

History of the Catholic Church in Mexico

By MANUEL GOMEZ.

CHAPTER IV.

Conclusion.

BRIEF tho our study of the history of the catholic church in Mexico has been, the conclusions to be drawn from it are inescapable.

The social basis of the church has been medievalism, peonage and domination by a bloated and futile land-owning aristocracy. As an integral part of this social order in the past the church piled up great wealth for itself, while it sought to maintain its authority by inquisitorial methods and by keeping the masses of the people in abysmal ignorance.



By Voze

As a religious institution the church is a purveyor of gibbering superstition for the mental enslavement of the masses. But we have seen that it is ridiculous to speak of the Roman catholic church in Mexico or anywhere else as a religious institution. The clerical organization seeks to permeate every phase of economic and political life. Defense of church privileges on the grounds of "religious toleration" is therefore entirely specious—even if the mere mention of toleration by the institution responsible for the holy inquisition were not in doubtful taste.

As a political institution the church is a pillar of reaction. It has been exposed as a defender of feudal and semi-feudal privileges, an irreconcilable enemy of Mexican progress, an accomplice of the imperialist designs of foreign capital.

The Record of History.

From the foregoing chapters the reader will have noted that the history of the Mexican people since the Spanish conquest records three great forward movements:

(1) The struggle for national independence (1810-21); (2) the great pro-capitalist reform movement led by Benito Juarez, culminating in the reform laws, the Constitution of 1857 and the long-drawn-out combat with Maximilian's foreign-implemented empire; (3) the Mexican revolution which began in 1910, overthrowing the military-aristocratic dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, sweeping aside Victoriano Huerta, gradually incorporating the diverse demands of bourgeois democrats, land-hungry Indian peasants and organized industrial workers in a battle against native aristocracy and foreign imperialism.

What the role of Mexican catholicism has been in each of these historic upheavals has been made clear to us. In not one of them has the church played a part of which it dares to boast today.

A consistent foe of progress, the church cannot lay claim to a share in a single of the great liberating traditions cherished by modern Mexico.

This is a terrible indictment of any institution. The history of the Mexican people as a whole supplies the best touchstone for judging the history of the catholic church in Mexico.

Where is the Church Today?

But the last word of history has not yet been written. At the present time

Mexico is living thru one of the proudest periods of her development. Mexico has not yet a workers' and peasants' government, but the peasants are still armed in great numbers and the agrarian revolution is still going forward, while the working class, 75 per cent organized in trade unions, occupies a strategic position in the life of the nation. President Calles, a petty-bourgeois, but a sincere national-revolutionary, is carrying out a policy based upon the principle of making Mexico economically as well as politically independent. His fear that the class-conscious workers may seize too many of the good things that he wishes to accumulate for petty Mexican capitalism has led him to make some ill-conceived compromises with Wall Street and Washington—which proves that petty-bourgeois leadership cannot be trusted to pilot the Mexican revolution to fruition. Nevertheless, his program indicates many points on which a constructive Mexican nationalism can base itself.

The Mexican nation has won the admiration of all Latin America, which looks to it as a leader against U. S. aggression. Thruout Mexico, and thruout Latin America as well, there is a growing consciousness that Mexico may be able not only successfully to resist the encroachments of imperialism but to build for itself a sound, independent economic foundation in the process, and at the same time to lead Latin America along the path of unified resistance to the lords of Wall Street.

Mexican catholicism has no part in all this. As usual, it stands in open opposition to what is plainly the only program on which a truly independent Mexican nationalism can be embodied.

The Present Conflict.

The present conflict between the Calles government and the catholic hierarchy is not a religious struggle, but a struggle between the revolution and reaction. The fight to nullify the national-revolutionary constitution of 1917 has been going on for a long time. It was first waged around the anti-foreign and agrarian provisions of article 27; then it shifted for a time to article 123 (containing labor provisions); it was again concentrated on article 27 when the new oil and land laws were adopted in the spring of this year.

That the general reactionary attack is now concentrated on the anti-clerical provisions of the constitution follows as a matter of course. Since the debacle of Adolfo de la Huerta's attempted counter-revolution, the church is the only important organized reactionary force in Mexico.

On August 1 the anti-clerical provisions of the constitution were to go into effect. The provisions to which the church took particular exception were those prohibiting the church from holding property, requiring the civil registration of all priests, secularizing primary education, and denying to ecclesiastical publications the right to invade the field of politics. Against the provision for registration the clergy declared a general strike. With the advice of Rome, an interdict was laid upon the country. All church functions requiring the participation of a priest were discontinued. Twenty-five thousand priests announced themselves in open rebellion against the revolution.

Behind the church was the reaction. Wealthy Mexican aristocrats organized themselves into the League for Religious Defense and declared a boycott on luxuries, the announced purpose being to paralyze all economic life and thus bring the government to its knees.

However, the rebellion has already been clearly defeated. Its one chance of success was to split the revolutionary forces and pave the way for intervention by U. S. imperialism. This failed. All that was accomplished was to accentuate the reactionary basis of church support.

(This final chapter of The History of the Catholic Church in Mexico will be concluded next week.)