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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
IN MEXICO

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Religious Education
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Religious Education

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

No attempt has been made in this thesis to cover the whole of the problem of Evangelical Religious Education in The Republic of Mexico, nor to deal with all the aspects of that country's situation.

It was the purpose of this study to show the influence that religion has had on the character and education of the Mexicans; the decisive and deep influence that the Catholic Church of Rome has exercised in the Mexican's rejection of religious teaching including even the Roman Catholic, and the need for a more efficient evangelical educational program.

The first part of this thesis has been devoted to the general character of the Mexican Indian society and its institutions, as well as to the general characteristics of the Indian character, before the Spanish Conquest. The moral aspects of those institutions have been described along with the general characteristics of that civilization.

The Spanish invasion occupies the second chapter, for it marked a definite and tremendous change in the life of Latin America, transforming not just its external aspects,

but the internal attitudes, the psychology, the spirit, and the mind of these people.

As a result of her war against the Moors, Spain had in those days a strong religious zeal which had brought together as a symbol the sword and the cross. Their war against the Mohammedans was a war of the cross against the heresy of "The Prophet" as Mohameth is called; it was a holy war. Every Spaniard was proud of serving in this cause, and soon, the terms Spanish and Christian (Catholic) were synonymous in their mind. They considered themselves people chosen by God in the service of Christianity, for the support of the Catholic Church and the destruction of any other form of worship.

Such was the spirit of those who came to America and conquered it for Spain and for Rome; again the sword and the cross were together, each supporting the other. The imposition of Catholicism on the country by any means was the immediate task of the invaders. Unfortunately, their impatience, their thirst for gold which was most imperative among them, their cruel behaviour, along with the unchristian spirit of the majority of the priests, produced the actual attitude of indifference or superstition that the Mexicans and the Latin Americans have toward religion.

Mexico could certainly have been a Catholic country if a real indoctrination had occurred. While some of the early missionaries were worthy of eternal gratitude and admiration, others were comfort seekers. The Indians were taught a few prayers (usually in Latin or Spanish), and to cross themselves. Then they were baptized and counted as Christians. Of course, to those Indians Christianity was only the religion of their oppressors and the cross, the Virgin Mary and the saints were the gods who had defeated theirs, being more powerful, but not better. It is not difficult to explain their tenacity in keeping many of their former religious habits. In view of that tenacity, the priests began a process of assimilation and substitution of deities and practices. The similarity already existing between Indian and Catholic practices and customs simplified the process of substitution.

After three centuries of really cruel domination the people of Mexico arose and cast out their oppressors. With the proclamation of Independence from Spain, made in 1810, a great struggle began which did not cease when Spain left Mexico. The spiritual and material confusion which a war brings, has existed in Mexico for a long time because until early in the twentieth century, she had no political peace. After the war with Spain, varying interests within the different parties; and the American and French invasions, were a source of painful chaos.

The passionate love for liberty which was Mexico's was only strengthened by her long struggle. Independence for the spirit was also partially secured when the Roman church, so long a cause of disturbance was in 1857 confined to the sphere of religion. Unfortunately the reaction has been bitter and almost every form of religion is now practically despised by the average Mexican, not so much in words as in attitude.

Education, which during the colonial epoch and the early years of Mexico's independence was in the hands of the Catholic church, has been secularized, and the historically great cultural tradition of Mexico has changed, from strongly religious, to religious indifference with its philosophy cast in the mold of Graeco-Roman classicism.

The Evangelical penetration started about 1850 with the introduction of the Bible. The teachings of Jesus as found in the Scriptures are the greatest challenge that Mexico has ever had. The results of this work are evident and its wonderful effects are a tangible reality. The same obstacles for more rapid progress are still encountered. There is an almost complete misunderstanding of and little or no desire to know "Christian" teaching. For a long time loyalty to Christ and loyalty to the Catholic church have been regarded as one and the same, and Mexico is tired of an organization which has given nothing but sorrow to her. The figure

of Christ, the Man of Galilee, is still unknown, and the word Christianity awakens feelings of either superstition or indifference.

CHAPTER II

MEXICO BEFORE THE SPANISH INVASION

The land of Mexico was possessed by many different peoples, the most powerful of which were the Aztecs of the Nahva stock, who had come to power during the centuries immediately preceeding the discovery of America.

They had built up their city Tenochtitlan in the midst of a lake by enlarging an island, and soon their armies began to seize the neighboring towns. When the Spaniards came, the Aztecs were exercising political control over the peoples from the highlands of Northern Mexico to even far-off Guatemals and Nicaragua and the West-Pacific. Nevertheless, the dominated peoples were permitted to retain their customs and social and religious organization, provided the payment of tribute was punctual. That tribute is described by Parker:

. . . maize and fish, gold ornaments and turquoises, curious birds and animals - for the pleasure of the Aztec nobles and the adornment of the Aztec capital.

Enriched by the loot of a hundred triumphant campaigns, Tonochtitlan acquired a splendor which could scarcely be duplicated in Europe. ¹

¹ Henry Bamford Parkes. A History of Mexico (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1938), p. 21.

I. CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

The Aztec empire was ruled by a monarch and a nobility highly esteemed for their services and culture. Everybody was obligated to do some kind of public service. The land was worked by the masses and the fruits of it were a national benefit. Beggars were not known. Society was organized into guilds of merchants, teachers, potters, weavers, dyers, painters, dancers, architects, musicians, scribes, workers in metal, of jewelers, leather workers and so on. Brenner describes the situation which prevailed:

Every man must work. The father said to his child at the coming of age: "Look for some craft, or occupy yourself with agriculture . . . the land is our mother and must be cared for, and always requires our love. Or carry the merchant's staff, or the warrior's shield and mask, or do penitence in the temple, to become a priest. For where has it been known that man live not by craft, but by nobility alone."²

A wide commerce was held with many other peoples including some in Central America. Mines were actively worked and agriculture was prosperous. A system of monetary exchange was used with gold as its basis. They were highly proficient in the manufacture of pottery, woven fabrics and metals, especially gold and silver. A complicated hieroglyphic writing enabled them to record their history, traditions, religious festivals and medical formulas, tribute rolls,

² Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Alters. (Payson & Clarke Ltd. 1929) p. p. 49, 50.

arts, sciences and so forth. Mathematics, astronomy, botany, medicine and the natural sciences in general were widely studied. Poetry had also her representatives since literary skill was common even among the princes. The tendency to learning was characteristic of the race.

Visual arts had an important place in their activities: painting, architecture and engineering were especially favored and highly developed. Palaces and other monuments were found side by side with their *teocallis* (temples) along the different avenues which crossed the city. There were canals which gave a beautiful Venice-like aspect to the golden Aztec capital. Parker describes the city,

Two stone aqueducts provided the city with drinking water from Chapultepec. Three concrete causeways thirty feet broad connected it with the mainland, while to the east of the islands a dike seven miles long had been built across Lake Texcoco, cutting the lake in two and preventing Tenochtitlan from being flooded by any sudden rise in the level of the water. On the southern side of the city was a broad embankment, lit at night by flaming braziers, to which came the peasants of Anahuac in fleets of canoes, bringing their tribute of maize and fruits and flowers. The Aztec nobles lived in houses of red or whitewashed stone, which were built round open patios with fountains and flower gardens and had gardens on their roofs. ³

All formal education was entrusted to the priests and was generally administered from the temples, thousands of which, truly magnificent and imposing in their grandeur, dotted the land. There was a large hierarchy of priests.

³ Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

The central temple was the meeting-point of the main causeways, so that everyone crossing the city had to pass by it.

II. RELIGION

When the Spaniards came to Mexico, they found an extremely religious people with gods of almost every kind, although the idea of a Supreme and Absolute Being was not known to them. He was held to be invisible, but His temples existed in several places. Only floral offerings and perfume were presented to Him, who was called Teotl (the general name for deity), and who was thought of as possessing powers and attributes not shared by any other god. Their manuscripts spoke of Him as "Him by whom we live" "He who has all in Himself." Nevertheless, their intuition of God was obscured by the mass of deities which formed their pantheon, and to some of which human sacrifices were offered.

There were thirteen principal gods and many inferior ones. Among the most important were:

a. Tezcatlipoca, corresponding to the Greek Zeus who was held in great reverence. Worship of him was the most important. He was the god of providence and the soul of the world, the creator of heaven and earth and the master of all things, being always represented as young to indicate that time had no power to lessen his strength. He was also the

personification of darkness and presided over darkness and night. Dreams and phantoms of the gloom were supposed to be sent by him.

b. Quetzalcoatl was perhaps the most interesting among the gods and also one of the chief influences for the success of the conquest and the conversion of the natives to Christianity. Myths about him contain the idea of the virgin birth, and therefore the idea of the virgin birth of Jesus and the Virgin Mary found an echo in Indian traditions. He was held to have been a "full grown man, tall of stature, white of skin, full bearded, barefooted and bare-headed, clothed in a long white robe strewn with red crosses and carrying a staff in his hand".⁴ He was the high priest of Tollan who, according to another myth, was one of the creator gods. He was good and wise. He knew how to give to his people the best of everything. He was the author of a miraculous prosperity. Cotton was very abundant and of all colors. There were also untold numbers of the most beautiful singing birds. His people were rich and lacking in nothing. But his enemy, Tezcatlipoca, brought every possible pestilence against him and finally made him drunk. As

⁴ Historia del Origen de las Gentes que poblaron la America Setentrional, Cap. XV, quoted by Brinton, American Hero Myths, p. 96 cited by Charles Braden, Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico (Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press - 1930) p. 22.

Quetzalcoatl had prohibited drunkenness, he sadly left his city and sailed away, after promising to come back some time with other people like him to rule the country. When the Spaniards came the Indians thought that the beneficent rule of Quetzalcoatl had returned and the invaders were his descendants, semi-gods at least.

c. Cinecoatl or Cihuacoatl was the first among the goddesses. Her name means "woman of the serpent" and she was something like the genius of fertility, extending her influence to both the vegetable and the animal realms. Her temple at Tepeyac was one of the most attended in Mexico.

In the same place, and bearing the name of Virgen del Tepeyac or Virgen de Guadalupe the most famous virgin in Latin America now has her temple.

As for their theology and philosophy of religion, the Mexicans had a different type of mythology than that found among other peoples. They honored the virtues, not the vices of their divinities, such as justice, bravery, chastity, prudence. Although they had deities of both sexes, they did not marry them. The pleasures which the Greek and Romans attributed to their gods would never have been accepted among the Mexicans, who imagined that the gods had a strong aversion to every species of vice. Their worship was done

with the object of appeasing the anger of their deities, provoked by their guilt, and to ask for their protection.

Spence says:

As a matter of fact, the Mahuan displayed a theological advancement greatly superior to that of the Greek or Romans and quite on a level with that expressed by the Egyptians and Assyrians. Toward the period of the Spanish occupation, the Mexican priesthood was undoubtedly advancing to the contemplation of the exaltation of one god whose worship was fast excluding that of similar deities. . . . ⁵

There is, in many respects, a similarity between the Indian and the Catholic religions. Such traditions as the Flood were common to both of them; there is a likeness between the goddess Cihuacoatl and Eve; there was presentation of new born babies in the temple, baptism, communion with the body of Huitzilopochtly (the god of war). Confession of sins to Tezcatlipoca was practiced twice a year. On occasions of confession the Indian went alone to some quiet place in his house, the temple, the mountains or to a fountain, and there he showed his contrition, sometimes before the statue of the god and many times to the priests who never repeated the confessions to anyone, claiming that it was the god, and not them, who had heard it. Sometimes the confessions were heard by the medical men for they believed that sickness was a result of sin. There was also celebration of the memory of the dead. Their fasts were extremely severe

⁵ Lewis Spence, Myths of Mexico and Peru, p. 54, cited by C. S. Braden, op. cit. p. 32.

and there was abstinence and chastity among the priests. The gift of the first fruits of the gods, the belief in the destruction of the world by evil spirits, an organized priesthood, constituted a basis for the introduction of Christianity. Even the ceremony of baptism was celebrated among the Indians before the Spanish entrance to America. It was performed by the mid-wife, and a priest was usually present. Padre Duran says that it was administered when the child was four days old and it was the occasion for naming him or her. The infant was given water to drink, was sprinkled with it, and finally immersed. Among other peoples baptism was performed between the ages of three and twelve years. What they thought to receive from that ceremony was a disposition to be good in their habits, to escape harm in temporal matters at the hands of the demons and to come by means of it and a good life to enjoy the protection of the gods to whom the children were consecrated, and under whose protection they were placed.

The cross was also a common sacred symbol among the Indians.

Though there was a belief in life after death, this idea had more poetical than real importance. It is not too important with them even now. They had high moral standards

for the details of daily life, and the punishment for the violation of any of those ethical rules could even be death.

So it is clear that in view of these similarities, it was a great deal easier for the Indians to yield to the various forms of external pressure which accompanied the efforts to convert them, than as if the two faiths had been totally unlike. Indeed, under Christian forms, the Indians carried over an "almost wholly pagan content", as for instance, the worship of the cross or the Virgin.

III. EDUCATION

Though religious education was separated from strictly lay education, both of them were intimately related and schools were held within the temples. The priests were usually the teachers and a very definitely organized priesthood embraced a great variety of religious orders under the general direction of the High Priest who came to power by election. In describing those priests, Fray Torquemada, a Spanish writer priest, tells us that they were very honest and chaste; they never drank wine or any intoxicating beverage. When they saw a woman they lowered their eyes to the ground. They displayed self control, gravity, dignity in their features and were held in the greatest esteem by the people and were allowed great authority.

since every aspect of their worship was carefully observed, including ornaments and music, schools were necessary for the preparation of those in charge of it. There were choir-boys, and one of the very important officials was the school master, who had charge of the temple school and trained the young people who were dedicated to the service of the gods.

Girls were also consecrated to the service of the temples. "Nothing, says Clavijero, was more jealously attended to than the chastity of these virgins." The girls had also their training schools where matters of religion, morality and housekeeping were taught to them. They were admonished:

"Do not adorn yourself profusely with overelaborate things, because this is a sign of little sense . . . Neither must your garments be very poor, dirty, or torn, because these are the signs of people who are laughable . . . Do not use strange words. When you walk do not go too fast nor too slow, for it is a sign of pride and pomp to go too slow, and too fast suggests disquiet and little surity . . . On the street and in the roads do not carry your head hanging, nor yet must you raise it too high . . .
6

In addition to the religious schools, and usually close to the temples, were other boys' schools. One was for the sons of common people; Another (called the Calmecac) was particularly for the sons of the nobles, where they were initiated into the traditions of their fathers and learned the art of hieroglyphic

writing, the principles of government and such knowledge of the stars and natural history in general as was current in that period.

Medicine and botany were sciences especially developed and studied.

The third type of school was for the boys of the middle classes, where they remained, as in the case of the other schools, until the time of marriage. They had to do less with the interior service of the temple and more with the external matters connected with it, caring for its buildings and grounds, working in several ways to provide funds for it, bringing wood from the mountains and so on. They were taught good manners and habits, corrected in their faults and taught the general principles of science and religion.

And finally, besides these great formal and regular schools, there were various professional schools.

It may be seen, however, that education was really in the hands of the priests. Moral and political matters were intimately connected. The details of behavior were carefully attended. The following passage is from a quotation given by Braden. ⁷

⁷ Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos, II, 59 ff. Braden, op. cit. p. 255.

. . . Reverence and salute your elders, comfort the poor and afflicted with kind words and works of mercy . . . Have no company with those who, like animals, do not honor father nor mother, and who will not listen to counsel . . . Be honest and well bred and do not bother nor annoy others. Go not where you are not called. Injure no one. Do not commit adultery, nor be licentious for it is a great vice and destroys those who are given to it. . . . Do not be an evil example nor speak indiscreetly; do not interrupt while others are speaking . . . Do not give yourself to fables, tricks or lies. Do not stir up discord where there is peace. Seek not pleasure; do not loaf in the streets, the markets, or the baths. . . Do not be a gossip. . . Offend no one . . . Be not proud. . . . nor depreciate others. . . .

Similar to those were the moral virtues taught to the girls and some additions were made befitting their sex, for instance:

. . . Should you forfeit your chastity, and afterwards be asked in marriage and should marry anyone, you will never be fortunate nor have true love . . . See that not more than one man approaches you . . . beware that you do not commit the treason against him, called adultery. See that you give no favor to another, since this, my dear and much beloved daughter, is to fall into a pit without bottom from which there will be no escape. According to the custom of the world, they will kill you; they will throw you into the street for an example to all the people, where your head will be crushed and dragged upon the ground . . . And remember that though no man shall see you, nor your husband know what happens, the god (God?) who is in every place sees you and . . . by his command you shall either be pained or struck blind or your body will wither or you will come to extreme poverty for daring to injure your husband . . . ⁸

It is seen that the punishments were extremely severe. Lies, for instance, were punished by piercing the tongue of

⁸ Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico, III, 423, 44 cited by Braden, op. cit. p. 256.

the liar with cactus thorns. Brenner says that "Sobriety and discipline were practiced for power, for accuracy, for ecstasy, for self-control in the sense of being able to sue the self to attain always a greater skill at life, and thus a greater delight." 9

The destruction of the Aztec civilization resulted in the loss of its art, its religion, its social structure, its language. Not only the development of the arts and sciences, the growth of communities of the Mexican empire came to an abrupt halt, but their morals and ethical standards were destroyed by the rude attitude and example of their conquerors. When Spain came, the Gran Tenochtitlan was

. . . ruthlessly demolished. The great temples were raged to the ground, the canals drained, the cause ways destroyed. Over the ruins . . . a new city was built . . . The gradual four-centuries-long disintegration of a great people was begun. 10

9 Brenner, op. cit. p. 54.

10 The New World Guides to The Latin American Republics. Vol. One (Quell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1943) p. 9.

CHAPTER III

THE SPANISH CONQUEST AND ITS METHODS AS A BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Character of the Invaders. When America was discovered in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, Spain was in the first glory of her victory against the Moors who had been in that country since early in the VIIIth century. The character of her struggle had been strongly religious and the Inquisition had been established to protect her people against heresies, especially against Jews and Mohammedans. Every Spaniard boasted of being a devoted Catholic; the Christian or no Christian faith of their forefathers was a matter of pride or of shame, and there was discrimination on this basis. The new converts from Judaism or Mohammedanism were continually watched and even the children and grandchildren of converts from another faith were held under suspicion.

Isabella and Ferdinand, the Spanish Monarchs, were called "The Catholic Sovereigns" and though they were very independent in their political and economical internal affairs, their spiritual submission to Rome was an accomplished fact. When their armies came to Mexico the battles were fought in the name of "God and the Holy Virgin"; they

would not be satisfied with less than a material and spiritual submission on the part of the Indians. Were not they God's own chosen people to destroy the enemies of Christianity? They had destroyed the Mohammedan empire in Spain and now they were to make the conquest of those heathen lands for Spain and Rome. So strongly rooted this idea was in them that the soldiers and even Herman Cortes said that the saints came to fight for them. Saint James, Saint Thomas and Saint Peter were "seen" on horses with swords in their hands killing Indians. Some representations of those saints dressed up as soldiers may be found yet in old churches.

In short, the general character of the whole conquest was distinguished by two characteristics on the part of the Spaniards: their insatiable thirst for gold, which spurred them to accomplish the most extraordinary adventures, and the religious zeal which inspired them to convert the Indians instead of killing them, whenever, indeed they were willing to accept their yoke.

Methods of Conquest. When the Spanish forces landed, an entirely new spectacle was presented to them, as well as to the Indians. There were two worlds discovering each other. The Spaniards were prepared to find extraordinary things, but not so the Indians. To them, the arrival of

the Spaniards was a sudden fact. The iron armor, the pistols, the horses which, together with the rider they thought of as being a strange creature and they recalled the prophecy of Quetzalcoatl regarding the appearance of the ones to come one day to rule Mexico. Everything had its part in making awful the impressions of the Indians; their minds were ready to receive them, for all the portents of the recent years had indicated that the time was near at hand when the prophecy should be fulfilled. The gods had spoken and those semi-gods had come; with a grim fatalism they bowed to the inevitable. The military and the religious conquest had the same basis, fear and wonder, of which Braden says:

The readiness of the Indians to listen to the religious teaching of the newcomers was in very direct proportion to the fear and wonder which they excited in their minds. It is also an indication of the attitude of Cortes toward the Indians, and reveals his disposition to fit into the part which myth and tradition had created for him. ¹

After the first stunning impression, the majority of the towns offered bitter resistance to the invaders; but they were soon annihilated by the superior weapons of the Spaniards and their march toward the capital did not stop.

¹ Charles Braden, Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico (Durham, North Carolina - Duke University Press - 1930) p. 91.

There they were peacefully received by Moctezuma, the Indian monarch, and a palace was given to them for their residence. Encouraged by such treatment and knowing that they were more or less protected by the tradition of Quetzalcoatl, Cortes began talking about religious matters. He asked the emperor to reject and to destroy their idols and to stop the sacrifices to them presenting to him the images of the Virgin and the cross as substitutes for them. The answer to his address was:

Malinche, (the name by which he was known to the Indians) we have heard all this from you in former occasions and willingly believe that this god and this illustrious woman are right good beings. But you should reflect how very recently you have arrived in our country and that you have but entered our city. You should certainly give us time to learn more of your gods. When we have satisfied ourselves respecting their qualities, we shall certainly make choice of those we consider best. How can you ask us to abandon our gods whom we have adored for so many years and prayed to and sacrificed to? If we should do so to please you, what would our priests, our young men, yes, even our boys say to it? Believe us, they would rise up in arms. The priests indeed have already spoken to our gods who have told them not to abandon human sacrifices nor any of our ancient practices; otherwise they would destroy our whole country by famine, pestilence and war. ²

Cortes could not say more on this subject. Some weeks after he was obliged to leave the capital in line of duty. In his absence, the soldiers who were left under the command of Pedro de Alvarado assaulted by surprise a temple

² Ibid. p. 101.

where the nobility were celebrating a feast and to which they had not brought their weapons. Alvarado and his men fell upon them killing as many as they could and taking prisoners to obtain by torture information about their treasures. The people arose in anger against the Spaniards as soon as they knew of that attempt, and the soldiers had to seek refuge in their quarters, being pursued by the Indians. Cortes returned, new forces from Cuba at his command, and a battle was fought in the streets and canals of the city until the Spanish army was defeated and expelled. Before they left, they took with them Moctezuma, whom they had taken prisoner while he was negotiating with Cortes. Then he was offered an easier death if he would become a Christian, but his ancestral pride, his shame, his hate toward a religion whose adherents had brought to him only disaster and sorrow, gave him courage enough to accept his death by any method, and he received it by torture.

Mode of Christianization. Reorganized and with the help of new allies, after a long siege the Spaniards defeated the Indians and took the capital. This done, measures for the religious conquest were taken. Cortes issued a requirimiento before taking possession of the land in the name of the "Catholic Majesties". It was given in Spanish and the Indians could not understand a word of it; but it

made no difference. Indeed, "the reading sometimes took place when there was no one present to hear; yet all scruples were apparently satisfied in this way, and if the Indians refused to submit, they were dealt with as rebels against royal authority." ³ However, no teaching in religious matters could be offered until the first missionaries came.

Three Flemish monks came in the year 1524. Among them was Fray Pedro de Gante, related to the Emperor Charles V and recognized today as the father of Christian Education in Mexico, where he spent his life as a true disciple of Jesus Christ, loved by the Indians and loving them.

After those three, twelve other Franciscan friars came under the direction of Fray Martin de Valencia. The character of those men was really exceptional, especially in view of the low state of the clergy in Spain during the period of the conquest. If they were narrow and fanatical, their holiness of life and unselfishness of purpose, their devotion to duty have not been exceeded in any period.

About eight months after the coming of the twelve, another group of Franciscans founded a monastery in Cuernavaca, and soon monasteries were scattered over the country,

³ Ibid, p. 125.

especially of the Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian orders. Fifty years later the first representatives from the vigorously newly formed "Company of Jesus" appeared in New Spain (1572) as Mexico was called at that time, founding the college of San Pedro y San Pablo four years later. Nevertheless, their work was done chiefly among the Spaniards and their descendants.

The conversion of the Indians was the chief interest of the earliest missionaries, but unhappily the secular priests who began to arrive in considerable numbers by the late thirties were not their equals. They lacked love, patience, honesty, having rather the ambition for riches and comfort characteristic of the soldiers. Gruening writes:

Meanwhile the luxury and magnificence of the clergy grew apace induced no doubt by the extraordinary conditions of unlimited servitude and boundless wealth of New Spain. The asceticism of the pioneers was forgotten. A new spirit of arrogant debauchery infected the ruling minority lay and cleric alike . . . the practice in that day to exploit the ignorant faith of the honest and simple-minded Indians for the clergy's financial benefit. ⁴

The strife for the usufructs of the system invaded the church itself. The regular clergy fought with the secular over the spoils, and various religious brotherhoods

⁴ Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage. (Pub. by the Century Co. New York and London, 1928) p. p. 172, 173.

quarreled with each other. The Dominicans accused the Franciscans of preventing the Indians from working in their houses and pointed out that the followers of Saint Francis had far greater edifices. The Franciscans in turn charged the brothers of Saint Dominic with envy. ⁵

However, though the corruption was general, there were placed where instruction was given. Since the earlier days of the conquest the methods followed were about the same. Child training was made the basis of any religious education. The children were required to be put in the hands of the clergy and located in large rooms which were used as dormitories and class rooms. They were cared for by old men and fed with provisions brought by their mothers who likewise looked after their clothing.

As for the adults and children who in large numbers could not enter these schools, they were baptized in mass after they had learned some prayers, to cross themselves and had knelt before the Virgin, the crucifix or the cross. This done they were considered as Christians and were obliged to support the church and the clergy in all their needs and wants. Their obligations were to attend mass, to

⁵ Icazbalceta, rep. in Don Fray Juan de Zumarrage, App. 24-5 - Letter of August 27, 1529. Cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 178.

celebrate the religious festivities and to work for the support of the church.

As soon as the military conquest of the town was done, it could be said that its "Christianization" was accomplished.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION AND RELIGION DURING THE SPANISH DOMINATION

Education. The Indian culture completely disappeared and the Spanish civilization took its place. Education was made one of the fundamental tasks of the clergy since teaching was one of their functions in the Old World.

The most common kind of school was the village type, attended by the community children but intended especially for the Indians since the other social classes were usually taught in their homes. Those schools were attached to a convent or to a church, large rooms having been built to serve as dormitories and classrooms. The priests and the friars were the teachers, though sometimes Indians helped them.

The school day began with matins which were attended by the school as a whole. After matins the children were taught until the hour of mass and again after mass until the noon meal hour. After eating they had a short free time and returned again to study until late afternoon. The curriculum consisted, first, of those things that every Christian (Catholic) ought to know: how to cross themselves and to kneel properly; the Lord's Prayer, and the Ave Maria,

the Apostle's Creed and the Salve Regina. The rest of their instruction was found in catechisms, the most popular of them being the one by Fray Alonzo de Molina, which soon acquired general and real importance. It begins with instructions as to making the sign of the cross and the prayers already quoted. It then lists: the fourteen articles of faith, seven relating to the divinity of Christ and seven to His humanity; the Ten Commandments, three relating to God and seven to man's relations with his fellows. Those relating to God are:

1. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.
2. Thou shalt not take His name in vain.
3. Thou shalt sanctify or keep holy the feast days doing no work or service labor thereon.

The five commandments of the Mother church follow:

1. To hear mass on Sundays and feast days.
2. To confess during lent.
3. To receive the body of Christ at Easter time.
4. To fast whenever the Mother church requires.
5. To pay tithes and first fruits.

The seven sacraments are also enumerated and briefly explained, as are the seven mortal sins, the seven virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The venial sins are pointed out and classified as are the eight beatitudes, the prayer for confession, the answers for the ritual of

A century later, the Baron de Humboldt wrote:

Now they are grave, melancholic, silent . . . The children are inclined to study and meditation and usually they are more intelligent than the Spanish children . . . for that reason the Indians are kept out of schools . . . ²

The school of Santa Cruz de Tlaltelolco was defended by Mendieta as late as 1576. He complained that the effort seemed to be to take everything away from the Indians and to give it to the Spaniards. But neither his voice or any other was heard and the school was closed.

Other efforts had been made in behalf of the mestizos. In 1529 the Franciscans founded the Colegio de Tezcuco for girls. In 1548 the School of San Juan de Letran was founded for boys. In 1558 the college called "de Nuestra Senorade la Caridad" was founded for the orphan daughters of Spanish and Indians. The daughters of Spaniards were also admitted. It was supported by the gifts of societies of charity and friends.

Due to the unbearable mistreatment that they received, many indians fled to the mountains where they could not be reached. But they could not take with them their destroyed culture or religion.

²Alexandre de Humboldt, Essai Politique sur le Royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne. (Paris, Chez F. Schoell library, Rue des Fosses Saint Germain L'Auxerrois - 1811) p. 90.

The situation for the Spaniards, creoles, and even those who among the mestizos were wealthy was different. They had every opportunity and their education was carefully looked after. In January 25, 1551, under the direct auspices of both the Crown and the Papacy, the University of Mexico was founded under the same rules by which the University of Salamanca (one of the most famous in Europe) was governed, the faculty being largely constituted of the most notable among the Jesuit Fathers. Many other colleges were also under their direction.

Religion. As has been said, there was a systematic and complete destruction of the Indian temples, idols and even ancient writings in order to do away with every signal and pretext for heathen religious practices. The Indians, especially the older and the poor, could not receive any adequate religious instruction but that of forms and rituals. There were certain similarities existent in both religions. Those facts are the general basis of actual Catholic worship in Mexico.

In the earlier days of the colony, Fray Pedro de Gante had taken advantage of the singing and dancing which always accompanied the Indian sacrifices. He wrote songs, the words of which were prayers, passages of the law and the things pertaining to Christianity and gave them to the

Indians to sing and to dance before the Catholic images. This practice was immediately followed by priests and friars in many other places. As abuses occurred, the chiefs of the church gave rules for the time and mode of those dances and songs, thus giving a more or less official acceptance to them. Many other such substitutions were made. The Franciscan Padre Betancourt, chronicler in Mexico wrote:

The Indians practice many ceremonies similar to those ordered by the evangelic law of Christ. The conversion of the natives was facilitated because the devil introduced things which he stole from our evangelical law, such as their method of communion, baptism, confession and adoration, which despite the enemy served that they received in truth what they had formerly received in falsehood. ³

And Padre Diego Duran, another of the earlier chroniclers, writing about the mixture of Catholic and Indian practices says of the festivals of the church in the celebration of special days and the former Indian ceremonies in honor of their deities: "Our movable feasts and their oldest and most important feasts often fall on the same day and at other times very close to one another." ⁴

The stories of the saints were slowly mixed with the legends of the Indian gods, as centuries before they had been mixed with the legends of the classic mythology. The

³ Vetancourt, "Teatro Mexicano", Vol. 1, 3 cap. VIII, cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 232.

⁴ Clavijero, Historia Antigua de Mexico, Libro VI, cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 233.

Catholic priests used to build the churches on the foundations of the destroyed teocallis, as a symbol, and rumors of miraculous apparitions of heavenly beings were then spread among the people. Of those "miracles", one did have definitely great importance.

In spite of the warring priesthoods, in spite of the feared and hated Spanishness of the new images; parallel to the undercurrent life of the ancient faith and cults, the demonstrable mystery of acceptance, transformation and new creation surged luminously to full expression. Somehow the interworking of imported form and native content awoke a new devotion, which made a new native religion and a new Christian art.

Of this epic a dearest and complete witness is our Lady of Guadalupe, Dark Madonna of the Tepexae, patroness of the nation. ⁵ Guadalupe "arose in the hills which had been shrine and dwelling of Tinonantzín or Tonantzín, ancient mother of deities . . . It is said that the Lady -- and which of the two, Guadalupe or Tonantzín, is not clear, for it might be either, and it is both -- wondered shocked and lost in these hills, homeless, in the first days of the colony. ⁶

The basic importance of the "apparition" of this Virgin, to whom a magnificent temple was erected, lies in the difficulties that the priests had to ~~make~~ the Indians love the Spanish-like saints and virgins. And a virgin with

⁵ The Pope Pius VI in his brief of April 13th, 1785 conceded plenary indulgence in the hour of death to all those who shall then have upon them one of the medals of "Our Lady of Guadalupe". Benedict XIV recognized her in a solemn ceremony in Rome. Pius XII crowned her as Queen of Latin America in 1945.

⁶ Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Altars (Payson & Clark Ltd. 1929) p. 149.

a Mexican appearance, wondering on the hills where Tonantzin used to have her dwellings, was a masterpiece of work for their conversion. In that Virgin, or, as the church would say, in that new aspect of the Virgin Mary, the Indians could feel something of their own, and thenceforth they could trust it.

But they could not trust the Spaniards. The laws given by the general government in Spain provided for their regular religious instruction. (Even now in many countries in Latin America it is a custom for the State to maintain some measure of responsibility for the religious life of their Indians) but that instruction was prevented by their masters. Christianity was pointed out to them as the highest moral goal, but the "Christian" Spaniards lived an evil life and the "Christian" priesthood was ambitious and wicked. They were taught that the virtues of Christianity were such as love, peace, joy, meekness, kindness . . . and the example of those virtues was to be seen in the Spaniards, who killed them and enslaved their children, who took everything they wanted at any time, no matter if it was the Indian's daughter or wife. They were told that Christ had made them free from the devil's subjection but the cost of that freedom was their daily sorrow.

Many of these Indians were taken as slaves for the mines, both men and women. Historians relate that:

It was ordered . . . that pregnant women or those recently in childbirth were not to work. And so they left the old and the sick, the pregnant and in child-bed at home, but . . . they were not able to work and needed their husbands and relatives. And so a village with twenty or thirty children under two or three years of age . . . who could support it? When the Indians returned they found all the children dead. If a mother took her child with her . . . she could not feel it . . .⁷

When working on the lands or in the homes of the Spaniards, the fate of the Indians was not better. With few exceptions, they were generally compelled to work without salary or support.

Some of them, in their despair, could go to those, who, among the friars, loved them. The majority of the clergy, though, had a different interest than the consolation of the Indians. Of this Gruening writes:

Within two decades after the conquest the clergy had already become so extortionate that the queen learning of the "excessive charges which the clerics and priests of New Spain collect for burials, masses, nuptial masses, marriages and all other things, related to holy worship" they were ordered "to adhere to the schedule practices in the archbishopric of Seville tripled".⁸

Prelates, bishops, priests and monks became so rich that they aroused the criticism of the Spaniards and the

⁷ Ibid. p. 79

⁸ Gruening, op. cit. p. 174.

resentment of those who had less fortune. They "pursue today", says a contemporary writer, "disposing of the goods of the church, spending them in pomp and other vices, and leaving inheritances to their sons and relatives." ⁹ It seems strange to talk about the "sons of the clerics", but it has to be remembered that there were but few limitations to their immorality, of which Rome believed little, in spite of the reports which from time to time came from New Spain.

The churches and convents had prospered too. They were so wealthy that their luxury scandalized a visitor sent by the King of Spain. He reported:

. . . I have seen two monasteries, one of which must have cost eight or ten thousand ducats, the other a little less; both were finished inside of a year, by the money, sweat, and personal labor of the poor. Some Indians die of the scant food and of this work to which they are not accustomed . . . and if the Indians do not come they are thrown into jail and whipped. Moreover it is entirely common to see richer ornamentation. ¹⁰

Summing up the possibilities for their conversion to Catholicism, it may be concluded that they were both favorable and unfavorable:

⁹ Biblioteca de Autoes Espanoles, Vol. XII, p. 115 - From a letter written from Mexico by Hernan Cortes to Emperor Charles V. October 15, 1524. Cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 173.

¹⁰ Documentos Ineditos de Indias, Vol. IV, p. 519 - Cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 174.

A - In favor:

1. The similarities between the two forms of religion and the acceptance of them on the part of the priests.
2. The high character of the earlier missionaries.
3. The military and political support of the government, both imperial and local.
4. The character of the Indians, inclined to the worship of beauty and forms; their humility secured through their natural kindness and the social state to which they were reduced; their tendency to believe in the supernatural and miraculous; their inclination to penitence, that put them in the hands of the priests.
5. The power of the church.

B - Against:

1. The hostile or indifferent attitude of the Spanish inhabitants toward the conversion of the Indians.
2. The evil example set by the Spaniards.
3. The gross mistreatment of the Indians.
4. The lower moral character of the priests who came later.
5. The conflict between the religious orders and even worse, between the secular and regular clergy.
6. The little or no instruction given in those matters as well as the way with which the priests taught the Indians to worship forms, lacking the true spirit of Christianity.

CHAPTER V

THE ACTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SINCE 1810

By the eighteenth century the City of Mexico was notable for its institutions devoted to the promotion of science, fine arts and technical education. The school of Mines (now School of Engineering) was superior to any other institution of its kind on the American continent. The Academy of San Carlos for Fine Arts (now School of Architecture) contained casts of the most notable sculptures of Europe and works of educated artists of local renown. Lasting contributions in linguistics, archeology, anthropology and history of precolumbian America have been made by Mexican born scholars.

Journals and periodicals began to appear as early as 1722 being widely read. Books in Spanish, Latin, French, Italian and other languages were commonly known by the educated, while national authors wrote immortal pages. Botany was encouraged by the creation of botanic gardens.

A different kind of literature was also eagerly read in spite of the prohibitions of the church and the censorship exercised by the Inquisition. The Creoles or Criollos and

the mestizos were excluded from places of political or religious responsibility even though they were well educated. Colleges and the University of Mexico had largely been created in their behalf and they were quick to learn. Soon liberal philosophers as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau were surreptitiously introduced and read. In 1794 someone translated into Spanish the Declaration of Rights of Man, which found a response in Mexico among the mestizos. The awareness of the injustice of their situation regarding their rights and obligations was sharpened day by day. They were greatly influenced by the French Revolution and the Independence of the United States in 1776. Those examples of freedom made heavier the already too heavy Inquisition and the impositions and injustices of the Spanish regime.

When the Spanish-French war broke up, the opportunity for Independence looked more real than ever; nevertheless, military and economic power resided in the government and the Inquisition still was supremely feared. The church, behind those powers possessed more than half of the wealth of the land. The time for independence had already come. Said one writer:

The city clergy held death-watch at noble beds and inherited thereby. The rural priesthood sipped chocolate and fattened, simple-mindedly worldly, or resenting the position in spirit of its urban superior brewed rebellion. Miguel Hidalgo, known as the liberator, was a village priest. He very reasonably observed at the beginning of

the nineteenth century that New Spain was Mexico, so he promptly rang a bell, and told his rural congregation that it was now free. ¹

The impetus for Independence (given by that priest in the first armed action in September 16, 1810) came not from the Criollos as in the other Latin American countries, but from the mestizo and Indian population. One of the first acts of Hidalgo in proclaiming the Independence from Spain, was to declare the abolishment of slavery.

The church excommunicated him, the Spanish armies moved quickly and he was shot in 1811. A friend and disciple of his, Jose Maria Morelos another village priest, immediately took his place. In 1813 a Congress was called in Oaxaca and the following year it drafted a Constitution proclaiming freedom and equality for all the inhabitants of Mexico.

In the meantime, the conservative forces (the clergy and the royalists will be called so from now on) were offering the throne of Mexico to the throneless Ferdinand VII or to any of the royal princes. They refused, sending instead, another viceroy. By then, the liberal forces had been reduced to guerrillas who had their headquarters in the mountains.

¹ Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Altars, (Payson and Clark, Ltd. - 1929) p. 129.

To return to his throne, Ferdinand VII had to give a liberal constitution for Spain which applied also to her colonies. But the church in Mexico was not prepared, nor willing to surrender her privileges to anybody, even if it had been ordained by the King of Spain. So, there arose a young Criollo, Agustinde Iturbide, who became chief of one of the royalist armies. When the new constitution was proclaimed in Mexico, he went (backed by the church) to the chief of the liberal forces offering his help to win independence from Spain. In 1821 Mexico was declared a free country with Roman Catholicism as its only religion. An episcopal edict followed, declaring "that all penalties, excommunications, reservations, censures, and edicts of the extinguished Inquisition" ² were in full vigor. Among these reservations was the prohibition to read "heretical books". Another edict from the Vicario General de la Archidicocesis de Mexico, declared that to the spiritual penalties would be added the civil. This policy of ecclesiastical and political power working together was to continue until past the middle of the century, when the Laws of Reform abolished it.

The following year in the cathedral Iturbide was crowned Emperor by the Archbishop of Mexico. But the people

² Ernest Gruening, Mexico and Its Heritage. (Pub. by The Century Co. New York & London, 1928) p. 190.

had fought for liberty, and were ready to keep it at any cost. Iturbide fell in 1823 and was expelled from the country. He came back in 1823 and was shot. When he fell, the Republic was declared a fact, and in 1824 a Constitution was proclaimed, based upon the French Constitution of 1789, the Spanish Constitution of 1812 and the United States Constitution of 1787. The conservative party managed to have an article in it: "The Religion of the Mexican nation is, and will perpetually be, the Apostolic Roman Catholic". Nevertheless, the difficulties between the church and the Republic began in the same year, 1824, with the refusal of the church to pay the "mesada and media anata" to the Republic, a part of the clerical stipend formerly paid to the King of Spain. Then Pope Pius IX engendered hostility when he extended an invitation asking Mexico to come back under the rule of Spain. This invitation was respectfully but firmly rejected by the government. Disgusted, the Pope broke off relations with Mexico refusing to appoint priests and their number, as a consequence, became continually smaller. Yet, the official protests against the papal interference in the state's affairs reiterated the fundamental and irrevocable catholicism of the government.

The common people knew little of the benefits of the church during those years too, for such benefits were

only for those who could pay for them. The friars, who were the teachers and educators of the people, now lived in their convents only, where they had every kind of economical resource.

The clergy's preoccupation was the maintenance of its privileges or fueros. Among these was the right to have all criminal and civil actions tried before ecclesiastical tribunals. The layman who sued or was sued before such a court was, naturally, at a disadvantage.

Despite their small numbers, the clericals were the real ruling force in the community. To the tremendous control through religion of the minds of the people was added the economic stronghold. The church had become the natural money-lender owning, at least, half of the national real state, holding mortgages and much other property. ³

She had income from investments in about everything: first fruits, the multiple revenues from every one of the religious ceremonies and the tithes, which the state helped her to collect, etc. Such were the enormous sources of her wealth.

Police and the army were also at the clergy's call. If a person had made a monastic vow, it was considered as a civil obligation for the fulfillment of which the church could call on the state's authority. Official orders were given by the local authorities to decorate the homes and stores for the religious celebrations and holidays.

³ Ibid. p. 192.

Specific censorship was also exercised over all the literature printed in the country and entering it. Books such as The Education of Woman which appeared in 1851 were condemned as "impious". Education for women was given only in convents or privately; and the whole of it for the population was as ever, committed to the priests and the monks.

Freedom of thought was, merely in religion but in social matters was strictly taboo, and the priests who dominated education, were the vigilant guardians of the minutest mental heresy. The Aristocracy rigidly conformed to their slightest indications, and the populace viewed mitre, cassock and cowl with superstitious awe, prostrating itself in the presence of religious manifestations and fervently kissing the ground on which the bishop had trod. One stood at one's peril when the host passed, persons failing to kneel even from ignorance were imprisoned . . . H. G. Ward, British charge d'affairs, was struck by the exorbitant fees for marriages, baptisms, burials, masses, and other church ceremonies which, in his judgment, produced "a most demoralizing effect among the Indian population . . . the consequence is that the Indian either cohabits with his future wife until she becomes pregnant (when the priest is compelled to marry them with or without fees), or, if more religiously disposed, contracts debts and even commits thefts, rather than not satisfy the demands of the ministers of that religion, the spirit of which appears to be so little understood. 4

Senora Calderon de la Barca, a devout Catholic lady, wife of Spain's first minister in Mexico, describing her visit to the convent of the Encarnation, wrote in 1842:

This convent is in fact a palace . . . each nun has a servant and some have two . . . the convent is rich; each novice at her entrance pays five thousand dollars in the common stock . . .

4 Ibid p. 193.

Having visited the whole building and admired one Virgin's blue satin and pearls, and another's black velvet and diamonds, sleeping holy infants, saints paintings, shrines and confessionals . . . we came at length to a large hall, decorated with paintings and furnished with antique highbacked arm-chairs, where a very elegant supper, lighted up and ornamented, greeted our astonished eyes; cakes, chocolate, ices, and lemonade, and other profane dainties, ornamented with gilt paper cut into little flags, etc. I was placed in a chair that might have served for a pope under a holy family. 5

Innumerable descriptions of about every sort of ceremony are given in her letters. The almost incredible wealth and luxury of the churches and convents, the superb ceremonies performed with extraordinary magnificence were astonishing even to the wealthy aristocracy from Europe.

On the other hand, writing about one of those solemnities on Palm Sunday, she says: ". . . the whole cathedral presented the appearance of a forest of palm trees . . . and under each tree a half naked Indian, his rags clinging together with wonderful pertinacity". 6

Justo Sierra, for a long time minister of Education under the regime of Porfirio Diaz and eminent teacher in the University of Mexico, wrote about the clergy of those days:

5 Calderon de la Barca, Life in Mexico, letter 15. cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 194.

6 Loc. cit.

The social leader was the bishop, the head of the clergy, the canons were next in order . . . indulgent toward all corruption, abuses, sins . . . toward the illegitimate family spawned from concubinage, which swarmed in the city and in the parishes. Ecclesiastical celibacy was almost a myth . . . the homes were shrines of images . . . (there were) continual church celebrations, (and the people) all resigned to earn a little, to spend a little, to exist in little comfort . . . the Indian lived as his father before him; a little agriculture . . . insignificant crafts . . . 7

Such a church enforced by the backing of the army and the political position of the conservative families still was the indifferent organization which two centuries before had begun her task among the Indians of New Spain, offering to them salvation in exchange for obedience and gold.

Finally the government could not bear the situation of submission to the church any longer, and in 1833 the Congress, constituted in large part by liberals and under the guidance of President Valentin Gomez Farias, abolished the civil enforcement of monastic vows, decreeing too that there were to be no obligatory but only voluntary contributions of any kind from the people to the church.

The church protested energetically and Gomez Farias was called from the pulpits "the little Judas". So dangerous became the "sermons" that the government issued a circular against the abuse made of the pulpit and confession with political purposes.

7 Justo Sierra. "Juarez Su Obra y su Tiempo", p. 32.3 cit. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 196.

When it became clear to the church that nothing could be gained with that policy, she resorted to her personal influence in the armed forces exciting them to a "holy revolution", offering in compensation long years of indulgence, and masses for their salvation. Also all the material support for the civil war was offered by her.

A very ambitious and unscrupulous man was selected to direct the revolt. After the success of the army against the government, Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana was placed in the presidency. He was the "a thousand times blessed man who with so skillful a hand has known to return to God his legitimate inheritance," ⁸ said the church.

But the long struggle had not ceased between liberals and conservatives on the one hand, and on the other, the ambition of the church against the ambition of Santa Ana who soon began to make use of her goods, when his excessive expenditures had exhausted the nation's funds.

Another element in the situation began to clearly appear when in 1831 Vincente Rocafuerte published his "Ensayo sobre Tolerancia Religiosa" (Essay on Religious Tolerance). He was arrested but not before the people had known his thought.

⁸ Ibid. p. 197.

Protestantism was feared. "Sedition, disorder, cruelty, blood and death are the terrible effects of Protestantism" said the bishop of Michoacan, Clemente de Jesus Munguia; ⁹ and bishop Labastida declared that religious tolerance was a "detestable and horrible pestilence" adding that the introduction of it to Mexico would be "to deny the truth of our religion, to persecute it openly, to carry war into its very bosom". ¹⁰

Yet, the liberals who were seeking religious tolerance considered themselves devout Catholics.

When word was received of the flight and exile of Pope Pius IX following the upheavals of 1848 in Italy, President Joaquin de Herrera invited His Holiness to transfer his see to Mexico . . . and the chambers voted a gift of twenty-five thousand pesos from the bankrupt treasury which were promptly remitted to the Pontiff. ¹¹

Santa Ana had been in and out of power several times. The war with the United States occurred and Mexico had to give up about a third of her territory. The church never helped the nation in her tribulations. Then Santa Ana was called to power again. His first act was to abolish freedom of the press, exile his opponents, silence any protest by imprisonment or death, assume the title of "Alteza Serenissima"

⁹ Ibid, p. 200

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

(Most Serene Highness) and secure in mutual interest the support of the church. The people made a new effort, a new liberal plan was formed (The Plan de Ayutla) and Santa Ana had to flee.

One of the brightest stars in the Mexican sky was arising. Benito Juarez, an Indian who by his own desperate efforts had attained the degree of doctor of laws, was minister of the Supreme Court of Justice. He presented to the Congress a law, the "ley Juarez", suppressing the ecclesiastical and military courts for civil cases, giving clerics the right to renounce their exemption from trial in the lay court in criminal cases. The law was voted and promulgated on Nov. 24, 1855. Another step was then taken: the church was obligated to sell her enormous land possessions, to the end of stimulating agriculture, commerce and individual initiative.

The church then organized a prompt movement of reaction arousing revolt everywhere, and so definitely hostile was her attitude that cemeteries were placed under civil control, and it was decreed that births and marriages were to be registered by the nation instead of by the church. Liberty of the press was made a reality. Nevertheless she kept on in her struggle, encouraging civil war. A writer quoted by Gruening said:

It should not be hidden from the wisdom of your Grace that the springs of the human heart and conscience become drained by calling upon them too much . . . and who knows whether with one more civil war provoked in our midst under the pretext of impiety, Mexico will not lapse into a lamentable indifference in matters of religion or into a schism from which it will not be possible to recall it. ¹²

The observation was a reality not too long after those days.

On February 5, 1857 a New Constitution was promulgated. Pope Pius IX condemned it and the government. The clergy also protested again and again but they were not heard. The Constitution established free instruction, free expression, free press, the right for free meetings, freedom from obligatory service from the church and freedom to fulfill or not the monastic vows; legal exemptions for the clergy were abolished. Also abolished were the titles of nobility and hereditary honors. The government was given the right to interfere, if necessary, in matters of worship.

Consciences were shocked however, and the war between church and state became more bitter than ever. Nevertheless the liberal party obtained the victory; Benito Juarez - "Soul and brain of the reform" movement was elected president. His next step was to declare that since Mexico was a free country,

¹² Vigil, Mexico a Traves de los Siglos, XXII, p. 72, quot. by Gruening, op. cit. p. 203.

the State would protect worship in the Catholic as well as in any other faith. Religious freedom, freedom of conscience was finally won.

The Roman Catholic church had used of her goods to sustain the civil war, so, the goods of the church became national property, (the usufructs being for her). The monastic orders, entirely useless for the nation, and the convents, which had been centers of vice and conspiracy were suppressed. The priests were ordered to wear their vestments only in the places designated for religious purposes and activities. State and church were declared entirely independent of each other; civil marriage was legalized and religious teaching was definitely prohibited in the public schools.

Yet, the government of Juarez was not hostile to the church to which the great majority of the Mexicans belonged. Free from "the corrupting influence of politics" she had the chance of being a better church, attending to the needs of her so long forgotten flock. The State, free from the dominion of her tutelage, would dedicate itself to the prosperity of the exhausted country.

The recovery of Mexico could have been a reality then, but the angry clergy would not give up. Defeated in Mexico, they began to make negotiations for a foreign intervention.

To recover herself Mexico had temporarily stopped the payment of her foreign debts. A united naval force from England, Spain and France came to the shores of the country and, while negotiations and conferences were carried on, the national government offered a fortress for the comfort of the foreigners.

England and Spain were satisfied by the explanations of the envoys of President Juarez, but France had a different intention. The emissary of Napoleon III asked for a payment which Mexico said she was not able to meet. France answered with the prompt occupation of the port and fortress in which Mexico had offered her hospitality. England and Spain retired immediately. The French army started its march against the capital.

Napoleon III had dreamed of a Catholic Empire in America. Encouraged by his wife, the Spaniard Eugenia Montijo, supporter of the Jesuits; and backed by Pius IX of whom he had been the military supporter in Italy, the French monarch had decided to conquer Mexico, and for that purpose he had sent his army.

The Mexican forces resisted bitterly, but in vain and Mexico City was taken. A few weeks later the Archduke

Maximilian of Hapsburg and his wife, the Princess Charlotte, were crowned and consecrated to the throne of Mexico with the papal benediction. The church was once more in power but not for too long a time. The forces of President Juarez after some years of struggle finally defeated the Empire. The traitors were executed and the French armies left the country. The Archduke was judged and executed. Charlotte had gone back to Europe.

Those of the clergy who had taken part in bringing that new suffering to the nation had fled.

They were not able, however, to assume much of the martyr aspect in their exile in view of the comparatively gentle treatment dealt out by the government to those who had the courage to remain at home and face the results. These churchmen, after recovering from their scare, began to glide back again to their places. They were not interfered with, but it was understood by both sides that political Romanism was henceforth dead in Mexico, and that they must now and forever keep their hands off the nation's affairs and mind their religious work, and that alone . . . ¹³

Some years later President Porfirio Diaz, a former general under the government of Juarez, came to power. He and his cabinet fought a titanic struggle for the recovery of the country. From its ruined soil there arose industries, agriculture, crafts, railroads and highways. Schools were encouraged and during the thirty years of his dictatorship

¹³ William Butler, Mexico in Transition (New York, Hunt and Eaton-Cincinnati, Cranston & Curts - 3rd Ed. 1893) p. 248.

the doors were opened to the protestant advance. Education however, was again, to a large extent, in the hands of the church. The higher classes of Mexican society were either Catholic or liberal. Religion was to them either a sacred duty or a "tolerable tradition". The poorest classes still were forgotten. Their situation became so desperate that from 1920 to 1921 armed revolutions shook the country again, and churches and religious properties, convents and palaces were sacked by the populace, the guerrillas and even by the army.

Peace came again and a new distribution of lands among the poorer classes was effected. Under the name of individuals the church had retained large possessions, and convents and religious communities were still important to business interests. The Revolution of 1910 took away from every layman or clerk the empty and until then useless lands, and gave them to the people (1926).

Ernest Gruening relates his conversation as an American traveler in those days with two priests, held while watching some workers in the private gardens of the estate:

"Have these workers been offered their communal lands?" I asked one of them.

"They have not, they do not want them", replied the priest.

"Why do they not want them?" I asked. "It seems strange that anyone should not want something that is given for nothing . . ."

"They would not know how to take care of the lands if they got them", said the priest.

"Why not, aren't they working the land now?" I inquired.

"They could work the land but they wouldn't know anything about buying and selling, and they would lose the money they had put in for seed and tools if they could ever get enough together to buy these."

A few minutes later I approached one of the peons and the following conversation took place:

"You people haven't received any *cjidos* in this region?"

"No, *senor*, we haven't."

"Is it because you don't want them?"

"Yes, we want them but . . . we wouldn't be able to take care of them."

"How is that? Aren't you working the land now? How would it be any different if you were working your own plot?"

"Oh, working the land would be the same, but we poor people wouldn't know anything about selling our product, and we would lose . . ."

"Who told you that?"

"The boss."

"Anyone else?"

"The padre" . . .

How illuminating as to the part of the clergy in molding the minds of the campesinos and what a revelation of the plasticity of that human clay! ¹⁴

¹⁴ Gruening, op. cit. p. p. 218, 219.

Nevertheless, the lands were distributed and the laws of 1857 came again to be fully kept.

Acrid and violently, the church locked its doors . . . It suspended services and sacraments surely expecting mass revolt, which did not occur. All the people mourned . . . Conducting their own spiritual activities, they knelt alone . . . ¹⁵

As for the church in urban centers, it has always been well attended, for the people of the cities can pay for the services and the spiritual help of the Catholic church.

¹⁵ Brenner, op. cit. p. 130.

CHAPTER VI

THE EVANGELICAL PENETRATION IN MEXICO

Though the works of liberal philosophers and politicians have been largely read in Mexico since the late days of the Spanish domination, the Inquisition first, the action of the church through the government later, had never permitted the entrance of any religious ideas other than those which conformed to the Roman Catholic doctrines. The censorship established had always been very effective. Nevertheless, different "heresies" and doctrines were known in Mexico, among which "Lutheranism" and "Calvinism" had a place. Against those protestant dangers the king and the church maintained special vigilance. Leonardo Donato, the Venetian envoy, in his report of 1573 asserts that the establishment of the Inquisition in Mexico by Philip II was chiefly due to fear of protestantism. ¹ Every foreigner coming from a country where the Reform had entered, was carefully checked and watched. If any of them was suspected or proven to be a "protestant heretic", he was immediately called by the Inquisition. If after some imprisonment and "persuasion" the hetherdox individual would not become

¹ Henry Charles Lea, The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies. (New York, The Mac Millan Company, - London: Mac Millan & Co., Ltd. 1908) p. 200.

reconciled (reconciliado) to the church, abjuring his errors, he was to be burned. If he accepted the pardon of the church, his goods were confiscated and his life was saved, but he had to fulfill a punishment which varied in degrees.

When the inquisition was established in Mexico (1571) it had jurisdiction from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Darien to the unknown regions to the north. The announcement of its establishment was made to every person above twelve years of age, who had been required to be present at the different churches, under pain of excommunication. The government officers were to be present without excuse, Charles Lea writes:

In an age of faith, it is easy to see how profound was the impression made when the population of every parish and mission was assembled in its church and listened to such utterances in the name of Christ and the Pope, with their reduplication of threats and promises, and each one was required to rise his right hand and solemnly swear on the cross and the gospels to accept it all and obey it to the letter . . .²

Those requirements were written and sent by the King of Spain himself.

The same author gives a description of the celebration of the first great auto de fe, on February 28, 1574. It was performed with:

² Ibid, p. 203.

. . . a solemnity declared by eyewitnesses to be equal in everything, save the presence of royalty, to that of Valladolid, May 21, 1559, when the Spanish Lutherans suffered. A fortnight in advance it was announced throughout the city with drums and trumpets . . . there were seventy-four sufferers in all. Of those . . . two for blasphemy; one for wearing prohibited articles although his grandfather had been burnt . . . and thirty-six for Lutheranism, of whom two, George Ripley and Marin Cornu were burnt. These Lutherans were all foreigners of various nationalities . . . One of these, named Miles Phillips has left an account of the affair, in which he says that his compatriots, George Ripley, Peter Momfrie and Cornelius, the Irishman, were burnt, sixty or seventy-one³ were scourged, sent to the galleys and seven, of whom he was one, were condemned to serve in convents; the wholesale scourging was performed the next day . . . being preceded by a crier calling out "See these English Lutheran dogs, enemies of God!" while inquisitors and familiars shouted to the executioners: "Harder, harder on those . . . Lutherans." ⁴

It is easy to see how with such treatment, the "enemies of God and the church" had but little chance.

The liberal Spanish constitution of 1812 suppressed the Inquisition, but it has been seen how in Mexico, the church in combination with the political power of the country, kept the country from any other influence as long as she could. The Constitution of 1857 ended that situation.

³ All of those were the remnant of the tripulation of an English ship.

⁴ Ibid, p. p. 205, 206.

Nevertheless, in spite of the many restrictions and difficulties, the Bible entered into Mexico by several means.

The most important of them being the American Bible Society which in 1836 sold Bibles and New Testaments through Mrs. Parrott, Mrs. Wilson, J. C. Brigham and others. Dwight says: "Mr. Pearse at Matamoras wrote to the Bible Society for a grant of Spanish Scriptures, saying that there was a serious demand." ⁵ In 1837 the British and Foreign Bible Society sent an agent to reside in Mexico City. ⁶ Since those days, in spite of dangers, troubles and persecutions, the spread of the Word of God has continually advanced, having always been the most important means to reach the people; its distribution is probably the most dangerous, the most blessed, the most fruitful and the most romantic of all the efforts to establish the Kingdom of God in Mexico.

At the beginning of this work immediate results were obtained. Again reference is made to Dwight:

It was remarkable the number of places in Mexico where the people were ready to be organized into churches originating in Bible distribution. The proportion of sales to donations increased every year . . . In spite of the liberality of the government intense fanaticism reigned in certain sections. Perhaps the climax was reached in the announcement of one Mexican priest that "He who kills a Protestant will not have to go through Purgatory" . . . but they kept on, the agent reporting real eagerness on the part of many people in Mexico to own a Bible. ⁷

⁵ Henry Otis Dwight. The Centennial History of the American Bible Society (New York - The Mac Millan Co., 1916) p.77.

⁶ Loc. cit.

⁷ Ibid. p. 471

No real missionary work was established in Mexico until 1871, 1872, when the Methodist Episcopal Church and a year later the Presbyterian Church sent their first representatives to Mexico City.

Miss Melinda Rankin, a teacher in Mississippi, in 1850 went to Brownsville, Texas, where she established a school for the Mexican children living in that state. Her principal activity was teaching but the interest of the people in the Bible made of her a very active colporteur. In her work she had many interesting experiences:

A mother of one of the little girls of my school came to my door one day, bringing her "saint" as she called it; she said she had prayed to it all her life, and it had never done her any good, and asked me if I would take the "saint" and give her a Bible for it. I very readily made the exchange
 . . . This woman and her daughter afterward became my most efficient helpers in the distribution of the Bible in Mexico. ⁸

Other people came to help her eventually in her work, among them, a protestant German. He was a traveling portrait painter who constituted himself a Bible agent supplied by Miss Rankin (1858, 1859). Because of the nature of his business he could carry the Word of God far into the interior of the country, having personal acceptance in the most diverse kinds of homes.

⁸ Melinda Rankin, Twenty Years Among the Mexicans. Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, Publishers, 1875) p. 41.

He was lost on one of his trips, presumably killed by fanatics, but the seed that he had sown for the Kingdom of God bore abundant fruit. In Saltillo, Coahuila, for instance, one of these copies of the Scriptures came into the hands of some people who soon broke away from the church of Rome. As soon as they could, they established and supported several schools from which the Catholic catechism was excluded and the Bible taught in place of it. In another town an elderly teacher bought New Testaments for all of his students. Many years before that, the teacher had procured a Bible from a British ship lying in a Mexican port and became converted to its teachings.

In 1865 Miss Rankin left her school in Brownsville in the hands of a board and came to Mexico establishing a new school in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey. This particular town, being one of the largest ones in that country and close to the States, had received the Bible a long time before and not only individuals but congregations of Evangelicals (as the Protestants are known in Latin America) were active centers of protestant propoganda.

In Zacatecas, a neighboring state, two years after the evangelical work had begun, there was a church of one hundred seventy members who had built their own building for worship of God. Among the members who professed conversion, it is said by Miss Rankin there

. . . were two highly educated Mexican men -- a father and son -- who, upon the departure of our Bible readers, took up the work and continued to carry it forward successfully. They soon started a periodical called "The Evangelical Torch" a paper which circulated quite extensively, enlightening public sentiment generally, and valiently defended the truth against the most violent oppressors. ⁹

In 1869 Rev. Henry C. Riley was sent by the American and Foreign Christian to the city of Mexico where he also found that the fields were white unto harvest. He wrote to Miss Rankins:

There is a perfect hurricane of Protestant feeling against the Roman church. I feel much as if I had suddenly found myself in the time of the Reformation. The great thing for us to do is to plant Christian churches and institutions here as rapidly as possible. ¹⁰

Those institutions soon began to arise. Two years after he went to Mexico, Mr. Riley had a church in the city composed of 400 members. This became the most important mission in the country.

In Puebla, a city of strong Catholic tradition, a part of the old Inquisition building became available to the Methodist Episcopal church. As a wall was being removed in the new structural arrangement of the building, several mummies, victims of the Inquisition, were found. These victims had evidently been buried alive.

⁹ Ibid. p. 141

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 153

The same denomination acquired a part of the old Franciscan Convent in Mexico City, which formerly was a part of the palace of Moctezuma, the Aztec emperor. (This church is now the First Methodist Church and one of the largest and strongest in the country). Among the people who joined this church was a friend of President Juarez. He is described as

. . . a sincere priest, Father Aalacios who, unable to accept the errors of the Roman church had come out from it with a little band of followers and had established a service where the Bible was read. Thus a simple evangelical church arose, which later joined our mission and Brother Palacios labored faithfully as pastor of one of our churches until his death in 1890. ¹¹

The Presbyterian, Baptist and other large denominations founded missions in Mexico City and other large towns. Some schools and hospitals were established. The stronger churches sent national workers to many places and established missions, as many as possible, in different towns. Publication houses and seminaries were founded. Colporteurs still are active and they are even now one of the most important factors for the spread of the Gospel in Mexico which, by the Grace of God, has been firmly established to the glory of His Kingdom. Nevertheless, the evangelization of the Latin American continent and the Christianization of Mexico is not yet accomplished.

¹¹ William Butler, Mexico in Transition (Third Edition Revised - New York: Hunt & Eaton, Cincinnati : Cranston & Curts - 1893) p. 253.

CHAPTER VII
MODERN TENDENCIES

The problem of Religious Education in modern Mexico has as many variations as the country itself. In the country where snow covered mountains are found beside tropical valleys are sharp contrasts in civilization, racial content, religious attitudes and temperament. Yet there is the unity of a common tradition which makes each portion a vital part of the others.

Since colonial times, at the bottom of the social scale has been the Indian, whose inclusion in Mexican society has been but limited. They live in the mountains or in towns away from the cities. The chief influences which reach them are the priest and now the rural teacher. Added to that, their own temperament and character determine the chief features of their existence.

The Mexican Indian has always been dominately artistic; every aspect of life is a subject for artistic creation. In Idols Behind Alters one reads:

Actions . . . are a matter of passion, or a matter of taste . . . he settles concerns with himself . . . first mostly by making some kind of tangible form in which his heart may be contained . . . There has been no seeking of the prescription of beauty; the very want of it creates it . . . It is so natural and spontaneous that the great mass of Mexican art -- and this is constantly enormous -- is anonymous. ¹

¹ Anita Brenner, Idols Behind Alters, (Payson & Clarke, Ltd. 1929) p. 32.

The Indian is a worshipper of beauty, and the majestic splendor of the Catholic churches give him a perfect environment for his soul. He is, though, "the most deeply unhappy and the most profoundly happy of all men."² To him nothing is ever perfect, nothing ultimate, nothing complete. To obtain the highest perfection in the things that he does he is capable of the most amazing sacrifices. The Indian may work all his life and die in misery if by doing so he can add beauty to the temple, "The House of our Lord", or if he can buy a new jewel for the dress of the Virgin. Is not she the "Queen of Heaven"? Has not she given him the stars and the light of the moon? And here is where the Catholic church has her strongest hold on him. She has transformed the religion of Christ into the religion of the Virgin Mary.

The church of Rome keeps a careful watch over the Indians, exercising a complete supervision of their beliefs and desires, contenting herself with their devote admiration of the Virgin and the saints, their blind obedience and sacrificial gifts. To them the "Holy Mother Church" is all powerful. Christ has a secondary role; He is the object of a blind and fearful adoration, a powerful being of whom they ask favors in exchange for offerings, who is worthy of

² Ibid. p. 33.

their love because sometime, somewhere, He suffered tremendously and died at the hands of the Jews, who are as wicked as the Protestants. By His death He opened the doors of Heaven and gave the keys to Saint Peter,³ whose successor is the Pope in Rome.

However, there has been another type of Catholic in Mexico since Catholicism has produced its saints in Latin America too. They are people who have known the purest aspects of that religion; highly developed characters, fine spirits whose lives are a challenge.

A larger group, possessing not the highest qualities of those mystics but who have been acquainted with the teachings of Christ, are under His influence and live the life of the Christian. They are definitely liberal and tolerant, their chief interest being the good of the country and of themselves. They know that the "golden rule" and the love of God are basic for the life of any person or organization.

But the largest part of the Catholic population has a different attitude. They call themselves Christians because to them the Christian church is the Catholic church, and backed by the doctrine of her infallibility, they regard as impossible any error in the Romanist doctrine. The worship

Matthew 16:18, 19.

of the Virgin Mary has a primary place in that religion, and the numberless saints can be called minor deities. And yet, they are sincere in their longings for God, they do not stop before any sacrifice if in so doing they can please Him. That assurance is to be given by the church, which prescribed even their prayers.

And yet the great mass of the people have another standpoint. They call themselves Catholics but they feel a complete indifference toward religion in general, which to them only means an organization which has brought to Mexico evils and superstitions. They are either hostile or indifferent. If they still bear the name of Catholic, it is because, as has been said:

The Latin peoples have a profound spiritual sensibility. They dislike being adrift spiritually and culturally, so the tendency is strong in them to preserve an outward or nominal relation to the church, though they may long ago have hopelessly given up all belief in her dogmas. Religion has become to them a social function, one of the amenities of life. ⁴

In Mexico, to be a "conservative" even in political matters means to be intolerant, religious, narrow and usually an enemy of freedom and democracy. To be a "liberal" means, on the other hand, to have no religion perhaps, but to be the possessor of a free conscience and tolerant spirit. The

⁴ George P. Howard, Religious Liberty in Latin America? (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1944) p. 117.

great majority of those "liberals" though, have a firm belief in the existence of God.

The position of the students is not better. They have a great distrust of religion. Their teachers are critical in their attitudes toward it. On the other hand, the Catholic church has prohibited the reading of the Bible and the investigation of religious matters. The result is the indifference of the students toward religion, which has proved itself entirely useless to them. Rycroft aptly describes the student mind:

When Christianity as a way of life and the only solution for the problems both of the individual and society is explained to students in any Latin American university, the idea strikes them as something entirely new . . . people have no extensive knowledge of the fundamental principles of Christianity and when they condemn religion, they are really rejecting a system or an organization. ⁵

The Hebrew-Christian tradition which produced the Reformation, also gave its ideals to Democracy. The classic Graeco-Roman thought gave birth to the Renaissance, and it has also been the basis for the western system of aristocracy. Both the Hebrew-Christian and positivistic Graeco-Roman thought have been the foundation of our western culture. Europe, though the birthplace of classical philosophy and

⁵ W. Stanley Rycroft, On This Foundation, (Friendship Press - New York, 1948) p. 105.

culture, was exposed to and finally conquered by Christianity. The United States of America, of European origin, is a direct result of the Reformation.

Howard explains how for Mexico and Latin America things were far different:

. . . Neither the saving influence of those Latin mystics, ⁶ nor the invigorating breezes of the Reformation ever reached its lands. Only the spirit of the Renaissance, the materialism and vanity of a superficial culture reached . . .

This dark picture, of course, is relived by some shining personalities: Bartolome de las Casas, Francisco Solano and others ⁷ who came . . . with true apostolic devotion. But the vast majority of those who landed on the shores of the southern continent were dominated by the several pagan influences of the Renaissance. ⁸

The intellectuals of Mexico have followed that tradition, and to satisfy their spiritual longings they have turned to French Agnosticism, Neo-Platonism, Cartesianism and so on. Their attitude, says Baez Camargo, is

. . . marked by a discreet and elegant benevolence towards Christ and Christianity. Under the covering of tolerance and equal regard for all religions as good and useful for uneducated people and of high respect for the teachings of Jesus Christ, there lies a deep and cold, and in the last analysis, a cruel indifference to religious matters . . . At their best, spiritual problems become nice philosophical and literary subjects for special programs or occasional evening discussions. Once

⁶ Such as Santa Teresa de Jesus, San Juan de la Cruz, Pascal, etc.

⁷ Fray Pedro de Gante is outstanding in the History of Mexico, which is also proud of the Mexican poetess, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz.

⁸ Howard, op. cit. p. 105.

in a while a religious topic is dropped into a conversation, but it is usually very soon discarded with some few complimentary remarks.

.....
 In the Mexican Bar there was a notorious lawyer who specialized as a defender of women murderers. Almost always he would end his argument with a masterly play on the sentiments of the jury by telling once and again the story of the Sweet Rabbi of Nazareth who forgave the adulterous woman. And he would always win his defendant's case. ⁹

In no case is religious instruction of any kind permitted in government institutions. Many of the professors may be called Christophiles but they do not render obedience to any church, devoting their interest to philosophical or exotic systems such as Theosophy and Spiritism. Or they will just regard any religion as a part of the cultural achievement of humanity, like history, art, science or sociology. To them God is the First Cause or everything, the Dynamic Force of the Universe; but any personal relationship with Him is regarded as impossible. "Within this class are some of the most cultured minds of our day, and any attempt to reach them with the great truths of the Gospel must necessarily be divested of all taint of sectarianism". ¹⁰

⁹ Gonzalo Baez Camargo, "Christianity's Rivals in Mexico" Jesse R. Wilson, Editor, Students and the Christian World Mission. (New York, Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1936) p. p. 82, 83.

¹⁰ Madras Series, Vol. III. Evangelism, Dr. Webster E. Browning, "Latin America" (International Missionary Council - New York - London - 1939) p. 268.

Sectarianism or denominationalism is a handicap in Mexico and all of Latin America. The unity presented by the Catholic Church offers a contrast to the Evangelical Church with her many divisions. It is not unusual to accuse it of being disunited and without a head to govern it. For this reason Ecumenicism is strong in Latin America. Not only the different branches of the church work together in the evangelization of the country, but several organizations of just "Evangelicals" are found all over these countries. Organizations such as the "Latin American Union of Evangelical Youth" which has as members the evangelical young people of every country, working together for the Kingdom of God, reflects interdenominational trends. Other different groups of the same kind have also great importance.

Finally, the attitude of the government is one of complete tolerance which stops only where there seems to be the danger of a religious monopoly, for, in Mexico religious monopoly over politics will never be permitted again.

. . . nearly all the history of our period of independence develops under the inspiration of the cult of free thought . . . we in Latin America are united in our scepticism and negation, because we have always lived under the sign of monopoly: Economic during the colonial period, political during the earlier independence period, financial later on and clerical all the time. ¹¹

¹¹ Luis Alberto Sanchez, cited by Howard, op. cit. p. 154.

If there is any persecution, it is because the Roman Catholic Church has declared herself to be "infallible" and who can argue with infallibility? Besides herself any other system or doctrine is an error and "Error has not the same rights as truth. Since the profession and practice of error are contrary to human welfare, how can error have rights? How can the voluntary toleration of error be justified?" 12

The Kingdom of God in Mexico, though, has been established.

12 Msgr. John A. Ryan, "Catholic Principles of Politics" quot. by Howard, op. cit. p. 18.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

If on the one hand it is true that the character of Education in Mexico was predominately religious until the beginning of the twentieth century; on the other hand it is also true that the separation of church and state and the efforts of the latter for the development of public instruction have made almost useless and very difficult in practice the functioning of schools with religious tendency.

Yet, it has been the historical attitude of the Roman Church in Mexico which has determined the present conditions. This situation affects every creed. (There are several in Mexico.) It is for this reason that educational and medical evangelism seem destined to disappear. All instruction has been generally placed under the control of the state and the schools have to adopt the educational programs given by the government, which leaves little or no place for religious instruction.

During the three centuries during which Mexico was under the complete control of Spain, a perfect opportunity for evangelization was presented to the Catholic church. The field was enormous but completely open; the people were

willing to hear and ready to learn; the civil authorities were giving complete support for this purpose and no other rival church was on the ground. Even the culture of the Indians was destroyed leaving that field entirely empty for the transplanting of anything.

Instead of educating those masses in the new civilization, the established schools were for sons of the conquerors and the supposed missionaries occupied themselves in the acquisition of power and wealth, far from the vigilant eye of Spain. They taught the Indians that they were unworthy heathen whose only hope of salvation was in complete submission to the church. Instead of Jesus they were given the Virgin Mary. Disobedience to the church or the admission of any dogma or institution not tolerated by her meant irremediable condemnation to eternal fire. She was able to keep the people in submission until the day when they were exasperated and arose against her.

Then an almost bottomless abyss was constituted in the minds of the people between life and Christianity, religion and freedom of thought which in that case seemed to be incompatible.

It has been shown how the Mexicans have either a deformed type of Christianity or a complete indifference toward religion.

The Evangelical message has proved to be effective where Catholicism and philosophy have failed. The words of Christ have the same vital influence over Latin Americans that they had over the people who, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, heard them from Jesus twenty centuries ago.

A missionary magazine recently published the testimony of a young pastor, a Latin American converted from Catholicism.

I was born of Catholic parents, and was a Catholic until the age of twenty-six when the Lord in His infinite mercy saved me and brought me out of darkness and into the light of Christ.

.
When about eighteen years of age I entered the army . . . gave free reign to all those passions which sank me in the most terrible vice and in the most unclean things that men do when they live without the fear of God. Only God knows to what depths He descended when He saved me. How great is the love of God!

.
Tired and desperate from this life I wished to seek God. I tried to seek God in the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church that I might erase the dark problems of my life. I did penance, climbing barefoot up Mount Monserrate where I entered the church upon my knees, paid the promises at the door of the church; but all this only mocked my suffering heart. Liquor was sold at the very entrance of the church. I came down from that place drunk and without home.

Tormented by the perversity of my life I sought the way of the suicide . . . I spent long hours drinking in taverns, hoping that this would give me sufficient valor to exterminate my miserable and unhappy existence.

. . . In the town of Garagoa . . . there were some American missionaries preaching the glorious gospel of salvation. But soon after their arrival it was discovered that they were protestants. Immediately there began great persecution and at last one night a man sent by

the priest came and put a bomb in the house with the purpose of killing all. But thanks be to God, the angel of the Lord does encamp round about them that fear Him, and keepeth them.

As a result of this attempt at bombing these missionaries, the national government sent a commission of the National Police . . . in which I was included . . . One night it was my duty to keep watch over the mission. I arrived under the influence of a few cups of liquor . . . At the mission I was received very cordially by the missionary who began talking to me particularly about spiritual things. At last he invited me into the kitchen which was also the living room. Then he spent some time reading the Bible, a book formerly unknown to me because I had thought it was a dictionary or something of the kind, anything but the Word of God. After having read this until about nine o'clock at night, the missionary gave me an invitation and asked me if I wished to accept Christ as my Saviour. I said "yes". Then we knelt down in that kitchen . . . For four hours I remained upon my knees but thanks be to the Lord from that place I arose a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Now by the grace of the Lord I am a regenerate man, a new man, a changed man, preaching the experience which I have had in my own life. Hallelujah! ¹

This is the testimony of a South American but his is a story which could be repeated over and over again because it is the story of hundreds and thousands all over Latin America. The testimonies which the writer has heard in Mexico are not different. Everyone has the same elements of deep sin, desperation, seeking God in the bosom of the Catholic Church, penitence carried on to sacrifice with only a deeper desperation and deeper sin as a result. Then the

¹ The Missionary Standard, Vol. 49, No. 3, March 1950. Rev. Ignacio Guevara, "The Snatched Branch" translated by Dr. B. H. Pearson, p. p. 16-18.

hearing or reading of the Word of God from a missionary, a country fellowman or the casual reading of a portion of the Word of God handed on to them as they passed along the street or while traveling in a train. At other times it is curiosity which impels them to enter into an Evangelical church where their curiosity is transformed into interest, then into conviction, and finally in repentance and acceptance of Christ.

The chaos which in many respects is shaking the world today is also deeply disturbing the soul of Latin America, and a profound social unrest is to be found there. Atheism has a basis in the actual indifference of the people. A "worship of scientific certainty and . . . effort to discover a God scientifically conceived and demonstrated is a growing trend, especially among the new generation. ² Atheism is an open door for other "political religions" such as Communism, which is presenting its best attractions: an ideal society where everybody will be equal. Prosperity, wealth, science, even theology has a place in their program, being regarded as a "branch of knowledge", and Communism soon may be a menace to Mexico. And the church of Rome still hopes to regain Mexico. Enforcements from Europe and even

² Gonzalo Baez Gamargo, "Christianity's Rivals in Mexico" Students and the Christian World Mission, Jesse R. Wilson Ed. (New York - Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions - 1936) p. 85.

from the United States are arriving. A catholic paper published an article during the past year under the title of "Mobilized Laity Can Win Churchless Millions for Christ." ³ A portion of this article has been entitled "Mexico Speaks" and the writer says:

. . . in Mexico . . . a boy on approaching manhood commonly discontinues church attendance, seemingly regarding that as a matter for women and children, and joins the father in ignoring, henceforth, the claims of mass except for an occasional wedding, funeral or possibly at Christmas. . . the overwhelming bulk of the men -- and now many of the young women -- have abandoned the practice of religion almost entirely. The religious outlook in those countries is dark, indeed . . . and reinforcements in priests from America are urgently needed to save the faith in those once Catholic countries.

The great chance for Christianity has also arrived. People are looking for something substantial that may satisfy their longings and many from every social and intellectual sphere are feeling the appeal of Christ.

Mexico is the possessor of vast material resources and a long and strongly cemented cultural tradition, but she lacks an ideal which may give her a new and definite goal. Mexico is a lover of art, devotee of science, worshiper of beauty. But she has never found spiritual rest and her life is an eternal effort to find satisfaction. She is lost in

³ Rev. John A. O'Brien. "Mobilized Laity Can Win Churchless Millions for Christ" Our Sunday Visitor (The Popular National Catholic Action Weekly, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 12, Huntington, Indiana, July 17, 1949).

the midst of her spiritual loneliness from which only Christ can redeem her. Some one has written about South America something which can be said of Mexico:

Without the ethical and deepening influence of real Christianity, the South American nations will present the tragic spectacle of peoples who have won the material world but lost their souls. South America without the influence of a living Christ will be the future powder magazine of the world. It will have the brilliance of modern paganism without the inner control of religious convictions.

The Lord of the Kingdom has a place for Latin America nevertheless. May he, Who is Love, come to the heart of that land which for so long a time has not truly found Him. May the abundant life of Jesus Christ give to her soul the vital impulse to the obtainment of the perfection for which her spirit is longing. The life of every Mexican saved by the love of God is devoted to the realization of an ideal: "Mexico for Christ."

⁴ George P. Howard Religious Liberty in Latin America? (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1944) p. 113.

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