

**RADICAL CATHOLIC RESISTANCE TO THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION:
THE CRISTERO REBELLION AND THE SINARQUISTA MOVEMENT**

A Thesis

by

MARTIN TOMAS VELAZQUEZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

August 2006

Major Subject: History

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ABSTRACT

Radical Catholic Resistance to the Mexican Revolution:

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The Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement were reactionary forces that opposed the progression of the Mexican Revolution in the first half of the twentieth century. This thesis compares the two movements, with particular emphasis on their ideologies. Both groups embodied Catholic resistance against an anticlerical and socialist Mexican government. The struggle between the church and state, which can be traced to colonial times, reached a zenith with the highly anticlerical Mexican Revolution of 1910. As revolutionary ideology was vigorously implemented by the Mexican state, Catholics rallied behind the church and sought recourse in violence. This culminated in the Cristero Rebellion of 1926-29, with disastrous results. In the 1930s, when the new threat of socialism emerged, Catholics abandoned the path of bloodshed and supported the Sinarquista Movement. These movements represented the ultimate expression in religious protest, yet little is written that compares the Sinarquistas with the Cristeros. Moreover, some historians contended that the two groups had little in common. In essence, present historiography views the movements as two separate events. This thesis argues that while a few differences exist, the Sinarquistas shared

many of the goals, ideologies, and demographics of the Cristeros. Moreover, it concludes that the Sinarquista Movement was essentially a continuation of the Cristero struggle.

To my grandmother,
Eleanor Smith Samuels

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This thesis would not be possible without the love, patience, proofreading, and support of my wife Monica.

NOMENCLATURE

ACJM	Asociación Católica de Jóvenes Mexicanos
ARM	Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos
LNDLR	Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa
NCWC	National Catholic Welfare Conference
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PRM	Partido de la Revolución Mexicana
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública
UNS	Unión Nacional Sinarquista
UP	Unión Popular

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement were Catholic challenges to the rule of the Mexican government in the first half of the twentieth century. These episodes were emblematic of the contentious relationship that existed between the church and state since colonial times. Throughout Mexican history, conservative forces rallied to the church's defense as this institution faced encroachment of its powers by liberal, anticlerical governments. The Mexican Revolution of the early twentieth century ushered in an unprecedented era of state-sponsored church persecution. Consequently, this drew a forceful response from the Catholic laity, which occurred in two phases. The first stage was a violent upheaval in the late 1920s known as the Cristero Rebellion. The second phase of Catholic resistance occurred in the 1930s, when the viciousness of the rebellion was transformed into a powerful sociopolitical force known as the Sinarquista Movement. This thesis compares and contrasts both groups and argues that Sinarquismo was a continuum of the Cristero struggle.

Cristero and Sinarquista Historiography

The Cristeros and Sinarquistas are subjects that received light treatment in

This thesis follows the style of the *Hispanic American Historical Review*.

Mexican historiography, especially when compared to the Mexican Revolution. It is due to the conservative nature of these movements that such a discrepancy exists. Earlier historiography lauded the Mexican revolutionaries, while ignoring or attacking their enemies. While many works were written about revolutionary leaders such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, little notice was given to the Cristero leader Enrique Gorostieta or the Sinarquista chief Salvador Abascal. The few early works written about the Cristeros and Sinarquistas were biased.

The Cristero Rebellion, also known as La Cristiada, exploded in 1926 to prevent attempts by the Mexican government to subdue the Catholic Church. This peasant uprising lasted for three years and claimed the lives of over 100,000 Mexican citizens.¹ Prior to the 1960s, Mexican historians distorted the popular nature of the Cristero Rebellion, mainly for political reasons. The rebellion was looked down upon because it was a reactionary movement that ran counter to the principles of the Mexican Revolution. This is not surprising, given that Mexico was dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for many years. Many of these historians accepted the party's view that the revolution was "progressive, triumphant and good," while its enemies were "reactionary, Catholic and bad."² Furthermore, Mexican historiography was dominated by secularists and Marxists, who caricatured the rebellion as "fanatical, obscurantist, and priest-ridden."³ The rebels were often dismissed as misguided, religious peasants who were manipulated by the church and landowners in their efforts to attack the revolution. Few early efforts were made by historians to understand the root causes and popular nature of the movement.

Beginning in the late 1960s, a number of researchers began examining the Cristero Rebellion in an objective manner. Writers such as Robert Quirk, Alicia Olivera de Bonfil, and David Bailey studied the origins of the conflict.⁴ Their works provided an excellent investigation into the church-state struggle. These authors critically examined the roles played by President Elías Calles and other state officials in the suppression of Catholicism in Mexico. Moreover, they studied the response of the Catholic Church, in particular the actions taken by Mexican bishops and top Vatican officials. They also covered the Mexican middle-class laity, whose leadership played a critical role in the uprisings. These historians greatly enhanced our understanding of the power struggle that ensued between the upper echelons of the two factions. However, they largely ignored the peasant soldiers on the battlefield, the Cristeros, whom they considered to be inconsequential.

It was historian Jean Meyer that first focused on the rebels and transformed them into a legitimate object for study.⁵ Meyer revolutionized the scholarship of the Cristero Rebellion by viewing the uprising as a grassroots movement, as opposed to an insurgence led from the top.⁶ Meyer's immense research included the innovative use of questionnaires and interviews directed at the survivors of the rebellion. Although Meyer's approach had some shortcomings, no other author came close to examining the peasant rebels in such exacting detail. Published in the 1970s, *La Cristiada* remains the standard in Cristero historiography. As one critic stated, "We still await a worthy sequel to the thesis advanced by Jean Meyer."⁷

In the decade following the collapse of the Cristero Rebellion, the Sinarquista Movement emerged as a direct response to the socialist policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas. The National Synarchist Union (UNS), established in 1937, attained an impressive following of over half a million members, making it a potent threat to the official party.⁸ Since Sinarquismo was also a direct challenge to the Mexican Revolution, its historiography suffered the same fate as that of the Cristeros. Contemporary accounts, along with works immediately following the collapse of the movement, were subjective.

The analysis of Sinarquismo fell into two categories: unequivocal praise and unabashed condemnation. The Nazi-looking Sinarquistas became an easy target of the Left and the Mexican government, which derided them as nothing more than a fascist group. Leftist writers, such as Vicente Lombardo Toledano and Carlos Velasco Gil, argued that Sinarquismo was not a grassroots movement, accusing it instead of being an “exotic plant” in the service of foreigners.⁹ Newspaper accounts, including those of the United States, also lacked objectivity and lumped Sinarquismo together with European fascism. Furthermore, the Sinarquistas’ views were rarely published, since the Mexican press was controlled by the government.¹⁰

At the other end of the spectrum were the works of the Sinarquistas. Salvador Abascal wrote numerous articles and published a memoir regarding his involvement in the organization. Another Sinarquista writer was Juan Ignacio Padilla, who published *Sinarquismo: Contrarrevolución*. Anyone researching Sinarquista writings and periodicals in order to obtain a clear picture of the movement should be mindful of

historian Kenneth Prager's admonition that their purpose was to "indoctrinate the fold against the abuses and hopelessness of the Mexican Revolution and to reinforce the impression that the UNS was Mexico's only means to attain salvation."¹¹

In similar fashion to Cristero historiography, objective and professional research on the Sinarquistas did not occur until the 1970s. Historians such as Hugh Campbell wrote about the Sinarquista movement, as well as other organizations of the Mexican Right. Extensive research of the Sinarquistas was undertaken by Héctor Hernández and Jean Meyer, who looked past the simplistic, extremist, and derogatory labels given by leftist historians and instead painted the UNS as a complex, yet undeniably Mexican organization.

The Need for Comparison

The improved studies on the Cristeros and the Sinarquistas have furthered our knowledge regarding these two groups. While these contributions are commendable, there is no work that compares these two movements. The existing research tends to analyze both subjects as completely separate entities. This thesis attempts to fill the void and argues that despite the lack of a "direct link," a great resemblance existed between the Sinarquista Movement and the Cristero Rebellion. Moreover, the evidence indicates that there was continuity between the two elements, where the Sinarquistas adopted and modified the Cristeros' brutal struggle into a nonviolent, but potent political entity.

At a glance, it appears that the Cristeros had little in common with the Sinarquistas. The Cristeros used vicious guerilla tactics, while the Sinarquistas employed passive resistance. The Cristeros waged their battles in the countryside, whereas the Sinarquistas marched in the cities. The peasant garb of the Cristeros contrasted sharply with the green uniforms and red armbands of the Sinarquistas. Furthermore, the majority of ex-Cristeros chose not to join the UNS.¹² These facts attack the notion of a strong connection between the two groups.

Yet, a methodical examination shows that a striking resemblance did exist. The movements shared the same goals: the defeat of the revolutionary government and the establishment of a Christian Social Order on Mexican soil. The ideology of the Sinarquistas and the Cristeros was compatible in many areas. They had common views on religion, land reform, morality, and (surprisingly) martyrdom. Moreover, both movements shared a troubled relationship with the Catholic Church and faced identical enemies as they strove to achieve their objectives. Also, the demographic make-up of both movements was remarkably alike: a peasant base with a middle-class leadership. Most importantly, both the Cristero Rebellion and the UNS represented popular, grassroots movements that threatened to destabilize the status quo of Mexican politics.

This thesis demonstrates that Catholic resistance against Mexico's anticlerical government was a changing process. This struggle, which emerged as early as the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century, depended principally upon the degree of persecution experienced by the church. This Catholic opposition was a continuous thread throughout Mexican history that became more active when the church suffered greater

oppression. When church-state relations improved, this resistance faded, yet remained just below the surface waiting for the next crisis to appear. Thus, when the Cristero Rebellion came to an abrupt end in 1929, it did not signify that the Catholic struggle ceased as well. Instead, it evolved and adapted into a different type of resistance, called Sinarquismo, which was possibly more effective in dealing with an intransigent Mexican government.

This thesis begins with an overview of the church-state struggle in Mexico; a history that contains the roots of both Sinarquismo and the Cristero Rebellion. A sequential timeline of both movements is rendered, which cites important developments and milestones of Catholic resistance between the 1920s and 1940s. This is followed by an in-depth comparison of both movements, which addresses key ideological concepts, demographics, relations with the church, and other elements. Hopefully this thesis will advance the knowledge of this obscure, but essential, facet of Mexican history.

CHAPTER II

THE CHURCH-STATE STRUGGLE

The Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement owed their existence to the conflict that arose between the Catholic Church and the Mexican government. The bitter struggle between church and state divided Mexicans more than any other issue throughout Mexico's history, leading to decades of war and ramifications in modern Mexican society. The once-powerful colonial church lost power and influence through increasingly liberal governments seeking to implement the principles of the Enlightenment. Conservative forces tried to reverse these setbacks and restore the prestige and authority the church once enjoyed. The Cristeros and Sinarquistas were but the latest of these groups that belonged to the Mexican Right. An examination of the church-state conflict shows that the Cristeros and Sinarquistas were true reactionary movements in the twentieth century, whose principles dated back five hundred years.

The Colonial Church

In colonial times, the Catholic Church enjoyed a special relationship with the Spanish monarchs that gave it immense power and influence throughout New Spain. The agreement, known as the *patronato real*, or the right of royal patronage, was a series of papal grants made in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to the Spanish crown. This agreement gave the Spanish monarch the responsibility to Christianize the natives

and to build needed churches and monasteries throughout the newly discovered lands. In exchange, the crown was made the head of the Catholic Church in Spain and her colonies. This allowed it to name church officials, collect tithes, allocate church revenues, assign missionary orders, and determine boundaries of holy sees. The Spanish kings also had the right to approve papal bulls and decrees before they could be disseminated throughout the colonies.¹³ These rights over the church were also exercised by ranking colonial officials and the Council of the Indies. The special arrangement of the *patronato real* became the root cause of the church-state conflict for centuries to come.

Under the *patronato real*, the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown became partners in the colonization of the Americas. Although the crown remained the ultimate authority, it needed the church to establish the legitimacy of divine rule. The church supported the notion that the king was responsible to God alone, making defiance of his pronouncements sacrilegious. Moreover, Spanish monarchs since the time of Ferdinand and Isabella were ardent Catholics and supported the spread and primacy of their faith. Consequently, Catholicism became the sole religion throughout the colonies and the church was given a royal blessing to obtain immense power and influence.¹⁴ This close cooperation between church and state on the basis of theocratic centralism can be traced back to Roman Emperor Constantine's First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.¹⁵

As time passed, the Habsburg rulers of Spain considered the church a dominant branch of the government, interlocked with the colonial bureaucracy at every level. This time period was labeled by Mexican conservatives as the "Golden Epoch," where

“humanity [had] reached its maximum creative capacity as a consequence of its ultimate union with divinity.”¹⁶ Emblematic of the closeness of church-state cooperation was the Holy Office of the Inquisition, established by the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella in 1478, whose purpose was to eradicate heresy and unify the Spanish Empire.¹⁷

Church influence throughout New Spain was pervasive. The church was responsible for maintaining social services, such as health care and orphanages. It was in charge of the educational system, from primary school to the university level. The records of births, deaths, and marriages were the domain of the clergy. The church was a wealthy institution, thanks to the contributions from pious donors and the collection of an ecclesiastical tax known as the tithe. This prosperity allowed the church to become the primary lender for capitalist undertakings. The biggest component of the church's wealth was its holdings in real estate. It is estimated that in 1700, the church owned half of Mexico's arable land.¹⁸

The clergy in colonial times had a prominent place in Mexican society. They were given corporate status and granted special privileges known as *fueros*, which made them answerable only to their own specialized courts for any offenses committed. Church authorities found that their advice heavily influenced the way in which authorities administered the colonial government. This sway extended to the lower clergy, who became sources of information for peasants and professionals. The church used this authority to promulgate its ideology to the flock. This philosophy, in turn, reinforced to the masses the concept of unquestioning allegiance to king and church.

Mexican colonial society was effectively divided into two major classes: the elite and the masses. The masses were primarily composed of the Indians and mestizos, who were generally weak in political and economic terms. The small but powerful class of the elite consisted of wealthy, literate, and fairly urbanized Spanish and creole landowners, royal officials, merchants, high-ranking military officers, and members of the church hierarchy. In order to justify this rigid top-down structure to the masses, church dogma preached that Mexican society was a well-regulated organism.

By this concept, a person lived not as an individual but existed as “cell in a human body without any identity of his own.”¹⁹ Essentially, everyone possessed a unique and fixed place in the social order with no opportunity for upward mobility. On the other hand, the notion of a fluid society was labeled anarchic by the church and as interfering with the harmony established by “divine arrangement.”²⁰ The church, with the support of the elite, adopted a paternalistic stance towards the lower classes in order to reinforce their sense of helplessness and condition them towards a strong obligation of servility.²¹

The church used its dogma of redemption as another tool to control the masses. This belief saw life as a temporal phase in which man would restlessly await his demise in order to be reborn into a “promised” perfect society awaiting him on the other side of death.²² The Indian and peasant were indoctrinated to resign themselves and perform the required sacrifices in order to obtain salvation. No more powerful symbol of sacrifice existed than that of Christ, whom Mexicans worshipped because they saw in Him a transfigured image of their own identity.²³ This spirit of martyrdom figured prominently

in both the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement. Acting as an intermediate between man and the hereafter, the church determined what God required and which acts had to be observed in order for one to be saved. This served as a potent element of control necessary to maintain complete and unwavering devotion.²⁴ The church's efforts kept the masses in check. However, erosion of its power came not from below, but from its supposed ally, the monarchy.

The Bourbon Reforms

The arrival of the Bourbon dynasty at the beginning of the eighteenth century spelled the end of the "Golden Epoch." After ruling Spain for centuries, the Habsburgs ended their reign with Charles II, who died without an heir. Following the War of the Spanish Succession, Philip d'Anjou, a member of the Bourbon monarchy in France, became the new king of Spain.²⁵ As ruler, Philip V implemented the same policies that were successfully used by his family. France had become a powerful nation under Bourbon rule and he hoped that the same formula would reinvigorate a decadent and impoverished Spain.²⁶ These new policies significantly altered the relationship between church and state.

The Bourbons were intent on modernizing Spain and bringing it out of its sixteenth-century mentality. Inspired by the principles of the Enlightenment, the Bourbons discarded Spanish practices which did not meet the eighteenth-century standards of utility, reason, and immediate economic advantage.²⁷ Spain and her

colonies were transformed through what is known as the “Bourbon Renaissance.”²⁸

Throughout their rule, the Habsburgs had delegated much of their power to councils and semi-private organizations, each with its own *fuero*. The Bourbon mentality, being quite the opposite, was based on a clearly organized and centralized system where the direct lines of command were unmistakable.²⁹ Effectively, the power of the Bourbon state was absolute.

The Bourbons, unlike the Habsburgs, did not trust the church nor see it as an equal partner. The Bourbons believed in the supremacy of civil over spiritual power and insisted that the church function as a minion under their rule. The Bourbons were not concerned with regulating the spirituality of the church. Instead, they wanted to end the church’s monopoly on land and property.³⁰ Consequently, the Bourbon state extended civil jurisdiction over the clergy by abolishing many *fueros* and by taxing income-producing property.³¹ The crown also imposed restrictions on the frequency of public celebrations and church spending, thereby reducing the social and political influence enjoyed by the clergy.³² This secular trend continued with subsequent governments.

The most controversial Bourbon act was the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish colonies in 1767. This powerful and wealthy order was seen as a “state within a state,” whose loyalties seemed more in line with the pope than the king.³³ The expulsion of the order raised the ire of many colonists. The Jesuits were highly regarded for their intellect and hard work, having established over a hundred missions and countless schools, including 23 colleges.³⁴ The result was an unprecedented series of riots instigated by Jesuit supporters in half-a-dozen cities.

The revolts in support of the Jesuits came from the grassroots level. The account of José de Gálvez, visitor-general of New Spain, attested to this fact. Knowing full well the unpopular nature of his orders, Gálvez took good care that the general public did not know about the expulsions until they were implemented.³⁵ Still, riots occurred in the northern villages and mining regions, where commissioners had been driven out and were thus unable to perform the evictions. The elite were not involved in the rebellion. These uprisings were brutally suppressed by the crown, which executed 90 leaders, sentenced seven hundred rebels to life imprisonment, and exiled over one hundred others.³⁶

The uprising was perhaps the first popular response by the laity against anticlerical policies in the New World. The key element of this rebellion was not ideological, but rather a personal connection that the rebels felt towards the Jesuits. Centuries later, this personal relationship also existed between the Cristeros and the oppressed clergy. Grassroots reaction also characterized the Sinarquista Movement. Whether intentional or not, the Bourbons had begun a challenge-and-response cycle between the secular state and the laity. Jean Meyer affirmed that the religious conflicts of the twentieth century stemmed from Bourbon policies and the opposition to them.³⁷

Conservatism vs. Liberalism

Sinarquismo and the Cristero Rebellion were also a legacy of the liberal-conservative struggle. Beginning with the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century,

the war between liberals and conservatives was a determining factor of church-state affairs as well as the course of Mexican history. The Sinarquista Movement and the Cristero Rebellion were emblematic of the conservative response to Mexican liberalism and post-revolutionary anticlericalism. It is therefore necessary to define the terms “liberalism” and “conservatism” vis-à-vis the framework of Mexican history.

Liberalism emerged from the Age of Enlightenment, a period that transformed Europe in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment advocated rationality as a means to establish an authoritative system of ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge.³⁸ This movement supported the idea of universal human progress and the use of empirical methods in science. Writers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, and Locke focused their criticism on the remnants of the Middle Ages. They disparaged religious intolerance, inflexible and disparate class systems, limits on economic activities, and absolute monarchies.³⁹ Liberalism carried forward the principles of the Enlightenment long after that period had ended.

Liberals advocated a pluralistic democratic system of government, a free exchange of ideas, and economic competition. They fought for equal rights under the law and the right to life, liberty, and property. Liberals challenged the status quo and were responsible for the two most important upheavals in the eighteenth century: the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. With regards to the Catholic Church, liberals opposed established religion and church dogma, while clamoring for religious freedom.⁴⁰

Conservatism was a direct response to liberalism. This philosophy sought to preserve the status quo, with the prospect of regressing society to former times. To a conservative, any existing value or institution had to be respected because it had undergone the correcting influence of past experience.⁴¹ A conservative did not oppose change, but insisted that it be natural rather than radical.

There were several key characteristics of conservatives. They treasured order because it guaranteed that existing values would survive. Conservatives valued tradition over innovation, and unity over conflict. Class loyalty to conservatives was vital, since they tended to be of the privileged class. Class was considered strictly hereditary. The plight of the lower classes was deemed inconsequential. Conservatives saw society as a tree with deep roots in the past. To do away with tradition meant cutting the roots and killing the great tree of civilization.⁴² Conservatism cherished the natural order and saw it wiser than any human mind. Furthermore, morality was emphasized over relativism by conservatives, who wished to enforce what they saw as “right living.” Consequently, religion became the guiding standard of the conservative movement.

Conservatism and liberalism are also defined in terms of the “Right” versus the “Left.” This political jargon emerged from the French Revolution. In the National Assembly of 1789, the liberals, or Jacobins, sat to the left of the speaker’s podium, while the conservatives, who defended the king, sat on the opposite side of the chamber.⁴³ These definitions serve only as general guidelines. In Mexico, as was the case throughout Latin America, the principles of “liberals” and “conservatives” varied depending on their goals and the situation at hand. For example, most Mexican liberals

in the nineteenth century did not believe in social revolution. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church found that its interests lay with conservatives, thus becoming a bastion of support for the Right and a loathsome enemy of the Left.

Mexican Independence

The Bourbon reforms brought with them the first exposure of liberal ideas to New Spain. This brought resistance from the privileged elites of colonial Mexico, who along with the church hierarchy, tried to preserve the authoritarianism, paternalism, and Catholicism of the earlier period.⁴⁴ Their commitment to these conservative goals proved to be greater than their loyalty towards the motherland.

The ouster of the Bourbon king by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808 ushered in a state of confusion for New Spain and the other Spanish colonies. Although a caretaker government was established in New Spain to run affairs in the name of Ferdinand VII, several factions fought to control the course that the state would take. Liberals and conservatives carried their cause to the battlefield, with the church solidly behind the latter faction.

The early independence efforts were led by Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, men that espoused the values of the Enlightenment. Conservative criollos refused to go along with the rebels and doomed them to defeat. The church denounced Hidalgo and Morelos, tried the priests under the auspices of the Inquisition, defrocked them, and turned them over to the government for execution. The church's role in the

demise of two of Mexico's most revered heroes was seen as traitorous and collaborationist by future Mexican governments.

Conservative loyalty to the Spanish crown faded after 1820. Although Ferdinand VII was reinstated as king, he was forced by his subjects to accept the liberal Spanish Constitution of 1812.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the Mexican Church, along with conservatives, threw its support behind Agustín de Iturbide to declare Mexican Independence in 1821. Some historians saw this ecclesiastical action as an attempt to maintain the Catholic faith intact from a European liberal "infection."⁴⁶

Mexican Independence was a compromise between liberals and conservatives. Iturbide, a criollo general of the Royalist Army, switched sides and signed an agreement with the rebels known as the *Plan de Iguala*. This document contained the "Three Guarantees," which proclaimed an independent constitutional monarchy, asserted Roman Catholicism as the state religion, and assured racial equality.⁴⁷ Although the church was pleased by this conservative triumph, an important question remained unresolved: should the Mexican government exert the same control over the church as had the Spanish crown?⁴⁸ This issue proved to be the root cause of the church-state conflict for decades to come.

The Spanish royalty spurned the idea of accepting a Mexican crown and thus allowed an ambitious Iturbide to manipulate the fledgling Congress to declare him constitutional emperor of Mexico in 1822.⁴⁹ The First Empire lasted only ten months. Iturbide's unscrupulousness and inability to run the country instigated another rebellion, consisting of conservatives and liberals. Following the successful overthrow of the

emperor, the insurgents enacted the *Plan de Casa Mata*, which called for a new government in the style of a republic.⁵⁰ Despite initial optimism, this alliance broke down and plunged the country into decades of chaos, in which conservatives battled liberals for control of the government. The church remained the focal point of this struggle.

The Early Republic

The decades following the overthrow of Iturbide were marked by financial disorder, political insecurity, and humiliation in dealing with foreign powers. Throughout this period, the liberals and conservatives refused to compromise on matters of substance, drawing battle lines instead. The ideological *mêlée* focused on whether the new Republic would become a federalist or centralist state.⁵¹ Throughout this period, conservatives and liberals became entrenched with their views of the church.

Mexican liberals supported federalism, which in Latin America meant states' rights, not central control. Liberals, also known as federalists, clamored for freedom of the press, religious toleration, curtailment of *fueros*, secular education, and an egalitarian society. In foreign affairs and models for nation-building, liberals looked to the United States as their model. These liberals came from a variety of backgrounds: middle-class intellectuals, journalists, teachers, lawyers, and small businessmen. The liberal camp was divided into two factions: *moderados* (moderates) and *puros* (ultraliberals).⁵² The latter

group advocated a radical restructuring of society, prompting a response from alarmed conservatives.

The liberal firebrands, who were inspired by the U.S. Constitution and the Spanish document of 1812, saw the Catholic Church as an obstacle to progress. Their rhetoric contributed to the rise of anticlericalism in Mexico. Liberals accused the church of being the collaborationist “shadow of Spain,” and of “[corrupting] man through mindless acceptance of dogma.”⁵³ Ironically, the church had been accused by the (liberal) Spanish government of manipulating the uneducated masses for its own benefit.⁵⁴ The church’s enemies wanted to seize its powerful influence over the masses.

The conservative faction favored a centralized state, even if it meant rule by dictatorship. Centralists advocated censorship, a class system of rule by the elite, preservation of *fueros* and titles of nobility, monopoly of religion by the Roman Catholic Church, and clerical control of the country’s school system. Conservatives looked for inspiration in Europe rather than the United States. They extolled the nation’s colonial heritage and its tradition of strong central government (ironically, conservatives adopted this aspect of the Bourbon Renaissance). Wealthy merchants, mine owners, army officers, and church officials were centralists. Indians generally supported the conservatives, since their communities also enjoyed *fueros*.⁵⁵

Delegates from liberal and conservative factions convened to adopt the Constitution of 1824, a compromise document that still guaranteed Catholicism as the sole religion in Mexico.⁵⁶ This cooperation, however, was short-lived and the federalist state that emerged was soon in jeopardy. The ideological divide was manifested in the

branches of Freemasonry to which many leaders belonged. Most conservatives joined the Scottish Rite (*escoceses*), while many liberals flocked to the York Rite (*yorkinos*).⁵⁷ Given the uncompromising nature of these two factions, it was an unwise policy that a president and vice-president were elected from opposite sides of the political spectrum. The result was that these men conspired and led rebellions against each other, plunging Mexico into disarray.

In 1833, liberals briefly held the reins of power and demonstrated their willingness to decimate the church's influence. In that year, Vice President Valentín Gómez Farías, a *puro*, enacted a series of radical decrees targeting the church. The right of *patronato* was given to the state, allowing it to name bishops and other church officials. Moreover, members of the monastic orders were allowed to renounce their vows, payment of the church tithe was deemed no longer mandatory, the Franciscan missions were secularized, and the University of Mexico, where most of the faculty was clerical, was closed.⁵⁸ Conservatives, rallying to the cry "*Religión y Fueros*," rose in indignation and ousted the liberal government.

Ideological leaders like Gómez Farías, however, were the exception, not the rule. The typical authority of the period was the caudillo; a military chief with a personal following. The caudillo was far more pragmatic and opportunistic than philosophically driven, a prime example being Antonio López de Santa Anna.⁵⁹ The mercurial Santa Anna switched sides between different factions whenever it suited his ambitions, as he did with Gómez Farías, whom he supported only to drive out later.⁶⁰ The end result was that throughout the Early Republic, Mexico was plagued with leaders that failed to

adhere to any set of principles, preventing the country from heading in any meaningful direction. As long as the government remained ideologically rudderless it could not assert any meaningful authority over the Catholic Church.

Mexico paid a heavy price during this chaotic period. Following the ouster of Gómez Farías, Santa Anna suspended the Constitution of 1824, disbanded the Congress, and worked to concentrate power into the central government. Though welcomed by some conservatives, Santa Anna's dictatorship sparked a number of rebellions, again leading Mexico into disorder. In the years 1833-55, the presidency changed 36 times, 19 of these with Santa Anna at the helm.⁶¹ Following a disastrous war with the United States, Mexico lost over half its territory in 1848. Adding insult to injury, Santa Anna sold another piece of Mexican territory in the Gadsden Purchase of 1853.⁶² At this juncture, Santa Anna had firmly allied himself with the conservatives, bringing ultimate discredit to their cause. Outraged liberals enacted the *Plan de Ayutla* in the summer of 1855 and rose in rebellion to rid the country of Santa Anna once and for all. This was a new kind of movement, where ideologies were more important than personalities.⁶³

La Reforma

The men who took control of the Mexican government in 1855 were of a different breed than the caudillos. They saw the war with the United States as a disgrace and wanted to redefine the conscience and goals of the Mexican nation. Anti-militaristically and secularly oriented, these politicians deeply mistrusted the church and

looked down upon the ambitious armed forces.⁶⁴ Many of them attributed the United States' power to its Protestant religion and felt that their own Catholic Church needed reform.⁶⁵ The Revolution of Ayutla had a wider base than previous antigovernment movements, giving its ideological leader, Benito Juárez, a mandate to impose major changes to the church-state relationship.⁶⁶ This period in Mexican history was known as *La Reforma* (The Reform).

Under Juárez's stewardship, the government enacted a series of laws designed to destroy the sustaining structures of the conservative state. The 1857 *Ley Juárez* abolished military and clerical fueros. It did not dismantle military and ecclesiastical courts, but limited their jurisdiction to cases involving military or canon law. Henceforth, priests and soldiers accused of violating civil or criminal law were to stand trial in state or federal courts.⁶⁷ The 1856 *Ley Lerdo* was even more controversial. This law prohibited civil and ecclesiastical organizations from owning property not directly used in daily operations. The Roman Catholic Church could keep its monasteries, seminaries, and church buildings, but had to divest itself from other rural and urban properties.⁶⁸ The church was obliged to sell its vast landholdings at public auction. The *Ley Juárez* and *Ley Lerdo* were only the beginning of a liberal backlash against the church.

The Constitution of 1857 was a more liberal document than its predecessor of 1824. Conservatives, who opposed the *Plan de Ayutla*, were mostly excluded from the drafting of the document.⁶⁹ The Constitution incorporated *Ley Juárez* and *Ley Lerdo* in addition to *Ley Iglesias*, which prohibited the church from charging high fees for the

sacraments.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Constitution did not declare Roman Catholicism as the state religion, allowing for the toleration of other creeds in Mexico. Predictably, conservative response was indignant.

Events in Mexico were not unnoticed by the Vatican. Pope Pius IX declared, “We arise our Pontifical voice in apostolic liberty...to condemn, to reprove, and declare null and void the said decrees and everything else that the civil authority has done in scorn of ecclesiastical authority and of this Holy See.”⁷¹ The actions of the state and church placed Mexicans in a dilemma. If they swore allegiance to the Constitution, they were seen as heretics by the church and if they refused, they were condemned as traitors by the government. Catholics who took advantage of *Ley Lerdo* to buy church property were excommunicated, while civil servants who refused to take an oath to the Constitution lost their jobs.⁷² Mexican society was hopelessly divided once again and the country sank into a disastrous three-year civil war.

The War of the Reform engulfed Mexico in the years 1858-61. It was the culmination of the church-state conflict that had been building since the Bourbon Reforms.⁷³ Ideological conflicts often bring out the worst atrocities, this war being no exception. The first intense persecution of the clergy occurred during this time period. Churches were desecrated by liberals, and priests who refused them the sacraments were summarily executed.⁷⁴ This unrestrained violence against the clergy was repeated seventy years later during the Cristero Rebellion.

Conservative forces held Mexico City, where they declared the anticlerical legislation null and void. They showed support for the church by taking communion in

public and swearing an allegiance to the Holy See.⁷⁵ The church was delighted to support the conservative war effort with its own treasury. The Juárez government, operating out of Veracruz, responded by enacting the Reform Laws, which were more radical than the 1857 Constitution. The new decrees made births and marriages civil ceremonies, legalized divorce, truncated the number of religious holidays, limited public religious processions, secularized cemeteries, abolished male monastic orders, prohibited female orders from accepting new members, taxed the priesthood, and nationalized all church assets and property.⁷⁶ The Vatican was not pleased.

An interesting phenomenon transpired during the War of the Reform. Indians and peasants joined the conservative cause in large numbers. The deciding factor for most was land. It was obvious to them that the liberals who enacted the Reform Laws were not interested in *social* reform. The land confiscated through *Ley Lerdo* was sold to wealthy landowners instead of being distributed to landless peons.⁷⁷ Indian villages, treated as corporations under *Ley Lerdo*, were forced to sell their communal property. Ironically, the liberal laws were working to the detriment of the rural masses and to the benefit of the hacendados.⁷⁸ The issue of land was also a driving force behind the Sinarquista Movement and the Cristero Rebellion.

The Second Empire and the Restored Republic

Juárez's liberal army captured Mexico City on New Year's Day, 1861, after trouncing the conservatives on the battlefield.⁷⁹ However, hopes for stability were

shattered when French armies invaded at the behest of conservatives. Emperor Napoleon III wanted a colony in the New World and the Mexican crisis presented him with an opportunity. An added benefit of rescuing the church in Mexico was to curry favor with the strong Catholic element in France.⁸⁰ On the pretext of collecting unpaid debts, French troops disembarked in Veracruz and marched inland. Welcomed by conservatives and the clergy, the French forced Juárez to abandon Mexico City once more. Napoleon, after conferring with conservative exiles, concluded that Mexico needed rule by a European monarch.

The conservative leadership was less concerned with the loss of Mexican sovereignty than the opportunity which presented itself in the wake of the liberals' defeat. With aspirations that Mexico would revert to rule by divine right and that the Catholic Church would be prominent once again, a delegation of conservatives offered the Mexican crown to Austrian Archduke Maximilian von Habsburg.⁸¹ Maximilian accepted the throne and in 1864 was received in Mexico by the church hierarchy and its conservative allies.⁸² The emperor, however, turned out to be a colossal disappointment. Fancying himself a liberal (he was a Freemason), Maximilian refused to suspend the Reform Laws and return seized church property.⁸³ By trying to find middle ground, Maximilian alienated his conservative base, while winning no friends from the liberal cause.

Napoleon, facing pressure from the United States and military concerns in Europe, withdrew French forces from Mexican soil. Abandoned by Napoleon and the pope, Maximilian made his stand in Querétaro, where he was defeated, tried, and

executed in 1867.⁸⁴ The liberals, having successfully ousted a foreign army, usurped the banner of nationalism. For the conservatives, however, association with the enemy tainted their cause as treasonous and led to their party's dissolution.⁸⁵ After this humiliating defeat, the church sought more modest goals.⁸⁶

Flushed with victory, but facing immense political and economic problems, President Juárez wisely chose a conciliatory approach. He issued an amnesty decree for conservatives and allowed for modest continuity of church activities.⁸⁷ The church hierarchy responded in kind, which led to a reduction of tensions. Symbolic of this détente was the Mexican archbishop's blessing at the government ceremony inaugurating the Veracruz-Mexico City railway in 1873.⁸⁸ The Laws of the Reform, while remaining on the books, were not vigorously applied. For decades to come, enforcement of anticlerical decrees proved pivotal to the intensity of the church-state struggle.

Benito Juárez died unexpectedly in 1872 and his successor, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, abandoned the path of appeasement.⁸⁹ Lerdo de Tejada applied anticlerical laws with greater vigor, even to the extent of expelling the last remaining order of nuns, the Sisters of Charity.⁹⁰ Moreover, the Reform Laws that had been enacted during wartime were fully incorporated into the Constitution in 1875.⁹¹ The brief tolerance under Juárez ended and the religious conflict arose once again. A new revolt emerged which presaged the Cristero Rebellion.

The Religionero Revolt

The Religionero Revolt was a peasant guerrilla movement that existed between 1874 and 1875.⁹² Yelling, “*¡Viva la religión! ¡Muera el mal gobierno!*” (“Long live religion! Death to bad government!”) the Religioneros waged their war throughout the western part of Central Mexico, the same region where the Cristeros emerged the following century.⁹³ Historian Jean Meyer argued that this uprising was the precursor to La Cristiada. He asserted that the Religioneros resembled Vendée and Spanish Carlism, both of which were conservative movements that sought to protect the Catholic faith in France and Spain, respectively.⁹⁴ The Religioneros fought tenaciously a government that they believed had abandoned Catholicism and turned Protestant.

The Religionero Revolt, like La Cristiada, was a true mass movement. Meyer called the rebellion “a war of the people” and noted that the rebel groups formed and disbanded as necessary to tend to their crops.⁹⁵ Meyer recited the story of a Religionero “general” by the name of Socorro Reyes, who was captured by government forces. When asked who led him to rebel, he replied, “My conscience commanded me.”⁹⁶ Reyes faced the firing squad with such grace and honor that Meyer remarked, “Such, then, was the character of the popular religious movement that the excellent Federal army proved unable to defeat.”⁹⁷ This attribute also applied to the Cristeros.

The Pax Porfiriana

Lerdo de Tejada's intransigence, along with other controversial actions, made him an unpopular president. His announcement for reelection prompted a prominent general, Porfirio Díaz, to issue the *Plan de Tuxtepec* and declare himself in revolt.⁹⁸ After forcing Lerdo de Tejada from office, Díaz took power in 1877.⁹⁹ Díaz was an astute politician as well as a military genius, which allowed him to approach the church-state controversy in a pragmatic and constructive way.

The priority for Díaz was to establish internal stability and stimulate economic growth. Though he had been a champion of the liberal cause for 20 years, he realized that he could not make an enemy of the church. Therefore, he ensured that constitutional restrictions on the church were not enforced and that anticlerical rhetoric of government officials was curtailed.¹⁰⁰ Still, Díaz was a "constitutional dictator" and forced all factions in Mexico to stand solidly behind through his use of the "carrot and the stick" method. Thus, the Laws of the Reform menacingly remained in the Constitution. Though there were no legal restrictions on church political activities, it was expected that the clergy would stay politically silent. Hence, the church remained subservient to a benign state.

The *Porfiriato* proved to be the most glorious period of the church since Independence. Church property and personnel increased considerably. Monasteries and convents reopened as charitable institutions, orphanages, and schools. The number of Catholic schools increased six times.¹⁰¹ There was an expansion of clerical influence and

prestige, for once again Mexico welcomed Catholicism. The church, for its part, became an ardent supporter of the regime. The hierarchy, religious newspapers, and most priests spoke favorably of the dictator.

The Legacy of the Church

Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church established a firm record of siding with the conservative cause. Intent on preserving its colonial power at all costs, the church supported governments that placed order and authority above personal freedoms. By opposing “heroes,” such as Miguel Hidalgo and supporting “villains,” like Maximilian von Habsburg, the church placed upon itself a traitorous label in a country replete with nationalism. Moreover, the church was seen as backward-looking; a relic. It appeared that the church did not care about the social welfare of the average Mexican. Nowhere was this more evident than during the *Porfiriato*, when the gap between the rich and poor widened into a chasm. Even when the church moderated its course in the late nineteenth century, it found that it was impossible to reach an accord with the Left. Its traditionalist heritage and its past allegiance towards the conservative cause became major liabilities when the Mexican Revolution began in 1910.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH AND THE REVOLUTION

The Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement would not have emerged were it not for the Mexican Revolution, for their *raison d'être* was to oppose it. The revolution was fundamentally anticlerical and presented a mortal threat to the Catholic Church. Unlike prior conflicts, there was no organized coalition of conservative elites that rallied to the defense of the clergy. The church's only recourse was to mobilize its mass base, the faithful. This period also marked a transformation for the church, where it worked for the needs of the laity beyond a spiritual way. This change in mindset ironically placed the church on a collision course with revolutionary ideology. The church and the secular government became adversaries in their quest to win the hearts and minds of the Mexican people.

The Revolution's View of the Church

The Mexican Revolution brought with it an unprecedented persecution of the Catholic Church. Under Porfirio Díaz, the church had enjoyed an accommodating policy with the government. Therefore, in the eyes of the revolutionaries, the clergy were seen as willing accomplices to the excesses of the regime. Previously, the church faced adversaries intent on implementing liberal principles without disturbing the framework of society. However, with the advent of the revolution, the church faced a

new breed of enemy, one that was willing to change the whole social order. The goal of the revolution was to create a “new man,” free of superstition, fanaticism, prejudice, and idolatry.¹⁰²

The church was the target of revolutionary goals. Revolutionaries felt that the church needed to be marginalized in order for Mexico to become a modern nation.¹⁰³ They accused the church of opposing every progressive movement in Mexican history, thereby retarding the development of the country.¹⁰⁴ Many radicals felt that the church obstructed nationalism, since it instructed its flock to remain faithful to the Vatican.¹⁰⁵ The church frustrated the revolutionary government’s goal of controlling the nation. With the absence of a major opposition party, the Catholic Church was perceived as the main political adversary in Mexico.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, a new social Catholic ideology had evolved, which made the church a competitor to the revolutionary program.

The Transformation of the Church

Contrary to revolutionary rhetoric, the church was not as intransigent as it once had been. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Vatican realized that it had to address the social ills affecting the laity, otherwise it would lose its following to secular socialist movements. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum*, an encyclical that promulgated a type of socialism which was compatible with Christian principles.¹⁰⁷ According to *Rerum Novarum*, social Catholicism was a form of Christian democracy that would unite the church with the people.¹⁰⁸ Catholics were called upon to solve the

problems of the working class, such as labor reform and the workers' right to organize, while rejecting secular socialism and class struggle.¹⁰⁹

The Mexican clerical response to *Rerum Novarum* was mild, but palpable. A handful of progressive clerics sponsored a series of Social Action Congresses during the first decade of the twentieth century. These congresses debated social issues, criticized the hacendados, and deplored the condition of the working class.¹¹⁰ Reforms were proposed that gave land to the peasants and rights to laborers. The focus on labor was particularly intense, exemplified by the formation of the Mexican Catholic Confederation in 1913, the first attempt at labor unionization in the country.¹¹¹ In addition, Catholic Worker's Circles were established to catechize the proletariat and fight social vices, such as gambling and alcohol.¹¹² Catholic action also infiltrated the political arena. On May 5, 1911, the archbishop of Mexico called upon the leaders of two nascent political organizations, *Operarios Guadalupanos* (Workers of Guadalupe) and the National Catholic Circle, to form the National Catholic Party.¹¹³ The party's platform was the furtherance of Catholic social aims publicized by the earlier congresses.

Rerum Novarum was not uniformly implemented. This was especially the case during the Díaz regime, when the Mexican hierarchy kept a firm grip on the reins of the program. Historian Kenneth Prager observed that until 1910, the Social Action programs were shallow and uneventful.¹¹⁴ These groups were never allowed to go beyond the discussion stage, lest they disturb the delicate balance that had been established with the state. Still, a precedent was set in motion which became useful once hostilities resumed.

The church began to organize its base as a check against the revolutionary government. These lay organizations ultimately provided the middle-class leadership for the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement.

The irony of the conflict between the church and state was that the former was no longer a “willing handmaiden of reaction.”¹¹⁵ However, the church had to fight an image that it had developed throughout the centuries. Moreover, it did not matter to revolutionaries that the church had changed. They were resolute on implementing reforms on their own terms and were unwilling to let another entity carry out a parallel program. The church was seen as a challenger to be dealt with, and crushed if need be.

The Onset of the Revolution

On November 20, 1910, the Mexican Revolution began as Francisco Madero led his forces against the Díaz government. The first stage of the revolution saw the ouster of the old regime, followed by civil war. The coalition dissolved and the revolutionary leaders fought against each other, bringing the country to near anarchy. Throughout this period, the church faced renewed persecution for its support of the dictatorship. In its quest for survival, the church tried to make pacts with the more moderate factions.¹¹⁶

Progressive Catholics were joyful with Madero’s triumph in 1911. As president, Madero welcomed the National Catholic Party as a tangible manifestation of Mexico’s new liberty.¹¹⁷ Catholic traditionalists, however, viewed Madero as weak and ineffective. They, along with other conservatives, greeted the coup of Victoriano Huerta

in 1913.¹¹⁸ However, Huerta had achieved the presidency through treachery, murdering Madero in the process. His actions precipitated another, bloodier phase in the revolution, as several governors proclaimed themselves in rebellion. The church had associated itself once again with an unsavory leader and consequently paid a hefty price.

Convinced that the clergy had colluded in Madero's overthrow, the rebels exacted their vengeance. Churches were seized and burned while priests were jailed, harassed, and murdered.¹¹⁹ In many regions, worship ceased to exist.¹²⁰ The revolution took a decidedly anti-Catholic tone. When the rebels triumphed against Huerta, a convention was held in Querétaro which gave an institutional basis to the revolution. A new constitution was drawn up which threatened the very existence of the Mexican Catholic Church.

The Constitution of 1917

No other document had greater impact on Mexican church-state relations than the Constitution of 1917. True to their convictions, the victorious revolutionaries incorporated sweeping anticlerical legislation into the charter. The Constitution adopted the Laws of the Reform and implemented other measures that further stymied church influence. Article 3 established secular education.¹²¹ Article 5 prohibited monastic orders.¹²² Article 24 banned public worship outside the confines of a church building.¹²³ Article 27 nationalized all church real estate and gave the government the authority to

regulate church buildings.¹²⁴ The most anticlerical section of the Constitution was Article 130, which proved to be the crux of the church-state conflict in the 1920s.

Through Article 130, the Constitution denied the church legal existence. As a nonentity, the Mexican Church was left without any official channels to address grievances. Legally, the church was defenseless. Furthermore, Article 130 treated the clergy as members belonging to a professional organization and gave the state governments the power to register and regulate them.¹²⁵ Article 130 allowed only native-born clergy on Mexican soil. Moreover, priests and nuns were not allowed to speak out against the government nor vote in elections.¹²⁶

Anticlerical laws prior to the Constitution of 1917 were meant to increase the government's power at the expense of the church and to separate the two entities. The intent of the Constitution, however, was radically different. It sought to *incorporate* and *subordinate* the church into the government, in essence a revival of the *patronato real*.¹²⁷ The church found itself in the precarious situation of state control with none of the privileges it had enjoyed during colonial times and no recourse to the Vatican. The church had no one to turn to except its flock.

The Practical Revolutionaries

The Mexican Revolution, like any other sociopolitical movement, had its moderates and radicals. The anticlerical provisions of the Constitution, striking as they were, could be rendered innocuous if not enforced. Therein lay the key to the church-

state conflict. A few leaders, such as Juárez and Díaz, understood that peaceful coexistence with the church was possible through non-enforcement of provocative laws. Practicality took precedence over ideology so that harmony could exist. Some revolutionary leaders heeded the precedent.

The first president under the Constitution of 1917 was Venustiano Carranza, leader of the armies that had ousted the unpopular Huerta. Although he convened the constitutional assembly, Carranza was no radical. The delegates drafted a document too drastic for his taste, especially those sections that dealt with land reform. Carranza wanted to build popular support for his policies without alienating the church. He therefore allowed public processions, such as one honoring the Virgin Mary in 1919.¹²⁸ He also talked of modifying Article 130. The church responded to Carranza's olive branch with goodwill.

Like so many administrations of the early revolutionary period, Carranza's rule was ephemeral. In 1920, he was driven out of office by rival Alvaro Obregón, a famous military general of the revolutionary campaigns. While Obregón adopted Carranza's conciliatory attitude towards the church, his approach was quite different. Obregón, who came from the northern state of Sonora, had a well-earned reputation as a fierce anticlerical. As a military man, he slandered the priesthood, closed Catholic schools, imprisoned clergy, seized convents, and even helped draft the 1917 Constitution.¹²⁹ Despite his anticlerical convictions, Obregón, as president, chose to avoid a direct conflict with the church. Obregón's priority was to consolidate his power, which he

achieved through persuasion and intimidation. An astute politician, he was able to manipulate various factions, including the clergy, to fulfill his goals.¹³⁰

To achieve his objectives, Obregón preferred cooperation over conflict. While he could be lenient, anything that seemed to challenge his authority was dealt with directly and brutally. With regards to the church, Obregón chose a prudent path by scaling back his caustic rhetoric and ignoring anticlerical laws.¹³¹ His patience was tested, however, when in 1923 a large open-air ceremony took place in Central Mexico to commemorate an enormous statue of Christ. Obregón viewed this as a deliberate church violation of the ban on public worship.¹³² He promptly expelled the Vatican's apostolic delegate, who had presided over the ceremony.¹³³ Obregón's response was just as decisive with the National Eucharist Congress of 1924. He shut down the convention, deported foreign clergy, and fired government employees who had participated in the assembly.¹³⁴

Obregón was a moderate, notwithstanding his actions. He was able to placate the anticlerical demands from the Mexican Left while maintaining an open dialogue with the Vatican.¹³⁵ Obregón's tactics were tame compared to the wave of anticlericalism that was sweeping across the country, for extremists had begun a campaign of terror by bombing churches.¹³⁶ The situation became more unbearable under Obregón's successor, Plutarco Elías Calles. This was a president who knew no patience and gave no quarter. Calles's callous policies unleashed the wrath of the Cristeros.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRISTERO REBELLION

The Cristero Rebellion of 1926-29 was a genuinely popular counterrevolutionary movement. Like the Religioneros of the 1870s, the Cristeros launched a vicious attack on a government they considered godless. The uprising was a measure of last resort to defend a church threatened with extinction. The Cristeros forced the government to curb its anticlerical policy. This grassroots phenomenon also transpired in the Sinarquista Movement of the 1930s. The composition of the rebellion was complex, consisting of elements from the middle and lower classes. These two factions attempted to work in conjunction with one another against the government. Adding to the fray was the Catholic Church, which endeavored to control and channel the laity into a potent weapon against the state.

The Intransigence of Calles

A new anticlerical phase of the Mexican Revolution began on December 1, 1924, when Plutarco Elías Calles assumed the presidency.¹³⁷ The church found an implacable foe in Calles, for this president lacked Obregón's reflective temperament. President Calles was an individual of stubbornness and principle; a man completely devoted to the ideals of the revolution.¹³⁸ Prior to Calles, there was hope that the revolution could be reconciled with the church. His actions erased all prospects for conciliation.

Calles was an absolutist. He imposed order on the chaos left by the revolution through centralized control. He consolidated the army and subjugated the revolutionary generals. He continued Porfirio Díaz's modernization efforts and imposed federal power over caciques, state governments, the press, and labor unions. Calles intended to institutionalize the revolution and manage it by identifying it with the absolute state.¹³⁹ To this end, Calles created a monolithic political entity, the National Revolutionary Party (PNR).¹⁴⁰ Meyer stated, "If a dictator is one who tolerates nothing outside his own will, then Calles was dictatorship personified."¹⁴¹ Calles intended to be the master of his house and found the church to be a stubborn guest.

Calles had other reasons for attacking the church. He was elected to the presidency with unwavering support from socialists, whose core component was the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (CROM). Calles wanted to use this support to solidify his grip on power and implement his programs. Therefore, he acceded to the demands of the Mexican Left, in particular the implementation of Article 27, the regulation of church buildings.¹⁴² The CROM, representing the most radical hue of the revolutionaries, had a privileged place within the Calles government. Its outspoken leader, Luis Morones, was appointed Minister of Labor. The CROM also controlled the Ministries of Commerce and Industry.¹⁴³

Calles was also driven by his personal views on the church. He, like Obregón, came from the northern state of Sonora, where Protestantism was making inroads.¹⁴⁴ Though not opposed to Catholic spiritualism, Calles had disdain for the clergy who misused it for their own benefit. He concluded that the church could only function

through government control.¹⁴⁵ However, when faced with church resistance to his policies, Calles's position radicalized. Convinced that the clergy were in open rebellion against him and in collusion with American oil companies, he wanted nothing more than to "extirpate the Catholic faith from the soil of Mexico."¹⁴⁶ The détente that had taken place between Obregón and the church disintegrated under Calles.

The Calles Law

President Calles needed only a pretext to unleash his anger on the Catholic Church. In February 1926, the primate of Mexico made a declaration that the church did not recognize the Constitution.¹⁴⁷ This ecclesiastical challenge to civil authority goaded Calles into decreeing full implementation of all constitutional provisions regarding religion. In July 1926, he signed the Law for Reforming the Penal Code, also known as the Calles Law.¹⁴⁸ This was an enabling act for the Constitution of 1917, which previously had been selectively enforced.

The Calles Law consisted of 33 articles which specified application of constitutional provisions relating to religion.¹⁴⁹ Religious orders were outlawed, church buildings nationalized, and public religious acts prohibited. Priests were required to register with the government, forbidden to wear their religious garments in public, and barred from criticizing the state. The laws had teeth; noncompliance meant fine, imprisonment, or both.¹⁵⁰ The greatest concern for the church hierarchy was Article 19,

the compulsory registration of clergy.¹⁵¹ This was seen as a prelude to the establishment of a Mexican national church.

On February 21, 1925, one hundred armed men from the CROM broke into La Soledad church in Mexico City, ousted the parish priest, and installed one of their own.¹⁵² This priest proclaimed himself to be the “patriarch of the Mexican Church.”¹⁵³ An angry mob of parishioners ejected the intruders and street battles ensued. The government eventually stepped in to restore order. Calles then made a curious proclamation in which he denounced the attempts by one creed to take over a church building *belonging* to the nation. He was, however, disposed to recognize the existence of a “Mexican Church.”¹⁵⁴ This confirmed suspicions that Calles had orchestrated the entire event in order to create his own church on Mexican soil.

The schismatic church eventually failed, but it was only part of the state’s secularizing agenda. The aim of the separatist church was to divide the clergy and establish a state-controlled religious entity.¹⁵⁵ Only a few parishes followed this sect, whose priests were promptly excommunicated by the church.¹⁵⁶ Still, the bold move by the government ushered in another wave of oppression. As if to prove his resolve, Calles ordered La Soledad closed and turned into a public library.¹⁵⁷

State governments followed the precedent set by Calles. Some states, such as Tabasco, were particularly anticlerical. Laws were enacted in that state which the church could not reasonably follow, such as limiting the number of clergy to 1 per 30,000 inhabitants, or requiring priests to be married and over the age of 40.¹⁵⁸ With Calles as president, it was quite acceptable for a municipality to turn a churchyard into a

basketball court.¹⁵⁹ The Mexican Revolution's socialist undertones also brought a new level of intensity to the war against the church.¹⁶⁰ Propaganda campaigns against the clergy were launched by the Left, which also waged a program of religious vandalism and terrorism. The CROM took part in church bombings, defaced sacred images, and planted its red flag on church grounds.¹⁶¹ Threatened with annihilation, the Catholic Church took action.

Attempts at Compromise

The church had been chastened by its previous battles with the government. It knew that it was useless to wage an all-out war; to do so would only make matters worse. Its experience with the Díaz regime and other administrations taught it that compromise was the best course of action. The church hierarchy could maintain an accommodating stance with the Calles government so long as the anticlerical provisions remained “theoretically” dangerous to the church's freedom.¹⁶²

Calles's encouragement of the schismatic church prompted the hierarchy to organize. In 1925, the Episcopal Committee was established to deal with the belligerency of the government.¹⁶³ Headed by Mexico's primate, Archbishop Luis Mora y del Río, the committee took guidance from Rome. Although some of the committee members wanted a confrontation with the government, the Vatican was resolute in seeking a diplomatic option. An apostolic delegate was sent to meet with the Minister of the Interior, to see if an arrangement could be made regarding the Calles Law. The

government's response was a prompt expulsion of the diplomat.¹⁶⁴ The Vatican's policy was reduced to impotence by the Calles administration. A different approach by the church was needed.

The Mexican Constitution, while not recognizing the church as a legal entity, did not prohibit individuals from seeking legal action.¹⁶⁵ An attempt was made by the hierarchy to petition Congress for constitutional amendments and to solicit injunctions against anticlerical decrees. However, the division of powers in Mexico was fictitious, for Calles controlled the system.¹⁶⁶ Rebuffed by the legislature and the courts, the church abandoned this tactic, convinced that it would never receive a fair hearing from the regime. Protests issued by the Episcopal Committee were also fruitless.

The inflexibility of the Calles government encouraged the Episcopal Committee to adopt a more combative posture. Rome at first discouraged this attitude, but found that its low-key approach had failed to provide results. Therefore, the Vatican agreed with the committee's advocacy of passive resistance. The pope issued an evangelical letter to the episcopate, condemning the anticlerical laws and recommending a course of "Catholic action."¹⁶⁷ Embarking on a new path, the Episcopal Committee counted on the fidelity of its flock. It was not disappointed.

Social Action

Social, not political, action was what the church needed to confront the government. Politics were placed outside the realm of the church by the Constitution. As

a consequence, the National Catholic Party disappeared in 1917.¹⁶⁸ The church wanted to avoid the appearance of meddling in affairs that were prohibited; therefore it directed Catholics to avoid political parties.¹⁶⁹ However, the hierarchy was aware that Catholic discontent with the government needed guidance. Consequently, it encouraged the formation of advocacy groups dedicated to protecting the church through social means.

The social action advocated by the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* became more relevant with the advent of the revolution. However, the Catholic resistance that emerged was of a grassroots nature and not a plan orchestrated by the church. Still, the hierarchy tried to guide the discontent of its Catholic legions. Control of Catholic mobilization became a learning process for the church.

The Laity Mobilizes

Several lay organizations emerged that strove to channel Catholic discontent into civic action. One of these was Popular Union, or Unión Popular (UP). The UP was founded in 1925 in response to an anti-Catholic offensive launched by the governor of Jalisco.¹⁷⁰ The founder of the movement, Anacleto González Flores, was inspired by the *Volksverein*, a German Catholic resistance group.¹⁷¹ González Flores based the UP on the ideas of two nineteenth-century German Catholics, Bishop Wilhelm von Ketteler and Ludwig Windthorst, leader of the Center Party. Ketteler wrote a book, *The Labor Question and Christianity*, in which he advocated a Christian and humanitarian approach to labor-management relations which rejected both laissez-faire capitalism and socialist

collectivism.¹⁷² González Flores, nicknamed *El Maestro* (the Teacher), strove to achieve his goals through nonviolence, believing that despotic systems should be overthrown through passive resistance.¹⁷³

The UP was very successful at recruitment and achieved a membership of over 80,000.¹⁷⁴ It organized an effective network throughout the towns and cities of western Central Mexico. Its territory was structured into street blocks, zones, and parishes, each headed by a leader in close touch with his subordinates and immediate supervisor.¹⁷⁵ The UP operated clandestinely, where bureaucratic functions were kept to a bare minimum and messages were transmitted, whenever possible, by word of mouth.¹⁷⁶ This urban system served as an effective urban base of support for the Cristeros.¹⁷⁷ Ironically, the UP's mission of peaceful resistance was ultimately transformed to support a bloody struggle.

Another important lay organization existed in the region about which very little is known. Called the "U," this ultra-secretive Catholic society from Morelia, Michoacán, was ostensibly founded in 1918 by a future archbishop of Mexico, Luis Martínez.¹⁷⁸ Apparently, the "U" was ultimately controlled by González Flores. The "U" was used to recruit Catholic leaders and to "pull the strings" behind the scenes of other lay organizations.¹⁷⁹ According to Jennie Purnell, it was the "U" that organized the information, espionage, and mobilization networks that made the UP successful.¹⁸⁰

The other important lay associations were based in Mexico City. The Catholic Association of Mexican Youth (ACJM) was founded in 1913 by a Jesuit priest, Father Bernard Bergöend.¹⁸¹ Bergöend, who worked with young people, became convinced

that Mexico needed a youth-oriented Catholic action group to combat revolutionary and secular influences.¹⁸² With the approval of Archbishop Mora y del Río, the ACJM was modeled after the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française of Bergöend's native France.¹⁸³

The ACJM's purpose was to prepare young Catholics for the task of infusing Christian principles of charity and justice into all functions of secular society. The ACJM also advocated abstinence from political involvement and declared that it was an "imperative duty" to defend political and religious freedom.¹⁸⁴ It was organized into chapters consisting of about 15 students, with an ecclesiastical advisor appointed by the local bishop.¹⁸⁵ These circles, named after famous Catholics, held weekly sessions where the three key principles were "piety, study, and action."¹⁸⁶ The gains made by the ACJM were at first modest, reaching a membership of seven thousand in 1923.¹⁸⁷

The ACJM, despite its small numbers, became a vocal organization against the Calles government. The original intent of the ACJM was not violence, but it ultimately radicalized and became the most combative of all lay organizations. The ACJM indoctrinated its membership to defend "directly and physically" Catholic interests.¹⁸⁸ A good portion of the weekly meetings emphasized militancy and self-sacrifice, casting the young members in the role of "Christian warriors."¹⁸⁹

The ACJM was headed by René Capistrán Garza, a fiery and gifted orator.¹⁹⁰ He declared that the Calles government intended to establish a country without religion or ethics.¹⁹¹ Under Capistrán Garza's leadership, the members of the ACJM became an armed and dedicated Catholic youth willing to combat the state. They were militants

who, when the time came, were prepared to die for the cause.¹⁹² These young Catholics waged violent street battles against police and state authorities.

The League

By 1925, the need for an umbrella organization was apparent. The incident of La Soledad alarmed many worshippers, who clamored for a new national Catholic entity. Existing associations, such as the UP, were of a regional nature and lacked cooperation with one another. On March 14, 1925, the National League for the Defense of Religious Liberty (LNDLR) was created by Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra, a militant member of the Social Action Congresses and the defunct National Catholic party.¹⁹³ The LNDLR, known as the League, intended to teach Mexican Catholics their rights and obligations as citizens and to organize them for the defense of religious freedom.¹⁹⁴ Reliance on the “volunteer spirit” for social action was emphasized.¹⁹⁵ While opposed to the revolution, the League supported reform within a Christian social context.¹⁹⁶ Still, the League declared that it would pursue its goals through constitutional means and “those required by the common good,” an ominous warning of things to come.¹⁹⁷

The fiery young men of the ACJM comprised the core membership of the League. The ACJM, unlike the UP and the “U,” was not confined to a particular region, giving the nascent League a national network to build upon. Consequently, it was the leader of the ACJM, Capistrán Garza, who headed the League’s Directing Committee.¹⁹⁸

Although the League was not a creation of the Mexican Episcopate, it received the church's blessing to invite various Catholic groups into the new coalition.¹⁹⁹

The League soon encompassed representatives from Catholic trade unions, the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Ladies, the Congregation of Mary, and the Nocturnal Adoration.²⁰⁰ Anacleto González Flores, aware of the combative spirit of Capistrán Garza, was reluctant to place the UP under the leadership of the League, but acquiesced at the request of the bishops.²⁰¹ It was through the UP that the League could influence Catholics in western Mexico.²⁰²

The membership of the League grew exponentially. In June 1925, it only had 36,000 members, but by September 1926, its numbers swelled to 800,000.²⁰³ Based in the capital, the League maintained a strong membership throughout Central Mexico.²⁰⁴ The initial ideology of the League was nonviolence, which the church wholly supported.²⁰⁵ Although not a political party, the League advocated political action as an acceptable form of passive resistance.²⁰⁶ A petition drafted by the League for the reform of the Constitution was signed by over two million Mexicans.²⁰⁷ Demonstrating audacity, the League carried out an intensive campaign of agitation and mobilization by encouraging legal action, economic boycotts, and other nonviolent exploits.²⁰⁸ This approach brought further persecution from the Calles government and leftist groups.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the Leaguers provided a bastion of support for the Catholic Church as it considered a drastic measure to confront the ensuing crisis.

The Suspension of Worship

The strongest measure enacted by the church was the suspension of public worship. It was clear to the hierarchy that the Calles presidency represented a new type of anticlerical persecution: inflexible and unrelenting, with no hope for compromise. Therefore, the Episcopal Committee voted on July 11, 1926, to enact the *cessato a divinis* (the suspension of mass), the most potent weapon of passive resistance at its disposal.²¹⁰ The Vatican, seeing the futility of negotiations, authorized the action.²¹¹ The suspension was to take place on August 1, the day the Calles Law was to take effect.²¹² The ending of the public cult was not an excommunicatory measure, but an attempt to put the sacraments and clergy beyond the reach of the civil law. This measure was deemed necessary, since conditions were incompatible for the free practice of the Catholic religion.²¹³

The end of worship was an unprecedented event in Mexican history. The announcement created panic and prompted a last-minute rush on churches by swarms of devotees.²¹⁴ Despite the end of public mass, the churches remained open and full of parishioners.²¹⁵ Still, Catholics yearned for the sacraments. Priests, striving to serve their flock, found themselves in a quandary: mass could not be celebrated in the church, where the episcopate forbade it, or outside, where it was declared illegal by the government. At the risk of persecution, priests celebrated mass in the private homes of the devout.²¹⁶ By breaking the law, they faced government reprisal in the form of expulsion, jailing, or even death.²¹⁷

The suspension of worship was accompanied by a nationwide economic boycott. The plan for the boycott was hatched by the League, with the hierarchy's approval.²¹⁸ Catholics were directed to buy nothing except basic necessities.²¹⁹ They were also asked to use public transportation as sparingly as possible, cut down on electricity, and give up entertainment.²²⁰ Catholic teachers stopped working in secular schools. The sanctions also targeted businesses that supported the government.²²¹ The UP was successful in implementing the boycott in the areas which it controlled: Jalisco, western Michoacán, and western Guanajuato.²²² It is estimated that economic activity fell by 75% in these areas.²²³

The boycott proved ineffective against the government, however. By October 1926, the program collapsed, due mainly to opposition from wealthy Catholics affected by the sanctions.²²⁴ These upper-class Catholics were fearful that continued mass opposition would worsen government repression.²²⁵ Without the cooperation of the wealthy, the boycott was doomed to fail, since the poorer elements lacked the buying power to inflict significant economic damage.²²⁶

The end of worship did not affect the government's impudence. The Minister of the Interior could barely contain his enthusiasm, stating, "The [church] has exceeded our wildest hopes in decreeing the suspension of religious services, nothing could be more pleasing to us... We have got the clergy by the throat and we will do everything to strangle it."²²⁷ President Calles boasted that the tactic was counterproductive and would decrease the church's membership by a weekly 2%, leading to its eventual extinction.²²⁸ Many Catholics were outraged and felt that passive resistance was fruitless. Impatient

for a peaceful resolution, many of them began taking matters into their own hands. Although intended as a nonviolent measure, the suspension of worship became the catalyst for the Cristero rebellion.

Spontaneous Mobilization

Catholics were more likely to respond violently to government anticlericalism if they felt it on a personal level. The suspension of services made the church-state conflict into an individual struggle for many worshippers, who saw *their* churches closed and *their* priests persecuted. Government harassment had a reinvigorating effect on popular piety, leading to a fierce reaction. Meyer described this phenomenon as “spontaneous mobilization.”²²⁹ A key example was the reaction to the schismatic church, which resulted in a massive street battle between Catholics and troops. “Spontaneous mobilization” also characterized the Jesuit and the Religionero revolts of earlier periods.²³⁰

At first, most Catholics wanted nonviolent protests, while a small, but visible, minority desired an insurrection.²³¹ The former group opted for wearing mourning clothes as a sign of dissent against the government.²³² The latter group, known as the “white radicals,” was not afraid of an open fight with the state.²³³ As attacks on the church increased, the number of “white radicals” swelled. These Catholics stood guard around their churches to prevent acts of iconoclasm and waged street battles with revolutionaries. The *cessato a divinis* was for many Catholics, the last straw: “Rather

than the unconvincing slowness of the civil struggle, the populace, its nerves shattered by the suspension of services, preferred open war, without realizing what that would mean in terms of horror.”²³⁴

Just a few days after the suspension of services, revolts began in Mexico’s western highland region. On August 3, 1926, four hundred armed Catholics entered the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Guadalajara, Jalisco.²³⁵ The ensuing battle with federal troops resulted in several dead and injured. The following day, in Sahuayo, Michoacán, 240 government soldiers stormed the parish church. The priest and his vicar were killed in the ensuing violence.²³⁶ On August 14, in the town of Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, federal soldiers executed several members of the ACJM, including a priest.²³⁷ These government atrocities ignited more revolts from indignant Catholics. Between August and December 1926, there were 64 uprisings in the Mexican countryside.²³⁸ These outbreaks were small, isolated, and uncoordinated.²³⁹

The League Declares War

By the end of 1926, the calls for passive resistance rang hollow to the League: “Patience, penance, and prayer of the period from May to December had been to no avail, for the heart of Calles had been hardened.”²⁴⁰ The League was tired of the nonviolent approach and wanted hostilities to begin. The mission changed from defense of the church to an offensive program, with the intent of seizing power.²⁴¹ The numerous spontaneous uprisings in late summer and autumn also precipitated this change in

strategy.²⁴² Its massive popularity, along with prior support from the church, had clouded the judgment of the League's leadership.

The young leaders of the League became delusional, thinking they could direct an army of thousands and force the government to capitulate.²⁴³ They abandoned passive resistance in the hopes of leading a crusade.²⁴⁴ The UP membership concurred with the League's decision, despite the objections of González Flores.²⁴⁵ The secretive "U" also had a role, which consisted of mobilizing and coordinating the leadership of lay organizations to support the rebellion.²⁴⁶ There is considerable debate as to whether the church approved of the uprising. Officially, the rebellion was neither condemned nor sanctioned by the episcopate.²⁴⁷ However, there are accounts which indicate that the rebels received the church's blessing. Regardless, the League always maintained that it had received the blessing of the church.²⁴⁸

The League, relishing its role as an all-encompassing Catholic organization, wanted to coordinate the uprisings into one massive rebellion. The League called upon all insurgents to attack the government beginning on January 1, 1927.²⁴⁹ On that day, René Capistrán Garza issued his famous manifesto, "*A la Nación*" ("To the Nation"). He declared that "the hour of battle has sounded" and "the hour of victory belongs to God."²⁵⁰ With that call, the state of Jalisco, which had until then remained relatively quiet, exploded.²⁵¹

The Rebellion Begins

The war erupted in the Los Altos (the Highlands) region of Jalisco, northeast of Guadalajara.²⁵² Hundreds of bands, consisting of groups of 50 to 300 men, began seizing villages.²⁵³ These rebels, often armed with old rifles and machetes, called themselves the Cristeros, for they were soldiers fighting for Christ the King.²⁵⁴ These insurgents launched themselves at government forces uttering the famous battle cry “¡Viva Cristo Rey!” (“Long live Christ the King!”).²⁵⁵ The rebellion spread from Jalisco to the bordering states of Michoacán and Colima.²⁵⁶ By the middle of 1927, the Cristero ranks had increased to 35,000.²⁵⁷

The government’s initial response was weak. Federal troops were left to guard the major cities, while agraristas (rural militias recruited by the government) were left to contend with the Cristeros. The rebels did well against these militias, for they were expert horsemen and knew the terrain well.²⁵⁸ The Cristeros could not equal the firepower of the federal army and employed hit-and-run tactics whenever possible.²⁵⁹ Yet, the rebels outmatched the federal cavalry and began scoring successes on the battlefield. The Cristeros also enjoyed the wide support of the local populace, which supplied them with food, shelter, and intelligence.²⁶⁰ The Cristeros suffered from the lack of a single leader, however.²⁶¹ Instead, several chiefs commanded troops independently of one another. The most successful of these commanders were Jesús Degollado (a druggist), Victoriano Ramírez (a ranch hand), and two priests, Aristeo

Pedroza and José Reyes Vega.²⁶² As the war raged, the League tried to organize the disparate rebel elements into a single unit that it could control.

The Role of the League

An unusual feature of the Cristero Rebellion was that it emerged as two separate entities belonging to different social classes. The middle-class League found itself isolated in Mexico City, while the lower-class masses fought in the western highlands.²⁶³ In January 1927, the League created an entity to oversee military matters.²⁶⁴ This commission, known as the Special War Committee, was to manage and coordinate lay organizations as well as the rebel bands.²⁶⁵ Members of the ACJM volunteered to join the Cristeros, eager to fight and die for the cause.²⁶⁶

The League also looked to the United States for help. Capistrán Garza embarked on a mission to obtain financial and political support from U.S. Catholics.²⁶⁷ Another goal of the League was to attain the neutrality of the American government, which at the time was experiencing strained relations with the Calles administration.²⁶⁸ Despite his efforts, Capistrán Garza failed in his undertaking. Not able to acquire funds for the rebellion, he resigned as the League's director in July 1927.²⁶⁹ The League also failed in its endeavor to control the Cristeros.²⁷⁰

The UP enjoyed a better relationship with the Cristeros. Under the leadership of González Flores, the UP functioned in parallel with the rebel forces. It continued its campaign of passive resistance, but also provided direct support to the insurgents. Some

UP members even became Cristero chiefs.²⁷¹ The UP offered an urban network of safe houses for the rebels operating in the countryside.²⁷² Moreover, the UP collected money, furnished supplies, and distributed propaganda.²⁷³ Working in conjunction with the UP were the Women's Brigades, secretive units of feminine Cristeros which obtained funds and smuggled munitions to the insurgents.²⁷⁴ These women were so adept at their task that their mission remained a secret until the final stages of the war.

Setback and Resurgence

Humiliated by initial defeats, the government took aim at the Cristeros. The state engaged in a brutal re-concentration campaign, similar to that employed by General Valeriano Weyler during the Cuban insurgency of the 1890s.²⁷⁵ Whole villages were evacuated and had their grain and livestock looted by soldiers.²⁷⁶ Anyone found inside the perimeter was summarily interrogated, then hung or shot.²⁷⁷ This effectively curtailed the supplies that the rebels were receiving. Another loss to the Cristeros was the capture and execution of González Flores on April 1, 1927.²⁷⁸ The Cristeros also lost public support when they sacked and burned a passenger train on April 19, killing over 150 people.²⁷⁹

The government took pains to target the clergy, since it surmised that they provided moral support to the cause. Priests found in the countryside were accused of treason and summarily executed.²⁸⁰ President Calles persecuted the bishops and exiled over half of the Mexican hierarchy by May 1927.²⁸¹ The Episcopal Committee

regrouped in San Antonio, Texas, where it continued issuing formal protests.²⁸² The harassment was also extended to the membership of the League.²⁸³

Calles, however, made a serious miscalculation with the execution of Father Miguel Pro on November 13, 1927.²⁸⁴ The Jesuit priest, wrongly accused in a plot to assassinate former president Alvaro Obregón, was shot by firing squad without the benefit of a trial.²⁸⁵ Images of the execution were published in an effort to dissuade the rebels from continuing the fight. However, the pictures of Father Pro, with his arms outstretched in the form of a cross, inspired the Cristeros to follow him into martyrdom.²⁸⁶

Helping in the recovery of the movement were the addition of two important military leaders. One was Victoriano Ramírez, nicknamed “El Catorce” for having allegedly killed 14 men sent out to arrest him.²⁸⁷ This gifted guerilla leader brought the rebellion back to life, buying the League enough time to select an overall commander for the movement. The only substantive action taken by the League on behalf of the Cristeros was the appointment of General Enrique Gorostieta.²⁸⁸ A talented artilleryman in the days of the *Porfiriato*, Gorostieta organized the Cristeros in a way similar to the federal army.²⁸⁹ In 1928, under Gorostieta’s leadership, the rebels achieved impressive gains in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, Querétaro, and Guanajuato.²⁹⁰ Although appointed by the League, Gorostieta eventually distanced himself from the organization.²⁹¹

Stalemate

The insurgency was in a standoff by early 1929, due to another government offensive.²⁹² The Cristero Rebellion became a war of attrition, where neither group was able to defeat the other. The federal army had supplies, but lacked popular backing and the will to fight. The Cristeros had popular support and conviction, but had few munitions.²⁹³ An opportunity presented itself in March, when an army barracks revolt led by General Gonzálo Escobar diverted the government's attention.²⁹⁴ The rebels immediately launched a successful counteroffensive in the Guadalajara region.

However, the military rebellion was quickly put down. Moreover, the Cristeros faced divisions within their own ranks. A rebel chief by the name of Mario Valdés, widely believed by historians to have been a federal spy, managed to stir up sentiment against El Catorce, leading to his execution before a rigged court-martial.²⁹⁵ A bigger setback occurred on June 2, when General Gorostieta was ambushed and killed by a federal patrol.²⁹⁶ Still, the Cristero army, numbering around 50,000, showed no signs of relinquishing the fight.²⁹⁷

The Assassination of Obregón

The return of Alvaro Obregón to the presidency might have put a timely end to the rebellion. The popular leader did not abide by the no-reelection principle and managed, through Calles, to have Congress amend the Constitution to provide for

unlimited (but not consecutive) reelection.²⁹⁸ The intent was to rotate the presidency among the two powerful men in a perpetual diarchy. The pragmatic Obregón was able to give a public show of support for Calles's anticlerical stance, while concealing his true intentions regarding the church.²⁹⁹ He secretly informed the Episcopal Committee that it could trust him to pursue a reasonable course in religious matters.³⁰⁰ Obregón looked forward to an "era of peace" during his administration.³⁰¹ An assassin's bullet put an end to those prospects.

On July 18, 1928, Obregón was assassinated at La Bombilla, a restaurant in the outskirts of the capital, by José León de Toral.³⁰² Toral, a young arts teacher and staunch Catholic, killed Obregón because he felt that his death would put an end to religious persecution.³⁰³ Government officials executed Toral and imprisoned Madre Conchita, a nun whom they accused of aiding the assassin.³⁰⁴ Although the facts did not support a conspiracy by the clergy, Calles blamed the church for the assassination and unleashed further persecution.³⁰⁵ Obregón's killing had other repercussions as well.

At first, some believed that a political adversary had ordered Obregón's killing. Suspicion was cast on Luis Morones and the leftist bloc of Calles's supporters, the traditional enemies of Obregón.³⁰⁶ Throughout the election campaign, Morones, leader of the Labor Party and one of Calles's cronies, had attacked Obregón incessantly in blistering and intemperate speeches.³⁰⁷ Following the assassination, Morones and his allies went into hiding for fear of reprisal from indignant Obregonistas.³⁰⁸ Even though they were not responsible for Obregón's killing, Morones and the leftists fell from

power.³⁰⁹ Without this pressure from the Left, Calles was able to choose his own policy with the church.

Consequences of the Rebellion

According to Meyer, it was Mexico's economy that forced Calles to negotiate.³¹⁰ Problems with credit and investment, suspension of servicing the foreign debt, a drop in agricultural exports, and the deferment of public works were exacerbated by the ongoing insurgency.³¹¹ A majority of Mexicans believed that the nation could not recover economically without first settling the rebellion.³¹² Only the financial, political, and military support of the United States kept the Mexican state from collapsing.³¹³ This influence made the U.S. a logical peace broker between Mexico and the Vatican.

U.S.-Mexican relations had just normalized following the Mexican Revolution. Although Obregón assumed the presidency in 1920, the U.S. withheld recognition of his government pending resolution of several contentious items. These included U.S. claims resulting from the revolution and the threat that Article 27 of the Constitution, which stipulated that all land belonged to the state, posed to U.S. oil companies. In the Bucareli Agreements of 1923, Obregón agreed to a mixed claims commission and assured that Article 27 would not be applied retroactively. In exchange, he received official U.S. recognition.³¹⁴ Three years later, Mexico's relationship with the United States would be strained once again, this time due to pressure from American Catholics.

The National Catholic Welfare Center (NCWC), established in 1919 to be the Catholic voice of America, became an outspoken critic of Mexico's anticlerical policy.³¹⁵ It filed several protests with the U.S. State Department regarding Calles's treatment of the church.³¹⁶ The NCWC, however, refused to condone the Cristero Rebellion.³¹⁷ Despite pressure from the NCWC, the Coolidge administration did not condemn Calles because it saw the religious affair as an internal matter.³¹⁸ However, the efforts by the NCWC eventually bore fruit, as noted by historian Douglas Slawson: "If the American Catholic community were not so active in agitating against Mexico's religious policy, especially through the NCWC, it is unlikely that ...the State Department would ever have attempted a solution of the church-state riddle."³¹⁹

The election of 1929 was another factor that forced Calles to consider peace with the church. With Obregón's death, Calles consolidated his power as *Jefe Máximo* (Maximum Chief), where he ran the country through "puppet" presidents who lacked a political following of their own. At the end of his term, Calles stepped down as president, allowing for the interim appointment of Emilio Portes Gil in 1928.³²⁰ In the presidential election of 1929, Calles's handpicked candidate, Pascual Ortíz Rubio, was challenged by the popular José Vasconcelos. Vasconcelos had achieved fame as Obregón's Minister of Education by emulating Mexico's mestizo heritage and bringing art, music, and literature to the masses.³²¹ This philosopher-educator had an immense political following consisting of leftist students and intellectuals, who considered him their moral leader.³²² Since Ortíz Rubio was a virtual unknown, Calles could only ensure his election through massive fraud.³²³

Meyer argued that Calles was threatened by the likelihood of an alliance between Vasconcelos and the Cristeros.³²⁴ A major flaw of the rebellion stemmed from the insurgents' isolation and the absence of powerful urban allies.³²⁵ Potentially, Vasconcelos's movement could provide it with the necessary support.³²⁶ It was imperative for the government to demobilize the Cristeros by the autumn of 1929 so that they would not threaten the election.³²⁷ Meyer maintained that the Cristeros supported the candidature of Vasconcelos, yet this assertion is debatable.³²⁸ Although Vasconcelos later turned out to be a fervent Catholic, throughout La Cristiada his tendency was towards the Left. More scholarship is needed to ascertain what the Cristeros hoped to achieve by the election of Vasconcelos.

Negotiations

It was the American ambassador, Dwight Morrow, who persuaded Calles that the time to negotiate had arrived. Morrow, a skilled diplomat, developed a rapport with the obstinate president through informal breakfasts, an approach dubbed "ham and eggs" diplomacy.³²⁹ Morrow convinced Calles that the church-state conflict was hampering domestic tranquility and good relations with the United States.³³⁰ Only the resumption of public worship could demobilize the Cristeros.³³¹ The talks were further facilitated by the succession of Portes Gil, who did not share Calles's dislike for the church.³³²

The Vatican was also predisposed to negotiations. All that Rome wanted was lenient enforcement, not revocation, of the anticlerical laws in Mexico. In abandoning

the radicals, the pope was willing to sacrifice social and political Catholicism for spirituality.³³³ The Vatican had expertise in making arrangements with other anticlerical countries and saw the confrontation in a broader perspective than either the Mexican bishops or the laity.³³⁴ Rome's minimum requirement was that the clergy were allowed to perform its spiritual duties under its chain of hierarchy.³³⁵

Talks began between the Mexican government and the church, with Ambassador Morrow and a representative of the NCWC acting as intermediaries.³³⁶ The League, however, chose continued aggression and became a liability for the church. The League was convinced that it could still win the war and opposed negotiations at all costs.³³⁷ It sent delegates to Rome urging the pope not to compromise.³³⁸ The League even went so far as to denounce as a traitor any bishop that advocated peace.³³⁹ With the government at the negotiating table, it became necessary for the church to distance itself from the radicals.

The Vatican separated the church from the uprising, letting the rebels act as individuals.³⁴⁰ The pope instructed the clergy to refrain from giving moral or material assistance to the insurgents.³⁴¹ Furthermore, the bishops exiled in the U.S. undermined the League's attempts at fundraising.³⁴² These actions worsened the League's unpopularity with mainstream Catholics. Moderate lay groups, such as the Knights of Columbus, withdrew their support. Having fallen from grace, the League's influence diminished.³⁴³ It became an alienated entity and stopped being the mouthpiece of the Catholic people.³⁴⁴

The plight of the Cristeros was also ignored. Ambassador Morrow recognized that the important protagonists were the Vatican and Calles, not the rebels.³⁴⁵ Therefore, the Cristeros were left completely out of the discussions and kept in the dark.³⁴⁶ The church insisted throughout the negotiations that it had the right to act on its own, without the Catholic lay leadership.³⁴⁷ The breakthrough came on June 21, 1929, when the church and the government jointly announced that an agreement had been reached.³⁴⁸ The church bells rang for the first time in almost three years, signaling the end of a disastrous conflict.

The Arreglos

The Vatican's goal had always been one of compromise and it had been achieved. The *Arreglos* ("Arrangements") were agreed upon by moderates of both sides.³⁴⁹ The *Arreglos* were pragmatic in nature, the same as previous agreements between church and state. In exchange for the resumption of worship, the government granted three concessions to the church: only priests who were named by hierarchical superiors would be required to register; religious instruction in the churches (but not in the schools) would be permitted; and all citizens, including the clergy, would be allowed to petition the government.³⁵⁰ Since the anticlerical laws remained on the books, many Catholic radicals were unhappy with the *Arreglos* and felt that the church had gained nothing.³⁵¹

The rebels also felt betrayed and refused to give up the fight. However, the church threatened them with excommunication and the rebellion was extinguished. By September 1929, the last of the insurgents laid down their arms.³⁵² Although the casualty figures are not very reliable, it is estimated that over 100,000 Mexicans died in the conflict - 60,000 federal forces and 40,000 Cristeros.³⁵³ The relative calm that ensued was known as the *modus vivendi* ("way of living," or "living with differences").³⁵⁴ The fundamental issues not been resolved, yet a truce existed once again between church and state.

CHAPTER V

THE SINARQUISTA MOVEMENT

The Cristero Rebellion was a painful lesson to both flock and church. Though anticlerical state policy was stymied, the cost in bloodshed was deplorable. Throughout the uprising, the church's silence, along with its suspension of mass, gave the insurgents encouragement to combat the government. Following the *Arreglos*, the church decided to avoid further carnage by quickly and unequivocally condemning any violent action. Still, a viable response was needed lest a new threat emerge against the clergy.

The new hazard posed by state-sanctioned socialism encouraged the church to focus discontent into a course of peaceful action, giving birth to a new form of Catholic resistance: Sinarquismo. This new phenomenon essentially emerged from the ashes of the Cristero Rebellion. Like the uprising, the Sinarquista Movement of 1937-44 was a popular Catholic counterrevolutionary event. Sinarquismo was a continuation of the Cristero struggle, but modified into a nonviolent form. Though unarmed, the Sinarquistas proved as effective as the Cristeros in forcing the government to moderate its threatening stance towards the church. Though it claimed to be an "apolitical entity," the UNS (National Synarchist Union) had a tremendous impact in Mexican politics, compelling it to shift away from the Left.

Aftermath of the Cristero Rebellion

The *Arreglos* of 1929 were strongly opposed by Catholic extremists, who felt betrayed by the church.³⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the Vatican abided by the truce and insisted on a policy of moderation and reserve. In September 1929, the archbishop of Mexico declared that the *modus vivendi* was not up to debate; the pope had made his decision and the clergy were forbidden to openly criticize it.³⁵⁶ Despite the optimistic outlook of the hierarchy, the Cristeros had their misgivings.³⁵⁷ Indeed, the good faith of the government proved temporary.

The government's war on the Cristeros never waned, despite the demobilization of the rebels. A systematic and premeditated murder of the insurgents, who were now integrated into civilian life, took place following the *Arreglos*.³⁵⁸ Between 1929 and 1935, there were five thousand Cristero victims, five hundred of whom were officers.³⁵⁹ Because more leaders died during the "peace" than throughout the rebellion, historian Andrés Azkue termed the period the "*modus moriendi*."³⁶⁰ No interest emerged from either the church hierarchy or the government to investigate the killings.³⁶¹ Feeling abandoned, many former rebels fled to the United States and to San Luis Potosí, where a sympathetic caudillo, General Saturnino Cedillo, gave them refuge.³⁶² The government, taking advantage of the ceasefire, deployed troops in Cristero areas to prevent future revolts.³⁶³

The League, once a powerful bastion of Catholic opposition, also faced eradication. It had failed in its efforts to lead La Cristiada. It misappropriated funds

intended for the rebellion and “did not provide the Cristeros with a single bullet.”³⁶⁴ The League was also incapable of working with other lay organizations, resorting to attacking those which it could not control. It succeeded in getting the “U” and the Women’s Brigades condemned by the pope as secretive organizations in violation of a nineteenth-century encyclical.³⁶⁵ These actions brought discredit to the League in the eyes of the laity.³⁶⁶ As new troubles arose with the government, the League and the ACJM ceased being important avenues for Catholic opposition.³⁶⁷ As a final act of redemption, the League strove to defend the hapless Cristeros, claiming that the government had violated its amnesty agreement.³⁶⁸ It clamored for the pope to nullify the *Arreglos*, to no avail.³⁶⁹ By 1932, the League had dissolved.³⁷⁰

Renewal of Church Persecution

The *modus vivendi* was seen as sham by Catholic radicals, who lamented that the uprising had failed to resolve the church’s grievances. They were proven right, since the gains achieved through the *Arreglos* lasted only two years.³⁷¹ The accord was undermined through the efforts of anticlerical extremists, who opposed any deal with the church.³⁷² Among these radicals was former president Calles, who never relinquished his disdain for the clergy. The conciliatory efforts by presidents Portes Gil and Ortíz Rubio were openly sabotaged by Calles, a man of considerable influence.³⁷³

The death of Obregón in 1928 left Calles as the primary political power broker in Mexico. To retain control over the national government, Calles created the National

Revolutionary Party (PNR) to institutionalize the hierarchical and personalist system that previously bound the ruling coalition of revolutionary chiefs together.³⁷⁴ During the period of 1929-34, known as the *Maximato*, Calles used potent allies to impose his will, which often conflicted with that of the president's. In defiance of the federal government's policy of peace, anticlerical states, with Calles's encouragement, imposed stringent measures against the church.³⁷⁵ In 1932, Calles grew tired of Ortíz Rubio and forced him to resign, replacing him with the more acquiescent Abelardo Rodríguez.³⁷⁶ With this change, the floodgates of anticlericalism were opened once again.

Article 130 of the Constitution, regularization of the priesthood, was wholeheartedly enforced by certain states. Veracruz, for example, limited the number of priests to 1 per 100,000 (11 total).³⁷⁷ The federal government joined in, limiting the number of clergy in the capital and firing officials who took part in religious ceremonies.³⁷⁸ By 1935, 17 states succeeded in expelling all of the clergy, while Mexico as a whole contained only 305 registered priests.³⁷⁹ The situation had deteriorated so badly that the apostolic delegate postulated that the church had ceased to exist in Mexico.³⁸⁰

A new anticlerical program, deemed "de-fanaticization," was implemented throughout the country. The campaign was designed to eliminate Catholic names, symbols, and rites to make way for revolutionary creed and ritual.³⁸¹ The political elite of the Mexican Revolution believed that "spiritual emancipation" was necessary for the masses.³⁸² Crosses were outlawed from cemeteries, saintly images burned, and names with religious overtones replaced with those of revolutionary heroes.³⁸³ Religious

holidays were ignored and festivals forbidden. Ecclesiastical weddings were to be replaced by socialist nuptial ceremonies.³⁸⁴ The *Ley de Cultos* (“Law of Religions”) was passed, which forbade the conducting of religious acts without government sanction.³⁸⁵ Under this law, citizens were arrested for conducting private worship in their homes.³⁸⁶

The Advent of Lázaro Cárdenas

On December 31, 1934, Lázaro Cárdenas assumed the presidency.³⁸⁷ Cárdenas was a fervent anticlerical as governor of Michoacán and intended to implement the same principles during his presidency.³⁸⁸ He appointed well-known enemies of the church to his cabinet and continued harassment of the clergy through property seizures, arrests and deportations.³⁸⁹ During his first two years in office, 19 out of 32 Mexican bishops remained in exile, while 350 churches were confiscated by the state.³⁹⁰ Even the primate of Mexico, Archbishop Pascual Díaz, was not exempt from persecution. He was arrested in March 1935 and forced to sign a confession, as a condition of his release, that he had performed illegal religious activities.³⁹¹

Under the stewardship of Cárdenas, the government enacted more anticlerical legislation. In February 1935, a decree was passed prohibiting the sending of religious material through the mail.³⁹² In September, the *Ley de Nacionalización de Bienes* (“Law of Nationalization of Goods”) stipulated that supplies used for religious purposes were property of the government.³⁹³ Cárdenas also encouraged the use of anticlerical propaganda. *El Nacional*, the semi-official government paper, relentlessly condemned

the priesthood, denouncing it as a class enemy of the poor.³⁹⁴ On a more sinister tone, Catholic protesters (labeled “fanatics” by the government) were shot during demonstrations.³⁹⁵

The Cárdenas administration gave the Mexican Left carte blanche to attack the church. The governor of Tabasco, Tomás Garrido Canabal, was allowed to organize a leftist militant group, called the “Red Shirts.”³⁹⁶ This organization waged a terrorist operation against the church, in which priests were shot, churches sacked, and riots instigated.³⁹⁷ The Red Shirts were greatly admired by Cárdenas, who gave them important posts in the Ministry of Agriculture.³⁹⁸ He even sent a wreath to the funeral of a member, who had been lynched by Catholics in retaliation for prior violence.³⁹⁹

The Temperance of the Church

The hierarchy remained steadfast in its commitment to avoid bloodshed. During the administrations of Portes Gil and Ortíz Rubio, the church remained silent, recognizing that a power struggle was taking place with Calles.⁴⁰⁰ It was not until the removal of President Ortíz Rubio that Pope Pius XI condemned the violation of the *Arreglos* in his encyclical *Acerbi Animi*.⁴⁰¹ Still, the pope indicated that the clergy would have to yield, for it was better to have some churches open than none at all.⁴⁰² Some bishops wanted to suspend worship, but they were overruled by the Vatican.⁴⁰³ The hierarchy was not completely silent, however. In September 1935, 14 bishops and

archbishops signed a petition asking for the abrogation of the *Ley de Nacionalización de Bienes* and the modification of the anticlerical articles of the Mexican Constitution.⁴⁰⁴

In certain respects, the church fared worse under Cárdenas than it did under Calles, a fact the laity could not ignore. Once again, spontaneous mobilization of Catholics raged throughout the country. In November 1934, over 7,500 men waged a Cristero-type rebellion, termed “La Segunda” (“The Second One”).⁴⁰⁵ Though smaller, La Segunda was in ways more violent than La Cristiada, employing terrorist guerilla warfare. The agitation, led by several ex-Cristeros, targeted the socialist education programs being implemented by the state, singling out teachers. Three hundred educators were assassinated, while another two hundred were mutilated by the insurgents.⁴⁰⁶ Curiously, the conflict did not take place in Jalisco. Instead, the rebellion was concentrated in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz.⁴⁰⁷

The rebellion failed miserably. The church hierarchy, which had remained ambivalent during the Cristero Rebellion, chose a different course of action with La Segunda. It swiftly condemned the new insurgency, with some bishops even excommunicating rebels.⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, the pope issued a new encyclical, forbidding armed resistance and urging Catholics to participate in social programs that the church was implementing.⁴⁰⁹ La Segunda eventually dissipated by 1938, though some guerilla units continued the fight.⁴¹⁰ In 1941, the last Cristero general, Federico Vázquez, surrendered in the state of Durango, only to be later killed.⁴¹¹ The age of religious insurrection was over.

A Thaw in Anticlericalism

President Cárdenas, despite his anticlerical predisposition, decided to curtail his attacks on the Catholic Church. His primary goal was to gather popular support for his reformist agenda, which was hampered by the ongoing persecution of the clergy. Also, Cárdenas needed the unity of the proletariat, whose rural component was heavily influenced by the priesthood.⁴¹² Cárdenas could ill-afford to have the church as an enemy while he faced foreign oil companies in a widening dispute.⁴¹³ Moreover, historian Adrian Bantjes argued that Cárdenas's volte-face was prompted by popular Catholic opposition to the de-fanaticization campaigns.⁴¹⁴

Cárdenas intended to find a solution to the religious situation in an expeditious manner. He changed his rhetoric, attacking fanaticism instead of religious conscience.⁴¹⁵ In his speeches, Cárdenas declared that the government was not antireligious and that anticlerical campaigns would only retard economic growth.⁴¹⁶ He rescinded the prohibition of the mailing of religious materials and appointed a Catholic as Minister of Agriculture.⁴¹⁷ Teachers were instructed to apply the socialist curriculum in a pragmatic manner, without raising the ire of the populace.⁴¹⁸ Another obstacle was Calles. Cárdenas, unlike his predecessors, was no puppet and exiled the recalcitrant strongman in June 1935.⁴¹⁹

The thaw was evident in 1936, when the government stopped seizing ecclesiastical property and the Red Shirts abandoned their campaign of terror.⁴²⁰ Many states joined the new course, allowing churches to be opened once again.⁴²¹ In an

emblematic move, Cárdenas allowed the public funeral of Archbishop Francisco Orozco y Jiménez, who was known for his support of the Cristeros.⁴²² Still, this new acceptance of the Catholic Church had one important condition attached to it: the clergy were to stay out of politics.⁴²³ Cárdenas held the social reforms of the Mexican Revolution sacred and did not allow any meddling by the hierarchy.⁴²⁴ A statement by the Interior Ministry reiterated this position, explaining that freedom of conscience would be respected, so long as it did not violate federal and state laws.⁴²⁵

This new approach by Cárdenas was greeted by many moderate Catholics, who drew comparisons with Porfirio Díaz.⁴²⁶ The hierarchy responded by stressing a message of peace and moderation.⁴²⁷ By 1937, many of the church's high officials from the Cristero period had died, resigned, or remained in exile. This allowed for the appointment of more moderate bishops.⁴²⁸ The naming of Archbishop Luis Martínez as primate and acting representative of the Vatican allowed the pope to give a unified message of restraint to the Mexican hierarchy.⁴²⁹ Under this policy of flexibility, the church accepted revolutionary nationalism and fully supported the oil expropriation of 1938.⁴³⁰ Even more telling was the hierarchy's refusal to support the rebellion of pro-Catholic General Saturnino Cedillo that same year.⁴³¹ Still, improvement of relations was limited and socialism remained a point of contention between church and state.

Cárdenas and Socialism

The election of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934 signaled a major shift to the Left in Mexican politics. The Callista political machine increasingly lost its popular support as the Great Depression worsened and the revolution's promises of reform were not fulfilled.⁴³² Reformists within the PNR, who developed a radical program to mobilize the popular base, coalesced around Cárdenas.⁴³³ Calles, the *Jefe Máximo*, employed political expediency by supporting the candidature of Cárdenas as the best course to quell party dissidence and popular alienation.⁴³⁴ Calles was also confident that he could control Cárdenas as another "puppet" president.

Cárdenas had a practical, populist desire for the social betterment of the Mexican masses. As governor of Michoacán, he fostered labor and peasant organizations, developed education, and redistributed land.⁴³⁵ Cárdenas used the 1934 election to galvanize support for reforms and to create his own political base. As president, Cárdenas organized peasantry and labor through the creation of powerful syndicates such as the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM).⁴³⁶

One of Cárdenas's goals was the formation of a national party based upon worker, peasant, and middle-class support in opposition to the old landowning elites and foreign property holders.⁴³⁷ In 1938, he transformed the PNR into the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM), the precursor to today's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).⁴³⁸ Another important element of Cárdenas's program was to replace the country's

exploitive system of foreign “industrial capitalism” with economic nationalism, a prime example being the oil expropriation of 1938.⁴³⁹ The pillar of Cárdenas’s socialist program was enforcement of agrarian reform, contained in Article 27 of the Constitution.⁴⁴⁰ He confiscated 35 million hectares of private land and distributed them in the form of ejidos - communal farms regulated by the state.⁴⁴¹ In his six years in office, Cárdenas distributed more land to the peasantry than all of his predecessors combined.⁴⁴² Cárdenas’s ambitious program of social engineering led him to adopt a moderate course towards the church. However, this restraint did not extend to his educational policy, which inflamed Catholic passions.

The Threat of Socialist Education

One issue on which President Cárdenas remained inflexible was socialism in public education.⁴⁴³ Cárdenas aimed to modernize the country’s educational system in order to transform Mexico into a socially integrated nation.⁴⁴⁴ Education had been a sensitive issue between the church and state since the Bourbon Reforms. By the twentieth century, the church was effectively separated from the public education system, but its influence was felt nonetheless. The church vigorously fought the Education Ministry’s implementation of a sexual education program in 1933.⁴⁴⁵ In 1934, the hierarchy expressed alarm once again, when Article 3 of the Constitution was changed to read: “State education will be socialist in character.”⁴⁴⁶

Socialist education was implemented in conjunction with the de-fanaticization campaigns intending to combat religious doctrine.⁴⁴⁷ In its ideology, fanaticism would be eliminated through education in order to save the Mexican proletariat and peasantry for the new revolutionary order.⁴⁴⁸ Influenced by positivism, the new curriculum taught civics, patriotic history, and anticlericalist ideology inspired by Voltaire.⁴⁴⁹ The schools emphasized the role of workers and peasants in the Mexican Revolution.⁴⁵⁰

Under the administration of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), schooling assumed a “religious” character, in which the church’s moral quality would be appropriated and integrated into the state.⁴⁵¹ The rural school was to replace the village church as the town’s identity.⁴⁵² Teachers were at the forefront of the revolutionary program and became key political performers in mobilizing and unionizing workers and peasants.⁴⁵³ The teacher would supplant the priest and preach the new values of unity, patriotism, and work.⁴⁵⁴ Cárdenas envisioned teachers as defenders of the revolution, stating, “The mission of the teacher ought not be limited to the confines of the classroom.”⁴⁵⁵ As a matter of course, Catholics were expunged from educational positions.⁴⁵⁶

Cárdenas’s socialist program accommodated a religion which confined itself to the home and stayed out of politics and education.⁴⁵⁷ Cárdenas would not bend on the question of socialist education, believing that the church-state problem could be resolved if the clergy abdicated its influence over teaching.⁴⁵⁸ By forging ahead, Cárdenas was intent on rooting out completely what he called the priesthood’s method of self-preservation: evangelization.⁴⁵⁹ Cárdenas’s answer to clerical protests was rapid

implementation of his policies through the Education Law of 1940, an enabling act for Article 3.⁴⁶⁰

The church's initial response to socialist education was to openly fight it. During the height of the de-fanaticization campaigns of the early 1930s, Archbishop Pascual Díaz declared, "No Catholic can be a socialist...parents are forbidden to put their children in any college or school which teaches socialism."⁴⁶¹ The church stressed that socialism was an irreconcilable enemy and urged school administrators not to enforce the curriculum.⁴⁶² Teachers who worked for the federal government were excommunicated.⁴⁶³

The laity vehemently opposed socialist education.⁴⁶⁴ They followed the hierarchy's order and withdrew their children from the system. In one village in the state of Jalisco, only 9 out of 170 students attended class.⁴⁶⁵ Teachers who dared to blaspheme God in front of village schoolchildren would often meet with deadly reprisals.⁴⁶⁶ It would be wrong, however, to blame the church for these atrocities, which could be explained by the inherent xenophobia that existed in these remote locations.⁴⁶⁷

The improvement of church-state relations in other areas prompted the hierarchy to moderate its policy. In 1934, the church was struggling for its existence, while in 1940 it was only fighting for control of the educational system.⁴⁶⁸ The church ceased to openly battle the revolution and decided to behave calmly and decisively with regards to socialist education.⁴⁶⁹ Unlike the Cristero Rebellion, the laity was carefully mobilized and controlled to oppose government policy in a nonviolent manner. These efforts gave rise to the Sinarquista Movement.

Catholic Action

The church was resolute in preventing another rebellion like La Cristiada. It realized that if it did not organize the laity, then another radical organization such as the League would emerge. A double policy ensued, where it was necessary to end the activities of the most confrontational Catholic elements, while channeling that militancy to work in an acceptable manner.⁴⁷⁰ Article 130 prohibited the Catholic Church from generating a political party, therefore any organization representing clerical interests had to be limited to spiritual matters.⁴⁷¹ Mexican Catholic Action was established in 1930 to fulfill such a purpose.⁴⁷²

Catholic Action was a generic name for lay organizations that were established throughout the world in response to Pope Pius XI's call for Catholics to actively support the church and defend the faith against the dangers of Protestantism, liberalism, positivism, and communism.⁴⁷³ Catholic Action made inroads into Latin America by the 1930s, where it received support from the hierarchy. It had branches for men, women, and children. There were specialized groups for workers, students, businessmen, secretaries, and peasants. Catholic Action had strong ties with the religious schools run by orders, especially those of the Jesuits.⁴⁷⁴ In Mexico, it was Bernard Bergöend, founder of the ACJM, who established Catholic Action.⁴⁷⁵

As the church ceased to openly attack the Mexican Revolution, it relied on Catholic Action to push forth its agenda. Religious displeasure with the government was organized into positive civic action.⁴⁷⁶ In March 1937, Pope Pius XI emphasized the

advantage of Catholic Action over the use of violence in defending the rights of the Mexican Church.⁴⁷⁷ In the same spirit of *Rerum Novarum*, Catholic Action was promoted as an alternative to socialism in solving agrarian and labor difficulties.⁴⁷⁸ Also, Mexican priests were instructed by the hierarchy to evidence concern for the socioeconomic welfare of the laity.⁴⁷⁹ Though Catholic Action was officially forbidden to participate in politics, it served as a school of political leadership for a new generation of Catholics.⁴⁸⁰ Nevertheless, a void existed; a more vocal association was needed that could work for church interests without any apparent connection. The relationship between the laity and the hierarchy needed to remain secret.⁴⁸¹

The Legion

The papal encyclical *Acervi Animi* of 1933 encouraged lay people to form an entity, based on Christian principles, that would give guarantees for the defense the church “without calling itself Catholic.”⁴⁸² The hierarchy envisaged the formation of action groups that would exert demands on government officials at the local level. The pressure would take the form of protests, petitions, and legal resources. The task of the groups was to teach social action, propagate ideas, and educate the laity in the exercise of civil rights.⁴⁸³ It was believed that individual conversions would bring about the essential transformation of the country.⁴⁸⁴ These groups, known collectively as La Legión (the Legion), were created to channel the violent tendencies of the laity.⁴⁸⁵

The Legion was founded in Guadalajara in 1934 by Manuel Romo de Alba, a schoolteacher and former member of the UP.⁴⁸⁶ His testimony has allowed historians to reconstruct the obscure origins of the Legion, as well as its transformation into the Sinarquista Movement.⁴⁸⁷ The Legion was controlled by a Supreme Council staffed by devout laymen, whose decisions were subject to the approval of the archbishop of Mexico and the apostolic delegate.⁴⁸⁸ This relationship was of a strictly secretive nature.

The survival of the Legion depended on concealment; its structure was created to prevent the possibility of repression. The “cell” was the basic unit of the Legion. Each cell was secret to all others, so that if one were uncovered, the whole organization could remain intact.⁴⁸⁹ Only when it was certain that an individual could be relied upon would he be asked to take the secret oath.⁴⁹⁰ The first three years of the Legion’s existence were devoted to attracting as many people as possible; from universities, factories, offices, and villages.⁴⁹¹ The initial reaction to the Legion was promising: in six months it expanded into several states and boasted a membership of 20,000.⁴⁹² In 1935, the Legion extended into the Federal District, where it recruited a great number of professionals, especially lawyers and doctors.⁴⁹³

“Legionarios” vowed a secret loyalty to the church and swore an oath to obey their leaders “with all that conformed to morality and justice.”⁴⁹⁴ They disrupted political gatherings by exploding stink bombs and tried to influence public opinion regarding Catholic doctrine.⁴⁹⁵ Legionarios boycotted government schools and businesses they deemed unfriendly to church interests.⁴⁹⁶ Another tactic was to scrawl on public buildings and peso bills the phrase “Down with socialist education!”⁴⁹⁷ Despite initial

enthusiasm, the Legion floundered, as Catholics demanded a more radical response to government policies and became disillusioned with “boring” activities. With the rebellion of La Segunda raging, the hierarchy acknowledged the shortcomings of the Legion in providing a viable outlet for militant Catholics.⁴⁹⁸ Hence, the church deemed that a transformation of the Legion was in order.

The Base

In 1936, the Legion underwent restructuring by the hierarchy, who were intent on attracting a larger contingent of Catholics to the organization. The Legion served as the core of a new body called the Base, with greater control by the Supreme Council and a closer cooperation with the episcopacy.⁴⁹⁹ Each cell leader answered to a division (state) leader, who in turn obeyed the orders of the *jefe nacional* (national chief), who was also the head of the nine-member Supreme Council.⁵⁰⁰

The Base followed some of the ideas contained in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which advocated a corporative structure in order to penetrate all levels of society and called for the establishment of social justice, not only for the proletariat, but for all sectors of society.⁵⁰¹ The Base wanted to build the social awareness of Mexicans, believing that a people conscious of their rights and duties produced a just government working for the common good.⁵⁰² It rejected the socialist policies of Cárdenas, which tied the employee to the company, which in turn was tied to

the state. As an alternative, the Base advocated the creation of separate, parallel organizations for management and labor.⁵⁰³

The Base's cells were like those of the Legion, except they were set up along geographic as well as functional lines.⁵⁰⁴ The Base was divided into ten divisions, corresponding to regions in Mexico.⁵⁰⁵ These divisions were subdivided into municipal sections composed of cells.⁵⁰⁶ In addition, the Base was partitioned into 16 sections, some corresponding to practical purposes (such as finances, propaganda, communications, and politics) and others to socioeconomic sectors.⁵⁰⁷ The formation of these latter sections was intended to permit infiltration into all sectors of society, labor in particular.⁵⁰⁸ Sections, akin to unions, were assigned to represent laborers, peasants, management, and professionals.⁵⁰⁹

The Base experienced an upsurge in membership, driven by Catholics' dissatisfaction with socialism.⁵¹⁰ However, these new members were disappointed that the Base lacked the crusade-like mentality of the Cristero Rebellion, adding to their frustration.⁵¹¹ The essential problem was the Base's use of *non-militant* passive resistance, which included activities considered foolish by the membership. Base actions included writing to teachers, attending mass, and dropping stones near a church as a "sign" of protest.⁵¹² A cadre of Base members petitioned the Supreme Council for the creation of a more militant institution to "organize all of the Catholics in Mexico as a unit under civilian leadership, but under a military discipline, to confront... all enemies of the faith and liberty of the Catholic people."⁵¹³ Rather than risk losing popular

support, the Supreme Council acquiesced and set aside the 11th sector of the Base, which it called the Unión Nacional Sinarquista (National Synarchist Union).⁵¹⁴

Birth of Sinarquismo

The Sinarquista Movement was founded on May 23, 1937 in León, Guanajuato.⁵¹⁵ The founders were a small contingent of Catholic students from the state university who were outraged by the anticlerical policies of the Cárdenas regime.⁵¹⁶ Headed by José Antonio Urquiza, the group obtained the blessing of the Supreme Council to establish a Catholic activist organization through the creation of a “visible” section of the Base. While the UNS had the appearance of a separate entity, it was strictly dependent on the Supreme Council.⁵¹⁷ Important decisions, made by the Base leadership, were simply executed by the Sinarquista chief.⁵¹⁸

On June 21, the new movement issued its *Manifiesto del Partido Sinarquista*, a document stating its ideology and raison d’être.⁵¹⁹ Sinarquismo emerged in a climate of discontent over Cardenista policies and tailored its message accordingly.⁵²⁰ The movement challenged President Cárdenas’ policies regarding the church, socialist education, and land redistribution.⁵²¹ The Mexican Revolution was cast as a chaotic event in which the natural order of society was threatened. Sinarquismo offered “salvation” and a restoration of civil rights that had been lost at the hands of the state.⁵²² The word “Sinarquismo” was defined as the opposite of anarchy, in other words the

“counterrevolution.”⁵²³ “The Sixteen Points,” written by José Trueba Olivares, outlined Sinarquista dogma to members and would-be recruits.⁵²⁴

In stark contrast to its militant ideology, Sinarquismo advocated a policy of peace. The violence that marked the Cristero Rebellion was abandoned by the new Catholic struggle. As a promoter of harmony, the UNS repudiated revolutionary movements, particularly the socialism of the Cárdenas administration.⁵²⁵ This principle of nonviolence was enforced at all Sinarquista events, especially the famous marches that became the hallmark of the movement. The UNS also rejected politics, defining itself as a “unifying” civic movement and denouncing the political process as a divisive force in Mexican society.⁵²⁶ Notwithstanding this self-imposed label, Sinarquismo became a “force” that changed the political sphere.

The UNS grew steadily under the leadership of its first two presidents, José Trueba Olivares and Manuel Zermeño.⁵²⁷ The new message of Sinarquismo appealed to the Base membership, 90% of which joined the new movement.⁵²⁸ At the end of 1937, the UNS had nearly five thousand members.⁵²⁹ Recruitment was accomplished through the establishment of Sinarquista committees. Organizers were sent out to make initial contact with a sympathizer, sometimes the local priest. After they had five or ten people interested in joining, these recruiters arranged to show films of Sinarquista activities, discuss doctrine, and distribute literature. With enough recruits, a local chief was appointed, charged with organizing the new converts into a committee. The primary objective of the committee was to attract more members and establish new committees.⁵³⁰

The UNS suffered a series of setbacks during its early years. In November 1937, police raided Sinarquista headquarters in Guanajuato.⁵³¹ Shortly thereafter, the state governor expelled the leadership on the excuse that their lives were “endangered” by the local chapter of the leftist CTM.⁵³² Following the ouster, the UNS moved to its new base in Mexico City.⁵³³ Tragedy struck the Sinarquista Movement in April 1938, when Urquiza was murdered.⁵³⁴ Although it was a case of personal vengeance, Urquiza’s death was treated as an act of martyrdom, a theme that became a key element of Sinarquismo.⁵³⁵ Despite government oppression, the UNS attracted new recruits, mainly because of its effective propaganda.⁵³⁶ The message of land reform, carried in pamphlets and the weekly bulletin *El Sinarquista*, appealed to the peasantry, who chose to join the movement in large numbers.⁵³⁷ By the end of 1938, the UNS claimed a membership of 30,000.⁵³⁸

Sinarquismo under Abascal

The Sinarquista Movement might have remained an obscure organization were it not for Salvador Abascal. Abascal, the pivotal leader of the movement, transformed the UNS into an immense “political” force capable of threatening the PRM’s hold on power. Born in Morelia, Michoacán, Abascal came from an old family of miners and property owners.⁵³⁹ A great influence on the young Abascal was his father, a former member of the secretive “U” during the Cristero Rebellion.⁵⁴⁰ As a child, Abascal learned to hate the Mexican Revolution, believing that it had destroyed social order and family

tranquility.⁵⁴¹ At a young age he joined a seminary but eventually left in order pursue a career in law.⁵⁴²

In 1935, Abascal was approached by “an anonymous person,” who invited him to join the Legion. Abascal gladly accepted, swearing an oath on a crucifix.⁵⁴³ He dedicated himself to the cause, establishing the organization in Michoacán. He traveled to San Antonio, Texas, in order to obtain a blessing for the movement from the exiled Mexican apostolic delegate.⁵⁴⁴ Abascal soon had a reputation as an excellent organizer and propagandist.⁵⁴⁵ The Supreme Council recognized the potential of the young firebrand and appointed him to head the southern sector of the Base.⁵⁴⁶

In May 1938, Abascal, by then a regional leader of the Sinarquista Movement, organized Catholics to recover religious freedom in Tabasco.⁵⁴⁷ Tabasco was a stronghold of anticlericalism, where church desecrations were sanctioned by the state. Abascal was determined to take over the Church of the Immaculate Conception, which had been closed by the government.⁵⁴⁸ He mobilized large numbers of peasants from the surrounding ranches and villages using the sound of indigenous drums.⁵⁴⁹ Ten thousand protesters, some of them walking several miles, arrived at the church, located in the state capital of Villahermosa.⁵⁵⁰ State troops used violence against the crowd, killing four activists and injuring many others in the process.⁵⁵¹ Although Abascal was arrested, the government’s heavy-handed tactics backfired as the killings provoked outrage among the Mexican populace. The Sinarquistas, on the other hand, were praised for their peaceful resolve. The state government felt compelled to back down and mass was celebrated at the church for the first time in ten years.⁵⁵²

Abascal's victory in Tabasco heralded a new kind of Catholic militancy with a fervor equal to that of the church's enemies.⁵⁵³ His innovative technique of passive massive resistance, known as the "Abascal method," proved to be an effective pressure device against the government.⁵⁵⁴ President Cárdenas was obliged to rein in the state governor, Tomás Garrido Canabal, ordering him to disband his infamous Red Shirts and to cease enforcing anticlerical laws.⁵⁵⁵ Abascal's militant spirit transformed the nature and perception of Sinarquismo.⁵⁵⁶

Abascal's audacity was rewarded by the Supreme Council, which appointed him *Jefe Supremo* (Supreme Chief) of the UNS in January 1939.⁵⁵⁷ He fused vitality and enthusiasm into Sinarquismo and took the movement to levels of fanatical militancy.⁵⁵⁸ Abascal wanted to make the UNS into a "shock group" that would carry out a frontal attack on the Mexican Revolution, thereby "exposing its crimes, spiritual and economic."⁵⁵⁹ He strengthened the military structure of the movement and promulgated a set of strict moral rules in *The Ten Norms of Conduct for Sinarquistas*.⁵⁶⁰ Force would be repelled with nonviolent "force" – militant passive resistance.⁵⁶¹ Under his rule, Sinarquista activities were audacious, fiery, and intense.⁵⁶²

As *Jefe Supremo*, Abascal began an era of immense Sinarquista marches, beginning in June 1939, with the "capture" of Guanajuato.⁵⁶³ Marches were the feature and nucleus of his leadership style.⁵⁶⁴ As in Tabasco, Sinarquista rallies were carried out without consent of the authorities, thereby inviting government persecution.⁵⁶⁵ The demonstrations were aggressive, yet nonviolent, staying true to the Sinarquista principle of passive resistance.⁵⁶⁶ Abascal recognized that it was essential to keep the marches

peaceful, for any display of hostility would instantly brand them as rebels, dooming their cause.⁵⁶⁷ Abascal understood early on that any violent response perpetrated by the government served to inflame the masses and win more followers.⁵⁶⁸ The composure of the Sinarquistas in the face of brutal government reprisals inevitably gave the movement the moral high ground, adding to its popularity.

Abascal made the marches extremely attractive to Mexicans through the use of nationalism. The rallies were a display of order and discipline, flags and songs, uniforms and armbands.⁵⁶⁹ He hoped Sinarquismo would win over the public and militarize Mexico spiritually.⁵⁷⁰ Several marches took place in 1939 throughout the cities in the Bajío region of western Central Mexico.⁵⁷¹ A watershed event occurred in July, when several Sinarquistas were killed by agrarian militias in the city of Celaya. Among the dead of the “Celaya massacre” was María Teresa Bustos, who became a Sinarquista symbol of sacrifice.⁵⁷² Though the government condemned the killings, Sinarquismo’s popularity swelled now that it had martyrs of the Catholic faith.⁵⁷³

After Celaya, the Sinarquista program spread, increasing in size and geographical dimension.⁵⁷⁴ Between August 1940 and July 1941, there were marches in over four hundred towns and cities.⁵⁷⁵ By August 1940, the movement claimed a membership of 360,000, concentrated mostly in the Bajío states of Guanajuato, Querétaro, and Michoacán.⁵⁷⁶ Sinarquista councils were established in several Mexican migrant communities of the United States, to include Los Angeles, Chicago, and El Paso.⁵⁷⁷ These immigrants, affected by discrimination, poverty, and insecurity, were attracted to the UNS because they felt abandoned by the Mexican government.⁵⁷⁸

The popularity of the UNS reached a zenith with the election of 1940, due to its outright rejection of the Mexican political system. Many conservatives, terrified at the prospect that Cárdenas would select another socialist to run for president, threw their support behind Juan Andreu Almazán.⁵⁷⁹ A wealthy Catholic landowner who attracted fascist support, Almazán won the endorsement of the National Action Party (PAN), a conservative entity that had a strong Catholic following.⁵⁸⁰ Conservatives implored the UNS to support Almazán, but the movement was steadfast in its resolution to remain uninvolved. Any participation in politics would have implied Sinarquismo's endorsement of the electoral process, thereby aiding Cárdenas and his cronies.⁵⁸¹

The defeat of Almazán was inevitable, since the ruling PRM controlled the election through fraud.⁵⁸² Following the election of 1940, the Mexican Radical Right experienced a considerable decline of support, but not Sinarquismo. Many Mexicans, frustrated with the corrupt electoral process, joined the UNS (the "honest party") in droves.⁵⁸³ Moreover, the movement offered a lucrative alternative to a potentially violent response from the defeated Almazanistas.⁵⁸⁴ By the end of 1940, there were over half a million Sinarquistas, making the UNS the most potent "political" force after the PRM.⁵⁸⁵ The Sinarquista Movement became the primary exponent of the Right and the only viable opposition to the government.⁵⁸⁶ This success proved temporary, however. A failed undertaking, internal schisms, and an abrupt change in the political climate colluded to render the UNS impotent by 1944.

María Auxiliadora

The UNS failed to capitalize on the momentum garnered by the election of 1940. Instead, it squandered its energy supporting a bizarre colonizing project. This mission, headed by none other than Abascal, involved the creation of a “Heavenly City.”⁵⁸⁷ His goal was to establish a Sinarquista utopia on Mexican soil where the Christian Social Order would prevail. Magdalena Bay, in the peninsula of Baja California, was the appointed place. The isolated location allowed the UNS to operate its religious colony without any external influence. The Mormons’ achievement in Utah was an inspiration to the Sinarquistas.⁵⁸⁸ Religion was not the only incentive to colonize, however. The UNS awaited an opportunity to implement its competing version of land reform.⁵⁸⁹

Abascal asked the new president of Mexico, Manuel Avila Camacho, to give the UNS permission to colonize Baja California.⁵⁹⁰ Despite opposition from the Mexican Congress, Avila Camacho granted the request, stating that the Sinarquistas had the right, as Mexican citizens, to establish a settlement in national territory.⁵⁹¹ Elated with the opportunity to isolate a political threat, the president offered to support the UNS colony with free transport and employment opportunities.⁵⁹² In December 1941, Abascal left for Baja California along with 85 Sinarquista families, leaving the UNS presidency in the hands of Manuel Torres Bueno.⁵⁹³ Named María Auxiliadora (“Mary the Helper”), the colony was envisioned by Abascal to succeed with Divine Providence, the spirituality of the settlers, and outside help.⁵⁹⁴

The endeavor, despite the enthusiasm of Abascal, experienced serious problems from the beginning. Unsurprisingly, the government reneged on its promise to pay for the long passage, forcing the colonists to expend their scant resources.⁵⁹⁵ Employment from the construction of a federal railroad and financial aid from American Catholics never materialized.⁵⁹⁶ Another problem was the lack of water in the arid peninsula.⁵⁹⁷ The majority of the settlers were not farmers and those who had farming experience were used to the rich and fertile lands of the central states.⁵⁹⁸ Possibly the biggest failure came from a lack of leadership. Proper preparations were not made for the colonists, who were left to suffer in the extreme conditions of the land. Instead, everything was left to prayer and enthusiasm. Abascal later admitted that he regarded the whole project in apostolic and providential terms, and that he was wholly unqualified for such a venture.⁵⁹⁹

The crops failed, forcing many of the dispirited colonists to leave. During 1942, nearly half of the settlers abandoned María Auxiliadora and returned to the mainland.⁶⁰⁰ The evacuees not only complained of the physical hardships they endured, but condemned Abascal's ineptitude and callousness.⁶⁰¹ Abascal, in turn, denounced his critics as cowards and deserters, urging that they be ousted from the organization.⁶⁰² The Sinarquista leadership disagreed, however, and welcomed the returned settlers as loyal members.⁶⁰³ Moreover, Torres Bueno refused to provide any more support for the enterprise, which he considered to be a financial burden on the UNS.⁶⁰⁴ Soon, a rift developed between Abascal, the avatar of Sinarquismo, and the leadership back in the

mainland. The colonization scheme pierced the movement's psychological shield of destiny and uncovered it as human and fallible.⁶⁰⁵

The Decline of Sinarquismo

The political climate experienced a change during the early 1940s that further weakened the Sinarquista Movement. The election of 1940, which gave the UNS an enormous following, ironically contained the seeds of its destruction. President Cárdenas surprised Mexicans, who were expecting a Leftist candidate, by choosing moderate Avila Camacho as his successor. Cárdenas realized that the Mexican Revolution needed a shift back to the middle, in order to avert further conflict with the Right.⁶⁰⁶ Once Avila Camacho took power, he transformed the revolution into evolution, rejecting Marxist ideology as part of the new order.⁶⁰⁷ This new path addressed many of the factors that had empowered Sinarquismo.⁶⁰⁸ Times were changing and the UNS could not adapt to a policy that chose compromise over confrontation.⁶⁰⁹

Avila Camacho did not abandon the principles of the Mexican Revolution as he played the part of consolidator.⁶¹⁰ He made sure that national unity took precedence over social struggle and that industrialization was emphasized over agrarian reform.⁶¹¹ A skillful leader, Avila Camacho made overtures towards conservatives in order to stem the radical elements of the Right. When asked about his views on the church, he declared "I am a believer," providing Catholics with the most comforting words they had heard in an entire generation.⁶¹² Avila Camacho pursued his path of reconciliation by

pronouncing that the revolution did not intend to destroy religion.⁶¹³ He went further by allowing military officers in uniform to attend public religious manifestations, though they were in violation of the law.⁶¹⁴ The church reciprocated, praising him for defending the spiritual needs of the Mexican people.⁶¹⁵ In 1942, Avila Camacho unequivocally declared that there was no religious problem in Mexico.⁶¹⁶

Another important development was the president's refutation of socialism. Avila Camacho asserted himself as a democrat, not a socialist, and stated that no communist would intervene in his administration.⁶¹⁷ Mexican business was favored over labor and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, most hated by the Right, was replaced with Fidel Velázquez as leader of the CTM.⁶¹⁸ In late 1941, Leftist elements were expunged from the Ministry of Education and a new law was passed that specified that state instruction could not be of an antireligious nature.⁶¹⁹ These changes, in addition to eliminating federal inspectors from private schools, were sufficient to allow the resurgence of Catholic education.⁶²⁰ Still, references to socialism were not removed from Article 3 until 1946.⁶²¹ In the meantime, Avila Camacho placated Catholics and satisfied revolutionary rhetoric by stating that, "Article 3 is not Marxist Socialism but Mexican Socialism."⁶²² Thus, Avila Camacho effectively abandoned the socialist education project established by Cárdenas.⁶²³

The moderate measures taken by Avila Camacho served to undercut support for the Sinarquistas. The government's reconciliation with the church eased the discontent of the devout, who consequently lost interest in the UNS.⁶²⁴ Catholic teachers, who no longer had to teach in secret, left the organization as well.⁶²⁵ Although the UNS

continued to press for the repeal of Article 3, it did not matter since the offensive piece of legislation had been effectively neutralized by the president.⁶²⁶ The Avila Camacho administration also reached out to peasants, the core of UNS support. The regime became aware that the problem lay in the shortcomings of the revolutionary program and in particular agrarian reform.⁶²⁷ The Ministry of the Interior sent out “cultural brigades,” whose mission was to visit villages and give cultural lectures about the beneficial work being carried out by the federal government.⁶²⁸ These brigades provided vaccinations, medical supplies, books, and clothes to the needy.⁶²⁹ The propaganda measures effectively arrested the growth of the Sinarquista Movement: the UNS’s numbers remained constant from 1941 till 1944.⁶³⁰

The government also took direct steps to quell Sinarquismo. Initially, the government did not take any measures to limit the Sinarquista marches. However, on May 18, 1941, President Avila Camacho’s visit to Morelia was soured by a surprise Sinarquista march of 20,000.⁶³¹ This embarrassment forced the government to accept the Sinarquistas as a serious threat.⁶³² The increasingly larger marches worried the revolutionary leaders, who were fearful of losing popular support.⁶³³ On June 3, the PRM issued a manifesto, asking its members to “frustrate the restoring prospects of the reaction.”⁶³⁴ The proclamation was endorsed by unions, peasants’ leagues, and political groups, who called for the UNS to be disbanded.⁶³⁵

The strongest opponent of the UNS was the Mexican Left, particularly the CTM, a harbinger of communist ideologues.⁶³⁶ The militant-looking Sinarquistas were labeled fascists by their foes. Word was spread that the UNS was of Nazi inspiration; a

collaborationist tool of the Axis powers.⁶³⁷ The Sinarquistas were accused of taking advantage of the ignorance of the masses in order to serve foreign powers, hacendados, and industrial capitalists.⁶³⁸ The national media as well as the United States joined the anti-Sinarquista movement, claiming that the organization threatened Mexican stability.⁶³⁹ An anti-Sinarquista committee was established by the Mexican Congress, placing more pressure on Avila Camacho to restrain the “seditious” group.⁶⁴⁰ The administration took action, instructing state governments to apply the laws vigorously against the UNS.⁶⁴¹ In June 1942, it banned public gatherings without prior consent of the authorities, placing a severe obstacle to the Sinarquistas.⁶⁴² Before Sinarquismo could succumb to external forces, however, it suffered a swift, staggering blow from within.

The Collapse of Sinarquismo

The Sinarquista movement imploded due to strife among its top leadership. During Abascal’s absence, the UNS began taking a moderate stance towards the government. Mexico’s entry into World War II changed the paradigm in which Sinarquismo existed.⁶⁴³ The Supreme Council of the Base felt that the UNS risked being labeled unpatriotic if it continued its feverish stance against the administration. Manuel Torres Bueno, the new head of the movement, wanted to restrain the fascist and violent aspects of Sinarquismo, fearing increased suppression by the government.⁶⁴⁴ Prior Mexican figures that had been reviled, such as Benito Juárez and Miguel Hidalgo were

now accepted by the Sinarquistas.⁶⁴⁵ The UNS, despite its opposition to Mexico's involvement in the war, felt obliged to remain silent on the issue of compulsory military service.⁶⁴⁶ This decision was not shared by all members, many of whom left the movement.⁶⁴⁷

Abascal, outraged by the moderate stance, began denouncing the new policy from his colony in Baja California.⁶⁴⁸ The disagreement became an embarrassment for the movement and the Supreme Council decided to expel Abascal in February 1944.⁶⁴⁹ Shortly after arriving in Mexico City, the irate Abascal published a public declaration, calling on members to abandon Sinarquismo because it had been corrupted by Torres Bueno.⁶⁵⁰ Many of the more militant Sinarquistas chose to leave the UNS, causing a large split. Surprisingly, Abascal refused to establish a competing version of Sinarquismo, in effect abandoning his followers.⁶⁵¹

A second division appeared within Sinarquistas, this time involving Torres Bueno and the Base leadership. The leader of the UNS wanted to transform the organization into a political party.⁶⁵² The Supreme Council vehemently opposed a political form of Sinarquismo and asked Torres Bueno to leave the movement.⁶⁵³ He blatantly disobeyed the order and wrested the UNS from the Base, making it an independent organization.⁶⁵⁴ The Supreme Council tried to appoint a new leader, but this failed, exposing an inherent weakness in Sinarquismo. Since the Base and the Supreme Council were secretive organizations, they were mostly unknown to the Sinarquista masses, which only recognized the "visible" leadership of Torres Bueno.⁶⁵⁵ Although the Sinarquista Movement eventually split into three separate factions (Abascal, Torres

Bueno, and the Base) the only one that was officially recognized as the “UNS” was the group headed by Manuel Torres Bueno.⁶⁵⁶

The final blow for the movement came in June 1944, when an article appeared in *El Sinarquista*, imploring the Mexican army to prevent a communist takeover of the government.⁶⁵⁷ This was an obvious call for a military coup. Although the article, written by a wayward radical, did not represent the new moderate ideology of the UNS, it did not matter: it was seen as treason by the government.⁶⁵⁸ *El Sinarquista* was suspended, a ban was imposed on UNS meetings, and an investigation was launched by the Mexican government.⁶⁵⁹

Without a public outlet, the UNS could not defend its reputation against Abascal, whose attacks remained unabated.⁶⁶⁰ As members left the organization in droves, Torres Bueno made one last desperate gamble by having the UNS participate in the elections of 1946. The venture proved disastrous, as most members left when they saw that their organization had kowtowed to the corrupt political system.⁶⁶¹ The UNS, emaciated, never again played a decisive role in Mexican history. Yet, it refused to disappear. Today, the Unión Nacional Sinarquista exists as a minor entity; a former shadow of itself, devoid of the militant ideology that had once made it a potent force.

CHAPTER VI

A COMPARISON OF IDEOLOGY

A study of the ideologies behind the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement demonstrates that these two events shared important goals. Foremost, was the establishment of a Christian Social Order in Mexico, namely a society ruled by morals where the Catholic Church would regain the prominence it once had during colonial times. These two movements emulated martyrdom as the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice and devotion to the cause. The Mexican Revolution was reviled by both Cristeros and Sinarquistas, who felt that that this pernicious event had corrupted the nation through chaos and immorality. Another fundamental commonality was the topic of land reform. The desire for private property was a factor as important as religious consciousness in driving peasants to join the movements in large numbers. These common factors demonstrate that Sinarquismo was essentially a continuation of La Cristiada.

Ideology can also explain why most Cristeros chose not to join the Sinarquista Movement. Sinarquismo exuded extreme nationalism, which bordered on fascism. On the other hand, the Cristeros' sense of nationhood was less developed and limited only to their region; the *patria chica*. More importantly, the two movements differed sharply in how the Christian Social Order would be achieved. Sinarquismo envisioned the new society under an authoritarian state, where hierarchy and control would prevail. The Cristeros, on the other hand, cherished their freedom and sense of individuality. The

Cristeros had strong democratic values that made them incompatible with the repressive Sinarquistas. Although the Cristeros and Sinarquistas shared similar objectives, they disagreed on the means to achieve them.

The Christian Social Order

Needless to say, religion was a fundamental characteristic of the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement. Both movements were deeply Catholic and made the protection of the faith a priority. They wanted to establish a new society in which the church would regain the exalted position it previously enjoyed during the days of the *patronato real*. In their vision, the Christian Social Order would bring harmony to Mexican society through creed and morality. Both the Cristeros and Sinarquistas established small-scale governments with the intent of implementing the Christian structure. These experiments at self-rule gave an indication of what these organizations hoped to achieve for the whole of Mexican society.

Jean Meyer observed that “The theme of the Reign of Christ is firmly entrenched in Cristero ideology.”⁶⁶² The Cristeros, while battling government troops, felt they were participating in the creation of a new world.⁶⁶³ This moral and perfect society which they hoped to build used family and religion as twin pillars for its foundation.⁶⁶⁴ The rebels did not feel that they were taking part in a revolution. Instead, they believed they were participants in the reformation of the social lawlessness that threatened the traditional mores of behavior.⁶⁶⁵ The Cristero army was building “the Kingdom of Christ,” argued

Meyer, in order to restore the hope of a “brilliant future” for the peasants.⁶⁶⁶ This liberating Catholic movement was entirely moral and focused on eliminating all disorder.⁶⁶⁷ Héctor Hernández stated that this vision was shared by the church hierarchy, which may have precluded them from condemning the rebellion.⁶⁶⁸ The Cristeros were effectively the “last Crusaders of Christianity,” who tried to establish colonial values in twentieth-century Mexico.⁶⁶⁹

The Cristeros used religious logic in fighting the Callista regime. They recognized that all legitimate authority emanated from God, and were willing to “submit to a Caesar, on the condition that he didn’t wage war on God.”⁶⁷⁰ President Plutarco Elías Calles violated that principle, making him an implacable enemy of heaven in the eyes of the rebels.⁶⁷¹ The Cristeros saw the rebellion and the persecution of the church as fulfillments of the prophecies of the Apocalypse.⁶⁷² The killing, pillaging, hunger, and desecrations heralded the arrival of a reign replete with destructive evil.⁶⁷³ By depriving the faithful of the sacraments, Calles exposed himself as the anti-Christ, leaving the Cristeros no option but to fight for God and the salvation of souls in a just war.⁶⁷⁴ It is no wonder then, that the rebels chose the name “Cristeros” to identify themselves as Christian soldiers attacking a satanic government.⁶⁷⁵

Anacleto González Flores, founder of the UP, believed that the duty of a Christian soldier was to plan his life with Christ as the ultimate goal.⁶⁷⁶ This lifestyle was to extend to one’s family and community, with the aim of reaching a higher ideal. He described this as “the glorious heroism of identifying the honor of God with one’s

own and placing this ideal ahead of one's own life."⁶⁷⁷ The Cristeros routinely practiced this way of life even while waging war.

The areas in which the rebellion took place had a strong tradition in the Eucharist and the sacraments.⁶⁷⁸ The majority of respondents to Meyer's questionnaire stated that they had courses in catechism and attended Sunday services.⁶⁷⁹ In Cristero camps, mass was given frequently by the few priests who ministered to the rebels.⁶⁸⁰ In the absence of clergy, the insurgents continued practicing their religion.⁶⁸¹ In the camps there were individuals who practiced perpetual adoration of the sacrament, which was exposed whenever possible.⁶⁸² The Cristeros prayed the rosary every day and sang to Christ and the Virgin Mary.⁶⁸³ Passages of the Bible were read aloud by the rebels for the benefit of their illiterate comrades.⁶⁸⁴ According to Meyer, Cristero culture was based on Christian oral tradition and the Bible.⁶⁸⁵ Militant Catholic figures, such as Joan of Arc and Charlemagne, were emulated by the insurgents.⁶⁸⁶

The Cristeros were able to create local governments in the territories they controlled.⁶⁸⁷ The rebels considered themselves a free and sovereign people and did not recognize the legitimacy of the Calles government.⁶⁸⁸ As soon as territory was taken, the Cristeros tried to organize it efficiently, using the Christian Social Order as a model.⁶⁸⁹ 25 Cristero municipalities were established in the Los Altos region of Jalisco and 9 in the southern part of Zacatecas.⁶⁹⁰ In May 1928, a congress was held in the town of Mezquitic, Jalisco, in which a governing document, known as the General Order, was drafted so as to provide a framework for the judicial and administrative functions of these settlements.⁶⁹¹ Meyer recognized that this self-rule was a fundamental objective of

the rebellion: “With a precise ideology that preaches the Adventism of justice and a cortège of Christian virtues, the Cristero government was the emancipation of the insurrection.”⁶⁹² The two foci of the Cristero state were religion and morality.

The General Order recognized only the Mexican Constitution of 1857, a document that excluded the hated Reform Laws of the Juárez period.⁶⁹³ Consequently, the Order established a unified, harmonious relationship between church and state. Catholicism was recognized as the “true” religion and the apostolic church was hailed as the “perfect” society.⁶⁹⁴ The inhabitants were instructed to attend mass on Sundays and religious holidays.⁶⁹⁵ Religious education was emphasized and municipal leaders were required to establish Catholic schools in areas where there were at least ten children.⁶⁹⁶ The Order rejected civil unions and divorce, and stipulated that a certificate from a priest was necessary in order to marry.⁶⁹⁷

The emphasis on religion was also adhered to by the UP, which controlled many local governments. UP leaders promoted “pious acts of oration and penitence” and worked for the establishment of religious education.⁶⁹⁸ The Christian spirit was maintained alive by making sure that Catholics repeated religious proclamations.⁶⁹⁹ Residents were reminded to sacrifice for God’s cause and to maintain the period of mourning.⁷⁰⁰ Military leaders, such as Gorostieta, also recognized the importance of faith in their soldiers.⁷⁰¹

Priests found a haven in these Cristero enclaves, where they could operate without any obstacles.⁷⁰² In areas that could not be reached by the priesthood, the laity maintained “organized and fervent pious organizations, where they would teach

catechism to the children, promote the acts of the divine cult, [and] celebrate with solemnity the large liturgical festivals like Corpus Christi.”⁷⁰³ The UP and other lay groups organized sacramental life in secret masses and maintained religious schools in private homes, caves, and trenches.⁷⁰⁴ The Women’s Brigades taught catechism and directed religious feminine groups such as Adoraciones Nocturnas Femeninas (Nocturnal Feminine Adorations).⁷⁰⁵

The moral aspect of the Christian Social Order cannot be overstated. The Cristeros witnessed a decline in social mores since the advent of the Mexican Revolution, where “wine, gambling and scandals involving women” were on the rise.⁷⁰⁶ These vices created conflict, violence, and death, leading to the disappearance of peace and justice.⁷⁰⁷ The Cristeros wanted to reestablish the social values and neighborly relations which they felt existed during the *Porfiriato*.⁷⁰⁸ In the wake of social disintegration, the Cristeros established a movement seen by Meyer as “thoroughly moral.”⁷⁰⁹ The eradication of the afflictions of society meant “a step towards perfection, the preparation of the Kingdom.”⁷¹⁰

The moral spirit was imposed by military chiefs. Ethical standards for soldiers were enforced by leaders such as Gorostieta, who felt that vices distracted the troops from the real enemy.⁷¹¹ Many rebels were executed for rape, robbery, and vengeance.⁷¹² Alcohol was outlawed and there were harsh penalties for thievery.⁷¹³ Rules were imposed to weed out corruption and inefficiency.⁷¹⁴ One chief demanded that his troops, as soldiers of Christ, relinquish personal grudges for the new order.⁷¹⁵ Accordingly, the

Cristeros placed themselves on a higher ethical plane than the government troops, believing that morality in Mexico would be regenerated with “rifle in hand.”⁷¹⁶

Morality was also imposed by the General Order of Cristero governance. Municipal presidents were instructed to “persecute immorality in all its forms” and to choose only employees who were “good Catholic citizens” and exhibited “wholesome habits.”⁷¹⁷ There was a campaign against parties, drinking, and gambling.⁷¹⁸ Municipal leaders had the authority to confiscate alcohol and destroy gaming devices.⁷¹⁹ In order to observe the period of mourning (the closing of the churches), public celebrations were outlawed.⁷²⁰ Marriage was considered sacrosanct and the government attacked anything that might denigrate it, such as prostitution, adultery, and concubinage.⁷²¹ Single men were obligated to marry, under penalty of fine.⁷²²

The Sinarquista Movement shared the same Catholic religious and moral values as the Cristero Rebellion. Kenneth Prager argued that Sinarquismo, despite its nationalist overtones, was primarily a Catholic movement, with an ideology that was basically the application of Thomas Aquinas’s natural law.⁷²³ The establishment of a Christian government was a major theme of the Sinarquista Movement: “Sinarquismo... is a civic movement which seeks the restoration in Mexico of the Christian Social Order.”⁷²⁴ Sinarquistas believed that the new society would be under God, governed by a God-fearing state.⁷²⁵ Hernández claimed that the church hierarchy established the UNS with this purpose in mind.⁷²⁶

Prager stated that the Sinarquistas drew inspiration from Argentina’s pro-Catholic Peronista government of the 1940s.⁷²⁷ There were theoretical aspects to the

Peronista regime that intrigued the UNS.⁷²⁸ An Argentine priest, Julio Meinvielle, formulated the concept of the “New Christian Order,” which postulated that the restoration of the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages would save the modern world from chaos and destruction.⁷²⁹ Meinvielle’s New Order was based on the theory of General Will advocated by Thomas Aquinas, namely the Christian regularization of society’s economic life.⁷³⁰ Everyone in the New Order belonged to a syndicate, content to perform their function in society.⁷³¹ The significance of Meinvielle’s theory for Sinarquismo was that the Christian Social Order, instead of being a theological dream, had the potential of being implemented under the right circumstances.⁷³² Such a world was envisioned by Juan Ignacio Padilla, a Sinarquista propagandist. In his pamphlet, *The Formation of the New Conscience*, Padilla envisioned Mexico under a Sinarquista regime.⁷³³

Like the Cristeros, the Sinarquistas felt that society had lost its moral compass: “Mexico began to forget about God and lived in a period of ambition, of disorderly sensuality, and of chaotic values.”⁷³⁴ Sinarquistas believed that practical remedies for society’s evils could be found in Catholic philosophy and spirituality.⁷³⁵ Socialism was the new “evil,” which could only be confronted by Catholics through national unity. Once the scourge of socialism was eradicated, social justice and Christian principles would prevail.⁷³⁶ Mexico could survive the chaos by looking back at its historical traditions, which were based on the Roman Catholic faith.⁷³⁷ Sinarquismo, the antonym of anarchy, wanted to establish in Mexico a modern version of St. Augustine’s City of God.⁷³⁸

The UNS looked to the colonial church as the blueprint for the Christian Social Order.⁷³⁹ Sinarquismo hailed the close collaboration between church and state that existed in New Spain, the important *patronato real*.⁷⁴⁰ It argued that this relationship fostered a community of religion, ideals, language, and Christian human values that allowed the colony to be effectively governed.⁷⁴¹ Other colonial legacies acclaimed by the UNS were the church's organic view of society and redemption, which were used as mechanisms to maintain order. Sinarquistas wanted to recreate the system in which some governmental functions were placed under the control of the Catholic Church.⁷⁴² Eighteenth-century Mexico was seen as a utopia, where there "was a marvelous harmony of all the social classes, united under the paternal authority of the two powers, the temporal and the spiritual, indissolubly linked."⁷⁴³

Religious schooling was a principle of the Sinarquista Christian Social Order. Education could not be secular, since man was inherently a spiritual being.⁷⁴⁴ Sinarquista thinking was based on the premise that man lived in three societies: family, state, and church.⁷⁴⁵ All three could intervene in education, but only the family and the church had a "natural and divine right" to be a fundamental aspect of it.⁷⁴⁶ Sinarquistas believed that the church had the supreme authority in teaching, not subject to the rule of any worldly power.⁷⁴⁷ The state's role in education was to be supplementary, consisting of subsidies for private Catholic schools.⁷⁴⁸ Sinarquistas presented this model as an alternative to the Cardenista socialist educational system.⁷⁴⁹

Sinarquismo portrayed itself as the defender of the church, claiming that within the essence of Mexico was Catholicism.⁷⁵⁰ Sinarquistas believed that "Catholic

doctrine...is a principal [sic.] and a foundation of our concept of the Christian Social Order.”⁷⁵¹ Sinarquistas were ardent practicing Catholics, sworn to protect the interests of the church against the “evils” of Protestantism, Freemasonry, and international Judaism.⁷⁵² Many Sinarquista leaders were trained in the Congregations of the Holy Virgin.⁷⁵³ According to Hernández, the Sinarquista leaders were true mystics, men of “undeniable religious character,” who were not animated by ulterior political motives.⁷⁵⁴ Religious peasants found in Sinarquismo a comforting force capable of defending the church from “anti-Christian” powers such as the United States and the Mexican Revolution.⁷⁵⁵ The UNS ingeniously capitalized on Catholic sentiment that had been riled by the socialist policies of Cárdenas.⁷⁵⁶

Morality was another precept that Sinarquistas shared with the Cristeros. The UNS believed that man could achieve spiritual perfection if he lived according to moral principles.⁷⁵⁷ Through individual conversions, a profound change in society would occur.⁷⁵⁸ A worthy government could arise only through the efforts of a strong, hard-working, moral people.⁷⁵⁹ The UNS demanded that all its members “be men of consistent honesty in all fields of their activities.”⁷⁶⁰ Though Sinarquistas were instructed to obey their leaders, it was with the condition that such orders were not contrary to morality and justice.⁷⁶¹ Likewise, Sinarquismo believed that natural law and Christian values took precedence in relations between capital and labor.⁷⁶² The nucleus of morality lay within family life, which the UNS considered the foundation of society.⁷⁶³ Therefore, the Christian Social Order would be dedicated to promoting and protecting the family unit.⁷⁶⁴

The Sinarquistas, like the Cristeros, were intent on establishing a governing body capable of implementing the Christian Social Order. They were eager to prove to the world that a model republic, a materialization of Sinarquista philosophy, could function.⁷⁶⁵ Under the leadership of Salvador Abascal, the Sinarquista colony “María Auxiliadora” was founded in the arid peninsula of Baja California. Abascal, who believed that “a totally Catholic regime” should rule Mexico, established the colony out of “spiritual necessity.”⁷⁶⁶ The enterprise was seen by the UNS as a renewal of the work of the Spanish missionaries.⁷⁶⁷

At the colony, Abascal drafted a set of bylaws which pledged the settlers to Christian principles.⁷⁶⁸ The activities of the colonists were prescribed: “Each person was to make the sign of the cross and pray an ‘Our Father’ before and after each meal, each family had to say Rosary together at least once a day.”⁷⁶⁹ The stern rules contained in *The Ten Norms of Conduct for Sinarquistas* were enforced. Dancing was strictly prohibited and every settler had to be in bed by ten in the evening.⁷⁷⁰ Therefore, the ideal Sinarquista state embodied a puritanical interpretation of Christianity, as did the Cristeros.’

Martyrdom

The Cristeros and Sinarquistas shared a genuine desire to die for the cause. The followers of both movements were eager to offer up their lives as the ultimate act of faith; a sacrifice for the advancement of the Christian Social Order. This similarity is

remarkable, given that the Cristeros were armed combatants and the Sinarquistas peaceful demonstrators. The concept of martyrdom in Mexican Catholicism can be traced back to the early missionaries. The Cristeros and Sinarquistas carried on with this legacy in order to underscore the religious aspect of their cause. For them, salvation was the key motive behind martyrdom. This act of sacrifice also became an important recruiting tool for both groups.

Meyer noted that the concept of sacrifice was important to the Cristeros: “The desire for martyrdom, thought of as a grace and as the means to advance the salvation of Mexico and of the world, was quite evident.”⁷⁷¹ The Cristeros, in their apocalyptic view of the world, believed that their actions aided the Second Coming of Christ.⁷⁷² “Our men gave their lives so that Our Father would return again,” wrote one rebel.⁷⁷³ They viewed sacrifice as a fulfillment of history to unfold itself, in the same way that the death of Christ and other martyrs was necessary for the rise of the Catholic Church.⁷⁷⁴ Meyer believed that the Cristeros were engaged in a collective “imitation of Christ,” in which they prioritized their own sacrifice, rather than the demise of their enemies.⁷⁷⁵

Martyrdom was seen as the key to salvation; an expedient way to the gates of heaven.⁷⁷⁶ Anacleto González Flores composed a prayer in which the Cristero asked Christ for death on the battlefield as a way of atoning for his sins.⁷⁷⁷ Rumors were spread of miracles involving martyred rebels, giving comfort to those facing the firing squad that heaven was awaiting.⁷⁷⁸ The Cristeros applied the same principle to their enemies, offering them an opportunity to confess before being executed, since their soul was as precious as any other man’s.⁷⁷⁹ Still, God preferred the blood of martyrs than that of the

enemy, since only the former could wash away the sins of the world and defeat Satan.⁷⁸⁰ In this paradigm, it is not surprising that many Cristeros preferred death when offered the opportunity to join the Callista army.⁷⁸¹

González Flores, the founder of the UP, was fascinated by the notion of martyrdom. His resistance philosophy consisted of two elements: collective civil disobedience and individual sacrifice.⁷⁸² When he founded the UP, he dreamed of martyrdom: “Holy Mother of Guadalupe! Concede that my last words on earth and my first declaration in heaven be the words ‘Viva Cristo Rey!’” Martyrdom was a constant theme in González Flores’s speeches and writings, which called upon his followers to sacrifice their blood.⁷⁸³ His only published work was titled *The Plebiscite of the Martyrs*.⁷⁸⁴ However, historian Jim Tuck stated that it would be wrong to label him as a death-obsessed fanatic.⁷⁸⁵ González Flores deplored violence, seeing it as a way to tyranny. He believed that only through individual sacrifice and a mass program of passive resistance could despotic systems could be overthrown.⁷⁸⁶ His concept of martyrdom and his ideas on democracy were more in league with the Sinarquista Movement than the Cristero Rebellion.

Meyer was able to count at least 250 Cristeros that met the church’s definition of “martyr.”⁷⁸⁷ The victims met their end with such a calm, almost gleeful, mien, that they instilled fear into the government troops.⁷⁸⁸ “It was a great adventure, so great and so noble, we were so happy at that time,” remarked a Cristero.⁷⁸⁹ To the rebels, death was not to be feared, since it was “communion with God.”⁷⁹⁰ The “need” to die was so great that the survivor of a mass execution felt sad that he was not chosen by God.⁷⁹¹ The wish

for martyrdom was not limited to the peasants on the battlefield; members of the ACJM and the Women's Brigades also sought it.⁷⁹²

Sinarquistas revered the act of martyrdom. They considered themselves monk-like "soldiers;" fanatical crusaders willing to give up their lives for God and country.⁷⁹³ Kenneth Prager linked Cristeros and Sinarquistas through martyrdom, saying that by dying for the Catholic faith, both groups attracted a rank and file composed primarily of obsessed lay elements.⁷⁹⁴ "By appealing to the religiosity of the mass, both movements had a momentum which was gained through the cult of martyrdom, which was an integral part of their crusading spirit," observed Prager.⁷⁹⁵ Prager also noted that the UNS was inspired by the sacrifice and martyrdom proclaimed by a founder of the League, Miguel Palomar y Vizcarra.⁷⁹⁶

The language of the UNS accentuated sacrifice, danger, blood, and death.⁷⁹⁷ Almost every issue of *El Sinarquista* cited a sacrifice made by a member for the glory of the movement.⁷⁹⁸ "God," the newspaper declared, "requires blood for the salvation of Mexico."⁷⁹⁹ José Trueba Olivares, an early leader of the UNS, compared the sacrifice of the Sinarquistas to that of the early Christian martyrs of Rome.⁸⁰⁰ The UNS incorporated martyrdom into its policy of nonviolence. Sinarquistas took no weapons to rallies because "they were not going to take the life of anybody, but risk their own for religion."⁸⁰¹ Hernández observed that martyrdom energized the militant spirit of the UNS.⁸⁰² According to Prager, what made martyrdom so appealing was its compatibility with the peasants' religious convictions and "tragic sense of life."⁸⁰³

Like the Cristeros, Sinarquistas used salvation to justify martyrdom. Prager stated that Sinarquismo used the peasants' willingness to sacrifice themselves as "an act that was God's way of allowing them to be redeemed and be saved."⁸⁰⁴ Salvation applied to the country as well, keeping with the movement's nationalist spirit. Each follower was asked to wage an unarmed struggle and sacrifice himself for the "freedom and greatness of Mexico."⁸⁰⁵ According to Meyer, the Sinarquistas rationalized that everything that needed conquering exacted a price: "It is dumb to suppose that Mexico can save itself without a fight... in order to save Mexico we must risk family, life and tranquility."⁸⁰⁶ This feeling was so strong that a mother brought her sick child to a march, stating: "If he dies, he is one martyr more."⁸⁰⁷

The act of sacrifice was used as an effective recruiting tool by the UNS. This tactic was engineered by Abascal, who saw the movement as a war in which lives and property were lost as a matter of course.⁸⁰⁸ To him, it was essential that massive numbers of unarmed Sinarquistas be killed in the streets. The violent death brought on by the marches invigorated the spirit of the movement and gave the UNS a tremendous boost in membership.⁸⁰⁹ Calling the Sinarquistas "soldiers of freedom," Abascal said, "It would be regrettable and sad if they didn't lose a life when the enemy was fought."⁸¹⁰

The "Abascal method," consisting of immense numbers of marchers, provoked the desired response from the authorities. Hernández documented at least 87 martyrs between the years 1939, when the tactic was introduced and 1941, the height of the Sinarquista Movement.⁸¹¹ Hence, there existed a direct corollary between death and

recruitment. A similarity existed in the Cristero Rebellion, in which Meyer argued that the clergy saw the sacrifice of the rebels as potent recruiting tool.⁸¹²

Two prominent examples of martyrdom existed in the Sinarquista Movement. The first was José Antonio Urquiza, a prominent member of the UNS who was assassinated in 1938.⁸¹³ Although it was later determined to be untrue, most Sinarquistas assumed that Urquiza had been killed on the orders of Cárdenas.⁸¹⁴ Urquiza, known to Sinarquistas as “*El Ausente*” (“the Absent One”), became a celebrity of the movement.⁸¹⁵ Another martyr was María Teresa Bustos, killed in the infamous “Celaya massacre” of 1939.⁸¹⁶ Bustos was carrying the national flag when shot by the agrarian reserves.⁸¹⁷ The bloodstained ensign was procured by the UNS, which passed it down from one leader to the next as a symbol of sacrifice, a tradition that continues to this day.⁸¹⁸

The Mexican Revolution

The Cristeros and Sinarquistas considered themselves counterrevolutionary. Both movements stridently opposed the Mexican Revolution, which they saw as an obstacle to the creation of the Christian Social Order. The revolution was seen as an atheistic entity, intent on eradicating church influence in Mexico. It had created anarchy, threatening to destroy peace and order, which was the legacy of the *patronato real*. The revolution fostered the evils of communism and socialist education, menaces to one’s family and country. Moreover, it was apparent that the revolution had failed in its promise of

improving the lot of average Mexicans. The Mexican Revolution was continually vilified by the ideologies of the Cristeros and Sinarquistas. The general discontent created by the revolution effectively generated the mass support for both movements.

“One might simply say that the Cristiada was a movement of reaction against the Mexican Revolution,” observed Meyer.⁸¹⁹ He added that the rebellion was doubly counterrevolutionary, both in the context of Mexican politics and in the technical and sociological sense of the term: “squabble, quarrel, conflict, [and] riot.”⁸²⁰ Indeed, the Cristeros viewed their struggle as the opposite of the chaos engendered by the revolution.⁸²¹ This sentiment was voiced by their greatest general, Enrique Gorostieta: “Our fight, despite the fact that it is a guerilla movement... I am proud to declare of it that it is far from the anarchy and the disorder, like our enemies of justice and honor.”⁸²² The antirevolutionary sentiment of the peasant rebels was shared by their middle-class counterparts, the members of the League.⁸²³

Historian David Bailey saw the rebellion as an attempt by Catholic militants to destroy the regime created by a “godless” revolution.⁸²⁴ Andrés Azkue agreed, admiring the Cristeros for their resilience: “They are the clear reflection of a Christian people that resists death at the hands of a modern revolution.”⁸²⁵ Azkue felt that the war was not fought to open the churches, but to finish the revolution once and for all.⁸²⁶ Aurelio Acevedo, a Cristero leader, protested that the adjective “revolutionary” be applied to him, asserting that his cause was the exact “opposite of a revolution.”⁸²⁷ His statement echoed the hopes of many Cristeros, who wished for the reformation of society, not its destruction.⁸²⁸ The rebels used this philosophy when they established their self-rule.

They strove to prevent the military from having influence on civilian rule, a defect they saw in the revolutionary regime.⁸²⁹

The Sinarquista Movement, with its battle cry of “No Revolution!” was a continuation of the reactionary sentiment expressed by the Cristero Rebellion.⁸³⁰ “Synarquismo [sic.],” wrote Hernández, “represented the counter-revolutionary response of the next generation.”⁸³¹ Sinarquistas took the Cristeros’ counterrevolutionary theme and developed it further, disparaging not only the anticlerical aspects of the Mexican Revolution, but also the Marxist features it acquired in the 1930s.⁸³² The UNS believed that the country had been overtaken by a corrupt “revolutionary gang” that had failed to deliver on its guarantees of social reform and economic progress.⁸³³ As Meyer observed, “Synarquismo utilized in a very effective and dangerous manner the promises that the Mexican Revolution was unable to fulfill.”⁸³⁴ Synarquismo saw that the revolution had destroyed colonial civilization without creating a superior state.⁸³⁵ Synarquismo, signifying “with order,” was established to oppose the anarchy created by the revolution.⁸³⁶

The UNS considered the Mexican Revolution a great threat, making its defeat the primary goal. Prager described the relationship between the two: “While the revolution promises the better life of justice and equality, invokes the good and undertakes its achievement, counterrevolution builds on evils already achieved, arms the people in their own humiliation and their suffering.”⁸³⁷ Synarquismo saw itself as the expression of the popular will that had not been reached by the revolution.⁸³⁸ The UNS denounced

revolutionary society as unjust, with its true purpose of enriching the politicians at the expense of the peasantry.⁸³⁹

Prager argued that the founders of Sinarquismo were alienated from the world created by the revolution.⁸⁴⁰ The monopolistic control of the country's political, economic, and social processes by the revolutionaries reinforced their belief that it was impossible to have honest elections in Mexico.⁸⁴¹ The Sinarquistas felt that it was essential to create an alternate society, which would serve as the basis for "a new man, a new mode of community."⁸⁴² This concept was appealing to many Mexicans, who saw the hollowness of revolutionary promises as their wages were outpaced by the cost of living.⁸⁴³ Prager believed that by tapping into this discontent, the Sinarquista Movement was able to turn the Mexican Revolution against itself.⁸⁴⁴

Sinarquista literature was devoted to attacking the revolution, calling it the root of Mexico's ailment and disorder.⁸⁴⁵ The revolution, Sinarquistas claimed, had created division among Mexicans and left the people impoverished.⁸⁴⁶ The despotic revolutionary government allowed union bosses to oppress workers and failed to provide land to the peasants.⁸⁴⁷ The corrupt state had misused public funds, while the country lacked schools, roads, and public services.⁸⁴⁸ The revolution was led not by true patriots, but by self-serving lesser men.⁸⁴⁹ Instead of bringing progress, the revolution had left millions in "illiteracy, injustice, misery and terror."⁸⁵⁰ The abomination of the Mexican Revolution could only be exorcised through the creation of a Christian Social Order.⁸⁵¹

Sinarquismo attacked the revolution by linking it to communism. Sinarquistas claimed that the Cárdenas regime was run by communists and influenced by the Soviet

Union.⁸⁵² The rhetoric intensified the fears of the Mexican middle class, who had witnessed Cárdenas's partiality for radical leftist organizations like the CTM and the CNC.⁸⁵³ This group was concerned that the government favored the interests of the working class above all others.⁸⁵⁴ These worries were exacerbated by Cárdenas's support for Republican Spain and his welcoming of civil war refugees, many of whom were communists.⁸⁵⁵ The UNS tried to counteract the socialist programs of the Mexican Revolution by offering its own proposals for the working classes.

Sinarquismo subscribed to the belief that the labor movement had become too radical for the nation's good. The UNS wanted a cordial relationship to exist between capital and labor: "Neither employers nor employees should forget that they are above all, Mexicans, and that the unity of the country comes first."⁸⁵⁶ Under the corporatist Sinarquista plan, labor unions would be dedicated to the moral, material, and intellectual development of its workers.⁸⁵⁷ The unions would refrain from engaging in "unlawful strikes" or promoting class struggle.⁸⁵⁸ Still, Sinarquismo advocated that laborers receive a decent wage and work in safe conditions.⁸⁵⁹ Under the Christian Social Order, the state's function was to develop industry, while protecting the laborer and fostering the common good.⁸⁶⁰

Sinarquismo singled out socialist education as the worst institution of the Mexican Revolution. Its criticisms of the educational system found favor with many religious Mexicans that opposed the anticlerical teachings of the state. Allying itself with parental groups, such as the National Union of Parents, the UNS attacked Article 3 as "unconstitutional, anti-Mexican, oppressive, obscurantist, and retrograde."⁸⁶¹

Sinarquismo demanded that educational decisions be made by the parents, not the state.⁸⁶² Under the Christian Social Order, education was to be religious in nature, dedicated to eradicating illiteracy.⁸⁶³

Agrarian Reform

Next to religion, agrarian reform was the most important ideological facet of both the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement. Some historians argued that it was the most important reason why peasants joined the movements in great numbers. Land reform was seen as the greatest disappointment of the Mexican Revolution. Many campesinos felt that the revolution had failed to deliver on its promise contained in Article 17 of the Constitution.⁸⁶⁴

The land distribution that was taking place was deemed defective and insufficient. The Cristeros and Sinarquistas capitalized on this discontent, offering lucrative alternatives to the destitute. The Mexican government counterattacked by portraying the two groups as reactionary forces allied with the hacendados. However, there is ample evidence to establish that the Cristero Rebellion and Sinarquismo were true agrarian movements that were willing to go further than the government in redistributing the land.

The Mexican government used the socialist device of the ejido to redistribute land to the peasants. The ejido was not private property; instead it was land that was owned by the state and parceled out to communities for cultivation. In his study of the

Cristeros, Meyer was very critical of the ejido, explaining how the system failed the peasants.⁸⁶⁵ Instead of benefiting the campesino, the ejido was used by the government as a political control mechanism.⁸⁶⁶ Land distribution lay at the hands of the local ejidal committee, an entity with overreaching powers. The committees controlled the movement of land parcels (which included allotment, inheritance, and planting) and the management of communal forests and pastures.⁸⁶⁷ Ejidal boards were controlled by corrupt officials, who manipulated the system to enrich themselves at the expense of the peasants that they were supposed to serve.⁸⁶⁸ Ejidatarios, those lucky enough to receive parcels, were unable to use their lands effectively.⁸⁶⁹ They lacked the necessary loans to obtain seed, beasts of burden, and other necessities.⁸⁷⁰

Several authors suggested that the Mexican Revolution was not a true agrarian revolt.⁸⁷¹ They argued that the masses were mobilized by a “national bourgeoisie” in order to overthrow an unwanted dictatorship.⁸⁷² Once the dictator was deposed, this elite group of “revolutionaries” imposed their own rule and disregarded the interests of those who had supported them.⁸⁷³ The great exception was Emiliano Zapata, the most radical leader of the revolution. Zapata died fighting for the rights of peasants, something for which the Cristeros admired him greatly.⁸⁷⁴ Zapata’s vision of land reform differed significantly from the state-led agrarian reform program of the 1920s, which was disdained by the Cristeros.⁸⁷⁵ Plutarco Elías Calles, however, represented what the Cristeros most despised in the revolution. Calles, like other “revolutionary” presidents, distributed land sparingly as a way to pay lip service to Article 17. In 1926, the vast

majority of peasants remained outside the ejido system.⁸⁷⁶ The Cristeros took up the cause of the disinherited classes, condemning Calles for betraying his own citizens.⁸⁷⁷

Two historians, José Díaz and Ramón Rodríguez, insisted that the rebellion was not a religious war.⁸⁷⁸ They argued that La Cristiada was caused by an “ecological crisis” in Los Altos, induced by a shortage of land, combined with a rising population.⁸⁷⁹ While Meyer believed that the root cause of the rebellion was religion, he stated that the agrarian problem was particularly acute in Cristero areas.⁸⁸⁰ In Jalisco, the ejido system negatively affected small property owners, while leaving the haciendas, which were powerful and influential, unscathed.⁸⁸¹ Many of those dispossessed landowners became rebels.⁸⁸² Moreover, the land that was distributed tended to the worst in the region, where it was unfeasible to raise crops.⁸⁸³ In order to survive, the peasants that worked these lands were forced to work as laborers on the haciendas.⁸⁸⁴ The government’s favoritism towards the landed elite generated the resentment that fueled the rebellion.⁸⁸⁵

Jean Meyer’s questionnaire and Jenny Purnell’s study revealed how important the agrarian problem was to the rebellion.⁸⁸⁶ The Cristeros’ main foes throughout the conflict were the agraristas, the agrarian militia of the government.⁸⁸⁷ The Cristeros and agraristas shared the same set of religious beliefs and practices.⁸⁸⁸ Hence, Meyer and Purnell concluded that the key dividing factor between the two mortal enemies was land reform, not religion.⁸⁸⁹

The Cristeros rejected revolutionary agrarian reform, seeing it as a form of enslavement, in which the peasant was tied to the land without actually owning it.⁸⁹⁰ The government’s conscription of ejidatarios supported their accusations.⁸⁹¹ The agrarian

reserves were forced to fight at the front, suffering the brunt of Cristero attacks.⁸⁹²

Purnell stated that the Callista regime depended on thousands of agraristas to conduct its counterinsurgency campaign.⁸⁹³

The Mexican government was aware that the lack of land distribution fueled the insurgency. The state tried to undercut support for the rebellion by distributing land in the troubled areas.⁸⁹⁴ It parceled out more land during the three years of the insurgency than during the ten years prior.⁸⁹⁵ After the war ended, the state continued issuing ejidos as a conciliatory and coercive measure.⁸⁹⁶ The effort paid off, since those towns that had firmly established agrarian committees did not rise up in rebellion.⁸⁹⁷ The Cristeros realized that the agraristas were forced to fight and never lost hope in trying to convert them to their cause.⁸⁹⁸ Still, the Cristeros were not against land reform *per se*, but the manner in which the state was implementing it.⁸⁹⁹ Private, not communal, property was what drove many Cristeros to rebel.⁹⁰⁰

The Cristeros incorporated their own version of land reform into the Christian Social Order. The Cristeros seized land and animals from haciendas they felt were not being productive.⁹⁰¹ They took complete control of the economy wherever they could and imposed rules to eliminate inefficiency.⁹⁰² Agriculture, lands, and cattle were administered and price control measures were placed on maize.⁹⁰³ Ironically, the Cristeros farmed the lands communally.⁹⁰⁴ However, this was done out of necessity and private ownership of land would have been established once the rebellion triumphed. The Cristeros promised ejidatarios that they would be given titles to their properties

under “just conditions.”⁹⁰⁵ Moreover, Article 51 of the General Order stipulated that private property would be respected.⁹⁰⁶

The government, as well as some writers, accused the Cristeros of being a reactionary movement against land reform. The agrarista leadership called the Cristeros the “White Guards,” who were in the pay of the Vatican and the landowners.⁹⁰⁷ However, Meyer used his research to debunk these claims.⁹⁰⁸ According to him, the hacendados never considered the Cristeros as their allies against the government’s program of land reform.⁹⁰⁹ The landed elite saw the Cristeros as bandits, calling their movement “*la ratería* (“the robbery”).⁹¹⁰ On the other hand, they openly welcomed the Mexican army, providing them with intelligence, supplies, and horses.⁹¹¹ Some of them even executed Cristeros.⁹¹² Thus, Meyer described the rebellion as a war between the rich and poor.⁹¹³

Sinarquismo continued the Cristeros’ tradition of agrarian protest. Historian Rionda Ramírez argued that Cristerismo endured past the year 1929 because the issue of land reform had not been resolved.⁹¹⁴ The appearance of Sinarquismo, she stated, revived this social force and channeled it into nonviolent action.⁹¹⁵ Sinarquismo offered the same enticing promise of private land to campesinos.⁹¹⁶ Sinarquismo, like the Cristero Rebellion, wanted a Christian Social Order based on agriculture. Both movements turned their backs on a modern, industrial Mexico, preferring the agricultural, colonial aspect of the past. It is ironic that the vigorous application of land reform under Lázaro Cárdenas made the message of Sinarquismo even more appealing. However, this was due to the peasants’ desire for private, not ejidal property.

Prager noted that the corruption and bureaucracy inherent in the ejido system only worsened the plight of the peasants.⁹¹⁷ During the early period of the UNS, over three million ejidatarios had pending claims for land distribution.⁹¹⁸ The biggest problem, according to Hernández, was not the lack of land, but the abundance of government red tape.⁹¹⁹ Peasants, uncertain of the future, were desperate for a piece of land, a situation that Sinarquismo exploited.⁹²⁰ Another predicament was the lack of available credit, since peasants had to deal with powerful (and corrupt) bank officials.⁹²¹ The situation deteriorated in 1938, when credit from the ejidal bank was reduced.⁹²²

Insecurity was an additional problem of the ejido. Peasants believed that the lack of a clear deed made them vulnerable to the greed of agrarian superintendents.⁹²³ The ejidos were also inefficient, partly because peasants were not motivated to work on land that was not theirs.⁹²⁴ Other negative factors were an expansion of the population and a lack of improvement in the country's irrigation system.⁹²⁵ These elements, along with a drought, led to a reduction in maize production, which in turn increased the price of that vital commodity.⁹²⁶ The economic stress forced many Mexicans to leave the country to work as *braceros* (migrant workers) in the United States.⁹²⁷ According to Prager, a large portion of the peasantry felt betrayed by the government.⁹²⁸ This pessimistic conception of agrarian reform formed the basis of Sinarquista ideology.⁹²⁹

Sinarquismo tailored its program to address the agrarian issue. The UNS proclaimed that the revolution had failed to keep its promise of giving land to the peasants.⁹³⁰ The Sinarquistas vehemently rejected the ejido program, saying it was a system alien to the rural world.⁹³¹ Sinarquismo claimed that the ejido bounded the

peasant to the state rather than the land.⁹³² The UNS published compelling pamphlets, such as one from 1938 titled, “Peasant: the revolution has betrayed you.”⁹³³ Sinarquismo proposed that in order to rehabilitate national agriculture, large properties had to be subdivided into small *private* landholdings.⁹³⁴ Sinarquista propaganda affirmed that the right of private property “was conferred on man by Natural Law and taught by Christianity.”⁹³⁵ The enemy of private property was not the haciendas, but the “communist” state of Cárdenas, along with Protestant groups.⁹³⁶ “The UNS fights to make you the absolute owner of the land, to get you a definite deed,” Abascal told peasants.⁹³⁷

Sinarquista propaganda targeted the agrarian reserves, the traditional enemies of the Cristeros. Federico Gil condemned the reserves, stating, “Neither order, nor the material or moral betterment of the peasant, nor the complete and stable development of our agriculture, can be attained unless the Government sees fit to remove the gravest obstacle to the attaining of these ends, which obstacles consist of these armed groups of land users designated by the name of ‘Agrarian Reserves.’”⁹³⁸ The Sinarquistas viewed the agraristas as a state instrument of “terror and tyranny” designed to intimidate and impoverish the peasant.⁹³⁹ The Sinarquistas suffered casualties at the hands of the agrarian reserves, just as the Cristeros did. In their marches clamoring for agrarian reform, several Sinarquistas were killed, the prime examples being the martyrs of the “Celaya massacre” of 1939.⁹⁴⁰

The Sinarquista message worked, enticing thousands of disgruntled peasants to join the movement. Hernández noted the allure of the UNS, stating, “The strongest

appeal Sinarquismo makes, and the most dangerous, is to the unrealized ambitions of the Mexican revolution [sic.] itself... Sinarquistas hold out the prospect of private land ownership.”⁹⁴¹ Sinarquismo also attracted small property owners, who saw themselves as the losers in the state’s land redistribution program.⁹⁴² Hernández stated that even those who benefited from the ejido system were attracted by the lure of private property.⁹⁴³ Meyer agreed, noting that many agraristas, unhappy with certain aspects of the ejido, joined the Sinarquista Movement.⁹⁴⁴ Moreover, Sinarquismo shared a distinct characteristic with La Cristiada in that it enjoyed greater success in those areas where the government’s agrarian program experienced the most difficulty.⁹⁴⁵

The Sinarquistas incorporated agrarian reform into their vision of the Christian Social Order. They felt that they could distribute land to the peasants using the unexploited lands in northern Mexico and near the Pacific coast.⁹⁴⁶ Land would also be obtained from the large estates, which would be compensated.⁹⁴⁷ The ejidos, the “imperfect form of property,” would be transformed into individual landholdings.⁹⁴⁸ Small property owners would be exempt, since they had already achieved the desired goal.⁹⁴⁹ The state would support the independent peasants with guarantees, security, protection, and financing.⁹⁵⁰ Moreover, credit unions would be established in the form of “genuine” cooperatives, where farmers could obtain long-term loans at low cost.⁹⁵¹ Still, the Christian Social Order demanded that private interests remain subordinate to the national well-being.⁹⁵²

An interesting aspect of the Christian Social Order was the establishment of an agrarian, instead of industrial, society. In this manner, both Sinarquismo and La

Cristiada were anti-modernist. The Sinarquista ideal was to have each peasant individually cultivate his own piece of the “national soil.”⁹⁵³ Instead working for an employer, families would live self-sufficiently and sell their surplus on the open market.⁹⁵⁴ The goal was to form a “landed bourgeoisie that would share in the welfare of the community and economic security of the largest number of Mexicans.”⁹⁵⁵

Sinarquistas rejected a country based on industrialization because it placed it under foreign tutelage and impeded the formation of a society composed of small independent landowners.⁹⁵⁶ Hernández argued that the Sinarquistas ignored monopolistic and state capitalism in favor of nineteenth-century economics, where industrial production was performed by craftsmen.⁹⁵⁷ National wealth would be derived from agriculture, argued the Sinarquistas.⁹⁵⁸ Consequently, the nation would focus its educational and other efforts towards its rural sector.⁹⁵⁹

The Sinarquistas looked for opportunities to experiment with their ideology of land reform. The UNS called upon its members to get elected to the post of ejidal superintendent.⁹⁶⁰ Others were encouraged to accept whatever plots of land they received from the government.⁹⁶¹ Once in place, the Sinarquista peasants and superintendents solicited the agrarian authorities for registration of the plots so that they could become privatized.⁹⁶² The Sinarquistas also tried to take over ejidos directly, with the intent of subdividing these into private holdings.⁹⁶³ Lastly, agrarian reform was implemented in the colonization scheme of María Auxiliadora.⁹⁶⁴ The colony, however, was unable to achieve this goal because of the difficulties encountered. The colonists were instructed by Abascal to pool their resources in order to survive.⁹⁶⁵ The

Sinarquistas repeated the irony of the Cristeros, who had to be communistic until they could become self-sufficient.⁹⁶⁶

Several historians viewed Sinarquismo as a true movement of land reform. Meyer, who doubted that the Cristeros championed land rights, saw the Sinarquistas differently, stating that their organization was “the great agrarian movement” of Mexico.⁹⁶⁷ Meyer believed that peasants were the first intended converts of the Sinarquista Movement, who were supposed to be followed by the workers, the middle class, and the intellectuals.⁹⁶⁸ Hernández agreed, stating that Sinarquismo continued to attract the peasantry because it challenged the entire concept and system of agrarian reform.⁹⁶⁹

Prager stated that the UNS was related to Mexico’s two distinctive traditions of agrarian protest.⁹⁷⁰ One was the “folk tradition” advocated by the country’s illiterate peasants, who translated protest in terms of direct reprisals against “concrete personalities.”⁹⁷¹ The other tradition was of those educated elements of society (journalists, lawyers, clerics, politicians, philosophers, and professors), who saw protest in terms of its legal, philosophical, and political aspects.⁹⁷² In essence, the key to Sinarquismo’s popularity was in adopting the needs of the peasant: “complete ownership of the land; work and bread for all; the right to preserve his property, security and dignity.”⁹⁷³

Nationalism, Fascism, and Hispanismo

Important differences in the ideology of nationalism of the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement exist. The Sinarquistas' ideology of nationhood was more developed than that of their Cristero brethren. The Cristeros, while undoubtedly patriotic, had a confined sense of nationalism that was directed towards the *patria chica*; the region in which they lived. On the other hand, Sinarquista ideology encompassed the whole of Mexico, which they called the "fatherland." In essence, Sinarquismo was a national program, while Cristerismo was regional. Moreover, Sinarquismo was also part of a larger movement, known as the Mexican Radical Right, which also included secular groups. Furthermore, the UNS had similarities to extremist nationalist groups, known as *las derechas*, based in other parts of Latin America. Another factor that distinguished Sinarquismo from La Cristiada was its undeniably fascist aspect. Still, the Cristeros and Sinarquistas shared the xenophobic aspect of nationalism. Elements of hispanismo, the glorification of Spanish culture, can also be found in both movements.

Meyer described the Cristero Rebellion as a patriotic movement.⁹⁷⁴ Azkue agreed, saying that the Cristeros had three loves: God, *patria*, family.⁹⁷⁵ Although the insurgents were in rebellion against the government, they still cherished parts of Mexican national tradition. This nationalism was evident in the Cristeros' adoration of the Mexican flag, to which they added an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.⁹⁷⁶ To the Cristeros, the red and white on the ensign symbolized the martyrdom of Christ.⁹⁷⁷ The respect that the Cristeros had for the national pennant was so intense that they were upset

by the scarcity of flags among the federal troops.⁹⁷⁸ They were also disappointed that the *federales* abandoned the national colors in favor of other flags used for communication.⁹⁷⁹

The Cristeros lacked a uniform; however they distinguished themselves from the agrarian reserves by wearing a black armband (symbolizing mourning), which was replaced by another with the Cristero colors of red and white.⁹⁸⁰ The Cristeros adopted a few Mexican heroes as their own, namely Hidalgo, Morelos (who were priests), and Iturbide (a defender of the church).⁹⁸¹ However, no explanation is given as to why these figures were emulated. Furthermore, the Cristeros demonstrated their patriotic passion by marching around the town plaza during festivals, with weapons displayed, to the tune of the national anthem.⁹⁸²

Jim Tuck, who conducted a regional analysis of the rebellion, stated that Los Altos was a *patria chica* in every way, except linguistically.⁹⁸³ Tuck described Alteños as “clannish, suspicious of outsiders, and conservative in an anarchistic, non-Hamiltonian way.”⁹⁸⁴ While he did not elaborate on the “anarchistic” element of the Cristeros, Tuck explained that they detested the Hamiltonian view of a central government, whether on a “federal, state or local” level.⁹⁸⁵ Tuck argued that this made the rebels prone to a decentralized leadership style consisting of *cabecillas*, or ringleaders.⁹⁸⁶ This argument is conceivable, given that the Cristeros rejected the authority of the League and lacked a singular military figure until the arrival of General Gorostieta. The Cristero disdain for strong, centralized authority clashed with Sinarquista ideology, a topic that is subsequently discussed.

Jim Tuck's research suggested that there were elements of hispanismo in Cristero society. According to Tuck, Los Altos, Mexico's most fervently Catholic region, had a unique culture which set it apart from the rest of the country.⁹⁸⁷ Tuck described the area as a "European Catholic enclave," unaffected by the pagan influences that were prevalent among the natives in Mexico.⁹⁸⁸ Tuck emphasized the isolation of Cristero culture by stating, "With their French, Spanish-Basque, and Germanic antecedents, the *Alteños* are ethnically as well as ideologically related to the narrow country clericalism that prevails in the Vendée, Navarre, and highland Austria."⁹⁸⁹ The Cristeros clung to their European ancestry and resisted influence from Mexican indigenous society. This Catholic European element of Cristero society is compatible with Sinarquista ideology, which emphasized an admiration of Spanish culture while rejecting Indian heritage. Known as hispanismo, this ideological element was an integral part of the Sinarquista Movement. On the other hand, the evidence does not suggest that the Cristeros glorified their Spanish legacy. In Cristero ideology, hispanismo was limited to the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.

Tuck stated that Los Altos unflaggingly supported the church throughout Mexico's various conflicts.⁹⁹⁰ The *Alteños* opposed Hidalgo's Independence movement (which contradicts the notion that they would have later considered him a "hero"), supported the conservative Independence movement against liberal Spain, and of course defended the church during the War of the Reform.⁹⁹¹ Moreover, this is the same region where the Religionero revolt of the late nineteenth century took place.⁹⁹² Tuck argued

that the strong faith of the Alteños kept the church from being attacked in their region during the early years of the Mexican Revolution.⁹⁹³

The governments of Carranza and Obregón pragmatically enforced the anticlerical aspects of the 1917 Constitution, limiting them to the traditionally secular areas of Tabasco and Veracruz.⁹⁹⁴ According to Tuck, they avoided attacking the church in Jalisco because they feared a conflict with the Alteños.⁹⁹⁵ Calles disregarded prudence, hence he found himself mired in the Cristero Rebellion. Luis González, in his history of San José de Gracia, a small village in the state of Michoacán, described the manner in which the *patria chica* affected the perception of Calles.⁹⁹⁶ The villagers in San José were not aware of the nationwide “constructive acts carried out by Don Plutarco.”⁹⁹⁷ Instead, they knew only of the “destructive ones,” namely the closing of the churches and persecution of the clergy in their village.⁹⁹⁸ This indicates that the Cristeros’ concern was for the local, not national welfare of the church. National concerns were the domain of the League; the middle-class element of the rebellion that remained isolated in Mexico City.

The Cristeros’ notion of *patria chica* was reinforced by their xenophobia. Their intense faith made them intolerant of outside influence. This xenophobia was related by a priest who lived there for many years: “You can’t imagine how it is in those little villages, how set in their ways these people are. Even today they will tell you to your face, ‘If you’re not Catholic, get out of town.’”⁹⁹⁹ Tuck described their religion as a “back-country” variety, removed from modernism and ecumenism.¹⁰⁰⁰

The Mexican Revolution was seen by the Cristeros and their League allies as a movement influenced by outsiders.¹⁰⁰¹ Indeed, the Cristeros blamed foreign entities such as the Masons, Protestant groups, and the United States for instigating the rebellion.¹⁰⁰² Calles was referred to as “The Turk” (a reference to his alleged Arabic heritage), who was the “hireling of international Freemasonry” and represented the “Yankee and Protestant foreigner.”¹⁰⁰³ Moreover, the League believed that the Cristeros were fighting bolshevism.¹⁰⁰⁴ In contrast, the church was seen as part of the Cristero community and the priests as originating from the peasantry.¹⁰⁰⁵ This strong xenophobic element of nationalism was also present in the Sinarquista Movement. Nevertheless, Tuck stated that for all their “narrow conservatism,” it would be wrong to label the Cristeros as fascists or racists.¹⁰⁰⁶ Meyer agreed with Tuck’s assessment, stating that some authors wrongly portrayed the Cristeros as a “proto-fascist” movement.¹⁰⁰⁷

Hernández stated that Sinarquismo was the “fiercest nationalist attack” faced by Mexico’s revolutionary regime.¹⁰⁰⁸ The Sinarquista Movement, unlike the Cristero Rebellion, had a better defined ideology of nationalism. This ideological component was as important to the UNS as agrarian reform and the Christian Social Order. Sinarquismo had an unmistakably fascist aspect to it, which inevitably caused concerns that it was part of a “Nazi” conspiracy to take over Mexico. Whereas the Cristero Rebellion was perceived by scholars as an isolated, singular event, the Sinarquista Movement was seen as part of a nationalist phenomenon that spread throughout Latin America.

Sinarquismo belonged to the Mexican Radical Right, a term given to a group of Mexican nationalist organizations that emerged in the years leading up to World War II.

These extremists shared a similar xenophobic and anticommunist component in their ideologies. Sinarquismo also had a likeness to South American nationalist groups known as *las derechas*. Another important feature of Sinarquista nationalism was hispanismo, which made Sinarquista ideology similar in many ways to that of Franquista Spain. Despite appearances, Sinarquismo cannot be simply classified as a fascist organization. Nationalism was but one component of a complex ideology that made Sinarquismo a unique Mexican experience.

Nationalism was a recurrent theme in Sinarquista propaganda.¹⁰⁰⁹ Salvador Abascal described the movement as a “nationalist, nonviolent, mystical struggle.”¹⁰¹⁰ Sinarquismo wanted to bring an end to the anarchy of the Mexican Revolution by encouraging all Mexicans to work together. This concept of national unity consisted of strength, peace, and prosperity.¹⁰¹¹ Sinarquismo defined itself as a union that was above all classes and parties, professing to represent the “comprehensive and inclusive character of the nation.”¹⁰¹² Sinarquismo’s preoccupation was with the salvation of “the Fatherland,” a term it recurrently applied to the Mexican Republic.¹⁰¹³ Hernández wrote that the UNS skillfully developed a “brilliant nationalism, which captivated the spirit of post-revolutionary Mexico.”¹⁰¹⁴

Sinarquistas made every conceivable effort to make themselves appear patriotic to the Mexican public. Sinarquista rallies, which were full of uniforms, flags, fiery speeches, and military-style marches, were the hallmark of the organization. Green was the official color of the Sinarquista Movement.¹⁰¹⁵ The uniform consisted of green trousers and shirts and an armband with a green map of Mexico imposed on a white

circle.¹⁰¹⁶ The Sinarquista flag was red, housing a green map of Mexico encircled in white with the letters “U.N.S.” stamped in the middle.¹⁰¹⁷ According to Prager, the green color represented patrimony, white stood for justice, and red symbolized liberty.¹⁰¹⁸ The Sinarquista salute consisted of moving the right arm across the chest along with the shout “Viva Mexico!”¹⁰¹⁹ Sinarquista songs and slogans were replete with patriotism, sacrifice, and victory.¹⁰²⁰

Abascal said that “Sinarquismo had to acquire the mobility, the precision, and the flexibility of an army on the verge of battle.”¹⁰²¹ This goal was accomplished through the use of massive, nonviolent marches, which were the most potent weapon at the Sinarquistas’ disposal. The UNS took pride in being able to organize the “takeover” of cities using efficiency and coordination.¹⁰²² The Sinarquistas were able to elude detection from the authorities by arriving in small groups at predetermined locations throughout a city.¹⁰²³ These were arranged along a route, so that the groups could easily join the march once it began.¹⁰²⁴ The marchers were eerily silent; no talking was allowed, except for commands in a low voice given by the chiefs.¹⁰²⁵ Smoking and eating were out of the question.¹⁰²⁶ The element of surprise was the essential component to any Sinarquista march. While impressive, the military-style rallies of the Sinarquistas were suspicious and alien to many Mexicans, who inevitably compared them to the fascist *assalto* and the Nazi *Sturm*.¹⁰²⁷ Moreover, the Sinarquista uniform was alarmingly similar to that of Hitler’s Brown Shirts.

Sinarquismo promoted an isolationist policy for Mexico, which placed it at odds with the Pan-Americanism of the United States.¹⁰²⁸ This, along with an emulation of

Hispanidad, gave the UNS a distinctive anti-American character.¹⁰²⁹ The Sinarquistas denounced the “Yankee imperialism” of United States foreign policy, as well as the racial discrimination faced by Mexican migrant workers in that country.¹⁰³⁰ The UNS employed a hostile campaign against the Anglo-Saxon countries of the U.S. and Great Britain, claiming that their goal in World War II was to expand their empires, not defend democracy.¹⁰³¹

Sinarquismo reminded Mexicans of previous American interventions, particularly the loss of Mexican territory in the nineteenth century.¹⁰³² The UNS also claimed that Mexican Catholicism was in peril due to the “Protestantizing” efforts of the Americans.¹⁰³³ Sinarquista nationalism demanded that Mexico never submit itself as a satellite to the “Colossus of the North.”¹⁰³⁴ Accordingly, the UNS insisted that Mexico refrain from joining the Allied cause and to end its *bracero* program with the United States.¹⁰³⁵ The Sinarquistas continued advocating a non-interventionist policy until 1942, when Mexico’s entry into World War II made their position untenable.¹⁰³⁶

The Sinarquistas’ disdain for Americans was exceeded only by their hatred for communists. The UNS was an uncompromising foe of the Mexican Left, reserving a special contempt for Mexican labor – a group they associated with the soviets.¹⁰³⁷ The Sinarquistas claimed that the objective of communism was to destroy the family and “the good habits essential for the material and moral prosperity of the country.”¹⁰³⁸ Sinarquismo, the champion of the Catholic faith, saw itself as the “absolute denial of atheism and communist irreligiousness.”¹⁰³⁹

The UNS denounced communism as a producer of anarchy through its advocacy of class war.¹⁰⁴⁰ The communist tenet of a classless society was threatening to the Sinarquista vision of the Christian Social Order, where a stratified civilization guaranteed peace and stability. Moreover, the UNS rejected historical materialism, since this Marxist concept negated the role of God's will in the course of history.¹⁰⁴¹ The Sinarquistas' abhorrence of communism was so intense that they advocated the destruction of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴² Sinarquismo's undertaking of constructive nationalism could only be achieved once it saved Mexico from "communist totalitarianism."¹⁰⁴³

The conspicuous feature of the Sinarquista Movement was that it esteemed European fascism. According to Prager, Sinarquismo admired Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Franco's Spain.¹⁰⁴⁴ The material progress and military power of these countries was appealing to the Sinarquistas.¹⁰⁴⁵ The UNS emulated the fascist "cult" of a strong leader, confident that its *Jefe Supremo*, Salvador Abascal, would be the man capable of bringing greatness to Mexico.¹⁰⁴⁶ The Sinarquista Movement copied another trait inherent in fascism by appealing to the feelings, not intellect, of its audience.¹⁰⁴⁷ Leftist writer Carlos Velasco Gil characterized the UNS as an unoriginal entity that mimicked the proven methods, banners, and uniforms of the fascists.¹⁰⁴⁸ In the advent of World War II, Western intelligence services, along with some contemporary observers, worried that there was more than a casual connection between Sinarquistas and the European fascists.¹⁰⁴⁹

The Mexican Left equated Sinarquismo with Nazism. It accused the Sinarquistas of being a subversive tool of the Nazis, an allegation many Mexicans accepted.¹⁰⁵⁰ The UNS was labeled as a “fifth column,” preparing Mexico for an Axis invasion.¹⁰⁵¹ The Mexican press joined the fray, with *El Nacional* stating, “Sinarquismo represented a regressive movement with very clear affinities with the foreign interest of the expansionist countries under totalitarian regimes.”¹⁰⁵² The Mexican Left, spearheaded by the aggressive CTM, charged that the Sinarquistas were being financed and militarily trained by Germany.¹⁰⁵³

The members of the UNS were derided as “Nazinarquistas,” while Abascal was called the “Führer of Mexico” and the “Hitler with *huaraches* [sandals].”¹⁰⁵⁴ The Left also charged that the Sinarquista colony in Baja California was a scheme to acquire a Pacific port for the Japanese.¹⁰⁵⁵ When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Mexican leftists intensified their efforts and demanded that the UNS, being a “creole assault force” of the Nazis, be dissolved by the Mexican government.¹⁰⁵⁶

As Sinarquismo was gaining popularity, the Mexican Left concocted a foreign conspiracy theory, designed to attack the Mexican core of the movement.¹⁰⁵⁷ The Left charged that the UNS was not endemic; that it was a creation of Nazism and the Spanish Falange.¹⁰⁵⁸ It alleged that the acronym “UNS” was the German word for “us,” taken from the phrase “*Gott mit uns*” (“God is with us”), the rallying cry of a Kaiser military unit during World War I.¹⁰⁵⁹ Even more damaging was the assertion that a Nazi agent by the name of Oskar Helmut Schreiter founded Sinarquismo.¹⁰⁶⁰ According to the Left, Schreiter, a professor of linguistics at the University of Guanajuato, headed an

anticommunist center that included José Antonio Urquiza (the traditional founder of the UNS) among its members.¹⁰⁶¹ Allegedly, Schreiter gathered his “disciples” (Urquiza and others) to combine elements of Nazism and Falangismo in order to create the Sinarquista Movement.¹⁰⁶²

The allegations that Nazis controlled the UNS are false. The importance of Schreiter to Sinarquismo was exaggerated by the Left. According to German records, Schreiter was a petty criminal, not a Nazi spy.¹⁰⁶³ Hernández stated that the only link between Schreiter and Sinarquismo was a casual contact with UNS leader Manuel Torres Bueno.¹⁰⁶⁴ Hernández maintained that the two men did not share philosophies and that Schreiter had nothing to do with the early stages of Sinarquismo.¹⁰⁶⁵ Meyer also defended the independence of the Sinarquista Movement. Meyer backed his claim that the UNS never received outside funds by recounting the Sinarquistas’ extreme poverty. Many members could not afford the requisite uniform or the publication *El Sinarquista*.¹⁰⁶⁶ Meyer stated that Sinarquistas raised their meager capital through the collection of dues, which typically amounted to five *centavos* per member.¹⁰⁶⁷ Hernández concurred with Meyer’s assessment, stating that the Sinarquistas didn’t need outside funding to rally 50,000 men (as was claimed by the Left), since most traveled by foot or second-class bus.¹⁰⁶⁸

The evaluation of the Sinarquistas by the U.S. intelligence services also deserves scrutiny. Historian Friedrich Schuler stated that the U.S. and Britain used fear of fascism as a propaganda tool to mobilize citizens against the Axis powers in Latin America.¹⁰⁶⁹ Counterintelligence by these countries created a large trail of rumors, half-truths, and

misinformation, such as an assessment by the Office of Strategic Services which stated that the goal of the Sinarquistas was to overthrow the Mexican government and plunge the country into civil war.¹⁰⁷⁰ However, the final analysis concluded that despite its anti-American sentiment, the UNS did not have contacts with either the Germans or the Japanese.¹⁰⁷¹ Moreover, it was not in Germany's interest to foment unrest in Mexico. The Germans' priority in 1937 was to develop a Mexican oil trade relationship.¹⁰⁷² Any unrest would have welcomed interference from the U.S.; therefore the Germans could only support the toppling of the government "with great hesitation."¹⁰⁷³ In any case, the Nazis looked for converts in Mexico's German community, not the Sinarquistas.¹⁰⁷⁴

There were elements of Sinarquista ideology that were incompatible with fascism. Sinarquismo stressed nonviolence, a practice not followed by fascists. The Sinarquistas abhorred the racist ideology of the Nazis, calling it "a deification of a race by the government."¹⁰⁷⁵ The Sinarquistas recognized that Nazi ideology had no place in a racially mixed Mexican society; "Mexico is a mestizo nation which makes it clearly a protest against these pretensions of racial superiority."¹⁰⁷⁶ Hence, Abascal emphasized that "Nazism cannot be our model."¹⁰⁷⁷ Sinarquismo might have admired the strong leadership qualities, the nationalism, and the anticommunist tendencies of fascist groups, but not their intolerance, which was contrary to its goal of creating an all-encompassing union of Mexican society. Moreover, Nazism was anti-Catholic: "Hitler is an enemy of God," said Abascal, who added, "His theory is barbarous, anti-Christian, and fundamentally false."¹⁰⁷⁸ God would punish Hitler and Mussolini, predicted the Sinarquista leader.¹⁰⁷⁹

The fascist movement that Sinarquismo most resembled was the Spanish Falange. Franco's victory in 1939 encouraged the Falange, a fascist pro-Spanish organization, to infiltrate Spain's former colonies. The closeness between Sinarquismo and Falangismo was derived from their shared colonial heritage, language, and basic values.¹⁰⁸⁰ They shared an equal devotion to the principles of Catholicism and had a similar concept of hispanismo.¹⁰⁸¹ Sinarquismo was a bastion of hispanismo, which it incorporated into its vision of the Christian Social Order. The Sinarquistas commemorated October 12, 1492, as the "Day of the Spanish Race," the date when Hispanic culture graced the American continent.¹⁰⁸² Sinarquismo recognized Hernán Cortés as the "father of Mexico," because it was he who brought Catholicism to the country.¹⁰⁸³ Both Falangismo and Sinarquismo agreed that sixteenth-century Spain was the model for Mexico's future.¹⁰⁸⁴

Sinarquismo rejected the indianismo of the Cárdenas administration and consequently ignored Mexico's pre-Hispanic origins and accomplishments.¹⁰⁸⁵ Sinarquismo disregarded native skin color, saying, "Indians, mestizos, and the descendants of pure Spaniards, all form a single race in the spirit forged by Spain."¹⁰⁸⁶ Mexico's independence from Spain was seen as a tragic event, where every subsequent government was a "sorry imitation" of the colonial legacy.¹⁰⁸⁷ Mexico's history from independence onward was as a tale "of treason that must be eradicated from the minds of patriotic Mexicans."¹⁰⁸⁸

The Sinarquistas looked to Spain's leadership under Francisco Franco to restore the cultural glory of the Hispanic people.¹⁰⁸⁹ Prager, a proponent of the Sinarquismo-

Falangismo connection, stated that “General Franco and the Nationalists were, for the Sinarquistas, heroic crusaders who aimed to rid twentieth-century Spain of the satanic and destructive forces of Bolshevism, Republicanism, Masonry, and liberalism.”¹⁰⁹⁰ Abascal, who often criticized Hitler and Mussolini, had nothing but praise for Franco.¹⁰⁹¹ Prager noted that several similarities existed between the two movements. Sinarquismo and Falangismo adopted a spirit of sacrifice and service, requiring their members to be “half-monk and half-soldier.”¹⁰⁹² They also agreed on the principle of caudillismo, where all authority rested on a strongman, or *jefe*.¹⁰⁹³ Both movements were also devoted to the *patria* and displayed a high degree of xenophobia.¹⁰⁹⁴

The UNS was accused by the Mexican government of being nothing more than the “Spanish Falange transplanted to Mexico.”¹⁰⁹⁵ Moreover, the Left claimed that Sinarquistas received funds and training from the Falange.¹⁰⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Prager stated that Sinarquismo was not a creature of the Falangistas.¹⁰⁹⁷ Unlike Falangismo, which exalted war and violence, Sinarquismo emphasized civil disobedience as the preferred method to bring about change in government.¹⁰⁹⁸ Despite the UNS’s praise for Spanish culture, it emphasized Mexican nationalism and independence.¹⁰⁹⁹

An important difference between the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement was that the latter is considered part of a much larger movement which occurred throughout Mexico and Latin America, while the former was a regional phenomenon. Sinarquismo was part of the Mexican Radical Right, a movement that Hernández defined as “ultra-nationalist, anti-parliamentarian, and anti-Marxist.”¹¹⁰⁰ Extremist nationalist groups, such as Frente Constitucionalista Democrático Mexicano

(Mexican Democratic Constitutionalist Front), Partido Social Demócrata (Democratic Socialist Party), Vanguardia Nacionalista Mexicana (National Mexican Vanguard), and Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista (Mexican Revolutionary Action), belonged to the Mexican Radical Right.¹¹⁰¹ These groups, along with the UNS, held an equal contempt for Cárdenas, the United States, and the Mexican Left.¹¹⁰² Nevertheless, the Right failed to unite as a common front.

A main characteristic of the Mexican Radical Right was its fragmentary nature; its inability to achieve cohesion.¹¹⁰³ The main reason for this was a conflict in ideology. The smaller groups that composed the Mexican Radical Right (Sinarquismo was the only one that attracted a large following) were secular in nature.¹¹⁰⁴ Another important difference between these groups and the UNS was their racism, a trait that was exemplified by Acción Revolucionaria Mexicanista (ARM), better known as Las Camisas Doradas (the Gold Shirts). Founded in 1934, the Gold Shirts was a product of rising Mexican anti-Semitism and middle-class frustration.¹¹⁰⁵ With its slogan of “Mexico for the Mexicans,” the ARM gained notoriety by viciously attacking Jewish businesses and labor unions.¹¹⁰⁶ The Gold Shirts’s message of violence and hate naturally conflicted with the Sinarquista philosophy of pacifism. Moreover, Sinarquistas never made anti-Semitism an important part of their platform.

The Radical Right existed in other parts of Latin America. Sandra McGee Deustch wrote a study of these movements, known as *las derechas*, which existed in South America.¹¹⁰⁷ Groups such as Liga Patriótica (Patriotic League - Argentina), Ligas Patrióticas (Chile), and Ação Social Nacionalista (National Socialist Action - Brazil)

shared an ideology of extreme nationalism and had an ambiguous relationship with the church.¹¹⁰⁸ Like Sinarquismo, these groups emphasized the creation of a strong corporatist state ruled by moral individuals rather than a specific economic program.¹¹⁰⁹ Meyer concluded that Sinarquismo was hardly alone, noting that other fascist-like organizations emerged in Latin America at the same time as the Sinarquistas.¹¹¹⁰

Democracy and Individualism

An apparent conundrum arises in this comparative thesis: most Cristeros did not become Sinarquistas. Meyer stated that only one percent of the rebels joined the Sinarquista Movement.¹¹¹¹ Meyer expressed surprise at his finding, and understandably so. It has been shown that the Cristeros and Sinarquistas shared strong similarities in the topics of the Christian Social Order, martyrdom, the Mexican Revolution, and agrarian reform. It is therefore logical to assume that when the Sinarquista Movement appeared in 1937, only eight years after the rebellion ended, many Cristeros would have joined. However, this was not the case. True, Sinarquista ideology was more developed in the realms of nationalism and hispanismo. Yet this difference cannot justify why most Cristeros felt a “great aversion” towards the Sinarquista Movement.¹¹¹²

A compelling explanation is found in a facet of Cristerismo that was completely irreconcilable with Sinarquista ideology: a strong sense of individualism and democracy. The Cristeros had a fierce attachment to their individual freedom. They rebelled, after all, to gain their religious liberty from a government they considered totalitarian.¹¹¹³ The

Cristeros rose up spontaneously and were able to wage war while lacking leaders and outside help.¹¹¹⁴ This was an “individual war,” where all of the troops were volunteers.¹¹¹⁵ This “extreme individualism” made discipline a challenge, a problem that even General Gorostieta had to contend with.¹¹¹⁶

An impressive feature of the Cristeros was their admiration for democratic values, which was a byproduct from their strong sense of individuality. Cristeros had strong-minded personalities; during meetings, they freely expressed their opinions and readily criticized their chiefs.¹¹¹⁷ The Cristeros elected their leaders.¹¹¹⁸ They chose men with qualities such as bravery, honesty, and military experience.¹¹¹⁹ Chieftains needed to earn the respect of their soldiers in order to be followed.¹¹²⁰ If the rebels did not agree with their leader, they would simply not follow him.¹¹²¹ According to Meyer, a commander with whom the troops were discontented could not remain in his capacity for long and had to either return to the ranks or leave.¹¹²² “In the final reckoning,” stated Meyer, “it was the troops who recognized their officers.”¹¹²³

Democracy was an important element in Cristero government. Meyer stated, “The insurgents made clear their desire to give themselves a just government...It was an aspiration of self-government, of village democracy.”¹¹²⁴ Townships controlled by the rebels democratically elected their own authorities.¹¹²⁵ Another key democratic feature was the lack of military intrusion in civilian affairs. Article 7 of the General Order stipulated that administrative authorities were to be completely independent of the military leadership.¹¹²⁶ Meyer related that the Cristero military and civilian sectors worked cordially.¹¹²⁷ Still, it was the civil element that held sway; each armed sector

took orders from its civilian administrators.¹¹²⁸ General Gorostieta wanted his soldiers to understand that the role of the military was to protect the sovereignty of the state.¹¹²⁹ Cristero military men were expected to respect civil authority.¹¹³⁰

Another interesting feature of the Cristero Rebellion was its deference for women, an unlikely trait in Mexico's male-dominated society. Meyer remarked that there was a surprising lack of machismo among the Cristeros; "Being all volunteers, they had little respect for the 'macho' classic-type of leader."¹¹³¹ Women took an active role in La Cristiada, for which they were valued by their male counterparts.¹¹³² "Women," declared Meyer, "were at the heart of the movement."¹¹³³ Women fulfilled vital tasks, such as welfare services, espionage, finances, and propaganda.¹¹³⁴ The Cristeros were wholly dependent on the Women's Brigades to provide them with supplies, particularly weapons.¹¹³⁵ Some women were adept at explosives and taught the men the art of sabotage, while others took a direct part in combat.¹¹³⁶ Hence, it is not surprising that many Cristero men believed that women should have a large part in their movement, to include roles of leadership.¹¹³⁷ However, the record does not show an instance of women leading soldiers to battle.

The democratic element of La Cristiada was not embraced by one prominent Cristero leader, however. Anacleto González Flores, a pacifist, was ironically an authoritarian Catholic leader.¹¹³⁸ While most Catholic activists wanted a democratic Mexico, he disagreed.¹¹³⁹ González Flores rejected the view that social Christianity and political democracy could easily walk hand-in-hand.¹¹⁴⁰ Democracy in Mexico had to be postponed, he argued, until it could be purged of secularism.¹¹⁴¹ Ironically, González

Flores feared that a premature democracy would bring demagogues to office and a “rebirth of tyranny.”¹¹⁴² A period of spiritual and moral regeneration was needed before the Mexican people could be entrusted with the political system.¹¹⁴³ González Flores’s ideology showed a surprising resemblance to the philosophy of the Sinarquistas. In certain respects, he could be considered as a forerunner to Sinarquismo.

The unruly Cristeros would have had a difficult time adjusting to the strict discipline of the Sinarquista Movement. Sinarquismo was given an organizational structure that was authoritarian, hierarchical, and semi-militaristic.¹¹⁴⁴ Sinarquista publications emphasized that the UNS was highly stratified, with a definite hierarchy of officers, each taking orders from superiors.¹¹⁴⁵ The *Jefe Supremo*, the depository of Sinarquismo’s supreme authority, was obeyed unquestionably.¹¹⁴⁶ Beneath the *Jefe Supremo* existed a chain of command composed of chiefs at the regional, district, municipal, and rural levels.¹¹⁴⁷ These chiefs administered their charges using sub-chiefs and committees, with the power to remove members from their duties.¹¹⁴⁸ Hernández stated that the executive function of the chiefs, along with the committees, was to direct, coordinate, and execute the orders and programs issued from their superiors.¹¹⁴⁹ Clearly, the Sinarquistas shaped their organization after the fascist model.

The Sinarquista movement was distinctly antidemocratic. Sinarquista leaders, such as Abascal and Torres Bueno, were not elected by the membership. Instead, they were appointed by the secretive Supreme Council.¹¹⁵⁰ The rank and file of the UNS were urged to have implicit faith in their chiefs and to render strict obedience to all instructions.¹¹⁵¹ When Manuel Zermeño passed the leadership of the UNS to Abascal, he

stated, “Of us soldiers only one thing is expected: to accept his decision and to follow the conduct which he himself, who is our model, has taught us, that is to place our entire faith who since today is our chief.”¹¹⁵²

The controlling nature of the UNS was clearly laid out in the *Handbook for Chiefs*. Only the chief could make the decisions in a Sinarquista cell, who may request the advice of his committee.¹¹⁵³ However, there was to be no discussion on any subject during Sinarquista meetings.¹¹⁵⁴ “The general and absolute rule is that no matter must be subject to voting by the assembly,” reminded the handbook.¹¹⁵⁵ The rationale for not deliberating was that all Sinarquistas “agreed on everything.”¹¹⁵⁶ The function of the chiefs was to solve conflicts and dictate orders while that of the soldiers was to listen and obey.¹¹⁵⁷ Specific instructions for upcoming activities, such as marches, were given out at these meetings, although their reason was rarely explained.¹¹⁵⁸ These commands were announced at the last minute in order to achieve surprise and train members to obey orders unfailingly.¹¹⁵⁹

Sinarquistas suppressed democracy in other ways. No Sinarquista pamphlet, poster, or text could be published without the express approval of the hierarchy.¹¹⁶⁰ Everything in these was eliminated “that was contrary to the militant spirit” of Sinarquismo.¹¹⁶¹ Only accepted individuals were permitted to give Sinarquista speeches.¹¹⁶² The Sinarquista marches were designed to keep complete control of the membership, where silence and order were the norm.¹¹⁶³

Women were considered important to Sinarquismo, but mainly because “they were extremely religious and were easy to incorporate and control in a religiously-

oriented movement.”¹¹⁶⁴ Women had a submissive role in the Sinarquista Movement, unlike the Cristero Rebellion. Women were not allowed to march with the men; instead they walked alongside on the pavement.¹¹⁶⁵ They were “not to run the same dangers as men,” stated Hernández.¹¹⁶⁶ The obvious exception to this rule was María Teresa Bustos, the exemplary martyr of the movement.¹¹⁶⁷

The colony of María Auxiliadora gave a glimpse of Sinarquista authoritarian rule. Abascal drew up a series of rules, known as the “Table of Laws,” for the colonists to follow.¹¹⁶⁸ Historian Hugh Campbell stated that these rules made Abascal the absolute despot of María Auxiliadora.¹¹⁶⁹ Not only was Abascal in complete control of the executive, judicial, and legislative powers of the colony, but he also micromanaged the activities and habits of the inhabitants.¹¹⁷⁰ “For any infraction of the stringent rules he established for the colony, he himself served as judge, jury and executioner.”¹¹⁷¹ According to Campbell, the colony’s experience foreshadowed what would happen if the Sinarquistas came to power in Mexico.¹¹⁷²

The Christian Social Order envisioned by the Sinarquistas was more autocratic than that of the Cristeros. In his thesis, Prager noted that the Sinarquistas focused on the repressive features of colonial Mexico. The UNS subscribed to the organic view of society with a class structure, the enjoyment of *fueros* by those who “possessed wealth, prestige, and power,” and a governmental system that was highly authoritarian and religiously oriented.¹¹⁷³ “Their ideology promoted a restoration of the paternalistic and fanatically religious government of Mexico’s Golden Age,” stated Prager.¹¹⁷⁴

Prager wrote that the Sinarquistas wanted a society regulated by the laws of God “as revealed by his [sic.] church,” in which a theocracy would inevitably develop.¹¹⁷⁵ Abascal was a proponent of such a view; “There is no authority which does not come from God...therefore, the social order and the economic order should submit itself to the moral and dogmatic instruction of the Church.”¹¹⁷⁶ Paradoxically, the Sinarquista vision of the Christian Social Order conflicted with its ideology of agrarian reform, since the rural lower classes were to be kept in check by the elite; “The hacendados would lead and the church would inspire, while the illiterate and impoverished peasantry would follow.”¹¹⁷⁷

The UNS believed in the inequality of humans.¹¹⁷⁸ Their ideology held that authority was given to men by God in order to govern fellow men.¹¹⁷⁹ Effectively, man was unfit for self-rule and had to accept his own place in accordance with his personal inequality.¹¹⁸⁰ Prager argued that Sinarquismo had a general contempt for humanity. The majority of human beings were felt to be nothing more than the “scum of the earth,” eternally bound to their colossal ignorance.¹¹⁸¹ Only a hierarchical society could control the unruly masses.¹¹⁸²

It is little wonder then, that Sinarquismo viewed liberalism with contempt. The Sinarquistas felt that with liberty, man would make himself a servant; “a slave of his passions...a slave of his necessities...a slave of the democratic bait.”¹¹⁸³ Therefore, democracy’s belief in the guaranteed rights of man was thoroughly condemned by the Sinarquista Movement. The UNS assumed that through democracy, an absolute lack of government would prevail.¹¹⁸⁴ All the evils that colonial Mexico had undergone were

caused by democratic values.¹¹⁸⁵ In order to combat this abomination of liberty, the *Ten Norms of Conduct* preached self-denial for the Sinarquista soldiers.¹¹⁸⁶

Sinarquismo's ideology strongly supported the notion that the UNS was fascist. However, there are indications that the Sinarquista Movement was supportive of a limited form of democracy. The term "democracy" appeared several times in Sinarquista propaganda. The Sinarquistas believed that a Christian democracy could operate within a religious state.¹¹⁸⁷ Sinarquista society would be ruled by a "legitimate authority, emanating from free democratic action of the people, that will guarantee a social order."¹¹⁸⁸ Even though the UNS condemned the United States' democratic system, it still acknowledged that there were some benefits to it.¹¹⁸⁹

The Sinarquista Manifesto of 1937 claimed that the UNS was fighting for the restoration of individual rights taken away by the Mexican Revolution.¹¹⁹⁰ The UNS announced that its marches were the "effective exercise of the freedom of association and expression."¹¹⁹¹ Federico Gil, in his pamphlet touting the Sinarquista program, wrote that UNS meetings were gatherings of Mexicans, who in a *democratic* manner, united to ask for the restoration of social order.¹¹⁹² Sinarquismo condemned the totalitarian state, saying that it repudiated the "natural right" of men and that it was the "the worst of all tyrannies, because it is a tyranny which converts the law into the pretext and accomplice of its excesses."¹¹⁹³

Man could not live in a totalitarian state, argued the UNS, because his only purpose for existing would be his usefulness to the government, "for which he should sacrifice everything, including his soul."¹¹⁹⁴ The UNS also denounced totalitarian states

because they threatened private property and family life, which Sinarquistas held sacred.¹¹⁹⁵ “Sinarquismo is the emphatic, calm, definite denial of all totalitarianisms. The principles of Sinarquismo oblige it to be irreconcilable with them,” stated Federico Gil.¹¹⁹⁶

Meyer and Prager concurred that the intentions of Sinarquismo were not dictatorial. “The originality of Sinarquismo is that it is one of the avatars of Christian democracy and not a ‘fascism in *huaraches*,’” stated Meyer.¹¹⁹⁷ Prager’s conclusion was not as flattering, yet he believed that the Sinarquista program did not mean the elimination of democracy.¹¹⁹⁸ Prager was convinced that the Sinarquistas wanted to restore some form of traditional government, perhaps a monarchy or a government by elites.¹¹⁹⁹

Validity of the Ideologies

Potential arguments exist which attack this thesis’s view that the ideologies of La Cristiada and the Sinarquista Movement, with certain exceptions, were comparable. Some historians, such as Azkue, believed that the Cristeros lacked an ideology.¹²⁰⁰ Many rebels fought the government for reasons such as revenge, adventure, or money.¹²⁰¹ The motives behind the League have also been criticized, with historians, such as Meyer, arguing that its leadership craved power.¹²⁰² Moreover, there was a suspicion that the Cristeros rebelled for psychological, rather than ideological reasons. Meyer stated that the Cristeros, having a “warrior culture,” were easily provoked.¹²⁰³ It could also be

argued that the Cristero Rebellion was an instinctive defensive reaction, rather than a movement with deep-seated ideological values; “These outraged peasants, who loved their village, their church, and their priest, quite naturally rose in rebellion.”¹²⁰⁴

Sinarquista ideology has also come into question. As has been shown, there were several inconsistencies that made the ideology of the UNS complex and confusing, or as Prager stated, “Sinarquismo is difficult to exactly define.”¹²⁰⁵ Meyer supported this assessment by saying that ambiguity was a fundamental characteristic of the movement.¹²⁰⁶ Moreover, Hernández argued that Sinarquismo, being essentially a negation of the Mexican Revolution, had an ideology that could not evolve; “The Sinarquistas would only content themselves with denouncing more and more strongly the failure of Cárdenas’s reform.”¹²⁰⁷ The Sinarquistas never elaborated on the future. They did not explain how they would achieve power in Mexico, other than to say that it would not be through violence or the ballot box.¹²⁰⁸ More importantly, they did not clarify how life for the average Mexican would function under their rule.¹²⁰⁹ This indicates that the Sinarquista Movement wanted to spread an ambiguous message in order to attract as many Mexicans as possible to their cause.¹²¹⁰

This thesis argues that the ideologies of both movements are valid, despite their inherent problems and inconsistencies. As has been shown, the Cristeros had goals and a value system. It is true that the rebels were “simple, religious men” not capable of publishing and explaining their ideological values, but they had them nonetheless.¹²¹¹ It is more accurate to state that the Cristeros, who saw the religious problem in regional, not national terms, had an ideology that was in the developing stages. In writing his

seminal work, Meyer wanted to contradict the popular notion that the Cristeros were unrefined peasants without a culture; “Their ideology is a system of reasoning that is more or less elaborated.”¹²¹² It could very well be that the Cristeros had the “conscience of a Christian country.”¹²¹³

The Sinarquistas had developed an ideology that was fraught with inconsistencies. Still, it is clear that the ideology of the UNS was no mere recruiting tool. Sinarquismo had a challenging task of crafting an ideology to which all Mexicans could relate. Its goal after all, was to create an all-encompassing union that would ostensibly benefit all Mexicans.¹²¹⁴ Furthermore, it has been shown that the Sinarquistas developed elaborate concepts regarding private property, martyrdom, and the Christian Social Order. The UNS borrowed ideas from fascist organizations, but it fused them into traditional ultraconservative elements to create a movement that was all its own.¹²¹⁵

It was demonstrated that there are several areas in which the Cristeros and Sinarquistas shared similar ideologies. A desire to establish a Christian Social Order, backed by a feverish desire of martyrdom was the principal driving force behind both movements. The contempt for the Mexican Revolution, portrayed as having failed the Mexican people, was another core component of their philosophies. Land reform was crucial to both organizations, especially to their mass base.

There also exist significant differences between their ideologies, which explain why the Cristeros chose not to join Sinarquismo. The rebels’ sense of nationalism was limited to their region. Perhaps they were not interested in or could not relate to a movement like Sinarquismo, which viewed Mexico in a larger context. More

importantly, the strict discipline and fascist doctrine of the Sinarquista Movement discouraged the Cristeros from joining, since they were accustomed to their freedom and democratic ways. Nevertheless, what should be remembered is that both movements were a continuation of Mexico's Catholic response to a liberal threat. This conservative tradition, dating back to the colonial period, was the principal legacy inherited by both the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement.

CHAPTER VII

A COMPARISON OF CHURCH RELATIONS

The Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement had a troubled relationship with the church. This association was necessary, since a primary reason for the existence of the movements was to defend the church against encroaching government powers. The extent of the church's authority in these movements is speculative, but intriguing. Both Cristerismo and Sinarquismo were extensively influenced by the church in their early stages. Once mobilized, these forces were of great benefit to the hierarchy, since they forced the government to scale back on its anticlerical and socialist policies. However, there came a pivotal point where the Cristeros and Sinarquistas became radicalized, threatening the church's bargaining position. Once they became a liability, the church took decisive action, leading to the movements' collapse. The question arises of whether the church used the Cristeros and Sinarquistas as pawns against the Mexican government.

The Church and the Cristeros

The extent of the church's role in the Cristero rebellion is highly controversial. As stated earlier, the persecution of the church by the Calles government provoked the "spontaneous mobilization" of thousands of Cristero rebels. Suddenly, the church found itself with a volunteer army with which to fight a sacrilegious state. The church may not

have mobilized these forces, but did it manipulate them? Officially, the church never approved of the uprising. Yet, it refrained from condemning the rebels until the very end of the conflict. The church's silence, along with its suspension of mass, was seen by the rebels as a tacit approval to fight. It is also likely that the church was unsure of how to act. There were many conflictive actions at all levels of the clergy, from the local priests up to the pope. The evidence supports the contention that at the very least, the church tolerated the rebellion as a means to force the Mexican government to the negotiating table. Once they were no longer needed, the rebels were cast aside in what Meyer termed a "sterile sacrifice."¹²¹⁶

In the months leading up to the Cristero Rebellion, the laity rallied behind the church in two different ways. First, there were the organized groups, such as the UP, the ACJM, and the League, that advocated a policy of passive resistance. Of all the lay groups, the League had the most involvement with the hierarchy. When the League was established in 1925, the episcopate declared that it was not involved.¹²¹⁷ Some historians, such as Robert Quirk, rejected that claim, arguing that the bishops controlled the whole organization.¹²¹⁸ However, it is more likely that the League operated independently, as postulated by Meyer and Bailey.¹²¹⁹ Even if the League was independent, it is apparent that the church had a strong influence over it. The League sought guidance and was very susceptible to any allusion received from the bishops.

There existed a noticeable connection between the League and the church. Douglas Slawson observed that it was Rome's apostolic delegate that changed the official name of the League in order to reflect that it was defending religious liberty, not

just religion itself.¹²²⁰ Furthermore, it appeared that the League retained Jesuit advisors, as noted by Meyer.¹²²¹ Meyer also stated that it was the bishops who requested Anacleto González Flores and the UP to join ranks with the League.¹²²² Still, it is difficult to conclude how influential the church was, given that it had an obscure relationship with the League.

Undeniably, the League received strong support from the church up until the summer of 1926.¹²²³ During this period, the League embarked on a campaign of passive resistance against the government. In fact, Meyer stated that the church was counting on the fidelity of Catholics to oppose the state in this manner.¹²²⁴ In some ways, the episcopate viewed the League as a junior partner in its effort to get Calles to stop his attacks. League delegates accompanied Mexican bishops to the Vatican to argue that the moderate course was not working.¹²²⁵ When the episcopate decided on the drastic measure to suspend mass, the League offered its support.¹²²⁶ The League's nationwide boycott was fully endorsed by the church.¹²²⁷ The hierarchy was impressed by the League's ability to rally thousands of people.¹²²⁸ Therefore, it is plausible that the church, facing the possibility of eradication, was tempted by the League's later offer of armed rebellion.

The church gave its full backing to the League while it was participating in nonviolent resistance. What is unclear is whether the Mexican episcopate endorsed a religious war.¹²²⁹ The League presented a petition before the hierarchy on November 26, 1926, asking for its approval to rebel against the government.¹²³⁰ The petition posed a theological question to the bishops: whether their cause was "licit and

laudable action, deserving legitimate armed defense.”¹²³¹ Meyer related the bishops’ response; “Consulted as to the theological legitimacy of a war of this nature, the Episcopal Committee, referring to the classics on the subject, answered with a prudent expression of assent that the Leaguers interpreted as unconditional support.”¹²³² Rather than being forthright, the hierarchy used surreptitious language in dealing with the League.

The Mexican hierarchy refused to give a direct answer to the League, neither encouraging the rebellion nor condemning it. Some historians, such as Slawson, argued that by refusing to condemn a resort to arms, the bishops consented to the rebellion.¹²³³ Instead of chastising the League, the church “wished it well.”¹²³⁴ The Mexican hierarchy was imbued with a combative spirit, which perhaps clouded its judgment.¹²³⁵ Hernández contended that the hierarchy gave its initial “support” to the League because it thought that the rebellion would be successful.¹²³⁶ Regardless of the actual response, the League always insisted that the church approved its plans for war.¹²³⁷

The second manner in which the laity supported the church was through “spontaneous mobilization.” As discussed previously, the Cristeros cherished their individuality and loathed authority. The rebels were very religious and readily provoked when they saw their church under attack.¹²³⁸ A Cristero remarked, “Without their permission and without their orders we are throwing ourselves into this blessed struggle for our liberty, and without their permission and without their orders we will go on until we conquer or die.”¹²³⁹ This implies that the hierarchy was blameless for the actions of

the Cristeros. However, scrutiny of the church's motives behind its suspension of worship suggests otherwise.

Critics viewed the *cessato a divinis* as a “piece of medieval obstructionism designed to force the regime to restore clerical privileges by depriving Catholics of the sacred and stirring up a revolt.”¹²⁴⁰ Meyer placed the blame of the rebellion squarely at the church's doorstep: “It would be to under-estimate the convictions of the Christian people to suppose that they would suffer the suspension of public worship and the consequent suspension of the Sacraments.”¹²⁴¹ Essentially, the Cristeros were driven to revolt through the closing of the churches. Moreover, the state recognized that the resumption of mass held the key to the end of the rebellion. This was the only provision it sought from the church as it entered negotiations. However, it does not appear that the church had a well-orchestrated plan. Meyer conceded that while the suspension of mass instigated the rebellion, the bishops were not *formally* responsible.¹²⁴²

The record suggests that the church was reacting to the situation. The rebellion caught the clergy off guard - the response at all levels was ambiguous, conflictive, and confusing. A few months after the rebellion began, Pope Pius XI published the encyclical *Iniqui Affictisque*, in which he admired the resistance of the people and the young men who offered their lives to Cristo Rey.¹²⁴³ However, he soon reversed his position and never again offered praise for the rebels.¹²⁴⁴ The Vatican took a “neutral” stance with regards to the rebellion, offering neither encouragement nor condemnation; “Rome's silence was never broken, except to deny that any blessing had been given to

the combatants.”¹²⁴⁵ According to Bailey, the church was caught in a bind and withdrew to narrow spiritual ground.¹²⁴⁶

The Mexican Catholic hierarchy was just as conflictive. Once the uprising began, there were several bishops who openly supported the rebels.¹²⁴⁷ According to Slawson, Mexico’s primate, Archbishop Mora y del Río, wanted the United States to lift the arms embargo so that the rebels could receive military supplies.¹²⁴⁸ The Mexican exiled bishops sent encouraging pastoral letters to the rebels, exhorting the faithful to “imitate the constancy of the early Christians...who died like good men, and their blood was the seed of new converts.”¹²⁴⁹ The bishops from Durango and Huejutla were more direct, telling the Cristeros to be “tranquil in your consciences and receive our blessing.”¹²⁵⁰ Confusingly, another group of bishops opposed the rebellion.¹²⁵¹ They made it clear that they did not desire any form of resistance that was not passive and peaceful.¹²⁵² The episcopate made public statements in which it denied having ever supported the rebellion.¹²⁵³ The bishop of Chihuahua even threatened his flock with excommunication if they joined the insurrection.¹²⁵⁴

Ambiguity, however, was the predominant response. Meyer stated that the church reacted with the “outmost prudence” in regards to the rebellion.¹²⁵⁵ He explained that the majority of prelates refused to give any guidance to their parishioners, leaving them in “complete liberty of action.”¹²⁵⁶ The rebels consulted their parish priests as to the legitimacy of the insurrection.¹²⁵⁷ The priests, in turn, looked to the bishops for guidance. Instead of answering, the bishops passed the question to the theologians.¹²⁵⁸ The end result was silence, a ploy adopted by Rome.¹²⁵⁹ When they did speak, the

bishops' words lacked clarity. An example was the statement made by the bishop of Zacatecas: "The tyranny of the authorities justifies the resolution of the Catholics to defend themselves by armed force...however, it is not absolutely clear that all Catholics have an obligation to employ this ultimate recourse...nonviolent methods would have led to the same result."¹²⁶⁰ Meyer noted that many bishops condemned the uprising while implying that under certain circumstances it could be approved.¹²⁶¹

The confusion of the church's position reached the lowest echelons of its organization. Many priests were faced with the dilemma of choosing between the law and their flock.¹²⁶² Meyer stated that 25 priests were involved in the rebellion, with 15 acting as chaplains to the insurgents, and 5 taking arms against the government.¹²⁶³ As stated earlier, two of them became Cristero chiefs. Another hundred or so priests followed the example of the bishops of Colima and Jalisco, who chose to remain at their posts, thereby giving the rebels priceless moral support.¹²⁶⁴ This decision was not taken lightly, since anyone caught in the countryside was presumed to be a rebel and executed.¹²⁶⁵

The majority of the clergy, however, chose not to join the rebellion. Out of 3,600 priests, 3,390 abandoned their rural parishes to live in towns.¹²⁶⁶ Meyer viewed their action as a form of passive resistance *against* the Cristeros.¹²⁶⁷ By fleeing to the relative safety of urban areas, the clergy effectively left the rebels to their own devices.¹²⁶⁸ Other priests were more vocal against the rebellion, actively dissuading their parishioners from joining.¹²⁶⁹ Meyer cited many instances in which clergy preached openly against the rebellion.¹²⁷⁰ Some priests denounced the rebels as "cattle thieves," while others

implored them to follow the example of Christ by rejecting violence and “turning the other cheek.”¹²⁷¹

There came a point during the rebellion when the church abandoned its ambiguous position and took decisive action against the Cristeros. A gradual distancing took place between the League and the bishops. The League, which during its peaceful phase enjoyed the full support of Pope Pius XI, had become a warmonger.¹²⁷² Once viewed with esteem, by 1927, the League had alienated most of the hierarchy.¹²⁷³ The Vatican ceased endorsing the League, but stopped short of condemning it.¹²⁷⁴ It was likely that the church tolerated the League as a necessary evil in its struggle against the Mexican state. However, once the government agreed to negotiate, the League, as well as the Cristero cause, had become a liability.

As discussed earlier, the church’s main concern was the resumption of mass, not the welfare of the combatants.¹²⁷⁵ By late 1927, the Vatican realized that a victory in the battlefield was impossible.¹²⁷⁶ Continuance of religious hostilities would only further spiritual suffering and encourage the rise of Protestantism.¹²⁷⁷ The Vatican recognized that the key power player in the scenario was the United States, against whom everyone in Mexico was powerless.¹²⁷⁸ Once the United States had persuaded the Mexican government to talk, the church decided to cut ties to the rebellion, since any continued association would hurt its interests.¹²⁷⁹ The church’s policy consisted of “simultaneously displaying human prudence and Divine wisdom, of satisfying interest and consciences: ‘It was providential that there were Cristeros, and providential that they ceased to exist.’”¹²⁸⁰

Bishops who were once allied with the Cristeros turned against them. Bishop Pascual Díaz, the unofficial leader of the exiled bishops, was initially an advocate of the rebels.¹²⁸¹ Once negotiations began, however, he quickly turned against them, undermining Capistrán Garza's attempts at fundraising and urging the NCWC to disavow the League.¹²⁸² When the League sent delegates to Rome, Bishop Díaz discouraged the pope from seeing them.¹²⁸³ Díaz's stance won Rome's approval; in less than three years he rose from being the bishop of an unimportant see to primate of Mexico.¹²⁸⁴

Once the Vatican decided that the Cristeros had become a burden, it took steps to distance itself. The hierarchy's position could no longer remain ambiguous.¹²⁸⁵ The pope, through Nuncio Fumasoni-Biondi, instructed all Mexican clergy to stop giving moral or material assistance to the rebels.¹²⁸⁶ The League was no longer consulted as negotiations with the government continued.¹²⁸⁷ Yet, the church did not order the Cristeros to stop fighting.

The rebels were convinced that the church was on their side until June 20, 1929, the day the *Arreglos* were announced. For them, the clergy's call to arms had been the closing of the churches. Yet for three years Rome had refused to give a clear answer to the question of armed resistance, leaving the rebels to flounder on their own, fighting and dying while the parties reached an agreement.¹²⁸⁸ As a settlement became imminent, the Cristero leadership realized the consequences. The suspension of mass, which had fueled the rebellion, was also capable of squelching it. General Gorostieta correctly predicted, "As soon as they open the churches, you will all leave me."¹²⁸⁹

The resumption of the sacraments was the coup de grâce of La Cristiada. The church had achieved its goal and forsaken the rebels, as evidenced by a bishop's statement: "I don't know, and I'm not interested in knowing, in what conditions you are going to be left...The only thing I must tell you is that you must lay down your arms...the banner for which you were fighting has ceased to exist now that the arrangements have been made."¹²⁹⁰ Since the Cristeros had not been consulted, they were caught off guard and took them a whole month to organize a surrendering of weapons with the government.¹²⁹¹ The Cristeros were forced to lay down their arms without guarantees and were abandoned to the "butcher's knife."¹²⁹² Meyer summarized his harsh view of the hierarchy by stating, "The Church abandoned its own, got rid of its servants who were a nuisance, and won victory in the game of loser takes all."¹²⁹³

Confusion exists as to whether the Vatican repudiated the Cristeros or used them to force better terms from Calles.¹²⁹⁴ The evidence rejects the notion that the church led the Cristeros into war, as some critics charged. Once the rebellion erupted, however, the church showed a profound lack of leadership; "The overwhelming majority of the bishops and priests, displaying a criminal degree of conforming, wallowed in an accursed inertia, all expecting sheer miracles from Heaven to give liberty to the Church."¹²⁹⁵ The church evaded giving the Cristeros clear answers, conveniently absolving itself of any wrongdoing.¹²⁹⁶ Another possibility is that the church took advantage of the situation by playing Machiavellian politics, such as using the suspension of worship as a catalyst for rebellion.¹²⁹⁷ New evidence is needed in order to concisely ascertain the church's multi-faceted role in the Cristero rebellion.

The Church and the Sinarquistas

The Achilles' heel of the Sinarquista Movement was the same as that of the Cristero Rebellion: its tumultuous relationship with the church.¹²⁹⁸ The rebellion proved a harsh lesson for the church, where its ambiguousness contributed to a conflict that killed tens of thousands. The hierarchy could no longer risk disastrous consequences by allowing the laity to mobilize on its own. After the conflict, it took an active role in providing adequate venues for the faithful to vent their anger. The church surmised that it would be easier to manage an entity that it created, instead of one that mobilized on its own, such as the League. The difficulty lay in controlling the laity, while keeping that link a secret. The result of the church's efforts was the Sinarquista Movement, which proved useful against the government's socialist assault. Yet, the Sinarquistas became too radical for the church's interests and were subjected to the same fate as the Cristeros.

The Sinarquista Movement was a creation of the church. This was in contrast to the Cristero Rebellion, which was a lay-generated movement with which the hierarchy involved itself. Sinarquismo was established to provide Catholics with a nonviolent option to combat anticlericalism in Mexico, thereby preventing another religious insurgency. The formation of Sinarquismo took various stages: Catholic Action, the Legion, and the Base. At each step, the church gauged the laity's response and its control over the organization. Moreover, the hierarchy developed a furtive mechanism in which it could impose its will. This secrecy makes the analysis of the church-UNS relationship a challenge.

The years of the *modus vivendi* were a period of transformation for Catholic activism. The Cristero Rebellion epitomized the failure of armed revolt against the Mexican Revolution.¹²⁹⁹ A change in strategy was needed, where the radical energy of La Cristiada would be channeled into a new “mystic-social” organization that could be used as a nonviolent, but powerful clerical tool.¹³⁰⁰ Sinarquismo, noted Hernández, was to serve a dual purpose: it provided radicals with an escape for their energies, while giving the hierarchy an ability to exert political pressure on the government.¹³⁰¹ The change in paradigm was evident with the outbreak of La Segunda in 1934. This rebellion, unlike La Cristiada, was quickly, thoroughly, and unanimously condemned by the church.¹³⁰²

The role of the hierarchy in Sinarquismo was decisive from the beginning.¹³⁰³ The archbishop of Michoacán, Monsignor Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, was instrumental in the creation of the Legion, the precursor to Sinarquismo.¹³⁰⁴ Ruiz y Flores imagined a religious organization with a council “pulling the strings” behind the scenes.¹³⁰⁵ According to Hernández, Ruiz y Flores wanted a Legion in each archdiocese, where it would exert pressure on the government at the local level, with the aim of alleviating the church’s difficult situation.¹³⁰⁶

Jesuits were involved with Sinarquismo. Ruiz y Flores specifically wanted to entrust them with establishing the Legion and becoming its advisors.¹³⁰⁷ The Jesuits, according to the archbishop, could be trusted because of their strict discipline and loyalty to the pope. Therefore, they could prevent the formation of another League.¹³⁰⁸ This contradicts the view that Romo de Alba created the Legion on his own. Historian Rubén

Aguilar mentioned the role of Jesuits in Sinarquismo, claiming that they helped transform “the secretive organization such as the Legion into the semi-secret, ambivalent organization such as the UNS.”¹³⁰⁹ It is an interesting concurrence that both the UNS and the League retained Jesuit advisors. However, it is not possible to draw any conclusions since the record is vague in this matter.

The relationship between the Legion and the church remained strong throughout its transformation into the UNS. According to Hernández, the Mexican episcopacy and the Vatican’s apostolic delegate gave their blessing to the new movement.¹³¹⁰ The Legion remained under the tight grip of the hierarchy via the Supreme Council.¹³¹¹ When the Legion morphed into the Base, the power of the council was further consolidated.¹³¹² According to Prager, it was the church that organized elements of the Base so as to attract peasants to the movement.¹³¹³ Priests, who had remained without guidance throughout La Cristiada, saw no such ambiguity in the UNS.¹³¹⁴ Many of those who distanced themselves from the Cristeros fully supported or at least sympathized with Sinarquismo.¹³¹⁵ Nevertheless, the connection remained clandestine; both the Sinarquistas and the church officially disavowed the existence of a relationship.¹³¹⁶

There was an important facet of the Sinarquista Movement which the record does not address: how could the church allow the UNS to adopt a fascist image? The link is most likely Abascal, whose ascendancy was apparently supported by the hierarchy. The primate of Mexico, Archbishop Luis María Martínez, was a longtime friend of the Abascal family.¹³¹⁷ In his memoirs, Abascal stated that the archbishop was his godfather during his first communion and his teacher and advisor at seminary.¹³¹⁸ This powerful

friend probably convinced the Supreme Council to choose Abascal for the top post of the UNS. Meyer stated that Antonio Santacruz, the leader of the Base, endorsed Abascal's appointment in 1940.¹³¹⁹ Santacruz believed that Abascal was someone who was "obedient and malleable."¹³²⁰ Could it be that the church underestimated the radicalism of Abascal?

The militancy of the UNS reached new heights under Abascal. The record does not demonstrate whether this was a plan envisioned by the church, the Supreme Council, or Abascal himself. It is more likely that Abascal formulated the plan, transforming the Sinarquista Movement into something "much more than the church really intended."¹³²¹ The reason for this assertion is that soon after Abascal's arrival, tensions developed between the UNS and the hierarchy. The atmospheric growth of Sinarquismo was both a blessing and a curse to the church. The popularity of the UNS forced the government to abandon socialist policies and moderate its course. However, the hierarchy was losing its influence over the Sinarquistas, who threatened to destroy the gains already made. Just like the Cristero Rebellion, the Sinarquista Movement had outlived its usefulness and needed to be disposed of.¹³²²

Circumstances had changed dramatically between 1937 and 1941. The administration of Avila Camacho ushered in an era of better relations with the church.¹³²³ In this new spirit of cordiality, it behooved the church to cooperate in order to gain concessions from the government.¹³²⁴ The militancy of the UNS, however, showed no signs of restraint, causing concern among the hierarchy that it could derail the *modus*

vivendi.¹³²⁵ Another fear was that Abascal, enjoying the zenith of his personality cult, could take over the UNS and sever ties with the church.¹³²⁶

Abascal's leadership style, while energizing Sinarquismo, had become an embarrassment, even a threat, to the church. Abascal was perceived by many Mexicans to be an ally of the Nazis and Falangistas.¹³²⁷ He contravened church policy by condemning any attempts at rapprochement with the government.¹³²⁸ Worse, Abascal envisioned himself as the head of a coup, convinced that true liberty would be gained once "the revolutionary government was overthrown."¹³²⁹ Abascal's intransigence caused fears that a neo-Cristero type crusade was imminent.¹³³⁰ Consequently, the Supreme Council felt it necessary to remove him as national leader and to give the movement a more moderate image.¹³³¹

The Supreme Council's control over the UNS was sufficient enough to force Abascal's departure.¹³³² His dismissal had to be handled tactfully so as to give the appearance that he had voluntarily stepped down.¹³³³ Abascal's removal risked causing a split within the UNS and revealing the church's secret role in the organization.¹³³⁴ Aguilar surmised that Abascal's old friend, Archbishop Martínez, convinced him to step down in order to avert a crisis.¹³³⁵ A cover story was concocted to explain Abascal's departure, namely his decision to lead the ill-fated colony in Baja California.

The record suggests that the church and the Mexican government schemed to oust Abascal. The Avila Camacho administration made the unprecedented step to help Abascal by offering to pay the colonists' traveling expenses.¹³³⁶ According to Hernández, Antonio Santacruz had close ties with the American ambassador and was a

personal friend of Archbishop Martínez.¹³³⁷ His contacts allowed him to establish a “gentleman’s agreement” with the Mexican government, where the UNS would cease its anti-American propaganda and fully support the president.¹³³⁸ Moreover, Santacruz assured all involved that Abascal’s departure was imminent.¹³³⁹ Although a conspiracy cannot be proven, the actions of the church and state complemented each other.¹³⁴⁰

Abascal’s banishment to the desert was only the first step. According to Juan Ignacio Padilla, the Supreme Council wanted the colony to fail in order to discredit Abascal and remove him as a threat.¹³⁴¹ This may explain why the UNS refused to help the colonists once they arrived.¹³⁴² By February 1944, the Supreme Council had enough of the intractable leader and decided to recall him.¹³⁴³ An envoy was sent to María Auxiliadora to ask Abascal to step down and return to Mexico City, which he refused.¹³⁴⁴ A second delegation arrived, this time with an emissary from Archbishop Martínez.¹³⁴⁵ This priest was able to impress upon the devout Abascal his obligation to obey and surrender the colony.¹³⁴⁶

Abascal’s faith may have also prevented the formation of a breakaway branch of Sinarquismo. After leaving the organization, Abascal denounced the UNS leadership for the moderate course it had adopted.¹³⁴⁷ Many of his followers, the Abascalistas, took this as a sign that he was establishing a competing form of Sinarquismo.¹³⁴⁸ Upon leaving the UNS, however, the Abascalistas were disappointed to find that their former leader had no such plans. In the end, Abascal was loyal to the church, refusing to contest the hierarchy’s choice of Manuel Torres Bueno as the legitimate leader of the Sinarquista Movement.¹³⁴⁹ Campbell stated that Abascal’s faith was stronger than his

disillusionment with Sinarquismo.¹³⁵⁰ It could very well be that the church exploited the conviction of its faithful servant.

The U.S. Catholic Church may have also influenced the Sinarquista Movement. Velasco Gil stated that the American clergy exerted a moderating influence over the Mexican Church, leading to a transformation of the UNS.¹³⁵¹ Allegedly, a visit by American Bishop Fulton Sheen pressured the Sinarquista Movement to modify its policy towards the U.S. and Pan-Americanism.¹³⁵² Moreover, trips were arranged for *El Sinarquista* writers to visit dioceses in the U.S. so that they could moderate their views.¹³⁵³

The removal of Abascal did not end the church's predicament. His successor, Manuel Torres Bueno, was acceptable to the Supreme Council because he was deemed compliant.¹³⁵⁴ While Torres Bueno embraced the policy of temperance, he embarked on a political path that was unacceptable to the hierarchy.¹³⁵⁵ Unlike Abascal, Torres Bueno refused to obey the orders of the Supreme Council.¹³⁵⁶ The unilateral decisions made by the Sinarquista leader could not be stopped by the church, exposing the fatal flaw that existed in the secretive arrangement.¹³⁵⁷ Despite the pleas of Santacruz, the hierarchy refused to speak out against the obstinate leader.¹³⁵⁸ Torres Bueno realized that since the hierarchy could not condemn him publicly, the Supreme Council had in effect no control over Sinarquismo.¹³⁵⁹ This led to the split of the UNS from the Base and the demise of the Sinarquista Movement.¹³⁶⁰

The Sinarquista Movement had the same fundamental weakness as the Cristero Rebellion, namely its religious foundation.¹³⁶¹ There was an ecclesiastical learning curve

between La Cristiada and Sinarquismo, where the church attempted to better define its relationship with the laity. In the Cristero Rebellion, the church acted as an advisor, while allowing the faithful to mobilize themselves. With Sinarquismo, the church took a different approach by providing the means for the laity to take action in a more appropriate manner. However, at some point the UNS tired of the church's tutelage and tried to pursue its own agenda. Once the hierarchy sensed danger, the movement was decapitated. The church could not solve the predicament of controlling the laity in a clandestine fashion.

CHAPTER VIII

A COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHICS

An analysis of the demographics of the Cristeros and Sinarquistas underscores the similarity between the two groups. Both movements were strongest in the western part of Central Mexico, a region that was predisposed to religious uprisings. Both Sinarquismo and Cristerismo had rural, landless, and uneducated peasants as their rank-and-file members, which supports the theory that land reform was at the heart of both organizations. Another important finding is that the leadership of both movements was composed of the urban middle class. Nevertheless, the picture remains incomplete. Despite Meyer's commendable studies, more data is needed to make an exhaustive examination between the Cristeros and Sinarquistas. Still, the information is sufficient enough to draw some important conclusions.

Meyer compiled an impressive amount of research for *La Cristiada*, which took over seven years to complete.¹³⁶² In writing his work, he consulted the traditional archival sources but realized that the Cristeros, who were illiterate, did not leave a written record. Thus, he employed two social science techniques, the interview and the questionnaire, in order to glean information from his subjects.¹³⁶³ Meyers' direct contact with the survivors made him unique in Cristero historiography.

Meyer's study took place in five different municipalities that were spread throughout the Cristero regions.¹³⁶⁴ He collected 348 questionnaires from the former insurgents.¹³⁶⁵ The topics covered by the survey included age, gender, civil state,

education, land ownership, religious beliefs, occupation, and military experience. Meyer also conducted a number of personal interviews of former Cristeros, and used 80 hours of tape recordings for his study.¹³⁶⁶ In his bibliography, Meyer meticulously listed the names of all individuals that were interviewed, including their hometown and state of origin.

Meyer's research is the only direct insight that we have into the Cristeros; however it is not without its detractions. Reviewer Ramon Jrade took particular issue with the process in which Meyer conducted the surveys. He noted that by having many of the interviews inside a church, following Sunday mass, Meyer introduced an element of religiosity into his work.¹³⁶⁷ Jrade also criticized the manner in which the questionnaires were distributed, saying that Meyer's sampling pool was limited to the readership of a veterans' weekly magazine.¹³⁶⁸ Moreover, Meyer's surveys were conducted in the late 1960s, which meant that older participants were no longer alive and that the research relied on memories over 30 years old.¹³⁶⁹

Meyer also gathered data on the Sinarquistas; however he did not conduct the survey. Instead, the census was taken by the UNS during the early 1940s.¹³⁷⁰ The survey covered four Sinarquista committees scattered throughout Mexico and one located in the United States.¹³⁷¹ The entire state of Aguascalientes was also included, which Meyer considered the most reliable part of the census.¹³⁷² The census provided information on the age, sex, and civil state of the participants, but remained vague on their professions and social status.¹³⁷³ Therefore, the data on the UNS is a limiting factor in allowing a comprehensive comparison between the two movements.

Location

The Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement had their origins in western Central Mexico. The rebellion began in the Los Altos region of Jalisco, while Sinarquismo was born in the adjacent state of Guanajuato. The movements were strongest in the Bajío region of Mexico and surrounding areas. The Bajío is a fertile area of rolling hills located northwest of Mexico City. This region is centered in the state of Guanajuato and encompasses parts of Jalisco (including Los Altos), Michoacán, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, and San Luis Potosí. It was in the Bajío that the Mexican Independence movement under Miguel Hidalgo originated in 1810. However, the Bajío was and remains a bastion of Catholic conservatism.¹³⁷⁴ It was here that the Religionero Revolt of 1875 took place.¹³⁷⁵ Although not exactly identical, the regions of the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement overlapped, which supports this thesis' contention that there was a strong relationship between the two movements.

Table 1 shows a side-by-side comparison of Cristero and Sinarquista membership broken down by state. The data, collected by Meyer, reflects the number of Cristeros in 1929 and Sinarquistas in 1940.¹³⁷⁶ As shown, the largest number of followers was concentrated in only a few states. Michoacán, adjacent to both Guanajuato and Jalisco, had the highest number for both movements. Jalisco, the birthplace of La Cristiada, had a lower number of Sinarquistas, probably because most Cristeros chose not to join the UNS.¹³⁷⁷

Sinarquismo was strong in three states where there were few Cristeros: Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Puebla. Meyer gave an explanation for the low Cristero numbers in each case. The state of Querétaro had a moderate governor who did not enforce anticlerical legislation or persecute priests, a fact that was publicly known and likely prevented many from taking arms.¹³⁷⁸ The Cristeros could not rise up in San Luis Potosí because it was under the tight grip of General Saturnino Cedillo, a quintessential caudillo.¹³⁷⁹ In similar fashion, Puebla did not partake in the rebellion because it was on the main route to the port of Veracruz, hence easily controlled by Mexico City.¹³⁸⁰ No reason, however, is evident for the low number of Cristeros in Guanajuato or of Sinarquistas in Zacatecas.

Table 1: States with the largest Cristero/Sinarquista membership¹³⁸¹

STATE	CRISTEROS	SINARQUISTAS
Guanajuato	3,000	75,000
Jalisco	10,000	20,000
Michoacán	12,000	85,000
Puebla	None listed	16,000
Querétaro	1,000	25,000
San Luis Potosí	None listed	20,000
Zacatecas	5,000	None Listed

There were important reasons why the movements flourished in these areas and not others. Meyer argued that Los Altos was ideal for the rebellion to occur. Besides its historically Catholic conservative tradition, Los Altos was also a “modern” area.¹³⁸² Meyer defined the term as a location where there was a continuum between urbanity and the countryside.¹³⁸³ The peasants that lived in “modern” areas were in constant contact

with the cities and towns; hence they were not isolated from the outside world and were “enlightened.”¹³⁸⁴ Although Indian communities were sympathetic to the cause, it was in these “modern” areas where the rebellion “was most strong, unanimous, and organized.”¹³⁸⁵ However, Meyer did not elaborate why this aspect of modernity induced the peasants to rebel. Moreover, this contradicts the concept that the Cristeros viewed their world in terms of the *patria chica*.¹³⁸⁶ These regions were also not controlled by caciques, which may have made it easier for the Cristeros to rebel.¹³⁸⁷ Furthermore, the network of small towns provided an effective cover for the rebels, who could go easily blend back into the countryside.¹³⁸⁸

According to Aguilar, Sinarquismo traces its roots back to Guadalajara, Jalisco, where the Legion was established.¹³⁸⁹ When the Legion transformed into the Base a few years later, however, the movement shifted from Los Altos to the lowlands of Guanajuato.¹³⁹⁰ Although Sinarquismo spread to the old Cristero areas of Michoacán and Jalisco, it was strongest in the state of Guanajuato, where the city of León (dubbed “Sinarcópolis”) had the largest urban population of Sinarquistas in the country.¹³⁹¹

Sinarquismo flourished in the Bajío because the element of hispanismo was especially strong there. Manuel Romo de Alba, the founder of the Legion/Base, wanted the Bajío to constitute the heart of the movement because of its culture, customs, and “Hispanic traditions.”¹³⁹² Campbell stated that the success of Sinarquismo was furthered by the “atypical” society of Guanajuato, which was traditionally suspicious of domination from Mexico City’s elite.¹³⁹³ Guanajuato’s social makeup was similar to that of Los Altos, where there were few Indian communities and no legacy of the

encomienda. Prager's description of Guanajuato's culture is also reminiscent of Los Alto's strong Spanish element; "Its Catholic faith and its Hispanic culture have always been cherished in this region not only because of this tradition, but also because [of] the westerner himself – a tall, well-built individual with blue eyes who resembled the Northern Spaniards more than their fellow Mexicans."¹³⁹⁴

The Cristero and Sinarquista movements were not restricted to the Bajío. Pockets of Cristero rebels existed in the states of Sinaloa, Veracruz, Nayarit, Durango, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and the Federal District.¹³⁹⁵ The Sinarquista Movement was more widespread. Sinarquista committees were established in every Mexican state and even the United States, where a few migrants embraced it.¹³⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the heart of both the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement remained in the Bajío, where these movements were strongest and best organized.¹³⁹⁷ It is also noteworthy that both groups failed to achieve a significant following in the northern part of Mexico, which was the traditional stronghold of the Mexican Revolution.¹³⁹⁸

The Soldiers

The rank-and-file members of the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement were mostly uneducated peasants. One reason these recruits were drawn to the movements was because of their lucrative message of land reform. The Cristero Rebellion, like Sinarquismo, was primarily a rural phenomenon.¹³⁹⁹ Meyer found that 60% of the Cristeros lived in the countryside.¹⁴⁰⁰ Out of that percentage, most were

agricultural laborers versus landowners.¹⁴⁰¹ Townspeople, except those who had some connection to the countryside, such as leatherworkers, drivers, miners, agricultural workers, and muleteers, were conspicuously absent from the battlefield.¹⁴⁰² Meyer's study showed that almost 60% of the Cristero rebels did not complete primary school and less than 3% finished secondary school.¹⁴⁰³

The Cristeros elected from among themselves their own battlefield commanders; hence these individuals shared the same qualities as the soldiers.¹⁴⁰⁴ Only 16 out of 200 chiefs attempted secondary education.¹⁴⁰⁵ Illiteracy was so prevalent among the Cristero chiefs that most of them had to dictate their orders and proclamations.¹⁴⁰⁶ Meyer described these leaders as "true proletarians;" 92% were country dwellers and most worked as peons.¹⁴⁰⁷ The leaders of the UP also had a similar humble background.¹⁴⁰⁸

Most of the Cristeros were landless.¹⁴⁰⁹ Property owners constituted only 10% of the rebel force.¹⁴¹⁰ Another 10% were agraristas; peasants who communally farmed state-owned property.¹⁴¹¹ The rest did not own land nor had access to an ejido.¹⁴¹² These landless peasants came from various groups: Indian *comuneros* despoiled by haciendas, laborers, and sharecroppers who rented land in order to farm.¹⁴¹³ The field commanders were landless for the most part, with only 32% of them being proprietors.¹⁴¹⁴

The Sinarquista Movement also found its strength among the "common people." Most of the Sinarquista "soldiers" were poor, uneducated campesinos.¹⁴¹⁵ The rural element of Sinarquismo was emphasized by the fact that the movement did not take hold in Mexico's largest cities.¹⁴¹⁶ Guanajuato, the core of Sinarquismo, had an "extremely high" illiteracy rate compared to the rest of Mexico.¹⁴¹⁷ At first, the UNS tried to attract

Mexicans from all classes of society in order to form the perfect “*unión*.” Its forerunners, the Legion and Base, recruited intellectuals, businessmen, professionals, and industrialists.¹⁴¹⁸ The working class, in particular, was wooed.¹⁴¹⁹ However, after the Legion/Base morphed into the Sinarquista Movement, the bulk of the organization came from the peasant class.¹⁴²⁰ The census from the state of Aguascalientes shows that 72% of Sinarquistas came from the agricultural sector.¹⁴²¹ Although workers were encouraged to join the UNS, most decided against it for fear they would be kicked out of the CTM.¹⁴²²

The Sinarquista Movement emerged in the Bajío, an area left untouched by the government’s land reform program.¹⁴²³ Prager described the chief followers of Sinarquismo as rural cultivators of “low economic and political status, who hoped to achieve some sort of institutional reform to improve their lot.”¹⁴²⁴ In the Sinarquista census, only 5% were agraristas, while 18% were small property owners.¹⁴²⁵ On the other hand, 44% were laborers and 33% were sharecroppers.¹⁴²⁶

The Bajío’s mixed agrarian culture was conducive to the Sinarquista message of land reform. It was composed of moderately-sized haciendas which employed a substantial non-Indian labor force.¹⁴²⁷ These laborers naturally wanted their own private parcel. Moreover, the region possessed a large number of small, subsistence-type landholdings.¹⁴²⁸ Many of these small land owners joined the UNS out of fear that their property would be expropriated by the government.¹⁴²⁹

Both the Cristeros and Sinarquistas had a large female component with a similar social makeup. The Women’s Brigade of the Cristero movement tried to recruit from all

social classes.¹⁴³⁰ Members included shop girls, office workers, and seamstresses.¹⁴³¹ Although the brigades strove for diversity, over 90% of the members were “simple women peasants,” a figure which is in league with the demographics of the male soldiers.¹⁴³² They were mostly unmarried and young, their ages ranging from 15 to 25.¹⁴³³ Their leadership was also young and humble.¹⁴³⁴ While there is limited data on Sinarquista women, the survey shows that there was an equal number of males and females within their ranks.¹⁴³⁵ Meyer stated that women comprised between one quarter to over one half of the membership in every Sinarquista committee.¹⁴³⁶

There exists some uncertainty with regards to ethnicity in the movements. Two historians, Meyer and Tuck, have differing viewpoints. Tuck stated that the inhabitants of Los Altos were mostly of European stock, descended from both Spanish creoles and French troops quartered in the area during their campaign against Juárez.¹⁴³⁷ “In this region of fair-skinned folk, many with blond hair and blue eyes, the original Indian population became a minority,” asserted the historian.¹⁴³⁸ The people of Los Altos belonged to one of Mexico’s most unusual subcultures. According to Tuck, they and the blacks of the Costa Chica are the only sizable ethnic groups found outside the country’s prevailing mestizo heritage.¹⁴³⁹ Los Altos also underwent a unique phenomenon, where the Mexicans of European heritage remained in the rural areas, unlike the rest of the country, where they gravitated towards the towns and cities.¹⁴⁴⁰ Tuck’s analysis supports the theory that La Cristiada had a strong undercurrent of hispanismo.

Meyer’s assessment is the opposite of Tuck’s. He argued that ethnicity did not seem to be a factor in the Cristero Rebellion.¹⁴⁴¹ According to Meyer, Indian

involvement in the uprising is “irrefutable.”¹⁴⁴² He stated that the Huicholes, Coras, Tepehuanos, Acaxees, Xiximes, and Purépechas participated in the rebellion.¹⁴⁴³ Since these Indians did not distinguish themselves from their mestizo or criollo brethren, Meyer rejected the labeling of the rebellion as “a white or mestizo phenomenon that also had the aspect of religious fanaticism and ethnic protest.”¹⁴⁴⁴

Meyer’s and Tuck’s assessments are not completely incompatible, however. Tuck conceded that Indians participated in the rebellion, observing that they “were as ardently Cristero as their Creole brethren.”¹⁴⁴⁵ However, he stated that in Los Altos, the Indian population remained isolated from the Hispanic element, leading to the lack of a mestizo culture in the area.¹⁴⁴⁶ Meyer’s survey does not contradict Tuck’s findings since it does not specifically address the racial makeup of Los Altos. Moreover, Meyer made an interesting assessment which supports Tuck’s view. Meyer stated that Cristero Indians were more “cultured” and “Catholic” than those who chose not to join the rebellion.¹⁴⁴⁷ One example was the Tepehuanos, the most “advanced” tribe, which was 75% Cristero.¹⁴⁴⁸ It appears that the more “hispanicized” the Indians were, the more likely they would join La Cristiada.

Ethnic data for the Sinarquista Movement is lacking. However, it was mentioned earlier that the state of Guanajuato, which was the center of Sinarquismo, had a strong Hispanic element. Meyer mentioned that the UNS had an interesting success among the Mayo Indians of Sonora.¹⁴⁴⁹ This supports the notion that while the Sinarquistas emulated Spanish culture and ignored Indian traditions, they were sincere in creating a movement that included all Mexicans, regardless of skin color.

The Leaders

The leadership of the Cristeros and Sinarquistas was composed of the urban middle class. However, there was an important difference in how they connected with the troops. The middle-class element of the Cristero leadership (the League) emerged separately from the rebels. The League portrayed itself as the leader of the rebellion and spokesperson of the Cristeros. However, it was never embraced by the insurgents.¹⁴⁵⁰ In their war against the government, these two entities failed to present a united front. Sinarquismo, on the other hand, represented a better integration of middle-class management. Unlike the rebellion, in which the peasantry mobilized on its own, the UNS organized the lower classes within a structure that had already been firmly established.

The Cristero Rebellion emerged as a leaderless insurgency. Out of necessity, the Cristeros elected their battlefield commanders from amongst themselves. These leaders were recognized and respected by the troops because they were effectively “from the ranks.” However, the rebellion as a whole suffered from the lack of a single leader who could manage and coordinate the different insurgent bands. The League, a middle-class organization based in Mexico City, tried to fill this void.¹⁴⁵¹ Established one year prior to the war, the League had been instrumental in leading Mexican Catholics on a nonviolent crusade against the Calles government. When the Cristeros rose up in rebellion, the League sensed an opportunity to take command. It represented the rebels at the Vatican, promoted their cause to the media, and provided them with General Gorostieta, their

most important leader. However, the Leaguers and rebels had a troubled relationship and failed to cooperate. A connection could not be established and the League was never accepted by the soldiers on the field. Much of the friction had to do with the League's ineptitude, but societal differences were also a factor. The Leaguers and rebels, while engaged in the same struggle, lived in different worlds. These two groups languished separately throughout the conflict.

The Catholic militants who joined the League were urban-based, middle-class professionals.¹⁴⁵² The League was a young, male organization, with an age group between 25 and 35.¹⁴⁵³ The ACJM, which provided the League with its "core" radical leadership, was comprised of young, middle-class students, the majority of which were unmarried.¹⁴⁵⁴ Besides the students of the ACJM, the League had attorneys, politicians, engineers, doctors, former military officers, and men associated with the church as members.¹⁴⁵⁵ Absent were the upper echelons of society; the hacendados and urban entrepreneurs.¹⁴⁵⁶

The Leaguers and rebels had difficulty relating to each other, which inevitably led to suspicion and a lack of teamwork. The urban members of the ACJM, who were sent as emissaries by the League, experienced culture shock when they met the Cristero rebels.¹⁴⁵⁷ An encounter between the two groups highlights the problem: "In photographs, one can see, in symbolic form, the difference between the Leaguers of the ACJM and the Cristero peasants. The first group have [sic] city haircuts and moustaches, boots and buttons, and are dressed in khaki; they look like the brothers of the dashing

officers on the Government's General Staff. Those in the second group have no uniform; they are long-haired peasants, wearing sandals, with jutting beards."¹⁴⁵⁸

The Leaguers, who approached the peasants with the arrogance of a city dweller, were received badly.¹⁴⁵⁹ Tuck stated that the Cristero soldiers despised the "egghead, the dandy, the poseur, and the puritan."¹⁴⁶⁰ The rebels looked with contempt at the educated young men, who lacked the soldierly qualities that they respected.¹⁴⁶¹ Not used to dealing with the privations of guerilla warfare and faced with the distrust and ridicule of the rebels, most of the students returned to the city.¹⁴⁶²

Ironically, the Leaguers had more in common with their enemy than the Cristero rebels. According to Meyer, the difference between the membership of the League and the supporters of the revolution was not social, but ideological: "Culturally and socially, the Leaguers were first cousins, hostile brothers of the revolutionaries, and they lived in a world which had no connection with that of the Cristeros or the followers of Zapata."¹⁴⁶³ These two groups were the same demographically, except that the revolutionaries came from the North, while the Leaguers were from the central plateau.¹⁴⁶⁴

The leadership of the Sinarquista Movement had virtually the same demographic qualities as the League; "Sinarquismo was the result of the reflections of the politically minded young men of the middle classes."¹⁴⁶⁵ However, Sinarquismo represented a better union of the middle and lower classes, where the former led while the latter followed. Prospective members had to adapt to a strict hierarchy and obey the stringent rules in order to be considered Sinarquistas. Hence, the UNS leadership lacked the

problem of the League, which had to deal with a disorganized and independent-minded group of rebels. As discussed earlier, the rigid structure of the UNS dissuaded most of the unruly Cristeros from joining, which in turn must have aided its stability.

The record shows that the leadership of the UNS came from the Legion/Base, which recruited from the same social classes and geographical areas as the League.¹⁴⁶⁶ Sinarquista chiefs were all less than 30, middle class, and from the central part of the country.¹⁴⁶⁷ The Sinarquista leaders were jurists, civil servants, businessmen, students, and professors; careers that were remarkably similar to those of the Leaguers.¹⁴⁶⁸ According to Meyer, these Sinarquista chiefs were not rich.¹⁴⁶⁹ However, some of the men who headed the Supreme Council, such as Antonio Santacruz, were hacendados or wealthy businessmen.¹⁴⁷⁰ Yet, these men did not become an integral part of the UNS, choosing to remain disengaged from the day-to-day activities. The difference in social stature between the Supreme Council and the Sinarquista chiefs may help explain why the UNS eventually broke free.

The demographic relationship that exists between Cristerismo and Sinarquismo remains incomplete. The passage of time prevents a census of Sinarquista members in the style of Meyer from taking place. Nevertheless, with the limited data, an intriguing picture emerges. Both movements were appealing to the lower and middle classes, recruited from the same geographical area of the country, and were rural phenomena. The middle class was attracted to the movements' counterrevolutionary stance, while the peasants were drawn to their simple message of religion and land. The key difference between the Sinarquista Movement and the Cristero Rebellion lay in the relationship that

existed between the two classes. In this regard, Sinarquismo represents a better liaison between the middle-class leadership and the soldiers. It could be that this middle-class element served as a bridge between the church and its peasant base.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Some historians, including Meyer, have argued against viewing the Cristero Rebellion as a precursor to Sinarquismo, “the Mexican variety of fascism.”¹⁴⁷¹ Others have also discounted a connection, citing the fact that most Cristeros chose not to join the UNS.¹⁴⁷² Yet others, such as Hernández and Aguilar, saw the UNS as being “directly descended from the earlier Cristero Movement.”¹⁴⁷³ Hernández summarized, “In style, in the way of being and living, the Unión Popular, the Cristero Revolution and Sinarquismo are one and the same thing.”¹⁴⁷⁴

This thesis agrees with the latter viewpoint and contends that it was the Cristero *struggle*, not the Cristeros themselves, that continued through Sinarquismo. The UNS saw itself as carrying the banner of the Cristero Rebellion.¹⁴⁷⁵ Sinarquismo turned the Cristero cause into a national movement, under a central authority that the rebels were not willing to follow. It has been shown that both groups shared many ideological views. Moreover, they had close, though contentious, ties to the church. Meyer allowed that both movements grew in the sphere of Catholicism and that the UNS was a direct descendant of the League.¹⁴⁷⁶ Furthermore, Sinarquismo and Cristerismo came from the same societal groups and geographical areas.

This thesis argues against viewing the Cristero and Sinarquista movements as separate events in Mexican history. A clear and compelling relationship has been shown to exist between the two. It is unlikely that a “missing link” directly connecting the two

movements is out there, waiting to be found. The process was rather complicated, where the laity and the church experimented with different ways of dealing with the intransigent government. An evolutionary process took place between Cristerismo and Sinarquismo, where religious warfare gave way to passive resistance in dealing with a hostile government. Another progressive step was better control of the masses through the integrated leadership of the middle class. The church and laity alike learned their lessons, adapted, and persevered.

The Cristero and Sinarquista movements have had the misfortune of being mischaracterized by early historians, the Mexican government, and the population at large. The Mexican educational system, never losing its tone of revolutionary rhetoric, emulates the achievements of liberal heroes such as Hidalgo, Juárez, and Cárdenas, while downplaying the contributions of conservative men like Iturbide and Díaz. In the same manner, the Cristeros and Sinarquistas are dismissed as reactionary movements that dared fight the “will” of the revolutionary people.

This perception of history denies that the Mexican Revolution disregarded the needs of many Mexicans, who chose to join these movements in order to express their popular will. By refuting their popular nature, this view ignores the contribution that the movements made to the development of modern Mexico. It was because of this mass support that the Cristero Rebellion and the Sinarquista Movement turned into such formidable threats that they were able to *force* the Mexican government to retreat from its route of apostasy and socialism that it had embarked upon. These movements kept Mexico on a centrist path, an immeasurable contribution that is felt to this day.

NOTES

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- ¹¹⁸⁸ “Manifiesto del Comité Organizador Sinarquista al Pueblo Mexicano,” *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*.
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- ¹¹⁹⁰ “Manifiesto del Comité Organizador Sinarquista al Pueblo Mexicano,” *Unión Nacional Sinarquista*.
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- ¹¹⁹² Federico Gil, 20.
- ¹¹⁹³ Ibid., 22.
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- ¹¹⁹⁷ Jean Meyer, *Sinarquismo*, 24.
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- ¹²⁰¹ Luis González, 155.
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Chapter VII

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- ¹²³⁷ Rius Facius, 133-34.
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- ¹³²⁶ Ledit, 263.
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- ¹³²⁹ Hernández, 281.
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Chapter VIII

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- ¹³⁷⁴ Ramírez, 1.
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- ¹⁴⁵⁰ Luis González, 157.
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Chapter IX

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