

The Church and Totalitarianism

Our Catholic Heritage

Church Condemns Fascism, Nazism, Communism

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

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Mussolini aptly described totalitarianism when he said: "Nothing outside or above the state; nothing against the state; everything within the state; everything for the state."

In the totalitarian system of government, therefore, the state dictated every facet of culture, politics, economics, religion and the personal liberty of its citizens. Totalitarianism, whether of the Communist or the Fascist model, is a direct attack on the human rights and dignity of citizens. Totalitarianism always shackles the Church, the champion of human freedom.

The Marxists set up the first totalitarian state in Russia in 1917. Not content with one nation's subjugation, they managed to export their theory of Soviet Communism on an international scale. Such communistic ideas, blended with

various anarchistic, socialistic and anti-clerical theories, helped to spark the revolutions which took place in Mexico and Spain prior to World War II.

The menace of international Communism, which is basically anti-religious, seemed to be carrying the field. The Church suffered severe losses of personnel and faithful by death and imprisonment prior to, during, and since World War II as a result of Communist activities. Russian Communists and their fellow travelers boasted that Communism is the rule of the workers. In practice, Communism is the absolute rule of the supreme Communist Party.

A second type of totalitarianism developed in Italy and Germany and was called Fascism in the former; Nazism in the latter. According to this model, the state is supreme, above any individual, political party or institution, and its powers are centralized in a dictator. Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy were its leaders.

Fascism was diametrically opposed to Communism, but equally totalitarian.

For a time, the Church in Italy was able to live with Fascism. But events in Italy soon forced Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) to condemn Fascism in his scathing encyclical *Non Abbiamo Bisogno* (1931) as "an ideology which openly resolves itself into a true pagan worship of the State... a sham religion which cannot in any way be reconciled with Catholic teaching and Catholic conduct."

After his rise to power in 1933, Adolph Hitler soon began an undeclared war on the Church in Germany. So devastating were the anti-Catholic atrocities in Germany, even before the start of World War II, that Pope Pius XI was forced to issue a strongly worded encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937). This condemnation of Nazism, the first great public document to confront the Nazis, was

smuggled into Germany and read from every Catholic pulpit on Palm Sunday, 1937. In this encyclical, the Holy Father described Hitler as a "mad, possessed prophet of repulsive arrogance."

At the same time, the Holy Father condemned Soviet Communism in equally stern language in his encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris* (1937).

The Church had taken the lead in condemning Fascism, Nazism and Communism even before World War II started. Constantly, the Holy Father and the Church worked for human rights. The New York Times summed up the gratitude of the free world to Pope Pius XI and the Church when he died, Feb. 10, 1939:

"Pius XI made his little domain (Vatican City)... a center of freedom and of defense of religion against the newer cult of worship of the State. In this defense he was as brave as he was wise. The free men and women, whose battles he fought, will not forget him."

A Priest-Hero for the Catholic Mexican People

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

Plutarco Calles (1924-1928), "The First Chief of the Revolution," who was secretly supported by the U.S. government, diabolically enforced the anti-Catholic laws of the Mexican Constitution (1917). This Constitution, approved by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, promulgated laws against the Catholic Church which were as severe as any in history, and this a Catholic country.

All foreign priests and teachers were expelled from Mexico. In 1926, all public worship was prohibited. Catholic schools were closed; priests and Sisters were harassed by the government. When the Catholics of Mexico began to organize protests, which sometimes ended in violence, Calles reacted with a bloody persecution.

While the civilized nations of the world, including the United States, turned their backs, hundreds of priests and nuns were exiled, imprisoned or killed. Only the Catholic Church in the United States protested. Pope Pius XI also protested the prosecution in his encyclical on the "Persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico."

One of the priests who was martyred was Father Miguel Pro Juarez, S.J. whose life is the stuff of a novel. Born in Guadalupe, Mexico, on Jan. 13, 1891, to a fairly prosperous family, Miguel grew up in a typically Catholic Mexican family. As he grew old-

er, however, he grew so lax in the faith that his pious mother prayed like another St. Monica for



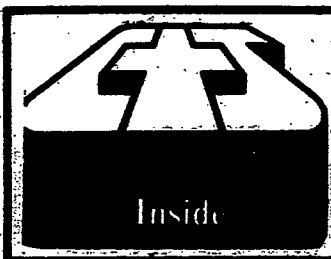
another St. Augustine. Her prayers were heard.

In 1911, Mexico was bathed in blood of revolutions and pillaged by the rag-tag armies of Pancho Villa and Zapata. At Durango, churches were profaned and nuns violated. Priests were marked men. There was open war on the Catholic Church. Miguel Pro entered the Society of Jesus in 1911.

By 1913, war finally came to the Jesuit seminary and the seminarians had to disperse. Miguel's flight took him to the United States, to Spain, to Nicaragua, back to Spain and then to Belgium, where he was ordained on Aug. 21, 1925. The next year he was back in Mexico in disguise.

Like the hedge-priests of Ireland during the English persecution, Father Pro had to hide from the harassment of the police. He had to celebrate Mass and bring the sacraments to the faithful in secret. Finally, he and his brother were arrested in a police sweep following an attempted assassination of General Obregon. On Nov. 23, 1927, they were shot by a firing squad. Father Pro's last words were: Viva Christo Rey! ("Long live Christ the King!")

The Catholics of Mexico have made Father Pro's burial crypt an unofficial national shrine. They consider him a martyr for religious liberty. In 1947, Father Pro's cause was introduced in Rome with a view towards canonization.



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