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Story of Persecution Of Church in Mexico Told From Beginning

Conflict Was Started by Attempt of Calles to Enforce Drastic Anti-Clerical Provisions of 1917 Constitution—The State Exercised Dictatorial Authority Over All Religion, and Took Ecclesiastical Authority from Bishops—Pastorals of Hierarchy of U. S. and Mexico Recalled, and Protests of the Christian World

CHURCH PROPERTY DESECRATED AND CONFISCATED BISHOPS EXILED, PRIESTS SHOT, NUNS IMPRISONED

(By the N. C. W. C. News Service)

Washington, June 27.—The religious conflict in Mexico, although it dates back to the early days of the independence of that country in 1821, can be regarded as having had its culmination in the victory of the anti-clericals when the Constitution of 1857, which was openly hostile to the clergy and to the Church was adopted. Prior thereto the dispute had been largely one over Church benefices.

The religious problem in Mexico was given new life by the enactment in 1917 of the "Constitution of Queretaro" but became acute only when efforts were made to enforce its drastic provisions making impossible the exercise of numerous liberties.

Although adopted in 1917, during the Carranza regime, this Constitution of Queretaro was enforced only in part, and no effort was made to put into effect the provisions of Article 3 and Article 130, which sections denied freedom of education and gave to the Federal authority the power to legislate and to intervene in matters of religious worship in every part of Mexico.

(Continued From Last Week)

Last week The Courier and Journal published the first installment of the story of the troubles of the Catholic Church in Mexico, telling how the religious persecution slant in 1925, after the adoption of a constitution of Calles; how the persecution was made possible under the drastic act of a Constitution that was drafted for express purposes of making all religion subject to the state, even taking away from Bishops the right of authority over priests, and forbidding the Church to own property, or conduct asylums, hospitals or schools.

The story, written by the News Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Council of Washington, D. C., is completed this week. It follows:

The Churches Closed Following the action of Congress, the Bishops issued a joint pastoral explaining why they could not accept the new decrees. They were supported by a committee of prominent citizens, and efforts were made by laymen to demonstrate the unconstitutionality of the new decrees, but they were refused a hearing by the Federal Congress.

In their Pastoral, the Bishops announced that the decree having made it impossible for the clergy to exercise their sacred ministry, they were obliged to withdraw the priests from the churches, and to suspend all services requiring the presence of priests, effective July 31, 1926. That part of the Pastoral referring to the withdrawal of the priests said:

"Therefore, confronting the impossibility of practicing our sacred ministry under the conditions imposed by this decree, and, after having consulted the Most Holy Father, His Holiness the Pope, and with his ratification, we order that after July 31, until we order otherwise, all religious services requiring the intervention of priests shall be suspended in all the churches of the country."

Accordingly, on July 31, the priests were withdrawn from every church in Mexico.

Bishops Are Deported The Government then declared that criticism of the decrees constituted rebellion, and the Bishops were seized and deported. Priests and laymen who criticized the decrees also were held to be in rebellion.

Those captured were tried by summary courts which, under the Constitution, have no authority. A large number of priests and laymen were summarily executed. Nuns were seized, inhumanly treated and deported. The denial of religious liberty became more and more emphatic.

Late in 1925, a Pastoral Letter was issued by the Mexican Bishops in which they attacked the complete loyalty of the priests of Mexico to their Faith despite the fury of the persecution through which they were passing.

"Every one of you," said that portion of the Pastoral attacking the constancy of the priests, "is most closely united to us by the bonds of sympathy; your sufferings are our sufferings; your sorrows are our sorrows; your perplexities and uncertainties are ours; but we find comfort, too, in that fortitude which God is giving you to sustain with heroism the struggles through which we are passing unchained by the powers of darkness against Christ, and His Holy Spouse, the Catholic Church."

"Blessed be God, our Lord, because He has permitted no desecrations nor any acts of cowardice among you, most beloved priests, in spite of the artful flatteries of the enemy, who, in a thousand ways, one more hypocritical than the other, has tempted you to schism and apostasy. 'Glorious is the spectacle which you have given to God and to His Angels and to the entire world and which, with saintly humility, you have attributed alone to the special grace by which God in His Mercy strengthens and comforts you in your trial, and which is the symbol of the victory to which we look for-

ward and which in submission we now lay at the feet of our Supreme Captain, Jesus Christ."

U. S. Bishops Issue Pastoral

On December 16, 1927, the Catholic Episcopate of the United States issued a Pastoral Letter in which it declared that the troubled conditions in Mexico were caused by the Mexican Government's defiance of the fundamental principles of liberty as they are understood in the United States. Their reason for speaking on this matter, the American Bishops said, was that the Mexican Government itself had appealed to the American people.

The Pastoral recounted the various violations of American law toward religious, educational and charitable agencies, and showed how admirably they serve the cause of universal peace.

"In contrast with this," the Pastoral stated, "according to the present Constitution of Mexico, no religious society may enjoy the right of corporate religious existence. Officially, there are no churches in Mexico; for a church cannot possess anything, lack the right of petition for redress of grievances, cannot sue or be sued in the civil courts and in general is without legal standing. Clergymen are disfranchised by the fact of ordination. A church cannot own the building in which its public worship is held. It cannot possess endowments. It cannot take up a collection or subscription outside the doors of the building used for religious services.

"It is scarcely necessary to set down the conclusions that naturally flow from the contrast we have made. They are at once apparent and must convince right-thinking men and women that there can be no relationship between the principles upon which the Mexican Constitution is built, the laws that embody them, the spirit with which it is proposed that they shall be enforced, and the principles, law and spirit that are held sacred by the American people."

Church Answers Charges

The second part of the pastoral was taken up with answering the various charges that had been made against the Church in Mexico. Of this the Pastoral said:

"For the sad days of decline, the Church, forbidden by law to teach and robbed of the means to carry on the mission of enlightenment, has only to show her chains, and say to her enemies:

"You blame me for poverty, yet you took from me the endowments for my hospitals, my orphanages, my countless works of mercy. You took the cross out of their hands to replace it with a torch and gun."

"You blame me for lawlessness, yet you destroyed my missions among a peaceful and striving Indian population, and gave to them in place of Christ's gospel, the thirty pieces of silver with which you bribed them to murder their fellows. You took the cross out of their hands to replace it with a torch and gun."

For several months before the churches were closed and many of the clergy forced to flee the country, innumerable protests against persecution of Catholics in Mexico had been made by peoples in all parts of the world.

Congressman Boylan Protests Early in April, 1926, a resolution was presented by Representative Boylan of New York in the United States House of Representatives charging that the Government in Mexico was making "deliberate and ruthless campaign to drive God out of the country and through its conduct had forfeited the right to recognition by the United States as a family of nations. The resolution was referred to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House.

As the hearing closed, Representative Fish of New York expressed the view that representatives of the

State Department should be heard on the question, and read to the Committee a draft of a resolution which he said he had drawn up but had not introduced. It said:

"Whereas the American people are inherently and constitutionally in favor of religious tolerance and freedom of worship,

"And whereas there is considerable apprehension among liberty-loving Americans as to interference on the part of Italy, Mexico and Romania with American ministers, priests, missionaries and instructors attached to religious schools:

"Therefore be it resolved: That the Secretary of State be requested, if not incompatible with public interests, to communicate to the House of Representatives such information as he may have bearing on the subject and what action the Government may have taken to protest against such practices in order to permit all American citizens in foreign countries to worship according to their own beliefs."

Account of Outrages Given

Charles W. Barr, attorney representing Archbishop Cullen of Baltimore, Mother Superior of the Visitation Order, who was forced with her nuns to flee from their convent near Mexico City; Judge Alfred J. Talley, representing the Catholic Club of New York and accompanied by Judge Morgan J. O'Brien; and the Very Rev. M. J. Ripple, O. P., P. G., Director General of the Holy Name Society in the United States, succeeded in each other in sitting outrages against religion by the Mexican Government and registering the protests of the organizations.

In concluding her statement, Mother Superior said: "The law of 1917 is the basis of all. As long as that law exists, there will be no living in Mexico for Catholics, Protestants or any one else."

"The Mexican situation should not only cause the American people to cherish still more their great inheritance of religious freedom, but should lead them to indicate to the Mexican people their regret at the crushing of that freedom below the Rio Grande," declared Joseph A. Beck, Solicitor General of the United States, before the Pittsburgh Council of Catholic Women during the week of Nov. 6, 1926.

"In some effective manner the people of the United States should make known to the Mexican Government that they have no sympathy whatsoever with any government which deprives its people of fundamental individual personal rights and liberties," said Mr. Beck.

The directors of the Knights of Columbus, meeting in Chicago, Nov. 5, 1926, charged the Mexican Government with "violation of all principles of civilized government" and the agents with "resorting to murder, rapine and cruelties" in the fight against Catholics.

Protest against the persecution of the Catholic Church and its religious and lay members in Mexico was carried in resolutions adopted by the Catholic Convents' League of New York, March 12, 1926.

Protest Meeting in Washington Spirited addresses by Dr. Abram Simon, rabbi of the Washington Hebrew Congregation, and Representative Boylan, featured a great meeting of protest against the persecution in Mexico on March 7, 1926, in Washington, D. C., held by the Knights of Columbus.

Petitions of all sorts and from every part of the country and from Mexican citizens deluged President Calles and the State Governors.

Catholics of Chihuahua, Mexico, sent a petition containing thousands of signatures requesting the Mexican President to amend provisions of the Constitution which referred to freedom of worship.

A petition from Houston, Tex., containing a similar request, bore several hundred signatures of Mexican citizens living across the border. Catholics of San Luis Potosi, Colima, Morelia, Jalapa, and many other States and cities of Mexico flooded the President's office with protests.

(Continued on Page Seven)

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