

Critics of papal visit fear failure, Mexican bishop says

By Karen M. Franz
Editor

More than 100 years of systematic persecution against the church — including torture, propaganda, legal restrictions and the intense proselytizing efforts of fundamentalist sects — have failed to lessen the faith of the Mexican people, according to Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales.

Instead, Bishop Garcia claimed, the persecutions have produced a spiritual renewal among Mexican Catholics.

The prospect of this failure being put on display to the world is the real reason for widespread opposition — especially among such anti-clerical factions as the Mexican branch of Masonry — to the pope's planned 1990 visit to the country, the bishop said. The visit "will signal the end of their campaign to eliminate the church," said Bishop Garcia, a member of Mexico's 15-bishop Episcopal Commission to Receive the Pope. For the Masons, he said, the visit will signify that "they are a little bit of a museum piece."

Bishop Garcia, head of Rochester's sister Diocese of Tabasco, Mexico, visited Rochester recently to discuss the Diocese of Rochester's Tabasco mission team with social ministry officials, and to inform Bishop Matthew H. Clark that the pope may visit Tabasco in May.

Although public opinion seems to favor relaxing the constitution's harsh anti-church measures, since the papal visit was announced July 27 its opponents have charged that the Mexican bishops contrived the visit to pressure the government for changes the bishops seek to the Mexican constitution.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Bishop Garcia traced the history of the church's relationship with the various powers that have ruled Mexico since the days of Spanish colonialism.

'The thrust of the visit would be, as always, to confirm the faith of his brothers and sisters. But it would also be an opportunity to clarify the history of the real church.'

Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales

Under the Spanish and in the early years of Mexico's independence, the people suffered greatly from economic hardship and the effects of continuous political strife. The church, on the other hand, had prospered under the Spanish system of *Patronato Royal*, a relationship in which the state played an active role in the administration and support of the church.

Although the church hierarchy later came to oppose state involvement in its governance — including the selection of bishops — *Patronato Real* allowed the church to amass great power, wealth and

land holdings. At one point, the church owned fully one-third of all Mexican property.

As independent Mexico became more and more influenced by the political philosophies of England and France, however, Mexican liberals sought to eliminate church influence in politics and society, and to strip the church of its wealth.

Formal persecution began with the constitution of 1857, whose provisions served to impoverish the clergy, and to destroy their reputations and political power. One of the leading factions in the continuing repression of the church, Bishop Garcia observed, is the York rite of Masonry, which had been introduced to the nation by Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico (1825-1830).

The relationship between church and state continued to deteriorate during the mid- and late-1800s. Priests were killed and tortured, clergy and religious were banished, seminaries were confiscated, and nearly all churches were either plundered or completely destroyed. Among the churches razed in this persecution was the Cathedral of Tabasco.

Persecution of the church abated somewhat during the era of dictator Porfirio Diaz, who ruled the nation with an iron hand from 1876 to 1911.

Yet when Diaz was overthrown, his opponents retaliated against the church, placing a number of repressive articles in the constitution of 1917, under which Mexico is still governed. More than 80 years later, the bishops of Mexico are still struggling to have these provisions reversed.

In particular, Bishop Garcia said, the Mexican bishops seek changes in constitutional articles calling for:

- prohibition of religious involvement in the education of farmers and workers.
- prohibition of monastic orders.
- restriction of worship to within church buildings and only under watch.
- prohibition of church ownership of any property, with all church facilities technically owned by the government.
- no legal status — virtual non-existence — for the church.

He said the bishops see the question of legal status, contained in Article 130 of the constitution, as the key to gaining religious liberty for Mexico's Catholics.

Although Bishop Garcia said that in recent years the government has enforced these provisions only "selectively ... as a reminder or sword over the people's heads," talk of amending Article 130 is hotly debated.

Only recently, since the 1988 election of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, has the government shown any inclination to negotiate with the church. Salinas set precedent in Mexican politics by inviting church representatives to attend his inauguration last December.

Bishop Garcia also points out that Salinas' state secretary jumped the gun on the nation's bishops, announcing approval of the papal visit before the bishops or the pa-

Continued on page 22



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier
Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales, the leader of Rochester's sister diocese in Tabasco, Mexico, discusses his hope for a papal visit and the effect the upcoming tour is having on the Mexican political scene.

Sponsor A Child like Conchita (\$15 a month)

CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION
For CHILDREN
& AGING

Founded and directed by
CATHOLIC LAY PEOPLE.

YOUR \$15 MONTHLY PROVIDES A NEEDY CHILD WITH: NOURISHING FOOD, MEDICAL CARE, the chance to GO TO SCHOOL and HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. YOUR CHILD WILL GROW IN THE DAILY KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S LOVE AND YOUR LOVE.

You will receive a photo of your child, description of your child's country, family history, translated letters, & quarterly newsletters!

Plus you will receive the personal satisfaction of helping a child in need.

Let the little children come unto me.

— Mark 10:14



Little Conchita lives in a small village in the mountains of Guatemala. Her house is made of cornstalks, with a tin roof and dirt floor. Her father struggles to support the family as a day laborer. Your concern can make the difference in the lives of children like Conchita.

FOR THE CHILD WHO IS WAITING
You can make visible GOD'S LOVE.
(Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Philippines, India, Kenya).

The NEW Dickens

One of Rochester's most popular restaurants

We invite you to see our newly remodeled dining room.
We have added many new Italian dishes to our already large menu.

A must Wed., Thurs., & Fri.
our famous Lobster Bisque.

1501 University Ave. (Between Culver & Winton Rd.)

271-6470 or 271-9635 for reservations
Plenty of free parking.



CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION
FOR CHILDREN
& AGING

Attn: Robert Hentzen
President

13001 Wornall Road
P.O. Box 410327
Kansas City, MO 64173-0158
(816) 941-9100

YES I would like to share my blessings with a needy child.

I would like to sponsor a boy girl A CHILD WHO MOST NEEDS MY HELP.

I am enclosing \$15 for first month \$45 for three months.
 \$90 for six months \$180 for the entire year

I cannot sponsor a child at this time, but I enclose my gift of \$_____ to be used for the EMERGENCY FUND for Children.

Please send me more information on sponsoring a child.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

Main checks payable to: CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN & AGING (CFCA)
Member: U.S. Catholic Mission Association • National Catholic Development Conference
• Catholic Press Association • Financial report available on request CJ 10/5/89