asserted that the revolt was against the presidency of Portes Gil, who they accused of crimes in office and of being a tool of [Elías] Calles. It was to purge the nation of [Elías] Calles they were fighting, they said. If [Elías] Calles quit the country they would put down their arms and work again for the social and economic independence of the nation.⁴¹⁶

For President Herbert Hoover, who took the oath on March 4, 1928, the Mexican revolt represented his first problem of foreign policy.⁴¹⁷ The rebels tried to buy arms and ammunitions in the U.S. The U.S. government avoided intervening, and prohibited to sell arms

⁴¹⁶Morris Gilbert, "Mexico is Again Plunged into Civil War," *New York Times*, March 10, 1929, 147.

⁴¹⁷"Hoover's First Task is Mexican Revolt," *New York Times*, March 5, 1929, 12.

to the rebels. Meanwhile in México, Portes Gil appointed Elías Calles, as Minister of War. Elías Calles, as head of the Mexican Army, took nine weeks to defeat the rebels. The efforts and resources directed to beat that rebellion distracted the Mexican Army. It allowed the *Cristero* uprising to reignite. At the same time, the political campaign for the presidency had already unofficially started, with Vasconcelos as the leader of those opposing the Mexican government. Vasconcelos traveled around the country with a powerful message against the authorities, claiming that what the country needed was democracy and that he was the only one able to provide it. On January 6, 1929, *Il Osservatore Romano* published an article suggesting Vasconcelos would be the kind of candidate Catholics could support. Less than a month later, on February 3, Vasconcelos met with two representatives of the General in Chief of the *Cristero* Army, Enrique Goroztieta, who offered the support of his troops to back Vasconcelos on the presidency.⁴¹⁸

In the middle of all this, the *Cristero Army* decided to play every single card available to defeat the Mexican government. The movement was in the hands of the radicals who determine to fight for all or nothing. On February 7, during his travel to Tampico, President Portes Gil received a letter signed by the legal team defending José De León Toral. In that document, the lawyers asked for a presidential pardon for their client. As soon as Portes Gil arrived to Tampico, he got another letter signed by a group of members of the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty demanding the exoneration of De León Toral; in case of a negative answer, they threatened to derail the presidential train. The same day, the Mexican president wrote a reply to the group of lawyers denying any clemency. He argued that the case had been analyzed enough by different judicial tribunals, which had concluded unanimously that the assassin deserved capital punishment. Two days later, De León Toral was executed by a military

⁴¹⁸Taracena, *La Verdadera Revolución Mexicana: 1928-1929*, 193.

firing squad. On February 10th, returning by train to México City, Portes Gil became the target of an attempted assassination. While passing through the State of Guanajuato, a bomb exploded. The president, his family and members of the cabinet emerged unharmed, but some of the train crew died.⁴¹⁹ The president blamed members of the aristocracy for supporting the rebels. He threatened to confiscate properties belonging to those directly or indirectly involved in these activities. In the end, the investigations concluded that some female members of the League in Mexico City had paid a teenager three hundred pesos to set the explosives.⁴²⁰

Morrow was kept busy during this time. Between February and early April, Morrow faced requests from the Mexican government demanding assurances that the American authorities would not allow the rebels to obtain weapons in the U.S. At the same time, Mexican authorities asked for help in order to secure armaments from America.

At the End Reason Prevailed...Unofficially

During 1929, the Catholic Church ended political disputes with two civil governments. First, the Catholic Church and the Italian Government signed the Lateran Treaty in February. Later, at the beginning of the summer, a *Modus Vivendi* ended the religious conflict in México. In both cases, political pragmatism prevailed over other considerations.

On February 11, 1929 Cardinal Gasparri in the name of Pope Pius XI and Benito Mussolini in the name of the King of Italy Victor Emmanuel III signed the Lateran Treaty. The treaty showed that officials of the Church could put aside considerations of freedom and democracy in order to accomplish specific goals. The Treaty recognized the Catholic Apostolic Roman religion as the only State religion in Italy and created a new fully sovereign and

⁴¹⁹Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana*, 555-558.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 560.

independent state called Vatican City. The government of Italy also recognized the person of the Pope sacred and inviolable and approved religious teaching in public schools with text-books approved by the Ecclesiastical Authority.⁴²¹

With one problem solved, Pope Pius XI decided to search for a solution to the Mexican conflict. Taking into account that there was no official recognition from either the Mexican government of the Vatican or from the Vatican of the Mexican government, negotiations needed to be done unofficially. Father Walsh became the unofficial representative of the Pope. Ambassador Morrow continued operating on personal basis as a mediator in the conflict. President Portes Gil never “officially” engaged in the discussions.

During March and April, with the Mexican government battling the military uprising, negotiations regarding the religious conflict appeared to be frozen. However, the search for a solution to the religious conflict developed quietly on the surface but without pause underneath. Catholic radicals continued showing their opposition to any possible ending other than the surrender of the Mexican state. They tried to create an international conflict with actions such as threats to Morrow’s life. At this point, however, some other people became involved in the process. Two of them were the Mexican bankers and fervent Catholics, Agustín Legorreta, a close friend of Elías Calles, and Manuel Echeverría. Both were tired of the extremists’ attitude and decided to work in favor of a settlement. On April 23, “Echeverría pointed out to Morrow that by this time a minority of the bishops were holding out against the majority who desired peace.”⁴²² Echeverría decided to “send to Rome at his own expense Monsignor Antonio Guizar y Valencia, Bishop of Chihuahua who desired peace and was prepared to tell the Roman officials

⁴²¹Benedict Williamson, *The Treaty of the Lateran* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1929).

⁴²² Ellis, “Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico,” 498.

that the position taken by the uncompromising bishops in Mexico was untenable and that they should come to an arrangement with the Mexican government.”⁴²³

With Guizar y Valencia traveling to Rome, Father Walsh coming to México, and Morrow doing his job, on May 1, 1929, President Portes Gil gave an interview to the Associated Press correspondent, Clarence Dubose. During the interview, Portes Gil praised the attitude adopted by the Secretary of the *Mitra* of Oaxaca Father Villagómez who encouraged Catholics and members of the Catholic Church to obey civil authority’s dispositions. Portes Gil also stated that there was no religious persecution against members of any faith. When questioned if the government would allow the reopening of the churches, the Mexican president stated: ‘the government neither suspended the cult nor closed the churches; the priests did it without any order coming from the civil authorities. Catholics continued attending those places and groups of neighbors were in charge of the vigilance.’⁴²⁴ Two days later, Archbishop Ruiz y Flores declared in Washington that the problems originating from the religious conflict in México were of such a kind that good will men could solve them. Taking into account Portes Gil’s words, the Church and its priests were ready to work with the president for the well being of the Mexican people.⁴²⁵

The messages in the press did not end there. On May 8, Portes Gil recounted the reasons behind the disagreements. He pointed out that some extremists took the conflict to the point it had reached. Portes Gil invited Archbishop Ruiz y Flores to discuss the possibility of ending how the religious conflict.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Ibid., 498.

⁴²⁴ Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana*, 571.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 570.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 571, 572; “Overtures to Church Surprise Mexico City,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1929, 8; “Portes Gil Opens Way to Church Agreement,” *Washington Post*, May 8, 1929, 1; “Mexico Offers to Negotiate with Catholics,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 8, 1929, 12.

Events in México lay behind that suddenly harmonious attitude. In the early days of May, Father Walsh, accompanied by Cruchaga, had arrived in México. There is no documented record of a meeting between President Portes Gil and Father Walsh. On May 4, in a meeting with Morrow, Walsh announced that he “was prepared to stay for a month and would be in touch with reactionary elements among the Mexican clergy; his presence, he said, was unknown to the leading Catholics who have previously figured in the story.”⁴²⁷ Once he knew Walsh’s intentions, Morrow continued working with the Mexican authorities. Morrow maintained open communication with Portes Gil, meeting several times to discuss official matters related to agrarian and diplomatic problems unrelated to the religious conflict. According to documents from the State Department cited by L. Ethan Ellis, the American ambassador persuaded the Mexican president to make the remarks already cited.

On May 14, Ruiz sent a telegram to all thirty Mexican bishops, twenty of whom lived in the U.S., inquiring if they approved a meeting with the Mexican president. Ruiz y Flores mentioned that, as soon as he received their responses, he would submit them to the Vatican and ask for instructions for a possible meeting with Mexican authorities. The archbishop would then act once he got an authorization from the Vatican.⁴²⁸

At that point, Morrow had already unofficially submitted to Ruiz y Flores a proposal for a letter the priest would send to Portes Gil. The document, already approved by the Mexican president, was written on the basis of the exchange between Elías Calles and Burke in April 1928. According to that, Father Burke explored the possibility that, without disobeying the prevailing laws, the Mexican priests could find a way to exercise their religious activities and

⁴²⁷ Ellis, “Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico,” 498, 499.

⁴²⁸ “Bishops Consulted on Mexican Parley,” *New York Times* May 15, 1929, 15; “Hand of Vatican Seen by Mexico in Query,” *New York Times*, May 16, 1929, 29; “Ruiz Moves to End Religious Warfare,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 1929, 8.

later make some changes in the Mexican legislation. While the Mexican President assured that the Mexican government had no intention to destroy Church's identity but to preserve those dispositions written in the law. Morrow requested that Ruiz y Flores obtain approval from the Vatican and then proceed. In the meantime, the Mexican ambassador in Washington, Manuel Tellez, "had been authorized by President Portes Gil to begin closer negotiations on the Mexican religious controversy with Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores."⁴²⁹ During those days Morrow went to Washington to attend the wedding of his daughter Anne, to Charles Lindbergh. There Morrow met Ruiz y Flores, expressing his worries about the position adopted by the Church asking for a change in the Mexican laws as the basis for a solution to the religious conflict. Morrow reiterated that the best way to approach to the matter would be on the basis of the Elías Calles-Burke exchange.⁴³⁰

During the last days of May 1929, the negotiations looked as if they were making no progress; behind the scene, however, efforts continued. On May 31, *L'Osservatore Romano* published an article in which the Secretary of State of the Vatican, Monsignor Gasparri, expressed his thoughts about the religious conflict between the government of México and the Catholic Church. Gasparri said he encouraged Catholics to abide by México's laws. He stated that the Church had no choice but to accept the demands of the Mexican Government. His Holiness and the ecclesiastical authorities in México had no other alternative but to accept a friendly solution to the religious conflict; otherwise they would be responsible before God because of their negligence. The Church, however, would accept the dispositions written on the laws on cults if the Mexican government agreed to make some modifications in such laws on the basis of the instructions [not mentioned in Gasparri's piece] given by the Holy See and the

⁴²⁹ "Mexico Church Parley reported Authorized," *New York Times*, May 18, 1928, 28.

⁴³⁰ Ellis, "Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico," 501.

opinions of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Mexican Diocese.⁴³¹ Meanwhile, Morrow warned Bishop Ruiz y Flores against continued demanding an immediate change in the laws. For Morrow to follow that path “would end the possibility of negotiation and make it useless for him to continue active in the matter. Morrow continued to urge use of Burke or Montavon, representing what he called the conservative faction to balance Father Walsh’s influence representative of the so-called radical element.”⁴³²

The bad news for the Catholic radicals did not stop at the end of May. On the first day of June, Pope Pius XI announced the appointment of Archbishop Ruiz y Flores as Apostolic Delegate to Mexico ad interim, and ordered him to go to México for discussions about the religious conflict.⁴³³ Then on June 2, the *Cristero Army* suffered a serious loss. Its General in Chief, Enrique Goroztieta was killed in action by federal troops while members of his staff were held as prisoners. His death did not represent the end of the armed rebellion, but the *Cristeros* never recovered from that military defeat. The end of the conflict approached.

On June 9, Morrow returned to México, but this time he did not arrive alone. He had two companions: Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores y Pascual Díaz Barreto. Before arriving in México City, the priests were met by Walsh and Cruchaga who took them “to the home of the Embassy’s Naval Attaché, remaining there in seclusion, seeing only Morrow and Walsh and leaving only for conferences with the President.”⁴³⁴

Before the talks between Portes Gil and Ruiz-Diaz started, Walsh tried to impose his will on the negotiations. Walsh visited Morrow on June 10, indicating that the bishops had brought

⁴³¹ “La Iglesia se ve en el caso de aceptar las demandas del Gobierno de México,” *L’Osservatore Romano* Marzo 31, 1929, Traducción de Francisco Lazcano. Director del Centro Internacional de Prensa. Carpeta: Arzobispos, Expediente: 137, Legajo: 4/5, Inventario: 364, Gaveta: 5. (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca).

⁴³² Ellis, “Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico,” 501.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 500, 501.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 501.

no definite plan of action. Walsh proposed a plan that Morrow told him contained so many specific demands as to kill its chances of success. Walsh had no other option but to accept Morrow's recommendation and discuss the proposals with the Mexican priests. After conferring with them, Walsh returned to Morrow's office and reported their acceptance of the principles of the Elías Calles-Burke exchange of April 1928.⁴³⁵

The day after their arrival, the priests went to the National Palace in downtown México City and asked for an appointment with President Portes Gil, who at that moment was three miles away in a meeting with Ambassador Morrow which lasted for forty five minutes.⁴³⁶ The priests, however, did not leave empty handed. They obtained an appointment with President Portes Gil for June 12. According to the transcript taken by Portes Gil's private secretary, during the first meeting Archbishop Ruiz y Flores launched into recriminations related to the measures implemented by the Mexican government during the past years. These statements caused Bishop Díaz Barreto to interrupt and kindly suggest to his colleague that there was no sense in continuing to argue about events of the past. Díaz Barreto requested that Portes Gil open the Churches while praying to God to find ways to end the conflict. From then on, the conversation's tone changed and a frank dialogue prevailed. At the end of the first meeting, Portes Gil provided the priests with a draft of a possible agreement. Portes Gil asked Ruiz y Flores and Díaz Barreto to study the document for discussions in a future meeting.⁴³⁷ On the evening of June 13, the priests returned to hold conversations with the president which lasted for almost an hour and a half. They announced that the talks were going into the right direction.⁴³⁸ In spite of those public pleasant images, negotiations did not go exactly smoothly. According to

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 501, 502.

⁴³⁶ "Prelates Arrange Parley in Mexico," *New York Times*, June 12, 1929, 4; Taracena, *La Verdadera Revolución Mexicana: 1928-1929*, 279.

⁴³⁷ Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana*, 575-577.

⁴³⁸ "Portes Gil Confers Again with Bishops," *New York Times*, June 14, 1929, 20.

Walsh's account, the Mexican president adopted an unnecessarily brusque, hard, and cold attitude.⁴³⁹

Taking into account the way negotiations proceeded and the position of the radicals on both sides trying to break the negotiations, Morrow concluded that he had no choice but to intervene directly, it unofficially. On June 15, according to *The New York Times*, "Morrow held a conference for an hour with President Emilio Portes Gil concerning the negotiations now going on for settlement of the controversy with the Catholic Church."⁴⁴⁰ During the talk, the American Ambassador submitted a proposed statement, somewhat more explicit and less abrupt than the original one, which at the end with minimal changes became the document known as *Modus Vivendi*. Portes Gil, who did not know about this new proposal, "grudgingly agreed to have this translated for study."⁴⁴¹ Previous to this meeting, Morrow had discussed the document with former President Elías Calles who agreed with the terms contained in it. After his visit to the President, Morrow went meet with Ruiz y Flores and Diaz Barreto and provided them with a copy of the document he had presented to Portes Gil. Morrow also gave a statement which Ruiz y Flores might make in reply to the presidential pronouncement.⁴⁴²

Once Ruiz y Flores, Díaz Barreto, Walsh, and Cruchaga analyzed Morrow's document, they had no other choice but to accept its terms. They sent a telegram to the Vatican urging its approval. The reply from Rome arrived on June 20 with two major requests. One asked total amnesty for those involved in the conflict. Another demanded the restitution to the Church of its real estate. After reading that, Morrow went to talk with Ruiz y Flores. Ruiz y Flores stated that amnesty implied the right of the priests to return to their Churches. Restitution meant the

⁴³⁹ Ellis, "Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico," 502.

⁴⁴⁰ "Morrow Takes Hand On Mexican Church Issue; Critical Points Seen in Talk with Portes Gil," *New York Times*, June 16, 1929, 1.

⁴⁴¹ Ellis, "Dwight Morrow and the Church-State Controversy in Mexico," 502.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 502.

possibility that the Church could use its belongings.⁴⁴³ Meanwhile Portes Gil also made some changes in the document, which at the end were accepted by all parties involved in the negotiations.

Finally, on June 21, 1929, both parties accepted a settlement. The Mexican president announced to the press he had met several times with Archbishop Ruiz y Flores and Bishop Díaz Barreto and that they accepted the dispositions established under the Mexican Constitution. The bishops agreed that members of the Catholic Church would return to perform their religious duties. Separately, Archbishop Ruiz told reporters that he praised the respect and good will of the Mexican president during the talks. Ruiz announced that the Mexican priests would return to their religious activities according to the prevailing rules.⁴⁴⁴ The final result of the agreement was known as the *Modus Vivendi*, which in any sense represented an official document or recognition of the Mexican government to the Catholic Church as an official entity. The agreement was written in a couple of white sheets without official seal. At the bottom appears the signature of the President of México whose name was written only as E. Portes Gil. In the document, Portes Gil first pointed out his conversations with Ruiz y Flores and Díaz Barreto, while proceeding to recognize their patriotism, and desires to resume public worship according to the laws. Portes Gil mentioned that it was not the purpose of the Mexican Constitution, nor of the laws, or of the Government of the Republic to destroy the identity of the Catholic Church or of any other or to interfere in any way with its spiritual functions. Later, Portes Gil proceeded to submit the core of the agreement in three paragraphs mentioning:

1. - That the provision of the law which requires the registration of ministers does not mean that the government can register those who have not been named by the hierarchical superior of the religious creed in question or in accordance with its regulations.

⁴⁴³ Meyer, *La Cristiada*: 2, 339, 340.

⁴⁴⁴ Portes Gil, *Autobiografía de la Revolución Mexicana* 572, 573.

2. - With regard to religious instruction, the constitution and the laws in force definitely prohibit it in elementary or higher schools, whether public or private, but this does not prevent ministers of any religion from imparting its doctrines, within church confines, to adults or their children who may attend for that purpose.

3. - That the constitution as well as the laws relating to the country guarantee to all residents of the Republic the right of petition and therefore the members of any church may apply to the appropriate authorities for the amendment, repeal or passage of any law⁴⁴⁵

The agreements offered a way to end the conflict. After almost three years, the doors of the churches reopened. The Catholic Church hierarchy realized they had no choice but to accept the *Modus Vivendi* as the only means to return to operating. On the other hand, those involved in the armed conflict had no other alternative but to surrender. The representatives of the Catholic Church during the negotiations publicly expressed their satisfaction with the results achieved. Archbishop Ruiz y Flores sent a telegram to Father John J. Burke mentioning that: “the work of reconciliation ... started by you in the name of the National Catholic Welfare Conference [had] been crowned with a document officially signed as the first step toward definitive solution.”⁴⁴⁶

Participants agreed that Morrow involvement was crucial to the achievement of a settlement. After praising Portes Gil’s attitude during the negotiations, Walsh stated that Ambassador Morrow, acting as a private individual, was absolutely non-partisan and won the esteem and gratitude of the negotiators on both sides. The Chief of the Division of Mexican Affairs at the Department of State, Arthur B. Lane, also made a point of Morrow’s unofficial status. He pointed a conversation with the Mexican Ambassador at Washington that:

Mr. Morrow had acted in this religious question purely in a private capacity and that if any officials of the Department of State had transmitted messages on the subject, they were

⁴⁴⁵ The original document is at the Archivo Plutarco Elías Calles, Carpeta: Arzobispos, Expediente: 137, Legajo: 1/5, Inventario: 364, Gaveta: 5 (Ciudad de México: Fideicomiso Archivos Plutarco Elías Calles y Fernando Torreblanca); the translation was taken from L. Ethan Ellis who made an accurate translation of the text.

⁴⁴⁶ “Ruiz Felicitates Burke,” *New York Times* June 24, 1929, 4.

only acting as the personal agents of Mr. Morrow and not as officials of the Department of State. Mr. Tellez said that he understood this and said that he realized Mr. Morrow had done a great deal to modify ex-President Calles' point of view with regard to the religious question in general.⁴⁴⁷

Morrow's intervention earned congratulations from Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson on behalf of the President and himself. "Without the assistance you have rendered," wrote Stimson, "the adjustment could not and would not have been made, at least for some time to come...the way in which you have brought to the two governments the present friendly good will from a condition of near hostility, is a high achievement in the history of our diplomacy."⁴⁴⁸

Not all the acknowledgments to Morrow came in a private way. *The Washington Post* recognized the key participation of Walsh and Burke in the negotiations and explicitly mentioned that the: "settlement of the three-year-old controversy between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church in Mexico has been brought about to a large extent through the efforts of American Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow, who has worked tirelessly on the problem since he came to Mexico in an official capacity."⁴⁴⁹

Despite that reconciliation, not everybody was pleased. Catholic radicals persisted charged that the settlement resulted from the betrayal of some members of the Church who decided to join the enemy. After three years of fighting, Catholic radicals came away empty handed. For them, what was signed represented a provisional agreement. According to Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, after the agreement, there was no alternative for the *Cristeros* but to end the fight. Palomar y Vizcarra blamed Fumasoni-Bondi, Ruiz y Flores and Díaz Barreto for acting according to the wishes of the White House. In doing so, they became enemies of the armed

⁴⁴⁷ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1929* Volume III, "Memorandum of a Conversation between the Chief of the Division of Mexican Affairs and the Mexican Ambassador," May 30, 1929, File 812.404/974-1 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), 481.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., "The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Mexico (Morrow)," June 22, 1929, File 812.404/1012, 480.

⁴⁴⁹ "Washington clergy paved peace's way," *Washington Post*, June 22, 1919, 2.

revolt and engaged in partnership with Morrow and Portes Gil.⁴⁵⁰ These charges ignored that the priests engaged in the negotiations did so with the blessing of Pope Pius XI. Palomar avoided putting part of the blame on the Pope. For advocates of the *Cristero* movement, the *Modus Vivendi* was a sell out and represented a small accomplishment not necessarily in favor of Catholicism. That “small accomplishment” involved the efforts of representatives from three very different states and produced a tangible agreement. Behind the State-Church conflict laid four hundred years of struggles that often worked to the detriment of the Mexican people. It does not matter if it was called a product of official or unofficial diplomacy; the *Modus Vivendi* concluded a revolution that lasted for three years. The agreement established the basis for relations between the Mexican state and the Catholic Church for the next sixty years. Many problems appeared during those years, but never again did they result in a revolution. The time of the radicals began to end, and reason emerged.

⁴⁵⁰ Wilkie y Monzón de Wilkie. *México Visto en el Siglo XX: Entrevistas de Historia Oral*, 471, 474.

CONCLUSION

Diplomatic relations between the United States and México during the 1920s was important not only because they demonstrated, for both, how foreign policy influenced domestic politics and how internal political affairs framed international relations, but also because they shaped the relationship between the two countries for the rest of the 20th Century. Also, events during the Harding, Coolidge and Hoover presidencies confirmed not only William Appleman Williams' argument that American policy was not isolationist, but also that it could be described by what Joan Hoff called independent internationalism. By that, Hoff meant a policy characterized by the amalgamation of ideological and economic considerations. While the U.S. avoided "entangling" alliances, it actively engaged with other countries in pursuit of American interests.

American relations with México provided an example of this approach to diplomacy. The three main issues in U.S. - México relations in the 1920s addressed in this thesis were: the conflict between the American oil companies and the Mexican authorities, the domestic armed rebellions in México, and the religious conflict between the Mexican government and the Catholic Church. In each one, the U.S. government played an important role in reaching a solution. Diplomacy proved an effective tool to solve the problems of American companies' oil rights in México. The American government initially reached a settlement through the General Claims Convention or the *Bucareli* Agreements in 1923. Later, in 1927, due to the enactment of a new Petroleum Law, the dispute between the Mexican government and American oil producers reached a peak, and the participation of Ambassador Morrow ended the conflict. American involvement to end the religious conflict in México provided another example of how the U.S. actively took part in international affairs. American Ambassador in Mexico, Dwight W.

Morrow, was the leading figure in achieving a final settlement in both the oil and the religious conflicts. Seeking a stable Mexican government, the U.S. consistently supported the officially recognized government throughout the 1920s.

On the Mexican side, presidents, Obregón Salido, Elías Calles and Portes Gil, approached diplomacy with a great sense of what can be call nationalistic pragmatism. They understood that México was coming out of a civil war and engaged in a process of economic and political reconstruction, which encountered internal opposition that some times required the use of the army to settle down. In that new approach toward improving the living conditions of the Mexican population, the participation of foreign capital was required in the short term. Consequently, the oil sector became an important source of government's revenues to finance development programs. Presidents Obregón and Elías Calles did not try to ban, as some claimed, the participation of foreigners in the Mexican economy; rather they tried to set rules according to Mexican priorities. Sometimes their position toward foreigners seemed to be radical. However, they always kept open the channels of communication and negotiation, or searching for a resolution to the disputes. With respect to religion, a similar approach was implemented. The Mexican authorities did not intend to destroy the faith; they decided to pursue a new set of ground rules for relations between the Mexican State and members of all faiths, something that in the end was implemented by President Portes Gil. Those actions executed under nationalistic pragmatism at times appeared looked as extremist and provided the wrong impression to foreigners.

An example of the latter took place when Mexican policies led some in the U.S. to demand that their government intervene in México to stop what they considered a draft towards communism. American authorities answered with restraint, and diplomacy became the main tool

to settle the disputes between both countries. Related to American interests in the oil industry in México, the Mexican authorities tried to implement changes in the Mexican laws. Those changes implied the retroactivity of the dispositions, related to foreign concessions. In America, representatives of the oil companies engaged in an active campaign to portrait the Mexican government as an advocate of communism while demanding the U.S. government to take extreme measures to solve the problem. In response, President Coolidge implemented a hard line policy through Ambassador Sheffield's actions. However, a combination of the ambassador's poor performance and the Mexican government's ability to maintain open an unofficial channel of negotiations with members of the oil industry as well as direct communication with authorities in Washington converted Sheffield into a liability. Consequently, there was no other option but to replace Sheffield. At the end of October 1927, Ambassador Morrow arrived to México. Morrow's actions soon got results, and in less than two months; the disputes over oil rights had been solved. The Mexican authorities accepted Morrow's proposals, and the Mexican Supreme Court struck down the provision in the Petroleum Laws that established time limits on foreign concessions. The outcome proved the efficacy of President Coolidge's approach.

The American government not only engaged in those events related directly to American interests in México, but also displayed an active interest in México's domestic affairs such as the armed revolts uprising during those years. The American presidents knew that weak governments in México presented problems for the U. S. As far as the Mexican economy did not consolidate, the threat of a new wave of immigrants coming to the U.S. would be a problem. Also, a weak government in the neighboring country would not allow the healthy development of American business there. By supporting the governments of Obregón Salido, Elías Calles,

and Portes Gil in México, the U.S. supported its own international interests. Consequently, the American government avoided supporting those who rebelled against the Mexican authorities. In 1924, during the so-called *De la Huerta* Revolution, President Coolidge rejected the sale of weapons to the rebels; he issued a proclamation limiting the sale of arms and ammunitions to Obregóns' the officially recognized government. President Coolidge adopted a similar approach when the religious conflict developed into an armed uprising. In 1929 President Hoover, during his first day in office, firmly opposed support for the armed movement started by members of the *Obregonismo* radical wing against the Mexican government.

During the years of the religious conflict, President Coolidge maintained a policy of restraint and refrained from direct involvement but opened the unofficial diplomatic channels to negotiate with members of the Catholic Church and the Mexican government without engaging in unilateral action. The religious conflict in México during the 1920s provided several lessons related to political and diplomatic matters. From a political perspective, the conflict exemplified the essentially political nature of the struggle between the Mexican state and the Catholic Church. Some have tried to portray this disagreement as a dispute between the powerful Mexican state and a weak Catholic Church, but this was not the case. The Church invoked the preservation of an endangered Catholic faith to hide its real purpose: a return to old privileges. The Mexican state tried to establish rules to define the prerogatives of each entity. The provisions of the Mexican Constitution were similar for members of all religions. Only Catholics argued against the law. Advocates of other creeds respectfully attempted to function within the law. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, tried to define its role in the Mexican post-revolutionary state as the only and official faith.

The Catholic hierarchy's efforts to gain support outside the borders of México, especially in the United States, had the opposite effect to the one they expected. The activities of Catholic priests and laymen in the U.S. played into anti-Catholic prejudice in the United States, already stirred up by the potential presidential candidacy of Alfred E. Smith.

The American Catholic hierarchy and laymen openly favored the Mexican Church. When they asked President Coolidge to intervene in the domestic conflict South of the border, Coolidge refused. For him, the religious conflict represented a domestic issue that concerned only to the Mexican people and their government. It was a clear example of how domestic politics influence foreign affairs. Had Coolidge taken the Catholic's side in the Mexican conflict, he was in danger of creating a religious problem within the U.S. borders. By avoiding taking sides in a foreign dispute, Coolidge avoided a situation that could lead to religious disputes in America. In the end, religion did not even become a definitive issue in the outcome of the presidential election of 1928.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the decisions taken during those years was not their immediate impact but their middle and long term consequences. The agreement between the Mexican state and the American oil companies allowed the latter to work in México for the next eleven years until 1938 when the Mexican government nationalized the industry. It also proved that it was possible to operate American foreign policy on the basis of an amalgamation of ideological and economic considerations. For the Mexican government, the accord provided a source of revenue, through oil taxes, to finance development programs. It helped to start a new era for the Mexican economy. On the political side, American government's help toward the consolidation of the Mexican government set the basis for a political system that lasted for almost seventy years and provided the Mexican population with

peace and economic development. The agreements and negotiations of the 1920s shaped U.S.-Mexican relations for the rest of the 20th Century. No matter how big the differences were, always a channel of negotiation, official or unofficial, was open to discuss and reach a settlement.

When President Coolidge avoided taking an official stand in the religious conflict of México, he not only steered clear of a foreign dispute but also avoided exacerbating religious differences within the U.S. His policy diminished the impact of religion on the outcome of the presidential elections in 1928. Coolidge, and later Hoover, handled the religious conflict in México in such a way that the figure of the U.S. president was never questioned as interventionist. Those Catholic radicals who opposed any settlement focused their criticism on Ambassador Morrow, who was able to take all the “blame” for the American participation in the negotiations. In the end, it was Ambassador Morrow’s ability that persuaded members of the Church and the Mexican government to reach an agreement. The resulting accord called the *Modus Vivendi*, started a new era for both parties and demonstrates how the Catholic Church was able to put aside spiritual considerations in favor of political pragmatism, something demonstrated when it signed the Lateran Treaty with Benito Mussolini to create the Vatican State. From then on, a new era started in the years to come in the relations between the Church and the Mexican State. While not free from difficulties, those rules with some adjustments prevailed up to 1992 when the Mexican authorities decided to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican State.

In conclusion, the informal American intervention in the controversy between the Catholic Church and the Mexican state provided a case study of American independent internationalism in the 1920s. Anything but isolationist, the Coolidge administration played an

active role in foreign affairs. It did so not through alliances, but through informal channels, always keeping an eye on American interests. Indeed the diplomacy of the Coolidge administration in this instance proved skillful and successful. The incident offered a striking example of how domestic determinants influenced foreign policy and, at the same time, demonstrated how foreign policy could enter the American domestic political arena. Further, the incident played an important role in shaping U.S.-Mexican relations for the rest of the twentieth century.

The noted historian, Charles Joyner, has argued the case for local history by urging historians to look for “large topics in small places.” In a similar vein, the American intervention in the Mexican church/state crisis offers important insights into large topics of American history from the perspective of a little known, but nonetheless significant, incident.

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