

History of the Catholic Church in Mexico

By MANUEL GOMEZ.
CHAPTER IV—Concluded.

AMERICAN editorial writers comment on the present church conflict in Mexico with a certain amount of bewilderment. Eventually, they protest, the church must win out, for 90 per cent of the Mexican people are Catholics. Their logic continues to bear up rather remarkably, considering the shocks that it receives with every day's news.

As a matter of fact, the editorial logic referred to above has been proved false by all the events of history, not only European but also Mexican. (This is quite aside from the fact that while a great majority of Mexicans are Catholics, the percentage is by no means as high as that indicated in the religiously padded membership figures given out by the clergy.) It has been precisely in "Catholic countries" that the most bitter struggles against the church took place. Could the reformation have swept over nearly all Europe in the clearing years of the middle ages if it were impossible for Catholics to overthrow Catholicism?

Mexicans were early obliged to strike at the swollen power of the Catholic hierarchy. As far back as 1822, the year after independence from Spain, it was decided to occupy the buildings of the Philippine missions and to confiscate the funds accumulated by the Spaniards for clerical activities outside of Mexico.

On Nov. 23, 1855, a law was passed calling the immunity from civil prosecution formerly enjoyed by priests. The clergy fought this law savagely, but it did them little good. In June of the following year the government decreed the abolition of entail of church property. A precedent for interfering with church property had been created in 1822, as we have seen, but the decree against entail aroused the clergy to fury.

From the bloody war that followed the church emerged still worse off. With Benito Juarez at the head of a triumphant liberal government, the constitution of 1857 (referred to at length in a previous chapter) was put into effect, and in July of 1859 the reform laws were promulgated, suppressing all monastical institutions and prohibiting the exercise of functions by all except secular clergy. In the same month civil marriage was established; on July 31 cemeteries were taken away from church control, and on Aug. 11 religious holidays were denied recognition, and government officials were forbidden to take part in religious ceremonies.

And thus right on down thru the latest revolutionary period.

During these last fifteen years or more the influence of the church among the masses of the Mexican people has been declining rapidly. In the north and along the Pacific and Gulf coasts, many of the churches will be found standing empty. Organized labor has broken away almost completely from clerical influence. The same thing is noted among wide sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, the governing bureaucracy, intellectuals, etc. Even the peasants of the central plateau, while still the backbone of Catholic strength, are beginning to develop anti-clerical movements.

In the present conflict the church has found extremely little active support against the Calles government except among the wealthy reaction-

aries. The division is along class lines, with organized labor marching in the forefront of the anti-Catholic forces.

What will the outcome be? It is indicated for us in the fact that the church has always pushed against the forces of history. What is against history must eventually be destroyed by history.

President Calles insists that his government is attacking the Catholic church not as a religious but as a political institution. But what is political? What is left of the Roman Catholic church in Mexico after the new laws and regulations are in effect? No right to hold property, no foreign officials, no services of any kind outside of the church buildings assigned for that purpose, no right to wear ecclesiastical vestments on the street, no control whatever over elementary education, no polemical press. The process has been going forward at unprecedented speed since the overthrow of Porfirio Diaz.

What will take the place of Catholicism—whether it will be a modified hierarchical form, or something else—remains to be seen. Last year an attempt was made, with the covert and sometimes the open support of the government, to set up a Mexican Schismatic Catholic apostolic church, as against the Roman Catholic. The "Cismaticos" entered upon the scene with spectacular energy, but their attempt appears to have failed. It is possible that the peasants, the masses of whom are still religious, will eventually group themselves around their local priests. One thing is certain, Mexico's reformation will not and cannot follow the classic European lines.

The plight of the church should surprise no one familiar with the basis of its original power. The whole course of modern Mexican history tells us that the present movement is part and parcel of a great Mexican revolution which could not reach fruition while leaving the feudal church intact.

The End.

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By JEANNETTE D. PEARL.

IT is now becoming apparent that the tiny atom has stored within itself an infinite amount of latent energy, which, when once released, will just astound the world with the tremendous magnitude of its power and possibilities.

A similar discovery is now coming to light from an element of quite a different sort. An element not so tiny as the atom, but almost as much obscure, the hitherto submerged working class. This huge labor body also has stored in its cells infinite latent energy, which too, when once released, must amaze mankind with the magnitude of its power and the extent of its possibilities.

A glimpse of this latent energy of the labor cell is now being revealed in the huge co-operative enterprise, initiated, begun and being completed by members of the working class for members of the working class. The co-operative dwellings are much more than a mere attempt at cheaper and better living conditions for workers. These buildings, scientifically constructed, artistically designed, breathe a living spirit—the spirit of working class solidarity—a feature new in the social life of the worker.

This co-operative surge is not a whim. It is not an experiment. It is the signal of the workers' will to power—to mass action, mass effort, mass achievement. It is the assertive expression of a repressed force taking definite course. It is not sporadic. It is deep-rooted. It is not confined to any one city. It is nationwide and worldwide.

It is not an abandonment of the class struggle, but an intensification of it. In collective activity, workers will be trained for co-operative life, co-operative hope, co-operative efficiency. It is an additional channel in the means for labor emancipation. It is an added bridge for the revolution to cross. In co-operative enterprise

