

# Spanish Church and State Tread Uneasy Road

Difficulties between Church and the Spanish government, chronic conditions in Spain throughout living memory, have undergone a striking shift in recent times. Difficulties suffered by Protestants in the overwhelmingly Catholic country have been substantially reduced but tensions with the Catholic clergy are increasing.

Difficulties between the government and the Catholic Church, in a country where the two powers have usually worked together with smooth cooperation, are many-faceted.

Priests have been arrested in Spain during the past year almost as fast as they were being released or rehabilitated in Czechoslovakia.

Criticism of the Spanish government by Church leaders—mostly confined to private statements in the past or expressed in carefully diplomatic phraseology—has now moved to the stage where Pope Paul recently referred to Spain along with Nigeria, Vietnam and the Middle East in an address surveying trouble spots around the world.

At the same time, August Pastor Jose Maria Cardona, secretary of the Evangelical Defense Commission and spokesman for Spain's tiny Protestant minority, said recently that relations between the government and Protestant groups have become friendly.

The landmark in Spain's growing acceptance of non-Catholic churches is the religious freedom law of 1967 which established many basic rights for the first time. While it does not give Protestant churches full equality with the Catholic Church, the law does recognize their juridical existence and their right to function as religious organizations.

Remaining restrictions include the requirement that non-Catholic churches register with the government (though many have refused with no sanctions imposed) and restrictions on their freedom to communicate with the public outside of their membership.

Restrictions on freedom of speech are being suffered by priests now. Five priests of the Bilbao diocese are presently being sentenced to 10- to 12-year prison sentences because they wrote a pamphlet and engaged in a combined sit-in and hunger strike demonstration. Such sentences put the priests in a class with dynamite-using saboteurs.

During the last year, hardly a month has gone by without reports of priests arrested or put on trial—usually for activities which would be routinely permitted in most of Western Europe or the United States under constitutional guarantees of free speech or assembly.

Among the Catalans, a major center of opposition has been the ancient and famous Benedictine Abbey of Montserrat. From 1946 to 1965, while Dom Aurelio Escarot was the abbot, he stood as a symbol of resistance to the Falangist government and of Catalan nationalism. His vivid denunciations of the government, which went so far as to call "un-Christian,"

finally led to his exile. His successor, Dom Casiano just continued the tradition. On one occasion, defending a writer on trial for an article calling for social reform, he told a court that "it has become accepted practice to reduce Christians to silence by treating them as if they were Communists when their consciences prevailed upon them to behave according to the precepts of the Gospel."

For nearly a year, however, the chief center of agitation has been in the Basque provinces, where martial law has been proclaimed in response to the activities of anti-government

ent terrorists. Among the most ardent supporters of the interlocking causes of social reform and Basque self-determination have been younger members of the clergy, including many worker-priests. The government has accused some of these priests of associating or sympathizing with the Basque terrorist organization, "Euzko Fatherland and Freedom."

Offenses for which Basque priests have been fined or imprisoned have included refusal to display the Spanish flag in the sanctuary, criticism of government officials in sermons, participation in demonstrations and publication or distribution of subversive literature.

An estimated 10 Basque priests are presently serving long prison terms and at least as many more are still awaiting trial. Elsewhere in Spain, priests have been arrested for association with outlawed labor organizations.

The administration in Bilbao, Bishop Jose Maria Ciurda Lachiondo, 51, of the neighboring Santander diocese, has vigorously opposed police activity against demonstrators even when he disagreed with them. The invasion of the bishop's residence to arrest the five demonstrating priests was undertaken over Bishop Ciurda's protest.

The concordat itself has been subject to increasing criticism by Church leaders, largely because it gives the government a veto power over the appointment of bishops, and is probably due for revision before very long. Also apparently due for change, though perhaps on a less formal level, is the longstanding tradition whereby high churchmen participate actively in the government.

Archbishop Casimiro Morillo Gonzalez of Madrid resigned from several key government positions earlier this year after a campaign of severe criticism by priests and laymen because of his close identification with the Franco regime.

According to unofficial information, the Franco regime still has a high proportion—perhaps a majority—of strong supporters in the Spanish hierarchy. But this support seems to be shrinking through the appointment of younger bishops and the government's increasing activity against clergy and Church institutions.

One point, at least, is certain. If Spain were to witness another upheaval similar to the civil war of the 1930s, the Church today would not be identified with the Franco government as it was three decades ago.

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